



# A Fresh Start

tufano79

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# Summary

Bella is a recent divorcee, reeling from the abrupt ending of her marriage. In walks a certain green-eyed stranger. Can he convince her trust and love again? Or will she just ignore his advances? ExB, AU, AH

# The End

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*This story is kind of cathartic for me and it's based in real life. Rated M for future lemons.*

## A Fresh Start

### Chapter 1: The End

"Hey Bella," my co-worker Angela said to me. She was the art teacher at the middle school that I worked at, Cherry Blossom Middle School. "How are you doing?"

"I'm good, Angela," I smile. I look at my computer, bored at my lame job. The grades for my students' latest English tests were horrendous. I can only re-teach a concept so many times. "How about you? How are things with Ben?"

"Oh my gosh, Bells," she gushed. "He proposed. Look at the ring he got me." She waved her hand in my face and I was shocked at her newest bling. It was gorgeous: a large round cut diamond in a Tiffany style setting. Very classic, just like Angela.

"It's beautiful, Angela. He did good," I enthused. "Really good. So, how did he do it?"

"He took me out to dinner, renting out the entire restaurant. The wait staff and kitchen made all of my favorite meals and in the final course, he had the ring presented to me," she breathed. "It was perfect. Just like Ben."

I plastered on a fake smile, happy for my young friend. Hearing about her romantic proposal made me sad. It had been a long time since my husband of five years, Mike, did anything romantic for me. I was so spaced out that I didn't

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realize that Angela was asking me a question. "Excuse me, what?"

"Are you okay, Bella?" Angela asked as she adjusted her colorful skirt. "You seem a bit off."

"I'm fine," I replied automatically. "I'm really happy for you."

"Thanks," she said with a smile. "Are you ready for parent-teacher conferences?"

"Ugh, no. I have to meet with my team after school today to finalize some things. Then, drama club fun. Thank goodness my assistant director can start the rehearsal," I sighed. "Before I forget, can you help with the sets and costumes?"

"Hell yeah," Angela said, bouncing on her toes. "I was involved in the theater program at school and I loved it. What are you doing?"

"*Once on this Island, Jr.*" I replied. "It's really cute. Can have some awesome sets."

"Can I get a script?" she asked.

"Sure. I'll make a copy for you and stick it in your mailbox," I said.

"Thanks, Bells," she said, her brown eyes dancing. "See you later."

"Bye," I said, turning back to my computer. I needed to input these tests into the computer so they could be sent to the parent web module; the online gradebook used my school district. We were told that we needed to keep it up to date as we didn't send home paper report cards anymore. I finally finished my grading and walked down to my teammate's classroom. I was on one of the eighth grade teams. I taught accelerated language arts. I loved my students, when they applied themselves and my team was awesome. The other members included Jessica Stanley who taught the regular language arts students; Tyler Crowley who taught math; and Emmett McCarty who taught science and social

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studies. Out of all of my teammates, Emmett and I were the closest. He was like my dorky older brother even though I was older than him by a few years.

I was 32 and had been teaching in the same district since I got out of school. I got married when I was 26 to my husband, Mike Newton. He was a manager for a large insurance corporation. We were happy for the first years of our marriage. He doted on me when it was convenient for him. He assisted me when I had several ankle surgeries. I'm a habitual klutz and I've had more sprained ankles than I care to admit. He was a good man, but very cold at times. This cold demeanor wasn't there at the beginning of our relationship, but it has since transformed in the past few years.

I really noticed it at the end of the school year last year. My position had been drastically changed. I had been teaching a combination of regular language arts and accelerated language arts in another building, Chapel Middle School. My principal, who for some strange reason, didn't like me, he arbitrarily moved me to Cherry Blossom where I was going to be teaching all of the accelerated language arts classes, tripling my workload. I was so frustrated with the whole situation and I vented to my husband. He didn't take the side of my principal, but he didn't support me either. Thankfully I had some connections at Cherry Blossom. I was already the drama director for them and I knew most of the kids and some of the staff. It still pissed me off that it happened, but at least I'm employed.

I sat down in my team meeting, giving Emmett a smile. "Hey guys. Sorry I'm late. I needed to finish grading *Nothing But the Truth* tests," I said.

"No biggie, Bells," Jessica said, running a hand through her blond wavy hair. "We were just finalizing our schedule for parent/teacher conferences. It's going to be a light load, as it's the spring conferences."

"I don't understand the point of spring conferences," Tyler grumbled. "We've worked with the kids for three quarters and there is ONE left. If the kid doesn't give shit now, why would it change in the last nine weeks of school?"



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"It looks good on paper," I answered. "I just hate the schedule. 2-10 on Thursday? Ugh. By the time we get home, it'll be after eleven. I'll be worthless the next day. At least it's short."

"Damn straight," Emmett said, arching his brow. "Anything else that we need to discuss?"

"I don't think so," I replied. "I have to get to rehearsal. You guys can just email me if anything changes. Okay?"

"Sure thing, Bells," Jessica said. "Have fun with the drama kiddos."

"It's my one thrill in life," I said dryly. I picked up my script and pencil and walked to the cafeteria where our rehearsals were being held. The choir director, Alice Cullen, was leading the students in a vocal rehearsal until I was done with my meeting. I could hear some really lovely things being done, but anything compared to my barking singing voice was lovely. Alice was one of my really good friends on the staff at Cherry Blossom. She was so energetic and lively. She looked like an elf. Small, thin, petite features and very delicate bones. Her signature look though was her hair. It was short and stuck out every which way. It was also a deep chocolate brown. Her cornflower blue eyes were offset by deep, thick eyelashes. She was stunning. She was chic. Everything I wasn't.

Alice saw me from the front of the room and she gave me a wink, complimenting the students on their rehearsal. I barked out a few orders and the students all took their places for the beginning of Act I. The rehearsal went by uneventfully. My drama students were so well behaved. I could just leave a note with one of my student directors and it would get done. I was truly blessed by that. After all the students were dismissed, Alice skipped up to me, linking her arm with mine.

"You need a drink, Bells," she said. "You have *that* look."

"What look would that be, Alice?" I sighed.

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"That defeated, life sucks look," Alice said, demonstrating on her perfect features. "What's up?"

"I'm done," I mumbled.

"You're done with what?" she asked.

"With Mike. I can't handle his coldness. His distance," I said, narrowing my eyes. "He doesn't love me the way that I want to be loved."

"Did he ever?" Alice challenged. "I knew when you guys got married that this was your first one."

"Says my maid of honor," I said, poking her ribs.

"What? It's true! Mike is a very dedicated man, but he's not for you. He never was. You deserved to be worshipped. He didn't. You just weren't compatible," Alice said sagely. "Do you need a lawyer?"

"Yeah. Does Jazz know anyone?" I asked, mentioning her fiancée. He was a lawyer in a lucrative practice. He completely doted on Alice, giving her everything that she needed.

"I'll ask him," Alice said. "You'll get through this. I promise you."

"Thanks," I replied, kissing her head. Alice gave me a hug and danced back to her room. I walked to mine and gathered my things. I went out to my car and prepared myself for the discussion I needed to have with my soon-to-be ex-husband. I drove the half-hour home only to find my husband's car in the driveway. He usually didn't get home until after seven. It was a little after five. I warily walked into the house. It no longer felt like home to me. It was just a place where I slept and that was it. I didn't want to be there. I couldn't be there. "Hello?"

"In the kitchen," Mike's cold voice carried through our house.

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"Hey," I said as I walked into our gourmet kitchen. It was the sole reason for us to buy this house. Well, that and the four bedrooms. I so wanted children. I was ready when we were on our honeymoon. Mike wasn't. He insisted I stay on birth control. I hated taking those damn pills. "What are you doing home so early?"

"We need to talk, Bella," Mike said, not looking me in the eyes. He idly played with the beer bottle in his hands.

"Yes, we do," I said as I sat down. "I don't know what happened to us, but this is not working."

"No, it's not," he said. "I've been sleeping around, Bella. I've been cheating on you for the past year."

"What?" I said in disbelief. "Who?"

"Jessica Stanley," he whispered. "She just left."

"What the fuck? Jessica fucking Stanley," I roared. "You've been fucking Jessica fucking Stanley?" I pushed away from the counter and began pacing. "You're unbelievable. It's one thing to not stay in a marriage, but it's another to fucking cheat."

"Bella...I'm..."

"Get out, Michael," I sneered. "Never come back."

He looked at me and his eyes were filled with resignation and sadness. He placed his key onto the kitchen counter and pushed away from the table. I didn't notice when I walked in that he had several bags packed and they were sitting by the front door. "I'm sorry, Bella. So sorry."

"Too late for that," I snarled. "Get. Out."

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He sighed and gathered his things. He quietly left my house and pulled out of the driveway and out of my life, forever.

*Good riddance.*

**A/N: So, this is my newest story. It is hitting really close to home for me. Let me know what you think... Please :)**

# The Calm

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## Chapter 2: The Calm

*"We need to talk, Bella," Mike said, not looking me in the eyes. He idly played with the beer bottle in his hands.*

*"Yes, we do," I said as I sat down. "I don't know what happened to us, but this is not working."*

*"No, it's not," he said. "I've been sleeping around, Bella. I've been cheating on you for the past year."*

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Two Months Later:

"We want to thank Mrs. Newton. Erm. Ms. Swan for all of her help for our production of *Once on this Island, Jr.*," Rebecca said in her sweet soprano. "You have made us all such good actors and actresses. We appreciate it. Thank you, Ms. Swan."

Rebecca handed me a large bouquet of flowers and gave me a warm hug. I was numb, but her flub didn't go unnoticed. As soon as Mike left, I changed my name back to Swan. I didn't want to be associated with that weasel. Jessica also announced her immediate resignation when I returned to school. After Mike leaving, I fell apart and didn't leave the house for nearly a week. It took Alice's threats of burning down the house to finally to get me to leave. I immediately put the house on the market and actually found a buyer. I was selling it at a loss, but I needed to be rid of the monstrosity.

"Ms. Swan?" Rebecca asked.

"Oh, sorry, sweetie," I replied, shaking my head. "Thank you for the lovely flowers and the kind words."

"You're welcome," she smiled. She gave me another hug and the cast all threw flowers at my direction, a cast tradition at Cherry Blossom Middle School. I laughed and took the pummeling of flowers in stride. After a quick glance at my sound person, the bows music came on again and the cast broke into their final number a second time. I joined them, in my tone-deafness, enjoying the moment of normalcy. The song ended and the house lights came up. The cast scattered to their families and I walked up to Alice and Jasper. His arm was securely around hers and they were talking to a set of parents.

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"There she is," Alice smiled. "Another wonderful show, Ms. Swan."

"Thank you, Ms. Cullen," I answered. The parents gushed their congratulations and I could tell they were impressed. I knew I needed to pour myself into something. It happened to be this show. The kids took to my new fervor quickly and it was the best show to date. I put on a smile and decided to check on the students in the dressing rooms. It was closing night of the show and I wanted to make sure all of the costumes were put away properly and the classrooms we used were not completely trashed. I left Angela in charge of them, but being a type-A personality, I had to do it myself to ensure it was done correctly.

To my surprise, the dressing rooms were in good order when I poked my head in each of them. Angela, though being a novice teacher, was very strict and the kids loved her. Deciding that dressing rooms were okay, I checked on Alice and the sound equipment. It was almost put away and I was excited. I had mentally prepared on staying here at school until at least midnight cleaning up the messes of the kids. However, it looked like we were ready to go and it was only nine.

"We're going out for drinks," Alice declared. "My brother is in town and he's meeting us at Slammers."

"Which brother? I didn't know you had a brother," I said, looking at my elfin co-worker.

"Well, technically, he's my cousin. But, my parents adopted him when he was fifteen after his parents died in a car crash," Alice explained. "You'll love Edward. He's a doctor and he just moved back here from Seattle."

"Are you setting me up, Alice Cullen?" I asked.

"No. Never," Alice said, giving me a wink.

"You better not. I'm going to stay single for the rest of my life. No more men for me," I sighed.

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"Awww, Bells. Don't say that darlin'," Jasper drawled. "You'll find the right one."

"No. I won't. Thanks for the name of the lawyer, Jazz," I said. "Seth has been very helpful with this whole nonsense. The divorce should be finalized by the end of the school year."

"I'm glad, Bells," he smiled, nodding his head. "However, you won't be single for long."

"Oh, but I will," I snickered.

As I walked back to my classroom, I knew that I didn't want to be in a relationship. I had always been in some sort of relationship since I was fifteen. I met Mike in college and we dated our senior of college. We broke up for a bit and then reconnected, saying that we were it for each other. He was the typical 'All-American' boy. Blond hair, blue eyes, athletic build, tan, and pearly white teeth. I was the envy of all of my friends for nailing such a hot guy. Compared to me, Mike had the looks in the relationship. I was the brains. I was attractive. However, being married, I had let myself go a bit. From when we got married until now, I gained about fifty pounds and I never tried to look good anymore. I looked professional at work, but I didn't do anything with makeup and my hair was always pulled back in a ponytail. In all honesty, I was very plain. I had pale skin, dark brown eyes and mousy brown hair. My breasts were flabby and I had cellulite. What guy would find me attractive? No one, I tell you. I'm destined to live by myself with 42 cats and a small dog named Percy.

"Bella! Come on, girl!" Angela said as she stood by my door. "We gotta go. Slammers and Jaeger bombs are calling!"

"Ugh, I hate that shit," I grumbled. "Tastes nasty."

"When you drink ten of 'em, they don't" Angela giggled. "Alice and Jasper are waiting. Ben is meeting us at the bar and apparently Alice's hot younger brother is going to be there. Perhaps you can smack that."



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"You so did NOT say that," I said, rolling my eyes.

"Yes, I did. You need to get laid, Swan," Angela smirked, arching a brow.

"That's why God invented vibrators, Angela," I said sweetly. "Let's get drunk."

She let out a guffaw and shut off the lights to my classroom. I pulled the door shut and we walked out to our cars. Alice and Jasper were leaning against her yellow Beetle. It was cute and totally her. Angela skipped to her car, a very loved Honda Civic in bright red. It had many dings and scratches, but Angela would not get rid of it. I slipped into my large SUV, my Honda Pilot and we headed to Slammers. It was a local sports bar and it was fun. Every Friday, the staff of Cherry Blossom went there to commiserate and we got nice discounts.

We parked our cars. I grabbed my purse, pulling out my cell phone, license and credit card, slipping them into my pocket of my black dress pants. I reapplied some lip gloss (my only make up that I wore) and steeled myself for the joys of Slammers. Alice linked arms with me and dragged me to the tables that we were meeting Ben and her brother, Edward. Jasper went to the bar and returned with several drinks for us. He ordered Alice and I a Cosmo and got a beer for Angela and himself. I sipped my drink, enjoying the numbness that washed over me. Numb was good. Numb meant that there was no pain. I was so transfixed on my numbness, I didn't feel Alice jump off the stool and run into the arms of tall, red-haired man. Though red is not the right word for it, as I looked at him. Bronze is closer. I shook it off and checked my phone. I made a mental note to leave by no later than eleven. It was a little after ten.

"Bella, I'd like to introduce you to my brother, Edward Masen," Alice smiled.

"Edward, this is Bella Swan."

"Nice to you meet you," Edward said quietly. His voice was soft and smooth. It sounded like velvet, wrapped in silk, wrapped in rabbit fur.

He held out his hand and I shook it briefly. "Nice to meet you, too," I said curtly. Alice kicked me under the table, her blue eyes wide with disbelief.

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"Edward, let's get another round of drinks," Jasper suggested. "What do you ladies want?"

"The same," I answered, swirling my Cosmo.

"Me too," Alice smiled. As soon as the guys left, Angela and Alice snarled at me. "Why are you being so rude, Bella?"

"I'm sorry," I grumbled. "You know what, I can't stay. Angela, you have my drink. I'll see you on Monday."

"Bella, don't go," Angela said. "Have fun. You're too young to be resigned to the permanent single life."

"Who would want me?" I said sadly. "I really need to get out of here." I hopped off the stool and grabbed my car keys. I turned and walked away, tears falling down my cheeks. I was not ready for any of this. I was almost to my car when I heard my name being called. It wasn't Jasper, but whoever it was, was male. I turned around and saw Alice's brother/cousin running toward me. "What?" I snapped.

"Whoa, relax," Edward said, holding up his hands defensively. "You left your phone on the table. I needed to get my wallet and I offered to bring it out for you. I'm sorry I disturbed you."

"No, I should apologize. You're being nice and I'm being this colossal bitch," I said scrubbing my face. "Thanks for bringing out my phone." Edward handed me my phone and when our hands touched a spark traveled through my body. It was nothing that I had ever felt before.

"It's not a problem," Edward sputtered. I looked up at him and I was amazed at his beauty. He was tall, over six feet. His hair was a mess, like he ran his hands through it a million times. It was a combination of bronze and copper, a very unique color combination. However, it suited his face. He had a strong jaw line, straight nose and a smattering of freckles across his cheeks. What really startled me was his eyes. They were a deep jade green with brown flecks. They

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looked wise and loving. However, they held a sadness behind them that I couldn't pinpoint. But what's the point. He wouldn't want to be with me anyway. He probably has a supermodel girlfriend with looks like those. "Drive safe, Bella."

"Thanks," I said with a small smile. I could feel my cheeks heat up and a blush spread over my face. But I couldn't let him see my attraction to him. I refused to let myself get hurt again. I opened my car and hopped in. I gave him a wave and nearly peeled out of the parking lot of the bar. I couldn't get home fast enough. I needed to be in my bed, surrounded by my pillows and away from meddling elfin choral directors. As I sped home, tears fell down my cheeks. For the first time since my separation from Mike, I felt alone.

xx AFS xx

I apparently fell asleep with my clothes on. I woke up the next morning and I was still in my dress clothes from last night's performance. I ran my hands through my hair and padded to the bathroom, stubbing my toe on one of the boxes near the doorway.

"Mother fucker!" I yelled as I hopped on my foot. "Damn it!" I hobbled to the bathroom and inspected the damage to my toe. I could already see it swell and some discoloration. Just what I needed, another broken bone. I'm such a fucking klutz. I grumbled and got into the shower. I hastily washed my hair and body. I needed to do some planning for my classes tomorrow. We were finishing our narrative unit and I had to have another unit in place. I was thinking I would do something with plays or poetry.

I ate my breakfast and brainstormed some ideas for my next unit. I flipped through some of my old plan books for some ideas and finally decided to a poetry unit, culminating in a poetry slam during class. That should take us until the end of the school year. Well, at least until the last week. That was a total loss to begin with. I worked on my lessons until I heard my phone ring. I darted into the bedroom and picked it up. It was Mike.

"What do you want?" I barked.

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"Hello to you, too, Bella," he sneered. "I got your paperwork for our divorce. I can't believe you sold the house at such a loss."

"I can't afford to stay here, Michael. I don't make enough to pay this mortgage. I refuse to ask for alimony. So, I sold it. Just sign the papers and you can be rid of me," I grumbled.

"Why should I sign the papers? I got some pictures from last night, Bella. Are you dating?"

"What? No! I went out to Slammers after the show and I left my phone in the bar. Alice's brother brought it out to me. I'm not ready to date. Why do you have pictures? Are you having me followed? Seriously? You cheated on me. You have no right to have me tailed," I said, getting hot.

"You looked awfully friendly with him," Mike snarled.

"Whatever, Michael. I barely know him. If you are calling to insinuate something that *didn't* happen, then you must have a screw loose. Don't call me. Ever."

"Fine," he snapped and he ended the call.

I screamed at the top of my lungs and punched the countertop. I felt and heard a sickening crunch. "Son of a bitch! First a broken toe and now possibly a broken hand. Fabulous. I hate you Michael Walton Newton." I slipped on my flip flops and grabbed some ice. My left hand was already swelling up and it hurt like a mother. "Fuck it. I'm going to the hospital." I got my keys and started the car, driving the short distance to the hospital. I checked into the hospital, Craven Memorial and waited patiently for my name to be called.

"Isabella Swan," a pudgy nurse called. I raised my hand and she led me back into the ER. I cradled my hand as she took my vitals. She asked how I injured myself and muttered something about my own stupidity. She snorted but ignored my comment. She told me that the doctor would be right in. I sat back on the gurney, watching the bad television that was in the sterile room.

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I was waiting for about a half hour when the door opened up. "Isabella Swan," came a velvety voice. "I'm Dr. Masen and I'll be...damned."

"Hi," I grumbled. "Fancy seeing you here."

"Did I really piss you off that much that you punched a counter?" he teased.

"No. My soon-to-be ex-husband did," I muttered.

"What happened?" Edward asked as he pulled a rolling stool up to the gurney. His hand reached for mine and he began probing it with sensitive and gentle fingers.

"My ex-hubby called me to give me shit. He is having me trailed like I'm some sort of criminal. He accused me of dating," I seethed. "That's rich since the end of our marriage was a result of him fucking a colleague of mine. Asshat. I got so pissed; I punched the granite counter top."

"There's no bitterness between the two of you," Edward said, raising a brow over his glasses.

"No. None," I answered simply. Edward moved my pinky and it hurt. "Mother!"

"Sorry," he said, furrowing his brow. "From what I feel, it's broken. But I want to get some films first. Come on, Mike Tyson."

"Don't make me hurt you with my other hand," I said, arching my brows.

"Seriously, let's go," he said, offering me help off the gurney. We walked to the x-ray suite, his hand hovering over the small of my back. "Could you be pregnant?"

"One needs to have sex in order to be pregnant," I muttered snidely. "I've been celibate for quite some time."

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"Have you considered therapy for these anger issues?" he joked, holding back a laugh. I shot him a look and he led me to the x-ray machine. He put a lead blanket over my body and took several shots of my jacked up hand. Afterward, we walked back to my sterile hospital room and he helped me back onto the gurney. "I'm going to take a look at your x-rays. Do you want anything for the pain?"

"A shotgun. So I can shoot the pain in the ass that made me punch the counter," I quipped.

"I was thinking more along the lines of Vicodin or Codeine," Edward said slowly.

"Um, neither. Just advil, please," I answered. "I drove myself and I get too loopy to drive if I take any of those."

"Bella, why did you drive yourself?" Edward admonished.

"Because, I'm all alone," I said sadly, turning away from him. "I'll be fine."

Edward furrowed his brow and he looked unhappy. Why should he care? I'm just the bitch who snapped at him and abruptly left last night. I'm no one special. He stared at me until I looked him in the eyes. "I can drive you home, if you are in too much pain. I'm off as soon as I'm done with you."

"That's not necessary. If I could get a pill for when I do get home, that would be fantastic," I suggested. He nodded and left the room. As soon as he was gone, I relaxed against the bed, cradling my hand. Edward, Dr. Masen, returned a few minutes later carrying my x-rays and some supplies. "So, what's the verdict?"

"No break," he said. "You did do some damage to the tendons in your fingers and wrist. So the good news is that you don't have to wear a cast. The bad news is that you get to wear this fashionable black brace for six weeks."

"Alice will be overjoyed with that," I snorted. "That girl is always trying to dress me and make me look like a fashionista."

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"It's an illness for her," Edward laughed. "Almost an addiction."

"The first step is to admit you have a problem, right?" I said.

"Yep. She needs an intervention," he said, reaching for my hand. He put the brace around my wrist and fastened it securely. "This needs to stay on during the day. You can only take it off to shower. Also, here's a script for Vicodin. I have two pills for you in this envelope to take when you get home. I don't want you getting into a car crash on your way home from Craven. If it hurts or bothers you in anyway, call me. Here's my card. This is my work number and on the back is my cell phone. Okay?"

"Yeah, thanks," I said, taking the card from him. I slipped it into the pocket of my hoodie and he helped me off the gurney. I picked up my car keys and he handed me my prescription, Vicodin and an icepack. "Okay, random question."

"Burnt sienna," Edward said.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

"You were about to ask a random question. I just gave you a random answer," he snickered.

"Yeah, you are bizarre," I chuckled. "I totally forgot what I was going to ask. Thanks."

"Sorry," he said with a crooked smile. "Are you sure you're alright?"

"Yeah, I'll be fine. Thanks again," I said as I turned toward the exit. He leaned against the door frame, watching me as I walked out of the ER. He was the picture of casual ease, wrapped up in a set of green doctor's scrubs and white lab coat. With the hottest pair of glasses, ever. "I cannot fall for Dr. McSteamy, McDreamy or McFuckme. Ignore the hotness that is Dr. Masen," I said quietly as I walked to my car. I reached into my pocket and took out the card from Edward.

## A Fresh Start

*Dr. Edward Anthony Masen*

*Senior Attending, Head of the Emergency Department*

*Craven Memorial Hospital*

*609-555-1901 ext. 1979*

I flipped the card over and looked at this his elegant handwriting, giving me his cell phone number.

*Bella,*

*It appears we may have gotten off on the wrong foot. If you need to talk or hit something that is not a kitchen counter (my stomach is a tad softer), call me. I'm new in town and could use a friend or two, other than Alice.*

*Edward*

*609-555-2008, Cell*

Is Dr. McFuckme hitting on me? No. He's looking for a friend. I can be a friend. Right?

"I'm so screwed," I grumbled into my arms.

**A/N: And so they've met. Not the most explosive meeting, but the spark has been kindled. Leave me love or something, please :)**



# The Storm

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*This story is kind of cathartic for me and it's based in real life. Rated M for future lemons.*

## Chapter 3: The Storm

As soon as I got home from the hospital, I took my Vicodin and crawled into bed. My toe was throbbing and my hand...don't get me started on that. I was out within minutes. I slept through the night and woke up to the most annoying sound, my alarm clock. I picked up my phone and looked at the time.

"Shit," I grumbled, throwing the phone back on the bed. "I'm so not ready for work."

I swung my legs out of the bed and wavered as I walked to my bathroom. I hadn't really eaten yesterday and taking the Vicodin on an empty stomach was not very good for my mind and my body. I rushed through my morning routine, washing my hair with one hand and getting ready for my day. I took a few advil and got some breakfast. As I stuffed my face with a pop tart and a cup of coffee, I threw my lesson plans and computer into my work bag.

I put my dishes into the sink and went into the bathroom to brush my teeth and finish getting dressed. I looked at my appearance and groaned. My eyes were glassy and I had dark circles under my eyes. My hair hung limply around my shoulders and my clothes were huge on my frame. I was so ready to call in sick today, but I didn't have any plans for a substitute. I swiped my work keys and car keys, from my bedside table and darted to my car. I made it to school and was assaulted with congratulations from my administration for a job well done on the musical. I was walking through the main office when my principal, Mrs. Cope, called me into her office.

## A Fresh Start

"Morning," I said sitting down in the large wicker chairs in her homey office.  
"How are you?"

"I'm alright," Mrs. Cope said with a motherly smile. "I wanted to congratulate you for a wonderful job with the musical this year. My voicemail was filled with compliments for the work you did with the kids."

"Thanks, Mrs. Cope," I said, brushing a wayward hair from my face.

"Oh, Bella. What happened?" Mrs. Cope frowned.

"Oh this? I sprained my wrist. I had to make a stop at the emergency room yesterday. I thought I broke it. However, the doctor said it was just a sprain," I answered, wiggling my fingers in the black brace. "I'm fine."

"You are the clumsiest person, ever," Mrs. Cope giggled.

"Yes. Yes, I am," I snorted. "I have to make copies for my students, Mrs. Cope. I've been in musical oblivion for the past week and I am so far behind."

"Of course," she smiled. "Have a good day and I'll see you later."

I grinned and got up, walking to my classroom. I guffawed when I got to my door. It was decorated with a ton of drama decorations and cards from my cast. I really loved my kids. They were awesome and they could always manage to make me feel good. I unlocked the door and gathered the unattached décor from my door and put it on my desk. I placed my bag on the chair and I gathered my things to copy. I walked to the staff lounge and I ran into Alice.  
"Hey, Elf."

"Morning, Bella," Alice smiled. "I heard you went to the hospital yesterday. What did you do?"

"Isn't that some kind of HIPAA violation?" I teased.

## A Fresh Start

"No. I guessed. Edward came home from his shift and he had a dreamy look in his eyes," Alice snickered. "I asked him why he was so enamored. He said that he had a patient, with chocolate brown eyes and a snarky attitude come and visit him. I then pressed him asking if he knew said person. His blush gave him away."

"Why would he blush about me? He's gorgeous. Doesn't he have a girlfriend or supermodel wife or something?" I snorted.

"Nope. He's single," Alice said, giving me a wink.

"Don't, Elf. Just don't. I'm not ready for any kind of relationship. He's a nice guy who had to deal with my clumsy ass yesterday. And my bitchiness the night before. I just can't," I said, pulling my brown hair into a ponytail. "He wouldn't want me anyway. No one does."

"Bella, you are gorgeous, too," Alice said, pulling me into a hug. "Mike was a fucking tool."

"You want to know why I had to go to the hospital yesterday? Mike called. He accused me of 'dating,'" I grumbled into her shoulder.

"Didn't he cheat on you with Jessica?" Alice asked.

"Yeah. That's the irony. Asshat. Anyhow, I was so pissed; I punched the countertop in my kitchen. I thought I broke my hand," I sniffled. "Your brother/cousin was my doctor."

Alice looked at me and a wry smile appeared over her elfin features. "He likes you. A lot."

"Well, he's not going to get me. No one is. I'm not putting myself out there to get hurt. I'm done," I said, moving away from my friend. I put my papers into the copy machine and I could feel Alice's glare in the back of my head. "Don't try anything, Elf."

## A Fresh Start

"He needs a friend. You need a friend. Why not be friends? He gave you his cell phone number. He doesn't know the area. Invite him over for coffee," Alice suggested.

"No. That's final, Alice," I said. "I just can't."

"You are so stubborn, Bella. It's going to get you into trouble," she sighed. "I hope that you give him a chance. He's not like Mike. At all. He's a good man who was dealt a shitty hand. However, if you want to know his story, call him. He'll talk to you. You're not the only one who's gone through a divorce or who's been hurt."

I whirled around only to face the back of Alice's small form walking away. Was Edward married before? I didn't notice a ring or a tan line on his left hand. However, why should I care? Dr. McFuckme was so far out of my league.

I'll just get through the school year and move into the small condo I had purchased, and begin my cat collection. I didn't need a man. I am a strong, independent woman who is fully capable of surviving without the constant companionship of the lower sex. Maybe I'll switch teams. Become a lesbian. Yeah, that's the answer.

No, it isn't. Damn it.

xx AFS xx

Two Months Later:

I don't know how I managed to get through the rest of the school year, but I did. I moved out of the house and into a small, two bedroom condo. Alice and Jasper helped out, as did Emmett. Alice tried to get Edward to come, but I abjectly refused his help. I blew him off after he gave me his card. He probably didn't want anything to do with me. Not that I blamed him. I was a vile shrew to my friends and family. I'm surprised I still had friends.

## A Fresh Start

I only had one more hurdle to jump and that was the actual divorce proceedings. Mike was having a snit fit over the house and how much I sold it for. We were having a meeting in front of a mediator to finalize those details before it would be complete. I was getting dressed for my court date and I piled into my beastly car. I drove to the courthouse and met up with my lawyer, Seth Clearwater. He was a good man. Young. Knew his shit. He got my divorce proceedings to be completed very quickly. He told me that the housing issue would not be a problem and I believed him. I believed him because he was so gay. He reminded me of Alice, only nearly six and half feet tall and huge.

Mike arrived with his lawyer and a pregnant Jessica. She looked to be about five months along. On her finger was a large diamond ring and I bit back vomit. He was so careful with me and he was adamant on waiting to have children. Now he shows up with his pregnant fiancée? Stupid, hateful bastard. That's why he's fighting me on the house situation. He wants more money. I sneered at him and we were led into a large conference room. Thankfully, Jessica stayed outside. If she had come in, I would have kicked her ass.

"Mr. Newton and Ms. Swan, we are meeting here today to discuss the terms of your divorce proceedings. Everything was decided upon except the housing situation," the mediator, Felix Peterman, said. "Ms. Swan, please explain to me what happened?"

"Mike admitted that he cheated on me and I kicked him out. I put the house on the market and did a short sale with the first buyer. I sold the house at a loss, but I couldn't afford living there. Not on my salary. I work as a teacher at Cherry Blossom Middle School. I don't make enough to pay for the house, the utilities and everything else."

"How much did you sell the house for?" Felix asked.

"\$250,000. We bought it at \$425,000," I explained.

"Mr. Newton, what is your issue with this?" Felix asked.

## A Fresh Start

"That house was worth more than \$250,000. Before I moved out, I had an appraiser look at it and he said it was equal to \$375,000 with all the upgrades that I put into it. I realize that economy is bad, but we could have at least gotten what was appraised for."

"No, Mike. We couldn't. The real estate agent was not optimistic at selling it at anything over \$300,000," I said rationally. "I took their advice and accepted the offer when it was made."

"My name is still on that mortgage," Mike sneered. "We owe the bank money."

"I've already made arrangements to pay down that debt with the bank. It's all laid out in the paperwork you were supposed to sign," I sighed. "Or are you too busy paying off your new fiancée's engagement ring."

"Ms. Swan, please be civil," Felix warned. "Based off what I've read in the paperwork and what I've heard, the debt consolidation plan that Ms. Swan set up is an appropriate compromise. Since the sale of the house is final, we cannot address that. What we need to address is the payments of debt consolidation. After looking at your financial statements, these are the numbers that I propose for each party to pay each month until the debt is gone."

Felix pushed papers toward Mike and me. The payments that were for me was approximately \$350 a month for the next five years. It was the equivalent of a car payment. I could swing that as I asked my family for a loan to pay off my car. Both my parents, who were divorced, gifted me the money to pay off the beast. I didn't have to contend with that issue anymore. Mike was growling and he flew out of his chair. His lawyer put a hand on his shoulder, whispering in his ear. Mike snarled and he nodded tersely. "I'll sign the damn paperwork. However, I'm doing it under duress."

Felix held out a pen and Mike snatched it from him. He scrawled his signature on the dotted line and I did the same. Mike narrowed his eyes and he turned on his heel, barging out of the conference room. Felix gave me a sympathetic look and I just shrugged. I gathered my things and walked out of the conference room. Seth gave me a hug and I handed him his check for my payment. I left

## A Fresh Start

the courthouse with a feeling of freedom and happiness. I was no longer tied to Mike. No longer his wife. His doormat. I was going to be on my own. I needed to celebrate. I pulled out my cell phone and called Alice.

"Hey bitch," Alice giggled.

"What's up, elf?" I snorted. "I'm single. The divorce went through, thank GOD! Mike finally came to his senses and signed the paperwork."

"Excellent! Want to go out for some celebratory drinks?" Alice asked.

"You read my mind," I smiled.

"No, I just saw the future. Pick me up and we'll go to this new martini bar called Bar Louie. See you in about an hour?" Alice suggested.

"I want to change. How about two?" I replied.

"Sure. Wear your new red dress," Alice snickered.

"Ugh, fine," I grumbled. I hung up with Alice and drove to my condo. I checked my mail and walked down the corridor to my new home. I unlocked the door and slipped inside. I dropped off my mail and practically skipped to my bedroom. I hastily checked my voicemail and saw that I had a message. Whoever it was, didn't say anything. They just hung up. I checked the caller ID and it was a local number, but I didn't recognize it. I shrugged it off as a wrong number and went to shower and change.

Since my separation and divorce from Mike, I really worked on changing my appearance and taking better care of myself. I'd lost about twenty pounds and got about seven inches chopped off my hair. I now had a swingy style that just dusted on my shoulders with a lot of layers. I also started using makeup. Alice took me shopping and got me all the necessities of beautifying my skin. It was a lot of creams and tubes, but I really noticed a difference. I carefully applied my makeup and styled my hair using the products that Alice instructed me to use. I slipped on my red dress and put on a pair of black heels. For the first

## A Fresh Start

time in a long time, I felt sexy. Desirable.

Not like I was going to get any play tonight, but a girl can dream.

I got into my car and drove to Alice's townhouse that she shared with Jasper. I sent her a text, telling her that I was at her place and instantaneously she danced down the steps. She got into my SUV and she gave me directions to Bar Louie. It was in downtown Sherryville, the town where we lived. After about twenty minutes, I pulled into the parking garage and we walked to the chic bar. We settled down in a high booth and a young woman came and took our orders. I got a chocolate martini. Alice got a Cosmo.

Our drinks were delivered and Alice proposed a toast. "To being newly single," Alice smiled.

"Being newly single," I said, clinking my glass with hers. I took a sip of the delicious drink and I enjoyed the burn that went down my throat. "Alice, I know that I haven't been the most pleasant person to be around, but I appreciate your friendship and everything that you've done for me."

"You're like my sister, Bella. I would do anything for you," she smiled. "So, now that you're single, what are you going to do?"

"Focus on me. I need to be comfortable in my own skin before I can open my heart to another person," I said quietly.

"What have you done to do to begin that process, Bells?" Alice asked.

"I've starting taking care of myself. Hence the Alice Cullen makeover. I'm working with a therapist to boost my self-esteem. I'm also being a tad selfish. Bella needs to come first. Not anyone else. At least not now," I smiled.

"Good for you, girl," Alice said, draining her drink. She flagged down our server and ordered another round. We drank several drinks before heading out to the dance floor. Alice and I had a good time, but I was feeling my alcohol. I was definitely buzzed and I knew I shouldn't drive. "Alice, I'm done. I'm too



## A Fresh Start

drunk."

"Let me call Jasper. See if we can get him to pick us up," she said. We walked back to our table and Alice ordered another round of drinks. If we were getting chauffeured around, we might as well feel NO PAIN. I paid our server and sat down, clumsily into the booth. "Shit."

"What, Ali?" I asked, giggling uncontrollably.

"Jasper is drunk too," she whined. "Who can we call to pick up our drunken asses?"

I shrugged and downed my appletini. "We could call a cab."

"Nah. What's the point of having family close by when you're drunk? I know! Edward," she shrieked. She quickly dialed his number and I was too wasted to protest. "Eddie! My favorite brother! I'm lit and can't drive. Can you pick me and a friend up? Really? I love you, baby brother! Cousin! Whatever! See you in a few."

"You just called Edward," I grumbled.

"Yep. He'll be here in fifteen minutes," Alice said. "He just got off from a shift from the hospital."

I gaped at my elfin friend and collapsed on my arms, groaning. I didn't want to see him. Especially now. I'm drunk and I have absolutely no filter. I don't trust myself around Dr. McFuckme. Alice downed her drink and she ordered another round. If I'm going down, I'm going down with a flourish. I chugged my drink and quickly downed the other drink placed in front of me.

"Slow down, Bells," Alice laughed. "You are going to be so hung over."

"Too late. I'm already there," I said, giving her a slow, drunken grin. "I'll need to be drunk in order to handle Dr. McFuckme."

## A Fresh Start

"Dr. McFuckme? Oh, he'll love that," Alice giggled.

"Damn it," I said. "I'm going to pee. Don't leave without me."

"I promise, I won't. Neither will Dr. McFuckme," Alice snorted.

I got up and stumbled to the bathroom. I quickly took care of business and washed my hands. As I walked back, I stumbled into the arms of a large, smelly man. "Excuse me," I mumbled.

"No problem, sugar," he sneered, getting dangerously close to me. His brown eyes were dark and I could smell his foul breath. It was making my stomach turn. "You are quite the hottie. Are you free for the rest of the evening?"

"No, I'm not. I'm heading home, actually," I said, trying to squirm away.

"You can come home with me," he purred, snaking his hands down my body, resting on my ass.

"Please, stop," I said, pushing away from him.

"Hey baby," I heard in a velvety smooth voice. "I've been looking all over for you."

I looked over my 'friend's' shoulder and saw Edward. He was in a pair of jeans and black t-shirt, with his glasses on his face. His voice was calm, but his eyes were filled with pure ire. "Edward," I breathed. My 'friend' released me and I scampered away from him. Edward held open his arms and I ran into them. I buried my nose into his chest and melted into the safety of his arms. "I missed you, sweetie."

"Is this guy bothering you, love?" Edward asked, cupping my chin and bringing my face to look into his green eyes.

"Not anymore," I said. My 'friend' harrumphed and breezed past us, pushing against Edward's shoulder with impressive force. He stumbled and I felt a low

## A Fresh Start

growl in his belly. As soon as he turned the corner, I extricated myself from Edward's arms and relaxed. "Thanks. That would have been ugly."

"Are you okay, Bella?" Edward asked, his eyes filled with concern.

"Fine. My buzz has effectively been killed. But I'm fine. If you hadn't come, I would have put a stiletto in his ass," I said. "I appreciate your help."

"No problem. Alice was worried when you weren't back when I got to the bar," Edward said. "Ready to go?"

"Yeah. I'm exhausted and I have a date with the porcelain god," I joked lamely.

"Drink some water and some Gatorade when you get home. Come on, I'm your taxi service for this evening. We can pick up your car tomorrow," Edward said, leading me out of the hallway from the bathroom.

"Edward, you don't have to do that. I'll make Alice take me," I said.

"I insist," Edward said, arching a brow over his glasses. I grumbled and nodded. Edward gave me a crooked smirk and led me back to the main area of the bar. I picked up my purse and Alice linked her arm with Edward's. She was singing the newest Lady Gaga song that was being pumped through the bar as she walked to the exit. "Has she been like this all night?"

"We both have been. It's a celebration of sorts," I said.

"What were you celebrating?" Edward asked.

"Bella's divorce. It was finalized today," Alice said as we walked toward Edward's car. "She's free from the asshat."

"Congratulations," Edward said with a tight smile.

"Thanks," I said, frowning slightly. Edward took out his car keys and a silver Volvo beeped in the front of the parking garage. He helped Alice into the front

## A Fresh Start

seat while I got in the back. "Are you taking me or Alice home first?"

"Alice. She's barely coherent and I am assuming you know where she lives. I'm still learning the area," Edward said with a sardonic grin.

"Sure, no big deal. When you exit the parking garage, turn right," I said from the back seat. Edward nodded and started the car. I pulled out my phone and called the local police department to inform them that my car was staying in the parking garage. I directed Edward to Alice and Jasper's townhouse. Alice had conked out in the front seat and was snoring quite loudly.

"Wow, that's impressive," Edward snorted. "Who knows that someone so small can make such a loud noise."

"You should hear her go at it in front of her choirs. She's a force to be reckoned with," I giggled.

"That she is. Can you grab her purse and get the keys? I'm going to carry Snorey McSnorensen," he laughed. I picked up Alice's purse and got out her keys. Edward got out of the car and picked up his snoring sister easily. We walked up the stairs and I unlocked the door to Alice's door. Edward carried her to her room and deposited her into her king-sized bed. I wrote Alice a quick note saying what happened and I left it on her bedside table after I peeled her out of her dress. I helped her into a pair of pajamas and met Edward down in the family room. "Is she safely tucked into her bed chamber?"

"Yes. She's ensconced in dreamland, drooling on Jasper's pillow," I snickered. "I need to do the same. Minus the drooling part on Jasper's pillow."

"Your chariot awaits," Edward said as he opened up Alice's front door.

I smiled and walked past Edward to his sleek silver Volvo. "It's a very nice chariot, by the way." Edward opened the passenger door and I slipped into the car.

"Thank you," he smiled. "She's my baby. So, where's home?"

## A Fresh Start

"Clover Creekside Condominiums," I answered.

"We'll be there in a matter of moments," Edward smiled. "Which way?"

"Go east on Park Street," I said as I buckled my seatbelt. "Then you need to turn right onto Main Street. Take that until Vine Avenue and then turn left. The condo complex will be on the right hand side."

"Got it," Edward smirked. "I don't want to be presumptuous, Bella, but you look fantastic."

"Um, thanks," I blushed. "Getting divorced puts a new spin on things."

"What happened?" Edward asked shyly. "You don't have to tell me, but you were so bitter when I saw you last."

"My ex-husband cheated on me with a co-worker. He was a major prick," I answered, looking at my fingers. "I felt so lost and I hated myself for being with him. I am still hating myself for being with him and letting it carry on as long as it did. I am berating myself for not noticing the fact that he fucking cheated on me. Sorry."

"Don't apologize, Bella. Obviously there is a great deal of resentment toward your ex-husband. I'm sorry he hurt you," Edward said sincerely. "Your divorce was finalized today?"

"Yep. I'm no longer Mrs. Michael Newton. I'm back to being plain, simple Bella Swan," I said looking out the window.

"You are far from plain, Bella," Edward admonished.

"It's all the makeup and highlights that your sister imparted on my head," I said, running my hand through my short hair. "What about you? Why did you move here from Seattle?"

## A Fresh Start

"It's a long story. Not one I'll bore you with tonight," Edward sighed. "You'll need more alcohol to hear that."

"Sorry?" I squeaked.

"Don't be. I'm not," Edward said, glancing my direction. "Moving closer to my family has been the single best decision I've made in my life. I missed my aunt and uncle. Not to mention the craziness that is Alice. I love my job and I'm meeting a lot of new people."

"That's good," I said, giving him a friendly pat on the arm. Again, the sparks flew through my fingers when I touched his skin. I pulled my hand back and began digging through my purse for my keys.

Edward pulled into my condo complex and he asked what building I was in. I directed him to my building and he parked the car. "Look, I know you are going through a rough time, Bella. However, I really want to get to know you. Would you be willing to go to lunch with me before we get your car tomorrow? So we can talk, as friends?"

I looked at the handsome man sitting across from me. His face was twisted in an adorable look of hope and uncertainty. Friends. I can do friends. "Yeah. I'd like that. What time will you pick me up?"

"I have a shift at three. So, how about noon?" he suggested, grinning sweetly.

"Sure," I said.

"Can I call you?" Edward asked, his face filled with the same emotions as before. I nodded and he asked for my phone. He programmed his number into it and called his cell from mine. "I'll see you tomorrow, Bella."

"See you tomorrow, Edward. Thanks for saving me from that thing in the hallway and for driving."

## A Fresh Start

"Not a problem. I hope I didn't make you uncomfortable," Edward said, worry marring his features.

"Definitely not. He was the one who was making me uncomfortable," I chortled. "Thank you."

"You're quite welcome," he smiled. He reached his hand up, but frowned and put it back on the steering wheel. "Sleep well, Bella."

"You too. Drive safe. Text me when you get back home," I said.

"I will. Let me get the door for you," Edward said gallantly. He darted around his car and opened the passenger door, offering me his hand to assist me out of it. He kept his hand in mine and gently caressed the top of my hand with his thumb. "Good night."

"Night," I said and I turned to walk into my condo. I gave him a tentative wave and unlocked the door. I quickly snuck behind it and pressed against it. I ran my hands through my hair and tried to calm my nerves.

We're going as friends. Friends! We can be friends.

*But he's so pretty. Too pretty to be my friend. Why would he want to be my friend?*

I'm so royally screwed.

**A/N: Yeah. Edward picked up Alice and Bella from the bar. Saved Bella from stinky man and they're going for coffee. Leave me love, please :)**

# The Lunch

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*This story is kind of cathartic for me and it's based in real life. Rated M for future lemons.*

## Chapter 4: The Lunch

When I got into my condo, I drank three bottles of water before heading to bed. As I was changing, my cell phone beeped and I looked to see what it was.

*As requested, I'm texting you to know that I'm home safely. I look forward to our lunch tomorrow. Sleep well, Bella. - Edward*

*Thanks for letting me know. Also, I appreciate your taxi services. See you tomorrow around noon. - Bella.*

I put my phone on my nightstand and finished getting ready for bed. I washed my face and crawled in between the sheets, curling up with my pillow. My eyes drifted shut and I eventually fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

xx AFS xx

When I woke up, I was so disoriented. I was hearing a shrilling sound. I reached for my phone and discovered it was ringing. The caller ID indicated that it was Alice. She was probably more confused than I was. "Morning, elf."

"How did I get home?" she croaked. "I'm so confuzzled."

"You called your cousin/brother and he drove you home. We dropped you off first and you were snoring something awful in the front seat of the car. I put you in your pajamas and helped you to bed," I said, my voice thick with sleep. "That's how you got home, elf."



## A Fresh Start

"I really drank too much, Bells," she grumbled. "I have such a hangover. It's so bad."

"Drink some water and take some advil," I suggested. "I'm going back to sleep."

"Wait a minute, young lady. You need to get ready for your lunch date with Edward," Alice teased.

"How did you know that?" I squeaked, sitting up in bed.

"I'm omniscient," Alice said cryptically. "Wear that pretty purple sundress and espadrilles."

"He's picking me up to get my car and we're only going *as friends*, Alice. He is not interested. He helped me in a sticky situation last night, but he's not even remotely..."

"What situation?" Alice barked.

"Some nasty dude was trying to take me home and he wouldn't take no for an answer. Edward 'pretended' to be my boyfriend to give the guy a clue," I said. "No big deal."

"Huh," Alice said. "Wear the purple sundress and do your hair curly. He'll love it. Trust me."

"Fuck," I groaned. "Stop playing matchmaker with your 'baby brother.' Why do you call him that anyway? He looks older than you."

"We're only a few months apart. I was born in April and Edward was born in June of 1979. So, he's my 'baby' brother," Alice smiled. "Go get dressed and I'll nurse my hangover. Love you!"

"Love you, too, elf," I sighed. "Talk to you later." I hung up the phone and looked at the clock. It was a little after ten in the morning. I stretched and got

## A Fresh Start

up, walking to the shower. I hopped on the scale and grimaced at the numbers. I gained a few pounds, but then again I drank a ton last night. I took a quick shower, hastily shaving my legs and arms. I was putting on some lotion and I heard the shrill noise of my cell phone again. I ran and picked it up. "Hello?"

"Bella?" came a velvety voice.

"That's me," I smiled. "Edward?"

"Yeah," he said nervously. "I was wondering if I could pick you up around 11. One of my residents is sick and can only work until after one. I need to cover the last part of his shift."

"That's fine. I'm getting ready now," I answered as I walked back to my bathroom. "See you in a little bit."

"I'm looking forward to it," Edward smiled. "Bye."

"Bye," I answered and hung up the phone. I finished getting ready and applied my make up carefully, per Alice's instructions. I put some mousse in my hair and ran my fingers through it. I took out my blow dryer and used the diffuser to organize my curls. I slipped on my underwear and the pale lavender sundress that Alice suggested. It was a halter style dress and I didn't feel comfortable showing my shoulders, so I threw on a simple white cardigan. I slipped on my shoes and prayed I wouldn't need to go to the emergency room in these suckers. They were high and provided no ankle support. Not good for a gimp. At least I'm going out to lunch with a doctor.

As I was waiting for Edward, I hopped on my computer and decided to pay some bills. Ah, the joys of online bill pay. Makes life so easy. I was finishing up my bills when I heard my phone ring from my bedroom. I walked slowly to my room and picked it up. "Hello?"

"Hey, it's me. Edward. I'm outside but I would like to actually meet you at your door. What's your apartment number?"

## A Fresh Start

"B208. Find my name on the roster and I'll buzz you up," I said as I scrambled to toss random items in my living room into my bedroom. I wasn't a slob, per se, but I didn't have to worry about impressing anyone with my housework skills recently. The wonders and perks of single life. I got my living room and kitchen pretty organized in the two minutes it took Edward to buzz the intercom. I rang him up and a few moments later a soft knock came through my door. I opened it up and found a very nervous looking Edward. "Hi. Come on in."

"Thanks," he said, giving me a crooked smile. He was dressed very formally in a pair of charcoal gray dress slacks, white dress shirt and a red tie. "You look lovely, Bella."

I blushed and tucked my hair behind my ear, turning away from him. "Thank you. So do you. I'm assuming this is for work and not for lunch."

"Ah, yes. I have a meeting with the board of directors. All of the department heads do, today. We're discussing budget issues and possible layoffs. I hate it. I wish I could just practice medicine, but the administrative portion is an integral part of my job description," Edward said, pushing up his glasses.

"If you don't like it, why did you become the head of the emergency department?" I asked, immediately regretting asking such a personal question. "Sorry, if it makes you uncomfortable."

"No, it's not a big deal. I wanted to be an emergency room doctor. I am good at it. Really good. However, I'm also really good at handling sticky administrative situations. I was the head of the department at the hospital I worked at in Seattle and that was FAR more paperwork than Craven. I spent more time in my office than I did on the floor," he chuckled. "At least here, I'm able to be a doctor and an administrator. Also, my uncle is the chief of staff. He practically begged me to come work for him. His goal is to make Craven a level two trauma center. The previous head of the emergency department didn't share that vision. I can see the potential and I'm working with the rest of the hospital and vendors to make it happen."

## A Fresh Start

I nodded and turned to get my purse from my bedroom. "Ready?"

"Definitely," Edward smiled. "I'm taking you to a small Italian place, if that's alright. La Bella Italia?"

I giggled and nodded in acquiescence. I picked up my car keys and we walked to the door. Edward opened the door for me and I locked it as we left my condo. As we walked down the hallway, Edward kept his hand on the small of my back, almost protectively. The touch didn't go unnoticed and I could myself grow flushed. When we got out to Edward's car, he opened the passenger door and I slid into the Volvo. He got into the driver's side and took off his glasses. He slid on a pair of sunglasses and started the car. "When I saw you at Slammers, you weren't wearing glasses?"

"I usually wear contacts, but I'm working a double tonight and I hate the dry feeling I get when I wear my contacts for too long," Edward replied as he eased his car out of the parking spot. "Also, if I catch some shut eye, they get really itchy. Drives me insane."

"Lasik. It works wonders," I said. "I had it done two years ago and I was so thrilled."

"How bad was your prescription?" Edward asked.

"Really bad. I had coke bottle glasses, they were so thick," I chuckled. "I grew tired of dealing with contacts and the rigmarole with that and so I got the Lasik done."

"Any side effects?" Edward asked warily.

"I have something in my tear ducts to help to produce more tears, but other than that, no. Why?"

"I'm thinking. *Thinking* about it. I'm still leery about a flipping laser in my eyeball," he shuddered. "One wrong move and I'm blind. Not food for a doctor, you know?"

## A Fresh Start

"You kind of need to see," I teased.

"That would be a good thing," he smiled. "Who was your optometrist?"

"Dr. Eva Sandoval. She was wonderful," I answered.

"Can I get her number to make an appointment with your Dr. Sandoval?" Edward asked.

"Sure. I'll give it to you at the restaurant," I said. "You have to drive, buddy."

"Yes ma'am," he snorted.

We pulled into the parking lot of La Bella Italia and Edward got out of the car, opening my door for me. We walked into the restaurant and the hostess was ogling him. I think I saw a little drool on her chin. He brusquely requested a table for two and she led us to the front of the restaurant. Edward frowned and requested something quieter. The hostess blushed and obliged his request. We were in a booth in a secluded part of the restaurant. It was very romantic.

*You're out as friends, Bella. Remember that. Dr. McFuckme is not interested.*

"Bella?" Edward asked.

"Sorry. I spaced out on you," I tittered nervously. "Have you been here before?"

"No. But Dr. Gerandy highly recommends it," Edward smiled. I brushed my hair back from my face and took a hesitant sip of water. "Have you?"

"Once. My ex-husband had a work function here. His company rented out the back room for some party. We had their catered fare. It was good," I answered, playing with my napkin.

*Why am I so fucking nervous? Holy hell!*

## A Fresh Start

Edward stared at me and his jade eyes twinkled. I dropped my gaze and took a glance around the restaurant. It was very typically Italian. It had red checked tablecloths, wine bottle candles and bread sticks on the tables. All I needed was a plate of spaghetti and someone singing "Buona Notte" and I'm in a Disney movie.

Our waitress came out of nowhere, pulling me out of my reverie. "Welcome to La Bella Italia. I'm Roseta and I'm server for today. Would you like to hear our specials?" she asked in a bored tone.

"Sure," Edward said politely.

"We have mushroom ravioli in tomato vodka sauce, chicken saltimbocca, shrimp diavolo," Roseta said, chewing her gum. "Do you need some time or are you ready to order?"

"Can you give us a few minutes?" Edward asked.

"Can I get you some drinks while you wait?"

"I'll have a coke, please," Edward said.

"Water with a slice of lemon," I answered.

"Be right back with those."

"What looks good, Ms. Swan?" Edward smirked.

"I'm probably going to go with the mushroom ravioli. I'm a sucker for their vodka sauce," I said, pushing my menu away. "You?"

"Hmmm," he thought. "I'm going with the chicken saltimbocca. Sounds different."

Almost, as if beckoned, our server came back with our drinks. She also took our order, offering us salad or soup. I got a small salad. Edward ordered the

## A Fresh Start

minestrone. As we tucked into our appetizers, Edward asked, "So you work with my crazy sister?"

"Yes. She is the choir director at the building we work at. We also co-direct the musical. When I first met you was our closing night and we were celebrating," I said, grimacing at our first meeting.

"What do you teach?" Edward asked.

"Accelerated language arts," I replied. "Lots of reading but it's a lot of fun."

"What makes it accelerated?" Edward questioned.

"I cram more into the quarters. Cover more concepts. Read more challenging novels. I'd rather teach the accelerated group any day. They are usually the cream of the crop," I said wistfully.

"So, I'm assuming your major was English literature or something like that?" Edward asked as he finished his soup.

"Yeah. English literature major with a minor in secondary education. I also have my masters in curriculum and instruction, with a reading endorsement," I said. "I finished it the year before I moved schools."

"Alice told me about that. Your old principal sounds like a douche," Edward said with wrinkled nose.

"He was. To add to his douchery, he made all of these decisions and he's no longer in the district. Fucktard," I grumbled. "I wasn't the only one who got screwed. I had a friend who was a PE teacher at my old building, Chapel Middle School, and he was essentially forced to be a full time health teacher. He isn't even certified to teach health. There was much bitterness and resentment toward 'Davie B,' my former principal. At the end of the school year party, we had a picture of him on a bullseye and we tossed darts at his head. It was very cathartic."

## A Fresh Start

"And you said he's no longer at the district?" Edward inquired.

"Nope. He left the July following all of the madness. I would be hard pressed to not knee him in the balls if I see him on the street," I said, sipping my water. "However, I'm happy at Cherry Blossom. I like the people and the kids are awesome. It was not an easy transition, moving from building to building, but I'm glad I'm there."

Roseta came and delivered our meals. We dug into our lunches. "So, you're a doctor. Where did you go to school?"

"I did my undergrad at Dartmouth. I then went to University of Chicago for medical school," Edward replied. "I followed in my uncle's and my father's footsteps. Carlisle is a neurologist and my father, Edward Sr. was a pediatric oncologist."

"Alice mentioned about your parents. I'm so sorry," I said sympathetically.

Edward smiled sadly. "I miss them every day. However, I have Carlisle and Esme who took me in when I was orphaned at fifteen. I was a hot mess. In more ways than two."

"Okay?"

"Alice told you that they were in a car accident, right?" Edward asked. I nodded and arched a brow. "Well, I was in the car with them. They were hit head on by a drunk driver. I was sitting in the backseat and was thrown twenty feet from the car. I wasn't wearing my seatbelt. I had a nasty head injury and was in a coma for about three months. That's what fucked up my vision. I'm not sure if Lasik can work for me, but no harm in asking. When I woke up, I had to relearn everything. How to walk, how to talk, how to shave, how to take a piss; it was so demeaning and I was so angry. Angry at my parents for dying. Angry at the asshat who hit them. Angry at myself for not buckling myself in."

"Holy shit," I said, looking at Edward. He looked perfectly normal. No scars or anything. He actually looked better than normal. He looked beautiful.



## A Fresh Start

"Looking for any physical remnants?" he teased.

"No. Yes. Shit," I said, burying my head in my hands. "Sorry."

"Don't be. I have a huge scar on the back of my head where they put in a shunt. I also have some scars on my torso and legs from surgeries and broken bones. Other than that, I'm perfectly normal, save for a few migraines every so often."

"How did you handle school?" I asked.

"Once I was able to read again, I had tutors. I also had an IEP for a traumatic brain injury. It gave me extra time on my tests to accommodate my slower than normal processing issues. It took me forever to write a sentence, but my intellect was still intact; just slower. I graduated from high school with my class as I took my anger and focused it on my school work. I wanted to prove all the doctors wrong who said I'd be a vegetable. In undergrad, I had the same accommodations until I was a junior, when I refused them. My first semester was a bit rough, but I did it. I continued to improve and I went to medical school. My struggled the most with the ER rotation, but I found it to be the most rewarding. I decided that was going to be my specialty and I worked extra hard to make it a possibility for me."

"Wow," I said, looking at this incredibly brave man in front of me. "I can't believe it. I would have never known."

"Yeah. I overcame all of the odds when I woke up. I defied the doctors when I learned how to do everything again. I flummoxed the specialists when I became a doctor myself. My career is rewarding but it came at a cost," he said sadly.

"What happened?" I asked.

"My wife died in my ER three years ago," Edward said, a lone tear falling down his cheek. "She was killed by a drunk driver, like my parents."

## A Fresh Start

**A/N: Cliffie...sort of, kind of. Edward is reaching out to Bella and she's starting to realize her attraction. Poor Widowward.**

# The Flashback

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*This story is kind of cathartic for me and it's based in real life. Rated M for future lemons.*

## Chapter 5: The Flashback

*January 27 th , 2008. Seattle, Washington at Virginia Mason Medical Center*

"Dr. Masen, I need you on a consult," asked Victoria, a pretty red-headed resident who was assigned to Dr. Masen as her attending.

"I'll be right there. I have to finish setting this shoulder. What room?" Dr. Masen asked.

"Curtain area three, Dr. Masen," she replied.

Dr. Masen, Edward, nodded and used his body, with the assistance of Cynthia, the charge nurse to set the dislocated shoulder in the fifty year old man. With a resounding pop, the shoulder returned into place. "Get post reduction films and I'll come back when he's awake."

"Of course, Dr. Masen," Cynthia said, giving her favorite doctor a smile.

Edward signed off on his orders on the patient's chart and walked toward curtain area three. He strode into the small area and found a young mother, cradling her shrieking child. The mother looked panicked and distraught. "Hello, I'm Dr. Masen. Dr. Hunter asked me to come in take a look at Toby," Edward said as he looked at the young man's chart. He was running a high fever and he had fluid on the lungs. Edward crouched down to look at the screaming boy. "Hi, Toby. I'm Edward. I'm going to take a look at you. Can you stop crying, little man?"

## A Fresh Start

Toby looked at Edward with huge eyes. He burrowed into his mother's chest but stopped crying. Edward placed his hands onto the child's forehead, feeling for a temperature. He had one. He asked the nurse, Tiffany, to bring over a thermometer. He placed it in the child's ear and it registered at 104.7. Too high for such a young child. He was only two. Edward took out his stethoscope and warmed the bulb before putting it on Toby's heated chest. His heart was racing and he could hear fluid in his lungs. "What is Toby's other symptoms?" Edward asked the mother.

"He's tired all of the time and he can't pay attention to anything," Toby's mom said, her voice weary.

"Have you ordered a spinal tap, Dr. Hunter?" Edward asked.

"No, Dr. Masen. Would you recommend it?" Victoria asked.

"Yes. Set it up and I'll do it," Edward said, his voice filled with concern for the little boy. "Do you consent to give your son a spinal tap? He may have an infection called meningitis. Meningitis normally occurs as a complication from an infection in the bloodstream. Has your son been sick prior to this?"

"He's had an ear infection for a couple of weeks now. It just wouldn't go away."

"Okay. Can we do the spinal tap on Toby?" Edward asked. "It's the only way to know for sure if he has meningitis."

"Yes, please."

"Alright. Tiffany, put Toby into a gown and we'll be back in a few moments," Edward said as he got up from his crouched position. Victoria and Edward went to the storage closet and pulled out the necessary materials to perform a spinal tap. "Have you done a spinal on a child?"

"No, Dr. Masen," Victoria said, her eyes wide. "Can I do it on Toby?"

## A Fresh Start

"How many spinals have you done?" Edward asked his resident.

"Only two. Both were on older patients," Victoria said, with a frown.

"You'll watch this time," Edward said, arching a brow over his glasses. With the tray filled with the spinal tap materials, Edward and Victoria came back into curtain area three. Edward took another look at Toby's chart, noticing that he had an ear infection for a month and a sinus infection for two months. He took a quick look at the last name and looked at Toby's mom. "Mrs. Pattinson, I'm going to numb a portion of Toby's back and insert a small catheter. From that catheter, I will drain a small portion of Toby's cerebral spinal fluid. After obtaining the sample, it will be sent to the lab for verification of what you son has. Do you have any questions?"

"Just make my baby better," Mrs. Pattinson cried. "He's been so sick for so long."

"I'll try, Mrs. Pattinson. Would you like to hold Toby?" Edward asked. Mrs. Pattinson nodded emphatically and moved to Toby's bed. Edward told her how to hold him and Edward began the spinal tap. With a quiet, soothing voice, he spoke through the procedure, explaining each step he took. Toby whimpered but didn't move. After getting the sample, Edward handed it to Tiffany who took it to the lab. "It'll be an hour or so. Dr. Hunter, can you start an IV?"

"Um," Victoria said.

Edward arched a brow and looked at his resident. She shrugged and gave him an apologetic smirk. "Okay, I'll start the IV. I want to start Toby on some IV antibiotics. Is he allergic to penicillin?"

"No," Mrs. Pattinson said.

"Okay," Edward said as he got some IV supplies from the storage closet in the small, sterile room. He calmly set up the IV and started Toby's antibiotics.

"Because you were such a brave boy, do you want some ice cream?"

## A Fresh Start

"Vaniwwa," Toby said quietly, smiling shyly at the handsome doctor.

"With a cherry?" Edward winked.

"Rainbow spwinkles," Toby giggled.

"You got it, little man," Edward said, holding out a fist. Toby gave a weak fist bump and Edward asked Tiffany to bring up some vanilla ice cream with rainbow sprinkles.

After about an hour, Edward checked to see if Toby's test results were in. They were. Edward looked them over and unfortunately he had meningitis. At least it was the viral kind. Bacterial meningitis was a death sentence for someone Toby's age. Edward walked into the small curtain area and check on his little patient. He was eating his ice cream, or rather smearing it all over his face. "Is that good, little man?"

"Vewwy good," Toby smiled. "Thank you, Dr. Masen."

"You're welcome, Toby," Edward said, ruffling the young man's hair. "Mrs. Pattinson, Toby does have meningitis."

"What does that mean, Dr. Masen?" she asked quietly, gently rubbing her son's head.

"Well, it means that I can't really do anything more here in the ER. I am administering antibiotics for his sinus infection and ear ache. Once he's done with that, he can go home. For the home care, you just need to monitor his fever and give him Tylenol if it spikes. Make an appointment with his primary care physician in one to two days. If he gets worse, bring him back here, immediately. We'll keep him here until he's done with his IV. After that, he's free to go, if his fever is below 102. If it's still elevated, we'll keep him here overnight."

"Thank you, Dr. Masen," Mrs. Pattinson sighed.

## A Fresh Start

"No problem, Mrs. Pattinson," Edward smiled. The door pushed open and a very haggard Cynthia came in.

"Dr. Masen? We have a multi-car MVA coming in. Three critical patients," Cynthia said brusquely.

"Thank you, Cynthia," Edward said with a frown. "Excuse me."

Edward grabbed a fresh pair of gloves and waited in the ambulance bay. It was very cold outside and the roads were slick. It had rained earlier in the day and the rain had turned into ice. Edward was worried about his wife, Tanya, a world renowned child psychiatrist. She was driving back to Seattle from Portland. She was giving a lecture about ADHD to a small symposium at the University of Oregon. She should have been home by now and should have called or texted.

The first bus came into the ambulance bay and the EMT, Austin began barking the stats of the patient.

"Male, 34, driver of the first car. Blunt head trauma, smells like a swill. Unconscious at the scene. BP 120 over 60, pulse 74 and resps 20. His breathing on his own," he said as they walked to one of the trauma rooms.

"Victoria, he's yours," Edward said, his voice full of authority.

"Got it, Dr. Masen," she said.

He made sure that the patient was moved to the gurney without incident before heading back into the ambulance bay. The first ambulance pulled away and another pulled in. Edward watched as the doors opened to the ambulance. The EMT, Paul, looked at Edward and his eyes widened. "Female, 31, driver of the car that was hit. Dr. Masen, you might not want to take this one," Paul said. "Get someone else."

"Why?" Edward barked as he moved to the side of the gurney. He looked down at the patient and he saw his life laying there. "Tanya."

## A Fresh Start

As Edward stared at his wife, her heart began beating erratically. Dr. Moore, the other attending saw what was happening and he jumped in, barking orders. They rolled Tanya into the trauma room. Edward followed blindly, watching as they cut away Tanya's clothes. She was bruised from head to toe. Her face was cut up. Her legs were bent an awkward angle and there was a large bruise in the center of her chest, presumably where the steering column hit her chest. Edward couldn't look away. His eyes filling with tears.

Edward heard words like pneumothorax, chest tubes, and rib spreader. This was not good. Not good at all. Dr. Moore inserted a chest tube and huge amounts of blood poured out of her chest cavity. Tanya's heart was still sputtering and Dr. Moore cut into her chest, exposing her heart. He began working on fixing the defect that was causing her heart palpitations.

"Shit! Her aorta is fucking shredded," Dr. Moore growled. He removed his hands from Tanya's chest cavity and her heart stopped beating. "Astystole. Time of death, 19:18."

Edward blinked and shook his head. "No," he said quietly. "NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO! Keep trying damn it!" he roared as he began pounding on his dead wife's chest. His tears fell down his cheeks and he tried, in vain to restart Tanya's heart.

"Dr. Masen," Dr. Moore said.

"She's not gone. She can't be," Edward cried. "Paddles. Charge to 360."

"Dr. Masen," Dr. Moore said more forcefully. "She's gone. I'm sorry."

"No. She's young and strong. Give me the mother fucking paddles," Edward screamed. "She's my wife. She can't be dead."

"Edward, you have to stop," Dr. Moore said, putting a hand on Edward's shoulder.



## A Fresh Start

Edward looked at the other attending physician and saw the sadness in his eyes. Edward screamed and sent the tray of instruments flying across the room. He slid down the wall and began bawling uncontrollably. "No! No! No! Tanya. My Tanya. Come back to me. Please," he begged. "I love you. So much, my Tanya."

Cynthia came into the trauma room and she fell to her knees. Her heart broke for the young attending. She put her arms around the bawling man and held him to her chest. He wept openly, clinging to Cynthia like she was a life raft. She rocked Edward and held him as he cried over the loss of his wife. "Shhh, it's okay, hon," Cynthia cooed.

"She's gone, Cynthia," Edward said, sounding like a lost little boy. "What am I going to do?"

"Tiffany is already calling your family, Dr. Masen. Edward," Cynthia said. "You just take care of your wife. I know she loved you very much."

"I'm so lost," Edward said, drawing his knees up to his chest. He buried his head into his knees and the tears came flowing again.

Dr. Moore came back into the room and he crouched in front of Edward. "Your family is coming out on the next flight. They'll help you, Edward," he said. "Do you need anything? Something to calm you down?"

Edward nodded and looked at his colleague. "Ativan," he said.

Dr. Moore looked at Cynthia and she got up and got the Ativan. She got a bottle of water and handed Edward the small pill. He swallowed it and got up from his place on the floor. In his rage, the nurses had covered Tanya with drapes, to hide her injuries. Dr. Moore rolled over a stool and placed it near Edward. He sat down and picked up Tanya's hand, caressing her soft, cold skin. Tears spilled over onto his cheeks and he laid his head on her shoulder. "I'll miss you, my love. More than words can say."

## A Fresh Start

Edward stayed with Tanya until they rolled her to the morgue. He fought, tooth and nail to stay with her longer. However, they needed the trauma room. Cynthia gave Edward another Ativan and put him in the doctor's lounge so he could sleep. He refused to go home.

Early the next morning, Edward's family came looking for him. Cynthia who stayed with Edward all night, directed Carlisle, Esme and his sister, Alice into the doctor's lounge. He was curled up on the couch, holding the sweater that was cut off Tanya's body when she was brought in. Alice ran to her brother and threw her arms around his neck. He jumped at the contact. When he realized who was hugging, he began bawling again. He held onto his tiny, elfin sister like she was the last person on earth. She let him cry into her shoulder. Esme, Edward's aunt, joined in the embrace and it was all that Cynthia could do to not begin bawling herself.

Carlisle began handling the funeral arrangements and Alice and Esme finally dragged Edward home. Before they left, Dr. Moore gave Alice a small bottle of Ativan and another bottle of Ambien. Alice drove Edward's car home as he slept in the passenger seat of his sleek Volvo. With the help of Esme, Alice got Edward into bed in his large Seattle home. He stayed asleep for most of the day as Alice and Esme began preparing for Tanya's funeral. It was nearly twilight when the most gut-wrenching screams filled the house. Alice and Esme shared a look and darted up the stairs.

Edward was twisted in the bed linens, drenched in sweat, screaming bloody murder.

"Edward, wake up," Alice said, as she knelt in front of him. "You're having a nightmare."

The screams continued and Alice crawled into bed with her brother. She shook him and he finally opened his eyes. His green eyes were empty, dead. "Is Tanya still dead?"

"I'm sorry, baby brother. But yes," Alice said.

## A Fresh Start

"Then I'm living a nightmare," Edward said, rolling on his side, away from his family. "First my parents and now my wife? Who the fuck did I piss off?"

"Edward Anthony Masen, don't you go back down this path," Esme said sternly. "You have been dealt a bunch of shitty cards, but you did NOTHING WRONG."

Edward chuckled humorlessly and curled into Tanya's pillows, inhaling deeply. "If I did nothing wrong, then why am I being punished?"

"I don't know, Edward. It sucks and it's unbelievably tragic. But you can't fall apart. Even though she's gone, you need to be strong for her. I know you loved her," Esme said as she brushed a hair off her nephew's forehead.

"Want to know something else?" Edward said, barely above a whisper.

"What, Edward?" Esme asked."

"Tanya told me the day before she left for this trip that she was pregnant. I was going to be a daddy," he choked out. "Not anymore. My child's life was snuffed out with my wife's. All because of another fucking drunk driver."

"How do you know it was a drunk driver?" Alice asked, sitting in front of her brother.

"He was on the ambulance before hers," Edward whispered. "He smelled like a liquor store. That's twice I've had my life ruined because someone couldn't call a cab. Twice I've lost people that I loved. How am I going to survive this?"

"With us," Alice said simply. "We're your family, Edward and we love you."

"So much, my sweet boy," Esme said hugging her son.

"I don't know if that's enough," Edward said, his voice sounding dead.

"Edward, you've overcome so much. Don't give up now," Alice cried.

## A Fresh Start

"Alice, just let me be. I just want to be alone," Edward growled.

"Okay, Edward," Esme said. "We'll be downstairs if you need us. Do you want anything to eat?"

"No."

"If you want something, I'll make it for you," Esme said, kissing her nephew's cheek. She gave her daughter a pointed look and they left Edward's bedroom. Esme was in agony to see her sister's son be dealt another crippling blow. At such a young age, he shouldn't have had to have buried his parents. He shouldn't have to bury his wife. He shouldn't have had to relearn to walk, talk, breathe, write, and read. But in some cruel twist of fate, he was thrown back into the hell of this situation. "Elizabeth, please, watch over your son. He is such a sweet boy and I don't know if he can make it. Give him something to look forward to."

Esme and Alice stayed downstairs and ate a quiet meal with Carlisle. The driver of the car was not seriously injured. He only had a concussion and some bruising. Carlisle told the police that he wanted the driver arrested for vehicular homicide. The police assured that he would be, upon his release from the hospital.

However, that doesn't seem fair. Not for Edward who lost his wife. His child. His world.

xx AFS xx

Two Years Later:

"I'm putting the house on the market. I tried staying here, but I can't," Edward said to Alice on their evening phone call. "Everything in this house reminds me of Tanya. Of our life together. I'm happy with my job, but I can be a doctor anywhere."

"Where are you going to go?" Alice asked.

## A Fresh Start

"I'm coming home, Ali," he said. "Find me a townhouse or something. I trust you."

"When are you planning on coming out here?" Alice asked.

"After the trial of James St. Claire," Edward seethed. "The fucker who stole my wife from me. Probably in a few weeks."

"What can you afford, Edward?" Alice asked.

"I'm putting my home on the market for one million. I've already have some interest," Edward said as he ran a hand through his hair. "Dr. Hunter and her husband, Laurent, really like the place. It may be them."

"I'll find you something nice, baby brother," Alice said with a smile.

"Thanks, big sister," Edward teased. "I love you."

"I love you, too," Alice squeaked. "Talk to you later, baby brother."

"Bye, big sister." Edward hung up the phone and finished typing his letter of resignation to Virginia Mason. Six months after Tanya's death, Edward was promoted as the head of the emergency department. The youngest person to do so in the history of the hospital. He threw himself headlong into work after her death, drowning in the ER. He needed something to occupy his mind. Edward took to his new position with ardor and fervor. But, the job was less about being a doctor and more about being a pencil pusher. Edward spoke to Carlisle a few weeks ago and told him about his disenchantment with his position. Carlisle told him that if he came home, he would be handed the emergency department at Craven Memorial Hospital. Edward would take a huge pay cut, but he needed his family. That is worth more than any money in the world.

Edward finished his letter and was going to present it to the board of directors tomorrow during the weekly department head meeting. As he was sitting in his office, his cell phone chirped with a new text message. It was a photo from Alice of a house in Sherryville. Edward responded with two words: *Get it.*

## A Fresh Start

The next morning, Edward walked into the meeting with his head held high. They had their meeting and discussed the topics on the agenda. Before the end of the meeting, Edward cleared his throat and took out his letter. He passed it to the head of the board of the directors. "Effectively immediately, I'm tendering my resignation as head of the emergency room department and as an attending physician here at Virginia Mason. Due to personal reasons, I'm returning home for the foreseeable future."

"Edward, what can we do to make you change your mind?" Dr. Moore begged. He moved from the emergency room to the head of the cardiology.

"Nothing," Edward said simply. "Being here, at this hospital, in this city, is just too much for me. I've moved past my grief of the loss of my wife, but I can't stay here anymore. I've already accepted a position at Craven Memorial Hospital in Sherryville. It's close to my family."

"We can increase your salary, Edward. Please," the president of the hospital begged. In his tenure, the emergency room had flourished and was used in many clinical trials.

"I'm sorry, but I can't. No amount of money can keep me here," Edward sighed. "I'm staying in Seattle until the end of the trial of the man who killed my wife and then I'm gone. I appreciate everything that Virginia Mason has offered me and I have learned a lot as a doctor and as an administrator. But my place is no longer here."

"As sad as we are to see you go, we understand your decision," Dr. Moore said. "On behalf of the board, we wish you the best of luck in all of your endeavors."

"Thank you. I have already cleaned out my office, save for a few items. I'm going to pick those up and then leave. I was only scheduled for this meeting for today."

"Please leave your ID at personnel when you leave the building," the president said.

## A Fresh Start

"I will. Thank you," Edward smiled. He pushed away from the table and nodded at the board of directors. Edward walked down to his office and finished taking down his personal touches. He finished by removing his wedding picture of he and Tanya. They were happy and in love, kissing on the altar. Tanya was wearing a simple but elegant white dress and her strawberry curls were piled on her head. Edward was wearing a classic tuxedo and his normally messy hair was somewhat tamed. As Edward held his wedding photo, he twisted his wedding ring on his finger.

"Tanya, I love you, my sweet wife. However, it's time for me to move on. I'm going home. I'll come and visit you often," Edward said to his wife in the photo. He gently ran his finger over her face. He smiled sadly and put the picture into the box on his desk. Then, for the first time since his wedding, Edward removed his wedding ring and placed it into the box as well.

About a month later, Edward was sitting in a courtroom. He was going to make a victim statement at the sentencing hearing for James St. Claire. He wanted the judge to know what was taken from this world. Edward sat in his black suit, rubbing his thumb over his bare left ring finger. The judge called Edward to the front of the courtroom and he took a deep breath before he began speaking.

"You have found James St. Claire guilty of vehicular homicide. The person he killed was my wife, Dr. Tanya Masen. She was a world renowned child psychiatrist. She was brilliant with children who were diagnosed with Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder along with children who were diagnosed with Autism. In addition to being a brilliant doctor, she was a loving and caring wife. She was my life. I was at Virginia Mason when he and my wife were brought into my ER. I saw the injuries that killed my beautiful wife. I saw my colleague cut into her chest and blood spill out. I saw my wife's aorta torn to shreds because of the damage that he caused. I saw my wife's life end. I saw my unborn child's life end. All because of James St. Claire and his inability to use common sense and call a cab when he's drunk too much. This is not the first time I've been hurt by a drunk driver. I lost both of my parents two a drunk driving accident. I was in the same car and was in a coma for three months. When I woke, I was forced to relearn everything. Now, James cannot atone for my parents' death or my injuries. But he can atone for my wife's

## A Fresh Start

death. I hope that you will take my words into consideration when you sentence James St. Claire. Thank you for taking the time to listen to what I have to say."

Edward sat back down and he glared at James. The judge gave an equally evil glare to James and he began speaking. "Thank you, Dr. Masen, for your statement. Your words are heart-wrenching and powerful. I am truly sorry for your loss, of your wife and your parents. I was somewhat familiar with your history before you spoke. You are a very strong young man and I am in awe of your strength, poise and composure in this trying situation."

Edward nodded formally and gave the judge a small smile.

"With that being said, I'm ready to impart my sentence on Mr. James St. Claire. Will the defendant please rise?"

James stood up and he looked absolutely dejected. He wouldn't look at the judge and he shuffled on his feet.

"Mr. St. Claire, you are guilty of vehicular homicide. You are hereby sentenced to the maximum sentence of twenty five years with no possibility of parole," the judge said coldly to James St. Claire. "Bailiff, please escort Mr. St. Claire to the correctional facility so he can become acquainted with his new home."

Edward smiled wickedly and he got up from the courtroom after it was adjourned. He walked out of the courthouse, happy that Tanya's death was avenged. However, he was sad that it had happened in the first place. Part of him died when Tanya did. Hopefully, he would find that missing part at home in Sherryville.

xx AFS xx

Four Months Later:

Edward was unpacking his home when he received a text from his sister. She was so spunky and so pushy. He loved her tremendously, but she could be too



## A Fresh Start

much.

*Going to Slammers with some friends from work. Meet us, baby brother!  
Please :( - Alice*

*Fine, big sister. What time? - Edward*

*Meet us there around ten. Love you! - Alice*

*See you there - Edward*

Edward finished organizing his kitchen and hopped into the shower. He ran his hands through his hair and popped in his contact lenses. He slipped on a pair of dark jeans and white button down shirt. Over the top, he put on a black leather jacket. Edward got into his new Volvo and drove to the sports bar. He wasn't going to drink. He never drank alcohol. Too much of a reminder of what he lost. However, he did want to see his sister.

He pulled into the parking lot and headed into the bar. He saw his sister's yellow Beetle and he looked for his sister. He couldn't find her, but found her fiancé, Jasper. He waved at Jasper and was assaulted by his elf-like sister. "Hey my little fairy," Edward smiled as he hugged Alice.

"Hi, Edward. I want to introduce you to someone," Alice said as she tugged on Edward's arm.

"Alice, don't," Edward said, wrinkling his nose.

"Bella, I'd like to introduce you to my brother, Edward Masen. Edward, this is Bella Swan."

Edward looked at the brown haired woman sitting at the table. Her eyes were sad and she looked as defeated as he felt. However, for the first time since Tanya, Edward's heart sputtered and was lost in her beauty. Alice poked Edward and he spoke quietly, almost afraid to frighten Bella. "Nice to meet you." He held out his hand and Bella curtly responded to his greeting, shaking

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his hand. When their skin touched, he felt alive. The hole in his chest that was open and gaping began to heal as he touched this lovely creature's hand.

Jasper made a suggestion of getting another round of drinks. When they returned, Bella was gone. Alice and the other girl, Angela, were hissing about her abrupt departure. "Whose phone is this?"

"That's Bella's," Alice said. "Go bring it to her. She has a large burgundy Honda Pilot."

Edward swiped the phone and ran out of the bar. He looked for the first person in two years who he wanted to get to know. Who made his dead heart beat erratically in chest. Who made him feel like he was a part of the real world. Who made him feel alive for the first time in two and half years since Tanya's death. He saw the petite woman scurry away and he heard her crying. "Bella!" Edward broke into a sprint and ran toward her.

She whipped around and her eyes were still dead, tears spilling over her cheeks and she snapped at him. "What?"

She was obviously hurt by someone and was wary of trusting him. But he didn't want to leave her. He felt drawn to this woman. She looked as broken as he. What happened to her?

After their brief encounter, Edward made it his goal to find out.

xx AFS xx

Edward saw Bella again the next day in his ER. She thought she broke her hand. Thankfully, it was just a serious sprain. Edward was very upset that someone had caused her to get so mad that she punched a counter. Before she left, Edward gave her his card with his cell phone number on the back. He wished and prayed that she would use it.

But she didn't.

## A Fresh Start

Edward waited for months for the beautiful mahogany goddess to call him.

No phone call. No contact.

Two months past and Edward decided to give up on ever seeing Bella again. Alice would bring her up and Edward would grumble. She knew what he went through and what Bella went through. She was determined to get Bella and Edward together. Even as friends. Her intentions were good, but misguided.

As he was leaving the hospital, Edward got a phone call from his sister and she was lit. Completely wasted. Edward knew that he would go get her if she needed it. He lost too many people to drunk drivers. He wasn't about to lose his sister. He drove to the martini bar, Bar Louie. Alice was sitting in a booth, nursing a appletini. However, her features were in a grimace.

"What's wrong, Ali?" Edward asked as he took her drink away.

"Bella's been in the potty too long," Alice slurred. "Go find her."

"Okay, Ali. Order some water," Edward said, turning into a doctor.

"Aye aye, captain," Alice said, giving him a salute.

Edward rolled his eyes and walked to the rear of the bar, toward the bathroom. When he got to the hallway, he saw a large, bald man pushing himself onto a woman. He noticed the woman's eyes immediately.

*Bella.*

Thinking on his feet, he pretended to be her boyfriend. Bella's eyes widened and she played along. Cueball let her go and she ran into his arms. She felt perfect there. Bella buried her nose into his chest and Edward wanted to kiss her senseless. Cueball bought the ruse and he pushed Edward forcefully into the wall. As soon as he was gone, Bella pulled away.

*No!*

## A Fresh Start

Hiding a frown, Edward and Bella walked to the front of the bar and picked up a very drunk Alice. Edward drove her home and carried her to her bedroom. Bella changed her into some pajamas and they drove to Bella's condo. As they drove back, Edward complimented her on her new look. She looked radiant. Very much unlike what he saw two months ago. Her hair was shorter and filled with highlights. Her eyes, while filled with sadness, had more life in them. She also looked like she had lost weight.

When they pulled up to her condo complex, Edward asked Bella out to lunch before they picked up her car. He was so nervous. His palms were sweating and his heart was stammering in his chest. He tacked on 'as friends,' to put her at ease. But he wanted more. So much more.

She said yes.

For the first time in two and half years, Edward felt hope. For the first time in two and half years, Edward felt truly alive and excited. For the first time in two and half years, Edward had finally begun to heal. For the first time in two and half years, Edward felt love.

**A/N: Here's Edward's story. It is very, very sad. However, I just want to let you all know that I am NOT a doctor and I hope I did the medical terms justice. I am also not a lawyer and I don't know what the real penalty of vehicular homicide is. Please leave me love :)**

# The Holiday

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*This story is kind of cathartic for me and it's based in real life. Rated M for future lemons.*

## Chapter 6: The Holiday

I listened intently to Edward's story. His voice lost all emotion and his sparkling green eyes were flat, devoid of all feeling. He was detaching himself as he explained how his wife was killed by a drunk driver. He was removing himself from the pain of losing his wife and unborn child. As I heard the story, my heart broke for this incredibly strong man sitting in front of me. He was so young. Too young to deal with the tragedy that was bestowed upon him.

When Edward finished his story, I found my hand in his, offering him comfort. I rubbed soothing circles on the back of his hand and he gave me a wistful smile. "Edward, I had no idea," I said, barely above a whisper. "You seem..."

"So normal?" Edward finished for me, continuing to hold my hand. "Believe me, therapy has helped. Also, being removed from the situation and the location helps too. It was hard going to work and walking into the trauma room where you wife died. I couldn't go in there for a few months without having a serious panic attack."

Feeling uncomfortable, I gently removed my hand from his. Edward's brow furrowed and he put his hands back into his lap, appearing nervous. "Sorry about being such a downer," he said, picking at his napkin. "Not exactly how I envisioned this."

"I'm glad that you feel comfortable enough to talk to me," I said encouragingly. "Working with middle schoolers, I've learned to be a combination of a teacher, therapist, best friend and counselor."

## A Fresh Start

"I may have you on speed dial," Edward teased.

"Call anytime," I smiled.

Edward gave me a lopsided grin and he reached his hand across the table. His actions were stopped when his cell phone rang from his pocket. He had a look of irritation and he picked up the call, glancing at the caller ID. "Dr. Masen," he said brusquely. He listened intently. Whoever was speaking was very frantic and Edward was not happy. "Fine. I'll be there in a half hour," he said as he ended the call. "So sorry."

"I understand. Not everyone has summers off," I teased.

Edward gave me an apologetic look and waved down Roseta. She returned with the check and took our meals away to be wrapped. Edward took out his credit card and slipped it into the small folder.

"How much do I owe?" I asked, reaching for my purse.

"Um, nothing," Edward said, holding the folder to his chest. "This is on me."

"Edward," I admonished. "You did me a favor in picking up my drunken ass from Bar Louie. You did me another favor in driving me to pick up my car from the parking garage today. At least let me pay for my meal."

"Nope," Edward smirked, giving me a wink.

I growled lightly and narrowed my eyes. Edward mimicked my actions and handed Roseta the folder when she returned with our food. "At least let me get the tip."

"Bella," he warned. "I insist. My parents raised me to be a gentleman. Please?" He looked over his glasses and gave me an adorable pout. "Pretty please?"

"My eighth grade girls pull that with me and I don't even buckle," I laughed. "It looks better on them."

## A Fresh Start

"Are you saying I'm not attractive?" Edward scoffed.

"No. I didn't say that. You're very attractive. However the puppy dog pout is appropriate for a 13 year old girl. Not a 30-something year old man," I snickered.

"Minor technicalities," Edward said with a dismissive wave of the hand. His phone chirped on the table and he quickly checked the text. He looked over his shoulder and saw Roseta approaching with the folder. Edward slipped out his credit card and signed it, leaving a cash tip. "As much as I would love to spend the day with you, Bella. There's been a blow up at Craven. I need to head in and do damage control." He gracefully got out of the booth and I followed suit.

"What happened?" I asked.

"One of the residents administered the wrong amount of medication to a patient and now they are in a coma," Edward said. "I have to meet with the resident and legal to cover our asses."

"Damn," I mumbled as we walked back toward Edward's car.

He opened up the passenger seat and I slid into the Volvo. Edward jogged to other side and he slid on his sunglasses. He eased the car out of the parking lot and drove us to the parking garage where I left my Pilot. I got my keys out of my purse and sat in a comfortable silence with Edward as we drove. I had spaced out and didn't realize that we were at my car. Edward laid a hand on my shoulder and my heart warmed at the simple touch. "You okay, Bella?"

"Yeah. Just daydreaming," I said.

"About what?" Edward asked, his eyes piercing into mine.

"Nothing," I replied. "Just lost in space. Also known as my mind."

"Hmmm, I don't believe you," Edward said, arching a brow.

## A Fresh Start

"Whatever," I said, rolling my eyes. "Thanks for lunch and for picking me up to get the beast."

"It was my pleasure," Edward said, reaching over the console to grab my hand. "Despite the heaviness of the conversation, I had a good time. The best time I've had in a long time. I hope we can do it again."

"I'd like that," I said, looking into Edward's jade green eyes.

"Excellent," Edward smiled. He squeezed my fingers before letting my hand go. He got out of the car and opened up the passenger door for me, offering me a hand out of the vehicle. I unlocked the doors to my Pilot and started it, cooling it down from the warm summer heat. "Would it make you uncomfortable if I hugged you, Bella?"

"You did it last night, fake boyfriend," I said, slapping his arm.

"To save you from that ass clown," Edward said. "You are a handful aren't you."

"Meh," I said as I shrugged my shoulders.

"So, hug?"

"Whatever makes you happy, Dr. Masen," I said with a smirk.

Edward gathered me in his arms and I thought I heard him say, "You make me happy, Bella." It was so quiet, though, I wasn't sure if it was 'real.' His embrace was warm and welcoming. I felt safe in his strong arms. As he held me, I inhaled and reveled in his scent. It was a combination of laundry detergent, Tuscany cologne and the overall clean man smell. I faintly heard Edward doing the same as he kissed the top of my head. I grew stiff and Edward released me. His cheeks were pink and his glance flew to his feet. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay. I'm just...not used...shit," I said, mentally berating myself for ruining a perfectly good day.



## A Fresh Start

"I was out of line, Bella. I'm so sorry that I made you uncomfortable," Edward said, his eyes filled with sadness. He opened his mouth and his cell phone rang from his pocket. He looked at the caller ID and growled. "I'm on my way, Aro. Relax. This will be handled."

I gave Edward a tentative smile and he hung up his phone. "I really have to go. The CEO of the hospital is ready to fire, then kill and torch the resident who administered the medication. I need to look over the medical implications of this snafu. Can...can I call you tonight? If you're not busy, I mean," he said in a rush.

"Remember, I'm on your speed dial," I teased.

Edward smiled and ran a hand through his bronze, unruly locks. "It'll probably be after nine. That's when the ER 'slows down.'"

"I'll be up. I'm on summer vacation. I have nowhere to be until August 15th," I said.

"Lucky," Edward said. "I'll talk to you later. Drive safely, Bella."

"You too," I said as I climbed into my SUV. I put the car into drive and gave Edward a wave as I pulled out of the parking spot.

I drove back to my condo, by the way of the grocery store. I picked up a few necessities. I spent the rest of the afternoon cleaning and organizing my condo. It was a very nice place, especially for what I paid for it. It had warm wood flooring in the foyer and kitchen. The cabinets were white and they popped from the bright yellow paint on the walls. The appliances were white and brand new to the unit. The kitchen opened up to the dining room. It was in a deep red. Not a color I would have chosen, but it's grown on me. It really looked nice with my dining room set.

The living room was in a warm beige color. I accented the room with sage green and deep violet purple all throughout the room. The guest bedroom was pretty basic in a blue color. It had a small full sized bed and also housed my

## A Fresh Start

computer. In the guest bedroom/office, I also kept all of my lessons and books from college and school. My bedroom was probably my favorite room of the condo. I painted it a warm, taupy brown color. My bed spread was purples, greens and beiges. It was very feminine. Very much unlike what I had with Mike. Blue, geometric crap. I hated it, but Mike just loooooooooooooooved it and bought it, despite my protest at its hideousness. On the walls of my bedroom, I had several sepia photographs of various flowers and things of nature. It was my own little wilderness in Sherryville. Very pretty and romantic and very me.

After I cleaned my apartment, I put in a couple of loads of laundry. I was sorting my clothes when I heard a light tap on my door. I frowned as someone needed to be buzzed in if they were visiting me. I checked through the peephole and saw a gorgeous blonde standing outside with a plate in her hands. I unlocked my door and opened it.

"Hi! I'm Rosalie Hale and I just moved in. I'm in B210," she said, giving me a wide smile.

"I'm Bella Swan. Nice to meet you," I said with a tentative smile. "Would you like to come in?"

"Sure," she said. "Oh, these are for you." Rosalie handed me a plate of cookies.

"Um, aren't I supposed to give you baked goods?" I teased. "You just moved in and all."

"I don't sleep much and I bake to pass my time," Rosalie said with a wave of the hand. "I don't eat any of it, but it calms me."

"Well, I can't eat all of these. So you'll have to help. Let me put on some coffee and we can get acquainted," I said with a warm smile. "Make yourself at home."

I made a pot of coffee and put some of the very decadent-looking cookies onto a plate. I also grabbed some fresh fruit that I had purchased earlier in the day and put it in a bowl. I walked out to find Rosalie curled up on my couch,

## A Fresh Start

flipping through a magazine from my cocktail table. I put our snack onto the table and got the coffee mugs and fixings. "I really like your place. What you've done with it."

"Thanks. Most of it was like this when I moved in. The only room I changed drastically was my bedroom. And the master bathroom. It was a lovely shade of vomit green. That needed to go," I laughed. "When did you move in?"

"About a week ago. I've been making the rounds with the neighbors. You'd be surprised how many people don't answer their doors or slam their doors in your face. Like my cookies were poisonous or something," Rosalie grumbled. "I'm just being friendly."

"Don't mind them. They keep to themselves. When I moved in about two months ago, I ran into one person in the mail room. ONE! They didn't even say hi," I sympathized. "Assholes."

"Douches," Rosalie agreed. "So far, you're the nicest person I've met."

"Thanks. I try," I winked. "What do you do?"

"I just got hired at Cherry Blossom Middle School. I'll be on an eighth grade team, teaching language arts," Rosalie answered.

"Do you know what team?" I asked.

"Eight Orange," Rose answered.

"That's my team. You'll be with me, Emmett McCarty, who teaches science and social studies and Tyler Crowley, who teaches math," I said, my eyes widening.

"Oh, wow! That's awesome! It'll be nice to know someone when I start in August. It's an even better thing to know someone on my team," Rosalie said, clapping her hands. "Mrs. Cope gave me the curriculum and I'm excited to work with it. She also said that the other language arts teacher handles the

## A Fresh Start

accelerated classes. I'm assuming that's you."

"Yep, but if you want a section, I'm more than happy to give it to you. Three sections of accelerated is brutal," I laughed. "We can talk to Mrs. Cope if you'd like."

"I would love that. Thanks!"

"Where were you from before the thriving metropolis of Sherryville?" I asked, arching a brow.

"Um, New York," Rosalie said. Her eyes looked away and she swiped a cookie, stuffing it into her mouth.

"Fresh start?" I asked.

"Something like that," Rosalie answered as she swallowed her cookie. "It's a long story."

"If you ever want to talk, let me know," I offered. "Years of handling middle school students has made me a pretty good listener."

"Thanks, Bella," Rosalie smiled. "I may take you up on that. But not now."

"Whenever you want," I said. "More coffee?"

"Yes, please," Rosalie said. I picked up her coffee mug and went into the kitchen. My phone chirped from my purse and I noticed a text.

*I just wanted to say that I had a wonderful time at lunch today, Bella. I can't wait to do it again. Soon. Call you tonight. - Edward*

I smiled as I read his words. I knew he was dealing with a crazy situation at work, but he took the time to send me a text.

*I also had a lovely time, Edward. Thank you for opening up to me. - Bella*

## A Fresh Start

His response was almost instantaneous. *Thank you for listening. You've heard more than my therapist and family. It must be that good ear you've honed as a remarkable educator. ;)* - Edward.

*\*Rolls eyes\* Okay, Edward. Go save some people's lives or something. Perform open heart surgery with a plastic straw and a pocket knife.* - Bella.

*I'm a doctor, not MacGyver, Bella. Jeez! Talk to you later, beautiful* - Edward

Did he just call me beautiful? Am I dreaming? Holy fuck! Okay, breathe Bella. Answer the man.

*Bye, Edward* - Bella.

BYE? Are you a moron? Fucking stupid? Really smooth, Swan.

"Bella?" Rosalie called from the living room.

"Be right there," I said, sounding nervous. I quickly refilled the coffee mugs and walked back into the living room, sitting across from Rosalie. "Sorry about that. I was texting a friend."

"A male friend?" Rosalie asked with a waggle of her brows.

"Um, yeah. I just got divorced. It was finalized yesterday. My maid of honor from wedding and I went out for drinks last night and her brother, my friend, picked us up. We went out for lunch today. He told me some heavy stuff. Apparently, I've been the first person he's talked to, besides a therapist," I said.

"What happened?"

"I won't say much, but he lost both of his parents to a drunk driving accident, being seriously injured himself. He had to relearn everything but he did. Then, three years ago, his wife was killed in another drunk driving accident. He was a doctor in the ER where she was brought in and he saw her die," I said, my heart breaking for Edward all over again.

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"Holy shit," Rose groaned. "That's so sad."

"Yeah. I was in shock when he told me. What really surprised me was how dead he looked while he was telling his story. His eyes had no emotion in his eyes. His face was devoid of any affect; almost like he was detaching himself from the whole situation," I said, furrowing my brow.

"It's a huge step for him to talk about it," Rosalie said quietly. "You need to detach in order to get through it."

I looked at my new friend and saw the familiar dead look in her blue eyes. She blinked a few times and shook it off, giving me a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. "I'm going to go. Thank you for the coffee and enjoy your cookies, Bella Swan."

"I intend to, Rosalie Hale," I smiled. I got up and walked her to the door. As she left, Rosalie gave me a hug and headed into her own condo.

xx AFS xx

I apparently drifted asleep and I woke up to my phone ringing in the kitchen. I got up and stumbled to the counter and picked it up. "Hello?" I asked groggily.

"Did I wake you, beautiful?" Edward teased.

"Shut it. I was nursing a hangover this morning and I never truly recovered. I only acted like I was coherent at lunch today," I said yawning and padding back to my comfortable couch. "How's your 'situation?'"

"Bad. The patient died," Edward sighed. "The family is threatening to sue."

"I'm so sorry," I said sympathetically. "What's going to happen to the resident?"

"He's being placed on administrative leave until an investigation can be held. It's really sad. He was one of our best and brightest," Edward sighed. "How

## A Fresh Start

was the rest of your day, aside from your nap?"

"Good. I met one of my neighbors. It turns out she works at my school and will be on my team with me," I said. "I also cleaned and cleaned. I live a boring life."

"Boring is good," Edward laughed. "I have a random question for you."

"Puce," I answered, giggling at my reference to my random question when I first met him.

"Funny, Bella," he said dryly. "It's not so random. Are you going to Alice and Jasper's Fourth of July barbeque?"

"I was planning on it. Are you?" I asked.

"Yeah. Would you like to drive with me?" Edward asked nervously. "You don't have to, but..."

"I'd love to, Edward. However, we need to take my beast. Alice wants me to bring several coolers and they won't fit in your pretty little Volvo."

"Don't hate on my Volvo, woman," Edward teased. "The Swedes make very safe cars."

"I've driven a Honda ALL my life and they are extremely safe as well, Masen," I giggled. "I'll pick *you* up."

"Fine," Edward grumbled.

"Are you a control freak, Edward?" I asked. "Do you want to drive my car to appease your frail male ego?"

"I am a control freak, Bella. But you can drive. I unfortunately have to work until eleven in the morning on Fourth of July. Can you pick me up at the hospital?" Edward asked.

## A Fresh Start

"Sure," I said. I looked at my calendar and noticed that Fourth of July was only two days away. "Crap!"

"What?"

"Where has June gone?" I squeaked.

"It went by quickly," Edward chuckled. I heard a ruckus in the background and someone yell for Dr. Masen. "I have to go, beautiful. I'll call you tomorrow. Good night."

"Good night," I said as I ended the call, my cheeks heating up at his term of endearment.

I spent the next few days making the necessities for Alice's barbeque. She requested my potato salad and pasta salad. I was also making my famous rum cake. When I woke up on Fourth of July morning, I made sure that all of the food was securely placed in their Tupperware, with tape and plastic bags around them. I quickly got dressed, wearing a pair of navy blue capris and a red tank top with an American flag on it. I put a short sleeved white blouse over the top and a pair of brown sandals. Edward sent me a text and said that he went back to his house. His uncle felt bad for him and decided to finish his shift for him. Edward used the extra time to grab some sleep and a shower before the barbeque. He also sent me an email with directions to his place. He lived in my old neighborhood, a few blocks over from my former home with Mike.

I loaded up my car with the coolers that Alice requested, along with a couple of lawn chairs and the food. I also threw in a blanket and some sparklers from a vendor I met at the farmer's market when I went yesterday. I grabbed my purse, some sunscreen and my shades and got into the car. I sent Edward a text saying I was on my way and said he'd be waiting with bated breath.

I drove with trepidation through my old neighborhood. I wasn't really friendly with the neighbors, but I didn't want to run into evil Mr. Banner and his pug who shit on my lawn all the time. I got to Edward's street and pulled into his



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driveway. His home was huge. It was one of the houses that I always wanted if I was a millionaire. It was a large two story home with white siding and blue shutters. I parked the car and turned it off. I walked up the drive to the front door. I rang the doorbell and Edward opened it up. He was wearing a pair of khaki cargo shorts and was shirtless. His hair was still damp from his shower.

Did I mention he was shirtless?

*Can we say six pack? Holy fuck!*

"Hey, beautiful," he said as he opened door wider. "Come on in."

I walked into his home and it was immaculately decorated. Obviously not by him. It had a feminine touch, but was still masculine. To my right was the living room, filled with a deep chocolate brown leather couch. On my left was an open room with a grand piano sitting on a pedestal. "I didn't know you played."

"Yeah," he said, running his fingers through his hair. "My mom, Elizabeth, insisted I take lessons. I was actually really good before the accident. However, my fine motor control was not what it used to be and I'm not as good as before. Do you want something to drink? Tea? Soda? Water?"

"Water sounds good," I said.

Edward turned around and I saw the scars on his back from the accident. I also noticed some smaller scars on his legs. Even with those scars, he was beautiful.

*Stop it, Bella. He's not interested. You're FRIENDS.*

Edward got me my water and even put a lemon in it. He handed it to me with a flourish and he gave me his lopsided smile. "I'm going to finish getting ready and then we'll go?"

"Sounds good," I said, sipping my water. He jogged up the stairs with ease and I heard him putter in his bedroom. I walked around the family room and looked

## A Fresh Start

at his massive library. It was filled with various medical texts in addition to classical novels and some pop culture novels. I was so wrapped up in my explorations of his literary tastes, I hadn't realized he came back.

"Don't knock *Twilight*, Bella. I saw the eye roll," he said, his face very close to mine.

"Holy crap, Edward," I said, jumping about a foot in the air. "You startled me. Are you part ninja?"

Edward dropped into a defensive crouch and pretended to karate chop my shoulder. "My kung fu is strong, kimosabe," he snorted.

"You are a dork," I said, poking him in the side. He barked out a laugh and danced away.

*Hmmm...Edward Masen is ticklish. Good to know.*

"And proud of it," he said, grinning. "Would like a tour of my humble abode?"

"It's not so humble, Edward. I used to live in this neighborhood before I got divorced and I wanted this house. It's so homey, but huge," I said, my eyes glazing over.

"Shit, I'm sorry," Edward said.

"Edward, don't be. It's not your fault that my husband decided to trade me in for a younger model. Who is now the size of a small country," I giggled.

"She's pregnant?" Edward asked, his brows raising.

"Yep. About five to six months along," I answered. "You know how some woman are cute pregnant?"

"Yeah," Edward responded.

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"Jessica is SOOOOOOOOOOO not," I chortled. "Pretty soon, she'll be traded in."

"Seriously, have you talked someone about these bitter feelings you have?" Edward asked, arching a brow.

"Yes. Her name is Alice Cullen. Perhaps you know her?"

"Unfortunately, I do. We're related. Evil little fairy," Edward snickered. "You look very nice by the way. Very patriotic."

"So do you, Dr. Masen," I smiled as I plucked his navy blue flag t-shirt. "Old Navy?"

"Nope. Kohl's," he said, tucking a hair behind my ear. "Ready to deal with the psycho little elf?"

"Not really," I said as I finished my water. "This is my first time going to Alice's shindig, single."

"What a coincidence. ME TOO!" Edward said as he slapped his knee.

"Thank you Captain Obvious. Can I introduce you to Colonel No Shit?" I said as I walked to put my glass in the sink.

"He's my other cousin," Edward teased. "Shall we?"

"Sure."

Edward turned and went into his fridge, pulling out a plastic bag. "Steaks and chicken breasts," Edward explained. He handed me the bag and picked up a box of beer and we walked out to my car. We put Edward's items in the back and he scowled as he got into the passenger seat.

"Are you sure you don't want to drive, control freak?" I teased.

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"I'm fine," he said as he pulled out a pair of sunglasses from his pocket. He slid them onto his nose and I scrambled into the SUV. "What did Alice demand you bring?"

"Potato salad, pasta salad and rum cake," I answered as I opened the sun roof and slid on my own shades. "You got it easy with meat and beer."

"I'd rather not bring the beer," Edward sighed.

"I assume you don't drink," I said as I pulled out of his drive.

"Never. I've seen what alcohol does when people do not pay attention," Edward said sadly. "However, I don't judge people who do drink. I know it calms some and provides a release for others. Just don't drive when you're inebriated. I would rather get waken up at all hours of the night to pick someone up who's drunk than lose someone else that I love. Promise me, Bella. If you drink and aren't able to drive, call me?"

I stopped at a stoplight and looked at Edward. His eyes were beseeching me and his brow was furrowed. "I promise. Though, I have you know that I'm not much of a drinker," I said, arching my brow over my sunglasses.

"Says the woman who needed to be chauffeured home a couple nights ago," Edward teased.

"That was the first time since my wedding that I was drunk," I said. "Six years ago."

"Okay, beautiful," he said, as he tucked a stray hair that had blown across my cheek. Where his fingers touched my skin, it felt like it was on fire. I forced myself to not lean into his gentle touch.

*Friends, Bella. You are FRIENDS!*

I turned on the radio and we listened to some quiet jazz as I drove to Alice's townhouse that she shared with Jasper. Edward hummed lightly to 'My Funny

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Valentine' as it piped through my car. He had a really nice singing voice. It was deep and had a husky tone to it. He appeared to be spacing out and he gazed out the passenger window. I smiled and finished the drive to Alice's townhome.

I pulled up to her house and there were a ton of cars. I immediately recognized Emmett's jeep, Angela's Honda and Alice's parents' Land Rover. I parked in her driveway and opened the back of my car. Edward picked up the coolers and tossed the meat into one of them. We walked around to the back and deposited the coolers. Alice, who was wearing a jean skirt and red top, donning pigtails, ran up to me and threw her arms around my neck. "Bella! It's so good to see you," she shrieked. "Hey baby brother!"

"Hey Ali," he said as he hugged her and gave her a sweet kiss on the cheek.

*I wonder if his lips are soft as they look.*

What?

"Hey Bells," Jasper said as he gave me a warm hug. "Sorry I couldn't pick you and the fairy up. I went out with the boys and ended up calling a cab myself. Good thing Edward was available. How are you doing, man?"

"I'm good, Jas," Edward smiled, shaking Jasper's hand. "Did you get the file I sent you?"

"Yeah, I did. It doesn't look good. We'll have to meet after the Fourth to discuss it. Aro is going to be pissed," Jasper said, running a hand through his golden hair. "It's going to cost the hospital lots of money."

"This is why we have malpractice insurance," Edward grumbled.

"But you need to pay your premiums for it to work. Dr. Smythe hadn't paid her premiums in nearly a year. This is why the hospital is going to have to pay," Jasper said. "We'll discuss it later, Edward. Have fun now. You're getting wrinkles."

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"Am not," Edward said, smacking Jasper on the arm.

"Actually Edward, I see a few grays," Alice teased.

"Shut it, fairy," Edward growled.

"Next thing you know, you're going to have a beer belly and you won't be able to see your feet," I snorted.

"You all just suck," Edward said as he walked to the cooler. He opened it up and grabbed water bottle. Alice waved at him and he flipped her off. "Did you get everything from the car, Bella?"

"Just the cake," I said. "I can get it."

"No, I'll get it. If I don't, I'm going to dunk the fairy in her pool," Edward said, holding his hand out for my keys.

"You wouldn't dare," Alice squeaked.

"Don't tempt me, big sister," Edward laughed as I tossed him my keys. He caught them and went to the car, jogging easily.

"Spill it, Swan," Alice said, smushing my cheeks with her hands. "Are you and Edward dating?"

"No," I said, removing her hands from my face. I opened and closed my mouth. I gave her a glare. "We're friends. You know, friends? Men and women can be friends."

"Hmmm," Alice said. "He has the protective, loving look on his face whenever he gazes in your direction. I'd only seen it one other time. It was with Tanya. His wife. Shit. You don't know about her."

"Yes, I do," I said. "He told me about it when we went out for lunch. My heart broke for him. A widower at 29. Damn."

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"Wait, he told you?" Alice asked. "Voluntarily?"

"Yeah," I said as I got a beer from one of the coolers. "Is that wrong?"

"You're the first person he's told, voluntarily, since it's happened," Alice said. She, again, threw her arms around me and I could feel her tears against my shirt. I returned her embrace and gently swayed us. "Bella, I don't know what to say."

"You don't have to say anything, Alice," I said, pulling on her pigtails.

"Here's the cake," Edward said as he carried my rum cake. I held out my arms and he deposited it into my waiting hands. I walked into the kitchen and put it on the counter. Edward followed me. "Your keys, madam."

"Thank you," I said, holding my hand out. Edward put them into my fingers, giving me a crooked smirk. I put my keys into my pocket and gave him a wink.

"Edward?" came a quiet voice. A lovely woman came into the kitchen. Her caramel colored hair was curled and pulled back into a low ponytail. Her blue eyes held the same shape as Edward. I immediately recognized her as Esme, Alice's mom. "How are you doing?" she asked as she gave him a warm hug. "It's been too long since you've been to the house."

"I'm good, Esme," Edward said, returning her hug. "Work has been crazy, but it keeps me out of trouble. Carlisle said he'd be here for dinner, around four."

"I know, sweetheart. He sent me a text," she said, ruffling his hair. She turned and looked at me "How are you doing, Bella?"

"I'm good, Mrs. Cullen," I replied, politely.

"Mrs. Cullen is my dead mother-in-law," Esme chastised. "You know that."

"Sorry, Esme," I said. She held out her arms and I accepted her embrace. "It's good to see you."

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"Alice told me about your divorce. I'm so sorry," Esme said, frowning slightly.

"Don't be. I'm not," I said with a dismissive wave of my hand. "He cheated on me and we weren't in love anymore. I'm moving on with my life and I'm happy with the decisions I've made."

"Good for you, sweetie," she said. Esme looked at me and she glanced at Edward. Her eyes widened imperceptibly but she kept quiet. "Have you talked to Alice about her wedding recently?"

"Ugh, too much. The dress she's making me wear is too much," I grumbled.

"Too much what?" Edward asked.

"Too much. Too frilly. Too girly. Too much money. Too pink," I groaned.

"Pink?" Edward laughed. "I didn't realize that Alice's colors involved pink. I really hope I'm not stuck wearing a pink vest and tie."

"I think you are, buddy," I teased. "She showed me pictures of the groomsmen's tuxedos. Jasper's vest is white and the rest of them are pink."

"Fu...crap," Edward said, covering his mouth.

"You know better, Edward Anthony," Esme chastised.

"I know," Edward said, ducking his head.

"Edward! We need you to man the grill," Jasper shouted. "You're the only one who doesn't torch the steaks."

"Be right there," Edward yelled. "Excuse me." Edward gave us a smile and he darted off to grill. Jasper attacked him with a set of barbeque tongs. Edward smacked him upside the head and picked up the tongs and arranged the plate of meat onto the grill.



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"He likes you," Esme whispered.

"We're friends," I said, looking at her. "I'm not ready for a relationship. Not yet. I don't know if I ever will be."

"I was married before I met Carlisle. Did you know that?" Esme asked.

"No. I didn't. What happened?" I asked.

"He was abusive and I left him. I was pregnant when he hit me for the first and last time. His strikes caused me to lose the baby. A little boy. I was brought into the hospital by my parents and Carlisle was a medical student. He took care of me as I lost my son," Esme said, her blue eyes filling with tears. "I never thought I'd see the handsome medical student again. However, when I was at my divorce proceeding, Carlisle came. He was there as a representative of the hospital to describe my injuries and how I lost my baby. The judge sentenced my first husband to jail and granted my petition for divorce. Carlisle asked for my phone number and we became 'friends,' quickly. Our friendship grew and we eventually went out a date. They turned into several dates and a year later, we were married. Alice came nine months after that."

"What happened to your first husband?" I asked, in awe of Esme.

"He's still in jail. However, it's because he hit his third wife. He just never learned," she sighed. "However, the moral of my story is that don't discount your 'friends.' I see the way Edward looks at you. It's more than friendship. Or at least, he wants it to be. I haven't seen that look in his eyes in a long time. I haven't seen him this happy since Tanya's death."

"Tell me about her," I requested. "I know she was a psychiatrist and that she was killed by a drunk driver. But that's it."

"It's not my place," Esme replied. "Edward can tell you about her. He seems to have opened up to you. You'll learn about her, in time. But, you should know. The last time I saw the look I see in my nephew's eyes like this was when he was with her. And he loved her very much."

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Esme gave me a knowing smile and patted my cheek lovingly. She went outside as she slid on her sunglasses. I stood in shock as I let her words permeate my mind. I sat down on the couch in the family room and leaned forward on my knees. I wasn't ready for anything. Not yet. I can give Edward my friendship, but I'm so hesitant to give him my heart. Or anyone for that matter. The underlying feelings of self-doubt filled my mind as I couldn't fathom why he would be attracted to me. My appearance has improved, but I was nowhere near beautiful.

*Edward calls you beautiful. He thinks you are. Believe it, Swan!*

I can't. I won't. Shit, why are things so fucking difficult?

"Bella?" Edward called as he came back into the townhome. "Why are you crying?"

I hastily wiped the tears that fell onto my cheeks away. "Bad day. Feeling sorry for myself," I answered honestly.

Edward sat down on the table in front of me, his long legs surrounding mine. "Want to talk about it?" he asked as he wiped an errant tear from my cheek with the pad of his thumb.

I shook my head no and looked for a Kleenex. I found some on the end table and I wiped my face. "Just dealing with..." I said as new tears came down my cheeks. "God, I hate this."

Edward looked at me and he sat down opposite of me on the couch. He pulled me into an embrace and I sobbed into his shoulder. He held me tightly and let me cry, never saying anything. He just let me vent my frustrations. After a few minutes, I pulled away. I unattractively wiped my nose with my hand and gave Edward a watery smile. He wiped a few tears from my cheeks and gave me a smirk. "Better?"

"No. Yes. I've got a headache," I grumbled, pinching my nose with my fingers. "I hate crying."

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"I know. I'm with you," Edward said. "I thought I would run out of tears when Tanya died. I never felt so alone. But, I wasn't. I had my family. My friends. My co-workers. They helped me tremendously. I know what I went through was different. Losing a spouse to a tragic accident is one thing. However, losing a spouse to a divorce is another. You need time to grieve. It's still a loss."

I looked down at my fingers and ripped my Kleenex to shreds. "I'm afraid, Edward."

"Why, Bella?" he whispered.

"That I'm going to be alone. Forever," I sniffled. "Who will love me? I couldn't keep my husband satisfied. Who else will want me?"

"You won't be alone, Bella. I promise you," Edward said fervently.

"Don't make promises you can't keep, Edward. My husband promised to love me for the rest of our lives and he cheated," I said bitterly.

"I'm not your ass-hat ex-husband," Edward said, capturing my chin with his soft, warm hands. "He's a fucking douche for getting rid of you. His loss will be m...another man's gain."

"I'm sorry for turning all 'emo' on you," I sighed.

"Emo?" Edward snorted. "What's that?"

"My sobbing crying mess," I said, sitting back on the couch. "Sorry about your shirt."

"Bella, don't worry about it," he said as he picked at the damp spot on his shoulder. "It was three bucks and I had a 30% off coupon."

"Ahhhh, a man who is economical," I teased. "Smart."

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"I try, beautiful," he said, leaning back on the couch, putting his cheek on the cushion.

"Why do you say that?" I asked, looking into his eyes. "I'm not."

"You're not what? Beautiful?" Edward asked. "I wholly disagree. You are smart, compassionate and incredibly beautiful. Both inside and out."

"Don't, Edward," I whispered. "I'm not ready for this."

"I'll wait," he said honestly. "I know that you are reeling from everything that's happened to you in the past few months. But I'll wait for you. I'll be your friend. I'll be your shoulder to cry on. I'll be the stomach you can punch."

"I may break my hand on those abs, Edward," I teased. "They are harder than my granite counter top."

"Whatever," he said, rolling his eyes. "But, I mean it. I've been mourning my wife for nearly three and half years. I'll always love her. She'll hold a special place in my heart. I'm ready to move on. I want to take that step with you, Bella."

"I don't know," I said, looking into his penetrating gaze. "I'm all sorts of fucked up. I'm barely comfortable in my own skin. I'm not ready to be someone else's doormat."

"You would never be a doormat," Edward said, his eyes flashing with anger. "If that's how your ex-husband treated you, then you deserved a hundred times better. If we take the plunge, I want us to be equals. I don't think I can stay away from you, Bella. I honestly can't. You've pulled me in and I..."

"Edward," I said, putting my hand over his mouth. His lips were soft and smooth. "I am attracted to you. Incredibly attracted to you. You make my girlie bits tingle." Edward's brows shot up and he grinned under my hand. I pulled my hand away and blushed. "However, I don't want to rush into anything. I can handle friends. That's about all for right now. I want to try more, but when I'm

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ready. I don't if I will be ready, to be perfectly honest."

Edward picked my hand and placed it on his chest. I felt the steady thrum of his heartbeat. "You've brought this alive, Bella. I'm willing to wait as long as it takes to get you. All of you. Just so I can feel this." His jade eyes stared into mine and I could see nothing but sincerity. He was incredibly intelligent, kind, compassionate and good-looking. He deserved someone who would be worthy of that. It's not me. "It is you, Bella. I'll wait, patiently, for you."

"Promise you won't push me?" I asked meekly, removing my hand from his chest.

Edward covered my hand with his, keeping it attached to his heart. "I promise. If you want to be friends, then I'll be your friend. If you want more, I will happily give you more. I don't want this to stop. This feeling you've ignited in me. Please?" He jutted out his bottom lip and gave me the most pathetic puppy dog pout ever.

"Remember what I said about the pout, Edward?" I smirked, my heart fluttering.

"Only 8th grade girls can pull it off," Edward replied.

"Are you an 8th grade girl?" I asked.

"No, I'm a 32 year old man who's crushing on a gorgeous brunette," he smirked.

"Who's that?" I joked.

"Funny, Bella," Edward said wryly. "I just laid my heart out on the line for you and you're teasing me. I can so feel the love."

"Patience, Masen. Hopefully it'll pay off," I sighed. "Let me process at my own pace. Friends; that's what I can handle now. In the future, we'll see."

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"That's all I'm asking," Edward smiled. "Come on. I have a steak with your name on it."

I nodded and got up from the couch. I ran my fingers through my hair and we walked outside. I put on my shades and took off my blouse. It had gotten much warmer since we'd gone inside. It was after four and people were enjoying their food. I made a plate for myself. Edward insisted I try his filet mignon and I relented. I was never much of a meat eater, but it was good.

As the night progressed, I talked with my co-workers. Angela asked me to stand up for her wedding. I said yes, only if her colors were not pink or pink. She laughed and promised that they wouldn't be. She was aiming for a black and white wedding with teal accents. I could handle black.

I talked to Emmett who was with his latest floozy. She was a red head and dumber than a doornail. I gave him a look and he shrugged, saying she was good in bed. I smacked him and told him that sex was not the only redeeming quality in a person.

At around 8:30, Alice insisted we head to the park across the street from her townhome to watch the fireworks. I grabbed my blanket and we walked to the park, settling into the warm grass. I was shivering slightly as I had gotten a sunburn on my shoulders. I had neglected to put sunscreen on and I was paying for it now. I hate being so fucking pale. I spread out my blanket and sat down on it. Edward was talking with his aunt and uncle. He gave me a lopsided smirk and I grinned shyly back at him. He finished his conversation and he loped over to my blanket. "Can I sit with you?"

"There's more than enough blanket for two," I teased.

He grinned and gracefully sank onto the plaid blanket, crossing his legs, Indian style. I curled up and shivered again. "Are you feeling alright, Bella?"

"I got sunburnt and I'm feeling it now," I said, hugging my knees to my chest. "I'll be fine."

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Edward frowned and he felt my forehead. "No fever. Take some advil when you get home and drink some water."

"Yes, Dr. Masen," I chuckled. My teeth chattered in my head and tried to get warm.

"Do you trust me, Bella?" Edward asked. "You're cold and your body is all out of whack. I don't want you sick."

"I can always have this good-looking doctor check me out," I said, arching a brow.

"Who would that be?" Edward said with a seductive purr to his voice.

"Carlisle," I laughed.

"You wound me, Bella. Seriously," he sighed.

"I'm kidding. Jeez, lighten up," I said, shoving his shoulder with mine. It hurt. *Ouch*. I winced and inhaled sharply, sending a new wave of teeth chattering to occur.

"Come here, Bella. Please?" Edward asked. He spread his legs and patted in between them with his hand. "I'll keep you warm and I promise no funny business."

"Okay," I said as climbed over his legs. Edward wrapped his arms around my waist and I did feel warmer. I also felt much safer. I leaned back into his chest and I felt Edward kiss my head again. I didn't bristle as I had the first time he did. I actually welcomed it.

The skies darkened and soon they were filled with the multi-colored fireworks. I watched with rapt attention at the beauty in the sky. However, my body was attuned to the strong man who was holding me. With each firework that lit up the night sky, I felt more and more for him. I know I said I wanted to be his friend, but now I wanted more. His embrace, his warmth and his strength

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solidified that decision. How soon would I want to pursue something with him? Would I make him happy? Would he make me happy? My mind raced with these questions and I was confused.

I felt Edward sigh behind me and his grip tightened around my waist. I turned around and gave him a smile. He was looking down at me and he returned my grin. His eyes were filled with adoration and respect. They also were filled with love and sincerity.

*I definitely want more with you Dr. Masen. I want it all with you.*

Perhaps, I will get my happy ending. Edward will be my happy ending. My fresh start.

**A/N: They're feeling the fireworks, both literally and figuratively. Leave me love, please :)**



# The Plans

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*This story is kind of cathartic for me and it's based in real life. About a week ago, I decided to end my 5 year marriage with my husband. He wasn't my 'Edward.' He didn't love me in the way I wanted to be loved, similar to Bella. This story is almost like my journal of my feelings and emotions that I'm going through. Also, I'm hoping that I can find the eventual happiness that I have planned for these two characters. I so desperately want it. I'm not bitter in the end of my marriage. I'm actually relieved. Don't get me wrong, I care about my soon-to-be ex-husband, but he wasn't for me.*

*Rated M for future lemons.*

## Chapter 7: The Plans

A few weeks passed after Fourth of July. Rosalie, or Rose as she preferred to be called, and I went to speak with Mrs. Cope about getting an accelerated section switched to Rose's course load. She was more than happy to do so. Rose and I became fast friends. She also was divorced but had been for awhile. She left New York to come to our little town of Sherryville for a brand new beginning away from the hustle and bustle of the city. I asked why she needed a new start but she still wouldn't answer. She said she would explain everything soon.

I also introduced Rose to Alice. They were separated from birth. They were so much alike, it was scary. Within minutes of meeting each other, Rose was standing up for Alice's wedding and being included in the wedding plans. I was ready to bow out, but being the maid of honor negating that honor. I did ask Rose for some help in planning the bachelorette party. She got a gleam in her eyes and she said she'd be more than happy to help.

Alice's wedding was less than a month away. I was surprised that she was

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getting married in the school year. Being a teacher, the best time to get married is over the summer. When you're not teaching. You don't have to take time off to get married or go on your honeymoon. I got married on July 30th. It gave me nearly three weeks before the beginning of the school year to prepare. However, Alice insisted on getting married in September, Labor Day Weekend. Whatever Alice wants, Alice gets. Why she would insist on pink dresses on Labor Day weekend is beyond me...Only Alice.

Rose, Alice and I were at my condo, making the favors for the wedding, drinking some really good white wine. I had some girly rock blasting through my sound dock from my iPod. Rose brought over some more cookies and we were singing, some of us very badly, to Katy Perry. After the song ended, Alice picked up the remote control and lowered the volume.

"So, Bella, how are things with my baby brother?" she asked sweetly. "I know Jas is trying to get us to combine our bachelor and bachelorette parties. Since you and Edward are the best man and maid of honor, respectively, you need to get planning."

"This is the first I've heard about combining the parties, Mary Alice," I chastised. "When has this come about?"

"Right now," Alice smiled as she whipped out her phone. She tapped out a message and slipped the phone back into her pocket. "Jasper will *LOVE* it. We can do a wine tasting or something classy for my portion and then go to PoleCats for Jasper's party. I've always wanted a lap dance."

"It's fun," Rose said with a sly grin. "I went to a strip club for my bachelorette party as one of the stops. We had to do a dare and the one that I received was to get a lap dance from a stripper. I told her what I was doing and she actually gave me tips of what to do as she danced if I wanted to dance like this for my husband. It was very informative."

"Ooooh, great idea, Rose!" Alice gushed. "We should do a combined dare thing for the party. It'll be so much fun."

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"I think I still have the cards for the dares. If not, you can get them online," Rose smiled. "Anyhow, I think Bella is deflecting. How is Dr. McFuckme?"

"You know too? Hot damn," I mumbled, burying my head in my hands. "I should have never called him that. Please, please, *please* tell me that Edward doesn't know."

"Edward doesn't know," Alice replied, barely able to contain her smile.

"Fuck my life!"

"I know Edward wants to fuck," Alice giggled. "He's been single and *celibate* for three years. He's horny. I know that you are too. Come on...one roll in the hay. It'll be fun."

"Alice! I'm not going to fuck your brother/cousin. I'll stick with my vibrator, thank you very much," I said giving her a glare. "It's a sad approximation of the real thing but it works in a pinch."

"Okay, in all seriousness, Bella, I know that you are keeping Edward at arms length. I did see how you guys acted at the Fourth of July barbeque," Alice began.

"How did they act?" Rose asked.

"When they got there, they were friendly with each other. Then you both disappeared for like an hour," Alice said wagging her brows.

"I was crying and feeling sorry for myself. Edward hugged me. NOTHING HAPPENED!" I defended.

"Then the flirtations began. During the fireworks, he held you," Alice said. "You liked it. You seemed relaxed and blissed out. You had a smile on your face that I never saw when you were with Mike. You felt safe."

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"I don't want to get hurt. What do I have to offer Edward? My insecurities? My snarkiness? My fat ass? I have nothing," I said dejectedly. "Absolutely nothing. I'm surprised he's even remotely interested."

"What?" they both shrieked.

*Yeah, I forgot to mention that part to them. I'm so not ready for this conversation.*

"I guess I never told you that," I said sheepishly. Rose and Alice gave me a pointed glare and I ducked my head. "Okay, the hour or so that I was having my pity party, Edward pretty much confessed that he was interested. That he would wait for me. He also said he'd be my friend, though he wants more. Edward also said, as he put my hand on his chest, that I brought his heart to life."

"He loves you," Alice said quietly.

"Definitely, he's in love with you," Rose agreed. "Why are you not hitting that? Alice has shown me pictures and Edward is fucking gorgeous."

"I don't want to get hurt. I've said that before. Mike said he'd be with me forever and you saw how that panned out," I said. "I'm single and divorced living in a condo. Some forever."

"Bella, Edward would never hurt you. Ever. It's not in his nature. He has a heart of gold and once he sets his mind on something, he usually gets it. He has the patience of a saint. He got that during his accident. He was frustrated but he never let his physical disabilities hinder his recovery."

"What happened?" Rose asked.

"Edward and his parents were in a car accident when he was 15. His parents were killed by a drunk driver and Edward had some very serious injuries. The most serious one was a substantial head injury. The doctors told us that he was going to be a vegetable. He would never wake up. But he did and he had to

## A Fresh Start

relearn everything. He managed to recover fully, but it took about a year before he could go back to school. When he did, he had an IEP. He hated being labeled but he needed the extra assistance. Edward graduated from high school with our class as the valedictorian. He also got into an Ivy League school with a full ride scholarship.

"Because of his difficulties, Edward has gained the patience of a saint, as I've said before. He will wait for you, Isabella Marie Swan. He may become frustrated and take things into his own hands, but he'll wait," Alice said looking into my eyes. "I have a feeling that everything will work out for the two of you."

"Yeah, don't bet against Alice," I snorted.

"Seriously, don't. I knew something was going to happen to my Aunt Liz and Uncle Eddie. I knew something was going to happen to Tanya. I never vocalized it, but sure enough it happened," Alice said. "However, you and Edward are meant to be."

"Whatever, Alice," I grumbled. "We'll see if Edward has the patience to wait. I don't really believe it. Honestly, I don't. He's too good to be true."

"He is too good. However, he'll wait for you Bella. I promise you. You're all he talks about when I see him at dinner on the weekends. I know when you go out to lunch or dinner with him. The next day I see him, he's glowing. Bella, I have never seen him like this. Ever. Even with Tanya," Alice said fervently.

I picked up my wine glass and chugged the rest of it. I got up and filled my glass with more of the wine and downed it quickly. "I'm still so afraid," I said quietly. "I don't know if I have anything to offer to a relationship. He's been a great friend. I am attracted to him, both inside and out. He's brilliant, funny, witty and compassionate. He's devastatingly handsome. I never had seen such green eyes on a human, ever! And he's got a great ass," I said as I poured myself another glass of wine.

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"That's the basis of a great long relationship. A great ass," Rose snickered. "Cures all the ills in the world. A finely curved piece of ass."

"Speaking of a piece of ass, Emmett finally broke up with the girl from the barbeque," Alice said. "She was so dumb."

"Where does he find these girls?" I laughed as I leaned against my kitchen counter. "He is so sweet and cute. He needs a woman who can make him happy and not just an easy lay."

"Who's Emmett?" Rose asked.

"He's the social studies and science teacher on our team. This guy is bloody huge. Built like a linebacker, but as sweet as can be," I answered.

Rose's eyes widened and she looked at me expectantly. "So he's recently single?"

"Yeah. However, he's sworn off women for awhile," Alice said. "Are you interested?"

"I dunno," Rose answered. "What's he look like, other than a linebacker?"

"He's about 6'5" with a muscular build. He's got dark brown curly hair and bright blue eyes. When he smiles, he has the most adorable dimples in cheeks. The kids love him," I replied. "He looks like a big kid."

"How old is he?" Rose asked, appearing nervous.

"I think he's 29," Alice said, looking at me. I nodded and gave Rose a smile.

My phone chirped from its charger and I saw that I had a new text. It was from Edward.

*Apparently Alice and Jasper are wanting to have combined bachelor and bachelorette parties. Are you available tomorrow to plan for said parties? -*

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*Edward*

*I have to go to work for a little a bit in the morning, but other than that I'm free*  
- Bella

*Want to meet for lunch and then we can plan the best bachelor/bachelorette party ever?* - Edward

*12 okay?* - Bella

*Works for me. How about we meet at Heaven on Seven? It's a little Cajun restaurant. Very good* - Edward

*I'll be there with bells on. See you tomorrow. Good night, Edward* - Bella

*Sleep well, beautiful* - Edward

And cue blush. I'm so not beautiful. I am still in shock that he calls me that.

"Why are you blushing, Bella?" Alice asked.

"No reason," I said quickly.

"Liar," Rose and Alice both replied. "You were texting Edward."

"Uh, yeah," I said sheepishly. "We made plans to begin planning your parties for tomorrow. He called me beautiful. Hence the blush. I don't believe him. I'm not beautiful."

"Bullshit, Bella," Rose griped. "You are quite beautiful. Your skin is pale and translucent. You have the most alluring blush. Your smile is endearing and welcoming. Your hair is shiny and gorgeous. Your eyes are the most beautiful shade of chocolate brown and are almond shaped. Your shape is naturally curvy, but you are proportionate. The boob, waist and hip ratio are perfect. Bella, please!"

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"I have fucking cellulite," I said rolling my eyes. "My ass jiggles. My boobs are flabby. I have wrinkles and my fair share of gray hair."

"We all have cellulite, Bella. We all have jiggles and wiggly parts," Alice said.

"Where are yours, Elf?" I challenged. "Blondie?"

Alice stood up and wiggled her butt. She also flapped her arms, focusing on her triceps. Rose poked at her belly and smacked her butt as well. Their jiggle was less than mine. I scoffed at their jiggliness and poured myself another glass of wine. They both shrugged and went back to completing Alice's wedding favors. They stayed another hour or so, until we were finished with the favors. We put them into a box and stored them in my guest bedroom closet. Alice gave me a hug as she left. "Don't let your faults and your insecurities run your life. You are beautiful. On the outside yes but on the inside as well. I love you, Bells. Have fun planning my bachelorette party with my baby brother."

"Thanks, Elf," I said, returning her embrace. I also hugged Rose and she winked as she headed into her condo. Alice skipped down the hallway and waved as she headed down the stairs. I closed the door and took some Advil before I went to bed. I didn't want to be hung-over for tomorrow. I took a quick shower and crawled into my bed. I picked up Nook and turned to my latest book I was reading, *The Hunger Games*. It was one of the books chosen for the Battle of Books at my school and I wanted to be familiar with it. I read for about an hour before I decided to go to bed. I set my alarm on my phone and curled against my pillow. As I was falling asleep, my phone chirped.

*I'm looking forward to tomorrow, beautiful. Sleep well - Edward*

I smiled and tapped out a reply. *You too, handsome - Bella*

*:) - Edward*

I fell asleep with a smile on my face and dreamt of Edward. Oh how I dreamt about Edward. I dreamt of him in situations that were quite naughty. We were in positions that I was never in with Mike. In my dreams, I came numerous



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times and Edward was a sex god. I wonder if it was true. However, it's not like I would find out. But my fantasies were fucking awesome. So awesome that I needed to shower again in the morning and put on a fresh pair of panties.

I got dressed in a khaki skirt and a deep blue shirt. I eased on a pair of brown sandals and curled my hair. I grabbed my work bag and drove to Cherry Blossom Middle School. I got there an hour later than I anticipated as I needed to shower again. *Blasted sexy dreams filled with Dr. McFuckme*. I was only going to be able to work for about two hours on the plans for next year. I also wanted to place an order with the office for my classroom supplies before I left. I created the lessons I wanted to complete for the first few days of school. I also made worksheets and activities for each of the lessons. Afterward, I created my supply list and turned it into the office. I had some time before I needed to meet Edward at the restaurant and I wanted to get a head start on my copying for the year. I went to the copy room and made the copies for my classes. My phone rang from my skirt pocket and I picked it up.

"Hello?" I asked.

"Hey, Bella," Edward said in his silky smooth voice. "I was wondering if we were still on for lunch today?"

"Yep. I'm just about finished at school," I said as I organized my copies. "Still Heaven on Seven?"

"Yes," Edward said. I could hear the smile in his voice. "I'll see you there, beautiful."

I blushed and ducked my head. "See you in a little bit, Edward."

"Bye," he breathed and he clicked off the call. I slipped my phone into my pocket and picked up my copies and carried them back to my classroom. I was nearly to the classroom when I ran into a wall of muscles. "Ooof!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry," came a husky, deep voice.

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"It's no big deal," I said, looking up at the wall of muscles who I ran into. "I'm naturally clumsy."

"I beg to differ," he said conspiratorially. "I'm Jacob Black. I am the new math teacher for Eight Orange."

"Oh, wow! I have almost a new team! Jeez! I'm Bella Swan. I teach language arts for Eight Orange," I said as I shuffled my papers and stuck out my hand. "Nice to meet you, Jacob."

"You as well, Bella," he said. He was tall. Almost as tall as Emmett. His skin was a deep russet color and his hair was black and long. It was held in a ponytail at the nape of his neck. His teeth were bright white against his tanned skin. He was wearing a pair of khaki cargo shorts and a tight t-shirt that showcased his muscles. He was built like Emmett as well. "I'm looking forward to working with you, Mrs. Swan."

"It's 'miss,'" I said. "Mrs. Swan was my mother before she got divorced from my dad."

"You're not married?" he asked surprisingly.

"Divorced," I replied. My phone chirped from my pocket.

*I'm here. Where are you, beautiful? - Edward*

"I've got to go, Jacob," I said as I frowned. "I'm meeting a friend for lunch and I'm already late."

"Can I get your number?" Jacob asked. My eyes widened. "To talk about school. I think I'm going to be your mentee or something."

"Oh, right. Sure," I said. I rattled off my phone number and shook Jacob's hand again before I darted to my classroom. I tapped out a reply to Edward, apologizing for my tardiness. I deposited my stack of copies onto my desk and I grabbed my bag. I ran out of the school and drove quickly to Heaven on

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Seven. I parked next to Edward's Volvo. I walked into the restaurant and looked for him. He was sitting in a booth near the back of the restaurant. I walked to the back of the restaurant and slid into the booth. "I'm so sorry I'm late. I ran into a new team member at school."

"Hello, Edward! It's nice to see you. How was your day?" Edward teased.

"Hello, Edward! It's nice to see you. How was your day?" I said, rolling my eyes.

"Hi, Bella," he smiled. "My day was fine. Better now that I'm with you. Did you get everything that you needed to get done at school?"

"Not as much as I hoped. I didn't get up as early as I wanted to," I said. *I had sexy dreams about you, Edward. I soaked through my panties and I needed to shower because of said dreams.*

"I'm sorry," Edward said, frowning. "Do you need to go back?"

"Nah. I'm good," I said. "How are you doing? Really?"

"Tired," Edward answered. "I've been on overnights for the past couple of days. I also have been doing my administrative duties during the days and I've not gotten enough sleep."

"That explains the dark circles you're rocking and glasses, right?" I said, furrowing my brow.

"Yeah," he sighed. "Also, Alice is in bridezilla mode. Holy crap, I'm ready to kill her."

"Me too. However, you get to wear a tux. I have to wear this fluffy pink thing and heels. I'd rather wear a tux than *that* any day!" I grumbled.

"There is one thing that is good about their wedding though," Edward said with mischief in his eyes. "I'm going to be your date for the evening. I get to wow

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you with my mad dancing skills."

"Just because I'm the maid of honor and you're the best man does NOT mean I'm your date, Masen," I teased. "Once we're done with the aisle thing and entrances, I can dance with whomever I please."

"That's harsh, Bella," Edward said, feigning shock. "I was rather looking forward to dancing with you."

"Your toes might disagree. Klutz, remember?" I said. "I'm the brilliant person who punched a counter top and nearly broke my hand."

"That is not clumsiness. That was anger," Edward rationalized.

"I've had two ankle surgeries because I've sprained BOTH of my ankles about a hundred times. Three years ago, I had to take a month medical leave because I had microfracture surgery on my right foot. Then three days before the school year started, I tripped and fell and broke the left foot. The sad thing is that when I went into the ER, they didn't notice the break and I walked around on a broken foot for about a year."

"If I was your doctor, that break would have been addressed," Edward said confidently.

"It was a stress fracture," I said. "It was only diagnosed with an MRI. Unless you have supersonic eyes, then you wouldn't have seen it."

"As you can plainly see, that is not the case," Edward said as he waggled his glasses on his nose. "Speaking of vision, I met with Dr. Sandoval."

"And?" I asked.

"I appear to be a candidate. I'm hoping to get it done after Alice's wedding. However, I can't wear my contacts for two weeks before the procedure. Alice will be pissed if I'm wearing these for her wedding pictures," Edward said.

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"Wear them for the ceremony, but take them off for the picture part of the day," I suggested. "How blind are you?"

Edward took off his glasses and handed them to me. His prescription looked like mine. Thick. I put them on my face and blinked a few times. "I know it's bad. I'm just a step above blind," he laughed. I handed him back his glasses and he eased them back onto his face.

"Welcome to Heave on Seven. Can you get anything to drink?" a perky waitress asked as she appeared out of nowhere.

"Water, please," I said. "With lemon."

"I'll have the same," Edward said. "Can also get a cup of coffee?"

"Cream and sugar?"

"Both please," Edward smiled. She nodded and scurried off. "I need to stay awake to get home."

"Did you come from work?" I squeaked.

"Yep. I got there yesterday around four in the afternoon and did some work in my office. Then, I was on from eight to until eleven. I didn't really get out of there until 11:30. I was worried that I was going to be late," Edward said, arching a brow over his glasses.

"Edward, we don't have to do this now," I said, feeling horribly. "You must be exhausted."

"I'm exhausted, yes. However, I'm happy to be here with you," Edward replied, a blush creeping over his pale features. "Have you been here before?"

"Yes. I love their jambalaya," I said.

"Is that what you're getting?" Edward asked.

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"Yes sir," I smiled. "It's nice a spicy. Just like I enjoy it!"

"Sounds good," Edward mused. "You sold me."

Our waitress returned with our drinks and took our food order. I chugged my water and sat back against the booth. Edward made his coffee with a dash of cream and a ton of splenda. "Why don't you have some coffee with your splenda?" I joked.

"I hate this shit," Edward grumbled. "The only way I can handle it is with a ton of sugar. Well, splenda."

"Why don't you try Five Hour Energy or something?" I suggested.

"Makes me too jittery. I get the shakes with that. No one wants a doctor with shaking hands," Edward said, demonstrating a nervous tick.

"True," I said.

"So, about this party?" Edward said, contorting his features in an adorable grimace.

"This party," I sighed. "It was Alice's brain child. She suggested that we combine the bachelor and bachelorette party. I think she's trying to force us to work together."

"I like the way she thinks," Edward said with a wink.

"What did I say about patience?" I chastised.

"Can't blame me for trying," Edward said with a shrug. "Anyhow, Alice mentioned that she came up with some ideas for this shindig."

"She wants a wine tasting for her part of the party and then going to a strip club," I said, echoing her suggestions from last night. "I know that you don't drink so if that makes you uncomfortable, we don't have to do it."

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"I'm fine. I'll just be the sober driver," Edward said.

"Well, I was thinking about that too. Alice gave me her guest list for the party. She has like ten people on it. I don't know about Jas, but you can't be a shuttle bus for ten drunk women and ten drunk men," I rationalized. "I found this bus rental. It's a glorified 'short bus.' However, it's expensive. I can make the reservation but I can in no way afford to pay for all of it."

"What's the number?" Edward asked as he pulled out his phone. I told him the number and he programmed it into his cell. "I'll call them after I get a nap. Thank God I'm off tonight. I so need to sleep."

"We can split the costs for the bus rental," I suggested.

"Bella," Edward warned, arching his brow. "I can afford it."

"We're planning this thing together. We can split the costs. I'm not that broke," I sighed.

"How about this? I pay for the bus rental and let you handle all the rest of the plans, Ms. I'm-off-all-Summer," Edward suggested.

"I can handle that. I already know where Alice wants to have this wine tasting. Rose, my neighbor, is ordering the party games. I just need to make arrangements at the strip club and the dance club we're going to," I said.

"Did you say party games?" Edward asked. His eyes were filled with fear and apprehension.

"It's some card game. We each get a card and it has a dare. You need to complete the dare. She'll also get some other sexy-time fun games. Probably some penis shaped things and a crown for the bride and groom. She's all over this," I laughed. "Thank goodness because I'm so not."

"Let me guess. You didn't have a bachelorette party when you got married," Edward said as he leaned forward on his elbows.

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"Not really. I went out for dinner and then we went clubbing. I got a shot from a lesbian and made out with her," I chuckled. "I was tempted to switch teams. Then Alice told me how they are intimate and I decided against it."

"Hmmm," Edward said as he narrowed his eyes. "Interesting."

"What's interesting?" I asked.

"I'm imagining you making out with a woman. It's kind of hot," Edward said, his eyes darkening. "No scratch that, very hot."

"Perv," I laughed.

"I'm fucking born again virgin, Bella," he laughed. "It's been three years since I've gotten laid. Give me some fodder for my fantasies."

"Definitely a perv," I teased. "She was all tongue and her lips were mushy."

"Was she a blonde, brunette or red head?" Edward asked.

"I honestly don't remember. I was three sheets to the wind," I laughed. "I like men. Thank you very much."

"Good to know," Edward said, winking at me.

Our waitress came and delivered our jambalaya. I tucked into my meal and moaned at the deliciousness. "I forgot how good this was," I groaned. "So hot!"

"It is spicy," Edward said as he reached for his water. "Damn."

"So, when do we want to have this party?" I asked as I continued to eat my lunch.

"I'm assuming that you would like to have it before you go back to school, right?" Edward asked. "How about August 13th? That's the Saturday before your first week."



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"How did you know that?" I squeaked.

"It's posted on your district's website. Duh," Edward said as rolled his eyes.

"Alice actually suggested it, though."

"What Alice wants..." I began.

"Alice gets," we finished together.

"She so spoiled," Edward said wrinkling his nose.

"But you love her," I said. "Admit it."

"I do. She was my rock when I was going through all of my drama. First with my parents and then again with Tanya," Edward said with a sad look on his face. "She understood."

"What was she like as a kid?" I asked.

"She was a fucking maniac!" Edward laughed. "You think she's hyper now? Damn, she was like the energizer bunny on crack when she was younger. And she was involved in everything: choir, drama, cheerleading, dance team, speech team, newspaper, yearbook, scholastic bowl, the list goes on! She never slept. Then add a disabled cousin and she pretty adopted me and became my own personal cheerleader. When I was finally able to talk, I pretty told her to calm down and relax."

"What did you do in high school and college? Any extracurriculars?" I asked.

"Before the accident, I was on track, basketball and football. I was also a band geek," he said, his ears turning red. "I played percussion. I also was involved in the theater. As a freshman, I was the lead in the musical *Godspell*."

"You were Jesus?" I squeaked! "Crap! That's bloody awesome!"

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"Yeah. However, it was the summer in between my freshman and sophomore year of high school is when I had the accident. Sophomore year was pretty much spent in a coma and recovering. When I did go back to school, I focused on my studies and didn't do many extracurriculars. Even in college I didn't do much. I was in the choir at Dartmouth, but that was it," Edward explained. "What about you? What were you like in high school and college?"

"I was a nerd. Plain and simple," I said. "I was shy and introverted. A bookworm. I always had my nose buried in a book and I avoided people at all costs. I did find my niche in the theater. I was only involved in drama as I'm completely tone deaf. I assisted in the musicals, but strictly in a backstage capacity. In college, I was involved in the literary magazine and the theater. That's about it."

"You don't seem that shy, Bella," Edward said.

"Trust me, I am," I said. "The blush is a dead giveaway of when I'm feeling insecure about a situation."

*And cue said blush.*

"Are you feeling insecure right now?" Edward pressed.

"I always do when I'm with you," I answered honestly.

"Why?" he asked as he cocked his head to one side.

"Your confession from the Fourth, that's why," I replied quietly. "I'm not..."

"Don't, Bella. Don't put yourself down," Edward said as he pushed his plate to one side. He reached across the table and grabbed one of my hands. "You obviously don't see yourself very clearly."

"That's what Alice and Rose said last night," I said, enjoying his warm hands around mine. His hands were very soft and large. I liked the way I felt when he held my hand.

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*Don't Bella. You're setting yourself up to fail. He'll get tired and move on to some gorgeous supermodel. Rose, probably.*

"Did you ex-husband ever tell you were beautiful? Compliment you? Make you feel special?" Edward asked, his eyes searching mine.

"Not really," I sighed. "I was always stroking his ego. Never the other way around. I got flowers once a year. On our anniversary, if he remembered. He was cold and distant. I thought that would change, but it never did. It only got worse as we stayed together. I'm not used to any kind of compliment."

"Listen to what I have to say, Bella. You are beautiful. You are kind. You are intelligent. You are sweet. You are sexy. Even if you don't even realize it. When I first saw you, I was mesmerized by your beauty. That's what captured my attention. However, as I got to know you, especially in the last few weeks, your beauty has grown in my eyes. I can see your compassion and your love for your friends and family. I can see your dedication to your students and co-workers. Hell, you're dealing with my...how did you put it on the Fourth? My 'emo' ass," Edward said, squeezing my hand.

I dropped my gaze from his eyes and I felt tears fall down my cheeks. His words were so touching. So poignant. So truthful. Why can't I believe them?

*Because for five years, you were in a loveless marriage to a man who NEVER paid you a compliment.*

"Don't cry, beautiful," Edward said as he got out of the booth. He sat down next to me and pulled me into a hug. Again I sobbed against his shoulder. "I will tell you every day until you finally believe it."

"I don't know if I can ever believe it," I hiccupped. "I'm so fucked up, Edward. You deserve someone poised and elegant. That's not me. I'm haggard and clumsy."

"No, you're not," Edward said as he took my face into his hands. He stared into my eyes and he gently rubbed the tears that had spilled onto my cheeks away

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with his thumbs. "I. Want. You. So. Badly. I will wait. I'll be a persistent pain in the ass, but I'll wait for you, Bella."

His eyes dropped to my mouth and I could see the hamster moving in his head. He wanted to kiss me. At least, I think he did. He moved closer to me and he leaned down.

"Can I get you anything else?" the waitress asked.

*Damn it.*

Edward jumped away and looked at our waitress with a stern glare. "The check, please," he said in a clipped tone. She nodded and scurried away. "I'm sorry, Bella."

"It's okay," I said quietly. Edward looked at me and got out from the booth and went back to his side. Our moment was effectively ruined. I reached into my purse and took out my wallet. As soon as the waitress returned with the check, I took it from her. I slipped my credit card into the folder and handed it back to her. Edward glared at me. I smiled sweetly and crossed my arms over my body. "You are dealing with my 'emo' ass. I'm paying for lunch."

"Is this going to be an ongoing argument, Isabella?" Edward asked.

*Holy crow! Edward using my full name was fucking hot. Do it again.*

"No, Edward Anthony," I said, scowling. "I'm an independent woman. I can pay for lunch every so often."

He rolled his eyes and crossed his arms over his broad, muscular chest. "Let's not make it a regular occurrence, Bella," Edward chided.

I saluted and took the folder from the waitress when she returned. I put my card back into my wallet and signed the credit slip after I figured out the tip. I took the receipt and put it into my wallet. "One more thing about the party?"

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"What's that, beautiful?" Edward asked as a crooked smile flashed across his handsome features.

"Can we have everyone meet at your place?" I suggested. "You have the room, Dr. I-Have-Fucking-Mansion."

"It's not a mansion, Bella. But yes, we can meet at my place," he laughed. "Alice said something about gifts and she needs a place to open them. If she gets dildos and sexy lingerie, I will seriously be ill."

"Um, it's her bachelorette party. She'll get that stuff. Probably other sexual goodies," I said. "Even I got some good things at my non-bachelorette party. Old Faithful is a product of that party."

"Old Faithful?"

"My purple vibrator," I answered as Edward took a sip of water.

He spit out the water and his face turned a shade of bright pink. "Fuck me, Bella. You can't say shit like that."

"What? I'm single. I need some sort of release. Old Faithful has been the only reliable thing in my marriage," I said calmly. "I miss the real thing, but it serves its purpose."

"Hmmm," Edward said darkly. "A woman cannot live on a vibrator alone."

"This one has for two years," I said simply. "You lived with Rosie Palmer."

"Funny, Bella," Edward said as his blush deepened. "I can't believe you said that."

"Believe it, buddy," I said. "Can you send me Jasper's guest list and I'll send out an e-vite for this shindig."

"I'll email it to you, you perv," Edward chuckled.

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"That's you, Edward," I clarified.

He snorted and got up from the booth. He held out a hand and helped me out of the booth. We walked through the restaurant. Edward didn't release my hand. He actually laced his fingers with mine. It felt nice. Better than nice. It felt right.

*Why am I fighting this? He is attracted to you. You're attracted to him. Go for it, chicken! What's the worst thing that can happen?*

Get my heart broken again.

*He won't do that.*

How do you know?

*Shut it!*

"Bella?" Edward asked as he stopped me in front of my car. "Where were you?"

"Arguing with my subconscious," I muttered.

"Excuse me?" Edward asked, arching a brow.

"Nothing. Never mind," I said removing my hand from his. I reached into my purse and took out my keys. "Just trying to wrap my head around what has been said today and what I need to do for the party."

"Bella, I'm sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable," Edward said, his eyes filled with remorse. "I don't want to rush anything. I understand your trepidation. Really, I do. If you want me to back off, I will."

