

Hit By Destiny

By: ocdmess

Bella wants to die, and almost gets her wish fulfilled when she gets hit by a shiny Volvo. She is left with serious injuries, and the only thing keeping her from dying is the person who hit her. All Human, Rated M for language, dark themes & violence.

Status: complete

Published: 2009-10-24

Updated: 2024-11-28

Words: 463630

Chapters: 58

Rated: Fiction M - Language: English - Genre: Angst/Hurt/Comfort - Characters: Bella, Edward - Reviews: 20,686 - Favs: 13,646 - Follows: 7,501

Original source: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/5463682/1/Hit-By-Destiny>.

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Preface

New Author's note, written in September, 2020:

Please read ,

I started writing this story 11 years ago, in 2009. I was young and very ignorant. I was in a bad place mentally, which is mirrored in many of my characters and the events of this story.

I never meant to portray any offensive themes or behavior, but I have come to realize that it's not my place to decide what's offensive and what is not. Especially when it comes to ethnic groups or minorities which I am not a part of.

I will not go back and change what's been written. But I can promise you all, that I will never write anything this problematic again, and I will try my best to review and reflect on my writing, and become more humble and sensitive to people with different backgrounds and experiences.

The Edward in this story is problematic in more ways than one, but I tried my best to redeem him. The Quileutes are also portrayed in a problematic way, mostly due to me using their legends as a main plotpoint, which in turn made them out to be the bad guys.

And with all this said: this is NOT an excuse for my writing, simply an explanation. You do not have to agree with me, and I fully support your aversion to this story.

Thanks for taking the time to read this,

Emilie.

ORIGINAL NOTE FROM 2009:

A/N: This is a story that contains serious angst (no joke) along with dark themes and eventually lemons as well. This story is M-rated for a reason, and is not suitable for younger readers. Use your own discretion whether or not this story is for you. If you are uncomfortable with: *sex (any form), excessive use of curse words, self-harm, abuse, suicide attempts, drug use* and whatnot, then this story really isn't for you.

WARNING: This story contains the douchiest Edward known to man, and you will want to strangle him for a while. But have a little faith and patience, and don't give up.

Full Summary

Three months ago, something happened that came to change Bella's life forever. She is an outcast, hated by everyone, loved by no one. She wants nothing more than to end her life and she almost gets her wish fulfilled when she gets hit by a shiny Volvo. She is left with serious injuries and the only thing keeping her alive is the person who hit her...

I do not own these characters (that's a shocker). Stephenie Meyer owns it all.

I own nothing but the storyline. No copyright infringement intended.

Preface

The screeching noise is what made me turn around. And it was the sight of the oncoming car that made me freeze in place. I couldn't find it in me to move, and although the car seemed to be moving in slow-motion, and I could make out every little detail of the shiny Volvo's front, I still stood my ground, and watched it come. I could have made it if I wanted too.

But the truth is that I didn't want to.

You would think that the collision would have hurt, that I would have screamed in pain as I hit the windshield with a deafening crash, before rolling down on the ground and landing under the moving car. But no. It didn't hurt, and I didn't scream.

I didn't have time to scream.

I was unconscious long before the car stopped dead.

The only sound was the scream from the driver...

Envious

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Note: [**Beta'ed by:** Project Team Beta]

Chapter 1- Envious

Isabella Swan POV - Four days before the accident

Hiding out in the girls' bathroom during gym had become one of my daily rituals. I wouldn't be surprised if Coach Hunter thought that I was dead or that I changed schools, since I hadn't made it to gym for almost three months now.

I really wished she was right, though.

I splashed my face with cold water and stared at my taunting reflection in the mirror. My brown hair was sticking to the water on my face, and I looked like a complete mess. My reflection stared back at me with condescending eyes and I had to look away. Wasn't it enough that I had to endure those looks from the rest of the student body? Why did I have to look at myself the same way?

I should treat myself with more respect. I deserved better. If I didn't treat myself better, then who would? I had no friends and no one who really cared about me.

People say that often but, those who do are not truly alone. They have a few acquaintances to smile with while walking through the halls of their schools, or maybe a sibling to relate to. In my case, though, it's true. I really have no friends. I am an only child. But I can honestly say that that doesn't bother me. I don't mind having no

friends. Having friends means you are setting yourself up to get hurt. Trust me when I say that I have gone through enough betrayal and pain to last a lifetime. I know better than to try getting to know people since everyone thinks I'm crazy, anyway. I couldn't even count on my family to be there for me. They still blamed me for what had happened...

I shook those thoughts away. It was *definitely* not the time to think about *that* right now.

The door to the bathroom swung open, and Tanya Denali walked in with Jessica Stanley and Lauren Mallory hot on her heels. I don't think I've ever seen Tanya without Jessica or Lauren standing behind her like a couple of pathetic cheerleading bodyguards. I suppressed a scoff as all three of them turn to glare at me.

"Excuse me, but this bathroom is for normal people. The mentally unstable pee behind the gym," Tanya said to me in a sickly sweet voice. Jessica and Lauren giggled and I stared at them, my eyes expressing no emotion whatsoever. I had this look down pat and memorized by now. I couldn't let them get to me. I couldn't let any of them get to me.

"Then what the hell are *you* doing here?" I asked, veering my gaze away from her and her *posse* .

Tanya looked confused for a moment. I guess it took her a second longer than it should have before she understood what I said. I resisted the urge to roll my eyes. How was it even possible to be so dense?

"Freak," she spat when she couldn't come up with a good enough comeback, before storming into one of the stalls.

I grabbed a paper towel from the dispenser and patted my face dry. Lauren and Jessica were watching my every move through the mirror. I glared back at them, but they didn't even flinch. I threw the paper towel in the trash and left the bathroom.

The hallways were empty – apart from the occasional outcast like me, who roamed the halls when the rest of the school was busy in class.

I walked up the stairs to the second floor and steered my feet towards the closed-off wing. Nobody ever went there. That was the reason why I loved it so much.

I slipped under the caution tape that marked the restricted area and walked over to the abandoned music room. The door opened with a loud creak and I tried my best to close it silently behind me before making my way over to the grand piano, which was covered with a dusty white sheet. My steps echoed through the big, empty room. The piano was the only thing in the room. The seat was as dusty as the white sheet was, as were the floor and the rest of the room.

Everything was so dirty, but that was to be expected considering how long it had been since anyone, other than me, had been up here.

This wing had been closed off for almost a year now. It was first closed down due to renovations. But I guess the school couldn't afford to finish them, because the contractors only stayed for a week. Ever since then the wing had been a restricted area and classes were no longer scheduled there, because of the danger from construction.

The danger of the room is one of the main reasons I kept coming back. Each time, I hoped that something would happen to me, but each time I left the room disappointed. Nothing ever happened.

I looked down at my hands in my lap and tugged at my sleeve to make sure that my scars weren't exposed. I didn't feel ashamed about them; I just didn't want people to know about them. That would only fuel the fire, the taunting.

Don't go getting the wrong idea about me: I'm *not* a cutter. I just have scars – a lot of them. And it's not my fault they are there. I didn't put them there. Someone else did. And the scars are one of the reasons

why I refuse to go to gym. If I did, people would be bound to take notice of them, and they would never let me forget it. That was something I tried to do twenty-four seven. *I want to stop thinking about it!* An impossible goal, for sure. But I had to at least try, because it was the only thing keeping me sane, while the whole school made me out to be *in* sane.

I squeezed my eyes shut and rubbed the heels of my hands against my eyes.

Three months had passed, but I could still hear the screaming. Every time I closed my eyes, I would see his murderous gaze and my dreams were forever haunted by the memory. There was no way for me to get over this. The mental pain was slowly driving me insane and killing my will to live.

The physical pain I could handle. My wounds had been serious, but I didn't complain. With my wounds, I could see what hurt me. Plus, after a couple of months, the wounds had turned into pink scars. I was no longer broken. My body was fixed, but the wounds in my mind and in my heart would never heal. They would never diminish into pink scars.

Three months - and the pain was just as excruciating now as it had been back then. That would never change.

Why didn't I die that night?

I stood up and walked over to one of the dusty windows and jumped up to sit on its ledge. The window faced the parking lot where my big red truck stood out like a big red zit would stand out on a super model's pristine, pore-free forehead. It was bigger and older than any other car on the parking lot – and not to mention it was loud. People always stared at me when I came a-clunkin' to school every morning.

But I wasn't sure whether that was because of the loud roar of the engine, or the fact that I was a loser in their eyes, and they needed

to put me down before starting their day.

A shiny, silver Volvo caught my eye. It was moving fluidly down the parking lot, before parking in the Principal's assigned spot. I raised an eyebrow at the sight, since I knew that that particular car didn't belong to the Principal. It belonged to none other than Edward Cullen.

I watched him as he climbed out of the car and slammed the door shut, before pushing a button on his keys, pointing it towards the car. The lights flashed, indicating he had locked the car, and he walked off with his hands in his pockets. He slouched his shoulders, like he always did. I don't think I'd ever seen him walk with his back straight. He slouched and kept his eyes down, not meeting anyone's glance, as if he was trying to hide. This was pretty odd, seeing as everyone knew who he was and everyone looked up to him. The guys wanted to *be* him, and the girls wanted to *be with* him. *You know the type* . Yet, still, he always walked like he didn't want any of it. It was as if he just didn't want people to see him, or notice him.

Even more ironic, he was the sluttiest guy I have ever encountered. He had slept with the entire female population of the school. Actually, I wouldn't be surprised if he slept with a few of the guys too when he was getting short on girls. I was definitely *not* one of the girls he had slept with, though. I was still as virginal as the day God had created me.

I remember once, last spring, when I thought he had tried to flirt with me.

I was sitting in the library, during study hall, when he walked up to me. He stood across the table and leaned down on his arms as his eyes focused all his power on me.

"Isabella Swan...", he said with a husky voice. " *You're* looking pretty today."

I blushed and looked down, embarrassed. I was not used to getting compliments from guys, or talking to guys at all for that matter. Getting a compliment from Edward Cullen was like being told by Simon Cowell that you were good at singing. Both situations were equally rare, and equally amazing.

"Thanks," I muttered. He chuckled.

"So what are you studying, pretty Bella?" he asked. I could still feel his eyes on me.

"Advanced algebra..." I replied quietly, without looking at him. Why did he even bother asking? My algebra books were the only ones on the table in front of me and I was busy scribbling down equations and answers in my notebook.

"Oh, really? I was too, but I don't understand question four... do you?" He asked innocently.

I nodded weakly; I didn't have any trouble with AP algebra. Math was a cakewalk for me.

He leaned in closer towards me, over the table, and I could feel his breath on my face.

"Mind helping a guy out?" he breathed, still with that husky tone.

I glanced up and my breath caught in my throat as his beautiful emerald eyes stared back at me, barely inches from my face. I bit my lip and pushed my notebook to him.

"I... I— I solved it by using the method on page sixty five..." I stuttered nervously and pointed to the page without breaking the lock with his eyes.

He smirked and leaned back before snatching the notebook. He looked at the page and nodded, seemingly content.

"Thanks," he said, ripping the page out and throwing the notebook back down on the table, walking off without a second glance. I flushed as I reached for my notebook and frowned when I noticed that he had managed to get away with the whole assignment, while it had taken me over an hour to solve the problems. I was forced to do it again.

I shook my head at the memory. I had been so naïve back then. How could I have possibly thought that Edward Cullen would ever consider *me* pretty? Or that he would ever bother flirting with me in the first place unless he had something to gain from it? I was not pretty. My appearance was plain. Everything about me was either plain or broken. I had been naïve and I had let him get away with stealing my homework. Because of him, I had gotten in trouble for not managing to finish the homework again. Of course I got in trouble for not completing the assignment, while Edward got an A on his homework... or should I say *my* homework?

I jumped back down on the floor and the dust whirled around my feet. Some of it came up to my face and I sneezed, the sound echoing through the almost empty room.

I walked back to the piano and pulled back the sheet, exposing a part of the piano in the process. I wanted to admire the beautiful, black piano. The finish was still smooth and shiny. It was a pity that no one ever got to use it anymore. I had often wondered why it had never been brought down to the new music room next to the cafeteria. Instead, they had just brought the guitars and drums, along with the smaller woodwind and percussion instruments. Maybe the grand piano was simply too big and heavy to move. It wasn't worth the effort since they had planned on getting the music room back up here when the renovations were finished, anyway.

As if that were ever going to happen.

I put the sheet back, sheathing the piano back into hiding.

It was at times like this that I really wished that I had any musical talent whatsoever. It could really benefit in getting my emotions out in the form of music. It would be such a beautiful way of expressing myself; as opposed to writing countless pages of worthless days in my journals about how bad I have felt recently and how I have been wishing for the relief of death.

It wasn't like I could go to a therapist and talk about what happened. I wasn't allowed to talk about what happened at all— not with anyone. Not even with the people involved. Well, it wasn't like I could talk to them, anyway...

Instead, I had to live in a lie and pretend it never happened. If someone asked about it, I was to give them the lousy cover-up story. The same one we gave the hospital when they took care of my wounds.

A cover-up story that made me responsible for everything that had happened.

I absentmindedly pulled up my sleeve and was about to scratch my arm, but when my fingers touched the scars, I flinched and looked down. I stared at the scars like it was the first time I'd ever seen them and felt sick to my stomach. They disgusted me, but no more than the person who inflicted them did.

The bell rang, signaling that it was time for lunch.

I left the music room, and walked back down stairs. I reached my locker and grabbed my lunch bag, making my way outside and sitting down under the tree where I usually ate lunch whenever the weather was nice enough. It was kind of odd sitting outside and eating when it was already November, especially since this was Forks. Having any kind of good weather this late in the year was pretty miraculous. Though it was a little chilly, it was possible to eat outside as long as I had my jacket on.

"Haha, look, there's Isabella who never had a fella!" someone called out.

"When are you gonna become a Swan? Aren't you tired of being an ugly duckling yet, Swan?" someone else called out. The laughter ensued as it always did.

I tried to ignore the remarks, but felt my cheeks flush crimson anyway. I was used to their nasty comments, but that didn't mean that it had become any easier to hear it over the last few months.

I nibbled at my homemade chicken sandwich and tried to force the food down my throat. My body was resisting. It didn't want the food, but I kept pushing it down, anyway, fighting the urge to spit it all out. I took a bigger bite and I guess I forced it down too quickly because it got stuck in my throat and I began to choke.

Perfect.

I would have rolled my eyes at myself for being so stupid, but the big lump of sandwich wedged in my throat kept me from thinking about anything but the need to get air into my lungs. I coughed violently and crossed hands at my throat– the universal sign for choking. I wasn't getting any air and my eyes were watering.

I looked around as I stood up, hoping that someone would notice me and help me. I realized that they were all already looking at me. But no one was coming to help me. Instead, they were standing around and laughing at me.

They were laughing and pointing as I was slowly choking to death.

Maybe that was a good thing? *Death by sandwich* . Perhaps it wasn't the most ideal way to go, but beggars can't be choosers, right?

"Dear God! Are you guys insane! Somebody help her!" a tinkling voice shouted... finally.

It wasn't hard to recognize that bell-like voice. There was only one person who sounded like a fairy in our school. That would be Alice Brandon, a tiny pixie-looking girl with short black hair, who was always dressed in designer clothes. Even in gym.

She ran over to me and I wanted to roll my eyes, but I was afraid that they'd roll all the way back.

Cue the irony; the only person willing to help me was the only person who couldn't. There was no chance in hell that tiny Alice, who was barely five foot tall, would be able to help *me* .

But I had been proven wrong before, and this was no exception.

Alice wrapped her seemingly tiny arms around my waist from behind, clasped her hands together right under my ribs, and pressed hard. It didn't take more than one push for me to cough up the soggy piece of my sandwich that had been caught in my throat. I spat it out onto the ground as soon as it was freed from the confines of my throat.

I coughed a few times, feeling relieved that the obstruction was gone and I could take a few deep breaths. She let go of me and walked around so she was standing in front of me.

"You alright, Isabella?" she asked, putting a hand on my shoulder. I smiled meekly.

"I'm fine, thanks," I replied with a scratchy voice.

She smiled at me softly. "Anytime," she remarked casually, before scampering off.

People were still looking at me. Some were still laughing their asses off at my expense. My face was burning in embarrassment as I quickly gathered my things and walked off towards school.

I spent the remainder of lunch locked in one of the stalls of the girls' bathroom. I took extremely small bites of my sandwich, paranoid that

I would end up choking again. Alice probably wouldn't be there next time to save me if it happened again.

The good thing was that I could now cross that off my list of possible ways to die. Choking was obviously not an option; it was too uncomfortable and unsettling.

Death by sandwich? No thank you.

I parked my truck outside our house and noticed that the police cruiser was parked by the curb as per usual when my dad was home. I guess he was home. I really wasn't in the mood to see or talk to him— especially after the day I'd had.

I walked inside, not bothering to call out 'hello' since the loud rumble from my truck engine already alerted anyone within a ten mile radius to my presence.

Dad came out from the kitchen; he was still dressed in his chief uniform, with his gun in the holster on his belt.

"Your mom called," he announced casually, as if it meant absolutely nothing.

I flinched at the mere mention of her.

"She wants you to call her back," he clarified when I didn't answer.

"Oh, yeah! That is *exactly* what I want to do. Let's go call up Mother Dearest and see how she's been! " I retorted sarcastically, as I started towards the stairs.

"She's your mother," he replied sternly. "And she wants you to call her; you need to speak with her."

"I'm not gonna call her and I wish she would stop asking me to!" I muttered angrily as I stomped my way up the stairs and towards my bedroom. I would be the epitome of teen angst right about now.

I slammed the door behind me, making the thin walls quiver. I dropped my bag on the floor and threw myself on my bed.

I hated my mother and I hated my father for nagging me about calling her.

Another teenage cliché, I'm sure. Was there any teenager out there who hadn't uttered those precise words at some point? But even if they did, I had my doubts about whether or not it was earned. My hatred of my mother was well earned— and she knew that too. That's why it pissed me off that she wouldn't let me be.

It had only been three months. Did she really think I was going to get over it so *quickly* ? Did she really think that I was going to actually *forgive* her?

There was no way that would ever happen.

Tedious

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Note: [**Beta'ed by:** Project Team Beta]

Chapter 2 - Tedious

Edward Cullen POV - Four days before the accident

Fuck. Fuck. Fuck . Fuck in a bucket full of fuck ! Who was the asshole who thought it was a good idea to let old people drive? If I had any fucking say in it I would see to it that people over fifty weren't legally allowed to drive. I wouldn't mind revoking my dad's license either, even though he was barely pushing forty. He was driving me insane by driving like an old lady.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" I asked turning to my dad, as he gently put on the turn signal. He took his time making the turn, careful not to move his hands from the ten-and-two position. Did anyone drive like that after they passed the driver's test, except my dad? No. The fucking answer was no. No one held the damn wheel like that.

He chuckled at me.

"What's the hurry, son?" he asked and smiled, amused.

"The hurry is that I want my fucking car and at the speed you're driving we won't make it to Port Angeles until next week if we're lucky," I huffed and slumped down in the leather seat.

"I wouldn't complain about my driving if I were you, seeing as it's your car that's in the shop and not mine," he replied smugly.

"Like that's even remotely my fault," I said and gritted my teeth.
"Fucking Newton rear-ended me and if Emmett hadn't stopped me, I would have chopped his fucking head off."

"Yes, you would have, so I'm thankful your brother was there to stop you," he replied calmly.

I snorted in response. *I* wasn't thankful at all. That imbecile Mike Newton should know better than to rear-end my car and dent it like he did. *Fucking idiot*. I wondered how the hell he managed to get a license. I bet he had the ten-and-two position down to a science too.

It had been a week since Newton hit my car. I had been backing out from my usual spot on the school parking lot and out of nowhere that idiot plowed right into me. He was scared shitless as I stepped out of my car, marched up to him and pulled him out of his car by his collar.

I was just about to punch him right in the face when Emmett stepped up and pulled me away.

"Not worth it, bro," he had said simply as he pulled me away, to a safe distance from Newton.

But my attention wasn't on either of them anymore. Instead I had looked over at my car and the injury Newton had inflicted on my baby.

I had never loved anyone like I loved my car. My car was my baby. The love of my fucking existence and anyone who messed with her was messing with me. I *know* it's probably insane to be so attached to a piece of metal, but that car had brought me more pleasure than any girl ever could. So excuse me for feeling affection for my shiny silver baby.

"You're fucking dead, Newton," I growled and glared at him. I took silent pleasure in seeing his face contorted in panic, he was practically peeing his pants in fear. But the sight wasn't amusing enough to make up for the damage he had done. I didn't even care that his car had ended up worse than mine had.

His fucking car wasn't even worth the gas in the tank. It would be cheaper for him to buy a new damn car than to repair the damage to his old one. Maybe that was just as well, seeing as it was insulting for my Volvo to even be in the same parking lot as his piece of crap car.

It was almost as insulting as it was to have it parked in the same lot as Isabella Swan's ridiculous excuse for a car. It was a big, red and rusty truck with a bulbous cab and an open truck bed. It was dirty, loud, and it smelled like oil. I had no idea what she had been thinking when she got it, but she was clearly out of her fucking mind seeing as she seemed to *enjoy* driving it.

We finally hit the highway and I almost wanted to fucking high-five my father for finally finding the damn gas pedal. After an eternity in Dad's hospital-smelling black Mercedes, we finally made it to Port Angeles and to the shop that had repaired my baby.

My baby was parked outside, and I didn't even care to go inside with my dad to pay for the repairs. Instead I walked right up to my baby and stepped around her several times, examining every little inch of her. I saw to it that they didn't accidentally add to her suffering and that every little flaw Newton had put on her was gone and that she was now as good as new.

After a ten minute survey, I could fortunately see that my baby was indeed as good as new. They had even given her a wax. She was shinier than ever.

My dad walked over to me and handed me the keys.

"I'll call Mrs. Newton tonight and tell her about the expense of the repairs, you don't need to bother Mike with it," Dad said to me, and I rolled my eyes.

"Oh c'mon, you don't trust me?" I asked innocently and he shook his head. "You think I'm gonna tell him that it cost five grand to fix her?"

"It's unsettling that you keep insisting to refer to your car as a she," he replied, shaking his head.

"And it's unsettling that you drive like an old lady, but you don't hear me complaining," I retorted as I unlocked the car. He cocked an eyebrow at me, silently reminding me that I *always* complained about his driving. I rolled my eyes at him and snorted. "Fuck you."

He chuckled and started towards his car.

"Go to school now, boy, and keep out of trouble," he called to me over his shoulder.

"That's like asking the sun to stop shining. It just can't be done," I called back, before getting into the car. I groaned loudly when I felt that the seat was pulled back too far and not at all in its usual position. I couldn't even reach the damn pedals. This was one of the most obvious reasons why I never let anyone drive my car – they always messed with it.

It took me fifteen minutes to get everything in order again; the seat, the mirrors and even the damn radio. I didn't even want to know why someone had the radio set to a rap-station. Rap wasn't music. It was torture. I'd rather cut off my ears, like Van Gogh or some shit, than listen to that crap.

I drove back to school, with soft classical music playing from the stereo. I relaxed in the seat and smiled to myself. The soft music, combined with the soft purr of the engine, was easily my single favorite sound in the world. Nothing beat it. Nothing.

I pulled into the parking lot at school just in time for lunch.

I drove past my usual spot, not taking any chances with driving-impaired Newton again, and parked on the spot closest to the entrance instead. It was marked with Principal Greene's name, but I could care less about that as I smoothly pulled the car into the space. I turned off the engine and stepped out of the car, and as soon as I did I felt dread wash over me.

I really didn't enjoy this place. I hated school. The guys all acted like I was some kind of hero to look up to and the girls got off just by looking at me. Not that I minded the girl thing. Who was I to deny if a girl wanted me to fuck her senseless? Just because I used that to my advantage, didn't mean I didn't find it tedious at times. There was no challenge in fucking the girls in this school, and sometimes it would be nice to have something more with a girl than just a five-minute fuck in the janitor's closet. Sometimes I wished I could get the same fucking connection with a girl that I had with my Volvo. I guess that wasn't in the damn stars or something.

I put my hands in my pockets as I walked towards the entrance. I really wasn't in the mood for this shit.

The halls were filled with roaming students as I walked in. It didn't matter where I looked, there were people waving at me and nodding nonchalantly at me as I passed. Like I was some sort of fucking royalty. Which I guess I kind of was in this school. Who else would it be? I had been fortunate enough to be blessed with good genes, being born with great looks; of course I would become royalty because of it.

Not even the ridiculous and unnatural looking bronze-color that was my hair did anything to hinder my popularity. Instead the girls seemed to be even more drawn to me by it. They loved dragging their fingers through it and making it even more unruly. I guess my hair was my trademark, if I ever had one. I guess girls really dig the fact that it's totally out of control. I gave up on trying to tame it a long time ago. It can't even be beat with products, so I quit trying. The

bronze mess on *my* head gave me more head than I ever thought possible.

"Eddie!" an annoying voice called me.

I turned around and glared at the only person who ever dared to call me that.

"Rosalie," I replied with a nod.

"So, do you have your baby back yet?" she asked as she hooked arms with me and dragged me towards the cafeteria.

"Yes, I just got back from Port Angeles, they even gave her a fucking wax," I replied.

"Well I know how you like your girls waxed," she replied sarcastically.

"Can't argue with that," I smirked and she rolled her eyes.

Rosalie was a pain in the ass but she was sexy as all hell. The only reason I put up with her crap, and she with mine for that matter, was the fact that she is my brother's girlfriend, along with the fact that I had never slept with her.

Crazy, right? There's actually a girl in this school I hadn't slept with and that girl just happened to be one of the hottest girls in this place. I didn't mind though. I didn't want to sleep with Rosalie anyway - she might be sexy but I had a hard time imagining me fucking her and it was nice to have a friend who was a girl who didn't want to get into my pants. Pain in the ass or not.

She made me carry her tray of food to our usual table outside, where we always sat when the weather was alright, which frankly wasn't often in rainy Forks. She sat down next to Emmett. He put his meaty arm around her and she smiled at him before he leaned forward and kissed her. *God, they are disgusting.*

It didn't take long for the remainder of our group to make their appearance. Pixie-girl herself, Alice, and her boyfriend – and Rosalie's brother – Jasper. Alice was another member of the small club of girls I hadn't slept with and it had nothing to do with the fact that she had been together with Jasper for forever, but because – honestly – she scared the living crap out of me. She might be a tiny little human but she had the power of a giant. Nobody ever said no to Alice and when she got angry, you pissed yourself.

We were talking about nothing in particular, as we usually did, when suddenly we heard people all around us starting to whisper and laugh. We looked around in confusion, to see what got people so riled up.

"Oh God," Jasper groaned under his breath.

I followed his gaze and saw none other than Isabella Swan standing under a tree coughing violently, while she looked around panicked. She was obviously choking and the students were just laughing and pointing at her. What the fuck was this shit? Did they actually enjoy watching her die a painful death? Not that I liked her, that Swan chick was a damn freak and I wouldn't touch her with a stick. But come on? To laugh in her face while she choked wasn't fucking human.

I *almost* considered going over to help her – just because I'm such a considerate human being. But Alice beat me to the punch and pushed past me as she ran over to her.

"Dear God! Are you guys insane? Somebody help her!" she yelled frantically.

We watched as she stepped behind Swan and did the Heimlich-maneuver. Swan spat out whatever she had been choking on and coughed a few times before saying something to Alice. Alice smiled and nodded, before making her way back over to us.

People were still pointing and laughing, but did so now a little more discretely than before.

I watched as Swan picked up her stuff and quickly left the scene of the crime and disappeared from sight. I sighed and rolled my eyes.

"Fucking idiot," I muttered. How much of a freak was she if she couldn't even eat like a normal person without choking?

"This coming from the guy who just sat there. Doing nothing," Rosalie replied and smiled sweetly at me. She obviously mistook my comment as being pointed at the general student body, and not at Swan herself.

"Alice beat me to the punch. Besides, I wasn't laughing," I muttered. I didn't bother to correct her as I grabbed a French fry from Emmett's tray. He protested wildly and I rolled my eyes, "It's just a fucking fry."

"People can be so mean, especially to her. It's not like she ever did anything to them," Alice said with a frown.

"Yeah, so? Is that a requisite for people to like her, just because she hasn't done shit to them? C'mon Al, she's a freak. She doesn't talk to anyone and she sits by herself and from what I hear she never showers after gym. Pretty disgusting if you ask me," I replied and snatched another fry, without Emmett noticing.

"Well, I have it on good authority that the reason she doesn't shower after gym is because she hasn't attended a single class in three months," Rosalie replied with a bored tone.

"And how would you know?" I asked.

"Because I'm in that class, you moron," she replied and shook her head, "Sometimes you can be so dense."

"And sometimes you can be such a bitch," I retorted and stood up.

"Hey, don't talk to my lady like that," Emmett argued.

"Why? You talk to my lady like that," I replied.

"Oh God, I wouldn't be surprised if I one day find you with your dick in the exhaust pipe, fucking your precious car," Emmett groaned and pretended to shiver.

"Sometimes you can be so fucking immature," I sighed as I walked away.

"At least I don't get turned on by a car!" he called after me.

I turned around and tilted my head lightly to the side.

"You don't? Oh, then it must been another brother I walked in on when he bent his slutty girlfriend over the hood of the car she was working on," I replied loud enough for the people around us to hear. People laughed but Emmett wasn't embarrassed. Nothing ever embarrassed him.

"Oh c'mon, it wasn't the car that turned me on. It was the way my Rosie's ass looked when she bent over, you fuck face," he replied without missing a beat and I just laughed at him.

I went back inside and when I walked down the hallway towards my locker, I was met by the bombshell that was Tanya Denali. Shit, the jeans she was wearing were cut so low they were practically at her knees. I wouldn't mind bending her over the hood of my car... *no wait* , yes I would mind. *No fucking around the car.*

"Oh Edward," she purred and put her hands against my chest. "I missed you this morning..."

She pouted with her full lips, and I smirked.

"Of course you did sweetheart, but I had to get my girl," I replied as I traced her bottom lip with my finger. Her eyes widened at my words.

"What girl?" she all but shrieked.

"The girl who belongs here," I replied and touched my heart.

She gaped at me and I chuckled.

"Janitor's closet, the one by the office, after next period," I said to her, changing the subject.

"But we almost got caught last time!" she said, looking slightly panicked.

"I won't force you, I can obviously find someone else to fill my need," I replied simply.

"Of course I'll be there," she said, immediately backtracking. I smirked and nodded, before pushing past her and walking off.

It was ridiculous what I could get away with when it came to these girls. If I said jump, they jumped. If I said suck, they sucked. If I said fuck me on the football field after the dance, they were already naked and waiting when I got there.

Though I enjoyed the endless line of casual sex, I still found myself disgusted by myself at times. But I don't think it was about the sex, I think it just was about me. I kept wishing for that "special" connection with a girl, when in reality I never even gave them a chance to "connect" with me. Because as soon as my dick connected with her pussy, and we both had gotten off, the "connection" was broken and I either pushed her out of my bed or quickly left hers.

What can I say? I'm not a cuddler. I never got the act of cuddling, and maybe it's because I just hadn't found "the one" yet.

Not like I believed in that shit.

I had been raised in a loving home, with a picture perfect family. With a dad who was a doctor, a mom who worked as an interior designer and a cool big brother who didn't mind lending out condoms when I had emptied my own stash. My parents had always showed each

other affection and they seemed to be as in love now as they were when they met. Sometimes they acted like they were still teenagers who were experiencing their first crush.

If that didn't make one believe in "true love", then I don't know what would.

I still didn't believe. Just because my parents happened to stumbled over the person who completed them didn't mean I would. What were the odds that it would happen to me anyway? Where was I supposed to meet this supposed "one"? Here in Forks? Not likely.

God, I was such a girl. I needed to grow a pair.

I turned around quickly, and looked down the hallway.

"Hey Tanya!" I called out.

She had reached the end of the hall, but she heard me and turned around.

"Yes?" she called back softly.

"Janitor's closet. Now." I wasn't asking. I was demanding.

She smiled widely as she skipped her way to me, but I didn't even bother to enjoy the view that was her bouncing tits. Instead I quickly made my way to the janitor's closet and dragged her inside.

I closed the doors and unzipped my pants.

"What do you want to do?" she asked with something that probably was supposed to be a seductive voice but only sounded pathetic to me. I cocked an eyebrow at her.

"I'm not here to please you," I replied coolly and she got the hint as she sat down on her knees.

"Fuck Edward, this is the last time I'm gonna give you head in a fucking closet," she whined. She was trying to sound stern and serious, but only ended up sounding like she was asking more than she was demanding. It would have been endearing if it wasn't so pathetic.

"That's what you said last time," I replied sweetly and put a hand on her head, "Now shut the fuck up and do your job."

Anxious

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by:** Sonja & Freddy for Project Team Beta]

Chapter 3 - Anxious

Isabella Swan POV - Three days before the accident.

Sixty seconds. I had no more time than that. Fifty seconds maybe. No, probably around thirty.

My alarm clock blinked from 05:59 to 06:00 and the alarm sounded.

I guess I didn't even have thirty seconds. Of course, I never had the time I thought I had.

I turned off the alarm with a sigh, before climbing out of bed and making my way to the bathroom.

I made sure to not look at myself in the mirror as I undressed and put my pajamas in the hamper. I turned on the shower and stepped into the cold. I was not in the mood to look at myself right now, so I turned my head up against the spray and closed my eyes. I scrubbed my body clean and tried to ignore the uneven feeling when I let my hands scrub over my scars. I bit my lip in order not to scream.

Last night had been the worst in weeks. I had woken up, drenched in sweat, several times during the night. The event from the previous day, me choking during lunch, was replaying in my dreams over and over again, but every time it turned out different. The first time, Alice

did help me out. The next time, she didn't, and the people laughed even more as I slowly died. The worst one, though, was the dream when they closed in on me as I looked at them pleadingly, hoping someone would save me. No one ever did.

The story of my life - I never had the time I thought I did, and nobody would ever save me.

I washed the strawberry-scented body wash off and put some in my hair to put the scent into it. The scent always reminded me of better times. Times where I wasn't disfigured. Times where my family was still whole. And a time where I thought everything would end up okay and that I had a future.

That was back in the days when I was naïve and still believed a girl like me had a shot at life, before life decided to teach me a lesson. And the lesson was that girls like me never catch a break and we are not meant for greatness. Hell, we're not even meant for mediocre. We're meant to break. That's what we're born to do. And that was what I was doing. Slowly breaking apart.

I stepped out of the shower and patted my body dry, once again careful not to look down.

This was easily the worst part of my day. I could take the bullying and name-calling in school, and I would trade an eternity for it, if it meant that I would never need to be naked again.

I put on my bathrobe and walked back to my room while drying my hair with a towel. When I got in my room, I threw the towel on the floor and went over to my closet. I never gave much thought as to what I was wearing, as long as it was long-sleeved and didn't show any skin. I was lucky we were living in rainy Forks, since it never got too hot here,

Not like anyone ever noticed what I was wearing anyway. People didn't pay any attention to me, as long as they weren't in the mood to bring somebody down. Little did they know that I couldn't fall any

lower than I already was. I was at rock bottom, and the only way to go from there was to dig myself six feet under and stay there.

And to make that possible I needed to get a prescription.

That reminded me that I had planned on calling the doctor's office yesterday. I had forgotten all about it when I came home after school and my dad distracted me by telling me that mom called.

I wrote a reminder on a post-it and stuck it on my computer screen before getting dressed.

As I brushed my hair mindlessly, I thought about what kind of prescription I would ask for, and what I would be able to get away with. Something I could OD on, of course. What would be the point otherwise?

I should google it during study hall .

I gathered my school-stuff in my bag and went downstairs. My dad had already left for work and the kitchen was a mess. The man couldn't wash his dishes even if his life depended on it. He was a slob and I wondered how my mom ever put up with his crap... but then again, my dad had to put up with a lot of crap from her side too when they were married, so they probably balanced each other out. The slob-thing was nothing compared to all the issues my mom brought to the table.

I grabbed the last clean glass from the cupboard and opened the fridge to get the orange juice. I only got half a glass.

Glass half empty.

I threw away the empty carton and wrote down "orange juice" on the grocery list that hung on the refrigerator door. The list was growing long, and if I wanted to have any dinner I should visit the grocery store on my way home from school. Dad sure as hell wouldn't do it. He never did any shopping, even if I told him we were out of food.

He would rather eat at the Lodge, the town's only sorry excuse for a restaurant, than go grocery shopping. Besides, he never cooked anyway. He was a lazy man, if not a practical one. He never bothered with anything if he could get someone else to do it.

Which made the fact that he was a police officer pretty ironic.