"Don't, Edward," I said quietly.

"Don't what?"

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"Back off. Your persistence is starting to pay off. That's what I was arguing with my subconscious about," I giggled. "You're chipping away at my exterior."

"Really?" he asked, his smile radiant.

"Let's just say I was pretty pissed at our waitress when she stopped our 'moment,'" I said honestly. "I made sure I showed my disapproval in her tip."

"Can I finish what I wanted to do in the restaurant?" Edward asked eagerly.

"The moment has passed," I said, looking up at him. "I will accept a kiss on the cheek." I offered my left cheek and he chuckled. He leaned down and his lips caressed my cheek, close to my mouth. He pulled away and my cheek was on fire. I wanted to kiss him senseless and then fuck him in the car. However, my logical brain forced me to give him a hug instead. Edward held me tightly and he kissed my head.

We separated and Edward's eyes were filled with hope. "Thank you for lunch, Isabella."

"My pleasure, Edward," I said. Edward smiled and then yawned hugely. "Go to sleep, Masen. You're running on empty."

"I will. I'll call the bus company tomorrow. Have a good rest of the day and I'll talk to you tomorrow, if that's okay?" Edward asked.

"You can call me any time, Edward," I answered honestly.

"I'll give you a call after I set up the bus rental and perhaps I can cook dinner for you and we can finish planning this shindig," Edward suggested.

"Tomorrow around six?"

"Sure," I smiled. "I'll bring dessert."

"Rum cake?" Edward begged.

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"Anything for you, Edward," I said, poking him in the side. "Drive safe. Text me or call me when you get home, sleepyhead."

"Yes ma'am," he smiled. He leaned down again and pressed another sweet kiss to my cheek. "See you later, beautiful."

"Bye handsome," I said as I got into my car. Edward closed my door and jogged to his Volvo. He eased into the seat and waved from his car. I backed out and stopped at the store and picked up the ingredients for my rum cake. I was walking out to my SUV when my phone chirped.

*I'm home and safely ensconced in my bed. Thank you again for lunch, Bella. I'm so incredibly happy that my persistence is starting to pay off. I promise you, it'll be worth it. Anyhow, my eyelids are drooping and I desperately need sleep. Talk to you tomorrow, my beautiful girl - Edward*

*Sleep well, my handsome doctor - Bella*

*I'll dream of you - Edward*

I smiled and blushed at his words. His persistence was definitely paying off. As much as I wanted to ravage his mouth, the kiss on my cheek ignited something in me that I never felt. With Mike or anybody else. I gently pressed my fingers to my cheek and danced giddily. I stumbled and remembered that I was klutz. I got into my car and drove home, making my cake for my dinner with Edward.

Tomorrow couldn't come fast enough.

**A/N: Edward's making headway. Definite headway in Bella's head. Sorry about 'cockblocking' his kiss but they aren't ready for that yet. Leave me love!**



# The Parties

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Rated M for future lemons (they will come!)*

## Chapter 8: The Parties

I pulled into Edward's driveway. My cake sitting on the passenger seat and I was nervous. *Was this a date?* No, it's not a date. You're planning your best friend's bachelorette party with the best man. But he is cooking you dinner. *It's probably pizza. He is a guy.* Edward doesn't seem like a guy who would make or order pizza. He's too health conscious. You remember what he looked like with no shirt on. *Holy six pack, Batman!*

Okay, it's official. I've lost my damn mind. I'm carrying on ENTIRE conversations in my head. This really needs to stop.

*Let him love you, Bella, and it will. DUH!*

I buried my head in my hands, hitting it on the steering wheel. "I will behave myself. I will not act like a crazy lady," I mumbled. "Come on, Swan. You can do this."

I got out of my car and walked to the passenger seat. I picked up the cake and walked up the manicured steps of Edward's home. As I moved closer to the house, I heard the most beautiful piece of music being played on the piano. It was so good, it had to be a recording. The chords were lush and luxuriant. The melody was soft and sweet: a lullaby. I'd never heard it before. I should ask Edward what the name of the recording is. It's so good. I took a breath and rang

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the doorbell. The music stopped.

*Was that Edward? Holy shit!*

Edward opened up the door and he gave me a crooked smile. He was wearing a pair of dark, distressed jeans and a white button down shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows. "Hey, beautiful," he said as he stepped to one side. I walked in and handed him the cake. He bounced on his toes, similar to how Alice does when she's excited. It was very cute and un-Edward-like. "Yay! Cake!"

"What are you, like ten?" I teased.

"Shut it. This was the best cake I've had, ever," Edward said as he rolled his eyes. "Come on. I've made us some chicken piccata. I hope you like it."

"You know how to cook?" I squeaked.

"Yeah. I've lived on my own for three years. It's kind of a necessity. Did you expect pizza?" Edward chided.

"Well, kind of," I shrugged.

"I hate pizza. It's nasty," Edward said as he wrinkled his nose. "I'll eat it, but there are things that I enjoy more. Do you want anything to drink? I have some white wine that I used in the chicken if you want some."

"No, I'll stick with water," I said as I followed Edward into his kitchen. *His beautiful kitchen. I want to cook in this kitchen.*

Edward put the cake on the counter and he got my water for me. He sat down at the island and placed the water in front the empty chair. I hopped up and sipped my water. "How was your nap yesterday?"

"As soon as I got home, around two, I crashed and slept until like ten this morning," Edward laughed. "I felt like such a bum, but apparently I needed it. I

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woke up this morning refreshed and I actually went for a run today. My back and legs are barking, but it felt good."

"You run? God bless you, I couldn't do that," I sighed.

"Why not?" Edward asked he picked up his glass.

"No cartilage in either ankle. I can't handle the impact. If I do work out, it has to be low-impact," I muttered. "I hate having the ankles of an 80 year old woman."

"Have you tried physical therapy?"

"Yeah, but they still hurt like a son of a bitch," I said, looking into his jade eyes. "I usually walk or do the elliptical trainer."

"If you want, we could go for a walk after dinner?" Edward suggested. "We'll go the opposite way of your old house."

"Sure," I smiled as I checked my feet. I was wearing sneakers, thankfully. And a pair of jeans. "I have a question for you. That music that was playing when I walked up. Who was that? It was beautiful."

Edward blushed and he picked at an invisible piece of lint on his own dark washed, distressed jeans. "That was me. I was just noodling around on the piano and that's what stemmed from my brain."

"That was you? Holy crow!" I exclaimed. "You are fantastic, Edward."

"Thanks," he said, not looking at me. "I haven't really played since I moved out here. I guess I was inspired." Edward gracefully slid off the chair and he checked the oven. His brow furrowed and then he picked up a pan and filled it with water. "Spaghetti okay?"

"That's fine. Do you need help?" I asked.

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"Can you make the salad? All the goods are in the fridge and there is a cutting board in the cabinet where you are sitting," Edward smiled as he put some salt in the water. He reached above the stove and took out a large bowl. He put it down in front of me and handed me a knife.

I went into the fridge and pulled out the lettuce, tomato, onion and cucumber. "Do you have olive oil and balsamic vinegar?"

"In the pantry," Edward said as he nodded to the door to the right of the fridge. I opened the door and stepped into a pantry that was larger than my entire kitchen in the condo.

"Fuck me," I sighed in the huge pantry. It was well stocked and not with generic brands. I looked around and picked up some olive oil and some really expensive vinegar. I walked back and put the lettuce into the bowl. I then chopped the onions, tomatoes, and cucumbers. I put on some salt and pepper and tossed in the olive oil and vinegar. Edward drained the pasta and put it into a large bowl and covered it with the chicken that he had pulled from the oven.

"Are you in pantry envy?" Edward laughed.

"Your pantry is bigger than my entire kitchen," I snorted. I picked up the salad and put it on the kitchen table, which was set elegantly with simple white plates and gray napkins. "Thank you for cooking dinner, Edward."

"It was my pleasure," Edward as he put the meal on the table. He turned around and handed me a wine glass filled with white wine. "Alice told me you liked this stuff, Pinot Gris. Just because I'm voluntarily sober, doesn't mean that you shouldn't enjoy a drink, Bella."

"Thank you," I said, accepting my glass of wine. Edward dished out some of the chicken into my plate and we dug in. "Holy shit, this is delicious!"

"I'm glad you're enjoying it," Edward smiled as he twirled the spaghetti on his fork. "It was my grandmother's recipe."

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"Well, compliments to the chef," I smiled as I held up my wine glass. Edward clinked his water glass with mine and gave me a wink. We continued eating and soft music wafted through Edward's home through his sound dock. "I made arrangements for the party today."

Edward swallowed and took a sip of his water, "You did? So what's the plan?"

"We meet here at 5 on the 13th for some appetizers and drinks. Then around seven we're going to a wine tasting at Alice's favorite winery, Cooper's Hawk. We're also getting dinner while we're there in their private dining room. After that, we're going to PoleCats for some strip club fun and ending the evening at Features," I explained. "Rose got the 'games' and said she's going to make a penis cake. Did you know that they have a mold for that?"

"That's just fucked up," Edward laughed. "Please tell me she's not going to decorate it like a real dick."

"I think she is. Pubes and everything," I giggled.

"I will not be partaking in that cake. It's just wrong to eat cake that is in the shape of the male anatomy," Edward said, scrunching his nose.

"What did you do for your bachelor party, Dr. Masen?" I asked. "I told you about my party. It's only fair that you tell me about yours."

"Complete and total debauchery. On my groomsmen's part," Edward sighed. "They got lit. I mean completely and totally hammered at this strip club in Seattle. I was sipping my water and watched them act like total assholes. They bought me a lap dance, which I didn't want. The girl was no more than eighteen and she was scared something awful. She took me back to a private room and starting dancing. I could see her apprehension and I told her to stop. She blushed and started speaking in Russian. I then asked her if she was brought here against her will. Taken from her family and she nodded. I got sick and gave her all the money I had in my wallet and told her to leave the club. She hugged me and darted out of the room. I told my friends that I needed to go and they whined about the stick in the mud groom. We got back to my condo and

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they crashed. I called the cops and gave them an anonymous tip. The strip club was shut down the next day in connection to a sex slave and prostitution ring."

"Damn, trouble follows you everywhere," I said, frowning my brow.

"Yes, it does. However, I knew I did the right thing with that girl, Irina," Edward said. "I was happy that I helped her."

"How long were you married to your wife?" I asked.

"We got married as soon as I was done with medical school. Tanya was older than me by a couple of years and she was working on her residency. We were both going to be at the same hospital. We were married for a little over five years. We met when I was a senior in college and dated all through medical school, for me. We were together for eight years all together," Edward explained. "She was a good person. Beautiful. Brilliant."

"Do you have any pictures?" I asked.

Edward nodded and he got up. He gracefully walked to the family room and picked up a 5x7 photo from the mantle of the fireplace. He smiled wistfully and his absentmindedly twisted his left ring finger. Almost like he was twisting his wedding ring. He walked back and handed me the photo. It was the first kiss photo from their wedding. Tanya was tall and blonde. Her hair was curled and piled on her head in an intricate twist. Her dress was strapless and her arms were thrown around Edward's neck. "She's lovely," I said as I looked at the happy couple. "You both looked like you were so much in love."

"We were," Edward said. I handed him back the photo and he put it on the mantle. "She was a kind-hearted, beautiful woman. She was my equal in every way. However, she challenged me in certain aspects as well. Her temper was a force to be reckoned with. She could from zero to pissed in a matter of seconds. It got her into trouble with her attending more often than not, but she was respected as a physician and a psychiatrist. The first few months of our marriage were a struggle. I was getting used to be a resident at Virginia Mason and she was finally on the psych floor. I would work all these wacky hours and

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she would essentially maintain banker's hours. It was very stressful being newlyweds. But we made it work. It made me who I am today. Are you finished?"

"Finished?" I asked.

"With your dinner?" Edward said, pointing to my plate.

"Oh, um. Yeah. However, you cooked, let me do the dishes," I said, getting up from the table.

"Bella, I can handle my own dishes," he laughed.

"Put your ass on that couch and I'll do the dishes, buddy," I said pointing to the family room. "After you tell me where you keep your plastic containers." Edward snorted and took out the containers I requested. I put the food away and began washing the dishes and putting them into his dishwasher.

Edward put on the television but wasn't really watching it. He was looking back into the kitchen guiltily. I arched a brow and gave him my best teacher glare. "Do you look at your students like that, Ms. Swan?" Edward asked warily.

"When they act like shithheads, I do," I answered.

"Remind me to never get on your bad side," Edward said with a lopsided grin.

"I'm a firm believer in bringing back corporal punishment," I said. "These kids are getting more and more disrespectful and rude as I teach. It's atrocious how they act."

"Tell me about it," Edward grumbled as he got up from the couch. He came back into the kitchen and hopped on the counter. "Yesterday, I was called in for a consult for a teenage boy. He was complaining of headaches and his wrists were bothering him. I went and saw him and he was on his gaming system, holding it up to his eyes really closely. His mother was distraught but didn't

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understand why he was in such pain. I took the gaming system away and he got very belligerent. He said I had no right to touch his private property. He demanded to see the boss. I told him that I was the boss and he better zip it."

"Kids are so rude," I grumbled. "Why did I become a teacher?"

"To touch the future of the world," Edward said, putting his hand on his chest and wiping a fake tear from his eye.

"To get summers off," I answered honestly.

"A ha! The truth comes out," Edward guffawed. "I knew it!"

"I sure as hell did not become a teacher for the money. Shit, I get paid jack," I said as I finished the dishes. I closed the dishwasher and put the cloth I was using on the sink. I went to walk to get my wine glass and there was a slick spot on the floor. My right foot slid out from underneath me and I fell myself falling. I never reached the ground. Edward caught me before my head splattered on his beautiful tiled floor.

His eyes were frantic and he gently laid me on the floor. "Bella, are you okay? What hurts?" Edward asked in a panicked voice.

I did the experimental wiggles of all my body parts. I got to my right ankle and let out a shriek. "Right foot," I cried.

"You didn't hit your head?" Edward asked. I shook my head no and he gently picked me up, carrying me to the couch in the family room. He placed me on the soft cushions and he removed my shoe and sock. With his tender touch, he pressed and assessed my ankle. "Can you point and flex your foot?"

I did and it hurt, but not too much. "Press against my hand like your accelerating in your car," Edward demanded. I did and it still hurt. "Hmmm, it could be a sprain or a minor fracture. Do you want me to take you to the hospital and get an x-ray?"



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"It's probably just a sprain," I answered. "Should I get it x-rayed?"

"I would recommend it. Seeing as I am the head honcho in the emergency department, I can pull strings to get you in and out in less than hour. We'll have to take your car because you're parked behind me. Keys, please?" Edward said as he held out his hand.

"They're in my purse in the kitchen," I said. Edward got up and brought me back my purse. I pulled out my car key and handed it to him. He picked me up and carried me out the front door. He deposited me in the passenger seat of my Pilot and he eased into the driver's side.

"Jesus, Bella. You are so short. My knees are in my navel," Edward laughed. He adjusted the seat and the mirrors.

"I'm so sorry that I'm not freakishly tall like you, Dr. Masen," I said with a sardonic grin.

"I'm not freakishly tall. Jeez," Edward said rolling his eyes. He drove us to Craven Memorial and parked in a reserved spot: *Reserved for the Head of the Emergency Department*. Edward got out and picked me up. "Come on, hop along."

"Shut it or I'll kick you with my good foot," I said, tweaking his ear.

"I'd like to see you try," Edward said, his green eyes blazing into mine. We walked through the main entrance and strode past the triage nurse. She smiled sweetly, greeting Dr. Masen. He grinned tightly and carried me to the x-ray suite. He caught a nurse. "Rhonda, can you grab me a chart?"

"Dr. Masen! What a surprise to see you here! Aren't you off for a few days?" Rhonda asked.

"Yes, I am. However, my friend here injured her ankle," Edward said as he pinched my side that he held. I squeaked and smacked his shoulder.

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"Of course, Dr. Masen," Rhonda said as she scurried off. She returned a few moments later while we were in the x-ray suite. Edward wrote down a few things and handed it back to her. He positioned my foot and took a few films. "Here's a wheel chair, Dr. Masen. Do you want me to take her to your office?"

"I'll do it. Thanks, Rhonda," Edward smiled. He picked me up and set me in the wheel chair. Edward pushed me to his office. *Dr. Edward Anthony Masen, Emergency Department Head* was blazoned on the door. "Do you want anything, Bella?"

"Some ice, please," I requested. Edward nodded and darted out of his office. It was well decorated. The furniture was dark wood and the walls were in a deep green color. On the walls were all of Edward's degrees and photos of his family. Edward returned with a slipper and an icepack. He picked me up and put me on the chocolate brown leather couch in his office. He gently put on the slipper and wrapped the icepack around my rapidly swelling ankle.

"This is not how I wanted our evening to end, Bella," Edward said as he knelt in front of me. "You really are clumsy."

"Yes, I am," I snorted.

"I brought you some Tylenol-3. You are going to spend the night at my place so I can take care of you," Edward said firmly. "I have a nice guest bedroom. I also called Alice and she's stopping by your place to get you some clothes."

"Edward, I've sprained my ankles before. I'll be fine. RICE!"

"And how do you expect to get up the stairs to your condo?" Edward pressed. "Do you have an elevator? How are you going to drive? I can't release you to drive if I have to give you walking boot."

I gaped at Edward and he smiled slowly. "I've won, admit it."

"Yes, you've won, Edward," I grumbled. I held out my hand and he put the pill in my palm. He reached behind his desk and took out a bottle of water. I took

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the pill with the proffered water. "I'm not going to be held responsible for what comes out of my mouth in a half hour. Narcotics make me very loose."

"Oh, goody," Edward smirked. "Loose as in easy or loose as in loose lipped."

"You wish easy," I giggled. "Loose lipped. I will not be held accountable what comes out of my mouth for next twelve hours. It's the narcotics talking."

"Yes ma'am," Edward said, barely holding his smile back. "I'm going to check on your x-rays. Will you be okay here for a few moments or do I need to strap you to the couch?"

"I'll be fine, Dr. Masen," I replied. Edward gave me a look and then dashed out of his office. I sat back and closed my eyes. I could feel the narcotics course through my body and I was feeling absolutely no pain.

Edward returned a few moments later and he was carrying my x-rays. He tossed them up onto the light box in his office. He looked at them critically and smiled slightly. "It's not broken. It is a severe sprain though."

"Boot?" I slurred.

Edward turned around and looked at me. He chuckled and crouched down in front of me. "You are so stoned, Bella."

"Am not, Dr. Masen," I said. "I'm perfectly fine."

"Right. Your eyes are so glassy and you are slurring your words," Edward said. "I'm going to get you a boot and a set of crutches. Then, I'm taking you back to my place and you are going to sleep, beautiful."

"You're the beautiful one, Edward. Your eyes are so pretty," I said, cupping his cheek.

"Thank you, Bella," Edward said with a lopsided smirk. "However, I would rather get complimented when you're sober and not strung out on codeine."

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"Okay, handsome doctor," I said as closed my eyes.

"Oh lord," Edward mumbled as he got up. I heard shuffling and I felt myself getting lifted. I opened my eyes but didn't really think much of it. I buried my nose in Edward's neck and nestled closer to him. He put me into my car and drove us back to his house. He carried me up the stairs and put me into a guest bedroom, tucking me into the bed. He kissed my forehead and brushed my hair from my face. I gave him a sleepy smile and fell into a deep, dreamless slumber.

xx AFS xx

I woke up to a bright, comfortable room. *Where am I?* I looked around and I was in a deep blue bedroom. I wasn't home. What the fuck?

I felt around the bed and found a piece of paper on the pillow. It was a note. From Edward.

*Dear Bella,*

*You were quite out of it when we got back from hospital. Did you know that you are a chatterbox when you sleep? It was quite adorable. I have to say that the nickname that you gave me made me laugh. Anyhow, your boot is by the foot of the bed, along with a set of crutches. I've also left a toothbrush and t-shirt in the bathroom for you.*

*I apologize for the note, but I didn't want to wake up to explain this and you would have not remembered it anyway.*

*Yours,*

*Edward*

Okay, so that explains where I am at. I looked at the foot of the bed and saw a lovely black boot. I growled and threw on the sock that was inside and slipped it on my foot. I grabbed the crutches and hobbled to the bathroom in the

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bedroom and saw the toothbrush and t-shirt as Edward promised. I washed my face and brushed my teeth. I slipped the t-shirt onto my body and folded the old one. I pulled my hair back into a sloppy ponytail and crutched to door. I was about to open it when Edward did so. "Morning, sleepyhead," he said cheerily.

"I'm so hung-over," I groaned.

"I gathered that. So I made some good hangover food," Edward said as he held up a tray. "In bed, gimpy."

"Bite me," I retorted.

"Hmmm...maybe later," Edward teased.

I got back into the bed and Edward placed the tray over my legs. On it was a stack of blueberry pancakes, sausage links and a vase with a single rose. "Breakfast is served, beautiful."

"This looks great, Edward," I said, my voice rough with sleep. "Thanks for taking care of me while I was in a narcotic state of inebriation. What did I say?" I dug into my breakfast and groaned inwardly at the deliciousness that was the blueberry pancakes.

"Not a whole lot. Though, you did call me Dr. McFuckme," Edward said. "That's a new one."

"Shit."

"Alice told me about that nickname, but to hear it from you just made it classic," Edward laughed. "You also had some rather vocal dreams last night."

"And you didn't kick me out? I'm so screwed," I moaned.

"Bella, please. I'm kidding," Edward said as he tucked a hair behind my ear. "The only thing that threw me for a loop was the nickname. Dr. McFuckme. I like it."

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"Well, you exude sex appeal, Edward," I said, a blush creeping over my features. "It's the hair, the eyes and the body. Not to mention your fucking brilliant."

"Bella, my hair is a hot mess. So many damn cowlicks. It looks like I stuck my finger in an electric socket," Edward said self-deprecatingly.

"I like it," I said as I ruffled his soft tresses. "Hmmm, very soft and thick. Nice."

"That's not all that's thick," Edward said seductively.

"Patience. I'm gimpy now," I said wiggling my boot-encased foot. "How long am I in this stupid thing?"

"Two weeks," Edward said. "We'll examine if you need physical therapy after the two weeks."

"So I get to wear this for the party?" I asked.

"It appears so," Edward frowned.

"Yes!" I exclaimed as I did a fist pump.

"Why are you happy about this?" Edward asked confusedly.

"I don't have to wear heels!" I smiled. I leaned forward and kissed Edward on his cheek. He inhaled sharply and looked at me with lust filled eyes as I pulled away.

"You are weird, Bella," Edward said as he shook his head. "Technically you are not to drive with that thing. However, I'm probably safe to assume that you don't want to be chauffeured around for the next two weeks, right?"

"You assume correctly. I'll take it off to drive. I promise," I said as I held up my right hand. "So am I released from Masen Medical Center?"

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"I suppose," Edward grumbled. "I really enjoyed having you here. Sleep talking and all."

"Well, I'll be back here for the bachelor and bachelorette party. It's okay to have all the drunk people crash here, right?"

"Totally fine. You know me about drunk drivers," Edward said. "I'd rather they sleep it off on my couch then get behind the wheel. Speaking of getting behind the wheel, I'm going to follow you back to your place. I just want to ensure that you get home safely and have everything you need. Is that okay?"

I nodded and passed the tray to Edward. He picked it up and put it on the chest near the foot of the bed. He picked up my crutches and then looked at me with a mischievous look in his eyes. He reached for my hands and I grasped them. He helped me up and then threw me over his shoulder. "Edward!" I shrieked. "Don't be all caveman!"

He laughed and carried me down the stairs. I smacked his ass and he responded by smacking my ass before he put me on the floor and handing me my crutches. I scowled at him and he laughed again as he jogged into the kitchen and grabbed my purse. He also a bag in his hands. "Your shoe and some leftovers from last night," Edward explained. "Come on hop along. Let's get you situated at home."

I crutched out to my car and slid off the boot when I got into the car. I reached in the backseat and put on a flip flop and backed out of the driveway after I readjusted my seats so I can reach the pedals. I drove to my condo, with Edward in his Volvo on my tail. I parked my car and Edward was at my door helping me with my boot and crutches. I got up the stairs and then groaned. Edward put down the things he was carrying and told me to hold my crutches. He easily hefted me and carried me up the stairs. "You are getting quite a work out with lifting my fat ass," I called down to him.

"Bella, you are not fat," Edward chastised as he returned up the stairs with the stuff he left at the bottom. I hobbled to my condo and unlocked the door. Edward put the food into the fridge and helped me with some minor

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readjustments to my furniture to make it crutch friendly. "Do you want me to stay?"

"I've put you out enough, Edward. Thank you for everything, though," I said as I settled back into my couch cushions. "I'll just do some lesson planning and reading. I have all the necessary things: computer, books, pen and paper. I'll be fine."

"Okay," Edward said as he shuffled on his feet. "I really don't like leaving you here by yourself."

"Edward, I've been gimpy before and been on my own. I'll be fine. I promise," I said. "Thank you for everything. I really appreciate it."

He knelt down in front of me and looked me in the eyes. "If you need anything. ANYTHING! Day or night, just call me, please?" Edward asked, his eyes beseeching mine. I nodded and grasped his hands. He laced his fingers through mine and he pressed a linger kiss on my cheek and then moved to my forehead. "I'll call you later tonight, beautiful. Rest, ice, compression and elevate."

"Yes, Dr. McFuckme," I said giving him a middle finger salute.

"Smartass," he chided. "See you later, Bella."

"Bye, Edward," I smiled. He gave me a crooked smirk and he let himself out.

xx AFS xx

After a week, I was off the crutches, but still in the boot. Edward came over many times to make sure I was comfortable. And each time he brought over some sort of bouquet of flowers. My condo looked like a florist shop. He felt responsible for my fall and he took it upon himself to make sure I was healing properly. It was very sweet.

Finally after another week, I was moving more comfortably and I was over at Edward's place to help with the decorations for Alice and Jasper's party on the



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afternoon of the party of the century. Edward, Rose and I were making his home look more festive. Well, Edward and Rose were making his home look more festive, I was just giving my input.

"I have never seen so many streamers in all my life," Edward grumbled.

"It's Alice," Rose said as she twisted the streamers around Edward's chandelier in his dining room. "What Alice wants..."

"Alice gets. Believe me, I know. I've had to deal with it for 32 years. Spoiled little elf," Edward muttered darkly.

"She's still trying to get me into heels for this party," I said as I was arranging the napkins on the cocktail table. "Hello! I'm wearing a fucking boot because I'm injured."

"Well, that was my fault," Edward said guiltily.

"What did I say, Edward?" I said, giving him a stern teacher look.

"It's not my fault," Edward said in a bored tone.

"And...?" I prompted.

"Bella's a klutz," Edward sighed. "I still feel badly. It happened in *my house*."

"It could have easily happened at my place or on the street or..." I argued.

"Okay, Bella. I get it. You should become a lawyer, woman," Edward said as he hopped off the chair he was on.

"No thank you," I sang. "I'll stick with stinky 8th grade boys and drama-filled 8th grade girls."

"I have to get something from your car, Bells," Rose said. "The games for tomorrow. You should see the dare cards that I got. They are fucking sweet."

## A Fresh Start

"My keys are in my purse," I said as I nodded my head to Edward's stairs. She ran off and got my keys. "Are you ready for this thing?"

"Ah, no," Edward said. "I enjoy a party but this is a bit much. It looks like my house got painted with pepto bismol."

"Imagine wearing a dress this color," I shuddered.

"Well, it'll look absolutely gorgeous on you, Bella," Edward said. "I have no doubt."

"I had my final fitting yesterday and it does look good. However, the alterations cost nearly as much as the dress," I grumbled.

"Why?"

"I lost a shitload of weight from when I ordered the dress to now. When I put it on when it came in, it fell off my body it was so big," I laughed. "I had so much extra fabric left over, I had a purse and a wrap made."

"Hey guys, look at these dare cards," Rose said as she burst through the front door. She plopped down on an armchair and divided the cards into half. Edward sat down next to me on the couch and took the proffered cards. "The dares are innocent to completely raunchy."

"Here's an innocent one: 'Ask a man to buy you a drink,'" I read. "I want that kind of dare."

"Seriously?" Edward squeaked. "'Ask for a set of beads Mardi Gras style.' Are you promoting flashing, Rosalie?"

"It's all in good fun, Dr. McFuckme," Rose said as she ruffled his hair.

"Bella, remind me to kick your ass when you get healthy for that lovely nickname," Edward said with a sardonic grin.

## A Fresh Start

"I keep you on your toes, Dr. McFuckme," I said as poked his side. "'Kiss a woman.' Hmmm."

"Have you ever kissed a girl, Bella?" Rose asked.

Edward snorted and buried his face in his hands. I shoved him and gave him a glare. "When I was out on my bachelorette party. A lesbian made out with me. This one thinks it's hot."

"What? I'm a guy. It's every guy's fantasy to see two girls make out or more," Edward rationalized.

"Have you ever made out with a guy, Edward?" Rose asked.

"Ummm," he floundered. "Do you want something to drink? I'm thirsty." He shot up and I grabbed the belt loop of his jeans, pulling him back on the couch.

"Spill it, Masen," I said, grabbing his chin. "You made out with a boy."

"Fuck me," Edward grumbled.

"No thanks, Eddie. You're too skinny for my taste," Rose teased.

"Did you?" I pressed, staring Edward in his green eyes. I moved closer, invading his personal space. His eyes grew darker and more dilated. He licked his lips and nodded. "Was that so hard, Edward?"

"No," he squeaked.

"Did you like it?" Rose asked.

"Hell no! It was a dare at a cast party. Remember when I told you about the one musical I was in. I made out with the guy who played 'Judas.' Ironically enough, that was my first kiss. Ever," Edward said, his cheeks turning a bright, flaming red. "Suffice it to say, I was scarred for life."

## A Fresh Start

"Did you kiss girl afterward?" I teased.

"The first one I could find," Edward said quickly. "She was horrible at kissing, but she was female. She had boobs. She did not shove her tongue down my throat."

"Poor baby," Rose said as she patted Edward's knee. "Here's another raunchy one: 'Imitate giving a blowjob to a random man.'"

"Jesus," Edward said as he got up. "Please make sure I get an innocent one. I am too far removed from all things sexual to handle these as dares."

"Edward, relax. There are some that are too risqué for me and I've seen it all," Rose laughed. "I think we are good with the decorations. Come on, Bella. Alice told me that I need to make you gorgeous tonight."

"No heels, Rose," I barked.

"I have the cutest ballet flats, Bella. You'll great," Rose said. "Call us if you need anything, Edward. Thanks for the use of your house. It's a beautiful home."

"Thanks, Rose," Edward said. "See you both in a little bit."

We got up and walked out to the car. I handed Rose the keys and she drove us back to the condo. As she drove back, she told me that I was to shower and shave all parts of my body. She pulled into my parking spot and we headed into our respective places. I did as I was asked and showered. I was putting on lotion when I heard Rose come into my condo. Her hair was straightened and pulled into a sleek ponytail. She was holding a garment bag and a tackle case filled with makeup. Rose walked into my bedroom and put the garment bag on my bed. She dug around in it and handed me a small bag. "What's this?"

"Alice thought of everything. It's your underwear," Rose said.

## A Fresh Start

I took out the underwear and scoffed. "This is not underwear. This is dental floss. I'm not wearing this."

As I was finishing with putting on my lotion, my phone rang. It was Alice. She griped saying I will wear the underwear that she got for me along with the outfit. The only thing that she was wavering on was the shoes and that was because told her that if I wore heels, it would hinder my recovery.

*Thank you, Dr. McFuckme.*

I grumbled and put on the dental floss. Rose attacked my face with the makeup and curled my hair. After an hour, I was transformed from mousy Bella to sex goddess Bella. With a boot. Rose took out my dress for the evening. It was a deep purple with thick straps. The skirt was slightly a-line and fell to right above my knees. The bodice was form fitting and my boobs were pushed up quite well. Rose also put on some jewelry on me: a chunky silver necklace, earrings and bracelet. On the foot that was not in the boot, I wore a sparkly black ballet flat. Rose was wearing a tight black dress with red 'fuck me' heels.

"You ready to head back to Edward's?" Rose asked. "He's going to spooge when he sees you. You look fucking hot, Bells."

"Really?" I asked.

"Really," Rose said with a hug. "Let's go."

She handed me a black clutch and inside was my driver's license, credit card and some lip gloss. I slipped in car keys and we walked out Rose's car. She had a cute little red BMW. She drove us back to Edward's home and parked in the driveway. We got out and walked to the front door. There were some people already there. I could see that Angela and Ben were there. Emmett was there and some other people that Jasper knew. Rose rang the doorbell and Edward opened it up. He smiled at Rose and ushered her in. He then looked at me and his eyes dilated and his jaw dropped. "Bella," he sputtered. "You are a vision."

## A Fresh Start

"Thanks," I blushed as I looked up at him. He was wearing black dress pants, black dress shirt and a purple tie. "Apparently Alice wanted us to color-coordinate." I tugged on his tie. "She's subtle."

"That she is," he laughed. He took my hand and helped me into his home. "Jasper just texted me and told me that he's on his way with Alice. Are you ready for this?"

"No," I grumbled. "It'll be fun, but I don't like being the center of attention or even close to the center of attention."

"I'll be right by you, Bella. I promise," Edward said as he looked into my eyes. I nodded and squeezed his hand. He kissed my cheek and ushered me into the living room.

Angela ran up to me and hugged me tightly. "Hey, Bells! Long time no see!" she exclaimed. "How has your summer been?"

"Good. You?" I asked.

"Very good. So, are you and the good doctor an item yet?" she asked.

"No. But he's chipping away," I said as I looked at Edward. He smiled and gave me a wink as he wandered the guests. "He said he'd wait for me. I don't think the wait will be all that much longer."

"Oh, Bella. Go for it. He's gorgeous and smart and wow!" Angela gushed.

As she spoke, Alice and Jasper came in with a flourish. The crowd cheered and Rose put on a crown on Alice's head, along with a sash, proclaiming her to be the bride. Edward put on a baseball cap on Jasper and handed him a button. Rose explained the dare cards and distributed them to everyone. Thankfully I got a relatively innocent one. 'Kiss a single man who you find attractive.' I told the crowd what the plan of the party was. As I was talking the party bus pulled up in front of Edward's home and we all loaded on. I was walking out with Edward when Alice came up to us.

## A Fresh Start

"You need to wear these," she chirped as she handed us two buttons. One said 'maid of honor' and the other said 'best man.' We pinned them onto our clothes and loaded onto the bus. All of the seats were taken except for one. Edward frowned and told me to sit. "Bella, sit on Edward's lap," Alice suggested.

"Mary Alice," I warned. Edward took my hand and stood me up. He took my seat and pulled me onto his lap. "Edward, I'm too..."

"If you say fat, I will pummel you with your ballet flat," Edward said, arching his brow. "You are perfect."

"You are blind," I said.

"Not right now, I'm not. Contacts," Edward smiled.

I rolled my eyes and settled back on Edward's lap. He held tightly on my waist and he rested his chin on my shoulder. The bus pulled away from house and drove us to Cooper's Hawk. "So, what did you pull for the dare cards?"

"Not telling," Edward said.

"Is it innocent or raunchy?" I pressed.

"Hmmm, raunchy," Edward said. "How about you? What did you pull?"

"Not telling," I laughed. "But it's innocent."

We pulled up to the winery and piled out of the bus. Edward and I walked up and explained to the hostess that we had a reservation. They led us to the party room in the winery and sommelier explained the joys of winemaking. We all had some various wines, even Edward. He limited his to one glass, but he did try it. After the wine education, we ordered dinner and ate it voraciously. Edward kept his arm around my chair all night and he kept giving me flirtatious looks and smiles. I returned his flirtations and rested my hand on his knee. He drew his lip between his teeth and he kissed my cheek. We didn't get dessert and we settled our bill. We loaded back onto the bus and he drove us to

## A Fresh Start

the PoleCats.

We stumbled into the strip club and sat down in the reserved section near the stage. Alice and Jasper were announced as being on the bachelor and bachelorette parties and that the dancers were going to give them a special treat. The first dancer looked like Alice and she moved to the song I requested, "Hot for Teacher." She was wearing a tight pencil skirt, white blouse and a pair of glasses and she stripped down to her g-string, grinding in front of Jasper and Alice. Rose sidled up next to me and asked if anyone had completed their dares. I shook my head no. Rose then handed me a bag. I frowned and looked inside. It was the matching shoe to the one on my good foot. I slipped off the boot and put it in the bag and put on the flat. I poked Edward and he nodded, holding me tightly. Rose took the bag and walked to the DJ. He made an announcement for us to complete our dares. The person who completes the final dare will win a prize, to be determined by the bride and groom.

Emmett hopped up and ran to the DJ booth and they spoke quickly. Alice Cooper's 'Schools Out for Summer' came through the speakers and Emmett hopped up on the stage. He started dancing in front of Alice and Jasper, removing his dress shirt. I hid my face and laughed hysterically. Alice danced in front of him, waving money and sticking it into his pants. Rose was watching Emmett with rapt attention and she wanted him to take it all off. Or rather her expression said so.

*Hmmmm...Rose and Emmett. Interesting...*

Edward leaned in and he whispered something in my ear, "I want to do my dare."

"Well, go ahead," I said. "What is it?"

"Give a lap dance," Edward said. "I'm giving it to you, beautiful."

"What?" I squeaked and I looked at Edward. He got up and was walking to the DJ and he requested a song. The sounds of 'Bad Case of Loving You' came through the speakers as Emmett put on his clothes. Edward moved slowly



## A Fresh Start

toward me and I slunk down in my seat. He reached for his tie and loosened it. Rose handed me a handful of bills. Edward stopped in front of me and started moving his hips in rhythm to the music. His tie came off and he put it around my neck. I held up a dollar bill. He took it with his teeth and put it into his pocket. Alice screamed from her seat and she pumped her fist. Jasper was bopping his head at Edward's dance and I was turning a bright red. Edward straddled my legs and he moved above me quite seductively. I held up another bill and he told me to put it my mouth. I did and he removed it from my mouth with his. He turned around and unbuttoned his shirt, but didn't remove it. He turned around and he took my hands and placed them on his chest. I ran my fingers across his muscles and through the chest hair that was smattered on his torso. The song faded away and Edward pulled away, grabbing my hands. I got up and I tugged on his hand. I stood on my tiptoes and whispered in his ear. "Now it's my turn to do my dare."

"What's that, beautiful?" he asked as we moved to the back of the club, toward the bathrooms. He rebuttoned his shirt, but left it untucked.

"To kiss a single man who I find attractive," I said. I cupped his cheeks and his eyes widened. His lips looked so delectable and I couldn't wait to feel them against mine. Edward's arms wrapped around my waist and he pulled me flush to his body. I gently pulled his face down to mine. I looked into his eyes and they gave me permission. My eyes fluttered shut and I caressed my lips with his. My fingers tangled into his slightly damp hair and our mouths moved in tandem. I felt Edward tighten his hold on me and a low growl in his belly. His tongue traced my lower lip and asked for entrance. I opened my mouth and his tongue slipped inside. I moaned and my body was on fire. I pulled away and looked into Edward's fiery gaze. "I'm tired of feeling this attraction toward you Edward and denying how I was feeling. I was foolish to even think I could not even..."

"I said I'd wait for you, Bella," Edward said, his breathing heavy. "I'm glad I did." He picked up my hand and placed it on his chest, above his heart. It was stammering in chest. Probably like mine. "Only for you, beautiful girl." He leaned down and kissed me sweetly. "I could get used to this, Bella. You have the softest lips. Just like imagined."

## A Fresh Start

"Yours are better," I purred.

"Hmmm," he smiled against my mouth. "We'll just have to agree to disagree."

"It's about fucking time!" Alice shrieked.

Edward and I groaned and pulled apart. He kept his arms around me and held me tightly. "I know, Alice. I didn't want to push, so back off," Edward sighed.

"I understand," Alice said as she ran toward us, throwing her arms around both of our necks. "You are so going to be my sister, Bella."

"Okay, Elf," I said as I patted her back.

"Oh, by the way, you both won the dare game," Alice said as she pinched our cheeks. "Okay, I'll let you finish making out. Love you!"

"Hmmm, I do like the sound of that," Edward said as he nuzzled my neck. He turned me around slowly and dipped me, kissing me deeply and passionately. "Now that I've been granted the opportunity to kiss you, Bella, I intend to. Often."

"You can as much as you want, Edward," I said against his lips.

"Good," he said.

**A/N: So, they kissed. Leave me love, please :)**

# The Parties Still

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Rated M for future lemons (they will come!)*

## Chapter 9: The Parties...Still

Edward and I walked back to our party, our hands twined together. We were in our little bubble, staring into each other's eyes and not really paying attention to the rest of the guests. Edward sat down and pulled me onto his lap. He pressed soft, chaste kisses on my cheeks and down my neck. With each caress of his lips, my heart stammered and I wanted to be alone with him.

*Two years is a long time to go without sex. Damn it.*

"Bella!" Rose hissed.

I reluctantly looked away from Edward and at my new friend, "Yes, Rose?"

"I'm sorry to interrupt, but the bus driver is wondering how much longer we're going to be here?" she asked.

"Oh, um, what time is it?" I asked.

Edward looked at his watch, "A little after eleven," he answered. "Let's shoot for 11:30 to head to Features."

"Cool," Rose winked. "You guys look great together, by the way."

## A Fresh Start

I blushed and ducked my head, "Thanks, Rose," Edward said, kissing my cheek. "Good things happen to those who wait," Edward whispered in my ear.

I looked at him and I gently cupped his face, "That they do, Dr. Masen," I replied and I leaned in, brushing my lips with his. He deepened the kiss and his tongue danced languidly with mine. His arms tightened around my waist and his lips left mine. He nibbled along the column of my neck and he captured my earlobe between his teeth. I moaned and wrapped my arms around his neck.

"God! Quit sucking face," Alice teased.

Edward pulled away and stuck his tongue at his 'sister.' "Back off, Elf," he snapped. "I'm enjoying this."

I leaned in and whispered in his ear, "I can feel how much you are enjoying this, Edward."

"Hmmm," he smirked. "Very much, beautiful."

"Bella! Your purse is ringing," Emmett called.

I frowned and got up from Edward's lap. He had the most adorable pout on his lips. I kissed it away and got my purse. I checked my phone inside and saw that I had a new text message. It was from Mike.

*You are such a little slut, Bella. Making out with another man. What the fuck? - Mike*

I felt tears spring in my eyes. How did he know? Why does he care? We're no longer together. He's with Jessica and they are expecting a baby.

*Mike, I fail to see why this is important to you. We're no longer together. Are you having me followed? If you are, we're going to have serious issues. - Bella*

I grabbed my purse and went into the bathroom. As soon as I was in the bathroom, my tears spilled over onto my cheeks. I should be happy. Incredibly

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happy. A man who is brilliant, compassionate, sweet and gorgeous is attracted to me and we are no longer fighting that attraction. I kissed him. Then he kissed me. And boy did he kiss me. I felt his lips everywhere. His mouth ignited a fire deep within my soul; a fire that had long since been extinguished.

My phone beeped again and it was Mike. *I want to make sure that you are making good choices, Bella. We might not be married, but you are associated with me. We wouldn't want my good name tarnished. Watch yourself.* - Mike

I growled and threw my phone across the bathroom, causing it to shatter into a million pieces. I fell to the floor, sobbing. The door opened and Rose, Alice and Angela came in. "Bella," Alice said sympathetically. "What's wrong, sugar? Are you not impressed with Edward's kissing skills?"

"His kissing skills are fantastic," I mumbled. "My ex-husband's stalker-like tendencies are what are causing me to cry."

"So, that's the guy that Jasper, Edward and Emmett chased out," Rose said. "There was a man watching you like a hawk. He was also at the winery too."

"Fuck," I mumbled. "What should I do?"

"Call Seth," Alice said. "Obviously, not now. However, tomorrow. This is creepy."

A quiet knock rang through the bathroom. Edward poked his head into the bathroom. "That guy is gone. Is Bella in here?" he asked.

The girls parted and showed me curled up on the ground. Edward frowned and he strode over to where I was sitting. I was absentmindedly playing with the tie he had taken off and placed around my neck. "We'll be outside, Edward. Take care of her."

"I will. Thanks, Elf," Edward said to Alice. The girls left and it was just Edward and I in the women's bathroom. "What happened? Talk to me, beautiful." He sat down on the floor and faced me. His jade eyes were filled

## A Fresh Start

with concern and sadness.

"My ex-husband was having me tailed. He texted me and told me that I was a slut and that I was making 'poor choices,' I grumbled. "I didn't even know I was being followed."

"Emmett pointed him out. He said he was watching our interaction when we kissed," Edward said. "I was ready to kill him. However, we spoke with the management and had him removed."

"I thought Mike was out of my life. He's engaged to be married with a baby on the way. Why should he worry about me? I'm not his problem anymore," I said. "I can take care of myself, thank you very much."

"I know you can," Edward smiled. "However, I'm worried. If this assclown followed you now, how long has been following you? I'm really worried. Like I don't want you stay in your condo worried."

"Edward, I can't abandon my home. It's the first place I've owned by myself," I said.

"I know, beautiful. At least tonight, I'll know you're going to be safe," Edward said as he cupped my cheek.

"And how do you know that, Dr. Masen?" I asked, leaning into his touch.

"You're staying with me. Along with the rest of the hooligans," he chuckled. "Though, they get couches and the floor. You get a bed."

"That guest bedroom was quite comfy," I snorted.

"I wasn't thinking that bed, Bella," Edward said arching a brow.

"Edward," I warned.

## A Fresh Start

"No funny business. Just sleep. Please?" he begged. "I'm freaking out here. I need to know that you're okay."

"Do you snore?"

"I don't think so," Edward laughed. "Tanya never complained. She was the snorer."

"Hmmmmm, I'll consider it," I teased. I got up and frowned at the remnants of my phone. "Shit."

"What?" Edward asked. I pointed to the damage. "What was that?"

"What's left of my phone," I sighed. "Looks like I'll be getting a new one."

"I'll take you to AT&T tomorrow," Edward smiled. "Come on, we're heading back to my place. Features is a no go, especially since all that's happened. Half of the group is too hammered to function and the other half had their buzz killed."

He laced his fingers with mine and we walked out the women's bathroom. Our group had assembled near the front of the club and we loaded on the bus. Edward sat me down on his lap and held me close. One of his hands was laced with mine and the other was rubbing soothing circles on my back. The bus pulled up to Edward's home and signed the paperwork for the rental. He also took out some money from his wallet and gave him a hefty tip. We all trudged into Edward's house and he took out blankets, pillows and air mattresses. Alice and Jasper were staying in the guest bedroom that I stayed in when I was gimp. Edward led me to his bedroom and I walked inside.

It was a large room that was dominated with a large king-sized bed. The walls were painted with a soft gold color. The furniture was black and the bedding was a lighter shade of gold and cream. Edward walked to his closet and took out a pair of shorts and a t-shirt. He handed them to me. "So you can get comfortable. You'll be swimming in them, but it'll be better than the dress you're wearing," he said a shy grin.

## A Fresh Start

"Thanks," I said. "Where's the bathroom?"

Edward took my hand and led me to the bathroom. It was a huge en suite bathroom, painted in a lighter shade of gold than what was in his bedroom. The décor was simple and elegant. Edward knocked on the door and I opened it. He handed me a toothbrush and some towels. He had changed and was wearing a pair of sleep pants and a Dartmouth t-shirt. "I'm going to take out the contacts and I'll see you in bed, beautiful."

I nodded and shut the door behind him. I unzipped my dress and pulled it off my body. I threw on the t-shirt. It was a University of Chicago Medical School shirt and Edward's last name was on the back. I smiled and held the soft fabric to my nose. It smelled clean and like him. I picked up the shorts and Edward was right. I was swimming in them. However, I had to wear them as I had on dental floss for panties. I brushed my teeth and washed the makeup off my face. I limped out of the bathroom and smiled when I saw Edward in the bed. He had on his glasses and he was paging through a medical journal. "Is everyone asleep?"

"I have no clue," Edward laughed. "I'm just hoping that I don't find little piles of vomit on my floors from all of the drunkards."

"Um, ewwwwwwww," I said as I scrunched my nose. I hobbled over to the bed and climbed in. "I'm sorry about earlier."

"Why are you apologizing?" Edward asked. "You've done nothing wrong. Your ex-husband is the freak."

"He was never like this when we were married," I said as I ran my fingers through my hair. "He didn't care at all about what I did or who I hung out with. I guess now that I'm finally happy, he's ready to make my life hellacious."

"Bella, you deserve the right to be happy. I'm just grateful that you are willing to take the step with me," Edward said shyly. "Can...can I kiss you again?"

"You don't have to ask, Edward," I smiled.



## A Fresh Start

He grinned and he pulled me closer to his hard chest. He caressed my cheek and angled my head so he could caress his lips with mine. He did and my heart was about to beat out of my chest. My hands moved up his neck and took purchase in his soft, bronze hair. I felt us fall back onto the pillows and our lips danced with each other. I nibbled on his lower lip and he growled lightly at the sensation. His other hand traveled down my spine and grasped my hip. Our legs tangled together and I could feel how excited he was against my belly.

*Holy crow! He's fucking huge!*

Edward removed his lips from mine and he nibbled along my jaw and kissed my neck. I moaned wantonly at his tender touch and my hands held tightly in his hair. "Bella," he said reverently as he kissed back up to my lips. "I've never felt like this, beautiful." He looked at me, as he hovered over me. His glasses were askew and his hair was twisted. He looked delicious. I reached up and removed his glasses. He laughed and put them on the bedside table. "Seriously, never have I felt anything like this."

I was afraid to ask, but I needed to know. "Not even with Tanya?" I whispered.

"Not even with her," he said. "I'll always love her. She was my first *everything*. Okay, well, not everything."

"So you weren't a virgin on your wedding night?" I teased.

"Ah, no," Edward said as he blushed. "However, she was the first woman I'd ever made love to. But back to what I'm feeling now."

"I can feel what you're feeling now," I giggled.

Edward wiggled his hips and smirked crookedly. "You like that?"

"Hmmm," I nodded.

"Bella, I'm very attracted to you, physically. As you can feel and I'm experiencing. I'm also attracted to this," he said as he touched my temple. "And

## A Fresh Start

this," he said reverently as he placed his hand on my chest, above my heart. "When I'm with you, I get this feeling of electricity traveling through my body. It feels amazing. I don't want it go away. Ever."

Tears that I hadn't realized were building in my eyes spilled over onto my cheeks. Mike had never said anything so sweet or so loving in ALL of the time we were together. I reached up and pulled Edward back to my mouth and kissed him fiercely. He returned my kiss equally and he held me as he rolled onto his back. He deepened the kiss and his hands moved down to my ass and he squeezed lightly. My fingers traveled down his torso and I felt his muscles contract under my touch. "I'm hoping those are happy tears," he said against my neck. Not trusting my voice, I nodded. And then yawned. "Okay, my sleepy beautiful girl, it's bed time."

Edward reached over and turned off the lamp on the bedside table. He then held me tightly against his chest. "Good night, Bella. Sleep well," he said quietly.

"Good night, Edward. Thank you. For everything," I said as I kissed him sweetly on the lips. He smiled against my kiss.

I tried to roll away, similar to how I would with Mike, but Edward held fast. "Where are you going?" he asked.

"You can't be comfortable with another person laying on your chest," I said rationally.

"I think I can handle it," Edward said as he kissed my forehead. "Sleep, beautiful."

"Yes, Dr. McFuckme," I giggled as I kissed his cheek.

"Oh lord," he laughed and he held me close. I snuggled against him and fell into a deep sleep. Best sleep I'd ever had.

xx AFS xx

## A Fresh Start

The sun was shining brightly. I was warm and comfortable. I was on my belly and I felt another warm body next to me. I cracked open an eye and gazed around the room. *Edward's bedroom*. I turned my head and saw Edward laying next to me. His arm was thrown across my torso and he was spooning me. I reached up with my hand and brushed off a wayward hair off his forehead. *He's so pretty*.

"Men are not pretty, Bella," Edward mumbled into his pillow, his voice rough with sleep.

"Did I say that out loud?" I squeaked.

"Yes, you did, beautiful," he said winking at me. "You're the pretty one. I'm just the brawn. Good morning." He pulled me to his chest and he held me tightly, nuzzling my neck and hair with his nose. "I could get used to this."

"Really?" I asked as I twined my fingers with his. "What about this?"

"Waking up with you in my bed, in my arms," he said as he nibbled on my ear. "Wearing my clothes."

"You seem to be wearing less," I giggled as I reached behind me, scratching his bare belly.

"I got hot," Edward said sheepishly. "The sleeptalking woke me up and I was sweating bullets."

"What did I say?" I grumbled as my cheeks heated up.

"Nothing," Edward smiled.

"Liar."

"Me? Never," Edward said as he turned me around. "I cannot tell a lie."

## A Fresh Start

"Your nose is growing, Pinocchio," I laughed as I tweaked his nose. He kissed my fingertip and he grinned crookedly. I got up and extricated myself from his embrace. Edward frowned and I padded to the bathroom. I brushed my teeth again and pulled my hair back into a sloppy bun. I walked out of the bathroom and Edward dressed in a pair of jeans and a t-shirt. He was adjusting his glasses as he smirked and went into the bathroom. The door shut and I heard him go through his routine. I threw on my dress and folded Edward's clothes. I was beginning to make the bed when Edward came out of the bathroom.

"Bella, you don't have to make the bed," he chastised. "Or have changed. You could have worn these home."

"I'm good," I smiled as I adjusted a strap on my dress. Edward helped me make his bed and he took his clothes and tossed them into a hamper in his closet. I faintly heard rumblings in the house and his guests were slowly waking up. Edward held up my boot and gave me a smirk. "Nooooooooooooo! I hate that thing."

"I gave you a reprieve last night, but you need to wear it, Bella," he sighed. "I don't want you to injure yourself further."

"My back is killing me when I wear it because I walk funny," I grumbled. "Please, no more boot. I'll go to physical therapy if I don't have to wear that damn boot."

"I'll compromise," Edward said. "You have to wear sneakers for the first two weeks of school. With an ankle brace. I'll bring one over later today."

"I can handle that. Besides if I went to work with that thing, I would need a doctor's excuse clearing me to work," I said.

"Good thing you know a doctor," Edward said as he threw the boot on the floor with a resounding thud. "Come on, let's go wake up all the drunk people." I giggled and nodded as he opened the door. We walked past Alice and Jasper's room and heard squeaking. Edward blanched and he took off his glasses, rubbing his face violently. "I think I'm scarred for life. That is something I

## A Fresh Start

don't want to picture. Ever. Ewwwwwwwww!" he said as he jogged in place.

"What don't you want to picture?" Alice asked as she stood at the landing of the stairs. Jasper was right behind her.

"You're out here?" Edward squeaked.

"Yep."

"Who's in there?" I asked, pointing to the door.

"Emmett and Rosalie," Jasper drawled.

"Harder, Em! Oh GOD!" Rose screamed.

"Gah!" I said as I covered my ears. "I need brain bleach."

"I need to bleach my sheets," Edward moaned as he pointed to the door. "At least someone got laid last night."

"Were you expecting to get laid, Edward Anthony?" Alice and I barked.

"What? Hell no! I want to take out on a proper date before I try to bed you, Ms. Swan," Edward smirked.

"You're so gallant," I chuckled dryly. "Who said I am capable of being 'bedded?'"

Edward's mouth opened but quickly shut when Rose's voice burst through the hallway.

"Emmett, I'm coming! Harder! That's it," Rose screamed.

"Fuck yeah, Rosie. You are so tight. So wet," Emmett boomed.

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We all shared a look and scampered down the stairs. I barely held back the feeling to vomit. I looked at Jasper and Alice and they were equally as grossed out. Edward was frantically running his hands through his hair and pacing, mumbling something about bleaching that entire room. I reached for his hand and he pulled me into a tight embrace, whimpering against my shoulder. "I'm thoroughly repulsed, Bella. Hold me," he muttered pitifully.

"You're repulsed! I've got to work with those two horndogs," I whimpered.

"We'll hold each other," Edward said. I nodded against his chest and buried my nose against his torso. "Do you want me to drive you home?"

"Yes, please. I don't think I can look at Rose in the same respect again," I mumbled.

"I don't think I can look at Emmett in the same respect," Jasper gagged.

We heard a loud thump and two guttural screams. We all looked up to the second floor and Edward grimaced. "They better not have caused damage to my house. I'll be pissed. I just painted that room."

We walked into the kitchen and Edward made some coffee, much to his chagrin. He was muttering his hatred for the caffeinated beverage of goodness as he made it. Angela and Ben were wrapped up with each other on the couch and the rest of the party goers had left. There was a few notes on the kitchen table saying that everyone had a good time. However none as good as Rose and Emmett.

*EWWWWWWWWWWWWWWW!*

Edward took out a platter of food and some bagels from the fridge. He also took out some plates and utensils, placing them on the island. He stopped behind me and kissed my shoulder, holding my waist tightly. "I'm so glad you stayed last night, my Bella," he whispered against my hair. "Best night's sleep. Ever. In the history of time."

## A Fresh Start

"Me too, Edward," I cooed as I placed my hands over his.

"On the count of three, Jas," Alice chirped from her seat next to island. "One, two, three....Awwwwwwwwwwww."

Edward glared at his sister and flipped her off. Alice stuck out her tongue and giggled.

Angela and Ben woke up from their slumber and padded to the kitchen, confused at all of the noise. "We heard a loud thud. Bella?" Angela teased.

"It wasn't me!" I cried. "I know I'm clumsy, but jeez!"

"Not that kind of thud," Angela said, quirking a brow.

"Yes, there was a thud. But all of us were downstairs when said thud happened," Edward said as he gestured to the group that surrounding the island. "Ask Rose and Emmett when they come down."

"Really? Sweet!" Angela said as she poured herself a cup of coffee.

"Not sweet," Alice said, wrinkling her nose. "Gross. You didn't hear them upstairs."

"Uh, yeah we did," Ben chortled. "I think the entire neighborhood heard them."

"What are the neighbors going to think? That I run a brothel?" Edward snickered. "Damn."

We heard soft bustling upstairs and quiet footsteps coming down the stairs. Emmett and Rose were entangled with each other and thoroughly mussed. Alice ran up to Edward and whispered something in his ear. His eyes widened and then he smiled, nodding. His face then went blank and then pissed.

"Morning, guys," Rose said with a sexy grin.

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We all mumbled good mornings, except Edward. He glared at both Rose and Emmett. Rose shrank back and Emmett laughed. "Eddie, it's all good. I promise," Emmett said, holding out a fist.

"All good?" Edward whispered. "He says it's all good. Riiiiiiight."

"Are you pissed, Eddie?" Emmett said as he drew back his hand. "We'll pay to get the sheets cleaned. I promise."

"What did you do to my sheets?" Edward seethed. "And my name is not Eddie."

"Emmett, I'll handle this," Rose said. She walked up and got nose to nose to Edward. It was feasible as Rose was nearly as tall as Edward. "Edward, just because you haven't gotten any in a long time doesn't mean that the rest of us can't be freaking monks or nuns."

Edward's eyes narrowed and he stood to his full height into a menacing Rose's eyes. She poked his chest and growled. "I'd figure since you and Bella FINALLY got your heads out of your asses, you'd relax. But NOOOOOOOOO! Emmett and I fucked in your house. Big fucking deal," she said as she rammed a finger into his chest.

Edward's features softened and he barked out a laugh. He stepped away and snorted as he collapsed in a fit of giggles.

"Okay, what happened? Why is Eddie having a conniption fit?" Emmett asked, rubbing his head.

"It was a joke, Em," Alice snickered. "And really, don't call him Eddie."

"You're not pissed?" Rose asked as she smacked Edward on the ass.

"No," he barely got out between guffaws. "Scarred, but not pissed. Please tell me you used a condom?"



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"We used a condom. It's flushed down the toilet," Emmett sighed.

"So, we're good," Rose clarified. Edward nodded and wiped his eyes from the tears that had fallen from his laughter. "You are an ass, Masen."

"I know," Edward said as he hopped on the counter. "However, it was the Elf's idea. She's the ass. Originally I thought it was her bonking in my guest bedroom. Then I would have been pissed."

We all had breakfast and chatting when Edward's phone rang. He frowned and picked it up from the charger. "Hello?" His features darkened and his were cold. "I'll be in about an hour. I have family over and I need to make sure that everyone gets home. Thanks, Carlisle."

"What's wrong, Edward?" Alice asked.

"There was a pileup on the interstate. They're sending some patients to Craven. The attending that is on can't handle a mass casualty situation so I need to go in. Some patients are being airlifted and some are being transported by ambulance. We're getting the ambulance patients."

"Edward, go. We'll lock up the house. I have a key," Alice said.

He nodded and looked at me sadly. "Bella, can you come upstairs with me?"

I gave him a smile and followed him up to his room. He pulled out a small duffel and put in a pair of dress pants and a wrinkle-free dress shirt. He also put in a pair of dress shoes and a tie. He gave me a look and grabbed my hand. He led me to an arm chair in the bedroom and he sat down. "I'm sorry I have to go, beautiful. I was really hoping to spend time with you today. You have to go back to school tomorrow."

"It's okay, Edward. You have to work. The joys of being the boss," I said as ran my fingers through his soft hair. "I need to get a new phone and then get ready for tomorrow."

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"Change your number, Bella. Please," Edward said, his eyes filling with concern. "And call your attorney. I really don't like the fact that your ex was having you followed."

"I'll change it. As soon as I get my new number, I'll call you. If that's alright," I said shyly.

"I hope I'm number one on your speed dial," Edward teased. He leaned forward and pressed his forehead to mine. "You are amazing, Bella. Thank you for getting past your stubborn streak and letting me in."

"Thank you for being patient," I whispered, wrapping my arms around his neck. Edward kissed my lips chastely and held me on his lap. I hummed in response and opened my mouth slightly. His tongue glided between my lips and he deepened the kiss. I felt a slight vibration in Edward's pocket. He groaned and pulled out his phone. "You have to go."

"Unfortunately. I'd rather spend the day kissing you," he said, his green eyes meeting mine. "You are a dangerous creature, Bella Swan."

"That would be you, Edward Masen," I said as I kissed his nose. "Go save some lives with a spork."

"You are unbelievable," he chuckled. "I'm doctor, not a miracle worker."

"Okay, McCoy," I chortled.

"You know *Star Trek*?" he asked.

"My dad is a hard core 'Trekkie.' It rubbed off on me," I shrugged.

His phone vibrated again and he growled. "This conversation is not over, Bella. Are you free on Wednesday night?" he asked.

"Yep. You're coming to my place. I'll cook you my grandma's lasagna," I smiled.

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"Sold," he grinned. He stood up and dipped me into a passionate embrace.

"Really. Don't. Want. To. Go," he said punctuating each word with a kiss. His vibrating phone was saying otherwise. "Son of a bitch."

"Go, Edward," I said as I pulled on his hand. "Those patients need your handiwork with that spork."

He shook his head in disbelief and darted into the bathroom. He came out a few moments later wearing a pair of scrubs and sneakers, affixing his ID badge on his shirt. "I'll call you tonight, beautiful. I think I have your home number if you don't get to the cell phone store."

He picked up his bag and laced his fingers with mine. We walked downstairs and he gave everyone a wave goodbye. He kissed me chastely and squeezed my ass as he left through the garage. I smiled blissfully and floated back into the kitchen.

"Bella's in lurve," Emmett boomed as he wrapped his arms around Rose. "About time you get some decent lovin' girl. Mike was a fucking tool."

"He still is a tool," Rose said sharply. "That guy that you threw out was following Bella and reporting back to said tool."

"What?" Jasper fumed. "I'm calling Seth. You need a restraining order against Mike and his minions." Jasper whipped out his phone, calling my attorney. Within a few minutes, Seth said he would go to the courthouse and get an emergency order of protection for me. After that, we decided to leave Edward's home. Alice ushered us all out and locked it up. I rode back to the condo with Rosalie, listening to her tales of Emmett's cock.

*Where's the brain bleach?*

She then asked me if Edward was a good kisser.

*Um, yeah! Best kisser ever. Sweetest kisses. Softest kisses. Perfect kisses.*

## A Fresh Start

I didn't answer. I just blushed. Rose smiled knowingly and held her hand out. I gave her a high five and giggled. When we got back to the condo, I went inside and showered. Rose waited until I was in my condo before she entered hers. I did a cursory look around to see if anything had been fussed with. It all looked good. However, you needed to be buzzed in if you were a guest. After I showered and shaved, I headed to get a new cell phone. I explained to the sales associate that my phone was crushed in a car accident, *total lie*, and I needed a new one. He sold me on an iPhone. I loved it instantly and played with after I called Edward with my new number.

I managed to get ready for the next day and was about to fall asleep when my new phone rang from the nightstand. It was Edward. "Hello?"

"Hey, beautiful girl," Edward said tiredly.

"Hi. You sound exhausted," I said sadly.

"Tired, worn out, pissed, sad, ready to fire someone," he grumbled.

"What happened?"

"We were told by the emergency department that we would have two major and five minor victims. When they arrived, it was the reverse. Five major and two minor," Edward sighed. "We lost two of them. They were crushed and had irreparable damage to their brains. It was really fucked up."

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "Is there anything I can do?"

"You're doing it, beautiful. Letting me vent," he replied. I heard a slight smile in his voice. "Jasper told me that Seth is getting you an emergency order of protection."

"Yeah. I need to go to the courthouse tomorrow afternoon. I called my principal and told her. She was not happy, but she understands," I explained.

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"So, tell me. What goes on at teacher's institute days? I've always wondered," Edward mused.

"A whole lot of nothing," I laughed. "We discuss our school improvement plan, how to better our state test scores, and the expectations for the school year. It's boring as hell. I'd rather gauge my eyes out with a rusty spoon than sit through these damn meetings."

"What is it with you and utensils? First you tell me to perform open heart surgery with a knife and a plastic straw. Then you tell me to save someone with a spork. And finally you want to gauge your eyes out with a rusty spoon. You are bizarre, Isabella Swan," he laughed. "But I like you. A lot."

"I like you, too, Edward. A lot," I blushed.

"Are you blushing, Bella?" Edward asked.

"Yes."

"I love it when you blush, beautiful girl," he whispered. I heard a shuffle and some shouting in the background. A voice was urgently calling for Dr. Masen. "Fuck. I've got to go, Bella. I was supposed to be off today, but I won't be home until late tomorrow night. I know you'll be working so I'll send you texts throughout the day. Sleep well, beautiful."

"Good luck tonight, Edward," I sighed. "Talk to you tomorrow." I ended the call and set my alarm clock, settling into the covers. I felt strangely alone and missing his arms around me. I never realized that was what I wanted and what I craved when I was with Mike. Someone to make me feel safe. Edward did that. Surprisingly.

I knew he was busy, but I wanted to let him know that I missed him. As silly as that sounded. However, was it desperate? No harm in sending him a text.

*Who would have thought that spending one night with you made me addicted to your strong arms around me? I miss them. I miss you. - Bella*

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*PS - I'm not desperate. I just wanted to let you know - Bella*

I put my phone on the nightstand and curled up to sleep. I was nearly out when my phone chirped on the nightstand.

*I could get used to sleeping with you in my arms for the rest of my life, Bella. You are not desperate for thinking so. I miss having you in my arms. Try to sleep, beautiful girl. - Edward*

I fell asleep with a smile on my face, knowing that Edward felt the same way I did. I couldn't believe it but was so happy that he did. His words caused the fire in my belly to ignite and I finally came to the realization: I was falling in love with Edward Masen.

*Am I ready for that?*

**A/N: Mike's an ass. Edward's fucking wonderful. Bella is finally realizing her feelings for Dr. McFuckme. Rose and Emmett are just fucking. Leave me love, por favor!**

# The Court Date

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Rated M for future lemons (they will come!)*

## Chapter 10: The Courtdat

I woke up the next morning, disoriented and confused. Why was my alarm going off so early? Oh right, first day of school. Blech. This summer went by too quickly. I got up and took a cursory shower. I threw on a Cherry Blossom t-shirt, a pair of jeans and sneakers. I searched fruitlessly to try and find one of my ankle braces. I'm thinking that they didn't survive the move. Eh.

I put my stuff into my bag and poured myself a cup of coffee in my travel mug. I grabbed my cell phone from my nightstand. I lugged my bag and coffee mug to the car and hopped in. I backed the car out and drove to school, much to my dismay. As I was driving, my phone rang.

"Hello?"

"Hi, beautiful," Edward said groggily. "I wanted to wish you a good first day of school. I hope it goes well."

"If I don't drool during the meetings, it'll be a good day," I snorted. "You sound bushed."

"No sleep. I got no sleep last night. The ER was hopping. All kids. I think they are trying to avoid going back to school," he sighed. "Anyhow, I'm going to crash in my office for a few hours before I have to actually go INTO work

## A Fresh Start

today."

"That is not healthy. The lack of sleep, crazy hours and...I mean how do you do it?" I squeaked.

"It was easier when I was younger. Not that I'm old now, but I had a ton more energy when I was 25 as opposed to now at 32," Edward chuckled.

"I have a hard enough time staying awake during an eight hour day at school," I muttered.

"When it's slow, it's slow. That's when we usually crash. The one thing I've learned about being a doctor is I sleep anywhere, through anything. The flipside is that I can also wake up very easily too. Especially when I hear my last name," Edward explained. "When it's hopping, you can't focus on sleep. It's impossibility."

"Have you ever made mistakes because you were exhausted?"

"Remember that resident from our first lunch together?" Edward asked.

"Yeah," I replied.

"That was an exhaustion mistake. They were so tired that their eyesight was bleary and they didn't see the proper dosage of the medication," Edward said quietly. "Thankfully, I never made a careless mistake like that. Though it is a fear."

"Understandably so," I said. I pulled into my school's parking lot and put the car into park. "I'm here. Don't want to be. However the bright side is that I get to leave a bit early because of my appearance in court this afternoon."

"Shit, that's right! I can try and be there for you, Bella. I am not scheduled to be in the ER, just meetings. I can rearrange my schedule if you want," Edward said hurriedly.



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"No, I'm fine. Thank you, though," I said, tears stinging my eyes. A few dropped down my cheeks and I sniffled. "This is something I need to do on my own."

"Are you crying, beautiful girl?" he asked.

"A little."

"Why, Bella?"

"It's not fair to compare you to Mike, but if I had something like this, Mike wouldn't even care. You barely know me and you're ready to rearrange meetings to try and be at the courthouse. We're not even officially dating. We shared a few kisses and a bed on Saturday night," I laughed.

"Being in a situation like yours or mine, it's hard NOT to compare. However, I do want to clarify something with you. Even though we haven't really been out on a proper date, I do think of you as more than a friend. I'm friends with Rhonda, my charge nurse, and I would never kiss her like I kissed you. Well, that and her monster of a husband would kick my ass."

I giggled and then quickly sobered up. "I definitely think of you as more than a friend, too, Edward," I said, barely above a whisper.

"Would it be premature to ask for exclusivity?" Edward asked nervously.

"Like, 'Will you be my girlfriend?'" I asked, raising my voice, imitating a child's voice.

"Um, well. Yeah," Edward chuckled. "Will you?"

"Let me think about it," I teased.

"Bella!" Edward whined. "I've been up since yesterday morning. My patience is wearing thin and I would love to go to sleep with a smile on my face. I'd like to dream about my girlfriend."

## A Fresh Start

"Yes," I answered.

"Really?" Edward said.

"Yes, really," I giggled. "Boyfriend."

I heard a whoop and some shuffling. Then I heard a crash and muffled swearing. "Edward?"

"I'm okay. I just tripped over my own feet," he snorted. "I really do need to get some sleep if I'm going to be productive today. I'll text you later, beautiful girl."

"Okay. Have a good nap, Dr. Masen," I sighed.

"I will. I'll dream about you, Ms. Swan," he smiled. "Talk to you later, beautiful girl."

"Bye, handsome," I sighed as I ended the call. I got out of my car and grabbed my bag. I went into the office and said hello to the office staff and picked up my keys. I also swung by my mailbox and got the droves of mail that had accumulated over the summer. Most of it was junk and I pitched it. I walked to my classroom and deposited my bag. I grabbed my plan book that was provided by the school and a pencil, along with the agenda for the meetings today and cell phone and walked to the cafeteria for the meeting. I found Emmett and Rosalie sitting in the back of the room. They were friendly, but professional. Jacob, the new math teacher was sitting with them, but appeared to be very uncomfortable. I practically skipped to my seat and I sat down with my new team.

"Morning, kids," I said with a huge smile. "I see that you are all introduced."

"Yep," Rose said. "How are you doing this morning, Bella?"

"I'm fantastic," I said.

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"Does this have something to do with a good looking head of emergency medicine?" Emmett asked, waggling his brows.

"Yes. Yes it does," I grinned. "We kind of decided to be 'official,' and all that."

"Good for you, Bella. He's mighty fine and you deserve happiness," Rose said. "And boy can he move! That dance he did for you on Saturday was hot."

"Not too hot," I clarified. I looked at Jacob and he was biting his fingernails, appearing to be very nervous. "How was the rest of your summer, Jacob?"

"It kind of sucked," he mumbled.

"What happened?" I asked.

"Well, I moved out here because I wanted to be closer to my partner, Quil. He lives in Nottingbrook. Well, he broke it off with me about a month ago," Jacob sighed. "However, I'm locked in a year-long lease and it would be too expensive to get out of it."

"I'm sorry, Jacob," I said, patting his hand. "Were you together long?"

"About two years," he sighed. "We met in college. He's an EMT. It turns out he met someone else; someone from the firehouse that he works at. His name is Embry. What kind of name is that? It's pathetic!"

"You'll find someone," I said reassuringly. "I was married last year and got divorced this spring. I was resigned to being single and alone. However, I met someone who I care for deeply and surprisingly enough, he feels the same."

"The good doctor?" Jacob asked.

"That would be affirmative," I smiled. "Let's just say I'm trading up."

"Damn right you are," Emmett boomed. "I still can't believe Mike. What an assbat. And Jessica, don't get me started on her, the slut."

## A Fresh Start

"Emmett, they will get what's coming to them," I said quietly. "They made their bed. Now they need to lie in it. However, I think that Mike is finally seeing through Jessica. That's why he's having me tailed."

"Hold up. Who's Mike?" Jacob asked confusedly.

"My ex."

"Why is he having you tailed? That is a load a horse poop," Jacob growled.

"Horse poop?" Rose giggled.

"I have the worst potty mouth. I mean really. I got written up in my last district for my swearing. I've quickly changed my vocabulary," Jacob laughed. "Back to your ex, are you getting a restraining order or something?"

"Yeah. I'm going to the courthouse later today to meet with my attorney," I replied.

"Seth told me to give you this," Alice chirped as she sat down next to me. She handed me a folder and I looked inside. It was a draft of the order of protection. "Also, you will be fine. I just know it."

"Sure you do, Elf," I chortled. "Alice Cullen, soon-to-be Whitlock, this is the new math teacher on my team, Jacob Black."

"Nice to meet you, Jacob," Alice said as she held out her hand. "Welcome to our dysfunctional family."

As Alice said that, Mrs. Cope began our day of meetings. She started off with introducing the new staff and pointing out the team leaders. I was given that dubious honor for my team as I was the most 'senior' teacher in the team. I tried to get Emmett to step up, but he refused saying that he had to deal with football practice at Sherryville High School. Alice was on the phone or texting all morning. I was writing in dates in my plan book and adding the names of my students.

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About 11:30, I got up and left. I needed to go back to the condo and change before going to court. Mrs. Cope stopped me before I left and wished me luck. I smiled and thanked her. I drove to my condo and changed into a pair of black dress pants that were way too big on me and a conservative sweater set. I slipped on a pair of black Birkenstock clogs and I was good to go. I walked into the courthouse and went through the metal detectors. I checked with the clerk and he told me what courtroom to go to for orders of protection. I took the elevator and got to the assigned courtroom. Seth was talking to someone and I couldn't tell who it was. As I got closer, I noticed it was Edward.

*He showed up. Holy crow! He showed up!*

Edward saw me and his face broke into a wide grin. I walked quickly toward them and he held out his arms. I fell into them and gratefully accepted the warm embrace. "Hi, beautiful," he whispered.

"You came. I can't believe it," I mumbled against his chest.

"You are a part of my life now, Bella. A very important part of my life. I want to be there for you," he said as he drew my chin up to look at his face. I could see the dark circles under his eyes and he had a fair amount of scruff on his cheeks. However, in his eyes, I saw nothing but sincerity and love. I smiled and stood on my tiptoes, eager to kiss him. He bent down and his soft lips brushed mine and he wound his arms around my waist. "I also couldn't wait until Wednesday to see you, beautiful girl," he murmured against my lips.

"Bella, we're up next," Seth said, interrupting my reverie. I pulled away from Edward and gave him an appreciative smile. We were called into the courtroom and Seth did all of the talking. He explained my concerns and fears of Mike. He also told the judge about the man following me. I stood behind Seth, in the gallery, with Edward's arm wrapped firmly around my waist. I gripped onto his shirt as if it was a life raft. He held me closer and rubbed my back with his large hand. After listening to Seth's argument, he granted the order of protection. He signed it and gave Seth three copies: one for him, one for me and one for the court. Court was adjourned and we left. "Keep this with you at all times, Bella. If you see Mike or anyone that you think is associated with

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him, call 911," Seth said sternly. "Also, inform your employer. He should not be allowed on school grounds."

"Okay, Seth. Thanks," I said as I reached into my purse and took out my checkbook.

"Don't worry about it, Bella. In the short time I've known you; I've come to think of you as a sister. No woman should have to go through this," Seth said as he laid a hand on my shoulder.

Tears pricked my eyes and I hugged Seth. "Thank you, Seth," I cried. He hugged me back and rubbed my shoulders. I pulled away and wiped my cheeks. He handed me my papers and gave me a smile. I returned it shyly and held the order of protection to my chest.

"Go home, Bella. Get some rest and be ready for tomorrow," Seth said.

I nodded and Edward laced his fingers with mine. I looked at him and he gave me a sleepy grin. We exited the courthouse and Edward walked me to my car. "Are you going back to the hospital?"

"No. I called in one of my attendings to fill in. I'm going to follow you back to your condo," Edward said as he brushed a wayward hair off my cheek. "While you have the order of protection, I'm still leery of what's going on. I need to protect my girlfriend."

"Edward, you're dead on your feet," I said as I traced the circles under his eyes. "Go home and go to bed."

"Bella," he warned. "Humor me. I can always crash on your couch if I'm too tired."

"I would never make you crash on my couch," I giggled. "Fine, you can follow me home. You're like a lost puppy."

## A Fresh Start

"Can you keep me?" Edward asked adorably as he gave me the sad puppy dog look.

"Possibly," I teased. "Where are you parked?"

He pointed a few cars down the way and he kissed me before jogging to his Volvo. I eased out of the parking spot and pulled out of the garage. Edward was following me and I drove back to my condo. We got to my place. I tossed my keys on the kitchen table. "Do you want anything to eat?" I asked.

Edward shook his head and yawned. I grabbed his hand and tugged on it. I dragged him back to my bedroom and pushed him on the bed. "Bella, I'm fine," he mumbled.

"Your eyes are at half mast. You're barely coherent. You're one step up from blah," I said as I pushed onto my pillows. I reached his shoes and tugged them off. His eyes were closed and his breathing was deep and even. I removed his glasses. I untied his tie and unbuttoned the top two buttons of his dress shirt. I then pulled a blanket over his body and let him sleep.

I scampered into the bathroom and changed into some more comfortable clothes. I slipped on a pair of black yoga pants and a t-shirt. I grabbed my laptop from my office and went into the family room to check my work email. I had a few messages that need to attended to, but I handled those quickly. Afterward, I took out my plan book and completed the plans for the rest of the month of August.

Around five, I began making dinner. I didn't have much in terms of food, but I found something to make. I decided to make steak and potatoes with a salad. I set the broiler and put the steaks into the marinade. I walked back to my bedroom and crawled into bed with a very sleepy Edward. He was curled around my pillow, hugging it tightly to his chest. He was mumbling quietly in his sleep. "Hmmm...Bella...Love you," he murmured.

*What?*

## A Fresh Start

I stiffened and looked at the peacefully sleeping man in my bed. His face broke into a grin and he held my pillow tighter. I gently caressed his cheek and I felt the spark that Edward described under my own fingers. He sighed and his eyes fluttered open. He blinked a few times and then he sat up quickly. "Where am I?" he asked roughly.

"My bedroom," I said quietly, trying to soothe him.

"I fell asleep," he grumbled. "Shit."

"Edward, as soon as your head hit the pillow, you were drooling," I teased. "And talking. Apparently I'm not the only one with the sleeptalking affliction."

"What did I say?" Edward said as he stretched his body.

"Um, my name and some other incoherent mumblings," I blushed.

"My guess is that they weren't incoherent if you are blushing," Edward teased as he put on his glasses.

"No, they weren't. But...um..." I floundered. "I'm making steak. How do you like yours?"

"Um, abrupt conversation change," Edward chuckled.

"If you don't tell me how you like it, I'll just char it," I threatened.

"Medium, please. Do you have a toothbrush I can use?" Edward asked wrinkling his nose.

I nodded and got one from my linen closet. I pointed him to the bathroom and he got up gracefully and padded to the bathroom. I put the steaks into the broiler and potatoes in the convection oven. I quickly made the salad and set the table. Edward came out and sat down in the kitchen. "Better?"



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"Yes. I feel human," he snorted. "I got to the hospital yesterday and worked all the way until I called you. Then last night was crazy. I called you and took my nap. I squeezed in a shower and then had meeting after meeting. I rearranged my afternoon schedule so I could be at the courthouse and I called in a favor, getting the rest of the day off. I never realized how tired I was."

"I'm glad that you got some rest and slept well," I said as I put the salad on the table. The potatoes were done and I put them into a small bowl. I got out the fixings for the potatoes and placed them on the table as well. I served up the steaks and Edward dug in. He moaned and his eyes rolled back in his head. "Good?"

"Better than good, excellent," Edward said as he took a sip of water. "So what's the plan for tomorrow?"

"More meetings. Team planning time," I answered. "Being bored out of my mind. I'll be happy when the kids come back. They make the job interesting. You?"

"I'm off until three tomorrow. Then I work until 11 at night," Edward said. "I have some meetings on Wednesday, but I'm not scheduled to work in the ER, unless I'm needed. Do you still want me to come over on Wednesday?"

"Can I amend my plans?" I asked. Edward nodded. "Come over on Wednesday, but I won't cook. That's my first day with kiddos and I'll be an exhausted mess. I can order something. I could make my lasagna some other time."

"That works for me. I'll pick up dinner then," he smiled.

"Okay, I have a question for you. Do you know an EMT named Quil?"

"Yeah. He's a douche," Edward growled. "He's a love 'em and leave 'em kind of guy."

"Broken hearts all around the hospital?" I asked.

## A Fresh Start

"Yeah, both men and women alike, for as long as I've been there. He's supposedly sleeping with a doctor from peds and another EMT from his firehouse. Total manwhore," Edward said. "Why?"

"One of the new teachers on my team moved out here to be closer to his partner, Quil. He dumped my teacher friend and he's heartbroken," I said.

"That sucks. Quil is a dog. He makes my skin crawl and he's put the moves on me," Edward shuddered. "I'm sorry, I've heard about his reputation and I don't think so. That and I like women. Very much."

"I'm glad you like women. This would be weird if you liked men," I giggled.

"Well, I more than just like you, Bella," Edward chided.

"Really?" I squeaked.

"Yes, really," he said as he pushed his finished plate away. "The depth of the feelings I have for you are beyond words. I know that we have just started 'dating,' and proclaimed to be each other's boyfriend/girlfriend. However, I think of you as more than that. However, the ball is in your court. We'll take this at the pace that you want."

"How do you know exactly what to say?" I squeaked.

"I'm much better when I'm coherent," he laughed. "And rested. But I just say what I'm feeling in my heart, my Bella."

I blushed and ducked my head, hiding behind my hair. "Don't hide, beautiful. Why are you blushing?"

"I like that," I whispered.

"Like what?" Edward asked as he traced the contour of my jaw.

"My Bella," I said, quietly like a prayer.

## A Fresh Start

"That's what you are. My Bella," he said reverently. "I hope I'll be your Edward."

"My Edward," I breathed. He smiled and leaned across the table, kissing my lips. I moaned quietly and tangled my fingers into his soft, bronze mane. He cupped my face and traced my lips with his tongue. I opened my mouth and he slid his tongue into my mouth. I could taste the steak, mint and something that was inherently Edward. My phone shrilled from the counter and we jumped apart. "Sorry, Edward."

"You need to stop apologizing," Edward laughed. He reached behind him and grabbed my phone. "Why do you apologize so much?"

"I'll explain after I answer this," I said. "Hello?"

"Is this Bella?" came a husky voice.

"Speaking," I replied curtly.

"Bella, it's Jacob. I was wondering if we could meet tonight. I am overwhelmed with everything I need to do for the beginning of the year and I can't make heads or tails of it," he rambled.

"Not tonight, Jacob. I'm sorry. I have my boyfriend over and it's been an emotional, rough day. I'll be more than happy to help you tomorrow," I suggested. "We'll get you situated. I promise."

He huffed and sighed. "Okay. I'm sorry if I disturbed you," Jacob said.

"You didn't disturb me. I was just finishing dinner," I explained. "Relax, Jacob. You will be perfectly fine."

"Thanks, Bella," Jacob said quietly. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"Bye, Jacob," I said as I hung up the phone. "This is going to be an interesting year."

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"Why do you say that?" Edward asked.

"Jacob is the guy I was telling you about with Quil," I responded. "He's lost. Completely lost."

"Hmmm, who do I know that would be good for him? What does he look like?" Edward asked.

"Tall. Taller than you. Muscle-y, russet skin and black hair in a ponytail. He seems very sweet and smart. He teaches math," I said. "That's about all I know."

"Well, there's Ren who works in the emergency department. He's my chief resident. Funny as hell. About Jasper's height but a bit heavier. Has freaky red hair," Edward said.

"Freakier than yours?" I teased.

"Shut it. Not everyone can have bronze locks like me," he said, pretending to toss his hair over his shoulder. "You love my hair. Admit it."

"It's very soft, Edward," I said as I ran my fingers through his hair. "I do like it. Most women would kill for the natural highlights you have. Another way that men just suck. Also, what's up with guys having insanely long lashes? Your eyelashes are freakishly long. I mean really."

"Um, random," Edward snorted.

"Sorry, my ADHD is acting up," I shrugged.

"There's medication for that," Edward said, arching a brow. "Back to Ren. He's looking for someone and I know he's openly gay. When I came on, before my position was announced, he hit on me. He told me that I have a nice ass."

"You do, Edward," I said honestly.

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"Thank you. I like yours better," Edward flirted. "I'll ask if he's interested in getting set up. Is Jacob ready for some kind of relationship?"

"I don't know. No harm in trying," I said truthfully. "What kind of name is Ren?"

"His full name is Renford. He hates it and demands that he is called Ren," Edward said. "Whatever."

"We'll see what Jacob has to say. I'll bring it up tomorrow."

"Back to the apologizing," Edward said. "Why do you apologize so much?"

"Mike blamed me for things. I just got used to saying that I was sorry. Even if I didn't do anything wrong," I said quietly. "It's habit."

"Bella, you have nothing to apologize for. You haven't done anything wrong," Edward said as he cupped my cheek. "That is a habit we'll have to break."

I smiled and picked up the plates. Edward arched a brow and took the plates from my hands. He pointed wordlessly to the family room. I gaped at him and he gave me his own teacher stare. I narrowed my eyes and skulked into the family room. I picked up my computer and logged onto Facebook. I had one new notification.

*Edward Masen wants to confirm that you are in a relationship with him. Do you accept?*

Hell yeah! I clicked the appropriate box and smiled. I spent some time tending to my 'farm' and then killed some mafia bad guys. Edward put the dishes into the dishwasher and he came into the family room. "Thanks for the notification, Edward."

"Ah, you saw my request on Facebook?" Edward chuckled. "That shit is addictive."

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"Tell me about it. I spend more time tending my farm than I do grading," I giggled.

"I'm partial to the vampire game," Edward said as he put my laptop on the cocktail table. "I want to suck your blood," he growled in a bad accent. He pinned me to the couch and attacked my neck with his lips. I squealed and wiggled on the couch. He pulled away and looked at me. "God, you're so beautiful."

I blushed and hid behind my hands. He tried to pull my hands away from my face, but I held strong. Edward's hands moved down my sides and he gently tickled my ribs. *Won't work.* He grumbled and moved his hands to my knees. *Nope.* He finally reached the bottoms of my feet and he attacked the balls of my feet. I shrieked and hopped off the couch. *Winner, winner, chicken dinner.* "So the feet are what's ticklish," Edward said as he sat up on his knees. "Good to know."

"You are evil," I sneered. "Keep those fingers away from my toes."

"Accept a compliment and these fingers," he said as he wiggled them, "will stay away from your toes."

"Edward, I have been in a marriage where I was never told when I was beautiful, smart or anything. It's ingrained in my mind that I'm not," I said as I sat in front of him.

"Bella, I know I've said this before, but your ex is fucktard. Pardon my language," Edward said ardently. "You are beautiful, compassionate, loving and intelligent. I will spend the rest of my days making sure that you know that."

I nodded and played with my fingers. "I'll try to accept a compliment when it's given. Though it will be challenging."

"I know, beautiful," he said as he kissed my forehead. "It's late. I know you have to work tomorrow. I'm pretty certain you don't want me hogging your

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bed."

"You can stay if you want," I said timidly. "You'll have to leave when I do, but I really missed sleeping in your arms last night."

"I just missed sleeping," Edward joked. "I have some scrubs in my car. I'll go run down and get them."

"Take my keys. I have to shower," I explained. I got up and handed Edward my keys and he kissed me as he darted out the door. I went into the bathroom and stripped off my clothes. I washed quickly and got ready for bed. Edward was in my bedroom, wearing a pair of scrub pants and t-shirt. His clothes were draped on the chest at the edge of my bed.

"I left your keys in the kitchen. I also made sure your car was locked and I double locked the door," Edward smiled.

"Thank you, Edward," I said quietly. I put some mousse in my hair and finger combed it. "I truly appreciate you being at the courthouse today. I was an unexpected, but welcomed surprise."

"I would do anything for you, Bella," he said. I smiled and crawled into the bed. He held me in his arms and he lightly scratched my back. I was growing tired and my eyes were drooping. Edward hummed quietly and he kept scratching my back. "Sleep well, my Bella."

I hummed in response and drifted off to sleep, safely enwrapped in Edward's strong arms. There was no better place to be than in his arms.

# The Confessions

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Rated M for future lemons (they will come!)*

## Chapter 11: The Confessions

My alarm went off. I groaned and rolled over. However, I was hit with a warm body. The arms around my waist tightened and he groaned. "Too early," he grumbled.

I opened my eyes and saw a shirtless Edward in my bed. He was holding me tightly against his chest and his eyes were shut. I turned off my alarm and took the time to ogle my boyfriend. His cheeks and jaw were covered in heavy stubble. I ran my fingers through the facial hair on his face. He moaned lightly and leaned into my touch. I moved my eyes lower and looked at his body. I could see a few scars on his chest from his accident. There were two by his ribs, I'm assuming from chest tubes. There was a larger scar across his belly. I lightly traced the scar and Edward's muscles contracted. He stirred and pulled me closer to his chest. I moved my eyes up to his face and looked at the smattering of freckles across his nose and along his hairline. "Are you enjoying yourself, Isabella?" Edward asked his eyes still closed.

"Very much," I said. "I like ogling you."

An emerald eye opened and he pressed kisses along my neck and he rolled me onto my back. "I'm glad I'm 'ogle-worthy,'" Edward snorted against my neck.

"What happened to your shirt, Edward?" I teased as I tickled his sides. He



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giggled and gave me a stern look.

"I got hot," Edward said simply. "You know the threat you made about your toes. Insert sides for me. Elbows and fists fly when I get tickled. I don't want to hurt you."

"Yes, sir," I said. "However, why do you have this scar?" I asked as I traced the silvery skin on his belly.

"My spleen was removed," Edward said. "I have to take medication to ensure I have enough red blood cells, but other than that, I'm fine."

"Do you have that medication with you?" I asked.

"In my pants pocket," Edward said. "These are from chest tubes. Both of my lungs collapsed. The scar on my back was from when they removed one of my kidneys."

"Holy crow," I said. "Plus the head injury."

"Plus the head injury," Edward said. "I was royally fucked up for a long time. It took two years for me to be even remotely physically independent. Mentally, I was fine after a year. Despite the processing issues."

"But now you're fine," I said with trepidation.

"Yeah. If I take my medication and iron supplements," Edward said. "Other than that, I'm healthy as a horse."

"Hmmm..." I said. "I don't want to go to work."

"Me neither," Edward sighed. "I'd rather spend the day with you in bed."

"Tempting, Masen," I teased as I got up from his arms. "I need to get ready. I would say help yourself to some coffee but I know how much you hate it."

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"Ugh, yeah," Edward grumbled. He reluctantly released me and I got up. I padded to the bathroom and took care of my morning routine. I grabbed another pair of jeans and a Cherry Blossom hoodie and got dressed quickly. I walked out of the bathroom and found my bed made. I smiled and went into the living room. Edward had poured himself a glass of orange juice. "Hope you don't mind. I also swiped a bagel."

"What's mine is yours," I said as I poured coffee into my travel mug. "Not changing?"

"No. I'm going to go back to bed when I get to my place. I'd rather just undo a drawstring than unbutton a million little buttons," Edward said. He finished his orange juice and said he was going to brush his teeth. I nodded and scarfed down a bagel. Edward came back up to the kitchen and he kissed me. "I'm pretty certain you wouldn't want to kiss me with morning breath. Yuck."

"Not my favorite thing to do, but it's okay," I giggled. "Thank you for brushing your pearly whites."

I packed my computer bag and slung it over my shoulder. I also put my lanyard for school around my neck and grabbed my phone and car keys. "Ready?" Edward asked.

"Not really, but oh well," I shrugged. Edward opened the door and I walked through. He closed it and I locked it. We walked down the hall and down to our respective cars. Edward stopped in front of my car and pulled me into a tight embrace. He gently cupped my chin and kissed my lips. His mouth moved tentatively against mine and then quickly deepened. My hands moved up to his hair and tangled into his soft thick hair. "Mmmmmmmmm," I moaned.

"Don't want to leave you," he whispered against my mouth.

"Me neither. However, we both have to work. You know, work? It pays the bills. Allows us to live how we want," I giggled as I kissed along his scruffy jaw. "Someone needs to shave."

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"Meh," he shrugged as he pulled away. "I'll do it before our date on Wednesday. I want to be baby smooth."

"I can't wait until Wednesday," I smiled. "Have a good day."

"I will, beautiful," he said as he kissed me deeply before he got into his car. "I'll call you tonight if I get a free moment."

I waved and got into my car. I drove to school and steeled myself for another day of boring meetings. We started in the cafeteria and then broke off into team meetings. As a team, we figured out team rules and expectations. After our team meeting, Rose and I worked together to align our curriculum for our language arts classes. We spent a couple of hours on our ideas and then I checked on Jacob. He was in his classroom, putting up posters and arranging the desks.

"Hey Jacob," I said as I leaned against the door jamb.

"Hi, Bella," he smiled. "How does it look?"

"Good. I like the layout," I answered honestly. "How are you doing?"

"I'm still overwhelmed," he sighed as he sat down on the counter in his classroom. "I have so many expectations being a new teacher and reeling from this break up."

"Jacob, it's important that you should take things one step at a time. I know that you have a ton of expectations as a new teacher. But it's my job as a mentor to help you with those expectations. What's one thing that you need to do in the first few weeks of school?" I asked.

"I need to complete ten induction hours," he grumbled. "What do I do?"

"Go to the district website and log into the employee intranet. There's a part in the intranet for employee professional development. Sign up for the 'First Days of School' seminar. It's good for new teachers," I suggested. "In regards to your

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personal issue, don't let that consume your thoughts."

"How?" he asked. "I loved him. I was ready to propose."

"Can I tell you something?"

"What?" he mumbled dejectedly.

"I spoke with my boyfriend. He works at Craven Memorial Hospital," I said quietly.

"The good doctor," he chuckled.

"Yes, the good doctor. Anyhow, I asked him about Quil. He said that Quil was a manwhore," I said. "He's sleeping with a doctor in pediatrics and with Embry. He also put the moves on my boyfriend."

"He lied to me?" Jacob asked. "He said he was faithful when I was with him. That asshole. I gave him my heart and he did an Irish jig on it."

"Were you safe?" I asked, worried about my new friend.

"Not always," Jacob grumbled. "Should I get tested?"

"It would be prudent," I said. "I'm so sorry, Jacob. So sorry."

"Bella, I appreciate the information. I really do. Do you think your doctor would get me tested?" he asked, looking at me like a lost little boy.

"Let me check," I said as slipped out my cell phone. I tapped out a text. *Jacob, the teacher who I told you about and involved with Quil was not necessarily safe with you know. Can you test him? - Bella*

I put my phone on the desk and patted Jacob's hand. "It'll be okay, Jacob."

"Jake. I like to be called Jake," he said giving me a sad smile.

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"Deep breaths, Jake," I said. My phone chirped on the desk and I picked it up. *He can come in any time to get tested. Come in with him and ask for me at the triage desk.* - Edward

"You want to go now?" I asked.

"Yeah," Jake said with a shaky breath. "What if?"

"You'll cross that bridge when you get the results," I said. "Do you want to drive or come with me?"

"I'll drive," he said. We locked up Jake's room and then headed into my room. I grabbed my bag and we headed out. Jake followed me in a large red truck to Craven Memorial. I parked the car and Jake was parked next to me. We walked into the emergency room. I walked up to the triage desk and was greeted by Rhonda, the charge nurse.

"Can I help you?" she asked kindly.

"I need to speak with Dr. Masen. He's expecting me. Bella Swan," I said with a smile.

"Ah, yes. The young lady who finally made Dr. Masen smile," she grinned. "I'll page him. Hold on."

She picked up the phone and had Edward paged to the triage desk. A few moments later, Edward came up to the triage desk, wearing some scrubs and a white lab coat. He shaved his beard and he was wearing his glasses. "Hey beautiful," he said as he kissed my cheek.

"Hi, Edward," I said returning his kiss. "This is Jacob Black."

Edward turned to Jacob and shook his hand. "Let's head back to a room and we'll get things all settled. Okay?"

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"Can Bella come back with me?" Jacob asked in a small voice. It was so sad to see such a larger than life man crumble. "I've got no one. My mom died when I was a kid and I just lost my dad this past winter."

"If Bella has no objections," Edward smiled. He looked at me and his eyes were filled with adoration and love. I put my arm around Jake's waist and we were led to the curtain area where I was examined when I hurt my hand. Jacob hopped up on the table. Edward took out the necessary materials to draw some blood. He put on some gloves and asked Jake some questions, writing down the answers on the chart. Jake rolled up his sleeve after Edward asked his questions and he drew some blood, labeling it with a number. "I can do a rapid HIV screen if you want?"

"I want to get it all tested," Jake said quietly. "Whatever it takes."

"Okay, Jake. I'll be right back," Edward said as picked up the tubes of blood. He strode out of the room and Jacob's eyes filled with tears.

"It'll be okay, Jake," I said.

"I'm afraid, Bella," he said in a broken voice. "The love of my life screwed with me in more ways than one."

I put my arms around his neck and he sobbed into my shoulder. I held him until I heard Edward come back into the room. His face was solemn. I pulled away and kept my hand on Jake's shoulder. "So, what's the verdict, doc?"

"I did a rapid HIV screen and I put the rest of the blood through the rest of the tests. Jacob, there's no easy way to say this, but your HIV test was positive," Edward said sadly. "You need to notify all of your past partners. I'm so sorry."

Jacob looked at Edward and tears fell down his russet cheeks. "You're certain?"

"The rapid test is 99% effective. I did send the rest of your blood to be tested. I'll contact you with the final results when they come in. It usually takes about twelve to twenty-four hours," Edward said quietly. "Do you have anyone you

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can talk to?"

"No. Nobody," Jake said sadly. "I'm so royally fucked."

Edward rolled up a stool and took Jake's hands into his own. "There are so many new medicines for HIV. It's no longer a death sentence, Jake. You are not fucked."

"Jake, you're not alone," I said, squeezing his shoulder. "I know it's scary as hell, but you'll be fine."

"Can I get a moment?" Jake asked, looking at both of us. "I need to call Quil and inform him of the news. Though, he probably already knows since he's the one who gave it to me."

"Are you sure?" Edward asked.

"He's the only man I'd been with without a condom," Jacob sighed.

"I'll be right outside," Edward said as he led me into the hallway. He pulled the door shut and he leaned against the wall. "I could kill Quil."

"Where's the spork?" I seethed.

"Rusty spoon," Edward chuckled darkly. "What do you think will happen?"

"I don't know," I mumbled. "I need to be there for him. He's got no one, Edward."

"You are fucking amazing, Bella Swan," Edward said as he caressed my cheek. "Your heart is so full of love and compassion, it's mind boggling."

"You too, Edward. Most people would look at Jake and be freaked out. Not want to touch him, but you held his hands and reassured him," I said, wrapping my arms around his waist. Edward kissed my head and he leaned his cheek against my hair. We stood there for immeasurable amount of time when we

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heard a guttural scream. Edward released me and he rushed into the room and he found Jake curled up in the corner, sobbing hysterically.

"He knew! That mother fucker knew and he infected me," he cried. "I'll kill him. He ruined my goddamned life!"

Edward got on the floor and pulled Jake into his arms. Jake clung to Edward and sobbed into his shoulder. Edward looked at me and mouthed "Rhonda." I nodded and scurried to get his charge nurse. I found her at the nurse's station. "Rhonda? Dr. Masen needs you."

"Is this about the young man you came in with?" she asked.

"Yeah," I said.

"I'll call the counselor and HIV specialist," she said kindly. "They're on standby."

"Okay, thanks," I nodded. I walked back to the room and Jake was still crying against Edward. Edward was rubbing soothing circles on his back and I could see his anguish. I plopped down on the floor and took Jake's hand. He pulled away from Edward and he laid his head in my lap. "It'll be okay, Jake. You're not alone. I know that we're co-workers, but I hope that you will let me be your friend."

"You're definitely a friend, Bella," he said against my leg. "My best friend so far."

"She's good like that," Edward said as he drew his knees to his chest. "Jake, I know I'm your doctor, but you can talk to me, too."

"What's the next step?" Jake asked.

"You'll be put on a cocktail of medications to keep your viral load down. However, you need to take care of yourself. Your body is susceptible to infection now," Edward explained. "It's important that you follow the cocktail



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of medications and you should lead a long and healthy life. You will need to wear a condom if you are ever intimate with another man."

"Who says I'll be with anybody?" Jake muttered sarcastically. "I'm tainted."

"Jacob, you are not tainted," Edward said. "You have a manageable illness. You just need to be more careful than most. You will find someone special who will love you despite your illness and imperfections. If they can't love you because of them, then fuck 'em."

"I like you, Dr. Masen," Jake laughed.

"Edward. If we're going to be friends, it's Edward," he smiled. "It's okay to be pissed off and upset at Quil. However, you can't let it consume your life. My wife died three years ago. She was 31 and we had just found out that she was pregnant. She was killed by a drunk driver. If I let the grief that I felt when she died consume me, I wouldn't be here. I would be, honestly, six feet under. Was I pissed? Yes. Was I sad? Unbearably so. Do I miss her? Every day. I needed to move on with my life. It took me three years, two therapists, a strong family and an entire country of distance to figure that out. You will deal with this in your own way. But you will have a support system in Bella, in me and I'm certain my aunt and uncle will adopt you too."

Jacob giggled and looked at Edward. "So, it's not a death sentence."

"Only if you don't take care of yourself and don't take your medicine," Edward explained. "I'll also suggest to your doctor to give you an antidepressant. It'll help with these feelings you're having."

"Are you sure you're not a shrink?" Jake snorted.

"That was my second choice in specialties," Edward smiled.

"Do you want me to call Mrs. Cope, Jake?" I asked.

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"No. I'll be fine," Jake smiled. "I can't miss the first day of school. Shit, do I need to tell my employer?"

"No. Your medical history is confidential. The only time you need to inform them is you have an open wound and you're bleeding everywhere," Edward said. "I'm certain that your school made you watch the blood borne pathogen video."

"Yes. It was riveting," I said sardonically.

"I can imagine," Edward laughed. "However, be cautious. Don't take unnecessary risks."

"Got it," Jake said.

A quiet knock rang through the small room. A tiny woman with blue eyes and blond hair appeared. "Hi! I'm Dr. Jane Hetfield. I'm looking for Jacob Black?"

"That's me. Bella, thanks for coming. I know that you have to go. I appreciate you being here," Jake said.

"That's what friends are for, Jake. Give me a call or text me when you get home, okay?"

"Yeah," he smiled. Jake turned his attention to Dr. Hetfield.

Edward led me out of the room. He pulled on my hand and dragged me back to his office. He closed the door and caged me with his arms. His eyes were piercing through mine and his lips crashed against my mouth. I moaned and snaked my hands up to his hair. We were a tangle of limbs and tongues. I broke away from Edward's passionate kiss to catch my breath. He kept his lips on my skin and he nibbled along my jaw and down my neck. His hands moved down my sides and cupped my ass. "You are so amazing, Bella," he said between rough kisses. His hands moved lower on my legs and he picked me up by my thighs, wrapping my legs around his waist. I squeaked and kissed his swollen lips. "So compassionate. So loving. So perfect," he growled. He licked the shell

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of my ear and purred, "Mine."

"Oh god," I moaned. My hands tangled into his hair and I wiggled my hips against his arousal that was straining in his scrubs. He snarled erotically and his tongue plunged into my mouth. One of his hands moved up my body and he caressed my rib cage, fingers dancing under my breasts. As we kissed, I felt a vibration against my leg. Edward groaned and gently placed me on the ground. He pulled away and his eyes were feral and wild. They probably matched mine. I was breathing heavily and I was thoroughly soaked through my panties. Edward pulled out his cell phone and he frowned. "What?"

"Car accident," he grumbled. "I'm needed in the trauma room. To be continued, tomorrow. Be ready, Ms. Swan."

"Oh, I will be," I smirked. Edward kissed me chastely and I felt him adjust his erection. "Have enough blood to your brain?"

"No," he moaned. "But I'll live. You are a dangerous creature, Bella. However, I can't imagine my life without you now."

"Me neither, Edward," I sighed.

*Paging Dr. Masen. You are needed in trauma room one. Dr. Masen, trauma room one.*

"They're paging me. That's never good. I'll walk to you to the nurse's station," Edward said as he twined his fingers with mine. We moved quickly through the corridors of the hospital. Edward deposited me at the nurse's station. Rhonda said she'd show me out. He kissed me chastely on the lips and then ran to the trauma room.

"He's got it bad, Ms. Bella," Rhonda giggled. "He's so in love with you, girl."

"You think?" I asked.

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"I don't think. I know," Rhonda said. "My George looks at me the way Dr. Masen looks at you. Like you're the only woman in the entire universe. You look at him the same way, child."

"I do?"

"Uh huh," Rhonda said knowingly. "He's been through hell and back. His uncle told me his story. He deserves someone special. That's you, Ms. Bella. Love him. Don't be afraid. Just love him."

I watched Edward work smoothly in the trauma room. His eyes were focused on the task and he was very confident in his actions. I was truly in awe of his decisions in the situation and how coolly he handled it. "Thanks, Rhonda," I said quietly. "You have a good night."

"You too, Ms. Bella," Rhonda said with a wink. I walked out of the ER and to my car. Jake's truck was gone. On my windshield was a note.

*Dear Bella,*

*You have no idea what it means to me that you stayed with me while I got the worst news in my short life. I've never been so scared and alone. However, you were there for me and so was the good doctor. I am hopeful that things will turn out okay. I met with Dr. Hetfield and she set me up with the triple cocktail. I begin it tomorrow. I'm also going to work with a counselor and deal with this anger I feel toward Quil.*

*With your friendship, I will get through this. I appreciate everything you've done for me. Thank Edward for me for his professionalism and compassion. He is truly an amazing man and a wonderful doctor. I'll see you tomorrow, bright and early with the kiddos. Good times, good times.*

*Jake*

I smiled and got into my car. I drove home and showered as soon as I got there. I ate a microwave dinner and mentally prepared for the day tomorrow. I read

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my lesson plans and chose my clothes for the first day. I decided to wear a dress with a pair of ballet flats. Edward would not be pleased, but I wanted to look nice for my students. I also chose some nicer lingerie to wear under my dress. Not that Edward would see it, but I wanted to wear it to feel sexy and desirable to him.

I sent a text to Jake, saying I was thinking about him and that if he needed to talk he could call anytime. He texted back with a smiley and said he would be okay. He just wanted to kill his ex-boyfriend with a pitchfork. Not that I blamed him. I wanted to castrate him with a runcible spoon and then feed his balls to himself. Bastard.

I was putting on some lotion when my phone chirped. It was a text from Edward.

*I can't wait until tomorrow, my beautiful girl. I definitely want to continue what we started in my office - Edward*

*Are you horny, Edward? - Bella*

*Three and half years, Bella. You do the math - Edward*

*Rosie Palmer - Bella*

*Doesn't cut it anymore. I want the real thing. I want you - Edward*

*Well, good things come to those who wait - Bella*

*Believe me, I'll wait - Edward*

*Forever if I have to - Edward*

*Though I don't want to - Edward*

*Persistent much? - Bella*

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*Yep - Edward*

*You are too much, Dr. Masen - Bella*

*But you like me ;) - Edward.*

*I more than just like you, Edward - Bella*

*Really? - Edward*

*Yes, really - Bella*

*I've got to go to bed, Dr. McFuckme. What time should I expect you tomorrow?  
- Bella*

*Is five alright? - Edward*

*Excellent. - Bella*

*Then five it is! Good night, my beautiful girlfriend - Edward*

*Sleep well, Edward - Bella*

I curled up in bed and fell against the pillows. I grabbed one of the pillows that Edward slept on last night and it smells like him. I inhaled deeply and smiled against it. Holding the pillow I fell into a deep sleep and had lascivious dreams about my hot doc boyfriend.

xx AFS xx

The school year started with a bang. My students were awesome, for the most part. My regular language arts class will be a bit of a challenge. I had a number of special education students, but I have a support teacher in with me from the special education team. Unfortunately, it was Lauren. Jessica's best friend at Cherry Blossom. Lauren hates my guts. And I hate hers. However, I could be professional. But could she is the question.

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*Hmmmmmmmmmmmm....*

After school, I went and checked on Jake. He looked tired and his eyes were red. "Hey Jake. How are you doing?"

"Been better," he mumbled.

"I got your note on my car," I said as I sat down in one of the desks. "Have you started?"

"Yeah. This morning. There are so many rules," Jacob sighed. "It's overwhelming. However, Dr. Hetfield gave me a name of a support group. I'm going there tomorrow for my first meeting. Wish me luck."

"Good luck," I said. "You'll be fine. How was your first day with the kids?"

"They're good," he smiled. "A have a couple squirrely bunches, but nothing I can't handle."

"Do you have any classes that require a support teacher?" I ask.

"Yeah. My 5th hour. Lauren is my support teacher. What a bitch," he laughed. "She's so rude to the kids and completely unprofessional toward me. I know I'm young, but I'm still an authority figure in MY classroom."

"She might be problematic. I'll bring it up at team leaders," I said. "Anyhow, I wanted to see how you were doing."

"I'm surviving," Jake sighed. "Thanks, Bells."

"No problem, Jake. Call me if you want to talk."

He nodded and walked to his desk. I waved and went back to my classroom. I picked up the papers I had assigned and collected and shoved them into my work bag. I also put my plan book into my bag as well. I walked out to my car and ran into Alice in the parking lot. She was hissing on the phone and moving

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her hand emphatically. "Alice?"

She held up one finger and growled. She ended the call without saying good bye and glared at the offending piece of technology. "My photographer just canceled for the wedding."

"I'm sorry, Elf," I said with a frown.

"Stupid ass."

"Do you have any other options?" I asked.

"No," she wailed. "What was the name of your photographer from your wedding?"

"I honestly don't remember. The pictures that he took were not all that good. I took better photos with my piddly little camera from the head table," I giggled. "Couldn't you do a Google search?"

"Looks like I'm going to have to. The good thing is that the photographer is going refund all of my money. However, it pisses me off something awful that he waited to LAST MINUTE," Alice yelled at her phone, "to cancel."

"Did you say photographer?" Jake asked.

"Yeah," Alice sighed. "My wedding photographer canceled at the last minute and I'm afraid that I won't get the quality photos I desire."

"I'm not a professional photographer, assigned to a company or anything, but I've shot a few weddings. I can bring my portfolio tomorrow if you're interested," Jake said with a nervous smile.

"Really? That would be wonderful, Jake! Thank you," Alice said as she ran up to him and gave him a fierce hug. "We'll talk tomorrow during lunch, okay?"



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"Sure, sure," Jake said as he returned Alice's embrace. It was humorous to see the size difference between the two. Jake was nearly two feet taller and Alice and twice as wide. "Have a good night, ladies."

"Bye, Jake," I said as I waved.

Alice waved eagerly and watched Jake get into his car. He pulled away and Alice pounced. "Something's up with him. You know."

"I do know, but it's not my place," I said. "If he wants to tell you, he will."

"Poor guy," Alice said sympathetically. "Have fun tonight. Don't do anything I wouldn't do."

"Alice, I'm don't know if anything is going to happen. We've kissed and kind of made out yesterday," I said, rolling my eyes. "I am not ready for a physical relationship. I need to take things slowly."

"Let nature take its course, Ms. Swan," Alice winked. She went into her car and gave me a bag. I looked inside and saw a box of condoms. "Just in case."

I blush furiously and give her a sharp glare. She winked and got into her Beetle. I walked slowly to my car and got in. I swung by the store and picked up some appetizers and some soda. When I got home, I lit a few candles and tidied my condo. I put on some quiet music. I freshened my makeup and then settled on my couch to grade the papers I had brought home with me.

I was nearly done with my grading when my intercom buzzed. I walked over and Edward's velvety voice piped through the tinny speaker. I buzzed him up and a few moments later, a quiet knock came on my door. I unlocked it and saw a very nervous, but extraordinarily handsome Edward standing outside my condo. He was wearing a pair of khaki pants and black t-shirt that accented his muscled chest. His hair was somewhat tamed and his green eyes were sparkling. He didn't have on his glasses. On his feet were a pair of black Chucks. In his arms was a bag from La Bella Italia and large bouquet of red roses. His eyes rake over me and his eyes dilated and he licked his lips. "You're

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exquisite, Bella."

I looked down at my black and green dress and blushed at his admission.

"Thank you, Edward. Come on in," I said as I stepped aside. He put the bag from the restaurant on the kitchen counter and he laid the flowers on the table. He wound his arms around my waist and his lips crashed against mine. I moaned and snaked my hands up and down his back, resting on his ass, giving it a little squeeze. Edward squeaked and he pulled away, arching his brow. "What? You have a cute ass."

"Thank you," Edward blushed. "Though you've never squeezed it."

I pinched his right ass cheek and he jumped, dancing away. He held up a finger in warning and I giggled. I picked up the flowers and inhaled deeply. "Thank you for the roses," I smiled into the red blooms. "Can you grab the vase above the sink, handsome?" Edward nodded and grabbed the crystal vase I indicated. I trimmed the roses to fit and arranged them on my dining room table. Edward put the food into serving dishes and had set my kitchen table.

"Dinner is served, Ms. Swan," he said with a deep bow.

"Edward, I could have done that," I chastised. "You're a guest in my home."

He shrugged and pulled out my chair. He went into the bag and pulled out a bottle of white wine. "Pinot Gris," Edward said. "Where's the wine opener?" I reached behind me and pulled it out. Edward uncorked the wine and took out two glasses.

"You're drinking?" I squeaked.

"Bella, I make a conscious decision not to drink. However, it doesn't mean I haven't had any. I had my drunk moments in college, when I could walk home. Besides, it's a celebration."

"What are we celebrating?" I asked as he handed me my glass.

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He poured a glass for himself and put the wine on the table. "A few things. The first, to a new school year. I hope it goes well," Edward smiled as he clinked my glass. I grinned and sipped the wine. He did the same. "Second, to Craven Memorial. We got the preliminary approval to upgrade and become a level two trauma center."

I clapped my hands and bounced in my chair. "Congratulations Edward! That's wonderful news." I picked up my glass and took another sip of wine.

"Finally, to us. To our relationship. Our fresh start," Edward said, his eyes holding their gaze with mine. I put my glass down and got up from my chair. I gingerly sat down in Edward's lap and took his handsome face into mine, never breaking eye contact. I ran my thumb across his bottom lip and he leaned his forehead against mine. "Bella," he whispered.

"What, Edward?" I asked quietly.

"Don't freak out, please."

"Why would I freak out?" I questioned. "Are you breaking up with me?"

Edward shook his head and his gaze intensified. He took my face in his large, warm hands and looked deep into my eyes. He removed one hand and took one of my hands and placed it on his chest, above his heart. In all of my 32 years, had I never been in such an intimate moment. Ever. "I...Bella, I love you," he whispered as his eyes filled with tears. "I thought I never would feel this way ever again. My heart stammers for you. I understand if you're not ready to say it in return, but I can't hold it back anymore. Seeing you with Jake last night solidified my feelings. You are truly an amazing woman and I'm so lucky to have you as mine. I love you. I'm in love with you and I can't imagine my life without you."

My tears fall down my cheeks and I stare at this beautiful man who had given me the most heartfelt confession of love that I'd ever heard. It's only something that you hear in the movies. Or in books. Never in real life. His own cheeks are damp with tears and he gives me a crooked smirk. The most perfect smile. I

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lean in and caress my lips with his. I slowly drew in his lower lip between my teeth and nibble slightly. A low growl radiates through his body and his arms wrap around my waist. Before our kiss had become too heated and pulled away and I gently cupped his face. His eyes were still filled with the love and adoration from before. "Edward, you're right in the fact that I'm not ready to say those 'three words.' However, what I feel for you is all consuming. What I feel for you is a hundred times more than what I felt for Mike. That honestly scares me. I laid my heart on the line and I got hurt. I'm afraid if I do it again, I'll get hurt again."

"Bella...I would never hurt you," he said fervently.

"I know that, but the fear is something that I need to get over," I said quietly. "I want to give you all of me. My heart, my brain, my body and my love. However, they are not communicating with each other. My body is screaming yes, but my brain is hesitant. I want to give you my heart, but I'm afraid fully loving someone without getting hurt irreparably."

"I'm okay with the fact that you are not ready to say it in return, Bella. I get that. I do. Like I said before, I just can't deny how I'm feeling. I know that we just started to officially see each other, but these feelings I've had for you began when I first saw you in my ER with the injured hand," Edward said as he picked up my left hand and kissed each of my fingers.

"Edward, you barely know me," I whispered. "How can you love me?"

"Do you want to know when I knew that I was in love with Tanya?" Edward asked. I nodded slowly. "I knew on our first date. I knew after our third date that I was going to marry her."

"What if I'm not good enough for you? I'm just a teacher and you're doctor," I mumbled.

"If we didn't have teachers, then we wouldn't have doctors. Bella, you are all I want. You're all I think about. I can't imagine my life without you in it. We have our differences, but it's those differences that make us stronger as

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individuals and as a couple. I want to be with you, in every way. Mentally, emotionally and physically. I want to show you how much I love you and I intend to, my beautiful girl. Be prepared to be spoiled," he smirked.

I ducked my head and brushed my hair off my face. Edward's fingers trace the contours of my chin and they gently moved down across my collarbone. "Please be patient with me, Edward. I want to say those words in return, but..."

"I know, Bella," he whispered. He kissed me sweetly and looked into my eyes. "I love you. Always."

**A/N: Unexpected twist with Jake. Edward is horny and confesses is love. Bella is equally as horny but is hesitant to act. Leave me some love...more love, the fast the lemons come. Ha ha! Get it? Come? Gawd, I need a life.**

# The Realization

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Rated M for future lemons (they will come!). I have a mini lemon for you today! Woo hoo!*

## Chapter 12: The Realization

We spent so long sharing our feelings; the dinner that Edward brought from La Bella Italia is cold. I reheated the food in the microwave and we ate in a comfortable silence, soft jazz wafting through my home. I looked up at Edward and I felt so guilty. He tells me that he loves me and I flounder. What the hell is wrong with me? Edward notices my guilty stare and he frowned.

"What's wrong, beautiful?" he asked.

I snapped out of my guilty trance and gave him a smile. "Nothing," I answered quickly.

"You're lying, Isabella," Edward growled. "You're thinking too hard. What's the matter?"

"Are you mad?" I blurted. I covered my mouth with my hands and buried my face against the table.

"Mad? Why would I be mad, Bella?" he asked incredulously. "Is it because you didn't say you loved me back?"

I nodded and sniffled. "I want to say it. In my heart and in my head, I feel it but

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I'm so afraid."

"Bella, you are in a different stage in this relationship than I am. I've been through the ringer. If I had met someone within the first few months of Tanya's death and they professed their love for me, I'd be in the same boat. I understand that your relationship with your ex-husband wasn't necessarily the most conducive for a good, loving marriage, but it's all that you've known. It's my job as your boyfriend and possibly more, to help you see that you deserve all the happiness in the world. The way you treat me and care for me shows me that you love me on some level," Edward said as he knelt in front of me. "I'll wait. Just like I promised at the barbeque. When you're ready, you'll tell me."

I brushed a wayward hair off his forehead and wrapped my arms around his neck. "What did I do to deserve you, Edward?"

"I could ask the same, Bella," Edward chuckled against my shoulder. "However, I've got to move. My knees are barking."

"Then get off the floor, silly," I giggled as I released my hold on his neck. He gracefully got up, but his knees cracked. "Ouch."

"Yeah, ouch," Edward said. "I ran this morning and I took a miss-step. I think I jacked up something."

"Go sit in the family room and I'll give you something," I said as I pointed to my couch. "It saved me when I was gimpy."

I went into the freezer and grabbed a blue icepack. I stuck it in a Velcro pouch and walked to where Edward was sitting. "Which body part?" I asked. Edward pointed to his left knee. I strapped the icepack to his knee and placed a pillow underneath for some support. "You should take better care of yourself, Dr. Masen," I scolded.

"I wanted my nurse to take care of me," he purred seductively.

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"If you think I'm wearing a tiny white dress and one of the nurse hats, you're sadly mistaken, buddy," I said, putting my hands on my hips.

"A guy can dream, right?" Edward laughed.

"Keep that on until I'm done with dishes, 'Hop Along,'" I commanded.

"Yes, Dr. Swan," Edward said with a mock salute. I handed him the remote and turned off the music. Edward turned on the television and I put the food away and did the dishes. I pulled out a tin of cookies that Rose made for me. I arranged the cookies and some fruit on a platter and I walked back out to the family room. Edward was watching CSI or some other crime show. I removed the icepack and felt around on his knee. "It's not swollen," Edward said.

"Just making a thorough diagnosis," I teased. "Do you want any Advil?"

"Nah, I'm good. I'm just old," he laughed.

"You're as old as me. Well a little older," I giggled. "Alice said you were born in June?"

"Yeah, June 20th," Edward replied. "When's your birthday?"

"Uh, I don't like to celebrate my birthday," I said quickly.

"Bella, when's your birthday?" Edward asked.

"September 13th," I grumbled.

"That's after Alice's wedding," Edward said surprisingly. "Why don't you like celebrating your birthday? It was the day that you were brought into this world. It's definitely a day for celebration."

"It was the day that my grandmother died," I mumbled. "And the day that my parents told me that they were getting a divorce. However, they happened on two separate occasions, but on my birthday, nonetheless."



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"Oh, Bella," Edward breathed. "I'm so sorry."

"Well, that's why I hate my birthday. It's no reason for you to apologize. That and I am getting older. Blech," I said as I wrinkled my nose. "I ain't no spring chicken."

"Bella, you are perfect," Edward said, arching a brow.

"Perhaps you getting Lasik will improve your eyesight as you are blind, Edward. I'm far from perfect," I laughed. "I have many, many flaws."

"So do I," Edward said. "Those flaws make us who we are. However, you're perfect for me. I know you have flaws."

"Yeah, like my indecision about..."

"Bella," Edward warned. "Stop. Let's move past this. I love you and I know on some level you feel the same. You'll say it when you're ready. Let's not beat a dead horse, okay?"

"Okay," I said quietly. Edward held open his arms and I cuddled next to him. We watched some television and snuggled on the couch for a couple hours.

"Bella?"

"Hmmm?" I responded intelligently.

"Have you ever truly been in love?" Edward asked quietly as he gently rubbed my back.

"I thought so. With Mike," I answered. "But was he the love of my life? No. Is it safe to assume that you have been truly in love?"

"Yes, with Tanya," Edward replied. "However, was she the love of my life? I don't think so. She was my love of my life in that moment. Would we have drifted apart as we grew? Possibly. We were very different."

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"How so?"

"She was a doctor and she came from an affluent family. However, that's where the similarities end. She was very vivacious, outgoing and full of life. I have a tendency to be more reserved, calculated and deliberate. I needed to be to compensate for my mental deficiencies. I also take a long time to let people in. But when I do, I'm fiercely loyal. Tanya was a bit fussy and flighty. I enjoyed art, music and theater. Tanya didn't. She would rather go to a sports game than to an opera. I was actually surprised that she said yes when I asked her out. However, she liked the way I looked."

"You are devastatingly good-looking, Edward," I said, stroking his soft cheek. He leaned into my touch and kissed the palm of my hand.

"Thank you, my Bella," he smiled. "You are incredibly gorgeous, both inside and out."

"So, Tanya," I encouraged.

"Tanya was beautiful too. However, she was different than you. She was tall, about 5'8". She had the most amazing blue eyes; they were almost violet. Her hair was strawberry blond and curly. She had the most adorable nose and sweetest lips. She was very smart and empathic. She was amazing with her patients. Especially her autistic patients. She really got through to them. It was because she was big kid," Edward said. "The kids loved her, tremendously. I loved to see her with her patients. She wanted to children so badly. We tried as soon as we got married, but she had difficulties. We tried in vitro and we found out the morning she left for her trip before she died that she was pregnant."

"How far along was she?" I murmured.

"Not long. Only a few weeks," Edward said quietly. "I was going to be a daddy. I was ready. I still am ready."

"Oh," I whispered.

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"Have you met the love of your life?" Edward asked.

"That's complicated," I replied.

"Why?" Edward asked as he captured my face, forcing me to look into his jade eyes.

"I'm sitting with him," I whispered. "I never thought I could feel the way I feel about you. You are brilliant, kind, sweet, compassionate, loving, and...and...amazing. Edward..."

"Bella, you don't have to. I'm sorry I pushed," he said as he kissed my forehead.

"I love you, Edward," I said confidently. "You are the love of my life."

"Oh, Bella," Edward cried as he drew me into his arms. He pressed sweet but ardent kisses to my lips. I opened my mouth and slid my tongue along Edward's bottom lip. He groaned and he pulled me over his lap. I straddled his strong thighs. His fingers danced along my spine and I tangled my hands into his soft hair. "Those words make me so happy, my Bella," Edward said fervently between soft but heated kisses. "I love you, beautiful."

"I love you, too, Edward," I whispered against his lips. Edward's hands moved up my back and they gently caressed across my collarbones. He pulled away and his eyes asked for permission, pleading with me. *What did he want?* His eyes dropped to my breasts and he wrapped his hands around my ribcage. I inhaled deeply and brought his face back to mine, giving him permission with my kisses. With my hands, I covered his and brought them to my chest, resting on my breasts. Edward growled and his fingers expertly squeezed my breasts. I ground into his lap and moaned wantonly, wanting all of him. Edward's lips moved from my mouth and he nibbled down my neck and licked across my collarbones. "Edward," I moaned as pulled on his hair, dragging his mouth back to mine.

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"Hold on, Bella," Edward said quietly. I pulled away and arched a brow. Edward's hands cupped my ass and he stood up. I wrapped my legs around his waist and held tightly around his neck. He kissed my earlobe and nibbled on my neck. He carried us back to my bedroom and gently laid me on the bed, his muscular body hovering over mine. He looked down at me and he muttered that I was beautiful. I blushed and hid my face. "Don't hide from me, Bella. You are exquisite, alluring and beautiful." He pulled my hands away and looked down at me. "Believe it."

"I'm trying," I whispered. "I'm not sure if I'm ready for..."

"Not tonight," Edward said. "I don't put out on the first date."

I snorted and began laughing hysterically. Edward's laugh joined mine and it was musical. He rolled onto his side and grabbed his stomach. We laughed for an immeasurable amount of time, until my sides were aching from giggling. Edward looked at me and his eyes were sparkling, full of amusement. He stared at me and he caressed my cheek. His smile turned from amused to loving. His eyes softened and he pulled me closer to his hard, muscled chest. He ran his nose along my jaw and I shivered. He smiled against my skin and his hands moved up to my chest. His fingers gently cupped my breast and I moved closer to him. I felt his arousal strain in his khakis. Feeling bold, I moved my hands down his sides and I rested my hand on his hip.

I ghosted my hand closer to his straining erection and gently palmed his hardened length. Edward inhaled sharply and he pulled away. "Too much?" I asked in a small voice. He shook his head and wiggled his hips. I giggled and rubbed his length over his pants. He moaned and held me closer, moving his hand up my leg. He wrapped his fingers around my knee, hitching my leg over his hip. He pushed my hips closer to his and his arousal hit in just the right spot. I rocked against him and I could feel my body react to the sensual movements. "Ungh," I groaned.

"You are so hot, baby," Edward cooed against my neck. "I can feel you through my pants."

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"I haven't felt like this in a long time, Edward," I moaned. "Sexy. Desirable. Wanted."

"You are all of the above, my beautiful girl," Edward said as his fingers moved up my thigh, under my dress. His fingers were igniting a line of fire on my leg and I wanted him to touch me. Everywhere. Edward kissed me and his mouth was aggressive against mine. His teeth nibbled on my bottom lip and his hand was gently caressing my ass under my dress, tracing the edge of my panties. He pulled away and he moved his hand on my thigh, moving closer to where I wanted his fingers. It had been so long since I had been touched that way. At least not by myself. I swiveled my hips and gave Edward a confident stare. He smirked and his fingers moved closer to the promised land. "Can I touch you, Bella?"

Not trusting my voice, I nodded and pulled my lip between my teeth. He reached up with his other hand and released my lip from its enamel prison. He kissed me with fervor and his fingers reached the waistband of my lacy boy shorts. His hand dipped into the lacy fabric and it moved to my slick folds. When he reached my pussy, he moaned and his hips bucked. "You're so wet, Bella," he said in a strangled voice. His finger circled around my clit and I tangled my fingers into his hair, pulling his face back to mine. Our breath mingled and we stared into each other's eyes. Edward's fingers were magical, pulling me closer to bliss and rapture. He slid a long finger into my entrance and I hissed at the feeling. Two years since anything with a pulse had been near my pussy. It felt fucking amazing. "Shit," I breathed as I moved against his hand. "Feels so good."

Edward grunted and added another finger, toying with my clit with his thumb. "You have no idea how this feels for me, Bella," he said against my skin. "So good. So tight, beautiful." His teeth bit down on my earlobe and I moaned loudly. I held him closer to my body and his fingers moved faster in and out of pussy. "Fuck," Edward said as he latched on to my neck, sucking lightly. I grasped at Edward's neck and I felt my body get closer to release.

"Edward," I moaned. "I'm so close." His mouth attacked mine and his hand moved faster, rubbing against my clit. He added a third finger and bit down on

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my bottom lip.

"Let go, Bella," he coaxed. "I want to feel you come. All over my hand, come for me, beautiful girl."

His words were my undoing. My muscles clenched around his fingers and I let out a guttural scream as I rode out my orgasm. I had never felt one so intense. Ever.

I collapsed against the bed and Edward removed his hand from my panties. He looked at me and put one of his fingers into his mouth, sucking on the juices that were undoubtedly there. He moaned and moved to another finger. I grabbed his hand and put the final finger into my mouth. Edward's eyes widened and he growled lightly. I could taste myself on his hand and it was hot. Edward removed his fingers from my mouth and his tongue plunged into my mouth and he rolled us so I was straddling his waist. My hands were on either side of his head and his hands were on my ass, pressing my heat against his cock. I swiveled my hips and smiled against his lips. I scooted down on his lap and reached for his belt buckle.

Edward stopped my hands and looked at me. "Tonight was all about you, beautiful."

"But..." I argued.

"Bella, if you touch me, I will not be able to control myself. I want you so badly. You are fucking beautiful when you come and I wanted to bury myself into your body as you were clenching my fingers," Edward said as he turned feral and predatory.

"Can you stay tonight?" I asked quietly as I unstraddled his legs.

"I have a bag in my car," Edward said as he cupped my cheek. "I didn't want to bring it up. It would appear presumptuous if I brought it up. On our first date."

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"It would have, but we're past that," I giggled. "We can safely say that we are not conventional."

"This is true. We share our first kiss at my sister's and soon-to-be brother-in-law's bachelor/bachelorette party. Decide to be exclusive before our first date. And then, proclaim our undying love on said first date," Edward chortled.

"The next date is the wedding, right?" I teased.

"I was thinking I would save that for the third date," Edward joked. "A good thorough fucking is on the second date."

I squeaked and looked at Edward with wide eyes. "Relax, Bella. All in good time, baby. I'm going to grab my bag."

I nodded and Edward got out of the bed. I followed him into the family room. I blew out the candles and turned off the lights as Edward was getting his duffel. I walked into my bedroom and heard my front door click closed and the locks be twisted. I went into my dresser and pulled out a pair of sleep pants and a tank top. Edward came back into the bedroom and his bag was in his hand along with a garment bag.

"I'm going to shower. School tomorrow," I said with a grimace.

"Me too," Edward said. "We're getting some med students and I have to do the orientation for them. I get to wear a suit. Yay!"

"Don't sound too excited there, doc," I teased.

"It's hard to be a doctor and wear a suit. I'm sorry. I deal with bodily fluids. Do you realize how hard it is to get blood out of merino wool? And how expensive?" he griped. "Give me scrubs and I'm a happy man."

"Oh, speaking of scrubs, erm, rather clothes. You left your dress pants and shirt here the last time you stayed. I sent the pants to the dry cleaner with my latest

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batch and the shirt is getting washed this weekend," I said as I held my sleep clothes against my body.

Edward dropped the garment bag on the bed and strode to where I was standing. He gathered me in his arms and kissed me fiercely, with renewed passion and adoration. My clothes fell to the floor and my hands flew to his hair.

*Who knew laundry would be such a turn on?*

Edward pulled away and his jade eyes were nearly black with desire. "What was that for, Edward?" I asked.

"I don't know. I just..." he said as he eyes dropped to the floor.

*I know why he was so excited. I'm taking care of him.*

"When was the last time you had someone pamper you?" I asked, running my fingers across his cheekbone. "Take care of you?"

"When you let me take that nap," he said quietly.

"Edward, you've been so strong. For so long. It's okay to let someone care for you. I don't mind. I enjoy taking care of you," I said, pressing my finger to his chin. "Is that alright if I do that every so often?"

Edward's eyes closed and several tears fell onto his cheeks. He nodded and held me against his chest. Pretty soon his tears turned into full blown sobs. He had been alone for so long and it was finally ringing in his mind that he wasn't going to be alone anymore. I gently scratched his back and offered my comfort and love. We stayed tangled in our embrace for an immeasurable amount of time. He pulled away and gently rubbed his tears from his face. "Sorry," he mumbled.

"Don't be. It's part of my job as girlfriend to be your shoulder to cry on," I said as rubbed his face with the pads of my thumbs. He smiled and kissed my lips



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sweetly. He wrapped his arms around my waist and he gently picked me up.

"Thank you, my Bella. My heart has swelled in your compassion. I love you, my sweet girl," he said into my hair.

"And I love you, Edward," I said into the crook of his neck. "But, as much as I hate to break up this love fest, I *really* need to shower."

"Oh, right," Edward said as he placed me back on the floor. I picked up my clothes and darted into the bathroom. Edward walked to his bag and took out a pair of scrub pants. I winked as I shut the bathroom door. I started the water and stripped out of my dress and underwear. I slipped into the shower and quickly washed my body. I leaned back into the hot spray and washed my hair. As I washed my hair, my hands moved down my body. It had changed so much since I ended it with Mike. I lost nearly all of my 'marriage' weight and was finally back to how I looked when I walked down the aisle. I was still displeased with the flabbiness of my breasts, the jiggliness of my thighs and the lack of tone to my body, but it had improved. My hands moved to the apex of my thighs and I shuddered at the climax I had experienced at Edward's fingers. The thought of it made me wet again and I wanted all of him. His fingers, his mouth, and oh God, his cock.

I stayed in the shower until the water turned cold. I shivered and turned off the water. I stepped out of the shower and wrapped a towel around my body. I dried off and put on my pajamas. I put on mousse in my hair and walked out of the bathroom. Edward was curled up around my pillow. His glasses were askew and a book was laying on his hip. His scrubs were hanging low on his hips and I could see the delicious 'v' on his body and top of his boxer briefs.

*I love Calvin Klein.*

I removed his glasses and put his book on his bag. I set my alarm and crawled into bed. Edward's arms wrapped around my waist and I turned off the lights. I gently traced his handsome features and he hummed contentedly. I pressed a kiss to his jaw and then to his soft, pouty lips. Edward's eyes opened and he smiled sleepily. "Hmmmm, you took a long time in the shower," he said

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gruffly.

"I was thinking," I whispered in the darkness. "Edward, I...love you so much. It's happened so quickly it scares me."

"I know, beautiful. It honestly scares me, too. But why deny it? I love you more than my own life," Edward said fervently. "I'm so happy and full of joy that I can say it to you. I don't want to be afraid of the feelings that I have. We'll take these steps together, my Bella."

"Promise me something, Edward," I said quietly.

"Anything, beautiful girl."

"Don't break me. I won't handle it if you do," I said, tears falling down my cheeks.

"Never, beautiful. I promise that I'm in this for the long haul. Forever, if you'll have me," Edward said. The sincerity in his statement rang through the quiet of my condo. "I love you, Bella. Believe me when I say that."

I nodded and nestled closer to his chest. He instinctually wrapped his arms around my body and kissed my forehead. I stayed cuddled next to Edward and his breaths evened out. I stayed awake for and listened to his breathing, smelled his unique scent, gently traced the contours of his back and body and marveled that he was meant for me.

*But when will the other shoe drop?*

Don't be such a killjoy. He loves you. He's wanting 'forever.' Get over it.

*I can't. Mike ruined my faith in love. All faith in love.*

I extricated myself from Edward's steely grasp and padded to the family room. I curled up on the couch and looked out the window, trying to sort out my feelings. I knew I loved him. Irrevocably. But I was so afraid. I didn't want to

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be hurt again. I couldn't be hurt again. My heart couldn't handle it. I got up from the couch and started pacing. My mind was reeling and I couldn't get it to calm down. I sat down again and I heard my phone chirp from the kitchen. I got up and checked it.

*Bella, he loves you. Let him in. Trust in yourself. Please. I need a sister! - Alice*

I blinked and gaped at her uncanny timing. *How did you know? - Bella*

*Sixth sense - Alice*

*I'm so afraid, Elf. - Bella*

*He's got a lot more to lose than you, Bells. You know his story. - Alice*

*I know. He's been through hell and back. - Bella*

*I understand that you are afraid of getting burned again. Mike was a fucking tool. Will always be a fucking tool. Don't let his transgressions ruin your chances with Edward - Alice*

*I'm trying, Elf - Bella*

*Try harder, Bells. Go to sleep. - Alice*

*Thanks, Alice - Bella*

*Love you, sis - Alice*

*Love you, too, Elf - Bella*

I plugged my phone back into the charger and walked back into my bedroom. Edward was curled around my pillow, but his brow was furrowed. He looked worried. I got back into bed and nestled into Edward's arms. His brow relaxed and he sighed. "Love you, beautiful," he muttered sleepily.

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"Love you, too, handsome," I said as my eyes drifted shut. I quickly fell into a deep sleep.

xx AFS xx

*I walked into the hospital. I was confused. I saw Alice and Jasper. They were crying. Or rather, Alice was crying. Jasper was holding her tightly.*

*"Ali? What's wrong?" I asked.*

*She bawled harder. Jasper gave me a sad smile and held his fiancée. I frowned and looked further into the hospital. I saw Esme standing near a trauma room. Her shoulders were shaking. I walked up to her and put my arms around her. "Esme?"*

*"Oh, Bella," she cried as she hugged me. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart."*

*I pulled away and frowned. Then I saw what was going on the trauma room. Carlisle was pounding on Edward's chest, fruitlessly. His beautiful body was mangled and broken. His bronze hair was bright red with blood and his chest was cracked open.*

*"No," I cried. "No! Edward!" I ran into the trauma room and looked at Edward. His eyes were glazed over and fixed. Not focused on anything. Dead. "Edward," I wailed as I sunk to my knees.*

*"Noooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!" I screamed as I bolted out of bed.*

*"Bella! Baby, it's okay. It's a dream," Edward said frantically.*

*I looked at him and he was alive. I touched his face and his body to verify that he was real. I threw myself into his arms, crying into his chest. He held me and I could hear him coo in my ear. "You're here. You're here," I chanted.*

*"I'm here, beautiful. I'm not going anywhere," he said. "What's this about?"*

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"Horrible dream. Nightmare," I sobbed.

"What was it about?" Edward asked as he caressed my cheeks.

"Gone. You were gone," I muttered. "My heart shattered."

"Bella, I'm not going anywhere. I promise you that," Edward said fervently.

"You were in the hospital and it looked like you were in a car accident or something. Carlisle was pounding on your chest and you were dead. Can you promise me that you won't die? No. You can't promise me that you aren't going anywhere. It's an impossibility," I snapped as I got up from his arms and stalked to the bathroom. I slammed the door and sunk to the floor.

*Is it too soon to take a sick day? It's only the second day of school.*

I bawled and sobbed in my bathroom. I wanted to give myself to Edward. But I couldn't. I was too broken.

*So is he, idiot.*

"Bella?" Edward said in a broken voice. "Please open the door, baby."

I sobbed harder and curled into myself. Edward was a persistent guy and he opened the door. He sat down on the floor and his green eyes were filled with sadness and concern. "Talk to me, please," he pleaded. I shook my head. "If you're not going to talk, then I am. Bella, I'm scared shitless. The people that I loved and cared for the most were taken from me. Violently. I would not survive if I lost you too. I want everything with you. However, if you dwell on what could have been, then you won't live. I learned that when my parents died. It took years for me to realize it. Then I got a refresher when I lost Tanya. Bella, I know your scared and frightened. But I'm not Mike. I'll never be like him. He made a promise that he couldn't keep. I intend to keep my promise of being with you, loving you for forever."

"I'm sorry, Edward," I mumbled. "I... don't know what to say, but sorry."

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"Bella, don't apologize. We're going to make this journey together. I promise. And besides, what you experienced was just a dream. A nightmare. It won't happen. I will do everything in my power to prevent it. I refuse to be taken from you in the same manner I lost my parents and my wife," Edward said as he took my hands in his.

"We're quite a pair," I chuckled darkly.

"Yes, we are," Edward sighed. "But know one thing. I love you. I will always love you." I giggled. "Why are you laughing?"

"You remember that movie with Whitney Houston and Kevin Costner?" I asked.

Edward's mind was working and he got a slow smile on his face. He clutched his chest and started singing, "And I...ee...I will always love you...oohoo," he barked.

"Edward, stop! You make me sound like an opera diva," I laughed.

He stopped singing and gave me a wink. "Don't quit my day job?"

"No, Pavarotti."

From the bedroom, an alarm went off. Edward groaned and his head dropped to his chest. "Can I use your shower, beautiful?"

"Of course," I said as I yawned.

"Tell me about it," Edward laughed as he did his own yawn. I got up from the bathroom floor and chose my clothes for the day. Edward got out of the bathroom and picked up his clothes from his bag. I tossed him some shampoo. He frowned and gave me a questioning look. "What's this for?"

"So you don't smell like girl," I giggled. "Strawberries and freesia probably aren't your style."

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"Maybe I want to smell like you," Edward argued. "But thanks."

Edward went into the shower and I heard the water start. I put on my clothes for the day, a pair of charcoal dress pants and a sweater set in a deep lavender. It was still hot outside, but in my school it was an icebox. Fucking freezing cold. The kids always complained about the temperature, as did the teachers, but nothing was ever done. You just dressed like it was winter when it was a 100 degrees out. I decided to put on some makeup as I looked like shit. My eyes were drooping with dark circles and they were puffy from the crying. I did the best I could with my limited makeup expertise. I went into the kitchen and poured myself a cup of coffee. I downed it quickly, ignoring the burning I felt as it went down.

Edward strolled into the kitchen, wearing a very expensive navy suit, white shirt and burgundy tie. His hair was damp and in disarray. His eyes were hidden by his glasses and he smelled delicious: clean man smell and Tuscany cologne.

*Yummy.*

"Can I have a cup of the evil stuff this morning?" Edward asked as he yawned. "I was up way early."

"Sorry," I mumbled as I poured him a cup of coffee. He took it and grimaced as he swallowed a sip. He reached into his pocket and took out a small prescription bottle. He shook out a pill and swallowed it with the coffee.

"That's just fowl," he grumbled. "Coffee and my meds are not a good combo."

"At least it's not a horse pill," I shrugged.

"Speaking of meds," Edward transitioned. "I know that we got pretty hot and heavy last night."

"That we did," I blushed. "That was the first orgasm that I've had..."

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"What?" Edward barked.

"Let me finish, Masen. Jeez," I chided. "The first orgasm that I've had in two years that was not self induced. It was very nice."

"Nice?" Edward sneered. "It was nice?"

"Not a good word?"

"No, Bella. I was hoping for earth shattering, planet tilting, mind blowingly fucking awesome," Edward prompted.

"It was the most intense orgasm I've had. Ever," I said. "Happy now?"

"Slightly," Edward pouted. "Anyhow, if and when we take the plunge in making love?"

"Are you asking if I've been safe? Been tested?" I asked.

"Kind of. Jake's situation got me thinking. That's all," Edward said. "I'm safe. I've only been with three women. And I've been celibate, or rather a fucking monk, for the past three and half years."

"Well, I'm good too. I've also been with only three men. None without a condom, either. Mike was adamant that I take the pill, but he was so fucking paranoid that he still wrapped it up," I grumbled. "Well, Dr. Masen, do you know a name of a good ob/gyn?"

"Whatever for, Ms. Swan?" Edward asked coyly.

"I want to get back on birth control," I answered simply. "Your sister gave me condoms, but..."

"But, what?"



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"I want to feel *all* of you," I answered quietly. I dropped my gaze to the floor and blushed furiously.

Edward cupped my chin and brought my face up to look at his. His eyes were shining with tears and he had on a smile. "I'll text you with a number, but I'm grateful that you trust me enough to be with all of me."

"That's if you still want me," I sighed.

"Always, Bella," Edward answered. "However, I have an eight o'clock meeting and I have yet to prepare for it. So need to go, love."

"I've got bus duty this morning," I mumbled. "Yay!"

"Try to contain your enthusiasm, Bella," Edward said dryly. "Come on, beautiful."

I gathered my bag and cell phone, while Edward got his stuff from the bedroom. He slung his duffel over his shoulder and laid the garment bag over his arm. He also held a sleek, black leather briefcase in his hand and he was checking his Blackberry. He gave me a smile and adjusted his bags to hold my hand as we walked to our cars. Edward dropped off his stuff and gave me a searing kiss before patting me on the ass before he got into his car. I drove to school and got through the day. Barely.

*Seriously, next to no sleep and stress can really make me bitchy.*

Alice and Jake were discussing photos during lunch. She decided to go with him, as she was incredibly impressed with his work. Especially for an amateur photographer. Emmett and Rose were nauseating. I was obviously grumpy. I was looking forward to coming home right after school, but I forgot that I had a team leader meeting. I didn't want to sit through that. Argh!

However, as I was walking to my classroom after lunch, my name was called over the intercom. "Please pardon the interruption. Ms. Swan, please come to the office. Ms. Swan to the office." I shrugged and headed to the front office. I

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walked in and saw a huge bouquet of red, white, and pink roses sitting on the counter.

"Someone has an admirer," Maryann said from her desk. She was the principal's secretary and very nosy.

"Are these for me?" I squeaked.

"That's what the cute delivery boy said," Maryann confirmed.

I picked up the bouquet of flowers and thanked her. I walked to my classroom, setting the beautiful arrangement on my desk. Tucked inside was a card. I opened it up, reading its message.

*Dearest Bella,*

*I told you that you need to prepare to be spoiled. This is first way I intend to spoil you, beautiful girl. These flowers indicate special meanings, for you, for me and for us. The red roses mean passionate love. White means purity. Pink means friendship. You are all of these things to me, my beautiful girl. My love, in the purest sense and my friend.*

*I love you, so much.*

*Yours always,*

*Dr. McFuckme (Edward)*

I clutched the card to my chest, tears falling down my face.

"Ms. Swan?" asked Taylor, one of my students. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Taylor. Just fine," I smiled as I gazed at my beautiful bouquet. And I actually believed what I said.

*About damn time!*

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**A/N: Okay, Bella finally got her head out of her ass. Dr. McFuckme is bloody perfect (I want flowers sent to me at work, dagnabbit!). And I snuck in a little lemon. Cumquat. Cutie tangerine. You get the idea. Leave me love, please :)**

# The ER

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Rated M for future lemons.*

## Chapter 13: The ER

The rest of the week went by quickly. Each moment I doubted my feelings for Edward, I looked at the beautiful bouquet of flowers on my desk. I then put my hand on the sweet, poignant note he wrote to me with the flowers. I kept it in my pocket.

I didn't see Edward the rest of the week, unfortunately. He had to do his administrative duties on Thursday and then ended covering an overnight shift in the ER on Thursday night. He texted me when he had a spare moment, each time saying his love for me. Each time I read 'I love you,' I blushed tremendously. It warmed my heart and it burst through my chest. On Thursday night, I pretty much crashed after I put away the food from dinner. I was so exhausted from staying up so late and being up so early.

Saturday was Alice's bridal shower. It was at Esme and Carlisle's home. I woke up at a decent hour and got dressed for the shower. I put on my outfit that Alice insisted I wear. *She's such a wedding Nazi! Jeez!* It was deep, blush pink sheath dress. She also had me wear a pair of beige peep-toe heels. I was hesitant to wear them, but what Alice wants, Alice gets. I did slip a pair of brown sandals into a bag, just in case. I straightened my hair and spiked it. I also put on my makeup, very softly on my face. I finished my look with a set of pearls and pearl earrings. I checked my watch. I needed to get going. I wasn't sure where Esme and Carlisle lived. I printed out directions last night, but still I was leery

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about the location.

I grabbed the present I bought for Alice and Jasper: a large crystal vase and a set of matching crystal candle holders, and carried it to my car. I hopped up into my beast and backed out of the parking spot. I got on the highway and drove to Esme and Carlisle's home. I followed the directions and pulled into a lavish looking subdivision. The homes were huge and immaculately kept. I checked the house number and I drove through the gorgeous neighborhood. I found Carlisle and Esme's home. The mailbox was bedecked with pink balloons and streamers. I pulled in and parked the beast. I gathered my present and camera and walked up to the front door. I balanced the present and rang the doorbell.

Esme opened up the door. "Bella! You look lovely," she gushed. "Come in, come in."

"Thank you, Esme. You have a lovely home," I replied.

"Oh, why thank you, my dear," she said quietly. "It's a bit of a passion. I'm an interior decorator and I love decorating a home with my creativity."

We walked to the living room and I deposited my present on the pile of other presents. Alice was wearing a white dress with a pink sash around her waist. Her black hair was curled and she had a large pink flower pinned behind her left ear. She looked at me. Her face broke into a huge grin and she skipped to where I was standing. "Bella! You look beautiful," she smiled as she kissed my cheek. "That dress is gorgeous on you."

"Thanks, Elf. You look radiant," I said as I wrapped her in a hug. "Can you believe this happening?"

"Yes," she gushed. "It's been forever. Jas and I were together since college and it took *this* long to propose. Now it's really happening."

"What took him so long?" I asked.

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"He was gun shy. His parents got divorced and it was nasty. I mean a ton of mudslinging and nastiness. Jasper wanted to make sure that I was the one. But I knew. As soon as I met him, I knew," Alice said wistfully. "Speaking knowing, do you have some news for me, Ms. Swan?"

"I have no idea what you're talking about," I evaded.

"Bella," Alice whined. "Edward said something happened and he had a shit-eating grin on his face. He won't tell me. Please, tell me! I beg of you."

"Okay, okay, okay," I said, placating my elfin friend. "We had our first date on Wednesday."

"And..." Alice prompted as she led me to a plush, cream couch.

"Anyhow, he came over and brought dinner. It was from La Bella Italia. The restaurant that we went to for lunch after our drunken taxi ride. As we were sitting down to eat, Edward said that..."

"What?" Alice shrieked. Rose had come in and sat down on the couch. "Tell me, Bella! Please!"

"Edward said that he loved me," I said as I prepared for the onslaught of shrieks. And that's what I got! Alice, Rose and Esme all surrounded me and hugged me tightly, shrieking in my ear.

"And? Did you say it back?" Rose asked.

"It took me awhile, but I did," I smiled. "However, I'm not done."

"There's more?" Esme squeaked. "Spill it, girl."

"At school, do you remember when they called me to the office on Thursday?"

"Yeah," Alice and Rose answered.

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"Well, I had flowers delivered to school. A huge rose bouquet of red, pink and white roses. They were from Edward. He sent this card with the flowers," I blushed as I took out the card from my purse. I handed it to Alice and she squealed as she read the card. Alice handed it to Esme and Rose read the card over Esme's shoulder.

"Dr. McFuckme. I love it," Esme giggled. "Who came up with that?"

"I did," I giggled. "He just oozes sex appeal."

"Yeah, he does. Not like Emmett, but he is very sexy and he's got moves," Rose said, arching a perfect brow. "For the bachelor/bachelorette party we had the people do dares. Edward chose to do a lap dance. He gave it to Bella. His hips and body moved very well."

"Yeah, he did," I said, fanning myself. "Damn."

"So, that's what happened," Alice clarified.

"That's what happened," I answered. "Well more happened, but I'm not going to elaborate anymore."

"Did you get some loving?" Rose asked bluntly. I blushed. "That answers that question," Rose laughed. "Good."

"Okay, enough," I said sternly. "Let's get this party started."

I got up and we sat down in the tables set up in the large sun room. The caterer brought out the food and we dug into the five course meal. The food was delicious and I wanted to lick my plate it was so good. After lunch, Rose and I started the shower games. They were silly and fun. After the games, Alice attacked the pile of presents. I wrote down what she got and Rose made her bow bouquet. Alice got a lot of lovely things. She gushed and smiled at each present, personally thanking the guests who gave her the gift.

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After a few hours, all of the guests had left with their little goodie bags. Jasper came and he loaded up his large Hummer with all of the presents. Esme divvied up the leftovers from the caterers and sent Rose and I home with enough food for the rest of the week. Rose and I left Esme's home and she grabbed my hand.

"Rose, what the hell?" I barked.

"You need to go shopping," Rose said, arching a brow.

"For what?"

"Lingerie," she said simply. "Come on, trust me."

"I don't have the money, Rosalie," I said, frowning. "I have a mortgage and bills to pay. I don't make enough as a teacher to go on a lingerie shopping spree."