In his job he had to take charge and take control over situations before they got out of hand. He couldn't pin it on somebody else. He did his job, and surprisingly, he did it well. I'm still convinced that the only reason he ever became an officer was because he wanted to wear a uniform and carry a gun. We all know how much the ladies love the uniform. That's what brought my mom his way. Poor guy, he never stood a chance when the brown haired beauty decided to put her claws in him.

People still spoke about how in love they were and how nothing could ever break them apart. They were living a fairytale life, just loving each other for almost two years before I came along and spoiled the party.

My dad would never blame me for what happened three months ago, though my mom sure did. Still, I could see it in his eyes that he sometimes thought I deserved it somehow. Even if I lived a thousand years, I would never understand how a father could honestly think his daughter deserved getting disfigured like I was now.

I didn't like thinking about it so I rarely did, but sometimes I couldn't help the thoughts that snuck into my mind.

I drank my juice and quickly washed the glass before putting it on the empty dish rack, gritting my teeth in the process. We didn't have any clean plates or glasses in the cupboard, but still the dish rack was empty? How hard was it to wash a few dishes anyway?

I glanced at the clock; it was a little before seven thirty. I still had a good forty minutes before school started. Although it wasn't a long drive for others, it would be for me. My car was too old and worn to

go over forty miles per hour, and when I tried to push it the car only growled and made unhealthy noises. It was practically screaming at me that it would break down if I didn't slow down. Even though my big red truck had its limitations, I still loved it. It had its flaws, but so did I. We were perfect for each other and I wouldn't trade it for anything.

Not even for a stupid shiny Volvo.

I walked out the front door, and locked it safely behind me. It was raining today and I broke my umbrella last week, so a fat load of good it would do me now.

I pulled up the hood of my jacket and quickly made my way over the muddy ground to my truck. I almost slipped when I stopped by my car, but I managed to grab hold of the truck before I landed flat on my ass in the mud, and getting my sorry ass late to school because I had to go change.

My car wasn't locked because I just didn't see the point. Nobody would want to steal this piece of junk anyway. I opened the door and climbed in as quickly as I could trying not to let the rain soak me more than necessarily.

The cabin of the car smelled like oil and I wouldn't be surprised if the engine was leaking again. I had it fixed just a few weeks prior. I sighed as I turned the key and the engine roared loudly to life. It almost sounded like thunder.

The radio in my car was old and outdated. It had broken down during the summer and I never bothered to get it fixed. So I rode to school in silence. The only sound surrounding me was the loud roaring of the engine and though it was loud and I would probably end up getting hearing impaired, I still found it relaxing because it was familiar. Things were constantly changing, but my truck wasn't. The loud roar was constant and it was comforting to know.

I made it to school with ten minutes to spare. I saw that Edward Cullen had parked in the Principal's spot again, and I wanted to roll my eyes. He was begging for trouble, but I guess that just turned him on. Just like yesterday, when I saw him leave the janitor's closet with Tanya. He made a big deal about zipping up his pants, though he tried to make it look nonchalant. As if he wanted everybody to see him and realize what he did, before he walked off towards biology without giving Tanya a second glance. She followed him with his gaze, as she discretely wiped the corner of her mouth.

You didn't need to be a genius to understand what went down in there. Or *who* went down in there, I should say. There was no need for Edward to make a show about zipping up his pants, because everybody already knew. High school students might be stupid in general, but when it came to sex, they all knew the signs.

It was things like that which made it obvious that he wanted to get caught and get into trouble. If the Principal would have been a woman then Edward probably would have tried to flirt his way out of it, as he had no shame. I wondered what the hell was wrong with him, why he kept doing what he did... what was he trying to prove? That he was a bigger jackass than we already thought?

I quickly made my way towards the building, the rain had ceased but seeing as this was Forks, it was only a matter of time before it would start up again.

I kept my eyes down when I walked through the hallway, trying to make myself as small as possible. I dumped my stuff in my locker, and grabbed my history textbook, and the homework from my bag, before shutting the locker with my foot.

I shuffled my feet to the classroom, and took my usual seat in the back. Nobody ever sat down beside me and for that I was glad. I couldn't handle it when people got too close. Even yesterday, when Alice grabbed me to save my life I was panicked. Although I knew she was only trying to help me.

The last person who ever touched me with affection was the one who hurt me the most, so excuse me for not liking it when people touched me.

The rest of the day went by without much incident. I knew better than to push my luck by eating in public again, so I decided to lock myself in a stall in the girl's bathroom. Since I didn't grab any food from home, I still had to go by the cafeteria and buy my lunch.

The line was moving slowly and I was stuck between a nerdy freshman and two giggling girls. The girls were standing behind me and their perfume was sticking me in my nose. I assumed they bathed in it, since the smell was so strong and concentrated. If I had been turned towards them my eyes probably would have watered by the stench.

"I swear! She told me herself!" one of the girls said excitedly.

"But Mike Newton? C'mon, she can do so much better," the other girl complained.

"Doubt it," the first girl snorted, "Edward hasn't looked at her twice since they slept together at that party. I don't even think he knows her name. And have you seen her nose? I don't think she has the right to be picky. She got her round with Edward, and now she needs to settle with whatever God throws at her."

"Even if it's Mike Newton?"

"Even if it's Mike Newton," she agreed seriously, before bursting into a fit of giggles again. "Did you see her hair this morning?"

"I almost feel sorry for her. Jessica should know better than to get a perm. It's so... eighties. Seriously," the other girl said smacking her lips in disgust.

I tuned them out as I finally reached the register and paid for a soggy sandwich, an apple and a bottle of water. The girls were still giggling

when I passed them on my way back out.

"Duck!" one of them called after me.

"Goose!" the other chimed in.

Several students in the line laughed, but I let it roll off me. I didn't make a face, I didn't roll my eyes and I most definitely didn't say anything back. Instead I walked as quickly as I could, without tripping, towards the bathroom.

I locked myself into a stall and put the lid down on the toilet so I could sit down. I took a deep breath to collect myself, before I unwrapped my sandwich.

"... *she do anyway?*"

I only caught the end of the sentence as I heard the door open and the familiar clinking of heels. I slowly bended my knees, and hugged them to me, so they wouldn't see my feet under the door. I didn't know who had come in, but I really wasn't in the mood to get harassed right now. I just wanted to eat my lunch in peace.

"You are getting too invested in this girl. Who do you think you are, Mother Teresa? Yesterday you saved her from choking, and now you're gonna defend her honor in the lunch line? C'mon!" an annoyed voice replied.

My ears peeked, as I realized they were talking about me. Who else choked on their food yesterday? I assumed the annoyed voice belonged to Alice's friend, Rosalie Hale. The only girl who could put Tanya Denali's beauty to shame and of course she was dating Edward's scary looking big brother, Emmett, who looked like he was on steroids.

"She obviously doesn't want to stand up for herself, so somebody's gotta do it. Right?" Alice replied easily.

"Somebody, nobody, it's a fine line," Rosalie replied with a bored tone. "I just think you shouldn't bother. She's obviously a lost cause. What did she do to you to deserve your protection anyway?"

"Nothing, but that's exactly the reason I'm doing it. Because she has done nothing wrong or right to me or, to anyone else for that matter," Alice replied with conviction. I wanted to snort at her comment. She obviously didn't know anything, because I had done my fair share of "wrongs" against people, and I had the scars to prove it.

"Why can't you find a normal hobby, like most people?" Rosalie sighed. "What happened to good old shopping?"

Alice laughed, and the bell-like chiming echoed through the almost empty bathroom.

"I would never give up on shopping, you know that," Alice replied cheerily, "but helping a fellow human isn't about hobbies, it's about being a respectable human being."

"I see someone's been watching re-runs of Dr. Phil again," Rosalie mocked.

"Just because you don't have a heart doesn't mean I shouldn't be using mine," Alice replied.

"I should be insulted, but sadly, I'm not," Rosalie replied with a smile in her voice. "C'mon, let's go. We wouldn't want to keep the boys waiting."

Alice laughed again, and I heard the door open and the clinking sound from their high heels faded as the door swung shut behind them.

I didn't move for several moments because I was too angry. I didn't even move my legs until they were on the verge of falling asleep.

The superior complex seemed to be a trait that they shared in their circle of friends. Alice obviously had been hanging out too much with Edward.

I was furious over the fact that Alice thought I needed saving; that I needed someone to protect me from all the vile things people did and said to me. Like she could even make the slightest difference. She didn't know me and I didn't know her. We weren't friends. We hadn't even spoken to each other at all since junior high - if you don't count the brief encounter we had yesterday. So why was she bothering now?

Rosalie was most likely right, Alice was obviously just looking for a new hobby. She probably wanted a charity case to make over and form as she wished. I must say though, that Alice was mistaken if she thought I would be that charity case.

Alice was wrong about another thing too; I didn't need anyone to stand up for myself. Didn't she get that I was trying to fade into the background and become invisible? There was a reason why I never fought back and it was surprising that Alice didn't get that. I guess she had her head so far up her ass that she wouldn't know left from right, or when it was time to back the hell off. Just because she saved my life didn't mean we were going to be best friends forever now.

The things Alice said almost hurt more than all the bad things I heard daily. Alice made me out to be a weak person and I honestly didn't see myself that way. A weak person wouldn't even bother getting up in the morning.

I ate the rest of my lunch, silently brooding over what just went down. Just like yesterday, I ate everything in small pieces, careful not to choke. For someone who really wanted to die, I was sure as hell careful not to let it happen.

The warning bell rang and I knew it was time for me to leave the comfort of the stall, and make my way to biology. I shuffled my feet

towards the biology classroom, after a brief stop by my locker. I really wasn't in the mood for this crap. I just wanted to go home, call a doctor, get a prescription, and die.

I wonder when I should do it... should I set a date ? I thought to myself, as I sat down on an empty seat in the back of the classroom. I was thankful that we didn't have assigned seats in this class. The room was buzzing with the talk of the other students, and I tuned them all out.

Should I buy flowers, throw the petals all around, and light a candle? Maybe not. What if dad doesn't find me and I end up burning the house down?

Okay. No candles, but what else would I need?

Should I write a note? What should it say? "This is all your fault, thanks and goodbye"?

I shook my head at the thought. No, I wasn't going to write a note, and I wasn't going to buy any stupid flowers. I was just going to take the pills and go to sleep and never wake up again.

No muss, no fuss.

I leaned back in my chair with a satisfied smile on my face, but the smile faded as someone came in and gave our teacher, Mr. Melina, a note. He read the note and turned to look at me.

"Isabella Swan, they want you in the Principal's office," he said.

The room fell silent, and everybody turned to stare at me. I felt my face grow hot and I quickly gathered my things, not even bothering to ask what the note said and why I was called there. I never got in trouble in school, so what the hell would they want from me now?

Someone snickered as I passed them, and I stumbled out of the classroom with a face that was on fire. I didn't go by my locker, to

drop of my books; instead I went directly to the office. I didn't want to push my luck and I just wanted to get whatever was going on over and done with.

The principal's assistant looked up from her desk and I noticed she was doing a crossword puzzle – *what a great waste of government funds* - when I walked in. She gave me a friendly smile and nodded.

"Isabella Swan? Mr. Greene will be with you in a moment," she said, before turning her attention back to the crossword puzzle.

I sat down and waited, my leg was bouncing up and down anxiously. *What was taking so long?* It felt like I had waited for over an hour before the door to his office opened, but when I glanced at the clock I realized it had barely been three minutes.

"Miss Swan? Please come in," Mr. Greene said to me with a gentle smile and stepped aside so I could walk in. I looked down at the floor as I passed him and sat down slowly in the lone chair in front of his large desk.

He closed the door, walked around his desk and sat down. He leaned forward and clasped his hands on his desk. The gesture felt very formal and it scared me.

"I assume you know why you're in here," he said, still with that gentle smile. I hugged my books to my chest, and shook my head as I looked away from the scrutiny of his gaze. He sighed. "It's come to my attention that you refuse to attend gym class and Coach Hunter says she hasn't seen you in class at all for the past three months. I understand that what happened back then inhibited you from participating, and though I'm not going to force you to participate in the class along with your friends I do wish you to attend. Your absence will go on your permanent record, and you will need to pass gym in order to graduate. Do you understand?"

I nodded and stared out the window. I got it, but I didn't need to worry about passing gym anyway, since I wouldn't be graduating.

Because I wouldn't be alive when graduation rolled around .

"I said, do you understand?" he repeated, and I turned my eyes to him.

He was no longer smiling, and I assumed it was all a show from the beginning, in a wasted effort to make me feel comfortable.

"Yes, sir," I replied quietly.

"Good," he nodded sternly, "Because we believe we have cut you enough slack, and you need to pull yourself together and pass your classes." He looked down at my file that he had in front of him, and frowned, "And I see you're failing Art as well. I honestly didn't know that was even humanly possible."

Of course it was humanly possible. The way to fail art was the same way I was obviously failing gym. I quit going. I didn't say this aloud, of course, I wasn't about to fuel the fire.

"What is going on? You had straight A's when we left for summer, and now you're falling behind and you're averaging B's and C's in all your classes," he frowned. "Do you want me to set up an appointment with the school psychiatrist?"

I wanted to scoff at the question, but I held it back considering it probably wasn't an appropriate response. What did he think I would talk to her about? Was I supposed to talk about the thing that *didn't* happen? Talking wouldn't get me anywhere.

I shook my head no and he sighed in frustration.

"I hate to see you waste away your future like this, Miss Swan. With your track record it wouldn't have surprised me if you ended up with a full scholarship and a spot in an Ivy League..." he trailed off and shook his head, "if this is about a boy..."

I looked at him incredulously, was he serious? He saw my glare and he sighed.

"Or if it's just a rebellious phase... I don't know. I think it would do you good if you talked to someone, and you'll see that things aren't as hard as you think."

He sounded so sure of himself, like he honestly believed that all I needed was to talk to someone once a week for a month, and everything would go back to normal. Like normal even existed in my world anymore.

"Can I go?" I asked quietly, careful not to look at him.

"Yes, you may leave, and think about what I've said, okay?" Though he wasn't asking really, he was demanding. I nodded once, before standing up and leaving the room.

What was the worst thing he could do if I refused to do what he asked? Suspend me? Yeah, like I would be able to get to class in order to pass them then.

I was so focused on my feet, seeing to it that I wouldn't trip on air like I had a habit of doing, when I rounded a corner and plowed head first into someone. The collision made me fall backwards, and I landed flat on my ass. The sudden pain ricocheted through my body. Fortunately I managed to not drop anything, since I still held my books tightly to my chest.

"FUCK!" someone cursed loudly.

I looked up and for the first time I saw who I had bumped into. Edward Cullen. Of course. Day two of torture week was just getting better.

"Are you fucking blind or some shit? Watch where you're walking!" He snapped at me.

I didn't understand why he was so mad though, he was still standing after all. He wasn't the one sitting on the floor with a pain in the ass that wouldn't quit. I narrowed my eyes at him, and hugged my books closer to me.

"Shouldn't you be in class and not roaming the halls anyway?" I snapped back.

He seemed to be slightly taken aback by my outburst and it served him right. He quickly collected himself and smirked evilly at me.

"I could ask you the same fucking thing," he replied, and rubbed a spot on his chest mindlessly, I guess my fat head had made an impact on him. I hoped it hurt.

"I was at the principal's office," I replied, as I awkwardly tried to stand up.

His smirk grew wider.

"And what could an innocent *duck* like you ever have to do in the principal's office?" He asked, "Were you gonna press charges against the sandwich that tried to kill you yesterday?"

"No, he wanted to ask if I had anything to do with why a certain Volvo, that's parked in his space, had a crashed windshield and a dent with the size of a crater on its hood," I replied.

His face fell, and I smirked inwardly. I knew all about the accident he had with Mike Newton last week, when Mike accidentally drove into him when Edward was backing out. Edward had been furious, and if his brother hadn't stopped him he would have smashed Mike's face in. So his car obviously meant a lot to him, and who was I to deny the perfect opportunity to mock him about it?

"You... *you* ! If my car is even remotely damaged when I'm leaving today, then I'm gonna hold you responsible!" he said angrily, his face growing red.

I rolled my eyes and pushed passed him, without responding.

"I'll fucking kill you!" he called after me.

"Please do!" I called back, without turning around.

If the solution was only that simple.

"Hi, my name is Isabella Swan and I'm calling to make an appointment," I said into the phone later that afternoon.

"And what would it be concerning?" the woman asked.

"I... I..." shit, I hadn't thought this through, "I need something prescribed for my anxiety."

"And if you would rate your anxiety level, one to ten, how would you rate it?" she asked.

"Twenty three," I replied without missing a beat.

"Have you had anything prescribed for anxiety in the past?"

"No."

"Okay, please hold a moment."

Her voice disappeared and was replaced with some classical music. I sighed and leaned against the kitchen counter, while my leg was bouncing wildly, as I waited patiently for her voice to come back. Six minutes and fourteen seconds later, the music finally stopped and her voice was back on.

"Unfortunately, we cannot help you today, but Dr. Cullen can see you tomorrow at three-thirty. Does that work for you?"

"Yes, that works, thanks," I replied quickly, as if she was going to take back her offer.

"Okay, good. We'll see you at three-thirty, then. Good Bye."

She hung up and I put the phone back on its holder, before making my way up the stairs. I almost tripped on the last step when her words shot back to me.

Dr. Cullen.

What are the odds that he is related to a certain Edward Cullen? I inwardly scoffed at myself, what a stupid question. This being tiny Forks, and this being my luck, he was probably Edward's father or something.

I hoped he wasn't as morally impaired as his son, but if he was maybe I could use it to my advantage, and make him write out more pills to me than I needed?

Maybe it was a good thing if he turned out to be the baby-daddy of the Devil's spawn.

Did that make Dr. Cullen the Devil, or was Mrs. Cullen the Devil?

I shrugged. *Maybe both ?*

I stumbled my way into my room, and sat down by my desk before turning on the computer.

I never got any chance to google prescription pills. People had been sitting all around me in the computer lab and I didn't want anyone to see what I was searching for. Rumors would spread and I would be screwed before I was dead.

I surfed onto google as soon as my computer had booted up, and for the next two hours I was immersed in the gains and pains of different prescription medications. I mainly searched for information about anxiety pills, seeing as that was my "cover" for seeing Dr. Cullen. It was somewhat true, I guess. I did suffer from anxiety, and I had suffered from three or four serious anxiety attacks under the past

three months, when the pain was too much to handle. So maybe it wasn't just a cover, maybe I really needed these pills.