"I do. My ex-husband left me a ton of money in our divorce settlement. I'm setting you up in lingerie that'll make Edward permanently hard," Rose said.

"I'll go. If you tell me what happened to you," I said, crossing my arms across my chest.

"Deal. After we get you set with push-up bras and thongs," Rose winked.

I groaned and got into my car. Rose pulled in front of me and I followed her to a swanky lingerie store. I parked the car and we got out, walking to the store. Rose opened the door and was greeted by a small woman.

"Rose! Back so soon! You got enough lingerie to wear for years," she said.

"Shut it, Heidi. We're here to set up my friend, Bella," Rose smiled as she indicated to me.



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Heidi turned and looked at me. "HMMMM...turn around, Bella," she demanded. I reluctantly did what she asked and she clucked. "Let me guess. Kohl's specials, using your 30% off coupon."

"Unfortunately," I grumbled. "I just recently got divorced and I'm in a new relationship."

"Well, then, we need get you in some hot lingerie to keep your new relationship steamy," Heidi as she laced her fingers with mine. "34C, right?"

"Uh, yeah," I said.

"Trust me, Bella. You will not be disappointed," Heidi grinned lasciviously. She pushed me into a dressing room and threw tons of colorful scraps of lace and satin at me. I tried on the racy lingerie, liking some, hating some and absolutely love most of it. I picked up a bra and checked the price. I stumbled in the dressing room and started hyperventilating. "Bella? Are you okay?"

"Sticker shock," I squeaked.

Rose opened the door and sat down next to me. "Bella, when was the last time you bought something for you. Not Mike. Not Alice. Not Edward. You?"

"Not for awhile. But I can't afford this," I mumbled.

"Yes, you can. Remember, my ex-husband is buying this for you," Rose winked. "Is this the keep pile?" I nodded and blushed. Rose picked up the lingerie from the keep pile and handed it to Heidi. "We want all of this. Also matching negligees."

"Got it," Heidi said as she skipped to the register.

I leaned forward on my knees and tried to calm my erratic breathing. *Must not pass out. Must not pass out. Must not pass out. Shit, I'm going to pass out.*

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"No, you're not, Bella," Rose crooned. "Edward's peen will be consistently hard when he sees what you are going to be wearing. I can imagine he's huge. Is he?"

"From what I've felt, yeah," I muttered.

"You haven't seen it?"

"No."

"Why the hell not? He wants to jump your bones!" Rose chided.

"I'm not ready for *that*," I said, giving her a hard stare.

"Okay, what have you done?" Rose asked as she helped me up. We walked out into the store and Rose picked up some lotion and garters. She waved down Heidi and she grabbed them from her. We wandered around the store as I told her about Edward's magical fingers and my first orgasm that wasn't brought forth from my own hand in two years. We stopped in front of a beautiful blue nightie with a matching thong. It was my favorite color blue and I fingered the delicate material. "Wear that when you decide to give yourself to Edward." She rooted through the racks and plucked out my size. I blushed and followed Rose to the register. Heidi added the nightie to our staggering pile of naughty underwear. She prattled off the total and I blanched. Rose elbowed me. She handed over a sleek black credit card and signed the credit slip. "Courtesy of Royce King, the Third. Too bad he won't reap the benefits."

"Is he your ex-husband?" I asked.

"He's a fucking douche. Come on. Let's head back. I need to bake some cookies if I'm going to tell you my story," Rose said as Heidi handed me my underwear. I followed Rose back to the condo complex and parked the car. We walked up the stairs. "Change and then I'll explain my ex-husband."

I nodded and walked into my condo. I deposited my bags of naughty lingerie on my bed. I stripped off my dress and put on a pair of yoga pants and a Cherry

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Blossom t-shirt. I slipped on a pair of flip flops and grabbed my phone and keys. I knocked on Rose's door and saw it was already open. "Rose?"

"I'm changing! Can you open up a bottle of white wine? It's in the fridge," she yelled from her bedroom.

I opened the fridge, pulling out a bottle of chardonnay. I found the bottle opener and opened the wine. I took out two wine glasses, pouring each of us a glass. Rose walked into the kitchen, her hair piled on her head and her makeup removed. She looked so young. I gave her a glass. Rose took it and clinked mine. She then busied herself in gathering the ingredients for snicker doodles.

"Okay, spill it, Hale," I said as I sat down.

Rose was putting the ingredients into her Kitchenaid and grumbling. "Fuck. I'm warning you, it's not pretty."

"I gathered that," I said.

"Royce and I met in college. He was the son of an affluent banker and our parents were very close friends. It was almost an arranged marriage. We started off as friends. Then our friendship grew into something more. We eventually started dating. We dated all throughout our college careers. Royce was the epitome of a sweet, doting boyfriend. He was loving, smart and unbelievably good looking. He proposed on the eve of our college graduation. I, of course, said yes. The ring he gave me was fucking huge, but absolutely gorgeous and not gaudy.

"We started our jobs. I was a Language Arts teacher in New York City. Royce worked for his father in his bank, managing hedge funds. We got married on Christmas Eve, spending our honeymoon in the Greek Isles. The first few months of the marriage were perfect. Blissful. Hot. A dream come true.

"Then, I had to stay at work late for parent teacher conferences. I told Royce that I had to work late and he understood. When I got home, I was tired and cranky and just wanted to sleep. Royce had other ideas. He was livid. He

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demanded where I was and who I was fucking. I snapped and told him no one, explaining that I had parent teacher conferences. He didn't believe me and he slapped me. Hard. Across my face. I got my stuff and drove to my parents' home. I stayed there for a few days, but went back to Royce when he came and apologized. He told me he was drunk and he had a bad day at work. I told him that was not an excuse for hitting me. He promised not to do it again. He also promised that he would go to anger management classes. Despite my better judgment, I went home.

"Things improved and we settled back into our routine. On the last day of school, I went out with my friends from work for a drink. I sent Royce a text telling him where I was going to be. He didn't respond. I shrugged it off and continued drinking, celebrating the end of the school year. I got home and Royce, again, was livid. He said I was cheating on him and that I wasn't worth his time. He could find anybody he wanted that would be home to cook him dinner and service him whenever he needed. I paled and backed away from him."

"He didn't?" I squeaked.

"He did. He threw me against the stairs and he raped me. My own fucking husband raped me. I told him no. I didn't want to be with him like that. I clawed and shoved him away. He wouldn't relent. He pounded into me and kept going until he was done. Afterward, he pulled out and proceeded to beat the shit out of me. He slumped over when he was done and I dragged my body to the hospital. I only had bruises and contusions. No broken bones, thankfully. I met with some detectives and told them what happened. The barged into my home and arrested Royce."

"What happened?" I asked.

"His family hired him a lawyer and they finagled a deal where we were just having 'rough sex.' He was released. I served him with divorce papers. However, he wouldn't sign them. He refused to let me go. I was his.

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"Later on during the summer, I was feeling sick and blah. I went to my doctor, thinking I had food poisoning or the flu. Except it wasn't. I was pregnant with the demon's spawn," Rose said as her eyes filled with tears. "I carried the baby, a little girl, to term. But I couldn't keep her. She was a reminder of how she was conceived. I gave up Lily for adoption. It was the toughest thing I had to do."

"Did Royce fight you on it?"

"He did. However, I told him that if wouldn't sign the papers, I would inform the media of his temper and it would ruin his father's company. Royce finally signed over his parental rights and Lily was placed with a good family in Nebraska. He also signed the divorce papers, giving me everything that I wanted. I stayed in New York for another year, but I couldn't take it. Once the school year was done, I started looking for a new job in a new, but smaller town. I found something that I stayed at for a year, but I stumbled on the job here in Sherryville at Cherry Blossom. I'm glad I did," Rose smiled. "I've made some great friends and I'm finally happy."

"I can't imagine what you've gone through, Rose," I said. "How...?"

"There was a point in time where my self-worth was in the crapper, but I know I'm better than what Royce led me to believe. I know I made the right decision for my daughter. I get emails from her parents and she's happy."

"How old is she?" I asked.

"She's three," Rose smiled sadly. "I hated that I had to give her up, but I didn't want to resent my own child because of her father. Royce also arranged for her to be cared for when she gets older. It was part of the divorce decree."

"Why is he not in jail?" I seethed. "He fucking raped you and beat you up!"

"He had excellent attorneys. It was my word against his," Rose mumbled as she put the cookies into the oven. "My parents tried to help me, but we couldn't afford it. I sold everything of worth, including the ring that he presented me

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when he proposed, but we couldn't do it. So a rapist is walking free and clear because he had great representation and I didn't."

"Holy fuck," I sighed. "That sucks, Rose."

"I know. But I'm over it. For the most part. I have bad days. You can tell when I have bad days. I bake," she laughed. "But those are few and far between now. Besides, I have Emmett. He's everything that Royce wasn't."

"Does he know about Lily?"

"Yeah. He was sad that I gave up my daughter, but understood why I did it," Rose replied. "Anyhoo...enough sad shit. Tell me about Edward."

"You heard everything that I told Alice," I giggled. "Nothing has changed since that conversation."

"I can see you're holding back, Bella. You said that he said he loved you. You hesitated in telling him it in return. Why?"

"I'm afraid of being hurt. Mike, my supposed-love-of-my-life, said he'd be with me for better or for worse. For forever. But that didn't work out. I had a minor, okay, MAJOR panic attack on Wednesday night. I was pacing until nearly midnight. Then I had the worst nightmare, screaming bloody murder the next morning. I'm afraid he's going to leave me; that he's not real."

"Bella, he's real. He loves you. I barely know him and I can see the love he has for you. I saw it at the bachelor party. I still can't believe that was a week ago, but he was in love with you then," Rose said as she grasped my hand. "Enjoy it. Enjoy him."

"I'm trying."

"When are you seeing him next?" Rose asked as she got up when the oven blared.

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"I have no clue. We've texted but haven't set up any plans," I said.

"See if he's available tonight. Wear some of that new underwear," Rose said with a suggestive waggle of her brows.

"He's working tonight," I sighed.

"I know! Bring him some cookies," Rose said as she took out a plastic container. "Put on a cute pair of jeans and boobly top and deliver these. He'll love you even more."

"Booby top?" I squeaked.

"A shirt the pushes the girls up to new heights. Go change and I'll make these all pretty on a platter," Rose giggled. She smacked my butt and pushed me out the door. I darted to my condo and put on a pair of dark, distressed jeans. I found a black tank top. I put the top on and was disappointed in my lack of boobage. I looked at the bag of naughtiness on the bed. I stripped off the top and slipped off my plain bra. I found a black lacy bra and I slid it over my shoulders. My boobs were raised to heights and I smiled. "Edward will like. I hope."

I pulled on a black cardigan and my black Chucks. I went back to Rose's and walked into her kitchen. She handed me the plate of cookies and kissed my cheek. "Go get 'em, hot stuff."

I nodded and dashed to my car. I drove to Craven Memorial and parked in the parking garage. I took a deep breath, calming my frazzled nerves. *Will he be pissed? Will he be happy? Fuck! What am I thinking?*

I picked up the plate of cookies and my phone. I walked into the ER, heading toward the triage desk. Thankfully, Rhonda was sitting there. "Hi, Rhonda."

"Ms. Bella! What a pleasant surprise! How are you doing?" Rhonda asked.

"I'm good. How are you doing?" I replied, giving her a smile.

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"Excellent. It was a quiet day today. So, it's all good. Are you looking for Dr. Edward?" she asked.

"Yes, I am. I have some cookies for him. Would you like a snicker doodle?" I asked, opening the container. Rhonda grinned widely and swiped two cookies, putting them on the triage desk.

"I'll page him," Rhonda smiled. She picked up the phone and spoke quickly and quietly into the receiver. "He'll be right up, Ms. Bella."

"Did you say it was me?" I asked.

"No. I just said he was needed at the triage desk," Rhonda winked.

"Thanks, Rhonda," I grinned, excited that she saw through my ruse. I leaned against the desk and waited for Edward. He strode onto the floor. He moved slowly and I swear angels wept, he looked so good. His hair was in its usual disarray and he was wearing his blue scrubs and white lab coat. He was sporting a few day old beard and he looking scrumptious. He walked to the triage desk, his head buried in a chart.

"You needed me, Rhonda?" Edward asked.

"Dr. Edward, get your nose out of your chart," Rhonda chided as she swiped the chart from his hands.

"Rhonda!" Edward squeaked. He looked at her sternly and Rhonda pointed to me. He looked at me and his angry glare softened. "Bella, oh my word. What a pleasant surprise," he sighed as gathered me in his arms. He cupped my chin and kissed my lips sweetly.

"Dr. Edward, she brought cookies. For you. Go to your office and enjoy them," Rhonda said. She put the plate of cookies into his hands and pointed toward Edward's office. Edward twined his fingers with mine and walked us back to his office carrying my cookies.



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He opened the door of his warm office and closed the door shut. He put the cookies on his desk and he pulled me to the couch, sitting down and straddling me over his legs. He slipped the cardigan off my shoulders. "This is the most wonderful surprise, my beautiful girl," he breathed against my lips. His tongue thrust into my mouth and his hands grabbed my ass. My fingers tangled into his hair and I moaned quietly against his mouth. Edward's fingers moved under the hem of my shirt and ghosted up my skin. His fingers burned against my heated flesh. "So soft, Bella," he moaned. "I love you, beautiful."

"I love you, too, Edward," I said as I kissed his cheeks, moving to his earlobe. I drew it into my teeth and nibbled.

Edward's hands moved to my breasts and they expertly kneaded the sensitive mounds. He lifted my tank and tossed it on the floor. "Fuck. So beautiful," Edward said as he looked at my lacy black bra. His mouth was attached to my neck and he kissed down to the swell of my breasts. He slipped his fingers into the cups and extricated my breast from its lacy prison. Edward licked my nipple and he drew it between his teeth. As good as this was, I wanted this to be about him. I captured his chin and brought his face back to mine. I brushed my lips against his and slid off his lap. "Bella?"

I knelt on the floor and reached for the drawstring of his scrubs. "This is about you, Edward," I purred seductively. "I just hope that you don't get paged. That would be embarrassing. Also, one more thing." I got up and locked Edward's door shut. His eyes widened and I took my place back on the floor. I untied the drawstring and cupped his straining erection. "Hmmmm. I've been thinking about this since Wednesday."

"What have you thinking about, Isabella?" Edward purred.

"Feeling you. Touching you. Making you come," I cooed. *Where is this confidence coming from?* I gently massaged his balls and hardened length through the cotton of his boxer briefs and scrubs. Edward's head fell back and he grunted. "Can I make you come, Edward? With my mouth, Dr. Masen?"

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"Fuck, Bella," he growled. I gently pulled down his scrub pants and he lifted his hips. I then reached for the waistband of his Calvins and pulled it down as well. His erection sprung free and my eyes darkened in lust. And my question was answered as to how big he was. He was fucking huge. I was panicking at how I would take all of it into my mouth or my pussy. I licked my lips and looked up at Edward. He was watching me with rapt attention, his eyes filled with desire and passion. I grasped his cock and pumped it a few times. Edward's breathing became erratic and his jaw dropped. I smirked and rubbed my thumb on the head of his perfect cock.

"Are you ready, Dr. Masen?" I crooned. He gulped and nodded. I leaned forward and pressed a chaste kiss to the tip of his dick. Edward inhaled sharply and his hips bucked. "Hmmm, excited?"

"God, Bella. So excited. Please, baby," he pleaded.

"Please, what, Edward?" I asked as I licked the tip of his cock.

"Put your mouth on me, Bella. I'm begging you," he croaked. I smiled and wrapped my lips around his penis. Edward groaned and his fingers tangled into my hair. I relaxed my jaw and pushed his cock into my mouth. He hit the back of my throat and I was grateful for not having a gag reflex. With my hand, I wrapped my fingers around the base and began bobbing my head, moving my hand in conjunction with my mouth. "Holy shit, baby. Feels so good. So good," Edward moaned.

I removed my mouth from his cock and licked the underside of his shaft. I pumped his dick with my hand, using the lubrication of my mouth. "You like, Dr. Masen?" I asked. He nodded emphatically and caressed my cheek. I plunged his cock into my mouth and I used my teeth on the bottom of shaft. He growled and his hips were moving at a rapid pace. "Do you want to come, Dr. Masen? In my mouth?"

*Holy fuck. I can't believe I'm doing this. I've never done this before. Who am I? What happened to shy, reserved Bella Swan?*

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"Please, baby," Edward moaned. I smirked and began bobbing my head faster, massaging his cock and his balls with my hands. He threw his head back and his chest was rising at an amazing pace. "Bella, I'm close. So close," he breathed. I smiled against his skin and dragged my teeth along the underside of his cock. Edward grunted and his eyes rolled back in his head. "I'm...Bella..." he growled. I kept moving and I felt a hot stream of liquid pour down my throat. Edward bit back a roar and he collapsed against his couch. I licked him clean and put his cock back into his boxer briefs. Edward lifted his hips and pulled up his scrubs. He tied the drawstring and picked me up, throwing me onto the couch, pinning me with his hips. His lips covered mine and his tongue thrust between my lips. "That was the most erotic thing, ever, my love," he said against my lips. "You are so fucking perfect."

"Hmmm," I moaned as I hitched my leg around his hip. "I'm glad I could make you feel good, Edward. So, I take it you like your surprise?"

"Immensely, beautiful girl. It's not every day my girlfriend. My beautiful and thoughtful girlfriend. Brings me cookies, wears the most exquisite black bra and give me the single most perfect and sensual moment I've had in my life. I really like this," Edward said as he traced his fingers over my bra.

"It's new," I said, ruffling his hair. "For you."

"Well, I appreciate it. Very much," Edward said as he settled between my legs. "Let me show you how much, I appreciate it."

"That might be a challenge, Edward," I giggled.

"What? Why?" he squeaked.

"Your pocket is vibrating," I said. I reached into his lab coat pocket and pulled out his Blackberry. It was vibrating in my hand. "See?"

"Goddamn it," he growled. "I don't want to let you go."

"But you are being paged to trauma two," I said as I read the text on his phone.

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Edward snarled and he got up. He dug around in his bag and handed me a key. "I'll be home in an hour, two at most."

"Are you asking me for a sleepover, Dr. Masen?" I asked coyly.

"Yes, Bella," he said as he dropped to his knees in front of me. "I want to properly thank you for my 'surprise.'" He snaked his hand around my neck and thrust his tongue into my mouth. "Turnabout's fair play, Bella."

I put my hands on his chest and looked into his eyes. He smirked and handed me my tank top and cardigan. "As much as I hate to see you put these on, it would be prudent. This," he said as he squeezed my tit, "is for *my eyes* only."

I pulled my tank top over my head and my cardigan over my shoulders. Edward placed the key in my hand. "Keep it, beautiful," he said. The disembodied voice of Rhonda came over the intercom system, paging Edward to the trauma room. "I'll see you back at my place. I love you." He kissed me chastely and got up off the floor, holding his hands out for me. I grabbed my keys and phone, taking his hands. He unlocked the door and kissed me again. "I'll call if I'm going to be any later."

"Go, handsome," I said as I swatted his ass. He snarled and ran down the hall, his white coat trailing behind him like a cape. I smiled and headed back to the triage desk.

Rhonda was giggling at the triage desk. "I'm sorry, Ms. Bella. I tried to keep the attendings at bay for as long as I could," she chortled.

"Mission accomplished, Rhonda. Dr. Edward LOVED his surprise," I said with a wink. "See you later."

"Good job, Ms. Bella," she said, holding up her hand. I gave her a high five and skipped out of the ER. I whipped out my phone and called Rosalie.

"So? Did he like his cookies?" Rose greeted.

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"Very much," I grinned. "Rose, I think the lingerie you got me has magical powers. I turned into the sex goddess."

"Spill it, Swan," she shrieked.

"I will. Let me back out," I said as I started my car. I backed it out of the parking spot and headed toward my condo. "Okay, I'm back."

"So, what happened?"

"Well, I went up to the triage desk and saw his charge nurse. A lovely African American woman named Rhonda. I love her. She rocks. I told her that I was here for Edward to deliver cookies. She paged him to the desk and his head was buried in a chart. She swiped the chart from him and pointed to me. He squeaked and dragged me back to his office. He pulled me into his lap and we started making out, hot and heavy. Then I got bold."

"Did you go down on him?" Rose asked.

"Yep," I said with a wicked grin.

"And was he big?"

"The biggest I'd ever seen," I said, rolling my eyes back. "I could barely fit it in my mouth."

"Spit or swallow?" Rose questioned.

"Swallow. He was at work. It's not appropriate or professional to have jizz on your scrubs," I laughed. "Then again, it's not really appropriate to suck off your boyfriend at his place of work."

"Bella, he's the fucking boss. Who's he gonna fire? Himself?" Rose laughed.

"Last, but not least, he gave me a key to his place," I said quietly.

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"What? Like to keep? Like you can go over anytime?"

"Yep," I smiled. "I'm heading home to pack a bag and then I'm going to his place."

"Ooooh, an adult sleepover. Isn't that the third one you've had with the good doctor?"

"Yes. I sleep so well with him," I sighed. "I feel safe. Well for the most part."

"Explain that last statement," Rose demanded.

"The night he said he loved me, I had the worst nightmare. I dreamt that he was killed in a car crash and that he died. It was horrible. In my dream it was so real. His eyes were dead. No spark. No life. I lost it."

"Bella," Rose said sadly. "He is not going to go anywhere. You have to know that."

"I know. I'm still freaking out," I muttered.

"Don't. Just don't, Bella. If you ask for the moon, Edward would find a way to get it for you," Rose said.

"But, I've never had anyone who would do anything like that for me. Ever," I said. I pulled into my condo and got out of my car. "I'm here."

"I'll meet you by your door. We need to make sure that you pack the right thing," Rose said as she clicked off the phone. I walked to my condo and saw Rose by my door. I unlocked the door. She grabbed my hand and went into my bedroom. She dug into the lingerie bag and took out a pair of black satin shorty pajamas. I nodded and got my overnight bag. She threw my pajamas into the bag. "What are you wearing now?"

"Um, black lacy bra and my regular panties," I blushed.

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"Change into these," she said, flinging the matching boy shorts to the bra I was already wearing. "Are you shaved? Waxed?"

"Rose!"

"What? If he's going to go into the promised land, he better not have to battle a forest of hair," Rose shrugged.

"I'm shaved. I did it this morning," I said, pink creeping in my cheeks. "Who says he's going to go to the promised land?"

"Bella, you sucked him off. At work. He will want to reciprocate. TRUST ME!" Rose pleaded. "Go change, woman."

I growled and went into my bathroom. I stripped of my jeans and my plain black panties. I ripped off the tag and put my new, sexy underwear. I pulled up my jeans again and went back out into my bedroom. Rose had packed my bag and handed it to me. "I know you aren't going to fuck him tonight, but he won't know what hit him."

"What if he thinks I'm ugly, Rose?"

"Bella, he already thinks that the sun shines out of your ass. Go sex up Dr. McFuckme," Rose said, arching a perfect brow. She turned me around and pushed me out of my condo. She grabbed my keys, locking my door. She handed me my keys and dragged me down the stairs and to my car. "Have the most fucking wonderful orgasm at the whim of your doctor. My guess is that like his fingers, his tongue will be magical too."

I blushed and climbed into my SUV. I rolled down the window. "Wish me luck, Rose."

"I will, but you won't need it," she winked. I backed out and drove to Edward's home. I parked in the driveway, making sure that Edward could get his car into the garage. I picked up my bag, reaching for the key that Edward gave me. I took it out of my pocket and walked up the manicured walkway. I unlocked the

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front door and turned on the lights. I put my bag down by the stairs and closed the door. I walked around the living room, running my fingers across his piano. I saw down and plunked out "Twinkle, Twinkle Little Star," the one thing I remembered from piano lessons. I looked up at the music stand and saw some staff paper. Edward's handwriting was on the top.

I picked up the music that was obviously written by my doctor. The title was "Bella Berceuse." I put the music back on the stand, trying to make my brain remember the French I took when I was in high school. I finally remembered. "Bella's Lullaby," I whispered. "He's writing a song for me?"

I shook my head and got up from the piano. I went into the kitchen and grabbed a bottle of water. I sat down in the family room. I picked up the remote, turning on the television. I was watching a movie when I heard the garage door open. The door from the garage opened and Edward walked in. His scrubs were covered in blood.

*Oh, no.*

"Edward?" I said quietly.

He looked up at me and his eyes were filled with tears. He strode over to me and pulled me into his arms. His tears drenched my cardigan and I held him tightly. "What happened, baby?"

His hands fisted my sweater and wouldn't let go. "Edward," I crooned. "Tell me, sweetheart."

He pulled away and wiped his cheeks. "Car accident. Drunk driver. It was a kid who died. Fourteen years old. His injuries were so similar to mine," he said in a small, broken voice. "However, his brain was gone. Gray matter was everywhere. He didn't stand a chance."

"Oh, Edward," I cried, as I rubbed his cheeks. "I'm so sorry."



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"Bella, I think it was one of your students from your school," he whispered. "I'm violating HIPAA right now, but do you have a Taylor Schmink in your school?"

"Oh my god," I paled. "He was one of mine." Tears fell down my cheeks. He was one of the best and brightest students at Cherry Blossom. He was in my class after lunch. He was the one who asked if I was okay when I got my flowers. "No...NO!" I got up and began pacing. "He was a baby. How?"

"Some asshole went through a stop sign at 50 mph, hitting Taylor who was on his bike," Edward said. "Bella, you shouldn't know this."

I ran my fingers through my hair. "I know. Oh, God. My students. His friends. It's so unfair," I wailed. I looked at Edward and crawled into his lap, straddling his legs. "Please tell he was not in pain. That he went quickly."

"He probably was already dead when he hit the pavement. He felt nothing," Edward said as he cupped my face. "I'm so sorry, love."

I closed my eyes and leaned into his touch, tears pouring down my cheeks. "Monday's going to suck."

"It is," Edward whispered.

"Is this...?" I asked as I picked at his scrubs.

"Yeah. I didn't change. I needed to get out of there. I nearly lost my shit. I'll go shower," Edward said as he started to get up.

"No," I said as I tightened my hold on him. "No," I whispered. "Just let me hold you, please."

Edward relaxed and he wrapped his arms my waist. We stayed wrapped up in each other until my feet fell asleep and Edward's stomach growled. I pulled away and frowned. "Have you eaten?"

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"I threw it up," he muttered. "Seeing Taylor on that table brought back some traumatic memories."

"Edward, you need to eat," I said as I got off his lap. I tugged on his hand and hobbled to the kitchen.

"Why are you walking like a penguin?"

"Both of my feet are asleep. Sit," I said as I pointed to a stool by the island. I rooted around in Edward's fridge and took out the makings for sandwiches. I got out some plates and made each of us a turkey sandwich. I went into the pantry. *Oh that pantry. I love this pantry.* And I got some chips. I put a plate with a sandwich and chips in front of Edward. I went into the fridge and pulled out a bottle of water, handing it to him. I sat down in the stool next to him.

"Eat."

"You're bossy, you know that?" Edward sassed.

"And you are not in charge of your ER," I snarked.

"Ain't that the truth," he snorted. "Rhonda, God bless her, keeps me on my toes."

"I love her," I said as I took a bite of my sandwich. "She's the fucking shizz."

"The shizz?"

"The shizz. Got a problem that, Dr. Masen?" I said arching a brow.

"What the hell is 'the shizz?'" Edward asked. He popped in a chip and chewed it slowly.

"Awesome, great, phenomenal," I answered. "The kids say it all the time."

"Sounds a little too close to 'jizz,'" Edward snorted. "They're sneaky."

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"Yes, they are," I sighed. "Are you feeling better?"

"Yeah. Are you?" Edward asked as he brushed my hair behind my ear.

"I'll be fine. I'm worried about my students," I said quietly. "He was a popular kid. Very popular kid. He was the lead in the musical last year, in choir, student council and a straight A student. Like I said, Monday's going to suck."

"Are you going to go to the wake or funeral?"

"Probably. Or someone from Cherry Blossom. I'll most like be drafted as I had a previous relationship with the student and the parents," I said, a tear falling my cheek. "It's a god damn shame."

Edward pushed his empty plate away. He looked down at his scrubs. His nose scrunched and he plucked at his top. Edward growled and he pulled the scrub top off his body. He removed his ID tag and tossed it onto the counter. "I really need to shower. I feel just nasty. I need to burn my clothes."

"Now, I understand why you hate wearing a suit," I said. I picked up his shirt with two of my fingers and threw it in the garbage. "I would hate to do that to Armani."

"I'm a Gucci man," Edward said, arching a brow over his glasses.

"Sorry, Dr. Gucci," I said with a sardonic grin. "Go shower, dirty boy."

"I may need help with my back. Join me?" Edward asked with a pout.

"Um..."

"What happened to the sex goddess from my office?" Edward asked as he turned my stool around and standing between my legs. He traced his nose along my jaw and licked the sensitive skin behind my ear.

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"She's on vacation," I answered in a breathy tone. "I don't know where that came from."

"Me neither, but I fucking loved it," Edward growled as he bit down on my ear. "Knowing that you were going to be here when I got home was the only thing that kept me from losing my cool in the trauma room. Imagining your lips around my cock, swallowing everything that I gave you helped me maintain my composure."

I whimpered and my hands danced up his spine. He shivered and suckled on my neck. "Shower with me, my beautiful Bella," he whispered in my ear, licking the shell. "Please, baby. I need you to help me forget. Forget what I saw today."

*I can't. He'll think I'm fugly. I'm a lard ass. He won't want me after he sees me without clothes. He'll see the cellulite and the flabby boobs.*

Edward pulled away and his eyes were filled with desire. They were nearly black and his lips were swollen. He pouted his bottom lip and gave me the puppy dog look. It was pitiful. Saddest thing I ever saw. Also the most adorable thing. *Edward can convince you to donate your left eyeball with that look.* I drew my lip into my teeth, furrowing my brow. I felt my body be pulled closer to Edward's. His muscled chest contracting under my touch. He angled my legs and he picked me up from the stool. "Please?"

I latched onto his neck, not wanting to be dropped. "I can walk myself, Edward."

"I want to hold you, beautiful," he said held me tighter against his bare chest. I could see his muscles in his shoulders strain and it was hot. "Please, baby?"

*I am a sex goddess. I can do this. Edward will not freak. I hope.* I nodded and Edward grinned crookedly. He moved us through the house and up the stairs. I was amazed that he was able to carry my fat ass up the stairs without dropping me. He put me down in the bathroom in his room. He turned on the lights and lit a few candles. Once the candles were lit, the lights went back out. The

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bathroom was bathed in the warm light of the candles. I relaxed as Edward turned on the shower. "Bella? It works to take off your clothes to shower. Unless you want to shower in your jeans," Edward teased.

I looked at Edward and he was already naked, with a towel wrapped around his waist. He handed me a large fluffy towel and I held it to my chest. I blushed from head to toe. "Help me?" I asked quietly. "Please?" I pulled out my own puppy dog look and Edward walked to me.

Edward looked at me and his gaze was loving. "I won't hurt you, Bella. I promise."

"I know. I'm just afraid you won't like what you see," I said honestly. "I mean, you're perfect."

"Bella, you've seen my scars. I'm not perfect," he said as he pressed my hands to his belly and his back. "You also probably noticed a scar on my hip, too."

"I was looking elsewhere, Edward," I chided. "Like the supercock I just sucked off."

"Holy hell, women," Edward barked. "I do not have a supercock."

"Uh, yes, you do," I giggled. "Compared to what I've seen, you are fucking huge."

Edward ducked his head and I saw his ears redden. "Edward, you're going to be the first man to see me naked in nearly eight years besides my ex-husband. Even when I was with him, I never was comfortable."

Edward looked at me and took the towel I was holding, dropping it on the floor by the shower. He gently pushed off my cardigan. He reached for the hem of my tank top and pulled it over my head. His breath hitched as he looked at me in lacy bra and jeans. He reached for the button of my jeans and he released it. He slowly lowered my zipper and he knelt on the floor in front of me. His eyes never breaking my gaze. He eased my jeans over my hips. My body was

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getting hotter and I felt embarrassed. I stepped out of the jeans and Edward tossed them by the sink. His penetrating gaze left my eyes. He looked at my body and he stood up. "Bella, do you know what I see?" I shook my head and dropped my eyes to the floor. Edward captured my chin and forced me to look into his emerald eyes. "I see an incredibly beautiful woman. With a woman's curves. And fucking exquisite taste in lingerie. I'm so fucking lucky to have you. And that you're mine."

I tried to pull my face away from his intense stare. "Bella. You are gorgeous. I will spend the rest of my days telling you so," he said fervently. I searched his eyes. I gently cupped his face and held his gaze. I took a deep breath and released his face, reaching behind me. I unclasped my bra and let the offending garment fall to the ground. I reached my hips and shimmy my boy shorts off my body. Before I lose my nerve, I walked past Edward and into the large shower. Edward stares at me in disbelief and drops his towel, joining me in the glass encased room. I reached up and picked up Edward's body gel. I put some in my hands and pressed them to his chest, massaging his muscles. I wash his torso, shoulders, arms and back. I save the part that I want to wash for last: his cock. I gently grasp his cock and pump him a few times. He growls and stills my hand. "Bella," he said with a look in his eyes. "Please, baby. I'm hanging on by a thread here."

"Do you want me?" I asked. *And the sex goddess is back.*

"Very much," he breathed. "But, I want all of you. No barriers."

"Hmmm," I said with a smirk. "Do you have that number for me?"

"In my phone, baby," he purred.

"Good. Now, kneel down. I want to wash your hair, Dr. McFuckme," I said as I pushed him under the steamy spray. Edward leaned his head back and wet his hair. He knelt down in front of me and I rubbed my hands through his wet hair that was darkened by the water. I gently massaged his scalp, running my fingers through his silken strands of hair. I leaned his head back and rinsed out the shampoo.

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Edward leaned forward and he kissed my belly. His kisses move up my body and he grasped one of my nipples with his teeth and his tongue is swirling around the taut, hardened peak. I fist my fingers in his hair and pull his head back, forcefully. I bent down and captured his lips with mine. He growled and his arms wrapped around my body. Edward quickly stood up and spun us in the shower. I am now getting drenched by the water. Edward's hands are dancing along my body. I can feel it react to his finger, his hands, his warmth, his arousal. Very prominent arousal poking me in the stomach. Edward grabbed some shampoo and his fingers are knotted in my hair, massaging my own scalp. His mouth is moving with mine, tongues dancing erotically. Sensually, Edward rinses my hair with deft and expert fingers. He reached behind me and the water abruptly stopped. He pulled away and gave me his signature crooked smirk.

Edward reached outside the shower and handed me a towel. I wrapped it around my body. Edward did the same with his towel, attaching it around his waist. He pulled my arms and he wrapped my arms around his waist. His mouth crashed against mine and I moaned. Edward is walking backwards out of the shower and once we are clear of the shower. He bent down and slung me over his shoulder. "Edward!" I squealed.

Edward chuckled and he smacked my ass. *Ooooh, two can play this game.* I reached for his towel and removed it from his body. I smacked his bare behind with my hands. He shook his ass and flopped me on the bed. Edward pinned me with his body and his lips are attached to my neck. "You are so amazing, Bella Swan," he breathed against my skin. "I love you so much, beautiful girl." His lips moved further down my body. His teeth nibbled along my collarbones. His hand moved up the towel and I could feel it become looser. "My turn to make you come, my love," he cooed. "As I said in my office, turnabout's fair play."

I whimper and clamp my eyes shut. *No man has gone down on me. Okay, one did. The guy I dated in college, Mark. He was down there for like a minute before he stopped.*

"Bella?"

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"Hmmm?" I answer.

"What's wrong, love?" Edward asked as he stroked my cheekbones.

"Nothing," I squeak out.

"Bella."

"Fuck," I grumbled, hiding my face.

"Not yet, beautiful. What's wrong? You can tell me," Edward coaxed, pulling my hands away from my face.

"Um, no guy has been down on me," I blew out in one breath as I covered my face again.

"What? Are you serious?" Edward asked. "Oh, baby. Get ready."

"Edward," I said, holding his face above mine. "You don't have to. I understand if you don't."

"Bella, I want. No. I need to taste you," he growled lightly. "Please, love?"

"Edward," I whisper.

"Trust me, Bella," Edward said as he loosened the towel, pushing it away from my body. His lips met my skin and his fingers moved to my breasts. They gently cup my mounds and pinch my sensitive nipples. I moan and I could feel my body become aroused as he expertly played my body. My legs are moving, craving friction. Any kind of friction. Edward moved his lips to my breasts and he pulled one of my nipples into his teeth, biting down lightly. My back arched and I mewl in response. I feel Edward smile against my skin and his lips move down my body. He swirled his tongue around my navel and his hand moved to my leg. He gently rubbed my leg, spreading it. "Scoot back, baby." I move back further on the bed and lay back on the pillows. Edward settled between my legs and he looked up with me his crooked smirk. "Do you trust me,



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Bella?"

"Yes, Edward," I breathe.

"Good," he smiled. He spread my legs and he nibbled along my hipbones. His fingers lightly trace circles along my legs and I moan wantonly at his ministrations. His tongue followed the same path as his teeth and he was moving further south. He pressed a kiss to my inner thigh and I hear him inhale deeply. "Fuck, baby. You smell amazing," he cooed. Edward leaned in and he looked at me. His eyes captured mine. I was trembling in anticipation and in fear. "Trust me, Bella. I love you."

"I love you, too," I said, barely above a whisper. Edward moved closer to my sex and he pressed a chaste kiss to my body, just above where I wanted him to put his mouth on me. My hips bucked and Edward took that as a go. With a flat tongue, he ran it up and down my dripping slit. "Oh, God!"

Edward hummed against my skin and he flicked my clit with the tip of his tongue. "So sweet, my Bella. So good," he murmured. With utmost tenderness, he licked my clit. I was moaning and moving on the bed. I never could imagine it could feel like this. Edward slipped in one of his fingers into my entrance and he focused his attention to my clit. He drew it between his lips and nibbled lightly. With each lick, suck and nibble, I was getting closer. Dangerously close. I wanted nothing more than to explode around his cock, but that was not possible. Not yet. However, this is far more intimate than making love.

Edward added another finger and he was moving his fingers in my body, curling them in the most delightful way. My hips respond to his movements and I move my hands to his hair. It is still damp from our shower and I feel better knowing that I was clean while he was doing this. "Edward," I moaned. "Shit."

He chuckled against my skin and bit down more forcefully on my clit. I squeak and my back arches again. Edward added a third finger and he was pumping furiously in my body. My muscles were clenching his fingers and I knew I was getting closer. I wanted to come. So badly. Then, out of nowhere, I clamp

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down on Edward's fingers and I let out a scream as I rode out my orgasm. Edward's lips stayed attached to my clit and his hand still pumped in my body as returned to earth. I shuddered a few times and Edward removed his fingers from my body. He put them in his mouth and groaned. He crawled up and laid down on his side. "So?" he asked as he traced lazy circles on my stomach.

"Bella's not here right now. Please leave a message after the beep. Beep," I said as I covered myself with the towel.

"That good, huh?" Edward said smugly.

"Like I never imagined," I sighed. I rolled on my side and kissed his lips. They were still covered the remnants of my orgasm and it was so erotic to taste myself on his lips. "Hmmm, you taste better."

"We'll have to agree to disagree, beautiful," he said as he deepened our kiss. "You are the nectar of the gods. So fucking delicious."

"Can you do me a favor, Edward?" I asked.

"Anything, beautiful," he smiled.

"I'd like the moon. Can you get me the moon?" I teased, echoing the words that Rose said earlier.

"Let me work on that," Edward winked. "Really, what do you want?"

"Can you grab my bag from the foot of the stairs? I don't trust myself. My legs are like jelly," I blushed.

"A good orgasm will do that to you," Edward said confidently. He hopped up and strode, in all his naked glory, to the dresser and pulled out a pair of shorts. He slipped them on and dashed out of the bedroom. I sat up on the bed and waited for Edward to return. He came back a few moments later with my bag and a plate.

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"What's that?" I asked.

"It's my weakness. Whenever I have a rough day, I need to have chocolate cake," Edward said as he put my bag on the bed. "I swear, I gained like fifty pounds after Tanya's death. I lived on this shit."

I arched a brow and poked around in my bag. I pulled out my pajamas and the panties that Rose tossed in there. I stood up and put the panties and shorts on under the towel. I then slipped the shirt over my shoulders. I walked to the bathroom and gathered my clothes. I folded my jeans and tank top, placing them on my bag. "Edward, you are in wicked shape. I can't imagine you fifty pounds heavier," I said.

"I was a hot mess. I'm in wicked shape *now*. Running and working out helps that, you know," he said as he shoveled a forkful of cake into his mouth. "HMMMM, so good."

"Better than me?" I teased.

"Uh, no. You're better than any piece of chocolate cake," Edward purred seductively. "Perhaps that'll be my new weakness. Your delectable pussy."

"You know, for a doctor, you have a potty mouth," I said.

"Damn right," Edward said with a mouthful of cake. "Want some?" He circled the fork with a piece of cake on it. I opened my mouth and closed my eyes. My cake never came. Edward was pulling the fork out of his mouth.

"Hey!" I said as I smacked his chest. "Ass. I want some."

"What's the magic word, Ms. Swan?" Edward asked.

"Now," I retorted as I swiped the plate from him. I grabbed the fork and put a small piece of cake between my lips. "This is good. Where did you get it?"

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"This bakery in downtown Sherryville. Come on, Bella. Give me my cake," he pouted.

"What's the magic word, Dr. Masen?"

"Now," he snorted. I rolled my eyes and handed back his plate. Edward effectively shovels the rest of the cake into his mouth and he puts the plate on the nightstand. "Is this new, too?"

"Yep. Rose took me shopping," I blushed. "I got a lingerie makeover. I hope you approve."

"I loved what I've seen so far," Edward replied. "Though, I'd rather see you naked."

"Perv," I giggled.

"But I'm your perv," Edward said as he leaned back on the pillows. "Was tonight okay? Really?"

"It was better than okay, Edward," I said. "Thank you for making me feel special."

"You are incredibly special. And kind. And beautiful. And loving. And..."

"Okay, enough," I snorted.

"Well, tonight, before the accident, you made me feel incredibly special. It was such an unexpected surprise to see you at the hospital. Delivering cookies. They were delicious, by the way," Edward smiled.

"You can thank Rose. She made them. She just told me to bring them to you," I shrugged.

"Rose is fucking brilliant," Edward said as he kissed my lips. They tasted like me, chocolate cake and something that inherently Edward. "Oh, here's a name

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of ob/gyn." Edward reached into the pocket of his shorts and handed me a card. "She's the best. I've taken the liberty of making you an appointment on Monday afternoon at four. Is that okay?"

"That's fine," I smiled. "Thank you, Edward."

"You're welcome, beautiful girl," he smiled. Edward yawned and he shook his head. "So fucking sleepy."

"Then go to sleep, silly," I said, poking him in the sides.

"Sounds good to me," he said. He got up and pulled down the comforter. I settled between the sheets and Edward blew out the candles in the bathroom. He shut off the lights as he was walking back and crawled into his large, insanely comfortable bed. "Good night, my beautiful Bella. I love you."

"I love you, too," I said as I curled up against his chest. He kissed my head and we fell into a deep sleep, entangled in each other's embrace.

**A/N: Bella Swan...is finding her groove. Definitely. Leave me love. More love = faster updates; faster updates = more lemons. ;-)**

# The News

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*I cannot believe the response for this story. 81 reviews, so far. Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

*Rated M for future lemons.*

## Chapter 14: The News

"Awwwwww, they're so cute. I don't have the heart to wake them."

"Alice, Esme all but demanded that Edward and Bella come to brunch. Your mother is like you. What Esme wants, Esme gets, sugar."

"Look how he's holding her. Jas, let's go. We'll just say that Edward's sick or Bella's busy."

"I do not want to deal with the wrath of my future mother-in-law."

I felt a tug and blast of cold air. I curled closer to Edward and shivered.

"Jasper Dale Whitlock, if you value your balls, I suggest you put the blanket back on the bed," Edward growled.

"Get your lazy ass up, Masen. Mama Bear has been calling for the past hour," Jasper said as he smacked Edward.

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"That's it," Edward barked and he jumped out of bed. Jasper squeaked and I heard them tumble down the stairs. I blindly searched for the blanket and threw it over my head.

"Bella," Alice sang. She crawled into bed, taking the place that Edward just vacated. "Wakey, wakey time."

"Go away, Elf," I grumbled as I huddled in the covers. "You and your fiancé are fucking toast. I was very comfortable. And warm. And happy. But nooooooooo, you had to wake us up."

"Let the record show that I didn't want to. Jasper is the culprit who ripped off the blankets. I wonder if Edward knows that he's naked," Alice said.

I shot out of bed, glowering at my friend. "What?"

"Gotcha," Alice giggled. "He was wearing a pair of shorts."

We both jumped when we heard a loud crash and Jasper laughing. Alice grabbed my hand and we darted down the stairs. Edward and Jasper were dancing around the kitchen island. Edward's hair was sticking every which direction and Jasper was the picture of calm and cool.

"You are an ass, Whitlock," Edward growled.

"I know," Jasper laughed. He moved to the left and Edward countered. He turned around and ran out the back door, onto the patio. Edward followed him.

"Edward has a pool?" I asked.

"Yeah...fuck," Alice said as she ran out onto the patio. "Edward Anthony Masen do not throw Jasper into the..." *SPLASH!* "pool."

Both men broke the surface and continued their 'fight.' Alice started chucking pool toys at Edward's head and he turned around, hopping out of the water, throwing Alice into the pool. She shrieked and screamed about ruining her

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Louboutin heels. I fell onto a chaise, laughing hysterically. Three pairs of eyes looked at me.

*Fuck. Me.*

Jasper and Edward shared a look and they both hopped out of the pool. My eye widened and I got behind my chaise, using it as a shield. "No. You wouldn't dare," I squealed.

"I'm in a fucking suit, Bella. I'm fucking drenched," Jasper laughed. "You are going down, Swan."

I ran from behind my shield and Edward's strong, wet arms caught me. I wiggled and squirmed. "Let me go! Please!"

Edward laughed and he wrapped his arms around my waist, throwing me into the deep end of the pool. I sputtered and broke the surface, scowling at my 'loving' boyfriend. Edward snorted as Jasper shoved him back into the pool. He swam to me and popped up next to me. "Are you mad?"

"At least I'm not wearing a suit," I said, shooting a look at Jasper. Edward pulled me toward him and my legs wrapped around his waist. "I'd rather be wearing a bathing suit. I think I ruined my new pajamas."

"I'll get you new ones," Edward said.

Jasper was helping Alice out of the pool. She looked like a drowned rat. "You suck, Edward. I mean, these shoes are \$500! You so are buying me a new pair."

"It was worth it, Elf," Edward laughed. "This was NOT the way I wanted to wake up, that's for sure."

"We've been calling all morning," Jasper said as he took off his suit coat, wringing it out. "Yeah, this is done. Alice, we're going to have to go back to change, darling."



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"Um, duh," Alice said as she rolled her eyes. "Why didn't you pick up your phone?"

"I think it's still in my car, Alice," Edward said as he went to the stairs at the shallow end of the pool. He gracefully got out and went into a small shed, pulling out four towels. "Last night was rough."

"How so?" Alice pressed. "I heard a certain brunette brought you cookies."

"I did," I said as Edward helped me out of the pool, wrapping the towel around my shoulders.

"It happened after the cookies. I had a patient get brought in. He was hit by a drunk driver. Same injuries as mine, but his brain was already gone," Edward said. His eyes filled with grief and anguish. "He was a student at your school."

"Wait, I heard about this on the news last night," Jasper said. "Taylor something."

"Taylor Schmink?" Alice asked, looking at Edward. He nodded slightly, giving her sad look. "Oh no! No. No. NO!"

I walked over to Alice and embraced her. She bawled into my shoulder, fisting my towel. I rocked her gently, crooning in her ear. Edward came behind us and he wrapped his arms around both of us. "I'm sorry, Alice."

She sniffled and extricated herself from our embrace. "I don't think we'll be at brunch today," she said quietly. "Can you let Mom know?"

"Of course," Edward said.

"Do you have some more towels, Edward? I don't want to ruin my upholstery," Jasper asked. Edward got more towels and handed them to Jasper. He took his crying fiancée around to the front of the house. We heard the car doors slam and Jasper's car drive away.

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"She took that really hard," Edward whispered. His hair was drenched and his shorts were hanging low on his hips. His jade eyes looked at mine and he frowned. "Why?"

"Taylor was a prominent part of the choir program. She's had him for three years," I said. "I've known him for three years, but this was the first time I had him as a student." I shivered and drew my towel closer to my body. "You better call Esme. Mama Bear..."

"Will understand that none of us aren't coming to brunch," Edward said. "Come on. Your lips are turning blue. I don't want you to get hypothermia."

I nodded and followed Edward into his home. He tugged on my hand. We went up the stairs, back into his bedroom. "Do you want to shower again?" Edward asked.

"Nah," I shrugged. "I'll just get dressed." I walked to my bag, pulling out a pair of jeans and a t-shirt, along with a pair of white lacy panties and matching bra. *Ah, Rosalie.* Edward went into his dresser, pulling out a pair of loved jeans and navy blue v-necked t-shirt. "I can't believe you threw Jasper in the pool. In a suit."

"He had it coming," Edward snorted as he pulled down his shorts. He was still naked underneath. Even its flaccid form, his cock was a vision. He stepped into his jeans and buttoned the fly. *Holy crow! He's going commando!* I turned around quickly, blushing.

"I'm going to brush my teeth and get dressed," I said meekly. I held my clothes and toiletry bag, walking toward Edward's bathroom. I shut the door and took a few cleansing breaths. I took out my brush and ran it through my snarled hair. I removed my soaking wet pajamas and dried off using the same towel from last night. I put on my underwear, smiling at the effect they had on my body. My boobs never looked so good. I blushed and put on my jeans and red v-neck t-shirt. I quickly brushed my teeth. I put on some light makeup and scrunched my hair with some gel I had in my bag. I walked out of the bathroom and I heard Edward puttering in the kitchen. I left my bag upstairs and walked to the

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kitchen.

"Esme, I'm sorry. I truly am. However, Alice and Bella found out that one of their students was killed in a brutal car accident," Edward said as he was whisking some eggs. "They are extraordinarily upset." Edward smiled at me, putting the bowl on the counter. He reached his hand out. I linked my fingers with his, falling into his arms. "I will, Esme. She'll appreciate it. I love you, too. Have a good day," Edward said. He hung up the phone. "We're off the hook. She was pissed, but understanding about why we couldn't make it."

"You could have gone, Edward," I said as I wrapped my arms around his waist.

"I want to go with you, my beautiful girl. Besides, this frees up our afternoon," Edward said as he kissed the top of my head. "What do you want to do?"

"Hmmm," I said as I looked up at Edward. His eyes were dancing in the warm sunlight. "We could go to the arboretum. Or to the community band shell. They put on free concerts on Sunday afternoons."

"Sold," Edward said as he kissed my nose. "Let's eat some breakfast and then we'll do both."

"We need to swing by my place if we're going to the arboretum. I need to grab some sneakers and a brace if we're going to do any extended walking."

"I could just carry you," Edward said as he nuzzled my neck.

"You'll throw out your back or something. No, Dr. Masen," I replied, pinching his sides.

"What time does the concert start?"

"About two. I think?" I said.

Edward looked at his watch and smirked. "That gives us two hours before we absolutely *need* to go. I can think of a few things I want to do in that time. All

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of them involve me making you feel good."

"You are insatiable, Dr. Masen," I laughed breathily.

"Only for you, my beautiful girl," he said as his lips gently brushed mine. My stomach growled. "However, we need to eat first. I'm famished."

Edward released me and picked up the bowl of eggs. He whisked them a few more times and took out a large pan. He put some olive oil into it and started the burner. He made us two of the fluffiest omelets that I'd ever eaten. After we finished our breakfast, Edward went upstairs to get my bag. He came back down, his brow furrowed. "Your pajamas are still soaked. I laid them on the tub. Keep them here for when you spend the night," he winked.

"Oh, is this going to be regular occurrence?" I teased.

"I hope so, my beautiful girl. I'm loving having you in my arms at night," Edward said quietly. "It feels so right."

I blushed, drawing my lip into my bottom teeth. Edward reached up and cupped my cheek. His thumb moved to my lip and released it from my teeth. Electricity flew between us and I caught my breath. Edward smiled his lopsided smirk. "You feel, too. Don't you?"

"Yes," I breathed. "Have you ever...?"

"Not before you, my Bella," he said as he closed the gap between us. "I've never felt this with anybody I've been with. Have you?"

"No," I said, looking up into his green eyes. "Never. Only you."

Edward leaned down but was stopped by the abrupt shrill of my cell phone. We jumped apart. I grumbled and pulled my phone out of my bag. It was Mrs. Cope. "Hello?"

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"Oh, Bella. I'm so sorry to disturb you on this lovely Sunday afternoon," she said quickly. "However, we've received some disturbing news. Are you available to meet with your team and few others this afternoon at Cherry Blossom?"

"I have plans, Mrs. Cope. But I'll be there," I sighed. "What time?"

"1:30. Thank you, Bella. I'll see you later," she said.

I hung up the phone and frowned. "Damn it."

"You have a meeting? On Sunday?" Edward asked.

I nodded and glowered. "I'm assuming it's about Taylor. I didn't want to say anything, indicating that I knew, but it has to be. I'm not sure how long it'll take."

"It's okay, Bella. We can meet up after your meeting," Edward said, his voice sounding sad.

"Why don't you come? Obviously not to the meet, but you can hang out in my classroom until we're done," I suggested. Edward's eyes lit up and he nodded emphatically. I giggled and tugged on his hand. We walked past his piano room. I stopped him. I looked up at him, through my lashes. "When I came in here, Edward, I saw this," I said as I pulled him to his piano. "What is this?" I handed him the music, 'Bella Berceuse.'

Edward gulped and blushed. "Well, um," he floundered. "You know that the song you asked me about when you came over to plan the bachelor/bachelorette party? This is it."

"Play it for me," I asked quietly. "Please?"

Edward took the music and sat down on the piano bench. "Be kind, baby," he said timidly. I ran my fingers through his soft hair and gave him an encouraging kiss. He sighed against my mouth, turning on the piano bench. His

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long graceful fingers rested on the ivory keys. He ran them up and down the keys in a quick warm up. He looked at me sheepishly and began the sweet lullaby. It was soft, romantic and perfect. The beginning was melancholy filled with minor chords. As the song progressed, the chords took on a more optimistic sound and there was a buoyancy in his music. I sat down next to him and I felt my eyes tear up. I looked at Edward and his eyes were closed, lost in the music. The song grew and swelled in a dramatic crescendo. Then it faded away and one lone note held poignantly in the air. Edward removed his hands and the single note rang through his home. His eyes fluttered open and he turned to me. "It's you, Bella. How I imagined you. How I hoped you would be," he whispered. He gently rubbed my cheeks. They were damp with tears. "I hope those are happy tears."

"They are," I said as I threw my arms around his neck. "That was beautiful, Edward. The most beautiful thing I've ever heard. No one has ever done anything like that for me."

"You know what, my beautiful?" Edward asked.

"What?"

"You are so much more than I had imagined, or hoped could be. Each day I am graced with your presence, I fall more and more in love with you," Edward whispered.

"Oh my God," I moaned into his chest. I looked at him and saw his eyes. They were filled with such adoration and devotion. "I love you, so much, Edward. My heart feels like it will burst with what I feel for you. Never in my life have I felt anything like this. Ever."

Edward smiled and leaned his forehead against mine. "You have no idea what that means to me, Bella. I hope you know that you are stuck with me. For as long as you'll have me."

"Forever," I whispered.

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"Always," he replied.

We sat on the piano bench like that for a few minutes, until my phone rang again. It pained me to get up and answer it. It was Rosalie. She was calling to see if I was going to meeting. I said that I was and I would see her there. After I hung up, I noticed it was pretty late. "Edward, we have to go."

"Got it, beautiful," he smiled as he got up from the piano bench, closing the lid over the keys. "Do you want to drive?"

"Sure," I said. I took out my car keys, slipping Edward's home key onto the key ring. I then opened the door. Edward picked up my bag and we walked to my beast. I unlocked the doors. Edward tossed my bag in the back seat and clambered into the passenger side. He slipped off his glasses and put on his sunglasses. I reached up into the compartment and took out my own shades. I started the car and backed it out of the driveway and drove the short distance to Cherry Blossom Middle School. In the parking lot, I saw Emmett's car, Jacob's truck, and a few other cars. I parked next to Alice and turned off the car. I went into my workbag and slipped out my keys. I handed them to Edward. "I'm in room 126. I have some quizzes if you are feeling ambitious," I teased.

"There's a reason I'm a doctor. I can't spell for shit and the whole sentence structure thing is a conundrum," Edward snorted.

"Though you do have great vocabulary skills," I smirked. "Come on, Dr. Masen." He twined his fingers with mine and we walked into my school. Edward asked which way to go. I pointed him the right direction and he put my keys in his pocket, lanyard hanging out of his pocket. Like I wore on a daily basis. I giggled and walked into the office. Maryann was in there and she was crying. I asked where we were meeting and she told me in the large conference room. I walked to the conference room and sat down next to Jake. "Hi, Jake."

"Hi, Bella. How are you doing?" he asked quietly.

"Confused," I lied. "Do you know what's going on?"

## A Fresh Start

"No. Mrs. Cope will be in a moment," Jake said.

"How are you feeling?"

"Tired, but fine," Jake sighed. "The meds are kicking my butt, but what can you do? I need to take them to stay healthy."

I laid my hand on Jake's shoulder, squeezing tightly. Mrs. Cope breezed in as I was offering comfort to my friend. Her face was pink and filled with tears. She closed the door and sat down at the head of the table. She was wearing a pair of sweats and her normally perfected hair was in a sloppy bun. "I bet you're all wondering why you're here on a Sunday afternoon."

We all nodded. Though, I knew. My boyfriend tried to save the boy's life. Unsuccessfully.

"I received some disturbing news late last night. Annabel and Richard Schmink called to notify me that their son, Taylor, was killed in a tragic car accident. He was riding his bike home from a friend's house when a drunk driver ran through a stop sign and hit him at nearly 50 mph. The doctors tried to revive him, but failed. He was dead on arrival," Mrs. Cope said quietly. "They had the head of emergency medicine working on him for an hour and it was fruitless."

I caught Alice's eyes and she nodded imperceptibly. I turned my attention back to Mrs. Cope. "Have arrangements been made?" I asked.

"Yes. The wake is on Tuesday and funeral is on Wednesday. Undoubtedly, tomorrow and the next few days will be very difficult. I've contacted the district office and they are sending over all of the counselors from the other buildings for the students and staff, if they need it. I know that each of you worked with Taylor. I received approval from the district office to send four of you to the funeral. However, Ms. Cullen and Ms. Swan, you've been personally requested to be there." Alice and I nodded. "Let me know who is going be attending the funeral by tomorrow, alright? I'm sorry, folks."



## A Fresh Start

Mrs. Cope gave us a sad smile and got up from the chair. She sniffled as she left the room. We all sat in stunned silence.

"I need to get out of this room," Jake said. "It's insanely claustrophobic."

"Come on, let's go to my room and we can chat there," I suggested. "I need to see the sunlight." We got up and walked to my room. Edward was sitting at my desk, thumbing through my plan book. The rest of the teachers who were requested followed me.

"Do you need me to go?" Edward asked.

"No. You're fine. We just needed to get out of the conference room," I answered.

"It was stifling," Emmett said soberly. "You worked on him. Mrs. Cope said that the head of emergency medicine worked on him."

"I really can't say anything," Edward whispered. "It would break the law and I'd lose my license."

"You don't have to say if you worked on him or not, but can you at least tell us if he was in pain?" asked Angela.

"No. He felt no pain," Edward said sadly. He looked down at my plan book and doodled in the corner. I walked over to him and sat in a chair next to my desk. I put my hand on his knee, giving it a reassuring squeeze.

"Okay, Alice and I have to go to the funeral. Who else would like to go?" I asked, stepping into my 'team leader' mode.

"I would," Chris, one of our PE teachers said. "He was on the basketball and volleyball team with me. He was an amazing player."

I reached into my desk and pulled out a sheet of paper, jotting down Chris's name, in addition to mine and Alice's. "Anyone else?"

## A Fresh Start

"Is administration going to go?" Alice asked.

"Good question," I said, scribbling that down on the paper. "It would be nice to have an administrator present."

"I'd like to go," Angela mumbled. "I had Taylor in art club and he did a lot of work on the sets for the musical last year."

"Excellent," I smiled. "Now, this should go without saying, but we need to be as professional as possible tomorrow. The kids are going to be reeling at the loss of their classmate. Send a student who is having difficulties to the office and they'll direct them to the counselors. If the students feel more comfortable talking to you, do it during your plan or lunch. Don't neglect your responsibilities as a teacher to the rest of the class. Tomorrow is going to suck. I mean really suck. Rely on your colleagues if you can't handle it. The kids are suffering a loss as are we. Before you go, write down your plan periods. If someone is struggling, one of us can step in to assist their class. Okay?"

I put my pencil down and we all jotted down our plan periods for 'emotional relief.' "Are there any questions?" My colleagues and friends shook their heads no and left my room. Alice stayed behind and hopped up on my desk. "You okay, Elf?"

"Can I take a sick day tomorrow?" she mumbled.

"Alice, this is an unbearable tragedy. I know that Taylor was one of your best students, but we need to be strong. We can't fall apart," I said, giving her a hug.

She returned my embrace and smiled sadly. "You know, Bella, you rock at this administrator crap."

"Um, random," I giggled.

"Bella, I agree. You handled a very delicate situation with grace and poise," Edward chimed in behind me. "I know you got your masters in curriculum and instruction, but have you considered getting it in school administration?"

## A Fresh Start

"I started a program, but didn't finish," I replied. "What does this have to do with the poor dead student?"

"Bella, you commanded the room. Took control," Alice said. "How many classes do you have left?"

"Just my practicum. I've already taken the comps and the state test," I said, arching a brow.

"Did you pass?" Edward asked, rubbing my back.

"What do you think?" I sassed.

"With flying colors," Edward snarked back.

"Damn straight, Masen," I snorted. "I can't afford to take classes right now. I just don't have the money. At all. I'm barely scraping by."

"I can help," Edward offered. "I'd be happy to."

"Bella you have to. Mrs. Cope is retiring at the end of this year. You would be awesome in her position! Come on! Go for it," Alice said.

"Okay, both of you, tag teaming it is a little scary," I said backing up. Edward arched a brow and crossed his arms across his chest. Alice did the same. "Really fucking scary. You look the same. Except, not."

"Bells, that makes no sense," Alice said with a wave of the hand.

"I know. It didn't make sense when I thought it. Damn," I giggled. I looked back at them and took a deep breath. "I'll think about it. I'll contact my old advisor and see what I can do."

"Excellent," Edward smiled. "My baby is all growned up," he said, wiping a tear from his eye.

## A Fresh Start

"You are a dork. Do you want to walk home?"

"Ah, no. I'll behave," Edward laughed. "Come on beautiful. Let's enjoy the rest of this gorgeous day before your sucky day tomorrow."

xx AFS xx

As predicted, Monday was horrendous. If it was capable of going wrong, it did. The kids were a mess as were the teachers. In all of m classes, half of them were empty because the students were seeing the counselors. If they weren't talking to the counselors, they were talking to the teachers. I barely ate lunch or had any spare plan time. As I was getting ready for my last class of the day, my phone vibrated in my desk.

*I'm thinking about you, my beautiful, loving girl. I know today is rough. However, remember that I love you. - Edward*

*Also, don't forget your appointment at four. I sent you an email with directions. xoxo - Edward*

I smiled and blushed. I quickly tapped out a reply. *Thank you, baby. I appreciate your support. I'm going to need it. Also, thanks for the reminder for my appointment. I'm soooooo looking forward to that. Love you, Edward. - Bella*

*A small amount of discomfort will equal hours upon hours of pleasure, baby. Remember that. - Edward*

*Are you sexting me? - Bella*

*Do you want me to take a picture of my cock and send it to you, Bella? ;) - Edward*

*Um, I'm at school. That's very inappropriate, Dr. Masen - Bella*

*Says the woman who gave me a blow job in my office - Edward*

## A Fresh Start

*Bite me - Bella*

*Real mature, Swan. Go teach some young impressionable teenagers. Love you lots! - Edward*

*Love you, too, Dr. McFuckme - Bella*

I slipped my phone back in my desk drawer and turned to my students. Our class went by quickly and class was dismissed at the end of the day. After school, I checked my email and saw the directions to the Garrett Clinic in nearby Nottingbrook. My doctor's name was Dr. Stephenie Forks. I also saw a response to my query about my practicum. I could still take the class and sign up now. However, I needed to do so before the end of the week to ensure I got into the class. I would have to do some number crunching, but it might just work.

I left school and drove the half hour to Nottingbrook. I pulled into the parking lot of the Garrett Clinic. I walked in and spoke with the receptionist. She handed me out forms to fill out and asked for my insurance card. After a few minutes, a young nurse came out and led me to the examination room. She asked me a few questions and then instructed me to take off all of my clothes, putting on a gown. She left and I did as she asked. I sat back down on the table, waiting for Dr. Forks.

A timid knock came through the small room and a petite woman with a chin-length bob came in. She was wearing a pair of pink doctor's scrubs and a lab coat. "Good afternoon, Ms. Swan. I'm Dr. Forks. Welcome," she said with a friendly smile. "I see that you want to be on birth control and are here for your yearly exam."

"Yeah," I said, blushing.

"Well before I do the examination, I'm going to ask you a few questions, alright?" Dr. Forks asks. I nod. She prattles off questions about my sexual history, medical history and overall health. We then discuss options for birth control. We decide on Depo-Provera. The only sucky thing is that I need to

## A Fresh Start

come in every three months to get it done. I asked if I knew a doctor if he could do it. She asked if it was Dr. Masen and I nodded. She floundered but nodded that he could do it. She'd administer my first shot, but he could do the remainder. Dr. Forks then performed my internal and pelvic exam. I hated that. Immensely. However, she said everything looked good.

*Oh goody. It's not every day a woman looks up your hoo ha. Blech!*

Dr. Forks instructed me to get dressed and she would administer my shot. Thankfully I had just had my period recently. It would become effective immediately. I dressed and she returned with a needle. I shuddered. I hate fucking needles. I turned away as she injected me with the medication and I blanched. I took a few breaths. Dr. Forks patted my shoulder, telling me that I did fine. She handed me three small containers. They were the rest of my shots. Dr. Masen can administer them as prescribed. I smiled and took my goods.

I left the office and called Edward. "Dr. Masen," he said tersely.

"Edward? Is everything alright?" I asked.

"Hey baby. Sorry about the rude greeting. My phone has been ringing off the fucking hook. The media was all over the place because of Taylor's accident and I've been the face of the hospital. I hate it," he snarled. "How was your day?"

"As I predicted," I sighed. "I never saw so many tears and crying children than I did today."

"I can imagine," Edward replied. "How was your doctor's appointment?"

"Fan-fucking-tastic," I growled. "Being a woman just blows."

"Okay," Edward said slowly. "Explain."

"All you have to do is turn your head to left and cough. Me, women, have to be poked and prodded and ARGH!" I grumbled.

## A Fresh Start

"Bella, I hate to burst your bubble, but being a man ain't that easy either. We have to deal with prostate cancer. It's a given for all men. Regardless. Male pattern baldness. Back hair. Beer bellies," Edward listed off.

"You don't have any of those," I argued.

"That's because I just saw my aesthetician," Edward said with an effeminate voice. "He waxed my back."

"You are an ass," I giggled. "You do not have a hairy back."

"No, I don't. My dad, yeesh! He was an ape. Thank goodness I got the Platt genes when it came to hair," Edward shuddered.

"Platt?"

"That was my mom's and Esme's maiden name," Edward explained. "So, are you coming over or am I heading to your place?"

"Who said we're doing either?" I teased.

"Bella," Edward whined.

"You know, for a successful, brilliant doctor, you're awfully whiney," I giggled. "You act like my eighth graders."

"I've finally found the person I want to be with forever and she's giving me shit," he mumbled.

"I have to do some grading and adjustments to plans, so can you come to my place?" I asked. "Dr. Whine."

"Okay," he sighed. "I'll be there in an hour."

"See you then. Love you," I smiled.

## A Fresh Start

"Love you, too," he replied. I hung up the phone and drove back to my condo. I picked up my work bag and prescription and walked to my place. I unlocked the door, placing my keys on the kitchen table. As I waited for Edward, I took out some food. I defrosted chili for dinner and I changed into something more comfortable. I was tired of holding up my pants. I really needed to update my wardrobe with clothes that fit.

I sat down in my family room and took out my plan book and computer. I needed to change my lessons for Wednesday as I was going to be out for the funeral of Taylor. I created my lessons and wrote on my sub plans. I was nearly done when my intercom buzzed. I rang them up and opened my door. It was Edward. I think. I walked into the kitchen and worked on my chili. The door opened up more and I called out that I was in the kitchen. However, the person who I thought was at my door did not walk into my kitchen.

"You've been a very slutty girl, Bella."

"Michael," I seethed. "You're not supposed to be here." I reached for my phone but Mike swatted my hand away. "What the fuck is wrong with you? Shouldn't you be home with your fiancée?"

"She's so fucking huge. I can't stand the sight of her," Mike said, his eyes cold and detached. "You, my dear, have definitely improved. I like. I like a lot." Mike ran his finger across my cheek and down between my breasts.

"Get out," I snarled. I heard my intercom buzz. *Edward. Please let him get up here.*

"I don't want to get out. I realize that I made a huge mistake, Bella. I never stopped loving you," Mike said as he pressed kisses to my cheeks and down my jaw. "Please say you'll take me back."

"No," I said. Mike growled and he shoved me against the counter. "Leave, Michael. Please. I promise I won't call the cops if you leave now."



## A Fresh Start

"Why would you call the cops, Isabella?" Mike said, his eyes icing over. His hand wrapped around my neck and I whimpered. "Have I done something to offend you?"

"You're having me followed, Michael. That shit ain't right," I whispered. Mike's hold on my neck got tighter. "Please." He slammed my head against the cabinet and it hurt. I cried out and tried to push him away. I faintly heard a metallic sound in my lock. *Edward, please! Help me!*

Mike snarled and he threw me down on the floor, straddling my waist. He pushed me down, slamming my head on the kitchen floor. "You fucking slut. You're not worth anything," Mike fumed. "I pitied you when I proposed. You'll never find anybody who wants you."

"You're wrong, fucker," Edward yelled. He grabbed Mike by the neck and pounded him with his fists. I heard the distinct sound of sirens and Edward was snarling over Mike, pinning him to the kitchen floor. Rose came in with two policemen. Edward got up from Mike's lap and the police hauled him away.

I watched this all transpire and my head swooned. I was getting dizzy. I stumbled into the family room. My vision was blurry and I vaguely remembered Edward speaking to the cops. "Edward," I whimpered and I fell. Blackness consumed me.

**A/N: Must remind you, this is a work of fiction. While the whole 'divorcee' thing is based on my life and certain aspect of Bella's character is me, this never happened to me. My imagination just likes to run wild. Leave me love. Please :-)**

# The Funeral

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 15: The Funeral

"Bella! Open your eyes for me, baby," Edward frantic voice permeated my subconscious. "Please, baby."

I felt a rock in the middle of my chest. I grimaced and curled up. "Response to painful stimuli, Dr. Masen." Edward growled and he brushed my hair off my face.

"Bella, please. I need to see those beautiful brown eyes. Open your eyes for me," Edward crooned in my ear. My eyelids fluttered. "Come on, sweetheart." I blinked my eyes but then clamped them shut.

"Too bright," I croaked. I heard a shuffle and the warmth I felt on my body disappeared.

"Try now, Bella," Edward whispered. I opened my eyes and it was darker. I relaxed and sighed deeply. "Bella, Dr. Gerandy is going to examine you."

"No, you," I whimpered.

## A Fresh Start

"I can't. You're family. I can't be impartial. I'll stay with you, okay?" Edward said as he kissed my head. Oh my pounding, ringing head.

*Wait, did he just call me family?*

"I love you, my beautiful girl," Edward whispered in a broken voice.

I looked at Dr. Gerandy. He was an older gentleman with kind hazel eyes and an impish grin. "Hello, Bella. How are you feeling?"

"Tired. Nauseous. Dizzy. My head killing me," I said quietly. Dr. Gerandy shone a pen light in my eyes and made note of something in my chart. He then picked up my hands, instructing me to squeeze. I did. He told me to squeeze harder. I did, minutely. Dr. Gerandy then felt around the back of my head. I winced when he hit a particularly tender spot. Edward's hand reached for mine and laced through my fingers.

"Rhonda, I want a CT scan," Dr. Gerandy said brusquely. "Also, some mild pain killers. Are you allergic to narcotics, Bella?"

"Not allergic. They make me stoned," I answered sleepily.

"Give her darvocet, Rhonda. Thank you," Dr. Gerandy said. Rhonda wrote down his orders on my chart and scurried out of the room after she gave me a reassuring smile. "Will you be alright with Dr. Masen?"

"I think I can manage," I joked lightly. "Thanks."

Dr. Gerandy left after patting my hand. As soon as he left, I looked at Edward. My eyes wild. "What happened?"

"What do you remember?" Edward asked as he took my hands. "Be honest, love."

"Coming home from work and then here," I said, shaking my head, trying to rattle the cobwebs out. "Edward, I'm so confused."

## A Fresh Start

Edward gingerly took me into his arms and held me tightly. "I know, Bella."

"Please, tell me what happened," I wailed into his chest.

"I buzzed up to your place and you didn't answer. I tried again with the same result. I then buzzed Rose and she let me into the condo. She met me at the stairs with a spare set of your keys. We opened your door and I found your ex-husband straddling your waist and pounding your head against the kitchen floor," Edward said, his emerald eyes filling with tears. Then his face turned in a murderous glare. "I was ready to kill him, Bella. It took all of my restraint to not pummel his face with my fists. I held him down until the cops showed up."

"What happened with Mike?" I asked as I put my hand on Edward's face. His angry glare softened and he looked into my eyes. He kissed the palm of my hand, holding it to his face.

"He's under arrest. For violating the order of protection and for attacking you," Edward replied.

"Do I need to talk to the cops?"

"Yeah. You need to press charges," Edward said. "I was so afraid, my Bella. Each time I saw him push you into the floor, my heart broke."

"I'm fine, Edward," I said.

"No, you're not. Based on what I saw and your symptoms, you have moderate concussion. You're off work for the next week," Edward said sternly.

"What? I can't! I don't have plans made up. I only have plans for Wednesday," I said, trying to get up.

"Bella, you're covered. Rose will do your plans. She already said she would," Edward said as he kept me on the gurney. "She's also called Mrs. Cope and arranged for your sub. You're fine."

## A Fresh Start

"But..."

"Also, you're not going back to your condo until you get your locks changed. You're staying with me," Edward said, daring me to defy him.

"But, I have no clothes. I have the funeral on Wednesday," I listed.

"When you're released, we'll go back to your place and get you some clothes. I'll be attending the funeral with you on Wednesday. You won't be able to drive. The risk of seizure is minute, but it's there. I would hate for you to go into a seizure while driving and..." he trailed.

"Okay, Edward," I said, not wanting to argue. I was too tired and in too much pain to argue.

"Here you go, Ms. Bella," Rhonda said as she returned with two pills and a bottle of water. I took them and sipped the water. It made my stomach turn. I smiled weakly at her and curled on my side.

Edward gently caressed my cheeks. He stared into my eyes and he held my hand as his eyes filled with anguish and pain. "I can't lose you, Bella. I just can't. I thought the worst," he whispered.

"Dr. Masen? I'm here to take Ms. Swan to get her CT scan," a pretty nurse said.

"Thanks, Laurie," Edward said. "I'm going with her."

"Sure, Dr. Masen." She unlocked my gurney and 'drove me' down the hallway. Edward laced his fingers with mine and walked beside my gurney. We got into the CT suite and Edward helped me into the machine. "Are you pregnant, Ms. Swan?"

"No," I blushed.

"Okay. Just lay back and this'll be over in a jiffy," Laurie smiled. "Dr. Masen, you need to stand behind the protection screen."

## A Fresh Start

"Fine," he grumbled. He kissed my lips lightly. "Love you, Bella."

"Love you, too," I whispered against his lips. He squeezed my hip and went into the small room with Laurie. Ten minutes later, the scan was done and I was wheeled back to my room. I was also feeling my darvocet. My eyes were drooping and the overall stone feeling was consuming me. I grinned lazily at Edward. "You know what, Dr. Masen?"

"Oh lord. Stoned Bella is back," he chuckled.

"Am not," I slurred. "Okay, maybe a little. Back to what I wanted to say. You're fucking gorgeous."

Edward blushed and laughed. "Thank you, beautiful. How's your head?"

I ran my fingers through my hair. "It's there," I giggled. "But it hurts."

"I know, love," Edward sighed. "I'll take you home soon. Then you can rest."

"Will you wear a nurse's uniform? Can I get a sponge bath?" I crooned.

"Sorry, baby. I don't have the ass for the uniform, but I'm more than happy to give you a sponge bath," he grinned. The door opened and Dr. Gerandy came back. "How is she?"

"Moderate concussion. I was concerned about a possible skull fracture, but you've got a hard head, Ms. Swan," Dr. Gerandy said. "Unfortunately, you will need to take it easy for the next couple of days. I'm certain Dr. Masen won't let you go to work until next week. I concur."

"Dr. Mc..." I started. Edward looked at me, arching a brow. "Masen told me as such."

"Good. Since you're under the care of one of the best in country, I'm okay with releasing you. Do you have any questions, Ms. Swan?" Dr. Gerandy asked.

## A Fresh Start

I shook my head and leaned back on the gurney, wincing as the back of my head hit the pillow. I closed my eyes and heard Edward and Dr. Gerandy speak in hushed tones. I eventually drifted. "Bella? Wake up, love," Edward soothed. "You need to get into the wheel chair."

I cracked my eyes opened and got out of the gurney. I felt dizzy and Edward wrapped his arms around my waist, steadying my jittery body. He all but carried me to the wheel chair and we left the emergency room. His silver Volvo was in the ambulance bay. He helped me into the backseat, laying me on the soft leather upholstery. He climbed into the driver's side and drove back to his home. I think. I don't remember as I was dead to the world. I woke up around two in the morning in Edward's bedroom. I was disoriented and confused. Plus my stomach was churning, not in a good way.

I stumbled out of Edward's bed and crawled to the bathroom, barely making it to the toilet to throw up. I heaved until I had nothing left. Edward came into the bathroom with a cold washcloth. I leaned against the wall, entirely spent.

"You okay?" Edward asked. I shook my head. He put the washcloth on my forehead and he felt my cheeks. "No fever. How's your head?"

"It's pounding," I whispered, grimacing at the pain I felt. "Make it stop."

"I'm hesitant to give you anything stronger," Edward sighed. "You shouldn't be sleeping with a head injury. You could lapse into a coma. I have some more darvocet from Dr. Gerandy. Would you like some of that?"

"Yeah. And something for my stomach. It's doing flip flops, triple axels, and karate kicks," I joked weakly.

"Okay, love. Stay there," he said as he caressed my cheek. I heard him get up and leave the bathroom. I curled up on the small rug by the toilet, wanting nothing more than the pain to stop. A few moments later, Edward returned with a bottle of Gatorade and three pills. I eyed them warily. "Two darvocet and a reglan. It's an anti-nausea medication."

## A Fresh Start

I took the Gatorade and tossed the pills down my throat. I hesitantly sipped the Gatorade, swallowing the three tablets. I struggled to get up and Edward assisted me. I walked slowly out of the bathroom with Edward's assistance. He laid me on the bed, covering me with a blanket. As soon as my head hit the pillow, I was out.

xx AFS xx

I woke up late the next morning. I was in Edward's comfortable bed and I was alone. I felt on his side and it was cold. He probably had to go to work. I flopped back onto the bed and curled around his pillow. I was dozing when I heard the door open. I hummed and hugged the pillow tighter to my chest.

"Wake up, lazybones," Edward said.

I groaned and burrowed deeper into the pillows. Edward gently removed his pillow from my hands, taking its place. *Much better*. He wrapped one of his arms around my waist the other moved to my head. He gently ran his fingers over my huge lump on the back of my skull. I winced and gripped his waist tighter. "Sorry, baby. How are you feeling?"

"Blah," I answered. "I feel blah."

"Descriptive, Bella," Edward said dryly. "You need to give me more than that."

"My head is hurting, but not as badly as last night or rather this morning. I'm hungry but I am hesitant to eat anything. I'm a little dizzy and disoriented."

"Not as promising as I'd hoped. I don't like the dizzy comment," Edward said, frowning. "Squeeze my fingers. I want to test your neurologic function."

"Edward," I groaned.

"Humor me. Squeeze my damn fingers," Edward said, arching a brow. He held out his hand and took the two proffered fingers in my hand, squeezing them tightly. "Okay, sit up." I did slowly and Edward took out a penlight, checking



## A Fresh Start

my vision. "Follow my fingers with your eyes." I followed his fingers, but got woozy while he was doing it. My stomach turned again and scrambled to the bathroom, slamming the door shut. I fell to my knees and dry heaved into the toilet. I clutched my stomach and bawled against the smooth, cold porcelain of the toilet. I hadn't realized it, but Edward came into the bathroom and placed a cool washcloth to my neck.

"When will I feel better?" I sobbed. "I hate this!"

"Bella," Edward croaked as he pulled me into his lap. The sudden movement caused my stomach to roll. He held me against his chest, stroking my back with slow, languorous strokes. "You'll feel better soon. Your brain was essentially scrambled when it hit the back of your skull."

I sniffled and nestled against Edward's chest. I inhaled deeply, allowing his scent to soothe my rattled nerves and upset stomach. I calmed myself and pulled away. For the first time since last night, I looked at Edward. His emerald eyes were filled with anxiety and sadness. His skin was sallow and he looked tired. I ran my fingers over his nose and cheeks. I wanted to make sure he wasn't a hallucination. That he was real. "I'm sorry, Edward."

"Don't you dare apologize, Isabella Swan," he growled, his eyes flashing with anger. "You did absolutely nothing wrong. Nothing."

I cringed and pulled my hands away from his face. I ducked my head, trying to hide my embarrassment. Edward gently captured my chin, slowly lifting it to peer into his intense gaze. "I'm sorry I snapped, Bella. But you did nothing wrong, my beautiful girl. Why are you apologizing?"

"I don't know," I mumbled. "I'm disrupting your life."

"I'd rather be distracted by you, beautiful," Edward whispered. "You are the single most important person right now. Please know that."

"Shouldn't you be at work?" I asked quietly.

## A Fresh Start

"I took a sick day. I needed to take care of you. Tomorrow, I'm going to be at the funeral as a representative as the hospital, by your side. I know that it is important for you to go," Edward said as he kissed my forehead. I sighed and looked at him. My stomach snarled and I winced. "As much as you probably don't want to eat, you should. Your queasy stomach is due to taking the pain meds without eating."

"I don't want to throw up anymore," I grumbled.

"You'll have to eat something bland. I made some toast and jelly," Edward said as he wrapped his arms under my legs and waist. Easily he stood up, holding me. I squeaked and held his neck. "I won't drop you, beautiful."

"Edward, I know that I'm not the thinnest woman," I chided.

"Bella, you wound me. I am fully capable of carrying you. Besides, I love your curves. Very much. It shows me that you're a woman," he cooed.

"Can I at least brush my teeth?" I said. "I can stand to do that."

"After you eat," Edward said, raising his brows. He carried me down the stairs and placed me on the couch. He gave me a stern glare and I knew well enough to stay put. He puttered around the kitchen and returned with a tray. On it was a few slices of toast, some butter and jelly. He also had a bottle of Gatorade and a large glass of water. "It's not much, but your stomach is uneasy. Eat what you can, but you need to drink the entire bottle of Gatorade to get your electrolytes up."

"Yes, Dr. McFuckme," I teased.

"You almost called me that at the hospital," Edward laughed as he sat down next to me, sipping his own water. "That is for my own ears. Not my colleagues."

"Alice and Rose know," I giggled as I put some jelly on my toast.

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"That's different," Edward said with a wave of the hand. "I need to maintain the illusion that I'm in charge of my ER. Even though we both know the truth."

"Rhonda is in charge," I sighed.

"Hell yeah," Edward laughed. "I'm glad you caught yourself. You were pretty out of it."

"Yes, I was," I frowned. "I hate not knowing what the hell happened. It's disconcerting."

"I can imagine. Well, I actually know and understand. You lost a few hours. I lost essentially six months," Edward said, brushing my hair behind my ear.

"One minute I was in the car, joking with my parents about something. I want to say it was about the Cubs. My dad was a huge fan and they had lost again. I gave him grief, as I was a Sox fan. Then, the next minute, I was in a hospital, attached to tubes and monitors, unable to really speak or communicate my discomfort. It was nearly six months after the accident. I had woken up prior to that, but wasn't really coherent. I was just a lump that drooled and blinked."

"How did you cope, Edward?" I whispered.

"I didn't. At first. I was a ruthless, heartless bastard. I was mean and spiteful, barely talking to anybody when I gained that ability. I threw things at the nurses and no one wanted to care for me. Not that I blamed them. The only person who got through to me was Alice. God bless her, she was my personal cheerleader. I spoke my first words to her. She was there when I took my first steps. She was there when I had my biggest setbacks, but never gave up on me," Edward said with a wistful smile. "I was so upset that I was crippled. I was so upset that my parents were gone and I didn't get a chance to say goodbye. It was fucking tough."

I nibbled on my toast, thinking about what he said. He pushed the Gatorade toward me, arching a brow at me. I grumbled and took a sip. *I hate this shit.* I gave Edward a tight smile as he encouraged me to drink more. I swallowed the nasty drink and looked at him. "So what's next? Do I need to talk to the

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police?"

"Yeah," Edward said as his hand through his hair. "I spoke with the police and Seth. They are coming here around three. You think you'll be able to speak with them?"

"I don't know how much I'll be able to say. I don't remember anything," I said. "Have you spoken with them?"

"Not yet. They wanted to speak with me when we got the hospital. I refused to leave your side," Edward said.

"How did I get to the hospital?"

"Ambulance. Rose drove my car behind us and Emmett picked her up. She refused to leave either, but I asked her help for your classes. She immediately said that she would do that for you," Edward replied. "Rose was ready to kill Mike. She was muttering about 'Royce' and that men are fucking asshats."

"Royce is her ex-husband. He was abusive in more ways than one. He slapped her around and actually raped her," I said.

"What?" Edward seethed. "After I gut Mike, Royce is next on my list."

"Edward, don't. Rose is fine. It happened years ago and she's over it," I said as I patted his arm. His nostrils were flared and he looked pissed. *Best not mention the baby. For certain he'll kill Royce.* I put my tray on the cocktail table, resting my hand on his scruffy cheek. His eyes closed and he leaned into my touch. He laid his own hand on top of mine and pulled me to his chest. We stayed there for an hour or so. I snoozed against his chest once my brain shut off.

"Bella, wake up, love. The police will be here in a little bit. Do you want to shower?" Edward said softly.

"Would be nice," I mumbled against his chest. "I don't have clothes, though."

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"Rose packed a bag for you and delivered it this morning on her way to work. It's already upstairs in our room. Do you need help?" Edward asked.

"No, I'll be fine," I said as I stood up, stretching my sore and tired body.

"Edward, I don't know if I said this at all, but thank you."

"Bella, you don't need to thank me," Edward said as he hugged me. "I would do anything for you."

"Still waiting for the moon, Masen," I teased as I pinched his ass.

"I'm working on it," he laughed. "Go shower. I'll hang out in the bedroom in case you get dizzy."

We separated and I walked on unsteady legs up the stairs. I could tell that Edward wanted to pick me up and carry me, but knew enough to let me do this on my own. After an exhausting climb up the stairs, I went into the bedroom and pulled out some clothes. I didn't care what I looked like. I just wanted to be comfortable. I ended up with a pair of yoga pants and t-shirt. I also saw the Rose put in some of my regular underwear. *Thank goodness! I don't have the patience for butt floss.*

I walked into the bathroom. I looked at myself and I saw an exhausted woman. My eyes were drawn and I had dark circles under my eyes. My hair hung limply around shoulders and I looked defeated. *Fuck you, Mike.*

I showered quickly. I hissed as I washed my hair. I felt my head and it had a huge goose egg on the back. I finished showering and exited the luxurious shower. I dried my body and my hair gingerly. I then brushed my teeth. With each movement, I was getting more and more exhausted. I wanted nothing more than to fall asleep. The bathtub was looking mighty comfortable. I forced my eyes open and pulled on my clothes and underwear. I folded the towel and put it on the towel rod. I walked back out in the bedroom to my bag. I rummaged through it and pulled out my toiletry bag. I got my brush and gingerly ran it through my snarled locks.

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Edward stepped behind me and took the brush from my hands. "Let me, beautiful." I turned and looked at him warily. He gave me a loving smile and ran the brush through my hair gently. He got out all of the tangles and he turned me around slowly. "All done. Did I do good?"

"Excellent, Dr. Masen. You missed your calling," I teased. "I love you, Edward."

"As I love you, Bella," he smiled. He leaned down and kissed my lips sweetly. Gently. Almost like he was afraid I was going to break. However, at this point, I probably was. I was getting more and more tired as I stayed awake. I pulled away and laid my head on his shoulder. "Want to head downstairs?" I nodded and yawned. "They'll be here soon. Then you can sleep."

We walked down the stairs and Edward urged me to eat some more food. I was still hesitant to eat anything, but I choked down some apple and crackers. Edward lay down on the couch and held me to his chest. I was fading in and out when I heard the doorbell ring. Edward kissed my forehead and got up to answer the door. It was Seth.

"Hi, Bella," Seth said with a worried smile. "How are you feeling?"

"Tired. My head hurts," I mumbled. "I'm also sore."

"I'm so sorry, Bells. I can't believe he would openly defy an order of protection," Seth said, rubbing his hands over his hair. I looked at him blankly.

"Bella's also experiencing some minor memory loss, Seth. She hit her head very hard," Edward said. "I don't know how much she'll remember to tell the cops."

"Well, I have a few questions. If that's okay?" Seth asked. I nodded. "Has Mike done stuff like this before? Threatened you in anyway?"

"Never while we were married. He got crazy when we got divorced," I answered honestly. "He never really cared about who I hung out with or

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anything. We lived very separate lives."

"Mike is engaged. Do you think that his fiancée is dealing with the same thing?" Seth questioned.

"I don't know. We never really talked after Mike left me. She used to be on my team at Cherry Blossom," I replied.

"Okay," Seth said. "Are you going to press charges?"

Edward growled and I placed a hand on his arm. "What do you think?"

"That would be a yes," Seth tittered nervously. He opened his mouth and the doorbell rang again. Edward got up and ushered a detective and policeman into his family room.

"Thank you, Dr. Masen. We appreciate you taking the time to meet with us," the detective said. Edward gestured to me and gave me a smile. "Hello. I'm Detective Jackson Lemon. I've been assigned to your case, Ms. Swan. This is Officer Douglas Stohn. How are you feeling?"

"I'm tired and my head is pounding. I've also been dealing with nausea and memory loss," I answered.

"I'm so sorry. However, I need to know what happened in your condo?" Det. Lemon asked.

"I don't remember. Honestly. I remember getting home and then waking up in the hospital," I muttered. "Edward told me what happened when he got there, but I don't remember it."

"Okay. Dr. Masen, can you tell me what you saw when you got to Ms. Swan's condo?" Det. Lemon questioned.

Edward explained what he saw and how Mike was slamming my head against the kitchen floor. He also told Det. Lemon about how he held Mike down until

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the police came. Det. Lemon wrote down all of this information in his notebook. Det. Lemon then asked the extent of my injuries. Edward explained them in medical terms that I didn't recognize. Seth wrote down his description in his notebook as well. My eyes were drooping as the conversation continued.

"Ms. Swan? Do you want to press charges against your ex-husband?" Det. Lemon asked, pulling me out of my reverie.

"Yes," I replied sleepily.

"Good. Because he already confessed. He was wasted and didn't really know what he was doing. He's going to plead no contest to assaulting you and violating the order of protection," Det. Lemon said. "Seeing as this was his first offense, he will probably get minimal jail time, if any. Do you have questions?"

"Not that I can think of. However, my mind is a bit scrambled right now," I said, rubbing my eyes. "If there's anything else, I can call you, right?"

"Of course. Here's my card," Det. Lemon said. He handed it to me and got up to leave. "Thank you for taking the time to meet with us. I hope your recovery is fast, Ms. Swan."

Edward led Det. Lemon and Officer Stohn to the exit and wished them a good day. He walked back and his face was rigid. "Can he do that? Not get jail time?"

"If it's his first offense, yes. The judge will be more lenient. Also, since he's an upstanding member of the community, that's in his favor too," Seth mumbled. "We can slap with him a civil suit for pain and suffering."

"No, Seth. I don't want his money," I said harshly. "I just want him to pay for what he did to me."

"He will pay for what he did. He is a convicted felon and with that title comes limitations," Seth explained. "I'll do some research and let you know what those limitations are."



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"Thanks, Seth," I said as slunk into the pillows in Edward's couch. He pulled my feet into his lap, rubbing lightly. "What do I owe you?"

"Bella," he sighed. "Nothing. Jasper, my fuck awesome boss, told me to do this gratis. You don't need to worry about this."

Tears pricked my eyes and I sniffled. "Thank you," I said in small voice. Seth patted my hand and got up. Edward moved, but Seth said he'd let himself out. As soon as the door closed, my eyes fluttered shut and I was asleep again, snuggled next to Edward.

I woke up later and it was dark outside. I had a blanket thrown over me and a pillow under my head. I sat up, looking around. A few candles were lit and the scent of garlic permeated the house. "Edward?" I called. I looked at the clock and saw it was after eight in the evening. I swung my legs off the couch, standing unsteadily. I walked to the bathroom and took care of necessary business. I padded through the house and saw a light on in a room off the kitchen. I walked toward it and found Edward in a lavishly decorated office. His brow was furrowed and he was typing on his laptop. In his ear was a small microphone and he was talking quietly. I knocked on the door. Edward looked up, giving me a crooked smirk. He finished his sentence and pressed a button on his computer.

"How are you feeling, beautiful?"

"Hungry," I giggled. "What were you doing?"

"Dictation for medical records. A necessary evil," he said, scrunching his nose. "I caught up on most of them while you were sleeping. You were out, my love."

"Getting slammed into a kitchen floor kind of does that to a person," I grumbled. "Though I do feel much better. Not as nauseous and dizzy."

Edward got up from his desk and walked toward me. "Follow my fingers," he commanded. I did and my stomach didn't turn. He then pulled out a pen light,

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checking my vision again. "Good. Very good. Want to try real food?"

"Nothing too spicy. I still don't trust myself," I replied.

"Okay. I made some chicken and rice. Very bland, I promise you," Edward said as he laced his fingers with mine. He led me to his kitchen and sat me down at his island. He went into his oven and pulled out a plate covered in aluminum foil and placed it in front of me. He turned off the oven and sat down next to me.

"Aren't you going to eat?" I asked.

"I already did. Sorry, baby. My stomach was growling," he said sheepishly. I smiled and tucked into my chicken and rice. I ate all of it, nearly licking the plate. Edward was snickering next to me. "Jesus, woman. Hungry much?"

"Shut it. I haven't eaten much of anything since yesterday at lunch," I snorted. "God, I'm tired still."

"Your brain needs to heal. You'll be sleeping a lot for the next few days. Though tomorrow will be a challenge. If you are tired, dizzy or nauseous in anyway tomorrow, we're coming right home. Got it?" Edward asked sternly.

"Yes, sir," I said with a salute. "We may need to stop by my condo so I can have clothes for tomorrow. Rose just packed comfy things for me."

"Alice swung by with something for you. I think it is clothes for the funeral. Meddling elf," Edward laughed. "You didn't even move when she came in and she was loud."

"I'm sorry that I've been this drama queen girlfriend," I mumbled, pushing my plate away. "Are you sure you want this? Me?"

"Undoubtedly, Bella," Edward said with certainty.

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"I have a question for you. At the hospital, you said that I was family. Is that how you think of me?" I whispered.

"Yes. I've professed my love to you, Bella. You are incredibly special and I don't intend to let you go," Edward whispered back. "I'm too emotionally vested in us to be your doctor. I can't separate my feelings from you if I treat you."

"Can you...?" I trailed off.

"Give you your shot? Yes. I can," Edward said, holding up his hand.

"How did you know that what I was going to ask?" I squeaked.

"I saw the prescription on the kitchen counter. I can give you a shot, Bella. However, make major medical decisions for you as your doctor would be impossible. I couldn't detach myself from our relationship to make rational choices."

"Oh," I mumbled intelligently.

"I said before, I plan to be around you for a long time. Forever, beautiful," he said. "I love you, my Bella."

"I love you, too, Edward," I said softly.

I hopped off the chair and wrapped my arms around his neck. He held me tightly between his legs and nuzzled my hair. I kissed his neck and put my head on his shoulder. I tried to stifle another yawn and failed miserably. Edward chuckled and stood up. "Bedtime for my Bella," he snickered. I snorted and rolled my eyes. "Do you want some pain killers?"

"Probably. My head is hurting pretty badly," I grimaced.

"Okay, why don't you head upstairs and I'll bring you your meds," he smiled. I removed my arms from his neck and walked slowly up to his room. I decided

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to stay in the clothes I was in and crawled into bed. I laid back against the pillows and yawned. Edward came up a few minutes later with a glass of water and a plate. "You had a rough day. Here's my prescription. One piece of chocolate cake with a side of whipped cream," he grinned.

I laughed lightly and took the plate. Edward handed me a fork and sat down next to me. I inhaled my 'prescription' and smiled at him. He took the plate away and handed me two darvocet and a bottle of water. I downed the pills and settled back into the pillows. Edward kissed my forehead. "Sleep well, my Bella."

"Thank you, Edward," I mumbled. "Love you, baby."

"I love you more, Bella," he whispered. "The funeral is at ten. What time do you want me to wake you up?"

"Around eight," I slurred.

"Okay, sweetheart," Edward said as he kissed my neck. My eyelids drooped and I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

xx AFS xx

Edward woke up me at eight with the most tender kisses. He kissed my lips and moved to my jaw, then my ear lobe and down to my chest. He laid his head against my heart and he splayed his hand against my belly. "I can't believe you're mine, Bella," he whispered.

"Of course, Edward," I said, my voice rough with sleep. "As long as you have me."

"I've said it before and I'll say it again. I want you forever," he said as he looked up at me, leaning his ear against my chest. "HMMMM...your heart is stammering."

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"That's because of you, Dr. McFuckme," I said, tweaking his nose. "You make my heart race with excitement. With love."

"I'm glad," he said, nestling his nose into my neck.

"You are a hot mess, Edward," I giggled, as I ruffled his hair.

"Um, pot meet kettle," he snickered. "But I like it." He ran his fingers through my ratted hair and I scrunched my nose. "Do you want to shower first or do you want to conserve water?" Edward wagged his brows and licked his lips.

"No funny business, Edward. I'm still wobbly," I said sternly.

"Scouts honor and all that bullshit," he said, holding up his right hand. He got up and helped me to the bathroom. Edward turned on the shower and grabbed a few towels. I took off my shirt and slowly lowered my yoga pants and panties. Edward hissed and he came up behind me, putting his hands on my back. "Bella! What happened?"

"What?" I asked.

"I'm blind as a fucking bat right now and I saw this," Edward said as he turned me in the mirror. Sure enough, there was a huge bruise across my back.

*Please take me back, Bella. No. **CRASH**.*

I shuddered and grabbed Edward's bare shoulders. "He pushed me against the counter. He must caused this," I choked out. My hand went up to my neck. "He tried to choke me."

Edward's eyes grew cold and he held me to his chest. "We're calling Seth and Det. Lemon after the funeral. He tried to kill you, Bella," he cried. "I can't lose you."

I nodded against his chest and wrapped my arms around his waist. Edward bent down and picked me up. I latched my arms around his neck and my legs

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around his belly. He carried us to the shower and washed me reverently. With kid gloves. With love. With patience. With devotion. I looked up at him and tears were spilling over his cheeks. I gently kissed them away. He pulled away and he sunk to his knees, pressing kisses to my belly. He wrapped his arms around my waist and cried into my body. I put my arms around him and held him as he sobbed. "You won't lose me, Edward," I whispered.

"Now, I know what you felt like a week ago. With that dream," he whispered. "I refuse to let you go, Bella."

"I'm not going anywhere, baby," I said as I ran my fingers through his wet hair. "Well, anywhere but out of this shower. I'm turning into a prune."

"Shit, sorry," he said as he scrambled up.

We finished our shower quickly after our little breakdown. Edward dried me gently and let me use the bathroom to get ready. He said he'd use the guest bathroom to finish his bathroom routine of shaving and other things. I ran some mousse through my hair, wincing as I did so. I then went into the bedroom and found a garment bag with my name scrawled on a sheet of paper in Edward's closet.

*He's got more clothes than I do. Damn.*

I took out the garment bag and found a chic black pant suit with a white camisole and heels. I groaned at the heels, not trusting my balance. In the bottom of the bag was my underwear. *Thanks, Alice.* At least it wasn't butt floss. I put on my underwear and my clothes, pleased at Alice's choices. The suit was tailored for me in mind. I loved it. I went back into the bathroom and put on my makeup, trying to hide the dark circles under my eyes. I brushed my teeth and fluffed my hair. When I got out of the bathroom, Edward was in the bedroom wearing a conservative black suit with a grey shirt and black tie. He was spraying his cologne and adjusting his hair. "You clean up good, Masen."

"I could say the same thing about you, Swan," he winked. "Oh, this is from my lovely elfin sister, too." He shook a tiny box and put on his dresser. I walked

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over and opened the box. It was a pair of earrings and a simple necklace. Edward looked in the box. "She thinks of everything. However, I wanted to get you jewelry," he pouted.

"Edward, please," I chuckled as I put on my earrings and necklace. Edward grabbed my left hand and he drew my left ring finger in his mouth. "Don't even think about it, Masen."

He smirked sexily, arching a brow. "Think about what?" he asked innocently.

"Just don't," I emphasized by poking him in the belly.

He giggled and quickly sobered. "Fine."

I gave myself a once-over in the mirror. I still looked like shit, tired and drawn, but I needed to represent my school. I needed to support my student. I stepped into my shoes and Edward laced his fingers with mine. We ate a quiet breakfast before heading to the funeral home. Edward led me into his garage and he hit the key fob on his key ring. A sleek black car opened up and I arched a brow. "You have two cars?"

"The Volvo is my sensible car," Edward smirked. "The car we're taking today is the car I bought when I made the decision to move out here with the sale of my home in Seattle."

"Spoiled," I grumbled as I walked to the passenger seat of the black car. I slid in and groaned at the softness of the leather. Edward also moaned as he got in. "What kind of car is this?"

"Aston Martin Vanquish," he sighed.

"How much does this cost? You know what? I don't want to know. Probably more than the last five years of my salary," I said.

"Probably more than that," Edward said sheepishly. He turned over the car and eased it out of the garage. He pulled away from his house and looked over at

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me. "When my parents died, I was left a sizable inheritance. Even with my medical expenses, most of it was placed in a trust. When I turned 21, I received access to that trust. I used it to pay for medical school, but for the most part, it's been collecting interest and growing. The home I owned in Seattle, I owned outright. No mortgage. I sold it for twice what I paid for it and made a sizable profit. Even in this economy, I was shocked. With the profit I made, I purchased this home and my Vanquish."

"No mortgage or car payment."

"Nope," Edward said, glancing at me. "Please tell me you're not pissed."

"No, not pissed. Not at all," I said, nibbling on my fingernail. "Must be nice."

"What?"

"Not having to make a mortgage payment. Shit, I'm so in the hole, it's sad. The divorce wiped out my savings and I'm barely scraping by," I sighed.

"Bella, I can help out if you're floundering. It's not like I don't have the money," Edward said.

"I don't want your money, Edward," I snapped. "I'm fine."

"Bella," Edward said. "I know you don't want me for my money. It's my smoking hot bod."

I glared at him in disbelief. I was pissed. I was shocked. I was bent over in a fit of giggles. "Fucking-a! I can't believe you said that!"

"It's the damn truth. You look at me like I'm something to eat," Edward teased. "Admit it, you want to lick my abs."

"That ain't the only thing I want to lick," I said, giving him a smoldering stare.



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"Fuck me," he muttered. He reached down and adjusted his crotch. "Do you know what you do to me? Give me your hand." I reached my hand across the console. He placed my hand on his bulging erection and smirked. "That. I don't think it's appropriate to walk into a funeral with a full on boner."

"If I didn't have a massive goose egg on the back of my head, I'd give you road head," I purred.

The car swerved and Edward looked at me in disbelief. "God damn it, woman. You can't say shit like that to me," Edward laughed nervously. "Behave, Ms. Swan or you will be punished."

"How, Dr. Masen?" I cooed.

"I'm thinking," he said with a harsh look. He turned into the funeral home and was greeted with a grim man. He handed Edward a sticker to be placed on the car. He laid it on the front console of the car, not wanting to stick it to the window. Edward got out and opened my door. He laced his fingers with mine and we walked into the funeral home, into the room where Taylor was laid out. I signed us both in. Edward reached into his pocket and placed a mass card into the small box next to guest book. He led me to the line to pay our respects to Taylor. I started sniffing and Edward wrapped his warm hand around my waist. He kissed my temple and gave me a reassuring squeeze. As we waited in line, I saw a number of my students, both past and present. They were crying and upset. I also saw Angela and Chris. I gave them a small wave. Next to them sat Mrs. Cope and our assistant principal, Mr. Merritt.

We reached the front of the line and I knelt in front of Taylor's coffin, praying quietly. Edward said the Lord's prayer in a hushed tone and patted Taylor's hand. We got up and met up with Richard and Annabel, Taylor's parents.

"Mr. and Mrs. Schmink, I'm so sorry for your loss," I said sympathetically. I held out my hand and Mrs. Schmink hugged me tightly. I returned her embrace, rubbing her back as she cried on my shoulder.

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"Ms. Swan, Taylor spoke so highly of you. He begged to be in your class this year. You were one of his favorite teachers and you really helped him get out of his shell through drama. Thank you for all you have done," Mrs. Schmink sniffled. "It means the world to us that you came to his funeral. Especially after what happened to you. Mrs. Cope said that you were questionable about coming. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Mrs. Schmink," I said. "I wouldn't have missed this. Taylor was a very special young man. It was my pleasure to have him in my class and to see him grow as a student. He will be sorely missed by everybody."

She nodded and looked at Edward. "You were the doctor who worked on my baby," she said quietly. "Thank you for doing all you could."

"I'm so sorry, Mr. and Mrs. Schmink," Edward said quietly. "I wish I could have done more." He shook her hand warmly and gave her a sympathetic smile. He did the same to Mr. Schmink.

"Dr. Masen, right?" Mr. Schmink asked in a husky tone. Edward nodded. "I know you worked on our son, even though he was essentially dead for as long as you could. You might not have saved our boy, but you will always have a special place in our hearts for not giving up."

"Thank you, sir," Edward said with a sad look in his eyes. "He was too young."

"Thank you both for coming," Mrs. Schmink said as she hugged me again. She turned and hugged Edward.

We left the line and sat down next to Angela and Chris. Mrs. Cope and Mr. Merritt asked how I was doing. I answered honestly and said I felt like shit. However, I needed to be here. Alice came in a few moments later with Jasper. We sat and chatted quietly until the pastor came into the room. He explained what to expect. He led us in a prayer and then asked all of the guests to leave, that only family remain. We all got up and headed to our cars. Once we were in Edward's Vanquish, I leaned my head back against the buttery leather seat.

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"Are you feeling alright, Bella?" Edward asked warily.

"Not really. My head is splitting. Do you have any Advil in this thing?" I asked. Edward opened up the center console and pulled out a bottle of ibuprofen, handing it to me. I shook out three pills and took them dry. "Blech."

"I had water, Bella" he said as he shook a water bottle. I rolled my eyes and swiped it from him, guzzling it in one pull. As we sat in the car, Taylor's coffin was rolled into the hearse and we drove slowly to the nearby church. We parked and walked into the church. Edward and I sat with the rest of the teachers from Cherry Blossom. My headache was mildly improved from earlier, but it was still pounding. Edward twined his fingers with mine and we sat through the moving church ceremony. Several students gave eulogies. Alice gave one as well. She barely held it together, but she did fabulously. She also sang 'The Irish Blessing.' When her sweet, soft soprano voice lilted through the church, I lost it. Tears flowed down my cheeks and I started to hyperventilate. Edward put his arm around me and rubbed soothing circles on my back, kissing my temple. She ended her song and sat down next to Jasper, collapsing in his arms. I bit back sobs and buried my face in Edward's shoulder. He held me as I cried silently for the poor boy who was robbed of his life. Of his future. Of everything.

I don't remember the rest of the ceremony, but it ended soon after Alice's song. We all piled into our cars and drove to the cemetery. I was quiet, introspective, as we drove the few miles to the cemetery. We parked and got out by the gravesite. It was very clichéd with the tent, chairs and flowers. We stood toward the back of the crowd. Alice stood next to me and we held hands as the pastor send his 'ashes to ashes' speech. Edward had his arm around my waist, supporting most of my weight. My tears were falling down my cheeks like a waterfall. Edward handed me a handkerchief and I gently patted my cheeks.

After the gravesite service, the Schminks invited us to a luncheon at a nearby restaurant. Edward asked me if I wanted to go and I knew I couldn't handle it. I was dead on my feet. He kissed my lips sweetly and led me to his car. We hugged Alice and the rest of the Cherry Blossom Middle School group. I crawled into the car. As soon as the door was closed, my eyes drifted shut and I

## A Fresh Start

was asleep, drained from the two emotional days.

**A/N: For those of you who are pissed at me about Mike, he will be punished. However, his 'torture' of Bella is not over yet. He's an asshat and he won't leave well enough alone. Leave me love, please. The reviews in my inbox make me happy. Incredibly happy. So happy they make me forget the craziness that is my real life. MUAH!**

# The Recovery

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 16: The Recovery

God, what is that snarling? So annoying? There it is again. What the fuck?

"Bella?"

Now, I'm hearing voices. In addition to the snarling. I'm definitely losing my damn mind. Though the voice is very smooth. Hmmm?

"Wake up, beautiful girl. You need to eat," the velvety voice said again.

I groaned and rolled over. I was in a bed. I cracked open my eyes and looked around the room. "Where am I?"

"In bed, silly."

"How did I get here?" I asked as I looked toward the voice. I saw Edward. He had a tentative smirk on his face. "Why are you wearing different clothes?"

"Because it's Thursday, love," he answered. "You fell asleep as soon as you got into the car and didn't wake until now."

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"That's because you woke me up," I grumbled.

"I wanted to make sure you weren't in a coma," Edward said. "And your stomach was growling. I heard it in the bathroom while I was getting ready."

I looked at Edward and he was in his scrubs. He was also wearing his glasses and ID badge. "You have to go to work?"

"Unfortunately. I have a meeting that I need to attend and we're short a few doctors. The stomach flu is going around. Esme said she would stay with you today. I'll be home by five," Edward said.

"What time is it now?" I asked as I sat up. I looked down my body and saw I was wearing just my camisole and panties from yesterday. I blushed and hid my face.

"A little after eight. Why are you blushing?" Edward asked.

"My lack of attire," I mumbled, pulling up the comforter. "Did you undress me?"

"Who else do you think did it? The leprechaun down the street?" he teased.

"Shut it," I said, rolling my eyes. "You just wanted a reason to take off my clothes."

"Always, Bella. Though, I'd rather you be coherent and reacting to when I take off your clothes," Edward purred seductively as he lounged on his bed. "But, I did remove your suit. It's in the closet. You were so drained, it took almost all of my strength to get out of it. I hope you don't mind."

"Not really," I said, blushing furiously. "I just feel a little naked."

"I kept on the tank top thingy and your panties," he reasoned.

"Camisole, Edward," I laughed.

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"Tank top thingy," he retorted. "I brought you breakfast. Eat what you can, okay?" He got up gracefully and placed tray with blueberry pancakes and breakfast sausages over my lap. I gulped, fearful of eating all this food and then throwing up. "I think you're past the nauseous phase, Bella. You need to regain your strength. Be grateful I didn't put a protein shake on there."

"Ewwwwwwwww," I said as I wrinkled my nose. "That shit is nasty. Nastier than Gatorade."

"Not when it's made by me," Edward said as he sat on his bed, Indian style. "Mine taste like ice cream shakes."

"Sure, Edward," I giggled as I dug into my breakfast. "Do I need to call Seth or the cops?"

"No. I did. I told them what happened and they adjusted the charges from assault to attempted murder. Then Mike changed his plea to not guilty," Edward seethed. "He was released on bond."

I lost all will to eat and I pushed the tray down my legs. Edward gave me a look of disapproval. "You need to eat."

"I lost my appetite," I said in a small voice, drawing my knees to my chest.

"Do I need to put in a feeding tube, Isabella?" Edward said sternly.

"No. I'm not hungry," I whispered. "Please, don't."

Edward's gaze softened and he picked up my tray. He held me to his chest. "Bella, I'm worried about you. I want nothing more than for you to be happy and healthy," he said.

"Hello?" Esme called. "Are you decent?"

"Yes," Edward called out.

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"No," I hissed. I jumped out of the bed and scrambled for clothes. I ran into the bathroom, slamming the door shut. I hopped into the shower, washing hastily. I didn't wash my hair, my head was killing me. I finished my shower and dressed in a pair of workout pants and a Cherry Blossom t-shirt. I brushed my teeth and washed my face. I took a few cleansing breaths before heading out to see Esme. I left the bathroom and headed downstairs. I heard Edward and Esme speaking in the kitchen.

"There she is," Edward smiled. "Feel better?"

*Not really.* "Yeah, thanks," I muttered. "Hello Esme."

"Hello, Bella dear," she said kindly as she took into a warm embrace. I hissed quietly as she laid her hands on the tender part of my back. Edward mouthed 'Sorry.' I shrugged as Esme pulled away. "Edward told me what happened. Are you okay, dear?"

"I'm fine. Just been sleeping a lot," I giggled.

"We had a funeral yesterday. She slept from the end of the funeral to about an hour ago. Completely out," Edward sighed.

"Oh, no! Your days and nights are going to get all flipped," Esme chided.

"I'll be fine, Esme," I answered honestly.

"As much as I hate to go, I need to head to the hospital," Edward said with a sad sigh. He walked around the island and wrapped his arms around my body. I nestled closer to his chest, relishing in his strength and his love. He pulled away slightly and cupped my chin. He kissed my lips sweetly. "I love you, my beautiful girl," he whispered.

"I love you, too," I said against his mouth. He groaned and grabbed his keys.

"See you tonight, Dr. Masen."



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He rolled his eyes and gave us a wave before heading out of the house. Edward was no sooner gone than Esme dragged me to the kitchen table and put my half eaten pancakes in front of me. "Edward told me you need to eat," she said, arching a brow.

"Esme, I really don't have much of an appetite," I said, looking up at her.

"Sweetheart, you need to keep up your strength. You're getting too thin," Esme chided. I snorted and rolled my eyes. "Eat, Isabella."

"Yeesh, you sound like my mom," I giggled. I picked up my fork and dug into my breakfast. I, surprisingly, ate it all. "I guess I was more hungry than I thought. Esme, you don't have to stay. I can take care of myself."

"Bella, please. It's my pleasure. Besides, Edward would go bat shit crazy if I left. In case you haven't noticed, Edward is a bit of a worrywart," Esme tittered. "We don't have to talk, Bella. I brought my 'homework.'"

"What's that?" I asked as I got up to clean my plate.

"I have a few sketches that I'm working on for a big client," she answered. She looked at a large portfolio on the island. "I need to add finishing touches and patterns. It'll probably take all day."

I nodded and gave her a small smile. I also washed the glasses and plates in the sink while I heard Esme set up her work. "Esme?"

"Yes?"

"Can you drive me to my condo? I need to get my laptop," I asked.

"No need, my dear," she grinned. She got up and went into Edward's office. "Rosalie dropped it off on Tuesday, Edward said." She returned with my laptop bag and a small sheet of paper. "Password for the wireless network here."

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"Oh, thanks," I said as I took my laptop and paper. I plugged it in and powered it up. I put in the password, a jumble of numbers and letters, and accessed the wireless network. I checked my email and paid a few bills that needed my attention. I then logged into my work email. It was inundated with tons of messages. I deleted a bunch of emails that did not pertain to me. However, the email from my old advisor stuck out at me. I only had one class to complete and then my administrative degree would be done. I went online and checked my balances. I grimaced. I couldn't do it. Even if I used my credit card. I sighed and put my laptop on the ground. I curled up on a pillow, my mind racing about how I could do this.

Apparently I dozed off and was gently woken up by Esme. She put a tray of soup and some crusty bread over my legs. I inhaled my lunch and cleaned my mess. Esme gave me a smile as she spoke quietly on her cell phone. I was nearly done with washing my dishes when the house phone rang. "Bella, can you get that?"

"Sure," I said with trepidation. I was a guest in Edward's home. I didn't feel comfortable picking up his phone. It rang again and I picked up the cordless in the kitchen. "Hello?"

"Hi, beautiful girl," Edward crooned.

"Hi," I sighed. "I was hoping it was you. But fearful it was like your bank saying they lost all your money."

"I put my cell phone as my primary number, silly. I only have a landline because the hospital demanded it," he laughed. "How are you feeling?"

"Good. I ate," I replied. "Finished my breakfast and ate a pretty good lunch. How are you?"

"Frazzled. I've been meeting after meeting all fucking day," he groaned. "However, I wanted to call my beautiful girlfriend. And to say that I love you."

"Hmmm, I love you too, baby," I smiled. "You still coming around five?"

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"I'm hoping so," Edward sighed. "I have a question for you , love."

"What's that?"

"Have you thought more about what Alice and I mentioned to you on Sunday? I realize it's probably the last thing on your mind, but you really should consider it," Edward said, a tinge of nervousness in his voice.

"I actually emailed my old advisor on Monday when I had a spare moment," I answered. "She said I could still sign up , but it needs to be done this week. But I just can't afford it."

"Baby, I can help," Edward said in a small voice. "I want to help."

I drew my lip into my teeth. "A loan. I'll accept a loan," I conceded. "As soon as I submit my paperwork and get bumped up to the next lane, I'll pay you back. Okay?"

"Excellent," Edward smiled. "I actually left my credit card on the kitchen counter if you decided to do that. Sign up for the class and use my card, okay? Baby?"

"But..."

"No buts, baby. Do it," Edward commanded. "I've got to go. I have a meeting in a few minutes . I love you, beautiful girl."

"Love you too, Edward. Thank you," I sniffled. I hung up the phone and walked to the kitchen counter. Sure enough, Edward's credit card was sitting there. I picked it up and spun it in my hands. I huffed and walked to my computer. I logged into my old graduate school's website and signed up for the practicum. Using Edward's credit card. I saved the receipt and emailed it to Edward. I then contacted Mrs. Cope to see if I could work with her on the practicum. Her response was immediate saying that she would love for me to work with her. I smiled.

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The rest of the day went by quickly. Esme and I talked about Alice's wedding. Esme pretty much told me that when it's over, she will be a happy woman. She also said that Carlisle was ready to wring Alice's neck with all of the expenses she's incurred. We both groaned that what Alice wants, Alice gets.

We also worked side by side to make dinner for Edward. I decided to make lasagna as he had all of the necessary ingredients for the Italian specialty. My grandmother would be proud for all of the work I put into my meal. I truly love being half Italian. I actually consider myself to be fully Italian, as my father's heritage is a bit unknown. He was a mutt. We didn't know what he was. My mom was the Italian and I inherited most of her traits. With the exception of her flightiness. I was more like my father. I always had my head on straight. My mom, not so much. But what can you do?

Esme left around 4:30 and she gave me a warm embrace. The lasagna was in the oven and I decided to watch some television. My head, for the first time since getting hurt, was not pounding. It was just a dull ache. I flipped through the channels and found something that held my attention. A few moments later, I heard the garage open.

"Honey, I'm home," he snickered. "Fuck, what is that delicious smell?"

"Lasagna," I answered as I got up from my spot on the couch.

"You made me lasagna? Hot damn, woman, I'm going to gain back that fifty pounds," he laughed. He pulled me to his chest and dipped me in a passionate kiss. "I love having you here."

"Hmmm," I moaned. "I'd figured you'd get sick of me. I've done nothing but sleep, drool and shower."

"You've been injured, my love," he said as he put his stuff down on the kitchen table.

"I know, but I still feel guilty," I sighed. "So, the lasagna is a peace offering."

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"Bella," Edward warned.

The oven dinged and I danced away from Edward, sticking out my tongue at him. He growled as I took out the lasagna. I turned off the oven and set the table. "I love cooking in your kitchen, Edward. It's a chef's dream."

"Based off what I smell, you are truly a gourmet chef," Edward smiled. "I got your email, by the way."

"I just wanted you to know how much my practicum was going to cost when you got your credit card statement." I walked to the family room and got his card. I handed it to him and he slipped it in his wallet. "As soon as I complete the class and get reimbursed, I'm paying you back."

"Reimbursed?"

"We get \$75 for each credit hour we take. It's a three credit hour practicum and I'll get \$225 back," I answered. I cut the lasagna and dished out a large piece, placing it in Edward's plate. I cut myself a smaller piece and sat down. Edward put some cheese on his lasagna and dug in. He moaned. "Good?"

"Best fucking lasagna, ever," he said with a full mouth.

"You can thank my Grandma Marie for the recipe," I snickered.

"I love your grandma," Edward said as he shoveled in another forkful. "But I love you, more."

"I love you, too, Edward," I smiled. I sighed and pushed my plate away. "I probably should head back home tomorrow. I can't even imagine..."

"Bella, you don't have to. I would love for you to stay," Edward said quickly.

"Edward, no. I appreciate your hospitality and everything you've done for me, but I can't stay here," I said.

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"Baby, I'm afraid that Mike'll come back. And finish the job he started," Edward said, his eyes filled with sadness and anger. "I would be more comfortable if you stayed. With me. Forever."

"Edward, really, I can't. It's...just...it's too fast," I said honestly. "I'm sorry."

Edward sighed and ran his hands over his face. "I know, beautiful. Can't blame a guy for trying," he teased. However I could tell that I really hurt his feelings in refusing his offer to move in. But I wasn't ready. I couldn't. As much as I wanted to stay in Edward's home, I couldn't. It didn't make sense for me to keep the condo, pay the mortgage and live with Edward. "You will get your locks changed and I insist on an alarm system," Edward said, arching a brow.

"Yes sir," I said. "Do you work tomorrow?"

"Only in the morning," Edward said. "I have a half shift in the ER. I should be home by one-ish."

I nodded and picked at my dinner. Edward gently pushed my plate back toward me with an elegant finger, daring me not to finish my lasagna. I finished my dinner and Edward did the dishes. I started to clean, but he gently shooed me out of the kitchen, telling me to relax and watch some television. I put on the TV, not really paying attention. Edward came and sat down next to me, cuddling me to his chest. "I'm going to fucking miss you, Bella," he said into my hair.

"I'm going to miss you, too, baby," I whispered. "However, you can come over whenever you want. I'll give you a key."

"After you get new locks," Edward said as he poked my side.

"After I get new locks. Also, if you could stay tomorrow, that would be..."

"I was planning on it, Bella. You're going back to your home where you were attacked. I understand your trepidation about being there alone," he said.

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"I probably should call school," I sighed. "They'll probably want to know if I can come back on Monday."

"You'll need medical clearance," Edward said. "I'll talk to Dr. Gerandy about squeezing you in tomorrow afternoon."

"You seem hesitant around him. Why?" I asked.

"He was next in line to be the head of the emergency department before I came along. He thinks I'm a brilliant doctor, but too young to be an administrator. I don't have my 'head in the game.'"

"There's more, isn't there?"

"He also worked with my father when he was alive," Edward said inaudibly. "My father was a pediatric oncologist. Best in the country. Dr. Gerandy did one of his rotations with him when he was a resident. He thought very highly of him and I'm afraid I'm not meeting my father's standards."

"Edward, I may not have remembered much from Monday night, but I do remember two things. The first was when you called me your family. The second was when Dr. Gerandy said he was discharging me with one of the best in the country. From what I've seen, you are a remarkable doctor. Compassionate, brilliant, strong, cool, and I'm so proud that I'm with you. I'm proud that you chose me to be with you," I said as I sat up to look him in the eyes. "You are surpassing the invisible goals that you've created for yourself. You are 32 and the head of the emergency department of Craven Memorial Hospital. You have succeeded in obtaining the preliminary approval to upgrade the ER to be a level two trauma center. You have undoubtedly achieved so much in your professional life, your father and your mother would be insanely proud of your work. I know I am and I've known you for a few months."

Edward didn't say anything. He just stared at me. His eyes blinking slowly. Then, in a flash, his mouth was crashing against mine and I found myself straddling his legs. His tongue moved languidly with mine and I was grinding on his growing arousal. *Those scrubs don't leave much to the imagination.* His

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hands moved up my sides and he gently caressed my breasts, flicking his thumbs over my nipples. "Bella," he moaned. "That is the most beautiful, sincere, wonderful thing ANYBODY has ever said to me." His lips moved from mine and he licked down my jaw to my earlobe. "You are truly an amazing woman and I'm so proud that you have chosen to be with me." He pulled away and his green eyes were darkened with desire. I wanted nothing more than him. All of him. His straining erection and piercing gaze indicated he wanted the same. His fingers moved under the hem of my t-shirt and they moved to my bare breasts. He groaned and with his other hand, he pulled my face back to his, gently caressing my swollen lips with his mouth.

As we were beginning to get hot and heavy, Edward's phone rang from his bag on the kitchen table. "Damn it," he grumbled. "It's the hospital."

"How do you know?"

"Ring tone," he said as he kissed me while he moved me off his lap. He jogged to his bag and pulled out his Blackberry. "Dr. Masen...No, I'm afraid that's not possible...Aro will just have to wait...I can't drop everything when a resident fucks up. Their attending physician should be the one to put out the fire. If they can't handle it, then it'll be reflected in their evaluation...Fine...I'll speak with Aro tomorrow morning."

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"I run an ER full of idiots," Edward said as he slammed down his phone. "One of the attendings was MIA and his resident set a broken bone wrong. He was casting it when the attending noticed the deformity, but the damage was done. The patient has to have surgery to correct it. Aro is spewing lava and fire. The attending is so on the line right now. He should have been there to observe the resident's progress."

"Where was he? Or she?"

"I have no clue, but I will be speaking with both parties tomorrow after I meet with my 'fearless leader,' Aro Volturi."



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"Ohhh, I've heard of him. He's a bit of a prick, but he runs a tight ship," I said. Edward slumped down and ran his fingers through his hair. "He's the CEO of the hospital, right?"

"Yeah. He makes sure that we are in the black and not in the red. He does allow the doctors make the medical decisions, but he makes all financial decisions. He was not pleased when I was hired."

"Why? You are fucking awesome," I said, laying my head in his lap.

"I'm too expensive. I am board certified in several different specialties, in addition to emergency medicine. I have an Ivy League undergraduate degree and nationally ranked medical degree. Plus, the hospital I came from paid me big bucks. Craven was not ready to dole out that kind of cash. But I came here anyway. I took a huge paycut, but I'm happier being closer to my family. It also brought me you," he said quietly.

I blushed and bit my lip. He chuckled lightly and removed my lip from my teeth. "What else have you specialized in?"

"Emergency medicine, pediatric emergency medicine, and trauma surgery," he answered.

"So you could perform open heart surgery with knife and plastic straw," I teased.

"If the job called for it," he laughed. He sighed and ran his fingers through my hair. "God, you're gorgeous."

"Oh, okay," I snickered. "I've been a hot mess for the past few days. I look like a total bum."

"You really don't see yourself very clearly, Bella," he said.

"You know why, Edward. I'm trying, though," I replied. I grinned at him sleepily and nestled closer to him. "You are definitely the gorgeous one."

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"I have my positive qualities," Edward said with a wide grin. "I also have my negative qualities."

"I've only ever seen positives from you, Masen," I laughed.

"You've never been around me when I've had a migraine. I turn into a fucking prick. Steer clear. I have a temper. It takes awhile for me to blow my top but when I do, it ain't pretty. Mushrooms give me gas..."

"Okay, Edward. You have your flaws. Yeesh!" I said. "However, I love you tremendously. Flaws and all."

"I love you, more, beautiful girl," Edward smiled. He leaned down and kissed me sweetly, gently caressing my cheeks. We stayed curled up with each other until I started dozing off. We eventually went upstairs and fell asleep, nestled in each other's arms.

*How am I going to be without him when I go back home?*

xx AFS xx

I woke up to an empty bed. I checked the clock and saw that it was nearly eleven. Next to me, on Edward's pillow, was a note in his elegant scrawl. I chuckled thinking that doctors had horrendous handwriting. Apparently Edward missed that memo.

*My dearest Bella,*

*I hope that you've slept well. The past few nights, I've gotten the best sleep I've ever had. I will definitely miss having you curled up next to me, though I understand why you need to go back to your place.*

*Doesn't mean I have to like it.*

*Which I don't.*

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*But I'll deal.*

*Anyhow, I'm rambling. I have my meetings this morning and I should be back around one or so. I have cereal in the pantry that you love so much. (I feel like you love me for my kitchen and not my smoking hot bod) and I have coffee ready to be made. Just start the coffee maker.*

*I miss you and I love you tremendously, my beautiful girl. I'll see you when I get home.*

*Yours,*

*Edward*

I smiled and got out of bed. I was pleased that my head wasn't spinning and it wasn't pounding either. I had a minor, dull ache where my head was slammed against the kitchen floor, but other than that it was fine. I walked to bathroom and quickly took care of business, showering, washing my hair and getting dressed. I decided on putting on actual pants, with a button today. I slipped on a pair of jeans and slate gray graphic t-shirt that Rose slipped in my bag. I put on my black ballet flats and went to put on my makeup. Afterward, I packed my belongings into my bag and went downstairs. I ate a hasty breakfast of Honey Nut Cheerios. I went into the family room and packed up my laptop, placing it by the door with my other bag.

I sat down and watched some television. I never watched television. However, my brain was not focused enough to read. I could watch dancing lights and sounds. I found something that held my attention and I watched that until I heard the garage door open. Edward walked in and he was wearing his navy suit and grimace. He was barking to someone on the phone. I frowned and got up from his couch. Edward slammed down his phone, pinching the bridge of his nose.

"Want to talk about it?" I asked.

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"Mother fucking Aro," he seethed. "He went above me and fired the resident and the attending in the broken bone debacle. I've spent the entire morning with Carlisle and Aro arguing about how this looks. I ran a level one trauma center and I never had to deal with political bullshit."

"Can Aro do that? Just arbitrarily fire people?"

"He needs board approval. I reminded him of that fact and he 'allowed' the resident and the attending to be on administrative leave until the board meets. Which is next week. I have to plead their case. I can't afford to lose either one of them. We're stretched too thin as it is," Edward said. "Carlisle tried to make him see that fact and he listened to him. But would he listen to me? Fuck no. Judgmental asshole."

"Is there anything I can do?" I asked quietly.

"No. Not really. Letting me vent is helping. But it doesn't stop the fact that my boss is fucking retard," Edward growled. "He threatened me that he would fire me. It won't happen. The other board members love what I've done to the ER. Aro is the only one who hates my guts."

"For the board to fire someone, what has to happen?"

"For a doctor or a nurse, it needs to be a majority. For a department head, it needs to be unanimous," Edward explained. "However, the doctor or nurse needs to be placed on a probationary period of ninety days before they can be fired."

"Has the resident or attending been on that probationary period?" I questioned.

"Resident has been. Yes. The attending? No," Edward replied. His eyes lit up and he kissed me. "Bella, you are fucking genius." He whipped out his phone. "Carlisle? Dr. Uley was never placed on probation. He can't be fired until he gets his mandatory ninety days...Bella did. She asked what the ramifications are for being fired...She's a genius, I know...Okay, I will. Love you too."

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"Did I solve something?" I asked.

"Yes. Yes you did, my beautiful girl," he smiled. "Thank you!" Edward wrapped his arms around my waist and picked me up, kissing my cheeks and lips. I grimaced when he put me down and he smacked his head. "Fuck, I forgot your bruise on your back. Turn around."

I did and he did an examination. "I'm fine, Edward. It was just a little rough on my back. I'll survive," I said, looking over my shoulder. He placed his hand on my back and frowned. I turned around and smacked his chest. "I'm perfectly fine. Stop sulking."

"Fine," he grumbled. He rubbed his chest and frowned. "You know, you're freakishly strong."

"Whatever, Edward."

"I'm going to change and then you need to get seen by Dr. Gerandy for your medical clearance to return to work," Edward said as he untied his tie. "We're going to his office in Nottingbrook."

I nodded and gave him a kiss on the cheek. He ran upstairs and I heard him shuffle in his bedroom. I did some minor puttering around the kitchen, cleaning my mess from breakfast and cleaning the coffee pot. Edward came back downstairs, wearing a pair of cargo khaki pants and a black button-down shirt with the sleeves rolled up to the elbows. He had his sunglasses on his head and he was typing furiously on his Blackberry. On his shoulder, he carried a small duffel bag. "You all ready, my beautiful girl?"

"Yeah," I said as I checked the kitchen. Edward smiled as he picked up my bags, carrying them to the car. He put them into the trunk and slid into the driver's side after he opened the passenger side for me. He backed out the car and drove us the short distance to Nottingbrook. We were at an office building adjacent from where I had my appointment with Dr. Forks. Edward parked the car and helped me out. We walked in and were immediately led into an examination room. Dr. Gerandy came in a few moments later and gave me a

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thorough examination. He was pleased with my progress, but told me that my headaches would linger for a few more days. He wrote out my medical note, handing it to me and giving Edward a tight smile.

We left the doctor's office and Edward drove us to my condo. I could feel my anxiety and worry mount as we got closer to my home. My heart was stammering, palms were sweating and breaths coming in irregular pants. "Bella?"

"I'm fine, Edward," I said quietly.

"No, you're not," Edward said as he laid his hand on my neck. "Your pulse is racing. Are you sure you're ready to go back?"

"I have to," I whispered. I clamped my eyes shut. *I cannot rely on a man to fix all of my problems. Edward is wonderful, but he'll leave, too. Just like Mike. He'll hurt me, break my heart.*

"This is more than you going back to your condo, isn't it?" Edward pressed.

Yes. "No, I'm fine. Just having a minor panic attack," I said in a tight voice. Edward growled lightly when he parked the car in front of my condo. My brow was sweating and my heart was nearly pumping out of my chest. He opened my door and helped me out of his Volvo. He took my keys that he borrowed from Rose and placed them into my hand. I gripped them with a shaking palm.

"Bella, you are not fine. You're shaking like a leaf," he said quietly. "I can feel your heart stammering. I'm taking you back to my place."

"No! I need to do this. I'd rather do it with you, but if you can't support me, give me my shit and go," I snapped. I went to Edward's open trunk and grabbed my bags, slinging them over my shoulders. I stomped past him. I tried, unsuccessfully, to calm my nerves. With shaking knees, I climbed the stairs and unlocked my door. I stood, frozen, at my entrance of my condo.

## A Fresh Start

I felt two strong arms wrap around my waist. "You can do this, Bella," Edward crooned. "I'm right next to you."

Fat tears fell down my cheeks and I took a hesitant step into my home. Edward kept his arms around me, holding me up. We entered my small foyer and I was immediately assaulted with the smell of rotten chili. I wrinkled my nose and tried to not throw up. I put my bags down. I went into the kitchen and saw the chili still sitting on the stove, growing a lovely green fuzz. I covered my mouth, forcing back vomit. Edward took the pot and darted out of condo. He returned a few moments later with his hands empty. After disposing of the fuzzy chili, I appraised my kitchen. I saw a dent where my head hit the kitchen cabinets. I hissed involuntarily.

"Are you okay, Bella?" Edward asked warily.

I nodded and went to my patio door, throwing it open. "It stinks in here," I grumbled. I walked past him and into my bedroom. I stripped off my clothes and put on my grubbies. "I need to get the stench out," I said as I threw my hair back into a ponytail.

Edward grabbed my wrist, pleading with his eyes. "Bella, you don't have to do that now."

I ripped my hand from his and glared at him. "Yes, I do," I seethed. I reached under the sink and took out all the materials to clean the kitchen. I began scrubbing the stove and methodically worked through the entire space. Edward huffed a breath and skulked into the family room. I heard him quietly speak on the phone. To who, I have no idea. I scoured and scrubbed every surface of the kitchen. I lit every candle in the condo, trying to rid it of the foul stench. I was working for nearly two hours when the intercom buzzed. Every hair on my head bristled. My breathing was erratic and my vision got fuzzy.

Edward went to the intercom and spoke to whoever was at the door. My fists clenched and my body was rigid. A sharp rap resounded through my door and Edward opened it up. I squeaked and fell against the counter. "No. No. No." I murmured, running my fingers through my hair.

## A Fresh Start

"Bella?" Edward asked.

"Mike, don't. Please," I begged.

"Bella. Look at me. Listen to my voice. It's Edward," he said soothingly.

"Hey, buddy, I've got places to go. Where do I need to put in the new lock?" a nasal voice asked in a bored tone.

"Front door," Edward snapped. "Bella, you're okay. I'm here. Please, baby."

He walked toward me and I moved away from him. "Don't touch me, Mike," I said, anxiety lacing my tone. "Please. Leave me alone."

Edward held up his hands in a defensive posture, his eyes filled with sadness and worry. "Baby, I'm not Mike. I'll never hurt you, Bella. Never in a million years. Please?" he begged. "Please?" He took another step toward me and I found myself cornered in the kitchen. I had no way of escape.

Edward's warm hands reached my face and I tried to push him away. "No! Leave me alone!" I shrieked.

Edward forcefully grabbed my hands and brought me into a restraining embrace. "Bella," he sobbed brokenly. "Snap out of it, beautiful. Please?" He held me to his chest and I fought, futilely against his steely hold. "Baby, listen to my voice. You're okay. You're safe. No one is going to hurt you. I refuse to let it happen. I love you, Bella."

His hands moved up and down my back, massaging my tense muscles. I put my nose into his chest and inhaled deeply. His scent of Tuscany, laundry detergent and Edward filled my nose. I bawled and collapsed against his chest. He picked me up and carried me to my bedroom. He lay me on my bed and rummaged through his bag. He pulled out a small prescription bottle, shaking out a pill. "Take this, Bella."

I looked at him warily. "What is it?"



## A Fresh Start

"Xanax," he answered. "Dr. Gerandy prescribed it for you when you were at the hospital."

"I want to see the bottle," I whispered. He picked it up and handed it to me. Sure enough, my name was emblazoned on the small bottle and the date it was filled was Monday. I reached for the pill with a shaky hand, swallowing it dry. I lay back against my pillow, trying to calm my breathing and my stammering heart. Edward rubbed his hand across my forehead and stopped to check my pulse.

"Bella, I'm worried, sweetheart," Edward whispered. "You went through a traumatic experience and having someone ring your doorbell should not elicit such a reaction."

"Were you able to go into the trauma room where Tanya died?" I asked, looking at him sadly.

"Touché. It took me six months before I could go in there before breaking out into a cold sweat," Edward said. "Will you be okay here? Once I've left?"

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "As much as I appreciate all you've done for me, I can't rely on it."

"Why?"

"What happens when you leave?"

"Bella, I'm not going anywhere. I've told you that. You're stuck with me forever," he said fervently.

"Mr. Masen? You're locks are done."

"I'll be right there," Edward called. "Stay here." I nodded and Edward went out to my family room. I listened to his conversation with the locksmith. A few moments later, Edward came back into the bedroom holding a set of keys. "Your new keys, madam."

## A Fresh Start

"Thanks," I mumbled. I couldn't look at him in the eyes. I was so horrible. Horrendous. Hateful. "How much do I owe you?"

"Nothing, beautiful. This is about your safety. It is of utmost importance," Edward said forcefully.

Being stubborn, I got out of my bed and went into my dresser. I took out two hundred dollars in cash and stuck it in Edward's pocket. "I don't need your charity, Edward. I can pay to get my fucking locks changed," I sneered.

"Bella, relax. I'm trying to help," he said, taking the money out of his pocket and placed it on my bedspread. "I know you're scared and you're lashing out."

"Edward, I'm fucking terrified," I shouted. "He's out on bond. He's coming back. He's going to finish what he started. Did you see my cabinet? That was my fucking head!"

"God damn, yes! I saw it. I saw it when I ran in to find your ex-husband slamming your head into the kitchen floor. He was slamming your head on a concrete floor, Bella. I just found you and fucking REFUSE to let you go. I will walk through fire and pits of hell to make sure that you're safe," Edward yelled. "I can't lose another person who I love. If it means that I have to pay to get you new locks or move you into fucking Fort Knox, I'm sure as hell going to do it. Bella, I know you are not ready, but I know in my heart that I am going to give you my heart. My soul. My life. Quit being so damned proud and stubborn and let me take care of you."

Edward sat down in the chair in my bedroom, burying his hands in his hair. He ran into his sunglasses and he tossed them on the floor. I sat on my bed, flummoxed at Edward's tirade. He ran his hands furiously through his hair and I heard him sniffle and cry. I stood up and knelt in front of him. I gently took his face but he pulled away. "Bella, don't," he growled.

I sat back on my heels, dropping my hands. "I'm sorry, Edward," I whispered inaudibly. "I fucked up." I got up and Edward's arms shot around my waist. He pulled me to him and buried his nose into my shirt.

## A Fresh Start

"I can't lose you, Bella," he sobbed. "My heart can't take it. It just can't." I pushed him back on the chair and straddled his waist, wrapping my arms around his neck. I put my head against the crook of his neck, inhaling his heady scent. "I love you, Bella. So much. I physically ache when I'm apart from you. I can't...just...can't..."

I pulled his face to look into his eyes. They were glistening with tears, but a beautiful shade of evergreen. His cheeks flushed from his tears. I leaned down and caressed my lips with his. An angel's kiss. Soft, sweet and inviting. Our kiss deepened as Edward's lips moved more forcefully with mine. His tongue brushed my top lip and asked for entry. I opened my mouth with a moan and his tongue danced erotically with mine. My fingers reached his shirt and began unbuttoning his shirt. My fingers lightly raked down his skin. His muscles contracted and his smattering of chest hair tickled my palms. "Bella," he moaned as his lips moved to my neck, across my jaw and to my ear lobe.

I moaned and tangled my fingers in his hair. His hands moved to my hem of my shirt. Edward's fingertips danced along my stomach and to my back as he inched my shirt up. He removed his lips from my skin and ripped my shirt from my body. I pushed his button down off his broad shoulders. Edward's hands fisted my hair and angled my neck so he could attach his warm, wet lips to my neck. "Edward," I sighed. He nipped at my sensitive skin, reaching behind my back. With a flick of the wrist, my bra was unclasped and he was pulling down the straps. My bra was flung across of the room and Edward took my nipple into his teeth, biting down. I yelped and I felt myself get more aroused as his tongue licked my taut peak.

"Fuck, you taste delicious, Bella," he mumbled against my skin. "I could live off of you." His mouth captured mine in a needy, forceful kiss. Our tongues fought for dominance and I grinded against his growing erection. Edward moaned and his hands moved to my ass, pulling to his body. "I want you, Bella."

I groaned and moved my mouth from his, licking along his scruffy jaw. I bit down on his earlobe and I felt his cock twitch. "Oh, God," I moaned.

## A Fresh Start

"God's not here, baby. I am," he teased as his hands moved to my breasts. "Your tits are perfect, baby. They fit perfectly in my hands."

I moaned. I licked his neck and bit down on the sensitive spot behind his ear. Edward growled, deep in his chest and he stood up, wrapping my legs around his waist. He took a few steps to my bed and we fell onto it in a tangle of limbs, lips, and moans. Edward pinned me to the bed with his hips, his mouth moving fervently against mine. I rolled my body and shoved on his shoulder. I straddled his waist and I gently cupped his cock. "Hmmm, so hard, Edward," I purred.

"Always and only for you, baby," he said in a husky voice. "Are you wet for me?"

"I'm not sure," I said coyly. Edward rolled his hips and I was on my back. Edward reached for my button of my jeans and he deftly released it. He slipped his hands into my jeans, into my underwear. His long fingers circled my clit, teasing me.

"Hmmm, very wet," he said as he withdrew his fingers from my panties. He moved his fingers to his mouth, sucking on them lightly. "Definitely could live off you, Bella. The sweetest delicacy." I whimpered and wiggled my hips. "Want more?"

"Please," I begged. "I need you, Edward. I'm sorry that I was so stubborn..."

Edward stopped my apology with his lips. He unzipped my jeans and pulled them down my hips. I reached for his belt buckle, releasing it. I then unbuttoned his fly, easing them down. "Fuck, baby. I want you so badly," he moaned. "I want make you forget. Make you scream *my name*." Edward settled between my legs and thrust his arousal against my cotton covered core. "Only think preventing that is a few scraps of fabric."

"Edward, I want you, too. But not yet. I don't want the first time we make love for it to be 'make up sex,'" I said, running my fingers through his hair.

## A Fresh Start

Edward's face fell slightly, but he smiled wickedly. "We may not make love today, but I can still make you scream my name, beautiful girl." He arched a brow and his fingers danced along my waistband of my black boy shorts. His hand pulled on my panties and they moved down my legs. He moved down my body, licking and suckling on my breasts. I moaned and wiggled my body. Edward laughed against my skin and he moved further down my body, nipping at my hipbones. He inhaled deeply as he ran his nose along my soaking core. "God, baby. You're so fucking wet." Edward flicked my clit with his hot tongue. My hips bucked and he placed a restraining arm across my body. With his tongue, he licked the depths of my sex and I threw my head back in ecstasy. Edward hummed against my skin and it reverberated against my core.

"Ed-ward," I moaned, fisting my fingers through his hair. His tongue moved faster against my core, causing the most wonderful feeling to my body. My hips moved over their own accord, moving at the same rhythm as Edward's tongue. With one of his fingers, he traced my entrance. With expert precision, he plunged it into my body. "Fuck," I screamed.

"Soon, baby," Edward cooed as he licked my inner thigh. "You won't know what hit you, beautiful." He drew my clit between his teeth and put in a second finger, curling them against my body. His tongue moved feverishly against my body, bringing my body to the brink. I was so close. So close to erupting in pleasure. "Damn baby. You are soaked. That's so god damned hot," he growled. "Do you want come beautiful girl?"

"Oh, god! Please," I moaned as I moved my hips against his face. "I'm so close, Edward. I've never felt so good." My hands moved up to my chest, gently playing with my breasts. Edward arched a brow as he continued to eat my pussy. His ministrations were faster and he added a third finger, pumping his hand faster in my body.

"Come for me, Isabella," Edward commanded, his voice forceful. At his words, my muscles clenched and I screamed, arching my back. Edward kept his lips attached to my body as I returned to Earth from my brief trip to heaven. My breathing slowed and I threw my arms above my head. My body was jello and covered in sweat. Edward crawled up my body, pressing soft kisses as he went.

## A Fresh Start

"Feel good beautiful?"

I nodded, looking at him. He had a sexy smirk on his face, obviously proud of what he had done. I caressed his face, brushing his hair off his forehead. Edward leaned down and kissed my lips. I deepened the kiss and wrapped my legs around his waist. He fell between my legs, his hardened length pressed against my entrance. However, it was covered by his boxers. I pushed us so we both laying on our sides and I snaked my hand down his belly. I slipped my hand into his boxers and grasped his cock.

*I forgot how big he was.*

He groaned and he shimmied his boxers off his body. I pumped his erection a few times before I moved down his body. I pressed soft kisses to his chest, to each of his scars and licking across his belly. Edward grunted as I looked at him through my lashes. "I taste okay, Edward. You're better," I purred. I swirled my tongue around the head of his cock. He watched me with lidded eyes. I pulled his cock into my mouth, taking him as far as I could. I relaxed my jaw and eased further back in my mouth.

"Fuck, woman. Do you have a gag reflex?" Edward croaked.

"Nope," I said as tapped his cock against my lips. I plunged his cock into my mouth and sucked lightly. Edward groaned and his hips swiveled. With my hands, I twisted and worked his dick and balls. Edward's brow was furrowed and I could see beads of sweat along his temples. "Don't hold back, Edward. I know you want to."

"I want to what?" he crooned.

"Fuck my mouth," I answered with a blush that crept over my cheeks. "Let go, handsome." Edward growled and hips moved at a frantic pace. I moved my head with the same rhythm as his hips, twisting my hands around his glorious cock. I dragged my teeth along the underside of his shaft and his jaw dropped.

## A Fresh Start

"God, Bella. I'm...fuck!" he roared as he put his hand gently against my head. I hummed against his skin and his eyes were filled with lust and love. "Shit, baby. I'm...I'm..." he cried as his brows raised. I kept up my pace, moving quickly with his body. I bit down more forcefully and I felt his cock harden and then twitch in my mouth. Edward fell back against the bed and he spilled into my mouth. I lapped up all he had to offer, which surprised me. I never enjoyed doing that to Mike or anybody else. But I craved it with Edward. I wanted to taste him. All of him.

I released Edward's cock and giggled. "What are you laughing at?" Edward panted.

"You. The fact that I reduce a 6'2" man to a panting mess is very empowering," I smiled.

I dabbed my lips daintily and smirked. Edward growled and threw me onto the bed, hovering over me. "You are a dangerous creature. So tempting. So delicious. So *mine*," he said as he rolled his hips against mine. His cock nuzzled my entrance and I moaned. Edward pulled away and put on his boxers. "Tempting is the most apt description of you, Bella. I so wanted to make love to you."

"I want you to, but not yet," I said as sat up, leaning on my elbows. "I don't want it to be a reaction to us fighting."

"I understand. I do," Edward sighed. "Besides, I'm not as young as I used to be. I need some recovery time. You drained me."

"Yummy," I said as I licked my lips.

Edward growled and he tossed me my shirt. "Get dressed before I do something that I might regret, Swan."

"Yes, Dr. McFuckme," I purred as I slowly put my shirt on. I hopped out of bed and bent down in front of Edward, flaunting my lack of underwear as I picked up my panties and jeans. Edward snarled and smacked my ass. I

## A Fresh Start

squeaked and Edward got dressed.

"I am sorry, Bella. I didn't mean to yell earlier. You just don't know or understand the depth of my feelings for you. I say that I love you, but it's so much more than that. I never believed in soul mates or any of that crap until I met you. What I feel for you rocks me to my very core. I honestly couldn't imagine if anything would happen to you. I am naturally protective, but even more so with you," Edward said as he sat down in front of me. He caressed my cheeks and kissed my nose.

"Edward, I do understand. I'm just so afraid of getting hurt again. Emotionally, mentally and physically. I want nothing more than to be with you in every way, but I'm so fearful of getting burned. I mean, the man I was married to for five years, been with for nearly eight, up and tells me he cheated on me and we get divorced. Then months after the divorce is finalized he goes bat shit crazy!"

I took a deep breath and stared into Edward's sea green orbs, "I love you so much that I would do anything in my power to ensure your safety, your happiness, your sanity. I...just...I love you."

"Are you still going to shove \$200 in my shirt?" Edward snarked.

"No. You've done so much for me this week. I don't want to be indebted to you any further," I sighed.

"Bella, I'd give you my left kidney. Which is a lot since I only have my left one," he laughed. "You can never be indebted to me. Simply because I won't accept anything in return."

"But you said..."

"Is this about your practicum?" Edward asked.

"Yes," I replied. "I will pay you back."

"We'll see," Edward smiled.



## A Fresh Start

"A loan! I said I'd accept a loan," I wailed. "I have my dignity."

"There's also dignity in accepting a gift. It's not wrong to accept gifts. Bella, please?" Edward pouted, jutting his lip out.

"Fuck me, with the damn lip," I grumbled. I tweaked his lip, licking it. "You are too adorable."

He smiled, knowing he'd won. "Damn straight I'm adorable. And sexy. And fucking in love with you."

"Dr. FoulMouth," I giggled.

"Would you rather I use multisyllabic medical terms when I'm going down on you? Describing your labia in graphic detail?" Edward teased.

"No, that's okay."

"Good, because I don't think I could do it. You love me. Foul mouth and all," he said pulling me closer to him, causing my legs to surround his waist.

"Yes, I do."

"As I love you," he grinned.

*It's official, we're nauseating.*

"Yes, we are, Bella. But I fucking love it."

"Did I say that out loud?" I squeaked.

"Yep."

*Fuck. Me.*

"Later, baby," Edward laughed.

## A Fresh Start

"Okay, I apparently have no brain to mouth filter today."

"Nope. It's god damned adorable," Edward said as he kissed my lips. "And I won't 'fuck' you. I'll make sweet love to you. I promise you that."

*Squeak.*

"I heard that!"

**A/N: Some lemony goodness. I hoped you like. Leave me love! Reviews make me insanely happy. I mean really happy. xoxox!**

# The Talk

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 17: The Talk

### EPOV

I was worried about Bella. Her reaction was too strong upon entering her condo. My first instinct as a doctor was to calm her down. But a stronger instinct as her boyfriend was to get her the fuck out of there. Not that she would have left. Damn stubborn woman.

I was also concerned about her lashing out at me. What she had gone through with her ex-husband was horrific and terrifying. I get that. Really I do, but I had a strange inclination that she was comparing what he did to what I was doing. It was pissing me off. I want nothing more than for Bella to be happy. I see glimpses of it, but there's an insecure, scared woman there who is afraid of letting me in. I had to get in. She says she loves me, but I see the doubt in her eyes. Fuck. Lord knows I love her. So much.

*More than Tanya. If that is even possible.*

After our argument in her bedroom, I changed into a pair of scrubs and worked with Bella to finish cleaning her kitchen. We scoured and scrubbed every inch

## A Fresh Start

of that place. Bella then handed me a measuring tape. I arched a brow and she pointed to the cabinet door where there was a Bella-sized shape in the wood. We measured the door so Bella could replace it. I could see her hands shake when she wrote down the measurements as I read them off. I covered her hands with mine, gently taking the pen from tiny fingers. "You're not ready to be here. Baby, even with the Xanax, you're a nervous wreck," I whispered.

"I can't just stay with you, Edward. I have my mortgage and I can't afford to stay at both places," she said, running a trembling hand through her hair.

"What can I do to convince you otherwise?" I asked. "Make a pros/cons list?"

Her brows shot up and she drew her lip into her teeth. *Fuck. I love it when she does that. Makes me hard.* Behave, you perv!

I picked up the pad of paper with the measurements and the pen. I grabbed her hand and dragged her into the family room, plopping her on the sofa. I flipped the paper to a new page and put the pen in my hand. Bella chuckled.

"What?"

"I can't believe you're doing this, Edward," she giggled. "And random thought, I didn't realize you're left handed."

"Yeah, definitely random," I laughed. "Okay, let's start with pros."

"Hmmm, you get me out of your hair," she teased.

"Isabella!" I snapped. "I enjoy having you at my house. It's not as lonely. Be serious."

"Fine," she huffed. She rolled her doe eyes and tapped her lips.

"Having a hard time trying to figure out positives, Bella?" I chided.

"Shut it, Dr. Masen," she said with a sardonic grin.

## A Fresh Start

*Fuck, I love when she calls me that.*

Must tame the monster. Down boy.

"Mail," she blurted.

"Mail?"

"Yes, my mail is delivered here," she said triumphantly, pointing to pad of paper in my lap. I picked up my pen and scrawled mail on the pros side.

I arched a brow. "That's one."

"It's closer to school," she said. "Rosalie's down the hall. Um, my clothes are here."

I jotted down her ideas making mental notes that they were weak arguments. Extremely weak arguments. She was shooting for anything. Her brows furrowed and she nibbled on her finger. "Struggling? We can move to the cons," I suggested. She nodded.

"Okay, so cons for staying," I said as I wrote it down on the paper.

"I'm afraid to be alone," she whispered.

*Ah ha! We're getting somewhere!*

"Alone as in by yourself or alone as in fearful of someone hurting you?" I pressed. I tried to rely on my psych rotation from medical school to get her to open up and tell the truth.

"Both," she said, fumbling with her jeans.

"Who are you afraid of that's going to hurt you?" I asked, putting the paper down.

## A Fresh Start

"Mike," she said.

"That's not all, is it?"

Her eyes shut and she bit her lip, hard. I winced at the action. "Bella? What are you afraid of?"

"You," she sighed.

*Bingo...shit.*

"Why are you afraid of me?" I whispered, cupping her chin, forcing her to look into my eyes.

"You'll leave me too. I can't get too attached," she said, pulling her chin away.

"Why do you think I'll leave?"

"Shit, look at you, Edward. You're Adonis in the flesh," she snorted. "You can have any woman in the world."

"But, I want you," I answered honestly. "Bella, I've been on dates since Tanya's death. Friends setting me up with their single girlfriends. They were nice, but they weren't you. I feel this connection with you that I've never felt with anyone before. Even Tanya. But there is more to what you're saying besides my appearance."

"I'm afraid that I'm not good enough. That I'm tainted. Not worthy of your love," she sniffled.

"Why do you feel like that? You're not tainted," I said.

"Yes, I am. I couldn't keep my first husband. How can I get another one? Do I want another one?" she said as she paced around her living room.

## A Fresh Start

"Bella, your first husband was a fucking moron who couldn't keep it in his pants. Now that he sees you finally happy, he wants you back. Obviously, he's going through the wrong channels to get you back, but that's his thinking," I said, watching her pace.

"What can I do?" she whispered as she stood by the patio door. "I'm so fucking lost."

"The first thing you need to ask yourself is what is good for Bella?" I said. "If it's not good for you, then you need to take a step back. Us, for example."

"Us," she sighed.

"Is our relationship helping you or hindering you?" I asked, afraid of the answer. I knew that she would say helping, but in all actuality it was probably hindering her. "If my presence is hindering you, I will back off. Bella, I'm determined to keep you in my life. If I need to walk away so you can focus on you, I will."

"Edward, you're the one thing in my life that is positive," she said, looking at me. "You've been so supportive and loving and I can't even describe it."

"But you doubt me. You doubt us. I think a lot of that is stemmed from your insecurities with Mike," I said.

"What should I do?"

"Have you considered counseling?" I asked. "When I lost Tanya, I was so fucking hesitant to do it, but in the long run it was the best god damned decision I made in my life."

"I met with a counselor a few times but we didn't 'click,'" she replied.

"Mind if I ask who?"

## A Fresh Start

"Um, Cynthia something," she floundered. She walked to her purse and dug through her wallet. "Peterman. Cynthia Peterman."

"She's a clown," I laughed. "Not the sharpest tool in the shed. That and her specialty are children with behavioral disorders. Not grief counseling."

"Grief counseling?"

"You experienced a loss. The loss of your marriage. It's normal to have grief over that loss," I said as I cocked my head.

"I'm not sorry that my marriage is over. I'm sorry that he can't get a fucking clue!" Bella ranted. "He is cold and distant. Always been that way. I thought it would change, but it didn't. When I finally get to my breaking point, he tells me he cheated on me with a co-worker. We go our separate ways. He proposes to his whore who is pregnant with his child and he flies off the deep end. I mean what the fuck?"

"Bella, your ex-husband is an asshat. I mean seriously disturbed and stupid. He obviously fucked with your mind without you even knowing it. I think that you need to talk to someone," I encouraged.

"But, I'm comfortable talking with you," she said petulantly.

"It's like the ER. I can't be your doctor. I'm too emotionally vested. I'm also not all that great with the psychiatry crap," I said with a wave of the hand.

"You did pretty well right now," Bella mumbled.

"That's about the extent of my expertise. I know my limitations. The rest is compassion," I offered. "And love."

"I don't want to go back to Cynthia Peterman."

"So, don't. Michele Fillman is an excellent therapist. I think you'd like her," I said with a reluctant grin. "She's smart, sassy and completely irreverent."



## A Fresh Start

"Give me her number," Bella relented.

I smiled and got up from the couch. I flipped through my contacts on my phone and rattled off the number. Bella wrote it down on the paper on the couch. "I'm going to program it into my phone," she smiled.

"That might be a problem," I said with a grimace.

"Why?"

"When I was cleaning up by the baseboards, I found this," I said as I held out her ruined iPhone. Her eyes dazed and she started shaking uncontrollably.

"Bella?"

Fat tears fell down her cheeks and she fell into herself. *She's having a flashback, idiot.* I knelt before her and took her hands into mine. "Listen to my voice, Bella. You're safe. No one will hurt you," I said soothingly. She whimpered in reply. "I love you, my beautiful girl. I'll do everything in my power to ensure your safety. Please come back to me."

Her breath was coming in short pants. I felt her pulse at her wrist and it was racing. "Deep breaths, Bella," I whispered. Her breathing got more erratic and she moaned, rubbing her chest. I pulled her onto the floor with me, her back to my chest. "Breathe with me, Bella. Please," I begged. I surrounded her in a warm embrace, breathing slowly and deeply. She resisted at first. I held her close, cooing in her ear. Pleading with her to calm down. Her body slowly relaxed against mine as her breathing normalized. I surreptitiously checked her pulse and it was slowing to a more normal rate. We sat on the floor, with Bella huddled between my legs for awhile. "You can't stay here," I whispered.

"I know," she said in a broken voice. "I have nowhere else to go."

"Yes, you do, Bella. You can stay with me," I replied. "If you want to stay in the guest bedroom, that's fine. I won't take offense."

"I can't stay with you forever, Edward," she muttered.

## A Fresh Start

*If I had my way, you would. With a ring on your finger.* "I know, baby. But being here is not good for your mental health," I said, kissing her neck. "You had a strong reaction with the locksmith and another with your phone. You are displaying symptoms of PTSD."

"PTSD?" she asked, turning in my arms.

"Post traumatic stress disorder. I had it when I lost Tanya. Remember when I said I couldn't go into the trauma room where she died?" I asked. Bella nodded. "That was a trigger for me. Flashbacks, nightmares, night terrors."

"How do you get over it?"

"Through therapy and if that doesn't work, medication. A mood stabilizer and anti-anxiety medication," I answered.

"Did you take medication?" Bella questioned.

"Anxiety meds. Not the mood stabilizer. I tried it for a few weeks but it kicked my ass. I got off of it really quickly," I replied, wrinkling my nose. "I was ativan. It's a bit stronger than xanax. But then again, I'm a bit bigger than you."

Bella scoffed and rolled her eyes. "You're like a whole head and a half taller than me, Edward. I'm a midget compared to you."

"But you're my midget," I smiled. "Do you want to head back to my house?"

"By way of the cell phone store," she muttered as she held up her broken phone. I plucked the phone out of her hand and put it into my pocket of my scrub top. "I'll pack my bags." She got up and walked to her bedroom. Her posture was still defeated. I was so frustrated. I didn't know how to fix this.

*You can only lead a horse to water...*

Bella was puttering in her room and I went out on her balcony. I called Alice. "Hello, baby brother!"

## A Fresh Start

"Hey, Elf," I smiled. "How are you doing?"

"I'm good. Tired as fuck. This week was killer. The kids were torn up about Taylor and the staff was on edge. How are you?"

"Overwhelmed," I sighed.

"That's not good. I got the sigh," she giggled. "Is it Bella?"

"I'm worried about her, Alice. We came to her condo today and she flipped out. I mean lost her shit," I said, running my hands through my hair. "Twice."

"Damn," she mused. "Is she okay now? Is she staying there?"

"I don't think she's okay. And no, she's coming back to my house. She was trembling and terrified when we came in this afternoon," I answered. "Then she had some pretty strong and profound flashbacks."

"Fucking Mike. I hate him," Alice seethed.

"Was he like this when they were married?"

"Physically violent? No. Emotionally cruel? Yes."

"What?" I growled. "Explain, Mary Alice."

"He would put her down constantly. Belittle her in front of her friends. When we went over to their home, he treated her like a servant, not a wife. He showed no love to her. No affection. I never said anything as it wasn't my place, but you could see the pain in Bella's eyes when he was with her. It got worse as the years progressed. She gained weight and he would fucking torture her about being a fat ass. Edward, she gained weight because she had ankle surgeries and serious ankle injuries. She can't do much in the form of exercise."

"Anything else? I'm so ready to string this fucker up by his balls," I sneered.

## A Fresh Start

"No. Just the constant belittling and relentless teasing. However, there could be more. You'd have to ask Bella," Alice said quietly. "Edward, you're good for her. She might not realize it now, but I've seen my old friend since you've come into her life. She used to be a shell of her usual vibrant self. Then she married Mike and all that changed. She became shy and withdrawn. She's also brought back my brother. I've missed you."

"I've missed you, too, Elf," I smiled into the phone.

"Tell Bella that we're going shopping tomorrow. We need to get her some clothes that fit," Alice demanded.

"Alice, she said that she's strapped for cash," I explained.

"So? Give her your credit card," Alice said simply.

"She won't accept it. She borrowed it to sign up for her practicum but she's insisting that she pay me back," I grumbled.

"She knows how much you're worth? Right?"

"She knows I have money. Not the exact amount though," I said as I nibbled on my thumbnail. "She knows I own the house I live in. No mortgage."

"Edward, your parents saved and scrimped and invested wisely. She should know your worth," Alice said.

"Alice, it's not about the damn money. Hell, if I lived under a fucking rock, I'd be happy if Bella was with me," I said fervently. "She doesn't need to know. Not yet."

"Okay, Edward," she relented. "But, I'm still taking your girlfriend out shopping. I'll buy her clothes. She's drowning in the ones she's wearing. Except for the suit she wore to the funeral. She looked hot in the suit. But then again, I bought it for her in the right size."

## A Fresh Start

"Alice, you're rambling," I snorted.

"What? She lost fifty some odd pounds and she's still wearing the same clothes she wore when she was heavier," Alice wailed.

"Alice, let it be," I griped. "Jesus! Not everyone is into fashion like you."

"You are," Alice teased.

"That's because I like to look nice. I'm metrosexual, Elf."

"Whatever, fashion boy," Alice teased. "I'll talk to you later. Love you."

"Love you, too."

I hung up my phone, sliding it into my pocket. I went back inside to find Bella balancing two duffel bags. "Shit, Bella. Let me get those," I said as I jogged over to her. "Do you need anything else?"

"I have a garment bag with some of my work clothes," she said sheepishly.

"Your dress pants and shirt are in that bag. I'm sorry. I feel like I'm moving in."

"Well, you know my opinion of that," I smirked.

"It's only temporary, Edward. I have to not have a fucking panic attack when I walk through the door," she grumbled. "One week. Two tops."

"Fine," I said as balanced her bags on my shoulder. I went into her bedroom and slipped the garment bag over my arm and picked up her new keys. I walked back out into the foyer and Bella had thrown my bag over her shoulder. She gave me a small smirk. She dangled her keys with her fingers. "Are you okay to drive?"

"I'll be fine. You look like a pack mule," she giggled.

## A Fresh Start

"Shut it, Swan," I said narrowing my eyes. "Let's go." We descended the stairs and loaded up her car.

She drove to the cell phone store and followed. She walked into the store, wary of their reaction to her broken phone. Bella asked to speak to the manager and she explained her situation. He bristled and said that she would need to purchase a new phone at full cost. She calmly reasoned with him that she purchased the extended warranty. He checked the computer and discovered she was right. He gave her a new phone, 'under duress.' She said that if his attitude didn't improve, she would contact his boss. Talk about a 180. You would have thought that she shit diamonds the way he fawned over her. *That's my girl.*

We drove back to my place and I cooked us a quiet dinner. Bella didn't eat much and she said she was tired. She went up the stairs, dragging her feet. I heard her putter in my bedroom and then silence. I grabbed my laptop from my office and sent off a quick email to Michele about Bella. I also did some research about her ex-husband. She said that she was with him for nearly eight years, but they met in college. I did a Google search of her ass-hat ex-husband and found some information. I accessed his Facebook page and saw he was still listed as 'engaged' to Jessica Stanley. That surprised me. I looked back at the articles that I found and sifted through them. There was one that caught my eye. It was in 2001. 'Michael Newton' was arrested for domestic battery in Nottingbrook. I checked his age and it appeared to be him. There was no picture. I checked the information on his victim, logging into the hospital's database. She would have been brought to Craven. On the date that was mentioned, two possible domestic battery cases were brought into the ER. I searched those names. One of the women had moved or so it appeared. But another woman, Charlotte Mitchell, had died. Had died by blunt force trauma due to extreme physical contact. She was beaten to death. Her killer was never found.

She looked exactly like Bella.

*Holy Shit.*

## A Fresh Start

**A/N: I hope you enjoyed the glimpse into Edward's head. So, did Mike kill Charlotte? Is Edward being too much like Nancy Drew? Am I being too predictable? Leave me love (or hate) ;-)**

# The Reality

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 18: The Reality

### BPOV

I'm dating a fucking saint. I'll tell you that.

I lost my shit. I mean lost it. My heart was pounding. My head was spinning. My breath was shallow. I wanted nothing for it all to end. All of it. But, Edward calmed me down. He faced my wrath, which was unpleasant, but he calmed me down. He rationalized and made me come to grips that I was in no state to stay in my condo. I was fucking losing it with him there. What would happen if he left?

*You'd slice your wrists.*

We wouldn't want that. No sir. Nope. Nope. Nope. That would just royally suck and yeah.

After we got back to Edward's house, I unpacked my bags while Edward cooked. He told me to put my clothes in the closet, using up whatever space I needed. We ate a quiet dinner. I wasn't in the mood to talk. Edward didn't press



## A Fresh Start

me. Once we finished our dinner, I excused myself to go to bed. I showered and brushed my teeth. I crawled into the sheets and fell into a restless sleep.

I was aware of every sound. Every movement. Everything in that house. When Edward got into bed, I tensed up. Fearful that it was Mike. Edward crooned in my ear and held me tightly to his chest, spooning me to his body. My mind settled down after he came to bed, but I was rattled with horrendous nightmares. Being back in my condo triggered my memory. The attack that Mike did to me came rushing back and I never realized how brutal it was. With each nightmare, Edward held me close. He talked me down. He breathed with me. He calmed me. Loved me.

*Why?*

Around five in the morning, I rolled out of bed. Edward was still asleep but his face was furrowed in a sleepy grimace. I gently ran my fingers over his handsome features and he relaxed some. I put on a pair of workout pants, sneakers and t-shirt and grabbed my iPod. I put my ear buds in my ears and went for a walk. I needed to calm my mind. I pounded the pavement, walking to the beats of the music resounding in my ears. I walked until I felt my muscles in my legs scream at me. I walked until I couldn't anymore. I walked until I felt a sharp tap on my shoulder.

"Mrs. Newton?"

I pulled out my ear buds and looked at the person who was addressing me by *that* name. It was Mr. Molina. One of my neighbors. "Hi, Mr. Molina. How are you doing?"

"I'm good. I don't see you around much," he smiled, his black eyes twinkling.

"Oh, I don't live here anymore. Mike and I got divorced. He moved out in March and the house sold in late April," I said with a wave of the hand. "I live in a condo but I'm visiting a friend."

"Ah. That's a shame about your divorce, Mrs. Newton," he sighed.

## A Fresh Start

"Swan. My last name is Swan," I said curtly.

"My apologies. Mrs. Molina and I have been together for thirty years. She deals with my cantankerous ass every day," he joked. "Bless her soul."

"You are not cantankerous, Mr. Molina," I laughed. "Mr. Banner. He's the grumpy one."

"Definitely. Him and his damn pug. What's that's dog's name?"

"Don't know. Don't care. Because that damn pug shit on my lawn," I said.

"He shits on all of our lawns. Lazy ass," Mr. Molina said knowingly. "It was good to see you, Ms. Swan. I'll let you finish your walk."

"Nice talking to you, Mr. Molina," I waved. I put my ear buds back in my ears and walked back toward Edward's house. As I was walking, I found myself stopped in front of my old home. It looked the same. Big, lavish and...

*Not yours.*

This wasn't my home. My condo wasn't my home.

*Edward is your home. He makes you feel safe. He loves you. He supports you. He deals with your crazy ass.*

I stared at my old house, emotions flowing through my body. It was like a car accident. I should look away, but couldn't. I wanted to hurdle rocks through the windows. I wanted scream at the top of my lungs. But I just stood there, staring blankly at the house.

"Bella!"

Edward's voice broke me from my reverie. He was wearing a pair of running shorts, running shoes and t-shirt. His hair was covered by a baseball cap and he had on his sunglasses. I shuffled on my feet, staring at him as he gracefully ran

## A Fresh Start

toward me. I removed my ear buds, stuffing my iPod into my pocket.

"I've been looking all over for you," he said, breathing heavily. "I woke up to go to the bathroom and your side of the bed was empty. And cold."

"What time is it?" I asked.

"Nearly eight," he said as he removed his hat, wiping sweat from his brow.

"I couldn't sleep," I muttered. "So, I went for a walk to clear my head. I've been up since around five."

"Fuck me," Edward mused.

"Not yet, Dr. Masen," I said as I slapped his sweaty chest. "What time did you wake up?"

"Around seven. When I saw you were gone, I grabbed my running shoes and started searching. Why did you stop here?"

"This was my old house," I said, gesturing to the traditional home in front of us. "I was heading back when I stopped and here I was."

"It's nice," Edward said. "Do you miss it?"

"No." I turned on my heel and started walking toward Edward's home.

Edward jogged to catch up with me and he fell into step with my brisk pace.

"What's wrong, Bella? What's with the curt tone?"

"Bad memories," I bristled.

"Of?" Edward prompted.

"Mistakes," I said cryptically. My mind raced to memories of Mike's coldness. His constant teasing of me. How he treated me like a servant in my own home.

## A Fresh Start

Expecting meals to be prepared when he walked through the door. An immaculately kept house. Constant belittling and snide comments about my friends, weight and job. His cruel jokes about my body. "I'm a fucking idiot."

"Bella, you are not an idiot," Edward said.

"Yes, I am. I should have gotten away sooner. Mike is a cancer. He spreads his vileness all over the planet," I sneered. "He made me believe that I was worthy of his love, but I wasn't."

"Did you love him?"

"At the time, I thought so. I was over the moon that he chose me," I said, arching a brow.

"Did he love equally?" Edward asked, stepping in front of me, stopping us in our tracks.

"How so?"

"Did he love you in the same way that you loved him?" Edward asked, trying to clarify his question.

"Not really," I replied. I brushed past him and continued walking back to Edward's house. "Why are you asking me these questions, Edward?"

"Testing a theory," he said grimly.

"A theory?"

"Yes, a theory. Did you know a woman named Charlotte Mitchell?" Edward asked.

"I went to school with her. She was murdered in 2001. Why?"

"Do you know how she was murdered?"

## A Fresh Start

"Edward, what the hell are you talking about?" I questioned.

"Answer the question, Bella."

"I think she was beaten to death," I replied.

"Bella, listen carefully to what I have to say. Last night, I did some research after you went to sleep. Alice told me some things about Mike," he sneered. "His behavior just doesn't sit right with me."

"It doesn't sit right with me either," I sighed as I started up the walk to Edward's house. He opened the door and pulled my hand to his living room, sitting on the microsuede couch.

"I Googled Mike and there were some articles about him. Some were sketchy at best, but one stuck out. A Michael Newton was arrested in 2001 for domestic battery in Nottingbrook."

"I was doing student teaching at the time. Mike and I weren't together in 2001. It was right after we broke up in college. He was living Nottingbrook. I think. I didn't really care at the time," I said.

"I then checked medical records at Craven. I logged on to the hospital database and checked for possible domestic battery cases on the date in question that came into the ER. There were two women that were brought in. One moved away and never returned. The other was Charlotte Mitchell. Less than three months after her 'attack,' she's beaten to death," Edward said, holding my hands. "She refused to press charges against her attacker, Michael Newton. Michael Walton Newton. Please tell me that is not your ex-husband's full name."

I blinked at Edward. I paled and shot up from the seat on the couch. I ran to the bathroom and hurled up my dinner from the night before. Edward crouched next to me, holding my hair from my face. "Bella, there's more."

## A Fresh Start

I sat back and leaned against the wall, staring at Edward. He smiled sheepishly and then tucked a hair behind my ear. "Charlotte looks freakishly like you."

"In school, everyone thought we were twins," I chuckled darkly. "If you walked behind us, you couldn't tell who was who. Same body type. Same hair. Same coloring. Hell, we even dressed similarly."

"Did you know that Charlotte was dating Mike?"

"I didn't think so. We had broken up. I was in the mourning phase," I sighed.

"Who broke up with whom?"

"I broke up with him. I needed to focus on student teaching and Mike was begging for more," I sighed.

"More like, sex?"

"Kind of. Mike was my first. But I was fairly conservative in my ways. He wanted more creative sex. Stuff that I wasn't comfortable doing," I grumbled. "Really kinky shit."

"He never forced you, did he?" Edward growled.

"No. I decided to put the kibosh on it and break it off," I explained. "I did it the summer before I student taught. He was royally pissed, but he let me be."

"When did you meet up with him again?"

"We bumped into each other in September of 2004. We rekindled as friends and our relationship grew from there. However, he was different. Colder. Detached," I explained. "You don't think that...?"

"I do, Bella," he whispered. "We need to tell the cops. And you need to know that I will fucking buy your god damned condo because you are NEVER stepping foot in it again. Hate me all you want, but I can't...I refuse to let you

## A Fresh Start

get hurt or killed by this lunatic." Edward's green eyes shot to mine and they pierced through me. "We'll find you someplace else if you don't want to move in with me, but you cannot go back there."

"But, I can't afford it..."

"I know you are strapped for cash. I'm willing to help. Don't let your pride stop you," Edward said as he grabbed my face, gazing into my eyes.

"It's not right, Edward. You have your own expenses," I muttered. "You shouldn't have to adopt mine."

"Bella, don't freak out," he said as he sat on the bathroom floor facing me.

"Too late, Edward," I snarled.

"Touché. This is something that only Alice, Esme and Carlisle know. No one else. Except Tanya and you know about her," he joked.

"Edward," I growled.

"Okay, okay. You know my father was a pediatric oncologist. My mom was classically trained pianist. World renowned and famous. She made a lot of recordings. Anyhow, they put every penny they made into the stock market and invested wisely. I told you that I received a trust fund when I turned 21. I've since played my own hand in the stock market and quadrupled the original amount."

"What are you saying, Edward?"

"Roughly, I'm worth \$50 million dollars," he said calmly. "Give or take a million."

Again, I blinked at Edward. Then I barked out a hysterical laugh. I rolled onto my side, giggling and snorting in disbelief. "Fifty...fif...million...what? Dollars? You've got to be joking," I said as I wiped my tears away from my conniption

## A Fresh Start

fit. I looked up at him and he was the picture of calm. "You're not joking."

"Nope," he smiled. "So, I could technically buy you condo and you wouldn't have to worry about a damn thing."

"You're not buying my condo, Edward," I said as I sat up. "I'll put it on the market and get another place."

"Bella, I refuse to let you step foot in there. Ever. I just can't even fathom..." he trailed off, his jade eyes saddening.

"Who's to say that Mike will 'finish' the job?" I asked.

"His history indicates he has obvious violent tendencies," Edward said. "Bella, I know 'his' type. He's a man obsessed. He wants you. He let you go when you got divorced, but something snapped. I mean literally caused him to go completely bat shit crazy. In his mind, he only sees himself with you. What does Jessica look like?"

"About my height, blond hair and brown eyes. Very pregnant," I answered. "She doesn't look like me."

"If you dyed her hair, would there be a similarity?" Edward pressed.

I mentally pictured Jessica, closing my eyes. She resembled me, if her hair was brown. However, it was the wrong texture. Her hair was extremely curly. Mine was wavy. "Slight resemblance. Very slight. Hair texture is wrong."

"We need to tell the police. Bella, please say you'll stay with me. I will pay for a realtor, storage unit and anything else just so you don't have to go back to that condo. I'm physically sick to my stomach at the thought of you being there by yourself."

"Rose is down the hall," I retorted.



## A Fresh Start

"I'm concerned for Rose, too," Edward chastised. "Put yourself in my shoes. What if I was in a place, by myself with a crazy psycho ex trying to kill me. Would you want me there?"

"No. But Edward, you're a guy. Big and strong," I said curling my fingers around his bicep. "You can fight someone off."

"I can't fight a gun. Or a knife. I'm fast, but not bulletproof," he said, arching a brow. "I've cheated death once, I don't want to risk it again."

"But..."

"No 'buts' Bella. It's not safe. Would you want your daughter living there with the possibility of her getting hurt? Would your parents want you there? Be reasonable," Edward fumed as he glowered at me. "Like I said, I will help you get another place if you can't afford it and if you are not comfortable moving here. Sure, it may be too damn fast, but this is your life we're talking about. I can't let you die. Call me an overprotective bastard, but it's the damn truth."

Edward got up and stalked out the bathroom. I heard him run up the stairs and the water from the shower started. I sat in the bathroom until I heard my phone ring. I grumbled and ran up the stairs. It was Alice. "What, Elf?" I barked as I left Edward's bedroom.

"Someone's cranky," she giggled.

"Just a smidge," I grumbled. "Mike and I are no longer together and he's still fucking up my life."

"Whoa, explain," Alice said. "How is he fucking up your life?"

I scrubbed my face and laid down on the guest bed. "Edward has this theory that Mike killed Charlotte Mitchell. You know that girl I went to school with?"

"Yeah, you two were like twins," Alice mused. "Did she date Mike?"

## A Fresh Start

"Apparently so. She was brought into Craven with bruises and whatnot. They said it was domestic battery, but she refused to file charges against a Michael Walton Newton," I sighed. "Three months later, she was beaten to death."

"Holy fuck," Alice whispered. "Bella, you can't stay in that condo. What are you going to do?"

"I have no clue, Elf. Edward all but begged me to move in with him, but it's too soon. I can't move out and get an apartment because I have no money," I wailed.

"Bella, Edward will seriously give his left nut to ensure your safety," Alice said simply. "He's insanely protective and he won't stop until he gets his way. My guess is that he wants you to be with him. AND he's willing to buy your condo. Am I right?"

"Yep," I muttered darkly.

"Isabella Marie Swan! You get your head out of your ass and move in with my baby brother!" she screamed, no shrieked, into the phone. I pulled the phone away from my ear and grimaced. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"I don't know, Alice," I yelled back. "I'm fucking terrified. I'm terrified of what'll happen if I stay in my condo; that Mike will fucking find me. And he'll finish me off. But you know what more terrified of?"

"What?"

"That Edward will finally see me for the fucking lunatic that I am and leave me. He's going to leave me. Just like Michael. He'll take my heart out and fucking throw it in my face," I screamed, pulling at my hair. "I'm not worthy of him, Alice. He deserves...he deserves..."

"You," Alice finished for me. "Bella, he's over the moon for you. I mean, I've never seen him this happy or this free since before his accident. When he was injured, he lost part of himself. He got most of it back when he found Tanya."

## A Fresh Start

However, it crumbled when she died. He never fully recovered, until he met you. He smiles. He jokes. He is my Edward. The boy I remembered when I grew up. The man I know he was supposed to be. Not the orphan. Not the widower. He's Edward. And Edward loves you. He wants you. He deserves *you*."

"How do I get over this fear?" I muttered quietly.

"Only you have that answer. I know that Mike fucked you up. I saw how he treated you. I didn't say anything, but I wanted to. You deserved so much better than him. Now, you've found it. Found him. In Edward," Alice sighed. "Don't shut down, Bella. Don't push him away."

"I'm so fucked up, Alice. I don't know what to do. My mind logically thinks I need to stay in my condo. My heart screams for me to stay here," I whimpered.

"Where do you feel safe? Like home?"

"With Edward," I admitted.

"There's your answer, Bella. Don't let your rational mind talk you out of it. He creates an environment for you that is safe, warm and inviting. Follow your heart," Alice said.

"But..."

"Follow. Your. Heart. Do I need to tattoo it to your ass?" Alice chided.

"No," I laughed weakly. "What if I fucked up too much and he rescinds his offer?"

"He won't. Edward is too vested in your relationship. Your safety is paramount. He won't rescind his offer," Alice replied. "Talk to him."

"Okay," I said softly.

## A Fresh Start

"And be ready to go by two," she said.

"What? Why?"

"Because I'm tired of seeing you in clothes that hang off you. Esme, Rose and I are buying you a new wardrobe. Consider it an early birthday present. We won't take no for an answer so buck up and deal with it, Swan," Alice said as she hung up the phone.

*What the hell just happened?*

I blinked and crawled onto the bed, curling around a pillow. Tears fell down my cheeks and I was torn. "What do I do?"

*Follow your heart.*

I heard a faint knock on the door and Edward came into the bedroom, his eyes wary. "Hey," he said quietly.

"Hi," I said, my voice rough. "All clean?"

"Yeah," he said, shuffling his feet. "Bella, I'm sorry. For pushing you. This is your decision to make and I don't want to be an overbearing ass. I'm just worried."

*Follow your heart.*

"I'm sorry, too, Edward," I said holding the pillow to my chest, sitting up on the bed. "I'm..."

"You're what?" Edward asked.

*Follow your heart. Not with your head.*

"I'm terrified," I whispered.

## A Fresh Start

"I know. I heard you yell at Alice," Edward said as he sat on the edge of the bed. I arched a brow. "She texted me. Telling me that you were upset."

"I'm terrified for two reasons. Reason number one, Mike. Obviously," I said.

"And reason two?"

"You."

"Why me?" Edward asked.

"What if you leave?" I questioned.

"I won't. Bella, I promise you. I understand that you are hesitant to believe that promise but I won't leave you. I'm in this. All of this for the long haul. Though you will give me a few new gray hairs with the process," he said with a sardonic smirk.

"Follow your heart," I murmured.

"Excuse me?" Edward asked,

"I'm following my heart," I smiled wistfully.

"Okay, I'm lost," Edward said as he ran his hands through his damp hair. "I need a fucking user's manual with you."

"Your 'big sister' told me to follow my heart and not my head," I sighed. "Don't make me regret this."

"This?"

"Moving in," I smiled.

Edward's face broke into a beautifully radiant grin. He grabbed my arms and picked me up, spinning me in his guest bedroom. I was beginning to feel

## A Fresh Start

nauseous. "Edward?"

"What baby?" he asked.

"I'm going to puke," I said. He quickly put me down and cupped my face with his hands. "Before you get too excited, a few ground rules."

His face sobered but he still had a twinkle in his eyes. "Okay, rules."

"Rule #1: I will pay half of the utilities for this place. If I'm staying here, I can't stay scot free."

"Fair enough," Edward agreed.

"Rule #2: I'm maintaining my own bank accounts. I'm hesitant in combining stuff. It was hellacious..."

"Got it, Bella," Edward laughed. "Anything else?"

"I need help," I sighed.

"Help with what? Your condo?" Edward pressed.

"Yeah. A loan," I said, poking him in his chest.

"Sure, sure," Edward said. "I'll cover your mortgage payments until it's sold. I'll contact my realtor while you're out with Alice, Esme and Rose."

"Fuck me," I grumbled. "Do I really dress that poorly?"

"Bella, you can fit three of you in your clothes," Edward laughed. "You have a gorgeous body. Curves in all the right places. Show it off."

"Pffft," I said intelligently.

"Bella?"

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"What, Edward?"

"I love you," he grinned.

"I love you, too. Also, thank you," I said as I wrapped my arms around his waist. I buried my nose in his chest and for the first time in eight years, if not longer, I felt truly relaxed. I felt safe. I felt like I was home.

xx AFS xx

Promptly at two, Alice, Rose and Esme arrived at Edward's home. *Our* home. And took me to the mall. Edward said he would go back to my condo and replace the broken cabinet door. He also promised to contact his realtor and get it ready to be put on the market.

We spent four hours trying on clothes, shoes, underwear and everything in between. I was fucking exhausted when I got back from my shopping excursion with the girls. However, they dressed me in a brand new wardrobe. Much to my chagrin. I hated to be 'spoiled.' They all convinced me that I deserved to be spoiled. Dealing with this whole thing was overwhelming. So, I got new work clothes, thanks to Rose's ex-husband. New casual clothes, thanks to Esme. New shoes and more new underwear, thanks to Alice and Jasper. They insisted that this was my birthday present.

*Yeah, like ten times over. Jeez!*

Rose and Esme wanted to stop at some jewelry store. I took the opportunity to talk to Alice.

"I got my head out of my ass," I said attractively.

"Yeah, and?" she asked.

"I followed my heart," I smiled.

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"You're moving in?" she asked. I nodded, biting my lip. "With my baby brother?"

"Yes, Alice," I said.

"Ohmigod!" she shrieked as she threw her arms around my neck. "Bella! I can't believe it. You listened to me! Fuck me! This is great news. What's going to happen to the condo?"

"Selling it," I said. "Edward's going to help me, but I'm selling it."

"You realize he's just going to buy it," Alice said, linking her arm with mine.

"No, I refuse to let him buy my condo. What would he do with it?"

"I dunno," Alice shrugged.

"And who knows? Maybe Edward and I won't work out together. Living together, I mean. Maybe he scratches his ass and farts in his sleep," I giggled.

"Don't most men do that?" Alice guffawed. "Bella, I have a feeling. A very strong feeling that you and Edward will make it. And I mean all the way."

"What do you mean?"

"You will be my sister," she said simply. She tapped my left ring finger and grinned. "Mark my words. Come on. I saw a pair of boots that would look fucking fabulous on you."

*So easily distracted.*

When they dropped me off, I thanked them all and gathered my packages. I walked into Edward's home, depositing my new wardrobe by the stairs.

"Edward?" I called.



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"In the dining room," he yelled back. I followed the sound of his voice to his lavish dining room. It was painted in a deep burgundy and had a mahogany dining room set. The table was set elegantly with two place settings, candles and a large bouquet of red roses. "Surprise."

"Edward," I breathed. "It's beautiful. What's the occasion?"

"It's not every day the most beautiful woman in the whole world decides to move in with you," Edward said with mock solemnity. "So, I cooked a special meal and we're eating it in here."

"What's this special meal?"

"Lamb chops with garlic mashed potatoes and asparagus," Edward smiled. "Sit, my beautiful girl." He pulled out my chair and he tucked my napkin into my lap. He kissed my cheek, his lips lingering on my skin. "Hmmmmmm, so soft."

I blushed and ducked my head. He caressed my cheek and darted back into the kitchen. He came back with a huge bowl of potatoes and a platter of asparagus. He set the plates down and scurried back into the kitchen. A moment later he placed a smaller platter with several lamb chops in between the two of us. He poured some water into wine glasses and arched a brow. "It's probably best that you don't drink. Concussion and all," he said.

"It's fine," I giggled. "My head is not feeling all that great. Drinking would just compound that."

Edward sat down at the table and clinked his glass with mine. "To us."

"To us," I agreed. We dug into the delicious meal that Edward prepared. I cut into my lamb chop and it was perfectly cooked; melting in my mouth. "This is heavenly, Edward."

"Thank you," he grinned as he swallowed his bite. "After Tanya passed, I took cooking lessons. I couldn't cook for shit. I mean, I could burn water I was so fucking bad. Ironically enough, cooking soothed me. All of the steps,

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intricacies and nuances helped me calm down and cope with my life. Once I learned the basics, I bought a few cookbooks and well, here you go."

"I'm not surprised. You don't seem like a guy who do anything half-assed," I said.

"Nope. Balls to the wall, baby," he said. "And like you, I'm as hard-headed as they come. Once I set my sights on something, I do everything in my power to achieve it."

"At least we have that in common."

"A lot more than that, Bella," he smiled. "Anyhow, I repaired your cabinet and had my realtor come around to inspect the place. He was pleased with the overall condition of the condo. You could easily get what you spent back on it. Even a small profit. He took pictures and started the paperwork to put it on the market. The question is what do you want to do with everything when it sells?"

"The furniture?"

"Yeah," Edward clarified.

"I guess I could put it into storage. My furniture would look shabby in here," I said with a smile.

"Bella, you have impeccable taste."

"I have good taste, but my furniture is crap. Mike and I bought it when we first got married. He got all of the 'newer' stuff," I huffed.

"Why not include the furniture with the condo?"

"What if this," I asked as I gestured between the two of us, "doesn't work out?"

"It'll work out, Bella. Trust me," Edward said as he grabbed my hand. "You feel that energy. That jolt between us? We're connected. My feelings. My love

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for you transcends everything. I promise you. I make a solemn vow that everything. That we will be perfectly fine."

"Edward," I sighed breathily.

"Bella, do you trust me?"

"Immensely. It's shocking how much I trust you," I laughed lightly.

"Then believe me that *we* will be fine," he said with fervor.

"I have a confession to make, Edward," I said, looking into his evergreen eyes.

"You're secretly a man," he joked. I smacked his arm. "Ouch."

"Pussy," I chided.

"What?" Edward squeaked. "Did you just call me a pussy?"

"Yes, I did. I'm a weakling," I giggled.

"I can't believe you," he laughed. He rubbed his arm, arching his brow. "Back to your confession, Ms. Swan."

I blushed and bit down on my lip, hiding behind my hair. "Edward, when I'm with you. I feel safe..."

"Okay," he said slowly. "But there's more."

"There is. For the first time in my life. I feel like I'm 'home' with you," I whispered. "That my life is complete and...yeah. Sorry about the rambling..."

And Edward's mouth crushed against mine. His lips moved frantically against my mouth. My hands weaved into his soft hair and I opened my mouth slightly. His tongue danced with mine slowly and sensually. His lips left mine and he leaned his forehead against mine, "Bella," he whispered.

## A Fresh Start

"I'm sorry," I apologized.

"Don't. I feel the same way," he said. He picked up my hand and placed it on his chest. Above his heart. "This is yours. You own me, Bella. Mind. Heart. Soul."

"I love you, Edward," I whispered.

"I love you. So much, my Bella," he whispered back, his green eyes glistening with unshed tears. He gently brushed his lips against mine and I truly felt cherished. Loved. *Home*.

**A/N: I hope you're liking what you're reading. If you do...leave me some love. I'm hoping that fantasy has a grip in reality. I want to find my own hot doc. ;-) MUAH!**

# The Wedding

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 19: The Wedding

It had been a few weeks since I moved in with Edward. We went to my condo on Sunday and with the help of Alice, Emmett, Rose, Jasper and Jacob, we emptied out my personal items; dishes, cups, clothes, and other decorative items. I changed my address with the post office and made my cell phone number the primary phone number for all my emergency contacts. I also canceled my cable and internet. I needed to keep the electricity on and the water so they could show the condo.

I also started therapy. I met with Michele, who was a crazy Italian lady. I loved her instantly. She said she was going to work on improving my self-worth. She also told me that while I may be in a new relationship, I shouldn't let my own identity disappear. She also suggested that I start journaling. I was never one to write down my feelings. I grumbled when she suggested it. She said that I didn't need to do a 'Dear Diary' type of thing. I could write how I felt in the format the suited me the best. I said I'd consider it. I tried it that evening, writing in the form of fiction. Fiction based on *my life* and I really felt like I accomplished something. She really knew her shit and I felt immediately at ease with her.

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I also went back to work. Yeah, that was interesting. My kids gave me a huge card and teddy bear. They begged me to never be absent again as the substitute they found for me was older than dirt and was uber crotchety. I told them that I would try. Or if I was going to absent, I'd forewarn them of my not being there. With that being said, I told them that I was going to be gone the Friday before Labor Day to prepare for Ms. Cullen's wedding. They grumbled. I told them that if they were respectful with the sub, I'd give them an iPod day when they had their silent reading time. That placated them. Thankfully.

I began my practicum upon my return to work. Let me just say that I was going to get my butt kicked. I had a ton of responsibilities that were thrust upon me by Mrs. Cope. She told me that I was pretty much going to be 'her' whenever she wasn't at school; be a dean if any one of them were absent; or be the assistant principal if he was gone. I also had to do a major project which involved the creation of a new schedule for the ELL students, approximately 250 students. This project was in addition to twelve other mini-projects.

In regard to my relationship with Edward, everything just flowed once I got over my pride. The roles that we played in the house were significantly different to the one I played when I was married to Mike. With Mike, I was the typical 'Suzy Homemaker' wife. I made sure that the clothes were washed, dishes were cleaned, the meals cooked and the pantry stocked. I was also in charge of scouring the house. Edward treated me as an equal. Not a servant. If he made a mess, he didn't expect me to clean it. He cleaned it himself. He cooked, he ironed, and he put the seat down (surprisingly!). However, his schedule was fucking crazy. The first week we lived together, he worked nights. He left at five and got home the following morning when I was leaving for work. We barely saw each other. It was even worse when he had meetings at the hospital. He would be there for an entire day. I was amazed that he was so well-adjusted. He joked and said that you get used to the schedule and sleep when you have to.

It was the week before the wedding and Edward was making dinner. I was doing research for my major project for my practicum, ready to bang my head on the table. I think I actually did that.

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"Bella, don't break the kitchen table," he teased.

"I fucking hate research," I grumbled into the table. *Bang*. "What the hell was I thinking when I signed up for this practicum?" *Bang. Bang.*

"Bella," Edward said as he pulled me back in my chair. He tipped my head back, forcing me to look up at him. "You will do fantastically. You've completed two of your minor project things."

"Shit, I have to do the reflections for those," I said as I opened the file on my computer. "Thanks."

"Oh, Austin, my realtor, put your condo on the market today. He's already received a few emails and nibbles," Edward said as he put dinner into the oven.

"That's good," I said. "The sooner I'm rid of that place, the better. I had good luck when I sold the house down the street. Found a buyer right away," I replied as I typed my reflections. "Then again, I wasn't really all that picky. I took the first offer from the first buyer and was done with it."

"Was it a short sale?" Edward asked.

"Kind of? The bank wouldn't release us from all of our debt. We had to continue paying. I still pay them \$350 a month," I sighed as I saved my work. "Reflection one, DONE!"

"That was fast," Edward laughed.

"It's only a two page reflection on what I did, the reasoning behind it, and how it relates to the administrative standards. Blah, blah, blah. Total bullshit," I said as I worked on the second one. "I'm the queen of all that is bullshit. I can make the driest prose sound almost eloquent."

"I should have you read one of my medical journals and make it sound pretty," he teased as he kissed my temple. "Some of that shit is fucking boring. And seriously, just because we went through eight years of school and umpteen

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years at a hospital, is it so hard to use a fucking comma?"

"Jeez, rant much?" I joked.

"I may suck at spelling but I at least can write a sentence using the appropriate punctuation," he grumbled. "Speaking of which."

"Appropriate punctuation?"

"No. Hospitals. Brain is totally random right now. Sorry," Edward said with a frown. "I have to work doubles for the next three days. It's to ensure that I have Alice's wedding weekend off. I work pretty much tomorrow until Thursday afternoon."

"Ugh, that sucks, Edward," I sighed.

"Tell me about it. I hate to be away from you," he said as he laid his head on my shoulder, jutting out his lip.

"Now, Edward," I chided as I tweaked his lip.

"What?" he asked, fluttering his eyelashes.

"You are just too much. You know that?" I giggled.

"But you love me," he smiled as he nibbled on my neck. "As I love you."

"I do love you," I said kissing his forehead. "But I have to get this shit done. Stop distracting me."

"Yes, dear," he snorted.

"Don't 'yes dear,' me, Masen," I said, narrowing my eyes.

He snorted and walked back to the stove to finish making our dinner. As he did that, I managed to finish the second reflection, read two articles for my major



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project and planned another minor project. A very effective evening. After dinner, I did the dishes while Edward packed his duffel for his marathon at the hospital. I heard him curse his sister for her insistence on getting married Labor Day weekend. Even though he was scheduled to be off, he still had to carry a pager for an emergency.

Edward trudged down the stairs, dropping his bag in the mudroom by the garage, a scowl on his face.

"Oh, Edward, turn that frown upside down," I said pinching his cheeks.

"Stop it," he said as he swatted my hands. "I really don't want to be at the hospital for three fucking days. Can I kill the elf?"

"Nah. I think Jasper would prosecute you get the death penalty," I teased.

"We don't even have the death penalty here," Edward said.

"That's the point, Dr. Masen," I snorted.

Edward scratched his head. Then the light bulb went off. "You suck, Bella," he said, sticking out his tongue.

"Hmmm, I do," I purred seductively. I turned on my heel, walking to the family room. Edward's strong arms wrapped around my waist and he pulled me to his chest. I could feel his excitement poke me in the back. "Horny, baby?"

"Fuck yes," he growled. He nuzzled my neck with his nose and inhaled deeply. "Hmmm." His lips ran across my jaw and he nibbled lightly on my earlobe. "Do you have any more schoolwork to do, beautiful?"

"Um," I mumbled intelligently. *Fuck, his lips are so soft.* "I have...have to..."

Edward's hands snaked up from my waist, under my shirt to the underside of my breasts. His lips were still moving on my neck. "You have to what?" His soft hands moved to my breasts and he softly kneaded them. My head fell back

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against his chest and I moaned.

"Fuck," I breathed.

"I refuse to fuck you, Bella," Edward said as he bit down on the sensitive spot behind my ear.

"Ungh," I whimpered. His fingers reached in my bra and gently pinched my nipples. My ass grinded against his body.

"I intend to make love to you," he whispered as he licked down my neck. "You will feel so good, beautiful."

I moaned again, pushing my ass against his growing cock. Edward removed his hands from my chest, turning me to face him and he placed one on my hip and the other on my cheek. He looked at me, gently rubbing circles on my jaw before he descended to give me the sweetest, most loving kiss I'd ever experienced. I braced myself against his biceps. Edward bent down and grabbed the backs of my thighs. He lifted me easily.

*How, I have no idea. The man is fucking strong!*

He carried me to the kitchen island, standing between my legs. His lips never stopped their emotional, passionate kiss against my mouth. I reached for his shirt, my fingers dancing at the buttons. I slowly popped each button to reveal his muscular chest. Edward reached the hem of my sweater and lifted it from my body, revealing a soft lilac bra. He growled and he kissed me with fervor.

When Edward's pocket rang, we jumped apart. "Son of a bitch," Edward growled. "Now? I mean really now? God damn phone is a god damn cockblock." He whipped out his cell phone. "Dr. Masen," he barked. He listened for a few moments. He rubbed his face and snarled. "Fine. But I'm off Thursday until next Tuesday. Remember I have my sister's wedding. I'll be there in an hour." He ended the call and put his head against my chest. "I love being a doctor. Really I do. But...GAH!"

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"Explain, Dr. McFuckme," I said running my fingers through his hair.

"Three residents have to go home because of the stomach flu. AGAIN. Dr. Gerandy is at a medical conference until Wednesday and the other attending is on FMLA for paternity leave," Edward grumbled. "I have to 'resident' sit."

"Sorry, baby," I sighed, wrapping my hands around Edward's neck. I buried my face in his soft hair and frowned. "So, you have to leave tonight?"

"Yeah. After a cold shower," he grumbled against my neck. He grabbed my hand and placed it on his bulge. "Feel that? That's going to be the worst case of blue balls ever."

"I can demonstrate how I suck, Edward," I said as I licked his ear.

"Don't tempt me, Bells," he said. I giggled. "What?"

"That's the first time you've called me 'Bells.' I like it," I said.

"Well, when you laugh, it sounds like peeling bells. I love that sound," he said, kissing my lips. "I want to hear more of it."

"That can be arranged," I smiled against his mouth.

"Though, I enjoy your wanton moans more," he growled. He pulled me closer to him, wrapping my arms around his neck and my legs around his waist. "I want you, Bella."

"You'll have me," I blushed. "Soon. Just not now. You need to go to work."

"Meh," he said with a wrinkled nose. "Work." He reluctantly pulled away, his face in a petulant grimace. "Don't wanna go."

"What are you? Five?" I giggled.

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He stuck out his tongue as he adjusted his erection. Edward helped me down off the counter and he ran upstairs. He returned ten minutes later with his hair washed and wearing a pair of blue scrubs. "Why blue?"

"I'm on call for trauma surgery," he said, doing an enthusiastically sarcastic fist pump. "Blue's what the surgeons wear."

"Oh. Go save some lives, Dr. Masen," I said, palming his delectable ass.

"Not helping, Bella," he said as he wiggled his butt. His phone beeped in his pocket and grumbled. "I really have to go, my beautiful girl. I love you. So much," he said, kissing my lips. "I'll call or text when I can."

"Love you, too, Edward," I smiled as I swatted his ass. He yelped and flipped me off. I returned it in kind and he darted out the door.

xx AFS xx

To say that I missed Edward was a VAST understatement. Sleeping in his large king-sized bed was lonely. I felt safe in his home. Our home. Though, I was definitely missing him. As he promised, he called and texted when he could. I could tell he was tired in the sound of his voice and tone of his texts. He was also ready to kill Alice. She was giving him shit about Jasper's present and about him getting a haircut. Edward had assured her that he would get it all done by the wedding.

On Friday, I woke up to Edward curled up on my chest. His arm was draped across my body and he was mumbling incoherently. He was supposed to be off on Thursday, but ended up working. He was pissed. Not that I blamed him. The poor man was being worked to the bone.

I was off today and was dealing with last minute wedding details and a spa day for the girls; golf outing for the boys. I smiled at his soft expression on his sleeping face. He looked content and happy. I ran my fingers through his hair. He hummed lightly and held me tighter. "Love you, my Bella," he mumbled. "My Bella. My life."

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I felt tears prick in my eyes at his sleepy admission. He really did love me. He was truly a kind man. With a huge heart who loved me for who I was. Faults and all. Cellulite and flabby breasts be damned. I lay there, massaging Edward's scalp until my alarm went off. Edward jumped a little bit and his jade eyes opened slightly. "Morning, my beautiful girl," he smiled lazily. "You make a comfortable pillow."

"It's all the extra flab," I teased.

He growled and pinched my side lightly. "Stop it. You're absolutely gorgeous."

"Whatever, Edward," I sighed as I rolled my eyes.

"Bella, repeat after me," he said as he sat up, in his shirtless glory. *God, he has a beautiful body.* "I, Isabella Marie Swan..."

"Edward," I whined.

He gave me a pointed look. "I, Isabella Marie Swan..."

"I, Isabella Marie Swan," I repeated, huffing and holding my right hand up.

"...do hear by promise," Edward prompted. I repeated him. "...to NEVER put myself down," Repeat, repeat. "...and accept compliments my loving boyfriend gives me. Because I fucking rock."

"Seriously, Edward?" I squeaked. He cocked a brow. I sighed, "...and accept compliments my loving boyfriend gives me. Because I fucking rock."

"Excellent," he grinned. "So, what's on tap for you today?"

"Spa day," I said. "Manicure, pedicures, massages, waxes."

"Sounds like oodles of fun," Edward said with a grin.

"You?"

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"I'm getting this," he said as he ran his hand through his hair, "cut. Alice would have my dick if I looked as shaggy as I do now for her fucking pictures. Then golf fun with the boys before the rehearsal. I have to be out the door by no later than eleven."

"You golf? Isn't it a requisite for doctors to golf?" I joked.

"No. I am horrible. I mean, really bad," he snorted. "I can't shoot the ball in a straight line to save my life. It's really sad."

"Sorry, baby," I said with a mock frown. He growled and rolled onto his pillow. "What time did you get home last night?"

"Um, three this morning," Edward grumbled. "I was royally ticked that I had to work essentially four days, no five days in a row with no real break. Aro pretty much told me that I have until next Wednesday off. My assistant is rescheduling meetings and I'm completely jazzed."

"That's nice," I smiled. "You deserve some time off." I traced the dark circles under his eyes and the amount of scruff he had on his cheeks. "You look absolutely drained."

"I am. I slept at the hospital, but I couldn't get comfortable. I got used to holding you," he smirked.

"Edward, we've barely slept together in the past few weeks I've been here," I said, arching a brow.

"That doesn't mean that I don't miss holding you," he countered. "Speaking of holding, can you 'hold' my hand on Monday? I'm getting the Lasik surgery at 8 in the morning. Yay."

"Of course, Edward," I said. "I've got to shower, though. You. Sleep."

"Don't have to ask me twice," he laughed. "Love you, beautiful girl."

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"Love you too," I answered as I slipped out of bed. I took a quick shower and dressed in the velour track suit that Alice gave all of her bridesmaids. They were a shade of pink with our last names emblazoned on the back in bling in addition to our 'job.' She had the foresight to make sure that mine said Swan. I slipped on a pair of soft pink panties and matching bra. I put on some light makeup and exited the bathroom. Edward was snoring lightly, hugging my pillow. I made sure to set the alarm for Edward. I kissed his forehead and he hummed, puckering his lips. I brushed his mouth with mine and he smiled.

I ate a breakfast of toast and a cup of coffee. I did my dishes and drove to Carlisle and Esme's. We were all meeting there before we headed out to our spa day. I parked my car in front of their expensive home and walked up the drive. Alice nearly tackled me. "Bella! I'm so happy! I'm getting married tomorrow," she squealed.

"Yes, I know, Elf," I giggled. She pulled away and her blue eyes were sparkling. "Are you ready for your day of beautification?"

"Totally!" she gushed. "Come on! The limo will be here in a little bit." I went into the living room to join the other bridesmaids. We talked and laughed until a large white Hummer limo pulled up in the drive. We loaded up and drove to the spa, Elite Essence Spa. We were divided up into smaller groups. Rose, Alice and I were getting our massages first, while the rest of the bridesmaids were getting manicures and pedicures.

After our massages, which were incredibly relaxing, Alice insisted that Rose and I get waxed with her. I was assuming she meant eyebrows. Boy was I wrong.

"Bella, you are getting a full bikini wax. No arguments," Alice said as she took off her pants and underwear. "Edward will love it."

"How do you know if Edward has even been down there?" I asked as I vaguely gestured to my hoo ha.

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"Bella, you've been glowing. That only comes from orgasms. Edward is not a slouch in bed," Alice laughed.

"And you know this because?" Rose asked.

"Tanya bragged about his sexual prowess frequently," Alice said with a smirk. "She was proud of her husband."

"Isn't that a little weird?" I asked.

"No. When I was curious about sex, I talked to Edward first. Well, that was because he was unconscious and he couldn't judge. He told me that when he came to that he remembered that conversation and that when he had his strength back, he'd kick my ass," Alice laughed. "Also, Tanya and I gave each other pointers and tips from our respective 'other halves.'"

"You're unbelievable, Elf," I giggled.

"I know. But you are getting the damn wax. Strip down, Swan," she barked. Rose tossed me a robe and I slipped off my pants and underwear. Alice pointed to the room with a small table and I hopped up. Rose and Alice smirked as they left the room. A young Asian woman came and put the warm wax on my vajayjay, pulling out the hair. *Mother fucker! That hurts! Why do women do this?*

After I was thoroughly stripped of all my hair and dignity, I waddled out to where Alice and Rose were sitting. They snickered and I flipped them off. Rose hopped up and skipped to the room to have her goods done. I moved slowly back to the locker room and put on my clothes. My nether regions were barking at the intrusion. I was ready to dismember Alice for talking me into this. Meddling elf.

We met up with the other bridesmaids as they were getting the massages. Alice, Rose and I got our manicures and pedicures. We all decided on getting French tips on our toes and fingers. Alice added some bling to her big toes while the rest of us kept it simple. We finished our day of beauty and headed



## A Fresh Start

back to Carlisle and Esme's. We needed to change and go to the church for the rehearsal. Alice told us where to go and that our clothes were laid out on the bed. I went into my assigned room and found a wrap dress in a deep sapphire blue. The sleeves came to the elbow and the skirt had ruffles on the bottom. Alice also included a set of midnight blue underwear. Thankfully it was not butt floss. She also provided a pair of shoes and jewelry. She thought of everything.

I picked up my clothes and walked into the bathroom. I changed into the matching underwear, still cursing Alice and her idea of me getting my hoo ha waxed. I was putting on my jewelry when I noticed a small toiletry bag on the counter.

*Make up for your outfit, Swan. Apply as directed. And your vajayjay will calm down. Take some Tylenol in the bag. - Elf.*

God bless her!

I applied my makeup and tossed my clothes into a small bag in the bedroom. I slowly walked down the stairs, not wanting to fall. *The boot will not match your dress, Bella. Alice would have your head.* The rest of the bridesmaids who included Rosalie, Angela, Kate, who was a cousin of Jasper's and Chelsea, who was a friend of Alice's in grammar school, all milled around in the kitchen. They were nibbling on appetizers that Esme left out. Esme was drinking some wine with Maria, Jasper's mother.

"Hey Rose," I smiled as I poured myself a glass of wine.

"How's the poonani?" Rose teased.

"Shut it, Hale," I said, narrowing my eyes.

She snorted and sipped her wine. "I'm sorry that you're selling your condo, Bella," she said giving me a sad smile. "I really enjoyed having you as a neighbor."

## A Fresh Start

"Me too. It was the one place that was *mine*. Too bad Mike tainted it," I sneered.

"Well, at least you moved in with Dr. McFuckme," she giggled. "How's that working out?"

"Fine. It's different," I sighed. "So different from what I'm used to."

"How so?"

"Edward actually treats me like an equal. Not the hired help," I said. "It was disconcerting to see him make his lunch and then actually do the dishes. Mike just left them for me to do."

"Edward isn't Mike, Bella. Edward loves you tremendously. I've never seen a man look at another woman the way he looks at you," Rose said, holding my hand.

"Emmett looks at you like that," I said with a shy grin.

"Sometimes. With Edward, he looks at you like that ALL the time," she sighed. "It's so special. Just like your relationship with him."

"He's incredible. I'm so lucky to have him," I whispered.

"However, enough sappy stuff. Onto the smut. How's the sex?" Rose said, looking me squarely in the eye.

"Um, I don't know?"

"What do you mean you don't know? Are you falling asleep while he's boning you?" Rose laughed.

"No. We haven't 'boned,'" I answered.

"What? Surely, you jest," Rose scoffed.

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"Nope. No sex. We've done other stuff, but not *that*," I blushed. "The day I was attacked I did have an appointment with a gynecologist and was put on birth control."

"What?" Rose asked.

"The shot. I'm the worst pill taker. Mike was adamant in my pills. However, when we went our separate ways, I stopped taking them. But I do want to make sure that no unwanted babies appear," I giggled nervously. "However, sex helps in the baby making aspect."

"Yes it does," she giggled. "Are children something that you want, Bella?"

"Yes," I sighed giving her a wistful smile. She winked and gave me a tight hug.

Alice came down and she barked that we needed to pile into the limo to meet the guys at the church. We got in and drove the short distance to St. Mary's Catholic Church. I saw Edward's Aston in the parking lot. The guys were here and I assumed they were inside. The bridesmaids all got out of the limo and walked into the sanctuary. Edward was standing near the altar, speaking with Jasper. Edward had on a pair of black dress pant and a sapphire blue dress shirt with a black tie. His hair was freshly cut and it was tousled effortlessly. He had on his glasses and his signature crooked smirk as he spoke with Jasper.

We all filtered into the church and sat down in the pews. Edward noticed me and his eyes widened imperceptibly. His crooked smirk widened to a full blown smile as he sat down next to me. "You look beautiful, Bella," he said as he kissed my lips.

"Again, Alice matched us," I said, plucking his shirt.

"Hmmm, she did. However, I love this color on you," he purred as he nuzzled my hair. "And this dress is incredibly sexy."

I moaned and leaned my head against his shoulder. He chuckled lightly and kissed my forehead. He laced his fingers with mine and we waited for the

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rehearsal to start. A few moments later, the wedding planner breezed in and barked orders. She lined us up, instructing us where to walk and where to stand. We started the processional. Chelsea was walking Felix, one of Jasper's friends from middle school who reconnected with him on Facebook. Angela was walking with Seth. Kate was walking with Garrett, her boyfriend and Jasper's old roommate. Rose was being escorted by Emmett and I was being walked down the aisle by Edward.

"What I wouldn't give to see you in white dress walking down the aisle to me, Bella?" Edward whispered in my ear. "It would be my dream come true, beautiful girl."

My eyes fluttered shut and I thought back to my own dreams. They were like Edward's. Our wedding. However, it wasn't a happy ending. Mike always found a way to fuck things up and Edward and I wouldn't take the plunge. Like, Mike would kill me. Kill Edward. Kill us both. Suffice it to say, my sleeping has sucked.

"Bells?" Edward asked, wrapping his hand around my waist. "What are you thinking about?"

My eyes opened and I looked at Edward, trying to hide discomfort. I guess I failed as Edward frowned. "It's nothing, Edward. Horrible dreams."

"Mike?" he asked.

"Yeah," I muttered.

"Ms. Swan? Dr. Masen? You're next," the wedding planner announced. We both nodded and Edward put my hand in the crook of his elbow. The wedding planner put one of the bow bouquets in my hand that we had made from Alice's wedding shower. She gave us a wink and told us to go. Edward walked with me, slowly, down the aisle. We got to the front of the church and did a slight bow before separating to go to our spots on either side of Alice and Jasper.

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As the priest talked through the ceremony, my mind drifted. I was so happy for Alice and Jasper. They'd been together for years and were finally getting their happily ever after. Rose and Emmett were just starting their relationship, but I could see the love when they looked at each other. Then there was Edward. My knight in a starched white lab coat. I looked at him during the rehearsal and his eyes caught mine. He smiled his perfect lopsided smile, mouthing 'I love you,' to me. I blushed and responded in kind.

I averted my eyes, looking at my shoes. I idly played with the curling ribbon on my bouquet. Did I want to get married again? I had said before that I would be resigned to be single for the rest of my life when I kicked Mike out. However, my life had changed dramatically since that happened. Did I want to be with Edward forever? I smiled a tiny smile and realized my answer.

"Are there any questions?" Father McManus asked, the officiant for Alice and Jasper's wedding.

"Yes," I whispered.

"You have a question, Ms. Swan?" he asked, arching a bushy brow over his thick glasses.

"What? No. Sorry, I was spacing," I blushed. I hid behind my bouquet and the rest of the bridal party laughed. Alice reached over and kissed my cheek, giving me a knowing look.

"Okay," Father McManus said with a leery look. I smiled sweetly and he explained the ending of the ceremony. We all processed out, Edward lacing his fingers with mine. We got to the rear of the sanctuary and Alice asked for us to practice the processional and recessional again. She was such a damn perfectionist. We did as she asked and we headed to the restaurant for the rehearsal dinner.

It was a loud boisterous affair. Embarrassing stories of Jasper and Alice floated through the room. Gifts were distributed for the parents and attendants. The groomsmen received a Mont Blanc pen set with their names engraved on the

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case. The bridesmaids received their jewelry for the wedding: a necklace in various shades of pink and a matching set of earrings. In addition to the jewelry, Alice also promised that our hair and makeup would be part of our gift as well. Alice and Jasper gave brief toasts and expressed their gratitude for us in being a part of their special day. After their toasts, they sat down at the table with Edward, Rose, Emmett and I. Alice glared at Edward.

"Whatever you're thinking, Elf, stop," Edward said as he sipped his water.

"I see things over your eyes. I better not see them tomorrow, Masen," she demanded, poking his shoulder.

"Fuck, Alice. Stop poking me with your talons," Edward said. "You will see me with these tomorrow. I'm getting Lasik done on Monday and I can't wear the contacts for two weeks prior to the procedure."

"But Edward," she whined.

"But Edward," he mimicked, matching her tone perfectly. "I'll take them off for the group shots after the ceremony. Relax."

"Alice, leave your brother alone, darlin'" Jasper drawled. "If he wants to wear his glasses, then let him. I don't think that Edward's fashionable frames will detract from our pictures. At least they are not pink and sparkly."

"Yeah, Eddie, if the Lasik doesn't work. Get pink sparkly frames," Emmett guffawed.

"Um, no," Edward said with a smirk. "I'm hoping that the Lasik works and no more hellacious glasses for me. I hate them."

"I think you look sexy in glasses," I said quietly. I immediately blushed. Edward looked at me and gave his sexy smirk.

His lips brushed mine, "I'll get some plain frames just to wear for you, beautiful." I laughed and leaned my head against his shoulder.

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"Okay, you two are nauseating," Emmett said, sticking his finger down his throat. "Quit sucking face. You two aren't even getting married and you are acting like newlyweds."

"Shut up, Emmett," I said, tossing my napkin at his head. "I've seen your tongue down Rose's throat a few times and let's NOT mention the day after the bachelor/bachelorette party."

"I still need to bleach those sheets," Edward said, wrinkling his nose.

"Edward, you are an ass," Rose said, smacking his shoulder. "We're not toxic."

"Rose, you aren't. Emmett is," I explained.

"Fuck you, Swan," Emmett grumbled, flipping me off.

"No thanks, Em," I retorted as I sat back in my chair. "I'll love my men to be tall, pale and devastatingly handsome."

"I'm not *that* pale," Edward retorted.

"Edward, you make an albino look tan," Alice laughed.

"Do not!"

"And you should see him in the sun. He almost sparkles," Alice continued. "If you ever go anywhere tropical, make sure you bring 100 SPF sunscreen. He'll burn in an instant."

"You suck, Alice," Edward snarled. "I don't burn in an instant."

"Two words: anniversary trip," Alice giggled.

"Anniversary trip?" Rose asked.

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"For Carlisle and Esme's 25th wedding anniversary, we went to a small island off the coast of Brazil. Carlisle chose it because of the island's name," Edward explained. "It was called 'Isle Esme.' He thought it was insanely romantic. So, Esme and Carlisle, Tanya and I and Alice and Jasper went down to the island for their anniversary. On the first full day we were down there, I fell asleep on the beach. Tanya came up to me, placing her hand on my chest and she hissed. I was as red as a lobster. I thought I could handle it on my own. However, I was running a fever and couldn't do much of anything. Carlisle and Tanya insisted I go to hospital in Rio de Janeiro and I was admitted for sun poisoning. For the remainder of the trip. What a great way to spend your vacation."

"How long were you down there?" Rose asked.

"Ten days. I was in a fucking hospital for ten days, hooked up to IVs and pumped full of meds. Tanya never left my side. She kept me sane. I couldn't stand watching the horrible Brazilian soap operas," Edward grumbled.

"When did you guys go?" Emmett asked.

"Um, it was right after Tanya and I got married. We were 24?" Edward asked Alice.

"Yeah. You and Tanya were married for about six months," Alice clarified.

"Anyhow, we probably should go. Robert is paying the bill for the dinner."

"Good old Dad," Jasper grinned. Jasper took Alice's hand and led her away.

The rest of us gathered our belongings and said our goodbyes. I hopped into Edward's sex car. The Aston Martin. Love that car. And we drove home. He parked the car in the garage and he helped me into the house. We walked upstairs to our bedroom and I went over to my nightstand. I plugged in my phone after setting my alarm. Edward took off his tie and went into the closet. I was standing next to the bed and felt Edward's strong arms surround me. "I love you, Bella," Edward whispered in my ear. "I'm so blessed to have you in my life."



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I leaned against him and sighed. "I love you , so much, Edward," I said, lacing my fingers with his. His thumb gently grazed my left hand and it circled my ring finger. "You excited about tomorrow?"

"No," Edward laughed. "Did you see what Alice is having us wear?" I shook my head and Edward reluctantly let me go. He went into the closet pulling out a garment bag. He took out his tuxedo. It looked nice. I told him so. Then he showed me the vest and tie he had to wear. It was pepto bismal pink. "Nasty isn't it?"

"It matches my dress," I said with a wrinkled nose. I went into the closet, pulling out the bright pink strapless bridesmaid dress that I was wearing tomorrow. "You only have to wear accents of pink. I will look like the fucking Pink Panther."

"Bella, I love you. Very much, but that dress is absolutely hideous," Edward laughed.

"I know, right?" I said as I threw it on the bed. "Fucking elf."

"Her heart was not in the right place with that dress. I'll look forward in unzipping you from it at the end of the night in our hotel room," Edward said with a sexy smirk.

"Hotel room?" I squeaked.

"Yep. I reserved a suite at the hotel where Alice and Jasper are having their reception. Did I not tell you?" Edward asked, biting his fingernail nervously.

"Um, no," I said, arching a brow.

"Sorry, love. I had a lot on my mind and being at work for five days straight kind of threw me for a loop. So, surprise," he said weakly. "You're not mad are you?"

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"No, Edward. I'm not mad. Surprised, definitely. Let me pack a bag for tomorrow night and then I'm going to shower," I said, kissing his cheek. Edward nodded and went into the bathroom. I heard the shower start. I went into the closet and packed my bag, throwing in several necessary items. In the dresser in the closet, I noticed the Wedgewood blue nightie. I smiled and put it in my bag. I was putting finishing touches on my overnight bag when Edward came out of the bathroom wearing a pair of sleep pants and a grin. I darted into the shower, moving quickly through my routine and then padded into bedroom. Edward was sitting up in the bed, holding a book but he was dead to the world, snoring slightly. I took the book out of his hands and removed his glasses. I gently pushed him down and covered us with the blankets. Without even thinking, Edward wrapped his arms around me and sighed. I kissed his chest and nestled close to him, falling asleep easily.

xx AFS xx

My alarm went off, quite annoyingly, at the ass crack of dawn. Or so I thought. When I rolled over, it was about eight in the morning and I needed to get ready to go to Carlisle and Esme's to get ready for Alice's wedding. I looked around and saw that the room was empty. I frowned and got out of bed. I walked down the stairs and found Edward in a pair of jeans and gray t-shirt at the stove, cooking breakfast.

"Morning," I said, my voice rough with sleep.

"Morning, beautiful," he said with a lopsided smirk. "How did you sleep?"

"Like the dead," I smiled. "I never realized how much I missed you while you were working this week. I slept like crap."

"As I told you, I don't sleep well when I'm not with you either, my beautiful girl," he said as he a plate of French toast in front of me. "Dig in."

"Hmmm. Smells delicious," I smiled. Edward kissed my cheek and put a cup of coffee next to my plate. "Thank you, Dr. McFuckme."

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"You're welcome, Ms. Swan," he grinned. He sat down next to me with his own plate of French toast and we dug into our breakfasts in a comfortable silence. We finished our food and I did the dishes. When we were done, my cell phone rang in the bedroom. I ran upstairs and answered it. It was Alice telling me to get my ass to her parents' home ASAP! I grumbled and told her that I would be there in an hour. I called down to Edward. "Yes, my love?"

"Can you put my dress in my car along with my overnight bag?" I asked, sweetly.

"I was planning on driving you to Carlisle and Esme's so we don't have two cars at the hotel. I'll put the Pink Panther dress and your overnight bag into the Aston Martin, okay?" Edward suggested. I nodded and Edward took my dress and bag out of the bedroom. I dressed quickly, putting on a pair of jeans and a light pink hoodie that Alice had made for us. I slipped on a pair of pewter ballet flats and grabbed my phone and purse, walking downstairs. "You ready to go, my beautiful girl?"

"Not really. I'm not looking forward to getting poofed and prodded and poked by the stylists that Alice hired," I grumbled.

"Bella, you will look absolutely gorgeous. You already do," Edward said with a crooked smirk. "Come on."

I shrugged and followed Edward into the Aston Martin. He started the car, moaning as the car purred to life. He backed it out and drove us to his parents' home. He gave me a sweet kiss as he helped me into the house. Alice glared at him as he dropped off my dress. "There are no boys in the house, Edward," she snapped. "Dad is at Jasper's getting ready."

"Relax, Alice. I'm just helping Bella carry in her dress," Edward said with a sigh. "Be happy, Elf. You're getting married."

"I am happy," she wailed. "I'm just impatient."

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"Oh lord," Edward laughed. "I'll see you at the church, Mary Alice. I love you, Bella."

"Love you, too," I grinned as I kissed his cheek. He captured my chin and caressed his lips against mine, tracing his tongue along my lower lip. He growled lightly and pulled away. He winked and he ran out of the house.

Alice took my hand and plopped me down in a chair that was set up in the family room. A short, flamboyantly gay man came up to me. He stuck out his hand and introduced himself. "Hi, I'm Demetri and I'll be taking care of you today, Bella. You are absolutely gorgeous. Skin is flawless and hair looks to be so soft. Let's have some fun."

"Ooooooooookay," I said as I arched a brow. Demetri laughed and he stood behind me, running his fingers through my hair. He twisted and curled my hair with a curling iron. He then began pinning my hair up in an elegant updo with soft tendrils surrounding my face. After he finished my hair, he applied makeup to my face. While he worked, he prattled on his work at a local salon and his partner who he loved dearly, a man named Paul. He finished his work and stepped away. He gasped and bounced on his toes. He thrust a mirror into my hands and I held it up. "Is that me?"

"You bet, sugar," Demetri grinned. "Your husband will think you are the most beautiful creature in the room."

"My husband?"

"The good looking red head who dropped you off. Girl, he's fucking gorgeous," he swooned "If he was gay and single, I'd jump on him like white on rice."

"Oh, he's not my husband," I muttered.

"Yet!" Alice chimed from her seat.

"When Alice speaks, it usually happens," Demetri said with a wink. "I'll do your hair and makeup for your wedding. Free. Here's my card."

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I took the card, staring blankly at him. He kissed my cheek and began cleaning up his station. I got up woodenly and went upstairs to get my dress on. I walked into the bedroom where I changed before the rehearsal dinner and found my dress along with my shoes and underwear on the bed. I stripped out of my clothes and put on my hipster lacy pink panties and matching strapless bra. I then put on my dress, zipping it up. I put on my jewelry and gave myself a once over before I slipped on my strappy silver sandals. I walked slowly down the stairs. Rose was sitting in the living room, playing on her phone. "What are you doing, Rosalie?"

"I'm texting Emmett," she grinned. "He's such a goof."

"Yes, he is," I replied sitting down. "The dress looks good on you."

"It looks good on you, too, Bells," she smirked. "You have the boobs for it. I really don't. Thank goodness for push up bras."

We sat quietly as Rose continued to text Emmett. "I'm going to sleep with Edward tonight," I blurted.

"Really?" Rose smiled. "About time. You need to get laid, Bells."

"It's not about sexual release, Rosalie," I sighed. "I can get my sexual release with Old Faithful."

"Let me guess. Your vibrator?" she giggled.

"Yes ma'am," I responded. "I feel ready to be with him like that. He makes me feel special. Beautiful. Loved. Cherished. I want to give him all of me."

"Good for you, Bella," she said as she hugged me. "Have fun with Dr. McFuckme."

"Oh, I intend to," I said. We sat until Alice danced down in her gorgeous dress. She twirled and gave us a huge smile. She bounced on her toes and wrapped her arms around our necks. "Alice, you look beautiful."

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"Thank you, Bella," she smiled as she fluffed her veil. "So do you. I love the dresses."

"They're very pink, Alice," Rose snorted. "But they're pretty."

"Come on. The photographer is here and we're taking the pictures outside," Alice smiled as she walked through the house. We grabbed our bouquets and walked out into the backyard. The photographer was taking pictures of Esme and Maria. We spent about a half hour taking pictures with Alice and the ladies before we all loaded up into the stretch Hummer. We drove to the church and walked into the brides' room, waiting until the beginning of the ceremony.

Alice was pacing the tiny room. Rose and I, along with the other bridesmaids were sitting watching her wear out the carpet. Esme rolled her eyes and stopped her daughter from having a nervous breakdown. However, she wasn't nervous. Just anxious to get married. After fifteen minutes, the wedding planner came in and gave us the green light to begin our procession. We left the tiny bride's room and walked to the entrance of the sanctuary. All of the groomsmen were already there. I was behind Alice, carrying her train of her dress. I fluffed it and laid it behind her. She gave me a water thank you and took a few deep breaths.

The doors opened and the strains of Pachelbel's Canon in D carried through the church. Each of the bridesmaids walked down the aisle on the arms of their groomsmen. I was talking quietly to Alice when I felt a soft hand on the middle of my back. I turned around and saw Edward, wearing his black tuxedo. I gave him a huge smile. "You look so handsome, Dr. Masen," I said, batting my eyelashes.

"Not as beautiful as you," he blushed. "Shall we?"

He offered his elbow and we took our spot at the doors. "Don't let me fall, Edward."

"I promise to catch you, beautiful girl," he grinned. The wedding planner told us to walk and we processed down the aisle. I recognized a few faces from

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school and some of Jasper's friends. I put on a smile as we walked down to the altar. Like at the rehearsal, Edward and I bowed at the front of the church before separating and taking our spots. I looked into Edward's eyes as the music changed from Canon in D to Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring. His eyes held my gaze and they were filled with love. I'm certain my eyes mirrored his emotion. I barely noticed that Carlisle had walked Alice up to the altar and kissed her cheek sweetly. I also didn't notice that Jasper and Alice had begun the ceremony. It wasn't until Alice turned to me and handed me her bouquet that the ceremony had started. I blushed and took the bouquet after I fluffed her dress.

Father McManus went through the ceremony, proclaiming devotions of love and trust. The same thing he did when he married Mike and I. As Alice and Jasper went through their ceremony, I reflected on my failed marriage. Was it truly *my fault*? No. Mike was the one with the problem. Not me. He had these insane expectations and he never once validated my feelings. He never once showed me love. Not that it mattered. He was a murderer anyway. Or was he? The evidence that Edward presented to me was circumstantial at best. When we talked with the police and with Seth, they agreed that they would investigate this lead in Charlotte's cold case.

Alice and Jasper turned to each other and recited their vows. Jasper went first, his voice wavering and his lower lip trembling as he looked at her. "Mary Alice Cullen, I've known for ten years, seven months, thirteen days and," he looked at his watch, "forty-seven minutes. They have been the happiest I'd ever been in all my life, sugar. You have given so much. Love. Honor. Respect. Happiness. Sensuality. Humor. Family. And most importantly, hope. Hope for our present. Hope for our future. Hope for everything that comes our way. I know that we will have our good days and our bad days. The thing that will get us through those days is our love and the fact that we will always be at each other's side. I love you, Alice. With everything that I am. I promise you that I will always strive to be the best man, loving husband, and hopefully an exuberant father to you and our future children."

Alice could barely contain herself when he finished. She threw her arms around his neck, crying hysterically. Father McManus cleared his throat and gave

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Alice a pointed glare. She quickly sobered and gave him a smile. He then indicated for Alice to say her vows. She nodded and looked into Jasper's eyes. "Jasper Whitlock. You kept me waiting a long time. But the old adage says, 'good things come to those who wait.' I'm definitely glad that you waited for me. And that I waited for you. You have had such an impact in my life. You are loving, kind, sweet, gorgeous and mine. I dreamt of you. I saw you coming into my life and I was so happy when you did. I love you so much and that love grows every day that I know you. I look forward to the steps we will take in our lives as husband and wife. Mother and father. The only thing that matters is that we will be together. Forever."

Jasper sniffled and he wiped his nose unattractively on his sleeve. Edward snorted and handed him a handkerchief, eliciting laughter from the crowd. Father McManus had Alice and Jasper exchange rings and they lit the unity candle. Afterward, Alice looked at her brother and he walked to the piano. He sat down and Alice picked up a microphone. Sia's *My Love* delicately flowed through the church and I felt my eyes prick with tears. Jasper was a weeping mess as he listened to his wife serenade him.

After the song, Alice walked back to Jasper, lacing her fingers with his. Edward took his place behind Jasper, blushing a shade of pink that rivaled the pink of my dress. The priest gave a few parting words of wisdom before allowing Jasper and Alice to kiss in front of our friends and family.

"It is my greatest pleasure to introduce to you for the first time Mr. and Mrs. Jasper Whitlock," Father McManus announced. Family and friends broke into a rousing round of applause. Alice and Jasper kissed again and I handed her bouquet. The Trumpet Voluntary started and the newlyweds walked down the aisle. Edward extended his arm to me and I gratefully accepted it. We followed the newlyweds to the bride's room until everyone had reconvened on the steps of the church. Jasper and Alice were making out in a corner while the rest of us were waiting.

"God, get a room, bro!" Garrett laughed.



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Jasper snarled and flipped him off. "Shut it. I'm kissing my wife." He dipped her low and kissed her senseless.

"Jasper has the right idea," Edward laughed. He wrapped his arms around my waist and dipped me into a passionate kiss. I fought feebly against him and I heard snickers around the room. Edward pulled away and gave me a sexy smirk. "I wanted to do that since I saw you. You are so fucking beautiful," he whispered as his lips moved against mine. I opened my mouth and his tongue slid between my lips. My hands moved to his hair and I moaned quietly.

"Fuck me! Now we have two couples who need a room," Garrett barked.

Edward laughed and righted us. "We really don't have an excuse like being 'just married,'" Edward blushed.

"Edward, you never have an excuse for kissing Bella," Alice giggled as she extricated herself from Jasper. "You two are like horny teenagers."

"Alice!" we both yelled.

"What? I'm so happy that both of you found each other. However you are extremely nauseating," Alice shrugged. "Let's go get bubbled and then take some pictures." Alice reached into her purse and adjusted her lipstick. She then tossed it to me, arching a brow. I rolled my eyes and applied the lipstick on my mouth. Edward was snickering and I smacked his belly. We laced fingers and walked out to the front of the church. We picked up some bubbles and attacked Alice and Jasper as they walked out of the church and into the limo.

The crowd dissipated and we walked back into the church for pictures. That was two hours of my life that I'll never get back. Every configuration of people was arranged with the photographer. However, the most surprising picture that was taken was of Alice's family. She insisted that I join in the picture. I hesitated and Edward grabbed my hand, standing behind me. We smiled and our pictures were taken. We then headed to a small park for some more candid shot. Alice insisted that Edward and I take a number of pictures of the two of us. The photographer happily obliged Alice's request and Edward and I got

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play model. He loved it. I thoroughly hated it. The only redeeming quality of the whole thing was being with Edward the whole time. His subtle touches, loving caresses and soft kisses made the pictures worthwhile.

After all the pictures, we headed to the hotel where Alice and Jasper were having their reception. We immediately went into the receiving line for everyone. Another hour and then the doors opened, ushering people into the large banquet hall that was decorated in pink, white and black. The wedding party hung out and waited to get called into the reception hall. The DJ came out and asked us how to pronounce our names and clarified if we were married or not. After that, the music changed and he started announcing the wedding party.

"...and now the Best Man and Maid of Honor! Dr. Edward Masen and Ms. Isabella Swan!" the DJ announced with a smirk and we walked onto the dance floor. Edward pulled me into a dance hold and twirled me around. I didn't fall. Praise the lord!

"Last, but not certainly not least, introducing our newlyweds! Mr. and Mrs. Jasper and Alice Whitlock!"

Alice and Jasper strode into the room falling into their first dance as husband and wife. The wait staff distributed drinks and we settled into our meals. Alice and Jasper took their seats after their dance. After the salad course and before the main course, the DJ came over with a microphone for the speeches. I blushed and looked at Edward with a frantic glance. He turned on the microphone, clinking his water glass for their attention. The crowd hushed and he held up the microphone. "Good evening, ladies and gentlemen, family and friends. I hope you enjoyed the salad. For those of you who don't know me, I'm Edward, Alice's brother. I'm also the best man for Jasper. I'd like to take this time to congratulate my sister and my best friend on their wedding today. Anyone who can live with my sister or be in the same room as her for any length of time is a saint."

"Shut up, Edward," Alice hissed.

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"Love you, Elf," Edward winked. "Anyhow, Alice and Jasper met in college. I'd like to say that I was the one who introduced them, but no. It wasn't me. I didn't even meet Jasper until they had been dating for a few months when she brought this guy home for Thanksgiving. However, I knew then when I met him, he would marry my sister. He was everything that she wanted and dreamed for in a boyfriend, husband and father. Trust me, I know. She constantly called me to tell me about her dream man. But I didn't let Jasper in right away. I played the part of the protective 'older' brother, even though Alice is a few months older than me. In all the time that Jasper and Alice dated, I could see their love grow and blossom. When he decided to propose, he asked Carlisle and me for permission. I laughed at that as I knew Alice would put a stiletto up my butt if I refused his request. But, Jasper, you are a special man. A man who is worthy of my sister's love. I'm honored to have you as my brother. Welcome to the family." Jasper got up and gave Edward a huge hug. "One more thing. If you hurt her, I will kick your ass." The crowd laughed and they hugged again.

After Edward's speech, I got incredibly nervous. Put me in front of 30 8th grade students and I'm fine. Put me in front of adults and I'm a hot mess. Edward handed me the microphone, kissing my cheek. "You'll do fine, beautiful."

"Sure, sure," I mumbled. I smiled at Alice, tugging on her veil. She returned my grin with a wink. "Alice. Alice. Alice. You are truly unique. For as long as I've known you, you've marched to the beat of your own drummer. Usually, the beat of your drummer was fast. Until you met Jasper. Then you slowed down. Not in a bad way. But in a way that you could enjoy life. Enjoy love. Enjoy it all. Jasper did that for you. He brings out the best in you. He handles your bouts of extreme hyperactivity and dramatic tendencies. He provides a calming influence in all that you do. Most importantly, he loves you. Unconditionally. I've never met two people more different than each other, but more right at the same time. I love you both, so much. I wish you the best of luck in this journey that you are about to embark on: marriage. The road may get bumpy, but with each other, you can handle anything. To Mr. and Mrs. Whitlock!" I raised my glass and toasted my friends.

## A Fresh Start

The DJ collected the microphone and walked back to his perch behind his equipment. The rest of the meal went by quickly and pretty soon we were called onto the dance floor for the wedding party dance. Edward wrapped his strong arms around me and we swayed to Nat King Cole's *Unforgettable*. He placed my hand over his heart and crooned quietly in my ear. He was truly a smooth dancer. I never once stumbled or tripped in his arms. He twirled me and dipped me at the end of the song, kissing my lips chastely. "I love you, Bella," he whispered as the song morphed into something more upbeat. "Let's go out on the patio." I nodded and he led us outside to the large patio overlooking a small pond.

I stood in front of the edge of the patio, leaning on the railing. I sighed contentedly. Edward stood behind me, his arms securely around my waist. "What are you thinking about, beautiful girl?"

"Everything. Nothing," I smiled. "You."

"Me?"

"Yep. You. I am so lucky to have you, Edward," I said. I leaned my head back against his shoulder, forgetting that I had enough bobby pins in my hair to go to China and back. "Ow."

"Hair?" Edward asked as he gently patted my head. I nodded and grimaced. "Well, it looks beautiful. Just like you."

"Demetri did a fabulous job," I said. "I just have a hairpin headache."

"Was Demetri your hair guy?" Edward asked.

"Stylist, Edward. And yes," I laughed.

"Should I be jealous?"

"No. He was very gay and very much in a relationship with another guy named Paul," I giggled, turning to face him. I laid my hands on his chest, looking up at

## A Fresh Start

his handsome face. "Besides, he was too short for me. I was taller than him in my heels." Edward laughed and he kissed me. "I love you, Edward. Thank you for everything you've done for me. Opened your home..."

"...Our home," he corrected.

"Our home," I laughed. "Shown me love, support and strength. And yeah..."

"Very eloquent for an English teacher," he teased.

"Shut it," I snorted. "There is something else."

"What, beautiful girl?"

"I want you. All of you. I want to give you all of me," I whispered. "If you'll have me."

Edward looked into my eyes and his face slowly reacted to what I was saying. His eyes sparkled behind his frames and his mouth was pulled up in a radiant grin. "Are you saying what I think you're saying?" I blushed and nodded. Edward leaned down gently caressed my lips with his. His grasp around my waist tightened and I moaned quietly against his mouth. He pulled away, leaning his forehead against mine. "Is it too early to leave?"

"Probably," I said, caressing his soft skin of his cheeks.

"Bella...there...there are no words that I can express at the gift you're giving me," he said quietly. "I love you so much. I can't wait to show you."

"As I love you, Edward," I smiled.

"Bella? Edward? They're getting ready to do the bouquet and garter toss," Angela called. We pulled apart and headed back into the reception hall, eagerly waiting for the wedding reception to end.

## A Fresh Start

**A/N: I'm stopping there. I want to make this upcoming lemon extra juicy and this chapter is already 10,000 words. Leave me love. Por favor.**

# The 32 Year Old Virgin

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*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

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## Chapter 20: The 32 Year Old Born Again Virgin

Edward and I reentered the reception hall. Rose grabbed my hands and dragged me to the dance floor for the bouquet toss. I really didn't want to be out there. Yes, technically I was single. But the thought of being bum-rushed by twenty some odd women in stiletto heels was not appealing to me. Rose, apparently, noticed my grimace and smacked my arm.

"Rose! That hurt! I bruise easily," I said rubbing my arm.

"Bells, enjoy this. Catch the damn bouquet," she giggled. She plopped us in front of crowd and Alice stepped in front of the DJ booth. She gave us all a wink and turned around as the music blasted through the speakers. The DJ roused the crowd and Alice turned around. She looked at all of us girls with a coy grin, waving her toss bouquet. She was getting to throw it when she turned around abruptly and placed into my hands. I squeaked and gave her a glare. She kissed my cheeks and scampered away. The rest of the 'single ladies' grumbled and exited the dance floor.

Edward was off to the side, laughing hysterically. I threw the bouquet at him and he caught it. "Alice is only trying to help, Bella," Edward laughed as he

## A Fresh Start

waved the bouquet in my face.

"She could have just THROW it. Not placed it in my hands," I moaned. "Give the other chickies a fair chance."

"This is Alice's way of being subtle," Edward replied, putting the bouquet back in my hands. "She's always wanted a sister. She whined and moaned whenever I visited that I was, and I quote, 'an icky, stinky, stupidhead boy.'"

"Edward, you are none of those things. Okay, except the 'boy' part. Though, man is a more apt description. There ain't nothing that is 'boyish' about you," I said, tracing my finger along his tuxedo-clad thigh.

"I have boyish charm," he winked. The DJ called out the single men. Edward gave me a quick kiss and walked out to the dance floor, standing next to Jacob. They were talking and I sat down at one of the guest tables. I wondered if Jasper was going to do the same thing as Alice. He better not. Edward was already hinting at his level of commitment with me. Now, I was ready to be with him intimately and capable of being his girlfriend, I was nowhere near ready to be his wife.

Alice danced onto the floor. Jasper came behind her with a chair. Alice sat down and crossed her legs, hiking up her wedding dress. Jasper gave her a lascivious grin and kneeled in front of her. His hands danced around her ankles. His fingers walked up her legs and he put his whole head under her dress. The crowd laughed and Jasper stayed hidden for a few minutes. He pulled down the garter with a triumphant grin. He stood up, assisting Alice to her feet. He kissed her sweetly and she left the dance floor. Jasper shook his hips to the rhythm of the music and turned around, stretching the garter. He looked of his shoulder and at the crescendo of the song, he shot it. It fell right into Jacob's hands. He floundered and thrust it into Edward's pocket, laughing hysterically. Edward bent over in a fit of giggles as Jasper approached Jacob. Jake pointed to Edward and darted off the dance floor, plopping down next to me.

"Didn't want the garter, eh?" I teased.



## A Fresh Start

"Hell no! Who would want to marry me?" Jacob said.

"Jacob Black, you will find your special someone," I spat. "I promise you!"

"Jeez, Swan. Rant much?" Jake laughed.

"She's quite passionate about people she cares about," Edward retorted as he spun the garter on his finger. "They need us for pictures."

"More pictures?" I whined. "Fuck me."

"You know my opinion on that, Bella," Edward snorted as he helped me off the chair. The muscles in my legs protested. Stupid heels. The photographer arranged us and snapped a few pictures. Afterward, I walked back to the table with Jake. Edward was close behind. Jake was sitting, idly twisting a coffee cup. "What's wrong, Jacob?" Edward asked.

"Nothing," he sighed.

"Bullshit," Edward retorted as he sat down next to him. "You were fine until the garter toss. Now you look like you're at a funeral."

"I'm never going to get this," Jake said, gesturing to the wedding. "No one will want me. I'm fucking tainted."

"Jake, listen to me," Edward said sternly. "You are not tainted. I know I told you this when you came in. You will find someone who will love you, regardless of your issues. I actually have a co-worker who is really great. His name is Ren. I mentioned you to him and he seemed interested."

"Will he be interested when he knows my HIV status?" Jake grumbled.

"You won't know if you don't meet him," Edward said, placing a hand on Jake's shoulder. "I can find out when he's available and if you want, give him your phone number."

## A Fresh Start

"Sure, sure," Jake said. Edward whipped out his phone and programmed Jake's number into it. Edward also snapped a photo of Jake. He protested but Edward insisted with an impish grin.

The rest of the reception went by without a hitch. Edward dragged me out onto the dance floor, against my protests. After third trip out there, I slipped off my shoes and immediately felt better. We all danced, laughed and had a good time. Edward always kept his hand on me, holding me close to his body. The only time he stepped away was when he took off his tuxedo jacket. Around ten, Alice grabbed my hand and we walked to a suite. I helped Alice remove her dress, along with Esme. She changed into a white slip dress with a white shrug to travel on her honeymoon. We went back into the reception hall and the remaining family members all gathered to wish Alice and Jasper a good time on their honeymoon: ten days in Hawaii.

After they left, the party continued. I dragged my old and tired ass to one of the tables sitting down. I put my feet up on the chair and sighed. Edward sat in said chair, putting my feet in his lap. "Tired, beautiful girl?"

"Mentally, I'm wired. Physically, my muscles are barking. I'm too old for this shit," I laughed. Edward's fingers began massaging my feet and I moaned. "Fuck, that feels good. My ankles are killing me."

Edward smiled and he continued his foot massage. He frowned when he noticed the scars on my ankles. "You have surgery scars," he stated.

"Yeah. I've had three surgeries on my feet. Two on the right; one on the left," I answered. "I've sprained my ankles more times than I can count. I have no cartilage and they are very weak. But you know that already with the boot."

"Yes, I know. I also know you had the surgeries. I saw your history when you came in for your hand. I just wanted to hear it from you. Mike..."

"Didn't hurt my ankles. My own damn clumsiness did," I replied. "I'm shocked I haven't hurt anything today with these." I held up my silver sandal. "For certain I would have broken something."

## A Fresh Start

"But you didn't. Besides, you have Dr. McFuckme to save you," Edward laughed. "Are you ready to head up to our suite?"

"I don't think I can move," I muttered. "My poor feet."

Edward got up and gently tugged on my arms. He turned around, crouching a bit. "Hop on."

"Edward, I'll throw out your back," I said, biting my lip nervously. "I'm a heifer."

"Do you remember your pledge?" Edward asked as he looked over his shoulder. I nodded and huffed. I hiked up my skirt so he could grab my knees. I wrapped my arms around his neck and hopped onto his back. He easily lifted me and we walked out of the reception hall. He strode to the elevator and we walked in, riding it to the top floor. We reached the last room in the hallway when Edward put me down gently. He reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. He retrieved the key card and unlocked the door. Edward laced his fingers with mine and pulled me through the door of the suite. It was beautiful, decorated in beiges, blues and white. The furniture was sleek and opulent looking. "Are you going to move from the entrance, beautiful?"

"Just admiring," I sighed. "It's lovely. It must have cost a mint. Please..."

"Bella, I got the room for us. If you try to offer to pay for it, I'll get pissed," Edward said, arching a brow.

"Sorry," I mumbled, dropping my gaze to the floral arrangement on the sofa table. He walked to me, tenderly touching my cheeks and forcing me to look into his evergreen orbs. He leaned down and kissed me. My heart stammered in my chest and my stomach did flip flops. I gently pulled away and smiled at him. "I really am sorry. I'm just not used to this." I gestured to the room and to us. "I'm going to shower and remove the ten million hairpins in my head."

"Okay, Bella. Your bag is by the bed," Edward said as he laced his fingers with mine. He handed me my bag and I darted into the bathroom. I spent twenty

## A Fresh Start

minutes removing all of the pins from my hair. Once I had my hair free from its hairpin prison, I turned on the water and stripped out of my pink dress. I stepped into the hot stream, washing off the grime of the day. I washed my hair and finished my shower. I walked out and dried my body with a towel. I dug around in my bag and pulled out the nightie that I packed. I blushed furiously.

"You can do this, Bella. This is Edward. He loves you. He's seen you naked. He loves you," I chanted. "I can do this. I know I can." I put on some deodorant, lotion and perfume before I slipped on my nightgown and panties. I ran my fingers through my hair, scrunching it slightly. I put on the bathrobe behind the door and walked into the suite. Edward was sitting on the couch, watching some television. "If you want to shower, go right ahead."

"Thanks, beautiful," he smiled. He got up and took off his shirt as he walked into the bathroom. As he showered, I took the opportunity to look around the room. There were some candles around the suite and I lit them with a flame thrower on the dresser. I put in my iPhone into the sound dock in the room, choosing a quiet jazz playlist. I turned off the television and I sat down on the bed, toying with the ties of the robe.

Edward walked out of the bathroom a few moments later, wearing a pair of sleep pants, his glasses and a smirk. His hair was flopped in front of his eyes. He tossed his tuxedo pants, shirt and shoes onto the chair. "Shower help with your tight muscles, beautiful girl?"

I nodded and kept my eyes trained on the pattern in the carpet. A few stray tears fell down my cheeks. I didn't know why. I wanted this. I wanted him. Why am I such an emotional wreck?

*Because you're making love to a man who is not your husband. This is not a bad thing, moron. Mike was not good in the sack. At all. Talk about a two pump chump. It was all about him, Bella. Edward has proven to you that he is selfless lover, willing to make your pleasure be his number one priority.*

"Bella? Love?" Edward asked. I sniffled and drew my knees to chest. He knelt in front of me. "If you don't want to do this, I'm okay with it. I don't want to

## A Fresh Start

push you. I want to make love to you, but if you aren't ready..."

"Edward, I want you. I want you to make love to me, but I'm afraid. I'm afraid that I won't...won't...be good enough. That you'll hate me," I whispered.

"I can never hate you, Bella. My heart bursts for the love that I feel for you," he said as he pulled my legs down. He knelt between my legs and looked at me. His gaze was earnest and loving. "I love you. All of you."

I wrapped my arms around his neck, sniffing against his damp skin. His strong arms snaked around my waist and he held me tightly. "I'm sorry, Edward. So sorry," I bawled.

"Bella, don't apologize," he said quietly. "Don't ever apologize." He scooted back and caressed my cheeks with his thumbs. "If you don't want to do this..."

I was having none of that. I looked into his jade eyes and crashed my lips to his. He was surprised momentarily and then he reacted to my kiss. His hold on my waist tightened and I fisted my fingers into his wet hair. We kissed until we were breathless and needed to pull apart. I looked at Edward, reaching for the ties of the robe, releasing them. I shrugged off my robe and Edward looked at my nightgown. His eyes darkened and he swallowed. "So beautiful," he murmured.

"You make me feel that way, Edward," I said reverently. Edward smiled and cupped my face in his large hands. He kissed me sweetly and pushed us back onto the bed. He hovered over me, never putting his full weight on me as I spread my legs. He moved his lips from mine and gently kissed down my neck, nibbling along the heated skin there. I shifted underneath Edward and moaned. His hands softly ran down my arms and I tangled my fingers into his hair. His tongue moved along my skin, on my collarbone, my neck, the swell of my breasts, the sensitive spot behind my ear and the ending on my lips. His kiss was soft and sweet, morphing into heated and desperate. He rolled and pulled me across his waist, straddling his hips.

"Bella," he whispered as he looked into my eyes. "Are you sure?"

## A Fresh Start

I looked at him, never feeling more sure about anything in my life. "Positively sure. Edward, I love you. Tremendously and I want to be with you. I want to feel your hands on me. I want to feel you inside me," I said, smiling shyly. "Please?"

He sat up on his elbows and his eyes were filled with tears. A few tears fell onto his cheeks and he smiled brilliantly. "Anything for you, Bella," he murmured. He took off his glasses and sat up, kissing my lips with renewed fervor. His fingers danced along the hem of my nightgown. The same touch moved to my legs. I moaned and moved along his hardening length. My hands ran across his strong shoulders, kneading the muscles. Our mouths moved in tandem, fighting for dominance. Edward's hand wrapped around my waist and he held me tightly. Still keeping his powerful hold on me, he pulled away. "Can I see you, my beautiful girl?" he asked quietly. I nodded and his fingers ghosted up my body, dragging the nightgown with it. He pulled it over my head and tossed it on the ground, gazing at my body. I instinctively covered my body, but Edward stopped my hands. "Don't, Bella. You're exquisite."

I blushed and dropped my gaze from his eyes to the bedspread behind him. "I'm not," I said, almost inaudibly.

"Bella, you are gorgeous. Here," he said as he ran his hands along my arms. "Here," as he pressed my temple. "And most importantly, here," he whispered as he laid his hand above my breast, over my heart. "You are the most beautiful woman in my eyes. You need to recognize it. When you do...holy shit! Look out. The world will tip on its axis. Bella, believe me."

He kept one hand on my chest and his other hand gripped the back of my neck. His lips brushed mine. My heart stammered and I inhaled sharply. His soft kisses were pressed to my mouth, my eyes, my cheeks and then back to my mouth again. The hand that was on my chest moved to my breast, gently squeezing. I moaned and opened my lips. Edward's tongue languidly slid into my mouth. It danced with mine, running along my teeth. My hands ran across his shoulders and down his arms. He rolled his hips and I was on my back, with Edward hovering me. His lips left mine and moved down my body. He looked up at me and took one of my breasts into his mouth. I arched my back and

## A Fresh Start

whimpered. He laughed lightly, causing reverberations to radiant through my body. His tongue flicked my nipple and his other hand played with my other breast. I could feel my panties get damp and my legs were moving restlessly.

Edward's mouth moved from my chest and he kissed back up to my mouth. His hand traced my leg and moved to my inner thigh. He growled and his fingers moved closer to my throbbing core. Edward pulled away and he looked at me with such love and affection. "I love you, Edward," I whispered, trying to calm my erratic breathing.

"I love you, Bella. More than my own life," he murmured. His fingers slipped into my panties and he gasped. His brow arched and wicked smile broke over his face. "Let me guess. Alice convinced you?"

"Meddling elf," I giggled. "You like?"

"Hmmm," Edward nodded as he pulled my panties down my legs. He looked down between my legs and I felt his arousal grow harder against my leg. "I like very much, my beautiful girl." He moved down my body and he pressed chaste kisses to my inner thighs. He licked his lips and his fingers moved along my slit. I moaned and bucked my hips. He arched a brow and he placed an opened mouth kiss to my clit, pulling it into his teeth. My back arched and I nearly came when his lips met my core. He pushed two fingers into my body and I groaned.

"Edward," I mewled.

"I love hearing you say my name. Especially like this, beautiful," he purred against my heated skin. He kissed my inner thighs, sucking on the skin. His hand moved in my body faster and he sucked on my thigh, probably marking my pale skin. He hummed and turned his head back to my dripping core. He nibbled lightly on my clit and he added a third finger into my pussy. My hips moved in conjunction with his ministrations and I could feel my muscles respond to his erotic touch. Edward pulled away and he was breathing heavily. He looked up at me and his eyes were filled with desire and lust. "Let go, Bella. Come for me."

## A Fresh Start

"Oh, God," I moaned as I tangled my fingers into his hair. I didn't want to push him back to my pussy, but I was too close. I needed release. Edward took the hint and he licked the length of my slit, adding his tongue to his fingers in my core. With his other hand, he flicked my clit and I was panting. My hands moved to my breasts and I grabbed them forcefully. "Edward! So good. So close."

Edward worked furiously in pussy and I felt my body move close to the edge. He removed his tongue from my sex and then bit down on my clit. I yelped in surprise and I felt my walls clamp down on Edward's fingers. I arched off the bed and Edward kept his mouth attached to my core as I rode out my orgasm. I regulated my breathing and calmed down my body. Edward crawled up my body and his mouth crashed against mine. I could taste my arousal on his lips and I moaned. My hands snaked down his body and I pushed his pants off his hips. He pulled away and kicked his sleep pants off the rest of the way. He was naked underneath and his cock smacked his belly when he removed his pants. Instantaneously, his lips were moving with mine. With my legs, I wrapped them around his waist, bringing his body closer to mine. His cock nuzzled my entrance and he pulled away from me abruptly. His eyes were filled with love, but wary. "Are you sure?"

"Never been more sure about anything in my life, Edward," I whispered. "Make love to me."

His eyes softened and he leaned down to kiss me again. There was no hesitation in his kiss. Just love. Just adoration. Just Edward. He moved his hips closer to mine and his cock moved closer to my core. He opened his eyes and brushed my hair from my face. He balanced his weight on his elbow and he looked down momentarily as he lined up with my body. His eyes moved back to mine and he smiled. "I love you, my Bella." He moved his hips and he slowly slid into my core. With each inch that he filled me, my heart was bursting and I felt a livewire jumpstart my body. A tear fell down my cheek and he kissed it away. He closed his eyes and took a few breaths. "So good," he whispered. "You feel so good." He moved out slowly and thrust back into my body. His jade eyes opened and I saw tears in them. I reached up and caressed his cheeks as he thrust in and out of my core. My skin was overheated, my



## A Fresh Start

heart was stammering and I felt nothing but absolute love for the beautiful man above me. Inside me.

"I love you, Edward," I whispered. A few tears left his eyes and his lips crushed against mine. His movements sped up and I latched my legs around his waist, squeezing him with my walls. I'd never been with a man without a condom and the feeling was indescribable. Feeling all of Edward. Not an approximation of him through a thin layer of latex. I felt my body respond to his movements and I mewled in his ear. He linked one of my legs over the crook of his elbow and he sat back. His eyes never left mine. They were filled love, lust, desire and adoration. "Shit," I moaned. "I...I..."

"Fuck, baby," he moaned. "I'm so close. Being with you like this is unreal. A dream come true. You were made for me, Bella," Edward said as he angled his body to hit a different part of my core. I saw stars as he shifted. I screamed in complete ecstasy. I'd never come from penetrative sex and this was fucking amazing. My muscles clung to Edward's cock and I reached between us, feeling our connection. Edward growled and he moved with more ardor against me. Inside me. Filling me completely with everything he had. Edward's breathing was labored and his brow was covered with sweat. I felt his body slap against mine and my own skin was covered in a sheen of sweat. Edward's mouth dropped and he grunted. Seeing him like this made my muscles clench. I looked at him and rubbed my clit with my hand. My other hand tangled in Edward's hair, pulling him down to me. His tongue invaded my mouth and I felt his dick twitch. With that feeling, my muscles clamped around Edward's cock and I ripped my mouth away from Edward, screaming silently as I came. My orgasm triggered his and he spilled into my body with a thunderous roar of expletives and proclamations of love. He collapsed on top of me, breathing heavily. He released my leg and I wrapped my arms around his neck, nuzzling his damp, soft hair. Edward started to pull away, but I kept my arms and legs wrapped around him.

"Don't," I whispered. "Stay."

"I've got to be squishing you," he said sleepily.

## A Fresh Start

"No. You're fine," I murmured. "I don't want to let you go. I feel so complete right now."

"God, baby. So do I," he said, kissing my neck. "There are no words to describe how I feel."

"Home," I answered.

I felt Edward smile against my neck. "Home. Perfect," he muttered. He looked at me and he slid out of my body. I felt bereft at the absence of him in my body. I wanted nothing more to be connected to him like that forever. I had never felt so complete. So loved. So cherished in all of my life. Edward must have noticed my frown as he gently ran his finger between my eyebrows. "Don't be sad, beautiful girl. Tonight was the first night of forever," he whispered. He got up and went into the bathroom. He returned with a washcloth. I arched a brow. "You're going to be sore tomorrow. Just trust me," he smiled as he ran the warm washcloth between my legs. I could already feel the soreness begin and I hissed. Edward chuckled lightly and he continue to soothe the soreness that was in vajayjay. He tossed the washcloth on the floor and pulled down the comforter. I settled in between the sheets and cuddled next to Edward, on his chest. Before I knew it, my eyes were closed and I was in a deep, deep sleep.

**A/N: They did it. They did it! Holy crow! They did it! What do you think? Leave me love! :-)**

# The Morning After

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## Chapter 21: The Morning After

### EPOV

"Hello, Edward," came a sweet voice. "I've missed you."

"Tanya," I breathed. I looked in the direction of the voice and saw my wife. She was standing before me in a flowing white dress, her strawberry blond curls flowing around her heart shaped face. "Oh, Tanya," I cried. I reached for her but she held up her hand. I frowned in confusion. "Why?"

"I'm just visiting, Edward. I wanted to see how you were doing," she smiled. "Obviously very good. Seeing your lack of clothing."

I looked down and noticed I was wearing a pair of sleep pants and that was it. I self consciously crossed my arms across my chest. "Sorry," I mumbled.

"Don't be, Edward. I'm happy for you," she replied. "You spent so long grieving me. It's about time you moved on."

"You're not mad?" I asked.

## A Fresh Start

*" No. Edward I'm not mad. I'm actually very happy for you. She's beautiful."*

*" She is. Both inside and out," I whispered. "But I'm worried, Tanya. I can't lose her. Not like I lost you. I can't imagine the pain of losing her."*

*" Oh, Edward," Tanya whimpered as she reached out toward me. "I'm so sorry that I had to leave. I never wanted to be without you."*

*" Tanya, you didn't leave. You were taken from me," I wailed. "I was so lost."*

*" But now you're not. You have your Bella."*

*" My Bella," I muttered.*

*" Your Bella. She loves you. Very much. She just is hesitant to truly let you in. She made a huge stride last night, but she's not done in letting you in," Tanya said as she floated toward me. "Be patient with her."*

*" I know. She's so fragile."*

*" She's not as fragile as you think. But be aware of her past. It will bite you. And her," Tanya warned. "Be strong for her. Love her. Protect her."*

*" I intend to, Tanya," I said, looking into her violet eyes. "I'm just afraid of forgetting about you. You were so important to me."*

*" I still am. You won't forget me. I'll show up like this to remind you of what you missed," she winked. "And Edward?"*

*" Yes?"*

*" I approve. She's truly your soul mate. I was your wife, but she is your other half. Her strengths are your weaknesses and vice versa. Love her. With this," she said as she touched my temple. "And this." She touched my heart. "She will make you inordinately happy. As you will make her happy. I love you, my Edward. Enjoy your love."*

## A Fresh Start

*"I love you, too, Tanya," I whispered. She leaned down and kissed my lips before she vanished like a puff of smoke.*

My eyes cracked open and I smiled. "Thank you, Tanya," I whispered in the darkness. Bella nestled closer to me and sighed against my chest. I ran my hand through her soft hair and held her closer to my chest. I watched my angel sleep in my arms. Her tiny arms wrapped around my waist and she was mumbling quietly. I watched as she slept and I was in awe of her. Of her strength. Of her love. Of everything about her. I was over the moon that we had shared the most intimate of moments. I was so happy that she felt comfortable enough to share it with me. I was ecstatic that I was able to share my love with her. Never in my life had I felt so content. So loved. So complete.

Bella summed it up perfectly. She was my 'home.' My dream about Tanya solidified it. She gave her blessing. I was so happy. I couldn't wait to take that next step. But I needed to. Bella was dealing with some serious shit. Her ex-husband was a first class douche. Possibly a murderer. I couldn't let her get hurt. I would lose it if she did. Or worse. I couldn't be without her. I wanted to make her my wife. The mother of my children. The grandmother of my children's children. But it was too soon. We had been friends for a few months. Dating for less than a month. It was too soon. However, I knew with Tanya that I was going to marry her after three dates. I did wait to propose to her. I'll have to wait to propose to Bella. Maybe on Christmas?

"Edward...love you...my Edward," Bella sighed. She tightened her grip on me, kissing my chest. My heart soared at her sleeping admission and I kissed her forehead before slipping back into deep sleep.

xx AFS xx

"Edward," Bella grumbled. "Turn off your damn phone."

"Huh?" I answered intelligently.

"Your phone. Turn it off. It's been ringing forever," Bella said into her pillow.

## A Fresh Start

I groaned and got out of bed. My muscles protested. Especially in my ass and lower back. *Ugh, I'm old.* I padded to my pants and pulled out my cell phone. There were several new messages. Two from Alice and one from Emmett. The messages from Alice pretty said that they arrived in Maui and were settling into their hotel. She called a second time to make sure that I get her mail while she was gone. The message from Emmett was one word. "FOOD!"

I looked at the clock on my phone and saw that it was nearly eleven. I groaned and padded back to the bed, pulling Bella against my chest. "Who called?"

"Alice and Emmett," I said in her hair.

"What did they want?"

"Alice called to let me know that she got to the hotel and to get her mail. Emmett just said that he wanted food," I laughed.

"Emmett always wants food," Bella snorted. "He's a walking garbage disposal. I've never seen one human being eat as much as he does."

As Bella was talking, a loud banging rang through the suite. Emmett's booming voice resounded through the door. "Stop fucking you two and let's get food!"

"How did he know where we were staying?" I asked. "It's not like I announced the world we were in the suite."

"I have no idea," Bella giggled. "You may want to answer the door. Emmett will take matters into his own hands and beat it down. Trust me I've seen it."

I rolled out of bed, groaning in pain as I stood back up. Bella laughed hysterically and covered her face with a pillow. I smacked her ass and pulled on my sleep pants. I walked to the door and opened it. Emmett was standing at the door with an impish grin on his face. "Morning sunshine," he bellowed.

"What the fuck?" I asked.

## A Fresh Start

"Food. I need food," Emmett said simply. "Rosie's sleeping and I figured you'd be up."

"Now. I'm up now, Emmett," I laughed. "After a bunch of phone calls."

"Can I come in?" Emmett asked as he started to move into the suite.

"No!" Bella yelped from the bed. I gave him a shrug and he looked at my attire.

"I didn't interrupt did I?" Emmett asked, his eyes wide.

"No, Emmett. You didn't," I snickered. "We'll see you later, okay?"

"Of course. Later, Bella," Emmett called.

"Bye Em!" Bella shouted. I laughed and Emmett danced down the hallway. I closed the door and walked back to the bed. Bella was wearing my tuxedo shirt and a smile. "That was, um, interesting."

"Is he always like this?"

"Yes. He's like a big kid. I'm surprised that anything gets done in his classroom," she giggled. "How are you?"

"I'm fine," I said, smiling. I stretched my body and my back cracked causing me to grimace.

"You're lying," she said, wiggling her finger at me.

"I'm fucking sore," I grumbled. "How about you?"

"Me too. We're too old," she laughed.

"Yeah, we are, but it felt good while it was happening," I smiled as I crawled up her body, pressing her to the bed with my hips. "So good. Amazing."

## A Fresh Start

"Wonderful," she answered.

"Earth shattering," I supplied.

"Fucking hot," she purred as she ran her fingers through my hair. "You are...wow."

"I could say the same about you, beautiful," I replied as I kissed down her neck. My fingers danced along her legs. "How sore are you?"

"Not sore enough to do this," she said as she pushed on my shoulder. She straddled my waist and unbuttoned my shirt, tossing it on the floor. Her lips crashed against mine and my hands went to her hips. "I love you so much, Edward." She scooted back on my legs, tugging on my pants. My cock was released from its plaid prison and she smirked at me. "Do you want me, Edward?"

"God, yes," I breathed. "Always, my Bella."

She reached behind her and stroked my cock with her soft, tiny hand. "So hard, Edward," she cooed. She smiled and moved further back on my body. She lined up her entrance with my cock and I could feel how wet she was. My breath hitched and she slowly lowered herself onto my dick. She moaned and her head fell backward. "Fuck." Her slick walls hugged my cock and it was the most perfect place for me to be. She started rocking on my body and she held my gaze.

"Bella," I croaked as I sat up. My lips attached to hers and we kissed passionately as she moved above me. I could feel her body grow wetter and she was so tight. Tighter than I had ever imagined. I wrapped my arms around her waist and our lips move together in tandem. I could feel her muscles flutter around my cock and her breathing was growing more erratic. "You are amazing, Bella. I love you."

She moaned and her fingers latched into my hair. She tugged forcefully on the strands and I hissed. It hurt, but it felt good at the same time. Her body moved



## A Fresh Start

faster and she removed her mouth from mine, biting down on my shoulder. I reached in between us and gently circled her clit as she moved faster.

"Ed...Ed..ward....," she moaned into my skin. "Fuuuuuck," she cried as she gripped my neck tightly, digging her fingers into my shoulder. She leaned back, bracing herself against my knees. Her body was undulating as she got closer and closer to her release. I watched her as she moved sensually. Her head fell back and her face scrunched into a grimace as her muscles clamped down on my cock. She kept moving and I felt my own release follow hers. My dick twitched and I spilled into her, biting my lip to prevent my screams. She leaned forward and her sweaty body molded against mine. Her breath was heavy and erratic, just like mine. "Okay, now I'm really sore," she laughed.

"There's a Jacuzzi tub in the bathroom," I suggested. "Let's go sit in front of the jets to relax our tired and old muscles."

"That means I have to move," she said as she tightened her hold on me. "I don't want..."

"I know, Bella. Me neither," I said as I kissed her bare shoulder. "It's my new favorite place to be." I wiggled my hips and my dick perked up. Bella kissed me but unstraddled my waist. I frowned. She tweaked my lip and tugged on my hand. We walked into the bathroom and Bella turned on the tub. She got it to the right temperature and plugged the stopper. I got in first and Bella followed, settling between my legs.

We sat in the tub, allowing the jets of the Jacuzzi to relax our sore muscles. I rubbed Bella's shoulders and I could feel the knots in them. She moaned at my massage and my dick perked up. *Not now, you perv.* Bella reached behind her and wrapped her fingers around my cock and giggled. "Someone's excited."

"Can you blame me?" I snickered. "I have the most beautiful woman, naked, in a Jacuzzi, making moans that would rival a porn stars."

"Do not," she laughed.

## A Fresh Start

"Hmmm, I think they do. You are incredibly sexy, my beautiful girl," I whispered into her ear, licking the shell of it.

"Edward," she sighed. "I'm too sore to do anymore. My cooter is protesting."

I snorted and let out a guffaw. She smacked my chest and started to get out of the bathtub. I gently pulled her back down, wrapping my arms around her waist. She was scowling and I felt a faint growl reverberate in her belly. "Don't be mad, love. I just have never heard someone reference their vagina as a 'cooter.' It's funny."

"You are an ass, Edward," she grumbled. "You...you...are hung like a fucking horse and...yeah."

"A horse, huh?" I asked as I nibbled her neck. "And this is a good thing?"

"First time I came from penetrative sex," she whispered, a blush covering her body.

"Really?" I asked, a triumphant grin spreading over my face. I did a mental fist pump and pulled her closer to my body. She squeaked and nestled against me. We stayed in the water until we both turned into prunes and the water had turned cold. We got up and did our normal morning routines before checking out. On the way out of the hotel, Bella threw away the Pink Panther dress. I laughed hysterically, wishing I could do it to my tuxedo. But alas, it had to go back to the tuxedo rental.

We drove back to our home, by way of the tuxedo rental, and spent the rest of the day just lounging around the house. Neither one of us did anything. Bella even went so far as ordering pizza, which I normally would have despised, but was okay with it because I just wanted to spend time hugging, loving, kissing and groping my girlfriend.

*She's more than that, you know...*

Yeah, I know. In my mind, she's already my wife.

## A Fresh Start

*Don't let her know that yet. She'll eat your balls for dinner.*

We wouldn't want that. I'd like to have children.

After our dinner of pizza, Bella put in a movie and tried to distract me. I was getting nervous about my eye procedure tomorrow. She put in some pointless comedy and got me a bottle of water. I was almost tempted to get shitfaced so I could sleep tonight. Tempted, but resisted. After the mindless movie, we headed upstairs and settled into bed. I lay awake for several hours while Bella was curled into my side. I couldn't get my mind to stop racing. I huffed and climbed out of bed. Bella grumbled and then grabbed my pillow. I traced her cheek and went into my office. I spent my time working on some dictations and my presentation to the board about upgrading our trauma suites. I heard a quiet cough and I looked up to see Bella standing in the doorway of the office.

"Edward, you have to be at the surgicenter by seven. Come to bed," she croaked.

"I can't sleep," I muttered. "My brain won't shut off."

"Are you nervous?"

"Honestly? Yeah," I said with a shaky breath. "One wrong move and I'm blind."

"Edward, you're nearly blind now," Bella snorted.

"Shut it, Swan," I growled.

"It's the truth."

"I know," I sighed.

"Sleep, Dr. McFuckme," Bella snickered. "Maybe I'll give you a blowjob."

## A Fresh Start

"Tempting," I snorted. "It's not necessary, my love. I'll just take some anti-anxiety meds and I'll be good."

"You still take them?"

"On average about once a month," I answered as I walked to Bella, shutting off the lights to my office. "Whenever a case, like Taylor's, comes through the ER, it hits hard. Too close to home, you know?" Bella nodded and laced her fingers with mine. We walked up to the bedroom and I took an ativan before crawling back between the sheets. Bella was on her side and I spooned my body protectively around hers, nuzzling her soft, fragrant hair. "I love you, my beautiful girl."

"I love you, too," she whispered sleepily.

My brain finally shut off and I fell into a fitful sleep. It almost seemed like my head hit the pillow when Bella's alarm shrilled from the bedside table. She turned it off and padded to the bathroom. I pulled the pillow over my head and tried to get some more sleep. Bella eventually removed the covers from the bed, smacking my ass. I got up and brushed my teeth and taking a brief shower. I walked downstairs and ate a quick breakfast of a bagel. Bella was sipping some coffee, reading the newspaper. After a few moments, I handed Bella my car keys to the Volvo. "Why are you handing me these?"

"You're driving my car," I answered simply. "I'm not sure how my depth perception is going to be and like you, I have clumsy tendencies."

"Right, Edward," she snorted. "I'll drive your car, control freak."

"Thank you, baby," I smiled.

"You're welcome. However, we have to go," she said as she looked at her watch. I groaned and followed her out to my car. She eased into the driver's seat, adjusting the mirrors. I got into the passenger side and I could feel the butterflies attack my stomach. I'd been through numerous surgeries from when I was in my car accident, but it didn't negate the fact that they still freaked me

## A Fresh Start

out. I wasn't going under, thankfully. I was still nervous. Bella must have noticed as she grabbed my left hand after she backed out of the driveway, lacing her fingers with mine. "Edward, you'll be okay. I had it done and I'm fine. No glasses. No contacts. No worries," she reassured.

"I'm afraid it won't work," I whispered. "Dr. Sandoval said I was a candidate as I did have some deformities in the eye, but I'm fearful that it's more to do with my injury to my noggin."

"I know it's driving you bonkers to not be in control, Dr. McFuckme. Trust your doctor," she said, arching a brow.

"You know what they say about doctors. They make the worst patients," I joked.

"It's the same thing with teachers. We make the worst students," she laughed. "We think we know all of the answers and techniques when we don't. But we insist on knowing it all."

"Same with doctors. We self diagnose. I was in medical school, third year. I was feeling run down and exhausted all of the time. I was certain I had some rare blood disease based off the symptoms. I went home for the weekend and Carlisle smacked my head. I was just exhausted, not being used to the chaotic schedule. No rare blood disease or anything else. Just exhaustion," I laughed. "After that, I pretty stuck with having my own physician diagnose me. I have a flair for the dramatic."

"And you're wicked protective," Bella said quietly.

"Only about people who I love and care about deeply. I've lost too many people in my life. I'll probably be overprotective. Don't hate me because of it," I said, squeezing her tiny hand.

"Edward, I could never hate you," Bella replied, looking at me as we stopped at a stoplight. "I'm...I'm just not used to it."

## A Fresh Start

"Well, we'll have to change that," I winked.

Bella blushed and turned into the surgicenter where I was having my Lasik procedure. She parked the car. I took a few deep breaths and got out of my Volvo. We walked into the reception area and I gave my name. The nurse had me fill out some forms and then she handed me a water bottle and small cup with three small pills in them. "What's this?"

"Valium, Mr. Masen," she replied. "It'll relax you."

"It actually does the opposite with me," I said. "I get jittery and wired."

"Okay. Let me check with Dr. Sandoval what she wants you to have," the nurse huffed as she strode away from the desk.

*Rude, much?*

I waited for the nurse to come back and she handed me three ativan. I handed one pill back to her and she arched a brow. "You need all of them."

"No, I don't," I smiled. *Kill her with kindness.* "I know my body and I'll only need two."

"And why do you know that?" she sneered.

"Because my medical degree told me. And it's Dr. Masen," I snapped. *So much for kindness.* I popped the pills and strode back to where Bella was sitting. She was looking at me with wide eyes. "Bitch," I muttered under my breath.

"She's probably calling you every bad name in the book," Bella chortled.

"She was just rude and probably didn't even talk to Dr. Sandoval. She just grabbed whatever pill was back there without asking," I grumbled.

"What did she try to give you the first time?"

## A Fresh Start

"Valium. Does nothing but make me super hyper. I told her that and she came back with ativan. She insisted I have three pills, but I would be one step up from amoeba if I had taken all three," I said, giving the nurse the stink eye. "I'm still going to be incoherent as it is with two."

"I'll carry you, big guy," Bella snorted as she poked my side. I jumped, giving her a pointed glare. She mimicked my look before she kissed my lips sweetly. "I love you, Edward. You're going to perfectly alright."

I wrapped my arms around her, inhaling her heady scent, allowing it to calm me. "I love you, too, beautiful." I pulled away and held her face in my hands. I stared into her eyes, memorizing every freckle, every contour, everything about this gorgeous woman.

"Dr. Masen? You're next," called a voice.

"Good luck, baby," she said as she caressed my scruffy jaw. "Love you."

"Love you, too." I kissed her lips, relishing in the softness of mouth before going to the entrance of the surgery suites. I could feel the ativan kick in and I was getting woozy. Dr. Sandoval came in and she put in several drops into my eyes in rapid succession. After fifteen minutes, I was led into a cold room with a large machine. I lay down on the bed and Dr. Sandoval checked my eyes. After another fifteen minutes, my procedure was done and I had my eyes covered by a clear shield to protect them from any scratching or anything else.

Dr. Sandoval explained my aftercare instructions and I was led, or rather stumbled, out to the waiting area. I grinned at Bella drunkenly and she wrapped her arm around my waist. She pulled me to the car, putting the sunglasses that I had to wear over my shield. I leaned my head back against the head rest, dozing slightly as Bella drove us back to the house. She left the car out on the driveway and helped me into the garage and up the stairs. Bella removed my shoes and gently took off my t-shirt. I fell onto the bed, taking her with me. I held her closely, nuzzling her hair.

"Edward, let me up," she shrieked.

## A Fresh Start

"I love holding you," I mumbled incoherently. "So soft."

"Oh lord," she giggled. "You are so loopy. Now I know how I look when I'm on narcotics. Come on druggie."

"I am not a druggie. Just say no," I said as Bella dragged my legs up onto the bed.

"Okay," she laughed. "You need to sleep, Edward."

"But, I don't wanna sleep," I said, sitting up. Bella pushed me down, straddling my waist. "I like this idea better."

"Edward, you're so looped, you probably couldn't get it up," she teased. "Go to sleep. I'll check on you in a few hours."

"Then can we have some fun?" I asked, waggling my brows.

"Possibly. Sleep, Dr. McFuckme."

"Yes, Ms. Swan," I sighed as I laid back on the pillows. "I love you."

"I love you, too," she said as she kissed my forehead. Bella drew the curtains and shut the door. With no problems whatsoever, I fell into a deep sleep.

**A/N: It was more than just the 'morning after.' Sorry. Anyhow, I hope you leave me some love (or hate!). comments are always welcome! ;-)**



# The Birthday

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

*I'm also trying to limit Edward's point of view on this as it is Bella's story. Her fresh start. But I wanted to put the dream about Tanya and her approval of Bella. There may be some more EPOV, but not too much. As always, thank you for reading the ramblings from my brain.*

*And, I'll stop talking. On with the story ;-)*

## Chapter 22: The Birthday

After Edward's Lasik procedure, I made a solemn vow to never let him drink. Even if he wanted to. What a hot mess. He was loopy. Handsy. But completely adorable. He woke up after his nap, unaware of what he had said before he went to sleep. His brows furrowed and he didn't like not being in control. I told him to stop obsessing over his lack of control and pressed him to tell me how his vision was. He removed his shield, which was fucking riot to see, and he looked around the room. He grinned and said that the procedure worked. I sniggered and went back downstairs to finish what I was working on: a theater lesson for my language arts classes.

Edward plopped down on the couch next to me and read over my shoulder as I typed my theater lesson. "Your birthday," he said simply.

## A Fresh Start

"Sucks," I retorted. "Don't even think about anything. Doing anything. Getting anything. NOTHING related to my birthday."

"But Bella," he whined.

"Fuck, Masen, you sound like my middle schoolers," I teased. "'Ms. Swan, it's not fair!' 'I didn't deserve that grade.' 'Ms. Swan!'" I mimicked.

"I don't sound like that," Edward said, tickling my sides.

I swatted his hands away, giving him a pointed glare. "Edward, you know why I don't like my birthday."

"I do. But, Bella, I want to do something for you," he said, jutting out his lip in an endearing pout.

"You've already done so much, Edward. Letting me live here..." I began.

"I'm not letting you live here. I invited you. I want to live with you. This is not *my house*. It's *our house*," Edward said fervently.

"I don't feel like a contribute anything. I mean, I pay half of the utilities," I said.

"I'd rather you not pay for anything," Edward sighed. "It's not like I don't have the money, beautiful girl."

"But it's not right," I said. "I need to help out. I make a good amount of money. Not as much as a doctor, but enough."

"Bella, call me old fashioned or call me whatever. But my job is take care of you. Whether it's helping you out with your mortgage for your tainted condo or letting you stay here. It's my job and I enjoy doing it. Please, baby, let me spoil you," he said, lacing his fingers with mine.

"Have you gotten me the moon?" I teased.

## A Fresh Start

"Not yet. But it's work in progress," he winked. Edward's phone chirped from his pocket and he grumbled. "Eye drop time. Blech." He got up and went into the bathroom, putting his eye drops into his emerald eyes.

I turned back to my lesson and began creating some worksheets and doing some research for a possible field trip. I found something that piqued my interest. The local opera house provided backstage tours and then gave discounted tickets to the student matinee. I would have to ask Mrs. Cope about the possibility of taking my students on this field trip. As I was typing up my proposal, my cell phone rang. It was number that I didn't recognize. I picked it up, "Hello?"

"Is this Isabella Swan?" asked a male voice.

"Speaking."

"Hi, I'm Austin Stevens and I'm the realtor working on selling your condo," he said. "I had several showings today and you've had an offer."

"What is it?" I asked as Edward came and sat down next to me.

"\$275,500," Austin said triumphantly. "A very generous offer."

"It is. That's more than I paid for it," I smiled. "A lot more."

"So, do you accept the offer?" Austin questioned.

"Are they willing to take the furniture?"

"Yep. They loved the décor. Tremendously," Austin answered. "So, do I call them back?"

"Yes. I'll accept their offer," I said, bouncing on the couch. "Thank you, Austin!"

## A Fresh Start

"You are quite welcome. Once they have received the news that you accepted the offer, you will need to sign some paperwork. Is there a number that I can fax it to you?"

I rattled off my school's fax number and said I'd get it tomorrow. Austin told me to not worry about it and that he would send it out first thing in the morning. I told Edward the news and he spun me around, kissing me fiercely. He insisted we go out for dinner tonight, but I was tired from the weekend and from being up at the ass crack of dawn this morning. I told him that we can go out another day. He pouted.

We decided on eating the leftover pizza for dinner and both settled in for an early night to bed. He was still a little loopy from the meds and I had to go to work tomorrow. Work, meh!

xx AFS xx

Work was brutal. The kids were hyped up on something or another. I never had to write up so many detentions and referrals in the four days we had this week. The only positive was my signing off of the offer for my condo. Oh, and being with Edward. When I got home from work on Tuesday, he pounced. I was dragged upstairs and sexed up within an inch of my life. He was truly a wildcat in the bedroom. The things he could do with his body, his tongue, and his hands made my hair curl and my panties damp.

On Friday, I was working in my classroom during my plan period when I heard a soft knock on my door. I looked up and saw Edward leaning against the door jamb. "Hi, beautiful."

"Edward, what are you doing here?" I asked.

"Just got off from the hospital and I wanted to see my beautiful girlfriend," he smirked.

"But, in order to get into the school, you need to be escorted by a staff member," I blushed.

## A Fresh Start

"He had the office call me," Rose smiled. "Your boy is quite the genius. You know that, right?"

"Thanks, Rose," Edward grinned.

"Quite welcome, Edward," she said as she poked him in the belly. He snorted and she danced away. "Behave in your classroom, Ms. Swan."

I growled lightly and shook my head. I got up from my desk and kissed Edward chastely on the lips. "I thought you were working until seven."

"I got off early. Besides, I need to make some arrangements for this weekend," he said, wagging his brows.

"Ugh," I grumbled. "My birthday, I almost forgot."

"Bella, the day of your birth is incredibly important. If you weren't born then we wouldn't be together," he rationalized. "I absolutely adore being with you. You are so incredibly special to me."

"I know, Edward. You are so special to me, too. It still doesn't change that I don't like my birthday," I sighed. I walked over to the whiteboard and put up my agenda for my last class of the day. Edward walked over to me, wrapping his arms around my waist. "I'm sorry for being such a grump."

"You're not a grump," he whispered. "Just trust me, okay?"

"I do trust you, Edward. Immensely. With my life," I said as I turned around in his arms. He kissed me sweetly again as the bell rang, indicating the end of my plan period. "You have to go. Unless you want to teach my kiddos on how to discern the difference between an adverb and an adjective."

He wrinkled his nose. "That would be a no. I love you, beautiful," he said. "I'll see you at home."

## A Fresh Start

He strode out of the classroom, almost being bulldozed by thirty eighth grade students. He chuckled as he waved and he left the school. The rest of the school day flew by and I headed out to my car. In my windshield wiper was a card. I frowned and opened it.

*It all started here...meet me at 6.*

I turned the card over and saw a coupon for Slammers. I giggled and drove home. When I got there, I noticed that Edward's Volvo was in the garage, but the Vanquish was gone. I walked into the house and went upstairs to shower and change. I left my hair down and curly. I put on a pair of distressed jeans, a blue graphic t-shirt and a gray blazer. I slipped on a pair of metallic ballet flats and checked the time. I put on some light makeup. I snorted as I thought how Alice would be pleased. I checked the clock and noticed I need to boogie out of there to get to Slammers.

I drove to the sports bar and walked in. I didn't see Edward's car and I frowned. I checked my watch and saw that it was six, on the dot. The bartender noticed me at the door and waved me over. "Bella?"

"Yeah, that's me," I frowned.

"This is for you," he smiled as he handed me another card. I thanked him and opened up the envelope. Inside was Edward's business card. I flipped it over.

*No broken bones this time. But the offer still stands for the shoulder to cry on. My office is awfully empty without you.*

I snorted and got into the car, driving to Craven. I walked into the ER and was greeted by Rhonda. She gave me a huge hug and birthday wishes. I asked for Edward and she told me that he was in his office. I walked down the corridor to his office and knocked on the door. A quiet voice bid me to enter. At Edward's desk, Carlisle was sitting there.

"Hi, Bella," he grinned.

## A Fresh Start

"Hi, Carlisle. I'm looking for Edward," I said, arching my brows.

"I know. He's got you on some kind of wild goose chase," Carlisle laughed.  
"Here."

I reached for the envelope, thanking him with my eyes. I opened it up and there was another card.

*The first 'quasi' date. I think I knew that I was in love with you then, my beautiful girl. I'm in the mood for some mushroom ravioli. Or perhaps chicken saltimbocca.*

"Thank you again, Carlisle," I smirked.

"Happy birthday, Bella," Carlisle said warmly.

I waved and darted out to my car, getting another hug from Rhonda. I drove to La Bella Italia and parked in front of the restaurant. It looked dark, like it was closed. I furrowed my brow and walked to the door. I opened it and found it lit up with a million twinkle lights and one table in the middle of the entire restaurant. Edward walked out from behind the bar, wearing a pair of dark jeans, black t-shirt and black sport coat and holding a large bouquet of roses.  
"Table for two?"

My eyes filled with tears and I launched myself at him. He put down the flowers and caught me easily. I covered his face with passionate kisses. I pulled away and looked at him, my eyes wide with shock. "How...how...did you do this?" I asked.

"On Tuesday, I made all the arrangements. I got off early to make sure that everything was in place," he replied, brushing my hair off my face.

"But the entire restaurant?" I squeaked.

"I wanted you all to myself," he smirked. "And I intend to have *all* of you."

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I whimpered as Edward's mouth descended on mine. His tongue slid between my lips and danced languidly in my mouth. His hands moved to my ass, squeezing lightly. Too soon, he pulled away and kissed my nose. "Don't want to get too carried away. Come on, beautiful girl. Dinner's waiting."

He led me to the table and assisted me in my seat. I blushed when I remembered my attire.

"What's wrong, Bella?"

"I look like a schlump," I grumbled. I picked at my blazer and dropped my gaze to the red checkered table cloth.

"You look beautiful. Exquisite. Gorgeous. Alluring," he pressed. "I can't imagine a more beautiful woman."

"Your biased, Edward," I giggled.

"And this is a bad thing because..." he teased.

I rolled my eyes and picked up the small menu placed in front of me. It was an embossed piece of paper with a pre-made menu printed on it. It recreated our first meal perfectly. I felt my tears build behind my eyelids. No one had ever done anything so thoughtful for my birthday.

"Bella?"

"Sorry," I cried. "This is just so much."

He got up and knelt in front of me, cupping my cheeks. "Nothing is too much for you, my beautiful girl. You deserve the world, the stars and the moon," he winked. He reached into his pocket and pulled out a small box, placing it in my hand. I arched a brow and looked at him skeptically. He looked at the box and gestured for me to open it. I did and inside was a ring. It was sterling silver or white gold with a large oval stone that looked iridescent blue when you looked at it head on, but faded to clear as it moved. On either side of the stone were a



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cluster of small diamonds. I gasped and looked at him. "It's not the moon, but it is a moonstone," he explained as he took it out. "I'm still working on the actual moon, beautiful." He slipped the ring onto my right hand, kissing it reverently. He looked up at me expectantly. "Do you like it?"

"It's beautiful," I whispered as I looked at the unique ring. "I've never seen anything like it. Thank you." I leaned forward and kissed his soft lips. Things started to heat up when Roseta cleared her throat. I blushed and looked down. "Oops."

"It takes two to tango," he chuckled. He got up gracefully and sat back down in the chair facing me. Roseta put two salad plates onto the table along with two glasses of white wine. I quirked a brow at Edward. "It's your birthday. A reason to celebrate."

"Edward, you do not make a good drunk," I snorted. "You blacked out when you had your eyes done."

"That was not alcohol," he rationalized. "That was ativan. Relax, beautiful. I am only having one glass."

"You can have as many glasses as you want, baby. I'm not worried," I smirked. "It was funny to see you loopy. I mean hysterical."

"I'm glad I amuse you, Bella," he said with a wry grin.

I winked and dug into my salad. I caught a glimpse at my ring and I sighed. I was mesmerized by the unique and different stone. It matched the man who gave it to me. He really did give me the moon. I looked up at him, in his handsomeness, and smiled. His hair was tamed. Well for him. His jade eyes sparkled. His mouth was turned up in a crooked grin. His clothes fit him impeccably. In addition to his good looks, Edward was the most compassionate man I had ever met. His heart was so big for everyone in his life. He'd do anything for his friends and family. He was a brilliant doctor and excellent administrator. I felt nothing but pride for him in addition to the love that overwhelmed my heart. "I love you, Edward."

## A Fresh Start

"I love you, so much, Bella," he said as he grabbed my hand. "Our conversation is so different now than the first time we were here."

I chuckled and nodded. "We've come a long way." Roseta came and cleared our salad plates. She put down our dinners. Edward had the chicken saltimbocca and I had the mushroom ravioli. We ate our dinners in a comfortable silence, staring at each other. After our dinners were taken away, Roseta brought a cup of coffee for me and some water for Edward. "Thank you again for all of this," I said as I waved my hand to the restaurant.

"It's not over, yet," he winked. Roseta came out with a huge slice of rum cake and a candle on it.

I barked out a laugh. "Rum cake?"

"I found your recipe and emailed it to the pastry chef," he said, giving me a shy smile. "She made it for your birthday."

"But you're the one who likes my rum cake," I said with a mock accusing glare.

"You like it too," he countered. "Happy birthday, Bella. Make a wish and blow out the candle." My eyes closed and I made my wish.

*I wish to be with Edward forever.*

I opened my eyes and blew out the candle. We shared the slice of rum cake, Edward eating most of it. After dessert, Edward got up and offered me his hand. I twined my fingers with his and he led me to the door, picking up my flowers as we left. "But, we need to pay," I said.

"Already done," he said simply. "We have one more stop."

"Oh," I said intelligently. He led me outside and my car was gone. "Um, Edward. You know the big burgundy thing. My car? Yeah, it's gone."

## A Fresh Start

"I know. I had Rose pick it up with Emmett and drop it off at the house," Edward replied. "I swiped your spare key."

I looked at him, my mouth gaping like a guppy. He captured my chin, kissing my lips softly. He tugged on my hand and put me into the passenger seat of the Vanquish. He drove us to Lover's Point. Cheesy as it sounds, it is a popular location for weddings and vow renewals because it overlooked the small mountain range near Sherryville. He parked the car and assisted me out of the Vanquish. He got a blanket and a small bag from the trunk. We walked slowly on the uneven trail. Edward was behind me in case I was going to fall. Surprisingly, I didn't.

We got to the gazebo at Lover's Point and it was covered in twinkle lights. Edward took the blanket and spread it out on the ground. He sat down gracefully and patted between his legs. I snuggled up next to him, his arms resting on my waist. "Has this birthday been better?"

"Yes. Thank you, Edward," I said as I kissed his jaw. "You are truly amazing. I mean, I can't believe you went through all this trouble."

"It wasn't trouble, Bella. I enjoy doing it," he smiled, caressing the contour of my cheek.

I leaned into his gentle touch, sighing. My eyes fluttered closed and he kissed my forehead. I felt him chuckle behind me. "What?"

"I'm surprised you haven't asked why we're here," Edward snickered.

"Why are we here?" I asked.

He snorted and smiled his perfect lopsided grin. "The second part of your present," he answered.

"My present is on Lover's Point?"

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"Not exactly," he replied cryptically. "You can see it the best from here. But it needs to get a bit darker before we can see it. So, until then, we sit and cuddle and make out and talk and make out some more."

"Okay, Edward. I get it. You're horny. Insatiable, really," I giggled.

He growled and at inhuman speed was hovering over me. I was flat on my back, pressing my hands against his chest. "I'm horny and insatiable for you, Bella," he said in a seductive purr. His nose ghosted down my jaw and one of his hands hitched my leg over his hip. I whimpered and pulled him down against my body with my legs. I could feel his growing arousal push against my jeans. My hands fisted in his thick, soft hair and his lips brushed against mine. His tongue traced my mouth and left a wake of heated flesh to my earlobe. I moaned and bucked my hips. Edward's hands moved to the hem of my shirt and he lightly touched my belly, tracing circles around my navel. Too quickly, Edward pulled away and distanced himself from me. "I better behave or we'll get arrested for indecent exposure." I pouted and sat up, fixing my mussed up hair. "Don't pout, love. I intend on making you scream my name multiple times tonight."

"Can't wait," I replied. I pulled on Edward's lapel and he settled behind me again. "Since we can't go at it outdoors, what do you want to talk about?"

"You want to make love outdoors?" Edward squeaked.

"There's a first time for everything," I shrugged. "I'm not going to lie, my sexual experiences were very *square*."

"Square?"

"Boring. Lights off. Missionary. Me on top if I was feeling creative," I answered. "You know that you were really the first guy to, *you know*."

"Go down on you," he chuckled. I blushed and nodded. "Your past boyfriends and the douche of an ex-husband were assholes. Being with a woman that way is so intimate."

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"I was always afraid of being 'icky' down there," I said.

"Trust me when I say, that there is nothing 'icky' about you. The way you smell; the way you taste; everything about you is an enormous turn on. I love that you react to me that way," Edward said as he nibbled along my neck. "That I make you that wet."

"Not helping the overbearing need to jump your bones, Edward," I whispered, grasping at his pant legs.

"Are you wet now?" he cooed.

I stealthily unbuttoned my jeans and grabbed Edward's hand. I brought it to my opened jeans. He slipped his fingers inside my panties and he circled my clit, groaning lightly. "Fuck, you're dripping, Bella," he rasped. He pulled out his hand and sucked on his fingers. "Better than the damn rum cake," he winked. "I can't wait until we get home. Ever made love in a pool?"

"Insatiable," I sighed as I rebuttoned my pants.

"Only for you, beautiful girl," he said. Edward glanced up and he got out from behind me. He took out a small telescope from his bag.

"Edward?"

"It's the last part of your present," he answered. He set up the telescope and peered through the viewfinder. He found what he was looking for and he dragged me to the telescope. "Look."

I pushed my eye up to the scope and looked at a small cluster of stars in the shape of a parallelogram. "The star on the top right," Edward prompted.

"What about it?" I asked.

He took out a small frame and handed it to me. It was a certificate from the International Star Registry. "The moon was too small. I wanted to get you the

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stars. So the blue giant star in that cluster is named after you."

"The star on the top right?"

"Yep," he handed me the frame and flicked on the flashlight he had on his car keys. Sure enough the certificate stated that the star I just looked at in the viewfinder was named for me. Again, my eyes filled with tears. They plopped down on the glass frame. "Bella, don't cry," Edward soothed.

"Happy tears," I said, hastily wiping my tears away. "Extremely happy tears."

"Not to be a jackass, but why are you crying?" Edward pressed as he placed the frame onto the ground, leading me to the gazebo. "You say happy tears, but..."

"In all of my life, I've never felt special. Not on my birthday. Not on any day. You make me feel like I'm the most important person in the world. The way that you care for me, it's heartwarming," I sniffled.

"Everyone has the right to feel special. I'm sorry that you never experienced it," Edward said sadly. "I plan on making up for lost time and I will make you feel special for the rest of my life, if you let me."

"The rest of your life?" I whispered.

"I know that you are nowhere near ready for marriage. I completely understand your hesitancy to get married again, but I want nothing more than to be your husband. For you to be my wife," Edward said quietly, cupping my face with his soft, secure hands. "We've been together for only a short time, but I feel it in my heart, in my soul, in everything that we will be together forever. I love you so much, Isabella. Whenever you're ready, I am. Hell, if you want to fly to Vegas tonight, I'd buy the damn ticket."

"No Vegas, Edward," I snickered quietly. "Alice would kick your ass."

"So, consider the ring on your hand. The one from your birthday to be a promise. A promise from me to you that we will take that step, when you're

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ready. If it's tomorrow, a year from now, ten years from now, we'll take that step," he said as he peppered my face with kisses. His strong arms wrapped around my waist and he held me close. I snuggled against his chest, relishing in his clean scent.

"Thank you, Edward. For everything. I mean everything you've done for me," I whispered. "You've restored my faith in love and that everyone can find their fairy tale."

"Am I your prince charming?"

"Definitely," I smiled. "So devilishly handsome."

"As you are incredibly beautiful," Edward whispered as his lips caressed my temple.

"Edward, take me home, please?" I asked. "Make love to me."

"You don't have to ask me twice," he laughed as he picked me up, throwing me over his shoulder.

"The blanket, the bag, the telescope," I wailed.

"Damn it," he grumbled as he put me down. He stuffed the items into the bag and laced his fingers with mine. We walked briskly back to the car. I stumbled a few times and Edward looked back at me with a worried expression. I shook it off and walked up to Edward's Vanquish. He unlocked the doors and I slid into the passenger seat. Edward put the bag and blanket into his trunk.

*Hmmmm...this is a fine sexy car.*

Edward got in and started the sleek vehicle. He moaned as the engine turned over. "Does your Vanquish turn you on?" I teased.

"Not as much as you," he retorted.

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"How about taking me *in the Vanquish*?" I suggested. Edward gulped visibly and he looked at me. His eyes were black as onyx and piercing with lust and desire. *He never looked so fucking hot.*

The engine turned off and he put on the radio. Some smooth jazz filled the interior of the car. "Get in the backseat," he whispered, his tone husky. I scrambled out of the front seat and into the back of the car. Edward took a furtive look around and joined me. He pulled me onto his lap and his lips attached to mine. Our kisses were desperate and greedy. His fingers fisted into my hair, pulling lightly at the chestnut strands. I moaned and gyrated my hips over Edward's growing erection. His hands moved from my hair to my face and pushed my blazer off my shoulders. I reached for his jacket and he shrugged out of it. "Bella," he moaned as his hands moved up my shirt to my navy blue bra.

I took off my shirt and Edward's mouth moved to the swell of my breasts, licking and nipping at the sensitive flesh. My body moved on its own and I wanted him to be buried so far deep inside. My moans and whimpers egged him on and I could feel his control ebb. I reached for Edward's tight black t-shirt and pulled it over his head, causing his hair to return to its usual state of disarray. I ran my fingernails down his chest as I moved back off his lap and knelt between his knees. I reached for his belt buckle and deftly released it. I then unbuttoned his jeans and unzipped his fly. I ran my hand over his impressive length. "Bella, you don't have to..." he trailed off.

"I know. But I want to," I replied, looking up at him through my lashes. I reached for the waistband of his boxer briefs and pulled it down, along with his jeans. He lifted his hips so his clothes were easily removed. I wrapped my hand around Edward's cock and pumped it lightly. He whimpered and his head fell back against the headrest. I leaned forward and pressed a small, chaste kiss to the tip of dick. His hips bucked and his hands moved to the edge of the seat. I laughed sexily and swirled my tongue along the head of his arousal.

"Fuck," he mumbled. "What you do to me..."



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"I love seeing you like this, Edward," I cooed. "Just like how feel when you make me wet, that's how I feel when I see you like this."

"Are you wet now?" he snarled erotically.

I removed my hands from his cock and divested myself of my jeans. Not an easy task in the backseat of a luxury vehicle, mind you. I slipped my hand into my matching navy blue lacy panties and felt an amazing amount of dampness seep from me. I moaned and rocked against my hand. "Drenched, Edward," I murmured. "All for you."

"There are no words," he whispered.

"Edward Masen. Flummoxed," I teased. I removed my hand from my panties and used the lubrication from my juices to pump his cock. His breathing became erratic and I smirked as I plunged his member into my mouth, taking him as far as I could. I sucked on his impressively large dick and Edwards' moans became louder. His fingers fisted into my hair, pulling to the point of pain. Not that it mattered. He felt amazing in my mouth. A light sheen of sweat covered his body and swirled my tongue around the tip. His hips rocked and bucked, wanting more friction. Using my teeth, I dragged along the underside of his shaft.

"Bella," he squeaked. "Stop, beautiful. I need to be inside you."

"But..." I whined.

"No, buts," he said as he reached for me. He pulled me onto his lap and crashed his lips against mine. Again our kisses were desperate and frenzied. Edward's hands moved to my panties and he cupped my ass. "Do you like these?"

"Huh? What?" I asked as I pulled away, looking at him.

With a wink, he tugged on my panties and they were ripped from my body. *Holy fuck*. I felt myself become wetter and my arousal drip down my things. I looked into Edward's eyes and they gazed into my soul. He hugged my body

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close to him. I could feel his cock nuzzle the entrance to my sex. "Jesus, Bella. So wet," he breathed as he attacked my neck with his lips and teeth.

My fingers knotted into his hair. "Edward, please," I begged. He looked up at me, his eyes capturing mine. With one of his hands he gripped my hip and he gently pushed me down on his cock, never breaking our gaze.

"I love you, Bella," he whispered as we connected in the most intimate of ways.

Tears fell from my eyes and I leaned forward to kiss him. Between my ardent kisses, I proclaimed my love for him. I started rotating my hips on his arousal. We moved in perfect harmony, like we had been lovers for years as opposed to a few days. Edward seemed to know all of the quirks to make my body sing and vice versa. His hands moved to my breasts and he gently flicked the lace-covered mounds with his fingertips. His lips moved in tandem with mine, causing my body to react with butterflies. Edward's hips bucked in conjunction with the rhythm to my body and he hit the deepest part of my body. With each thrust, I felt my walls tighten and my arousal seep down my legs. "Edward," I moaned against his mouth. "So good. I love you," I said breathlessly.

He angled me back so I was leaning against one of the front seats, still on his lap. His finger reached my clit and he looked down at our connection. He pounded into me as he pinched the sensitive bundle of nerves. "I'm so close, Bella," he rasped. His eyes met mine, "Let go, beautiful girl. Come for me. I need to feel you come."

I whimpered, staring into Edward's eyes. They were filled with love, lust and desire. I was pretty certain that mine mirrored his. I fisted my hands into his hair, plunging my tongue into his eager mouth. He growled and his hands tightened against my hips. My body moved of its own accord and I could feel my release approach. Our bodies were covered in sweat and the smell of sex and Edward was causing me to lose my control. I moved my lips from his mouth and I sucked on his neck, biting down on his pulse point. My hips moved at alarming rate, wanting more friction. More pleasure. "Ed...ward...I'm coming," I croaked as I tightened my hold on his shoulders, digging fingernails

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into his soft skin. My muscles fluttered and then suddenly clamped down on his cock. I let out a guttural scream. Edward's dick twitched in my body and his seed spilled into my body. His mouth crushed against mine, silencing my screams.

After our respective orgasms, Edward just held me tightly, breathing heavily into the crook of my neck. "I'm going to drive this car for the rest of my life," he laughed. "That was the best ever."

"Right," I giggled.

He sat me up, looking into my eyes. "Bella, you say that you had 'square' sexual relations before, but you are the most insanely sexy, sensual, passionate, amazing woman I've ever met."

"Edward, you know so much more about *this*," I replied as I wiggled on his softening cock. Though my movements caused it to perk up a bet.

"I only react to you," he cooed. He leaned forward and gave me a chaste kiss. As his lips moved against mine, his Blackberry rang from his jacket pocket. It was the hospital ringtone. He groaned and pulled away. I got up off his lap and searched for my jeans. I slipped them on, feeling weird wearing them without panties. "Dr. Masen."

I got dressed, looking at Edward. His eyes widened and he pulled up his jeans and underwear with one hand. "I'll be there as soon as I can." He closed the phone, looking into my eyes. "There's been a fire."

"Where?"

"Your old condo complex," Edward whispered.

**A/N: Cliffie... I know. However, there was some hot Aston Martin Vanquish sex. What do you think of Bella's presents? Good? Bad? Indifferent? Leave me love ;-)**

# The Fire

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 23: The Fire

*I got dressed, looking at Edward. His eyes widened and he pulled up his jeans and underwear with one hand. "I'll be there as soon as I can." He closed the phone, looking into my eyes. "There's been a fire."*

*"Where?"*

*"Your old condo complex," Edward whispered.*

*"What? When?" I shrieked.*

*"I don't know. However, it's a mass casualty situation and I need to go to the hospital," Edward said as he finished getting dressed.*

*"Rose," I whispered. "What about Rose?"*

*"Call her," Edward said as he got out of the backseat. I numbly followed, sliding into the passenger side of the car. I took out my phone and dialed Rose's cell phone. It went straight to voicemail. I tried Emmett's phone but it also went to voicemail. Edward started the Vanquish and he tore out of the Lover's Point,*

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racing down the highway to Craven. "Any luck?"

"No," I wailed.

"Bella, they're fine. I'm certain of it," Edward said, lacing his fingers with mine.

"How do you know?" I whispered. "Another birthday goes down in the record books."