Some anxiety medication, that I found information about, had unconsciousness as a side-effect, and that was a good sign. That would probably mean I would end up dead if I swallowed all the pills at once. Even though none of the pages I visited said outright that you could die if you overdosed on these pills, I still believed that the unconscious part was the key word to my salvation.

I turned off my computer and grabbed my car keys before leaving the room and going downstairs. I snatched the grocery list from the fridge door, and took a few bills from the can above the fridge.

I was going to make an extraordinary dinner, to celebrate that I was finally getting somewhere, and that I hopefully wouldn't be stuck in this hell anymore. The phone rang just as I was about to step out the door, and I turned back and answered without a second thought.

"Hello?"

"Bella? Is that you? Sweet Bella?"

I froze and stared down at the caller-ID. Damn it. There was a reason we had caller-ID, and that reason was that we would know who called before we went and answered it. *You idiot !*

"Bella... please, talk to me... my sweet, sweet Bella," the familiar female voice cooed.

"Fuck you," I snarled, and hung up the phone. I all but threw it back in its place, and a few seconds later the phone rang again. The caller-ID flashed, but I wasn't going to answer. No chance in freaking hell. *Never again* . I all but ran out of the house as the phone kept ringing and the caller-ID kept flashing.

Seattle Mental Institution... Seattle Mental Institution... Seattle Mental Institution...

Tuesday

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by:** Project Team Beta]

Chapter 4 - Tuesday

Edward Cullen POV - Three days before the accident.

Fucking Tuesdays . I hated Tuesdays. Has anything good ever happened on a Tuesday? No, it has not. Tuesday was nothing but a wasted day. *Fuck* .

I groaned as I rolled out of bed. My body was stiff, my head was pounding, and I felt fucking useless. I stepped into my bathroom and switched on the light. My eyes immediately protested and I squinted at the harsh light.

When my eyes finally adjusted to the light I was met by the sight of my sorry looking mug.

God, I look like crap .

My hair was standing in every direction and my eyes were bloodshot. Then again, I guess they had every right to be.

Jasper had come over the night before, and Emmett had challenged us to a shot race. Yes, on a fucking *Monday* . My brother was a genius that way.

His choice of poison was Absolut Vodka Vanilla. A fucking girl-vodka if you ask me, and a fucking puke-explosion waiting to happen. I had

nothing against vodka in general, I chugged that shit down like water, but flavored vodka was another story. Sadly, it was the only shit Emmett had available. I just had to toughen up and take it like a man, even if I ended up puking like a dog afterwards and waking up with a head that was ten sizes too big.

Fuck Emmett and his stupid ideas.

I turned on the shower and tugged down my boxers before stepping under the hot spray. The warm water loosened up my muscles instantly, and I leaned my forehead against the cold, tiled wall. I closed my eyes and rolled my shoulders to release some tension.

There was nothing I wanted to do more than to just go back to bed, and forget that Tuesdays even existed. I did not have that luxury, since my mom worked from home and would notice if I stayed. I couldn't fake an illness either since my fucking father was a doctor. Although I was a fucking awesome actor – just ask all the girls I've slept with – I still couldn't fool my dad by acting like I was sick, because that man could read me like a boring fucking book.

I almost fell asleep in the shower, the warm water almost relaxing me to the point of unconsciousness, and I didn't awake from my trance until I felt the warm water run cold. I left the shower with a sigh and pulled a towel around my waist, before walking back into my room.

My mom had done my laundry the day before, for which I was glad, because I wasn't in the mood for going commando. Although, it would make the visits in the janitor's closet easier, just yank down the zipper and pull out the snake.

I shook my head at myself. *Underwear it is .*

I pulled on the first pair of jeans and shirt I found and didn't even bother to do anything with my hair. Then I walked downstairs to the kitchen.

Emmett was sitting by the kitchen island. My mom had brought out everything you could ever think of wanting for breakfast and I inwardly rolled my eyes. No one in my family, except my mom, was a breakfast person. This fact didn't hinder her though, as she kept pushing as much food as she could down our throats, to the point where we almost fell into a fucking breakfast-induced coma. Therefore it was not my fucking fault if I fell asleep during first or second period. I doubt my teachers would believe my excuse when I said that my mom had stuffed me like a Thanksgiving turkey before school. Too much food makes you sleepy, that's a known fucking fact.

"Morning bro," Emmett said, as I sat down on the stool beside him.

"Morning yourself," I muttered and poured myself some orange juice.

"Hangover?" he asked.

"Fucking vanilla," I replied.

He began to chuckle, but cut short as he groaned and squeezed his eyes shut.

"Hangover?" I mocked, he groaned and flipped me off.

I smirked at him. It made me feel a hell of a lot better to know that he was just as hung over as I was, since it was his fucking idea. It was also nice to know that even a big guy like Emmett could be affected. At that moment, dad walked in with his usual stride, being the epitome of a morning-person that he always was. He was all smiles and cheery as he walked around the kitchen island and poured himself some coffee.

"Morning boys," he said cheerily, "Rough night?"

He took a sip of his coffee and looked at us from over the rim.

Our dad might call himself a serious doctor and he might be a worthless fucking driver, but at home he was a pretty laid back dad.

He knew we drank and he knew we had both done drugs – I still did, occasionally – but he didn't condemn our behavior, he just asked us to take care of ourselves, and not to go too far. His laid back attitude made it impossible for us to do any damage by rebelling, like a normal fucking teenager. And yes, that bugged me. It would be nice to be able to do something fucking reckless just for the hell of it, and piss them off.

Yeah, Mom was a little stricter than Dad, but she would never yell at us. She didn't even yell at me when I came home one night high as a fucking kite with cocaine still in my nostril. She knew what I had been doing, she told me she didn't like it and then she told me to go to bed. All the while just shaking her head, no fucking yelling whatsoever. I had wondered many times in the past if they were even fucking sane. Parents shouldn't behave like that.

Maybe they didn't get the handbook on how to torture their teenage kids.

I thought that shit was fucking mandatory.

Dad glanced down at his watch and put down his cup on the counter.

"Okay, I'm off. Please behave today," he said and turned to look at me, "And that means you too, Edward."

"I always behave. Badly, yes, but it's still a fucking behavior," I replied with a light shrug.

Dad shook his head and sighed, before leaving the room.

"Wanna skip school?" I asked, glancing at Emmett.

"Nah, I promised Rosie I would take her car shopping today," he replied, brightening up instantly by the mere thought of his blonde bombshell of a girlfriend.

"You're fucking whipped," I complained with a sigh.

"Have you seen her ass? Of course I'm whipped," he snorted and leaned back on his stool, "Ready to go?"

"Might as well get this shit day over and done with," I agreed and stepped down from the stool. Emmett walked out to get his stuff, and I grabbed my thermos from the dish rack and filled it with coffee.

I needed my caffeine. Especially since today was Tuesday.

Fuck. I hate Tuesdays.

I parked my car in the Principal's space again. Emmett rolled his eyes at me, though he kept his mouth shut. He knew better than to question me when it came to my car. Emmett disappeared as soon as he left the car. I couldn't have cared less about it. He was probably just in withdrawal and he needed his Rosalie-fix. The way he was attached to that girl was fucking disturbing. He couldn't make a fucking decision without asking her first. He had even called her the day before to ask if it was okay if he got drunk with Jasper and me. *Whipped* wasn't a strong enough word to describe what he was. He was a fucking pansy. It was like she had grabbed his balls and taken them for herself, and given him her pussy in return. She was the one with the balls in that relationship. No fucking question about it. If there was one thing Rosalie Hale didn't need more of, it would be power. I was glad I managed to dodge that fucking bullet.

I would never be whipped. That's for sure. Because the difference between my brother and I was that I had a fucking backbone and balls that wouldn't quit. He did *not* .

I walked down the hallway and got my usual ego-boost. I winked at a few girls, they blushed and looked away, before giggling with their friends. God, girls in this school were so fucking easy . I picked up my stuff from my locker and headed to class.

Despite the big thermos of caffeine I still ended up falling asleep during both first and second period. With this fucking hangover I

needed some fucking sleep, and what better time was there than during school hours?

Lunch was uneventful. No one was choking today. Alice and Rosalie excused themselves to go to "powder their noses" - a fucking girly way of saying "taking a leak" or "talking about our awesome boyfriends until we puke". Or until I puke. At least they didn't talk about that shit when I was around.

Jasper yawned, and stretched his arms behind his head. He didn't look hung over at all, he just looked... well, like fucking Jasper. He smirked at me.

"Don't glare at me like that," he laughed.

I didn't even realize I was glaring, so I rolled my eyes instead and took another chug of my now cold coffee.

"You guys are fucking weak," he smiled, "Can't take a few shots without looking like you're dying the day after..."

"Fuck you," I muttered, "You should keep your fucking mouth shut... remember last time you drank Jägermeister?"

I gave him a pointed look, but he just kept on smiling, with his hands behind his head.

"If I remember correctly I had a fever of a hundred and four during that party, because Alice wouldn't let me miss it, so I don't think it was the Jägermeister that got to me," he replied coolly.

"Fucking excuses," I muttered.

"So I hear Mike Newton is having a party on Friday, are we going?" Emmett asked.

"Have you asked your wife?" I asked sarcastically.

"She asked me, thank you very much," he replied, "But yeah, are going or what?"

I groaned, and rested my elbows on the table before pressing the heels of my hands against my eyes.

"Newton is a fucking moron, he couldn't throw a good party if his fucking life depended on it," I muttered.

"Whatever, man, I hear it's going to be good. Everyone is going to be there... what else are we supposed to do anyway? It's not like anything else is happening, this is fucking Forks!" Emmett complained.

I let my hands down and stood up.

"I need to be wasted, and on the point of passing out before I ever step my foot into that imbecile's house," I said before walking away.

"C'mon, bro! Live a little!" Emmett called after me.

I rolled my eyes, as I pushed open the cafeteria door.

'Newton' and 'party' were two words that did not belong together. Mike Newton was a sorry excuse for a man, who ran after girls like a fucking rabid dog. He's still a virgin, I'm sure, I can't believe any girl with even an ounce of fucking self-respect would ever let him touch them. He's a disturbed little guy, a pathetic one too. He's always trying to get on my, Emmett and Jasper's good side. Occasionally he even tries to sit with us at lunch. I wonder how fucking long it will take him to get the fucking hint. *Nobody likes you, ass face !*

Sadly, Emmett had a point when he said that the party was the only thing happening this weekend. Nothing ever happens in Forks, because there is just nowhere to go to make things happen. *Fucking worthless piece of shit town* . But I'd be damned if I had to go to that fucking party.

The warning bell rang and I slipped into the guys' bathroom. I was so not in the mood for biology, so I decided to hang out in the bathroom until everyone was in class, and I could go about roaming the halls without anyone being the wiser.

I smoked a cigarette in the bathroom, before throwing it in a toilet and leaving. The halls were empty – no surprise there. Sometimes I wondered if I was the only person in this fucking place that even dared to skip class. People in this place were to fucking afraid of being caught. Like skipping class and being caught was the equivalent to the death sentence.

Suddenly someone rammed right into me. I got the wind knocked out of me, and the perpetrator landed on her ass with a loud thud.

"FUCK!" I cursed loudly as I stared down at her.

I immediately recognized her. Fucking Isabella Swan, a walking fucking time bomb. Couldn't she do anything right? Couldn't she even walk down a hallway without ramming into the only other person there? She obviously was the kind of person who would ram into the only tree in a fucking desert.

"Are you fucking blind or some shit? Watch where you're walking!" I spat at her furiously.

I expected to see her lips tremble and her eyes water up. I bet girls like Isabella fucking Swan cried all the time. She seemed to be that type, you know? The one who cries for nothing. She probably cries when she sees a puppy too, or when she gets something lower than an A on a test.

She surprised me by narrowing her eyes at me and she jutted her chin out in defiance, as she hugged her books tightly to her chest.

"Shouldn't you be in class and not roaming the halls?" she snapped.

I was slightly taken aback by her tone, to be honest. Who knew Isabella Swan had it in her? Besides, didn't it occur to her that she too was roaming the halls during class? I knew for a fact that she didn't have study hall or any of that shit right now, since she was in my biology class.

I couldn't help but smirk at her comment.

"I could ask you the same fucking thing," I replied coolly.

My chest hurt where she had rammed her steel head into me, and I rubbed the spot on my chest absentmindedly. I saw that her eyes wandered down, and I resisted the urge to smirk again. Did I make an impact on the poor little virginal freak girl?

"I was at the Principal's office," she replied in her defense, as she stood up.

I smirked and had to hold back a laugh. Isabella Swan in the principal's office? What a fucking joke.

"And what could an innocent *duck* like you ever have to do in the principal's office? Were you gonna press charges against the sandwich that tried to kill you yesterday?"

I used the nickname the school had given her. Everybody called her "duck", "ugly duckling", "goose" or any other bird, really. All because she didn't live up to her last name. Isabella Swan was many things, but a *swan* was not one of them. Maybe a turkey... nah, she was too skinny to be a turkey. Maybe a penguin? They walked funny too, and Isabella seemed to have issues with walking over a flat surface without tripping over air. But as far as I know, penguins didn't have that problem. They just walked funny.

"No, he wanted to ask if I had anything to do with why a certain Volvo, that's parked in his space, had a crashed windshield and a dent with the size of a crater on its hood," she replied sweetly.

I was about to make a snarky comeback when her words sank in. My smirk faded quickly. If she was fucking serious then she was about to be as dead as a Thanksgiving turkey.

The look in her eyes showed that she was clearly very pleased with her comment, and I guess she wasn't totally unaware of the love I had for my car – or maybe she was just bluffing.

"You... you!" I said, my voice shaking in anger, "If my car is even remotely damaged when I'm leaving today, then I'm gonna hold you responsible!"

She rolled her fucking eyes at me, before pushing passed me without even a response. Did she even know who I was? I could destroy her. I had all the girls in this school wrapped around my finger, and I could make her life even more shitty than it probably already was.

"I'll fucking kill you!" I called after her angrily.

"Please do!" she called back, without turning around.

I gaped at her as she walked away. What the hell was that? Since when did Isabella fucking Swan talk back to anyone? She's supposed to take the shit and make the rest of us feel good, but instead she had to talk back on the one day I really didn't need it?

I'll be damned if I let her make me feel bad about it. *Fucking goose* .

I slammed my door and quickly walked up the steps to our house. I opened the front door and stepped inside. If I was lucky, the house would be empty, and if I was...

"Sweetie, there you are!"

I groaned as I let the door close behind me. I was met by my smiling mother. Her brown hair was hanging loosely around her heart-shaped face and her eyes were sparkling with excitement.

"What are you doing home?" I groaned.

"That's no way of talking to your mother," she chastised me with a smile, "I just got assigned a very exciting decorating job and I really would like your opinion."

"Since when do you want my opinion on your shit? I don't know the first thing about interior whatever," I replied with a quirked eyebrow.

"First of all, my designs are not shit," she said sternly before smiling at me, "and secondly, I'm actually designing the interior of the new concert hall for the Seattle music society, and since you are my go-to guy when it comes to classical music, then of course, I want your opinion. Come on."

She nodded her head towards her downstairs office, silently signaling for me to follow her. I sighed and dragged my feet as I followed her. Her working table was overflowing with designs of everything and nothing. She walked around the table, picked up a large sheet of paper and showed it to me.

"What do you think? I don't want to go the regular route, you know, with gold finish and red plush carpets and things like that..."

I looked at the design, and though I didn't know shit about this shit, I still had a feeling she was onto something here. She had used light colors, mostly white, grey and silver. The only real color was splashes of baby blue. The drapes and the chairs were all in the same baby blue tone and the carpets were in a slightly darker. The floor seemed to be white marble and the overall feeling was a cold winter wonderland. And it worked. It really fucking worked.

My mom was a fucking genius.

"I fucking love it," I said honestly.

She smiled widely.

"You do? I wasn't sure if I was crazy to think that these cold colors would work... you sure though? It's not too cold and too... wintery? People up north don't need to be reminded about how cold it is," she replied with a thoughtful frown.

"Seriously mom, it's awesome," I said sincerely, "Just put a white grand piano on the stage and you're fucking set."

She smiled and slapped me playfully.

"You and your piano," she murmured softly.

"Can I go now?" I asked and she nodded. I left her office and went up to the third floor to my room.

I closed my bedroom door behind me and walked over to my keyboard and put on my headphones. Up until this summer I had always played my music on the grand piano downstairs, in the living room, but something changed and one day when I sat down I just couldn't get started. I couldn't even touch the fucking keys. I didn't know what the fuck that was about, but I hadn't been able to play on that fucking piano for over four months now, I can even remember the day when it all went to hell.

It took me over a month to get my head out of my ass and buy a fucking keyboard. I figured that if I put that in my room instead, and used headphones, maybe it would be easier. Then nobody but me would hear the crap I composed.

Because it was crap. *All fucking crap* .

My mom always gushed to her friends about how talented her sons were. Emmett with his sports, and me with my music. I guess she couldn't gush about me anymore, since she hadn't heard me play in months. She asked me about it once, but I just shrugged and changed the subject.

How was I supposed to explain to her why I couldn't create anymore, when I didn't understand the fucking issue myself?

And the fucking keyboard wasn't helping.

I tried to play a little Für Elise, just to get me going, but even that sounded like crap.

I threw my headphones aside and dragged my hand through my hair.

Fucking crap .

Fucking Tuesday.

I rubbed the heels of my hands against my eyes and sighed.

I wanted to blame Emmett and his piece of shit vodka. I wanted to blame Mike Newton, for being the only fucking person in this shithole that was holding a party this weekend. I wanted to blame Isabella Swan for... for... for being alive. *Fucking waste of space.*

I also wanted to blame her for plowing into me like a fucking freight-train. I bet I was going to get a bruise, with the shape of her head, on my chest now. Who was she to mark me like that?

Of course, I couldn't do that. I couldn't blame anyone of them. My problems started a long time ago. Neither of them was there when it happened. Neither of them could be held responsible. The only thing I could blame was Tuesday.

Because my luck ended on a fucking Tuesday .

All my musical inspiration disappeared on a fucking Tuesday.

I left my place by my keyboard and went over to my stereo, I pressed the play button, not really caring whatever CD I had in at the moment. The soft tones of Beethoven flowed from the speakers, and I guess it was a good thing. Though, I would have liked some angry tunes, I guess Beethoven was better. It made me relax and I

wouldn't need to pay to get my window fixed again. Like the last time when I couldn't handle my anger and I ended up throwing a shoe at the window, breaking it in the process.