"Baby, technically it's not your birthday anymore," Edward said, trying to lighten the mood. "It's the day after."

"Not helping," I muttered.

"Sorry," Edward said dejectedly. He pulled into his parking spot at Craven. "Do you want to come in and see if Rose and Emmett are here?"

I nodded and woodenly got out of Edward's car. We walked briskly to the ER, where Edward was inundated with staff members and nurses. He held up his hands, trying to get his staff to calm down. "Relax, people. Let me change and we'll discuss in five at the nurse's station. Keep your cool." They nodded and scurried off. Edward took my hand and we walked to his office after stopping to get him a pair of scrubs. He pulled me into his office and he quickly changed out of his clothes and he attached a spare ID onto the pocket, grabbing a lab coat from behind the door. He slipped on a pair of sneakers that were hidden behind his desk. "Bella, do you want to wait in here or go back to the house?"

"I don't think I can drive," I said quietly.

He knelt down in front of me and took my trembling hands into his own. His brows furrowed and he kissed my fingertips. "They're fine," he whispered.

"I hope so," I answered, leaning my forehead against his. He kissed my lips chastely and grabbed his Blackberry from his jacket.

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"I don't know how long I'll be. If you need to leave, just let the charge nurse know. I'll catch a cab to get home," Edward said as he stood by the door. "If Rose or Emmett are any of the victims, I'll find you. Okay?"

"Yeah," I said.

Edward caressed my cheek and darted out of the door. I grabbed his jacket and I curled up on his couch. Tears filled my eyes and I cried for my friends. I prayed that they were not in Rose's condo and that they were not seriously injured. I listened to the hustle and bustle outside of the office. My heart sank as I heard doctors and nurses yell about third degree burns, smoke inhalation, and crushing injuries. These people who I lived with for a few short months were now homeless and injured. I couldn't help but think that it was my fault. An irrational thought, but I still felt that way. The tears came anew and I bawled for the better part of an hour. I eventually cried myself out and zonked out on the couch in Edward's office.

I felt a gentle push on my shoulder. The office was dark, save for the light on Edward's desk. "Bella?"

"What?" I croaked. I blinked the sleep out of my eyes and looked up to find Edward's worried face looking down at me. "What is it?" He didn't answer, but he grabbed my hand. He led me to one of the trauma rooms. In the room, I saw Rose. Her normally glowing skin was ashen and covered in soot. She was intubated and appeared to be sedated. My heart sank to my feet and it took all of my strength to not collapse. "Will she...?"

"She's under heavy sedation. She inhaled a lot of smoke and she has third degree burns on her legs and feet," Edward said. "You are her emergency contact according to the condo association."

"Emmett? Was Emmett there?" I asked.

"No," Edward answered. "She was found in her bedroom, collapsed on the floor."

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"I need to call him," I said. "Is she going to be alright?"

"She'll make a full recovery. However, it will be slow going. Her legs were badly burned," Edward said as he wrapped his arms around my waist. "I'm sorry, Bella."

I extricated myself from Edward's grasp and I walked stiffly to the nurse's station. I took out my cell phone and dialed Emmett's number. Thankfully it rang. He picked up and he groggily answered. "Hello?"

"Emmett? It's Bella," I said.

"Do you know what time it is, Bella?" he grumbled.

"Yes, I do. However, I'm calling you because you need to come to Craven Memorial," I said, in a robotic tone.

"What? Why?" he roared. "Are you okay? Did Edward hurt you?"

"No! It's Rose," I said quickly. "There was a fire at her condo and she was injured."

"What? NO! I'll be right there," he wailed. The phone call ended abruptly and I was met with dead air. I walked out of the hospital and sat down on one of the benches near the entrance to the ER. I curled my knees up to my chest, resting my head on them. I felt the tears fall onto my cheeks and I never felt so helpless.

"Bella?" Edward's voice soothed. "This is not your fault."

"Why does it feel like it is?" I sobbed. Edward gathered me in his arms and held me tightly, swaying us.

"Shhhh, baby. She's going to be fine," Edward whispered soothingly, caressing my hair. "This is not your fault. Did you start the fire?"

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"No, but..."

"Bella," he said, forcing me to look into his eyes. "This. Is. Not. Your. Fault." He crushed me to his chest and I buried my nose against his chest, inhaling his scent. It was masked by the antiseptic smell of the hospital, but it was there.

"Ms. Isabella Swan?"

I sobered quickly and looked toward the direction of this new voice. "Yes?"

"I'm Detective Brian Frederiksen. Did you use to own the condo, B208?" he asked.

"Yeah. I just sold it earlier this week," I replied. "Why?"

"The fire marshal said that was where the fire started," he said sadly. "I'm assuming you don't live there?"

Unable to find my voice, I just shook my head. Edward wrapped his arms around my waist.

"Do you know of anyone who would want to cause you bodily harm?" Detective Frederiksen asked.

I looked at Edward, my eyes filled with fear. "Her ex-husband," Edward answered for me. "Michael Newton. She has a restraining order out against him. He attacked her a little over a month ago."

"And you are?"

"Dr. Edward Masen," Edward replied.

"What's your relationship to Ms. Swan?"

"She's my girlfriend," Edward said, looking the detective in the eyes.



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I stared out into space, not really paying attention to what the detective or Edward was saying. My mind was reeling from what he had said. I couldn't stop my thoughts from running away from me. I wanted nothing more than to find the nearest hole and crawl into it. I stood up and started walking back into the ER. My feet were unsteady and I got dizzy. The next thing I knew, the pavement was getting closer.

xx AFS xx

*Ow. My head. My wrist. Why am I hurting?*

I opened my eyes and found myself in one of the curtain areas. I sat up and I felt my stomach turn. I groaned and fell back on the gurney.

"Bella?" Edward asked. "Don't try to move, love."

"What happened?" I croaked.

"You fainted. You fell onto the ground, hitting your head quite hard and twisting your wrist," Edward explained quietly. "I couldn't get to you in time, to prevent you from hitting the pavement."

"Edward, you're not Superman," I teased. "How's Rose?"

"She's been admitted and is on the burn unit," Edward said. He reached for my hand and I saw that I was wearing the attractive black brace again. "She's still sedated."

"What did the detective say after I kissed the pavement?"

"Bella," Edward warned.

"What?"

"Nothing," he mumbled. "The detective pretty much put an APB on Mike. There's a warrant for his arrest for his possible connection to the fire. I wasn't

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really paying attention. I scooped you up and grabbed my best resident to treat you."

"I'm certain you verified all of their findings," I winked.

"With the most important person in my life? Hell yes," Edward replied. "After you were treated, the detective informed me that there was an accelerant in the condo, starting in the bedroom. Your bed specifically."

"Do you think that Mike did this?" I muttered.

"I wouldn't be surprised," Edward replied. "How are *you* feeling?"

"Fine, I guess. My stomach is unsettled and my wrist is killing me," I said.

Edward looked out into the hallway and grabbed a nurse. "Can you get some ginger ale for Ms. Swan?" he asked.

"Of course, Dr. Masen," she giggled. She fluffed her hair and batted her eyelashes at him before she scurried off.

Edward grumbled and ran his fingers through his hair. "She is going to be the death of me," he sighed.

"Why?" I asked, holding back a smile.

"Every day she flirts. She finds some way to touch me and she gives me googly eyes," he shuddered.

"Edward, you are incredibly handsome," I said.

"I want to be handsome *for you*. Not Trixie," he replied.

"That's her name?"

## A Fresh Start

"Yep. I nearly laughed in her face when she told me, but stopped, thankfully," he said. He sat down on the edge of the bed, caressing my face. "You're the only one for me, love." I leaned into his touch and sighed.

"Dr. Masen, here's the ginger ale for Ms. Swan," Trixie said as she skipped to his side. She handed him the can of soda and batted her eyelashes again. They were caked with mascara and looked like spider legs. "Do you want to get some coffee, Dr. Masen? You look tired."

"I'm fine. Thanks," he said tersely.

"Are you sure?" she pressed.

"Honey, in case you haven't noticed. He's not interested. He's your boss and I'm his girlfriend. Back. The. Fuck. Off," I snarled. Trixie's eyes widened and she blushed furiously. She muttered her apologies and ran out of the room.

Edward turned and looked at me. His eyes wide and a triumphant smirk spreading over his handsome features. "Remind me to never get on your bad side. Thank you!" he cried as he kissed my lips with excitement. "I. Love. You," he said, punctuating each word with a passionate kiss. He pulled away and his eyes sparkled. He handed me the can of ginger ale and got a glass with some ice. I opened it and poured it into the glass, sipping the semi-bitter soda. It settled my stomach slightly. "Better?"

I wiggled my hand, indicated that it was so-so. He frowned and took out his pen light, checking my eyes and neurological function. "I'm fine, Edward. I think the stomach issue is nerves," I said. "Can I go see Rose?"

"Yeah," Edward sighed. "I'll get Dr. Suni to release you. I'll be right back."

"Thank you. I love you, Edward," I smiled weakly.

"I love you too, beautiful girl," he said as he grinned crookedly. He kissed my lips and darted out of the room to find Dr. Suni. A young Indian woman came in and she signed off on my release, having Edward sign off as her attending.

## A Fresh Start

She explained my care for my wrist and I didn't really pay attention. I thanked Dr. Suni. I put on my shoes and Edward led me to the burn unit. Emmett was sitting outside in the waiting area, holding his head in his hands. "Any change, Em?" Edward asked.

"No. And they won't let me in since I'm not family," he spat angrily.

"Let me take care of that," Edward said as he walked to the entrance of the burn unit. He punched the security code and strode into the ward. I sat down next to Emmett, taking his hands in mine.

"I can't lose her, Bells. I love her," Emmett said, his eyes brimming with tears.

"I know, Emmett," I whispered.

"What the hell happened to you?" he asked as he brushed a tender spot on my forehead and looking at my wrist.

"I had a date with the pavement," I chuckled darkly. "I fainted and sprained my wrist."

"Why did you faint? You're not pregnant are you?"

"No! I was in emotional overload. I was taking the fire as being my fault. In a way, it is," I sighed. "The fire started in my condo."

"Could Mike have done it?" Emmett growled.

"The cops think so," I said.

The doors to the burn unit opened up and Edward came out. "Emmett? You can go in now," he smiled.

"How did you?" he squeaked.

## A Fresh Start

"I have friends in high places. However, only one at a time," Edward said. "I know how worried you are, Em."

"Thanks, Edward," Emmett replied, shaking Edward's hand before walking into the burn ward.

Edward sat down next to me and laced his fingers with mine, lightly rubbing his thumb over my ring that he got me for my birthday. "I'm sorry, Bella. I feel terribly about what happened," he whispered.

"Why should you feel bad?" I asked. "You did nothing wrong."

"I know," he whispered. "However, I know how you feel about your birthday and to have this happen during the vicinity of your special day is almost tragic."

"Up until you got that phone call, it was the best birthday ever," I said, leaning my head on his shoulder. He kissed my head and put his cheek against my hair. "What will Rose's recovery be like?"

"She'll probably have to have some skin grafts on her legs, specifically her calves. She'll have scarring and will need to relearn how to walk. However, it will be a complete recovery, just time consuming," Edward explained. "She'll probably have to be off for the rest of the school year on medical leave."

"Why is she sedated?" I asked.

"Her lungs were injured because of all of the smoke. We need her to be intubated and her sedation allows the doctors to control her breathing and medication," Edward said. "They'll probably lower the dosage of her sedation tomorrow or the day after."

"And she'll wake up?"

"Yeah," Edward said as he wrapped his arms around me. "Call me selfish, but I'm so happy that you weren't there. I could have lost your," he cried into my

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shoulder. "I can't. I can't ever lose you."

"I'm not going anywhere," I said as I sat down in Edward's lap, putting my head in the crook of his neck. "I can't lose you, either. I love you too much."

"Rest assured I love you more," he snorted, looking into my eyes. He leaned in to kiss me when Emmett came through the burn unit doors, looking as white as a sheet. "Emmett?"

"Edward," he wailed as he fell to his knees. I got up off Edward's lap and we both helped Emmett to the waiting room chairs. He clutched at Edward as he bawled into his chest. I'd never seen Emmett like this. So broken. In so much pain. "She's...she's...oh GOD! My Rosie," he bawled.

"Emmett, what happened in there?" Edward asked in calm, soothing voice.

"The doctor came in and he checked her legs. They were charred, Edward. CHARRED! No skin. Just black shit," he said frantically. "She's going to be so pissed."

"Emmett, she has third degree burns on her legs. However, she's young and strong. She will recover. It's going to be long and tedious, but she will be fine. Trust me," Edward said fervently.

"Will she have scars?"

"Yes. However, having scars is better than not having legs. The burns were only a few layers deep. Anything deeper and they would have had to amputate," Edward explained. "Infection is a possibility, but she will be fine. We have her on antibiotics and strong pain killers."

"But she'll walk?"

"Yes," Edward said, clapping his hand on Emmett's shoulder. "If no infection takes hold on her legs. She will make a full recovery."

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"What are the possibilities of an infection?" I asked.

"Slim to none, but it is a possibility," Edward said.

"I'm going to head in so you can talk to Emmett, okay?" I whispered. Edward got up and punched in the security code for the burn unit. The doors opened and he pointed to a shelving unit filled with gowns. I slipped one on and walked to Rose's room. She was laying on her bed. Her skin was cleaned of the soot, but still had an ashen tone to it. Her normally bright blonde hair even looked duller. I felt so badly for her. I pulled up a chair and sat down next to her. "I'm so sorry, Rose. So sorry. I'm going to be here for you. I promise you. I'll be your friend. I'll take care of you. Please be okay," I cried quietly. I took her small hand into mine and prayed for her. I begged and pleaded with God to make her be alright.

I heard a quiet rustling behind me and I saw Edward, wearing one of the gowns over his scrubs leaning against the door jamb. "I'm free to go if you're ready," he said quietly. "I'm sorry, love."

"It's not your fault," I whispered. I leaned down and kissed Rose on her cheek. "I'll be back tomorrow or rather later today." I got up and walked to the exit of the ward, putting my gown into the bin near the exit, following Edward's example. "How's Emmett?"

"A mess. He's calling Rose's family and going to wait for them," Edward explained as we rode down the elevator. "I tried to convince him to go home, but he refuses to leave. He's stubborn just like someone else I know."

"I'm not that bad," I joked, then yawned. "Fuck, I'm exhausted. What time is it?"

"Nearly six in the morning. I get to sleep for a few hours before coming back in," he said with mock enthusiasm.

"Edward, just stay here. I'll catch a cab home," I said.

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"Hell no. I sleep better with you. I'd rather spend a few hours curled up with you than in my office," he said as he walked out of the elevator to his office. He picked up his clothes and handed them to me. I took them and we walked out to his car. We drove back to his, erm, our home in silence. We climbed the stairs and into bed, not bothering to change. Edward opened his arms and I nestled into them falling into deep sleep.

xx AFS xx

"I'm heading back to the hospital, my love," Edward whispered against my hair. "I should be home by eleven or so."

I grunted in response and waved my hand in acknowledgement. "Love you, Edward," I mumbled into my pillow.

"I love you, too, beautiful girl," he said, kissing my cheek. "Call me if you need anything."

I heard his quiet footsteps leave the bedroom and down the stairs. The garage door opened and then closed. I rolled over and stared at the ceiling fan. I couldn't stay in bed anymore. I got out of bed and padded to the bathroom, wanting to take a cursory shower. When I stripped out of my clothes from last night, I was reminded at what happened before the phone call. I had no panties on. I don't know why I started sobbing, but I did. I went into the shower and bawled. I'm talking all out sobbing, screaming at the top of my lungs crying. I was crying so much that my throat was raw and painful when I got out of the shower, exhausted. I went through the motions of getting dressed and I walked to the kitchen, making a simple lunch. I ate it without really tasting it. As I was trying to force my food down my throat, my phone shrilled from my purse on the counter. I picked it up and saw Alice's number. "Hello?"

"What happened? Tell me everything!" she shrieked.

"Be more specific," I said.

"Rose," she nearly whispered.



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"There was a fire at my old condo complex and she was caught in her condo. She has third degree burns on her legs and she has some minor smoke inhalation. She's been admitted to Craven and is in medically induced coma," I explained, detaching my emotions. It was the only way I could get through explaining Rose's injuries. My friend who was in the hospital because of me.

"Will she be okay?" Alice asked.

"Edward thinks she'll make a full recovery," I whispered.

"Bella, what's wrong? You seem off," Alice said perceptively.

"It's nothing, Alice," I replied. "No big deal."

"Bull shit," she spat. "What's wrong?"

"It's my fault," I said, barely raising my voice.

"What? I didn't hear you."

"It's my fault. My fucking fault. It was my condo that was on fire that caused it," I yelled.

"Bella, where you in your condo when the fire started?" Alice asked. I answered no. "Then how can this be YOUR fault."

"I just have this overwhelming feeling of guilt," I sobbed. "I don't know what to do."

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself and letting the guilt consume you," Alice said. "I get it, Bells. I really do. However, it was a coincidence that it happened in your condo."

"Really? I have a feeling that my ex is involved somehow," I said. "The police have a warrant out for his arrest for the possible connection. The detective who talked to me last night said that there was accelerant in my condo, focused on

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my bed."

"Bella, this is NOT your fault. It's Mike's fault. He's the delusional psychopath who will not let you go. I'm surprised he went along with the whole divorce thing," Alice said.

"Shouldn't you be on a beach or something?" I asked. "You're on your honeymoon."

"We're coming home. We're on a layover in San Francisco. I had a sinking feeling last night and we got the next flight out," Alice explained. "I'm certain Mrs. Cope will be pleased when I come back early."

"Shit! Mrs. Cope! I have to call her and tell her about Rose's situation," I said as I slapped my forehead, forgetting my wrist brace. "Ow."

"What did you do, Bella?"

"Nothing. I'll talk to you later. Do you need me to pick up from the airport?" I asked.

"No, Carlisle is doing it. Love you, Bells," Alice said.

"Love you, too," I said as I ended the call. I took a few deep breaths and called Mrs. Cope. I explained what happened and Rose's situation. She said she would arrange for a long term sub. I would need to help with the plans, but I was more than willing. After the phone call with Mrs. Cope, I sent a text to my therapist. I needed to schedule an appointment with her to try to relax me from the craziness of the weekend. She responded immediately and told me to come in on Monday at four.

I decided to head the hospital after making my phone calls and see if there was any improvement with Rose. I went up to the burn ward and found Emmett sitting in the waiting room. He was still wearing his clothes from this morning. "Hey, Emmett. How is she?"

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"No change. The doctor's talking to her parents now," he answered. "Her mom is a trip. Very hoity toity."

"Why don't you go back to your place and go shower and change, Emmett?" I suggested. "You look like hell."

"I feel like hell. I am at a loss as to what to do," Emmett said sadly. "I love her so much, Bells. She's my soul mate."

"She's going to be fine. Edward said she will make a full recovery," I said comfortingly.

"She spiked a fever about an hour ago. There's an infection somewhere," Emmett said, looking into my eyes. "I'm so afraid they're going to take her legs."

"If they do, it's not the worst thing," I tried to rationalize. "She'll still be alive."

The door to the burn ward opened up and a two people came out. The woman looked exactly Rosalie, only older. The man had a refineness to him, even in his sorrow. They both were crying. Emmett hopped up and walked to the couple. "What happened?" he asked.

"We're just overwhelmed, Mr. McCarty," the woman sobbed. "Our baby."

"Is she still running a fever?"

"Yes," the man answered. "Who's your friend?"

"Oh, this is Bella Swan. We work with Rose," Emmett said. "Bella, this is Daniel and Roberta Hale. Rosalie's parents."

"Nice to meet you. I'm sorry it wasn't under better circumstances," I said with a sad grin.

"Rose has mentioned you. She thinks very highly of you," Roberta said.

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"I feel the same way," I answered. "She's a remarkable woman and I'm honored to call her my friend."

"We're going to head back to our hotel for a little bit. This is all so much," Daniel said. "We'll be back later tonight. It was nice to meet you, Bella. Thank you for calling us, Emmett."

Daniel and Roberta left the hospital, their hearts incredibly heavy. I felt badly for them. "I'm going to check on Rose. Go shower and change, McCarty. You smell," I commanded.

"Sheesh, Swan!" he laughed. "I'm going. I'm going." He grabbed his jacket and keys and left the ward.

I rang the bell for entrance to the burn unit and it was opened. I walked in and grabbed one of the gowns. The charge nurse on the floor gave me a dirty look but didn't say anything as I went to Rose's room. Like before, there was no change in her outward appearance. She was still intubated and sedated. Her chest moving slowly up and down in conjunction with the machinery that was assisting her breathe. I took her hand in mine, gently caressing it; offering what comfort I could. I said my prayers for Rose. I wanted her to be happy and healthy.

"It's family only," the nurse sneered. "You are not family, so you have to leave."

"I've been given permission to be here," I answered politely, looking at the irritated nurse.

"By whom?"

"Dr. Masen, head of emergency medicine," I retorted.

"I know who you are. You're his whore. He'll get bored with you and then he'll come to one of us," she said, snarling at me.

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"Who are you?" I asked. "What right do you have to speak to me that way?"

"I'm Tracy Middleton, Trixie's sister," she seethed. "But I have every right to speak to you like that. Dr. Masen is not worthy of a mouse like you."

"Well, Tracy, I suggest you leave before I kick your ass. And I will be speaking with Dr. Masen and Dr. Cullen about your behavior and your sister's behavior," I said coolly.

"Who are they going to believe? Me or you?" she threatened before she left the room, slamming the door shut. I cowered and tried to calm my erratically beating heart. I spoke with Rosalie, trying to work out what I was going to say to Edward and Carlisle about the Middleton sisters. Evil trolls. After a half hour, I kissed her cheek and left the burn ward. Tracy's eyes were burning a hole in my head as I left. I rode the elevator and walked to the nurse's station. Rhonda was there, doing some charting.

"Hi, Ms. Bella," she said solemnly.

"Hi, Rhonda. How are you doing?" I responded.

"Better than you, it seems," she smiled. "I heard about your friend. I'm sorry, sweetheart."

"Thank you, Rhonda. Is Edward around? Is he busy?" I asked.

"No. He's in his office. Go right on in," Rhonda answered.

I nodded and walked to Edward's office. I knocked on the door and he beckoned me in. "Hi, beautiful girl."

"Hey, handsome," I said, sitting wearily on his couch. "Can we talk?"

"Uh oh, this doesn't sound good," he said as he got up and sat by me. "You're not dumping my pale white ass, are you?"

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"Hell no! I can't imagine being without you, Edward. I just can't," I said fervently. "It's about a situation that happened up in the burn unit."

"What happened?"

"Tracy Middleton called me your whore and threatened me," I said meekly.

Edward's face went red and his nostrils flared. "What?" he fumed. "This just happened?" I nodded and before I knew it, Edward was on the phone. "Carlisle, call Aro. We need discuss a nursing issue. Now. Thank you." He took out a piece of paper and asked me to write down what happened. I did so and handed the account back to Edward. He read it over and his face grew more red. He tossed the notepad on the desk and he pulled me into his lap. "I'm sorry, love. They're actions will be dealt with efficiently and harshly."

"Are they getting fired?" I squeaked.

"Most likely," Edward answered. "I warned Trixie of her advances and Tracy is a shrew. They've both had letters put in their files about fraternization with other staff members."

"So, a doctor can't date a nurse," I said.

"No. They can be equals. Like, if I dated another department head. However, that won't happen since I have you," he said, kissing my nose. "But that is the only way two staff members can see each other romantically."

A sharp knock resonated through Edward's office and Edward called out to the person at the door. Carlisle and a short, weasly little man came into his office. "Dr. Masen, Carlisle told me that there is an issue with some of the nurses," the weasel said in a nasal tone.

"Yes, Aro. My girlfriend was visiting a friend up in the burn unit when Tracy Middleton threatened her and verbally assaulted her," Edward snarled. He got up and handed him my account. "This was in retaliation of a situation that happened earlier this morning with Tracy's sister, Trixie."

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"Is that in the account?" Aro asked.

"Yes," I answered. "Edward also explained the fraternization policy of the hospital."

"I see," Aro said, narrowing his little, beady black eyes. "We'll have to perform an investigation. Tracy and Trixie will be placed on administrative leave. Can you provide me with your phone number in case I need to call you...Ms.?"

"Swan. Isabella Swan," I answered as I jotted down my cell phone and email address on the paper.

"Ah, yes. I've heard about you," Aro smiled, making his tiny eyes appear smaller. He clapped his hands and rubbed them together. "I'll be in touch with you, Ms. Swan."

"Thank you," I said, feeling uncomfortable under his scrutinizing stare. He held my gaze a few moments longer and he snuck out of Edward's office. I shuddered. I felt dirty after dealing with that man. "Is he always like that?"

"Seedy? Yes," Edward replied. "I really don't like him. Is there any way to get rid of him?"

"We've been trying for years but to no avail," Carlisle sighed. "We'd need something scandalous to get him ousted."

"And he's very careful about everything," Edward grumbled. "However, enough about Aro, the weasel boy. How's Rose?"

"She has a fever. Some sort of infection?" I said, raising my brows. "Other than that, no change."

"How high was the fever?" Edward asked, slipping into doctor mode.

"I'm not sure," I answered honestly. Edward got up and went to his computer, pulling up Rose's chart.

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"Shit," he spat. "103 degrees and the antibiotics aren't working. She's got some sort of infection that may be resistant to antibiotics. I should call..."

"Edward, let the doctors in the burn unit handle Rose's case," Carlisle said.

"She wouldn't want to lose her legs because they couldn't kill the infection," Edward said, holding the phone.

"I know. They'll figure it out. If the fever is still there and that high when I leave, I'll step in, okay?" Carlisle pleaded. Edward huffed a sigh and nodded. "I'm going to go back to my office and finish the charting that is growing and having babies on my desk. I'll see you later."

"Carlisle, are you picking Alice from the airport?" I blurted.

"As soon as I leave here, I get to go there," he said with a wry grin. "I'm too old for this shit."

"We can pick up the elf," Edward said.

"No. It's okay. I'm off for the next three days and I'll be enjoying them thoroughly," Carlisle said with a waggle of his brows.

"Oh, gross, old man!" Edward said, wrinkling his nose.

"Edward, you are no virgin, so hush!" Carlisle chided. "Good night."

Edward's jaw gaped and he watched his uncle leave the office. When the door shut, he rubbed his hands through his hair roughly. "Gah! I'm scarred for life."

"Um, I hate to burst your bubble, Dr. Masen, but babies come from sex. You were not conceived from immaculate conception, unless you're not telling me something," I said, arching a brow.

"I know babies come from sex and I want to have a gaggle of them, but it's still gross to think of people *that age* getting it on," he squeaked. "Imagine your



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parents doing the nasty."

"I don't have to imagine. I saw, multiple times," I said, giggling. "It took them four times before they invested in a lock. However, a gaggle? How many children are in a gaggle? Because if you want kids with me, you may get two, tops."

"If you are willing, I'd be happy with any children, Bella," he said. "One, nineteen, a gaggle..."

"Two. Hopefully twins," I said, poking him in the sides.

"Then why are you on birth control?" he asked.

"Because, we're not ready for children yet. I want to get to know you. And be further along in our relationship before we add children into the mix."

"But do you want to have children with me?" Edward asked in a small voice. His jade eyes glistened.

"I would love to have perfect little bronze haired babies with green eyes with you," I blushed. "I love you, Edward."

"I love you, too, Bella. Let's practice," he said, a wicked grin spreading over his face.

"Practice what?"

"Making babies..."

And we did, all over his office.

*Edward Masen is a sex addict, but I'm not complaining.*

**A/N: We found out more about the fire and met Rose's parents. Edward and Bella decided that they want to have children together after being**

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**accosted by the bitch sisters. And Aro is a weasel. Leave me lots of love! ;-)**

# The Breakdown

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 24: The Breakdown

Rose's sedation was lessened a few days later. The damage to her lungs was more substantial than originally anticipated. It was a mistake that was missed by a resident. Edward saw red and laid into the said resident. The damage to Rose's lungs is what caused her fever. Once that was determined, they prescribed the right medication and the fever finally broke. Emmett took the first few days off when Rose was in the hospital, but Edward, Alice and I convinced him that if he stayed in Rose's room, she'd be pissed. He reluctantly went back to work but was really cranky with his kids.

I visited Rose every day. I talked to her and told her about school, the mundane things that would make her laugh. I told her about her sub. He was a young man who was very attractive and all the eighth grade girls were in *love* with Mr. Drum. Mr. Drum, Rose's sub, relished in his attention. I found it to be extremely disturbing.

Despite the medication that held her under sedation was lessened, Rose still remained asleep. Her body had undergone a radical change and obviously needed to heal. I asked Edward about it, but he said that she would wake up when she was ready. It was the end of the week and Rose still hadn't waken up.

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I was getting really worried.

The weekend came and went. We were preparing for open house. It felt weird to not have Rose with us. She was still in the hospital, asleep. We were having our team meeting in my room, discussing what we wanted to share with the parents. Emmett was not really paying attention, Mr. Drum, Tyrone or Ty as he liked to be called, was grading some papers and Jacob was creating a math test. I was working on the power point for the team presentation. I was loading pictures onto the power point, showing the kids in various poses and our classrooms. I typed up the basic curriculum that was covered in my classes. I saved the power point and sent it to Jacob. Out of the team, he was the most focused. However, he said that school was the only positive thing in his life. I made a mental note to remind Edward about talking to Ren about Jake.

"So, is this open house thing required?" Ty asked.

"Um, yeah," Emmett said, arching a bushy brow.

"Shit. I have a date and I guess that'll have to be cancelled," he grumbled. "I thought that since I was a sub, I'd be able to get out of it."

"Ty, you are, for all intents and purposes, Rosalie Hale. All of her responsibilities are your responsibilities. You do her bus duty, handle parent concerns, attend open house, attend parent/teacher conferences and anything else that Rosalie would have done if she was not in a fucking coma and fighting for her life," I seethed. "If you can't handle it, then I'll talk to Mrs. Cope and get another sub. Are we clear?"

"Yeah, sure," he said, blinking a few times. The bell rang and the boys got up to leave. I heard Ty mutter the word 'bitch' under his breath as he left my room. I growled lightly as my one class of regular language arts class strolled in. I sent off a quick email to Mrs. Cope, requesting a meeting to discuss Mr. Drum. The rest of the school day went by quietly. I had a great class with my final accelerated class. We had a deep conversation about the virtues of vampires versus werewolves. It was humorous, listening to their arguments. At the end of the day, I went into the main office and checked if Mrs. Cope was in her

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office. She was and I told her about my concerns with Mr. Drum. She said that he was going to finish out the week but would not return after that. She had received several parent phone calls about his behavior in class that was deemed inappropriate.

I was driving home when my cell phone rang. I picked it up and saw the phone number for Craven Memorial dance across the screen. It wasn't Edward's number. I shrugged and picked up the call. "Hello?"

"Is this a Ms. Isabella Swan?" asked a nasal voice.

"Speaking."

"This is Aro Volturi. I was wondering if you had some time to meet with me to discuss your claims against Tracy and Trixie Middleton," he said in a slimy tone.

"I'm not available today. I have a meeting that I'm late for, but I can come in tomorrow," I said.

"What's this meeting you're going to?" Aro asked.

"It's something for my graduate degree," I answered. "Will tomorrow work for you?"

"Of course, Ms. Swan," Aro said. "Four in the afternoon?"

"Yes. That'll be fine."

"I'm on the seventh floor. I look forward to seeing you again, Ms. Swan. Have a good night and good luck with your meeting," he answered. He ended the call and I tossed my phone into the center console. Aro was such a little weasel. I didn't trust him as far as I could throw him. He looked slimy and seedy. His expensive suits were impeccable, but he wore them like a used car salesman would. His black hair was slicked back and his mustache was small and pointed. I shuddered at the mental image of Aro.

## A Fresh Start

I managed to drive to the campus of the school where I was getting my masters, or rather finishing my second masters from. I sat through the two hour meeting and was bored out of my mind. I took notes and doodled on my notepad, trying anything to keep me awake. I didn't want to be there. I wanted to be at the hospital, checking on Rose. I wanted to be with Edward. Practicing...

And we practiced a lot. Every flat surface in the kitchen, bathroom and bedroom had been christened. Not that I complained or anything. Okay, well my cooter was protesting. Edward really had a supercock. And the extra friction of not using a condom was delightful when we were in the moment, but caused me discomfort when we weren't. It was a welcome change to actually have sex with a man and not a vibrator. Though it really wasn't sex. It transcended 'sex.' What Edward and I did truly was making love. He was always concerned about my needs. He was gentle. He was experienced and he knew how to make me come. Every fucking time. Hot damn.

*Is it hot in here or is it me?*

I was driving home from my meeting when my phone rang again. It was Edward. I picked up the cell phone. "Hi, handsome," I smiled.

"How are you doing, gorgeous?" he asked.

"I think I lost a few brain cells. But I turned in the first half of my practicum binder. My advisor said I'd get my grade in a week or so," I said dryly. "Do you want me to pick up some dinner?"

"Actually, could you swing by the hospital? Rose is awake," Edward explained.

"What? When?" I squeaked.

"About an hour ago. I sent you a text, but apparently you didn't get it."

## A Fresh Start

I pulled my phone away and saw that I did have a new text from Edward, Emmett, and Alice. "Shit. My phone was on vibrate in my bag and I didn't realize. I'll be there in a little bit," I said. "Love you, Edward."

"Love you more, beautiful girl," he responded and the call ended.

I drove to Craven and parked in the parking garage. I rode up the elevator to the burn unit and was met by Emmett, Alice, Jasper and Edward. He held open his arms and I gratefully fell into his hug. He kissed my forehead and we swayed back and forth. The burn unit doors opened up and Rose's parents came out. They were smiling and appeared to be more relaxed. Roberta looked at me and told me that Rose was asking for me. I looked up at Edward and he kissed my lips chastely before I headed into the burn unit. I looked at the nurse's station and was grateful that Tracy was not there. I knocked lightly on Rose's door and she called for me to enter. Her usually clear voice was raspy and low from disuse.

"Hi, Rose," I smiled. "How are you feeling?"

"Like total shit," she answered honestly. "I just had an exhausting conversation with my parents and the doctor. I'm in shock."

"You look pretty damn good for being in shock," I chuckled.

"I haven't seen the damage," she muttered darkly. "Can you get Edward in here? I trust him. The doctor that was assigned to me was a bit of a jackass and reminded me of Royce."

"Yeah, let me call him," I said as I took out my phone. I dialed his number and asked him to come into Rose's room. A few moments later, Edward came in, wearing the requisite gown over his dress shirt, tie and dress slacks.

"How are you feeling Rose?" Edward asked, smiling warmly.

"Edward, you tell me. Don't beat around the bush. Tell me what's wrong and be honest," Rose said, her eyes flashing with fire. "Show me my legs."

## A Fresh Start

"Before I show you your injuries, I'm going to explain them to you and what your recovery will entail. I'm assuming you don't want me to sugarcoat?" he asked.

"Fuck no. The doctor who was talking to my parents and me was a jagoff," she seethed.

"He's not the best. I'm sorry," Edward frowned. "So, not beating around the bush. Your legs and feet were burned. They are classified as third degree burns. A majority of the burns are below your knees and on your feet. You will have to get skin grafts to repair the damage. However, before you can have the grafts, the dead skin will have to be removed," he frowned. Edward then explained the process of the removal of her charred skin. I held onto Rose's hands as Edward told her what she would have to endure. A lone tear fell down her cheek as she listened to the prognosis.

"Do you want to see the damage?" Edward asked quietly, taking Rose's other hand. She clamped her eyes shut and nodded. Edward went to put on a pair of latex gloves and he lowered the blankets that covered her legs. Gingerly, he removed the dressings. "Rose?"

He removed his gloves from his hands and cupped her cheek. I wrapped my arms around her neck, trying to give her the strength. "You can do this, Rose. We're here for you," I whispered in her ear. She took a deep breath and looked into my eyes. I gave her a smile. "We'll look together. No matter what, you'll be fine."

"Okay," she whispered. She broke my gaze and we both looked at her legs. I was shocked and appalled at the damage. I bit back the overwhelming feeling to vomit. Her legs were charred and black. Rose let out an ear piercing scream. She reached for her legs, scratching at the dead skin.

"Rosalie," Edward said, capturing her face with one his hands and holding her hands with other. "Listen to me. Listen to my voice. You will be fine. Please stop fighting me."



## A Fresh Start

"I'm fucking ruined, Edward," she said as she fought against his hold. "I'm a freak. They're useless." Her eyes kept looking at her legs.

"Rose, look at me. Look at my eyes," he said coolly. His eyes captured mine and he pleaded with me. I gently covered her legs with a blanket so she wouldn't see the damage. "If you don't calm down, I'll have to give you another sedative."

"No! No! No!" she begged. "I don't want to sleep. Please, Edward. I'm afraid."

"Rose, you will not die," I whispered.

"Not dying. That the fire will get me," she murmured. Her eyes dropped and she stopped wiggling against Edward's grasp. He released her, but held her hands in his, restraining her.

"Has a counselor come to talk to you?" Edward asked, his voice soothing her.

"No," she said in a tiny voice. "It won't help. My legs are fucked up."

"Do you know my story, Rose?" Edward asked.

"Sort of," she answered. "You were in some sort of car accident and were gravely injured."

"Yes," he took her hand and placed it on the back of his head. "Do you feel that?" Her fingers moved in his hair and she felt the plate in the back of his head. "I had a shunt and I have a plate in my head. I couldn't walk, couldn't talk, couldn't do anything for myself for six months. I had to relearn everything. That took a year. I'm still not as 'sharp' as I should be. My processing is slower than most. I also don't have a spleen and a kidney. Do I look like a freak?"

"No," she whispered. "You look normal."

## A Fresh Start

"But I have my scars. Bella's seen them," he said, glancing at me. "Do you think that she thinks that I'm a freak?"

"No, she loves you," Rose said. "But who will love me?"

"Emmett," I answered for her. "He's been here every day, just like me. We've all been here for you. We all love you, Rose."

"How can he love me? I have charcoal briquettes for legs," she spat.

"Rosalie Hale," I seethed, "Stop it. Emmett has been worried sick about you since you were brought in. He's been here every day and didn't leave until Alice, Edward, Jasper and I threatened him because he smelled like cheese that had been left out in the sun too long."

"Bella, that's just gross," Rose laughed.

"It's true, Rose. He was foul," Edward agreed.

"But, he's been wanting to be with you every moment of every day," I answered. "He loves you. Despite your injuries."

"Even if I'm scarred?"

"Even if you're scarred," Edward responded. "Hell, my abs look like a road map and Bella puts up with me."

"Stop it, Edward. The scarring on your belly is nearly translucent," I chided. "Back to you, Rose. Do you want me to get Emmett?"

"He's here?" Rose squeaked.

"Yes," I smiled. Rose's eyes filled with tears and she nodded emphatically.

"Bella, why don't you get Emmett and I'll redress Rose's legs," Edward said. I gave him a smirk and kissed Rose on the cheek. I walked out of the room and

## A Fresh Start

into the waiting room, informing Emmett that Rose wanted to see him. He hopped up and ran into the burn ward like a shot. I sat down next to Alice and she put her arms around my shoulders.

"She's going to be okay," Alice said with certainty. "Perfectly fine."

A few tears slipped from my eyes. "Her legs were..."

"I know, Bells. But she'll be fine. I just know it," Alice said with resolve.

Edward came out a few moments later and his cheeks were pink. He looked like he had been crying. I looked at him, furrowing my brows and he mouthed that he would explain later. Alice and Jasper suggested that we go out for dinner and I was about to say no when Edward suggested that we all go together. I arched a brow and he shrugged. We headed down to the main entrance. Edward had to get his bag from his office and he said that he'd meet us at the restaurant. We ended up going to a Mexican restaurant, Front Street Cocina in downtown Sherryville.

We were seated immediately and Edward slid into the booth as soon as we were given our drinks. He looked a little frazzled. He kissed me lightly and pulled me against his side. I leaned up and hissed in his ear, "Are you okay?"

"Not really. We'll talk when we get home," he said sadly. He buried his nose into my hair and inhaled. "I love you, my beautiful girl."

"I love you, too," I whispered.

"Okay, enough, lovebirds," Alice chastised. "Why don't just fuck on the table and get it over with."

"Mary Alice Whitlock," Edward growled.

"Come on, you two need to have the sex. It's a wonderful thing," Alice laughed. "Right, Jasper?"

## A Fresh Start

"The best ever," he drawled.

"Alice, our sex lives are none of your business," I said, crossing my arms. "If we had it or didn't have it, it's our prerogative to tell you or not tell you."

"They did it," Alice squealed. "It's about damn time."

"Where's the waitress? I want my meal to go," I joked.

"Oh, come on, Bella," Alice laughed. "You both were on the masturbation train for too long."

"Alice," Edward hissed as he ran his hands through his hair. "For the love of God, woman!"

"Really, where's the damn waitress?" I said, narrowing my eyes.

"Alice, darlin', please stop. You're making Bells and Eddie uncomfortable," Jasper said. "Besides we have our own news to share."

"What news?" Edward asked. "And don't call me Eddie."

"Well, we were going to wait, but..." Jasper began.

"We're pregnant!" Alice shrieked as she bounced in her seat. "You're going to be an auntie and uncle!"

"Wha...? When?" I squeaked.

"Baby was conceived on Fourth of July," Alice said. "You want to see pictures?" Before waiting for an answer, she went into her purse and pulled out several ultrasound pictures. Their baby was tiny in the photos.

"Alice, congratulations!" I smiled. I reached across the table and grasped her hand. She continued to bounce on her seat. Jasper wrapped his arms around his wife, willing her to calm down. Edward was sitting and he wasn't saying

## A Fresh Start

anything. His eyes had glazed over and he had a slight frown on his face. I reached under the table and caressed his knee. He jumped and looked into my eyes. His grass-colored orbs were filled with so much sadness, pain, anguish. "Hey, Ali?"

"What's up, Bella?"

"I'm really feeling pretty lousy. It came on suddenly. Migraine," I lied, surprisingly easily.

"But..." Alice wailed.

"Loud noises don't help, Alice," I said. I opened my purse and threw down some money onto the table. "I'll see you tomorrow at school. Bye, Jas. Congrats, Daddy." I gently nudged Edward and he woodenly got up from the booth. I took his hand and led him out to my car. His eyes were dead. His posture was defeated. I opened up the car and before I could usher him into the passenger seat, Edward crushed me to his chest. His face was buried in my hair and I felt his tears against my blouse. I couldn't imagine why he was...

*He was going to be a daddy. Tanya was pregnant when she died. Oh, no...*

"Edward? Can you drive?" I asked as I ran my fingers through his hair. He shook his head no and I could feel him trembling. "Okay, come on. Let's get you home." I gently pried his tight hold from my body and helped him into the car. I got into the driver's seat and backed out. I laced my fingers with his and we drove home. He looked so lost when I glanced at him. So lost. So defeated. The man sitting next to me was not the man that I knew and loved. He was the widower who had his life ripped apart. I pulled into the driveway, parking in the garage. I took the spot that the Volvo usually resided. When I turned off the car, Edward made no effort to move. He was just sitting in the passenger seat. I got out of the car and helped Edward into the house. I dragged him to the couch in the family and sat him down. "I have to make a few phone calls and then we'll talk. Will you be okay, Edward? Do you need anything?"

"You," he whispered as fat tears rolled down his cheeks.

## A Fresh Start

"You'll have me in ten minutes. I need to call the police to inform them that your car is going to be in its spot overnight and we're taking tomorrow off. We've been through the ringer and..." I said as I ran my fingers through his soft hair. "Ten minutes, tops." He wrapped his arms around me and clutched me to his chest. The air in my lungs whooshed out. I squeaked as I braced myself against him. As quickly as he grabbed me, he released his hold. Edward kicked off his shoes and curled up on the couch, laying his head on his knees. I frowned as I took out my phone, stepping into the living room. I called the police and took care of Edward's car. I then called Mrs. Cope, informing her that I would be taking a personal day tomorrow. I'd send sub plans in an email to Maryann and to Emmett. I also contacted Carlisle and informed him about Edward and that he was going to take tomorrow off. He had a sudden, but violent case of the stomach flu. I know that Carlisle didn't believe me when he asked if Alice told us about the baby. I blushed and said that she did today at dinner. Carlisle then arranged for Edward to be off until the end of the week. After finishing my phone calls, I went back into the family room to Edward.

"Baby," I whispered. "Talk to me. Please?" Edward was shaking uncontrollably and when he raised his head, his eyes were glazed over and blank. "Do you want your meds?" He blinked and didn't answer.

I started to get up and he pulled me into his lap, straddling his waist. "Three. That's how old my child would have been if...if..." he wailed.

"I know, Edward," I said as I held him to my chest. He sobbed against my body. I felt so helpless. I just held him. I held him until my feet fell asleep. I held him until his sobs quieted to soft whimpers. I just held on, giving him all my love and support that I could. I was so afraid that it wasn't enough. I told him that I loved him and that we would have babies. It was at that point that I decided that I wasn't going to continue with the shot. When I was due for my next one, I wouldn't take it. If I got pregnant, great. If not, then we'll work on it for the future.

When Edward had calmed down enough, I sat back on the couch. I gently pulled Edward forward and laid his head in my lap. I played with his hair as we sat on the leather sofa. "Edward? Are you feeling better?"

## A Fresh Start

"Not really. However, the shakiness is gone," he said weakly. "I don't feel like I'm going to jump out of my skin. Thank you."

"I understand why you reacted the way you did, but I'm surprised at the force," I said.

"That's what I was for the six months after her death," Edward murmured. "I wasn't human. I was just a shell of a man, going through the motions."

"Edward?"

"Yes, beautiful girl," he replied as he looked up at me. I bit my lip and blushed. *Now's NOT the time, idiot.*

"Nothing," I said, brushing it off. *I so want to make him happy. Telling him that I wasn't going to continue with birth control would make him happy. Wouldn't it?*

"It's something if you're biting your lip," he said, releasing my lip from my teeth.

"I took tomorrow off. I also called Carlisle and you're off too," I said quickly. "It's been crazy and we both need mental health days, yeah?"

"Okay," Edward said, arching a brow. "That's not what you're thinking, but I'll let it slide. I'm too exhausted to think."

"Do you want anything to eat? We didn't get a chance to have dinner," I asked.

"No appetite," Edward mumbled, looking at his fingers.

"Not even for chocolate cake?"

"Cake?" Edward asked, his eyes sparkling slightly.

## A Fresh Start

"I think I have the fixings for my mocha chocolate cake," I smiled. "You can lick the bowl."

He snorted and got up. "I'd rather lick you," he teased.

"How about I pour the batter over my body and you can go to town?"

"Sounds like the perfect plan," he said, hugging me tightly. "Thank you, Bella. I don't think I would have gotten through Alice's surprise without you. I love you beautiful girl."

"I love you too. However, are you okay with Alice's announcement?" I asked warily.

"I'm happy for them. Tremendously happy for them, but it opened some wounds," he said with a sad look in his eyes. "My own child."

"Did you want a boy or a girl?" I asked as I pointed to him to sit on the stool at the island. I gathered the ingredients and necessities for my cake.

"I didn't honestly care as long as the baby was healthy," Edward answered.

"I know you are just saying that," I said, quirking a brow.

"A girl. I wanted a girl," he blushed. He lowered his eyes and a few tears slipped down his cheeks. "I'm just afraid that the time has passed for children..."

"Why?" I asked, my brow furrowing. "Do you not want children with me? I know we're just dating, but I want kids too. We've spent a fair share of practicing."

"Bella, of course I want children with you. I just remember all of the hassles that Tanya and I went through to get pregnant. Her infertility issues," he sighed.



## A Fresh Start

"Edward, please don't freak out," I whispered.

"Too late," he replied. "What?"

"In my mind, I always had this notion of what my life would be like when I reached a certain age. A twenty-five, I'd be married and have 2.5 kids and a dog. However, that changed drastically. I got married at twenty-six, with no children and no dog. My dreams didn't come to fruition. Also in my mind, I wanted to be married before I had kids. But, now, I don't care about being married. The only thing that matters is you. Your happiness. I can see how much you want to have children, Edward. You'll be a fantastic father. Hell, you've stepped in a fatherly role with Jacob and to some extent with Emmett. Anyhow, I'm rambling. What I'm trying to say is that after the shot that I got from the gynecologist wears off, I'm not going to ask you for another one. And we'll keep doing things as it is, if you want," I said quietly, blushing furiously.

"What are you saying, Bella?" Edward said inaudibly.

"I want to have your children," I replied, looking into his jade depths.

"Bella..."he said gently. He blinked a few times and his eyes filled with tears again. He got up from the stool and he crushed me to his chest, kissing my lips roughly, but sweetly at the same time. He kept kissing me and I could feel him smile against my lips. "Really? You want to have babies with me?"

"Cute little bronze haired children with green eyes," I said against his mouth.

"I was hoping for brunette babies with chocolatey brown eyes," he said, picking me up and setting me on the counter. "I love you so much, Bella. I can't imagine my life without you."

"Then don't," I answered simply. Edward smiled and he picked me up, wrapping my legs around his waist. He easily carried me upstairs and we practiced making our hypothetical babies.

xx AFS xx

## A Fresh Start

Edward and I spent all morning making love and staying tangled in the sheets. I finally ventured out of bed, much to Edward's chagrin around one because I had to get ready for my meeting with Aro. Edward furrowed his brow and asked what it was about. I told him that it was related to the situation with the Middleton sisters. He asked me if he wanted to go with me, but I insisted that he stay home and rest. We had gotten very little sleep the night before and he was emotionally spent. Honestly so was I, but I couldn't really do much about it.

I left the house to head to Craven. Edward told me to be careful around Aro. He always had something up his sleeve. I agreed whole-heartedly. He was an evil little troll who needed to have his head examined. I rode the elevators to Aro's office and was met with a young woman who was impeccably dressed in his lavish office. She introduced herself as Renata and that she was Aro's personal assistant. I explained to Renata that I had an appointment with Aro and she told me he was running behind and would be here in a few minutes. Renata instructed me to sit down and wait for Aro. Her violet eyes were penetrating and she had a slight sneer on her otherwise attractive face. *Lovely.*

About fifteen minutes later, Aro breezed in with a grimace on his face. He grunted a greeting to Renata. She pointed toward me and he snarled. "Ms. Swan, in my office," he commanded.

*Rude, much?*

I got up and adjusted my sweater and dress pants idly before walking into Aro's office. His door was slammed shut and he looked at me with an evil sneer. Then it morphed into something different. His face grew darker and almost seductive. "I can see why Edward is taken with you. You're quite attractive, Ms. Swan."

"Um, I'm here to discuss the situation with Tracy and Trixie," I said, fumbling for my words. "Have you spoken with them?"

"Yes," Aro sighed as he took out his file folder. "They said that Dr. Masen was putting the moves on them. They also said that you and Dr. Masen were

## A Fresh Start

engaged in sexual relations in his office on company time."

"We never did such a thing," I huffed. *Actually, we did. But that's not the point.*

"I can overlook these infractions that Dr. Masen has done, if you do me a favor Ms. Swan," Aro smiled as his eyes trained in on my breasts. I self-consciously crossed my arms over my chest.

"Obviously, you have other things on your mind, Mr. Volturi," I fumed. "If you are not going to take my claims seriously, then I will speak with the other members of the board. Perhaps they would be more receptive to my plight and to your inappropriate actions."

"What would that be?" Aro growled.

"You were blatantly staring at my chest and insinuating that Dr. Masen and I had sexual relations on the campus of the hospital," I listed.

Aro got up and sat on the edge of his desk, leaning forward, in my face. "Listen to me, little girl. I did none of those things," he spat. His eyes bore into mine and he licked his lips. Without provocation, his slimy lips were on mine and I nearly fell out of my chair. I turned my head away and slapped him with my hand. He grabbed my hand and stopped me from slapping him again. His fingers tightened around my wrist and he leaned in again. I shot out of the chair, ripping my already sore wrist from his steely grasp.

"I can't believe you just did that," I whispered. I stood up and backed out his office. Aro stood watching me, his mouth scraping the floor. I clumsily opened the door and darted out of the stifling office. I tried to walk calmly to the elevator but my heart was going a mile a minute. I stopped a random doctor and asked for Dr. Cullen's office. He said it was a floor down and I went immediately to talk to Carlisle.

"Can I help you?" asked Carlisle's assistant.

## A Fresh Start

"Is Dr. Cullen available? It's something important I need to speak with him about," I said in a shaky voice.

"Is Dr. Cullen expecting you?"

"No. I'm Isabella Swan and I was just upstairs meeting with..." I said, swallowing back bile, "Aro Volturi. Something happened and I need to tell him."

"Okay, dear," she said as she gave me a wary look. "Dr. Cullen? Isabella Swan is here to see you...Of course...I'll send her right in. Go ahead." She pointed to the door and I thanked her with a smile. I walked into Carlisle's office and he was sitting at his desk.

"Hi, Bella," he said with a friendly grin. "What can I do for you?"

I looked at him and the tears streamed down my face. I collapsed on his sofa in the office and began rubbing at my face and arms, trying to get Aro's sweaty feeling off my skin. He got up and sat next to me and pulled me into a hug. I cried into his shoulder, drenching his designer suit coat. I cried for a few moments before calming myself to actually talk. I pulled away, sniffing. "Aro..."

"What about him?" Carlisle asked, concern in his blue gray eyes.

"He crossed a line with me. I went in for a meeting about my issue with the Middleton sisters and...and...damn it, I can't even say it. I feel so dirty and gross," I wailed.

"He didn't rape you, did he?" Carlisle asked, his gaze hardening and his nostrils flaring.

"What? NO! He kissed me," I said, looking at my fingers. "His slimy, worm-like lips kissed me and then I slapped him."

"Was it just you in the office?" Carlisle asked.

## A Fresh Start

"Unfortunately," I sighed. "But it doesn't negate the fact he touched me without my permission."

"This just happened?"

"About ten minutes ago," I said.

"We need to play this carefully. This could be what gets him ousted as CEO of Craven," Carlisle said. "The rest of the board is tired of his shenanigans. However, are you okay?"

"No. He grabbed my wrist. The one that I've jacked up a few times," I said. Carlisle took my hand and he gingerly felt around the bones. He proclaimed it slightly sprained and he said he'd get me a wrap. He then called down to security and had me tell the head of the security department what happened to me and with whom. The head of security was shocked and appalled, but not all that surprised. While I was talking with him, Carlisle was on the phone. With whom, I had no idea, but his conversation was quite heated. An hour after my whole ordeal, Carlisle guided me out his office and I was met with a worried Edward. Well, a worried, pissed off, ready-to-kill-Aro, Edward. He embraced me tightly, not saying a word, but his hold was unwavering. I started to ask him how he got here, but my question was cut off with his lips caressing mine. Edward's mouth felt so much better against mine than Aro's. His lips were soft and full, not slimy and thin like Aro's. His kiss erased the grime of the CEO's mouth and I felt more at ease. Edward pulled away and his green eyes looked so upset.

"Are you okay?" he asked in a strained voice.

"I feel dirty," I said, shuddering.

"Understandable. I feel dirty just standing near him," Edward replied with an angry smirk. "Did he do anything else? Other than kiss you?" I held up my wrist that had been wrapped by Carlisle. "That fucker. I'll kill him."

## A Fresh Start

"Edward, don't. Please. I need you..." I whimpered. "I can't...just can't even imagine if..."

"I'm sorry, love. So sorry. I should have been there with you," he muttered as he crushed me to his chest.

"Edward, you couldn't have known," I said, putting my hand on his scruffy cheek. "Come on. I'm tired and I have to work tomorrow. Open house and all."

"I love you, Bella. We will make Aro pay for what he did to you," Edward seethed. "No one touches you without your permission."

"The only person I want touching me *that* way is you. Your mouth. Your hands. Your...well, you know what I mean," I blushed.

"You are the only woman I want to touch *that* way. Ever, baby."

"Let's go home, please? I have this overwhelming need to shower," I said with a shudder.

"I'll wash your back, Bella. I love you."

"I love you, too, Edward."

**A/N: So, Aro is a tool. Rose woke up and is freaking out. Bella and Edward want to make beautiful babies together. Alice and Jasper already made babies together...leave me love. More love = faster updates. Please and thank you! MUAH!**

# The Halloween Party

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 25: The Halloween Party

A month had passed since my 'incident' with Aro. A formal investigation was opened and he was none-too-pleased with that occurring. However, he brought it on himself. To make matters worse, my complaint against the Middleton sisters was dropped and they were allowed to return to work. Their flirtations with Edward increased since they knew that they wouldn't get 'caught.' I was pissed about the whole situation but nothing REALLY could be done about it. I was more concerned about Aro's unwanted kiss and getting that handled. Hopefully, it would be handled.

Rose had started her treatment for her legs. She begged Edward to be her primary doctor for the duration of her treatment, but he wasn't a specialist in burns. He didn't feel comfortable with doing it. However, he did go out of his way to be there when she had her skin sloughing treatments. They were brutal, but necessary to remove the charred, dead skin from her legs. She was nearly done with her treatments and they were preparing her thighs with balloons for skin grafts. The balloons stretched her skin so they could extract it. I also spent time with Rose when I wasn't working on practicum shit or preparing for the spring musical, *Thoroughly Modern Millie, Jr.* Rose and I had formed a close bond over our fucked up former relationships and now since the fire.

## A Fresh Start

The fire. Former relationships. Michael. That asshole. I hate him. He's still missing.

Even his very pregnant fiancée has no idea where he's at. However, that's what she told the cops. Do I believe her? Hell no. Do I think she's lying for him? Yes. Stupid, pregnant cow. Baby is eating all of your brain cells, honey.

In regard to my condo, I had already closed on it and had received payment at the time of the fire. The poor couple who had bought it was now in possession of a ruined home. I felt horribly. But, I couldn't help it. They tried to sue me for damages, but since they already signed for it and paid me, it was a moot point. With the money I received from the sale of my condo, I paid Edward back for the class and the two months of mortgage payments. I wanted to pay more to him for staying with him, but he insisted that I finish paying off my debt to the bank from the sale of my home with Mike and then invest the rest. He helped me tremendously in setting a stock portfolio. I had no clue what to do, but he was a whiz.

*Is there NOTHING the man can't do?*

It was a Sunday afternoon and Edward and I were having Alice and Jasper over for dinner. Relations between Alice and Edward were a bit strained after she dropped her pregnancy bomb on us. Alice was pissed at Edward for not being excited about his future niece or nephew. Edward was pissed at Alice for dropping something that important and delicate to him in such a public forum. Edward later explained to me that he nearly lost all control of his temper and emotions at the restaurant. If it hadn't have been for me, he would have been a sobbing crying mess. He also told me that my presence in the house and my support stopped him from careening over the edge of emotional oblivion. When Edward said that, I arched a brow. He sighed and said, "You stopped me from going bat shit crazy. Not eating, showering and counting the imperfections in the wallpaper."

"You don't have wallpaper, Edward," I retorted.

"Exactly," he said with a flourish.



## A Fresh Start

*Ohhhhhhhh...*

I was putting some appetizers into the oven and was fussing over the dinner. Edward was uncorking the wine and he was pacing the kitchen. "Edward, relax."

"I can't. Alice and I haven't really talked since that night at the restaurant. She probably hates me and thinks I'm selfish, self-absorbed prick," he said as he put the wine into the fridge. "Alice was the hugest support I had when I lost my parents and again when I lost Tanya. Then, she announces that she's pregnant and I lose my mind. Maybe I am a selfish, self-absorbed prick."

"Edward, stop it! You are not. You are the most compassionate man I'd ever met," I said, as I threw the oven mitts next to the stove. "If you were selfish, self-absorbed prick, you wouldn't rearrange your schedule to be with Rose for her treatments. You wouldn't have held Jacob when he was diagnosed with HIV. You wouldn't have calmed Emmett when Rose was in the hospital. You sure as hell wouldn't have dealt with my drama with my psycho ex-husband and my fifty shades of crazy. So, don't. Just don't even think it. Don't even say it. Don't!"

Edward's mouth opened and he was going to say something when the doorbell rang. I huffed and walked to the door. I pulled it open. On the front steps was Jasper and Alice. "Hi, Bella," Jasper said with lazy grin.

"Hi, Jas. Hey, Elf," I said as I hugged them both. I could feel Alice's baby bump and she laid her hands on her belly, smiling warmly.

"We brought dessert," Alice said as she motioned for Jasper to hand us a platter.

"Thanks," I said. Edward came up and he gave Jasper a smile and a guilty smirk toward Alice.

"Hey, Edward," Jasper said as he held out his hand. "Long time, no see."

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"I know," he blushed. "You look good, man. Marriage obviously agrees with you. Hi, Alice."

"Edward," she said coldly. She brushed past him and I could see the sadness in Edward's eyes.

"Jasper, I need to get something for dinner. You're parked behind me. Can you drive me to store?" I asked. I pleaded with my eyes for Jasper to understand my ploy.

"Definitely, Bells," Jasper said as he held open the door for me. I grabbed my coat. Edward gave Jasper a brief look and then cornered me by the closet.

"Bella! What are you doing?"

"Trying to salvage your relationship with your sister. Talk. To. Her. Or no nookie," I said, poking him in the belly.

"But, Bella," he whined like a petulant teenager. I glared at him, giving him my most menacing teacher stare. His eyes widened and he held up his hands in defeat. "You are cruel."

"No. I'm not. You need to talk to her. Make her understand your issues. We'll be back," I said "I love you."

"Hmmp," Edward grunted as he let me walk past him.

Jasper opened the door to his Hummer and I crawled in. I felt like I was in a tank. I'd only ever ridden in this monster twice and it still boggled my mind how big it was. "So, Bells. Very ingenious, leaving them in the house together. If I heard about much Edward was an ass anymore, I'd kill myself."

"Don't do that, Jasper," I chuckled. "Edward feels horribly about he reacted. He's excited but obviously torn about to react about the whole thing."

"Tanya was pregnant when she died, right?"

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"Yeah," I said sadly. "He was essentially thrown back into the darkest time of his life when Alice announced your news. Even though Edward is sad about his own child, he's ecstatic for you and Alice. And for his niece or nephew," I said honestly.

"Okay, random question, though," Jasper said.

"Turquoise," I giggled.

"Excuse me?"

"Sorry, inside joke with Edward and I. When I went into the ER when I injured my hand initially, I said 'random question,' and he replied with burnt sienna. Now whenever we use those words, we blurt out different colors, trying to one up each other with the most random colors," I said.

"You two are perfect for each other. I've also never seen you this happy. Even when you and Mike were newly married, I've never seen such a look of happiness and joy on your features," Jasper said as he squeezed my hand.

"So, back to your random question," I said.

"I forgot," he laughed.

"Do you and Alice want to know what you're having?" I asked.

"Um, we already know," Jasper said. "We found out at the last appointment."

"Am I buying pink or blue baby clothes?" I asked, bouncing in my chair.

"Blue," Jasper said and then he smacked his hand over his mouth. "Shit. I wasn't supposed to say anything."

"Jasper, I promise I won't tell anybody," I said earnestly.

"Can I tell you another secret?" he asked.

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"Um, sure?"

"We're thinking of naming the baby Edward. In honor his godfather," Jasper blushed.

"Oh, Jas," I sniffled. "He'll be honored, when he gets over this funk he's in."

"Hopefully, it'll be soon."

"I'm certain it will be fine by the time we get back," I said.

"It's either that or Alice will chop off Edward's balls and feed them to him," Jasper shuddered. "I'm certain he wants children. It's a little difficult to have children when you don't have balls."

"Very difficult," I said softly. "It would look weird too."

"You're right," he said, wrinkling his nose. "Oh, by the way, are you and Edward going to come to our Halloween party?"

"Um, when is that?"

"Halloween?" Jasper answered with a guffaw.

"No, what day? Friday or Saturday? Alice said that she wasn't sure what day she would have it," I retorted with snort.

"Right, Saturday. Eight until whenever," Jasper said with a wave of the hand. "Do you think they made up?"

"I don't know. However, no harm in heading back," I said with a wink. Jasper drove us back to our home and pulled into the driveway. "The house is still standing. That's a good thing."

"Yes it is," Jasper said. "Let's see if there was any bloodshed."

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I fell out of the Hummer. Jasper managed to wrap his arm around my waist, righting me before I got another concussion. I smiled weakly at him as he gave me a sardonic smirk. I gathered my dignity and we walked up the steps. I put my ear to the door to see if I could hear yelling. There was none, thankfully. I opened the door and pulled Jasper into the house. We listened intently and heard sniffing. Jasper and I walked to the family room and found Alice with her arms wrapped around Edward, crying into his chest. Edward also crying quietly, comforting Alice.

"Did you two finally kiss and make up?" Jasper sniggered.

"Shut it," Edward grumbled. "We're finally okay."

"Good because I didn't want to hate you, Edward," Jasper smirked.

"Jasper I never said I wanted you to hate Edward," Alice wailed. "I just wanted you to take my side."

"I was trying to be diplomatic and see both sides," Jasper argued. "You kind of dropped the bomb on them at some restaurant after their friend woke up from being asleep and having her legs burnt to a crisp. Hell, I would have reacted that way."

"Ugh, fine," Alice conceded. "However, we're all good. I told Edward EVERYTHING."

"Everything?" Jasper squeaked.

"Well, not everything. Edward knows we're having a boy and that's it," Alice smirked. "However, on to more important things. Halloween."

"Oh lord," Edward mumbled. "Do you still do your Halloween party?"

"Yep. It's Saturday of Halloween weekend. You're both coming and wearing costumes. Got it?" Alice said as she glared at both of us, resting a hand on her belly. "Got it?"

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"Yes, Alice," we both grumbled.

"Good. Now, let's eat. Baby is demanding some of Auntie Bella's delicious food," Alice said as she skipped to the kitchen.

The rest of the dinner went by uneventfully. The tense atmosphere that had been between Alice and Edward dissipated quickly. Alice ate enough for five people. And then some. She even pounded down three slices of pineapple upside down cake. I was in awe at the sheer amount of food that Alice ate. I mean how anybody that small could eat so much. Alice patted her belly and said she had a growing boy. By the time she delivers, that boy will be twenty pounds. Yeesh!

Alice and Jasper left the house around eight and Edward and I got ready for bed. I had to be the administrator on duty a band concert tomorrow and I wasn't going to be home in between school and the concert. Edward conveniently scheduled himself to work a double tomorrow and wouldn't get home until after nine at night. We both had long fifteen hour days tomorrow and neither one of us was looking forward to it. Meh!

I was sitting on the bed, reading an article for my major project in my practicum when Edward came and plopped down on the bed. "You know I love you, right?" Edward said as he put his wet head on my lap.

"As I love you, Edward," I said as I absent-mindedly ran my fingers through his hair. "What's up?"

"I've been thinking. About us," he said as he took my article and placed on his pillow.

"Should I be worried?"

"What? No! However, I've always assumed that we would, hopefully, get married. But is that something that you want?" Edward asked, pulling his lip between his teeth.

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"If you asked me six months ago, I would have said hell no. Now, I can see myself get married again," I answered honestly.

"Would you want to marry me?" he asked shyly.

"Are you proposing?" I replied.

"Not yet, but if you're interested..." he trailed off.

"Edward, I can't imagine my life without you. I've already told you that I want to have your children," I said sincerely. "I love you, so much. It hurts that I love you as much as I do. I never thought I could feel anything like this."

"Okay, so, we're living in sin," he chuckled.

"We know this. But I'm divorced, so I know I'm going to hell," I giggled. "God doesn't like divorced people."

"Nor does he like people who have pre-marital sex. So, I'll be in hell with you. At least you'll be in good company," he winked. "We're living in sin, but you're not opposed to formalizing our relationship. Becoming Mrs. Edward Masen."

"No, I'm not opposed. I'm actually pretty open to the idea," I blushed.

"Good to know," Edward smirked. "Now, let's have some pre-marital sex and solidify our residence in the depths of Hades."

"You're insatiable, Edward," I laughed.

"Not insatiable, perfectionist. Practice makes perfect," he grinned as he covered my lips with his.

"And what are we practicing?"

"Making our perfect children. You're wearing too many clothes, Bella," he grinned as he pulled me over his lap, straddling his waist. I could feel his

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hardened length beneath me and I wiggled my body over it. "Bella," he growled. His hands reached underneath my tank and he ripped it from my torso. He flipped us so I was on my back and his lips attached themselves to my breasts. He licked and nipped at the soft mounds, toying with the hardened peaks of my nipples. I moaned and arched my back. My fingers tangled into his now damp hair and he grinned against my skin. His mouth left a trail of kisses down my torso and to my waistband of my sleep pants. He gently pulled them down, revealing my plain white panties with a sweet little pink bow on the front. They were eased down my legs and I was bare before him. Edward spread my legs and he kissed up the length of my thigh, nibbling and licking as he went. His mouth was hovering over my heated core and he arched a brow, teasing me. I was writhing and wiggling, begging him with my eyes to kiss me. "Anxious, aren't we, Bella?" he smirked.

"Edward," I breathed. "Baby..."

With my moans, he lost his control and his mouth attached to my swollen clit. His tongue flitted the sensitive bundle of nerves. One of his hands moved up to my breasts and he gently kneaded them. When his mouth attached to my slick folds, I arched off the bed, moaning quite loudly. Edward growled and slipped two fingers into my body. His velvety voice caused vibrations to travel through me and it created a delightful effect on my arousal. He shifted his other hand and captured the back of my thigh, pushing it up. I was spread further and he licked, sucked and nipped at my displayed sex. His erotic snarls filled the room and I could feel my body react to his sounds. Edward moved his fingers faster into my body and his tongue worked furiously on my clit. I could feel the coil in my belly. It was getting wound tighter and tighter. My breathing was become erratic and I moved my hips with Edward's ministrations of my pussy.

I looked down at him, smiling at the beautiful bronze haired man between my legs. His eyes caught mine and I could see his smirk. He thoroughly enjoyed seeing me come undone. His teeth grazed my clit and I let out a small yelp. Still holding my gaze, he flipped his hand and curled his fingers to touch the spot that would easily cause me to explode around him. He gently massaged with his hands and his teeth nipped at my clit. I was not attached to the rest of my body. My hips rolled and the wanton moans that came from my throat were



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not me. "Come for me, Bella," Edward murmured against my inner thigh before he sucked it, probably marking my pale skin. "I need to see you come." He twisted his hand and his lips went back to my clit, biting down more forcefully. His bite caused my muscles to contract and I let out a guttural scream. I fisted large parts of the bedspread as I reached my release. Edward's mouth was attached to my body as I returned from my 'high.' When I finally relaxed my muscles, Edward kissed up my torso and his lips were on mine, moving languidly with mouth. I could taste myself on him and I loved it.

"Bella, I need to be inside you," he whispered.

"What's stopping you?" I smirked as I pulled on his perfect ear with my teeth. "I need to feel you. All of you."

"Fuck," he groaned as he slid into my wet heat. *Where the hell did his pants go?*

Edward rolled us so I was straddling his waist, never breaking our connection. I slowly moved up and down along his hardened length. We fit together like puzzle pieces. It was perfection having him inside me. I had never felt so complete with another man before. My heart swelled when we were together.

"Bella, I love you, so much," he said as he laced his fingers with mine. I smirked and pushed his hands above his head. "I'm so in love with you." His mouth attached itself to one of my breasts, nipping as I rode his huge cock.

"I love you, baby," I said as I looked into his mossy green eyes. They were filled with so much emotion. I couldn't help but to kiss his soft lips, weaving my hands into his soft hair. Edward's arms circled around my waist and he guided me over his length, speeding up my movements. I rolled my hips and I felt his cock reach deeper into me. Edward moaned and flipped us so I was on my back. He captured my legs and placed them on his shoulders, driving his cock deeper into my body. *Who knew I could be this bendy?* "Gooooooooood!" I moaned. "So good."

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"God's not here, Bella," Edward grunted as he moved his hips at breakneck speed. "Only me. Holy shit, you feel amazing. So tight like this." Keeping my legs on his shoulders, he planted his hands on either side of my head. I could see his muscles ripple under his skin and a sheen of sweat broke over his insanely, inhumanly handsome features. *A God is making love to me.* "So close, baby."

"Edward," I moaned as I reached between us, pinching my clit. I could feel his body slap mine and it was insanely erotic. My muscles fluttered and Edward growled. He leaned down and pulled my bottom lip into his mouth. "Love you," I mumbled against his lips.

"I adore you," he breathed as he pulled away. I brushed his hair away from his face, wiping a bead of sweat away from his brow. He moaned and he sat back on his haunches, pulling me at a different angle. Again he went deeper and I moved my hips in conjunction with his. My inner walls clamped down on his cock and I let out a silent scream as I came suddenly. My orgasm triggered Edward's and he let out a stream of profanities as he spilled into my body. When he was done, he sat back, his cock pulling out of me. I whimpered and sat up, jutting out my bottom lip. "You drained me, Bella. Hot damn."

"I could say the same about you, Edward," I said as I found my sleep clothes. "I'm gelatin. No bones."

Edward slowly got up and pulled on his sleep pants. He crawled under the blankets and held his arms open for me. I nestled in next to him after I set my alarm. "I love and adore you, my Bella. I am so happy and blessed that you are in my life," Edward said as he kissed my forehead.

"I love you, too, Edward. So much. I never imagined I could be this happy," I said as I kissed his jaw. "Good night."

"Good night, my love," he said as he turned off the lights. We met in the center of the bed and fell asleep quickly.

xx AFS xx

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The week went by slowly. I mean really slowly. The band concert was uneventful, but long. I couldn't leave until all of the students were gone and the auditorium was back to its original state. The really bad part was a student was not picked up until nearly ten at night. The band director had to go home to her two year old and I stayed with the student. It was boring and I was ready to lay into the parents when they came and got their kid. When the parents arrived, the student gave me a wave and ran out to the parking lot. I made a mental note to contact the parents tomorrow about picking up their children in a timely fashion. We have lives.

On Thursday evening, Edward surprised me with tickets to the symphony. I had never been and I was excited to go. We were seeing the premier of a new symphony by a local composer. It was a little bizarre, but a magical evening. On Friday, Alice and I went to a local costume shop to look for our Halloween costumes. I wanted to make sure that Edward was available. He said he was, but he was on call that weekend. He may have to leave if needed, but we would try to make it to the party.

"So, Bella, what do you want to go as?" Alice asked as we meandered through the costume shop.

"I don't know," I answered honestly. "What are you and Jasper going as?"

"White trash," she giggled. "I'm going to be 'barefoot and pregnant.' Jasper is going to be a country hick."

"That's such a stretch for you," I laughed. "You are pregnant and Jasper was originally from where? Kentucky? Tennessee?"

"Texas, Bella. He was from Texas," she chided. "HMMMM, I know what you and Edward could be. Vampires."

"Vampires?" I snorted.

"You're both ghostly pale," Alice said. "Slap some leather pants on Edward and oooh! I know exactly what I want you both to wear." Alice grabbed my hand

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and we got the part of the costume shop where she wanted. She grabbed several outfits and winked. I held up the outfit she picked for me and I squeaked. There was not enough fabric. "You'll look so fucking hot, Swan. You're wearing it." She then dragged me to the makeup section and thrust some makeup into my hands with my costumes. "You were involved in theater; I can trust you to do your makeup. I know that you hate wearing makeup to school, but you know how to do it."

"You are so pushy, elf," I grumbled.

"I spoke with Edward and he told me that Rose will be released in few days," she said, abruptly changing the subject. "She's moving in with Emmett until she's healed. She's also going to purchase a house with the insurance money from the damage to her condo. It was irreparably damaged."

"Oh," I answered intelligently. "Abrupt subject change, Alice."

"Sorry, pregnancy makes me stupid. I have no focus. You should see me in rehearsal. My choir students don't know whether I'm coming or going. It's absolutely crazy," Alice tittered. "Speaking of choir students, can you be the administrator for my holiday she-bang? Mrs. Cope is going to be at a conference and I refuse to work with Merritt. He's an asshat." Merritt was the administrator on duty for her final concert of the year. For the first time in her life, she had to pull a student from the stage because of behavior and the parents were none-too-pleased. They got into Alice's face and Merritt was nowhere to be found. He was in his office, watching the Stanley Cup playoffs. Another parent found him at Alice's insistence. Ever since that debacle, she avoided him like the plague and requested Mrs. Cope as her administrator for the choral concerts

"I'll talk to Mrs. Cope," I smiled. "However, I'm not an administrator."

"Bella, I spoke to her and she's essentially grooming you for her job. She respects you and thinks you are amazing. Even with all the DRAMA you've had this year, you've been professional, courteous, and driven," Alice said with a wink. "Edward helps too."

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"Alice, he's amazing," I whispered.

"I know. He is. You've both been through so much and together you fit. I never saw such a happy, contented look on his face then when he's with you. When you're separated, it's pitiful," she giggled. "The whole first month after you met, he was like a little lost puppy. He constantly asked about you, but he respected your distance."

"I know. I was such a bitch to him," I grumbled.

"Yes, you were. But he saw past your façade. He loved you even when you were a bitch," she giggled.

"I think I loved him when he rescued me from the slob at the bar," I retorted. "But I still kept him at arms length."

"Now, you're not," she smiled. "You're living together. You're having sex."

"Making love, Alice."

"Making love. Got it. You are going to get married and have beautiful babies..."

"Okay, Elf. Enough," I snorted. "Let's pay for this stuff."

"Okay. Then we need to go to Cooper's Hawk. I want me some Bananas Foster Cheesecake," she said, licking her lips.

xx AFS xx

"Edward, come here!" I demanded.

"You're going to put that shit on my face. Hell no," he squeaked.

We were currently in a battle of the wills about getting ready for Halloween. We were circling the piano and he had this look of absolute terror. "Edward,

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the Elf will be pissed if you are not dressed and made up properly. Trust me."

"But, it's MAKEUP! I'm a dude. Dudes don't wear makeup," he whined.

"Dudes in theater wear makeup ALL THE TIME," I argued. "You will be the hottest vampire in the party. I took three theater makeup classes in college. Aced each and every one of them. Please? I'll give you a blow job!"

"Great, you're bribing me with sexual favors," he muttered. "You won't make me look like Bela Lagosi, right?"

"Think more *Twilight*," I said. "Minus the contacts."

"Fuck me," he growled.

"Later, Masen. Bathroom, on the toilet. NOW!" I said, pointing to the stairs.

"Jesus. Yes, Mom," he pouted. I smacked his ass as he trudged past me. He yelped and whirled around, pointing at my face. I grabbed his hand and pulled his finger into my mouth, swirling my tongue on the tip. Edward mumbled something unintelligently and adjusted his erection.

I followed Edward up the stairs and sat him on the toilet in our bathroom. I picked up the makeup I was using on him from the counter. I had to put the makeup on his face, neck and ears. I was going to leave his hands alone. I grabbed a makeup triangle and used a clip to pin his hair back. "Did you just put a barrette in my hair?" he asked, raising a brow.

"Yes, I did. Someone needs a haircut," I said as I began putting the pale makeup on his face. "You look so pretty, Edward."

"Fuck you, Swan," he grumbled.

"You love me, even though I'm putting makeup on you," I teased, dabbing his nose with the makeup triangle.

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"I do love you. I hate this shit you're putting on me," he said, rolling his eyes. "Oh, is Jake coming?"

"What is it with you and Alice and the abrupt conversation changes?" I joked.

"Sorry. I invited Ren. He's going to be there and I was curious if Jake was coming. I can feel a love connection," Edward said with a suggestive waggle of his brows.

"Close your eyes, Cupid," I said. "Yes, Jake is coming. I think he's going to be a nerd. He asked if he could borrow a pair of nerdy glasses from the prop closet." I put the makeup all over Edward's face and neck. After I finished the base, I dusted Edward's face with some translucent powder. He glowered at me as I used a huge fluffy brush to set his makeup. I then instructed him to close his eyes. He looked at me warily and I mirrored his look. I put on some eye makeup, giving him dark circles under his eyes and some eyeliner and mascara to enhance his lashes. I then put some neutral lipstick on him to give him some color and I proclaimed his face finished. Before he got up from his perch on the toilet and I ran my fingers through his hair, styling it with some gel. "You're done. Check it out."

Edward looked in the mirror and he gasped. He moved closer and inspected my work. His already pale features were even whiter with the makeup. I made his jaw and nose appear to be more angular with shading. "Is that really me?"

"Yep. Makeup ain't so bad after all," I teased as I poked him the belly. "Now, go get dressed. Your costume is in the closet. I hope you're not opposed to leather. You're wearing a lot of it."

"Oh, jeez," he said.

I shooed him out of the bathroom so I could get ready. Edward was going as a vampire and I was his victim. I made that change, unbeknownst to Alice. I put on the pale makeup, highlighting and working with my features. I then gave myself two bite marks on my neck with some stage blood trickling down. I pulled my hair back into a sleek ponytail and went to put on my outfit. I was

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wearing a black and red corset top with a pencil skirt. In all of the craziness that was my life, I managed to fall to my pre-marriage weight and I looked fucking hot. I put on the necklace that Alice wanted me to wear and the sky high heels. I adjusted my tits and carefully walked down the stairs. Edward was tinkling at the piano, wearing the black leather pants, tight black shirt and long black leather trench I got for him. I cleared my throat and Edward turned to look at me. "Holy fuck," he breathed. "You are not going out in public dressed like that."

"Edward," I said, purring at him. "I need your assistance."

"Bella, you look completely indecent," he growled.

"Then mark me as yours," I said, angling my neck so he could attach his lips to my throat. "Or would you rather bite here?" I cupped my breasts and leaned forward. Edward was next to me in a flash and his mouth was sucking on my neck, leaving a huge hickey on my throat. I gripped his biceps and moaned. He pulled away and smirked. "I'm yours now, Edward. I have your mark on my neck."

"I'd rather show that you're mine with something a little less crass. Jewelry perhaps?" he said, picking up my left hand. "Something sparkly and shiny that goes on this finger." He pulled my left ring finger into his mouth.

"I do have something sparkly and shiny," I said, flicking him off with my right ring finger. "See?"

"More sparkly," he growled. "You are so fucking hot, Bella. It's going to take all of my control to not jump you at this party."

"Then I probably shouldn't tell you..."

"Tell me what?" he asked.

"Nothing," I sang as I danced to the kitchen. "Come on, we need to go and get our Halloween on!"



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"Bella!" he griped. I picked up his car keys to the Volvo and dangled them. He growled and I skipped into his car, hopping into the driver's seat. "Who said you could drive? My car?"

"You did when you took forever to get here," I said with a dismissive wave of the hand. "It's going to be so much fun." Edward huffed and got into the passenger seat. He really looked like a vampire. A really hot vampire. *I'm going to have a hard time not jumping HIS bones.* I drove the half hour to Alice's town house. I parked behind Jake's car and we got out of the Volvo. Edward put his arms around my waist as we walked up to the bustling party. The bass was pumping and we could see a ton of people in the window. I groaned inwardly as we walked through the door.

"Bella! Edward!" Jake boomed. "Hi guys!" He ran up to me and pulled me into a tight hug. He released me and I subtly adjusted my boobs as he shook Edward's hand. "Okay, Edward, you're a vampire. Bella what are you?"

"His victim," I said. "Can't you see the bite mark?" I angled my neck and gave Jake a wink.

"Nice," Jake said as he adjusted his nerdy glasses. His costume was a pair of pants that were three sizes too short, some mismatched socks and shoes, and a short-sleeved button up shirt that was buttoned all wrong. His hair was slicked up with an 'Alfalfa' like spike in the back of his head. "I'm a nerd, but I guess you figured that out."

"Looks good, Jake," I giggled.

"Who knew that big and muscly could translate into nerdy?" Jake said proudly. "The juxtaposition of it all is kind of ironic, don't you think?"

"Juxtaposition?" Edward and I both said.

"Sorry, I turn into a walking dictionary when I'm drunk," he giggled.

"Oh my lord," Edward laughed. "Just be careful with your meds."

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"Yes, Dr. Masen," Jake said as he punched Edward's shoulder. "Hey, I have a question. There's this really cute red-head here. I think he works at the hospital. Do you know him?"

"Who?" Edward asked, leaning forward looking like a teenaged girl in his enthusiasm. Jake pointed out a very good looking red headed man with a red goatee. He had an impish grin and bright blue-green eyes. "Ah, that's Ren. He does work at the hospital. And single."

"Is he gay?" Jake asked, clutching Edward's leather clad arm.

"Yep. Tried to get me to switch teams," Edward said, letting out a belly laugh. "Come on, I'll introduce you. You okay, Bella?"

"I'm fine. I'm going to find Alice and Jasper," I said as I kissed his cheek. Edward put his arm around Jake's shoulder after he told me he loved me and I went in search of Alice and Jasper. I found them in the family room talking to someone in the recliner. I didn't recognize who it was until I got closer. "Rose!"

"Hey, Bells," she said as she shifted on the chair. She was wearing a pair of doctor's scrubs and a white lab coat. Her hair was pulled into a low ponytail. Her legs were covered by a blanket and she looked tired, but healthy. "How are you doing?"

"I'm good. What are you doing here?" I squeaked as I sat down on the couch next to a very slovenly looking Jasper.

"I got out for good behavior. Emmett told me about the party and I begged to come. So, here I am. Dr. Rosalie Hale," she grinned from her chair. "Alice helped getting me ready and Emmett carried me to my perch."

"Rose, I'm so happy that you are out of the horrible place," Alice said as she bounced next to Jasper. "Do you have to go back?"

"In three days, I'm having my first skin graft. That's part of the reason why I'm in scrub pants. It's the only pair of pants that fit over the balloon," she laughed.

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"Is Edward here?"

"He's introducing Jake to Ren," I said with a smirk.

"Bella, I just have to say, you look fucking hot," Jasper slurred. "I mean really. I'm surprised that Edward let you go off by yourself dressed like that."

"Jasper, you are so drunk," Alice chided, smacking his chest.

"Making the most of it before we have our little one," he said, letting out a loud burp.

"That's disgusting, Whitlock," Edward laughed.

"Holy shit, Edward. You look bloody fantastic," Rose said. "Who did your makeup?"

"That would be me," I said proudly. "Looks good, eh?"

Edward reached for me and I stood up. He put his arms around my waist and he kissed my neck, licking my mark. "My beautiful girl," he whispered against my ear. "I can't believe you're mine."

"Yours," I whispered, leaning back into his embrace. "How did Jake and Ren's set up go?"

"Oh, I think they will be very happy together. They were making googly eyes at each other," Edward said as he nibbled my ear. "I fucking want you," he whispered to me. I moaned and closed my eyes. "I want to take you from behind, Bella. Make you scream my name."

"Edward," I whispered.

"So, Edward, I'm getting my first skin graft in a few days," Rose said, breaking our reverie.

## A Fresh Start

"That's great. Who's your surgeon?" Edward asked as he pressed his hardened length against my ass.

"Um, Dr. Graham?" Rose answered.

"He's good. Very good," Edward said as he cupped my ass. "If you excuse us." Edward took my hand and laced his fingers with mine. He pulled me upstairs and into one of the bedrooms after taking a furtive look. He locked the door and he glared at me. His gaze was filled with lust and he had a predatory stance. "I can't stay away from you. I need you," he purred.

I moaned as I looked at him. Edward swooped and picked me up. My skirt rode up and I wrapped my legs around his waist. He pinned me against the wall and his mouth moved with mine. I reached for the button of his pants and tried to release him from his leather pants. "You are fucking hot, Edward. These pants make your ass look amazing."

"Too bad it was covered with this," he chuckled darkly as he shrugged out of his long leather duster. He put my legs down and he crouched in front of me, pushing my skirt up. When he got it completely up, he growled. "No panties? Fuck me." He threw one of my legs over his shoulder and he dove into my soaking wet pussy. His tongue and fingers assaulted my body and I was soon a quivering mess. I never came so quickly. Edward stood back up and he slid his pants down his legs and picked me up. I wrapped my legs around his waist again and he slammed into my body. I bit down onto his shoulder to quell my screams. Edward put my back against the wall and he pounded into me.

"Edward," I moaned as I grabbed fistfuls of his hair. I thrust my tongue into his mouth as he drove into my body. He eagerly returned my kisses and his hands braced themselves against my bare ass.

"Bella, so fucking hot. Fuck," he grunted against my mouth. "I'm so close, baby." He looked into my eyes and he bit down on my neck as I felt his dick twitch in my body, spilling into me. "Shit, Bella."

## A Fresh Start

"What the hell was that, Edward?" I said, running my fingers through his hair. He slid out of my body and gently lowered me onto the ground. "Were you just so overcome with my hotness that you just had to have me?"

"Essentially yeah," he said sheepishly. He pulled his pants up and a blush crept over his cheeks. Even under the pale makeup I could see his blush.

I heard a banging on the door and Alice's loud yelling. "You better not be fucking in there."

"She is the devil," Edward grumbled as he pulled me into his arms.

"We probably should be heading back downstairs," I said, smoothing my skirt. "Oh, I feel squishy. Perhaps I should have worn panties."

"I love the fact that you didn't wear panties," Edward purred as he ran his finger down my neck, in between the valley of my breasts. "You are so perfect, Bella."

"Hardly, Edward," I scoffed. "I'm so far from perfect."

"I know. But you're perfect for me," he said, caressing my cheeks. "I love you, so much."

"I love you, too," I smiled.

"Seriously, you better not be fucking in there. Don't make me sic Emmett on you," Alice grumbled.

"We better get out of here," Edward said. "Come on, beautiful girl."

"I need to stop in the bathroom to get rid of the squishy feeling," I smirked. "Since I was the brilliant person who didn't wear panties."

"Easy access...I loved it."

## A Fresh Start

"I'm just amazed I didn't break you," I giggled. "I'm not the..."

"Bella, if you put yourself down, I will kick your ass," he warned. "You're beautiful and I love your body. I'm stronger than I look. Do you want to know how much I can bench press?"

"You have until the count of three before I open this door," Emmett boomed. "I will not hesitate to laugh if you both are naked. One..."

We both groaned and opened the door. Emmett was standing there, his arms crossed and a menacing look on his face. However, it was hard to take him seriously when he was wearing a cheerleading uniform, complete with a wig and pom poms. "You totally fucked," he guffawed as he appraised our appearances. Edward's make up was slightly smeared and I know I had his mark on my neck. "Nice." He held his fist up to Edward. He chuckled and returned Emmett's fist bump. "Alice is pissed."

"Eh," Edward shrugged. "Bella was just too irresistible for me to ignore. The Elf can just get over it."

"Edward Anthony Masen, I will not get over it," Alice said as she glared at us. "You fucked in my guest bedroom. I better not find any of your spooge in my bed."

"Nope. No bed," Edward smirked. I squeezed his hand, begging him to not say where we had sex. *The wall, Alice. We fucked against the wall.* "So, no spooge on the bed. Please, like you haven't had some fun in my pool. I don't hold that against you."

"Wait, you know?" Alice squeaked. "I thought we were discreet."

"The screams kind of stopped the discretion, Elf," he said kissing her cheek. I did my own squeak as he still had my pussy juice on his lips from when he went down on me. He winked at me, licking his lips. I giggled and walked past Emmett in his ridiculous cheerleader costume and Alice in her white trash costume. She even went so far as blacking out one of her teeth. We headed

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downstairs to the living room and met up with Ren and Jake. They were engrossed in a conversation, obviously attracted to each other.

"Hey Edward," Ren said with a slight accent. "Who's this?"

"Ren, this is my Bella. Bella, this is Ren," Edward introduced.

"Nice to meet you," I said with a smile. "I hear you work at the hospital?"

"Yeah. I'm the chief resident in the ER," Ren said as he laid a hand on Jake's knee. "I love it there. Especially since Edward took over as the head of the department. The other guy who was there was a bit of a tool. Had no vision."

"Trying to kiss up to the boss?" Edward joked.

"Doesn't hurt, Dr. Masen," Ren laughed. "You teach with Jake?"

"Yeah. Accelerated language arts to eighth graders. However, I'm completing my second masters in educational administration. I'm hoping to become a school principal," I answered.

"Bella, do you want anything to drink?" Edward asked as he tucked a hair into my ponytail.

"Um, beer, please?" I asked.

"Any kind?"

"Blue Moon if they have it. If not, Miller Light," I answered.

"Do either of you want anything?" Edward asked. Ren held up his Heineken and Jake just asked for water.

"So, spill it, girl," Ren said, his flamboyancy kicking in. "Is he good in the sack?"

## A Fresh Start

"Ren! He's your boss!"

"I know, but it doesn't hurt to find out," Ren giggled. "Right, Jake?"

"Hell, I think he's cute for a paleface," Jake snorted. "But, I like you better."

"Awww, thanks Jake," Ren blushed as he nudged him with his shoulder. "I think you're smoking. Better than Dr. Masen. But, Ms. Bella, spill!"

"I will not," I scoffed. "I barely know you. And besides, I do not kiss and tell."

"Well, it looks like both of you had some good loving wherever you were," Ren said knowingly. "Nice hickey. I didn't know that Dr. Masen had it in him. He's so straight laced and prim at work."

"Prim?"

"Yes, prim. He has this air about him that almost reminds me of the Victorian era. The way he interacts with the patients is detached but still warm. It's nice to see him in a more relaxed light," Ren said with a grin. "And wearing makeup. He'd make an awesome drag queen. Who did it? It's very good."

"I did. I was involved in theater in high school and college. I took several classes and well, that's what I got out of it," I chuckled. "I would have liked to have done more with him, but I barely got him to sit still for that."

"I did some theater in college, too," Ren enthused.

"Bella is the director of the musical," Jake said proudly. "They put on a show each year. This year they're doing some Minnie show?"

"*Thoroughly Modern Millie, Jr.*," I laughed. "Rehearsals start after we get back from winter break. Auditions are held the week before we leave with the results posted on the Friday before break. That way I don't deal with crying, sobbing, distraught children."



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"Smart woman," Ren chuckled. "Well, I was, as bizarre as this sounds, a dance minor. If you need help with choreography, I'm more than willing to help."

"I'd love it! Since my regular choreographer is going to be very pregnant soon," I begged. "I can't dance for shit. However, it won't be paid. We have no money. I barely scrape by with what I got."

"No problem," Ren said with a friendly smile.

"Jasper is cut off," Edward grumbled as he came back with our drinks. "That man is the sloppiest, most disgusting drunk I've ever seen."

"What did he do?" I asked as Edward handed me my beer.

"I was getting a water bottle from the cooler on the patio when he stuck his ass in my face, sending some noxious fumes in my direction. He then turned around and burped," Edward said, wrinkling his nose.

"Wait a minute, Jasper farted in your face?" I asked, barely containing my laughter.

"Yes. The bloody hick farted in my face and it was just FOUL. I mean I think a rat crawled up his asshole and died it was so gross," Edward shuddered.

"There was this one party that I hosted when I was still with Mike. I think it was New Year's Eve a couple of years ago. Well, Jasper was lit. I mean completely hammered. He thought one of my vases was a toilet and he took a shit in it. We hadn't realized it until the next morning when we smelled the crap. Mike and I sniffed around the house and finally discovered our present in Mike's antique vase that belonged to his mother. Jasper was banned from the house if he was drinking from that moment on," I chuckled.

"Who banned him? Mike or you?" Edward asked warily.

"I did. Mike wanted to seek revenge and shit on his Hummer, but I talked him out of it," I giggled.

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"Yeah, Jasper is banned from our house when he's like this," Edward grumbled. "I don't want my home to smell like a glorified kitty litter box."

"So, Edward," Ren started. "Do you have any stupid drunk stories?"

"Not really. I drank, but not enough to do anything stupid. I just tend to shy away from that stuff," Edward shrugged. "I lost too many people to drunk drivers."

"Understandable. But no embarrassing stories or anything? Smoked pot?" Ren pressed.

"There was a point in time when I was in college that I tried pot and cigarettes. However, I had the worst reaction to pot. Seriously it was a hangover on crack," Edward sighed. "Never again. I'm too much of a health nut to abuse my body like that."

"How about you, Bella? Any embarrassing stories you care share with the class?" Jake asked, wagging his brows.

"Too many to share," I sighed. "I was a hot mess in high school and when you add alcohol into the mix in college, it just got worse."

We were sitting and talking to Ren and Jake for a few hours when we heard a bit of a shuffle in the family room. Edward's brow furrowed and we got up. Rose was curled up on the couch, her face in a tight grimace. "Rose?" Edward asked.

"I'm getting shooting pains in my legs. It hurts," she panted.

"Alice, can I take her upstairs to examine her?" Edward asked. Alice nodded blankly and Edward gingerly lifted Rose. She squeaked as she threw her arms around his neck. Edward looked at me and I followed him up the stairs. He went to Jasper's office and thankfully not to the room where we went at it against the wall. He turned on the overhead light and darted to the bathroom. I sat behind Rosalie, caressing her back. Alice came into the room with a large

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bag. "Thanks, Alice."

"Where was that?" I asked.

"The trunk. What self respecting doctor wouldn't have the requisite doctor's bag?" he quipped. "Alice, you might want to leave. I know that seeing burns freaks you out." Alice nodded and left the office.

"Why do burns freak her out?" Rose asked.

"She volunteered when I was in high school at the hospital where I got treatment. One of my roommates was a burn victim. He had third degree burns over fifty percent of his body. They were doing a wound check one day when she came to visit me and she flipped out. I was barely able to talk, let alone walk and I couldn't calm her," Edward explained. "Bella, are you okay?"

"Of course," I said as I hugged Rose. Edward reached for the drawstring of Rose's pants and he pulled them down. I could see the balloon under the skin of her thigh and she groaned. Edward's nose wrinkled and pulled on a pair of latex gloves. He removed the dressing on her legs and I could see why Edward's nose was scrunched. There was a portion of Rose's leg that looked to be infected. It was red and filled with puss. Rose whimpered and leaned against me, hiding her face in my shoulder. She felt warm. "Do you have a thermometer in your bag of tricks?" Edward nodded and handed me a thermometer. I looked at it and saw it was the ear kind and I put it in Rose's ear. It beeped and I showed it to Edward.

"Fuck," he grumbled. "Rose, I need to take you back to the hospital. You're running a fever and you have an infection in your leg. We need to put you on antibiotics." Rose sniffled and nodded. "Do you want me to call an ambulance or do want me to drive you?"

"You. Please," she said quietly.

"Okay. I'm going to lightly redress your legs and then we'll head down to my car. Bella, do you want to come with?" Edward asked.

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"Yes, she's coming," Rose said, holding my hand.

"Got it, Rose," Edward smirked as he quickly wrapped Rose's legs. He pulled up the scrub pants and picked her up easily.

"You know, you are quite strong, Dr. Masen," Rose said with an arched brow.

"It's deceiving how I look. I appear to be all lean and shit, but I'm just one big muscle," he joked. He carried Rose down the stairs and I held open the door. Once we were outside, I shivered and unlocked the Volvo. Edward placed Rose in the backseat. Rose pleaded with me to sit with her. I gave Edward the keys and crawled in with Rose. She laid her head on my lap and promptly fell asleep. Edward backed up and drove us to Craven. Edward was on the phone with Craven as he drove, explaining the situation. I could see Emmett's jeep behind us. Edward pulled his car into his spot and he went to go get a wheel chair. Rose was still out, drooling on my lap. With the wheel chair, Edward carried a pair of scrubs. Emmett met up with us and he was still in his cheerleader uniform. "Here, McCarty," Edward said as he tossed the scrubs to Emmett. Emmett pulled up the pants and removed the skirt and whipped off the cheerleader top and swapped it with the scrub top.

"Thanks, Edward," Emmett said as he helped Edward get Rose out of the car. They placed her in the wheel chair and brought her into the ER. Her doctor from the burn unit met Edward and he explained her condition. They wheeled Rose to the burn unit and we were left standing in the ER.

"Will she be okay?" I whispered. "Will she lose her leg? That wound was nasty."

"If they get the infection under control, she'll be fine," Edward said, kissing my temple. "Come on, love. Let's go home."

I nodded and wrapped my arms around his waist. "I love you, Edward Masen," I said as I kissed him.

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"I absolutely adore you, Bella Swan," he responded. We headed to the car and drove home, safe in our little bubble of contentment.

But little did we know, we had someone following us.

**A/N: Dun dun dun...Cliffie alert! A pretty fluffy chapter, with the exception of Rose's infection. But I assure you, she will be fine. Leave me love and reviews. They are better than getting taken by Edward against a wall in your sister's house. MUAH!**

# The Conferences and Concerts

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 26: The Conferences and Concerts

"Bella, I'm heading to the hospital. I'm working a double, filling for Dr. Gerandy," Edward called from the kitchen.

"Okay, baby. Don't forget, I have parent teacher conferences tonight. I should be home by ten or so," I yelled from the bedroom. I heard Edward's footsteps climb the stairs and he entered the bedroom.

"Make sure that you have someone walk out with you to the car, okay?" Edward said with an adorable grimace. "I don't like you being out so late."

"Edward, I'll be fine," I sighed, putting my hands on his strong shoulders. "But, I'll make sure that Jake or Emmett walk out with me. Does that make you happy?"

"Yes," he said, kissing my lips sweetly. "I love you, so much my beautiful girl."

"I know, Dr. Masen," I said returning his kiss. "I absolutely adore you."

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"We are so fucking nauseating," he chuckled. "I love it. Have a good day and text me if you need anything."

"Will do, handsome. Go save some lives with soup spoon," I replied, squeezing his ass in his delicious scrubs.

"Bella, you are too funny with the utensils," he said as he kissed my lips roughly. "See you when I get home, around eleven."

"Bye, baby," I said as I extricated myself from his embrace. Edward winked and danced out of the bedroom. I finished getting ready, putting on the black suit from Taylor's funeral and a blue blouse. I put on a strand of pearls along with the matching earrings, my ring that Edward gave me for my birthday and a pair of black heels. I took a furtive glance at the clock and I needed to get going. I hopped into my car and drove to school, going through the motions of school for the half day. The kids were mentally checked out, not that I cared. I didn't introduce new things today. I just reviewed and had the students watch a video related to the field trip that we were going on in two weeks. Mrs. Cope gave me the go ahead to take my team to the backstage tour of the opera and then to the student matinee later on in the year. I was going to do a unit on the 'librettos' and the stories of operas. Then with my accelerated students, we were going to put on an opera in class, with Alice's help. Hopefully, before she goes on maternity leave.

After the half day with the students, I went out to lunch with Emmett, Jake, Alice and Angela. We spent some time talking about the impending parent teacher conferences. I felt for Alice and Angela. They had very few conferences. I think Angela told me she had four conferences the last time. Our team had conferences jam packed the entire day, with only an hour for dinner around five. Thankfully, when we had a ton of conferences, the night went by quickly.

We returned from lunch and settled in for our conferences. Before we knew it, dinner time rolled around and we ate in the staff lounge. I took the time to contact Edward. I called him and left a message on his voicemail. He probably was busy and couldn't pick up the phone. After dinner, we headed back to our

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rooms and sat through the rest of the conferences. We only had one troublesome conference. The parents were upset with the grade that their daughter was getting in language arts. Unfortunately, she was not one of my students. She was one of Rose's. But I remember us discussing her as a team when Mr. Drum was a part of the team. He didn't like this child and apparently took it out on her with her grades. We had to call in administration. Mrs. Cope gave the family a reasonable compromise. Ironically, it was the exact same thing I recommended, but dismissed because I was just a teacher. The family finally left and I told Mrs. Cope about my suggestion and she just smiled knowingly. She said that everything will change when I'm the boss. I arched a brow and she just snorted.

*Mrs. Cope is definitely molding me into her. Not that I'm complaining...it's a huge pay raise.*

We finished our first night of parent teacher conferences and we headed out to our cars. I made sure that I walked with Emmett. He questioned my motives, but still walked with me. I gave him a hug and drove home. I was surprised when I saw Edward's Volvo in the driveway. He was supposed to be working until eleven. It was only a little after nine. I walked into the house and called out. "Hello?"

"In the kitchen," Edward said flatly. I moved to the kitchen and saw Edward sitting on the stool on the island, twirling a bottle of water. "Hi, beautiful girl," he said sadly. *This looks sadly familiar...*

"What's wrong, Edward?" I asked, my heart dropping to my toes.

"Horrid day," he whispered.

"Another car accident?"

"No. A young woman was brought in today. She was around your age. Maybe a little younger. She was beaten within an inch of her life," Edward said softly. "She was pregnant."



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"Was it Jessica?" I asked, sitting down next to Edward. "Jessica Stanley?"

"Yes," Edward muttered.

"Did she lose the baby?"

"No. We managed to stabilize her and prevent pre-term labor. However, she's never going to wake up. She was hit in the head with a wrench or some other metal tool," Edward said, caressing my cheek. "She's brain dead. We're keeping her on life support until the baby can be safely extracted. We've started pumping her with steroids just in case, but it is too early."

"How? When?" I squeaked.

"Her neighbor heard her screams when she was attacked. He called 911. Unfortunately, the sirens spooked whoever did this to her. They were gone by the time the police and EMTs arrived," Edward said. "The neighbor said that he saw Mike run from the address."

"He did this? He beat up Jessica and...and...nearly kill their baby?" I sobbed.

Edward got up from the stool and scooped me in his arms. "Shhhh, Bella. You're safe. I'm never going to let him get close to you," he comforted as he held me against his chest. "Never, baby." I sobbed against Edward's chest as he embraced me, clutching me with his strong arms. I felt him cry, sob with me. I didn't even realize when Edward picked me up and carried me up to our bedroom. We made love that night, soft and sweet. We needed to connect with each other. Our love making was reverent and deep. Deeper than anything that we had ever done in previous times. After we made love, we fell asleep, tangled in each other arms.

xx AFS xx

The alarm went off too early. Edward grumbled and he held me tighter against his naked body. "Don't want to let you go," he said into my neck. "Play hooky and have a naked day with me."

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"Edward, I can't. I have four hours of parent teacher conferences," I said, kissing his shoulder. "I also have a meeting with my advisor this afternoon. I'm almost done with my practicum. I just need to turn in my binder and then I'm done. Woo hoo!"

"What time is your meeting?" Edward asked as he rolled us so I was underneath his body. He nestled himself between my legs and I could feel his erection press into my hip. He inched forward, bringing his cock closer to my entrance. His hands traced down my sides, gently cupping my breasts. "Time?"

"Um," I mumbled intelligently as Edward kissed me, sliding into my body. "Fuck."

"That's not a time, beautiful girl," he said as he slowly thrust in and out of my body.

"One," I breathed as pulled his face to mine, plunging my tongue into his mouth. Edward's movements quickened as he nipped at my lips and kneaded my breasts. With his thumbs he flicked my nipples and I groaned as he brought me closer to the brink. "Edward...Harder."

"Your wish is my command, beautiful girl," he growled seductively. His hips pistoned against mine and I could feel my muscles flutter around his cock. Edward's lips worked with mine and he put one of my legs over his shoulders. He worked faster and I moaned against his mouth. "God, I love the sounds you make, Bella. So fucking hot," he mumbled as he reached between us and pinched my clit. I groaned at his ministrations and he rubbed my clit with his dexterous fingers. "Let go, baby. Come for me. I need to feel you come around my cock," he purred. "Now, Isabella."

*There's my full name, in the throes of passion. I think I just squirted a little bit...fuuuuuuuuuuck!*

I threw my head back and let out a delightful scream. My muscles clamped around him and the friction was perfect. Just like him. Edward pounded into me until he found his release and he collapsed on top of me. We lay like that,

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panting and connected. "What was that for?" I laughed. "Not that I'm complaining."

"I needed to feel you, Bella," he breathed, his body glowing with a sheen of sweat.

"We did a lot of feeling last night," I said.

"I'll never get tired of feeling you, beautiful girl," he whispered before he kissed me reverently. He was still inside me and our kisses perked up his cock. He growled and he moved slightly.

"Edward, I really have to go to work," I said, rubbing Edward's back and shoulders with my fingertips. "As much as I would love to play hooky and have a naked day with you, it's not feasible today."

"But it is feasible, right?" he asked, his face lighting up like a kid's on Christmas Day.

"I promise you. We will have a day of nakedness," I retorted. "Now up. You're squishing my bladder and unless you want to see a puddle, you might want to move." Edward scrambled off me and I darted to the bathroom, taking care of my business. I then hopped into the shower, only to have one Dr. Edward Masen join me, trying to get frisky in the marble shower. I gently swatted his hands away and gave him a glare. He pouted and begged for another go around. "Jeez, Edward! You are so touchy feely today. What's the deal?"

"I'm freaking out, Bella. Honestly. I saw what Mike did to Jessica and I'm afraid I'm going to lose you," he said, tears welling in his emerald eyes. "I can't lose you. I refuse to lose you."

"Edward, you're not going to lose me," I said, wrapping my arms around his waist. "You're stuck with me, for as long as you'll have me."

"Forever, Bella," he whispered.

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"Edward, I do need to work. I'll be home after my meeting. Two at the latest," I said, kissing his chest. I finished my shower, with Edward's help and got dressed. I wore some black dress pants and pale pink sweater set. As I got dressed, Edward made breakfast. I shoveled down the omelet that he made for me and I darted out of the house after I gave him a searing kiss. "Love you, Dr. Masen!"

"Love you, more, Ms. Swan."

Parent teacher conferences for this morning were extraordinarily boring. Half of the conferences that were scheduled didn't show up and the other half were good students. After we were done, I went out to lunch with Alice and Emmett at Emmett's apartment, visiting Rosalie. She was recovering from her first skin graft surgery and she was currently bedridden. She hated it, but was in good spirits. Rose said that she is going to try to be back to work by the second semester. She will need a wheelchair, but she needed to get back to work. I told her that her kids will love to have her back. Hell, I would love to have her back. The parade of horrendous subs was endless.

When we finished lunch, I drove to the campus and went to my advisor's office. I plopped down and waited to meet with her. I sat outside of her office for about ten minutes when she sauntered up and unlocked the door. "Come in, Ms. Swan," she smiled.

"Thanks, Dr. Knutsen," I said as I followed her into the office. I sat down in one of the stiff chairs and looked around her tiny office. It was filled with a ton of books and pictures. "I have my binder for you."

"Excellent. The first half of your work was excellent," she said. "I look forward to your final product. Have you taken the administrator's exam for the state?"

"I did and the comps for the university," I answered. "Passed with flying colors."

"That's wonderful, Ms. Swan. Have you thought about your future as an administrator?" Dr. Knutsen asked.

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"I have. I've worked with my principal, Mrs. Sherrie Cope, and she thinks that I have a promising career as an administrator," I smiled. "I've taken up some administrative duties at my school, in addition to my practicum assignments."

"That's great to hear," Dr. Knutsen said with a friendly smile.

"I was wondering if I could get a letter of recommendation?"

"Of course. I'll type something up and send it to you once I'm done grading your practicum binder," Dr. Knutsen answered. "If you ever need a reference, don't hesitate to put me down. It's been a pleasure working with you."

"You too, Dr. Knutsen," I replied.

"Moir. I'm no longer your advisor. We're colleagues now," she winked. "Your grades will be sent to you before Thanksgiving, along with your letter of recommendation." She stood up and reached out to shake my hand. I placed my binder on her desk. I briskly shook her hand and left her office. I walked to my car and drove back home. As I was driving, I noticed a black Acura following me. When I turned, the Acura turned. I took a roundabout way home and the Acura still followed me. My heart was stammering in my chest as I pulled into the driveway. The Acura drove past my home. I ran to check the license plate, but the car didn't have one and the windows were blacked out. I couldn't see inside. I turned on my heel and nearly sprinted into the house.

"Edward? Edward? Where are you?" I screamed frantically.

He ran out of his office, his eyes in a panic. "What is it? What's wrong?"

"Someone followed me. They followed me from the university and drove right past the house. A black Acura," I said. My body was shaking and my heart was pounding.

"Did you get a license plate?"

"No. No license plate," I said, looking into Edward's eyes. "Could it be Mike?"

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"I don't know, but we need to find out. Let's call the cops and tell them what happened," Edward said soothingly. He tried to pull away, but I kept my arms around his waist. I sobbed into his chest. "Baby, I won't let anyone hurt you."

"You can't guarantee that," I said brokenly.

"No, I can't guarantee it, but I'll try my hardest to make sure that no one will touch you," he said as he held me. "Come on, let's go to the police station."

"Edward, no. I am probably just spooked. I'm fine," I answered. "If I see the car again, then I'll go to the police."

"Bella..."

"No. I will not let him control me," I said, looking into Edward's emerald eyes. "He controlled me all through our marriage and now he's controlling me. Not anymore. If I see the car again, then I'll go to the cops. I promise."

xx AFS xx

A few weeks passed and there was no further incident with the black Acura. I threw myself headlong into work, trying to quash my overwhelming feeling of being watched. Whenever I left work, I made sure I had someone with me. Edward sometimes followed me on his way from the hospital. He was just as leery as I was.

Alice reminded me that I was her administrator for her holiday concert when I was over at the Cullens' home for Thanksgiving. I grumbled and nodded my assent. A few days after Thanksgiving, it was the day of Alice's holiday concert for her choir students. I stayed after school and helped her set up the gym with her army of choir monkeys. After that, Alice drove us to get some dinner. She finally traded in her yellow Beetle for a more adult Audi SUV. She was extolling the car's virtues for the entire ride to the fast food joint that we got our dinner from. We finished our dinner and I headed back to my room to change. I put on a pair of jeans to help Alice set up the gym. I wanted to look professional for the concert and so I put on my black power pant suit. Alice

## A Fresh Start

definitely got her money's worth with this puppy.

I picked up a walkie talkie and headed to the gym fifteen minutes before the start of the concert. I pretty was there to ensure that the school didn't burn down and to remind the parents and students of appropriate behavior. The choir walked in with their robes and stood on the risers. I walked up to one of the microphones and explained the expectations for the concert and bidding the audience to enjoy themselves.

The concert went off without a hitch. Alice was a consummate professional with her students and with her students' parents. Unlike the band concert, all of the students were picked up and gone by the time the gym was torn down and the risers were put away. Once the gym was rearranged, I told Alice to go home. She was dragging and her feet were looking mighty swollen. She didn't fight me and she scampered out to her new SUV.

I did a once-over of the school, making sure that no students were hiding in the bathrooms and that all of the classrooms were locked. I then poked my head into the custodian's office, saying good night to Kim, the night custodian. I grabbed my clothes, bag and keys and headed out to my car. Much to my chagrin, it had started snowing.

*I hate fucking snow.*

I dusted off my beastly car and climbed into the freezing interior. I started the SUV and waited for it to warm up before I started to drive back home. I finally got the car to the temperature that was not freezing and I slowly moved my car out of the parking lot. I drove at a snail's pace, not wanting to get into a car accident.

As I was stopped at a stoplight, a car pulled up behind me. They got very close to rear-ending me. I tensed up. I was still on edge about the whole car following thing. Once the light turned green, I took off with my 'friend' on my tail.

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"Yeesh, if I'm going too slow for you, go around me, you jackass," I grumbled out loud. I accelerated and my friend kept pace with me. I was watching the light in the distance. It turned yellow and I tapped the brakes. I managed to stop and not get rear-ended. We ended playing this 'cat and mouse' routine for the next few lights. Then he flashed his brights at me and I could see him get closer to the rear of my car. "Holy shit, he's going to hit me."

The car behind me tapped my bumper and backed off. I switched lane. The car followed me and hit my bumper again. My heart was pounding, stammering, out of control. I kept looking in the rearview mirror and tried to maintain my eyes on the road ahead of me. He finally backed off and I took a deep breath. To my left, a blur of shiny metal and red lights flew past me and stopped right in front of my car. I slammed on the brakes and t-boned the car. My head hit the steering column of the car and my vision faded. The next thing I knew, I was out.

**A/N: Another cliffie...sorry...leave me love and I'll update faster! MUAH!**



# The Accident

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 27: The Accident

### EPOV

My phone rang from its charger on the kitchen counter. I was getting a bottle of water and trying to relax after a long day at Craven. Meeting after meeting after meeting. I picked up the phone and saw the caller ID. *Alice*.

"Hi, Alice. How did the concert go?" I asked.

"It went very well. Smooth, like always," she chirped. "Bella was invaluable."

"She usually is," I smirked. "When did you leave school?"

"I left about fifteen minutes ago. Bella sent me a text saying she had to do a final walk-through and then she was heading out. That was about ten minutes ago," Alice said.

"Okay. Thanks, Elf," I said. "Congrats on your concert. I'm proud of you."

"Thanks, Edward. Talk to you later," Alice said as she hung up her phone. I sat

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back and put my feet up on the table in the family room. I was watching a basketball game, not really paying attention. I desperately wanted to talk to Bella. I wanted to take her someplace over her winter break. Someplace warm and tropical. We both deserved a vacation and it seemed like the right time to do it.

I put my water bottle down and lightly fingered the box that I kept in my pocket. After the fire on her birthday, I knew she was the one for me and I got her an engagement ring. It was a very simple, but elegant engagement ring. Platinum band with two round stones on either side of the three carat round diamond. It was large, but Bella deserved the best. I was planning on how I was going to pop the question when a knock on my door broke me from my reverie. I furrowed my brow and walked to the door. I opened it and saw a police officer standing on my doorstep.

*No. Not again. I can't lose her.*

My stomach dropped to my toes and I gripped the door frame.

"Mr. Edward Masen?"

"Dr. Edward Masen," I corrected. "Can I help you?"

"We need you to come to Craven Memorial Hospital," he said in a professional, yet detached tone. "There's been an accident involving Ms. Isabella Swan. Her driver's license indicated that she lived here and you are listed as her emergency contact."

"Let me grab my coat and I'll follow you," I said woodenly.

"Of course, Dr. Masen."

I pulled on my winter jacket and slipped on my sneakers. I walked to the garage and got into my Volvo. I needed to keep it together. I had to keep it together. I sent a quick text to Alice and Carlisle.

## A Fresh Start

*There's been an accident. Bella's at Craven - Edward*

I drove carefully, mindful of the horrendous road conditions. I pulled into my spot and followed the police officer into the ER. Dr. Gerandy greeted me with a sad smile and led me to one of the trauma rooms. *Don't freak out. She's fine. Don't freak out. Don't freak out.*

I was so freaking out. I ran my hand through my hair and followed Dr. Gerandy into trauma one. Bella was laying on the gurney. She had a large gash on her forehead along her hair line and scratches along her face. There was bruising along her collarbone. "What's her condition?" I asked quietly.

"She's stable. She hit her head on the steering wheel and some of the glass from the car caused her wounds on her face and head. She has some minor injuries across her torso from the seatbelt and a minor sprained ankle. She's going to be fine," Dr. Gerandy said kindly. "Edward, you're not going to lose her."

"You're positive?" I asked. "She's fine?"

"She's fine. I had the best plastic surgeon stitch her up and she won't even have any visible scars," Dr. Gerandy explained.

"Why is she asleep?" I asked. My mind knew the answer. She was probably sedated for her stitches.

"She came in unconscious, having hit her head on the steering wheel. She woke up when we started removing her clothes and we gave her a mild sedative to calm her down when we began suturing her head," Dr. Gerandy said quietly. "She started slurring something fierce."

"What type of pain killer did you give her?"

"Vicodin."

"That's why. Vicodin knocks her out," I said as I sat down next to her, picking up her tiny hand. "Can you give me a few moments?"

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"Of course, Edward. She's going to be fine," Dr. Gerandy said, clapping his hand on my shoulder.

He left the room and closed the trauma room door after he put up the privacy shade that we used for rape victims. Once he was gone, I lost it. Huge, fat tears rolled down my cheeks and I put my head on her lap. She looked so broken, so fragile, so weak laying there. "Bella," I sobbed. "I'm so sorry. Please be okay." I cried into her lap for a long time. My sobs eventually slowed to quiet sniffles. I laced my fingers with hers and prayed for my girlfriend.

*No idiot. Your fiancée.*

I sat up and took out the ring I had carried in my pocket for months. I picked up her left hand and slid the ring onto her finger. "Marry me, Bella," I whispered. "Be my wife."

*Okay, you coward. Now ask her when she's conscious.*

Rhonda cleared her throat and she gave me a knowing smirk. "You know you are a chicken shit. Proposing while she's unconscious. What is she going to tell your children?"

"We'll make something up," I chuckled. "I can't live without her, Rhonda. I just can't. When the police arrived on my doorstep, I immediately thought the worst. That she was gone."

"But she's not. She's got a few bumps and bruises, but she's fine. Dr. Edward, I know you were fucked over in your life," Rhonda began.

"Fucked over is putting it lightly," I said, giving her a dark grin.

"But, you have each other. You love Ms. Bella and she loves you. However, a word to the wise. Take the ring off her finger and propose when she's coherent. If my husband proposed to me when I was unconscious, we wouldn't have had any children as his dick would have been cut off," Rhonda said, giving me a stern glare. "Though it is a lovely ring. Perfect for her."

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I smiled and removed the ring from her finger. I put it back into its box and slid it back into my pocket. "When will she be discharged?"

"As soon as she wakes up. Dr. Edward, you should know that this was no accident," Rhonda said.

"What?"

"I overheard the police. A black Acura sped up and stopped right in front of Bella, causing her to t-bone the car. Her SUV is totaled and the Acura is unrecognizable," Rhonda explained.

"Did they get the driver?" I seethed.

"No. The car was empty when they came to extract Bella," Rhonda sighed. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. You're not the fucker who almost took the love of my life away," I fumed.

"Edward, don't let this anger consume you," Rhonda said as she laid a hand on my shoulder. "They'll find whoever did this and arrest him." I nodded and put my head back on Bella's lap. "Try to rest, Dr. Edward. She'll be here when you wake up."

Rhonda left the trauma room and I allowed my eyes to drift shut. I wanted to crawl into the bed with Bella, but the gurneys were small and my fat ass would push Bella out of it. Eventually my brain shut off and I fell into a fitful sleep.

I woke up to the feeling of feathers across my cheeks. I cracked my eyes open and saw Bella grin down at me sleepily. I sat up and felt my back crack. "Bella, you're okay," I said as I pulled her into a tentative hug. "I was so worried."

"I'm fine," she croaked. "Got a killer headache, but I'm fine."

"You really need to stop getting hurt," I joked.

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"Find my psycho ex-husband and that would be remedied," she said with a smirk. "Are you okay?"

*She's in the fucking hospital and she's asking me if I'm alright? There is something wrong with this picture. Fix it.*

"Bella, there is something I need to do. I can't wait any longer. When the police arrived on my door, my heart plummeted. I thought you were gone. I know that we've only known each other for a few months, but I can't imagine my life without you. I love you more than I can possibly imagine." I got onto one knee, grimacing at the ache in my legs. *I am really too old.* "Marry me, Bella? Be my wife?" I took out the ring from my pocket and presented it to her.

Bella gasped and her hand went up to her mouth. "Edward?"

"Please, Bella. Make me the happiest man on the planet. Marry me?" I asked, tears rolling down my cheeks. I took out the ring and put it on her finger. "Please?" Bella sniffled and looked at me. Ever so slightly she nodded and gave me a radiant grin.

"Yes," she whispered. "I'll marry you." I leaned down and kissed her lips chastely, sweetly and with all the love I could muster.

"Much better, Dr. Edward," Rhonda laughed from the door of the trauma room. "She was awake this time."

"Wha...what?" Bella asked.

"I did a dress rehearsal when you were sleeping," I said sheepishly. "Rhonda chastised me for proposing while you were unconscious."

"I'm pretty certain you'd want to remember this one's proposal," Rhonda said, smacking me on the back of my head. "He is a helpless romantic and all."

"I do want to remember it. And it was perfect," Bella answered, kissing my lips sweetly. "Now, can I go home?"

## A Fresh Start

"I'll get Dr. Gerandy," Rhonda chuckled. "Congratulations. I fully expect your first born daughter to be named Rhonda in honor of me."

"Sure, sure," I acquiesced. Rhonda scuttled out of the trauma room and I went to get her a pair of scrubs to wear home. I found some nurse's scrubs that would fit her and assisted in putting them on. Bella was covered in bruises on her chest and belly from the seat belt and her right ankle was very swollen. She pointed to a bag underneath the gurney with her belongings. I swiped it and put it on the stool I was sitting on while she was asleep. Dr. Gerandy came in with a pair of crutches and a boot.

"Oh, I don't need those," Bella said. "I have a pair at home and a boot as well."

"Okay," Dr. Gerandy sighed. "Just sign here and you're free to go. Edward, take today off. You got no sleep and I've already spoken with Carlisle. They're going to reschedule your meetings for today."

"Thanks," I said.

"Also, congratulations," Dr. Gerandy said. "I'm very happy for both of you."

"Thank you, Dr. Gerandy," Bella smiled as she looked at her ring. I grinned like a buffoon knowing that I got to keep Bella for the rest of my life. She was going to have my babies and be my wife.

"Okay, gimpy," I said as I picked her up. "Let's get you home." I safely deposited her into the wheelchair that Rhonda rolled into the trauma room. I put my coat over Bella's shoulders and I pushed her to the exit. Once there, I scooped Bella back up and carried her to my car. She unlocked the car with the keys that were in the pocket of my jacket. I placed Bella into the front seat, taking the keys from her and jogging to the driver's side. My teeth chattered as I warmed up the car. The temperature had dropped and my jacket was currently around my girlf...fiancée. *We're getting married! Woo hoo!*

I blasted the heat and rubbed my hands together, trying to warm up. I looked over at Bella and she was out in the front seat. I drove us home, slowly and

## A Fresh Start

carefully. The roads had not improved. In fact, they had gotten worse. I heard Bella's phone ring from her bag by her feet. I pulled over to the side and grabbed her phone. The caller ID indicated it was her school district. I picked it up. Thankfully, it was the automated systems saying that school was cancelled due to inclement weather. I am certain that Bella would be happy that she didn't need to take a sick day today. After I got off the phone with the school, I noticed the time. It was after six in the morning. It was so dark out; it appeared to be the middle of the night.

I got to our home and I drove into the garage. I turned off the car and stared at the sleepy beauty in the seat next to me. Even with her injuries, she still was gorgeous. Her skin was flawless and translucent. Her face was heart-shaped and framed by the most beautiful mahogany hair. Her lips were soft and pink. Her eyes were the most beautiful shade of dark chocolate and so expressive. Bella's body was exquisite. She always said that she was too fat, but she wasn't. She had some extra weight on her build, but it enhanced her curves. Her perfect curves. Her breasts were the right size for my hands, soft pink buds that just begged to be sucked. Her waist was proportionately smaller to her chest and her hips were...well...perfect. I really need to invest in a thesaurus.

"Edward..." she whispered as she curled against the door of the Volvo. Then she shivered.

*Get your fiancée inside, moron. Stop thinking with your dick.*

I got out of the car and gently picked up Bella. She nestled closer to me, burrowing into my chest. I kissed her forehead, mindful of her sutures and carried her up to our bedroom. I laid her on the bed, covering both of us with the bedspread. She snuggled next to me and I wrapped my arms around my sleeping fiancée. "I'm never letting you go, Bella. Ever. You're stuck with me for the rest of our lives."

"Good," she murmured and she nestled closer. "Love you, Dr. McFuckme."

"I love you, too, Bella," I chuckled as I closed my eyes, falling into a deep and restful sleep.



## A Fresh Start

xx AFS xx

I felt the bed jerk and Bella flew from my arms. "What time is it? I have to go to work?" she yelled. "Edward get up!"

"Bella, relax," I mumbled sleepily. "Your district called your phone when we were driving home and school's cancelled. Go back to bed."

"What?" Bella asked

"Here, check your phone log," I said, pulling out her phone out of my pocket. She hastily took the phone and saw that her school district did call. She eyed me warily. "Trust me, my beautiful fiancée. No school because it was snowy and icky. The roads just sucked when we were driving back from Craven."

"Fiancée?" she cooed. "It really happened."

"Yes, it did," I said, pulling her back into bed. "We're getting married. I love you so much, beautiful girl."

"I love you too. However, I don't feel very beautiful right now," she grumbled. "I feel gross."

"What do you remember from last night?" I asked.

"Not a whole lot. I remember being followed by some random car, too closely. The car then hit my back of my SUV and he kept ramming into the back of the car. Not stopping. I changed lanes and he raced past me and threw his car in front of me, causing me car to t-bone his car. I hit my head on the steering wheel and then I woke up in the hospital getting my clothes removed by Rhonda. Then I woke up again with you in my lap," Bella answered. "Oh, my car. What happened to my car?"

"I'm sorry, love. It's completely totaled," I said with a frown.

"How am I going to get to work?" she wailed.

## A Fresh Start

"Simple solution. You take the Volvo and I'll drive the Vanquish until we get you a car," I said simply. "We'll consider it an early Christmas present."

"A car is not a Christmas present," Bella said, giving me an adorable glare. Like an angry kitten.

*Don't call her that to her face, Masen. She'll wallop you with her crutches.*

"Yes it is," I insisted. "However, I'm too tired to argue and I'm certain you are exhausted. So. Sleep. Cuddle. Bed."

"But..."

"No buts," I said as I gently pushed her against the pillows. "Sleep, Ms. Swan. Or should I say, Mrs. Masen."

Bella squealed and wrapped her arms around my neck. "I love the sound of that!"

"Me too," I said. Bella kissed me and curled next to me, laying her head on my chest. Within a few minutes, her breathing evened out and she was asleep, drooling on my stomach. I kissed her head and fell asleep right along with her. Never truly sleeping though. My mind raced at what could have happened last night. Bella got extremely lucky. However, if she hadn't been driving her beastly Pilot, she would have gotten more seriously injured or worse, killed.

*I'm so buying her a tank.*

I held her tightly, being extra careful of her injuries to her torso. I watched her sleeping form and she mumbled incoherently in her sleep. I felt my phone vibrate in my pocket and I extricated myself from her steely grasp. She groaned, telling me not to leave. "I don't want to let you go, either. I'll be back," I said softly, caressing her slightly bruised cheek. I stepped out of the bedroom and into the guest bedroom, sitting on the queen bed. "Hello?"

"Is Bella okay?" Alice asked quietly. "I'm so worried."

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"She's fine. A minor laceration on her forehead and some bruising. But she'll make a complete recovery," I answered. My voice sounded cold and detached. Going into autopilot, doctor mode.

"How are you, baby brother?" Alice asked.

"I was a fucking mess last night, Alice. I thought I lost her," I replied, tears falling down my cheeks. "It was déjà vu with walking into the trauma room. I...can't...Alice...I love her so much."

"I know you do," Alice whispered. "We all love her."

"I proposed, Alice," I said.

"And...?" Alice asked the excitement in her voice was evident.

"She said yes," I smiled. "However, I was a chicken and did it while she was sleeping. Rhonda, my charge nurse, ripped me a new asshole and made me do it again when she was awake."

A chorus of squeals and happy giggles filled my ears. I pulled my Blackberry away from ear, trying to negate the deafening sounds that were being emitted from my sister. "Edward! I'm so happy for you! Have you set a date?"

"Uh, no, Alice. She's sleeping and we didn't get back from the hospital until after six in the morning. But, I'm certain that Bella will not a huge wedding. I don't want a huge wedding. This would be our second marriage for both of us and it will not be a huge blow out," I chided. "I'm almost tempted to take her to Vegas or city hall."

"But, Edward," she whined.

"Alice, this is a decision that Bella and I will have to make. You are not invited unless we ask you," I said sternly. "Anyhow, I have to call Carlisle and Esme. I want to tell them the good news. I'm certain Bella would want to tell her family too."

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"Did you ask permission from her father?" Alice joked.

"Um, no. Should I?" I squeaked.

"Not really. Charlie Swan is the most easy going guy ever. I'm surprised he's a cop," Alice teased. "You'll have to really work on her mom. But she really doesn't have a relationship with Renee."

"Renee is Bella's mom?"

"Yeah, she's a total bitch. She wore white to Bella's wedding to Mike. Her dress looked like a wedding gown and she was so bitter toward Bella. She had recently gotten divorced from husband number four and was taking it out on Bella and her marriage," Alice grumbled. "Don't tell Renee. She'll be too much."

"Okay, good to know," I said, running my hand through my shaggy hair. "Love you, Alice."

"Love you, too, baby brother. Congratulations," she chirped and she hung up the phone. I got up and decided to take a shower. I felt grimy and gross. I had meetings yesterday and was not in the trenches, but you still feel nasty after being in a hospital. I slipped into the bathroom and stripped out of my clothes from yesterday. I stepped under the hot stream of the shower and quickly washed my body. As I showered, I felt tears fall down my cheeks. I hadn't even realized that I was crying until loud, body wrenching sobs filled the bathroom. I fell to my knees in the shower and wrapped my arms around my torso.

"Edward?" Bella's quiet voice floated through the bathroom. "Baby?" She opened the shower door and knelt on the floor, drenching her scrubs that I put on her. She pulled me into a tight hug, allowing me to sob against her shoulders. "I'm okay. You're not getting rid of me. This," she said, waving her left hand in my face, "is a huge indicator that I'm yours forever."

"I know," I sniffled. I looked up at her and her eyes were tired and sad. "It's just, last night hit too close to home, you know?"

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"I know. Come on, the water's cold and I can't get my sutures wet," she said, getting up from the shower. I nodded and got up from the floor. Bella handed me a towel and I wrapped it around my waist. Bella removed her scrub top and pants and grabbed my robe from behind the bathroom door. She shivered and scampered into the closet to put on some warmer clothes. I followed her into the closet and wrapped my arms around her waist after she pulled my Dartmouth sweatshirt over her head. She leaned back against my chest, resting her hands over mine. I linked my left hand with hers and looked at the ring that danced and sparkled on her finger. *My ring. My love. My fiancée.* "It's beautiful, Edward. It's also too much."

"Nothing is too much for the love of my life," I whispered, kissing her soft hair. "I would do anything for you. You must know that."

"I do know that, but this is not a diamond, it's a planetoid," she giggled. "I don't deserve it. I don't deserve you."

"No, Bella. I don't deserve you. You've been this light, a beacon for me and I can't live without you," I said. "I'd give you a planet if I could. Hell, I already gave the moon and the stars."

"Yes, you did," she laughed as she turned around in my arms. Her tiny hands rested on my pecs and she stood on her tip toes to kiss me. Her mouth brushed mine and I trembled at the softness of her kiss. She pulled away and ran her fingers across my chest. "You're cold. Get dressed."

"I'm not cold," I said, arching a brow.

"Your lips are blue and you have gooseflesh," she said. "We can't have you getting sick. Get dressed, Dr. Masen and we'll eat some lunch or dinner or whatever."

"Yes, ma'am," I said, kissing her lips. She stuck out her tongue and left the closet. I pulled out a pair of workout pants and dark green fleece. I carried my clothes into the bedroom and put on a pair of gray boxer briefs and a black t-shirt. I hastily dressed, slipping on my sneakers and went downstairs. Bella

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was at the island, preparing some sandwiches and I saw some soup on the stove. I got two bottles of water and sat down at the island. "So, I was wondering..."

"Wondering what?" she asked as she turned to the soup on the stove.

"We probably should tell our families about our engagement," I said, giving her a crooked smirk.

"Oh, right," Bella said, grimacing slightly. "I really don't want to call my *mother*. She is such a bitch."

"What happened?" I asked, playing dumb.

"When I got married to the asshat, my mother was going through divorce number three. Or was it number four? I don't remember. She's been through so many husbands," she said with a frown. "Anyhow, she was jealous of my happiness and proceeded to ruin my wedding. She wore a white dress, criticized my every move, yelled at Mike's family, calling them white trash, got hammered and fucked Mike's father in the janitor's closet. Suffice it to say, we haven't spoken since. For all I know, she's dying of gonorrhea from all the men she's fucked."

"Um, wow. Bitter much?" I chuckled.

"She's a bitch. She's worse than that, but I refuse to say the 'c-word,'" Bella said, stirring the soup with a little too much vigor. "However, I will tell my dad. Charlie is a good man. He's the police chief of Forks, Washington."

"Forks...I've been there," I said, my brows shooting up. "I was on an emergency helicopter run to the Forks General when I worked at Virginia Mason. Very green."

"A very apt description of Forks. Let me grab my phone," she said as she went up the stairs. She returned a few minutes later, talking on her phone, presumably to her father. "Yeah, Dad...I don't know about Christmas. I'll let

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you know. Hold on for second, I'm going to put you on speaker phone." Bella pressed a button and she laid the phone on the counter in between us. "Dad, I have some news."

"What's that, Bells?" he asked.

"You know how I moved in with Edward?" Bella asked.

"Yeah, how is that going?" Charlie questioned.

"Good. Very good. He's a great roommate," she teased. I gently pinched her hip and she kissed me sweetly. "Okay, he's more than a roommate."

"I know that, Bella," Charlie grumbled. "Alice told me that you were dating and that things are good between the two of you. What's your news, though?"

"Um, last night Edward proposed and I said yes," Bella said with a glint in her eyes.

*And cue the crickets.*

"Dad?"

*More crickets.*

"Charlie?"

*Chirp. Chirp. Chirp.*

"Charles David Swan!"

"Engaged? Proposal? Isn't this a little fast, Isabella?" Charlie grumbled.

"Dad, I love him and he loves me. You approved of Mike and you saw how good that turned out," she snapped.

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"Isabella Marie Swan," Charlie roared.

"May I?" I asked. "Chief Swan?"

"What?"

*Charm the pants off him. You can do this, Masen. COME ON!*

"I know I probably didn't do this appropriately in your eyes, but I want to let you know that I care about Bella very much. I love her more than my own life and I couldn't imagine not being with her. The decision I made to propose last night was an impulsive one, but the decision to want to marry her is not. I know that Bella has told you my story."

"Yeah, you lost your parents and wife to a drunk driver," Charlie said sadly.

"Yes. Well, last night, a police officer was on my doorstep. I thought my world had shattered when he said the words 'car accident' and 'Bella' in the same sentence. I drove to the hospital and saw her in the trauma room. The attending physician, my colleague, Dr. Gerandy, insisted that she would be fine. I know she will make a complete recovery, but the sight of her on that gurney churned up horrible memories for me. Anyhow, I knew since the moment I saw your beautiful daughter that I was going to marry her. I knew the moment we spoke that she would be an important part of my life. I knew the moment when we shared our first kiss that she would be the mother of my children. I should have asked your permission for her hand and I apologize for not doing so. However, I would like to ask for your blessing?" I said. I looked at Bella and she was crying silently. Her face was tear stained but not out of sadness but of joy.

*Another set of crickets have entered the room.*

"Chief Swan?"

*Chirp. Chirp. Chirp.*

"Hello?"



## A Fresh Start

"So you love my baby girl?" Charlie asked gruffly.

"With all my heart."

"You'll keep her safe from the fucktard, Michael?" Charlie seethed.

"If I have to die for her, yes," I answered ardently.

"You'll give me grandbabies?" Charlie asked. I could hear the smile in his voice.

"Yes, Charlie. He'll give you grandbabies if there is nothing wrong with me or him," Bella laughed. "Jeez!"

"Okay. I give you my blessing. But you hurt my baby girl, I will shoot you," Charlie said.

"Can you shoot Michael?" Bella asked. "He's making my life a living hell."

"I know, Bells. Believe me I know. Alice has been keeping me apprised of the situation," Charlie said sadly. "I really wish you would come back home to Forks. It's safer here."

"Dad, Forks is the size of a postage stamp. I can't live there," Bella grumbled. "I have my life here. I love it here, despite the drama of everything. I met and found Edward here."

"Okay, okay," Charlie said. "I get it. Back to your wedding. Have you set a date?"

"No. Not yet," I answered. "As soon as we do, you'll be the first to know."

"Excellent. I'm sorry about my silence, but I am happy for both of you. It's about damn time you both get some happiness. And I get my grandbabies."

## A Fresh Start

"Enough about the grandbabies, Charlie," Bella griped. "I'll talk to you later. Love you, Daddy."

"Love you, too," he said and he ended the call.

"Do you want to call Carlisle and Esme?" Bella asked.

"Let's tell them over brunch on Sunday," I suggested. "We'll invite everyone over and announce it then. However, Alice knows."

"How does that not surprise me?" Bella said dryly.

"She called while you were sleeping and asked how you were doing. I told her after I had a mini-meltdown about the possibility of losing you," I said, gently cupping her cheek. Bella smiled and pulled away. A frown crossed my features and she went to the stove to dish out the soup. She put a large cup in front of me, along with a huge sandwich. She sat down and did the same for herself and we ate a quiet lunch.

"So, what else did Alice have to say?" Bella asked as she picked up the dishes. I glared at her and pointed to the couch. She growled lightly and walked to the family room. I did the dishes as Bella flipped the television channels. "Alice?"

"Oh, when I told her about our engagement, she went into wedding Nazi mode," I chuckled.

"Alice is NOT going to control our wedding, Edward," Bella said, looking at me pointedly. "Something small. I mean tiny. Vegas or city hall."

"That's what I suggested," I laughed as I sat down next to her. "Vegas is a little too clichéd and not romantic enough. Let's shoot for city hall or how about this, a destination wedding?"

"A destination wedding?" Bella squeaked.

## A Fresh Start

"I don't know. I'm just throwing ideas out here," I suggested. "I was going to ask you if you wanted to go someplace tropical over your Christmas break. But, we can hold off and go on your spring break and get hitched?"

"Um, where?" she asked quietly.

"Ideally, I'd love to take you to Isle Esme, but that is not feasible for spring break. We could shoot for Mexico or Jamaica," I said.

"I've never been to Mexico," Bella said, with a sparkle in her chocolatey brown eyes. "Jamaica is overrated. I went there on my honeymoon. Meh."

"Okay, Mexico. Where in Mexico?" I asked. "I've been to Puerto Vallarta. I didn't like it. Too rocky. How about Cancun?"

"Sounds perfect," she said, nestling against my shoulder.

"When's your spring break?" I questioned.

"Um, I think it's the first full week in April," she answered, wrinkling her nose.

I pulled out my cell phone and scrolled through the calendar. "How about we shoot for the wedding being on Wednesday, April 4th? That way we can spend the first part of your break with our families and the second part on our 'honeymoon.' However, you will get a proper honeymoon after you're out of school."

"Can you get that time off?" she asked quietly.

"Shouldn't be a big deal," I answered. "I'll put in the request tomorrow with Carlisle and the acting CEO of the hospital, Marcus Gregorio."

"What happened to Aro?" Bella asked.

"He was put on administrative leave after your allegations and other women came forward with similar stories. The board felt it necessary to remove him

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from power. He's still getting paid, but he's not in charge of anything in the hospital," I explained. "It's only a matter of time before he's ousted permanently."

"Oh, good. He's a jerk," Bella said, scrunching her nose. "But we have a date. We're getting married. Holy shit."

"I know," I smirked. "Mrs. Bella Masen. I love the sound of that."

"Hmmm...me too," she said as she straddled my waist. I wrapped my arms around her body and she groaned.

"Are you okay?" I asked, panic in my voice.

"No. You hit one of my bruises on my stomach," she grumbled. She lifted the sweatshirt and showed me the bruise across her abdomen that I gripped. I frowned and lightly ran my fingers over her purple bruises. "Hey, these bruises prevented me from going through the windshield."

"I know. But you were still hurt," I mumbled sadly. "What are we going to do about Mike?"

"I'm going to call Seth and the police. Hopefully, they'll be able to increase the potency of the order of protection. However, other than that, I'm not sure," she whispered, wrapping her arms around my neck.

"I'm so worried, Bella," I said into her soft hair. "I...can't..."

"And you won't," she said, looking into my eyes with a ferocity I'd never seen before. "We will be happy. We will get married. We will have a gaggle of children. Speaking of which, I need to borrow your car."

"Um, why?" I asked, arching a brow.

"I need to get feminine products. Tampons. My shot wears off the week and I need to be prepared," she said.

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"Do you want me to administer it, you know, later?" I asked.

"Hell no. I want to be with you and if we get pregnant, yay!" she grinned.

"Nothing is going to change how I feel about you and I am thrilled you want me to be your wife and the mother of your babies."

"You don't want me to get condoms?" I questioned barely hiding my smile.

"Nope. I love feeling all of you."

"I love you, Bella Swan," I said grinning like an idiot.

"I love you more, Edward Masen," she replied. I wanted nothing more than to carry her upstairs and make the most tender love to her, but her injuries negated my impulse. She smiled at me and then yawned widely. I chuckled only to get rewarded with a smack to my chest. "I'm wounded here and you're laughing at me?"

"Sorry," I mumbled, trying to quell my laughter.

"Meanie," she said, frowning and crossing her arms over her chest.

"I'm not a meanie," I countered. "Come on, let's take a nap. You're still exhausted and I'm probably going to have to work a double in order to make up my day today."

"I'm so not going to argue." Bella climbed off my lap and we went upstairs. Bella crawled into the bed and I removed the fleece and spooned my body protectively around hers. Her breaths were quiet and even by the time I was in bed and I knew she was asleep. I kissed her temple and held my beautiful *fiancée* in my arms.

**A/N: I hope that this meets with your approval. Bella and Edward are engaged. Having a destination wedding. Charlie is introduced and Renee is a megabitch. Leave me love! Reviews are better than getting a three carat diamond ring from Edward. Okay, well, not really. But they still make me**

**happy. MUAH!**

# The Brunch

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 28: The Brunch

I had to go to work the next day. School had been canceled the day after my car accident and I was so grateful for that. I didn't need to use a sick day. However, I needed to be at work the following day for a staff meeting. I was doing a presentation to the staff about the latest reading strategy our district was using. I was the expert, supposedly. Alice showed up to the house early to style my hair to hide my garish cut on my forehead. She said that I would look cute with bangs. But the first thing she did when she saw me was grabbing my left hand and stared unabashedly at my engagement ring.

"Holy fuck, Bells. This is huge!" she gushed.

"Tell me about it," I chuckled. "I can't believe it's on my finger."

"My brother has exquisite taste," Alice said, winking. "This is more gorgeous than the ring he got for Tanya."

"Not to compare, but what did that look like?" I asked.

"A princess cut diamond in a platinum setting. Her wedding band was a

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princess cut eternity band," Alice answered with a wave of the hand. "It was much smaller than this."

"I was also much poorer, Mary Alice," Edward laughed from the kitchen. "Residents get paid shit."

"But you weren't a typical resident, Edward Anthony," Alice sang. "You made your first millions."

"Doesn't mean that I want to flaunt it," he said, poking his head into the bedroom.

"What do you call this?" Alice asked, waving my hand.

"An investment in our future," he said with a smirk. "I've got to go. I love you."

"I love you, too, baby brother," Alice chirped, holding her hand over her heart.

"Not you. Bella," Edward laughed. I snorted and hid behind my hand.

"You wound me, Masen," Alice said, tossing a hand towel at Edward. "Go save lives or file something."

"Bye, Elf. Love you, Bells."

"Love you, too, Edward," I winked. He waved and darted out of the bedroom. Alice finished giving me my mini-makeover. I got dressed in a pair of corduroy pants and my snow boots. I figured if it was snowy and icky out, I better be prepared. Also, the extra support from the boots was necessary with my gimpiness. On top I wore a black sweater and a simple long necklace with matching earrings. Alice and I went to school; me driving the Volvo and Alice in her Audi. We parked our cars and headed to our respective rooms. I put up my agenda on the board and waited for my classes to come into my room.

As I was doing some grading, Jake popped his head in. "Hey. I just wanted to thank you and Edward for setting up me and Ren. He's fucking awesome," he



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gushed.

"Oh really?" I asked. "Do tell, Black."

"I think I'm in love," Jake said with a dreamy look in his eyes. "He's so sweet and handsome and generous and yeah..."

"Have you...told him...about...?" I said, wrinkling my nose.

"My HIV status? Yeah. He understands. However, we're taking the physical part of our relationship slowly," Jake said. "We're barely past the hugging and chaste kissing stage. But when he does kiss me, my toes curl."

I smiled and tucked my hair behind my ear. "What is that?" Jake asked.

"What's what?" I retorted.

"That shiny, sparkly thing on your left hand. Holy crap, Bella. ARE YOU ENGAGED?" Jake squealed.

"Um, yeah," I said with a sheepish grin.

"Let me see, let me see, let me see," Jake asked, flapping his hands flamboyantly. I put my left hand into his and he immediately dragged it up to his face, examining my ring. "Holy crap. It's like three carats, yeah?"

"I think so. I didn't ask him when he put it on my finger," I said with a wry grin. "I gave him grief about it being a small planet."

"Heck yeah," Jake said, further inspecting my engagement ring. "When did this happen?"

"Um, early yesterday morning," I replied. "I was the administrator for Alice's concert and I got into a car accident. My car was totaled and was taken to the hospital. Edward had a heart attack. As soon as I woke up, he proposed. His charge nurse gave him grief about the proposal because supposedly he did it

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initially while I was unconscious."

"Shut up," Jake laughed. "Really?"

"Yep. Only Edward," I giggled. "Anyhow, we're planning on a destination wedding over spring break."

Jake squealed again and wrapped me in a tight embrace. He squeezed me a little too hard and I grimaced. "You okay, Bells?"

"Yeah...no...sore," I grumbled. "I have a huge bruise across my chest and waist from the seatbelt. I also have this," I said as I held up my new bangs. "I think it's fifteen stitches."

"Holy hell. That sucks, Bells," Jake said, frowning. "Did you get in the accident because of the snow?"

"It didn't help. However, some asshole tapped my rear bumper and then sped up, stopping abruptly in front of me causing me to crash into their car. I hit my head on the steering wheel and then the windshield shattered. Hence the fifteen stitches."

The bell rang and quickly students came pouring into my classroom. Jake rolled his eyes and trudged to his room. He told me that we would discuss my dress at lunch. I groaned inwardly at the prospect. My students were all abuzz about the snow day yesterday. I decided to use that in my lesson. For their journal, I had them write about what they did on their day off, using their most descriptive words they could imagine. They also could put it in the form of a short narrative or poem. Some of the entries were really good. I would seriously have to submit a few of them to the literary magazine for the school.

The rest of the school day went by uneventfully. I was exhausted by the time the staff meeting rolled around. My head was pounding and my eyelids were drooping. I sat through the first part of the meeting and waited to do my presentation. Mrs. Cope called me up and I set up my power point in the presentation station. Alice and Emmett passed out the worksheets that I

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prepared for the staff. I gave my presentation, trying to sound enthusiastic about the whole thing but was failing miserably. After my presentation, I skulked back to my seat and collapsed. I put my head on Emmett's shoulder, groaning.

"You did good, Bells," he chuckled.

"Thanks, Em," I yawned. "So tired. My head is killing me."

"Your head? I'd figure your head would be in pain, since you've been lugging around that rock," he teased, picking up my left hand. "Congratulations, Swan. You did good with him."

"I know, I did," I said, giving Emmett a wink. As Emmett and I spoke, Mrs. Cope released us from our meeting. I was packing up my belongings when Mrs. Cope approached me with a friendly, motherly smile on her face.

"Do you have a moment, Ms. Swan?" she asked.

"Of course," I smiled. She led me into her office and I sat down in one of the cushy chairs in the welcoming room. "What can I do for you?"

"Well, as you are probably aware, I'm retiring at the end of the school year," she said. "Nearly 40 years as an educator, it's time for me to spend with my grandchildren."

"Sounds lovely," I smiled. "I'm jealous."

"You'll get your retirement, Bella. Anyhow, I wanted to discuss your future. I know you recently completed your graduate degree in educational administration. I was wondering if you were considering in throwing your hat into the ring for my position?" Mrs. Cope asked.

"I don't know. I mean, it's unprecedented to have a novice administrator get a job as a principal," I said, blushing slightly.

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"Rare but not unprecedented. Apply, Bella. I've seen some wonderful things with you this year. It's been a struggle, but you are poised, well-spoken, even tempered and would do a hell of a job as a principal. You'll have my full support if you do," Mrs. Cope said with conviction. "I'll write you a glowing letter of recommendation. You would be perfect for this position. The teachers and support staff respect you, as do the students and parents. Do it, Bella."

"I'll think about it," I muttered. "However, I do need to get home. I was in a car accident on Tuesday evening and I'm still recovering."

"Oh dear! Are you alright?" Mrs. Cope asked.

"I'm fine. Just a little banged up and some stitches on my forehead."

"How did you get to work?" she questioned.

"Um, my boyfr...erm, fiancé let me use his car," I said, blushing furiously.

"Fiance?"

"Yeah. It happened the night of my accident," I said, holding up my left hand. Mrs. Cope reached for my hand eagerly and she gasped when she looked at my ring. "It's huge, I know."

"It's exquisite. Your fiancé has fabulous tastes," she said with a sly grin. "I'm so happy for you, Bella. You deserve happiness. So much happiness."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cope," I said with a sincere grin.

"Sherrie. If you're going to take my job, call me Sherrie," she giggled. "You have a good night, Bella. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Thanks and good night, Sherrie," I said as I got up out of the chair. I walked to my classroom and gathered my bag. I slid my heavy winter coat over my shoulders and checked to see if Emmett or Jake were in their rooms. Jake was talking on his cell phone and I gave him a wave. He indicated he'd be one

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minute. I plopped down on the stool near the entrance to his door.

"I'll talk to you later, Ren. Maybe we can double with Bella and Edward," Jake said smiling sweetly. "Have a good shift." He hung up his phone and gave me a smirk. "Gawd! He's so dreamy AND a doctor."

"They are useful. It'll be nice when I have to get these out, I won't have to go to the hospital. Edward can do it at our kitchen table," I giggled. "Can you walk me out?"

"Of course, Ms. Swan," he said gallantly, offering me an arm. I snorted and accepted his arm. We walked out to the car and it was snowing, again. I fucking hate snow. Have I mentioned that? "Are you and Edward available to go out for dinner at some point? We want to thank both of you for setting us up. Ren and me."

"I'll check with Edward and I'll let you know," I said with a smile. "I'm happy you're happy with Ren. He seems like a wonderful man and he makes you giddy."

"He does, doesn't he?" Jake said with an impish grin. "Drive safe Bella. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Good night, Jake. Thanks for walking me out," I smiled. I opened Edward's car and eased into the driver's seat. I turned it on and let the sleek Volvo warm up. As sad as I was about my poor Pilot meeting its demise, this car was a lot of fun to drive. I felt safe in it. Which surprised me. I liked to be higher up off the ground. The Volvo had more of a race car feel to it. I eased the Volvo out of the parking lot and drove home, swinging by the grocery store to pick up a few necessities. I could feel my body become cranky with me and I was PMSing. *I really don't like being a woman. Stupid period.* I needed chocolate and lots of it. So, I picked up some chocolate cake and some other things. I pulled into the garage and saw that Edward was home. I balanced my book bag and other bags as I walked in. "Hello? Edward? Can you help?"

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"Sure, love," he called out. He jogged into the garage and took my bags, kissing my lips. I followed him into the kitchen and put the roasted chicken that I bought on to the counter. "How was your day, Bells?"

"I'm exhausted. Hence the chicken," I said, pointing to the bird. "Too tired to cook. Too tired to think. Too crampy to do anything."

Edward scrunched his nose and pulled me into a hug. "Sorry, beautiful girl. If I could make you feel better, I would," he said, kissing my cheeks.

"Why don't you hit me while I'm down," I grumbled. "First a car accident, fifteen stitches and Aunt Flo? Fucking A!"

"Aunt Flo? Nice," he snickered. "Other than exhausted, how are you?"

"Fine. Mrs. Cope, who is retiring, pretty much told me if I apply for her job, she'd fight for me to take over," I said, leaning back against his chest. "I don't know if I'm ready."

"Obviously if Mrs. Cope thinks you're ready, then you are," he said, turning me in his arms. His soft lips caressed mine and he held me securely against his muscled chest. "You are a wonderful teacher and obviously she sees something in you that indicates that you will be a fantastic administrator. I agree. You are poised, self-assured, and cool headed. Hell, I'd love to have you on my team as an administrator. You're logical. I think that when doctors become department heads, they take a test that removes all logic from their minds. It's so funny."