Did I need to mention that neither of my parents yelled at me then? They actually thought it was an accident. They are deluded if they think that nothing's wrong with me.

It was a Tuesday at the end of July. We had partied on Monday night – seeing as we had no school, there was no reason for us to reserve our parties for the weekends – and I was drunk as a sailor and speeded on whatever Tyler Crowley had to offer that night.

It had been a great night.

I remember that both Jessica Stanley and Tanya Denali's little sister, Irina, had my dick in their mouths that night. I think I even popped another girl's cherry that night too. Though, I can't remember her name. Whatever. She told me I was her first, and I could feel that there hadn't been anyone down there before me, so yeah, she was a virgin and I popped that.

Like I said; *great fucking night* .

Then I came home and passed out in my bed.

It was hours later, when I somehow woke up in the guest bedroom. I had no idea how I ended up there – I still don't - and with the hangover I was sporting that morning, I really didn't have the energy to care either.

I went down to play around a little on the piano, since it was the best hangover remedy I knew, after spending almost the whole day in bed. I sat down on the bench and I was about to put the fingers on the keys and I... just couldn't.

My fingers hovered over the keys, unable to touch them and I just fucking froze.

Whatever happened between my bed and the guest room messed me the fuck up. I have no idea what the hell that was. The not knowing was driving me insane and it made me act out even more than before. I became an even worse manwhore than before. Everything bad about me became worse, and the little that was good in me disappeared completely.

I was fucking disgusted by myself because of it.

The worst part isn't about my inability to create anymore. The worst part is that no one even seemed to notice that something was fucking off about me. Everyone is treating me like they always have. Even my parents.

One would think that at least they would notice, but they didn't. If you don't count the one time Mom asked me why I didn't play... but c'mon, one time? Didn't my music mean more to her? Maybe not. Maybe I was crappier than I thought, and they were all just happy that they didn't need to hear my shit anymore.

Shit, I'm beginning to sound like a fucking emo kid.

What the hell was that about? Maybe Miss Goose spread her freakiness on me when she pummeled into me, making me fucking depressed. I was just having an off day. Everyone had them. By tomorrow I would be back to fuckawesome and I would be ruling the fucking world again.

I was interrupted from my inner pep talk, by heavy footsteps outside my room. They stopped outside my door.

"Welcome in, Emmett," I said, recognizing the sound of his steps, before he even had the chance to knock. He busted the door open and chuckled.

"I don't know how you do it," he said, shaking his head.

"You're the only giant I know," I replied with a light shrug.

"Ha, ha, very fucking funny," he snorted.

"Was there something you wanted?" I asked with a sigh, looking at him.

"Yeah, we're going to Port Angeles. We're going bowling!" his eyes sparkled and I groaned.

"Bowling? What the fuck is wrong with this town?" I growled, dragging my hands through my hair in frustration.

"Yes, bowling. Are you coming or not?" he replied easily.

I looked around my room, my eyes landing on the keyboard. I wasn't gonna create anything today and I needed to get my frustration out somehow. Maybe bowling was the answer. At least I would get to throw a fifteen-pound ball at ten unsuspecting pins.

I could pretend they were the Goose.

"Whatever," I replied and grabbed my jacket from my chair before following him out.

Alice danced her way down before throwing the ball. She was jumping up and down like a child as she watched the ball. She stopped her excited jumping when she only managed to knock one single pin down. I chuckled. *Fucking amateur*. She pouted, turned around and walked back to us. Jasper held out his arms and she sat down on his lap.

"I think my ball is broken," she complained.

"Yes, it was the ball," Jasper agreed, kissing her cheek.

"I think *your* balls are broken," I muttered, and Alice slapped my arm. "HEY!" I protested.

"Don't talk to my boyfriend like that," she said.

"Whatever."

"Hey Ed, you're up," Emmett said from his place as the point-holder.

I went and grabbed my ball and proceeded with throwing it towards the pins. I didn't do Alice's ridiculous dancing routine before throwing the ball. I just walked and threw it. I didn't even bother looking back to see whether or not I knocked any pins down. I didn't care. I was just here because it was better than to being home alone, anyway. I wasn't here to have fun.

"WOW, A STRIKE!" someone shrieked.

I flinched at the sound and turned my head to the café part of the bowling alley. Lauren Mallory was here. She was clapping her hands enthusiastically and I wondered if she was having some sort of episode or something... it took me a second to realize she was clapping for me, and that I was the one making the strike.

She made her way over to us and ignored the others as she walked up to me.

"Wow, Edward, that was amazing..." she gushed. I shrugged and sat down on the empty seat that Rosalie had left, as she went up for her turn. Jessica sat down beside me and I was a little bit bothered by her ridiculous need to be so fucking close. *Ever heard of personal space ?*

"Are you going to the party on Friday?" she asked, her lips close to my ear.

"Haven't decided yet," I replied, without looking at her.

"Oh c'mon, you have to go... everyone is going..." I could almost feel her lips pout and I sighed. Did girls honestly think I was that easy? You couldn't break me with a fucking pout. I wasn't a weak pansy like Jasper or Emmett. A pout wouldn't get you anywhere with me, the only thing it would do was to get you further away from me. "Or

maybe you can come by my place... I can make you feel alright," she sighed in my ear when I didn't respond. She trailed her slender fingers up and down my arm. I turned my head to her.

"Why wait for the weekend?" I asked and cocked an eyebrow at her.

Lauren blushed and turned her gaze away. She had always been good at talking the talk, but she never really walked the walk. She only did that when she was drunk. *Fuck girls and their self-conscious bullshit.*

"Did you drive?" I asked, and she nodded slowly, "Good, so let's get out of here."

I looked at her and she bit her lip.

"I can't... I'm here with my parents, and my sister..." she said quietly, "But Friday?"

I groaned.

"Whatever," I sighed and slumped in my seat.

"See you then," she said and kissed my cheek before walking away.

I quickly wiped my cheek and shivered. All I got from one of the easiest girls in school was a fucking peck on the cheek? I didn't even kiss people on the cheek. What the fuck was this? *An after school special?*

I blame this fucking day. Fucking Tuesday.

Like I said before, nothing good ever happened on a Tuesday.

Scam

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by:** Project Team Beta]

Chapter 5 - Scam

Isabella Swan POV - Two days before the accident.

I was biting my lips so hard that I was on the verge of breaking the skin, while my leg was bouncing restlessly on the generic linoleum in the waiting room at the hospital. I was forced to sit between a woman and her crying baby and an old man who couldn't stop coughing. He also smelled like he had taken a shower in whiskey.

It was almost three-thirty in the afternoon, and I was waiting for Dr. Cullen to call me in. I really didn't know what to expect from him, and the fact that he was most likely related to Edward Cullen freaked me out.

I had dreaded this all day, and I had gone over my 'illness' again and again in my head, making sure that every detail was thought through and that I had an answer to any question he might ask. I had to be on top of my game, without overplaying it, in order to succeed with this.

I took a deep, cleansing breath and almost choked on the old man's odor. Seriously, did he *shower* in whiskey or did he simply use it as a perfume?

In an effort to try to be a little optimistic in this situation, I kept telling myself that Dr. Cullen was just like his son, and that he would be

unethical enough to prescribe me any drug I asked for. I'm sure Edward would, he simply had no morals, and if Dr. Cullen was anything like his son, I'm sure the only reason he became a doctor in the first place was to get access to prescription pills. Maybe he was even making extra money on the side by selling it to kids?

"Miss Swan? Dr. Cullen will see you now," a nice-looking nurse said. I didn't bother to give her a polite smile; I just picked up my bag and followed her towards Dr. Cullen's office without a word. I didn't need to have a casual conversation with an unimportant nurse; all I needed was to get this over and done with.

We reached an office, with Dr. Cullen's name on an expensive looking sign on the door, and she knocked once before letting me in. Dr. Cullen looked up from his desk and gave me a friendly smile as I stepped into his office.

"Isabella Swan?" he said and I nodded softly.

The very first thing I noticed about Dr. Cullen was that he didn't look like Edward at all. Edward was tall and muscular while Dr. Cullen was tall and lean. Edward had green eyes and bronze-colored hair while Dr. Cullen had blue eyes and blonde, almost white, hair.

The third and final thing I noticed, and the most unnerving thing of all, was that he had a very friendly and approachable demeanor about him, and I knew in an instant that he was nothing like his son. He had that demeanor that made you feel relaxed by his mere presence.

And that was not good, not good at all.

Edward must have taken after his mother, because there was no likeness between him and this man in front of me. None at all – except that they were both utterly beautiful.

"Please, take a seat," Dr. Cullen said and gestured to the chair across from his desk. I carefully sat down on the edge of the seat

with my bag clutched tightly to my chest. I really needed to hold on to something if I was supposed to be able to pull this off, with evil Dr. Devil turning out to be friendly Dr. Gorgeous.

"What can I do you for today?" he asked with a friendly tone.

"Anxiety," I croaked as I tried not to gape at him.

"How would you describe it? Do you have panic-attacks as well?" he asked, frowning a little as he opened up a file on his desk and picked up a pen, so he would be ready to scribble down anything I said.

He was looking at me expectantly and I was drawing a complete blank. This wasn't how it was supposed to go. He wasn't supposed to ask me to explain my anxiety and show such sincere concern while doing so. He was supposed to ask me what I wanted and then give it to me.

He was Edward's father for crying out loud.

Then again, maybe I was wrong. Maybe there was many other Cullens' in tiny Forks after all, because this man could not possibly be related to that jackass.

I tried to remember everything I had read on the internet about anxiety, and what would be the most appropriate answer. Maybe I should just be honest and tell him about the episodes I had before? Damn it.

I should know this .

"I... it's like I can't breathe... something is pressing down on my chest and... I just can't breathe," I mumbled, feeling my face redden. It felt like I was lying, although it was the truth. The few panic attacks I've had were exactly like that.

Maybe I should have brought cue-cards? I thought sarcastically to myself.

He scribbled something down before looking back up at me.

"And how often does this occur?" he asked, still friendly and patient, and not a hint of disbelief was to be found in either his eyes or tone. I almost felt bad for trying to scam this poor doctor. It seemed as if he genuinely wanted to help people, and here I was trying to scam pills from him.

Then I remembered why I was doing it. Suddenly, I didn't feel so bad anymore.

"Everyday... mostly when I come home from school and everything just... gets to me..."

I was totally lost now and was grasping at whatever came to mind. He was throwing me off my game completely, and I couldn't remember anything I'd read. Who was this witch doctor?

He looked at me for a long time. His gaze was so intense that I was sure he was reading my mind. He was only seconds from calling my bullshit. He put his pen down and clasped his hands on the desk. He frowned again.

Busted. Crap .

"How long would you say that this has been going on?" he asked seriously.

"Three months," I replied instantly, and I wanted to kick myself. Why did I say that?

"Three months?" he echoed, before flipping a page in the folder. He looked down and nodded to himself, before looking back up at me. "I took the liberty of looking at your file earlier, and it says you were admitted three months ago for-"

"I don't want to talk about that," I cut him off.

"I assume that the incident is the cause of your anxiety?" he replied softly. I gnawed on my lower lip, and looked away from the scrutiny of his gaze. What was I supposed to reply to that?

Damn straight it's the cause of my anxiety. And that's why I'm here trying to scam pills so I can kill myself because of it.

I didn't think that response would have gone over well with him. My mind was spinning as I tried to come up with a plausible explanation and response, but nothing came to mind, and the longer I was quiet, the deeper his frown became.

"Have you talked to anyone about this?" he asked.

I shook my head. Finally something I could answer honestly.

"I can't," I replied, my voice barely a whisper.

He sighed and leaned back a little in his chair, picking up his pen again. He made a quick note, and then went on to play with the pen between his fingers as he watched me.

"Isabella, I would love to help you, but I don't think there is anything I personally can do for you," he sighed. "But the one thing I can do is recommend you to one of our psychiatrists here; they are very good and much more qualified to handle patients with different grades of anxiety disorders. You can talk to them about what happened, and hopefully they can find a way to help you."

I held back a groan. This was the worst news he could have given me.

"Can't you... prescribe something?" I asked quietly, "something to make it... easier?"

The way he was frowning made him almost look pained, but he didn't shake his head or tell me no.

"I don't feel comfortable with writing you a prescription, since we don't know what you need. I can't pinpoint the cause of your anxiety based on this short conversation, and sometimes the medication can even make the situation worse. We need to make a proper evaluation, preferably with a psychiatrist, to make sure you get the best care possible. It's not even certain that medication is the right thing for you, maybe therapy would be enough," he explained.

God, this man was trying to kill me in the most painful way. Maybe he was related to Edward after all, since they both seemed to get off on hurting me. *Freaking Cullen family* .

"If you want, I can make an appointment for you to see someone as soon as tomorrow," he said with a gentle smile. I shook my head, before standing up on shaky legs and hugging my bag to my chest.

"No, that's okay... I... I guess I'll just have to endure it," I mumbled.

I put my hand on the doorknob and was just about to leave when he cleared his throat.

"Miss Swan?" he asked and I turned my head, careful not to look at him.

"Yes?" I whispered.

"It's very common for teenagers, especially girls, to suffer from anxiety. With the pressure from your parents, stressing over good grades in school and the added stress of peer pressure, it's not unusual to suffer from anxiety. It's not easy growing up, I know that. And while some teenagers grow up and do just fine, some need to get some help when things get too much. In your case, I would really recommend seeing someone, to talk about what happened. Nobody should have to suffer through that alone. Medication doesn't need to be the answer," he said softly.

This coming from the very handsome doctor; the handsome doctor who most likely was voted prom king, and 'most likely to succeed' in

the yearbook. The doctor who most likely didn't have a single defect on his perfect body, and who most likely grew up in a loving home with two parents who loved him... he had grown up to become a freaking doctor for crying out loud, what the heck did he know about suffering?

His perfect life was probably the reason why he sounded like a freaking hippie, saying that medication wasn't the answer... it wouldn't have surprised me if he suggested I do yoga, or that I should start every day with a fifteen-minute meditation.

Yes, I might have tried to take advantage of the system by claiming that my anxiety was far worse than it was, in order to get some pills, but I did it for a real reason. And weren't doctors supposed to help their patients feel better? Even if I didn't suffer from 'real' anxiety, I knew for a fact that those meds would help me feel better. That was what the health care system was all about, right? Making people feel better?

Who was I kidding? Of course it isn't.

"I'm sorry I wasted your time," I mumbled as I pushed open the door and stumbled out. I walked quickly down the hallway, almost tripping three times in the process, in order to get to my car as quickly as possible.

What the hell did Dr. Handsome know about mental suffering? Nothing, that's what.

How dare he deny me my way out? Freaking sadist was what he was.

As I climbed into my car and tried to put the key into the ignition, my hands were shaking too violently and I dropped the keys instead. I felt too frustrated to pick them up, and instead took out my anger on the wheel. I gripped it tightly as my entire body convulsed in anxiety.

What the hell was wrong with me? I had memorized everything I had read about anxiety. The symptoms, the physical as well as mental aspects of it and... *freaking everything* ! Why couldn't I do anything right? Why did I have to screw up everything? Now I was forced to find another way to off myself. What options did I have now that weren't painful? I had enough of pain in my life to last... well, a lifetime. And I wasn't planning on going out that way.

I don't know how long I sat in my car, silently seething over this turn of events, before I finally reached down, grabbed the keys and drove away from the hospital.

I didn't go home, though. I wasn't in the mood for seeing the answering machine blinking with countless messages from the insane woman. I wasn't in the mood to see my father either.

I drove aimlessly through town and I didn't register where I was going until I drove past a sign that said that I was a couple of miles away from La Push.

Now my mind was just messing with me. La Push? What a freaking joke.

La Push might have been the last place – aside from home – I would ever want to go to, but I still didn't turn the car around. Instead, I kept on driving and didn't stop until I reached First Beach.

I parked my car on the parking lot by the cliffs before turning off the engine and stepping out of the car. It was freezing and the cold wind from the ocean wasn't helping matters. My teeth chattered in the cold, but I kept moving, climbing the steep trail up to the highest point of the cliffs.

My family always used to come here when I was little. We used to have the most amazing picnics along with another family, the Blacks, who were living in La Push. The Blacks had been friends with my family for as long as I remembered, and they had a son who was just a year or so younger than me. We used to have so much fun

together and he had been my only friend for years. But that all went to hell when someone thought it was a good idea to go batshit crazy on my ass.

I hadn't seen or heard from Jacob Black since the incident. Not a single phone call or even an e-mail. I guess he also felt bad for what happened.

One could only hope that at least one of them still had a conscience.

I walked closer to the edge of the cliff and looked down. The sea appeared to be particularly angry today. It crashed against the rocks in a murderous rage. I wondered how much it would hurt and how long it would take for me to die, if I jumped right then and there.

I looked down at the dark water and shook my head.

No .

I didn't want to die that way and I didn't want to try, either. The risk was simply too big, because I might just survive. What would have been left of me then? Maybe I would end up paralyzed from the neck down and never be able to move a single muscle ever again. How the hell was I going to kill myself then?

I sat down carefully, and when I dangled my legs over the edge it felt like I was flying.

Mom used to hate it when I sat like this with my legs over the edge of the cliffs. She was always so afraid of me falling down and hurting myself. That was pretty ironic, considering the source.

I leaned back on my arms and closed my eyes. The cold air was stinging my eyes and I had goose bumps on every inch of my body. But it was all quite all right. This felt good. It was a comfortable cold.

I smiled crookedly at nothing in particular and opened my eyes again. The clouds were rolling in fast and I could see that it was

already raining a few miles away, over the ocean. Soon the rain would be here and I would get soaked. That was quite all right too.

It was nice to sit there and not think about anything. I almost felt normal. I almost felt like everything was back to what it was three months ago, before everything went to hell .

Maybe I should have taken Dr. Cullen up on his offer and made an appointment with the psychiatrist. If I had enough time before the appointment, then I would most likely be able to come up with a plausible situation and memorize all the symptoms I was supposed to be having.

But that was dangerous. Psychiatrists were dangerous. Beyond dangerous. They messed with people's mind on a daily basis. They did it for a freaking living. And they probably wouldn't believe me, instead they would most likely manage to manipulate me and get the truth out without me even noticing what was going on before it was too late.

I had walked down that road before and almost blew it then.

Like I said, way too dangerous.

I sighed and took a deep breath in a sad attempt to calm myself.

I remembered the last time I was here; it was the end of July. My family and the Blacks were all having a picnic on one of the lower cliffs. Jacob and I were jumping off the cliff edge, competing in who could do the coolest jump. Jacob won, of course, when he jumped from the cliff and did a back flip.

" Hey, Bella, top this if you can!" Jacob smiled at me in a cocky way, before jumping and doing a back flip off the cliff. I watched as he disappeared into the dark water and surfaced a moment later with a smug look in his face, "Top that!" he challenged me again.

I rolled my eyes and shook my head.

" That would kill me!" I called to him.

" Yeah, you're the only one I know who would be able to trip on your own feet and miss the ground," he chuckled, "So you might not wanna do a back flip, since you will most likely kill yourself."

" I'm not that clumsy!" I argued, feeling slightly insulted.

" Of course you're not," he mocked, as he swam towards the shore and climbed back up.

He sat down on the edge next to me and shook the water off his long black hair.

" Bella! Don't sit so close to the edge, you'll fall in!"

We both turned around and looked at my mom.

" Mom, we've been jumping off this thing for hours now, how can it be more dangerous for me to just sit here?" I asked in amusement.

" You... you can fall in and break your neck. And you know I don't like you jumping off that thing, it's dangerous," she chided.

" Mom, I've done it a thousand times. You should be happy that I'm not jumping from the higher cliffs," I laughed.

" I don't like it, you're gonna hurt yourself. I don't want you to get hurt," she replied sternly.

" Don't worry, Mom, nothing can hurt me." I smiled.

" That's right, Mrs. Swan, because Bella here is invincible. Nothing can ever hurt this one," Jacob laughed and put an arm around my shoulders. "Because she's not clumsy at all," he added.

I slapped his arm and he laughed.

" Shut up," I muttered.

I turned my head again and looked at my mother. The faraway look was back in her eyes, and it seemed to be a permanent fixture on her face nowadays. I wondered what was going on.

" Don't worry, baby, everything will be alright," she said, walking over to us and stroking my hair.

I looked at her, confused, but didn't ask what she meant. She smiled sadly and leaned down to kiss me on top of my head, before walking over to Dad and Billy and sitting down.

" Your mom is weird," Jacob commented.

" Don't I know it," I replied with a frown.

In retrospect, I'm surprised I didn't notice something was wrong back then. My mom was beginning to act weirder and weirder, and even my dad wasn't his usual self. He used to be so animated and excited when he discussed baseball with Billy, but on that day he was barely listening as Billy went on and on about their favorite team.

My mom kept stroking my arm and my hair, giving me soft smiles, telling me everything was going to be okay. I didn't know what she meant, but I didn't like the way it sounded. At first I had thought that my parents were splitting up, that would explain why she was acting so weird and why my dad was even more quiet than usual, and she was simply preparing me for the news by acting so sweet towards me. But the news never came. Not that news anyway...

A loud thunder awoke me from my musings, and I realized that the storm was getting closer and the rain was about to hit me. I quickly stood up and made my way back to my car.

I drove in a leisurely pace back to my house; I was no hurry to get back there.

It was almost five when I pulled up in front of our house, and much to my delight, I noticed that my dad's cruiser wasn't there. He was

probably working late.

My stomach grumbled as I unlocked the front door and I decided to start dinner when I got in. I wasn't in the mood for doing anything extravagant, not with my awful afternoon, so I just cooked some rice and fried some of the fish that Dad caught on his last fishing trip with Billy.

I had just begun frying the fish when I heard the familiar sound of the cruiser. A few moments later, Dad walked into the kitchen.

"Something smells delicious," he noted with a smile, before taking off his gun-holster and stepping over to me.

"It's just rice and fish..." I replied quietly.

"How long until it's done? I'm starving."

"Fifteen minutes or so..."

"You take such good care of me, Bells, I don't know what I would do without you," he said and gave my head a quick kiss.

"I think you'd survive just fine," I replied dryly.

"Don't sell yourself short, you're what's keeping our life together," he chuckled.

I huffed and he ruffled my hair before finally leaving the kitchen to get out of his work clothes. It was as if he could smell my intentions from a mile away, with his comment about how he couldn't manage without me – *way to give your suicidal daughter even more to feel bad about* .

I set the table and the food was ready when my dad walked back into the kitchen.

He took his seat and dug in immediately, and though my stomach was growling I just couldn't get any food down at all. I really had no

appetite anymore.

"So what did you do today?" he asked between bites.

"I went to school..." I replied.

"Yes, I know that, but after school? I could have sworn I saw your truck driving out of town earlier," he said, his voice muffled by the rice and fish in his mouth. I wanted to tell him to chew and swallow before speaking; I really didn't like it when people spoke with their mouths full.

"Well yeah, I went down to La Push for an hour," I replied honestly, leaving out the part about me being at the hospital.

"Oh? You were visiting Jacob?" he asked, looking up in surprise and sounding awfully hopeful.

I glared at him and he immediately looked down again.

"No, I was just hanging out by the cliffs, I didn't feel like going home right after school," I said.

"In this weather? It must have been freezing," he commented. "I don't like it when you visit the cliffs during storms, you know that."

And I can't even begin to wonder why, I thought sarcastically.

"Nothing happened, I'm fine," I replied with a sigh.

"I just want you to take care of yourself, Bells, I don't want you to get hurt," he said gently.

"You might have thought of that earlier," I snapped, standing up abruptly from the table.

"Bells, c'mon..." he pleaded and I shook my head.

"I'm going to my room, I have homework," I muttered and left the kitchen.

I heard him sigh before stuffing his mouth full of food.

Sometimes Dad could be such a hypocrite. He didn't want me to get hurt, but still he was one of the reasons why I was hurting so much in the first place. And if he didn't want me to get hurt, how come I had scars all over my body?

I lay down on my bed, ignoring the load of homework in my bag. What was the point in doing it, anyway?

Today had been a rough day. Though people ignored me in school, and didn't give me such a hard time by calling me names or anything like that, I still found it insufferable.

The principal had made a point to look at me every time I passed him in the halls, and my teachers were beginning to give me a hard time too. Why couldn't they just leave me the heck alone? It's not like I was failing every class! It was only art and gym for crying out loud, and when would I ever have a use for that crap, anyway? I was averaging Bs and Cs in the rest of my classes, so what was the problem? Most students in that school were averaging Cs and Ds at the best. I was still better than most of them, so why didn't the teachers go after them instead?

Maybe because the teachers wanted to torture me as well and not let the students get all the fun.

I rolled onto my stomach and propped my head up on my hand.

This day couldn't have gone worse even if I had tried. That was for sure. Although it all sucked, I still felt slightly lighter inside than I had the night before. Maybe it was the trip to La Push that did it.

I hadn't been there for months, and the place held many memories. Maybe the good ones were shining through a little more and

shedding some light on my situation. Making me think that maybe everything wasn't all lost yet, because if things were good before, there was no reason for me not to think it could be good again. I just needed to work a little harder, and be patient and wait for that day to happen.

But as always when I tried to be optimistic, the face of my mother flashed in my mind and I was immediately reminded why things could never go back to what they used to be.

I closed my eyes and saw my mother's smiling face.

" Sweet, sweet Bella, it's all going to be alright. You have nothing to fear, everything is going to be alright," she smiled at me with a faraway look in her eyes.

" But Mom... this isn't right... it's insane!" I replied in a shaky whisper. "You can't do this."

" My sweet Bella," she cooed and stroked my cheek, "It's all quite alright. Nothing will ever hurt you again, I promise."

" But nothing has hurt me, Mom. Please stop it, you're scaring me." I was almost sobbing now.

" Now, now, Bella, we don't want to upset it," she replied softly.

" But Mom-"

Dad knocked on my door and my eyes flew open.

"Bells? I need to leave again, there has been a break-in at the Newton's house. I need to go check that out, I don't know when I'll be back," my dad said from outside the door.

"Okay," I called back.

He walked away, his steps slightly muffled by the carpet in the hallway, and soon I heard the front door slam and the cruiser rumble

as he drove off. I sighed and closed my eyes again.

Nothing would ever hurt me again .

Yeah right.

Her usually blue-gray eyes looked almost black in the dim light, but as I looked closer I realized it wasn't because of the light, but because her pupils were dilated in an unnatural way. She was smiling at me, but not in a loving or caring way. It was sinister and terrifying.

" Bella, sweet, sweet, Bella, come with me," she said, taking my hand.

" I wanna sleep," I protested sleepily. I looked over at the clock on my nightstand; it was 3:05 in the morning.

" I can't let you sleep, we need to celebrate!" she protested and dragged me up into a sitting position.

" But Mom..."

" No buts! We need to celebrate!"

" It's three in the morning, can't we celebrate whatever you wanna celebrate tomorrow?"

" No, we have to do it now. It's the best time!" she said excitedly.

She dragged me to my feet and pulled me out of my room. I was too tired to protest, so I decided to humor her and celebrate whatever she wanted to celebrate at three in the morning on a Tuesday. The less I protested, the quicker it would all be over. I knew that from experience, since it wasn't the first time she had dragged me up in the middle of the night to show me something or do something. But this was the first time she used the term 'celebration'.

The lights were off when we reached the bottom of the stairs, but I could see the dim light from candles flowing out from the living room, it gave the room an eerie feeling, and I knew for a fact that this wasn't right.

"Come with me, sweet Bella," she cooed and pulled me into the living room.

We stopped by the door and I gaped at the scene before me. This wasn't happening. This couldn't be happening.

"Sweet, sweet Bella," she said, kissing my temple gently, "It's time."

I sat up straight in my bed, my heart pounding loudly in my chest. The nightmare was familiar to me, because I had it almost every night, but it never failed to terrify me and wake me up with a pounding heart and sweating like a pig.

I couldn't run away from what happened - that was one thing that was damn sure.

It took a while for me to relax enough to go back to sleep, and when I did, the dream just picked up where it had ended. And I had to relive that horrible night, all over again...

Payback

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by:** Say Goodbye Again & bikechick3]

Chapter 6 - Payback

Edward Cullen POV - Two days before the accident.

I devoured the lasagna that Mom made me for lunch, as though it was the first and last time that I would ever see food again. Alice and Rosalie didn't appreciate my manners and they both wrinkled their noses in disgust.

"What?" I said with my mouth full. "I'm just channeling my inner fucking Emmett."

"Hey! That's uncalled for!" Emmett protested, spitting food all over the table in the process.

Rosalie cringed and slapped Emmett on his arm.

"Hey! What the hell are you ganging up on me for?" He complained.

"C'mon, Rose, let the guys play with their food. I need to go to the bathroom anyway," Alice said, pushing her chair back and grabbing her tray.

"Yes, thank you," Rose replied with a relieved sigh before following Alice out of the lunch room.

I rolled my eyes and kept shoveling lasagna into my mouth.

My fucking alarm clock decided it didn't feel like ringing this morning. I woke up late and didn't have time to grab any breakfast. Luckily, Mom had prepared us lunches, so I didn't need to eat the disgusting sorry excuse they call food that they kept in this place.

I was fucking starving, so excuse me for inhaling the food rather than chewing it.

I could still feel the aftershock from the Tuesday blues and I was in no fucking mood for being fucked with today, especially when I was eating. Anybody who wanted to keep on breathing shouldn't ever fuck with me when I was eating. That was why I groaned in irritation when some poor motherfucker stopped by our table and cleared his throat. I looked up and groaned again when I found Mike Newton's ugly-ass mug looking back at me.

"I just wanted to thank you," Mike said enthusiastically.

"What for?" I muttered, silently damning him for ruining my appetite.

"For not getting all pissy over the car thing. My mom told me this morning that we didn't need to pay for the repairs. Mom was threatening to take it out from my salary at the store, but now she doesn't have to," he said, smiling widely.

I gaped at him, my mouth hanging open and I probably looked like a total dumbfuck, with food still in my mouth, but I didn't give a crap. I was still processing what the hell he had just said.

"What did you just say?" I asked slowly, sounding more menacing than intended, and that was probably a good fucking thing.

His smile faded as he frowned. "That we didn't need to pay?" he croaked. He was looking all nervous now, and he had every right to be. This wasn't fucking happening. Emmett cleared his throat and Mike looked over at him, his eyes wide in fear now.

Serves him fucking right.

"I advise you to leave this table right now if you don't want Edward to rip your head right off that noodle body of yours," Emmett said calmly. Mike nodded vehemently and quickly walked away. I glanced at Emmett and narrowed my eyes.

"Necessary?" I asked and Emmett smiled evilly.

"I didn't let you kill him last week because, frankly, I thought he would get punished enough with having to pay for the repairs... I bet the repair costs were even higher than what he makes in a year at their stupid store," he replied as he leaned closer to me and lowered his voice, "but that cat is out of the fucking bag now, since Dad decided to play saint. So why don't we do something funnier than just kick his ass?"

My lips slowly twisted into a smirk; Emmett was a fucking genius when it came to payback. It was sad that he never got a fucking chance to show off that side of himself anymore, because he had become so pussy-whipped by Rosalie.

When you meet Emmett for the first time, he'll probably come off as a big scary dude who wouldn't think twice about kicking your ass, when in reality he's just a big fucking pansy teddy bear. I blame Rosalie for that; he used to really live up to his scary appearance before she came along, although, he still does on rare occasions. He can still make you crap your fucking pants before you even know what's going on. Of course, this is only if he can keep it from Rosalie, because she would kick his ass if she ever heard him even voicing the words 'punish' and 'Mike Newton' in the same sentence.

Emmett might not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but he sure knows how to give people hell.

"What can be funnier than to just kick his ass and watch him cry?" I asked amused.

"Ever seen Newton cry? That's fucking disturbing," Jasper muttered from his place on the other side of Emmett.

"It's been a while since we did something really out there. Something really... *good* ," Emmett said, his eyes lightning up like a child's on Christmas morning.

"And what do you suggest we do?" I asked, waiting for the punch line.

Emmett smirked and the evil glint in his eyes alone made the adrenaline pump through my body. It really had been a long fucking while since we did something reckless, something really stupid and just... fucking awesome. I was glad that Emmett was the one bringing it up and not me for once.

"Breaking and entering," he proclaimed and threw out his arms in a wide gesture.

Jasper frowned, and I groaned. What the fuck was with my brother and breaking into other people's homes? This was always the first fucking thing he suggested we do when he wanted to 'live it up a little', and this wouldn't be the first time we carried through with it, either. I thought Emmett would suggest that we vandalize Newton's car or something, not that there was much left of it to vandalize, but still. I didn't know if I was in the mood for breaking into someone's house. The last time we did it, we almost got busted because Emmett went into the wrong house.

"Sometimes I wonder if all of Rose's slaps are beginning to damage your brain," Jasper sighed.

"Oh c'mon Jazzypants! It's gonna be awesome! We won't steal anything; we can just... freak him out a bit!" Emmett argued with a big grin plastered on his face. Jasper looked at me, probably hoping that I would back him up and say it was stupid, but I just cocked an eyebrow at him.

"You scared?" I asked coolly, just to piss him off.

"No!" he protested, immediately turning defensive, just like I knew he would. He was so fucking predictable.

"Then let's do it," I said, accepting the challenge myself. "We can just break into his fucking room or something, and throw shit around and maybe paint red shit on his walls, making it look like blood..."

"And what if we get caught?" Jasper asked.

"By who?" I asked. "This is fucking Forks. The cops are probably busy eating doughnuts and the neighbors are too busy with their boring lives to pay any attention to us. Nobody is going to catch us."

Jasper sighed and dragged his hands through his hair.

"Fine, I'm in," he sighed in defeat, "but don't expect me to save your asses if you get caught."

I chuckled and put my fist out, he bumped it and I leaned back in my seat.

"So, when should we do it?" I asked.

"There's no time like the present," Emmett replied. "What about tonight? I hear they're doing inventory this week at their store, so I don't think they're com-"

He cut off when he saw Alice and Rosalie re-entered the cafeteria and headed straight for us. I groaned inwardly; those chicks had the worst timing. They passed Newton's table and we all saw how he followed Alice's ass with his eyes. That disgusting pig was practically drooling.

"Looking good, Alice," Mike hollered at her as she passed.

His friends laughed and high-fived him like the morons they were. Like a girl would ever give him the time of day, let alone Alice. Of course, she didn't even flinch or make a face at the comment; she ignored him and kept on walking like nothing had happened. Alice

was nothing if not graceful when it came to idiots and their comments. If it had been me I would have punched his fucking face in. Then again, that's just me.

"I'll bring the blood," Jasper muttered under his breath before the girls reached us. Both Emmett and I looked at him in surprise. He *never* volunteered to do this stuff. He just tagged along because he didn't have the energy to fight us on it, and when he *did* join, he sure as hell didn't take an initiative of his own. Him bringing the paint for this was a fucking milestone. I wondered what had caused the change of heart.

Alice sat down beside him and gave him a quick peck on the cheek. I immediately realized why he had offered to do it, and I wanted to fucking laugh. Sometimes, Jasper could be such a possessive asshole; like Mike would ever manage to get near Alice, even if he tried.

"So, tonight?" I asked, not minding the girls.

Emmett glared at me and I wanted to roll my eyes. While Jasper could be a possessive asshole, Emmett had the habit of being a paranoid one. With me just uttering two words, he thought Rosalie would figure it all out and make him stay home.

Rosalie isn't a fucking mind reader, jackass.

"What's tonight?" Alice asked, hugging Jasper's arm.

"Nothing, just guy stuff," I replied with a shrug,

"Oh yeah? What are you gonna do? Drink till you puke again?" Rosalie asked with a bored tone.

"Don't knock it 'til you tried it, Blondie," I replied with a smirk.

She rolled her eyes at me and I chuckled. Tonight was going to be fun.

I glanced at the clock for the fifth time in probably sixty seconds. The temporary heat that was there a few days ago was long gone and it was evident that it was November now - because it was fucking freezing.

"Where the fuck is Jasper?" I hissed through clenched teeth.

"I don't know, he told us to meet him here," Emmett sighed.

I shuffled my feet and looked around, hoping to catch sight of Jasper's dark Audi, but I saw nothing.

We were currently standing behind the grocery store. The area was dark as shit since the street lights didn't work on this side of the building. I thought it was ridiculous that we had agreed to be picked up here, but Emmett had insisted. He claimed that it was a part of the adventure, to be picked up in a dark place before we drove off to do some mischief.

If I had gotten my way, then we would have been waiting in the warmth of our home right now.

Fucking idiot.

It was almost seven and we knew that the Newtons would be back at eight the earliest, but Jasper being late wasn't really helping us. I buried my hands in the pockets of my leather jacket.