"I used to say that about administrators," I snickered. "Anyhow, do you mind if I take a nap? I'm dead on my feet."

"Sure, my sexy, beautiful, intelligent fiancée," he said, kissing me after each word. "I love you so much."

"I love you, too, handsome," I said, weaving my hands into his hair. I nibbled on his lips and pulled away. Edward gave me the most adorable pout as I went up to the bedroom to catch a few Zs. I stripped off my clothes and put on a pair

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of yoga pants and a sweatshirt. I curled up under the covers and as soon as my head hit the pillow, I was out.

xx AFS xx

"Beautiful Bella," Edward crooned.

"Ungh," I groaned, pulling the pillow over my head. "Unless you are covered in chocolate laced with pain killers, go away."

"Um, no," he laughed. "How are you feeling?"

"My uterus is kicking my ass," I grumbled, curling in a ball. "My head is pounding and I fucking want chocolate."

"Well, I'll get you chocolate in a little bit, but you need to eat, my love," Edward said, placing a tray on the bed. I looked at him warily and saw the tray filled with chicken, some mashed potatoes and a salad. Next to the plate was a small cup filled with three small pills. I arched a brow. "Three ibuprofen, Bella. I don't think stoned Bella would be welcome at school."

"Probably not," I said, sitting up. I grimaced at the movement and put the tray over my legs. "Thank you for dinner." I dug into the chicken and smiled at the simple meal in front of me. Edward kissed my cheek and he darted out of the bedroom only to return with a slice of chocolate cake. I grinned widely at the cake and scarfed down my dinner. Edward gave out a large belly laugh as I greedily reached for my cake.

"I've never known you to be such a chocoholic," he sniggered.

"Only when I have my little friend," I said, stuffing my face with the chocolatey goodness of the cake. "What some?"

"Oh, no. I wouldn't want to deprive you of your chocolate," he giggled. "Christ, woman."

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"You love me," I said, waving my fork in his face.

"I do. Very much," Edward said with a loving smile. "More than my own life, Bella."

"Speaking of love, Jake and Ren want to go out on a double date with us," I said as I finished my cake. "Do you want to go?"

"Definitely," Edward said as he tucked a hair behind my ear. "When?"

"I don't know. I'll coordinate with Jake and I'll send you a text."

"Sweet," he said, kissing my lips. "HMMMM, chocolate and Bella. Great combination."

"Have you talked to Carlisle or Esme?" I asked.

"Yes. I invited them and Alice and Jasper over for brunch on Sunday. They'll be so pleased to hear about our engagement," Edward said with a crooked smirk. "They already love you."

"I love them, too," I said, moving the tray and curling up against Edward's chest. "I've always loved your family. Esme was like the mother I should have had. Carlisle was my caregiver in all of my gimpiness."

"I can imagine that's a lot," he laughed. I smacked his belly and he hissed. "What? You are clumsy."

"You're supposed to love me. Flaws and all," I wailed.

"And I do. I find your clumsiness to be endearing," Edward said, brushing his fingertips along my cheeks. "I have my own clumsy moments. When I'm tired and dragging, I have a tendency to kiss the floor at times."

"Edward, you are freakishly graceful for a man," I said, arching a brow.



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"You should have seen me when I was trying to relearn how to walk. That was a fucking joke. I felt like I was dragging my feet through mud," Edward said with a theatric eye roll. "You can still see a slight limp when I've been on my feet for more than forty-eight hours."

"Edward, anyone would have a slight limp if they were on their feet for more than forty-eight hours," I said dryly.

"Well, duh," Edward chortled. "However, as an ER doctor, you have to pull insanely long hours. Or do you forget when I worked essentially for five days straight?"

"Oh, I remember. It was right after I moved in," I said, kissing his chest. "Right before Alice's wedding."

"Best decision you ever made," Edward said, cupping my chin. He leaned down and kissed me. His tongue traced my bottom lip and I groaned quietly at his assault on my mouth. "You are the best kisser, ever, baby. Perfectly pouty lips."

"That would be you," I whispered against his mouth. Edward moved the tray of food and pulled me over his waist. I straddled my legs of his hips and we had several moments of a heated make out session. I could tell Edward wanted to do more, but my current physical condition hindered said activities. I pulled away from our embrace. Edward sighed and pouted. "Sorry, baby. I'm too sore from my accident and *you know*."

"I know. Doesn't mean that I don't want you," he grinned seductively.

"About a week, hornball," I said, kissing his cheek.

"Ugh, fine," he said, pulling me into a hug. "Let's watch a movie or something. Try to distract me from the lack of sex we aren't having."

"Insatiable."

## A Fresh Start

"Only for you."

"Hornball."

"Damn straight, woman!"

xx AFS xx

It was Sunday morning and I was running around like a chicken with my head cut off. Carlisle and Esme were coming over to brunch today and we were going to announce our engagement. I know they like me, but would they think that I'm good for Edward? Fuck. I'm so nervous.

I was putting finishing touches on the breakfast casserole and the cinnamon rolls. I turned on the Christmas lights in the living room. Edward and I spent the afternoon yesterday putting up the decorations he had from his parents in his basement. I made sure that the table was set and looked nice for Edward's family. I had sent Edward out on an errand to get some flowers and more coffee. I was panicking in his home while he was gone.

I smoothed my dress and fluffed my hair. I paced the length of the kitchen nervously. *Why the fuck am I so anxious?* I really needed to calm down but I didn't know how. Maybe I should do a shot of something. That should calm my nerves. Right, Edward doesn't have any alcohol. Only wine. I decided to the next best thing besides get lit.

Clean.

I scoured every inch of the kitchen, family room, dining room, and living room. I was nearly finished with the laundry room when Edward came in with a huge bouquet of flowers and the necessary supplies. I looked up at him and he noticed the crazed look in my eyes. "Bella, what's wrong, love?"

"They're going to hate me," I mumbled. "I'm not good enough for you."

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Bella, stop it," Edward said, taking the washcloth out of my hands. "You are perfect for me. Absolutely perfect."

"No, I'm not," I said, crossing my arms over my chest. "I'm tainted."

"Bullshit, Bella. You are not fucking tainted," Edward growled. "What is up with this insecurity?"

"I don't know," I wailed. "I just feel so inferior."

"Why, Bella? Why?" Edward asked, cupping my face with his. "Carlisle and Esme love you. They already think of you as a daughter. They see how much you make me ecstatically happy. How much you complete me. I already have a sneaking suspicion that they know. The meddling little elf may have spilled the beans, but they can't be more thrilled. Bella, I love you. They love you. We honored to be a part of your family. Don't let your brain tell you otherwise."

"I don't know how to not feel this way," I mumbled, staring into Edward's piercing green eyes. "I'm afraid that I'm going to lose you."

"You're not. You're stuck with me until we're old and gray, shitting in our adult diapers," he said, arching a brow. He pulled me into an embrace, crashing his lips against mine. His tongue danced along my lips, begging for entrance. I moaned quietly and opened my mouth. His tongue moved languidly, sliding into my parted lips. His hands moved down to my back, one resting on my ass and the other moving along my spine. Our kiss was cut short by the doorbell. I jumped out of Edward's arms and blushed furiously. Edward chuckled and kissed me sweetly before jogging to get the door. I took a few cleansing breaths before grabbing the flowers and bags that Edward brought in from the garage. I deftly arranged the flowers into a vase and put them on the dining room table. I walked back into the kitchen to be greeted by Carlisle and Esme.

"Hello Bella," Esme said, giving me a warm hug. I smiled and returned her embrace. "You look good. How are your injuries healing?"

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"Fine. The bruising on my torso is a lovely green color and Alice gave me a makeover of bangs to hide my sutures in my forehead," I answered. "I'll be happy when they're out. Quite itchy."

"Probably tomorrow," Edward winked. "Then no more itchy forehead."

"Hi, Bella," Carlisle said. He held out his hand and I eagerly shook it only to be pulled into another embrace. He rubbed my back and gave me a warm grin.

"I'm glad you are healing well. You had us extremely worried. When I got the text from Edward that you were in a car accident, my heart stopped. I'm glad it was not serious."

"No, not serious," I replied. "Would either of you like anything to drink?"

"Some coffee would be delightful," Esme said.

"Me, too," Carlisle said with smirk. I scurried off and grabbed two mugs from the cabinet, filling them with the coffee I had made before they came. I poured myself a cup and eagerly drank the bitter liquid. Edward got himself a glass of water and he plopped down on the stool next to where I was sitting.

"Do you know if Alice and Jasper are on their way?" Edward asked, wrapping his strong arms around my waist. I settled between his legs and inhaled his comforting scent. His chin rested on my shoulder and he kissed my earlobe.

"Alice is experiencing extreme morning sickness this morning," Esme said. "It's questionable at best if they are coming."

"Oh," I mumbled. "Well, I hope you're hungry. I made enough for an army."

"It smells delicious, Bella," Carlisle said.

"Thank you," I blushed.

"So, I bet you're wondering why we invited you," Edward said with an impish grin on his handsome face. *God, he's so fucking gorgeous. And mine.*

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"Well, it's been a long time since we've seen you at brunch at our house, Edward," Esme chastised. "Perhaps this is making up for all that lost time."

"Esme!" Carlisle said, arching a brow. "Ignore her. We know that you've both been busy."

"No, we have been neglectful in spending time with our family," Edward admitted. "We promise to do better. Right, love?"

"Of course," I agreed.

"Anyhow, we have some news that we want to share with you," Edward said, squeezing my waist and kissing my cheek. "The night that Bella had her car accident, I nearly had a heart attack. Okay, let me rephrase. I did have a heart attack. It was my worst nightmare. It was at that moment that I knew that I couldn't be without her." Edward picked up my left hand and he gently kissed my knuckles. "After she woke up, I asked her to marry me and she said yes."

"What?" Esme asked, a huge grin over her elegant face. "Oh, Edward! I'm so happy for you! And for you too, Bella!" She scampered over to me and hugged me fiercely. I grimaced as she hit a few tender spots on my body from my accident, but eagerly accepted her embrace. "Welcome to the family! Have you set a date?"

"Yes, we have. It'll be a destination wedding while I'm on my spring break," I said. "April 4th."

"Where?" Carlisle asked, his eyes sparkling.

"Cancun, Mexico," Edward said. "And I promise no sun poisoning."

"Good. Because that would just suck," Carlisle laughed. "Being on your honeymoon and hooked to IVs."

"Well, the wedding is going to be at a tropical destination that is not the honeymoon. I'm planning on taking Bella someplace special once she's done

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with school," Edward said, twining his fingers with mine. "So, obviously, we need you both to be there."

"Of course," Esme gushed. "We'll help out with anything that you need."

"It's going to be a small affair," I insisted. "Probably you two, Alice, Jasper, the baby, Emmett, Rosalie, my dad, Jake and Ren if they're still together."

"Don't forget Angela and Ben," Edward said. "I also want to invite Rhonda and her husband. We are naming our first born daughter after her."

"That's right," I giggled.

Congratulations were offered all around. Carlisle hugged Edward, saying that he was proud of him. He did the same for me, welcoming me to the family. We spent the rest of the morning, planning and talking about our wedding as we ate our brunch. Esme said that she'd assist with the details. However, I didn't want anything huge. Just me and Edward, on the beach at sunset. No huge blow out. Just us. Esme was not having any of that. She said that it will be understated and elegant. She told me to trust her and she looked so much like Alice when she did. We also were invited to the annual Christmas Ball for Craven Memorial. All of the doctors and their wives were expected to attend. Carlisle personally delivered Edward's invitation.

Sometime in the early afternoon, Carlisle and Esme headed out. Carlisle had an evening shift at the hospital and Esme had a meeting for some committee that she was on. After the dishes were washed and the food put away, I had to do some major grading. My students had turned in their persuasive papers and I was so behind on reading them. Edward lit the fire in the fireplace, pulled my feet up into his lap as he read some medical journal and I did my grading. Some quiet, jazzy holiday music wafted through the house and I felt so happy. Never had I felt this happy or content. Every so often, Edward would kiss my cheek, squeeze my foot or do something to remind me that he was sitting with me. My little touches were not so innocent. My toes grazed his crotch, nibble on his earlobe and gently palm his ass. Edward growled lightly with each touch that I gave him. I just giggled and continued grading. We were still on a sex

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embargo due to my little friend, but it would be soon before we could jump back into the saddle.

I couldn't wait.

I missed feeling Edward inside me.

Making me come.

I really need to stop thinking about this.

"You okay, love?"

"Fine. Perfectly fine," I squeaked. "I'm going to get some water. You want any?"

"Sure, baby," he grinned and pulled me into a sweet kiss. I hopped up and went to the fridge. I got the water bottles and walked back to the couch. Edward was lying down and he opened his arms to me. I nestled with my back against his chest, spooning with him. With his arms safely around me, I felt so loved. So blissful. So protected. "I love you, Bella Masen," he cooed in my ear.

"Hmmm, I love you more, Edward Masen," I smiled as I snuggled against him.

*Life couldn't get any better than this.*

**A/N: A bit of a filler chapter. Esme and Carlisle know about the engagement and are happy. No babies yet. Up next the Christmas Ball and possible angst with Aro...dun dun dun... leave me love! MUAH!**

# The Christmas Ball

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 29: The Christmas Ball

School seemed to move in slow motion. The day before winter break dragged on forever and ever and ever. The kids were downright crazy and the teachers were as equally as ready for the two weeks off. Thank goodness. Edward was working insane hours. He was edgy and cranky. Not that I blamed him. I would be edgy and cranky if I had to work the hours he did. The reasoning behind his schedule was so we could have Christmas and New Year's together. Christmas Eve was going to be spent with Alice, Jasper, Rose and Emmett; Christmas Day was with Edward's family. He also surprised me with tickets to Seattle to visit my dad the day after Christmas. We were staying there through New Year's Day. Edward dropped that bombshell on me when we were waiting for my new car to be spiffed up.

As we sat in a sushi restaurant near the Audi dealership, Edward grinned at me sweetly. "I have a surprise for you, love."

"Oh, like the silver Audi you're buying me," I said wryly.

"Alice told me you loved her car," Edward said with a crooked smirk.



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"It's great for her. But she's pregnant," I reasoned.

"Bella, the beast prevented you from having more serious injuries. While you were unconscious, I made a vow that I was going to buy you a tank. I got you the next best thing," he said, arching a perfect brow.

"I'm surprised you're not getting it reinforced with titanium," I snorted.

"Why do you think we're out to eat? The titanium is being installed as we speak," he laughed. His laughter filled the restaurant but quickly sobered.

"Your safety is of utmost importance to me, Bella. I don't know if you understand what I felt when I saw that police officer on my door step. I thought I lost you. My heart has been through the wringer with losing my parents and then Tanya. I will not survive if I lost you, too. I went to a very dark place while I was driving to Craven. I came back when I saw that you were okay. Well, relatively. I'm sorry if my protectiveness is disconcerting, but I just *can't lose you*. I love you too much." Edward's eyes dropped to the cherry wood table and he fumbled with his fingers. A few tears fell down his cheeks and he hastily wiped them away. "You are my life, Bella. I was just a shell of a man before I met you. You've given me the greatest gift in being with me."

I got up and sat with Edward in his seat. "Edward, I know you have been through extraordinary amounts of pain, both physical and emotional. However, I'm never leaving you. It's going to take a lot more than a psycho ex-husband to take me away from you," I said. I kissed Edward's forehead but pulled away. "I'm afraid of losing you, too. In all of my life, I've never felt what I've felt with you. You are so...so...I can't even describe it. So loving. So compassionate. So intelligent. So gentle. So patient. I've never met a man like you, ever. I'm surprised that you chose to be with me. But, I'm glad and so proud to be with you. I love you. The depth of my feelings for you is far-reaching. I literally ache when I'm not with you. I feel like half of my soul is missing when we're not together."

"I feel the same way, beautiful girl," he said, his eyes glistening. "I just couldn't articulate how I felt. You're so much better at that than me."

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"Being a language arts teacher has its perks," I winked as I laid my head on his shoulder. "So about this 'surprise...'"

"Oh, right. I got us tickets to visit your dad," Edward said as he wrapped his arm around my waist. "I've been working like a dog so I could have the week in between Christmas and New Year's off. We leave on December 26th and return on New Year's Day, late."

"Edward," I began, my lower lip trembling. "This is too much."

"No, it's not. When was the last time you saw your dad?" Edward asked,

"Um..."

"Truthfully, Bells," he said.

"My wedding day," I grumbled. "Mike refused to let me visit my parents while we were married. We spent all the holidays with his family. Whenever I scheduled a visit with either my dad or my mom, he would demand I not go."

"That's horseshit," Edward seethed. "So, we're going. Besides, I need to suck up because I didn't ask for your hand in marriage. I figured he'd enjoy the surprise."

While I wasn't happy with Edward spending his money on me, twice. First the car and then the trip, I was happy about seeing my dad. I did notice that he didn't push for me to see my mom. Hell, as far as I'm concerned, she's dead to me. Stupid skank.

We finished our dinner and drove back to the Audi dealership. We got my pretty silver Audi SUV and drove home. When we got back to the house, Edward had a predatory, lustful look in his eyes. He scooped me up in his arms, his lips caressing mine. In a flash, we were upstairs and our clothes were scattered on the floor. We made love that night, relishing in our recent confessions. It was sweet and powerful. With each thrust and caress, I felt my heart swell. I could never, EVER get my fill of Edward and the feeling was

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quite mutual from him. We fell into a deep slumber after our romp in the bed, curled into each other, not knowing where one ended or the other began.

xx AFS xx

"So, Bella, have you gotten your gown for the Christmas Ball?" Alice asked at lunch on the last day of school before break.

"Um, no?"

"What the hell, Swan? The ball is tomorrow!" she shrieked. "I've had mine since Thanksgiving."

"I was going to wear something from my closet," I mumbled.

"You do know it's black tie," Alice said, arching a brow. "You do NOT have anything that is black tie in your closet. We are shopping today. Rose is coming with."

"Okay," I grumbled. "I'll pick Rose up from Emmett's and we'll meet you at the mall."

"Not the mall. We're going to this boutique, After Twilight Designs," Alice said. "I'll send you a text with the directions. Oh, and Edward said he's paying for your dress. I already have his credit card."

I growled and whipped out my phone. *What's this I hear about you paying for my dress for the Christmas ball? - Bella*

"Did you just text my baby brother?" Alice giggled.

"You bet your ass, I did. He's in so much trouble," I said, staring at my phone, willing it to chirp. "I can pay for my own damn dress."

My phone beeped and it was a response from Edward. *Consider it a Christmas present, my beautiful fiancée. - Edward.*

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*What the hell is the car? - Bella*

*Um.... - Edward*

*EDWARD ANTHONY MASEN! You are in so much trouble! - Bella*

*Isabella Marie Swan please let me do this! \*flutters eyes adorably\* - Edward*

"Ugh! He's relentless," I said, sitting back in my chair.

"Bella, he wants to take care of you," Alice said, giving me a tiny smile. "It's in his nature to care for you. To love you. Don't be so hard on him. You know his history. Would you feel the same way? Do the same thing if it were you?"

"Probably," I grumbled.

*Bella? Please? - Edward*

*Edward, I understand your need to care for me. I do. But, I don't want you to spend your money on me unnecessarily. - Bella*

*I'm not. I want the best for my fiancée. However, if you want to purchase your own dress, I won't stop you. I understand. - Edward*

"Aww, crap. He's laying on a guilt trip and reverse psychology," I said. Alice swiped my phone and snickered. "I hate this. My fiancé is a fucking millionaire and he wants to buy me stuff. I feel like a kept woman."

"But you're not," Alice reasoned. "Edward is the most generous man I've ever known. Let him do this for you. And besides, come April, what's his is yours. You'll be married."

I squeaked and started to open my mouth in response. However, my answer was quashed by the ringing of the bell, indicating the end of lunch. Alice hopped up and danced out of the staff lounge. I watched her walk away with a scowl on my face. I got up and threw out my trash, walking back to my room.

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It was my plan period and I was going to take the time to call my stubborn fiancé. I dialed his number and waited for it to ring.

"Dr. Masen," he answered brusquely.

"Hi, Edward," I said quietly.

"Hi, Bella," he said softly. He sounded sad. "I'm sorry if I made you feel uncomfortable during our conversation via text."

"No, it's me who should apologize," I sighed. "I'm just not used to this. All of this. At all. My family was not poor, but we were not necessarily rich either. Mike never bought me anything except my engagement ring. I don't know how to handle this generosity."

"Bella, I love spending money on you. You are the single most important thing in my life and I intend to spoil you. As often as possible," he said. "If it makes you uncomfortable, I'll back off. However, I won't stop. I'll just use more discretion in the presents I do get you. But I am buying your dress. Alice told me about the store you're going to and it's not cheap."

"Fine," I said. "I am sorry about being such a killjoy. I'm just not used to this."

"I know, beautiful girl. I love you, though. More than my own life," he said quietly.

"I love you, Edward," I replied. "Anyhow, I have to go. I have to call Rose. She's coming with us to the store. I'm picking her up. We're probably going out to dinner afterward."

"That's good. I have to work until ten tonight. These eighteen hour days are kicking my ass," he grumbled. "But tomorrow, we have the evening to ourselves and I've booked room at the hotel where the Christmas Ball is being held. I'm looking forward to spending the night dancing with you and then..." he trailed off suggestively.

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"I love the sound of that," I smiled. "See you tonight, handsome."

"Love you, baby."

"Love you, too." I hung up my phone and dialed Rosalie. I told her that I was going to pick her up after school. She was giddy with anticipation and said she'd be waiting for me. I poked my head into Emmett's room and asked if he was heading out after school. He told me that as soon as that bell rings, his ass was out the door. I told him I'd follow him to his place to pick up Rose.

The rest of the school day went by quickly. I decided to not fight the students lack of enthusiasm about being in school. I grabbed a video that was related to what we were covering and set it up for the students to watch while they worked on a holiday puzzler I created for them. Once the bell rang, I dismissed my class and threw on my coat. Emmett was standing outside my door and we dashed out to the parking lot. I slid into my Audi and followed Emmett to his apartment. About twenty minutes later, I parked next to Emmett's Jeep in front of his apartment. He led me up to his place and inside.

Rose was sitting on the couch, wearing a pair of black yoga pants and cute top. Her blond hair was braided and had soft tendrils framing her face. "Hey, Bells," she chirped. "Come to spring me?"

"Yes ma'am," I smirked. "Emmett is going to help getting you out of here."

"Can you grab Rose's wheelchair from the closet?" Emmett asked. I nodded and got the wheelchair. I opened it and Emmett easily scooped Rose up into his arms. He gently placed her into the chair and we rolled her to the elevators. We rode down and walked to my car.

"Holy shit, Bells. Is this your car?" Rose squealed. "Nice."

"The beast was totaled," I said with a frown. "From my accident."

"I know. Emmett told me. But you got this beauty out of the deal," she said. Emmett lifted her and placed her in the passenger seat before he ran to his car.

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He retrieved a handicap placard from his car and handed it to Rosalie. "Love you, Em. Thank you."

"I love you, too, Rosalie," he said sweetly before kissing her lips. "Call me if you need me, okay?"

"Okay," Rose smiled. I hopped up and started the car. We drove to the boutique that Alice told me to go to. I was not looking forward to this. I enjoyed getting dressed up, but this was a ball. Gowns and shit. Rose prattled on about how bored she was and her experiences with physical therapy. She had her last skin graft surgery about three weeks ago and now she was working on relearning how to walk. She told me that when she was at the hospital, Edward always made it a point to talk to her and check on her progress. He told me the same thing and he kept me apprised of her improvement.

I parked my car in one of the handicapped spots in front of After Twilight Designs and helped Rose into her wheelchair. She could walk, but not for long periods of time. Her feet were still healing. I pushed her into the store and we were greeted by a young woman with long black hair and the most extraordinary violet eyes. "Hi, I'm Gianna. I'll be helping you today. Which one of you is Bella?"

"That's me," I said with a grin.

"Excellent," Gianna said with a grin. "Alice said she was on her way. She just called."

"Okay," I said.

"Come on. I already pulled several gowns for you. Along with some undergarments," Gianna said as she grabbed my hand. She had the same amount of energy that Alice did and it was scary. She shoved me into the dressing room, telling me to try on the red dress first. I slipped off my clothes and put on the strapless bra. I put on the red gown. It was shimmery and pretty, but there was something off about it. The boobs were saggy and there was no time for tailoring. I stepped out of the dressing room and found Alice and Rose

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speaking in hushed tones.

"So, what do you think?" I asked, blushing.

"Eh, next. The chest is too big and the dress gives you huge hips," Alice said, wrinkling her nose.

"Green, black or blue?" I asked.

"Try the green one next," Rose said. "It'll match Edward's eyes."

"Oh, for the love," I grumbled. I hiked up my dress and went back into the dressing room. I removed the red gown and put on the hunter green dress. It had a beaded bodice and was slightly A-lined. It fit better than the red one. I liked it. I walked out and Alice got up, telling me to turn around. I did and she made a disgusting sound.

"Front, great. Back, not so much," Alice said critically.

"The bustle makes it look like you have a huge ass," Rose said.

"I do have a huge ass," I said, looking over my shoulder at them.

"Please, Bells," Alice chided. "Your ass is not huge. Next. Go with the black one."

"Yeah, yeah," I said as I walked into the dressing room. Gianna was in there, removing the red dress. She helped me with removing the green one and into the black gown. The black gown was very simple. It was a sheath style dress and I was not comfortable in it. I felt like all of my imperfections and rolls were on display for all to see. I stuck my head out and shook my head fiercely. "I'm not coming out in this. I feel like a beached whale."

"Fine," Alice said with a dramatic eye roll. "Blue one."



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I huffed and removed the horrendous black dress. I tossed it onto the bench in the room and put on the navy blue dress. It was probably my favorite out of the four that I was forced to try on. It was strapless and had a large rhinestone appliqué on the left side. It looked like a snowflake. It hugged my curves and I felt sexy, alluring and downright gorgeous. I bounced on my toes before I exited the dressing room. "This is it!"

Alice's eyes widened and she nodded enthusiastically. Rose agreed and she clapped her hands excitedly. Alice told me to remove the dress and that we were getting it. Gianna was already in the dressing room and she took the dress from me. She also told me that she picked out underwear and shoes for me. They would be with the dress. I blushed and got dressed. I walked out and Alice was standing at the counter, chatting with Gianna. My dress was hung up in a garment bag. Next to Alice's feet was another bag, presumably with my shoes and underwear. Alice signed the credit slip and gave Gianna a wink. Alice handed me the credit card and we headed out of After Twilight Designs. We walked to a restaurant down the way for some dinner. It was a gab-filled affair. Alice told us about her latest doctor's appointment and she showed us pictures of the baby.

Rose told us about her progress in physical therapy. The doctors informed that she could come back to school for the second semester. However, she did need to use a wheelchair. She was not pleased about that, but staying in Emmett's apartment was driving her bat shit crazy. I didn't blame her. Emmett's apartment was okay, but it was a bachelor pad. Alice asked Rose if they were going to get something together. Rose said yes and they were looking for a townhouse in Alice's neighborhood. Alice then shrieked, telling them to buy her townhouse as they were putting it on the market after the holidays. Rose said she'd let Emmett know and they'd cross that bridge when the time was right.

After dinner and a bottle of wine later, we headed back. Alice went to her townhouse and I drove Rose back to her apartment. Rose texted Emmett and he was waiting outside with a huge grin on his face. He picked up Rose from the car and peppered her face with adoring kisses. I felt like I was intruding while I watched them kiss. They finally pulled apart and Emmett carried her to the

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elevators. I pushed Rose's wheelchair and followed Emmett to his apartment. I left soon after that and drove home.

I pulled the Audi into the garage. Edward had since put the Vanquish into storage. He refused to drive it in the winter time. I took my dress and accessories, carrying them upstairs. I placed them into the walk in closet and settled down to watch some television. I kicked off my shoes, poured myself a glass of white wine and watched some cheesy romantic comedy. I didn't even get through the first half hour before I zonked out on the couch. I woke up to Edward kissing my cheeks, my eyes, and my forehead and finally ending with my lips.

"Hmmm," I said. "I liked that. What a great way to wake up."

"You were so beautiful just lying there," he cooed as he pulled me into his lap. Edward was wearing a set of scrubs and sneakers. His cologne was masked by the antiseptic smell of the hospital, but I wrapped my arms around his neck and inhaled deeply. "I didn't want to wake you. I would have moved you but, we had a rather large patient come in today and I tweaked my lower back. I'm quite sore."

"Edward," I said, looking into his eyes. They had more of a blue green feel to them today. Whatever color he wore, reflected in his eyes. *So perfect*. "Do you want a massage?"

"Nah, I'm good. I'll just soak in the tub tomorrow morning," he said.

"Please? You must be feeling it," I pouted. I got up off his lap and helped him off the couch. Edward's face turned up in a grimace as he moved. "Yep, you are so getting a massage."

"Okay, okay," he grumbled. We walked up the stairs and I told him to take off his clothes. Edward's brows shot up to his hairline and I told him to get his mind out of the gutter. I grabbed some lotion from the bathroom. I instructed Edward to lie on his belly on the bed. I removed my rings and sat astride his ass. Thank goodness he kept on his boxer briefs. I put some lotion on my hands

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and began kneading Edward's knotted muscles. "Holy fuck, that feels good," he said into the pillow.

"And you were fighting this because...?" I teased.

"I have no fucking clue. Keep massaging, please," he begged. I giggled and obliged his request. I focused most of my attention to his lower back. I made sure I was gentle around the scar on his right side. The side where he had his kidney removed. I ran my fingers up and down his spine, noodling and pressing as I went. As I worked, the sound of Edward's soft snores filled the room. I smiled as I had massaged him into slumber. I climbed off his body and went to wash my hands. I changed into my pajamas and walked back out into the master bedroom. Edward was still dead to the world, drooling on the bedspread. I chuckled and tried to get him under the covers. However, he wouldn't move. I went and got an extra blanket from the linen closet and covered him with it. I gently lifted his head and placed his pillow underneath. I curled up next to him. "Love you, Bells," he murmured.

"Love you, too, Edward," I whispered in the darkness. I closed my eyes and fell asleep immediately.

xx AFS xx

I felt something tickle my nose. I swatted it away. A few moments later, the tickling sensation returned.

*What the fuck?*

"Bella? Wake up, lazy bones!"

I cracked open one eye and saw Alice perched on my bed, wearing a grin and holding a peacock feather. "I'm on vacation, Elf. Leave me alone," I said, my voice raspy from sleep.

"Well, that's too damn bad. You have an appointment to get your hair done, body waxed and make up applied. Get your lazy ass up. Edward went to the

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gym to sit in the whirlpool. Shower and be ready to go in fifteen minutes," Alice bossed.

"Argh," I groaned as I covered my face with my pillow. I crawled out of bed and took a cursory shower. I put on some comfortable clothes and walked downstairs. Alice and Edward were talking in the family room. Edward's brow was furrowed and he looked upset. "Everything okay?"

"No. I just got a phone call while I was driving home from the gym," Edward said. "Jessica Stanley died last night after they delivered her baby via c-section."

"Boy or girl?" I asked.

"A baby girl," Edward said, looking into my eyes. "The baby's healthy, but small. She's going to go home with Jessica's parents."

"Shit," I said. "I can't believe she's gone."

"Edward said that she was beaten. Do you think Mike did it?" Alice asked

"Wouldn't put it past him. He has fallen off the edge of reality," I murmured. I shook off the pit of dread I felt in my stomach and gave Alice a tight smile. "Ready to get me beautified?"

"Yep. Let's boogie, Bells," she said as she tried to get up. Her baby bump was getting larger every day and her center of gravity was totally off. "Help!" Edward laughed and assisted her off the couch. "Fuck. I'm six months along and I can't get up. What's it going to be like when I'm about ready to pop?"

"I don't even want to imagine, Ali," Edward said, kissing her forehead. "I'm sorry about being such a downer with the bad news."

"It's horrible that Jessica died, but at least the baby is okay," I said. "Did they name her?"

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"Emma," Edward said. "Emma Grace Stanley. She should be able to go home before Christmas."

"Emma Grace. That's really pretty," Alice said with a wistful grin. Alice smiled at her brother and then looked at the clock behind his head. "Shit, we have to go. Come on, Bells. You drive. I'm getting to the point where I can't reach the pedals because of the baby belly."

"Got it, Elf. Love you, Edward," I called as Alice dragged me to my car.

"Love you, too, Bella," he yelled back.

I got into the car as Alice climbed into the passenger seat. I backed the car out of the garage and drove to Elite Essence Spa. We both got waxed. I got my cooter waxed again, despite my better judgment. Edward did like it the last time I got it done. After the waxing, we both got our hair done. My hair was swept up in an elegant chignon with soft tendrils framing my face. In my hair, the stylist put some rhinestone clips that matched the appliqué on my dress.

Once my hair was done, I got my makeup applied. I was leery of the woman who was applying it. She looked a bit like a clown with all of the eye shadows she had on and her bright pink lips. She worked on my face for a good half hour before declaring me finished. I arched a brow and she handed me a mirror. *That's not me. She's too pretty to be me.* I smiled and thanked her profusely. I headed up to the front of the spa and found Alice sitting up on the benches, reading a magazine. Her hair was curled and she looked so elegant. I paid for my beautification and we headed back to my house. Alice grumbled as she climbed into her car.

"We'll see you at Carlisle and Esme's. Love you, Bells," Alice said with a grimace. "Ugh, baby is making my bladder into a punching bag. Meh. Bye girlie."

Alice drove away from our home and I went inside. I heard the shower going and I poked my head into the bathroom. "I'm home, Edward," I called.

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"I missed you, beautiful," Edward said as he poked his head out of the shower. His hair was covered with shampoo and he was delightfully wet. I could see all of the ripples in his body and I got turned on just looking at him. *Behave, Swan. You're all gussied up. Don't jump your fiancé.* "I love the hair, baby. You look so elegant."

"Thanks," I said, batting my eyelashes. "What time are we leaving?"

"Um, four. We're going to meet at Carlisle and Esme's before the ball for some drinks and appetizers. Will you be ready?"

"All I need to do is change," I said as I gave him a wink. "Will you help me zip up my dress?"

"I'd rather unzip you," he said, suggestively.

"Tonight, Dr. Masen. Tonight," I blushed. I turned on my heel and gathered my dress and underwear. It was hot, to say the least. The panties were navy blue and matched the dress perfectly. They were lacy and cheeky, but not a thong. I pulled them up and then turned to the bra. It was a bustier that matched the panties. I made quick work of the clasps and reached for the beautiful dress. I slid it over my sexy underwear and held it up with my hand. I walked into the bathroom and found Edward putting on his aftershave. "Zip me?" His eyes widened and he gulped. He gestured for me to turn around and I did. His warm hands ran across my shoulders and the spark that I felt whenever he touched me intensified.

"So gorgeous," he murmured as he reached for my zipper. His eyes caught mine in the mirror. He zipped my dress and he wrapped his arms around my waist. "I can't believe you're mine, Bella. I'm so fucking lucky to have you."

"I'm the lucky one," I said, smiling at him.

"Don't move and close your eyes," Edward said. I furrowed my brow and Edward released my waist. "Close them, Swan." I huffed and complied with his request. I heard Edward leave the bathroom and some shuffling in the

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bedroom. A few moments later, I felt Edward's presence in the bathroom. I heard a quiet tinkling sound and I leaned toward it. I then felt something cold and metallic rest on my neck and Edward clasping something behind me.

"Okay, open."

I opened my eyes and around my neck was a large pear shaped diamond pendant. I ran my fingers along the chain and gasped. "Edward, it's beautiful."

"No, you're beautiful," he said, kissing my shoulder. "It was my mother's. My father gave it to her for their first wedding anniversary. Do you like it?"

"I love it, but..."

"It's not too much, Bella," he finished for me. "I didn't spend a dime. It was my mother's and I know she would love for you to have it. It looks like it was made for you." He ran his fingers along the chain and lightly touched the pendant that hung between my collarbones. "Please accept it?"

"How could I not?" I asked as I turned around, flinging my arms around his neck. "Thank you, Edward. I love you."

"I love you so much, Bella," he said, as he kissed my lips sweetly. "I'm going to get dressed and then we're going to go. Can we take your car? It's supposed to snow tonight."

"You just want to drive my new beast," I teased.

"Guilty. But seriously, it is supposed to snow," he said.

"Sure, no big deal," I said, kissing his nose. "I'm going to finish getting ready and then we'll be ready to go, yeah?"

"Yep," he said as he swatted my ass. I yelped and walked out of the bathroom. I pulled out the silver strappy sandals and put them onto my feet. I also found a silver clutch in the bag with my accessories. I put my wallet, some cash, the lipstick that the clown girl gave me to wear and some gum into the clutch. I

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headed downstairs and slid off my key to my car and also placed it in my clutch. Edward sauntered down the stairs and he was wearing a navy blue tuxedo that was cut to his body perfectly. He was adjusting his cufflinks and he had on the most adorable grimace on his face. "Bella! Help!"

"What's wrong, handsome?" I asked.

"I can't get my left cufflink in," he whined, jutting out his lower lip. I rolled my eyes and put in the cufflink. As I adjusted it, I noticed that they were decorated. I ran my finger over the lion or whatever it was. "It's the Cullen Crest. Even though my last name is still Masen, I am classified as a Cullen. All of us have the crest in some form of jewelry. In addition to the cufflinks, I also have a wrist band. Alice has a necklace. Esme wears a bracelet and Carlisle's is on his wedding band. Esme will probably ask how you would want to wear yours tonight."

"Did Tanya have one?" I asked.

"Yeah. She had it as a ring that she wore on her right hand," Edward explained. "Jasper also received one for his wedding present from Carlisle and Esme. He got a wrist band like mine." I nodded and gave him a smile. He gently cupped my chin and kissed my lips. His tongue danced along my mouth and I opened up for him. His hands moved from my face and snaked around my waist as his tongue slid between my parted lips. My own fingers knotted into his hair and I moaned. Before we could get to wrapped up in our embrace, Edward pulled away. "Later, love. I will have you. We'll make the sweetest love ever imaginable." I whimpered and he chuckled. "Then we'll fuck like bunnies." My whimpers turned into full blown groans. "Let's go, beautiful girl."

"But, I want to stay home and fuck like bunnies," I whined.

"Later, love. I promise you, later," he said, caressing my cheek. Edward reached into the closet and held out my dress coat. I put my arms through the sleeves and wrapped the scarf around my neck. Edward put on his own overcoat and grabbed his keys. He wrapped his arm around my waist and helped me into my car. Edward got into the driver's seat and we drove to



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Carlisle and Esme's home. Edward parked the car and assisted me to the doorway. As Edward predicted, it was snowing, but it was perfect.

"It's magical tonight," I whispered.

"I know," Edward said as he kissed my cheek. "I love you, beautiful girl."

"I love you, too."

Edward opened the door and we were greeted with a hug from Esme who was wearing a silver gown. Her caramel hair was up in a twist with some curls around her face. She kissed Edward's cheeks and then rubbed off the lipstick she left on them. Carlisle came in and he was wearing his traditional tuxedo. He gave me a hug and shook Edward's hand. Alice waddled down the stairs and her face was pink. "You okay, Elf?" Edward asked.

"I thought morning sickness was only supposed to last through the first trimester. I'm in my third trimester and I'm still puking. What the fuck?" she griped.

"Alice, I was sick the entire time I was pregnant with you," Esme said.

"Elizabeth was sick the entire time she was pregnant with Edward. It's a Platt thing."

"Argh!" Alice said as she popped in a piece of gum. She was wearing a burgundy dress that accented her baby bump with silver accessories. Jasper was lightly rubbing her back and he was wearing a black tuxedo similar to Edward's.

"Do you want some Reglan?" Carlisle asked.

"No, I'm fine," Alice said. "I think I'll survive for the rest of the evening. Though this sucks."

I leaned back against Edward and hissed, "Is this what I get to look forward to when I get pregnant?"

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"I hope not," he chortled. "If you do, I'll hold your hair back while you puke."

"How romantic," I said dryly. Carlisle had left while we were talking and returned with a tray of champagne glasses. He distributed them. Even to Alice. She later told me that hers was sparkling grape juice. *Could have fooled me...*

"Before we head off to the Craven Memorial Hospital Annual Christmas Ball, I'd like to propose a toast," Carlisle said regally. He raised his glass and smiled. "First, I'd like to toast my lovely wife of thirty-five years, my beloved Esme. You are the most wonderful woman I've ever known and I'm so honored that you stuck with me for as long as you have." Esme blushed and clinked her glass with Carlisle's. They kissed sweetly and Carlisle continued with his toast. "Secondly, I'd like to toast my beautiful daughter, Alice and her new husband, Jasper. It took you both a long time to get to that point, but I'm so happy that you found each other. I can't wait to be a grandfather and I already love my grandson. I love you both." Alice sobbed against Jasper's shoulder and Carlisle laughed. "You won't miss those pregnancy hormones, will you, Alice?"

"Fuck no," she grumbled. "I hate crying over the most random things."

"Language, Mary Alice," Esme chided.

"Sorry, Mom," she blushed.

Carlisle cleared his throat and held up his glass, "Finally, I'd like to toast my son, Edward and his fiancée, Bella. I'm so happy that you are with each other. Seeing the love in your eyes, brings me so much joy. I can't wait until Bella is officially apart of this family. I love you both immensely."

Edward kissed my temple and held me close to his body as he sipped his champagne. I leaned into his strong chest and sipped my own champagne. After Carlisle's toast, we finished our champagne and headed to the hotel where the Christmas Ball was being held. Edward had the car valet parked and he grabbed a small duffel before the car was taken away. I arched a brow. He kissed my lips and strode to the check-in desk. He checked us in and had the bag delivered to the room, along with our coats. We walked to the ballroom

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and found our names. We were sitting with Edward's family. Edward pulled out the chair for me and I settled into it. He sat down next to me and took a sip of water. Dinner was a quiet affair.

There was a silent auction that benefitted the hospital. Alice and I got up during the meal to check out what was for auction. There was one item that caught my eye. It was a package to go to Chicago and see the Chicago Symphony Orchestra perform a premier of a new symphony written by a local composer. This included airfare, hotel and tickets to the symphony. I checked to see what the minimum bid was and I scrawled my name on the sheet with my bid. With all that Edward has done for me, I could do this for him. That is if I won. Alice pinched me, telling me that I would. She also told me that the composer was one Edward's favorites.

After dinner, the dance floor was opened up and Carlisle offered his hand to Esme. They stood up and danced to a slow song, moving gracefully along the dance floor. I swayed to the beat. "Do you want to dance, Bella?" Edward asked as he stood. I nodded. Our fingers twined together and he led me to the center of the dance floor. His arm was secured around my waist and his other hand rested over mine on his heart. We danced to "At Last," by Etta James. Our eyes never broke the gaze with the other. The song ended and I excused myself to go to the bathroom. I touched up my makeup after I took care of business. I looked at my reflection and I barely recognized the woman staring back at me. She was healthy. She was happy. She was in love. I smiled and headed back to the ballroom.

"Well, well, well. If it isn't the little bitch who single handedly ruined my career," a slimy, weasely voice sneered.

"What do you want, Aro?" I seethed.

"Payback," he growled. "You fucked up my life, you bitch. If you had kept your mouth shut, I would still be the CEO of Craven and your little boyfriend would be out. He's such a little pussy."

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I tried to move around Aro, but he cornered me with his hand. "You came onto me, Aro. It was not welcomed or appreciated. If you excuse me," I said, my heart stammering.

"You're not going anywhere until you recant your entire story," he said, getting into my face. His breath smelled of rotten onions and his skin was oily. He ran a finger down my cheek. "Will you do that for me, Isabella?"

"No."

He slammed his fist to the right of my head and I jumped. "You fucking bitch. If you won't recant, perhaps I'll make the most of my situation." Aro grabbed my hand and placed it on his crotch. I tried to pull my hand away from his dick but he held it there. "You like that, Isabella? Is it like Dr. Masen's or is it better?" I bit back vomit and tried to prevent tears from falling down my face. He removed his hand from my wrist and I took the opportunity to squeeze. Hard. He growled and shoved me against the wall. I let out a frightened yelp. "You'll pay for that, Isabella."

I heard the sounds of laughter and a few voices coming our way. Aro looked over his shoulder and he pressed his body against mine. I shoved him back but he refused to move. One of the voices I heard was Edward's. He was talking to Dr. Gerandy. I looked over Aro's shoulder and saw Edward. I reared my knee back and clocked Aro right in the balls. He let out a groan and I got away from him. "Edward!"

"Bella?" he said, his eyes in a panic. I ran into his arms, clawing at his chest. "Bella? What is it? What's wrong?"

"Aro..." I sniffled. Edward pulled away and looked over my head to a cowering Aro in the corner. He was cupping his balls, writhing in pain. "He touched me." Edward's eyes darkened and he gently handed me over to Dr. Gerandy. Edward walked over to Aro and shoved him against the wall.

"You sick fuck," Edward seethed. Dr. Gerandy was on the phone, talking to the police while he comforted me. "How dare you lay a finger on my fiancée?"

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Aro glared at Edward defiantly. "She asked for it, that slut. She's nothing but a two bit whore," he spat. Edward growled and he punched Aro in the face, connecting with his jaw. Aro pushed Edward, but didn't do any damage. Edward was easily six inches taller than Aro and had more than fifty pounds on him. All of it muscle. A few moments later, security arrived and escorted Aro, Edward, Dr. Gerandy and I into a small room. After the looks that Edward was giving Aro, they moved him to another location.

"Bella, are you okay?" Dr. Gerandy asked.

"Physically, I'm fine," I replied from Edward's lap. "Just nauseated at his words and actions. I didn't even know he was going to be here."

"He's not supposed to be," Edward said, as he tightened his hold around my waist. "He was removed from the hospital staff and should not have been allowed on the hotel grounds. Bella, I'm so sorry." Edward's head met with my shoulder and I could feel his tears against my skin. I turned and held him as he cried, letting my own tears spill over onto my cheeks.

A few moments later, a police officer came in and took our statements. Aro was being charged with trespassing and aggravated sexual assault. Edward asked if we needed to go the police station and he said no. But we would need to be subpoenaed once the trial started. The police officer left and said we were free to go back to the ball. I honestly didn't want to, but I knew that Edward had an obligation to do so. Dr. Gerandy said that he would give us a few moments. He gave me a sad, but reassuring smile before he left.

I was still perched on Edward's lap. I gently caressed his soft cheeks. "Edward. Talk to me."

"When can we catch a goddamned break?" he whispered. "If it's not one thing, it's another. First Mike, then Aro, the fire, you accident and now Aro again. I mean, what the fuck?"

"Edward, I'm fine. It was nothing. He just got in my face and called me some nasty names," I reasoned.

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"Bella, if we hadn't shown up, I don't even want to imagine what he would have done to you," he said, tears falling down his cheeks.

"I got away," I whispered. "My knee connected with his very small penis."

Edward's nose scrunched up and he gave me a disapproving look. "What else did he do?"

"He put my hand on his dick, essentially begging for sex," I whispered. Edward tensed beneath me. "I squeezed his dick, hard and he shoved me against the wall. That's when you and Dr. Gerandy showed up."

"Are you hurt, Bella?" Edward asked, his voice deceptively calm.

"No. I'm fine," I said. Edward huffed. "Really. I'm fine. Let's head back to the ball. I know that they are going to announce the winners of the silent auction in..." I picked up his hand and looked at his watch, "Well, now."

"You're worried about the silent auction?" Edward asked in disbelief.

"No. I'm just trying to distract you," I said. "I'll fall apart later."

"Fuck," Edward whispered as he held me on his lap. "Don't say shit like that, Bella. Fall apart now."

"Edward, come on," I said getting up off his lap.

I reached for his hand and we walked back to the ballroom. Edward was quiet and he never left my side. His hand around my waist was squeezing my hip so tightly, it hurt. I gently patted his hand and mouthed 'Ow.' He released my waist with a sheepish look. The emcee announced the winners of the silent auction. Like Alice predicted, I won the item I bid on. I was pleased and I walked up to the woman in charge of the auction. I told her that I didn't have my checkbook on me. She told me that when I sent the check to the address listed on the card I received, I'll get my prize. I smiled and thanked her.

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After the silent auction, Carlisle whisked me away to dance with him. I smiled politely as we danced to Eric Clapton's "The Way You Look Tonight." Edward danced with Esme. I could see the pained expression in Edward's eyes. The song ended and Edward whirled me into his arms, holding me tightly for the next three songs in a row. We pulled apart and headed back to the table. Edward gave his parents a smile. "We're going to head up to our room. I'm getting a bit of a headache."

"Do you have your medication, Edward?" Carlisle asked.

"Yep. In my toiletry bag in the room," Edward said. "Have a good night."

"Love you, Edward," Esme said as she kissed his cheek.

"Love you, too, Esme," he replied.

Esme hugged me, kissing me on the cheek. Carlisle did the same and we left the ballroom. Edward and I rode up the elevator in an uncomfortable silence. I fiddled with my clutch purse and with my engagement ring. We reached the desired floor and Edward twined his fingers with mine. His eyes were downcast and he pulled out the keycard out of his wallet, sliding it into the door. The door unlocked and he ushered me inside. I walked into the room and slipped off my heels. I sat down on the bed drawing my knees to my chest. Edward sat down in a chair opposite of me and he leaned forward on his knees. "This is not how I wanted tonight to end," Edward murmured.

"Me neither," I said. "Are you mad at me, Edward?"

"No, Bella. I'm mad at myself. I feel like I've failed you as a fiancé. As a husband," he whispered. "I can't protect you like I should. I...I...I'm just so fucking pissed at myself."

"Edward, you can't be everywhere at once," I chastised.

"No, I can't, but whenever you're in trouble...Bella, I just can't lose you. I've told you that a million times and tonight I almost lost you again."

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"I'm not going anywhere. Edward, please don't beat yourself up over this. Aro is the sick fucker but he's going to jail. All because you and Dr. Gerandy found me in time. However, can you help me forget? Help me forget what he did?"

"Bella," Edward said in a broken voice.

"Fine, Edward," I snapped as I grabbed the bag that was left on the dresser near the door. I walked into the bathroom and locked it shut. Safely behind the door, I crumbled. My strong façade broke down and I sobbed silently. I fell to the floor and curled up on the hard marble. I laid my cheek against the stone and sobbed, feeling dirty, used and worthless. Edward banged on the door, begging for entrance, but I couldn't move. I was too downtrodden. I hated the way that Aro made me feel. His words rang in my head, that I was a slut and a two bit whore. Maybe that's what I am. I don't know.

I pulled myself off the floor and searched in the duffel bag. I took out a t-shirt and stripped out of my dress. It fell to the floor in a heap and I sat on the edge of the tub, tears continuing to flow down my cheeks. Edward's pounding on the door became more insistent and I could hear his strangled cries. I couldn't bear to look at him. I wasn't worthy of him and he made it abundantly clear that he didn't want to be with me when he refused to help me forget.

Edward burst through the door, breaking the frame and he stared at me with tears in his eyes. I slid down to the floor. I curled up and cowered away from him. He kneeled on the floor, tears streaming down his face. "Bella, please don't shut me out. Baby," he cried.

"You've made your choice, Edward," I said in a cold, detached voice. "It's obvious that you are sickened by me and don't want me, so why carry on this charade."

"Bella, I'm not sickened by you. Why you would think that is beyond me," Edward snarled. "I love you with everything that I am. I'm ready to give you the world."

"Then, why won't you erase what Aro did to me?" I screamed. "I feel so...so..."



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Edward pulled me into his lap and held me as I crumbled. I sobbed against his shoulder as he rocked me gently. His hands moved up and down my back and he crushed me to his chest. "Bella, I want to make love to you. But, not in retaliation of what some sick fuck did to you. I want to make you feel exquisite, because that's what you are. You are special, beautiful, talented, and intelligent and I'm honored that you chose to be with me. You are not any of those things that Aro called you. Please don't think that my not wanting to be with you is an indication of how I feel toward you. I'm just being respectful of how you may feel. Trust me, Bella."

"I was so afraid that you would think that I cheated on you or that I was dirty," I sniffled.

"Bella, I know what I saw and you are not dirty. You are the epitome of purity and innocence," he said, caressing my cheeks. "I love you so much, Bella. So much. Please don't hate me because I'm trying to protect you."

"I can never hate you, Edward. However, your reaction hurt me," I murmured. "I don't want you to be a doctor or logical right now. I want you to be my fiancé and hold me. Make love to me."

"Bella, it's hard for me to turn off the doctor in my head. I know the psychological trauma that rape victims go through. While you were not raped, you were sexually assaulted and something that I do can trigger a reaction in you. I don't want to hurt you. I will hold you when you cry. I will wipe your tears from your cheeks. However, I'm so hesitant to make love to you. Trust me, Bella. Please."

I nodded resignedly against his chest. Edward kissed my forehead and he picked me up easily. "I'm sorry that you had to go through that, beautiful girl. I wish there was a way I could go back in time to prevent it from happening."

"Just hold me, Edward," I whimpered. He laid me down on the bed and stripped out of his tuxedo. He pulled down the bedspread and I nestled against his chest. Edward held me as I cried for most of the night. He whispered reassuring words and promises that Aro will pay for his betrayal and deception.

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He made a vow that he will make love to me when I was ready and that it will be the best I'd ever experienced. We eventually fell asleep around dawn after Edward requested a late checkout. He never let go of me as we slept. He held me as I cried in my sleep and most importantly, he made me forget. Not with sex, but with his love. While I fought against it, I will always be grateful for his gift.

**A/N: Sorry about the angst. Aro needed to be dealt with and now he's gone. For good. Lying prick. Anyhow, I wanted to add a lemon in there, but I couldn't. As Edward said, not in retaliation of what Aro did. I promise you, lemonade will be served up next chappie. Scouts honor and all that shit. Leave me love! Thanks for reading!**

# The Eve

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 30: The Eve

"Bella, I'm going to the grocery store! Where's the list you made?" Edward called up to me.

"On the counter, near the fridge," I yelled back. "Can you also pick up some decaf coffee too?"

"Anything else?"

"I don't think so. I'll text you if I remember anymore."

"I'll be back soon, love. I love you," Edward shouted.

"Oh, before you leave...can you get me gas for my car?" I asked as I sprinted to the kitchen.

Edward dangled my keys with a smirk. "Already on it, Bells," he said with a wink. "Half hour, hour tops. Love you."

"Love you, too," I said, standing on my tip toes kissing his soft lips. Edward

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grabbed my list and darted out the door. It was Christmas Eve and we were hosting our friends and family. I forgot several things and I made a list for Edward to get. He had worked an overnight shift and just got woke up from a brief nap. I felt bad that he wasn't really going to get very much sleep, but he insisted that we host Christmas Eve. We had this beautiful home and it was a shame to not share it with our families and friends. Alice, Jasper, Rose, Emmett, Jake, Ren, Angela and Ben were all coming over tonight for our party. I spent most of the morning scouring the house, making sure that everything was clean and sparkling. Edward was snoozing as I was cleaning. He told me to wake him up after two hours. He'd be fine for our party. I arched a brow in disbelief.

However, the dragging, exhausted man who walked in the door at 7:30 this morning was a different man at 10 after his nap. He had a spring in his step and his eyes had more life.

It had been a few days since the Christmas Ball. Edward was worried about me and my mental well-being. I scheduled an appointment with Michele and we agreed that I should meet with her more often until I get this feeling of inadequacy out of my system. Aro's words really cut me to the quick. I know that they weren't true, but I still absorbed them. I also apologized to Edward for my bitchy outburst. He said that he understood. I didn't negate the fact that I was colossal, mega bitch to him. Edward also apologized for his behavior, even though it was unnecessary. He let his professional mind overwhelm his emotional connection to me. He didn't realize how much I needed him to help me forget what Aro did to me. I explained to him that he was right. If he had attempted to make love to me, I probably wouldn't have been able to handle it.

While Edward was out at the store, I made several dishes that could be stored in the refrigerator. I also diced up some veggies and the cheese and sausage platter. I was nearly done when I looked at the clock. It was almost three and everyone was coming around five. When I asked Edward what he wanted for Christmas Eve, he was pretty flexible. I decided to keep it simple and made lasagna. I also made some homemade Italian gravy and meatballs. I was putting some finishing touches on the shrimp platter when Edward came in with his hands full with several bags.

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"I swear, people are dumb," he grumbled. "Like insanelly stupid. How hard is it to move your god damned cart out of the way when you're looking at something? And then when you need to get to where the cart is and you move it, they go fucking ape shit. Merry fucking Christmas to you, too, asshole."

"Um, are you okay, Edward?"

"Better now," he said, rubbing his hands through his hair. "Some elderly gentleman was blocking the entire aisle with is shopping cart and when I went to move it to get the croutons, he started wailing on me with his cane. He accused me of stealing his Oreos. So, I have no croutons. My shins wouldn't have survived from the attack from the Grinch."

"Sorry, baby," I frowned. "Do you want me to kiss it and make it better?"

"No," he pouted. "I'm just so frustrated with moronic, stupid, idiotic people. People without a fucking heart."

"Why am I guessing this is more than just the Grinch?"

"It is. You know we have the safe haven law here, right?" Edward asked.

"What's that?"

"If you have a baby and you are unable to care for it, you can leave the baby within the first week of life at a hospital, police station or fire station without repercussions," Edward said as he hopped on the counter.

"Oh, I didn't know that," I mused. "So, what does this have to do with the Grinch?"

"Well, last night, we had four babies unceremoniously dumped in the ER," Edward seethed. "Four newborns who will spend their first Christmases in a fucking hospital."

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"I'm so sorry, Edward," I said as I took his hand in mine. "Perhaps tomorrow, before we go to Carlisle and Esme's, we can stop at the hospital and spend some time with the babies. And the other children who are stuck in the hospital for Christmas. We can pick up some inexpensive toys and wrap them up, acting like Santa's elves or something."

"You'd do that?" Edward whispered, his mossy green eyes holding my gaze.

"Of course, Edward. No one should be alone on Christmas," I answered. "If you finish putting together the appetizers, I'll run to Target and Walmart and get some toys, along with wrapping paper."

Edward reached into his pocket and fished out his wallet. He handed me a sleek black credit card. "For you, Bella," he smirked. I furrowed my brow and he pointed to the name. *Bella Swan*. "I added you to my credit card. So, buy the toys using this. I love you, my beautiful girl." He pulled me between his legs and his lips caressed mine as he tangled his fingers into my curled hair. "Are you sure about getting the presents?"

"No problem," I smiled against his mouth. "Put the lasagna in at 4, 350 degrees for two hours. I'll be back before it's supposed to come out. Your clothes are on the bed."

"You take such good care of me," he murmured, holding me tightly to his body with his legs and arms. "Let's just call everyone and tell them to not come. I want to spend time with my beautiful fiancée."

"Nope. We need the elves. AKA our friends to help wrap the presents. How much should I spend?" I asked as I removed myself from his hold.

"Um, five grand?" he suggested. "Toys, books, and anything else you think would work."

"You're talking to a teacher here. Books are number one," I teased as I put on my coat. "I'll be back soon, handsome."

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"Love you, beautiful girl," he said as he crushed me into a passionate embrace. "So fucking lucky to have you."

"Hmmm..." I said against his soft lips. "Love you, baby."

I grabbed my purse and keys. I drove to Target and got a ton of toys, books, coloring books, markers, crayons and some clothes for the kids in the pediatric ward. I also picked up several Santa hats, wrapping paper and bows. I checked out and gulped visibly at the total. I handed over my new credit card and it went through without a problem. I signed the credit slip and drove home as quickly as I could. I breezed through the door and told Edward to get the bags out of my car. He was already in the clothes I laid out for him: a pair of dark, distressed jeans, red button down shirt with a tie I found in the back of his closet that had various Christmas pictures on it. It was kitschy, but cute. I was going to wear a pair of jeans and a horrible Christmas sweater that Mike's mom got me several years ago. I threw on my clothes and put on some makeup. I slipped on a pair of Birkenstock clogs and bounded downstairs.

"Jesus, Bells. Did you buy the entire toy department?" Edward laughed.

"What? I got a ton of stuff for the kids," I said. "I stayed within budget, Dr. Masen."

"Do you have the receipt?" Edward asked. I reached into my purse and handed it to him. "I'll see if I get the hospital to cover some of the cost of this. The rest we can write off as a charitable donation."

"Are you mad?" I squeaked.

"What? Hell no! Sorry. I just turned into hospital administrator there for a second. I'm just thrilled that you were willing to do this for kids you don't even know," he said, his cheeks turning a shade of pink. "You're going to be a great mom."

"Just like you're going to be a great dad," I said, my own blush creeping over my skin.

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"Practice tonight?" Edward asked, waggling his brows.

"Yes!" I shrieked as I bounded into his arms. He picked me up and I wrapped my legs around his waist and he covered my face with kisses. He placed me on the counter and our kisses deepened. Edward's fingers moved under my hideous sweater and danced along my skin, underneath my red lacy bra. *Merry Christmas, Dr. Masen. You'll LOVE your present.*

The doorbell rang and Edward jumped away from me. "If that's Alice, I'm going to kick her pregnant, hormonal ass."

"Be nice, Edward," I chastised.

"She calls every fifteen minutes with a new complaint about her the changes her body is going through," Edward whined. "I do not have the miracle cure for stretch marks. I'm a doctor, not fucking shaman!" The doorbell rang again. Edward growled and he pulled away from me, adjusting his cock. "You are too fucking sexy. I'm all hot and bothered, hard as fucking rock."

"Jeez, swear much, Edward?" I teased.

"Sorry, I turn into a truck driver when I'm cranky," he grumbled. "Can you brew some of that demon drink?"

"Coffee?"

"Yeah, that shit," he said, kissing my lips. "Love your lips." He kissed my mouth three times quickly and he jogged to the door. I brewed some coffee for his crankiness and put out the appetizers. Edward ushered Angela, Ben, Jake and Ren into the family room. Angela ran over to me and gives me a warm hug. She then thrust a bottle of white wine into my hands. Ben kissed my cheek and he placed the ornately wrapped presents for our gift exchange onto the counter. Jake and Ren give Edward a hug. They did the same for me and again, I'm handed a bottle of expensive wine. A few moments later the doorbell rang again and I opened it. Alice, Jasper, Rose and Emmett were standing on the doorstep. I stood aside and they came in. Emmett picked up Rose, much to her



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chagrin. She mumbled about when she can actually walk again she's going to kick his ass.

Edward was lighting some candles around the house and the fireplace when I showed the rest of the group into the house. He kissed his sister's cheek and offered hugs all around. Edward only hesitated when he got to Emmett, who gave him a menacing glare. Rose smacked him from her perch on the couch and Emmett pulled Edward into a bear hug. I heard the bones crack in Edward's back from the kitchen. I grimaced and looked at Edward. He gave Emmett a smack saying not to break his old body. I tossed in some mini-quiches into the convection oven above the stove and checked on the lasagna.

I carried out the appetizers and served up drinks. Edward told me to sit, that I was doing too much. I rolled my eyes and plopped down next to Jake. Edward took over as host and bartender. We talked and laughed. Edward took out the lasagna when it rang, placing it on the stove for it to settle. He made the salad and began dishing out the gravy as I talked with my friends. *Mike would have never done that. You would have been in the kitchen, slaving away, while Mike was being Mike.*

"Bella?" Edward called. "Can you help with the lasagna?"

I nodded and got up from the couch. I saw that Edward got most of the dinner ready and on the dining room table. I cut the lasagna and walked it to the dining room. I began dishing out the lasagna into everyone's plates. Before everyone came in, Edward wrapped his arms around my waist. "I love you, Bella," he whispered. He gently cupped my cheek and kissed my lips. "Thank you for making such a delicious meal. You didn't have to and I appreciate it."

I felt tears prick behind my eyes. A few stray drops fell down my cheeks and I nuzzled Edward's chest, wrapping my arms around his waist. "Bella? What's wrong, love?"

"Thank you," I said meekly.

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"For what?"

"For thanking me. I know I didn't have to do this, but I wanted to. However, never once did I get a word of appreciation from..." I trailed off.

"Bells, I appreciate everything you do for me. For us. For everybody. You have such an enormous heart. *He's* an asshole for not recognizing it and appreciating what he had. Now, I'm reaping the benefits," Edward smirked as he gently wiped my tears away. "His loss is my gain. Though he is a murderous, hateful leech. If I see him, I will be hard pressed to not hurt his disdainful ass. Two lives, innocent lives were lost at his hands. Almost a third with baby Emma. If he so much as breathes on you, Bella, he is a goner." Edward's green eyes flashed with anger and then with passion. "He won't take my love away from me."

"No, he won't," I whispered. "Let's get this dinner served and then wrap some presents for the kiddos."

"Dinner's ready," Edward yelled.

I covered my ears and smacked Edward in the chest. "Jesus! Can you be any louder?"

He laughed and kissed my nose. He went into the kitchen, grabbing the wine I'd chosen for the dinner. Our friends and family gathered in the dining room. We didn't have assigned seats. Everyone sat where they wanted. We put Alice and Rose on the ends of the table though. Alice because she needed to pee all the time and Rose because of her wheelchair. They both protested saying that Edward or I should sit there, as it was our house. We both rolled our eyes and retorted 'Whatever!'

"Okay, folks! In the McCarty household, we propose a toast on Christmas Eve," Emmett boomed. "Well, I'm assuming it happens in most households, but still...To our friends, family, loved ones and everyone in between, I wish you all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year. To our gracious hosts, thank you for opening your home to us and feeding us this delicious looking lasagna."

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Bella, if Edward doesn't marry you, I'm going to."

"Emmett!" Rose and Edward snapped. Edward glared and Rose smacked him upside the head.

"Rose, I love you but you can't cook," Emmett guffawed.

"But I can bake, you ass," she grumbled. "If you want my better than sex cake again, you better behave yourself, McCarty."

"Emmett, I won't marry you because you act too much like a sibling and not like...yeah..." I replied with a shudder. "Ew."

"Good," Rose and Edward retorted. Edward leaned over and kissed me. Rose, again, smacked Emmett. He groaned and rubbed his head.

"Well, let's not let the food get cold. Dig in!" I said with a smile. We all tucked into our food and it was silent around the table, save for the groans of happiness. Mostly from the guys. Emmett inhaled his slice of lasagna and eagerly asked for another. Thank goodness I cooked two full pans. Ren and Jake also ate several slices. They proclaimed to be 'growing boys.' Angela teased them that they would be growing in the middle if they kept up with all of the food. Jake tossed his napkin at Angela and she stuck her tongue out at him. Even Edward, who was usually pretty health conscious, had several servings. He sat back in his chair and rubbed his belly, like a pregnant woman.

"So full," he groaned. "But so good."

"Need to undo your jeans, Masen," I teased, poking him in the belly.

"Don't do that unless you want me to puke on you," he teased. "You are an amazing cook. I'm so going to be huge."

"Sure, Dr. Six-Pack," I snickered.

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"Every pound that Alice put on in her pregnancy, so have I," Jasper proclaimed proudly.

"And you still look like a string bean," Rose sighed. "Men suck. We get the huge baby belly and men..."

"Have to deal with prostate checks, back hair, male patterned baldness..." Edward reasoned. "Trust me, I rather enjoy women. You are all so soft and I don't know about the other guys, but seeing a pregnant woman does something to me. Rawr."

I looked at Edward like he had a third eyeball. Alice snickered and the rest of the table broke into laughter.

"Edward, that's just weird," Emmett said.

"No, it's not," Jasper said. "Alice is the most gorgeous now. And she's pregnant with our little peanut."

Edward blushed and he rested his hand lovingly on my belly. You can't really call it flat, but it was flatter than Alice's. He kissed my temple and pulled my chair closer to his. "Love you, beautiful girl," he whispered against my hair. I leaned up and captured Edward's soft lips with mine.

"Argh! Get a fucking room," Rose bellowed. I flipped her off while Edward grumbled. We broke apart and I could see Alice bouncing in her seat, Jasper trying to calm her and the rest of our family and friends making various faces of disgust, awe and everything in between.

"Speaking of babies and children," I began.

"You're pregnant," Alice chirped.

"No, Alice. I'm not pregnant," I sighed, rolling my eyes.

"Yet. We're not pregnant yet," Edward clarified.

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"Jeez! You all have babies on the brain! Anyhow, Edward told me about some unfortunate infants that were dropped off at the ER last night. I got a bunch of toys and books to bring to Craven tomorrow. They need to be wrapped and that's where you all come in," I said. "Want to be Santa's Elves?"

"Hells yeah!" Emmett boomed. "When are we going?"

"Let's meet at Craven at ten in the morning," Edward said. "Check in the main entrance. I'll make arrangements for everyone."

"Wear something Christmas-y," I said. "I got hats. Santa hats."

"Cute," Alice said with a squeal. "Who's going to be Santa, the man himself?"

"Um," I stuttered. "Never really went that far. I just got the presents."

"Edward, you'd look good in a Santa suit," Alice chirped.

"Too skinny, Elf. I am definitely not wearing a pillow on my belly," Edward laughed. "Also, me with facial hair? Not a pretty sight."

"It's fake facial hair, Edward," Alice groaned.

"No, Alice. Emmett would be a kick ass Santa," Edward said with a snort.

"He's got the twinkling eyes and everything."

"Are you just flirting with me, Edward?" Emmett asked as he puckered his lips toward Edward. "I know I'm fifty shades of hot. Come on, kiss me. You know you want to."

"Emmett, I think I just threw up in my mouth a little bit," Edward said, his pale skin blanching.

"Come here, you big lug," Emmett boomed as he grabbed Edward's face, pressing a kiss to his mouth. Edward's eyes grew large and he pushed Emmett away. Jake and Ren broke into laughter. Edward burrowed his nose into my

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hair, whimpering quietly. "Not bad, Edwardo. Soft, supple. Almost like a woman's lips."

"Emmett, I can't believe you did that. To my boss!" Ren snorted.

"You speak one word of this and you're midnights for a month," Edward said.

"Got it, Boss man," Ren said with a salute. "Anyhow, I'll be Santa. I did it when I had my peds rotation in medical school. I loved the kiddos. So cute. Do we have the costume?"

"I do!" Alice said. "I had to get it for a show and it's stored at the townhouse. I'll bring it tomorrow."

"Okay," I said. "Guys, can you handle dish detail while we set up the 'gift station?'"

"We're on it, Bells," Jasper said as he stood up with an armful of dishes. The guys gathered the dishes and with the help of Angela and Alice, I divided up the presents. The more regular presents would be wrapped by the guys and we'd handle the oddly shaped ones. I saw the presents that were wrapped under our tree. Edward could stitch someone up with his eyes closed, but wrapping presents obviously was not his strong suit. He told me that he wanted to make an effort. He usually just got gift bags, but he needed to try. I told him to stick with gift bags.

We started wrapping while the dishes were being washed. After about forty-five minutes, the guys came and started working on their piles. I relegated Edward to the piano. He frowned and I pointed to our Christmas tree and the presents he had wrapped. He pulled me into an embrace and blew a raspberry into my cheek. I shrieked and laughed. After his little 'tantrum,' Edward plopped down at the piano. He played some jazzy arrangements of Christmas carols. He and Alice sang while we worked. We managed to wrap all of the presents and loaded them into my car before we did our own gift exchange.

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Each person was given another member of our group and we had to buy a gift for them that was no more than \$100. I got Jasper. With Alice's help, I managed to get Jasper some funny presents. I worked off his drunken antics for his gift. I got him a large bottle of Jack Daniels, his poison of choice. I also got him some really bad 'toilet' books and a jumbo package of adult diapers. I also found cologne that was called 'Eau de Fart,' and I snickered as I wrapped that one.

We all sat around in the living room. I sat on the floor, leaning against Edward's legs by the piano. He idly played with my hair as the gifts were distributed. "So, who goes first?" Jake asked.

"The person who's birthday is closest to Christmas," Alice answered.

"Oh, that must be me!" Emmett said. "December 21st." Jake reached behind and handed Emmett his present. "From you, Black?"

"Yep. Enjoy it," Jake smiled. Emmett tore into his present and he got tickets to his favorite college basketball team on New Year's Day. He bounced in his chair and gave Jake a high five. The next person who got to open a present was Rose. Jasper handed her his present and he got her a day of beauty at Elite Essence Spa. It included a haircut, dye, make up and facial. Rose blushed and thanked him. Ren was next. Alice got him a gift card to the local mall. When Jasper was up, I handed him his present. He eyed me warily. I grinned like the Cheshire cat. Jasper opened his presents. He thanked me for the Jack Daniels. He then blushed when he opened the books. He wanted to die when he got to the cologne and the diapers. Edward nearly fell off the piano bench when he saw the final present. Jasper threw the diapers at Edward and growled.

Edward got his present next and it was from Rosalie. She had no idea what to get him. Hell, I had no idea what to get him. His present caused me a great amount of grief, but I hoped he would like it. I suggested to Rose that Edward loved music. She ended up getting him guitar lessons. Edward arched a brow and said he didn't have a guitar. *Yet*. Rose smiled and said all would be revealed on Christmas day.

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I was the last person to open their present. Surprise, surprise, Edward got my name. He handed me a small gift bag with a smirk. I opened up the bag and inside was a box. Inside was a bracelet with several charms. Edward slid onto the floor and put it on my wrist. He explained what each of the charms meant. "The bracelet has five charms, but we're going to add to it. The apple is obviously because you're a teacher. The stethoscope is for me. The drama faces are for your drama directing. The blue stone is a sapphire, for your birthstone. The other stone is an Alexandrite, which is my birthstone."

"I thought June had the pearl," I whispered.

"It does, but Alexandrite is so much more interesting," Edward said, tucking a piece of hair behind my ear.

"This is more than \$100," I chastised.

"Technically yes, but I'm making up for lost time," Edward said as he kissed my lips, pulling me into his lap. "Do you like it?"

"I love it, Edward," I said, lightly rubbing my fingers over the charms. I leaned back and whispered in his ear, "I hope the next charm is a pacifier."

"We'll work on that tonight," he purred in my ear. "To have our child be conceived on Christmas eve would be perfect."

"Hey, Jazz. I'm tired. We have to get up early because of our excursion to the hospital," Alice said. "Let's go home and have some wild monkey sex."

"Alice!" Edward said, breaking the spell that was cast between us.

"What? I'm horny," she said with a shrug.

"But we all don't need to know about it," Rose said, tossing a piece of wrapping paper at her direction. "I'm horny too, but yeah..."

"Rose, I've offered," Emmett whined.



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"I know. I just feel so unappealing with this," she snorted, pointing to her legs.

"Rose, you can be intimate with Emmett. Just be cognizant of your injuries," Edward explained gently. "No 'wild monkey sex,' as my darling sister just so aptly described it."

"Anyhoo..." Alice sang. "We're off. Help me up, Jasper." Jasper reached for Alice's hands and he heaved her off the couch. Edward got up and grabbed their coats. Angela and Ben left with them.

Emmett, Rose, Jake and Ren hung out for a little while longer. They nibbled on some cookies that Rose had brought. We had moved from the living room to the family room. Edward was laying on the floor with his head in my lap. His eyes were closed and he was snoring softly.

"Hey Bella?" Rose asked.

"What's up, Rose?" I replied, running my fingers through Edward soft hair.

"I'm happy for you," she said simply. "You and Edward are so happy. So much in love."

"Just like you and Emmett," I smiled.

"Damn right, Rosie," Emmett barked as he pulled Rose into his lap. "We're happy and in love."

"Well, you're happy. I'm working on happy," Rose sighed. "I'll be happy when I can walk like a normal human being again."

"Soon, Rosie. You'll be able to walk soon. Your PT said that you're making remarkable progress," Emmett said as he caressed her cheek.

"Rose, your legs sustained significant damage. It's going to take time to heal. I know that it's not what you want to hear, but it's the truth," Ren said as he laced his fingers with Jake's.

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"I'm just worried about my scars and nerve function. I can't feel the bottom of my left foot at all. It's so weird to walk," Rose said.

"Scars are a sad side effect of burns. As is nerve damage. You just need to be extra cautious. I'm certain you will be fine," Ren sympathized. "We're going to get going. This one is drooling on my shoulder." Ren bopped his shoulder and Jake's eyes went wide.

"I'm awake," he groaned.

"Sure, love," Ren laughed. "Let's get back to your apartment, sleepy boy."

"You're driving," Jake mumbled. "See you guys tomorrow at Craven."

"Bye, Jake. Bye, Ren. I'd get up, but I have my own sleepy boy on my lap," I said.

They both leaned down and kissed my cheek before they left. Emmett and Rose decided to leave after Ren and Jake. I slipped out from Edward's head and placed a pillow under his face. He moaned and wrapped his arms around the pillow as I let Emmett and Rose out of the house. I went around the house and turned off the Christmas lights. Edward was curled around the pillow in front of the fireplace. He looked so peaceful, so tranquil. I knelt down in front of Edward, brushing a wayward hair off his forehead. His eyes fluttered open and he looked around the room. "Where'd everybody go?"

"They went home. As soon as you put your head in my lap, you were down for the count," I snickered. "You should have slept some more, handsome."

"I'm sorry," he said, pouting his lip out. "I didn't mean to fall asleep."

"I know. You needed it. Your bags had bags," I joked as I traced my finger under his eyes.

"Well, I'm awake now," he said, licking his lips. He pulled me over his body, straddling my legs around his hips. He reached up my back and pulled me

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down to his mouth and kissed my lips. I moaned and anchored my hands around his head. His fingertips danced along my spine as they moved down to the hem of my horrendous sweater. "Where did you get this?"

"Mike's mom. She thought she was being fashionable," I giggled. "I only wear it on Christmas, obviously. I match your tie."

"Yes, I see that. Where did you find my tie?"

"Hanging in the back of your closet," I mumbled as I kissed down his jaw, nibbling along the soft skin behind his ear. He moaned and his hands moved to my ass. "I have no idea why you have it, but it works."

"I think it was from high school or college. I don't remember. It was a gag gift," Edward said as he reached for the hem of my sweater. "This needs to go." He pulled my sweater up off my body and revealed my red lacy bra that left little to the imagination. "Much better," he growled. He sat up and sucked on my neck, kissing down my torso. He latched my legs around his waist and he got up, with me holding on to him. I squeaked as I wrapped my arms tightly around his neck. "I won't drop you. I promise," he said as he carried me to the couch, plopping down gracefully. I undid his tie, flinging it over my shoulder. The fire from the fireplace was dancing across the walls and it cast an amber glow to the family room. The rest of the lights were off, except for the small Christmas tree we had in the corner of the room.

"I love you, Edward," I whispered.

"I love you more, my Bella," Edward smiled. As he spoke, the grandfather clock in the foyer chimed and Edward's face broke into a wider grin. "It's Christmas. Our first Christmas."

"Make love to me on Christmas," I said, tracing his lower lip with my thumb.

"Gladly, my beautiful girl," he muttered as he caressed his lips with mine. As his mouth moved with mine, I deftly unbuttoned his shirt, revealing his toned, muscular chest underneath. He shrugged out of the shirt and it was tossed

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carelessly onto the floor. My fingers ran over his abdomen. I could feel the muscles ripple underneath his smooth skin. My thumbs reached his nipples and I grazed them over his chest. He groaned and his hands tangled into my hair. "What you do to me," he moaned.

"Doesn't hold a candle to what you do to me," I purred. "I'm so wet for you, Edward." I stood up from his lap and reached for the button of my jeans. I slowly slid them down my legs and kicked them away. I was in front of Edward in nothing but a pair of red thong panties and a matching red bra. I ran my hands over my belly, gliding them down to my lace covered core. "So wet."

"Fuck." Edward leaned forward and he pulled me closer to his body. I was still standing in between his legs. His tongue and mouth moved along my torso. My hands took purchase in his soft hair and I threw my head back. His own fingers danced along my legs. His hands moved to my inner thighs and I could feel myself grow more aroused. His thumb lightly brushed over my clit. I groaned as he played with me over my thong. "Christ, baby. You're soaked," he mumbled against my skin, looking up at me. I arched a brow and slipped my hand into my panties to feel for myself. I had never been this brazen before and it felt liberating to show my sexuality with another person. Edward looked at my hand and his breath hitched. "Holy hell," he moaned. He reached behind and pulled down a throw blanket. He eased me onto the blanket and he pulled down my panties. "Show me. Show me what makes you come."

"You," I answered simply. I spread my legs and circled my finger around my clit. "You make me come. You turn me on. You make this wet," I whispered as I took my soaked finger and traced his lips with it. He took the finger between his teeth and sucked on it. I took it away and brought it back to my clit. "Does this turn you on? Seeing me play with myself?"

"Fuck, yes," Edward said as he divested himself of his jeans and boxers. His cock was standing at attention. I licked my lips and grinned seductively. Edward caught on quickly and he gently pumped his arousal. "Are you turned on as you see me play with my dick, Bella?"

"Oh, yeah. But I'd rather that dick be in me," I cooed. "So big. So perfect."

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"Goddamn it," he breathed. He reached for me and I straddled his waist. "I need you, Bella." His evergreen eyes beseeching me and I smirked. I coated my hand with my own arousal and stroked his hardened length. "Please? Let me love you."

*How can I refuse that?*

I kissed his lips, my tongue plunging into his mouth as I lowered myself onto his cock. Edward groaned as he felt my warmth envelope his body. I rocked against his body and he slid in and out of my core. "You feel amazing, Bella," he whispered against my mouth. "You were made for me."

"Only you, Edward," I murmured back huskily. Our mouths moved in tandem. Edward's hands were gently caressing my breasts, toying with the pebbled nipples under the red bra. My fingers were fisted in his hair, tugging on the coppery strands. I removed my mouth from his and nipped at his earlobe. Edward groans grew louder and his hands moved to my hips, guiding me faster over his cock. "I love you, Edward."

"I adore you, Bella," he said, looking into my eyes. "For the rest of my days, I'll adore you. Love you. Cherish you."

I bit back tears and I stared into his jade depths. I never doubted his words. His actions were loving and I felt so complete with him. I never wanted to be apart from him. I could feel my body react and I was close. His confession, his words of love and adoration brought me closer to the brink. "Edward," I moaned. My eyes fluttered shut and he pressed a kiss to my neck, tracing his lips down to my collarbone.

"I promise you, baby, that I will always show you how special you are," Edward murmured. "You are my life. My love. My fiancée. Soon to be my wife. The mother of my children. I love you. All of you."

"Oh, god," I moaned as my muscles clamped down around Edward's cock. His sweet, perfect words caused me to come and come hard. My eyes squeezed shut and I wrapped my arms tightly around Edward's neck, breathing down his

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throat in erratic pants. My release triggered his and his lips crashed against mine as he spilled into me. His lips softened and his kisses were soft and tender. He pulled away, gently touching my cheeks and running his finger tips down my body. "I love you, Edward. And you do have a way with words," I teased. "I have never climaxed from words before and I thoroughly enjoyed it."

"I enjoyed telling them to you," he smirked as he kissed my lips chastely. Then he yawned.

"Okay, Dr. Masen. We have some sick kids to see today for Christmas. You're tired," I said.

"You drained me, woman. But I just can't get enough of you," he smiled.

"This," he said as he wiggled his hips, "is my favorite spot in the whole world to be. I never want to leave."

"I think our bosses might have an issue with us being connected intimately," I smiled.

"Minor technicalities," he scoffed. "Doesn't mean that I don't have to like it."

"Bed, Edward. Let's go to bed and perhaps we can have round two?"

"Really?"

"Yes, really," I said dryly. I got up from his lap, causing his cock to slip out of my folds. He frowned and I picked up our clothes. "Come on, Dr. McFuckme. Live up to your name." Edward hopped up from the couch, throwing me over his shoulder and we made it up to our bedroom in record time. Suffice it to say, we round two, three and four.

*My poor cooter...*

**A/N: I promised lemonade and I gave you lemonade. Was it sweet enough for you? Leave me love!**

# The Hospital at Christmas

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## *Chapter 31: The Hospital at Christmas*

I was laying in our bed, completely blissed out. I felt Edward's warm body behind me and he was holding me tightly. I was on the cusp of being awake and asleep. As I lay there, I heard Edward's voice sing lightly behind me. It was slightly rough, but perfect. As he sang, I nestled back into his chest, relishing the moment.

*Winter snow is falling down  
Children laughing all around  
Lights are turning on  
like a fairy tale come true.*

*Sitting by the fire we made  
You're the answer when I prayed  
I would find someone  
and baby I found you.*

*All I want is to hold you forever  
All I need is you more every day  
You saved my heart*

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*from being broken apart  
You gave your love away  
and I'm thankful every day  
for the gift.*

*Watching as you softly sleep  
What I'd give if I could keep  
Just this moment  
if only time stood still.*

*But the colors fade away  
And the years will make us grey  
But baby in my eyes  
You'll still be beautiful.*

*All I want is to hold you forever  
All I need is you more every day  
You saved my heart  
from being broken apart  
You gave your love away  
And I'm thankful every day  
for the gift.*

*All I want is to hold you forever  
All I need is you more every day  
You saved my heart  
from being broken apart  
You gave your love away  
I can't find the words to say  
That I'm thankful every day  
for the gift.*

"Hmmm," I murmured. "You have a voice like an angel."

"Thank you," he blushed. I turned and looked at him. His hair was gloriously messy, his jade eyes were bright and loving and he was lightly tracing patterns



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on my naked back. "You are such a gift, my beautiful girl."

"Did you write it?" I whispered.

"No. Jim Brickman did. However, it has always been a favorite Christmas song for awhile," Edward replied. "I've always wanted to share it with someone who I adored. Now, I've shared it with you."

I reached up and gently kissed his swollen lips. His stubble rubbed against my skin and I pulled him closer to me. I opened my legs and his erection pressed against my thigh. I smiled as I twisted my fingers into his hair. As sore as I was, I wanted to feel him. I gently guided him so he was hovering over me. Edward pulled away, giving me a wary look. I reached up and kissed his mouth fully, letting him know my intentions. Edward reached between us and felt between my legs. He groaned at the arousal I had. His voice, his sexy, velvety voice did that to me. He removed his fingers and he slid into my body. I hissed and I clamped my legs around him. "Bella," he whispered. "Are you okay?"

"Just a little sore, but I'm fine," I said, looking up at his eyes. "I need you. I need to feel you. Please? Just go slowly." Edward nodded and with reverence, he moved in and out of my body. With soft lips and tender caresses, he kissed my lips. He touched my breasts and quietly brought me to my climax. It snuck up on me and I didn't realize it was happening until my body started shuddering in ecstasy. My breaths came out in erratic pants and I had no control over my body as I arched into his, begging him to plunge deeper into my core. Edward's eyes widened as he watched me climax. I could feel his own body respond to mine and his cock hit inside me. His lips were everywhere and I wanted more. I wanted him. Only him. Edward's eyes captured mine and as he moved within me, I only saw love. With him I felt complete. Like I was home. He was my home. My everything. "I love you, Edward. Let go. I need to feel you come," I rasped. "Please, baby?"

"Baby," he murmured and he crashed his lips against mine. "I love you, Bella." He increased his speed and I could feel him get harder in my body. My second release was close and I pushed on his shoulder. Edward took the hint and rolled us so I was riding his cock. I rotated my hips and Edward gently caressed my

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clit with his thumb. "You are so beautiful, Bella. So exquisite. Perfect." His hips bucked in sync with my rolling of my body. It plunged him deeper into my heat. I leaned back, bracing my hands on his thighs. My breasts were bouncing, along with the rest of my body. I screwed my eyes shut and felt his dick get harder inside and twitch slightly. "Bella...I'm...fuck...Don't stop, baby," he yelled. "So good. Fuck, it feels fucking amazing."

I moved more aggressively over him and I felt my muscles clench and clamp down on his cock. I let out a scream and Edward inhaled sharply. Soon after my second climax, he spilled into my body, latching his lips to mine as he sat up. We rode out our climaxes together and fell onto the bed in a heap of arms, legs and sheets. I laid my head against his chest, listening to his erratically beating heart. "That was, um...wow," he mumbled intelligently. "Intense."

"You can say that again," I chuckled, kissing his neck.

"Intense, perfect, hot, loving, and everything in between," he said, pulling my face to meet his. "Unfortunately, our post coital bliss has to end. We have to be at Craven in an hour."

"Drat," I grumbled, putting my head against the crook of his neck.

"It was your idea, Ms. Swan," he sniggered.

"I know, doesn't mean I don't want to stay. Right here," I sighed, wiggling my hips and feeling our connected bodies.

"Bella," Edward warned. "I'm not a seventeen year old boy with the stamina of a mad man. I need some time to recuperate. Last night was very pleasurable, as was this morning. But Edward Junior is tired."

"Oh, poo," I sighed as I climbed off his body. "Okay, my cooter is not happy with me either."

"Perhaps tonight, love," Edward said as he rolled onto his side.

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"Or a week from now," I said with a grimace. "Let's shower. Together. Conserve some water."

"Your wish is my command," Edward smiled as he hopped up from the bed. As he moved, I heard his back crack and he groaned. "Okay, I'm too fucking old. I was going to pick you up, but my muscles are protesting."

"Edward, I can walk to the bathroom," I giggled as I got up from the bed.

Edward gathered me in his arms, "That doesn't mean I don't like holding you as much as possible. Come on, dirty girl."

We showered and managed to not go at it like bunnies in the bathroom. This was in part of Edward's sore muscles and our tired bodies. Our shower was just that, a shower. We did caress each other lovingly and I washed Edward's hair. I had to push him onto the small bench so I could reach his head. He was nearly a foot and few inches taller than me. Edward returned the favor and washed my hair. After our shower, we dressed. I put on a pair of black dress pants and a red sweater set. Edward was in a pair of navy dress pants, white dress shirt and a red Santa tie. I arched a brow and he told me that the tie was from his Peds rotation.

I did my hair and makeup as Edward checked on everybody to see if they were still coming. The only couple that was unavailable was Angela and Ben. Angela's father was a pastor and he needed both of them at his church for Christmas services. Edward snuck into the bathroom and he did cursory shave with the electric razor. He then attempted to style his hair. "I need a haircut. I look like a hippie," he grumbled as he fussed with his bronze locks.

"Take off your shirt," I said.

"Bella?"

"You need a haircut, I'm giving you a haircut," I said simply. Edward eyes warily as he removed his tie and shirt. As much as Mike was an ass, I did give him good haircuts. He was too cheap to pay a stylist to cut his hair. I was all

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but forced to learn how to cut his hair. I picked up the trimmer I found his drawer and the scissors I bought when I cut Mike's hair. I sat Edward on the tub and trimmed his neck. I then moved to the rest of his head, snipping and cutting his hair swiftly. When he was done, I picked up some of his usual gel and ran my fingers through his hair, causing it to lay in its usual disarray.

"Done."

Edward arched a brow and got up, looking in the mirror. He ran his fingers through his hair and smiled. "Nice. You do better than my usual stylist. You understand the madness that is my cowlicks."

"You were pretty shaggy, Edward. I was almost tempted to attack that mop the night of the Christmas Ball," I giggled. "Now, you look devastatingly handsome."

"Thanks to you," Edward said, kissing my lips before he put his shirt and tie back on. We finished getting dressed and headed out to the garage. Edward drove the Audi and parked in his usual spot. He darted into the hospital and returned with a large cart. We loaded the presents onto the cart and walked into the main entrance, waiting for the rest of our group. Jasper was standing there already, playing with his phone.

"Hey, Jas," I smiled. "Merry Christmas."

"Merry Christmas, Bells. Edward," Jasper said as he hugged us both. "Alice is helping Ren change into the Santa suit."

"Oh, I bet that's a ton of fun," Edward laughed. "Is Jake here?"

"With Alice and Ren. They are so cute together," Jasper said with a wistful smile.

"Jake and Ren?" I asked

"Yep. It's really sweet to see them interact. They are so loving and attuned to each other," Jasper said. "I also think that something happened last night with

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them."

"Good, I'm assuming," I said with a lopsided smirk.

"Yeah. I think they took the plunge," Jasper said, waggling his brows. "Some loving, if you know what I mean."

Edward leaned forward and whispered in my ear, "Obviously, we weren't the only ones who had the idea of making love on Christmas eve night. Love you, baby."

"Hmmmm," I moaned quietly. "Love you more." Our little love bubble was burst when we saw Alice dragging a Santa-dressed Ren into the main entrance of the hospital. She was dressed as Mrs. Claus in a bright red dress and white wig. She looked very cute. So did Ren. Jake was following behind them and he had a huge smile on his face. He danced up to Edward and I, giving Edward a warm hug. Jake kissed my cheek and squeezed my hand. "You look like the cat who got the canary."

"I did," he winked. "Ren told me he loved me last night."

"And...?" I egged on.

"We made love," Jake said. "It was slow and sweet and perfect."

"Oh, Jake! I'm so happy for you," I squealed as I hugged him. "You two are so cute together. He absolutely adores you."

"I feel the same way," Jake blushed. "Ren also said that it didn't matter about my HIV status. He said he'd love me no matter what."

"You were safe, though. Right?" Edward asked.

"Yes. We both want to live long and happy lives. So we wrapped it up," Jake said, looking at Edward. "We made a more intimate experience, using the condoms. However, I won't say what we did. It's for us and no one else."

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"Hey kids!" Emmett bellowed as he pushed Rosalie.

"Merry Christmas, Em," Jake smiled. "Rosalie, you're looking radiant this morning." Rose blushed a furious red and she tucked behind Emmett's body.

"Are you okay?"

"She's fantastic," Emmett said proudly. "Better than fantastic. Orgasmic."

"Emmett McCarty!" Rosalie shrieked. "You have no goddamned filter!"

"I needed to forget the feeling of Edward's pouty lips..." Emmett joked.

"You're a douche," Edward said as he rolled his eyes. "Come on. Let's head upstairs to the peds floor before I kick Emmett's ass."

"I'll help you, Edward," Rose said.

"You weren't complaining this morning, Rosie," Emmett snickered as he pushed Rose toward the elevators.

"No. But I didn't want to broadcast to the entire fucking hospital that I finally got some," Rose sighed. "Let's go deliver some presents to sick kiddos."

"Hey, Em?"

"Yeah, Bells?" Emmett responded.

"Can I push Rose?" I asked. He smiled and nodded. Emmett went with Edward and the rest of the guys to head up to the peds floor. I waited for the next elevator. "Are you going to be alright, Rosalie? Being around the children? Especially...?" The elevator arrived and I pushed her into the car.

"Bella, you're sweet to worry. However, I'm fine. I got an email from Lily's parents. They got my present for her and are appreciative, of course. But, I love kids. I can't wait to have children with Emmett. But, I'm perfectly fine," she soothed.

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"Just making sure," I grinned. "Have you and Emmett discussed marriage?"

"We have and we're going to wait. At least for a little while," Rose responded. "I want to walk down the aisle to him, unassisted. I'll be using crutches and a cane for some time. However, for all intents and purposes, we've decided that we're it for each other."

"I'm glad, Rose. Really glad. You and Emmett are such a good fit with each other," I said as I pushed her out of the elevator and to the common area of the peds floor. Edward was talking to the attending on duty, explaining what was going on. The doctor, a woman, had tears in her eyes.

"Bella? I'd like to introduce you to someone," Edward called. Emmett was at Rose's side in an instant and I walked to where Edward was talking. "Bella, this Dr. Carmen el Salvador. She's the department head of the pediatrics ward. Dr. el Salvador, this is my fiancée, Bella Swan. Bella is the woman who decided to bring the presents for the children."

"Oh, Ms. Swan! You have no idea how much this means to me and the kids. With budget cut backs and financial woes, we couldn't do the traditional 'Santa' gift exchange. Aro sliced our budget in half. Your generosity is undoubtedly the most wonderful thing we've had this year," Dr. el Salvador gushed as she hugged me.

"Edward told me about the babies that were dropped off the night before last and it got my mind churning. No one should be alone on Christmas. No adults and especially not children. It was my pleasure, Dr. el Salvador," I said returning her hug.

"Thank you. Thank you from the bottom of my heart," Dr. el Salvador sniffled. "And call me Carmen."

"Of course, Carmen," I smiled.

"Edward, I sent the nurses to get the ambulatory children into the common area. You may need to make some stops to the more sick children," Carmen

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explained. "However, I'd like to get a picture of you and the babies that we're caring for. The ones that Edward mentioned."

"Have you named them?" Edward asked.

"We've been calling the boy David, because he's so tiny. The girls are Katie, Samantha and Iris," Carmen said. "That will change when they're adopted."

"Can we get a picture with all of the children?" Jake asked.

"Oh, that sounds lovely," Carmen said with a radiant smile. "You are?"

"Jacob Black. I work with Bella," Jake said, offering her his hand.

"We'll take the picture after all the presents are distributed," Carmen said. A nurse popped her head and notified us that the kids were in the common room. Jake darted off to get 'Santa and Mrs. Claus.' The rest of us gathered in the common area, with our Santa hats. The kids were excited and abuzz. Some parents were with their children, but for the most part, it was the kids and the staff from Craven.

A hearty 'Ho! Ho! Ho!' resonated through the hallways and Ren burst through the doors. The kids, the ones that could, bum rushed him. He knelt down and held his arms open. Hugs and squeals filled the room. Edward reached for my hand and he twined our fingers together as he pulled me close. His other hand rested on my belly and I know he yearned for his own child. We eventually separated and helped the kids. Alice 'Mrs. Claus' led the kids in a Christmas Carol sing along while we readied the presents. We wanted to make sure we had enough for every child. Thankfully we did. And then some. Each child got a present and a book. Ren sat down in the chair and each kid hopped up on his knee. A friendly nurse took the pictures of the kids as we distributed the presents.

After the presents were handed out, the nurses brought out the babies, David, Katie, Samantha and Iris. With the babies and all of the kids, we all huddled around Ren and Alice. Edward had Katie nestled in his arms and I held David.



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Several pictures were taken and Edward demanded he get a copy to put in his office. I looked down at the sleeping bundle in my arms and I walked to the window, cooing to David. "You are such a handsome little boy. Yes, you are," I whispered. I leaned down and kissed his soft forehead. His eyes opened up and they were brilliantly blue. His gaze was inquisitive and he gurgled. I made silly, goofy faces at David until the nurse came to take him away.

"You looked so natural, holding baby David," Edward whispered.

"You looked just as natural, holding Katie," I countered.

A little boy who was no more than four bounded into Edward's legs, giving him a toothy grin. Edward crouched down. "What's up, big man?" The boy tugged on Edward's hand and thrust a book into mine. "You want us to read to you?" He nodded shyly and tugged again on Edward. He got up and the little boy put his other hand in mine. Together we walked to a rocking chair. The little boy pushed me into the chair and crawled into my lap.

"What's your name, sweetie?" I asked. The boy blushed and burrowed into my chest.

"It's Todd," one of the nurses called. "He doesn't talk. He's almost afraid to."

"Is your name Todd?" I asked. Todd nodded against my chest. "I'm Bella and this is Edward." Todd pointed to the book. It was one of my favorites, *Goodnight Moon*. I opened the book and read to him quietly. Todd played with my hair and held Edward's hand as he sat next to us. I finished the story and Todd pointed to the book again. "You must really love this story! It's my favorite story too." Todd looked up at me and his eyes flashed with awe then his brow furrowed. "My daddy read it to me every night before I went to sleep. Hearing him read it to me made me feel safe." Todd smiled and hugged my neck after pointing to the book again. I read the book a second time.

"Todd, you need to take a nap, bud," another nurse said.

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Todd began to whimper and he clung to my body. I looked at Edward in a panic. Edward asked the nurse for his chart. The nurse bristled saying that only hospital personnel could look at patient charts. Edward whipped out his ID badge and asked for it again. His eyes were flashing with fire, but his voice never broke its calm cadence. The nurse returned with the chart and Edward briefly looked it over. His eyes saddened and he gently ran his hand over Todd's soft blond hair. I gently rocked the scared little boy in my arms. As I sat with Todd, I could feel his body become heavier and his breathing evened out. I got up from the rocking chair, holding the sleeping boy in my arms. Edward led me down the corridor to Todd's room. I placed him in his crib but he refused to let go. When I finally released his strangle hold on my neck, his eyes flew open and he started crying, silently. "It's okay, Toddler," I whispered. "You're safe. No one is going to hurt you." His hazel eyes filled with more tears and he stood up in the crib, hugging me tightly. "Oh, baby. Shhh, it's okay."

Edward gently rubbed Todd's back and he nestled closer to me. Todd whimpered and he pulled away. "Mommy? Where's mommy?" he sniffled.

"I don't know where your mommy is," I said, wiping his tears away.

"You look like my mommy," Todd said. His lower lip trembling. "Take me home with you!"

"Hey, big man," Edward said softly. "We can't take you home with us, but I promise you that Bella and I will come to visit you while you're here."

"Can you do me a favor, Toddler?" I asked, tweaking his nose. "Edward works here at the hospital. When he comes to visit you, I want you to make sure his shoes are tied. Can you do that for me?"

"Does he forget to tie his shoes?" Todd giggled.

"Sometimes. One time, he wore two different socks," I said with a shocked expression on my face. "Then, when I come to see you, you need fill me in how he did with his shoe tying skills. If he forgets, you have to show him. But,

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now you need to take a nap, Toddler. Please?"

"Hug?" Todd asked.

"I'm already hugging you, you silly goose," I said, kissing his cheek. Todd wrapped his arms around my neck and he squeezed tightly. Edward's arms went around both of us. Edward pulled away and kissed my head. Todd would not let go and I gently extricated myself from his hold. "What's your job, Toddler?"

"See if Edward's shoes are tied."

"Are they tied now?" I asked. Todd peered over my shoulder to Edward's feet. Todd nodded and I kissed his nose. Gently, I placed him back in his crib and he curled up against a large stuffed bear. "Sleep tight, Toddler." He smiled shyly and his fluttered shut. I ran my fingers through his fine hair until he cuddle deeper into the bear. He snored lightly and I chuckled as we left.

Edward cupped my face and his lips crashed against mine. "You are amazing, Bella," he murmured against my mouth. I blushed and tucked my head under his chin. "I never would have thought of that."

"Ten years of being a teacher really lets you master the art of distraction," I joked. "I know you probably can't say, but what happened to him?"

"I shouldn't say, but I'm going to anyway. His mother was killed in a car crash about a week ago. He was in the car but not injured," Edward explained.

"Why is he in the hospital?"

"He has a rare blood disorder. Apparently his mom was on the way to the hospital because he was very sick. Dad's not in the picture and he has no other family. He's currently receiving treatments but will be placed into foster care when he's healthy enough to leave the hospital."

"When will that be?" I asked.

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"About a month," Edward said. I nodded and wrapped my arms around Edward's waist. "You are so fucking incredible, Bella. I can't believe that you're mine."

"Forever and always," I murmured, looking up into his jade depths.

"Always and forever," he smirked.

"Edward! Carlisle and Esme are expecting us in an hour! We got to go," Alice chirped. Edward groaned and he kissed my lips chastely. As we left, Carmen gave us more hugs and words of gratitude. As a group, we all went our separate ways. Emmett and Rosalie went to Emmett's family for Christmas. Jake and Ren spent it with Ren's family. Edward and I went to Carlisle and Esme's along Jasper and Alice.

We ate a scrumptious dinner of prime rib, mashed potatoes and asparagus. We exchanged gifts at the Cullens' lavish home. Alice received a ton of stuff for the baby. She was excited to get so many outfits and necessities. Jasper received several history books. He actually was a history buff and enjoyed the time period of the Civil War. Carlisle and Esme received a trip to Italy from all of us for their present. It was a combination Christmas and anniversary present. They were married for 35 years and wanted to travel. We got them a month long trip to Italy. Edward got two guitars. One electric and one acoustic with all of the trimmings. He now understood Rose's gift of guitar lessons. I also got him an engraved stethoscope for our use only. I had his nickname engraved. Edward blushed and he kissed me. The presents I received were all based off the wedding. I got a 'gift certificate' for a wedding dress from Alice; a 'gift certificate' for flowers and photography from Jasper; and 'gift certificate' for my own Cullen crest from Carlisle and Esme.

We left the house and drove home after the presents. Alice wanted to play some game, but I was tired and so was everybody else. Edward and I also had an early flight to catch tomorrow. We were heading to Seattle to visit my dad in Forks, Washington. Alice grumbled but relented.

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Once we got home, Edward and I crawled into bed. We made love, slow and sweet. Each kiss, caress, touch and thrust was filled with reverence and adoration. "Thank you for making this the best Christmas ever, my sweet Bella," Edward said as he traced circles over my abdomen. "I love you, beautiful girl."

"I love you, too, Edward," I whispered. "This was the best Christmas. I got to spend it with you."

Edward smiled and his eyes twinkled in the moonlight. He held me tightly to his chest and hummed quietly. I kissed his jaw and my eyes drifted shut. I eventually fell into a deep and happy sleep, safe in the arms of my love. The best gift I could ever wish for. Ever hope for.

**A/N: I'm dreaming of a fluffy Christmas. Just like the ones I used to know... Up next, Bella and Edward's trip to Seattle/Forks. Visiting Edward's past and moving ahead. Leave me love! (Or hate...)**

# The Meeting with Dad

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 32: The Meeting with Dad

"Edward, are you're sure you alright?" I asked. He had been very quiet the entire flight to Seattle and was virtually silent as we drove to my childhood home in Forks. "The silence is killing me here."

"I'm fine," Edward said tersely, giving me a tight smile as he looked over to me as he drove.

"Bullshit," I snapped. "You're being moody and a bit of an ass. What the hell?"

"This is the first time I've been to Seattle since I've moved out to Sherryville. It's reopening some wounds," he muttered. "I'm struggling, Bella. I'm sorry."

"No, I'm the one who should apologize. I shouldn't be snapping and I guess I never realized. I feel like an idiot," I grumbled.

"How would you know? I lived here for a long time. I spent two years here after Tanya's death. You'd figure I'd be okay in coming back. I just forgot so much about Seattle. I feel like I've stepped back in time; through the looking glass. When I left here, nearly a year ago. I was broken. A shell of a man. Now,

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I'm back and I'm with you. My fiancée. I'm not broken anymore," Edward said as he laced his fingers through mine. "Your love healed me. I just need some time to process all of the emotions."

"Okay," I said, squeezing his large hand. "If you need to talk..."

"You're number one on my list," he said, kissing my fingers. We drove in silence, save for the music that was pumping through the stereo system. I took out my book and read quietly as we drove the four hours to Forks. We were getting close and I put my book into my messenger bag. I directed Edward through the sleepy town of Forks, Washington, pointing out minor things as we went. It was exactly the same. Nothing ever changed.

We pulled up to a small white home with black shutters. Edward parked the BMW he rented for the trip behind the police cruiser in the driveway. We got out of the car and walked up the steps to my childhood home. I reached above the eave of the door and unlocked it. I placed the key back in its hiding place and opened the door. "Dad?"

Charlie walked out of the kitchen. He was still in his uniform. His chocolate brown eyes twinkled when he saw me and his face broke into a wide smile. He held open his arms and I ran into them. Charlie embraced me, holding me close. He was never an affectionate man, but nearly six years of not seeing him made him want a hug. "I've missed you, Bells. I love you, kiddo," he whispered. I sniffled and burrowed closer to my dad's chest. I had missed this. So much. Charlie squeezed me tighter and I felt him kiss my head. I pulled away, wiping tears from my eyes.

"Dad, I'd like to introduce you to Dr. Edward Masen, my fiancé," I said, trying to keep my voice even. "Edward, this is my dad, Charlie Swan."

Edward stepped forward and held out his hand, "It's a pleasure to meet you, sir."

"None of this 'sir' business. If you're marrying my daughter, it's Charlie," Charlie said. He shook Edward's hand and smiled. "Been taking good care of

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my baby girl?"

"Of course, sir. Um, Charlie," Edward replied with a blush.

"Well, come in! Come in," Charlie smiled. He led us to the tiny living room. Charlie asked about our Christmas. We gave him the abbreviated version of Christmas Eve and the outing at the hospital. Charlie looked so proud at what we did. As we talked, my heart clenched for Todd. Poor little Toddler. He needed someone. And not some random foster family who may or may not understand his medical condition. Edward noticed my faraway look and squeezed my knee. I returned back to the present and laced my fingers with his.

After an hour or so, Edward went out to the car to get our luggage. We were staying with Charlie until New Year's Eve. In our luggage, we had Charlie's presents for Christmas as well. Or at least a picture of his present. We had gotten him a fancy, high tech sonar machine for when he fished. Edward was having it delivered to Charlie and it was due to arrive sometime this week.

"I can imagine you guys are tired," Charlie said. "Let's go out to eat and then you can get settled. Your room is ready to go and the couch is mighty comfortable."

"Dad, Edward is not sleeping on the couch," I sighed.

"Isabella," Charlie warned.

"Charles. I'm 32 years old, been married once and I'm engaged to be married again. We're sleeping together," I said, narrowing my eyes.

"On a full bed?" Charlie challenged.

"We'll manage," I said dryly. "Right, Edward?"

"Sure, love," Edward said. "What's good around here?"



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"The only restaurant that has decent food is The Lodge. Everything else is fast food and the really nice restaurants are in Port Angeles," Charlie explained. "We'll probably head there for dinner tomorrow. I'm going to change and then we'll head out, okay?"

Edward and I nodded. Charlie went upstairs and I heard him putter around his room. I leaned my head against Edward's arm and sighed. "Penny for your thoughts?" he asked.

"I'm worried," I replied.

"About?"

"Todd," I said.

"Me too, Bella," Edward said, pulling my face to look into his eyes. "He really latched onto you."

"He's an adorable little boy. I just hate the thought of him going with some strangers who know nothing about his condition," I said, tears filling my eyes.

"When he goes into the system, the social worker will inform the family of his medical needs. It will probably be harder to place Todd with a family that can adequately meet his requirements, but he will be cared for," Edward said.

"Why not us?" I blurted. I covered my mouth and my eyes went wide. "Forget I said that."

"I won't, Bella. Do you want to foster Todd?" he asked, his voice filling with excitement.

"No...maybe..." I fumbled. I looked at Edward and his eyes pierced through mine. "Yes. I need to take care of him."

"I'll contact my attorney and get some of the paperwork needed to apply to be a foster family," Edward said, his eyes glazing over. His fingers traced over the

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curve of my cheek and he gently tipped my head back, caressing my lips with his. It was a soft, chaste kiss, but it meant so much more. His tongue slid between my lips and his arms pulled me closer to his lean, muscular body. We heard Charlie stomp down the stairs and pulled apart. "I love you, Bella. So much. I can't wait until we're a family." I smiled and gave Edward a searing, boxer melting kiss before Charlie was fully down the stairs.

"I love you, too," I said against his lips. Edward groaned softly and subtly adjusted his bulge. I giggled and pulled away. Charlie was finally downstairs and he was wearing a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt. "Ready, Dad?"

"Yep," Charlie grinned. He grabbed his coat and we headed out to the car. Edward had to drive as the rental was blocking Charlie's cruiser. I slid into the backseat and the boys were in the front. Charlie chattered on what was going on with the police force. He had several new officers that were very green and eager to shoot their guns. Charlie was proud that in all of his years as a police officer, he never had to shoot his sidearm once. It was his goal to retire, never having to shoot his gun. At this rate, it probably was going to happen. Nothing ever happened in Forks. It's a boring, sleepy, little town.

We arrived at The Lodge and were immediately seated. *One of the perks of being the police chief.* Once settled and our orders taken, the Charlie Swan Inquisition began.

"So, Edward, you're a doctor?" Charlie asked as he sipped his beer.

"Yes. I'm the head of emergency medicine at Craven Memorial Hospital," Edward answered with a grin. "My uncle is the chief of staff and he all but begged me to come work for him." Edward took a drink of his water and squeezed my hand.

"Don't you want a beer, son?" Charlie asked, raising a bushy brow.

"I don't really drink," Edward said. "I lost both of my parents and my first wife to drunk drivers."

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"Shit. I'm so sorry, Edward," Charlie said. "When?"

"My parents died when I was fifteen and my wife died when I was 29. We were married for five years," Edward said with a frown. "She was pregnant when she was killed."

"What was your wife's name?"

"Dr. Tanya Masen. She was a child psychiatrist."

"I remembered the story. The guy, James something, was put away for life," Charlie mused. "I can't imagine what you went through."

"It was hell," Edward said darkly. "I stayed in Seattle for a couple of years after her death, but left when James was put away. I had nothing tying me to Seattle. Every corner reminded me of her. Of us. Of what was lost and I needed to leave. I needed a fresh start. So I called my sister, Alice, and told her to find me a place to live near her. She did. I interviewed at Craven and was offered the position. I packed up my belongings and drove across country. It was the best decision I ever made. That decision gave me your daughter. I love her very much and she is the greatest gift in my life."

Charlie blinked a few times. His were unfocused as he looked at Edward. Charlie's face slowly morphed into a huge smile. "I like him, Bella. He treats you like you're the most precious thing in the world. So much better than Newton," Charlie said. He hated Mike. However, Charlie didn't want to dictate my life and allowed my marriage to him. Though, he knew something was not quite right with Mike.

"Bella is the most precious thing in the world to me," Edward said. "And, an amoeba is better than Newton. So that's not saying much."

Charlie barked out a laugh and slapped his hand on the table. "I really like you, Edward. You are alright in my book. Probably better than my daughter."

## A Fresh Start

"Hey!" I snapped. "Not nice, Charlie." I smacked him with my napkin with each word. "Who cooked for you all throughout my middle school and high school years? That wouldn't be you. We'd be eating here all the time. Who cleaned your house?"

"I'm kidding, Bells. You know I love you. More than words can express. And, I do appreciate your cooking and cleaning skills. I wouldn't have survived without them," Charlie guffawed.

"You're surviving now," I said, arching a brow. "How?"

"Well, I wanted to wait until tomorrow to tell you. But, I've been seeing someone."

"Really? Who?" I asked.

"Sue Clearwater," Charlie replied. "She's coming out to dinner with us tomorrow in Port Angeles."

"Harry's wife?" I squeaked.

"You don't know. I called Mike when it happened," Charlie said. "Harry died while you were on your honeymoon. Sudden heart attack."

"What?" I whispered. My vision faded in and out. I was upset that my father's best friend died and I didn't know. I was upset that my father's best friend died and my husband didn't tell me. Angry tears filled in my eyes. Five years, I didn't know. "Excuse me. I need some air." I shot up from the table and stormed out of The Lodge. I didn't bring a coat and I didn't have it in me to care. I walked across the street to a park and sat down on one of the benches. I wrapped my arms around my waist and let my tears fall freely. Tears for Harry Clearwater. Tears for my anger at Mike for hiding something like this from me. Tears in general.

"Bella?" Edward called as he ran toward me. He carried my winter jacket and his brow was furrowed.

## A Fresh Start

"I'm sorry, Edward. I just need some time," I whispered.

"Well, at least put on your coat. I don't want you getting sick," Edward said, draping my coat over my shoulders. He crouched down in front of me. I turned away as I slipped my arms through the jacket. He sighed and kissed my forehead before going back into the restaurant.

I don't know how long I sat outside on the bench. However, Charlie came over to me and put his arms around my shoulder. "What's bothering you, Bella?"

"I didn't know about Harry. Mike never told me. I hate that I wasn't there for you when your best friend died," I whispered, leaning against his shoulder. "I'm sorry, Daddy."

"You don't need to be sorry, Bells. I figured that Mike never told you when you didn't come for the funeral. He was always a self-centered, egotistical prick," Charlie seethed. "However, it seems like he's escalating. Edward told me about his attack, the fire and your car accident. I'm worried, Bella. Mike is dangerous. Like something is missing in his brain to make him normal."

"That's the thing. He can blend in society and look normal. When on the inside, he's black and cruel," I sobbed.

"Sociopath. He's a sociopath," Charlie said, brushing my hair from my face.

"Do you remember Charlotte?"

"The girl you went to school with? The one that died?" Charlie asked.

"Yeah. She was beaten up by her boyfriend. She wouldn't press charges initially and she ended up dead. Do you know who her boyfriend was?" I asked. Charlie shook his head. "Mike."

"Have you told the police?" Charlie asked, turning into the police chief.

## A Fresh Start

"Yes. I have a restraining order out against him and there's a warrant out for his arrest," I said. "Also, Edward is ready to pounce if he sees him."

"I can see that. The vein in the middle of his forehead was pulsing as he explained all that happened and his face was red with such anger," Charlie.

"Reminds me of someone else I know," I joked, shoving Charlie with my shoulder. "You didn't leave Edward in the restaurant by himself, did you?"

"No. After we argued on who was paying the bill, he went fill up the gas tank," Charlie said.

"Who won the 'bill' argument?" I asked.

"He did. He said he had to go to the bathroom and he apparently slipped his credit card to our waitress as he did," Charlie grumbled. "He's slick." As Charlie said that, the sleek black BMW pulled up to the park. "And has uncanny sense of timing. Come on, Bells." Charlie deposited me in the front seat and he slid into the back. I curled my legs up and was silent as we drove back to Charlie's house.

Once back, Charlie grumbled something about having to work early and he darted out of the car. I followed Charlie and Edward stopped me before we got into the house. He wrapped his arms around my waist and pulled me to his chest. "I'm so worried about you, Bells."

"I'll be fine. Mike just betrayed me with not telling me my father's best friend, one of the men who raised me, had died. Like you said earlier today, I just need time to process," I said. "However, I'm exhausted and need sleep."

"You need to eat, Bells. We brought your dinner," Edward said.

"No appetite. I'll be perfectly fine. Trust me," I said. "However, I'm freezing. Let's get inside."

"I'll spend all night warming you up," Edward said as he kissed my nose.

## A Fresh Start

"Edward," I warned.

"Get your mind out of the gutter, Swan. I would have issues making love to you in your father's house. I'm talking about holding you close as you sleep," he chided as he pulled me inside.

He picked up our suitcase and followed me up the stairs to my childhood bedroom. It hadn't changed much since I moved out when I went to college. The walls were painted a light blue. The windows were adorned with yellowing, lacy curtains. The bed was covered in a blanket that Renee had made in her 'crafty' stage. It was a sad attempt at a quilt. Very sad. Pathetic really.

Edward put the suitcase on the desk near the window in my room. We opened it and I pulled out some comfy pajamas. Warm flannel ones that make you feel safe. Edward arched a brow and I shrugged. I felt lousy. Used, betrayed and like I was nothing. I couldn't be there for my dad and I felt horribly. I walked to the one bathroom in the house and closed the door. I went through my business of changing and brushing my teeth. I finished up and went into the bedroom. Edward was sitting on the bed, wearing a pair of sleep pants and a t-shirt. He was flipping through my old high school yearbook.

"Do you really want to look through that? All the horrible fashions and bad perms?" I joked lightly, not really feeling anything.

"I wanted to see what you looked like as a kid," Edward said as he pulled me into his lap. I flipped through the book and showed him my senior photo. I hadn't really changed much. My hair was longer in high school. No grays. "You were beautiful then."

"Not really. I was so fucking clumsy. My senior year of high school was spent on crutches and walking casts," I grumbled. "I was in a show and was a dancer."

"You? Dancer?"

## A Fresh Start

"Shut up. I hate to dance. However, I'm good at it when I have learned choreography," I laughed. "I can't sing to save my life, but I was always in the musicals." I flipped the pages of the book and turned it to the pages allotted for the spring musical, *Guys and Dolls*. I pointed out a picture of me, being lifted by a guy in the "Rocking the Boat" scene. I had a huge smile on my face in the photo and I looked comfortable.

"Why did you stop? Performing?" Edward asked.

"All the biggest Broadway artists are singers, dancers and actors. I'm only good at dancing and acting. You don't want me singing," I said. "Besides, I love teaching and directing. And I'm too old for a drastic career change."

"Okay, enough distraction," Edward said closing the book. "I'm tired. You're tired."

"And cranky. I'm cranky," I said. "Ready to punch something."

"Have at it, beautiful girl," he said as he stroked his belly.

"I don't want to punch you. I want to punch Mike. Asshole," I snarled. "You wouldn't withhold information like that from me. You'd tell me if something happened to my family."

"I would. I promise you," Edward said as he held me on his lap. "I can understand your frustration and anger toward Mike."

"It's more than that. It's guilt, too. I should have been here for Sue and my dad," I said. "It must have killed him to not have me there. I should have been there. Harry and Sue were almost like another set of parents to me. They were always so welcoming and loving."

"But it wasn't your fault," Edward pressed.

"No, probably not. However it doesn't stop the guilt I feel," I said, looking at Edward. "Sue probably hates me."



## A Fresh Start

"I doubt that," Edward said as he caressed my neck. "No one can hate you. You're too good."

I rolled my eyes and yawned. Edward chuckled and lifted me off his lap. We crawled between the sheets and got as close as possible, out of necessity. The bed was fucking tiny. Edward took up most of it. He cradled me against his chest and stroked my hair as I lay there. "I love you, Edward. Thank you for being here and for giving me time with Charlie."

"I love you more, my beautiful girl. You need to be with your family. It's important," he whispered in the darkness. He pressed a kiss to my forehead and I felt my eyelids droop. Edward hummed quietly and I drifted into a deep, but unrestful sleep.

xx AFS xx

*I was walking. To where, I had no idea. I was just walking. There were no landmarks. Just ethereal mist and white fog floating around. I furrowed my brow as I moved and walked in this purgatory. Where the hell am I?*

*" You didn't think I'd let you be happy for long, did you?"*

*" Who's there?" I squeaked. "Show yourself."*

*" Nah. That would be too fun," the voice laughed. "You were too happy, Isabella. I needed to stop that."*

*" Michael," I seethed. "You asshole."*

*" No. I'm not the asshole. I'm the voice of reason. You just never understood it," he snapped. "I was right. Always right. You never agreed with me, you bitch."*

*" That's because you were wrong. Not right, wrong. How could you not tell me about Harry?" I fumed.*

## A Fresh Start

*"What? You're mad about that?" Mike laughed as he appeared out of the mist. His blond hair was long and straggly. His blue eyes were cold and detached. His body was painfully thin and his face was pulled into a sneer. "He was a useless man who couldn't get it up for his wife. She loved your asshole father anyway."*

*"What the fuck?" I screamed as I charged toward him. He vanished and his ghostly chuckle came from behind me. "You are the asshole."*

*"No, I'm not," he smiled. "Your fuck buddy is the asshole. You're the asshole. I'm perfect."*

*"Leave Edward out of this," I shrieked. "He's shown me more kindness, more love than you showed me in our entire relationship."*

*"He'll leave you. Just like me," Mike said as he crossed his arms across his chest. "But, I'll take you back, Bella. We can be good again."*

*"No."*

*"What?" Mike scowled.*

*"I said NO," I challenged.*

*Mike growled and his hands wrapped around my neck. He tossed me onto the ground and straddled my waist. His fingers dug into my throat. My air supply was dwindling and I clawed at Mike's face. He squeezed tighter and I felt his hands dip into my skin. I tried, in vain, to buck him off my body, but he wouldn't budge. Mike pushed me into the ground, smacking my head against a rock. I gasped for air and my vision was blacking out.*

*Suddenly, Mike's hands were ripped from my neck and there he was. My personal savior. Edward. He was pummeling Mike with his bare fists. I got up shakily and stared at the fight before me. Mike reached behind him and pulled out something.*

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No! NO! NOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOO!

*A loud shot rang through and Edward fell back limply. Squarely between his eyes was a bullet hole. His green eyes were dead and focused on nothing. I cradled him in my arms and sobbed. It didn't last long as a searing pain went through my chest and I fell on top of Edward.*

"Bella! Bella, baby, wake up! Please, beautiful!"

"Kiddo, open your eyes."

My eyes flew open and I saw Edward kneeling next to me and Charlie standing by the door. Their eyes were trained on me, filled with sadness, fear and despair. I sat up and got really dizzy. I fell back on the pillows. "What happened?" I rasped, my throat raw.

"You started screaming and clawing at the bed and me," Edward said as he sat down on the edge of the bed. He felt my forehead for a fever. "Then you yelled 'No' like someone died."

"I had a nightmare," I whispered.

Charlie left the room and returned with a bottle of water. He handed it to me and patted my damp head. "Do you want to talk about it?" Charlie asked.

"No. Too fresh," I said as I sipped my water. I looked at the clock and saw that it was just after eight. "Let me make some breakfast."

"Baby, you are just going to stay here. I can manage breakfast," Edward said, giving me his authoritative 'doctor brow.'

"I'm going to work, Bells. Call me if you want to talk," Charlie said with a smile. "Love you, kiddo."

"Love you, too, Dad," I muttered. I sat up in the bed, still pretty dizzy but feeling better with the water. I hugged my pillow to my chest. Tears fell down

## A Fresh Start

my cheeks. It was true, I had been too happy for too long. Mike was bound to make an appearance. It just happened to be in my dreams. Or rather, nightmares. A few moments later, Edward appeared with a tray filled with a bowl and some toast.

"Your dad doesn't have much in the way of food," Edward sighed. "I could only find a box of cereal and some bread."

"I'll go shopping for him later," I said, my voice sounding dead. "He doesn't know how to cook a damn thing. At all. I'm surprised he had the cereal and that the bread wasn't moldy." I ate the breakfast, not really tasting it. My mind was too busy understanding the nightmare I had. As I thought, more tears fell down my cheeks.

"Don't cry, Bella," Edward said as he moved the tray to the floor. "Please don't cry. I hate to see you like this. Tell me what's causing you to feel like this?"

"It was a nightmare. About Mike. He said that I was 'too happy' and that he had to do something about it. He said that you were going to leave me. Like he did. He begged me to go back with him and I said no. He tried to kill me by strangling me. You appeared out of nowhere and got him off me. Then he shot you. You were dead. Your beautiful green eyes were dead. He killed you. Took you away from me."

Edward gathered me in his arms and I sobbed against his chest, clawing at his t-shirt. He let me cry. He whispered his love for me in my ear. He promised he wouldn't go anywhere. Mike wasn't going to get him or me. I wanted to believe him. I truly did, but I couldn't wrap my head around it. At all.

"Bella, look at me," Edward said as he gently pulled me away from his chest. I kept my eyes cast downward, looking at an imperfection on the quilt. "Bella..." His warm hands gathered around my face and forced me to look at him. "I'm not leaving. It was a dream. A horrible dream. I'm never going anywhere. You're stuck with me, beautiful girl."

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"I'm sorry, Edward. I'm really sorry. I just can't get past this," I whispered. "My mind just won't shut off. All I see is you and you gone. Mike is going to take you away from me..."

"Not if I have any say in it," Edward said, his hands tightening around my cheeks. "I'm. Not. Leaving. Ever. I love you too much. This ring is my promise to you that I'm yours forever. And then some."

Edward's mouth crashed against mine and his kiss was deep and insistent. There was urgency in his actions. He needed to get through to me. To let me know that he wasn't going anywhere. His tongue plunged into my mouth and he reached for the hem of my shirt. He lifted it with a growl and tossed it on the floor. I pulled on his t-shirt and in a flash, the shirt was next to mine. The rest of our clothes were haphazardly tossed onto the floor and Edward sheathed himself in my warmth. I let out a cry. But not of pain. Not of sadness. Of joy and pleasure. With Edward inside of me, all of my doubts and concerns dissipated.

"I'm never leaving you, Bella," Edward said as he rocked against me. His cock sliding in and out of my warmth. "I want to spend the rest of my life with you. Loving you. Kissing you. Comforting you. Making love to you."

"Oh, God," I moaned as I kissed his lips. "I don't want you to make love to me, Edward. Fuck me. Fuck me hard."

He snarled and his body moved faster and pounded into me. His mouth moved against mine, aggressively. I groaned and tightened my hold around his waist. Edward reached for my legs and placed them on his shoulders. He went into my body deeper and hit the right spot. I reached between us and felt our connection as I rubbed my clit. "Jesus, baby. That's so fucking hot," he said staring at my hand as he slammed into me. "I'm not going to last, beautiful girl. Come with me. Please, baby."

I moaned and rubbed my sensitive bundle of nerves furiously. I bucked my hips against his and it created the most delightful feeling in my body. Edward was deeper inside my body and I loved it. I never wanted him to leave. My

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muscles fluttered around his cock and he gasped. He pounded harder and then he growled as began to unravel. Edward's eyes captured mine and dropped my legs from his shoulders, kissing me forcefully. That was the trigger for my orgasm. I pulled away and bit down on his shoulder as I came around his cock. Edward muffled my screams with his mouth as he spilled into my body and collapsed on top of me. He was squishing me, but I didn't care. My hands ran up and down his sweaty back. His breathing was erratic and deep. He was slowly returning to earth and he pulled out of me.

"I'm sorry, Bella," he said sheepishly. "I don't know what came over me."

"I don't either, but I needed *that*," I blushed. "I needed to feel you. Thank you."

"You're welcome?" Edward said skeptically. "I never thought a thorough fucking would make you feel good."

"Anytime you make love to me, I feel good," I said, running my fingers down his sculpted chest. "However, this was different and I liked it. You are usually so gentle. I'm not breakable, Edward."

"Good to know," he snickered. "Let's shower and you can give me the grand tour of Forks."

"Prepare to be disappointed. It'll take five minutes."

"As long as I'm with you, I'll never be disappointed," Edward smirked.

I rolled my eyes and got out of bed. In my naked glory, I waited at the door. Edward stood up and walked to the bathroom. Suffice it to say, our shower was not very productive. We had round two in there. *Any takers for round three?*

xx AFS xx

"Charlie, where are we going for dinner?" I called down.

"Some Italian place. Kind of dressy," Charlie replied.

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"Great," I mumbled. I found a black knee length and green top. I slid on a pair of black boots and curled my hair. Edward was sitting on the bed, wearing a pair of slate gray slacks and black dress shirt. On the chair in the bedroom was his black sport coat. I finished putting on my makeup and walked into the bedroom. "How do I look?"

"Absolutely gorgeous," Edward said "I really like you in skirts."

"Why?"

"You have fabulous legs," Edward said with a glint in his eyes.

"Don't get all horny on me, Edward. We are having dinner with my *father* and his *girlfriend*. This morning was a one-time thing," I said, putting my hands on my hips. "I was vulnerable. Extremely vulnerable."

"I know. I still feel guilty being so rough with you," Edward said.

"Don't be. I'm not. I liked it," I said with a shrug as I put on some perfume. "It was just weird, doing it in my childhood home. In my childhood bed."

Edward looked beneath him and then around the room. I never seen him moved so quickly off the bed. I leaned over in a fit of giggles. "Relax, Edward."

He scowled at me and picked up his jacket. "Are we ready, you pain in the ass?"

"Yep," I said as I turned on my heel . I walked down the stairs and met a nervous Charlie in the living room. He was fussing with his tie. He looked very handsome. His khaki pants were ironed and creased along the front. His white shirt and red tie contrasted nicely. "You look good, Dad."

"Thanks, kiddo," he blushed. "Do you think Sue will like it?"

I walked up to him and adjusted his tie. I smoothed the silk and gave him a kiss on his cheek. "She'll love it. Do you think Sue would want to come to our

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wedding?"

"I hope so. I already bought her ticket," Charlie said. "She's never been to Mexico. Or out of the country for that matter. She's working on getting an expedited passport."

"Charlie, how long does it take to get to Port Angeles?" Edward asked.

"About an hour or so," Charlie answered. He checked his watch. "We probably should go."

Edward slipped my jacket over my shoulders and I grabbed my purse. We piled into the rental car and drove to pick up Sue from LaPush. Sue and Charlie sat in the back seat. Charlie gave directions to Edward to the restaurant. It was a new Italian place called Volare. It looked pretty posh for Port Angeles. Edward used the valet and we got out of the car. Sue gave me a hug when she saw me. I expressed my condolences for the death of her husband. She acted surprised at my admission. Charlie wrapped his hand around her waist and explained that Mike never told me. Sue gave me a warm smile and hugged me again.

Charlie walked up to the hostess and informed them that we were here for our reservation. The hostess gave Charlie a friendly smile and led us to a table in the middle of the dining room. Edward's brow furrowed. He walked up to the hostess, flashing his crooked smirk, "Can we go somewhere a little more private? It's a bit of a family reunion and it would be difficult to have a conversation here," he said smoothly. The hostess nodded dumbly, obviously awed by my fiancé's charm and looks. She led us to a small room with four tables in it. Edward held out his hand and handed her a tip as she tittered away.

I slipped my hand into his. "You really have some power over women," I whispered. "You always get what you want."

"Damn straight. Alice says I have a 'panty-dropper' smile," he snorted. "I personally think I'm a bit of a dork with crazy hair and a lopsided smirk."



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"This is true, but I love you. Dorkiness and all," I said, kissing his lips chastely. Edward pulled out a chair and I sat down. He did the same for Sue, giving her his 'panty-dropper' smile. She blushed and giggled.

"So, you must be Edward," Sue said as she recovered from Edward's charming ways. "I haven't heard much about you, except that you and Bella are getting married."

"This is true. We are getting married," Edward smiled. "April 4th in Cancun, Mexico. I'm hoping that you can come with Charlie."

"I'm working on it," she said. "I don't have a passport and I need to get an expedited one."

"I have a friend in the passport office in Seattle. I'll see if I can get him to move your application through," Edward said.

"So, what do you do, Edward?" Sue asked as she sipped her white wine. Our orders were placed and we were tucking into the appetizers we had ordered.

"I'm a doctor. I used to be the head of the emergency department at Virginia Mason here in Seattle, but moved to Sherryville to be closer to my family. I'm the department head of the ER at Craven Memorial," Edward explained.

"Edward's working with his uncle, who is the chief of staff, to make Craven a Level Two trauma center," I said proudly. "Things are on their way. Preliminary approval has already gone through."

"What does that mean, Edward?" Charlie asked.

"More severe traumas can come to the ER. Right now, we can handle moderate traumas with the equipment we have. Anything more severe needs to be airlifted to a level two or level one trauma center. The closest one is about an hour and half away by ambulance."

"How are things going with you, Bella?" Sue asked.

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"Better now. Obviously, Mike and I got divorced," I said nervously. "We weren't compatible. He let me go initially, but now he's...he's..."

"Lost his damn mind," Edward said. "He can't let go of Bella. Early in our relationship, I found Mike attacking her in her condo. Pounding her head into floor. I got him off of her, but he won't let it go."

"Oh my word," Sue said as she grabbed my hand. "Was he abusive to you when you were married?"

"Never physically. Emotionally and mentally, he was cruel," I said, ashamed of my admission. "He would never really cared for my friends. He let me 'have' friends but I'd have to clear it with him to go out. Also, he never let me be with my family. This is the first time I've seen Charlie since my wedding, nearly six years ago."

"Oh, that's horrible," Sue said. "If I see this Mike, he's toast. What a jerk."

"Get in line, Sue," Edward and Charlie grumbled. They shared a look and laughed.

Our meals were delivered. Edward and I decided to share a meal as the server said that the portions were huge.

"How's Leah?" I asked. She was Sue's daughter. She went through a rough time during college, getting pregnant and losing the baby. She went into a deep depression and took her a few years to get out of it.

"She's good. Married to a nice man named Jared. She had twins two years ago," Sue said proudly. She took out her wallet and showed me the pictures of her grandchildren. "This is Kaya and Kevin. Aren't they cute?"

"Absolutely adorable," I smiled. Sue handed her wallet to Edward and he grinned widely, agreeing with me. "Is she still here?"

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"No, she moved to Portland with Jared. It's a hike, but still close enough that I can see my two angels," Sue said lovingly. "I visit them every other weekend."

"Sue and I went to Leah and Jared's for Christmas," Charlie said. "Kaya and Kevin were very excited to see Nana Sue."

"They were excited to see you, too," Sue chided. "They absolutely love Pop Pop Charlie."

"Pop Pop?" I squeaked. "Okay, how long has this been going on?"

"Um, three years?" Charlie answered. "We finally realized our feelings for each other at Leah's wedding."

"We went out on our first date the week after that and our first kiss after about a month," Sue said lovingly. "The rest is history."

"Are there wedding bells in your future?" I asked, wagging my brows.

"Um," Charlie mumbled. "We're discussing it."

"Not yet," Sue said, kissing my dad's cheek. "But the discussions are quite heated."

I wrinkled my nose. *I must not picture my dad doing the deed. That's just wrong.* I stopped eating after that mental picture entered my mind. Edward arched a brow and I laid my hand on his thigh. My fingers danced up his leg to his fly. I gently rubbed him. He groaned quietly, warning me with my eyes. I needed to get the vision of Charlie doing it with Sue out of my head. Like yesterday. Feeling Edward's cock was helping me do that. His cock was perfection. His hand rested on mine, stilling my fingers. He looked at me and his eyes were black as pitch. He kissed my cheek and nibbled down to my earlobe. "Behave, Bella. We're here with your dad and his girlfriend. I don't want to come in my pants."

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I nodded and removed my hand from his cock, but kept it on his thigh. The rest of dinner went by uneventfully and with polite conversation. Sue asked about the wedding. Edward told her about the resort where we were having the ceremony. We had decided on an all-inclusive resort. I had been in touch with the wedding planner via email and we had most everything planned. The only things left to do were getting my dress and Edward's attire.

"Would you like any dessert?" Charlie asked. "I've heard that the apple crustini is excellent."

"That sounds really good, Charlie," Sue said. "Can we share that?"

"Sure, love," Charlie said, kissing her sweetly on the lips.

"Do you want anything, Bella?" Edward asked. He handed me the dessert menu and immediately my eyes trained on the tiramisu. However, the cheesecake looked good too.

"Um, whatever you want, Edward," I answered. He smiled and nodded. The waitress came and took away our plates. She then took our dessert orders. Edward decided on the tiramisu.

Dessert was delivered and it was quite good. Afterward, Edward and Charlie argued over the bill. While they were being stupid and male, I slipped the waitress my credit card and signed for it. The waitress chuckled as I paid the bill. She said that she understood.

"Where's the check?" Charlie asked.

"Don't worry about it, Dad," I sighed.

"Bella, you didn't," Edward said.

"What? You both were being stupid and trying to one-up each other. I paid the damn check, problem solved."

## A Fresh Start

"Bella, I love you," Sue laughed. She looked at the shocked faces of my father and my fiancé. "They're both speechless."

"With Charlie it's not an oddity," I sniggered. "Edward, he's quite verbose."

"Am not," Edward bristled.

"Um, yeah you are," I said as I ruffled his hair. He gently swatted my hands away and stuck out his tongue at me. "Real mature, Dr. Masen."

"Since the bill is paid, are we ready to go?" Edward said, tickling my sides.

"Yes, we are," Sue said as she got up.

Charlie assisted her in putting on her coat. Edward did the same for me. His hands traced down my back and he gently cupped my ass. I squeaked lightly and smacked his chest. He turned me around and kissed me playfully. "I can't believe you paid the bill."

"Well, we paid the bill. I was just tired of the testosterone you and Charlie were tossing around," I said.

"Hmmm, assertive. I like that," Edward said as he linked his fingers with mine.

"Do you like it when I'm bossy?" I said, batting my eyelashes.

"Oh yeah, baby. You can boss me around any day," he grinned.

*Good to know.*

**A/N: Okay, slight change in plans. This was basically the trip to Forks. Also, sorry about the angst. But, I had to break up the fluff. Up next will be New Year's and some spiked lemonade. Leave me love!**

# The Emerald City

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 33: The Emerald City

Edward and I spent the rest of our trip with Charlie. He had managed to get some time off. We did some things around Forks and Port Angeles. It was very quiet. It was very relaxing. It was exactly what the doctor ordered.

On the eve of New Year's Eve, Edward and I decided to head to Seattle. While in Port Angeles, Edward got a phone call from one of his old colleagues from Virginia Mason inviting him to dinner. Edward was hesitant to commit to the dinner. When I asked him about it, he said that it was Dr. Moore. He was the attending physician that worked on Tanya. I asked Edward if Dr. Moore was a friend. Edward grumbled that he was. I all but forced him to call Dr. Moore back. We were meeting Dr. Moore and his wife for dinner at the Metropolitan Grill. Edward also mentioned that he wanted to get in touch with Cynthia. She was one of the nurses at Virginia Mason. I suggested lunch. Edward readily agreed.

We met up with Cynthia at a local TGIFridays. She was on her lunch break. She was an older woman with her graying blond hair pulled back in a ponytail. Her eyes were bright and blue. She looked very friendly and kind. "Dr. Masen!" she called as she gave him a hug. He held her closely and they rocked.

## A Fresh Start

"It's so good to see you."

"You too, Cynthia. And it's Edward," he smiled. "You know that."

"Old habits die hard, Edward," she teased.

"Cynthia, I'd like to introduce my fiancée, Isabella Swan," Edward said proudly as he put a hand around my waist.

"It's nice to meet you, Cynthia," I said warmly.

She smiled and pulled me into a tight embrace. "I'm so happy you are with Edward. You seem lovely," Cynthia said into my ear. She pulled away and bounced on her toes, looking very much like Alice. "Let me see the ring." I held up my left hand and she gasped. "It's beautiful, Edward. So elegant."

"Nothing but the best for my love," Edward said, kissing my forehead. We were seated by the hostess and we settled into the booth. "So, how are things going with you, Cynthia?"

"One day closer to retirement," Cynthia grumbled. "The new boss is an asshole."

"Sorry," Edward grimaced. "Is he running my ER into the ground?"

"You can say that," Cynthia said. "Our death rate is up because of the scheduling of the residents. The attendings are overworked and don't get me started on the new charting system."

"Who's in charge?" Edward asked.

"Victoria," Cynthia sighed. "She's a great doctor, but horrible at making administrative decisions. She was only supposed to be the interim ER department head, but she's fucking someone."

## A Fresh Start

"Victoria? Red head? Couldn't do a spinal tap in her third year of residency?" Edward asked.

"The same."

"Oh lord," Edward said, rolling his eyes.

"However, enough about Virginia Mason. Tell me about how you met," Cynthia said. "I need me some romance."

"Cynthia, you're married. You have romance," Edward snorted.

"No, I don't. And I'm not. I divorced that lying, sleazebag prick when he told me he was fucking some blonde bimchette from his job," Cynthia growled.

"Damn bastard gave me gonorrhea ."

"Sounds lovely," I said, wrinkling my nose. "How long were you married?"

"Eighteen years. Two kids too," Cynthia sighed. "So, I'm single. I live in this crappy condo with my two hormonal, cranky teenagers and my ex-husband rarely pays his child support on time. Yay me!"

"Oh, Cynthia," Edward frowned. "I'm so sorry. What an asshole."

"Yeah, he is. But I'm better off without him," Cynthia said with a wave of the hand. "I found me a cute, younger guy on eHarmony! Back to your romance, how did you meet?"

"Well, Edward is my best friend's cousin. She kind of set us up," I answered.

"Kind of?" Edward snorted. "She forced us together. Not that I'm complaining."

"Well, I just went through a divorce about six months ago. My ex-husband was cheating on me as well. Alice had me meet Edward at some local bar after a show that we put on. I'm a teacher and I direct the drama club at my school.



## A Fresh Start

We had just finished our spring musical *Once on this Island, Jr.* Anyhow, our first meeting wasn't all rainbows and fireworks."

"Bella hated me," Edward laughed. "If looks could kill, I'd be struck down dead."

"I was hating all men at that point," I said, poking him in the belly. "You could have been Brad Pitt and I would have hated you."

"Then Bella came into my ER the next day," Edward said as he kissed my lips sweetly. "Her hand had a date with a granite countertop."

"My ex-husband was having me trailed. For the divorce, I presume," I shrugged. "He said that Edward and I were 'cozy.' I punched the countertop and I thought I broke my hand. Thankfully I didn't. Instead, I got some vicodin and this one's phone number."

"Dr. Masen!" Cynthia chastised. "Flirting with patient. How unethical of you."

"Shut it," Edward said with a dramatic eye roll. "She didn't call me. I was heartbroken."

"Why the hell did you not call him?" Cynthia laughed as she took a sip from her drink. I couldn't answer because the waiter came and took our orders. Cynthia was shooting him daggers and when he left she looked at me with a pointed glare. "Well?"

"I was a chicken shit," I answered simply. "I mean look at him."

"He is fucking good-looking," Cynthia said, raking her eyes over her old boss. "I'd do you."

"I can't believe you said that!" Edward squeaked, his cheeks a bright pink.

"What? You're not my boss anymore. I can lust over your hot bod unabated," Cynthia said as she waved her straw at Edward. "You are looking even more

## A Fresh Start

fine now."

"Okay, this is just bizarre. I feel like I'm in the twilight zone," Edward chuckled nervously.

"Sorry, Edward," Cynthia said in earnest. "I don't mean to make you feel uncomfortable."

"No, it's okay," Edward smiled crookedly. "Back to our story though."

"Right. So, what happened next?" Cynthia asked, looking at me expectantly.

"Well, I got my divorce. On the day that it was finalized, I went out drinking with Alice. I got drunk. I mean lit. Alice and I ended up calling her fiancé, who was also drunk, for a ride. He obviously couldn't pick us up. Alice called Edward and I nearly flipped out. Okay, I did flip out. I wasn't ready to see him. I drank some more. A lot more. I ended up going to the bathroom and was stopped by some random beefcake. Edward pretended to be my boyfriend and got me away. Suffice it to say, my buzz was effectively over."

"I drove Alice and Bella home. I then picked up Bella the next morning to get her car. We met for lunch beforehand. I told her about Tanya and my parents," Edward said with a frown. I laced my fingers with his. He kissed my temple, inhaling deeply. "Bella was so compassionate and caring. I think I knew then that I was in love with her."

Our food was delivered and we tucked into the greasy deliciousness. I inhaled my burger and all of my fries. Edward looked at me skeptically. I smirked and reached for a few of his fries. His brow arched and he chuckled.

"Soon after, it was Independence Day and Edward said that he would wait for me. He had feelings for me, but he would wait for me," I said wistfully. "Our relationship began as a friendship. Then, on the night of Alice and Jasper's, Alice's husband, bachelor/bachelorette party, we kissed. The rest, as you can say, is history. Things progressed pretty quickly from there. I moved in September after my ex-husband was being an assbat. We got engaged right

## A Fresh Start

around the beginning of December. Our wedding is planned for April 4th in Cancun, Mexico."

"That's wonderful!" Cynthia exclaimed. "You found your fairy tale."

*If she only knew that the fairy tale included some nightmarish moments.*

"We just can't wait until our 'happily ever after,'" Edward said quietly. He cupped my chin and kissed my lips sweetly.

"You were never like this with Tanya," Cynthia said.

"No. What I feel with Bella is deeper than what I felt with Tanya. I loved Tanya. Immensely. But Bella is my other half. My soul mate," Edward said. "It's indescribable how I feel around her, when I'm with her."

"I feel the same way," I said with a goofy grin on my face. "It's like an electric jolt running through my body whenever we touch. I don't want it to stop. I crave it."

Cynthia blinked a few times and then broke into a huge grin. "I'm so happy for you both. I can feel the love radiating off of you. You deserve it, Edward. I'm glad you found it. I was so afraid that you would just work yourself into oblivion. However, you didn't. You found Bella."

"We found each other," I answered. "I've never been so happy."

"Well, I know it doesn't count for much, but I totally approve," Cynthia said with a wink. "I better get an invite to this destination wedding."

"You got it, Cynthia," Edward winked.

We finished our lunch and Cynthia scuttled back to Virginia Mason. She gave Edward and I a hug and got into her Honda Accord. Edward and I drove to the hotel that we booked and thankfully were able to get into a day early. We spent the rest of the afternoon relaxing and spreading out in the king sized bed. So

## A Fresh Start

much better than the tiny full sized bed that we slept in at Charlie's.

We spread out a lot. Every corner of that bed. And again, my cooter is sore. But a good kind of sore.

xx AFS xx

"I really don't want to go out with Dr. Moore," Edward grumbled.

"If we go, I'll give you a blow job," I bargained.

"You drive a hard bargain..." Edward said, narrowing his eyes.

"I'll boss you around," I teased. Edward let out a guffaw and gripped his sides. "Hmmm...you're cut off, mister."

"Wha...what? No! Please no cutting off the sex," he begged. I growled and turned on my heel to finish getting dressed. I slipped on the black skirt I wore out for dinner with my dad. I then put on a purple top and some funky jewelry that Alice gave me for Christmas. I slid on my boots and finishing fluffing my hair and putting on my makeup. Edward was wearing a black suit with a white shirt and a purple tie. He smirked as he knew he was coordinating with me. "If I'm good, will there be sex?"

"We'll have to see," I said, smacking his chest. "Jeez. You are a horny bastard."

"Only for you, beautiful girl," he said as he kissed my lips. "Can't we just stay here and have naked fun time?"

"Tempting..."

"Please?" Edward begged as he spun me around and ground his growing arousal into my ass. "I need you, Bella."

"You'll get me..."

## A Fresh Start

"Yes!" he said with an emphatic fist pump.

"After dinner."

"Fuck me," Edward said dejectedly. I kissed his cheek and he groaned. "You are a tease, Swan."

"Yep. But you love me," I smirked. I tugged on Edward's hand and dragged him to the door of our suite. I'm surprised e didn't lay down on the ground and start having a tantrum based off his reaction about going. He sulked as we waited for the rental car. Edward was silent as we drove to the Metropolitan Grill and had the car dropped off with valet. "Edward, you're going to be fine."

"I know. It's just...I can't even describe it," he said. "Overwhelming is the closest thing I can think of, but it's not right. You know?"

"Edward, you're incredibly strong. You can do this. Dr. Moore is a friend and I know it sucks that he was the doctor that worked on Tanya, he wants to see you," I said, caressing his cheeks. "I'll be right by your side and I'm not going anywhere."

"I know," he whispered.. He leaned forward and pressed his forehead to mine. "I love you, beautiful girl. So much."

"I love you, too, Edward," I answered, kissing his soft, pouty lips. He deepened the kiss briefly and pulled away. The sadness in his eyes was replaced with lust. "Ready to go into the lion's den?"

"With you by my side, I can do anything," he said confidently. I kissed his lips sweetly one more time and we headed into the Metropolitan Grill. Edward strode up to the hostess' counter and asked if Dr. Moore had arrived. She gaped at my fiancé, focusing a little too long on his handsome face. *He's mine, bitch. Back off.* She nodded dumbly and led us to a secluded area of the restaurant. Once at the table, a middle-aged man with intelligent brown eyes, tanned skin, and light brown hair grinned at us. A younger woman with reddish hair was seated next to him.

## A Fresh Start

"Edward!"

"Kyle," Edward replied as he held out his hand to Dr. Moore. Kyle pulled Edward into a 'man hug' and released him with a friendly grin. "You look good."

"So do you, Edward," Kyle said, clapping Edward on his shoulder. "You remember my wife, Christina."

"Nice to see you again, Christina," Edward said with a friendly smile. "How is Riley?"

"You remembered," Christina said with a look of surprise. "Riley's great. He's nearly three now. Ripping up the entire house. Crazy little guy."

"I may not have been the most pleasant guy to be around, but Riley was unforgettable," Edward smirked.

"You seem so different from when you left, Edward," Kyle said. "It's good. Really good."

"Well, it's all due to this beautiful woman," Edward said as he wrapped his arms around my waist. "Kyle and Christina, this is my fiancée, Bella Swan."

"Fiancee," Kyle smirked. He held out his hand and we shook our hands. Christina gave me a hug and she squealed.

"It's nice to meet both of you," I said. We settled into our seats and Edward and Kyle started talking about Virginia Mason. The waiter came and took our orders. I turned to Christina. "So, what do you do?"

"I'm a stay at home mom," Christina said. "We had difficulty getting pregnant and my pregnancy was quite challenging. I was put on bed rest after four months because of dangerously high blood pressure. So, I never went back to work after Riley was born."

## A Fresh Start

"What did you do before Riley?"

"I was a journalist. Sports journalist," she smirked. "I loved it, but it was too much traveling. I spent more days away from my husband and family than with them."

"Did you travel with the sports teams?" I asked.

"Yeah. Mainly the Mariners in the summer and the Seahawks during the winter," Christine smirked. "I got some awesome perks with the job, though."

"I can imagine," I laughed.

"How about you, Bella? What do you do?" Christina asked as she sipped her martini.

"I'm a middle school teacher, language arts," I said as I took a hearty drink of my white wine. "I also am the drama director. We're beginning our rehearsals for the spring musical once we get back from winter break."

"Oh, what are you doing?" Christina asked.

"*Thoroughly Modern Millie, Jr.*" I answered.

"Junior?"

"It takes the main show and pairs it down for middle school students. Makes the vocal parts easier and adjusts the storyline to have it be more 'kid friendly.'"

"Sounds really fun," Christina said with a friendly smile. "I bet the kids absolutely adore it."

"They do. It's a lot of work, but worth it in the end," I replied.

"You seem good for Edward," Christina said. "He seems really happy."

## A Fresh Start

"I like to think so," I snorted. "Our relationship has had its ups and downs, but we really love each other."

"I can see that. He looks at you with such adoration. Kyle and I were so worried after Tanya died that Edward would fall apart. And he did, for a little while. Then he dove into work. He never went home. Ever. Kyle would have to drag him from Virginia Mason, kicking and screaming at times," Christina reminisced sadly.

"Do you blame him? His reason for living had been ripped away from him. Would you want to go home and be constantly reminded of what you lost?" I asked, a frown marring my features.

"You sound like you've been through this," Christina said thoughtfully. "Were you widowed?"

"No. Divorced. However, being in my old home was a constant reminder of my failed marriage. I sold the house and as soon as I could, I got into a condo," I said with a sad grin. "Unfortunately, my ex-husband has a bit of complex and is currently stalking me. I moved out of my apartment after he attacked me in September with Edward. It's a good thing since the condo complex burned down about a week after I sold my place."

"Holy hell," Christina mused. "That's awful. Is your ex-husband still on the loose?"

"I think so," I sighed. "We haven't really heard from him since I was in a car accident in December."

"He did it?"

"I'm not sure, but I wouldn't put it past him," I grimaced.

"Talking about your wonderful ex-husband," Edward said with a pointed glare.

"Unfortunately."



## A Fresh Start

"So, Bella, how did you and Edward meet?" Kyle asked. I was grateful for the change in subject. Discussing the happiness of my relationship with Edward was a needed distraction from my mind going a million miles a minute about Mike. As Edward and I were telling Kyle and Christina about how we met, our meals were delivered. They oohed and aahed at the appropriate places. Christina was over the moon about my engagement ring and the moonstone. She slugged Edward in the shoulder saying he had exquisite taste.

After dinner, we went our separate ways. Kyle and Christina needed to get home to their baby sitter. Edward looked at me and his eyes were filled with lust again. He licked his lips and his fingers grazed my ass in my skirt. I gently swatted his fingers away, giving him a warning look with my eyes. His jade orbs narrowed and he growled lightly. I smirked and hopped into the passenger seat of the car when it was pulled up to the entrance of the Metropolitan Grill.

"Are you happy that you went out with them?" I asked.

"I'll be happier when we're back in our hotel room," Edward said huskily.

"Jeez, horny much?" I giggled.

"No..."

"Sure, Edward," I snorted.

"I'm always hard for you, Bella," Edward said. "It's quite disconcerting when I go to work in scrubs and I'm sporting a huge boner."

"Sorry, baby," I said with a frown. "Well, when we get back to the hotel, you're in for a surprise."

"Oh really? What?"

"You'll see when we get there," I said, blushing furiously. I had wanted to have my wicked way with Edward. He found it strangely arousing when I was assertive and bossy. I was going to try a complete paradigm shift. He was

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going to do my bidding. Edward sped back to the hotel, tossing the keys to the valet and grabbing my hand as I got out of the car. We rode up the elevator in silence. The tension, sexual tension, was palpable. I couldn't wait to get Edward on his knees. *Oh, the fun we'll have.*

Once we got into the room, I spun around and pressed Edward into the door. Quite forcefully. Edward's eyes widened and I felt him twitch against my hip. I reached for his tie and removed from his body. "Bella?"

"Do you trust me, Edward?" I asked, twisting his tie in my hands.

"Implicitly," he whispered.

"Good," I said as tied the silk over his eyes. He inhaled sharply and his fingers dug into my hips. His cock twitched against my body and I snickered silently. I pulled Edward to the bed and sat him down. "Can you see anything, Edward?"

"No," he said, his voice rough and husky.

"Hmmm," I said as I stepped away. Edward's hands reached for me and I managed to dance out his grip. I quickly removed my clothes, save for my black lacy bra and black lacy boy shorts. "Now, you can't touch me, Edward. Not until I tell you."

"What?"

"Do I need to bind your hands, Edward?" I asked forcefully.

"No, Bella," he said, the excitement clear in his voice.

"Isabella," I said, leaning close to his handsome face. He moaned quietly and licked his lips. I reached for his hands and stood him up. I slowly circled him and began removing his expensive suit. When it came to his shirt, I smirked. "Do you like your shirt, Edward?"

"Um, why?"

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I chuckled and reached for his shirt. With all of my strength I ripped the shirt apart, sending the buttons flying. I pushed the shirt down his shoulders and tossed it onto the floor.

"Holy fuck," Edward said as he reached for me. I danced away and laughed seductively.

"No touching, Edward," I said, quickly sobering. "I don't want to have to punish you. Bind your hands."

"God damn it," Edward breathed. I unbuttoned Edward's pants and pulled them and his boxers down together. I sunk to my knees and stared at his arousal. I arched a brow and ran my tongue along the length of his shaft. He gasped and his hands moved to my head. I stopped my oral ministrations and removed his long fingers from my hair. He groaned as I stood up. I walked to the bathroom and got the belt from robe in there. I took Edward's hands and tied them behind his back.

"No touching, Dr. Masen," I seethed sexily in his ear. "Or I won't let you come."

"Oh god, Isabella," he moaned.

"Hmmm, I like when you call me by my full name. Especially like this," I said, running my fingers over his lean, muscled chest. "You look absolutely delicious. Perhaps I'll finish my taste." I fell to my knees and ran my hands up and down his thighs. I looked up at Edward and his mouth was slightly parted. He was breathing heavily. With my tongue, I repeated my actions from before. I lightly traced my fingers up his strong legs and wrapped my mouth around his impressive cock. He groaned and his hips bucked. With one of my hands, I circled the base of his arousal and started sucking on his dick like I was a god damned Hoover. His hips moved with my mouth and he plunged deeper into my mouth. I lightly scraped my teeth on the bottom of his shaft. I removed my lips from his cock. I pumped his arousal as I stood up. "You like, Edward?"

"God yes," he moaned.

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"Do you want to see me?" I purred.

"More than you can imagine," he responded.

"Do you want to touch me?"

"I'm dying to touch your soft skin. Your slick pussy," he growled. I reached behind his head and removed his purple tie from his eyes. Edward blinked and looked down at me. His eyes were hooded and black as onyx. "I need to touch you, Isabella."

"On your knees, Masen," I said. Edward gracefully fell to his knees and he was at the perfect height to kiss my abdomen. I walked around him and released his bindings from his hands. "Do you like it when I boss you around?"

"You see how turned on I am," he smirked.

"Yes, I can. What should I have you do?" I tutted as walked around his kneeling form. "Kiss me? Touch me? Fuck me?"

"How about all of the above," Edward suggested, his eyes piercing through mine.

"I want you to lick my pussy, Edward," I said. "That's what I want you to do."

"Hmmm, the sweetest nectar," he murmured as he reached for my panties. Like his shirt, my panties were torn from my body and Edward spun me around so I was on the bed. My hips were on the edge of the king sized bed and my legs were spread in front of Edward's eager mouth and tongue. Edward's hands were rubbing my thighs. I was trembling in anticipation. He leaned forward and his tongue was run along my dripping slit. He growled and the vibrations went through my body. I moaned and rotated my hips as Edward's mouth moved along my body. "God, Bella. You're so wet."

"Going down on you turns me on," I smirked as I looked at him between my legs. His green eyes met mine and he moved his tongue to my clit and two of

## A Fresh Start

his fingers were thrust into my warmth. His eyes never left mine as he licked my pussy. His tongue swirled around my clit and his fingers curled in my body, hitting my g-spot. I moaned loudly as I threw my head back in ecstasy. Edward smiled against my sex and he bit down on my sensitive bundle of nerves. His nibble on my body caused me to arch off the bed, breathing heavily. "Your tongue and fingers are so fucking perfect, Edward."

"Hmmm," he answered against my slick folds. His tongue darted in and out of my sex and I was getting closer to my release. He added his fingers to my body, in addition to his tongue and I started to feel the coil in my belly. The delicious tension in my body. I wanted it to release. But not. I wanted to come all over his face and fingers, but it would mean the end of this wonderful torture.

"Edward," I moaned as I reached for my breasts. I unclasped my bra and tossed it onto the floor. I ran my fingers over my pebbled nipples and bucked my hips against Edward's face and hands. "I'm coming, baby." My muscles fluttered against his fingers and he growled as he attacked my pussy with renewed fervor. I let out a guttural scream and arched off the bed.

"Fuck," Edward said as he pulled for a brief moment. He put his tongue and lips on my clit and sucked and nipped on my body as I climaxed, harder than I'd ever done before. I tried to regulate my breathing as Edward crawled up my body. He kissed my lips. I enthusiastically accepted his kiss, sucking on his hot tongue, tasting my arousal that coated it. "Shit, baby. That's so hot when you do that," Edward moaned. He rolled us and I was straddling his waist. Our kiss never broke and his hands found my breasts, gently kneading the soft mounds.

"I want you to take me from behind, Edward," I mumbled against his mouth.

He pulled away and we maneuvered so I was on all fours. I had never been with a man like this. Edward pressed kiss to my spine and his hands danced along my ribcage. "You are remarkable, Bella," Edward said quietly.

"So are you, Edward," I said, looking over my shoulder at him coyly. "Now, fuck me."

## A Fresh Start

He snarled and he slammed into my core, causing me to let out a yelp. He was so deep. So deep in my warmth and it felt so good. Amazing. I felt full and complete. Edward didn't start thrusting. It seemed like he was getting used to the depth. I wiggled my ass and he hissed. "You're killing me, Bella. You are so tight like this. So good," he moaned as he started moving in and out of my body. I started moving with him, pushing my ass toward him. "Fuck."

I reached down and rubbed my clit as Edward pounded into my wet heat. I reached further down and felt our connection as we fucked. Edward was grunting as he thrust in and out. In and out. God, I never wanted him to stop. He leaned forward and his soft hands found my breasts and he cupped them, squeezing the pert and taut nipples. He pulled me up and I was flush against his chest. The new angle felt different, but so good. Edward grabbed my chin and kissed me forcefully as his hips bucked against mine, pushing his hard cock into my slick depths. "Come for me Isabella," he growled against my lips. He nipped at my neck and his hand reached down my body to circle my clit. "I want to feel you come around my cock."

"Ed...Ed...ward," I moaned as his words caused a rush of arousal to flow through me. I pushed against his hand and his cock. "Shit, you make me feel...so fucking good."

"I aim to please," he said, biting down on my neck. "Let go. Come for me. Now, Isabella." He pinched my clit and I clamped down around his hard cock. I arched my back against his body and screamed loudly. My orgasm triggered his and I felt his dick twitch in my body as he spilled into me. He roared and his hand wrapped around my hip tightly. We collapsed on the bed in a tangled heap of legs, arms and sweat. Edward pressed sweet kisses to my damp neck and he encircled my waist with his muscular arms. "I love you, Bella. You are, by far, the hottest woman on the planet."

"You make me feel that way," I said, nestling back against his chest. "I love you, too, Edward."

"Hmmm, I do like the domineering side of you, Isabella," he cooed. "I could get used to that."

## A Fresh Start

"I can say the same for you, too, Edward. When you're all authoritative, I need new panties," I snorted.

"Good to know," he said as he licked and nibbled on my shoulder. He pulled out of my body and we eventually found our way under the covers. Edward kissed every inch of my face before yawning. I chuckled after I had my own yawn. I kissed him sweetly and we curled into each other, falling into a restful and satisfied sleep.

**A/N: Quasi 'Dommella.' Kind of, sort of. Up next, return to Sherryville. Update on Todd. Possible appearance of Mike? Let me know what you think! Love and kisses!**

# The Surprise

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 34: The Surprise

"I can't believe how fast this year is going," Rose sighed. "It's already February."

"Valentine's day is just around the corner," Alice said. "Do you guys know what you're doing?"

"Probably something quiet," I answered. "I never really celebrated Valentine's day before. You guys?"

"Emmett is taking me away for the weekend. He won't say where, but it's not here and that's all that matters," Rose said with a wink. "How about you Alice?"

"I'm assuming something quiet, too. Peanut is making things a bit difficult. Ugh, Bella. I'm as big as a house," Alice whined one day during lunch. "I can't see my feet."

"They're there," I chuckled. "Swollen, but there."



## A Fresh Start

"I'm calling Edward," she said as she took out her phone. "My back has been hurting for a couple of days and..."

"Alice, you're fine. You're not due for another month," I sighed.

"But, I could be going into labor," she whined. "Let me call my brother." She begged me with her eyes. I shot a look at Rosalie who just shrugged.

"I had a C-section. Scheduled. No labor involved," Rose said as she nibbled on her lunch.

Alice dialed Edward and held her phone up to her ear. "Hello, baby brother," she said. "I have a question."

I heard Edward groan over the phone, demanding to talk to me. "I won't put Bella on. She'll just tell you that I'm overreacting."

"She is, Edward. She's stark, raving mad," I shouted. Edward sighed and asked what her 'symptoms' were. She described what she was feeling and then waited. And waited.

"Edward?" she squeaked. He demanded that I be put on the phone. Alice paled and handed her cell phone to me.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

"Does your school have a blood pressure cuff?" Edward asked.

"I think so. In the nurse's office," I answered.

"Get the nurse and have her take Alice's blood pressure," Edward said authoritatively. I told him that I would and we'd call him back. I helped Alice out of the chair and we walked to the nurse's office. She sat down and our head nurse, Peg, affixed the cuff to Alice's arm. She pumped the cuff and rattled off some numbers. I called Edward back and told him what Alice's blood pressure was. "Shit. I was afraid of that. Bella, you need to bring Alice to the hospital."

## A Fresh Start

She's showing indications of preeclampsia. She needs to be monitored."

"Okay, Edward," I said. "We'll be there in a little bit."

"I love you, beautiful girl."

"I love you, too," I whispered. I darted to the office and told Mrs. Cope that I needed to take Alice to the hospital. My plans for my afternoon classes were on my desk. I went into Alice's room, picking up her coat and purse before I did the same for me. I pulled the car up to the rear of the school and helped a very pregnant Alice to my car. "Don't go into labor in my brand new, pretty SUV."

"Whatever, Swan," Alice said with a roll of the eyes. "Baby isn't coming today." I snorted and drove us to Craven. I asked Alice to send Edward a text when we left school. She did before she called Jasper. I drove carefully to the hospital as it was snowing pretty heavily. When we got to the hospital, I pulled up to the ambulance bay to find Edward waiting outside with a wheelchair. I stopped the car and Edward assisted Alice into the wheelchair. I told him that I would park the car. Edward said that Alice was going to be admitted to labor and delivery.

As I parked, I ran into Jasper. He was frazzled and upset, asking me for updates at a mile a minute. I just grabbed his hand and we went into Craven. I gave Rhonda a wave as we walked past the triage desk. She winked in return, turning back to the patient she was speaking with. Jasper and I rode up to the labor and delivery floor. Jasper went up to the nurse's station, asking for Alice Whitlock. The chipper nurse told us that she was in room 706. Jasper took off and I followed as closely as I could. We got to Alice's room and she was in a bed, dressed in a hospital gown and a large thing strapped to her belly. Edward was talking with another doctor, who was presumably Alice's gynecologist. Jasper sat down next to Alice and took her hands in his. Edward excused himself and wrapped his arms around my body.

He led us outside so Jasper and Alice could talk to the doctor. "Will she be alright?" I asked.

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"She'll probably need to be on bed rest for the remainder of her pregnancy, but she'll be fine," Edward said.

"At the hospital?"

"That's just for tonight. We want to see what the extent of her preeclampsia is before making that decision," Edward answered. "Dr. Mariani is going to run some tests. Do you want to go down to my office?"

I nodded. Edward laced his hand with mine and we rode down to the first floor. I leaned my head against his shoulder and took a few deep breaths. I dazed off, remembering the past few weeks.

We had celebrated New Year's Eve at the Space Needle. It was fun. We watched the fireworks from the observation deck. We then rang in the New Year with multiple orgasms. We woke up the next morning and headed back Sherryville. We didn't want to return, but it was necessary. Once back, Edward contacted his attorney about becoming a foster family for Todd and other children. The paperwork was almost complete and we were ready to bring Todd home when his birth father came out of the woodwork, demanding he take custody of his son. Edward was skeptical and he forced him to get a paternity test. Unfortunately, it was a match and the courts placed Todd into the custody of his father. I was heartbroken. Shattered. Numb. Pissed. Too many negative emotions to even describe. I had really gotten close with my little Toddler. I visited him every day that I could, making sure that he was keeping track of Edward's shoe habits. I was really growing to love him and I wanted to him be a part of our family. I had even bought some things for his 'bedroom.' We had begun converting one of the spare rooms into a child's room. The walls were painted and we had gotten some children's furniture. Now, that wasn't going to happen.

I shut down for a few days after that. I stayed in bed, not eating and sleeping a lot. Edward was growing very concerned and he dragged me out of bed, threw me into the shower and drove me to Michele's. He essentially carried me into the waiting room and I wouldn't have put it past him to sit on my lap to prevent me from running out of the cramped space. Once Michele met with me, I broke

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down. I explained how I loved Todd and I wanted him to be mine. I wanted my own baby, too. I was hopeful that with all of the smexing that Edward and I had done, sans condom or birth control, I'd be with child. Alas, I got my period a couple days after New Years. *Damn it.* Michele and I decided that I pick up my therapy sessions to two times a week until I got over the loss of Todd and come to grips with my desire to have children.

We returned to school a couple days after New Year's day. Rose was in school a few days that week. She had to meet with HR and get the medical clearance to come back. She had documentation from her doctor, in addition to sworn statements from Edward, Carlisle and several nurses on the burn unit, saying she was capable of coming back. The district was hesitant. However, when Rose mentioned something about dragging in attorneys and the American's with Disabilities Act, they changed their tune. She returned full time at the beginning of the semester. Rose needed to have the wheelchair because her feet were still healing and the muscles in her legs were slowly gaining strength. She could get through her first period class on her feet, then she needed to sit. It pained her to do so as she was a very energetic teacher.

"Bella?" Edward's voice broke through my reverie. "I lost you for a minute."

"What? Oh, sorry," I said. "Just thinking."

"I know. You had this adorable grimace on your face," he chuckled. His fingers swept over my cheek and he kissed my forehead. "What were you thinking about?" Edward unlocked his door and led me to the leather couch in his office.

"New Year's. Rosalie. School. Todd," I said the last one quietly.

"Me, too. Well, Todd," he said sadly. Edward was just as broken up about Todd. However, he was more put together about it. He told me that he did talk to Carlisle and was seeing a grief counselor. "I'm just concerned that his father is taking care of him."

"Can't you check? I mean have his social worker check? You're a doctor. You can have Department of Children and Families do a wellness check. You're a

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mandated reporter. So am I," I said.

"Trust me, I'm on the phone with DCFS daily to see if I can get any information. They always just tell me that he's fine and his father is caring for him," Edward answered. "Doesn't really put my mind at ease." I grunted and crossed my legs.

Edward gathered me in his arms and pulled me into his lap. "Maybe it's idealistic, but Todd is probably loving being with his real dad. It sucks because he was taken from us, but now he has a chance to be with his family."

"I wanted to be his family, Edward," I whispered. "I wanted us to be his mommy and daddy."

"Me too, beautiful girl. However, it wasn't meant for us. Not with Toddler. Things happen for a reason. We may not necessarily agree with the reason, but it leads us down the path that we're meant to travel. As much as it sucks for me to have lost my parents and my first wife, it led me to you," he said, his green eyes blazing with love and adoration. "I can't wait until you're my wife. Mrs. Edward Masen. I also can't wait until we have a baby. If we can't get pregnant, then we'll adopt."

I wrapped my arms around his neck and sobbed into his shoulder. Edward's fingers gently ran along my spine and he returned my embrace. "I love you, Edward," I said, pulling away and looking at his handsome face. His eyes were glistening with unshed tears. I traced under his eyes and leaned forward to kiss his soft lips. He angled my head to deepen the kiss and things were getting heated when his phone vibrated in his pocket.

"Dr. Masen," he said as he tried to sound professional and not extremely aroused. "Okay. Set up trauma two and I'll be right there. Thank you Rhonda."

"You have to go?" I asked.

"Yep. I'm sorry, Bella," he said sadly.

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"Why are you sorry? You didn't do anything wrong," I said, furrowing my brow. "Go save lives and be all heroic."

"Right, Swan," he chuckled. "I'll be home by seven tonight. I love you." I got up off his lap and he darted out of the office. I gathered my coat and bag and went back up to Alice's room. She was resting comfortably and Jasper was sitting next to her.

"Hey, Jas," I whispered.

"Bella, thank you for driving her to the hospital," he said.

"Not a problem. It got me out of teaching this afternoon. How is she?" I asked.

"She's on bed rest for the remainder of her pregnancy. However, she gets to go home tomorrow. They want to keep her overnight, just to be safe," Jasper answered. "I just got off the phone with Mrs. Cope. She called in Alice's maternity leave sub and we're good to go."

"I'm glad, Jas. If you need, I can bring over stuff for the sub," I said as I gently rubbed his shoulders.

"Nah. Alice is covered. She had a feeling over the weekend that something was 'up' and she started on her plans. They're on her desk," he chuckled. "That's my Ali. Always the planner."

"That's why she's such a good choir director," I said.

"You know, she's going to be all over your wedding now that she can't do anything else but sit and watch the wedding channel," Jasper chuckled.

"Oh, no. She had free reign with my first wedding. *I'm in control* of this one," I said.

"I heard that, Swan," Alice said, opening her eyes. "Please let me do something. Or else I'm going to be bored."

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"Nope," I said. "You just protect peanut and we're even."

"You suck, Bella," Alice grumbled.

"But you love me," I said with a smirk. "I am going to be your sister after all."

"You still suck."

xx AFS xx

Today was Valentine's day. The epitome of a 'Hallmark holiday.' I never really celebrated it with Mike. He never got any kind of presents. We exchanged gifts on Christmas, but that was it. They were usually gift cards. Nothing romantic. No meaning. Edward was hounding me for what I wanted for Valentine's day. I honestly didn't care. Hell, he could have just put a red bow on his cock and I'd be a happy camper. God knows we've been getting it on. A lot. I mean, really.

*Edward must really, really, REALLY want a baby. Hell, who am I kidding? I want one too.*

I was out with Rose and we were visiting Heidi at the lingerie store. Rose was determined to get me some lingerie goodness for Edward. I rolled my eyes and decided to not fight it.

"Bella, you have to look hot for your man," Rose said from the cushy chair in the lingerie shop. "Tell her Heidi."

"Really, Bells. You need something to make his cock harden and make him want to jump you," Heidi agreed.

"He always wants to jump me," I chortled. "Our sex life is not for the faint of heart."

"Ooh, Edward has a kinky side," Rose said, waggling her brows.

"Not Edward," I said, shooting her a look.

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"What?" Rose shrieked. She hopped up and grimaced in pain. "You're the kinky one?"

"A little," I giggled. "Edward gets turned on when I get all assertive."

"Like dominating him and shit?" Heidi asked. "Hot doc likes to be bossed around?"

"Sort of," I blushed.

"I know the perfect thing for you," Heidi said as she darted off.

I shot a furtive look over to Rose and she giggled. "You may be the kinky one, but I think Edward has an adventurous side, too. Compared to what you've had, how is he in bed?"

"Fuck," I said, hiding my face. "On a scale of one to ten, a twenty. He's the most unselfish lover I've ever been with. It's always about *my* needs. His release is inconsequential."

"Bella, men can get off anywhere. Women are much more difficult to please," Rose said. "If you had a choice of his cock, his fingers or his tongue, for the rest of your life, what would it be?"

"Ideally his cock," I said. "But the things he does with his tongue, GAWD!"

"How big is he?" Heidi asked as she plopped down next to Rose. She had a handful of black lace and satin, but was disguising what it was. "I'm curious. I've seen pictures of the illustrious Dr. Masen and he looks like he's well hung."

"When have you seen pictures?"

"Oh, there was a beautiful picture of you and him in the society page from the Christmas Ball. You looked gorgeous by the way," Heidi said. "And he's yummy. You are one lucky bitch."



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"Thanks, Heidi," I chuckled.

"So?" Heidi and Rose asked.

"Oh, hell," I muttered. I held up my hands and indicated his length between the two. Their eyes got huge and started squealing. "And it's thick too."

"Lucky bitch," Heidi grumbled. "My man is not hung like that. However, he makes up for it in other areas. His tongue should be bronzed. He does this little fluttery thing against my clit that causes me to shiver every time."

"Okay. Enough sex talk," I said, shifting uncomfortably. "What's that?"

"Guaranteed sex outfits," Heidi giggled. "Come on. They require some assistance." She grabbed my hand and told me to strip down. I eyed her warily and she told me that she's seen a million naked women. She also told me that I am wearing this outfit home. I stripped down and Heidi helped me into black and purple corset top, garter belt, and crotchless panties. She also had me put on black thigh highs. "He'll cream his pants when he sees you. Do you have a flogger?"

"Heidi, I'm not into that BDSM hardcore shit," I blushed. "The most we've done involved a blindfold."

"Hmmm, I think I have something that you both would love," Heidi said as I got dressed. She led me back out into the store, sitting me next to Rose. She returned with a wand-like thing with leather straps. "This is a flogger. It can be used for punishment or pleasure. Think of it like a whip with multiple straps."

"Heidi," I began.

"Oh, hush, Swan. Take the damn flogger. Whip Edward's tight ass until it's bright red," Rose giggled. "We'll take it."

"Good," Heidi smiled. "I was going to give it to you anyway."

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I rolled my eyes and helped Rose up. I walked to the cashier and paid for my present. Well, Edward's present. Heidi told me that she was giving me the flogger. I raised a brow and she said that it was an early wedding present. *Right.*

Rose hobbled to her car and gave me a hug. Heidi told me to have fun. I rolled my eyes and got into my new beast. I waved and drove home. I pulled the car into the garage, walking into the kitchen. "I'm home!" I looked around the house and saw a note on the kitchen counter. *Another scavenger hunt?* Not so much. Edward just left me a note to meet him upstairs when I got home. I walked up the stairs to our bedroom and noticed that the door was closed. I arched a brow. The door was never closed. *Hmmmm...*

I opened the door and found the room bathed in candlelight. The bedroom had a sandalwood scent to it from all of the candles. I closed the door and looked around for Edward. "Hello?"

Edward walked out from the bathroom and he was wearing a pair of jeans. His chest was perfectly bare. He looked delectable. *I want a taste.* He strode to me. Edward's eyes were filled with lust. I opened my mouth to say something and his lips covered mine. His tongue slid and danced with mine, fighting for dominance. I groaned and reached for his soft hair. He captured my hands and stopped them from touching him. "Two rules. One, no touching unless I give you express permission. Two, no speaking unless you are at your limit. Do you understand? You may answer, Isabella," he said seductively.

"I understand," I said, my voice sounding breathy.

"Good," he said as gently pushed me back against the wall of the bedroom. He lifted my hands so they were above my head and Edward ran his nose up and down my neck. "You smell amazing, Isabella." I groaned inwardly, pushing against his hold on my hands. His tongue followed the same path as his nose and he ran his fingers along the hem of my shirt. "This needs to go," he said, touching my blouse. "Remove it, Isabella."

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Edward removed his hands from mine and stepped away. I reached for the buttons of my blouse, quickly removing them and tossing the offending garment onto the floor. Edward's eyes widened and he smirked. He indicated with his finger for me to turn around. "Fuck. You are perfect, Isabella," he cooed. I cocked a hip and stared at him defiantly. His gaze hardened slightly and he pressed against me with his body. I could feel his erection press against my hip. "Do I need to blindfold you, Isabella? Answer me."

"No," I whispered against his ear. I lightly traced the shell of the ear with my tongue and Edward groaned.

He then shoved himself away and stared at me again. "Remove your pants, Isabella." I went for the button of my pants and slowly slid them down over my hips. I was left with my outfit that Heidi dressed me in after I kicked out of my pants. I ran my hands up and down my torso. Edward pointed to the bed and nodded to it with his head. I sauntered to the king-sized bed and sat down, crossing my legs daintily. Edward didn't want that. "Oh, no. Spread your legs, Isabella. I want to see you. Your beautiful pussy. As you play with yourself."

I bit my lip and uncrossed my legs. I scooted back onto the bed until I was laying on the mound of pillows. I spread my legs and Edward noticed my panties. My crotchless panties. I looked into his green eyes and smirked again. His gaze grew darker. Faster than a blink of an eye, he was pinning me with his hip. "Again, do I need to blindfold you? One more smirk or defiant look and I will, Isabella," he said as he bit down on my ear, hard. I nodded and he sat back. He was on the edge of the bed. "Now, you heard what I said earlier. I want to see you come."

I wanted to sass back. It was so much better when he did it. I, instead, snaked my hand down my body to my core. I reached my folds and began toying with my clit. I was already dripping. However, I was always turned on with Edward. He groaned as I circled my fingers around my sensitive nub. I closed my eyes and leaned back against pillows. I moved my legs further apart. I heard a faint rustling sound and I cracked open my eyes. Edward had removed his jeans and his hand was pumping his engorged cock. I watched his hand move along his shaft with rapt attention. Seeing Edward stroke his dick made me infinitely

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more turned on. My arousal was dripping down my legs and onto my hand. I slipped a finger into my body and arched my back. I bit back a moan, trying to adhere to Edward's rule of no speaking. *God, he knows I'm a screamer. This is torture.*

Edward's eyes sparkled mischievously as he saw me repress my voice. However his hand was moving faster. I wanted his cock to buried in me. Filling me to the hilt. "Add another finger, Isabella," Edward cooed. I did as he asked and added a second finger to my ministrations. With my other hand, I circled my clit. Edward grunted and he moved up the bed. He positioned himself between my legs, moving my hands away. With a renewed fervor, he plunged his tongue into my wet heat and lapped up my juices. I put a pillow over my face to quell my screams that I wanted to let out. I managed to get my 'voice' under control and I looked down at the beautiful man between my legs. His eyes were watching me and he had a smirk on his face. I reached, tangling my fingers into his hair as my hips bucked in rhythm with his tongue. I could feel my release. I was dancing on the edge and I wanted to come. I wanted to scream. Anything.

My body fell back against the pillows and I reached for my chest. I pulled my breasts out of the corset, tugging and twisting my nipples. I whimpered quietly when Edward's fingers plunged into me, curling in my body. Right at that spot that would send me over the edge. "Come for me, Isabella. I need to feel you come," he whispered. I bit back a moan. Edward's tongue flicked my sensitive nub and he sucked it into his mouth. He added a third finger into my body. He pumped furiously. The coil in my belly was wound so tight, it was so close to its release. I was breathing erratically. My hips moving disjointedly. Edward bit down lightly on my clit. That was the trigger to sending me soaring over the edge. My hips arched off the bed and I felt my muscles clamp around his fingers and juices flow out of my body. Edward kept his mouth attached to me and he eagerly lapped up all I had to offer, growling lightly as he did.

Once I calmed down, Edward wrapped his arms around my legs, drawing me closer to him. His hips pinned me to the bed. "You are undoubtedly the hottest fucking woman on the planet. And you're mine. Say it, Isabella. Tell me that you're mine," he growled as he sheathed himself in my body.

## A Fresh Start

"Yours, Edward. I'm only yours," I said roughly.

He snarled and threw my legs onto his shoulders, going deeper and deeper into my body. His hips moved forcefully, pistoning his cock in my body. His hair flopped onto his forehead and beads of sweat gathered at his temples. I could feel the sheen of his sweat over his body as he moved within me. He dropped my legs and he moved forward. He was hovering over me and he captured my lips with his, pushing one of my legs back. I groaned and moved my tongue with his. Edward rotated his hip and the tip of his cock was hitting in a new spot. It didn't last long as he wrapped his arms around my waist, flipping us so he was on his back. *God, how does he do that? No break in the connection. It's seamless.*

Edward's hands moved to my hips and guided me over his cock. I reached for his hands and laced my fingers with his. Then, using all of the strength that I had, I pushed his hands above his head as I continued to ride his dick. Edward's eyes widened and then they shone with a devious glint. I swiveled my hips. Edward's body moved with mine and I could see his mouth drop slightly. "Fuck, baby. I'm so close," he said. I removed one of my hands from his and covered his mouth. I arched a brow, daring him to talk. Edward mimicked my facial expression and I felt him smile under my hand. I traced his lips with my finger. He drew it into his mouth, sucking lightly as I moved harder and faster on his cock. I removed my finger and kissed his soft, pouty lips. I bit down on his bottom lip, nibbling slightly. I wrapped one of my hands behind his neck and I moved up. Edward followed suit and was sitting up with me. His arms snaked around my waist and we were so close to each other. I didn't know where one of us ended or another began. We were one body, one soul, one person.

Our breath mingled together and I could feel Edward get harder inside my body. I fisted his hair and pulled his head back. He growled and I sucked on his earlobe, licking and nibbling along the column of his neck. I inhaled deeply, enjoying the perfect scent of Edward: the light tang of his sweat, the clean smell of his body gel, and the perfect scent of his cologne. Edward tightened his hold on me and he was nibbling on my shoulder. His breathing was getting labored and he was close. So was I. My muscles were fluttering around his

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cock. I moved back and stared into his green orbs. Our gaze was intense. I took a sharp intake of breath as my body clamped around his cock. Edward held me closer to him as he pumped into me a few more times before releasing into my body. His lips crashed against mine and they moved in tandem with my mouth as we rode out our orgasms.

We slowly calmed down and looked into each other's eyes. "I love you, Bella. Happy Valentine's Day," Edward said with a lopsided grin.

"Hmmm, I think Valentine's Day is my favorite holiday now," I giggled. "I love you, so much, Edward. Happy Valentine's Day. Do you like your present?"

"Very much," he said as he ran his hands over the boning of the corset. "Especially these," he said as he snapped the panties. "Easy access."

"Perv," I laughed.

"But, I'm your perv," he countered. Edward cupped my face and kissed me sweetly. Things were getting more and more heated when Edward's cell phone rang on the nightstand. "Fuck my life," he grumbled. I got off his lap and he picked up the phone. "Dr. Masen...Slow down, Jas...We'll be right there." Edward hopped up off the bed and pulled up his jeans.

"Edward? What is it?" I asked.

"Alice is in labor," Edward answered.

**A/N: Cliffie...but a good kind! Leave me love!**

# The Baby

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 35: The Baby

*We slowly calmed down and looked into each other's eyes. "I love you, Bella. Happy Valentine's Day," Edward said with a lopsided grin.*

*"Hmmm, I think Valentine's Day is my favorite holiday now," I giggled. "I love you, so much, Edward. Happy Valentine's Day. Do you like your present?"*

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*"Edward? What is it?" I asked.*

## A Fresh Start

*"Alice is in labor," Edward answered.*

I blinked a few times. Alice is in labor. As in, having a baby. As in...HOLY SHIT! "It's too soon. The baby is not due until March, right?"

"The first week in March. It's not too soon," Edward said, a grin over his face. "Are you going to get dressed or am I going to have to drag you to the hospital wearing that?"

I looked down at my clothes, or rather lack thereof, and blushed. I hopped off the bed and ran into the closet, grabbing some yoga pants, fresh underwear and a fleece. I ran into the bathroom and stripped off my clothes. I ran a washcloth between my legs and got dressed in my comfy clothes. I walked out of the bathroom and I slipped on my socks and sneakers. Edward walked out of the closet, wearing a button down shirt that was untucked and a pair of Chucks. I licked my lips, wanting round two. "Bella, get your mind out of the gutter. We have to go. Our nephew is going to come into the world."

"Right," I said. I swept my hair up into a ponytail and we headed down to the garage. Edward started the Volvo and we drove to Craven. We got there in record time and headed up to labor and delivery. Carlisle and Esme were there, waiting for news. "Anything?" I asked.

"They just brought her into surgery," Carlisle said with a look of distress on his face. "The baby is breach and the cord is wrapped around his neck. They're prepping her for an emergency C-Section."

"When did she go into labor?" Edward asked.

"She was feeling it all day," Esme answered. "Her water broke around five this evening."

"Will Alice and the baby be alright?" I asked. "That doesn't sound good, 'breach' and 'cord wrapped around his neck.'"



## A Fresh Start

"As long as they get the baby out quickly, they'll both be fine," Carlisle assured me.

"How long does a C-section take?" I questioned, looking at the two medical experts.

"Depends on how risky the pregnancy is. She should be in recovery in a few hours," Edward said as he led me to the chairs in the waiting area. Esme sat next to me and she nervously fidgeted with her pants. Edward took out his Blackberry and appeared to be checking email. I looked around the room for anything to do. In my haste, I didn't grab my purse or more importantly my bag filled with papers to graded. I mentally slapped myself for that oversight, but Edward was excited to get here. I found a discarded magazine and idly flipped through it. There was nothing of interest in it. I hopped up and began pacing. "Bells?"

"I'm nervous. I have nothing to do and..." I rambled

"Come on, love. Let's get something to eat from the cafeteria. I know it's not romantic or anything, but we didn't get to eat the dinner I prepared," Edward said. "Call me if anything changes."

Edward and I rode down in the elevator to the main level. Edward wanted to swing by his office to pick up his laptop. For something for me to do. I shot him a look and he just chuckled. We went through the cafeteria line and got some dinner. I got a salad and Edward got a burger and fries. We sat down in one of the booths in the cafeteria and tucked into our food. "I'm sorry about our Valentine's day being ruined," Edward said quietly.

"It wasn't ruined," I said. "This is a wonderful thing. Your nephew is being born."

"Our nephew," Edward corrected. "I never got to give you your Valentine's day present."

## A Fresh Start

"Trust me, what we did was present enough," I said, fanning myself. "You are...there are no words."

"That good, huh," he teased. "I'm the shit. I know."

"And humble too," I said, tossing a crouton at him. "You didn't need to get me anything. Just being with you is present enough for Valentine's day. I never really celebrated it anyway."

"Why not?" Edward asked.

"I know I've said it before, but Mike and I never really exchanged gifts. The only thing he ever got me was my engagement ring," I said, looking at my fingers. "The presents we did exchange were very impersonal. Gift cards and the like."

"That's horrible," Edward muttered. "I'll spend the rest of my life spoiling you, Bella."

"It's really not necessary," I replied. "Just be respectful and loving. I'll be a happy camper if you do that."

"Bella," Edward chastised. "You are my life. You will always be my life. It is my goal to ensure your happiness. Your safety. Please let me spoil you."

"Well, turnabout's fair play, Dr. Masen," I said giving him a crooked smile. "I love spoiling you. You loved your present, right?"

"I nearly creamed my pants when you took off your clothes, Bella. You are so fucking unbelievable. I can't believe that you are with me. Forever," he said fervently. "So, aren't you at least curious as to what I got you for Valentine's day?"

"I'm curious, but you know what happened to the cat," I giggled.

"Funny, Bella," Edward said dryly.

## A Fresh Start

"What did you get me?" I asked.

"You'll have to wait until we get home to get it," he said with a smirk. I threw another crouton at him. Edward angled his head and caught it with his mouth. "Thanks. The fries were gross."

I rolled my eyes and finished my salad. We were nearly done with our dinner when Edward's phone rang from its perch on the table. "Hello?"

I raised my brows, waiting for his response. Edward's face told me my answer. He broke into a beautiful grin and he started throwing his trash onto the tray. He reached for my salad and tossed on the tray before putting the whole thing in the garbage. "We'll be right up. Alice had the baby. 8 pounds, 7 ounces, 18 inches long. They named him Edward," he said brokenly. But a good type of broken.

We bypassed the elevators and ran up to labor and delivery. I was huffing and puffing by the time we reached the floor. Edward chuckled and he hadn't broken a sweat. I smacked his ass and tried to regulate my breathing. We strode past the nurse's station and into Alice's room. Carlisle, Esme and Jasper were in the room. In Esme's arms was a tiny, squirming bundle. Baby Edward. We walked into the room and Jasper smiled at us. "We hope you don't mind that we named him after you," Jasper said.

"I don't mind," Edward said quietly. "Why?"

"We want you to be his godfather. And Bella, we want you to be his godmother," Jasper said, tears filling his eyes.

"We'd be honored," Edward whispered as he looked at the tiny baby in Esme's arms. She stood up and handed him to Edward. He cradled him against his chest, cooing quietly. "Hello, Edward."

"EJ," Jasper clarified. "Edward Jackson Whitlock."

## A Fresh Start

"EJ," Edward smiled as he kissed the baby's forehead. "Welcome to the world, EJ. Your mom is crazy, but I love her."

"Don't be telling my son about how crazy Alice is," Jasper chided. "We all know that she's a hyper one..."

"I know, I know," Edward laughed. He kissed the baby one more time and he passed EJ to me.

I cradled him and he burrowed against my chest. "Hi, Peanut. We've been waiting for you for a long time. You are so handsome," I said as bounced back and forth on my feet. "Just like your daddy."

"How's Alice?" Edward asked as he made silly faces at EJ.

"She's fine. Feisty as ever. She's itching to get out of recovery and into the room to take care of EJ," Jasper laughed. "She just had a baby an hour ago."

"Only the elf," I laughed as I pressed several kisses to EJ's soft forehead. He smelled so sweet. I loved the baby smell. I couldn't wait for my own baby. I rocked him as he started to fuss. "No cry, Peanut. You're fine."

"He's probably hungry, but we need to wait for Alice. She wants to breast feed," Jasper said.

"Well, I'm sorry Peanut. I have boobies but no milk for you," I laughed. "You have to get that from your mommy."

"Can I have my son back?" Jasper asked. I smiled and handed EJ back to Jasper. He held him awkwardly, unsure what to do. Edward assisted Jasper in holding EJ correctly. Jasper looked frustrated but accepted Edward's help.

"How do you know this, Edward?"

"Um, I'm a doctor, you moron," Edward laughed. "I did do a pediatrics and gynecology rotation in my medical training. I kind of learned how to hold a baby."

## A Fresh Start

"Oh, duh," Jasper laughed. "Did you have to do that too, Carlisle?"

"Yep. I toyed with the idea of being a pediatrician, but decided against it. I couldn't handle seeing a child die," he said sadly. "It's always hard to see a child die."

"Right. I hated when Taylor died. To tell his parents," Edward said, his eyes glistening. "However, this is time for us to be happy. Alice and Jasper have this perfectly healthy baby boy who has an AWESOME name."

"Damn right," I laughed. "Oops, sorry. Darn right."

"He's not talking yet," Jasper laughed as he put EJ into the bassinet.

"But he will be. My child is a genius," Alice chirped as they rolled her back into the hospital room. "Is he being good?"

"He's perfect," we all answered before we broke into laughter.

Alice rolled her eyes and settled into the hospital bed. Her eyes were tired but she had a wide grin on her face. She looked at Jasper expectantly and he picked up EJ, placing him in her arms. He nestled against her chest, obviously looking for dinner. "He's hungry. I don't know how to breast feed," she said, panicking slightly.

"I know it might be weird, but Carlisle and I could tell you," Edward offered.

"You, Edward. That would be too bizarre to get breast feeding tips from my dad," she said wrinkling her nose.

"We'll head out, then," Carlisle said with a chuckle. "Congratulations, Mommy. I love you." He kissed Alice's forehead and tickled EJ's chin. "Congrats, Dad."

"Thanks, Carlisle," Jasper said. Esme gave him a tight hug and kissed Alice's forehead, along with EJ's.

## A Fresh Start

They left and Alice looked at Edward with a look of fear and apprehension. "What if it doesn't work?"

"It'll probably take a few tries to get him to latch on, but he'll feed," Edward said. "Are you sure you want me helping you?"

"I trust you more than Nurse Ratchet," Alice grumbled. "She was downright cruel when she put in my IV." Edward snickered and instructed Alice in how to get EJ to breast feed. He was compassionate and professional. Like Edward had predicted, it took a few times for EJ to grasp the concept, but when he did, it was quite pronounced. "Shit, he's like the damn Hoover."

"What's it feel like, Alice?" Jasper asked as he watched his son suckle the milk from Alice.

"Weird. He's got some power in those jaws. He will make some woman very happy," she laughed. "Thank you, Edward."

"My pleasure, Elf. Weird, though," he teased.

"Shut it, Masen," she smiled. Alice then yawned and shifted EJ to her other breast. He eagerly latched on. She groaned and fell back against the pillows. "I'm so tired."

"We'll go," I said. "See you tomorrow, Alice. I love you."

"I love you, too, Bells. Thanks for being here," she smiled. "You too, Baby Brother."

"Love you, Elf. Be good to your mommy, EJ," Edward smiled.

We linked hands and headed down to the car. When we got back to the house, it was after midnight. I had the day off, as it was Saturday. Edward, unfortunately had to go to work. We crawled into the bed, holding onto each other before we dozed off into a deep, contented sleep.

## A Fresh Start

xx AFS xx

"Bella, you need to buy your wedding dress. The wedding is less than two months away," Alice chided as she rocked EJ. "You've chosen the bridesmaid dresses for me and Rose. Now, choose a wedding dress. It's not that hard."

"I don't want a typical 'white' wedding dress, Alice," I said as I was packing her kitchen. Alice and Jasper had purchased a home in Edward and my neighborhood. They were in the process of moving into the home. Alice couldn't do much because of EJ and Jasper was thrown into a huge case.

"Edward has his outfit," Alice said as she burped EJ. He let out a loud belch. "Who's mommy's little angel?"

"Christ. The kid burps and he gets love. Does he get a cookie every time he takes a dump?" I laughed.

"Shut it, Swan," Alice said, narrowing her eyes. "My son is perfect. Back to your dress. Let's go to After Twilight Designs sometime in the next week if you want a unique wedding dress."

"Something in a pale blue," I said. "Almost white, but blue."

"What about the veil?" Alice asked as she put EJ back in his pack and play.

"No veil. I've been married before. The veil isn't needed. Neither is the 'tiara,'" I said dryly. "I wouldn't mind having some flowers in my hair, but that's about it."

"Pale blue, flowers in your hair. We can work with that," Alice said thoughtfully. "And you're the ring bearer."

"We'll make sure that we decorate his stroller," I snickered.

"And he's going to wear the cutest outfit that matches his uncle's," she cooed. "Thanks for your help, Bells. I have no idea what I would have done without

## A Fresh Start

it."

"Not a problem, Alice. You helped me so many times in the past year. It's the least I can do," I smiled.

We worked together as EJ napped. We managed to finish packing up the kitchen and most of the family room. I drove home after spending some quality time with my nephew. I pulled into the garage and went into the office. I logged into the computer and did some work on my resume. I had officially put in my application to be Mrs. Cope's replacement. I was nervous as fuck. I just needed to pull together the resume for the board of education. I got most of it done when I heard Edward come into the house. "I'm home, beautiful girl."

"In the office," I called.

"Hey beautiful," Edward said as he plopped down in the couch in the office. "How's Alice? And EJ?"

"Skinny and adorable," I answered. "I hate your sister. She had a baby two weeks ago and she's almost back to her pre-baby weight. It's nauseating."

"And EJ?" Edward snickered.

"Stinking cute. I brought over some more clothes. I swear, that boy is going to be so well dressed," I said. "I just can't help myself. When I see a cute outfit or toy, I have to buy it."

"I'm guilty of that too," Edward said as he held up a bag from a posh baby boutique. "I was running an errand on my lunch hour and I saw the most adorable lion stuffed animal. I had to get it."

"I brought over a stuffed lamb," I snorted. "The lion and lamb. Nice."

"It's appropriate. So, what are you working on?" Edward asked as he looked over my shoulder. "Resume?"



## A Fresh Start

"Yep. For the administrator position. I'm almost done," I said as I made the final changes and saving it. "Can you grab that fancy paper from the table?" Edward grabbed the resume paper and loaded it into the printer. I printed out five copies and transmitted it to my work email. Edward kissed my neck and moved up to my ear. "Stop it, Edward."

"Hmmm, why?" he said against my hair as his hands moved to my breasts. "Don't you like it when I touch you?"

"I love it, Edward," I said, leaning into his touch. "Your hands are amazing. And don't get me started on your tongue."

"That good, huh?" he snickered as he turned me around. He knelt down in front of me and kissed me passionately. My fingers weaved in through his hair and I leaned forward in the desk chair.

We pulled apart abruptly when a loud crash echoed through the house. "What was that?" I squeaked.

"I have no idea," Edward said as he gracefully got up from the floor. He walked out with me on his heels. We searched the kitchen, family room and ended up in the living room. In the living room, on top of the piano, was a large brick. It had smashed through the window and splintered the lacquered wood of the piano. "What the fuck?" Edward seethed. He stalked over to the brick and saw that there was a piece of paper on it. Edward looked at it, but didn't touch it.

*I'm watching you. You're never safe until you're dead. Both of you.*

"Call 911, Bella," Edward said tersely.

**A/N: Dun dun dun...and he's back. Mike, that is. Stupid, sadistic fucker. Leave me love!**

# The Fight

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*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 36: The Fight

"If there's anything more, we'll contact you," a detective said as he shut the folder. "We have a pretty good lead on where Mike is and his prints were clearly on the note that was attached to brick that shattered your front window."

"Thank you," Edward said through clenched teeth.

"We'll also increase patrols in your neighborhood. If you say anything suspicious, contact us right away."

Edward and I nodded and got up from the conference room at the police station. We had spent the past two hours talking with the police and detectives about the threat that was thrown through our front window. Jasper had met us at the police station, acting as our representation. We didn't need an attorney, but he wanted to make sure that our complaints were heard and understood. Seth was on vacation, unfortunately and he couldn't be at the police station. Jasper, thankfully, stepped in. We drove back to the house, with Jasper following us. Edward and I were quiet. It was a tense silence. Not between us, but in regard to the horrendous situation. "Bella?"

## A Fresh Start

"What?" I whispered.

"I think until things settle down, I want you staying with Carlisle and Esme," Edward said. "I'm calling my insurance company to get an estimate for the repair on the window. I need to get some wood to cover it and I don't want you to be in the house by yourself."

"I don't want to be away from you," I said, tears filling my eyes. "I'm falling apart here."

"I don't trust Mike. I'm afraid he will come back and hurt you."

"He can hurt you, too," I said, lacing my fingers through his.

"Please, Bella," Edward pleaded. "As soon as I get the window boarded up, I'll be at Carlisle and Esme's. I promise."

"Have Jasper help you," I said, sounding like a petulant child. "How long are we staying?"

"I don't know."

"I would like to so I can figure out what to pack," I sighed.

"Shoot for the rest of this week," Edward said, kissing my fingers. "We'll come back over the weekend."

I nodded mutely and looked out the window of Edward's Volvo. We pulled up to our home and got out of the car. Slowly, we headed into the frigid house. The large hole in the front window caused the heat to quickly evacuate the premises. Edward and Jasper went in first, just to make sure that there was no one in the house. I followed close behind and went up to the bedroom, packing a bag for both Edward and I. When I was done, Edward carried the large duffel in his hand and placed it in my car. He told me that Esme was expecting me. I reminded him to hurry. He kissed me sweetly and promised he'd be at Carlisle and Esme's by no later than ten.

## A Fresh Start

I drove to Carlisle and Esme's palatial estate. Esme opened the garage and motioned for me to pull into it. I parked the car and grabbed the duffle bag that was in the back. Esme held open her arms and I collapse into them. I bawled, uncontrollably. She led me into the family room of her home, holding me as I fell apart. Crumbling into pieces. Ripping at the seams. After a good cry, I pulled away, wiping my cheeks. "I'm sorry, Esme."

"Don't be, sweetheart," she said, smoothing my hair. "What you are dealing with is horrible and terrifying. You're entitled to lose it every once in a while."

"When will it stop, Esme?"

"I don't know. Mike seems hell bent on ruining every ounce of happiness that you and Edward have created. Was he like this when you were married?"

"Not to this extent. He was controlling and detached. However, we lived our own lives. Did our own thing. This behavior is new. If I had known that this is what he truly was like, I would never have married him," I sniffled. "Did Edward tell you what happened to his fiancé? Mike's fiancé?"

"She was pregnant and brutally beaten. She managed to stay alive for the baby, but died," Esme said with a frown. "Mike did that?"

"Not conclusively. However, I wouldn't be surprised," I said, cringing slightly. "With the attack he put me through, he certainly is strong enough."

"Bella, you and Edward need to be careful. If something happens to either of you, I don't know what we'd do," Esme said, tears filling her eyes. "You are so much a part of this family. A daughter to Carlisle and me. As Edward is a son. We can't lose you. We almost lost Edward when he was fifteen and again when Tanya died. Too much tragedy for our family."

"I know," I whispered.

"Well, let's get you settled. You and Edward are staying in the guest house. Right this way," Esme said as she wiped her cheeks. She got up and led me

## A Fresh Start

through the house and to the backyard where the guest house was located. She gave me a key. Esme gave me another hug before she headed back into the main house. I put the duffle bag into the bedroom. It was a large room decorated in beige, deep red and cherry brown. I flopped down on the bed, gathering one of the pillows. I sobbed into it. I hated the fact that Mike had this control over me. Over us. We got fucking divorced. Leave me the hell alone.

xx AFS xx

I must have dozed off. When I opened my eyes, Edward was curled around me protectively, his arm thrown over my midsection. He was holding me tightly to his chest. I looked at the clock and saw that it was a little after three in the morning. I rolled over and burrowed into Edward's strong arms. I looked up at him and even in sleep, he looked worried. His brow was furrowed and his jaw was tight. My tears slid down my cheeks and I cried quietly, clutching Edward's shirt.

"Bella?" Edward croaked. I sobbed harder. "Baby, it's okay."

"No, it's not," I said brokenly. "Why can't he leave us alone?"

"Because he's mentally depraved, Bella. He has this sick obsession with you," Edward said as he cupped my cheeks. "I don't know why he does, but it's the sad truth."

"He won't stop, Edward. I'm so afraid that one or both of us is going to get hurt. Or worse," I gasped.

"He won't," Edward said fervently. "I promise you, he won't do anything. To either of us."

"How can you be so damn sure? He broke into my condo, beating me to shit. He killed Jessica and almost baby Emma. He caused my car accident and now this brick and the threat?" I started trembling and I shot out of bed. I paced the room, running my hands through my hair. "He won't stop. He won't. The only way he'll stop is if one of us is dead."

## A Fresh Start

"Bella. Bella. Bella," Edward said as he caught me by my waist. "No one is dying."

"How can you be so calm about this?" I snapped as I shoved away from him. "He's threatening us and making our lives miserable."

"You're right he is. However, if we show him that, he's won. We're stronger than that."

"You maybe. But, I'm fucking having a heart attack," I screamed. "I can't take this anymore. It needs to stop. Now."

"Baby..."

"Don't 'baby' me," I seethed. I picked up a pillow and skulked to the spare bedroom in the guest house. I slammed the door shut, locking it. I slid down the door, sobbing hysterically.

*When will this end?*

xx AFS xx

I don't remember falling asleep. I don't remember anything. I just know that my back is killing me, my head is pounding and I feel like I ran a marathon. I cracked open an eye and looked around. *Where am I?*

Oh, right. The spare bedroom in Carlisle and Esme's guest house. On the floor.

I heaved my aching body off the floor and I stumbled as I walked to the bathroom. I looked at my face. It was red and swollen. I had been crying most of the night. I didn't want to go to work.

*Work! Shit! What time is it?*

I spun around and looked at the clock on the nightstand. It was after nine in the morning. "Fuck!" I shrieked as I ran out of the bathroom and into the bedroom.

## A Fresh Start

I looked frantically for my clothes. *Where the hell are they?* Then I remembered. In the main suite of the guest house. I cringed when I opened the door. I looked around and darted into the bedroom to grab the duffle bag filled with my clothes.

"Don't worry about work," Edward said from the chair in the corner. His voice was cold. "I already called you in sick. I heard you cry. All night."

"Oh," I said, sitting on the unmade bed. "Thanks."

"I'm just trying to 'baby' you," he spat.

"I'm sorry, Edward," I said, tears falling down my cheeks again. "I'm terrified. I am so afraid of losing you. Losing us. Losing everything."

"You think I'm not?" Edward said as he jumped up from the chair. "I've lost too much in 32 years. Both of my parents, my wife and child. If I lose you, just shoot me now as I can't survive it." Edward, who is usually the picture of calm and cool, picked up a large vase and threw it across the room. It shattered into a million pieces. I jumped and curled into myself. I buried my head into my knees, again sobbing hysterically. Edward looked over at me, I think. He approached me slowly and he knelt before me. "Bella, I'm sorry I lost my temper." He put his hands on my knees and I jumped back on the bed. I clawed at my hair, trying to calm my emotions. "Bella," he whispered.

"Just leave me alone. I need a few moments," I cried.

"Alice is here. Do you want her?" he said, his voice wavering. Unable to calm myself enough to talk, I nodded. He got up and walked out of the room. A few moments later, I heard Alice's quiet footfalls in the bedroom. She crawled into the bed with me and held me tightly. For the millionth time in the past eight hours, I bawled. Cried. Sobbed. She didn't judge. She didn't comment. She just held me.

We stayed locked in our embrace for awhile. I'm not sure how long, but my arms were asleep and my body was still aching. I moved away, wiping my

## A Fresh Start

face. I looked up at Alice. Her eyes were sad and her cheeks were stained with tears. "This really has you rattled, doesn't it?" Alice asked quietly. I nodded. "Edward called me first thing this morning. He was in a panic. I was nursing EJ and I get this urgent call from my baby brother. He's so worried about you, Bella. I'm worried about you."

"I don't know what to do, Alice. I'm so confused. I'm so afraid of losing everything," I sniffled. "Mike can take it away in an instant."

"You don't think Edward's afraid? He's lost everything. Twice," Alice said harshly. I ducked my head in shame. "I don't mean to be stern, Bella. But out of the two of you, Edward has the most to lose. I can't bear to see my brother like I did when his parents died. Or when Tanya died. He shut down. He barely survived. He was going through the motions. He's only come alive since he's met you. Don't throw that away."

"I don't want to," I whispered. "Mike is ruining everything."

"Only because you're letting him," Alice said, holding my chin to force me to look into her eyes. "Mike is fucking asshole who is obsessed with you. However, you can't live your life in fear. If you did, what's the point? Get your head out of your ass and live life. Be happy. Make babies. Fuck each other until you can't walk straight. Love each other. I don't care what you do, but don't throw what you have with Edward away. He's crumbling. He's afraid that you're going to dump him because of your behavior."

"I would never..."

"Actions speak louder than words, Bella. You treated him like shit last night. He's feeling guilty right now because he lost his temper. My mother's vase received a brunt of that anger, but he's still pissed. And he was justified in losing his temper."

"I know," I said.



## A Fresh Start

"Good. Now, I'm sending him back in here. You will talk. You will resolve this. Then you will have amazing make up sex."

"Jeez, Alice," I grumbled.

"What? I can't have sex for another three weeks, six days, eight hours and forty-two minutes. I'm living vicariously through you and Rose," Alice said with a shrug.

"You have a countdown?"

"It's when I have my six week appointment," Alice smirked. "Talk. To. Edward." She turned on her heel and left the bedroom. Edward returned a bit later, his hair a tangled mess, his eyes drawn and a defeated slump to his usually tall posture. *I've broken him. God, I suck.*

Edward sat down on the bed, his posture still holding a defeated tone. He fumbled with the tie of his track pants and he refused to look me in the eyes. Not that I was capable of looking him in the eye either. I nervously picked at the strings of the pillow sham as I tried to formulate what I wanted to say to him in my head. I was sorry about being a mega bitch, but I didn't know how to say it.

"Edward, I'm sorry," I rasped. *Brilliant, Swan. Real original.*

"I know," he replied. "I am too." He pulled his legs up and rested his head on his knees. "We're not going to make it if this continues, Bella. I love you too much. I can't bear to be without you. However, you have got to stop letting Mike control your every move."

"It's hard not to," I said. "He has so much power over us..."

"Only because you're letting him have that power," Edward said, looking at me. His eyes were blank and dead. "Bella, do you love me?"

"Edward..."

## A Fresh Start

"No. Do you love me?"

"More than I could possibly imagine," I answered. "Do you still love me? Even after how I've behaved?"

"I'd give my life for you," Edward said, some life coming back into his eyes. "I love you so much, Bella."

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

"We live our lives. We do our thing. Hopefully, Mike will get caught and be sent to prison for the crimes he committed."

"Not that's not what I meant," I said. "Do you want to marry me still or are you done with me?"

"Of course I still want to marry you," Edward said, his eyes flashing with anger and annoyance. "Just because we fought doesn't mean I don't love you any less."

"No. I guess it doesn't," I said.

"God, he's really fucked with your head," Edward said.

I sighed and nodded my head solemnly. "I thought I was better, but I guess I'm not."

"Bella, getting over a relationship like yours and Mike's is going to take time. Up until last night, you were doing remarkably well. However, it's a process."

"Please be patient with me," I said. "I feel like I did when we first met. Hesitant to trust anyone."

"You trust me, right?" Edward asked. I couldn't look at him in the eyes. "You don't trust me?"

## A Fresh Start

"I'm a little afraid," I said.

"The vase."

"Yeah, the vase."

"It takes me a long time to get to the point where I'm throwing things, Bella. Let's just say that this whole situation with Mike and the strain it's putting on our relationship has finally forced me to reaching my breaking point. I will spend every minute of every day making it up to you. I'm so sorry that I scared you. Please know that I would never, EVER, raise my hand to you at all. I was not raised that way. No man should hit a woman, no matter if they deserve it or not."

"I know that, Edward. You are incredibly kind and gentle. You are obviously under a great deal of stress and I'm undoubtedly the cause. It still causes me concern that you broke a vase," I cowered.

"I know. I'm sorry," he croaked out. He looked at me and his eyes shone with tears. "Please forgive me, Bella. I need to know that we're alright."

"I forgive you, Edward. Only if you forgive me," I said, tears falling down my cheeks. Again. Edward reached for me and crushed me to his chest. We held each other as we both cried. We eventually fell against the pillows in the bed. Edward still held me as we calmed down. "I am really sorry about being such a bitch last night. I'm just so scared."

"Me too, Bella. I'm holding the most precious thing in the world to me," he said, caressing my cheeks. "I can't lose you."

"I can't lose you, either," I whispered as I looked up into his evergreen eyes. Edward leaned down and kissed me sweetly. His soft mouth moved languidly against mine. His tongue traced my top lip and I parted my lips. His tongue slid between my teeth and danced with mine. All too soon, he pulled away and held me tightly against his chest. "You know, Alice is expecting us to have wild monkey make up sex."

## A Fresh Start

"Well, she'll just have to be disappointed. I'm too fucking exhausted," Edward laughed. "We'll have wild monkey make up sex later."

"Promise?"

"Scout's honor."

"I love you, Edward," I said, kissing his lips. "I am truly sorry about being..."

"Stop. We both made mistakes. We both broke down. Let's move past it and go to sleep. I love you, Bella. With all of my heart. All of my soul. With everything that I am," he said. "Now, sleep."

"Yes, Dr. Masen."

"That's not my name, Swan."

"Yes, Dr. McFuckme."

"Much better."

**A/N: Mike is causing a ton of strain. Stupid , moronic asshole.**

**Anyhoo....next chapter will be wedding dress shopping and preparations for the wedding itself. Oh, and wild monkey make up sex. Leave me love!**

**xoxox**

# The Dress and Wedding Preparations

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*I got my first flamer...Apparently I pissed someone off with the last chapter. So, I apologize for the way it played out, if it offended you. I'm strangely proud of the fact that I got flamed...is that wrong?*

## Chapter 37: The Dress and Wedding Preparations

"Isabella Marie Swan, you've procrastinated long enough. We're going to After Twilight Designs and getting your dress," Alice said. "Right, Rose?"

"Right. Even Esme's coming," Rose said.

I was sitting in the guest house at Carlisle and Esme's. Edward didn't want us moving back to the house until he had an alarm installed and the window had been repaired. I was getting antsy to return to my house. However, I understood Edward's trepidation. Hell, I was still freaked out. I hadn't had a good night's sleep since the night of the brick. Neither had Edward. "But, I'm comfortable," I whined. I was wearing a pair of Edward's sleep pants and his Dartmouth hoodie.

## A Fresh Start

"Suck it up, Swan," Rose said as she tugged on my hand. I got up and was promptly shoved into the bathroom. I got dressed in the clothes that were laid on the counter. I brushed my hair and put on some makeup before I left the bathroom. Esme had joined Rose and Alice. She was holding baby EJ and cooing to her grandson.

"Guess what, little man? We're getting Auntie Bella a wedding dress today," Alice said to her son, kissing his head. "And it's going to have to be off the rack since she's slacked off."

"Alice, be nice to Bella. She's had it rough the past few days," Esme admonished.

"Please, Mom. Bella just hates shopping," Alice said.

"It's true. Shopping is eeeeeeeeeeevil," I said, wiggling my fingers. "EJ, your mom will always have this illness. She's a shopaholic. I think there's a twelve step program for that."

"Shut it." Alice took EJ from Esme's arms and loaded him into the stroller. We all got into her car and we drove to After Twilight Designs. Gianna was standing in the door with a huge grin on her face. Alice turned to her. "This one is getting married. She wants a pale blue dress. It's a beach wedding."

"Oh, sounds lovely. Let me pull a few dresses. Have a seat, okay?" Gianna said with a wink. She reached for me and dragged me back to the dressing room. "Do you have a strapless bra?"

"I'm wearing it," I said with a tired grin.

"Good. I'll be back. Take off your clothes and put on this," Gianna said as she handed me a robe. I removed my jeans and sweater. I was not happy with my body today. I felt very bloated and I struggled to button my jeans. *This is why I wanted to stay in Edward's sleep pants. They are comfortable. Little restrictions. Damn it.* Gianna returned a little bit later with an armful of dresses. I chose a few in the pile that I immediately detested. I didn't want a

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strapless dress. So, all of those were out. That left me three dresses. I tried on the first one: a chiffon dress that had a Grecian feel to it. I slipped it over my body and liked the shape of the dress. However, it was too casual. I walked out to the girls and EJ. He immediately started crying.

"EJ hates it. So, this is a no," I snorted.

"I agree with my son. It's bad. Next," Alice demanded. Gianna helped me into the next dress. It was a more structured dress. It had a ribbon like top and was one shouldered. It looked to be more gray than light blue. I wrinkled my nose and shook my head.

"Don't even want to show them?"

"No. The color is icky."

"It does look like dirty dishwater. Next," Gianna giggled. She unzipped me from that dress and held up a brighter blue dress. It was the color of blue topaz and it looked different. It was strapless, but had a single strap of large flowers. It also had an empire waist and a chiffon overlay. It was pretty, but it did cry 'wedding.' We zipped it up and headed out. Alice liked it. Rose hated it. Esme was in the middle. EJ babbled incoherently. I liked his response the best.

"I have one more. It's white, but I think it'll take the cake," Gianna said confidently. "Save the best for last."

We went back to the dressing room and Gianna held out a white dress with a floral design on the one shoulder. It had shades of blue, ivory, silver and white in the flowers. It was also an empire waist and chiffon, but it was so much more elegant than any of the other dresses. Gianna zipped me up and patted my shoulders. "This is it, Bella."

I floated to the front of the store where I was greeted with a chorus of gasps. Esme started crying. Rose gave me a hug. And if she wasn't nursing EJ, Alice would have jumped for joy. I found my wedding dress. It was perfect and I couldn't wait to wear it to walk down the aisle to Edward. Gianna squealed and

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dragged me back to the dressing room. She helped me out of my dress and let me get changed. I tugged on my jeans, sucking in my gut as I buttoned them. *I really need to go on a diet. Jeez!* I walked back out front to get my purse to pay for my dress. However, Esme's missing.

"Um, Elf? Where's Esme?"

"Buying your dress," Alice said simply as she burped EJ.

"What?" I darted to the rear of the store, only to be greeted with Esme holding a garment bag, filled with my wedding dress. Rose was holding another bag. She had a smirk on her model-like features. "You didn't."

"Oh, I did," Esme said conspiratorially. "Say 'thank you,' Bella."

"Thank you, Bella," I sassed. Esme rolled her eyes and handed me the dress.

Rose handed me the other bag. "Courtesy of Royce King. Your lingerie, shoes and garter."

"Oh lord," I said, accepting my booty. I walked to the front of the store and Alice handed me her car keys. She said that we were going out to lunch, but I needed to drive. Alice wanted to finish nursing EJ in the backseat. We piled in and we drove to quiet café near Esme's house. We were seated immediately and ordered our food.

"So, have you spoken with the wedding planner at the resort?" Esme asked as soon as we got our drinks.

"Yeah. Everything is pretty much set. The only thing Edward and I need to do is to go to the local municipality to get our marriage license. We're doing that on the second day that we're there," I said as I sipped my coffee. "I can't wait."

"Me neither," Alice chirped. "You need some good news. Happy times. Enough of this drama."



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"Well, find Mike and have him get arrested," I said sadly. "It's killing me. I'm in a constant state a nausea. I puked a few times this morning before you all dragged me to get my dress."

Esme felt my forehead. "You don't have a fever."

"It's just a nervous stomach. I'm fine," I said with a shrug. "Anyhow, Edward wanted me to tell you that he got us a block of rooms at the resort. You should be receiving our invitations in the mail. However, everyone who we want to come already knows. And has booked flights."

"I know that this is going to be small, but who is coming," Rose asked as she picked at her salad.

"Charlie and Sue. Carlisle and Esme. You and Emmett. Alice, Jasper and EJ. Angela and Ben. Rhonda and her husband. Ren and Jake. Cynthia and her boyfriend, Garrett, I think. And Kyle and Christina."

"Who are Cynthia, Kyle and Christina?" Rose asked.

"Cynthia is the charge nurse at Virginia Mason when Edward worked there. Kyle, Dr. Moore, is one of Edward's former co-workers from Virginia Mason and Christina is his wife," I explained. "I also invited Mrs. Cope and Mr. Merritt. Though, I highly doubt they're coming."

"I hope I can get into my bathing suit," Alice said as she ran her hands over her ever shrinking tummy. "I'm huge."

"Alice, don't make me hurt you," I said.

"Yes, Alice, you look remarkable for someone who had a baby three weeks ago," Esme chided. "I still haven't lost all of your baby weight. So, shut it."

"But, I want to be a MILF," Alice said.

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"Trust me, Ali. You are," Rose giggled. Esme looked confused. "It's Mom I'd like to..."

"Oh! Mary Alice Whitlock, that is disgusting," Esme said, arching a perfectly sculpted brow.

"Mom, all of my friends that were guys and Edward's buddies thought you were a MILF," Alice said.

"What? Oh...OH!" Esme said as she blushed, hiding behind her napkin. "That's just wrong."

We all snickered and teased Esme relentlessly about her newly discovered MILF-status. The rest of our lunch was fun. Esme insisted on paying for us, even though we grumbled. Well, Rose and I grumbled. Alice just accepted it. We all piled into the car and drove back to Carlisle and Esme's.

Rose had to scurry out. She had a date with Emmett. Alice hung around for a little bit, nursing EJ. After she left, Esme took out some photo albums. She showed me some pictures of Edward as a baby. There was a cute one with Alice and Edward in the bathtub. *Ah, the requisite bathtub shot.* They both had shampoo Mohawks and goofy grins on their faces. They looked to be around four. Edward was so stinking cute. Esme then told me stories about Edward's parents. We ended up talking until both of our doctors came home from the hospital. It was nearly nine at night.

"What are you two doing?" Carlisle teased.

"Just showing Bella some pictures," Esme said with a wink.

"Oh GOD! Please tell me the Mohawk picture was not included," Edward groaned, hiding behind his hands.

"Oh, it was included. I think you need to resurrect that look," I giggled. "It was hot."

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"Yeah, I'll do that for the wedding," Edward snorted. "Our pictures will be fabulous!"

"Um, never mind," I said. "Let's not bring the Mohawk back."

"Good choice," Edward said, arching a brow. "Do you mind if I steal my fiancée?"

"Oh, no. I've been with her all day, monopolizing her time," Esme said with a wink. "I'm going to head to bed. Good night."

"Good night, Esme. Thank you again," I said. Edward took my hand and led me to the guest house. He unlocked the door and pushed me against it as he shut it. "Horny, Masen?"

"Always for you love," Edward said as he kissed my lips languidly. I pulled away, wrinkling my nose. "What?"

"You smell," I said.

"What? No, I don't," Edward said as he smelled his scrubs. "I had to shower at the hospital because we had a kiddo with the flu. My poor tie and dress shirt didn't survive."

"Well, shower again and then we can have some naked fun time," I said. Edward's head collapsed to his chin and he grumbled. "Do you want me to join you?" Edward looked up at me through his lashes and nodded enthusiastically. He picked me up and threw me over his shoulder. I shrieked and pounded on his back as I was carried to the en suite. Edward placed me on my feet gently and he removed his scrubs, tossing his stethoscope, ID and wallet onto the counter. He then turned to me and slowly removed my sweater and jeans.

"Strapless bra?" Edward asked.

"Alice dragged me out today and we got my wedding dress," I said as I turned around, looking over my shoulder coyly. "Help?" Edward reached for my bra

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and released its clasp. I tossed the bra onto the floor and lowered my panties as Edward started the shower. He wrapped his arms around my waist and I could feel his excitement poke me in the ass. I wiggled a little bit, grinding my butt into his arousal. Edward snarled quietly and I giggled as I got into the shower. Edward followed me and caged me against the slate tile with his hands.

"Ooooh, scary," I said sarcastically.

"Swan," he growled as he ran his nose along my jaw and down my neck. "I'm not aiming for 'scary.'"

"Okay, not scary," I said weakly. Edward's teeth grazed my earlobe and his hands traced down my wet body. "Definitely not scary. Hot."

"Sexy," Edward mumbled into my neck. "Gorgeous. Erotic. Exquisite. Mine."

"Holy shit," I said as I fisted my hands into his wet hair. Edward's mouth moves hungrily to mine and his tongue is pushed between my lips. Edward's hand moved to my breasts and he gently kneaded the pert nipples. His other hand moved to my leg and gently wraps it around his waist. I reach around his neck and pull his face closer to mine. My other hand is wrapped around his hips.

"Bella," Edward whispered as he removed his lips from mine. He slowly knelt down and looked up at me. With a devious smirk, he kisses my belly button. His tongue circles the small scar that I have just beneath it from when I had chicken pox. His tongue and lips leave a hot trail as he descends further down my body. "So beautiful." Edward threw one of my legs over his shoulder, baring my pussy for him. "Fuck," he breathed as he leaned in, pulling my clit between his teeth. I lean my head back and try to calm my breathing. "So wet, beautiful girl." Edward's tongue encircled my clit and he slipped a finger into my body.

"Oh, GOD!" I said as I rocked my hips against his hand. Edward supported me with his other hand and he went to town on my pussy. Edward's tongue is magical. His fingers are perfect. I'm coming within a few moments of Edward's ministrations. He hummed against my body as I arched off the wall of the

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bathroom. Edward's mouth was attached to my body as I rode out my high. He gently removed his fingers from my pussy and I reached for his hand. I sucked and licked his fingers clean.

"Holy fuck," Edward said as he stood up. With ease, he lifted my legs so I had them wrapped around waist. My back was against the bathroom wall. "Hold on, my love," Edward said as he sheathed himself in my body in one swift thrust. My arms wrap around his neck and we kiss as Edward managed to keep us up and thrusting at the same time. His hands are on my hips and guiding my body along his cock as he thrusts into me. "Shit, baby, I'm not going to last." Edward carried us to the small bench in the shower and sat down. I rocked against his arousal. Our lips danced with each other and I could feel him harden in my body. His cock twitched. I felt him spill into my body and he bit down on my shoulder as he did. "I really didn't plan this," Edward said sheepishly as he looked at me. "I just wanted to shower with you, but you were too tempting."

"Sure," I said as I stood up from his lap. My knees cracked and I frowned when Edward slipped out of my body. "Too old for shower sex."

"Why do you think I had to sit down?" Edward said, his cheeks blushing furiously. "I ain't no spring chicken."

"You and me both, Edward," I said, tugging his hand. We showered, washing each other's body with tender and care. We headed into the bedroom, dressing in our pajamas. I curled against Edward's chest and fell asleep quickly. However, the nightmares were as fierce as ever.

*This really needs to stop.*

xx AFS xx

The next few weeks flew by. Edward and I moved back into his house. Our house. Sorry. He had a security system installed and he changed all of the locks. I swear, the place was locked up tighter than Fort Knox. Rehearsals for my show were going well. Alice's maternity leave sub was awesome. She

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stepped into Alice's role as music director easily. It also helped that she had done the show previously. Before I even realized it, we were in the last week in March and spring break was quickly approaching.

*Holy crap. I'm getting married in less than two weeks.*

Alice had arranged to send out all of the invitations. Everyone responded that they were coming. Even Mrs. Cope and Mr. Merritt. Mrs. Cope, Sherrie, said that she wanted to practice for when she's retired. Enjoying the sun. I didn't blame her. I was looking forward to a week in the tropical paradise. This winter was absolutely brutal.

I had had my first set of interviews for Mrs. Cope's position. It had gone well. It was pretty much with the staff and a few other administrators in the district. I was told at the conclusion of my interview that I was invited for the second round of interviews. They would occur after spring break. It would be with the higher ups in the district: the superintendent and assistant superintendents. *This is really happening.* If I made it to the final round, it would be with the Board of Education.

I had received my graduate degree in administration leadership. Edward wanted me to walk across the stage. I rolled my eyes at the thought of doing another graduation ceremony. He made me promise that if I got my doctorate, I'd do the ceremony. The whole pomp and circumstance. I'd just get my doctorate so we'd have two Dr. Masens in the family.

All too soon, it was the Friday before spring break. Edward and I were in the bedroom. I had two huge suitcases on the floor. We were leaving for Cancun early tomorrow morning. In my suitcase was an entire new wardrobe, thanks to Alice, the clothes fairy. She said that my clothes were too big and I needed to get smaller ones. I didn't feel smaller. I still felt bloated and icky. My nervous stomach was not going away. Nightmares, yes. Nausea, no. I'd be a happy camper if I didn't feel like upchucking every morning.

"Edward, can you grab the plastic bag with the sunblock and aloe?" I yelled. Edward returned with the large plastic ziplock bag filled with our sun

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protection. "Thanks."

"Thank you for packing. I hate doing this shit," Edward said as he sank onto the floor gracefully. "If it were up to me, it'd be in a plastic garbage bag."

"I find that hard to believe. You have more clothes and style than me," I teased.

"Not anymore. Alice has given you quite a wardrobe," Edward smirked. "You are definitely stylish."

"Yeah, shabby, flabby chic," I said, tossing my hair over my shoulder.

"Isabella," Edward warned. "You are perfect."

"Sure, sure," I said shrugging my shoulders. I turned around and picked up my bathing suit. Or rather the bathing suit that Alice bought for me. "You've got to be kidding me."

"What?"

"A bikini? I never wore bikini before. Why would I start now?" I wailed.

"Because it makes your soon-to-be husband horny?" Edward said, waggling his brows.

"I'm too fat. Ugh! Now I'll have to get another bathing suit. I'll just buy it in Cancun," I growled.

"But Bella," Edward whined.

"I'll wear a tankini. Not a bikini. I'll look like a fucking beached whale," I said.

"I'm so going to kill your sister."

"Aw, don't kill the Elf," Edward said. "She's just thinking about me."

"You are a horn dog," I said, arching my brow.

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"Only for you, Bella. Only for you," he said as he leaned forward and kissed my lips. "A quickie?"

"No. I've got too much to do," I said. "You can make yourself useful and pull out our passports from the safe and check us into the airline so we don't have to wait in that insanely long line."

Edward gave me a salute and got up from the floor. I finished packing and decided to hop in the shower. The later I can sleep in, the better. It was horrible that our flight was leaving at seven in the morning. We have to be at the airport by four. That's just sick and depraved to be up that early. I mean, really. The only positive thing was that everyone from our family managed to get on the same flight. We were meeting at our house and taking a shuttle to the airport.

In order to fall asleep, I ended up taking some cold medicine. I crawled between the sheets and picked up one of my books from the nightstand. Edward came up and hauled his suitcase down the stairs. He left mine in the bedroom for last minute additions. He stripped off his clothes and laid his head down on my lap. "Are you excited?"

"Do you really need to ask that question?" I retorted. "Of course I'm excited."

"Do you have your dress?"

"Esme is bringing it. She didn't want you to see it," I said, running my fingers through his messy copper locks. "Bad luck and all."

"I'm certain you will be absolutely gorgeous in it," Edward said. "You're gorgeous all of the time. I love you, Bella."

"I love you, too, Edward. I can't believe that this is happening. We're getting married."

"In five days," Edward grinned. "You'll be Mrs. Isabella Masen."



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"I love that," I said, smiling widely. I then yawned, flopping back on the pillows. "Okay, the cold medicine is working."

"Are you sick?"

"No. I just needed some assistance in sleeping," I said sheepishly. Edward rolled his eyes and tossed my book on to the nightstand. I turned off my light and curled up next to my fiancé. My soon-to-be husband. My life. I kissed his chest and nestled closer.

*My love. My fresh start. In more ways than one.*

**A/N: Okay, so it wasn't wild monkey sex. But hot shower sex will have to suffice. Up next, Cancun and the wedding. Leave me love! XOXO!**

# The Destination Rehearsal

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 38: The Destination Rehearsal

"Guess what, beautiful girl?" Edward croaked, his voice rough with sleep.

"What?" I mumbled into my pillow.

"We're getting married in four days," Edward said as he pulled me to his chest, spooning my body.

"Hmmm, we are," I said, lacing my fingers with his. I opened my eyes and looked at the clock. I groaned. "It's too damn early. How are you so damn chipper at 3:30 in the morning?"

"I'm holding the most beautiful woman in my arms," Edward said as he nuzzled my neck with his lips. "And we're getting married in four days. Leaving for our destination wedding in a little over a half hour. How could I not be chipper?"

"Right," I said, not awake enough to come up with a witty or funny retort. Edward got up and he padded to the closet, pulling out a pair of jeans and polo shirt. He winked as he went into the shower. I stretched and rolled out of bed

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myself. I pulled on a pair of yoga pants and a tank top after I put on my underwear. I quickly plaited my hair and wandered into the bathroom to brush my teeth. Edward was out of the shower and he was standing in front of the mirror in his boxer briefs. *Yummy*.

"See something you like?" Edward quipped as he pulled on jeans.

"You," I said simply as I tossed my toothbrush into my toiletry bag. "You're hot."

"Aww, shucks," he blushed. "Thank you, ma'am. You're mighty fine, yourself."

"You are a charmer, Masen," I giggled.

"And you love me," Edward said, as he kissed my neck. "As I love you. Everyone will be here in a few minutes. Let's boogie!" Edward swatted my ass.

"Hey!" I said as I tried to smack his arm. He danced out of my reach and laughed heartily as he left the bathroom. I finished putting my stuff into the toiletry bag. I tossed the bag into the suitcase and zipped it up. "Can you bring this bad boy down to the foyer?"

"Sure," Edward said as he kissed my lips chastely.

"Hmmm, toothpaste and Edward. Tasty," I said against his lips. I fisted my fingers into his damp hair, thrusting my tongue through his lips.

"Someone's horny," Edward laughed as he pulled away.

"Only for you, baby," I said with a wink. "I can't wait to make love to you as Mrs. Masen."

"I love the sound of that," Edward said with a lascivious grin. He heaved the suitcase up and lugged it down the stairs. Once he was down there, the doorbell rang. He opened it up and found Alice and Jasper standing outside with EJ. "Hey!"

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"Let's get the party started," Alice said as she bounced on her toes.

"She's been like this since two," Jasper said as he adjusted his hold on EJ. "I'm going to kill her, Edward. EJ is going to kill her."

"Alice, do I need spike your water with ambien?" Edward teased.

"No! I'm just excited because you're getting married," Alice said as she kissed Edward's cheek.

"Alice, you need to calm yourself," Jasper said in an exasperated tone.

"Ugh, fine. I'll pretend that I'm not over the moon that my baby brother is getting married to my best friend," Alice snapped. "Ass."

"Alice, be nice," I chided. "No one is an ass."

"My husband is being an ass. My brother is being an ass. So yes, someone is an ass."

"Alice, seriously," Edward said with a dramatic eye roll. "It's way too damn early for your shenanigans. I love you, but you're driving all of us nuts. I will drug you. Don't make me do it. If not, I'll get Dad to."

"Hello?" Esme called from the porch.

"Mom, Edward is being mean to me," Alice cried as she ran into her mother's arms.

"Oh, for the love," Edward said as he threw his arms up. "Jasper, can I hold my nephew so I don't kill your wife?"

"Gladly," Jasper said as he passed off EJ to Edward. As soon as EJ was in Edward's arms, Edward's face lit up like a Christmas tree. I walked over to him and kissed EJ's head. "Awww, you look so cute holding the baby. An adorable family," Jasper said as he framed a picture with his hands. "When are you guys

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going to go for a baby?"

"When the time is right," Edward said.

"We're not actively trying, but aren't actively stopping either," I said as I stroked EJ's soft blond hair. "God, he's so perfect, Jas."

"I know. He's the fruit of my loins," Jasper teased. "He's bound to be perfect."

"You're funny," Carlisle said dryly as he stood in the foyer. "If anyone is perfect, that would be me."

"Sure, Carlisle," Esme said as she ruffled his hair. "If you're perfect, then I'm a vampire."

"With the way you bite me, I'm not surprised," Carlisle said seductively.

"Oh, gross!" Edward and Alice groaned, making identical faces of disgust. Jasper and I laughed hysterically at their reaction. But it was really gross to even fathom Carlisle and Esme getting their freak on.

"Alice, you were not conceived from immaculate conception," Esme said.

"I'm just going to pretend that I was," Alice said, covering her ears and squeezing her eyes shut.

"Are we waiting for anyone else?" Jasper asked. Trying to sway the conversation from the idea of his in-laws doing the dirty.

"Rose and Emmett," I answered.

"What about Jacob and Ren?" Esme asked. "They are an adorable couple."

"Ren is working in the ER tonight," Edward answered. "They're flying out on Monday."

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"Did you schedule that, Edward Anthony?" Esme asked sternly.

"What? I am leaving for my own damn wedding. I needed someone to cover the ER," Edward said, his jade eyes wide with surprise. "He'll get enough time to enjoy Cancun. Relax."

"Okay," Esme said, clearly appeased. "What time is the shuttle coming."

"It'll be here at 4:30," I answered. "Emmett and Rose better here quickly, it's almost time to go."

The doorbell rang and Edward passed EJ to me. He jogged to the door as I cooed at my nephew. A tall man was standing at the door. He introduced himself as the shuttle driver and he asked to load up our suitcases into the bus. As we were waiting for the luggage to be loaded, Emmett and Rose pulled up and parked in the driveway next to the bus.

"Sorry we're late. Our alarm didn't go off," Rose said. Her usual polished look was disheveled. Her eyes were bleary and she was not wearing a stitch of makeup. "We got here as soon as we could." Alice tugged on Rose's hand and led her onto the bus. She whipped out some makeup and attacked Rose's face with her makeup sponges and other makeup booty. We all got onto the bus and headed to the airport. It took about an hour. I nodded off against Edward's shoulder.

We got to the airport, checked in and were waiting in the first class lounge. Edward managed to get a wheelchair for Rose. She was doing remarkably well, but still tired easily from her burns. It helped us sail through the security lines. I took out my book and read a few lines before I nodded off again. Edward was idly tracing patterns on my hip as we sat together. His soft, loving touch pulled deeper into sleep. I awoke with a start when the disembodied woman announced our flight was ready. My heart raced and I looked around confusedly.

"You were out, Bella," Edward said, a frown crossing his features.

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"I guess I'm just really tired. Getting up at 3:30 will do that to ya," I teased. Edward rolled his eyes and helped me up. We got on the plane and were seated in the first class section. I managed to stay awake until we took off. As soon as we were airborne, I was sleeping. Nestled against Edward's shoulder.

xx AFS xx

"Please put your tray tables and seats in their upright position. We are approaching Cancun International Airport. We appreciate you choosing American Airlines for your travel needs. Please enjoy your stay in sunny Mexico."

"Wake up, love," Edward said as he kissed my forehead. "You slept the entire flight."

"Sorry," I said as I rubbed my eyes. "Sleep obviously was not coming easily the past few weeks."

"I know. Me neither. I'm actually happy to be away from the house and here. It's a much needed vacation," he said as he caressed my cheek with his fingertips. "What do you want to do when we get to the resort, my love?"

"Ugh, shower. I hate traveling and planes. I feel so gross," I responded.

"Me too!" Esme said from behind me. "I feel so grimy after flying. After my shower, I'm going down to the pool and getting a margarita."

"Oh, that sounds good, Esme," Rose said from across the aisle. "Too bad I still can't swim. Stupid fire and burns."

"Sorry, Rose," Edward said, wrinkling his nose.

Once the plane arrived at the gate, we were met with a wheelchair for Rose. She sat down in it with a grumble. Like before, we sailed through the airport and through customs. We were met with a short man named Pablo with a sign that said 'Masen.' He was our driver for the resort. He loaded us into a stretch

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Hummer and our luggage was placed in a van behind the Hummer. We drove forty-five minutes to the resort and checked in. Edward and I had the luxury suite. On the night before our wedding, I would stay there and Edward would stay with Jasper.

As soon as our bags were brought up to the suite, I looked through them and pulled out a pair of Bermuda shorts and a tank top. I also grabbed a pair of fresh panties and bra. I hopped into the shower and scrubbed the grime from the flight off my body. Edward removed his clothes and slipped in behind me. "No funny business, Edward," I said. "We're on a sex embargo until we're married."

"Ugh, you're no fun," Edward said as he nuzzled my neck. His hands traced down my hips and to my core.

"Edward," I warned. "A sex embargo means just that. Nothing sexual. So you can *shower* with me, but no funny business."

"Fuck me," Edward said as he removed his hands from my body. "Meanie."

"No, I'm not. I want our first time as husband and wife to be special," I said, turning around in his arms.

"Isn't every time we make love special?" Edward wheedled.

"Incredibly so, but please, Edward?" I begged. "Please, do this for me."

He pouted adorably and slumped his shoulders. I stood on my tiptoes and kissed his lips sweetly. "Just think, Edward. The next time we make love, I'll be your wife."

"Hmmm, my wife," he said as he crashed his lips against mine. "I love you, so much, my wife."

"I love you, too, my husband," I giggled as I eagerly returned his soft yet urgent kisses. We finished our shower without any funny business. I dressed in



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my clothes. Edward put on a pair of khaki cargo shorts and a t-shirt. We walked out of the suite and headed to meet with the wedding coordinator. We needed to finalize some plans and make our final payment. After an hour with the wedding coordinator, Maria, we met up with our family poolside. Alice and Jasper were in their bathing suits. I scowled at Alice. She was in a bikini. Her tummy perfectly flat.

*Wench.*

Rose was holding baby EJ in a cabana. Emmett was playing peekaboo with him and acting like a doofus. But that was par for the course. Carlisle and Esme were floating in the pool. "Did everything go well with the wedding coordinator?" Alice asked as she pulled down her sunglasses.

"Yep. We're all set. We're heading to town on Monday to get our marriage license," Edward said as he wrapped his arm around my waist.

"Why don't you both put on your bathing suits and join us?" Esme asked from the pool, wiggling her margarita.

"I need to buy a bathing suit," I grumbled.

"Why? The suit I got you is perfect," Alice wailed.

"It's a bikini. I will never wear a bikini in public," I said. "I'm going to buy a tankini or a sensible one piece. Not everyone looks as good as you, Elf."

"Bella, you look beautiful," Alice said, sitting up. I rolled my eyes and swiped Edward's wallet from his shorts. I took out my credit card that I snuck in there while he was dressing and I skipped off to the gift shop. Edward followed me.

"I would have come with you, beautiful girl," he said as he laced his fingers with mine.

"I know. Let's buy me a bathing suit. Yay," I said unenthusiastically. I strode into the gift shop and idly looked at the bathing suits. Edward held one up that

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was more risqué than the one Alice packed. "No, Edward."

"Come on! It's nice," he said as he wiggled the dental floss.

"I'd be more covered if I was naked, Edward Anthony," I said, finding a few bathing suits that looked good.

"Naked is very good," Edward smirked as he wrapped his arms around my waist. "You're beautiful naked."

"You're biased, Edward," I snorted. "You think I'm gorgeous when I'm cleaning the bathrooms in my grubbies."

"True," Edward said thoughtfully. "Oh, I like this one." He picked up a deep teal blue tankini. "Try it."

I took the bathing suit and went into the dressing room. Out of the three that I held, the bathing suit that Edward chose was the best one. I put it on the hanger and handed it to Edward when I was dressed. "You got good taste, Masen."

"Of course I do. I'm marrying you," he teased as he walked to the cashier, handing her my bathing suit. He also grabbed a matching sarong and gave it to the cashier. He flashed a crooked smirk, causing the female cashier to titter flirtatiously. *Oh, hell no. He's mine.* She gave him the total in Spanish. He handed his credit card to her and thanked her in fluent Spanish. She put the bathing suit and sarong into a bag and gave him a smile. We walked back to our suite and changed into our bathing suits. I put some sun block, our books and towels into a bag. Edward and I walked to our family and enjoyed a relaxing afternoon by the pool.

xx AFS xx

"Senor Masen, your car is ready," Pablo said with a friendly smile. "You don't want to be late to your meeting with magistrate for your license."

## A Fresh Start

"Gracias, Pablo," Edward said as he fumbled with his khakis. "Come on, Mrs. Masen."

"Not yet, you goober," I said. "We have two days before I'm Mrs. Masen."

"Minor technicalities," Edward said with a wave of his hand. We climbed into the limo that was provided for us by the resort. We had eaten breakfast with our family and then we needed to head down to city hall to get our marriage license. I was wearing a pale pink dress with a dark pink sash. I normally wouldn't wear something so girly, but it seemed appropriate. My hair was curled and makeup was soft and feminine. When Edward saw me, he looked like he wanted to eat me. I reminded him of our sex embargo and he swore under his breath.

Pablo drove like Edward. Insanely fast. I clung to my fiancé for dear life as we sped through the streets of Cancun. We pulled up to city hall and went inside. Edward, in perfect Spanish, asked the reception where we needed to go to get a marriage license. She pointed to the elevators and explained that it was on the second floor, suite 225. Edward and I took the elevators and went into the suite for our marriage license.

"Perdone. Debemos conseguir una licencia de matrimonio. ¿Qué debemos hacer?" Edward asked the young woman at the desk.

"Debe llenar estas formas. Yo también debo ver una forma de identificación para usted y para su esposa. La licencia de manejar o el pasaporte son dos formas aceptables de identificación," she responded.

"Do you have your passport with you?" Edward asked. I nodded and reached into my purse, removing my passport. I also took out my driver's license. Edward did the same and handed them to the woman. She passed him a clipboard with some paperwork on it. "¿Ambos de nosotros deben llenar estas formas?"

"Si, señor," she replied.

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Edward and I filled out the forms and she made copies of our identification. Afterward, Edward handed her back the forms. She smiled and checked them over. "¿Cuándo es el día grande? ¿Su boda?"

"El miércoles, al atardecer," Edward answered. "Yo no puedo esperar."

"Es un hombre afortunado," she beamed. "Es hermosa."

"Si. Muy hermosa," Edward muttered as he kissed my forehead.

"Aquí está su licencia de matrimonio completada. ¡Felicitaciones!" she said, holding out her hand. Edward shook it. I did the same.

"Gracias," Edward smiled as he took the paperwork. I thanked her as well and we headed back out to the limo. "Okay, we're legit. Now all we need to do is get hitched."

"Can't it be Wednesday already?" I whined.

"I know," Edward said. "Come on, let's go celebrate with our crazy family. Ren and Jake should be here by now."

"I think Sue and Charlie are on their way tonight. Sherrie and her husband are coming tomorrow, as are Mike and his wife Sarah," I mentioned.

"Mike?"

"Mr. Merritt," I replied. "Not my ass-hat ex-husband."

"Thank God," Edward breathed. "Let's go swimming and work on our tans."

"Yeah, you suck. You're darker than me," I grumbled. Edward chuckled as he rubbed his pink nose. "We started off the same shade of pale. And you're more tan. I'm still albino."

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"Bella, you're darker. Relax, love," he said as he kissed my lips. "Do you want to be sunburnt on your wedding day?"

"Hell no," I said. "That would royally suck."

We got back to the resort and changed out of our clothes and into our swimsuits. We found our family by the pool, talking to Ren and Jacob. They gave us hugs and congratulations. Ren teased Edward about his tan. Edward blushed and rolled his eyes. We sat around the pool. We drank margaritas and laughed. Emmett gave Edward shit about being so reserved. Edward flipped him off. *Bad idea*. The next thing he knew, he was thrown into the pool and they were going at it like mad men. It was funny to see. Rose and I were in stitches watching them in their pool fight. Emmett didn't call Edward reserved after that.

Tonight, we were having our 'bachelor' and 'bachelorette' parties. Essentially, it was a reason for us to get drunk and have a good time. Like Alice and Jasper, we combined our parties. It wasn't like theirs. No debauchery. It was just a party in the club of the resort. Edward rented it out for our guests. Almost all of our friends and family had arrived. The only people who were missing were Cynthia and my bosses. They were coming in tomorrow and would be at the rehearsal.

Alice hijacked me and dragged me to her room. She and Rose plopped me down in the bathroom. With military-like precision, they attacked my head with a curling iron and my face with makeup. Alice then thrust a royal blue cocktail dress into my hands, along with matching panties. She told me that I was not wearing a bra. I growled at her. She snapped at me in return. Evil little elf. I put on the dress and walked out of the bathroom. Rose handed me a pair of pewter heels. *Death traps. They were death traps*.

I sat and waited for them to change and we headed down to the club. It was dark and the lights were pulsating. For some strange reason, I was worried about Edward. I know that his head injury had long since healed, but he still got nasty headaches from strobe and pulsing lights.

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The music had a Latin Jazz sound to it and the club was decorated in bright colors. Everyone was wearing a some sort of floral or bright color. It was weird to see Charlie in a bright yellow shirt and black tie. He was nervously picking at it all night. Sue was coordinated with him in a red dress. She looked beautiful. And happy. And there was something sparkling on her left hand.

I grabbed Edward's elbow. He looked gorgeous in a bright pink button down shirt and black dress pants. Under his shirt was a black v-neck t-shirt. "God, you look so handsome, Edward," I breathed.

"Thank you," he said as he kissed my neck. "You look even better."

"We need to talk to my dad. I think he proposed to Sue," I said as I dragged him to my father. Charlie saw us and gave me a warm hug. He did the same with Edward. "Hi, Daddy. Sue. You guys look great. How was your flight?"

"It was long," Sue groaned. "We got delayed in Dallas. Some mechanical error."

"How long was your delay?" Edward asked.

"Nearly three hours," Charlie grumbled. "We almost didn't make it to the party. Thankfully we had an insane driver to get us here. Puebla? Paco?"

"Pablo, Charlie. His name was Pablo," Sue giggled as she kissed his cheek. "We had enough time to shower and come down to the club. This is a fabulous resort."

"It is. They've been so accommodating with our needs," Edward said. "Perfect choice for the wedding."

"Speaking of which..." I said, arching my brow. "Is that some new bling on your left hand, Miss Sue?"

"Goodness, nothing goes past you," Sue giggled. She held up her left hand and on it was a simple round solitaire.

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"It's perfect," I gushed. "When did you propose, Charlie?"

"Valentine's day," he said, his cheeks turning a bright pink. "We almost went to Vegas to elope. But Sue convinced me to wait. She wanted you there. Leah too."

"Understandable. Oh my goodness! This is so exciting!" I said as I threw my arms around Sue. She eagerly accepted my enthusiastic embrace. Edward congratulated Charlie and shook his hand.

"Edward, since you're going to be my son-in-law, I was wondering if you could be my, um, best man?" Charlie asked.

"I'd be honored, Charlie," Edward smiled.

"You and Leah will share matron of honor duties," Sue said as she hugged me.

"I'm so happy for both of you," I gushed as tears fell down my cheeks.

"We're happy for you too, Bells," Charlie said as he wrapped his arm around my waist. "You and Edward are such a good match. So much better than..."

"Don't even say his name," I said. "He has no place at our wedding, at our party, in our lives. The next few days are about Edward and I. Right?"

"Right, my beautiful girl. I can't wait until you're Mrs. Masen," he said as he kissed my lips chastely. "I'm going to steal my fiancé, because I'm just dying to dance with her."

"Bella? Dance? Good luck with that," Charlie snickered. "She may break your toes."

"Shut it, Charlie," I said, smacking his arm lightly. "I'm not that bad."

"Okay, you're not. But you're willingly going to dance?"

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"When it's with Edward? Hell yeah," I said as I laced my fingers with his. "Come on, soon-to-be hubby." We walked out onto the dance floor. Michael Buble's "Sway" was playing. Edward snaked his hands around my waist and led us in a slow, rhythmic tango. "I can't believe that we're here. In Cancun. We're getting married on Wednesday."

"I know," Edward said as he looked into my eyes. "I'm so fucking lucky. I never thought I could be this happy, Bella. I was in such a dark place for so long. You are the light in my life. I love you so much."

"I love you, too, Edward," I said as played with the hair at the nape of his neck. We stayed on the dance floor, safe in our little love bubble for the next few songs. We never really paid attention to the song, we just held each other and danced. Occasionally we kissed. And fondled. Edward's hands rested on my ass and he hissed when he couldn't find any panty lines. *Alice and her evil ways. Damn elf put me in a thong.*

The rest of the evening was spent kibitzing with our guests, drinking the delicious margaritas and dancing. It was a lot of fun. By the time the last person left, it was after midnight. Edward and I crawled into our bed after we changed into our pajamas and fell asleep quickly. Edward holding me to his chest and nestling his nose in my hair.

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I was curled up next to Edward. He was holding me, idly playing with my hair. We were disrupted by a loud banging on the door. "Whoever it is, they can go away," Edward mumbled. The banging started again. "Or not."

"Bella! Wake up! We're getting you beautified," Alice chirped.

"Would you mind if I killed your sister?" I asked as I burrowed closer into Edward's body.

"No. I'll help you make it look like it was natural causes," Edward said as he pressed soft, angel kisses to my forehead. "I don't want to let you go."



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"I don't want to leave," I said as I looked up at Edward. His evergreen eyes were soft and he had his crooked grin plastered to his face. "You are so handsome. You know that?"

"Thank you," he said, his cheeks turning a lovely shade of pink. "You are exquisite."

"I know," I said, my voice dripping with sarcasm.

"Humble, Swan."

More banging. "ISABELLA MARIE SWAN! OPEN THE GOD DAMN DOOR!"

"I'm really going to kill your sister," I said as I rolled out of the king sized bed. I pulled open the door and found Alice, Rose, Esme, Angela and Sue standing on the other side. "Couldn't you at least wait until after eleven? Edward and I didn't get back to the room until midnight."

"Nope," Esme said. "Our appointments are for ten. So go shower. Chop!"

"We'll meet you at the spa in a half hour," Rose said with a wink. They all turned and headed toward the elevator. I groaned and slammed the door shut. I went to the closet and pulled out some comfortable underwear and clothes for the day. I decided on a red floral sundress and black flip flops.

"Are the guys kidnapping you?" I asked.

"I think so. Golf. Blech," Edward said as he scrunched his nose. "Our tee time is at twelve. Jasper arranged it."

"You can go back to sleep at least. I have to be at the 'spa in a half hour,'" I mimicked Rose's tone. "God, what could they do to me?"

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"Make you even more gorgeous than you already are," Edward said with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"Oh, stop it. I'm not gorgeous. Pretty, but not gorgeous," I blushed. "I'm going to shower." I turned and scurried into the bathroom.

"Wait a minute," Edward said as he hopped out of bed. He was tangled in the sheets and he nearly fell. "Fuck." He followed me into the bathroom and caged me with his arms. "Pretty? You think you're just pretty? That's just an insult."

"Edward, I've never been gorgeous. I'm still surprised that you, the epitome of all that is striking, wants to be with me, 'Plain Jane,'" I shrugged.

"Isabella Marie Swan, you are the most beautiful, gorgeous, exquisite, alluring, attractive..." Edward said as he kissed my lips and everywhere in between, "woman I've ever known."

"Edward, I've seen pictures of Tanya. She's beautiful. I'm a troll," I said, trying to push him away.

"Tanya was beautiful in a different way. She was pretty when she was perfectly made up. You are classically elegant. You don't need makeup or any enhancements. You're gorgeous the way you are. When you're made up, you are the most beautiful creature on the planet," Edward said as he cupped my face. "What boggles my mind is why you think that you a 'Plain Jane?' You're anything but. Sure you're gorgeous on the outside, but it's what's on the inside that makes you even more beautiful. Your brain, your intellect, your heart, your generosity, your compassion. All of that makes you so incredibly perfect, it's surreal."

My eyes filled with tears and I dropped my gaze from his intense stare. A few tears fell from my eyes and Edward gently wiped the away. "Don't cry, Bella."

"Good tears," I whispered. "I'm sorry I'm having an emotional moment."

"You've been having a lot of those," Edward snickered.

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"So, is that your vow?" I joked, trying to lighten the mood.

"If I can remember what I just said, sure," Edward said as he pulled me into an embrace. "Bella, you are my dream woman. I would do anything for you. I love you so much."

"I love you, too," I whispered as I kissed his warm chest. "Shower with me?"

"Of course," Edward said as he kissed my forehead. He opened the large shower doors and turned on the water. He adjusted the temperature and removed his boxers. I slipped off the camisole and shorts I was wearing and stepped into the hot spray. Edward held me under the warm water, swaying us in the shower. There was nothing sexual about this shower. It was just us, being together. Edward washed my hair with reverent and soft hands. I cleaned his muscular body. Edward's soft hands massaged my shoulders, washing my pale skin. I pushed him onto the bench and washed his soft hair, massaging his scalp. We finished our shower and dried each other off. I know that we took longer than a half hour, but I needed this. He needed this. We both needed this. Alice and the rest of the girls would just have to deal.

After our shower, Edward brushed my hair and helped me get dressed. I arched a brow. He just smiled sweetly as he assisted me. Edward took my hand and led me to the living room of the suite and assisted in putting on my sandals. "Now, you're perfect," he said from his crouched position.

Tears filled my eyes, again. *Traitorous tears. This emotional crap really needs to stop.* "Thank you," I whispered as I wrapped my arms around his neck. Edward was on his knees between my legs. He kissed me softly. His fingers glided down my spine and he looked into my eyes lovingly. I smiled. "I really don't deserve you," I sniffled.

"Yes, you do," he said quietly. "You deserve nothing but the best." The phone shrilled through the suite. "And apparently Alice is demanding you get the best at the spa," he laughed. He got up gracefully and picked up the phone. "She's on her way, Elf. Relax... Yeah, yeah. Minor meltdown. She's coming... Love you, too."

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"I don't want to go," I pouted. "Want to stay in bed with you."

"Me too, beautiful girl. But, Alice is threatening your dress," Edward grimaced.

"She wouldn't. She's so dead," I said as I hopped from the couch. I picked up my purse and key. "I love you, Edward. Don't forget sunscreen when you go golfing."

"Yes, Bella," he said as he snared my waist. He nibbled along the column of my neck. "Don't kill Alice. Her intentions are good."

"But the way she carries out those intentions are not," I grumbled. "I love you, Dr. Masen."

"Ah, ah, ah...that's not my name," he teased.

"Dr. McFuckme," I giggled. "I love you, Dr. McFuckme."

"Love you more, Mrs. McFuckme," he snorted. He turned me around and kissed me feverishly. "Stupid sex embargo. I want you."

"I want you, too, but Alice will tear my dress into shreds," I said as I pulled away. "I don't want to walk down the aisle naked."

"Hmmm...naked Bella. My favorite kind," he grinned as he cupped my ass.

"Good bye, Edward," I said as I danced out of his embrace. He pouted adorably as I left the suite. I blew him a kiss and headed to the spa. I was met by a petite woman named Maribel. She escorted me to the locker room and pointed out a robe for me. I removed my dress, frowning as I did so. Edward had taken such care of me while he put it on. I kept on my underwear and slipped on the short robe. Maribel led me to a large room where all of the women in my party were getting massages.

"About damn time, Swan," Rose said from her table. "Were you and Edward getting it on?"

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"No. I was having an insecure moment," I said as I hopped up on the table. Maribel told me to remove my robe and bra and lie face down on the table. "I'm good now. I think."

"You think?" Sue asked.

"I'm just feeling highly inadequate. I mean, look at Edward. He's beauty personified," I said as I adjusted my sheet over my body. "He's beautiful on the inside and out."

"Bella, you are gorgeous," Esme chided. "I can see why Edward loves you. You are kind, compassionate, brilliant and incredibly beautiful. Stop feeling like this."

"It's hard not to. But, I'm trying," I said. Maribel put some lotion on her hands and began kneading my shoulders and back. "God, that feels good."

"You have a lot of tension, Ms. Swan," Maribel said quietly. "You're getting married tomorrow. It's supposed to be a happy time."

"I'm incredibly happy. Trust me," I said. "I carry all of my stress in my back."

"By the time I'm done with you, you'll have no stress," Maribel teased. She worked on my back, my shoulders, my legs, my feet (GOD, that was awesome), my hands and oddly enough, my head for a solid hour. She was right. I felt no stress in my muscles after she was done with me. I felt like a puddle of goo. "No stress?"

"Huh?" I mumbled intelligently.

"I'll take that as a no," Maribel giggled. "Next up is a body mask. Put on your robe, but remove your underwear."

"Body mask?" I asked.

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"You sit in a tub of mud," Alice said as she slipped on her robe. "I'm not going to. I don't want to get my c-section scar infected. I'll be getting my hair cut and styled. Anyhow, I'm going to nurse my peanut. I'll be back for the next round."

"Have fun, Elf," I said as I followed the rest of the ladies into the massive room with a tub filled with mud. Fragrant mud. Hot fragrant mud. *This'll be interesting.* Maribel held out towels for all of us. I slipped the towel under my robe and put it on the bench. I stepped into the mud and wrinkled my nose. "This feels weird. I don't want to imagine getting all of this out of the crevices in my body."

"The next stop will be a hot tub," Maribel giggled. "It'll help."

"Oh good," Rose said as she got into the tub. We all sat down and let the mud ooze around us. "This is just bizarre. I feel like I'm sitting in perfumed cake batter."

"Interesting description," Esme said with a scrunched up nose. "But very accurate."

"Remind me not to do this again," Angela said as she wiggled in the mud. "Too weird."

"So, Sue," Esme said, trying to move our perseveration from the mud to another topic. "What do you do?"

"I'm a dental hygienist," Sue smiled. "I work at a dentist's office in the LaPush reservation near Forks, Washington. Been there my whole career."

"How did you and Charlie meet?" Esme asked.

"He and my first husband were best friends. Harry, my first husband, died of a heart attack about five years ago. Charlie was invaluable during that time. However, I never saw him more than a friend. Our friendship deepened and he stepped in when my daughter got married. He walked her down the aisle and filled in for Harry. Leah was like a second daughter to him, as Bella was like a

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second daughter to me. It was at Leah's wedding that we finally realized our feelings for each other and you can say the rest is history."

"When are you getting married, Sue?" I questioned.

"Probably over the summer. We want you and Edward to be there, obviously. Since you are both the matron of honor and best man, respectively," Sue laughed.

"Now, Bella, why didn't you invite your mom?" Esme asked.

"We haven't spoken much since my wedding to Mike. She kind of made an ass of herself at that wedding."

"She called Charlie after Valentine's Day," Sue said. "He kind of let it slip that you were getting married again. Renee was not happy that she didn't get an invitation."

"Well, there's a reason for that. She's a hateful woman who wore white to *my* wedding. Who slept with the father of the groom and made a drunken fool out of herself. She was horrid. I do not want her here. That's why I didn't invite her."

"I'm sorry, Bella," Esme said with a look of concern on her face. "I can't believe your mother would be that selfish on your wedding day."

"Well, I'm getting a do-over and she's not here. So, we're all good," I said with a smirk.

"Hot tub time!" Maribel said with a grin.

"Thank GOD!" Rose said as she got up, not caring that she was naked as the day she was born. Granted she was covered in mud, but still. She gracefully got out of the mud tub and wrapped a towel around her body, walking to the hot tub. We all followed suit, albeit more demurely. I'm not comfortable enough in my skin to let my future mother-in-law AND step-mother see me naked. No

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thank you. Uh huh. No way. I'm still not comfortable with Edward seeing me naked.

The rest of the spa day was uneventful. We spent some time in the hot tub, getting the mud off our bodies. Then we went our separate ways. We got waxed, primped, tweezed and beautified by the staff at the spa. After our day of beauty, Maribel led me to a private changing room where my rehearsal outfit was being housed. It was a strapless white dress with black floral accents. It was beautiful. Attached to the hanger was a note from Alice and Rose.

*Dearest Bella,*

*You will be the most beautiful bride. You deserve everything that Edward has given you. And more. We love you so much and are so happy for you. Please accept this dress as a token of our love. In the bag is your panties. No bra...again. We need to leave Edward wanting more and trust me he will want more.*

*Love, kisses and hugs,*

*Rose and Alice*

*PS - Shoes are courtesy of Royce King. - R.*

Oh lord. They are too much. I put on the sad excuse for underwear and pulled on the dress. My hair was curled and hung over my shoulders. I was putting on my shoes when I heard a quiet knock on the door. I looked up and saw Esme standing in front of me. She held a small bag. "I have something for you. It's from your fiancé."

"What is it?" I asked.

"Here," Esme said as she handed me the bag. She sat down next to me. I pulled a box out of the bag and opened it. Inside was a diamond necklace and a pair of diamond earrings. "They were Elizabeth's. Edward Sr. gave them to her on their wedding day. He got them from his mom."



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"It's beautiful," I said as I ran my fingers over the diamonds in the necklace. It was set in white gold or platinum. The diamonds were scattered randomly and were shining brightly. The earrings were dangly and held a large pear shaped diamond in each earring. Surrounding them was baguette cut diamonds. "I can't accept this."

"It's yours, Bella. Edward said he wanted you to have it," Esme said as she removed the necklace and placed it around my neck.

"Didn't this belong to Tanya?"

"No. He never gave this to Tanya. I've kept it in my safe since Edward was a boy," Esme said as she put the earrings into my ears. "I knew that he loved Tanya. However, what he felt for her is *nothing* compared to what he feels for you. You are his soul mate. His other half. You complete him, as cheesy as that sounds. Now, come on, we have a rehearsal to get to."

I got up with Esme, but I felt a little lightheaded. "Whoa, head rush," I said as I sat down.

"Have you eaten today?" Esme asked.

"Come to think of it, no."

"Let's get you something to eat," Esme said kindly as she helped me up. Her arm was around my waist and we went to get me a snack. I scarfed down some food and gave her a thankful smile. "Better?"

"Much. Thank you," I said as I sipped my water. "Let's do this." We walked to the gazebo where we were having our ceremony. Edward was talking to Carlisle. He was tanner. *Damn it*. His hair had a touch of blonde in it from the sun. *God, he's so fucking perfect. And he's mine*. I was nearly to the gazebo when I heard a groan. I turned and looked at Emmett. He was as red as a tomato. "Someone forgot their sunscreen."

"Shut it, Swan," Emmett said as he plucked at his shirt. "I'm in hell."

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"Sorry, Em," I said as I patted his shoulder gingerly. I kissed his pink forehead and walked up to Edward and Carlisle. Edward was wearing a pair of black pants, white dress shirt and black and white tie. *Aww, how cute. We match.* "Hello, Dr. Masen."

"Soon-to-be Mrs. Masen," he said as he looked at me. His eyes widened when he saw the necklace around neck. "Excuse me, Carlisle," he said as he laced his fingers with mine. He led me a few feet away under a lush tree. His hands cupped my face. "You are a vision, Bella," he whispered as he crashed his lips against mine. His tongue slid through my lips and danced languidly with mine. My hands moved up to his hair and fisted the soft, coppery locks. "So beautiful," he murmured as his hands moved from my face to my waist. "God, I want you. I want to be with you. I want to make love to you," he whispered against my mouth.

"Me too, Edward," I said softly, nibbling on his bottom lip. "Tomorrow. I promise."

"I don't know if I can wait," Edward said as he pressed his hips against mine. I could feel his arousal through my dress.

"As much as I love you, you will *have* to wait," I said as I pulled away. "Thank you for the beautiful necklace and earrings."

"You're quite welcome," he smiled as he adjusted his bulge. "Let's get our rehearsal on."

I smiled and twined my fingers with his. By the time we came back, there was a magistrate standing at the gazebo. He introduced himself and we spoke briefly about what we wanted for our ceremony. Nothing flashy. Just us proclaiming our love for each other and legally binding us to each other. We only had one attendant each. Alice was my matron of honor, again. Jasper was Edward's best man. Charlie was walking me down the aisle. We practiced that and we did the motions of the wedding, minus the vows and rings. After the rehearsal, we gave the magistrate half of his fee and went to dinner with our friends and family.

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Once we were done with dinner, Edward and I spent a few moments by ourselves before Jasper dragged him to his room with EJ. We spent that time holding each other and kissing each other until our lips were swollen. Jasper tugged on Edward's arm and led him away. My heart crumbled to see him leave, but I know that the next time I'll see him will be on that gazebo. When I walk to him to be his wife. Mrs. Edward Masen.

**A/N: Okay, so I wanted the wedding to be in the chapter, but it's been a beast. Next chapter will be the wedding itself and one huge long lemon. Beach lemons, balcony lemons, honeymoon lemons...lemons galore.**

### **Translations:**

**Perdone. Debemos conseguir una licencia de matrimonio. ¿Qué debemos hacer? - Excuse me. We need to get a marriage license. What do we need to do?**

**Debe llenar estas formas. Yo también debo ver una forma de identificación para usted y para su esposa. La licencia de manejar o el pasaporte son dos formas aceptables de identificación. - You need to fill out these forms. You also need to forms of identification for you and your wife. A driver's license or passport are acceptable forms of identification.**

**¿Ambos de nosotros deben llenar estas formas? - Both of us need to fill out these forms?**

**¿Cuándo es el día grande? ¿Su boda? - When is the big day? Your wedding?**

**El miércoles al atardecer - Wednesday, at sunset.**

**Yo no puedo esperar. - I can't wait.**

**Es un hombre afortunado. - You're a lucky man.**

**Es hermosa. - She's beautiful.**

## A Fresh Start

**Aquí está su licencia de matrimonio completada. ¡Felicitaciones! - Here's your completed marriage license. Congratulations!**

# The Dream Wedding of Bella and Edward

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 39: The Dream Wedding of Bella and Edward

I was sleeping soundly in my bed. I felt a pair of arms around my waist. And another pair around my shoulders. *What the hell?* I cracked my eyes open and found Rose and Alice curled up next to me in my king sized bed at the resort. Rose was spooning me. Alice was curled up against my shoulder. *Emmett would have a god damn field day if he saw this.* I wiggled and tried to get out of their steely grasp. Rose wrapped her arm around my waist tighter and squeezed my bladder. *Oh, don't do that. You'll be sleeping in a puddle.* I managed to get up and pad to the bathroom. I peed and brushed my teeth.

Then I was hit with a wave a nausea. I gripped onto the edge of the counter and prayed that the feeling of hurling would stop. *I'm on vacation. No Mike. No stress. No nothing. I'm getting married today. I don't need a nervous stomach.* I sipped some water and my stomach calmed down. I looked at the clock and saw that it was a little after nine the morning. The festivities for my wedding were going to start at ten with hair and makeup. I sighed and ordered breakfast for my two friends who were now cuddled with each other. I chuckled and picked up my camera from my bag. I snapped a few pictures. The sound of the shutter going woke up Rose. She looked at me scowled. "You so did not take a

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picture of us, did you?"

"You are so adorable," I said, wrinkling my nose. "I just had to."

"If it wasn't your wedding day, I'd kick your ass," Rose giggled. "You're getting married today!"

"I know!" I squealed as I bounced on my toes. I heard a quiet knock on the door. I opened it up and saw our breakfast. I ushered the server into our room and I tipped him. "Come and get it, Hale."

"Food!" Rose bellowed as she hopped out of bed. *She's getting more and more like Emmett every day. Weird.* Rose fixed a plate of bacon, waffles and eggs before heading out to the balcony overlooking the Caribbean. I got a muffin and a few sausages. I looked over at Alice and she was still sleeping soundly on the bed. It was so large, it dwarfed her tiny frame.

I left her to sleep as she was not getting a full nights rest with little EJ. He was a good baby, but demanded to be fed every few hours. Only by mommy. Jasper felt so left out. He tried to feed his son with a bottle, but he refused it. Apparently he took it this morning, since there was no frantic Jasper phone call.

"Swan!" Rose yelled.

"SHhhh!" I hissed. "Alice is sleeping."

"Sorry," Rose snorted. "So, are you nervous? Excited?"

"Excited. Definitely not nervous. Edward is the perfect man for me. I have no trepidation about marrying him," I said as I nibbled on my muffin.

"Did you feel nerves about marrying...you know?" Rose said as she got up for a second helping of food.

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"I did. I mean, when he proposed, it wasn't romantic or anything. He pretty much got down on one knee in his messy bedroom, asking me to be his wife. No hearts. No flowers. No fireworks. I was so desperate to be married that I said yes without really thinking it through. On the day of the wedding, I was nervous about everything but our actual marriage. Were the flowers alright? Was my mom drunk? Is my dress on correctly? Never did I once ask myself 'is this what I want? Do I love Mike?'"

"That should have been your first clue that you weren't in love with him," Rose said sagely "What are you thinking about now?"

"How I can't wait to be Mrs. Edward Masen. How I can't wait to see my groom at the end of the aisle, looking incredibly handsome and nervous. How I can't wait to start a family with him. How much I love him and I never want to be away from him," I said with a dreamy look in my eyes. "God, is it time for me to walk down the aisle yet?"

"Not yet, Bella," Rose snickered. "In a few hours. I promise you will be walking down the aisle to Edward."

Rose and I finished our breakfast. Alice finally woke up and gave us a sleepy grin. She darted off to her room to take care of EJ. I hopped into the shower and Rose went back to her room to do the same. I had put on my clothes and headed down to the extra deluxe suite that hotel provided for all of the women to get read in for the wedding. I opened the door and found Esme and Sue getting their makeup done by Maribel and another spa employee.

"Good morning, Bella," Sue said with a smile. She held open her arms and I eagerly accepted her hug. She was the closest thing to the 'mother of the bride' that I was getting and I was going to enjoy it. I hugged Esme as well.

"You have a present, Bella," Esme said as she pointed to the table near the balcony. I blushed and walked over to where my present lay. I picked it up and unwrapped it. It was a large leather bound book with my initials on the front. My new initials. IMSM. Isabella Marie Swan Masen. I opened up the book and found it was a journal. Edward had placed the first entry in it.

## A Fresh Start

*April 4<sup>th</sup> , 2011 - Our Wedding Day*

*My Dearest Isabella,*

*I am blessed to have such a wonderful woman in my life. In the short time that I've known you, things have changed for me dramatically. I came to Sherryville a widower with nothing to look forward to in my life. Work and home. Home and work. Now, I have you. The reason for my existence. Never in my wildest dreams would have thought that I would have found you.*

*I came to Sherryville for a fresh start. A new beginning. And I got that. With you. Bella, you are my best friend, my confidante, my lover, my wife, my future, my everything. I hope that I am the same for you. Individually, we were strong, but broken. Together, we are unstoppable. I see so much for us. A long and happy marriage. A loving family (the Elf included). And all of our dreams come true.*

*I love you. With all of my heart. All of my body. All of my soul. With everything that I am, I love you.*

*I can't wait until you're my wife.*

*Your loving husband,*

*Edward, aka Dr. McFuckme*

"Oh my god," I sobbed as I held the book to my chest.

"What?" Esme asked as she scurried over to me. I handed her the book and she read the first entry in my journal. Her eyes filled with tears and she held me close. "My son is an amazing, loving man."

Sue came up and reached for the book. She read the passage and she sniffled a few times. "You are so lucky, Bella. He's...there are no words to describe how wonderful Edward is. Or how much he loves you. Charlie told me that Edward talked to him last night before he went to bed."



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"What did he say?"

"He said that you his dream come true. That your happiness and safety are the most important things to him. That he loves you so much," Sue said. "Charlie said that Edward was the man that you were meant to marry. He approves of your Edward. He finally feels that you are safe and protected."

"I feel safe with him. So happy and loved, too," I blushed. I wiped my face and picked up a pen. "I'm going to write a little bit before I get all gussied up." I took my book and went out onto the balcony. I decided to write my entry as a response to Edward's.

*April 4 th , 2011 - Our Wedding Day...at last!*

*My Beloved Edward,*

*Your words mean so much to me. Your love, though, means more. You are right in the fact that we were broken when we were separated. Together, we have healed our wounds. But it wasn't an easy road. When I first met you, I was so bitter. So afraid of putting my heart on the line. I was hurt and betrayed by my ex-husband so badly. I was resigned to be by myself. I was resigned to never find love again. Then a meddlesome little elf insisted I go out for drinks after our show. And I met you. Now, hindsight is 20/20. I acted horribly to you. I'm surprised that you were even willing to give me a chance. But you did. First by giving me your phone number on your card and again by taking us out to lunch after my drunken debacle at Bar Louie.*

*I was still afraid, though. Your patience was unending. You said you'd wait for me on Fourth of July. I didn't believe you, at first. Then, our friendship grew. As did our attraction. I must admit, Edward, you are the most beautiful man I've ever known. Both inside and out. You are kind, loving, compassionate, intelligent, witty, fun, sexy...need I go on? On the outside, you are strong, bold, handsome and some other things that I don't want to write. I don't want to get into trouble. What would happen if our children find this journal? They would think their parents are horny pervs.*

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*Anyhow, I digress. I can't wait until I am officially your wife. Mrs. Isabella Masen. I love the sound of that. I love you. All of you. Your perfections. Your flaws (are there any?). Your quirks. Just you. I love you. I want to shout it from the rooftops in every language known to man that I love you. Only you. For the rest of my life, I will only love you.*

*Edward, you are my best friend. You are my protector. You are my angel. You are my husband.*

*I love you, with all of my heart. All of my mind. All of my body. All of my soul (I needed to one up you ;-).*

*Your loving wife and lover,*

*Mrs. Isabella Masen (aka Mrs. McFuckme)*

"Bella?" Maribel called out to me. "It's time for you to get ready. Unless you want to get married in your track suit."

"Ah, no," I giggled. "Thanks."

I got up and sat down in one of the salon chairs set up in the suite. I held my book against my chest. Cherishing the small piece of Edward that was in my hands. Maribel worked her fingers through my hair, coiling and twisting my mahogany locks with a curling iron. She placed my hair half up and half down. "Do you have a veil?"

"No, I don't."

"She's using these flowers," Alice said as she held out simple white and blue blooms. "One large clump on the right side."

"Oh, that'll be gorgeous," Maribel said as she added the flowers to my hair.

"What's that?" Alice asked as she pointed to my journal.

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"A wedding present," I smiled. "Oh, you have Edward's present, right?"

"I brought it with me. He's going to love it," Alice winked. Edward's present was twofold. His present was something practical but sentimental. I got him a new stethoscope. His stethoscope was old and falling apart. He griped about it more often than not and never replaced it. It was sentimental to him. He had it since he was in medical school and it had belonged to his father. So, I got him a new one and had his old one framed with a copy of medical degree in a shadowbox. I also got Edward's pictures from his childhood placed onto a DVD with all of his favorite music. Esme and Alice took over that present, especially after Alice was placed on bed rest for her pregnancy.

"Great," I said, putting my hand over my heart.

"So, can I see the present that Edward got you?" Alice asked. I handed over the book and she ran her fingers over the embossed cover. "It's beautiful. It's so you."

"Open it and read it. He put the first entry in. I just replied," I blushed. Alice opened the book and read the original entry by Edward and my reply.

"Oh my word. That is so romantic," she said, putting her hand on mine. "You two are so stinking adorable."

"Hello?" Jasper's voice called.

"Jasper, you are not allowed in here," Alice chided. "Is EJ okay?"

"He's fine. Charlie is in love with our son. He won't let him go. You are in trouble, Bella, when you have grandchildren," Jasper snorted. "Anyhow, I have a present for you. I see you got the first one."

"Another present?" I squeaked.

"It's your something old and blue," Jasper explained. "The blue is from Charlie and old is from Edward. Congratulations." Jasper leaned down and kissed my

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cheek.

"Old? Blue?" I said. Jasper pointed to the bag he gave me and sauntered out of the room after he kissed Alice on the lips. I opened up the smaller box in the bag. Inside was my Grandma Swan's sapphire earrings. I had wanted to wear them for my first wedding, but Renee wanted to wear them herself. Another reason why I hated her. She was so damn selfish. Charlie said that he wanted his mother's earrings at the end of the wedding and he pocketed them afterward. He kept them until today. I opened up the small note from Charlie.

*Dear Bella,*

*I'm glad you didn't wear these to your wedding to Mike. He wasn't worthy of them. Edward is. He is a wonderful man and I can see how much he loves you. These are my gift to you. Keep them and give them to your daughter on her wedding day. I love you so much, Bells. I'm so proud of you and so happy that you found a man that is worthy of you.*

*Love,*

*Dad*

And cue more tears.

"There's more, Bella," Alice said as she wiggled the bag.

"God, I don't know how much more I can take," I sniffled. "I'm a mess and it's not even the ceremony yet."

"You're allowed to be emotional on your wedding," Esme soothed. "Open up the next present."

I reached into the bag and pulled out a larger box. I opened up the box and was greeted with another diamond necklace. It was many small round cut diamonds in a floral design. "It's beautiful."

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"Again, it was Edward's. On her wedding day, my mother, Sylvia, gave Elizabeth this necklace. It was her grandmother's. It's been passed down to the daughters of the Platt family," Esme explained. "Edward asked me if he could give it to you, even though you are not a Platt. I told him that since he had Platt blood in his veins, he could give this necklace to the woman he deemed worthy. Originally he was going to give it to Tanya, but at the last minute he changed his mind and gave her something different. Something much smaller. That he bought. He was waiting to give it to you. And after seeing your dress, it's perfect for you."

More tears. If I cry anymore, I'll float down the aisle. Esme kissed my cheek and put the necklace around my neck and Alice put the earrings in my ears.

"I think I'll need to put on waterproof everything," Maribel teased as she dabbed my cheeks with baby wipes. She began prepping my face with some lotion and primer. "No more presents. I just got her un-red."

"I think that's it," Esme chortled. "Unless Edward has something up his sleeve that we don't know about. Alice?"

"He hasn't told me anything," Alice shrugged. "I'm going to pump and then get ready. You will be beautiful, Bella."

I sat back and let Maribel work her magic on my face. She chattered on about her own family. I wasn't really paying attention. I just nodded and grunted appropriately. As Maribel worked on my face, the photographer from the resort came and began snapping pictures. It was very relaxed and candid. "You're all done, Bella," Maribel said. "You just need lipstick and gloss, but I'll put that on after you've put on your dress."

"Thank you, Maribel," I said as I gave her a hug.

"You are so lucky. Alice showed me a picture of your fiancé. Damn girl, he's hot," Maribel said as she fanned herself. "A fine specimen."

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"Yes, he is," I said. Maribel scampered away and worked some on Angela. The door opened and Jake walked in. "Jake! I'm so sorry that I haven't spoken to you much." I ran up to him and wrapped my arms around his neck.

"You've been busy, silly girl," Jake laughed. "You look beautiful. Even if you don't have on your dress."

I blushed and ducked my head. "Thanks, Jake. You look mighty handsome, too."

"I know," Jake said as he buffed his fingers on his shoulder. "All of the guys are looking like this. Edward got us these shirts and told us to wear dress pants in light gray or khaki."

"My fiancé is a fashion plate. Surprisingly," I said dryly.

"I know. Are you sure he's straight?" Jake teased.

"Jacob Black! My fiancé is not gay," I shrieked as I smacked his shoulder.

"I know. I know. I'm just teasing," Jake laughed. "Seriously, I'm so happy for you and Edward. You both are so perfect and nauseatingly cute. You both are such good friends and I couldn't have gotten through my darkest part of my life. You have been supportive, loving and introduced me to the love of my life."

"I'm so happy for you, Jake. How are things with lover boy?" I asked.

"Oh, GOD! Wonderful. He's beyond words," Jake said as he gushed. "We fall more in love with each other every day. As soon as my lease is up, I'm moving in with him at his town house."

"Yay!" I said as I hugged Jake.

"Bella, we need to get you into your dress," Sue said with a friendly smile.

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"Promise me a dance, Bells?" Jake asked.

"Of course," I replied as I hugged him again. Jake left the room with a huge grin. Sue and Esme handed me a robe. Rose gave me the bag with my lingerie. I took both things and went into the bathroom. I removed my track suit and the panties I had put on earlier. I opened the bag with my lingerie and was surprised at how risqué, but elegant it was. I pulled on the white lacy boy shorts. I then put on the lacy white strapless bra. I wrapped the robe around my body and stepped out into the room. Esme was holding my dress for me for me to step into. Alice held my hand as I stepped into my dress. I undid my robe and slid the single flowered strap up my arm. Sue zipped up my dress, obviously filling in as the mother of the bride. God knows she was more wanted and welcomed than Renee.

"Bella, I know I'm not your mother, but I wanted to give you something," Sue said as she held out a small bag. She opened up the small cloth satchel and dropped a charm bracelet onto my hand. It was sterling silver with a heart charm hanging from it. "I gave the same bracelet to Leah when she got married. Please wear it today."

"I'd be honored, Sue," I said as I held out my hand. Sue fastened the bracelet to my wrist and we hugged. "I'm so happy my father found you."

"I'm so happy that Edward found you," Sue smiled. "You glow, Bella."

"Bella, your father is here. Can I send him in?" Maribel asked as she applied my lipstick.

"Of course," I said as I blotted my lips. Charlie came in and he was wearing a pair of linen dress pants in a beige color. His shirt was a pale blue that matched my flowers on my dress. "Daddy..." More tears.

"Don't cry, Bells," Charlie said as he hugged me. "You don't want to mess up...the stuff on your face."

"Makeup, Charlie," Sue snorted.

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"Whatever," Charlie smiled. "You look beautiful. Edward won't know what hit him. He's so nervous, but so confident at the same time, Bella. He's so over the moon in love with you, it's amazing. I'm so proud of you. So happy for you. I love you both."

"Daddy, thank you," I sniffled. "I love you, too. Thank you for the earrings."

"I'm glad that they are finally yours," Charlie said with a pointed glare. "Renee was so selfish in wearing them on your day last time. Now you can have them and wear them."

"Bella, it's time," Alice said as she bounced on her toes. "Time to meet your groom." She looked beautiful in her pale blue dress. It contrasted with her pale skin and dark hair, which was styled in a sleek bob. It was pinned with similar flowers to mine, only more colorful. More like the bouquet that I was carrying down the aisle. A mixture of hydrangea and white roses.

Rose handed me my bouquet and she kissed my cheek. Esme, Sue, and Rose left the suite. It left Alice, Charlie and I in the room along with the photographer. We waited a few minutes before heading down to the gazebo where our ceremony was going to take place. The path to it was lined with white and pale blue organza. My heart stammered in my chest as I neared where Edward was standing. Alice danced ahead and met up with Jasper who cued in the small string quartet that was playing for our wedding. The traditional wedding march started and Alice and Jasper walked down the aisle.

Maria, the wedding planner, helped me with the train of my dress. Charlie looped my hand through his arm and kissed my forehead. "I love you, baby girl. This should have been your first wedding."

"I know, Dad," I said.

"Time to meet your husband," Maria whispered in my ear as the song changed to 'Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring.' I took a deep breath and we headed down the aisle to the gazebo. I chorus of gasps and sniffles assaulted my ears. I heard the soft coos from EJ. She was on Esme's lap. I kept my eyes on the ground, not



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wanting to fall on the boards of the deck. Once I reached the concrete, I looked up and my eyes found Edward's.

"Oh my God," I whispered as I looked at him. He was wearing black dress pants and a pale blue shirt that matched Charlie's. His green eyes were filled with tears, but also with pure love. He gave me a water, crooked smile. He looked like he was about to jump the railing of the gazebo and run to me. He mouthed that he loved me and took a deep breath.

Charlie and I reached the gazebo and we stood in front of the magistrate and Edward. "Who gives this woman to this man?" asked the magistrate.

"I do," Charlie said as he took my right hand and placed it in Edward's left. "With all of my heart." Charlie kissed my cheek and patted my face. He then turned to Edward and he kissed his cheek as well. "Take care of my baby girl, Edward."

"I promise, Charlie. I'll take care of her until my dying breath."

"Excellent. I'd expect you," Charlie replied, giving him a pointed glare. That garnered a few laughs from the audience.

Edward looked at me and his jade eyes sparkled. "You're perfect," he whispered.

"So are you," I replied.

"We are gathered here today to witness the wedding of Dr. Edward Masen to Ms. Isabella Swan. They have prepared their own vows to share with each other today. So, without further ado, Edward, you're first."

"Thank you," Edward smiled. He took my bouquet and passed it to Alice. He took both of my hands in his. "Isabella, you are my love. My best friend. My confidante. My lover. My life. My soul. You are my everything. You represent everything in my life that is good and pure. You represent my fresh start in life and in love. I stand here before you in awe of your strength and beauty. I stand

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here before you, humbled by your intelligence. I stand here before you excited to take the next steps in our lives. Together. As husband and wife. I love you, baby. With all of my heart."

Edward cupped my face and wiped my tears away. I reached into my dress, down my cleavage, and pulled out a handkerchief from the bodice. A few snickers permeated the gazebo. "God, how do I follow that?" I teased. More laughs. I finished dabbing my cheeks and put my handkerchief back down my dress. I laced my fingers with his. "Edward, never in my life have I expected to meet someone like you. You are the embodiment of pure good. My white knight. My angel. My strength. My best friend and I couldn't be more thrilled that fate has led you to me. I love you with all of my soul. I never believed in soul mates until I met you. We were one soul that was separated, wandering aimlessly until we found the other half. Your strengths compliment mine. Together, we are unstoppable and I feel that we are impervious to all bad things when we're together. I can't wait to share every step of our marriage together. First time kissing as husband and wife. First time making love. Our first fight. Our first child. Our first grandchild. Each of those things excites me and I can't wait to have them. With you. I love you, Edward. So much. I'm so happy that I'm your wife."

"Can I have that handkerchief?" Edward laughed as tears fell down his face. I handed him the handkerchief and he wiped his face. "You so did better than me, beautiful girl."

"Okay, I'm a mess too," the magistrate chuckled. "Before we all float away from all the tears, do we have the rings?"

Jasper reached into his pocket and took out a velvet box. He opened it and handed the two rings to the magistrate. Edward's ring was a white gold ring with a braided pattern on it. My ring was an eternity band of diamonds in antique setting. "Edward, please take the ring and place it on Bella's hand and repeat after me."

Edward took the ring and slid it over my finger. "With this ring, I thee wed. In sickness and in health. In good times and in bad. For richer or poorer. For the

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rest of the days of my life." He kissed my hand, focusing his lips on my ring.

"Bella, please take the ring and place it on Edward's hand and repeat after me."

I took the ring and pushed it over his knuckle onto his left hand. "With this ring, I thee wed. In sickness and in health. In good times and in bad. For richer or poorer. For the rest of the days of my life." I repeated the same action of kissing Edward's ring and I smiled up at my husband. *My husband.*

"By the power vested in me by the city of Cancun, Mexico, I pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss your wife, Dr. Masen," the magistrate said with a look of excitement.

"Gladly," Edward beamed as he cupped my face. "I love you, Mrs. Masen."

"I love you, too, Dr. Masen," I said as Edward leaned down. His soft lips brushed against mine chastely. He pulled away slightly and pressed his lips harder against mine. He traced my bottom lip with his tongue and I opened my mouth for him. His tongue slid between my lips and he deepened the kiss slightly before pulling away for good. His jade eyes were so happy and so loving.

"I'd like to introduce to you, for the first time, Dr. and Mrs. Edward Masen."

Alice handed me my bouquet and we turned to face our families. They applauded and cheered for us. I thought my face was going to crack in two because I was smiling so widely. Edward picked me up in his arms and carried me to the beach. Our families followed. We had discussed a memorial for Edward's parents and for Tanya. The resort had provided us with three small floating wreaths for each of the people we were honoring. Well, that Edward was honoring. Maria held two wreaths and Maribel held the third. They placed the wreaths into our hands. "Bella, thank you for everything," Edward said as he placed one of the wreaths into the water. "I'm so blessed to have you in my life. My parents would have loved you. I know that Tanya would have approved as well."

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"I love you, Edward," I said as I handed him the next wreath. He placed it in the water. We put the final wreath into the water together and watched as they floated away, our arms around each other.

"We're married, Bella," Edward whispered. "I'm your husband."

"I'm your wife, Edward," I said with a giggle. Edward looked down at me and he picked me up and spun me around. He put me down and peppered my face with kisses.

"God, get a room!" Emmett boomed. Rose smacked him and hissed at him to shut up. We pulled apart and Edward arched a brow at Emmett.

"Emmett, I'm sorry but you are going down," Edward laughed. "Not today. Not tomorrow. But you will pay for giving me grief on my wedding day."

"Are you still sore about the reserved comment?" Emmett asked. Alice, Rose and Jasper smacked him that time. I buried my face into Edward's chest and laughed. Edward growled. I felt it through his chest. It went straight to my panties.

"Please join us for some dinner and some dancing," Maria said as she led us to the room where our reception was going to be held. Edward picked me up, bridal style and carried me up the beach.

"I can walk, Edward," I chided.

"I know. But I want to hold my wife," Edward said as he kissed my lips. "I love holding you."

"I can't wait to hold you tonight. You'll love what I have under this."

"You're killing me, Bella," Edward whined. "I've wanted you since we've landed and now you're teasing me about what you are wearing under this beautiful dress? Ugh!"

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"Who says I'm wearing anything?" I giggled.

"You're killing me, Smalls," Edward quoted. I kissed his lips sweetly and tangled my hands into his soft hair. Before we went to eat, we signed our marriage certificate along with Alice, Jasper and magistrate. He hugged us and went on his way. We did invite him for dinner, but he declined saying he had to get home to his own wife to remind her of how much he loved her.

*Awwwwwww!!!*

The photographer wanted a few pictures with Edward and I. We posed on the beach with the sunset as our backdrop. It was romantic and perfect. Just like our wedding. Just like us. We took some pictures with our family and with all of the guests from the ceremony. Our tiny wedding of twenty-five people was just right. Everyone we wanted there was able to attend and it made it so special.

Edward and I ate a quick meal and we made the rounds to the tables of our friends and family. Cynthia introduced us to her Roger. He was her boyfriend that she met on eHarmony. Kyle and Christina offered hugs and congratulations. Kyle was so happy for Edward. He had seen Edward at his darkest moment and now he saw him at his brightest. Our next stop was Rhonda and her husband, George. They were seated with my bosses. Sherrie looked like she was three sheets to the wind, but she was having a good time. Her husband, Ryan, was taking care of her. We finished our rounds at the tables and then were ushered out to the small dance floor. The smooth strains of 'The Way You Look Tonight' by Frank Sinatra filled the reception hall. Edward led me in a smooth dance. His lips never left my skin as we danced. His one hand was at the small of my back and his other hand held mine to his chest, right above his heart.

The next song morphed into 'Dance with my Father' and Charlie took over Edward's spot in my arms. I swayed with my dad, more clumsily than with my husband. I cried in my father's arms. He just held me as we stumbled along the dance floor. At the end of the song, my father kissed my forehead and cheeks before leading me off the dance floor. Edward led Esme onto the dance floor and they danced to 'There You'll Be.' Esme cupped Edward's face and she

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spoke to him in hushed tones. He nodded a few times and he hugged her close. Even though they were not mother and son, the bond they shared was special.

We danced and had a good time. We didn't do the usual bouquet toss or garter throw. It wasn't needed. Most of our friends were married or close to being engaged. Around ten, people started to leave and we bid them farewell. Tomorrow, we were having a brunch with our families and then they would leave too. It would allow us to have a brief honeymoon before heading back to the real world. We were leaving on Monday morning. I had to take a personal day, but Mrs. Cope allowed me to do so. She said that my wedding was more important than being back at school. She even said that she wouldn't charge me a personal day. It would be a 'sick' day. That meant no paperwork. *Sweet!*

The last group of people headed up to their room. Maria handed Edward a key. He arched a brow. "We have arranged for the rest of your stay to be in the penthouse. Your sister assisted us in moving your belongings to the new accommodations. Consider this upgrade our wedding present to you. Congratulations, Dr. and Mrs. Masen."

"Thank you, Maria. For everything," I said.

"It was a pleasure working with you. The photographer told me that he will create a DVD of your wedding photos. It should be done by the time you depart," Maria said with a grin. She led us to the private elevator to our penthouse. "Enjoy your honeymoon."

"Hmmm, honeymoon," Edward said as he led me into the elevator. "No more sex embargo."

"God, you'd think I was withholding sex for months not four days," I giggled.

"What? I have needs. And my hand was not cutting it," Edward snorted. "I'm dying to see what you have under your exquisite dress. If it's soft and lacy or nonexistent."

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"You'll have to wait and see, Dr. Masen," I said as I ran my hands down his shirt, feeling his muscular torso.

"I've been patient, Mrs. Masen. I don't want to wait anymore," he growled lightly.

"Can't we wait until we get into the new suite? I don't want the first time we make love as husband and wife to be in an elevator."

"Ugh, fine," Edward said as he slumped his shoulders. "Always the voice of reason."

"Besides, I want to thank you for all of the gifts you've given me and I want to give you your wedding present as well."

"Bella, marrying me was present enough," Edward said as he caressed my cheeks. The elevator opened up and we walked down the hallway to the penthouse. Edward slid the key into the slot and opened up the door. The room was massive with a huge bed in the center of it. There were candles lit all around the room and tons of roses and flowers. I looked over on the couch. I saw the bag that I had created with Edward's presents. I walked over to the couch and picked up the bag. "For you, Dr. Masen."

"Bella," he whined.

"Open it," I said, arching a brow. He grumbled and pulled out the tissue paper. He took out the DVD first. He looked at it and his eyes glazed over. "Alice and Esme put all of your childhood photos on there. I added the music. We can watch it when we get home."

"It's perfect," he whispered. "I..."

"There's more," I said, trying to keep my emotions in check. "It's a two-fer."

Edward reached into the bag and pulled out the shadow box with his stethoscope and medical degree. "Is this my old stethoscope? My dad's?"

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"Yeah. You've been using it and complained that it wasn't working properly so I swiped it before we left. I had it placed in the shadow box along with a color copy of your medical degree to hang in your office. There's one more thing in your present. Carlisle helped with this one."

Edward reached in and pulled out his final present. "A new stethoscope."

"Engraved and everything," I said as I showed him what I had put on there. *Dr. Edward Anthony Masen, My Love, 4/4/11*. "Carlisle chose the stethoscope since I had no clue what to get. I did the rest."

Edward looked at me and his eyes were filled with so many emotions. He put the stethoscope and shadowbox on the couch carefully. He pulled me into a tight embrace, burying his nose in my hair. He mumbled something into my shoulder.

"What was that?" I giggled.

"Can I make love to you now?" he said as he looked into my eyes. "You've given me so much. I need to make love to my wife."

"I need to make love to my husband," I whispered as I traced my hands over his handsome features. He captured my hand against his cheek and he turned his face to kiss my palm. He leaned forward and brushed his lips against mine. His strong hands cupped my chin and he deepened the kiss. Our tongues danced with each other and we moved closer together. Edward's hands moved from my face to my waist. "Edward," I moaned.

"What, my beautiful wife?" he asked reverently.

"Make love to me. Make me yours, completely," I said as I laid my left hand on his heart. My rings sparkled in the candlelit room. Edward did the same with his left hand, laying on my left breast. I traced my finger over his ring and I smiled. He was mine. All mine. With his right hand, he moved to the zipper of my dress and he slowly lowered it. I reached for the buttons of his shirt and with surprising precision, I released them. Our eyes never left each other. I



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pushed Edward's shirt off his shoulders and he stood before me, tanned and perfect. I leaned forward and kissed his jaw, his neck, his collarbones, and ending with the spot above his heart. I could feel his heart stammer in his chest.

Edward's fingers gently guided the single strap from my dress down my arm. He moved my bodice of my dress further down my body and my wedding gown fell in a soft thud to the floor. I stood before Edward in my lingerie that was sexy and innocent, all at the same time. "You're beautiful, Bella," Edward whispered as he picked me up. He carried me to the bed and placed me in the center of the huge bed. He pinned me down with his hips and his nose traced my jaw. His teeth nipped at my skin and I moaned. He licked down the column of my neck and he rolled so I was straddling his waist. With deft fingers, he released the clasp of my bra. It was tossed onto the floor. Edward's hands moved to my breasts and he gently kneaded the sensitive mounds.

"Oh, Edward," I moaned as I arched into his touch. Edward pulled one of my breasts into his mouth and he sucked on my pert nipple. I grinded into his arousal and whimpered at his touch. He flipped us again and he pulled away. He unbuckled his belt and pulled his dress pants from his body. *Holy crow! My husband went commando on his wedding day!*

Edward's hot mouth was on my body faster than a blink of an eye. His tongue traveled down the valley of my breasts and along my ribcage. His fingers pulled on my panties and he dragged them down my legs. He licked from hipbone to hipbone and he nudged my legs apart. He pressed soft, chaste kisses to inner thighs. He looked at my freshly waxed core and he moaned. "God, that is fucking gorgeous."

"You like?" I asked, arching a brow.

"I love," he said as he plunged his tongue in my bare slit. He dragged it to my clit. His tongue circled my sensitive nub and he plunged his fingers into my warmth. I squeaked as he worked my pussy. "So wet, Bella. So perfectly wet." Edward bit down lightly on my clit and I bucked my hips. I rocked against Edward's face and hand as he licked and nibbled me closer to the edge. With his other hand, he spread my lower lips further apart and he licked feverishly.

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"You're dripping, Bella. Come for me."

"I'm so close," I panted as I moved my hips. Or rather they moved on their own. Edward's eyes looked up at me and nothing was more erotic to see my husband between my legs, staring at me as he went down on me. He arched a brow as he sucked my clit into his mouth, adding a third finger. He curled his fingers in my body and that cause me to clamp down on his hand. I felt my arousal reach its peak and I let out a scream. Edward never stopped looking at me as I came. *My first orgasm as a married woman. Honestly.*

I was breathing heavily as Edward kissed up my body. I wanted to return the favor, but Edward didn't appear to want that. His mouth was moving with mine as he lined up with my entrance. "I need you, my beautiful wife," he said as he kissed my lips. "Please, baby."

"Yes, Edward," I said as my hands moved down his back to his ass. With a gentle push, I gave him all the encouragement he needed to proceed. He eased into my slick folds with his perfect body. He let out a strangled sob as he entered me. "So good," I moaned.

"Better than good," he said as he stayed within me, not moving. "Perfection. I never want to leave you, Bella."

I whimpered and brushed a hair off his forehead. I wrapped my hand around his neck and pulled his face to mine. Our lips crashed together and Edward began moving in my body. Slowly. Torturously slowly. With each thrust, I felt our bodies merge and our souls connect. It was overwhelming the amount of emotions flowing in the luxurious room. Edward pulled away and our eyes locked. As we moved together, I felt my heart sputter in my chest. I felt complete. Whole. Loved. Protected. Cherished. Wanted. "I love you, Bella. So much. Never forget that," Edward said as he caressed my cheeks. "I'm so close, Mrs. Masen. I need to feel you come with me. Please!"

"Oh, Edward," I moaned. I angled my hips so he could reach deeper. I also clenched my muscles around his cock. He let out a guttural moan and his lips moved with mine. His thrusts became harder and more erratic. He grunted as

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he moved within me. I didn't want our lovemaking to stop. However, I felt him harden in my body. He was close. I was close. I pulled on Edward's hair and dug my fingers into his back. I screamed and pulled away from his lips. I bit down on his shoulder as my second release came. My orgasm triggered his and he spilled into my body. His face contorted in the most pleasurable way and he collapsed on me.

"Bella," he breathed as he nuzzled my neck. "That was..."

"Intense," I said as I ran my fingers through his hair. "I missed you."

"Not as much as I missed you," he chuckled. "I love you, Mrs. Masen. I will never tire of calling you that."

"I will never tire of hearing that, Dr. Masen. Thank you so much for the most perfect wedding. I couldn't ask for a more perfect day. More perfect man. More perfect life," I said. Edward pulled out of me and held me to his chest.

"It was you who made it perfect. I know I said it a million times, but you were beautiful. Gorgeous. Exquisite. Perfect. I've run out of adjectives. But, I can't believe you're mine. Forever," he said as he yawned. His yawn triggered mine. "We both need sleep. We have the brunch tomorrow and then our 'honeymoon.'"

"Hmm, I love the sound of that. I love you,"

"I love you, Mrs. McFuckme," Edward snickered.

"Dr. McFuckme," I giggled as I kissed him sweetly. We curled up under the covers. I closed my eyes and nestled closer to my husband's chest. *My husband. Life couldn't get any more perfect.* And in that moment, everything was. Perfect.

**A/N: Sex embargo lifted! YAY! They're married! YAY! Up next is the honeymoon! YAY! Check out my profile for pictures of Bella's jewelry. Leave me love! xoxox**

# The Honeymoon

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 40: The Honeymoon

"We're married," Edward crooned in my ear. His strong forearms wrapped around my waist, pulling me to his chest. "I'm so happy, Bella." The bright sun in the Mexico sky filled our luxurious suite. The room was exquisite, filled with rich, deep woods. The colors were bright and warm. The bathroom was open to the room and had a huge waterfall shower and exposed Jacuzzi tub that overlooked the Caribbean. "Mrs. Masen," he breathed in my ear. "My wife. I love you."

"I love you, more, husband," I smiled as I stretched. My muscles were sore from the activities from yesterday, but I was happy. "I just want to stay here."

"So tempting," Edward said as he moved so he was hovering over me. He pushed my legs apart with his and placed his hands by my head. "We have the brunch." I wrinkled my nose and ran my hands up and down his back. Edward's eyes rolled back in his head. He dipped down and caressed my lips with his. Our mouths moved in tandem. I could feel him become more aroused against my thigh. *Move closer, baby. I need to feel you.* "They can wait. I need to make love to my wife," he purred as he moved his hips forward. His hardened length nuzzled my entrance. "Do you want me, Bella?"

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"God, yes," I panted. "I need you. To feel you."

"Excellent," Edward said as he flipped us so I was straddling his waist. I giggled at his movement. I laced my fingers with his and shoved them over his head. I positioned myself over his waiting cock and lowered my body on him slowly, inching my way down. "Bella," he groaned. "Stop teasing me."

"I want you feel all of me, Edward," I said as I continued to moved down at a snail's pace. Edward shifted underneath me, his brow furrowed adorably. I smirked as I sat up, taking his erection fully into my body. "You feel amazing, Edward."

"Not as amazing as you, Bella," he said as he took one hand and place it on my breast, kneading gently and twisting the nipple with his expert fingers. His other hand went to my hip and guided my movements over his body. "You're so warm. So tight. So perfect."

"We were made for each other, Edward," I whispered as I rocked against his body. I leaned back and braced my hands against his knees. Edward watched as I rode him. His eyes trained on where our bodies were connected. "You like watching us?"

"Fuck yes," Edward breathed. He sat up and wrapped his arms my waist. He stopped my movements. "I want you to see us, too. Get up."

"Wha...what?" I asked.

Edward gently lifted me from his cock. I frowned. "Don't pout. You'll like this. I saw it when I went to the bathroom this morning." He tugged on my hand and led me to full length mirror near the Jacuzzi tub. There was a chair near it. Edward sat down and pulled me into his lap. "Face away from me. As much as I hate not being to kiss you, you'll want to see this."

"Edward," I blushed. He took my hand and led me to sit on his lap. He spread his legs and settled me between them. With his hand, he turned my head and kissed me passionately. His other hand snaked down the front of my body to

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my core. His fingertips played with my clit and I moaned wantonly.

"Look at you," Edward mumbled against my mouth. He pulled away and kissed my neck, staring at the mirror. I looked at us, as Edward played with my body. *Fuck, that is hot.* I didn't look like me. I felt sexy. I felt powerful. I felt amazing.

Edward's hand moved from my core and he lifted me to his lap. I straddled his legs and angled my body to take him into me. His breathing was erratic and was so excited. I eased back onto his cock and reached around his neck. I pulled his lips to mine. Our mouths crashed together. I began moving up and down along Edward's dick. "Watch, baby," Edward mumbled against my mouth. I looked at us and how we were moving together. My eyes caught Edward's in the mirror. He had the most delicious smirk on his face. His eyes are what held me. They were filled with lust, sex and passion. Edward's hands moved to my hip and one of my breasts. His wedding band glinted off the sunlight that filled the room. *God, he's mine.* I arched my back into his touch but kept my eyes on his.

The hand that was on my hip moved down my body and took purchase on my clit. Feeling bold, I laid my hand on top of his. Together we rubbed my clit. "Oh, GOD!" I rasped as my body began to tremble. It was too much. Feeling Edward inside. See him move within me. Having both of our hands on my body was overwhelming. I was panting and moving uncontrollably.

"Holy shit, Bella. This is so hot. I'm so close," Edward said as he bit down on my shoulder. "Fuck. Come for me. I need to feel you come around my cock." I looked at in the mirror, my gaze piercing his. Edward's finger moved faster on my clit and I felt my body coil. I was so close to springing. Releasing. Coming undone. I could see my arousal on Edward's dick and I was amazed at how wet I was. "Bel...Bella..." Edward breathed. "Come for me." He pulled my head back and his tongue plunged into my mouth. With his assault from his mouth to mine, I clamped down and came with such intensity. I never felt an orgasm like this before. I pulled away and let out a scream. Edward did the same as he spilled into me.

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After our orgasms, I collapsed against Edward's chest. We were both sweaty and breathing heavily. "If last night was intense, I have no words to describe what just happened," Edward said between puffs. Not trusting my voice, I nodded fervently. Edward maneuvered me so I was sitting on his lap, my legs over his. It broke our connection. *Damn it.* I curled up against him and sighed. "You okay?" I nodded against his sweaty chest. "Not talking?"

"No words," I answered.

"I have words. Three of them," Edward said as he cupped my chin. "Let's go shower." I arched a brow and then glowered at him. "Not what you expected, huh?"

"No. I was expecting 'I love you,'" I snorted.

"Well, there's that, too," Edward said as he stood up, picking me up with him. I squeaked and wrapped my arms around his neck tightly. "Bella, a little faith. Have I dropped you yet?"

I shook my head and blushed. "Just don't start now. My ass would not like falling onto the cold marble floor."