"It's fucking freezing," I complained.

"Stop complaining," Emmett muttered, "We're doing this for your precious fucking car, remember?"

I huffed but didn't say anything. I could sense that Emmett was beginning to get aggravated too, and I knew better than to push him when that happened. Emmett might be a teddy bear, but even he had his limits, and those were not to be pushed or else you would fucking regret it.

A dark, familiar car pulled into the parking lot, drove around the store and skidded to a stop next to us.

"Finally!" I said to Jasper, as I opened the passenger door and climbed inside. Emmett took his usual seat in the back. "What the hell took you so long? We don't have much time as it is!"

"Don't worry, I just needed to grab some things," he replied with a smirk, as he put the car into gear and drove off.

"Did you get the red paint?" Emmett asked excitedly, all the earlier aggravation gone now that we were finally moving. Jasper just smiled broadly, not answering the question, and Emmett bounced in his seat.

It took us ten minutes to reach Newton's house. We parked a block away, since parking in front of the house would be fucking stupid. We climbed out of the car and Jasper popped the trunk. Emmett quickly opened it up to see what Jasper had brought and he squealed like a little girl when he picked up, and looked through, several plastic bags.

I had to admit, I was fucking impressed too, even though I had no idea what the hell we were going to use all this shit for. Jasper hadn't bought any red paint, but for some reason he had bought glitter, feathers and...

"What the hell is this?" I asked, picking up a pair of fluffy handcuffs, and then I laughed out loud as I saw the next thing next to it. "A fucking dildo? *Seriously*?"

Emmett picked up another plastic bag, and peered down at its contents. Then his loud laugh boomed out.

"I hope this isn't from your own secret stash, Dude," Emmett said, giving Jasper an amused look.

"No, Em, it's from yours," Jasper replied sarcastically with an eye roll.

"What is it?" I asked, grabbing the bag from Emmett and looked inside.

It was magazines, I could tell that much, but it was too dark to see clearly what kind of magazines they were, so when I picked one up, I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. The bag was filled with porno magazines. Gay ones at that.

"I suggest we put this shit all around his fucking room in strategic places," Jasper explained in a low voice, "I thought that would be a better payback than painting his fucking wall. Because paint is a bitch to get off your clothes, and Alice would kill me if I got that shit on me."

"You're a fucking genius, man!" Emmett said and slapped Jasper's back. "C'mon, let's take this shit and put it where it belongs."

I had to give it to Jasper, this idea was way better than painting a motherfucking wall. This would destroy Newton and scar him for life. Was there any better revenge than that for hurting my Baby? I thought not.

We all helped to gather the stuff before we walked into the woods, deciding that it was the best course of action, so we wouldn't be seen at all from the streets. Nobody would ever be able to place us at the scene of the fuckawesome crime.

We stepped out of the woods, which were luckily shielding us from view as we neared the house from the back. The Newton shack was a sorry excuse of a house. It was only one level and it was fucking small, with maybe three bedrooms at best. I wondered how the hell Newton had planned on managing to host a big party here on Friday, with the freezing November cold it would be fucking impossible to even use the backyard as extra party space. But that was his fucking problem, not mine.

Jasper moved stealthily towards the house and peered in through a few windows before stopping.

"I think this is the one," he hissed, gesturing to us.

Emmett and I joined him, we peered through the window and I rolled my eyes. This was fucking Newton's room alright. He had his football sweater pinned to the wall, which was fucking ridiculous, since he was only on the team for all of one week then he got kicked out because he was afraid of getting tackled. *Fucking pansy* .

"Who wanna break the window?" I asked.

"It can't look like a break-in, right?" Jasper replied giving me a look, "or else it won't look legit when his mother finds this shit."

"Okay, so how do you suggest we go about it then?" I asked impatiently.

He walked over to the patio door and slid it open. He shrugged.

"Maybe we can use this unlocked door?" he suggested.

"Har har, very funny," I replied.

We went inside and I noted that the house was even sadder-looking on the inside. Pictures of Mike, and what I assume was his litter sister, covered the walls of the living room. Like seeing his ugly face once wasn't enough.

"Those photos are giving me the creeps," Emmett whispered as he pretended to shiver.

"You're not the only one," I replied and made my way towards Mike's room.

We were careful and didn't turn on any lights as we placed all the shit in different places in his room. Jasper had really gone all-out when he bought this shit. He had bought three dildos, a ridiculous

amount of disgusting magazines, and a few DVDs as well. I threw some glitter around his room, and on his bed, along with the feathers. Emmett put a few magazines on his nightstand, another on his desk, and the rest under his bed, so that it would appear as if Mike had tried to hide them from his mother. We put one of the DVDs in the DVD-player, and put the cover casually on top of the TV. We topped it all off by putting one of the dildos on his night stand, and stuck the pink fluffy handcuffs to his headboard.

"What I wouldn't give to see his mother's face when she realizes her son is a fucking faggot," Emmett laughed.

"I always suspected he was," Jasper replied solemnly.

"And that's why he likes to hit on Alice? Because she reminds him of a boy with that short hair of hers?" I teased. Jasper shot his eyes to me.

"Fuck you, Cullen," he spat and I laughed.

"I'd rather not," I chuckled.

He slapped me on the back of my head and I laughed even louder, but my laugh was cut short by the sound of gravel and the living room was lit up for a moment from the headlights of a car.

"Shit," Emmett said, sounding a little panicked, "They're home early... *fuck* !"

We quickly left the room and just as we reached the patio door, we heard the sound of keys rustling and the front door being unlocked. This was a shitty thing, since the patio door was in plain view from the front door.

Fucking Newtons and their house and it's fucking open layout.

Emmett and Jasper disappeared before me through the door, and just as I was about to leave, the front door opened and the lights

turned on. I quickly left and the door smashed loudly as I slid it closed a little too hard behind me. I heard a woman scream as I ran through the yard, towards the dark trees. I could hear Jasper and Emmett laugh somewhere in the woods.

"Come back here you bastard!" a man's dark voice called from the patio. I resisted the urge to call back.

No chance in Hell, douche!

I almost tripped as I ran the short distance through the woods towards the car, but I managed to keep upright. Emmett and Jasper were already in the car with the engine running when I reached them. Emmett had taken the front seat, so I had to jump in the back.

"God, Bro, I thought the crazy guy caught you," Emmett said with a laugh.

"Like he would ever have been able to catch my ass," I replied with a snort.

I leaned back in the seat and tried to relax, despite the adrenaline that was still pumping furiously through my veins. Nothing beats a good fucking adrenaline kick.

We drove off in silence. The only sounds were our erratic breathing and breathless chuckles; each of us enjoyed the high while it lasted.

Jasper dropped us off at home. Mom and Dad were sitting in the living room when Emmett and I walked inside. They were cuddling on the couch, watching some sappy, romantic comedy.

"Hey, Boys," Mom said, without taking her eyes off the TV, "you haven't gotten yourself into any trouble today, have you?" she teased.

"No, Mom, wouldn't dream of it," Emmett chuckled and winked at me.

His comment made her turn her head to us and she narrowed her eyes at Emmett.

"I hope for your sake that you're not being sarcastic," she said sternly.

Emmett just laughed and went into the kitchen and I followed him. The adrenaline kick had gotten me hungry. We prepared ourselves some sandwiches and ate them in silence, the only sounds Emmett's loud chewing, the low sound of the TV and the conversation of our parents...

"... help to be concerned, Esme," Dad sighed quietly, "She looked so fragile. Like she had given up all hope. I really wanted to help the girl, but there was nothing I could do..."

" But are you sure she tried to scam you? I have such a hard time believing a young girl would do that... a teenager at that... she's just a child," Mom replied with a hushed tone.

" Yes, Dear, I'm sure. I recognized the signs, it's not the first time I've witnessed it, though it is the first time it was someone so young, and so innocent," he sighed.

" I wish you could tell me who it was, maybe I could help... she probably doesn't have a good support system at home, and maybe she would be more comfortable to talk to someone who isn't a professional..."

" I know you want to help, but I can't divulge her identity. Not even to you, it goes against everything-"

" -you believe in, I know," Mom cut off, ending his sentence for him.

" And it's against the law too," Dad said with a smile in his voice.

Mom scoffed and I heard him chuckle, then the unmistakable sound of kissing.

"I can't fucking wait to see Newton's fucking face in the morning," Emmett chuckled to himself. I glanced over at him and shook my head at his expression; he really did look like a fucking child on Christmas morning.

"What is it with you and breaking into houses anyway?" I asked, my voice low so our parents wouldn't accidentally overhear.

"What? Are you saying you didn't get a kick tonight? It was awesome!" Emmett said with his mouth full.

I shrugged and ate the last piece of my sandwich. He was right. It had been fucking awesome, but not because we were breaking into someone's house, but because we got to ruin a little sad part of Newton's life.

That reminds me ...

I pushed my chair back and went back into the living room. Fortunately, my parents had stopped kissing by now.

"Hey Dad, what's this shit I heard today?" I asked and plopped down on the empty loveseat.

He looked at me confused.

"What are you talking about?" he asked.

"Newton. He said you had told his mother he didn't need to pay for the repairs, what the fuck is that about?" I asked, hardly concealing my frustration over the matter. "He fucking plowed into me, and now he doesn't have to pay for the damage he did? What the hell?"

He sighed and put on his best "dad-face".

"Son, the Newtons aren't rich people and seeing as we could more than afford to pay for the repairs, and our insurance covered it anyway, I saw no point in putting that on them. It was an accident, pure and simple, and I don't feel comfortable to put such a burden on

a teenage. His mom would have been forced to take that money from his salary," he replied sternly.

"So fucking what? If I had been the one driving into him, then I bet my ass you would've forced me to pay for the fucking repairs of his piece of junk car," I snapped.

"That's different," Dad replied calmly.

"And how the fuck is that different?"

"You would never drive into anything with your Volvo, therefore, there would be no repairs to be paid," he replied simply.

I rolled my eyes and stood up.

"I still think it fucking sucks. He got away with nothing," I said, starting towards the stairs.

"I'm a firm believer in Karma, son, what goes around comes around," he called after me.

Damn right, it does. And tomorrow I would reap the benefits of it.

Ritual

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by:** Say Goodbye Again & bikechick3]

Chapter 7 - Ritual

Isabella Swan POV - One single day before the accident.

It was fascinating to watch my dad trying to cook his own breakfast. I leaned against the doorframe of the kitchen, with his back to me as he stood by the stove. He was trying to make, what I assumed were scrambled eggs, and he had yet to notice me.

He grumbled something under his breath when some of the oil sputtered up at him; it was like watching a kid learning how to walk or something, everything needed to be done with baby steps.

The smell was appalling, and I wondered how the hell he was even capable of producing such an odor from eggs, or any food for that matter, but I wasn't going to ask. At least he was trying to get better at something; at least he was trying to take care of himself.

And that was a heck of a lot more than one could say about me .

I cleared my throat and he whipped his head around.

"Morning, Bells," he said cheerily.

"Morning. Do I dare to ask what you're doing?" I asked, stepping over to him.

I looked down at the pan and wrinkled my nose. I was wrong. There was no freaking way that he was attempting to make scrambled eggs, because I had a hard time believing that that disgusting brown mush had ever been eggs.

"I'm making scrambled eggs," he said proudly and poked the mush with the spatula.

"No, dad, you're not," I said with a quiet chuckle. "Why didn't you just wait 'til I came down, and I could have done it for you?"

"Because I am a grown man and I'm fully capable of taking care of myself," he said defensively.

"Yes, I'm sure you are," I replied, taking the spatula from him and poked the brown mush with it. "But you're still not capable of making scrambled eggs."

He sighed and removed the pan from the stove, putting it in the sink and turning on the faucet. I chuckled as I opened the fridge and grabbed the things needed for making scrambled eggs the proper way. I told Dad to go sit down and let me prepare the food. He then proceeded to do the only thing he was able to do in the kitchen; he poured some coffee in his mug. It was the one with the Forks Police Department logo on it, kind of cheesy, I know, but I guess he was nothing if not his job, before sitting down by the table.

I glanced at him and smiled wistfully to myself. At least he was trying to take care of himself, and it wasn't really his fault that he was incapable of doing something simple as making scrambled eggs.

I did notice, however, that his uniform was unusually clean and crisp today; he had his gun firmly attached to the holster of his belt, and even his mustache was trimmed neat and tidy. He was the epitome of a small town Police Chief taken right out of a bad sit-com, or something.

It was pretty endearing, really, though a little stereotypical.

At least he was trying to take care of himself, and he removed a little of my doubt about whether or not he would be able to survive on his own when I was gone...

But with the luck I'd had this past week, I doubted that I would be gone anytime soon.

"How did it go with the Newtons last night?" I asked casually over my shoulder, not that I really cared, but at least I could make an effort in trying to be a normal daughter for him during the little time that we had left together.

His reaction was unexpected, and frankly; a little weird. He made a very uncharacteristically half-snort, half-chuckle noise, and I glanced over at him and saw him shake his head.

"The patio door was unlocked, and Mr. Newton swears he saw some kid running away from the house... but that's not even close to the most disturbing thing that I've found..." he said, shivering slightly. He closed his eyes and shook his head, as if he was trying to get a nasty picture out of his head.

"What did you find?" Now I was really curious. He shivered again.

"Nothing I would like to divulge to my innocent teenage daughter," he sighed. "Just promise me that you'll keep away from that Newton boy."

I snorted. That wasn't something I needed to be asked twice.

I expected nothing special of my day, when I came to school. I parked my truck in its usual space, and nobody paid me any attention at all as I stepped out and made my way up to the main entrance.

As I reached the steps, I heard the most beautiful sound, and I stopped dead in my tracks, smack dab in the middle of the flight of steps that led to the school entrance. This, obviously was a mistake,

which I became painfully aware of when someone bumped into me from behind. I almost fell face first down the stairs, but I managed to find my balance at the last second.

"Freak," someone spat at me as they passed, and I thanked my lucky stars for getting by with only a stumble and some taunting.

I heard the noise again, and I felt the hair rise on my arms. Someone was laughing, and it was the most beautiful sound I'd ever heard. I looked around, trying to locate the noise and the person creating it and I frowned when I found my target.

Edward was standing with his brother, Emmett, and their friend Jasper, by his Volvo - which he of course had parked in the Principal's space again. He threw his head back as another round of perfect-sounding laughter escaped his lips. I couldn't help but be a little jealous at how carefree it sounded.

He looked genuinely happy, and I envied him for it. I bet he'd never had a hard day in his life; everything was always served to him on a silver platter.

Or maybe a platter made of diamonds - carried by dozens of naked girls.

But it was something more than just jealousy that flared in my stomach as I watched him drag his hands through his unruly hair, and smiling widely at his friends.

What I wouldn't give to be a part of it .

The normalcy, I mean.

That train had left a long time ago, however, and there was no hope for me to ever be normal. Not after everything that I had been through, and it was with that thought that I turned my back to them, and climbed the rest of the way up to the entrance.

I was bombarded left and right by laughing and smiling students, mingling with their friends, telling jokes and sharing secrets. This was such an odd world for me. I didn't fit in here, yet I was still somehow part of it.

I considered myself as the appendix of Forks High. I'm sure I had some sort of purpose being here, but no one – not even I – knew what it was, and the school would survive just fine if I was removed. But unlike the body, the removal of me wouldn't leave a scar. Instead, it would be as though I never existed.

I went through my first classes in a haze and before I knew it, it was time for lunch, and was once again painfully aware of how much I didn't belong here.

I had never belonged. Not in kindergarten, not in elementary school, not in junior high and definitely not in high school. I remember once when I was about ten, I had begged and begged for my parents to let me go to school with Jacob, on the reservation in La Push, what with him being my only friend and all. But my parents wouldn't let me, and in retrospect, I guess I'm pretty glad that they had said 'No'. I would probably have ended up far worse than I did if I had gone there...

I shuffled my feet to the cafeteria, and took my place in line. Some cocky freshman pushed me and cut in front of me. Being who I was, I didn't say or do anything about it.

"Excuse me, Freshie? It's rude to cut in line."

I jumped when I heard the bell-like voice from behind me and turned my head to see Alice Brandon standing a few feet away, her beautiful face scowling at the nameless freshman.

"Sorry," he muttered and immediately took his place behind me. Alice smiled and stepped up beside me.

"Hi Isabella, that pop-quiz was a bitch, huh?" she said cheerily, as though it was totally normal behavior for Alice-freaking-Brandon to

defend me. I stared at her as though she had just sprouted another head, but she didn't even flinch.

"What?" I croaked.

"The pop-quiz in History, first period?" she clarified, "I'm in your class, remember?"

Yes, of course I remember. I could name every single person who was in every single one of my classes. I could even count the people who had willingly spoken to me in any of them on one hand. Hell, on one *finger*. Alice being that very one.

"Yeah... I...uh... I don't think it was that hard," I whispered.

"No, of course not, I bet you're totally smart," she said, and the fact that her tone held no rudeness or even a trace of condescension didn't escape my notice.

Smart? No. not really . More like, having no life so that the only thing distracting me from being reminded of my pathetic existence was to drown myself in homework and become a walking encyclopedia.

Why was she even talking to me?

Then I remembered the conversation she had with Rosalie in the bathroom two days ago, and it all fell into place, and the world finally made sense again.

I'm her freaking charity case. Her new hobby.

"You don't need to be nice to me, I'm not a charity case," I said through clenched teeth. Why didn't she just leave me the heck alone, couldn't she see that I didn't want to be bothered?

Her wide smile was finally wiped off her face and she gaped at me.

"I was just..." she trailed off and furrowed her brow, "I know you're not a charity case. I was just trying to be nice," she added quietly. I

glared at her and she took a step back - I guess I could be intimidating too, if I wanted too.

"Alice! What are you doing? C'mon, the guys are waiting. We're grabbing lunch off campus, remember?" Rosalie called from the opposite side of the hallway.

"I'm coming!" Alice called back before looking at me again. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you." She said to me in a small voice, before skipping over to Rosalie.

She didn't mean to *offend* me? What did that even mean?

As soon as Alice was out of sight, the freshman cut in front of me again, and the people behind him followed suit. Within seconds, I was back at the end of the line. A female freshman looked at me and snickered.

"Goose," she blurted, and then she and her friend burst into a fit of giggles.

I rolled my eyes, and stepped out of the line. I guess that was my cue saying that I wasn't going to have any lunch today. Fortunately, I had learned the art of surviving without lunch, so it would not be that hard to make it through the remaining classes of the day.