"You wound me, Mrs. Masen," Edward said as he walked us to the waterfall shower. He gently placed me on the floor and turned on the water. We showered. With some touching thrown in for good measure. The phone ringing incessantly was our ticket back to reality. We needed to say goodbye to our families. We would be able to sex each other up within an inch of our lives *after* they've left. *God, I'm a fucking nymphomaniac.*

"Bella?"

"Hmmm?" I responded intelligently.

"You spaced out," Edward said as he handed me a towel. "You okay?"

"Just tired. And nauseous. And hungry," I said, pulling my brows together.

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"Nauseous AND hungry? Okay, when we get back to the hotel room, we'll discuss these weird symptoms," Edward said.

"I'm probably just stressed out. With all of the craziness of what happened at the house, the wedding and everything else. I'm fine, Edward," I said as I wrapped my towel around my body. I ran my fingers through my hair and brushed my teeth. It quelled the nauseous feeling. Somewhat.

"Bella, when was your last period?" Edward asked, excitement filling his voice. He was scrolling through his Blackberry, clearly looking at the dates.

"Um, end of January, I think...January!" I shrieked. "Could I? Be pregnant?"

Edward's eyes filled with such radiance and his smile was beaming. "We'll get a pregnancy test at the gift shop. Oh, baby," he cried as he wrapped me in his arms. "A baby. Our baby."

"A baby," I whispered. I squeezed him tightly and felt tears filling my eyes. "It makes sense, Edward. I mean, I've been tired all of the time. Feeling bloated. Emotional as hell."

"Horny, too," Edward laughed. "I'm not complaining about that one." His hand dropped to my belly, caressing it reverently. "Our own little peanut."

The phone blared and burst our little bubble. Edward kissed my lips and went to pick up the phone. "We're on our way, Alice...I know it was you because you are insufferable...Ten minutes. Relax," Edward laughed. "Love you."

"Real world awaits," I said as I pulled out an indigo dress and some matching panties. I slipped them on and tugged the dress over my head. I quickly applied my makeup and put some mousse in my hair, making it curly. Edward put on a pair of olive green shorts and a navy button down camp shirt. He slid on some brown flip flops and ran his fingers through his hair, messing it up perfectly. "Are you happy? About..." I asked as I laid my hands on my belly.



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"Nothing can make me happier, Bella. You're my wife and possibly pregnant with my baby. I'm mentally smacking myself. I should have recognized it sooner. I am a doctor," he chuckled. "But, I didn't."

"We don't know if it's true. My body could be revolting," I said.

"Like, I said, we'll get a test. If it's positive, you'll set up an appointment with your gynecologist. If it's negative, I'm making you take one as soon as we get home," Edward said, arching a brow. "Not that I don't trust Mexican medicine, I'd just feel better knowing for certain." He went to reach for his cologne. I scrunched my nose. "Are certain smells getting to you?"

"It's a little strong," I said, blushing.

"You are pregnant. You love this cologne on me," Edward chuckled.

"You are so calm. I'd figure you'd be bouncing off the walls," I said.

"I'll be bouncing off the walls once we get the little plus sign," he replied.

"Come on. Alice is about ready to scalp us both." He laced his fingers with mine, idly running his finger over my engagement ring. His face was filled with such joy. I was much more cautious. I didn't want to get my hope up. Even though my heart and body felt like I was pregnant. We were walking out of the suite when we were met with our own personal concierge.

"Dr. and Mrs. Masen! I hope your accommodations were to your liking. I'm Juan and I'm your personal assistant/concierge while you're here with us," Juan said with a friendly smile. "Is there anything you need?"

"Yes, Juan," Edward said. "It may seem like an odd request, but can you get a pregnancy test? I don't want to purchase it at the gift shop and have our families assume anything."

"Of course, Dr. Masen. It'll be in your room when you return from brunch," Juan said. "I hope it's something you both want."

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"We do," Edward grinned. "Thank you, Juan."

"Thank you for your discretion, too, Juan," I said, a blush covering my cheeks.

"Of course, Mrs. Masen. Enjoy your brunch," Juan said as he walked with us to the elevator. We rode down the elevator, without Juan. We walked to the gazebo where we got married and there were several tables set up with brunch food and more tables for our family. Esme was talking to Charlie as Charlie held baby EJ. Sue was laughing with Jacob and Ren. Mrs. Cope was talking with Alice and Rose. Cynthia and Rhonda were huddled together, sharing secrets. Undoubtedly about Edward.

Alice tore her eyes away from Mrs. Cope and glared at us. "It's about damn time," she said, tapping her foot.

"What?" Edward said, his eyes widening. "Like you all DON'T know what was going on."

"Oooh, bossman go laid last night," Ren laughed.

"You are working midnights for the next month, Ren," Edward snarled, then laughed.

"Sorry, Edward," Ren said. "I didn't mean to offend..."

"Ignore him. He's cranky when he's sexually frustrated," I teased, laying my hand on his chest. "I passed out before anything happened."

"Likely story," Emmett snickered.

"Yeah, highly unlikely," Rose giggled. "Bells, you're glowing. So are you, Edward."

We both blushed and I ducked my head into Edward's chest. He wrapped his arms around my waist. "They'll be gone in a few hours and then the REAL honeymoon can begin. Last night and this morning were the tip of the iceberg,"

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he whispered against my hair. I moaned quietly and gripped his shirt. "Love you, Mrs. Masen."

"Love you, too, Dr. Masen," I whispered back as we kissed sweetly.

"Get a room," Emmett said with a huge grin on his face. Edward's head whipped up and he growled.

"You're dead, McCarty," Edward said as he slipped off his shoes. He took off in a sprint. Emmett's eyes widened and he stumbled over the gazebo onto the sand. Emmett was big but Edward was fast. Much faster than Emmett. Within seconds, Edward had launched himself on Emmett's back, pulling him to the ground. They were laughing and wrestling in the sand. Emmett managed to get free and he hopped up. They moved and ran closer to the pool. Edward noticed this. He angled his body so Emmett had his back to the water. With grace and precision, Edward got away from Emmett's steely grasp and shoved him into the water of the pool. A huge splash resounded through the resort. Edward fell forward on his knees and laughed heartily at Emmett who was sputtering in the pool.

Rose danced over to Edward and wrapped her arms around his neck. She kissed his cheek. Edward smiled at her sweetly. However, Rose had other things on her mind. She shoved Edward into the pool. However, Edward wrapped his arms around Rose's waist and brought her with him.

"Edward, you ass!" Rose said as she smacked him on the arm. "I can't get my legs wet."

"Rose, relax," Edward snickered. "You're fine. I heard you did the body mask. That's much more 'detrimental' to your healing than chlorinated water. You shower, don't you?"

"Fuck, yeah," Rose said as she climbed out of the pool. "You're still an ass."

"My husband is not an ass. Your boyfriend is," I said, arching a brow, but keeping clear from the pool. "He needs to back off. We're newlyweds. We're

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allowed to be obnoxiously lovey dovey. So, pffffffffffffffffftp!" I blew a raspberry at Emmett who snorted at my immature behavior.

"You're next, Swan. Or, um rather, Masen," Emmett said.

"Em, stop," Edward said as he laid a hand on Emmett's shoulder. "Truce?"

"Fine. But only because I'm a nice guy," Emmett said as he shook Edward's hand. Emmett then pulled Edward back into the pool, holding his head down. "REVENGE IS MINE! ARGH!" Emmett hopped up and ran out of the pool, rubbing his inner thigh. "That hurt, Edward."

"Don't try to drown me, douche," Edward said as he gracefully hopped out of the pool. Carlisle handed him, Emmett, and Rose some towels. Edward took off his ruined shirt and shook it out. "I just got your pressure point in your groin. You'll have a pretty decent bruise."

"Never fuck around with a doctor. They can incapacitate you with ease," Emmett mumbled. "We're going to go dry off. We'll be back." Emmett wrapped his arm around Rose and kissed her cheek. Emmett held out a fist to Edward who bumped it. "No hard feelings?"

"No. You?"

"Hell no. You're fun. Right, Rose?" Emmett snickered.

"Hysterical," Rose said dryly. Emmett tickled her sides. She giggled and gave him a smile. "No hard feelings, Edward."

They darted up to their room to change. Edward kept his shirt off and sat down on a towel. I made him a plate of food and one for me too. I still was hungry, but fearful of eating. My stomach was still doing flip flops. Or rather, my bean was doing flip flops. *My bean. My baby...*

"Bella?" Sue asked. "You seemed a million miles away. Are you alright?"

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"I'm fine. Just reflecting," I said. "How happy I am."

"How happy we both are," Edward said as he laced his fingers through mine. Edward's eyes glinted with our secret and he drew our hands to his lips. "This is definitely not how I wanted to spend my morning. Drying off."

"Emmett is a ball of energy," Charlie said as he sipped his coffee. "And he's a teacher?"

"The kids love him," I answered as I nibbled on my bacon. It wasn't sitting right and I went for some fresh fruit. We ate our brunch, talking animatedly about our wedding. Rose and Emmett returned in dry clothes. Sherrie came and sat by me and gave me a hug. "Are you having a good time, Sherrie?"

"I am having a fabulous time. Thank you for inviting me," Sherrie said. "I wanted to let you know that when you return, you've made the 'short list' of candidates for my position. You're in the final round of interviews. It's between you and two other candidates."

"Really?" I squeaked.

"Really. I've put in a strong word of recommendation and I hope it sways the board to lean your way. Out of the candidates, you're the one I want to fill my office. The other two, while more experienced, are more about politics and don't care about education. Just test scores and making the other administrators happy."

"It means so much to me that I have your support, Sherrie," I said, trying NOT to cry. "I hope I am able to live up to your expectations."

"You will. Anyhow, we're off. I have to stop by my children's home to see my grandbabies. Our flight leaves in a few hours to New Mexico. Enjoy the rest of your trip and I'll see you on Tuesday after break."

"Thank you and I truly appreciate your willingness to come down here," I smiled.

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"When we got the invite, I knew I had to come. Congratulations, Mrs. Masen," Sherrie said as she hugged me. She walked off with her husband and waved at our group as she left. Mike and his wife left with Sherrie. They were heading home to Sherryville. Eventually, the only people who were left were Esme, Carlisle, Alice, Jasper, EJ, Rose, Emmett, Sue and Charlie.

"Thank you everyone, for coming," Edward said graciously. "I know it was incredibly hectic to rearrange schedules and get flights, but we appreciate it."

"Yes, thank you. All of you for your generosity as well," I said, tears filling my eyes. Edward squeezed my hand and kissed my cheek. "You have all made our wedding incredibly special. Thank you."

"Bella, I knew on Fourth of July that you would be a part of our family. I could see then the way Edward looked at you. Welcome and we love you. Both of you," Esme smiled.

"Now, about those grandbabies," Charlie said as he bounced EJ. "Chop chop. I ain't getting any younger."

"Dad!" I admonished.

"What? I want to play with my grandchildren while I still can. While I'm not in diapers," Charlie said as he cooed at EJ.

"Charles Swan! They will have babies when they're ready," Sue said as she glared at Charlie. "Remember you can play with Leah's kids until then." Charlie glowered at Sue, but quickly softened when EJ grabbed at his mustache. "Or you can play with EJ."

"Okay," he smiled. He kissed EJ who giggled at Charlie's mustache that tickled his forehead. "But, we need to go. We're flying to Portland to visit Leah and then driving home from there." Charlie handed EJ to Carlisle and shook his hand. Hugs were passed around and I walked with Charlie and Sue to the front of the resort. Edward moved with me. Charlie enveloped me into a tight embrace. "You were beautiful yesterday, Bells. I can see how happy you are

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and I'm so glad you found your true love."

"Thank you, Daddy," I whispered as I hugged him back. Charlie pulled away and caressed my cheek. His brown eyes filling with tears. "I love you."

"I love you, too, baby girl," he said as he kissed my forehead. He looked away and turned to Edward. Edward held out a hand for a shake. Charlie grabbed it and pulled him to a tight hug. "You are a good man, Edward. You make my baby girl happy. You love her. You treat her right. Thank you."

"She deserves nothing but the best, Charlie," Edward said as he hugged Charlie back. They pulled apart but still kept their hands clasped. It appeared that they were speaking with their gaze. It was a bit freaky. "Sue, it was a pleasure seeing you again." Edward hugged Sue tightly. She returned the embrace and whispered something in Edward's ear. He nodded minutely before he passed Sue to me.

We also embraced. Sue pressed her mouth to my ear. "I know, Bella. Why you're glowing," she said. I gasped and nodded. "Congratulations. I love you, sweetie."

I pulled away and wiped tears away. She squeezed my hands and headed into the car that Pablo was driving. We waved as Charlie and Sue drove away. "Did Sue whisper to you that she knew?" Edward asked. I nodded. "I can't believe I didn't notice it."

"We've been inundated with craziness. Hell, I've been thinking that it was a nervous stomach. But we're still not sure. The test is in the room," I said.

"Can't they all just leave now?" Edward whined.

"Soon, baby. Very soon," I said as I laid my hands on his bare chest. "You are hot."

"I know," Edward said with a sardonic grin.

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"Not that way, Edward," I snorted. "I mean, you're warm to the touch. You need sunscreen. I can see a million freckles and you're turning a lovely shade of pink."

"I'll get some from the gift shop and I'll meet you back at the gazebo," Edward said as he poked his forearm. He wrinkled his nose. "Gah...sun burn."

"Yes, Dr. Masen," I teased as I shoved him toward the gift shop. He rolled his eyes and jogged to the shop. I walked back to the gazebo. Alice, Jasper and EJ were getting ready to go. Rose and Emmett were chatting with Carlisle and Esme. "Leaving so soon?"

"Oh, please, Bella. You are as transparent as saran wrap," Alice teased. "You're counting the minutes until we leave so you and Edward can go at it like bunnies."

"Mary Alice Whitlock!" Esme chided. "Be nice to your sister. She's on her honeymoon. They're ALLOWED to go at it like bunnies. You did."

"Mom," Alice whined.

"Now, Alice," Jasper said as he hugged his wife. "We've had fun. Spent time with our family. Now it's time for Edward and Bella to enjoy their honeymoon. It's very short. So, they don't need you to bitch and moan."

"Fine," Alice said. "I love you, Bella. Treat my baby brother good."

"I will, Elf. I love you," I said as I kissed her cheek and hugged her tightly. "You treat my nephew good."

"I will," she giggled. She reached for EJ from Esme and strapped him in his carrier.

Jasper hugged me tightly and kissed my forehead. "You were beautiful yesterday and I am so happy for you."



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"Thanks, Jas."

Edward walked up and wrapped his arms around my waist. In his hand he held a bag with some sun block. "Have a safe flight everyone. Thank you again for everything."

Hugs and kisses were spread around like wild fire. I was crying and as much as I wanted to be with Edward, I hated to see them go. Once they were in the limo, Edward kissed my shoulder. I leaned against his warm chest. "You are so sunburnt, Edward."

"I've had worse," he said as he walked us to our elevator to our suite. "Are you ready for our lives to change? Permanently?"

"I'm terrified," I answered honestly.

We reached the elevator and rode up in silence. "So am I, Bella. The last time this happened, my life was ripped apart. But, that's not going to happen."

"I know," I whispered. Edward looked at me and smiled. Once the elevator opened, Edward scooped me up in his arms. He strode to our suite and opened the door with ease. *How does he do that?* I smiled shyly as he put me down. On the table in the suite was two pregnancy tests as we requested. He picked up the test and led me to the bathroom. With eager fingers, he ripped open the test and read the instructions. In Spanish. "What do I need to do?"

"Pee on this," Edward said. "Sorry, that sounded so not romantic."

"Edward, please. This is not about romance."

"Of course it is. We are seeing if we're having *a baby*. A baby conceived out of love. If anything, this is the epitome of romance," Edward said ardently.

"Okay, that sounded cheesy."

"That's because it was. I'm going to pee on this," I said as I held the test.

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"Want help?"

"Edward. Really?"

"Okay, okay," he pouted. I went into the bathroom and stripped off my panties. I peed on the stick and took a deep breath. With shaky limbs, I walked out of the bathroom, holding our future in my hands. "We wait three minutes after you..."

"Peed on the stick," I giggled. I put it on the counter and wrapped my arms around Edward's waist. I put my head against his chest and listened to the steady rhythm of his heart. Edward looked at his watch and he timed the pregnancy test.

"This is the longest three minutes in the history of time," he grumbled.

"I know."

"I thought waiting for you at the altar was torturous. This is much worse," he said as he danced on his toes. "Finally."

"Three minutes?"

"Three minutes."

I picked up the test and held it with trembling hands. I took a deep breath and looked at Edward. He gave me a reassuring smile. I flipped it over and looked at the results. "Oh my god," I whispered. Edward gasped behind me and tugged me closer to his chest.

"Congratulations, Mommy," he whispered, his voice breaking.

"Congratulations, Daddy," I replied reverently. Edward turned me in his arms and he gathered me in his arms. He lifted me onto the bathroom counter and kissed me sweetly. His kisses turned more heated as he tangled his hands into my curled hair. "Oh, Edward."

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"I love you, Bella. So much. So fucking much," he said between kisses. "You are my world. You are my life. Both of you are. You and our baby." He pulled away and laid a hand on my belly, crouching in front of me. He kissed my tummy and started talking. "Hi, baby. I'm your Daddy and I'm so happy right now. I love you and your mommy so much. I can't wait to meet you, my perfect baby."

I ran my fingers through his soft hair. Edward looked up at me and the expression on his face was indescribable. It was filled with love, joy, adoration, excitement and adulation. He kissed my legs and rose to his full height. He pulled me gently closer to him and wrapped my legs around his waist. His lips danced with mine as he reached for the hem of my dress. I sat on my hands, lifting my body up. Quickly, my dress was thrown from my body and on the floor in the bathroom. I was on the bathroom counter wearing my bra and panties. I reached for Edward's shorts and I hastily unbuttoned the cotton fabric. He pulled away and his shorts and boxers were removed in one tug. "Do you like these panties, Bella?" he asked huskily. Not trusting my voice, I shook my head. "Good. Because they wouldn't have survived this anyway." With another swift tug, my panties were torn from my body.

Edward's mouth moved along my neck, licking my jaw and nibbling on my ear as his fingers moved to my swollen clit. "So wet, beautiful girl. My beautiful wife," he murmured against my skin.

"Only for you, Edward," I moaned into his shoulder. He looked at me and pulled me closer to him. His cock was pressed against my entrance. "Please. I need to feel you."

"Anything for you, Bella," he said quietly as he eased into my slick folds. "Oh, God. You are so fucking perfect, beautiful." He slowly began thrusting in and out of me against the counter of the bathroom. *Not the ideal place to make love, but shit, we're having a moment here.* Edward's emerald eyes looked into mine and he held my gaze as we moved together. One body. One mind. One soul. One love.

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Together, we had created a new life. A perfect new life. Our love had created a new life. Tears fell down my cheeks at my realization. Edward cupped my face as he pumped into me, wiping my tears away. He leaned forward and kissed me. This kiss held so much. So much love. So much happiness. So much joy. Yesterday had been the best day of my life. Right now, this is the best moment of my existence. All because of the beautiful, wonderful man kissing me. Making love to me.

"Bella," Edward moaned as he nipped at my earlobe. "I'm...baby..."

"Let go, Edward," I whispered into his ear as I wrapped my legs around his waist. He growled and spilled into my body. I held onto him tightly. I didn't get my release, but it wasn't about me. It was about us.

Edward was breathing heavily, his forehead resting on my shoulder. "You didn't...I'm sorry."

"Don't be. I'm not," I said as I ran my fingers down his back.

"Oh, no. You're getting your orgasm," he said as he pulled out of me. He crouched down and leaned forward. He pressed kisses along my inner thighs. I grimaced and wiggled. "Stop squirming, Bella."

"Edward, you really don't..."

"Hush and enjoy," he said as he licked my navel. His tongue left a hot trail down my body as he reached my core. His mouth attached itself to my body, pulling my clit between his teeth. I moaned wantonly and fell back against the mirror of the bathroom. His tongue circled my sensitive nub and he looked up at me. He was smirking as he went to town on my pussy. *God, that's erotic. Seeing him do that to me.* I panted and watched him. His eyes never left mind as he eased two fingers into my body. My muscles constricted around his fingers and I was close. I was actually very close to my release when Edward got his. This was sending me over the edge. Edward added a third finger and with his other hand his pinky danced around my *other entrance*. I groaned and I felt my body react.

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*I'd never want to do that, but damn it's hot that he's entertaining the idea.*

My hips bucked and I panted. My knees were closing around Edward's head and I felt my muscles clamp around his fingers. "Holy hell," Edward murmured as he looked down to my pussy. "You are so fucking hot, baby. Come for me. I need to feel you come." He licked, nipped and suckled my clit as he pounded his fingers into my body. I was grunting and moving my hips against his face. With a twist of his hand, I screamed and came. I came hard. I think I came so hard, I squirted. *Ew...*

"Not, ew, Bella. Hot as fuck," Edward said as he pressed chaste kisses along my core, licking up all of my release.

"I said that out loud?" I squeaked.

Edward stood up, his knees cracking. "Yes, you did. Seeing you that aroused is such a turn on. Seeing you that way...I can't even describe it. I want more of it," he said shyly.

"So do I. However, I'd like to get off the bathroom counter and take a nap. All of this excitement has made me tired and in about nine months or so, our sleep patterns will be drastically changed," I giggled.

"I can't wait," Edward said as he picked me up from the bathroom counter. He carried me to the bed and lay me down. He curled up next to me, putting his head on my thigh. "I love you, Bella. Thank you for the most wonderful gift."

"Edward, our bean would not be in existence without you," I snorted. "I didn't get pregnant on my own. You had a large part of it."

"I know, but still," Edward blushed. "You are carrying our bean," he said as he put his hand deferentially on tummy.

I smiled and caressed his stubbled jaw. I then yawned. "I'm so tired, Edward."

"Sleep, my beautiful Bella. I love you."

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"I love you, too, Edward," I said as my eyes drooped shut.

xx AFS xx

Edward and I spent the rest of our honeymoon sitting by the pool, eating at the resort and making love. We made love every possible place in our room. The most wanton place we made love was in the actual pool of the resort. It was late and we were one of two couples in the pool. Edward was extra frisky and he maneuvered my swimsuit so he could easily enter me. To the rest of the world, we looked like we were just standing really close together. But we were actually making love. Edward's hips moving slowly and deeply in my folds. I'd never been much of an exhibitionist. Okay, never, ever IN MY LIFE. The fact that we did that was so amazing. I came quickly and intensely.

On Monday morning, Edward woke me up by hovering over my body, kissing every inch of my skin. This is something I'm going to miss. Waking up to a frisky, NAKED Edward every day. When we were in our suite, clothes were optional. Nonexistent was more like it. I was hating the fact that I had to go back to school on Tuesday. I was hating the fact that we had to leave paradise. But our lives and our jobs were beckoning. I was packing our bags and a frown was on my face.

"Don't frown, Bella. We'll come back," Edward said as he snaked his arms around my waist. I laid my hands over his, idly playing with his wedding ring. I took a deep breath, not answering. "If it's any consolation, I don't want to go either."

"I just want to stay here forever," I pouted.

"Well, I don't think our bosses would like that very much," Edward teased. "Come on, Mrs. Masen. Pablo is coming up to get our bags in ten minutes."

I finished packing our bags and checked for all of our stuff. I wanted to make sure I had all of my jewelry that Edward had given me. I did another check of the room when I heard a knock on the door. Edward was speaking to Pablo and he was loading up the luggage cart. I picked up my carry on. Edward took it

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from me and slung it over his shoulder. "I'm not completely useless."

"I know. I just want to make sure my baby is not taxing herself," Edward said as he stuck out his tongue at me.

"Real mature, Edward," I snorted as I elbowed him in the ribs. He smirked and tossed his own carry on over his shoulder. We followed Pablo to the car. Edward went to the front desk and he paid for our stay. He also left an envelope with the tip for Pablo, Maribel and Maria. They had been extremely helpful during our stay. We got into the limo and Pablo drove us to the airport. We waited in the first class lounge after we dealt with security. Edward insisted I get the 'pat down' and not the invasive x-ray screening. I hated it, but I understood his concerns.

We got onto our flight and as soon as we were airborne, I was asleep against Edward's shoulder, just like the flight out. When we landed, Edward roused me with sweet kisses along my cheeks and ended with my lips. We got off the airplane and went through customs. Once through customs, Edward turned on his Blackberry and it immediately started beeping. I turned on my own phone and was inundated with texts and emails.

*Back to reality. Just GREAT...*

Can't we just go back to Cancun?

**A/N: Okay, so I wanted to have the honeymoon be citrus filled. However, with all of the guessing by my faithful readers, I wanted to put the pregnancy questions to rest. She is pregnant. I was going to have her discover her pregnancy later, but decided against it. I wanted Edward's reaction.**

**Anyhow, the past few chapters have been pretty fluffy. I can't ignore Mike or his fuckery. He will make his despicable return next chapter...**

**Leave me love. Or hate. Or anything in between. If you so choose, leave me your suggestions on how to kill Mike. He is evil, you know ;-) XOXOX**

# The Interview

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 41: The Interview

Reality hit us big time when we got back. Edward insisted I call my gynecologist on our way back to the house. Dr. Forks had an opening on Wednesday evening. Edward arranged his schedule so he could be there for me. When we got back to the house, I grabbed our suitcases and did our laundry. Edward took care of the garbage, getting the mail from the neighbors and making us dinner. My stomach was still going bonkers. Now that I knew what was wrong with me, I was more aware of my nausea. Edward offered to give me some anti-nausea medication, but I refused. I didn't want to harm the baby.

I checked my email from work and it was inundated with many notes of congratulations from my coworkers. I also had an email from Sherrie. My interview with the board of education was happening on Thursday during the school day. I would teach in the morning and then meet with them in the afternoon.

After finishing our chores from returning from our honeymoon, Edward and I went to bed early. He had an early shift the next morning and I wanted to go into school early to make sure that my sub wasn't an idiot and jacked up my



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lessons. Tuesday was stressful. The kids were excited that I was back. I began a new unit with my students, beginning a new novel. I had rehearsal after school and I wasn't ready for that. I was too busy during the day making copies for my classes. I did things on the fly for rehearsal and had my stage manager write the down for me. I told the students that we weren't having acting rehearsal. They would have a musical rehearsal and work on choreography. I arranged that to be done with Alice's sub. She was all too thrilled to spend the time with the kids.

Wednesday was easier knowing I didn't have rehearsal and I was having my appointment with Dr. Forks. Before I knew it, I was in my car driving to Nottingbrook and Dr. Forks' office. I parked next to Edward's Volvo and headed into the building. He was wearing a slate gray suit, white shirt and red tie that was loosened. His bronze hair was in a sexy disarray and he was reading something on his Blackberry. *God, my husband is fucking gorgeous. I wonder if he's up for a quickie in the bathroom.* "Hiya, handsome," I said as I walked up to him. He looked up at me and smiled brilliantly. He kissed me sweetly on my lips. "Hmmm...I love your kisses, Edward."

"Not as much as I love yours, Mrs. Masen," he said against my mouth. "You ready?"

"Yep," I said as I linked hands with him. We rode up the elevator and headed into the office. I checked in with the receptionist. Edward sat down and was tapping on his Blackberry. I settled in next to him. "What you doing?"

"We had a blow up at the hospital today. Not in the ER, thankfully. However, the head of surgery was called into a board meeting and he's in trouble. We don't know why," Edward said with a heavy sigh. "Something happened while we were getting married. He lost a patient or something..."

"I'm sorry," I frowned.

"It's not your fault. The rest of the departments are dealing with rescheduling surgeries and dealing with the interim head of surgery until the old guy returns or until he's fired. The interim head is a mess. Just thrown into the situation.

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They approached me to do it, but with recent developments I decided against it."

"I didn't know you were interested in surgery," I said.

"I am. But trauma surgery. Not cardiothoracic or anything else," Edward shrugged.

"Isabella Swan?"

"That's me," I said. I got up and Edward came with me. I sat down in the examination room. The nurse asked me a few questions. I told her about my recent change in marital status. She said she'd change my name in the file along with the updated status. She eyed Edward warily and I explained that he was my husband and the head of emergency medicine at Craven Memorial. She eased up after that.

"So, what can I do for you today?" the nurse, Audrey, asked.

"I think I'm pregnant," I said. "I took a test a few days ago and it came back positive." Audrey asked what my symptoms were and I explained what I was experiencing. She wrote a few things down and nodded. She then said that she was going to draw some blood. I winced. However, Edward held my hand. Audrey took my blood and left the room, having me remove my pants. "Are you excited, Edward?"

"Extremely," he said with a brilliant grin. "We get to meet the bean."

"Yes, our bean," I giggled. "Do you want to find out what the baby is going to be?"

"I do. However, we can't do that until you're at least twenty weeks along. We may have a few weeks before we can see anything," Edward said.

Dr. Forks breezed in and she greeted me warmly. "I hear congratulations are in order on your recent wedding. I'm so happy for you, Mrs. Masen," she said

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kindly. "You too, Dr. Masen."

"Thank you, Dr. Forks," Edward smiled.

"So?" I asked from the table. "Am I?"

"Indeed, you are pregnant," Dr. Forks beamed. "We're going to do an ultrasound to see how far along you are and then we'll go from there." A timid knock came through door. Dr. Forks opened the door and Audrey rolled in an ultrasound machine. She plugged it in and left the room. Dr. Forks lowered the sheet around my waist and squirted some jelly onto my stomach. I hissed. "Sorry, I should have warned you. It's cold."

"Yeah it is," I said, arching a brow.

"Okay, let's take a look," Dr. Forks said as she put the transducer on my belly. She ran it over my belly and found a tiny bean on the screen. "There's your baby," she said as she pointed to the bean. "Based on the size, baby looks to be about twelve weeks along which means you conceived in late January. Sound about right?"

I nodded dumbly and looked at the bean on the screen. Edward's hand was laced with mine and his eyes were filled with tears. Dr. Forks prattled on about the baby's size and weight. She also printed out some pictures.

"Do you want to hear the baby's heartbeat?" Dr. Forks asked quietly.

"Yes, please," I said in a whisper. Dr. Forks flipped a few switches and she moved the transducer over my slowly growing belly. She pressed down and a strong whoosh whoosh filled the room. I covered my mouth to hold back a cry of joy. Edward's fingers tightened around mine and he kissed my forehead.

"I love you, Bella," he said in a watery voice. "That's our perfect baby." I looked up at him. Edward's face was so happy and tears were falling down his cheeks. I smiled and wrapped my fingers around his neck. He leaned down, giving me a sweet kiss.

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I didn't pay that much attention after hearing the heartbeat. Seeing the baby and hearing it's heartbeat really solidified the fact that I was pregnant. Pregnant with Edward's baby. Dr. Forks left the room and told me to get dressed. I pulled on my pants and sat next to Edward. "We're really pregnant," I said, my voice filled with awe.

"Yes, we are," Edward said as he pulled me into his lap. "We're having a baby. A baby...I couldn't be happier, Bella."

"Me neither," I said as I leaned my forward to his. He wrapped his arms around my waist, placing his left hand on my belly. I ran my finger over his wedding band. He looked up at me and kissed me sweetly as he held his hand over our child.

"Okay, Dr. and Mrs. Masen," Dr. Forks said as she came back into the room. She saw our position and blushed. "I'm sorry."

"No, we're sorry," Edward replied, his own cheeks turning a bright pink.

"I've walked in on worse," Dr. Forks laughed. "I have some information for you and a prescription for prenatal vitamins. I should have you come in a few weeks. However, if there's any problems, don't hesitate to call or have your own husband help you out."

"Okay, that would be just weird," I said as I wrinkled my nose. "Edward, I love you, but you are not delivering our baby. Unless we have some random freak accident or all the cars die."

"You wound me, Mrs. Masen. I've delivered plenty of babies," he snorted.

"But it is different when it's your own wife," Dr. Forks pressed.

"I know," Edward said. "I wouldn't want to be placed in that situation. But it is beneficial to have a doctor as a husband."

"This is true," I giggled. "So, when do I need to come back in?"

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"Let's shoot for the beginning of May," Dr. Forks said as she handed me my information and prescription in addition to several print outs from the ultrasound. *Our first baby pictures*. I nodded and got up from Edward's lap. We walked to the receptionist. I set up my appointment for the week following my show. Edward marked it in his calendar and we drove back to our home.

When we got to our house, we noticed that there was police cars surrounding our block. Edward parked and he got out of his Volvo. He strode to the closest police officer. I got out of my car and joined him. "Excuse me? What's going on?"

"There was a break in," the young police officer said. "1760 Maple Drive."

"Edward," I said, my throat constricting.

"That's our home," Edward said curtly. "Why weren't we notified? We have an alarm. The company and the police are supposed to contact us if the alarm went off."

"I'm not sure, sir. You'll have to ask the detective on duty."

"Can you please ask him to speak with us?" I spat. He looked at me with an attitude. "Now!"

"Ma'am, you don't need to be rude."

"Trust me, I'm not being rude. My home was just broken into and some young punk is copping at attitude," I seethed.

"Bella, relax," Edward said as he pulled me to his side. I relaxed against him but was still pissed at the police officer standing before us. "Can you please radio your detective?"

"I'll see what I can do," the police officer sighed. He spoke into his radio quietly. He listened and nodded. "He'll be right out to see you."

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"Thank you," Edward said. I leaned against Edward, my body and mind exhausted. Tears fell down my cheeks. "Bella, it's okay. Everything is alright. They said it was just a break in. Hopefully nothing was taken."

"That's not what I'm worried about. What if...if...it was Mike?" I sniffled.

"We can probably safely assume that it was him," Edward said menacingly. The detective came up and introduced himself as Detective Santos. He explained what happened to Edward and I. He did tell us that our home was an active crime scene and we couldn't go into it. He said that the police department would pay for us to stay in a hotel. Edward declined the offer and said that we would stay with his family. Detective Santos gave Edward and I his card. We went back into our cars. We drove to Esme and Carlisle's. Edward had called them as we were driving and we were greeted by a teary Esme. She hugged both of us and led us to the guest house. We stripped off our clothes once in there and we crawled into the bed and into each other's arms. I sobbed most of the night. Edward just held me tightly, trying to calm and soothe my quickly fraying nerves.

xx AFS xx

I woke up to my alarm. Edward was still asleep. I got out of bed and went into the main house after I pulled on Edward's dress shirt. Esme was sitting in the kitchen, reading the newspaper. "Morning, Bella. How are you?"

"Shitty, honestly," I said. "I don't know how much more we can take."

"I'm so sorry, sweetheart," Esme said with a frown.

"However, I do have a favor to ask of you. I have an interview today. We were not allowed into the house and I have nothing to wear..." I indicated to my sleep attire, dancing nervously on my feet.

"Don't worry, Bella. Alice swung by with an outfit for you and some makeup," Esme said with a smile. "She came by after dinner yesterday. She had a feeling. She also has some clothes for Edward, too."

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"Thank GOD," I said. Esme handed me the garment bag and I went back into the guest house. I went into the bathroom and showered quickly. I put on the makeup that Alice had given me. I then dressed in the suit that Alice dropped off. It was a little snug around the middle, but Alice didn't know about our bean. *Our baby*.

I got out of the shower and sat down next to Edward. He was curled around my pillow. "Edward, wake up, baby," I said as I kissed his forehead.

"Don't wanna," he mumbled. "Play hooky and cuddle with me."

"I can't, Edward. I have my interview today," I sighed.

"Shit, that's today? God must be playing a cruel trick on you," Edward said sadly. "What time did you fall asleep?"

"About four?" I replied skeptically. "I'll be fine. Just wish me luck and say a prayer for me that I don't kill a small child today."

"Will do, Mrs. Masen," Edward said as he looked up at me. His fingers traced the dark circles under my eyes. I closed my lids and enjoyed his tender touch. "We'll get through this, Bella."

"At what cost? I don't feel safe there anymore," I whimpered.

"I don't feel comfortable there either," Edward said. "I can put it on the market and we get a place closer to Carlisle and Esme. They'd love being closer to their new grandbaby."

"But you just got that place," I whined.

"I did. However, our safety is more important than a damn house," Edward said forcefully. "I'm off this morning. I'll talk to my realtor and get a listing of places here near my parents."

"How can we afford it?"

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"Millionaire, remember," Edward laughed. "Don't worry about it."

"Edward, it's in my nature to worry," I said nervously. "Anyhow, we'll discuss it later. I have to teach young impressionable minds and get a job as a principal. Oh, and Alice dropped off some clothes for you."

"Thanks. I love you, my beautiful girl," Edward said as he kissed my lips chastely.

"I love you, too," I said as I danced out of the guest house. I drove to school and went through my morning on autopilot. After lunch, I headed to the district office. I desperately wanted coffee. However, Edward told me that I needed to curtail that habit quickly with my being pregnant. I was so cranky and tired. But I needed to put on my game face. I picked up my practicum binder, resume and portfolio. I walked into the district office confidently and signed in the front desk. The receptionist led me to a conference room. I sat down and nervously picked at my finger nails. As I waited, two men came into the conference room.

"Hello," one said, looking at me with disdain. "I'm Franklin Bendis. You are?"

"Isabella Masen," I said as I held out my hand. "Nice to meet you, Franklin."

"Masen? There isn't a Masen up for the job. An Isabella Swan is," he said.

"Swan was my maiden name. I just got married," I replied. "And you are?" I turned to the other man.

"William Tuner," he said, giving me an impish grin. "Nice to meet you, Isabella."

We sat in silence as we waited for the board to convene in the other conference room. We were called into the conference room and sat down at a long table. The board asked us questions as a group. The questions were the same. As Sherrie said, the two men were very much into politics and wanting to increase test scores. Now, while that is a valid and needed point, the climate of the



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school should be maintained. The best interests of the children should be taken into consideration. When I said that during my interview, the two men scoffed quietly. I didn't have the patience to think about this. I called them on it.

"Excuse me, but the commentary is not appreciated," I snapped at the two gentlemen sitting next to me. "The snickers are inappropriate. I've been respectful and quiet during answers. It would be welcomed if you did the same for mine."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Masen," William said with a genuine look of apology. Franklin just rolled his eyes. I bit my tongue and narrowed my eyes at both of them. *I don't need this. I don't need them.*

I probably ruined my chances of being principal, but their behavior was atrocious. It was rude and condescending. I know I may not have been the most experienced candidate and that I had an idealistic vision of how I wanted my school to be run. However, it is my philosophy.

After my tirade, I sat back in my chair. The board stared at me dumbfounded then they dismissed us. I got up and left the district office without any further incidents of my massive foot in mouth disease. I drove back to Carlisle and Esme's. I saw that they were both gone and I went into the guest house. I pulled off my suit and crawled into the bed. I curled up around Edward's pillow. I sobbed. I sobbed until I eventually crashed.

xx AFS xx

I woke up to Edward's arms around my body. I turned around and looked at him. His own cheeks were smattered with tear stains. His brow was furrowed and he looked so tired. Old, even. I nestled closer to him and put my head over his heart, listening to its steady thrum. "Why can't we just be happy? We've been through enough. It's time for happiness," I whispered in the darkness.

"I agree, beautiful girl," Edward said sleepily. He turned on the lamp. I covered my eyes, groaning at the sudden change. "How did you interview go?"

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"I fucked it up," I moaned into my hands. Edward pulled down my hands and looked at me expectantly. "I told off the other two candidates during the interview. They were scoffing at me and making underhanded comments all during my part of the interview. I ruined my chances."

"Bella, they were being rude. Perhaps I'm being optimistic, but maybe the board of education will see your reaction in a positive light that you won't stand for any bullshit," Edward said.

"Unlikely," I mumbled. "I'll just be a teacher and I'm okay with that. However, it still pisses me off that they got to me."

"If you had had a good night's sleep and not been dealt the break in card, do you think you would have gone off on them?" Edward asked.

"I don't know. Probably not."

"Then, relax. You're on edge. I'm on edge. Shit, I completely blew my lid at Ren today. He made a minor mistake in the supply room and I dragged him into my office. I screamed at him for nearly twenty minutes. He just took it, not looking at me. Once I was done, I immediately felt guilty. Ren asked me if anything happened and I told him about the break in and Mike. I hope you don't mind," Edward said. "Ren understood and I apologized. He knew he made a mistake and he knew that my epic blow out was not me. I still felt guilty the rest of the day. I didn't say much. I only said a few curt orders, but not much else."

"Can we go back to Cancun?" I asked sadly. "Life was perfect while we were there."

"I know. Believe me, I'm so close to booking a flight," Edward chuckled darkly. "The happiest moments of my life happened there and I want it back."

"Me too. It's also horrid that Mike took our moments of meeting our baby, hearing her heartbeat, getting our first baby pictures and tainted it. Loathsome little troll."

## A Fresh Start

"Her? You think we're having a girl?" Edward asked.

"I do. You wanted a baby girl with Tanya and I hope I can give it to you," I blushed.

"Bella, I don't care if we have a boy or a girl. As long as the baby and mommy are healthy, I'm exorbitantly happy," Edward said as he held me his chest. "Oh, when I was sulking in my office after losing my temper at Ren, I contacted my realtor. He sent over the listings in Carlisle and Esme's neighborhood."

"Do you really want to move?" I asked.

"If it means our safety? Yes," Edward said fervently. "My house only has three bedrooms. I'd like to get at least two more."

"How many babies are you wanting?" I squeaked. "I'm not popping out a million children..."

"Bella, relax," Edward chuckled.

"Five bedrooms? We share one bedroom. Why would we need four extras?" I asked.

"Family gatherings," Edward said simply. He got out of bed and rummaged through his briefcase. I ogled his glorious ass. He stood up and looked at me. I averted my eyes. "Were you staring at my butt?"

"Yes, Edward. My husband has the best ass in all of Sherryville...no, the entire COUNTRY," I said sarcastically.

"Damn straight. I do have a nice butt," he said as he strutted to the bed. He threw his head back and cocked his hip. I snorted. "Don't be hating...I'm hot."

"Not right now. You look ridiculous," I giggled as I fell back on the pillows.

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"Shut it," he said as he threw the file folder he was holding onto the bed. He crawled back into the bed and opened the folder. "There are a few houses that are out of the running. Too much mansion in my opinion." Edward pointed to one listing.

"29,000 square feet?" I said as my jaw unhinged. "Who in the hell needs 29,000 square feet?"

"Not us. Look at the price," Edward cringed.

"That's just sickening. That's not a house, that's a small country. What is on the list that is in our price range?"

"Technically the 29,000 square foot monster is in our price range, but you don't want it. I sure as hell don't want it," Edward teased. I arched a brow. "There are five houses that I personally like. I printed out their details and pictures from the website." He handed the folder and pointed out the five that he liked. He described each house. The first two I didn't care for. There was something about the layout and the colors in the pictures that threw me off. The third one was thrown out because I thought it was too ostentatious. It dwarfed Carlisle and Esme's home. We agreed to check out the final two. Edward sent an email to his realtor and requested a showing for those two homes.

"What are we going to do about the house?" I asked. "You know the one that's tainted."

"I'll sell it. As much as I love what happened in that house..." I looked at Edward with a look of confusion. "I met you. Fell in love with you. Proposed to you. Probably conceived our baby with you. All in that house. However, it is tainted. If it doesn't sell, I'll rent it. Bella, don't worry about it. It'll all work out."

I nodded and yawned. Edward picked up the papers and threw them on the floor. He pulled me to his chest. "Oh, Detective Santos let me into the house to let me get some clothes for us. I got us a week's worth of clothing."

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"I may need to go shopping. My pants are getting tight," I said. "Bean is growing and subsequently is my belly."

"I'm certain that Alice will love to go shopping for you," Edward chuckled.

"But she doesn't know about Bean. No one does."

"We'll tell them this weekend. I'm off Saturday and we can go out to dinner. We'll make our announcement then," Edward said as he kissed my lips sweetly. "You are technically out of your trimester and you can share the news."

"I can, can't I?" I said. "I love you, Edward."

"I love you, so much, Bella. We'll get through this. I promise you," Edward said as he kissed me with passion, adoration and love. I pulled away and yawned widely. "Sleep Bella. Neither one of us got a good night's rest last night."

"Kay," I mumbled as I put my head on Edward's chest, my favorite place to sleep. Within minutes, I was out. Dreaming about our perfect baby in our perfect house. However, there was a dark shadow cast my dream, but I couldn't figure it out. Something big was coming and it was not good.

**A/N: Mike's back. He's evil and cruel. Bastard. However, they did get to hear the baby's heartbeat on the ultrasound. What do you think the baby will be? Boy or girl? Whichever gets the most votes/suggestions in the REVIEW section will be the baby's gender. Also, if you suggestions for names, that would be AWESOME! Up next, the announcement to the family about Bean, Charlie/Bella discussions, the new house, and more Mike drama (possibly.) Leave me love and baby suggestions (names and gender!) xoxox!**

# The Announcement

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 42: The Announcement

Friday went by uneventfully. I didn't hear anything about the interview. I probably won't until they announce that Franklin Bendis or William Tuner got the job. It sure as hell wasn't going to be me. I spent Friday evening with Alice, Esme and EJ. Edward had to work an overnight and Carlisle was at a medical conference. We just spent the evening watching the DVD of our wedding pictures. I also uploaded them onto the website that Alice set up for Edward and I. I also ordered several pictures for our home.

I went into the guest house after Alice took EJ home. Esme gave me a hug as I left the main house. I showered and crawled into the sheets. I fell asleep quickly and slept hard. I didn't move when Edward came in around five in the morning. I didn't move when he got up around ten. I was down for the count.

I finally woke up around noon. To the smell of bacon and pancakes. "God, you were so dead to the world," Edward chuckled. "If it weren't for the snoring, I'd think you were in a coma."

"I do not snore," I said, my voice thick from disuse.

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"Um, recently you do," Edward laughed. I flipped him off and rubbed my eyes. "Breakfast, my lady." He put a tray of food over my legs. I took all of the bacon and handed it to him. "No bacon?"

"The smell is a bit nauseating," I said wrinkling my nose. "It's all you, Dr. Masen."

Edward shoved a few strips of bacon into his mouth. "Hmmm, delicious," he proclaimed with his mouth full.

"Attractive, Edward."

"You love me," he quipped.

"I suppose I do," I sighed. I tuck into my pancakes and managed to clean my plate. "How was work?"

"Boring. I spent most of my time in my office playing catch up and filling out paperwork. Not my idea of a fun overnight. I'd rather they be busy. I was falling asleep at my computer."

"Sorry, love," I frowned. "So, what's on tap for today?"

"Well, we're seeing those houses today and possibly putting in an offer," Edward said. "We're meeting the realtor at 2."

"I'm going to call Charlie and Sue, then I'll hop in the shower."

"Telling them about Bean?" Edward asked.

"Yep and I'm asking Charlie about my FOID card," I said.

"FOID card?" Edward asked.

"I can carry a firearm in Washington. I have this sneaking suspicion that something is going to happen. Charlie can tell me if it's transferable," I said.

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"You can shoot a gun. A gun?" Edward squeaked.

"I'm damn good shot. Remember, my dad is a police chief. He taught his daughter how to shoot a gun and proper gun safety," I teased. "I have a revolver in the house. In the safe."

"That's the box in there? Wow, I never knew," Edward said.

"Are you afraid?"

"No. I'm a bit turned on," Edward said seductively. "My wife can shoot a gun. Nice."

"You are a dork," I snickered. "I'm going to call Charlie and I'll meet you in the kitchen."

"Sounds good. Love you," he said as he kissed my lips chastely. I wrinkled my nose. "What?"

"You taste like bacon."

"Sorry, baby," he laughed. "I'll brush my teeth, freeing my lips and mouth from the taste of pig."

I looked up at him and ran out of the bedroom, directly into the bathroom. My breakfast came back up. Edward was behind me, holding my hair back. "I'm so sorry, Bella. Usually morning sickness goes away after the first trimester."

"Just don't talk about pigs or bacon or..." I puked again. "Just don't."

"Got it," he said as he got a washcloth to put on my forehead. I flushed the toilet and stood up on shaky limbs. Edward closed the toilet and wiped my face with a loving touch. He then filled a glass with water. I sipped it as I tried to calm myself. "Poor Bella," he said sympathetically. "Are you sure you don't want some Reglan?"



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"I'm fine. I've been good for awhile now. Today was the first really bad day," I said as sipped the water. "I'm good, Edward. If you could just get the tray out of here and then you leave, I'll be perfect."

"I'll shower at the house. I'm probably smelling like..."

"Don't. Say. It."

"Right," he chuckled as he kissed my forehead. Edward got up and closed the door behind after he said he loved me. I started the shower and hopped in. I washed my hair and body. As I was running my hands over my abdomen, I stopped to the bump that was growing between my hips. It looked like I had gained some weight and was sporting a pooch. But I knew that in there was our bean. I took a deep breath and finished my shower. I wrapped a towel around my body and padded into the bedroom. Edward had opened the windows and sprayed some air freshener. *Thank you, husband of mine.* I pulled on a pair of jeans and red cardigan set. I slipped on a pair of ballet flats and grabbed my phone.

I walked into the main area of the guest house and sat down on one of the couches. I dialed the familiar number. It rang a few times and Charlie picked up. "Hello?"

"Hey Daddy," I smiled. His gruff voice was a soothing balm on my nerves. "How are you doing?"

"I'm good, kiddo. How are you? Did you enjoy your honeymoon?" Charlie asked suggestively.

"It was great, Dad," I replied dryly.

"What? I want a grandchild. Desperately," Charlie groaned.

"Well, that's part of the reason why I'm calling you," I began.

"Really?"

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"Yes, Dad. But before I tell you anything, I have a question for you."

"Shoot, Bells."

"Is my FOID card valid here?" I asked.

"You need to take a safety exam but once you do, it is valid. Why?" Charlie questioned.

"Mike is escalating. I think he broke into our house. I'm terrified to go in there. Edward is actually thinking of selling our home and moving elsewhere," I said, biting my lip. "It's not safe."

"Well, if you go to the local police department and show them your FOID card, they'll give you the test and you're good to go. You still have the revolver, right?"

"Yeah. It's in the safe of house," I replied. "Are you ready for the other news?"

"I think I know, but yes," Charlie said, his excitement evident in his voice.

"You're getting your grandchild," I squealed.

"Hallelujah!" Charlie whooped. "When? Boy or girl?"

"Bean was conceived at the end of January and it's too soon to tell if Bean's a boy or a girl. I'm due in October," I smiled.

"Oh, Bella," Charlie cried. "I'm so happy. And so proud of you. You and Edward are made for each other and your child will have nothing but the best. I guarantee it."

"Is Sue with you right now?" I asked.

"No, she's at work. However, I think she knew," Charlie said thoughtfully. "I love you, Isabella."

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"I love you, too, Daddy," I sniffled. "I'll call you as soon as I find out what we're having."

"I'm hoping a boy. Charles Masen has a nice ring to it," Charlie teased.

"Oh, okay, Dad. We'll keep that in mind," I said sarcastically. "I think I'm having a girl. But we'll find out at our twenty week appointment."

"Fine," Charlie grumbled. "I'll talk to you soon, Bella. Send my love to Edward and baby EJ."

"I will Dad. Bye."

"Bye, kiddo."

I hung up the phone and grabbed my purse. I walked to the house and found Edward, freshly washed, sitting and talking with Esme. They gave me a smile and I plopped down next to Edward, sniffing him surreptitiously. Soap and Edward. Perfect. "Did you just smell me?"

"Yes, I did. Making sure that the fried pork product smell was gone from your body," I teased.

"You are too much, Bella," Edward laughed.

"Can we stop at the police department before we meet with the realtor?" I asked.

"Why do you need to go to the police department?" Esme questioned.

"I have a FOID card. I am allowed to carry a firearm in Washington state. I want to make sure it transfers over to here. I have this strange feeling that Mike is up to something. You know?" Esme nodded with a look of concern on her face. "So, I asked my dad, who is a police chief, if it was legit here. He said I needed to take a safety test at the police department and I'm good."

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"We'll head there now," Edward said as he finished his coffee.

"You're drinking coffee?" I squeaked. "You hate coffee."

"I got five hours of sleep, Bells. I need the demon drink," Edward said dryly. I narrowed my eyes and growled. Edward snorted and picked up his keys. "That was not scary. You looked like a pissed off Chihuahua."

"Esme, your son is being an ass," I grumbled.

"I know," Esme said as she smacked him upside the head. "Be nice to your wife."

"Great, my two favorite women are ganging up on me," Edward sighed. "Come on 'Annie-Get-Your-Gun,' let's get you situated to shoot your firearm." I stuck my tongue out at him as I walked past him to the Volvo. Esme giggled and put the mugs away. Edward drove us to the police station and I spoke with the captain. I showed him my active FOID card. He led me to a conference room and I took a brief test. I finished it and turned it back into him. He graded it and said I passed with flying colors. He handed it to his secretary and she printed out a FOID card that would be legit for Sherryville.

We drove to the first house that we were interested in. We parked in the driveway behind a large Lexus. Edward helped me out of the car and we walked to a man with sandy blonde hair. "Austin?"

"Dr. Masen, nice to see you again," Austin said with a grin. He had kind look to his face. He was plump and looked a bit like Santa Claus. His eyes were bright and blue, his cheeks were rosy and his smile was friendly. "I assume that you are the new Mrs. Masen?"

"I am. Bella Masen," I said as I held out my hand. Austin gripped my hand and gave me a friendly smile. "You sold my condo."

"Ah, yes. The condo. The new owners were not happy but they received a hefty sum to renovate. They are moving in later this month," Austin said.

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I shot a look at Edward who grinned guiltily. "Did you offer the new owners money?"

"Some," Edward said sheepishly. "I felt horrible that they purchased your condo that was promptly ruined by a fire. It wasn't a lot."

"How much, Edward Anthony?" I demanded.

"\$25,000," Edward said, biting his lip. I blew out a breath and decided to bite my tongue. Now is not the time or place to worry about this. Edward interlaced his fingers with mine and smiled apologetically.

"So, are you ready to see the house?" Austin asked nervously. We nodded and Austin opened the door. We were led into a large foyer that had dark wood floors. To our right was a winding staircase with wrought iron spindles. To the left was an open living room that had a fireplace. It was big enough to house Edward's piano and all of his living room furniture. Austin chattered about the upgrades to the house and how well it was maintained. He also told us the dimensions. Behind the living room was a small hallway/butler's pantry that led to the dining room. It was larger than Edward's dining room and had the most unique color on the walls. It was a deep teal blue. It made the dark cherry floors pop. We walked through a door and were led into the large gourmet kitchen. It was the same size as the kitchen at our current home but had nicer appliances and gorgeous granite countertops. I poked my head around in the pantry and cabinets, scoping out the storage.

The kitchen opened up to the family room and it was large and spacious. The ceilings were vaulted and there was a second fireplace. Behind the family room was the patio. It was intricate and beautiful brick pavers with elegant planters on the ledge. Austin stepped outside and he described the backyard. It was massive. There was a pool and a hot tub. Behind the hot tub was a small shack that matched the exterior of the house with a deep beige trim. Austin said that was the changing room and outdoor bathroom for the pool.

Austin led us back inside and we headed upstairs. There were five bedrooms and a loft. Edward said that he'd probably use the loft as an office and leave the

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bedrooms as is. We started with the smallest bedroom and moved to the largest. Ironically, the smallest bedroom was the size of our current bedroom which I thought was insanely huge. Each bedroom toted a walk in closet. The two largest bedrooms had attached bathrooms and there was a third one in the hall. The second largest bedroom was decorated as a nursery. The walls were painted a pale lavender and had a princess theme. *I really want a baby girl. A princess for daddy to spoil.* Edward's hand found its way into mine. His expression probably mirrored mine in his wishes. He smiled wistfully and kissed me sweetly in that room.

The final room we looked at was the master bedroom. It was huge. Easily three times the size of our current bedroom. The colors were warm and romantic. There was one wall painted a deep red and the rest were painted a deep gold. It was very elegant and I could see our bedroom furniture in there. The bathroom was equally as big, painted in the same golden color. The granite countertops were black and the cabinets were a deep cherry brown like they were in all of the house. The tub was a large Jacuzzi style tub and the shower was a great glass enclosure. Austin looked at us expectantly and asked, "What do you think?"

"Can you give us a few moments?" Edward asked with a smirk. Austin nodded and said he'd be in the kitchen. "What do *you* think?"

"It's nice," I said in a blasé tone. "Big."

"Yes, Bella. It's big and very nice, but what do you think? Could you see us living here with Bean?" Edward asked as he put his hand on my tummy. "Could you see our little brown haired angel in that princess bedroom?"

"I can," I whispered. "But what about the other house?"

"It's not as nice as this one," Edward said with a dismissive shrug. "We'd have to do some renovations and I'm not wanting to do that. The kitchen is a hot mess."

"What do you think?" I asked pointedly.

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"I want it. Badly," Edward said with a look joy and excitement on his face. "I've already transferred the funds needed to buy this place outright into my checking account."

"How much is it?"

"\$875,500.00," Edward replied. "It's actually appraised for easily double that. However, the family needs to sell right away. The owner got transferred to California immediately and is already living there. They can't afford their current home and the mortgage on this place."

"How do you know all of this?" I giggled.

"Austin told me. So, can I have him make the call?" Edward asked. "Please?"

"Yes, Edward," I laughed. He did an enthusiastic fist pump and kissed me passionately in our soon to be bathroom.

We walked down the stairs and Austin was looking at his Blackberry. "Do we need to drive to the other location?" Austin asked.

"Nope. We want to put in an offer," Edward answered.

Austin grinned and he dialed the selling realtor. "Hello? Joe? This is Austin from RealtyMax. I have couple here at the Pavilion address and they want to put in an offer...Hold on, let me ask," Austin muted the phone and looked at us. "How much?"

"Whatever they are asking and we need to move in immediately," Edward said confidently. "I believe the listing price was \$875,500.00."

"Do you have the down payment?" Austin asked, his brow pulled together.

"We're paying for it outright," Edward explained.

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Austin's eyes lit up in surprise. He nodded dumbly and unmuted the phone.

"The couple is willing to pay the asking price, paid in full...Wonderful. Contact me when you know their response. Thanks, Joe." Austin hung up his phone and looked at us. "He's calling his clients now. Hopefully they'll say yes and we can get the ball rolling on determining a closing date for this place."

"Thank you, Austin," Edward smiled. "Do you mind if we take some measurements and peruse?"

"Of course not. I have a feeling that this place will be yours," Austin smirked. We roamed around the house, placing the furniture in the respective places. Edward said that we needed two more bedroom sets and he wanted to change his living room furniture. It was his stuff from Seattle. Tanya had picked it out and Edward honestly hated it. We were talking about the possibilities of what we could do for the living room when we heard Austin's phone ring. Edward snaked his arm around my waist and led me to the window seat. He sat down and put me on his lap. We sat quietly, trying to hear Austin's conversation but not wanting to intrude. Edward kissed my temple, wrapping his arms around my waist. I nibbled on my fingernail. Austin finished his conversation and skipped into the living room. "Congratulations, Dr. and Mrs. Masen. You are now the owners of 2545 Pavilion Avenue."

Edward turned to me and captured my chin. His lips caressed mine and he held me closely. "Thank you, Austin. For everything," he said as he turned back to face Austin. "When do we close?"

"Monday if you're available," Austin said. "The family wants to be rid of this house and are willing expedite it all. I will set up everything so you can be closed on this place by Monday afternoon."

"Can you take Monday off?" Edward asked.

"Probably not a full day. But I can take a half day," I answered. "I'll teach in the morning and we'll close in the afternoon."



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"Works for me," Edward said as he looked at Austin. He began making phone calls and he told us to see ourselves out. We take one more tour of the house and headed out. Edward was absolutely giddy when he was in the car. He was acting like Alice, bouncing in his seat and talking animatedly about the house. It was adorable to see. We pulled up to Carlisle and Esme's. There was a limo in the driveway. Carlisle had apparently returned from his medical conference.

I checked my watch and saw that it was nearly five. We had dinner reservations for seven to tell our family about Bean. Edward and I head into the guest house and get ready for our dinner reservations. I put on a black wrap dress and a pair of flats. Edward insists I wear the necklace he gave me for the rehearsal. I blushed but put it on anyway. Edward was wearing a pair of black dress pants and a deep blue dress shirt.

"Where are we going for dinner, Edward?" I asked.

"Um, this new American restaurant called Waterloo. Apparently the owners were infatuated with ABBA," Edward snorted. "Are you ready to spill the beans about Bean?"

"Yes. I need Alice's assistance with buying maternity wear. We're both short and she can probably help me out in getting them hemmed and such," I said. "It really sucks being vertically challenged."

"Come here, Bells," Edward said. I arched a brow and stood up. Edward opened his arms. I welcomed his hug. "You fit perfectly under my chin. I love you this size. I love you, beautiful girl."

"Okay, Edward," I said, smiling at his logic.

"You think I'm weird."

"We've established this, Edward."

"Shut it, Mrs. Masen," Edward laughed.

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"I love you, baby."

"I love you, too."

We broke apart and met Esme and Carlisle in the main house. We were taking my car and driving to the restaurant together. Alice, Jasper, Rose and Emmett were meeting us at Waterloo. EJ was being babysat by Jasper's mom. She was in town for a few days visiting a friend and her grandson. Alice was also looking forward to getting it on with her husband. She got the go ahead from her doctor to have sex again. She said this on our night in with Esme and EJ. Alice was using this dinner to reconnect with Jasper afterward.

As we drove to Waterloo, Carlisle chattered about the conference he attended. He ordered some new equipment for the hospital and specifically for the ER. Edward was excited for the new toys that Carlisle got. They were talking 'doctor' in the front seat. Esme was chatting with me about my interview and show. I also asked her about her latest interior design project. Before we knew it, Edward pulled into the parking lot of Waterloo. He used the valet and we headed inside. Rose, Emmett, Alice and Jasper were already there looking fabulous.

We were seated in a small private dining room and had our drinks ordered.

"So, Bella, how was your interview for Sherrie's position?" Emmett asked. I hadn't talked to him since my debacle. He was working with kids on a science project on Friday during lunch.

"Um, a hot mess. They interviewed us together and the other two candidates were making snide and rude comments as I was speaking. I called them on it and probably blew my chances with losing my temper."

"Getting little to no sleep the night before didn't help, Bella," Edward said sympathetically.

"I know. It still is not good. I should have kept my temper in check," I shrugged.

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"Why did you not get a good night's sleep?" Rose asked. "Did something happen?"

"Yeah," Edward said as he ran his hand through his hair. His other hand went to my mine, lacing our fingers together. "On Wednesday, we were driving home and the house was broken into."

"What?" Emmett growled. "Was it your asshole ex-husband?"

"Probably," I answered. "I haven't been back to the house since Wednesday morning. Edward went on Thursday to get us clothes."

"It was a mess. The living room was trashed. However, the most damage was sustained in our bedroom. The bed was slashed and all of our clothes were strewn everywhere."

"Was anything taken?" Alice asked quietly.

"No. It was just trashed."

"What are you going to do?" asked Carlisle as he gave us a concerned look.

"Well, we just put in an offer on a house in your neighborhood and we close on Monday," Edward answered with a smile. "We're going to sell the other house."

"That's wise," Esme said. "Besides, it'll give me a new house to decorate."

"It's actually in pretty good condition. The only room that might need some work is the dining room," Edward said as he scrunched his nose. "That color on the walls was...there are no words for it."

"I liked the dining room. I think the color was different," I whined. "It was a deep teal blue. Very pretty." Edward gave me a look confusion but shrugged it off. The waitress came and took our orders. We all got something different and decided to share our meals.

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After the waitress left, Rosalie piped into our conversation. "How many bedrooms and bathrooms? Any cool amenities?"

"Five bedrooms and a loft. Three and half bathrooms," I answered. "It has a pool and hot tub. Massive gourmet kitchen and beautiful wood work all throughout the entire home. Very elegant and pretty."

"My favorite room was one of the bedrooms," Edward said as he gripped my hand. I smiled at our secret. Our soon-to-be revealed secret. "It was a child's room. Purple princess room."

"Edward?" Esme asked. "Are you...?"

"We're pregnant," I smiled. The table erupted in excited laughter and congratulations. Then we were inundated with a million questions being asked at the same time. When am I due? Boy or girl? Conception date? When did we find out? Edward held up his hands and everyone quieted down. He looked at me and kissed my cheek sweetly.

"Okay, so...we found out the day after the wedding," Edward began. "Bella was feeling nauseous and hungry. Then I started to put two and two together. Her constant lethargy, emotional outbursts, um, horniness and I looked at my calendar. Bella hadn't had her cycle since January. We asked our concierge to bring up a pregnancy test and we took it. Well, Bella took it."

"And it was positive. The plus sign was very bright in the test," I giggled. "We went to the doctor on Wednesday afternoon. She estimated that I conceived in the end of January. Like I said before, we weren't actively trying for a baby but weren't actively stopping either. I'm about twelve weeks along and will be due in October."

"So you don't know if you're having a boy or a girl?" Emmett asked.

"No. We won't find that out for another two months," Edward explained. "Bean is only about the size of my thumb. Too small to see anything."

## A Fresh Start

"Bean?" Jasper asked.

"EJ is Peanut. We're claiming Bean," I snorted.

"Well, this calls for champagne. Except for you, Mrs. Masen," Carlisle said. He waved down our waitress and ordered a bottle of Cristal and sparkling grape juice for me. Our meals and champagne are delivered and we toast Bean, our new house and hopefully the arrest of my asshat ex-husband.

**A/N: A bit of a filler chapter. Sorry...not every chapter is going to be brimming with action and sex, erm, lemons. Anyhow, Edward and Bella got a new house. Selling the old one. They told their families about Bean. I'm still waiting on the votes for what they should have...Boy or girl? Name suggestions, too...Up next will be the closing, decision on Bella's interview and possible resolutions with Michael, the evil asshat from Hades.**

# The House

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 43: The House

### EPOV (It's been awhile since we've heard from him...)

Bella's pregnant. Pregnant with our baby. Our Bean. Our little angel. Our miracle. I stared down at my wife and held her closely to my chest. We were in the guest house of my parents' home until further notice. We closed on the new home on Pavilion. We were in the process of cleaning up and cleaning out the house on Maple. Bella nearly had a heart attack when she saw all of the damage. Hell, I nearly had a heart attack when I saw all of the damage. The living room furniture was unsalvageable. My piano was ruined. Turpentine poured all over the black lacquer and the strings slashed. The bedroom was also ruined. The bedroom furniture was sliced with a knife and our bedding was torn to shreds. There was NO WAY in HELL that I was going to let Bella back into this house.

Thank God the family was willing to expedite our closing on the house on Pavilion. Esme was already working on purchasing new living room furniture. She also said that she was going to purchase a new piano for me as an early 33rd birthday present. Not like 33 is a big deal, but I think she was feeling guilty. And generous. A grand piano ain't cheap.

## A Fresh Start

However, why am I awake, watching my sleeping wife? I can't sleep. Sleep has evaded me since the break in. Like Bella, I am afraid that something will happen. Something big. Huge. Beyond us both. Even Alice feels it. And she's omniscient. Since Bella took her test for her FOID card, she's been carrying the loaded revolver in her purse in a small box. I insisted on it. I definitely anti-gun, but I don't trust Mike. Hell, I'm willing to take the damn test if it means I'm going to protect my wife and child.

Tomorrow we were spending the day finishing up packing our home. All of our friends and family helped out and now we were just finalizing things. Most of our belongings were already in the house on Pavilion. We were just cleaning and making sure everything was set to put the house on the market. However, I had a sinking feeling in my gut.

*Something is GOING to happen tomorrow. It's not going to be good.*

I pulled Bella closer to me, laying my hand on her belly. "I love you, Bella," I said into her ear. "You too, Bean."

"Hmmm, Edward. My love. Hero...cheese," Bella mumbled.

"Nothing says I love you like good Gouda," I chuckled as I nestled closer to Bella. "Shit, I can't lose you. Promise me I won't lose you."

"I promise, Dr. McFuckme," she sighed. "Pork products."

*I really love when Bella sleep talks. It's so random.*

I closed my eyes and tried to will sleep to come. However, like the past week or so, it didn't. I just held onto my wife with all of the strength I could. I only hope that it was enough to protect her. To protect Bean. To protect us all.

xx AFS xx

"Edward? Wake up, handsome," Bella said as she pressed sweet kisses to my cheeks. "We have a date with a house. It needs a good cleaning."

## A Fresh Start

"Can't I just pay someone to clean the damn house?" I mumbled. "I just got to sleep."

"We are not paying someone to clean the damn house, Edward Anthony. We are young and healthy. We can clean it ourselves. Get your cute ass out of bed," Bella said as she slapped my butt.

"Hey! That's smart!"

"Don't make me use my gun on you. I'm certain you don't want a bullet in the ass," she said, her chocolate brown eyes playful and her pink lips pursed.

"Bella," I whined, not sounding like distinguished doctor I am, "Give me another hour."

"You sound like one of my eighth graders. Didn't we have this conversation?" Bella snickered. I growled and stuck my tongue out at her. "Don't stick out your tongue unless you intend to use it."

"It's been awhile since I have used it," I said suggestively. I rolled over and pulled her over my body. Bella squealed and hit my chest playfully. "Perhaps I have to use it all over your body to convince you to get a cleaning crew."

"You can use it. Your tongue, that is. After we clean our house," she said she ran her fingers through my hair. "We're almost done."

"I know," I said as I kissed her neck, sucking lightly on the sensitive spot behind her ear. Bella pushed off of me and got out of bed. She threw some clothes at me and danced out of the bedroom. "You are a tease, Bella!"

"Am not!" she sang as I heard her leave the guest house. I grumbled and stood up. I stretched my tired body and went into the bathroom to brush my teeth and pee. I looked at the reflection in the mirror and I looked like shit. I had dark circles under my eyes and this ordeal has aged me. I shook it off and put on the clothes that Bella tossed at me: a pair of track pants and a t-shirt. *Grubbies. My favorite. Time to deep clean.* I grumbled and padded into the bedroom, tossing



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on a pair of socks and my sneakers. I swiped a hat from my bag and placed it on my head. I did not want to contend with that cat that sits atop my head.

I walked into the main house and find Bella nibbling on a bagel while drinking some orange juice. Next to her plate was her prenatal vitamin. She really struggled with taking it. She hated the stupid horse pill. Not that I blame her. I hate taking my meds for my missing spleen. However, they were nowhere near as big as her vitamins. I walked to the coffee maker and poured myself a cup. "You really must hate me, Edward. You hate coffee and you are drinking it. Just to spite me."

"Bella, I've been sleeping like ass. I'm sorry that your caffeine addiction is not being sated. However, do you want our child coming out of the womb with the shakes?" I said as I drank the bitter shit in the mug. "I hate this. Blech."

"I'll trade you one prenatal vitamin for a cup of joe," she giggled.

"No thank you," I said dryly. "Let's go clean our house and then settle into our new one. I would like to sleep in my new king sized mattress, please!"

Bella swallowed her pill and we headed out to her car. Driving in a comfortable silence, we arrived at our old house. The front window is boarded up, again. The front garden is trampled and it doesn't look welcoming. Not anymore. We parked in the driveway and head into the garage. I take out the cleaning supplies from the backseat and we begin working in the kitchen. Bella plugged in her sound dock and we listen to some quiet jazz as we scrub.

"Edward, we're out of Clorox wipes. I'm going to run to the store and pick some more up. Do you want some lunch?" Bella asked.

"Sure. Whatever you are getting is fine with me," I said. I walk into the office and I'm dusting the built in shelves. I heard Bella's car leave and I hum quietly along with the music. I don't know how long I was working, but I heard the garage door open and close. "Bella? That was fast," I called out as I walked into the kitchen. However, I was not met with Bella. A tall blonde man with a crazed look in his eyes was standing in front of me. He was gaunt and had a

## A Fresh Start

sadistic sneer on his face. His clothes looked like they had not been washed in ages and there was a stench coming off of him. He had a large hunting knife in his hands. It was covered in blood. *Bella...NO!*

"Not who you were expecting, am I?" he sneered.

"Mike?" I whispered. *Please let Bella be alright. PLEASE LET HER BE AT THE STORE!*

"You're smart. But being a doctor, I'd expect you to be," Mike said as he idly played with his knife. Across his arms were long scars and a few fresh ones. To emphasize my point, Mike ran the knife along his scarred skin. He chuckled humorlessly as he did so. Stuffed in his jeans was a gun. *Fuck me. I'm so screwed.* "You're fucking my wife."

"Ex-wife," I countered. "You agreed to divorce her. You were engaged to be married."

"To some slut. A slut who got fucking pregnant. Stupid cow didn't know how to take a god damned pill," Mike snarled. "I tried to end it, but it wouldn't work. The cow lived long enough to bear my progeny."

"Thank God," I said. "However, your daughter will be raised without either of her parents. Her mother was killed by her father. What the fuck is wrong with that?"

"I didn't kill her. I provided a service. The world did not need Jessica Stanley. Just like they didn't need Charlotte Irons. Just like they don't need Bella Swan. And just like they don't need Edward Masen."

*Think, Edward. Think. Get him to stall.*

"What did any of them do to you? What did I do to you?" I asked.

Mike circled me and he ran the knife along the countertop. "Charlotte fucked with me. She was my first, you know. She looked so much like my Bella."

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However, she turned when I called her Bella's name. We were fucking and I yelled out Bella's name. She dumped me and I kicked her ass. We separated for a time. But I found her. I beat the shit out of her until she begged for mercy. I didn't give her any. So, she's dead.

"Jessica you know about. And Bella, well...Bella was, or rather, is my soul mate. My other half. I was stupid to sleep with Jessica. But Bella wasn't giving me any. She was so beautiful and then she turned into a fucking pig. Gaining all of that weight. You got her all skinny again. She's falling into old habits though. Packing on the pounds. You like chubby women, Edward?"

*What the fuck is wrong with this guy?* I paced to the opposite end of the kitchen, trying to get to the door. Mike was blocking my only exit.

"I was stupid to agree to divorce her. But I did. Now, she's no longer mine. But if you're out of the picture, she can come back to me," Mike said as he lunged for me. I twisted out of the way and had my back up against the pantry. Mike lunged again and his hunting knife sliced my forearm. I yelped out in pain and looked for anything to fight against him. He waved the knife at me wildly. I danced out of the way, trying to not get stabbed. The laceration in my arm was bleeding profusely, all over my arm and onto the floor. I tried to maintain pressure, but couldn't as I moved away from Mike.

Trying a new tactic, I reached for Mike's shirt and threw him against the pantry door, forcing him into the small room. The door collapsed under our combined weight. I was easily heavier than him by fifty pounds and it was all muscle. The knife flew out his hand and he reached for his gun. *Fuck my life.* I hold up my hands and back away. "I was going to make this quick. However, your fighting back is going to prolong your suffering, Dr. Masen." Mike stood up and he raised the gun. He cocked the hammer and aimed for my leg.

I felt a searing pain in my thigh and I collapsed onto the ground, writhing in agony. *Dear God, please let Bella stay away. I can't lose her. I'd die for her. Please.* As I was praying and Mike was cocking the gun for another shot, the garage door opened. "Bella! NO!" I screamed.

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Bella walked through the door and saw Mike standing over me with the gun pointed at my chest. With lightening fast reflexes, Bella whipped out her own revolver and shot three times quickly in succession. Mike collapsed on top of me, landing right on my wounded leg. Bella's let out an ear piercing scream and rushed over to me. "Edward! Please be okay," she said in a panic.

"My leg," I croak out. We rolled Mike off my body and his eyes are fixed and dilated. I checked his pulse and there was none. There was gray matter all over the kitchen floor and he was gone. No way that he could have survived it.

"Is he...dead?" Bella whispered.

I looked at Mike and he had a bullet hole through his temple and two in his chest. "Yes, he's dead," I said weakly. Bella looked at me and sobbed. I was covered in blood. Both mine and Mike's. "Bella, we need to call the police."

"I know," she whispered. She looked down at my leg and placed her hands over the bullet wound, putting pressure on it. I hissed in pain. "Back pocket. My phone is in my back pocket." I reached into her pocket and pulled out the phone. I dialed 911 and relayed what happened to the dispatcher. As that was happening I was getting woozy. Bella pushed me onto the ground and maintained pressure on my leg wound. "Edward, you can't die. I refuse to let you die."

"I'm not going anywhere. I'm just so tired," I mumbled as my eyelids drooped.

"Stay awake, Edward," Bella said as she smacked my cheeks. I was fighting a losing battle. My mind was telling me that I needed sleep. My body was shutting down and I needed to heal.

"Love you, Bella," I muttered before I was engulfed in darkness.

xx AFS xx

I heard a quiet beep beep beep in my ear. My eyes fluttered open and I looked around. I was in a hospital room in Craven. My right forearm was covered in

## A Fresh Start

gauze and I couldn't really feel my leg. I searched the room and saw Bella curled up on the chair next to my bed in a pair of blue scrubs, her head resting on my good arm. Carlisle came in, his brows furrowed. "Carlisle?" I croaked.

"You're awake," he said, surprise lacing his tone. "How are you feeling?"

"Groggy, nauseous, numb from the waist down," I answered. "What's the diagnosis?"

"A seven inch lac on your arm. A bullet wound in your thigh. The bullet was lodged in your femur and we had to go in and extract it. You're on crutches for at least two months. You're red blood count was dangerously low, though. We had to transfuse you several times in the OR. We need to adjust your levels for your meds for a few weeks. But, you will make a complete recovery."

"How's Bella?" I asked sadly.

"She hasn't left your side since you were brought into your room," Carlisle said. "Only to remove her clothes for the police."

"Mike?"

"Dead. One of the bullets that Bella shot at him went into his brain stem. Immediate death," Carlisle said coldly. "Bastard."

"Tell me about it. Has she spoken to the police?"

"Yeah. Detective Santos said that it was justifiable homicide. It was self defense," Carlisle replied. Bella started trembling as Carlisle was talking. He walked over to her and caressed her face. Her features were pulled up in a grimace. "Bella, wake up, sweetheart."

Her brown eyes flutter open and she looked around. "Carlisle?" she whispered.

"Look who's awake," Carlisle said as he looked at me.

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Bella turned to me and she saw my eyes. She launched out of the chair and into the bed. "You're awake. You're awake. You're okay and you're awake. Oh, Edward, I love you, so much. Thank god you're okay. Please tell me you're okay."

"I'm fine, beautiful girl," I said as I wrapped my arm around her waist. "I'm gimpy but I'm fine."

"Oh, thank GOD," she sobbed against my shoulder. "I don't know what I would do if I lost you."

"I'm not going anywhere," I whispered as I kissed her lips. "Well, I'd like to go home, but I'm not leaving you."

"You will be discharged tomorrow, Edward," Carlisle said with a smile. "I'm going to call Esme and Alice. Let them know that you're awake. Bella, I'll arrange for a cot for you. I'm assuming you will not want to go back to the guest house."

"No, I want to stay with Edward. Thank you, Carlisle," Bella said as she nestled closer to me. Carlisle nodded and left the room quietly. "I've never been so scared, Edward."

"Me neither, Bella. I couldn't lose you. I was doing everything in my power to protect you and keep you safe."

"But you forgot about yourself," she said as she smacked my shoulder. "How could you? If he had aimed any higher he would have gotten your femoral artery and you'd be dead."

"I'm impressed, Bella," I said, trying to diffuse the tension with humor.

"Edward," she said dryly.

"Bella, I'm fine. My meds will need to be adjusted and I get to use crutches for a couple of months. I'll be running marathons before you know it," I said as I

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held her closer.

"Is it really over?"

"Yes. Mike is no longer a part of our lives. He's dead," I answered.

"I killed him. God, I killed another person. I'm going to hell," she said, her breathing becoming labored. "I'm going to be arrested and..."

"Bella, calm down," I said. "It was self defense. Justifiable homicide."

"I know, but it doesn't negate the fact that I took another person's life," she sobbed. Her breathing was more erratic and I felt her heart beat through her chest.

"Bella, you need to calm down. You're going into a panic attack," I said, trying to soothe her. She looked up at me and her eyes were frantic. *Put on your doctor hat, Masen. Calm down your wife.* "Bella, listen to my voice. I'm here. I'm not going anywhere. I'm safe. You're safe." I cupped her face and forced her to look at me. "Look at me, Bella. You are fine. Take deep breaths. In through your nose and out through your mouth." I breathed with her and her eyes finally lost their crazed look. I pulled her to my chest and held her tightly. "I love you, Bella. I'll always love you." She nodded and snuggled against me.

The nurse rolled in a cot and gave me a pointed glare. Bella is safely ensconced in my arms, asleep. "She can't stay there," the nurse said curtly.

"She's not moving," I reply in a sharp tone. "If you have a problem, lodge it with Dr. Cullen."

"Who are you to talk to me like that?"

"Dr. Masen, head of the emergency department. My wife is not moving and if you have a problem with it too damn bad. Do I need to speak with your supervisor?" I sneer.

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"No, Dr. Masen. I'm sorry," she said as she backed out of the room. "If you need anything, hit the call button." I nodded and she left the room. I pulled on the light and put my cheek against Bella's hair. I inhale the light fragrance of freesias and vanilla, letting it calm me. All too quickly, I lull back into a deep sleep.

xx AFS xx

"How am I going to walk on crutches with my arm?" I asked Carlisle. "It pulls on the stitches."

"Do you want a walker?" Carlisle chided.

"Fuck no!"

"Edward, language," Esme said as she held EJ. "I know you got injured and all, but you don't need to cuss."

"Esme, I have a hole in my leg and thirty stitches on my arm. I think I'm entitled to a little swearing," I grumble. "Where's Bella?"

"She's showering in the staff lounge," Carlisle answered. "She felt gross."

"Okay," I said. "What about the crutches?"

"Let's try them. If it's problematic, we can have you use a wheelchair until the stitches in your arm come out. Then you get to use crutches."

"Oh, yay," I said sarcastically. "When can I come back to work?"

"When you don't need the crutches," Carlisle said.

"What? I'm off for two months?" I squeaked.

"Yep. You have some significant physical therapy in front of you. Your previous injuries are going to flare up and we need to make sure you're okay."



## A Fresh Start

You will still be in charge of the ER, but won't be able to practice until you're medically cleared."

"So, I get to sit behind my desk all day," I sighed.

"Edward, we almost lost you. Again. I'd rather you sit behind a desk then be six feet under," Esme said as she kissed EJ's forehead. "Deal with it."

"Fine," I grumbled like a sullen teenager. I sat back on the bed looking at my nephew. He was babbling incoherently, but he was happy. I could hear Bella and Alice talking as they were walking down the hall. They came into the room.

"Clothes for you, baby brother," she said as she held up a bag. I gave her a half-hearted smile, only looking for the love of my life. She walked in after Alice. Bella looked terrible. She was still beautiful, but there was a desolation behind her eyes and a forlorn look to her appearance. She looked so broken.

During the night, Bella had had several horrific nightmares. She woke up screaming in my arms. It took the threat of sedation to get her calm down. She only did so because she didn't want to expose the baby to the medications. I was worried. I was worried as her husband. The guilt of killing Mike was obviously eating at her. That was as clear as day. She was also upset about me. I was hurt because of her psycho ex-husband and that guilt was also all-consuming.

I was also worried as a doctor. This stress is not good for her and definitely good for the baby. She needed some psychological help and I don't think just 'talking' about it would do her any good. Bella is stubborn though, she won't take medications while pregnant. Talking was her only option. Hell, I made an appointment with a colleague in Michele's, Bella's therapist, practice.

"Edward?" Bella rasped.

"I'm sorry. I guess I spaced out," I said, giving her a lopsided grin. "Feeling better?"

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"No."

"You've got to be happy that you're in your own clothes," I said as I waved a hand at her outfit. She was wearing a pair of yoga pants and one of Dartmouth hoodies. Bella shrugged. *I've to got to be strong for her. Give her time to process what she's gone through.* Automatically, Bella went to the clothes that Alice brought for me to wear home. With a tender touch, she helped me get dressed. All of my IVs and foley catheter were removed. Alice, Carlisle, Esme and EJ left as Bella helped me change. Once I had on my clothes, a pair of workout pants and a t-shirt with a fleece, Bella helped put on my shoes and socks. "Bella?"

"What?" she sighed.

"I love you, beautiful girl," I said sadly.

"I love you, too," she whispered as she sat down next to me on the bed. "He's gone and yet, I can't shake this feeling of dread."

"I know," I said as I kissed her damp hair. "I have the same sinking feeling in my tummy. But, it could have been a lot worse, Bella."

"Excuse me, Dr. and Mrs. Masen?"

"Yes," I replied as I saw a friendly face. She was one of the doctors from the psych ward.

"I'm Dr. Cassie Luskan and I wanted to catch you before you were discharged. It appears that you were both victim to some traumatic situations over the past few months. Is that correct?" Cassie asked.

"Yeah," I said as I ran my hand through my hair. *Ew, I need to shower. I feel so gross.* "My wife's ex-husband stalked her all throughout our relationship and it finally came to a head yesterday."

"What happened?"

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"I killed him," Bella murmured. "I found him trying to shoot Edward and I shot him three times."

"Mrs. Masen, you did what you had to. Anyhow, I'm here if you want to set up an appointment to meet with me and discuss recent events," Cassie said.

"Are you a psychiatrist?" Bella asked accusingly.

"I am. However, I'm not quick to whip out my prescription pad to help solve the problems of the mind," Cassie replied, not missing a beat. "I would like to work with both of you. Together. Are you available on Tuesday afternoon?"

"What time?" I asked. "My wife is a teacher and she gets out at three."

"We can fit you in at four. Does that work?"

I looked at Bella and she nodded minutely. "We'll be there. Where's your office?"

"It'll be the satellite office in Nottingbrook," Cassie said as she handed me her card. It was in the same building at Dr. Forks' office. I nodded and gave her a smile. "I'll see both of you on Tuesday at four."

"Thank you, Dr. Luskan," I said, giving her the professional courtesy.

"Thank you, Dr. Masen and Mrs. Masen," Cassie said as she shook both of our hands. She turned on her heel and left our room. Carlisle and Esme returned a few moments later with a wheelchair. I hobbled into it and was led to the hospital exit. Emmett was sitting in Bella's car and he helped me into the backseat of her Audi. Carlisle hopped in the front seat while Bella got in the back with me. It was a very somber drive back to Carlisle and Esme's. Emmett tried to make some jokes and get us to laugh, but it wasn't happening. Carlisle and Bella were worried about me. I was worried about Bella. The only positive in this whole thing was I could hire someone to finish cleaning my old house.

*What? Getting on my hands and knees is not my idea of a good time.*

## A Fresh Start

xx AFS xx

"Come on Edward, just one more push on the leg press machine," Jared, my physical therapist, pushed me.

"Fuck you, Jared. This hurts," I groaned as I did the push, swearing under my breath the entire time. After I sat back in the leg press machine, Jared handed me a water bottle. I glared at him. "How much longer is my torture today?"

"We have ball squats, your personal favorite, and trampoline toss. Then you get to be iced up, old man," Jared said with an impish grin.

"I'm not old, Jared."

"Your older than me," Jared pointed out. "So, you're old. Deal with it, you geezer."

"I'm going to put a crutch up your ass, if you don't stop it," I said as I threw my towel at him. "I'll be so happy when I'm rid of you."

"Nah, you love me too much," Jared snorted. "How's the wifey?"

"Still depressed. It's been nearly six weeks since the whole thing and she's still a walking zombie. The only time I see life in her eyes is when we talk about Bean."

"Bean?" Jared asked.

"The baby," I answered. "We are going in for our twenty week appointment after she's out of school."

"Are you going to find out what you're having?" Jared asked as he assisted me to the ball squat part of the gym. *AKA, the wall behind the treatment section.*

"Three sets of ten, Geezer."

## A Fresh Start

"You suck, Jared," I grumbled. I leaned against the large ball and began doing my squats. Each day I was getting stronger and my stamina more prolonged. However, I still had a noticeable limp and I needed the crutches for support. I was taking on the persona of House at the hospital. Gruff, cranky and popping vicodin. However, I've limited myself to two vicodin a day. Only if I needed them. But damn, having a bullet shot in your leg does not feel good. "And to answer your question, we are going to find out what we're having. We're hoping for a girl."

"And the therapy? How's that?"

"I'm fine. Bella is still struggling. I think she needs some more assistance than just talking, but she won't take meds. Not with being pregnant. Something has to give," I said as I leaned against the ball.

"The only thing that brings her happiness right now is the baby?"

"I wouldn't say happiness, but it's the only time I see a glimpse of what Bella was before the whole incident," I sighed. "I miss my wife. She was so feisty and now she's not."

"Maybe you need an intervention," Jared shrugged. "Get all of her friends and family together to get her snap out of it."

"That seems a bit harsh," I said. "However, it does have merit. All she does is spend time in our house and go to work. Very robotic. I've tried taking her out, but she refuses. I've tried to get family to come over, but Bella disappears when they do. An intervention...interesting."

"Glad I could help, Geezer," Jared said as he clapped me on the shoulder.

"Since you're dealing with that, I'll let you off of the trampoline toss. We'll put some ice on you and you're free to go."

"Thanks, Jared. You're a real pal," I said sarcastically. He winked at me and got some ice. I sat down, pulling up my workout pants. He wrapped the ice around my thigh and I limped out of the physical therapy facility. Throwing my crutch

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into the backseat, I called Alice.

"What up, Baby Brother?"

"Hey Elf. I need your help."

"If this about Bella then you have my complete attention," Alice chimed. "She's a hot mess. Rose says she doesn't socialize at school and she goes through the motions. I haven't seen her since you were released from the hospital."

"I live with her and I haven't seen her since I was released from the hospital. The woman that sleeps in my bed is not my wife," I sighed. "The guilt of what she did is consuming her."

"She did it to protect you. However, I don't think she was aware of the ramifications of her actions," Alice said sadly. "What do you suggest?"

"An intervention."

"Oh, I like," Alice said, the excitement in her voice was evident. "Where, when, and all that jazz."

"Her show is this weekend. So I'm thinking on Sunday," I suggested. "It sucks, timing wise, but I need my wife back."

"I need my sister. EJ needs his aunt. I'll call everyone and we'll be there on Sunday afternoon," Alice replied.

"Thanks, Elf," I said. "I hope it'll be the right thing."

"It will. I love you."

"Love you, too, Alice," I said. I finished my call and headed into the ER. I had some paperwork to grab before I could go home. I left it on my desk in my haste to get to my physical therapy appointment. I parked and headed into my office. I got my paperwork, tossing it into my messenger bag when Carlisle

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came into my office. "Hey. What's up?"

"I got a phone call from Alice. An intervention?" Carlisle asked, his blonde brows up to his hairline.

"When was the last time you actually talked to my wife?"

"That night in the hospital," he replied.

"Me too. We need to get through to her. The therapy with Dr. Luskan just isn't helping her. I'm fine. The nightmares are gone, for the most part. But Bella hasn't slept through the night since the incident. I'm grasping at straws here. This should be a happy time for us. Just married, expecting our first child and moving into our dream home. But it's not." I said as I sat down on my couch. Carlisle plopped down next to me and put his arm around my shoulder. Tears rolled down my cheeks. "I miss her, Carlisle."

"I know, Edward. We miss her, too." Carlisle pulled me into an embrace. I sobbed. All of the repressed emotions that I felt were poured into that hug. We stayed in our embrace for an immeasurable amount of time. I was the one who pulled away, only because my ice was leaking. "We'll see you on Sunday."

"Thanks, Carlisle," I smiled weakly.

"I love you, Edward. You and Bella will be fine. I agree with Alice. It will be a good thing," Carlisle said as he kissed my cheek. I returned his affection and drove home. Bella's car was already in the garage of our new home. I parked next to her and hobbled into the kitchen.

"Hello?" I called out.

"In the kitchen," Bella said in a lifeless tone. "I'm making stir fry."

"Okay," I said as I wrapped my arms around her waist. She pulled away and went to chop some vegetables. With considerable gusto. "How was work?"

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Bella gave a dismissive shrug of her shoulder and tossed the veggies into the pan. "I'll be happy when school is out."

"Have you heard anything about the principalship?"

"Nope. I didn't get it, Edward. I fucked up at the interview," Bella said with a cold tone to her voice.

"Bella, enough with this cold shoulder," I snapped. "I know you're hurting. So am I. But we need to get past this."

"I don't know if I can, Edward. I killed someone. Mike is dead because of me," she cried. "Cook your own damn dinner. I'm going for a drive." Bella grabbed her keys and left the house. I picked up the plate nearest to me and I threw across the room, screaming in frustration. I turned off the stove and tossed the vegetables.

I picked up the phone and called Alice. "I need you all here. Now," I barked into the phone.

"On our way," Alice said, her voice sad. "We'll park around the corner so she doesn't suspect anything."

"Good."

xx AFS xx

The family, Rose and Emmett, Jacob and Ren, Angela and Ben, Sherrie and shockingly enough, Charlie and Sue were sitting in my living room. Charlie and Sue were actually in town to visit Esme who was going to help with their wedding. I saw Bella's car pull up in the driveway nearly two hours later. She stomped into the kitchen, slamming the garage door. Bella walked into the living room, sorting through the mail.

"Bells, this is enough," Charlie said.



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Bella let out a startled scream and dropped the mail. Her hand went to her growing belly and her other hand went to her heart. "Fuck, you startled me."

"This walking dead routine and shutting us all out is getting a little old, Bella," Emmett said with a frown.

"I fucking KILLED someone!" she screamed. "How can you all go on with your lives like normal? I can't."

"Bella, you defended yourself. You protected your husband," Carlisle said as he stood up. He slowly walked to her. "Did you want Mike to kill Edward?"

"No...I...don't..." she sniffled. "I just feel so guilty. I don't know how to get past it."

"You've been seeing a therapist, right?" Rose asked. Bella nodded. "That's a step in the right direction. However, you need to not shut out your family. Your friends. Your husband. The guy you married and declared your love for. The man who's child you're carrying. You love him right?"

"Of course I do."

"You have a poor way of showing it, Bella," I said, sounding harsher than I intended. "We haven't said more than a few words to each other since that day at the hospital. I miss you. We all miss you."

"I am so confused," Bella wailed as she sat down on the piano bench. "I should be happy. Mike is gone. GONE. He's never going to hurt us again. But, I can't get the picture of his dead eyes out of my head. I can't wrap my head around the fact that I took someone's life."

"Bella, I'm going to tell you a story," Sherrie said as she sat next to Bella. "I was married before. It was an abusive relationship. My first husband almost killed me. If it wasn't for the fact that I protected myself, I would have been dead."

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"What did you do?" Bella muttered.

"When he was hitting me with his fists, I grabbed a knife. I stabbed him in the chest. The knife nicked his heart and he slowly bled out. By the time the ambulance arrived, there was no chance of his survival. I watched my first husband bleed to death on my kitchen floor. You were lucky, in a way. Mike was dead instantly. He felt no pain. Raymond, my first husband, was in agony until he took his last breath. I ended up having to take a year off of teaching to get my head in the right place."

"Did you feel this guilt?" Bella whispered.

"I did and much more. Bella, you are incredibly strong. However, by shutting out your friends, family, co-workers and husband, you're making it worse for you. For them. I don't want to force you to take time off, but if you don't work on *you*, I will."

"I can't, Sherrie. I need to work. It's the only thing that is keeping me sane," Bella said. "My show is this weekend and I don't want to let the kids down."

"You're letting your family down. Meghan can handle the show. I've already told her that she was in charge for the performances. Rosalie is also going to help along with Angela. It'll still be your show, but they are stepping in so you can focus on you. Your family. Most importantly, your husband. He needs you the most, Bella. Look at him."

Bella turned to look at me. I saw something flicker in her eyes that wasn't sadness. It was anger but a touch of lust.

"Do you love him?" Sherrie asked. Bella nodded. "Do you want to be with him forever?" Bella nodded emphatically. "Then go to him," Sherrie said as she hugged Bella tightly. Bella got up on unsteady feet and walked toward me. I stood up, balancing on my good leg. Her eyes were trained on the ground and she wouldn't meet my gaze.

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I ran my fingers down her cheek. Unlike the past few weeks, Bella didn't pull away. She leaned into my touch. *Progress.* I cupped her chin and gently forced her heart shaped face to look at me. Her eyes were filled with tears. I faintly remembered the people in our living room leaving for the kitchen. I was only focused on Bella's chocolate brown eyes. Eyes that held all of the sadness of the world. All of the guilt and I had to do something to make that go away. "I love you, Bella. I'm sorry that we've had to endure all of this, but I can't imagine my life without you."

"I'm so sorry, Edward," she said as she wrapped her arms around my waist. She sobbed against my shirt, tears soaking through the fabric. "I love you so much. I'm so sorry I've been distant and bitchy and horrible to you. You've been through hell and back...and..."

"Shhhhh, Bella," I soothed as I sat us down on the couch. She curled up against me and cried against my shoulder. Alice waved at me and said that they were all leaving. I nodded, my arms still wrapped around Bella. "I've missed you, baby."

"I missed you, too, Edward," she said into the crook of my neck. "I've been so horrific lately. I can't...I feel so badly."

"Don't. I understand why. I'm just so worried about you," I said as I kissed her forehead. She flinched slightly but didn't move away. "You need to focus on getting yourself healthy."

"But you were the one who was injured, Edward."

"My wounds are healing. Your emotional scars are more pressing," I said as I looked down at her. "The only time I see the woman I married is when you mention Bean." I laid my hand on her baby bump. "Other than that, you're a shadow."

"I know. What can I do?"

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"I think you need to spend more time with Dr. Luskan and Michele. Without me there. Your emotional wounds are more substantial than my physical ones. Write down what you feel. Keep a journal. I did give you one for our wedding," I teased.

"I've been writing down my thoughts. However, I've been trying to keep it lighthearted for Bean. I don't want to taint your journal with my dark feelings," Bella said. "Bean is the light in my day. Seeing my belly grow reminds me of what we have. But I couldn't look past my guilt."

"Bella, I understand your guilt. I've never took someone's life. I couldn't imagine it. However, when I lost my first patient, I was a mess. I kept replaying what I could have done to make it better. To prevent their death. But, I'm not God. Neither are you. You made a snap decision that ultimately saved *my life*. If given the choice, who would you want? Mike or me?"

"Edward..." Bella said.

"Answer the question," I said sternly.

"You know the answer."

"I want you to say it. Out loud. Mike or me? Who would you save?"

"You, Edward. I'd save you," Bella said. "I love you."

"If I was placed in the same situation, I'd answer the same way. You can't let your guilt consume you. You made the decision to save me and I'm so grateful for it. I can't imagine a world without you. I'm pretty certain that you can't imagine a world without me."

"No, I can't," Bella said as she looked at me. She really looked at me. Her eyes began to sparkle and the life returned to them. She placed her hands on my face and electricity jolted through my system. She leaned up and gently caressed her lips against mine. I let her lead the kiss but I loved the feeling of her mouth. *If only she would move her mouth a little further south. God, I'm so horny.* Bella

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pulled away and she gave me a tentative smile. "I love you, Edward."

"I love you, more, beautiful girl," I said as I kissed her lips chastely. "We'll get through this. I promise you."

"I know. I am sorry about..."

"Already forgotten. However, you do need to focus on you."

"I will," Bella replied as she hugged me. I pulled her over my legs and straddling my lap. We held onto each other, slowly reconnecting in the best way possible. We would be okay. I knew it. Our lives would continue to grow and flourish. Today was the beginning of our fresh start. A world without Mike. A world without anguish. A world without pain. A world where we were happy and loved. I couldn't wait to embark on this journey with her. With my love. With my soul mate. With my fresh start.

**A/N: Okay, we're getting close to the end. A few loose ends to tie up: Bean...boy or girl? Names? Did Bella get the job as the principal? Also, some lemons for good measure.**

# The Bean

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

*I'm thinking that this bad boy will be wrapped up in two or so chapters. Plus an epilogue. So, we are nearing the end, my friends.*

## Chapter 44: The Bean

Edward needs to be sainted. I mean, really. He's so patient. So kind. So loving. So...gah! I can't even describe his perfection. After the intervention, I picked up my therapy sessions. I also took to writing. The journal that Edward gave me for our wedding was almost half full with my mutterings. I was still a mess, but at least the guilt wasn't all consuming. He was slowly recuperating, too. He only needed one crutch to move around and that was only when he was physically tired. With all of the drama, my mental instabilities, his physical recuperation, the man deserves a place to the right side of Jesus. He's amazing.

Edward and I also reconnected. He took me away over the weekend that was supposed to be my show. We went to a small bed and breakfast, just being us. Away from our families. Away from the excitement. Just relearning how to be together. We didn't make love. Edward wanted to, but when we tried, his leg cramped up. I also was freaked out by the scar and how it got there. Edward spent an hour trying to get me to calm down. Through the bathroom door. I eventually opened up and he held me as I cried most of the night. I hated this. I

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hated that Mike still had so much control over me and he was fucking dead.  
*Asshat.*

It was nearly two weeks since the show. It had gotten rave reviews. I was proud of the kids, but saddened that I couldn't be there. However, Mrs. Cope told the students that I had a family emergency that needed to be attended to and couldn't get out of it. It was partially true. It was a family matter, but not necessarily an emergency. Edward would beg to differ. He insisted that my mental health was definitely important and maintaining my happiness was most assuredly an emergency.

The school year was winding down and I thought back at how different my life was from last year. I was separated from my husband and preparing to move out of my home. Now, I'm remarried to a saint and pregnant with my first child. Talk about an 180 degree turn around. I was sitting at my desk and grading my 8th grader's memoir scrapbooks. It was an idea that Rose had and we both decided to do it. It turned out really well and was going to be a treasured keepsake for them. But it was a pain in the ass to grade. I didn't want to lug 60 scrapbooks to my car. So, I stayed at work until I had them graded. Edward was working late, anyway. He was finally able to return to work as a doctor and he was making up for his absence. I finished my grading and put the scrapbooks on my shelf in my classroom. As I was cleaning up, I got a text from Edward.

*Meet me at La Bella Italia, beautiful wife of mine - Edward*

*Why, pray tell? - Bella*

*Surprise ;- ) - Edward*

*You know how I feel about surprises, Edward Anthony Masen - Bella*

*You'll like this one, beautiful wife - Edward*

*I'll be there soon. Just leaving work. - Bella*

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*See you, love - Edward*

I threw my phone into my bag and waddled out to the car. I was just now starting to show with my pregnancy. Alice had invaded my closet, purchasing maternity wear for me. Some of it was hand me downs from her, others were brand new. I was wearing one of the new outfits: a deep purple dress and black leggings. I was wearing a pair of black ballet flats and some fun jewelry that Alice gave me as well. I climbed into the SUV and drove to La Bella Italia. I parked next to Edward's Volvo and went inside. The hostess led me to the booth where my husband sat. I squeezed in after I gave him a brief kiss. "Okay, Dr. Masen. Why are we having dinner at La Bella Italia?" I asked, arching my brow.

"I went home during lunch. I forgot my meds and I needed to get them. On the answering machine was this," Edward smirked as he handed me a sheet of paper with his elegant script. I read the message and I squeaked. "Are you happy?"

"Is this a joke?" I asked as I pointed to the paper.

"Nope. Are you going to call them back?" Edward asked as he held out his cell phone. "You know you want to."

I scowled and pulled out my cell phone. I dialed the number on the paper and waited. "Hello?"

"Hello, is this Dr. Sancken?" I asked.

"Speaking. Is this Mrs. Isabella Masen?" Dr. Sancken retorted.

I nodded and then remembered he couldn't see me. I was on the damn phone. "Yes. How can I help you?"

"Well, Mrs. Masen, after much debate, we've made a decision regarding your application to be the principal for Cherry Blossom Middle School."



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"And...?"

"We'd like to offer you the position," Dr. Sancken said, his voice sounding excited. "You may be inexperienced, but your vision for the school and for the students impressed us. You also handled yourself well with the other two candidates during your final interview."

"So, I'm the new principal for Cherry Blossom Middle School?" I asked, grinning wildly. Edward's eyes twinkled and he squeezed my hand.

"Yes, Mrs. Masen. Congratulations. We will meet with you once school is out so we can get your contract signed and your new responsibilities."

"Thank you, Dr. Sancken," I gushed.

"You're quite welcome. I'll see you soon."

I looked at Edward after I hung up the phone. He beamed at me and moved to my side of the booth. He wrapped me into a tight embrace. "I'm so happy for you, Bella. I love you," Edward said as he kissed my face. We stayed on the same side of the booth and ordered our dinner. Afterward, we drove back to our new home. "When do you want to announce your news, Mrs. Masen?"

"How about we have everyone over for dinner this weekend?" I suggested.

"I'm working on Friday night. How about Saturday?" Edward countered. I smiled and nodded. I padded up to the bathroom and went to scrub off the grime of the day. Edward nestled behind me and wrapped his arms around my rapidly expanding belly. "Can I join you, beautiful girl? Please?"

I nodded and turned in Edward's arms. "Please be patient with me. I am still not used to seeing you with the new scars," I whispered as I laid my hand on Edward's arm.

"Bella, we'll take as long as you need. Hell, if I need to wear a bathing suit to shower with you, I will," Edward said. "I just miss being close to you, beautiful

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girl."

"No, that's just ridiculous." Edward chuckled and helped me out of my clothes, kissing my lips sweetly as he did. *Yep, definitely a saint.* Once I was naked, I went into the shower. Edward removed his clothing, tossing them into the hamper in the bathroom. He snuck in behind me and wrapped his arms around my body. I looked at Edward's arm, tracing the red, angry scar on it. "I'm sorry, Edward."

"For what, Bella?" Edward asked.

"For everything. I wish I was home when..."

"Bella, we're fine. I'm fine. I have some new battle wounds, but I'm healing. I'm more worried about your emotional scars. You're better, but still not quite yourself," he said as he placed his hands on my baby bump. "And stop apologizing. Please?"

I sighed and turned around. I looked up at Edward. His eyes were pleading with me. I caressed his cheeks, allowing his stubble to tickle my palms. He leaned into my touch and his eye lids fluttered shut. I stood on my toes, reaching up to kiss him. I brushed my lips against his. He moaned quietly and his lips parted. I slid my tongue between his lips and it danced with his. One of Edward's hands moved to my hip and the other went to my neck. Our kisses were deep and passionate. Filled with love. "Edward," I whispered against his lips.

"What, love?" he responded as he kissed down my neck.

"Make love to me, please?" I murmured.

Edward's kisses stopped and he looked at me. His green eyes solemn and wary. "Are you sure?"

"I need to feel you. Edward, please?"

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"What about going slow? Are you positive?"

"Edward, I love you. While your scars are a cruel reminder of what happened to us, I can't let them be the deciding factor in our intimate relationship. We went at like bunnies before the incident and honestly, I'm horny. Very horny. Extremely horny."

"Second trimester is the horny one..." I giggled and he grinned. His mouth crushed against mine. Our new kisses were frenzied and lust filled. Edward led us out of the shower, which we didn't even start. Our skin was damp, but that was about it. It fed the heat between us. With a flick of the wrist, he turned off the water. He bent down to pick me up.

"Edward, I'm heavier and you're still healing..." I pouted.

"Please, love," he said as he cradled me to his chest. "You are not heavier and I'm strong like bull. Thank Jared. My wonderful physical therapist." He arched a brow and snickered sarcastically. Slowly, Edward carried me to our new bed. He placed me on the sheets and crawled onto the bed. His eyes were black and he had a predatory move to him. I was getting more and more turned on as I stared at him. My eyes never left his as he pulled me to his chest, every inch of his body touching mine. His fingers caressed my skin, leaving a path of sparks in their wake. His jade eyes were staring into mine and I could see nothing but love. "Bella," he whispered as he leaned down to kiss me. His lips, smooth and soft, barely caressed mine. I sighed and fisted my hands into his damp hair. Edward's hot mouth moved from my lips and he kissed my neck, capturing my earlobe in his teeth. He nibbled and I moaned. "I missed the sounds you make, baby. I'm so hard just listening to you," he murmured in my ear as he licked the shell. I whimpered.

Edward chuckled as he kissed down my neck to my collarbones. He looked up at me and arched a brow before he drew one of my breasts into his mouth. My back arched off the bed and I moaned. Again. Edward's laughter reverberated through my skin. "You're really feeding my ego, Bella." He grabbed my hand and placed it on his huge erection. *FUUUUUUCK...*

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I smirked and pulled him back to my face, kissing his perfect. I shoved him onto the bed, on his back. I wanted to make this good for him. However, I was hesitant to go down on him. The scar from his bullet wound was close to his cock. *Deal with it, Bella. You love him. Scars and all.* I kissed down his body, swirling my tongue around his nipples. It was Edward's turn to moan. I crawled over his legs and settled between them. I nibbled along his hipbones. Feeling bold, I looked at Edward's scar. The scar that was given to him by Mike. I blew out a breath and kissed it reverently. Edward let out a strangled cry and I kissed up to his cock. With my hand, I wrapped my fingers around him and he bucked his hips at my hold. I licked the tip of his dick and he groaned, falling back on the pillows. Slowly, inching my mouth down the perfection that was Edward's penis, I engulfed him. Reversing the action as slowly, I pulled up. The expression on Edward's face was a combination of anguish and lust. He was on the verge of losing control. "Bella," he cried. "You're killing me here."

"In a good way or a bad way?" I asked as I ran my lips up and down his dick.

"A phenomenal way, but seriously..." Edward croaked. I giggled and plunged his cock into my mouth. Using my teeth, I scraped the underside of his shaft. "Holy shit!"

"Better, love?" I asked coyly.

"No...I want you, baby," he purred as he sat up on his elbows.

"Good things come to those who wait, Dr. Masen," I said as I wrapped my hand around his cock and began pumping in conjunction with my mouth. Edward watched me with rapt attention and he was breathing heavily. As weird as this sounds, I loved giving head. I felt so powerful. That I could make a guy this vulnerable. I felt even more in control with Edward. He was so responsive to my actions. I slowed down my bobbing and relaxed my jaw. I took him further into my mouth and Edward sighed. I swirled my tongue around his cock and he was rapidly losing his control.

I removed my mouth from his cock and kissed up his body. Edward growled lightly and flipped us so I was on my back. I squealed. "You are so fucking hot,

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beautiful wife. Mrs. Masen," Edward snarled erotically. "I need you, but payback is sweet."

*What?*

Edward spread my legs with his hands and he stared at my pussy. He licked his lips. "You are so wet, baby. Are you turned on? Does sucking my cock make you this wet?" he asked quietly, his velvety smooth voice rough with seduction. Not able to trust my own voice, I nodded and snaked my hand down to my core. Edward smiled evilly and gently swatted my hand away. He kissed my inner thighs, licking and sucking as he did. He moved his mouth everywhere but where I wanted him to be. My body was moving of its own accord and I was moaning wantonly. "So anxious, love."

"Now, you're killing me," I said as I sat up slightly.

Edward smiled and blew against my soaking core. "Good things come to those who wait, Mrs. Masen," Edward whispered, echoing my statement from earlier. He pressed a chaste kiss to my clit and he slowly licked me. "Delicious. Better than dinner."

"Edward, that's just weird," I said as a blush covered my skin.

"It's the truth," he argued as he ran his fingers along my slit. He licked my sensitive nub and eased two fingers into my heat. There was something that he did or perhaps being pregnant that made it feel fucking amazing. I nearly came right then. Edward growled against my skin as he licked my body. Edward's fingers curled in my pussy and I grabbed his hair, quite forcefully. My hips moved of their own volition and I was really close. I mean, insanely close. My muscles were fluttering and I could feel my arousal. I threw my head back. My body bucked and twisted as I clamped down around Edward's fingers. He moaned but kept his mouth attached to me, pumping his fingers.

"Edward, that was...there are no words," I breathed out.

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"Hmmm," Edward said as he idly traced circles on my thighs. "I still need you, beautiful girl." I smirked and pulled him up my body. I kissed his lips, tasting my release on them. As I kissed him, I pushed him onto his back. I straddled his legs and positioned myself over his huge cock. "Baby," he whispered. "I have to feel you around me. It's been too long."

I lowered myself onto Edward's dick, filling me to the hilt. *God, it's been too long and he's so perfect.* As soon as he was inside of me, I came again. My nerve endings were going absolutely bonkers, but I was loving it. Two orgasms in succession. I started moving up and down on Edward. I laced my fingers with his. Edward sat up and one of his arms wrapped around me. Our lips moved in tandem as did our hips. "Edward, feels so good," I moaned into his shoulder.

"Tell me about it," Edward replied as he brushed my hair from my face. "I love you, Bella."

"I love you, so much more," I cooed as I clamped down around his cock for the third time. Edward's motions became more frenzied and he spilled into me. He let out a guttural scream and held me close to his body. "Holy crap."

"Yeah," Edward said, breathless.

I wrapped my arms around Edward's neck and held him tightly. As I did I felt something in my belly, like a butterflies. "Oh!"

"What? Are you okay?" Edward asked.

I put my hands onto my baby bump. "I think Bean moved or kicked me or something," I said as I felt the butterfly move again. "Would I feel stuff?"

"The timing is right. You're at little over 19 weeks," Edward said as he placed his hand over mine.

"Can you feel it?" I asked as Bean went to town in my belly.

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"It's too soon for me to feel anything. Another month I can," Edward said with a crooked grin. "Apparently our lovemaking woke up our angel."

"Sorry, Bean," I said. "However without the lovemaking, you wouldn't exist."

"Damn right," Edward snorted as he kissed my neck. "Shower?"

"Shower," I said as I got up from Edward's lap. We showered together and crawled into bed, nestled with each other.

xx AFS xx

"Bella! We have to go! Your appointment with Dr. Forks is in an hour," Edward shouted from the kitchen.

"I'm coming. I'm just brushing my teeth," I snapped. "I'm feeling nauseous again. Chill! We'll get there."

"I know, but I want to know what we're having. A boy or a girl," Edward whined as he padded into the bathroom, hopping on the counter. He was dressed casually in a pair of shorts and t-shirt. I was in a pair of capris and tank top. I was so hot all of the time. I slid on a pair of flip flops and twisted my hair up into a clip. "Aren't you anxious?"

"I'm not anxious. I don't care what we have, as long as Bean is healthy," I said as I kissed his lips. "Are you anxious?"

"Hell yeah. I want to know if we need to repaint the purple princess room or leave it as is," Edward said with a smirk. "Do you have to go to the district office after your appointment?"

"Yeah. They know that I'm taking maternity leave, but I want to get my ducks in a row before I do. It's not ideal to be a first year principal and have a baby," I sighed. "Hopefully, I'll get hired back."

"You will," Edward said as he kissed my neck. "Let's GO!"

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"Okay, Mr. Impatient," I said as I smacked his belly. He made a mock wounded look and I snorted. I picked up a bagel and we drove to Nottingbrook to my appointment with Dr. Forks. We drove my car since Edward was insistent that we get the extra safety of the SUV. *He's freaking paranoid.* We arrived at the medical offices and went up to check in. Edward and I waited in the waiting room. Edward's leg was bouncing anxiously. I laid my hand on his knee. He stopped bouncing and gave me a sheepish look. "Relax. You're making me nervous."

"Sorry."

The nurse called us back to the examination room. She took my weight and informed me that I had gained five more pounds. I grumbled. Edward ran his hand over my back and said he'd love me no matter what. *Even with fat rolls?* The nurse then went on to ask if I was experiencing any issues. I shook my head no. She smiled and said that Dr. Forks would be right with me for my ultrasound. To find out what we were having.

Dr. Forks came in with a friendly smile. "How are we doing today?"

"Good," I answered.

"Anxious," Edward said as he nibbled on his fingernail. "I really want to know."

"Well, Dr. Masen, we'll just have to find out," Dr. Forks said with a laugh. Edward scowled and laced his fingers with mine. "Lift up your shirt, Mrs. Masen and unbutton your pants." I raised my tank top and shoved my pants down slightly. She put some of the cold jelly onto my belly. I yelped. Dr. Forks apologized and put the transducer on my baby bump. "Okay, let's take a look." She ran the transducer over my belly and her brow furrowed. "Interesting."

"What?" Edward asked as he looked at the ultrasound monitor. Dr. Forks pointed to something and Edward's hand squeezed mine. "Oh my God."

"Is everything alright? Please tell me everything is alright," I begged.



## A Fresh Start

"Everything is fine. The babies are perfect," Dr. Forks announced.

"Babies? Wait, I thought I was having one. Now I'm having more than one?" I squeaked.

"It appears that they were playing hide and seek in your womb," Dr. Forks said. "Baby A, Baby B and Baby C."

"Triplets?" I said, my eyes wide. "Three babies. Three. There are three babies in there. Three. Edward, we're having triplets. Three children at once. This is all your getting, Dr. Masen. THREE!"

"Do you want to know what the genders are?" Dr. Forks asked.

"Sure, why not," I said as I stared at the ultrasound monitor.

"Well, Baby A is a girl, so is Baby B. Baby C looks to be a boy. Definitely a boy," Dr. Forks laughed.

"Takes after his father," I snorted. Edward gave me pointed look. "What? It's your super sperm that gave us three babies. So don't look at me in the tone of voice."

Edward laughed and kissed me sweetly. "I love you, Mommy."

"Yeah, yeah," I grumbled against his lips. "I love you, too."

Now, we definitely had to go to the district office...I couldn't take this principalship now. I'm having triplets. TRIPLETS! Gah! I would still teach, but perhaps my priorities are changing. We'll have to wait and see. However, life couldn't get much better than it was right now.

*TRIPLETS!*

**A/N: So, we know what they're having. TRIPLETS! Two girls and a boy. We also found out about Bella's job offer. The next chapter will be the last**

## A Fresh Start

**one and then the epilogue. Thank you for reading! Leave me love xoxox!**

# The New Beginning

*Author's Note: I own nothing. I just like to play with the characters that were created by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

*Also, thank you for those of who have commented and offered well-wishes in my difficult time. It means a lot to me. Writing these stories has been my strength (as silly as that sounds) and has grounded me.*

*Thank you so much for reading and reviewing. It means so much to me. More than you can imagine. These stories (this one in particular) are my babies and I adore the reviews and comments I receive. Much, much love to ALL of you!*

## Chapter 45: The New Beginning

After our fateful appointment with Dr. Forks, Edward drove me to the district office. I met with the superintendent and explained the change in my medical status. He was extremely surprised at the unexpected turn of events. He was also distressed when I told him that due to my pregnancy and triplets, I would be unable to take the principal position at Cherry Blossom. He understood and said that my teaching position is there for me. I smiled and accepted it. Dr. Sancken also said that if I do apply for another administrative position, he'd do everything in his power to push me through. We shook hands and Edward drove us home.

When we got home, Edward was insatiable. We celebrated our news three times. One time for each baby. We also christened three rooms: the kitchen, the living room and the purple princess room. We were laying in the purple princess room on the queen bed that was in the guest bedroom in our old house. I had my head nestled against Edward's chest. "Are you happy, Edward?"

"Extremely," he said as he ran his fingers along my naked back. "Are you?"

"Now that I'm over the whole 'guilt' thing, yeah," I smiled as I kissed his neck.

## A Fresh Start

"We're having triplets."

"I can't believe it," Edward said as he kissed my forehead. "We have to come up three names. Damn."

"I do have a suggestion. For one of the girls," I said, my face blushing.

"Let me hear it," Edward said as he cupped my chin. "It'll probably be beautiful since you thought of it."

"Oh stop it," I said as I smacked his belly. "Anyhow, what do you think of Elizabeth Tanya? For your mom and your first wife?"

Edward looked at me and tears filled his eyes. His face broke into a beautiful grin. "Perfect."

"Okay, one down, two to go," I said. "I would love to name our boy after you and your father, but that would be insanely confusing with EJ. What was your father's middle name?"

"Same as mine, Anthony," Edward explained. "But I hate it. So did he."

"Anthony is out. What's Carlisle's middle name?"

"Um, Stewart," Edward replied with a scrunched nose.

"Oh, Baby Stewie," I cooed.

"Fuck no," Edward said with a pointed glare. "I will not name my son 'Stewie.' What's Charlie's middle name?"

"David," I answered.

"David Anthony Masen," Edward offered. "We still get the Anthony in there."

## A Fresh Start

"Two down, one to go," I said. "One more girl's name. I refuse to name her Madison or any trendy name. Blech."

"I'm with you. What's your mom's middle name?"

"I refuse to even acknowledge her. She behaved atrociously at my first wedding and we haven't spoken since. It's Elaine, though."

"I don't like that anyway. How about Marie like you?" Edward suggested. "Marie Esme?"

"We have our baby's names," I smiled. "Elizabeth Tanya, David Anthony and Marie Esme. Perfect."

"Just like their mother. I love you, beautiful girl," he said.

"I love you, too, Edward," I replied as I kissed his soft lips. Suffice it say, we had round four after that. *I married a sex god. Nice.*

xx AFS xx

I was standing in front of the mirror, gazing at my rapidly changing body. Everyone was coming over for dinner and we were going to announce our news about our beans. I couldn't find anything to wear. I felt huge. "Edward! I need your metrosexualness."

"My what?" Edward laughed as he strode into our closet.

"I'm as big as a house. I have nothing to wear," I moaned. "I need your style assistance."

"Okay, that's just sad. What did you call it?"

"Metrosexualness," I said as I bit my lip. "Come on, help me here. I'm a mess. They're going to be here in..." I grabbed Edward's wrist and looked at his watch, "forty five minutes."

## A Fresh Start

"Bella, you could just wear a burlap sack and you'd be beautiful," Edward chuckled.

"Not helping, Edward," I said as I stomped my foot.

"Did you just stomp your foot? I swear this pregnancy is causing you to revert back to your childhood," he laughed as he searched through my clothes. He pulled out a blue wrap dress and set out my black ballet flats. "Do you need help changing, too?"

"Thank you, Alice," I said as I fluttered my eyelashes at him. He rolled his eyes and left the closet. I pulled on the dress and slipped on the shoes. I put on my necklace from the rehearsal dinner and the earrings from the wedding. I fluffed my hair and applied a bit of makeup. I padded down the spiral staircase and found Edward checking the chicken piccata that he had made for our family. He also checked the angel hair pasta he had going on the stove. "Smells good, Dr. Masen."

"I know. You married me because I can cook," Edward said as he put a hand over his aproned heart.

"No, I married you because you are great in bed," I teased. "I married a sex god. Damn."

"I rock," Edward said as he shook his ass. "Have I ever left you unsatisfied?"

"That would be negative, ghost rider," I laughed. "And recently I've been pleased multiple times."

Edward looked at me with a lascivious grin. "That will continue tonight, beautiful girl. I love feeling you come all over me," he said as he pulled me to where he was standing. "It's so hot. Even more so with the baby belly. Seeing you filled with our children. It's amazing."

I arched a brow at him. "That's a little strange. Explain that to me, please," I retorted.

## A Fresh Start

"Bella, seeing you like this. There are no words for me to describe it. You are glowing. Your skin is radiant, your hair is thick and you look so healthy. Beautiful. Exquisite. You were beautiful before, now you're absolutely gorgeous. I love seeing you with the baby bump because I know that you have our children inside of you. They are growing and flourishing. I am so incredibly happy and so much in love with you. With them. I'm rambling but I don't know how to explain it," Edward said as he kissed my lips and then kissed my belly. "I love you, my angels."

*And cue tears.*

"Don't cry love," Edward said as he cupped my face.

"That was so sweet," I blubbered. "God, I won't miss these damn hormonal moments." Edward chuckled as he turned back to the pasta. The doorbell rang and I went to answer it. Rose and Emmett were standing on the doorstep. Rose was beaming and waving her left hand in my face. I captured it and held it. "Is this what I think it is?"

"Yep. Emmett proposed!" Rose screeched. I joined her and hugged her and Emmett.

"When? How? Spill it," I said brokenly. I led them into the family room and we sat down. Edward had put the pasta into the fridge and sat down next to us. "Rose! Come on!"

"Last night, Emmett took me to La Bella Italia," Rose said as she bounced in her seat. "We ate dinner and split some dessert. As we were settling the bill, Emmett dropped his credit card on the floor. However, he didn't get up. He knelt before me and...you finish it, Em."

"I told Rose that she was the light in my life and that I couldn't imagine my existence without her. I pulled out the ring and handed it to her and asked her to be my wife," Emmett said as he kissed her temple. "She smacked me and accused me of lying. Then she told me to shut up. Finally she said yes."

## A Fresh Start

"Congratulations, Emmett and Rose," Edward said warmly. "We should toast your engagement."

"Let's wait until everyone is here," I suggested. As I said that, the doorbell rang and Edward hopped up to get it. Carlisle, Esme, Alice, Jasper, EJ and Jacob walked in. Ren was invited but he had to work. We had already told Charlie and Sue.

Edward was hesitant to have me fly while I was pregnant with triplets. So, Charlie and Sue were having their wedding in our backyard in August. It wasn't ideal, but it was the best solution for everyone. Sue was adamant that I be involved in her wedding. My changed medical status just changed the location. It didn't stop the fact that Charlie and Sue were getting married.

I shook off my random mental lapse. Alice chuckled and said that she had 'pregnant' moments all of the time with EJ. Rose agreed when she was pregnant with her daughter. She spaced out more often than not. Edward got a bottle of champagne and we toasted Emmett and Rosalie's engagement after they regaled the rest of our guests with their story.

Soon after that, Edward led everyone into our dining room. He still hated the color on the walls, but he wouldn't dare cross me. I was vicious whilst I was pregnant. I could fly off the handle very quickly. However, my temper fizzled as quickly as it flared. But poor Edward got the brunt of it. He got our dinner and placed it on the table. Everyone dug into the food and it was blissfully quiet as we all gorged ourselves on Edward's delicious meal.

Alice told us that she was coming back to Cherry Blossom for the fall. She wanted to stay home with EJ, but decided against it. She was on the brink of insanity and the stay at home moms were driving her nuts. Jake said that he moved in with Ren and they were talking about having a commitment ceremony. Things were up in the air, but it was in the works. Esme told us that she was working with Sue in planning her nuptials. They had become very close while at our wedding. I was happy that our families got along so well.



## A Fresh Start

As we were drinking the coffee. *Tea for me. Damn it.* And enjoying my rum cake, Edward and I decided to share our big announcement. "We have some good news and some bad news," Edward began.

"Is the baby okay?" Esme asked. Her eyes wild with worry.

"The baby's fine," Edward said. "That's not the bad news." He looked at me and laced his fingers with mine.

"After our appointment with Dr. Forks, Edward drove me to the district office. I decided to not take the principal position at Cherry Blossom."

"What? Why?" Jake asked. "You'd be so awesome at it!"

"That brings us to the good news," Edward said. "We found out the gender."

"Am I buying blue or pink clothes?" Alice asked as she bounced in her seat. Jasper put his hand on her shoulder, trying to calm her.

"Um, both," I answered. "At the doctor's office, we found out that we're having triplets."

*Chirp. Chirp. Cue crickets.*

"Triplets?" Carlisle squeaked.

"Yes, triplets. Two girls and a boy," Edward said proudly as he kissed my temple.

"We even figured out names. Elizabeth Tanya, David Anthony and Marie Esme," I said.

"TRIPLETS!" Alice shrieked, waking up EJ who was napping on Jasper's shoulder. "You're having THREE babies! Holy Fuck!"

"Mary Alice Whitlock," Esme said. "Watch your damn mouth...oops."

## A Fresh Start

"Esme Cullen," Edward chastised. "Watch *your* mouth."

"Oh, shut it, Edward," Esme giggled. "Congratulations. Triplets. I can't believe it."

"We can't either. It's taking a lot to wrap our heads around it. So, that's why I can't take the principal job. With three newborns, I'll be a mess," I explained. "I will be back as a language arts teacher at Cherry Blossom. So, that's good."

"Do you know who is going to be the new principal?" Emmett asked.

"No. However, I'm hoping it's not either one of the asshats who interviewed with me. They were tools," I replied, wrinkling my nose.

"I love the names," Rose said. "So perfect for your children."

"Thank you," Edward said. "I can't wait to meet them." He placed his hand on my belly and in solidarity, one of the beans kicked. "Whoa."

"You felt that?" I asked.

"Yeah, I did. I figured it would be later, but it's going to get cramped," Edward said as he rubbed my belly. "Nice to meet you too. Daddy loves you."

"That is so stinking cute," Rose said. "You two are going to be the best parents."

"What about Jasper and I?" Alice whined.

"You're good, but do you see how much they are in love? With each other? With their babies?" Rose asked.

"I do. I'm so happy for you, baby brother," Alice sniffled. "You too, Bella."

We all hugged and our family left. Edward and I did the dishes and I went upstairs. I removed my dress and curled up in the bed. As soon as my head hit

## A Fresh Start

the pillow, I was down for the count. Telling out family that we were having triplets was exhausting work. I faintly remembered Edward crawling into bed behind me and kissing my neck. "I love you, beautiful girl. You are going to be the most wonderful mother."

"You're going to be the best daddy," I murmured as I snuggled into my pillow. "Shrine to the 409..."

"Good lord, she's sleep talking again," Edward chuckled.

"Hmmm...."

xx AFS xx

"Sue, there is no way I can fit in this dress," I moaned as I held up my bridesmaid dress she had made for me. "I'm the size of a large country."

"Bella, you're beautiful. It'll fit," Sue chided.

Leah was playing with her children on the floor. Kevin tossed a toy across the room and he giggled. "Kevin, don't throw," Leah scolded. "I swear, the kid is going to be pitching for Mariners by the time he's out of diapers."

"He's adorable, Leah," I smiled. "So is Kaya. She's a beauty."

"Takes after her father," Leah giggled. "The beauty so ain't me."

"Oh hush, Leah," Sue admonished. "You're beautiful."

"You're supposed to say that. You're my mom," Leah snorted. "Are you ready to be Mrs. Swan?"

"Definitely. I'm so happy that I have both of my daughters here with me," Sue said as she hugged us both. The beans kicked at Sue and she giggled. "The triplets are excited too."

## A Fresh Start

"They're excited all of the time. Sleep is a rare occurrence with these guys," I said as I laid my hand on my belly.

It was August 7th and we were getting ready for Sue and Charlie's wedding. Emmett applied to be an ordained minister online and he was presiding over the ceremony. I still chuckled at that. I put on the navy blue dress and zipped it up. Surprisingly it fit. And it fit well. My voluptuous breasts were contained in the fabric and I actually felt pretty. I was still huge, though. I had gained nearly twenty pounds since the appointment where the bombshell was dropped that we were having triplets. I was also like a dog in heat. Edward actually had to tell me to cool down. He complained that his cock was getting raw from all of the lovemaking we were doing. However, he still made me feel good. When he wasn't up for anything, he still went down on me or finger fucked me. *Such a dutiful husband.* I'd rather it be his cock, but beggars can't be choosers.

I adjusted my hair and looked at Sue. She was radiant in her simple off-white sheath dress. It had a lace overlay and hugged her body. She looked elegant and I could see why Charlie loved her. Leah was wearing the same dress as me except hers was much smaller. She also was much smaller. She wasn't pregnant with the next David Beckham. To emphasize my point, I got a kidney jab. *Oomph.*

We headed downstairs and got our bouquets. Edward was wearing his navy tuxedo from the Craven Christmas Ball. He had a red boutonnière in his lapel and he looked delicious. "My, my, my...you look good enough to eat," I said as I put my hands on my hips.

"I could say the same for you, beautiful girl," he said as he kissed my shoulder. "Hello my babies." Edward kissed my belly and put a hand on it, rubbing gently. "How are you?"

"Huge," I answered.

"Bella, you're gorgeous," Edward warned.

## A Fresh Start

"Please. You can't put your arms around the small country that was my waist," I grumbled.

"Yes, I can," Edward said as he stood behind me. He placed his arms around me and rubbed my belly tenderly. "See?"

"I'm still huge. Will you still love me if I don't lose all of the baby weight?"

"I'll love you forever, Bella," Edward said as he nuzzled his nose against my hair. "You smell so good, baby." I smiled and enjoyed his embrace and his soft kisses he placed against my neck. "Let's get your dad hitched."

I nodded and picked up my bouquet. Jared, Leah's husband and Edward were my dad's best men. Leah and I were her matrons of honor. The guests were in their seats. Edward offered his arm to me and I gladly took it. We walked slowly to the make-shift altar we had set up. Emmett looked very official in his black suit. Edward separated from me and we stood while Jared and Leah walked up the aisle, holding their children's hands. After a few moments, the string quartet that Esme talked Sue into getting began playing a romantic waltz. Everyone stood up. Charlie and Sue walked down the aisle together. Charlie looked incredibly dashing in a matching tuxedo as Edward and Jared. He looked at Sue with such love and reverence. They reached the front of the aisle and Emmett asked everyone to sit down.

He walked Sue and Charlie through a poignant and touching ceremony. He used parts of Sue's heritage in the ceremony. She was a part of the Quileute tribe in La Push. Emmett used an old legend from the tribe as he did his vows for them. I was a blubbing mess. But then again, I cried at the drop of a hat. Charlie and Sue exchanged rings and kissed. Emmett let out a whoop as everyone clapped.

We had a quiet dinner in our backyard for the newlyweds. It was a catered affair. There was some dancing, but not a lot. Charlie was worse than me when it came to dancing. He didn't want to make an ass of himself. So, we compromised. After the short dance portion, Charlie and Sue headed to their honeymoon. They were staying at the resort where we got married. Leah and

## A Fresh Start

Jared were staying with us and Edward was going to drive them to the airport in the morning.

I fell asleep on the couch in the living room as Edward was cleaning up. I faintly remembered Edward gingerly lifting me and carrying me to our bedroom. *The fact that he can do that while I'm the size of a Volkswagen is amazing.* He removed my dress and tossed a t-shirt over my body. He kissed my forehead before tucking me in. I nestled against his pillow and fell into a deeper sleep.

xx AFS xx

"Mrs. Masen?"

"Yes, Bryn?" I replied.

"There's a delivery for you in the front office," Bryn said with a shy smile.

"Thanks, Bryn." I got up from my chair and waddled to the office. To my chagrin, Franklin Bendis was offered the position as principal and he gave me shit every day. I glared at his closed office door as I went to Mary Ann's desk. "A student runner said I had a delivery?"

"You look like you're about to pop, Bella. When are you due?" Mary Ann asked.

"October 31st. However, I'm having multiples, I'll probably go early," I shrugged. "The sooner the better. I am dying here. My belly has its own zip code."

"Well, you look great, despite your belly. Your delivery is on the counter," Mary Ann said as she pointed to a large bouquet of flowers. "Can I clone your husband?"

"Nope. I got his clones. Right here," I chortled as I patted my belly. "Thanks, Mar."

## A Fresh Start

I looked at the flowers and inhaled deeply. I found the card and pulled it out. They were from Edward.

*My dear Mrs. Masen,*

*I can't believe a year ago we were single and just beginning our path together. Now, we're married and expecting our angels. What a difference a year makes. Our fresh start, with each other. Happy birthday, love!*

*I love you more than my own life.*

*Your Edward*

*PS - No scavenger hunt. I still hate the idea of you driving...*

"God, he really is perfect," I sniffled. I picked up my flowers and carried them back to my room. I sat down and finished planning for my day. Alice skipped into my room and sat on my desk. "Hey, Elf."

"Farms or Zoos?" Alice asked.

"Excuse me?"

"Theme for David's room. Farm or Zoo?"

"Neither. Edward and I are going for cars," I said as I input grades into the computer.

"Fine. How about for Lizzie and Marie? What kind of theme do you want for their room?"

"Princess. Since they will be Daddy's little princesses," I smiled sweetly. "We already have the room painted and decorated. So, stop plotting, Elf."

"You're not making your baby shower very fun," Alice pouted.

## A Fresh Start

"Alice, stop. I love you tremendously, but I don't want this huge extravaganza for my baby shower. Edward and I already have both rooms furnished and decorated thanks to your mother. The rest of the stuff we'll get on our own," I shrugged.

"Bella," Alice whined.

"No, Alice. I hate being the center of attention," I said with a tone of finality. "And don't try to get Edward to help you. He agrees with me. We are perfectly capable of buying our own baby items."

"But it's for three babies. It's going to be expensive," Alice said.

"It is expensive, but we can afford it," I said. My back cramped up and I grimaced. "Ouch."

"You okay?"

"I'm fine. Just Braxton Hicks," I said as I rubbed my back.

"I'm calling Edward," Alice said as she rummaged through my desk. She dialed Edward's cell. He picked up right away. "Edward? Bella's back is hurting...Okay, hold on. He wants to talk to you."

"Hello, Dr. Masen," I said dryly.

"What hurts? Explain to me exactly what you're feeling," Edward said.

"My back is spasming. I think I'm just having Braxton Hicks. I'm fine," I said. "I may have tweaked my back when I carried the lovely flowers down to my classroom. They're beautiful, by the way. Thank you."

"You're deflecting, Mrs. Masen. With multiples, you could go at any time after thirty weeks," Edward said.



## A Fresh Start

"Edward, I'm..." I hissed as another cramp rippled through my back. "Son of a bitch that hurt."

"Bella, you are coming to the hospital," Edward said sternly.

"But..."

"Now," he barked. "Hand the phone over to Alice."

I grimaced and handed my cell phone to Alice who was nibbling on her finger. "Edward?... Yeah, I'll take her...Relax, she's fine...Love you, too." Alice hung up the phone and started throwing things into my bag. "We're going to the hospital. Come on, Bella." She slung my bag over her shoulder and assisted me off the chair. "You head to the office and I'll pull the car around."

I nodded and walked back to the office. My back was throbbing and then I felt something trickle down my leg. I yelped out in pain. Franklin was coming out of his office and found me leaning against the lockers. "Mrs. Masen? Are you okay?" he asked with genuine concern.

"No. I think my water just broke," I moaned. "I'm heading to the hospital. Mrs. Whitlock is driving me. Can you help me to the front of the building?"

"Of course," he said stiffly as he helped me to the front doors. "I'll sign you and Mrs. Whitlock out. Good luck, Mrs. Masen."

I nodded and waddled to Alice's car. She helped me into the front seat. "Phone, Alice. I need the phone."

"Who do you want?"

"Edward," I moaned as I grimaced in pain.

Using her hands free link, Alice dialed Edward. "Dr. Masen," he said brusquely.

## A Fresh Start

"Edward, my water just broke," I sobbed. "It hurts."

"Bella, breathe, baby," he said. "Alice, how far away are you?"

"About ten minutes."

"Bells, I'm going to hang up and call Dr. Forks. I'll meet you at the emergency room. I love you, beautiful girl."

"I love you, too, Edward," I moaned. Alice hung up the phone and she sped down the street to Craven Memorial. I was going to become a mother today. The greatest gift I could ever wish for. I could ever want. I would share my birthday with my angels. But it was too soon. I was only 31 weeks along. Can I do this? Can we do this? I couldn't focus as I felt a ripping pain go across my belly and I let out a scream. Is labor supposed to feel like this?

"We're almost there, Bella. Deep breaths, sweetie," Alice said. She held my hand and breathed with me. We pulled up to the emergency room. Edward was at the door with a gurney. Rhonda was by his side. She was bouncing on her toes. As soon as Alice stopped the car, Edward opened the door and picked me gently.

"How far apart are the contractions, Alice?" Edward asked as he placed me on the gurney.

"She had two in the ten minutes we drove to the hospital," Alice said.

Edward captured my face and I stared into his green eyes. "It's too early, Edward," I bawled.

"No, they're fine. They'll be small, but the babies are fully developed. We may have to give you some steroids to increase their lung function, but they'll be perfect," Edward said soothingly. We flew through the ER and headed up to labor and delivery. I had another contraction in the elevator. Edward eased me through it, cooing in my ear. I sobbed as I collapsed against the bed.

## A Fresh Start

We got into our birthing suite. Edward assisted me out of my clothes and into a gown. He then strapped on a monitor around me to listen to the babies' heartbeats. Dr. Forks came in and she checked to see how I was doing. I was honest and said miserable. Rhonda put in my IV before she darted back to the ER. As Edward said, Dr. Forks administered some steroids to promote lung development. I started crying.

"It's too soon," I said.

"Bella, your babies are fine. You need to relax," Dr. Forks said. "Now, I'm going to check to see how far along you're dilated. Okay?"

I nodded and sat back on the bed. She felt around and rattled off some numbers. "You're about four centimeters dilated. Do you want an epidural?"

"Fuck yes," I moaned. "Sorry."

"No big deal," Dr. Forks chuckled. "I'll call an anesthesiologist."

"Thank you, Dr. Forks," Edward smiled. He sat down next to me and placed his hands on my belly. "You ready, little ones? Ready for the world?"

"They're ready, but I'm not," I said.

"Bella, you're going to be a wonderful mother," Edward smiled. "I'm going to put on some scrubs and I'll be back okay? Three minutes, tops."

I nodded and rubbed my huge belly. Edward darted out. I heard him speak with Alice and she danced in. "Hey Elf."

"Hey, Bells. I'm going to head to your place and get you some clothes. Also, Jasper and I are going to pick up your car from school. It's the one with the baby seats."

"Thanks, Alice," I said.

## A Fresh Start

"Happy Birthday, Bells. This is the most perfect present," Alice said as she hugged me. "I love you, sis."

"Love you, too, Elf."

Alice grinned and left the room. She left my cell phone and bag on the nightstand. I picked up the phone and dialed my dad. I told him that I was in labor. He said that he and Sue would be on the next flight out. I also texted Rose and Emmett about my abrupt departure from school. Edward came back in. He was wearing blue scrubs and his white lab coat. *God, he's so fucking yummy. And mine...le sigh...*

*You're having a baby. No scratch that, THREE babies. Do not think about sex. That's what got you into this mess in the first place. Yes, your husband is fucking gorgeous. But it ain't happening sister.*

"Bella, you're looking at me like I'm something to eat," Edward chuckled.

"No, I was just daydreaming about the hotness that is you," I snorted. I grabbed my belly and Edward looked at the print out next to my bed. "Fuck me. This hurts. Where is the man with the epidural?"

"He's on his way, love," Edward said as he rubbed my back. "Breathe, baby. Breathe through it."

"That will NOT make the pain stop," I snapped.

"I know," Edward said as he laughed nervously.

"Are you laughing at me?" I squeaked.

"Never, love," Edward said as he sobered up. As he was rubbing my back, another doctor came in. He was an older gentleman with a friendly face. "Dr. Morris, this is my wife, Bella."

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"It's a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Masen," Dr. Morris said with a smile. I grimaced in return. "Let's get you situated. Dr. Masen if you could help your wife sit up and have her legs hang off the edge of the bed."

Edward helped me and he untied my gown, exposing my back to Dr. Morris. Edward held me and I rested my head on his shoulder. As I sat there, another contraction ripped through me. "Oh, GOD," I cried as I gripped on Edward's arms.

"It's okay, baby," Edward soothed as he ran his fingers through my hair. Once my contraction was over, Dr. Morris administered the epidural. I stayed sitting until my body relaxed. Edward helped me back into the bed and he combed my hair out of my face.

"Can you hand me my bag?" I asked. Edward placed the bag on the bed and I found a ponytail holder. Groggily I lifted my hands to pull my hair away from my face. I couldn't get my hands to work right. "This isn't working..."

"Let me help you," Edward chuckled as he pulled my hair up and put into a messy bun. "I'm not a hair stylist, but it'll do."

"Thanks," I said with a shy grin.

Carlisle came in a few minute later. He wanted to see how I was doing. I shrugged and gave him a loopy grin. *Oh lord. Why do drugs affect me so?* "Bella is enjoying the wonders of the epidural," Edward chortled. "She's so high."

"Am not," I said as I tried to smack Edward's arm. I missed and ended up smacking the fetal heart monitor. "Ow."

"Right," Edward teased.

"How far along is she?" Carlisle asked.

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"When Dr. Forks last checked her she was at four centimeters," Edward explained.

"You know you could check, too, Edward. You've been through obstetrics," Carlisle said with a quirked brow.

"Noooooooooooo! I told Edward that he is NOT delivering our babies. That's just weird," I said drunkenly.

"If you would rather, I could check," Carlisle offered.

"Nooooooooooooooo...there is no way in hell that my father's fingers are going anywhere near my wife's hoo ha," Edward said as he waggled his finger at Carlisle. "We'll wait."

"Did you just say hoo ha?" Carlisle and I asked.

"Yes. Yes I did. Would rather I call it something else?" Edward challenged.

"Vagina, Edward. It's called a vagina," Carlisle snickered.

"I fully know what it's called, Carlisle. I did go to medical school," Edward argued.

"If you both don't behave, I'm kicking you both out and calling Jake," I threatened. "He won't touch my 'hoo ha' with a ten foot pole. Since he's gay."

"I'll behave, I'm sorry," Edward said, his head dropping to his chest.

"I'm sorry, too, Bella. I didn't mean to make you feel uncomfortable," Carlisle said as he blushed.

"It's okay, but don't do it again," I warned.

"At least we know the epidural is working. She's had two contractions since our discussion of her hoo ha and no screaming," Edward said as he pointed to

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the print out.

"Whoopy doo," I said as I twirled my finger. Edward laughed and Carlisle headed out of the room. He passed Dr. Forks who did the actual exam. I was six centimeters dilated. I was moving rapidly. Hopefully, our babies would be born tonight. Edward turned on the television. I called the school and told them that I was going on my maternity leave. Franklin had already informed the office since he escorted me to Alice's car and had to have my amniotic fluid cleaned up behind his office.

I then pulled out my journal and began scribbling in it. It was almost full. I had written a lot in it. Most of them were written as letters. Letters to Edward, to our children, to our families. Tonight's journal entry was to our babies.

*September 13 th , 2011*

*Dear Lizzie, Marie and David,*

*My angels.*

*Today is your birthday. At least I hope it will be. Mommy went into labor at school today and I'm writing this to you as I'm anxiously waiting for your arrival. Ironically enough, it's Mommy's birthday, too. Having the three of you today would be the most precious, most perfect gift I could ever ask for.*

*I can't wait to see your beautiful faces and finally see who's been kicking my kidneys. My daughters, you will understand the pain of childbirth and sympathize with your mother's pain. My son, take after your father and be extremely patient. And don't have your grandfather offer to check to see if how dilated you are. That's just weird. I'll explain when you get older. I promise. Or you could ask your father. He'll probably turn fifty shades of pink and run away.*

*Anyhow, I wanted to let you all know that I love you so much. I was so excited to find out that I was pregnant with you. I found out the day after I married your daddy. It made our wedding so much more special, knowing that you were*

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*a part of it. Even as 'Beans.' That's what we called you until we found out your genders. And actually we originally thought that there was just one of you. Imagine our surprise when we discovered there were three.*

*I hope Daddy doesn't expect any more Beans. Because if he does, he's barking up the wrong tree. I'll save all of my love for you.*

*I love you, my angels. My beans. Mommy is very excited to meet you and hold you and love you and kiss you and... well, you get the idea.*

*Prepared to be spoiled by Auntie Alice and Uncle Jasper. You will learn all about gross things from Uncle Emmett. You will learn all about fashion from Auntie Rosie. Nana Esme and Grandpa Carlisle will love you and kiss you. Grandma Sue and Papa Charlie will be there for you always. Most importantly, Mommy and Daddy will be your shoulders to cry on, your support when you need it, disciplinarians if necessary and providers of all unconditional love.*

*All my love,*

*Mommy*

I closed my journal and placed it in my bag.

"Who did you write to today?" Edward asked.

"Our angels," I answered. "It is their birthday today."

"It is," Edward said as he kissed me sweetly. "It's yours too."

"I know. I'm old. 33, blech," I groaned.

"I'm 33, too, Bells," Edward said as he arched a brow. "Am I old too?"

"No, you're perfect."



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"Hardly, Bella," Edward laughed. I hissed and grabbed my belly. "Baby?" He looked at the print out and he smashed the call button. Before the nurse could get a word in, Edward barked out orders. "One of the babies is in distress for Isabella Masen. Get Dr. Forks in here now and prep an OR."

"Who am I speaking with?" the nurse asked.

"Dr. Masen. Do it. NOW," he yelled.

"Edward, what's wrong?" I asked.

"One of the baby's heart rates is dangerously low. We need to get them out of there." As he explained, Dr. Forks came rushing in. She looked at the print out and agreed with Edward. They transferred me to another gurney and rolled me into an operating room. I was going to get a C-section.

"Edward, I'm scared," I whimpered as they strapped me down to the table. "What if..."

"Don't worry about that love," Edward said as he tucked his hair into a surgeon's cap. "They're going to be fine. Just fine." He caressed my cheeks and kissed my forehead. I began trembling uncontrollably. Edward went to a supply closet and tossed a warm blanket over my chest. Dr. Morris checked on my epidural and I was fine for the emergency C-section that they were about to perform.

Dr. Forks came in and she was covered. She spoke to me, but I couldn't focus on her words. I just nodded dumbly, trying to quell the tears that threatened to fall down my cheeks. A nurse put a mask over Edward's face and he kissed me one last time before he tied it. "I love you, Bella."

"I love you, too," I whispered, my teeth chattering.

I felt a tugging sensation on my belly. Dr. Forks' voice was distant. I felt like I was in a tunnel. Edward held my hand as they did whatever they did to my body. I felt a more harsh pull on my belly and I whimpered. "What's

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happening?"

"They just opened up the uterus," Edward explained. "Dr. Forks is getting ready to remove one of our babies."

I nodded and leaned my cheek against Edward's hand. A few moments and a smack later, a baby's cries filled the OR. "Congratulations, you have a boy!"

"David Anthony," I whispered weakly. Edward looked at me and he had tears in his eyes. "Go to your son, Edward. I'm fine." He was torn. "Go." He nodded and moved his mask down. He kissed me sweetly. "I love you."

"I love you more, beautiful girl," he said. He pulled his mask back up and went to the crib where they were working on David.

More tugging and another smack. "Congratulations, you have a girl," Dr. Forks announced. "And she's quite the screamer."

"Elizabeth Tanya," I said. I felt my eyelids get droopy. *So tired.*

Finally there was a harsh pull to my body and I let out a yelp. There was another smack and more cries. "Another girl."

"Marie Esme," Edward said as he sat down next to me. "Bella, are you alright?"

"That didn't feel right, Edward," I whispered. My eyelids fluttered.

"Bella, stay awake, love. Keep your eyes open for me," Edward said forcefully.

"Dr. Masen, your wife is hemorrhaging," Dr. Forks was saying. I floated in and out of consciousness.

"Do whatever you have to do to keep her alive," Edward snapped. "Bella, please, stay with me. Bella? I love you. Don't leave me. You promised you wouldn't leave me."

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"Dr. Masen, you have to go," Dr. Forks said. "I'm sorry. Now."

One of the nurses dragged Edward away and my eyes shut. I heard a clamor of metal falling on the floor and then blackness. Silence.

xx AFS xx

*Beep. Beep. Beep. Beep.*

I moved my head. *Ow*. My eyes slowly opened and I saw Edward sitting next to me, his hand linked with mine. He was asleep. I shifted in the bed. *REALLY OW!* "Edward?" I rasped.

His eyelids fluttered and he rubbed his face. "Bella?" he said as he looked at me. "Oh, you're awake. Thank God."

"What happened?" I asked.

"When Dr. Forks delivered Marie, there was a complication. It caused your uterus to begin hemorrhaging. You were bleeding out," Edward said. His eyes exhausted.

"Obviously, I'm still here. What happened after I drifted?" I asked.

"They couldn't stop the bleeding. Dr. Forks had to perform a hysterectomy," Edward said sadly. "I'm so sorry, love."

"Well, I told you that these kiddos were only ones you were getting out of me," I joked lightly. "Now, I really can't have anymore."

"Bella," Edward said.

"Sorry," I mumbled.

"I almost lost you," he said with frown.

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"But I'm here," I said. "With a few less parts. Where are our children?"

"In the NICU," Edward said. "They were fully developed, but small. Dr. Forks wanted to keep them there overnight."

"When can we see them?" I asked.

"Anytime you want. It's good to know the boss," Edward joked. "Let me get a wheelchair. I'll be right back." Edward got up and left the darkened room. I sat up and groaned. I lifted my gown and saw the nasty staples across my belly.

"You will never want to be with me when you see this," I sighed as Edward came back with a wheelchair.

"Bella, I will always want you. Even when we're old and gray and pooping in our depends, I'll want you." He looked at my scar and he shrugged. "That's actually better than most I've seen. You will have minimal scarring."

"Right," I said dryly. "How am I going to do this? It hurts to move."

"Very slowly," Edward emphasized. He gently put my feet on the ground. He turned and rolled the wheelchair to the side of the bed and locked the brakes.

"Put your arms around my neck." I did and Edward lifted me until I was standing. I whimpered as I moved. "Okay, now shuffle to the chair." I nodded and moved to the chair, easing my body into it.

"Christ on a cracker, that hurts," I moaned.

Edward pulled out my chart and checked something. "I can give you something for the pain. You're due."

"After we meet our children," I said. Edward smiled and went behind me in the wheel chair. "How much do they weigh? What do they look like? Are they healthy?"

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"Whoa, slow down, Bella. One question at a time," Edward laughed as he pushed me through corridors of Craven. "David was the biggest at four pounds, seven ounces. Lizzie was four pounds, four ounces. Marie is the runt at three pounds, fifteen ounces."

"Don't call my daughter a runt, Masen," I said.

"Sorry, love. They all have full heads of hair. God help our daughters, they have the same mess as I do," Edward laughed as he ran his hand through his own hair, ruffling it.

"I love your hair, Edward. It suits you."

"Thanks, beautiful girl. David has dark brown hair, almost black," Edward said. "And they are perfectly healthy. Being in the NICU is just a precaution since they were premature."

I nodded and nibbled on my fingernail. We reached the NICU. Edward used his swipe card to let us in. He put a protective top over my gown. He did the same over his scrubs. The nurse smiled at him and he rolled me into the quiet nursery. There were three bassinets in a row. Edward parked me next to them and he gingerly picked up one of the babies. He placed her into my arms. "Lizzie," he whispered. He turned and picked up the next baby. Carefully he placed him into my other arm. "David." Finally, he picked up Marie and crouched in front of us. "Our family."

"Oh, Edward," I cried as I looked at the sleeping faces of my children. "They're perfect."

"Just like their mommy," Edward said reverently. "Bella, I'm so blessed to have you. To have our angels. I'm so glad that you gave me a chance."

"I was so ready to give up, Edward. Thank you for waiting for me," I whispered. "With you, everything was how it was supposed to be. I got my fairy tale ending. With my very own prince charming. We've had our bumps along the way, but I wouldn't change anything about our relationship. About

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us. I love you. All of you. Your intelligence. Your compassion. Your beauty. Your wit. Your twisted sense of humor."

"My sense of humor is not twisted," Edward scoffed. "That would be yours, my dear."

"Okay, I concede. I do have a twisted sense of humor. Anyhow, you were my new beginning. My fresh start. And I'm eternally grateful for everything that you have given me. Given our children."

"Now, we start a new chapter, beautiful girl. The first book ends and a new one begins. I love you, Isabella Marie Masen."

"I love you, Edward Anthony Masen. Thank you."

"No, thank you." Edward kissed my lips and he smiled at me. "We love you, too, angels. You are going to be the biggest part of our lives."

"The most cherished part."

Edward sat down in the rocking chair next to me and we held our children. Gazing at their perfect faces. This was the end of a chapter in our lives. A tumultuous chapter. But it was filled with joy and happiness, culminating in the three angels in our arms. Never in all of my life did I expect to be so happy or so blessed. I had a husband who treated me with the love and respect that I desired. He made me feel special and sexy. I have a family who supported me in my decisions and cared about my life. I had friends who fun and spunky. They make me laugh. They make me cry. But most importantly they rounded out the perfection that is my life. Now, my life is complete. I have three beautiful children and loving husband. The only thing that's missing is a dog. *Let's get the kids out of diapers before we think about that, huh?* I couldn't wait to take the next steps in our lives. Together. As a family, with my husband by my side.

Now, a new beginning...

FIN