And survive I did. Our last class was canceled, because of some teacher-conference or something, and I got to go home early. Although, I had left school early, Dad was home even earlier, his cruiser already parked outside our house when I got home.

I stepped inside and heard Dad moving around the living room, and when I peeked in I was surprised to see that he was dressed in a casual college sweater and a pair of jeans. I was so used to seeing him in his uniform that it was beyond weird to see him dressed in anything else; especially on a Thursday afternoon, when he was supposed to be at work.

"Hey Dad, you're home early," I noted.

He whipped his head around to me, and he had a flustered look about him. If that wasn't a cause of concern, I don't know what was, since my dad *never* got flustered.

"Yes, and so are you I see," he said.

"Yeah, school let out early..." I replied, "So how come you're home so early... and not in your uniform?"

He sighed deeply and scratched his head.

"I'm going to Seattle", he replied, gauging my reaction.

My face went blank, as did my mind.

"Oh..." was all the response I managed to get out.

"I guess it would be a lost cause, if I asked you to join me join me?"

"Yes, that would indeed be the epitome of a lost cause," I replied calmly.

He sighed again and looked at me with pained eyes.

"She's your mother, sweetie, she feels very bad about what happened, and she won't forgive herself until you do..."

I snorted loudly, and crossed my arms over my chest.

"I won't ever forgive her, and I can't believe you're actually asking me to do it," I said, not even bothering to hide the feeling of betrayal that must be evident on my face. "What the hell is wrong with you?"

"Bells, sweetie, I know what happened was... horrible. She was trying to help you but just ended up hurting herself in the process. The doctors think she's getting better now and-"

"And nothing!" I cut him off, "She's insane! And she can con the doctors all she wants, and make them believe she's getting better when she's not. But I thought you of all people would be the very one she could never fool... I guess I was wrong."

"Now you listen to me, Isabella, she is your mother! And I demand you treat her with respect. *You* made a mistake that *she* is being punished for! She doesn't deserve your hatred! She's your Mother!" he argued loudly. I could tell he was holding back in order not to yell at me.

I took a step back and gave him an incredulous look. I knew he didn't know what he was talking about, but his words still struck a nerve.

"She... she doesn't deserve it?" I repeated slowly. "And you think I did?"

He furrowed his brow and looked at me without answering. I guess that was all the answer I needed. I felt my throat close up. I quickly turned around and ran up the stairs. I would not let Dad see me break down.

"You're seventeen years old, Bella, maybe it's time for you to grow up and realize that the world doesn't revolve around you!" he called after me, just as I slammed my door shut behind me.

I threw myself onto the bed and buried my face into my pillow. My body shook with silent sobs, but the tears did not fall. It was as if my body was no longer capable of crying correctly. Yes, my eyes welled up, but the tears never fell, and they disappeared just as quickly as they came. All I was left with was violent sobbing without tears; a pretty uncomfortable feeling, if you ask me, to cry without tears, but I was getting used to it.

Three months ago, when I had come home from the hospital, I promised myself that I would never shed another tear for my mother. And I never did. Not for anyone else either, for that matter.

I didn't even hear my dad leave; I was too busy feeling sorry for myself. I tended to do that a lot lately, and today it felt like I had every reason to.

It's time for me to grow up, and realize that the world doesn't revolve around me.

Did my father know me at all? Had I ever acted like the world revolved around me? No! Instead, I most likely acted like the world revolved *without* me. I was stuck in the past, while everybody else was moving forward.

I hated him. With every fiber of my being, I hated my father, and everything he represented. Yes, I understand that he wanted to be loyal to his wife, and take care of her, but how could he put her before his own daughter? He might not know what had really gone down that night, but why couldn't he show some loyalty to *me* ?

I left the bed with a sigh and went down to get my bag, which I had left in the living room before walking back upstairs and began working on my homework.

Algebra used to be such a cakewalk for me, but now, as I stared down at it, it could have been written in Japanese. I just couldn't concentrate, not with all the memories assaulting my mind...

" Bella, Sweetie, come and take a look at this, doesn't it look nice?" my mom called me from the backyard. I left the food I was preparing in the kitchen, and walked out through the kitchen door.

" Wow, Mom, you have really outdone yourself this year," I smiled.

Mom put her arms around my shoulders and smiled widely. The whole backyard was lit up with beautiful rice-paper lanterns, and she had put down a big wine-red carpet on the grass, and on the carpet she had put down big pillows for us to sit on.

It was July fifteenth, and my mother was turning thirty six. But she didn't look a day over twenty five – a fact that my dad always reminded her of, and making her smile and giggle like a schoolgirl in the process. Like always, she went all-out with the celebrations. 'Asia' was obviously this year's theme, she was dressed like a geisha, with makeup and all, and she insisted we all dress up too.

" The Blacks are coming over any minute now," she said, her eyes shining, "Maybe Billy has some good legends from Asia he can entertain us with..."

I scoffed.

" Mom, they're Native Americans, not Chinese," I said with a chuckle.

" So? They're so into their legends that it wouldn't surprise me if they have picked up a few from other countries, religions and communities as well," she replied with a pout.

" Sure, Mom, or you can just ask him to tell you one of their own legends, and pretend it took place in China," I replied with a shrug.

She nodded solemnly, and I laughed lightly to myself as I went back inside to finish the food.

Billy and Jacob came over just as I was putting out the food on the low table in the backyard. We all sat down on our big pillows on the ground, and gathered around the table.

We ate the countless dishes of Asian food that I'd prepared for the evening, and they all enjoyed my cooking. My own spicy rice was the most popular dish. We talked and laughed, and had a really great time.

When we were all full, and the evening was getting darker, it was the perfect setup for hearing Billy tell us one of their legends. He always did that for my mom on her birthdays, since she had always been fascinated with legends and myths. It didn't matter to her what they

were about, they could be about vampires and werewolves for all she cared, she still enjoyed them. She was certain that all of the stories Billy told her were true and that nothing was made up. Which was pretty amusing at times, especially since not even Billy believed them all, and it was his people's history after all.

" Billy, would you care to tell us one of your legends... preferably one with a lot of drama," my mom said excitedly and Billy chuckled. When he cleared his throat we all knew it was time...

" One of our oldest legends on the reservation is about youth and health. The quest for eternal youth, happiness and health has always been one of Mankind's most-attempted ones... People don't want to grow old and die, and they don't want to be miserable in their existence.

When we first settled here in La Push, several thousand years ago, there was a woman, Nukpana. She was happily married to Chunta, and though they did not have any children, they still lived a happy life together. But there was nothing Nukpana wanted more than to give her husband a child, and though they'd tried many times, she was incapable of bearing a child.

Her husband, Chunta, never mentioned it and never made her feel bad about it... and that's why Nukpana grew suspicious. She knew Chunta wanted a son, someone to carry on the line, and that's why it was strange for him to be so accepting of her not being able to bear his children.

Then, one day, as Nukpana was down by the river, she saw him together with another woman. The sight broke her heart. And though he had betrayed her, she knew she had to do something drastic to keep her husband. She loved him, and she wanted him to herself.

She went over to a neighbor tribe - which became extinct not too long after, and spoke to a woman named Powaga. Nukpana explained her situation and asked what she could do to keep her

husband, and if there was any way for her to bear a child, and Powaga told her that there was.

She told Nukpana that she could become pregnant, and gain eternal youth and beauty in the process, if she drank the blood of a virgin girl, drawn from each of the spiritual points of the body. If she did, Powaga promised that her body would heal and she would be able to bear a child, and no man would ever be able to resist her beauty and she did not need to worry about her husband ever looking at another woman again... but she had to be careful not to kill the virgin girl when she drew the blood, because that would ruin the ritual, and it would have dire consequences.

Nukpana left with a smile on her face. She had already picked out her victim, the other woman's fourteen year old daughter. Back then it was virtually a law, that a girl was clean of any sexual relations until the day she was sixteen. Therefore, Nukpana was sure that the girl was a virgin.

That very night, she kidnapped the girl while she was sleeping and dragged her into the forest, where nobody would hear her scream. And then she cut the girl in the spiritual points.

She didn't know how much blood she was supposed to drink, Powaga never mentioned the amount of blood needed, so she greedily drank from each cut and it wasn't until she drank the last drops from the girl's temples that she realized she had killed the girl.

She was petrified. What had she done? She would never heal now. She would never bear a child.

She went back to her tent, and lay down next to her sleeping husband. She was terrified of what the consequences of her actions would be. She did not hold any grief for the child she had killed, she only grieved for the child she would never be able to give her husband now...

The next morning she woke up in an empty bed. Her husband was gone. She immediately left the tent to search for him. It didn't take long to find him. He was standing by the river again, with the woman in his arms, kissing her passionately as tears fell down the woman's face.

One of the tribe's hunters had found the body of the child earlier that morning, and Nukpana's husband was consoling her... Nukpana watched them kiss and she gasped when they pulled apart. The woman's stomach was bulging, she was apparently pregnant. And it was Nukpana's husband's child..."

Billy's voice trailed off and we were all lost in thought at the end of the story.

" Would it have worked?" my mom asked after a few moments of silence.

" Would what have worked?" Billy asked with a gentle smile.

" The ritual? For beauty and happiness? Eternal life and all that?" Mom asked.

Billy chuckled, as did the rest of us.

" Renée, you are still beautiful, and you're too young to worry about your age," Dad chuckled and gave her a quick peck on the cheek. She playfully slapped his hand and I watched their exchange with a smile.

" I don't know, the legend doesn't say... but I assume nobody was stupid enough to try it after Nukpana's failure," Billy replied, "For all we know, Powaga was just full of it. There's a reason why their own tribe ceased to exist..."

Mom nodded and become lost in thought, as Dad struck up a conversation with Billy about their upcoming fishing trip. All the while,

Mom was rubbing my leg, with a soft smile on her lips, and a faraway look in her eyes...

A thunder outside my window brought me out of my musings, and soon I heard the familiar sound of rain against my window. I glanced over at the clock. It was already after five, and I had spent over three hours in my room doing...

I looked down at my homework and sighed.

... nothing .

My stomach growled and reminded me I had yet to eat anything, and I dragged my feet down to the kitchen. I wasn't expecting Dad to be back until late, so I took my time and made a proper dinner for myself and ate it in the kitchen, instead of in my room.

I hardly tasted the food I was eating; I was too lost in thought to register anything that went down my throat. For all I knew, I could have been eating dirt...

My thoughts were in Seattle. Though I wouldn't forgive my mom for anything, I still wondered how she was, and if she did get the proper help she needed. How was Dad dealing with all this? He wasn't an emotional man, but he did take care of the people he loved in the ways he knew how, and visiting Renée in the institution was one of them. Even though he didn't know the real reason behind her choice to leave.

The a sudden sound rang out and I jumped.

I went over to the phone, careful to look at the caller ID before I answered. It was Dad. I really didn't feel like talking to him right now, but I still found myself picking up the phone.

"Hello?"

"Bella? Sweetie, I have great news!" he said happily. It had been a really long time since I'd heard him sound so excited.

"Yeah? What's that?" I asked. *Did Mom finally kick the bucket?*

"Mom's coming home!" he said.

My eyes went wide and I lost grip of the phone, letting it clatter to the floor. I could still hear his voice from the receiver.

" *Bella? Bella... you there? Did you hear me? Mom is coming home!*"

Lunch

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by:** Say Goodbye Again & bikechick3]

Chapter 8 - Lunch

Edward Cullen POV - *One single day before the accident.*

I had no problem of getting out of bed the next morning. I was dying to see Newton's ugly-ass mug – though, I would never admit *that* out loud - and not because he's such a sexy motherfucker, because, frankly, he's not. No, I wanted to see him because I wanted to see whether or not our prank had been successful.

Emmett bounced down the stairs like an oversized kid, and the floor creaked loudly as he jumped down on it from the last step. He followed me into the kitchen with a shit-eating grin on his face and I chuckled at the sight.

"I guess I'm not the only one excited for today," I smirked.

"Are you kidding? I'm dying to see his sorry ass!" he grinned.

"Oh, maybe you should have kept a couple of his magazines..." I teased, cocking an eyebrow at him as I poured myself some coffee.

"Har har, very funny," he replied with a snort, rolling his eyes.

Leaning back on the counter, I began pondering how else we could make Newton's life hell today. How would we tease him about being gay, without raising suspicion? The worst thing that could happen

would be if he began to suspect that it had been us. Not that it would be such a problem, since the issue would be more than easily dealt with, with some well worded threats to his person. Still, it would be easier if he didn't suspect anything; he had no proof anyway.

We quickly ate our breakfast and walked out to the Volvo. Emmett was practically vibrating in his seat as we drove to school, and I couldn't blame him. This day was going to be fucking epic.

Jasper was already waiting by the Principal's spot, assuming I would park there again. *And hell yeah, I was* . I was done putting my Volvo at risk because the people in this place hadn't learned how to drive yet. Sometimes, I wondered if the state just threw licenses at people when they turned sixteen. Not bothering to be concerned at all, whether or not they even knew how to operate a motor vehicle.

I parked the car and we climbed out. I leaned back against the side of the trunk, of the car, crossing my arms over my chest as I glanced over at Jasper.

"Is he here yet?" I asked.

Jasper shook his head.

"I've been here for twenty minutes and he has yet to show up," he replied.

"If that bastard skips today, then I'm going to stop by his place and kick his ass. We didn't almost get busted last night just so he could skip today and pretend it never happened. We need our gay-Newton, damnit!" Emmett exclaimed loudly.

"Geez, Em, take it down a notch why don't ya," Jasper hissed, as he let his eyes sweep over the lot to make sure nobody had heard Emmett's suspicious comment.

"Sorry," Emmett muttered sheepishly.

We watched as the parking lot began to fill up. There was no sight of Newton yet and we were almost ready to give up. Just then, an unfamiliar Volkswagen Beetle drove up, parking a few rows down, but the face behind the wheel was anything but unfamiliar. I felt a smirk grow on my lips.

"He's making this too easy," I murmured in pleasure.

We watched as Newton left the car and walked with his hands deep in his pockets, and his shoulders slumped, towards the steps.

"Hey Newton, isn't that car kind of... *gay*?" Jasper asked casually as he passed us.

Newton shot his head up, and his eyes widened.

"It's my mom's!" he cried out exasperated.

"Hey, man, no need to get all defensive. I was just stating the obvious... It *is* kind of gay," Jasper said, putting his hands up in defense.

"My car broke down for real, and I needed to borrow hers until I can afford to buy another one. And the car is not gay! It's just... yellow," he explained hurriedly and little *too* defensively about the whole thing. It was fucking hilarious to watch.

"Still, looks pretty gay to me," Emmett nodded.

"I'm not gay!" Newton hissed hysterically through clenched teeth.

"Woah, man, I never said you were," Emmett said in feigned shock and held up his hands in a defensive manner. Newton's face couldn't get any redder after that, and he quickly walked away, leaving us laughing. If there was a better fucking way to start a day, I had yet to find it.

I parted with my friends to get to my first class. I was still grinning like the Cheshire Cat, and that seemed to attract the ladies even more

than usual.

"Hey Edward, you're in a good mood today," Tanya giggled, as she walked up to me and clung to my arm. I was too fucking satisfied with life to be bothered by her clinginess, so I threw the arm around her shoulders instead, and the squeal she just barely contained was evidence enough for me to realize I just made her fucking day. *God, these girls are easy* .

"So the party at Mike's tomorrow, I heard you're not going?" she said, pouting her already too big lips, making herself look like a fucking duck in the process.

"That shit's still on?" I asked, a little surprised, since I had expected him to cancel it.

"Yeah, it's still on. Apparently his mom is even helping out by supplying booze, how cool is that?" she replied. I chuckled and nodded. Cool indeed. His mom was probably thinking that a party and some free liquor would be enough to get him out of his faggot state, and who was I to deny free booze? Besides, he was just setting himself up for even more embarrassment.

There was no fucking doubt that he had probably cleaned his room of the evidence of our prank, but there was no chance that he had managed to get it all. We had been clever enough to hide some stuff in the bottom of his drawers and in the back of his closet. He couldn't have found it all. There was no way. Maybe we could even bring a few more things to the party, and lay them out in his room, just to make sure that somebody found it... this was going to be the best party ever. And, who would have thought that the best party ever would be one hosted by Mike-fucking- Newton?

"I'm fucking there," I grinned. "Wouldn't miss it for the world."

"Yay! But you know, if it gets too boring, you know we can always go somewhere more secluded... and private..." she said, her voice a little lower and a little more seductive.

If this had been any other day, I wouldn't have fucking let myself get teased by this chick. But considering the good mood I was currently surfing, I thought I might as well humor her.

I pinned her against a locker, and she looked at me through heavy lashes. I licked my lips and leaned down. She licked her lips quickly too, obviously thinking I was going to kiss her, but that was where she made her mistake – I was Edward fucking Cullen, and I did not kiss people on the lips. Especially not skanks like Tanya.

Because if a girl is skanky enough to give a guy head in a dirty janitor's closet, then you can be sure she's skanky enough to do even dirtier things to even dirtier people, only God knows where the hell her mouth has been. I wouldn't let my own mouth get near that shit.

I leaned down and pressed my lips against her throat, and then I gently nibbled on her skin, effectively making her moan in my ear.
Fucking easy .

"Edward..." she breathed heavily. "We... we can't do this here..."

"Says who?" I muttered against her skin, pressing myself even harder against her. She was totally stuck between me and the locker now, and though she pleaded for me to stop she made no effort to get away. I didn't pay any attention to the other motherfuckers in the crowded hallway, as I let my hand slip under her short skirt, and felt the dampness of her panties.

This shit was turning her on.

I smirked and bit down a little harder on the skin by her collarbone, while I put some pressure on her sex, making her squirm and moan under my touch.

Then the warning bell rang, and I pulled away quickly. She looked at me wide eyed, and the lust clouded over her eyes completely.
Fucking sleaze .

"Edward!" she whimpered in disappointment.

"Sorry, I have to get to class," I said with a shrug and disappeared down the hallway.

I could feel her shooting daggers at my back, but I just chuckled. What the hell did she expect? That I would get her off in a hallway? I don't think so. Not in a million fucking years.

I leaned against my locker and played with my car keys. It was time for lunch, and I was waiting for the others to get out of class, so we could get out of here and get some real food for once. But that wasn't going to happen if they didn't hurry up.

The only person I wasn't in the mood to see right now was, of course, the only person moving towards me. *Tanya*. Didn't I scare her off enough this morning? What the hell was she, some kind of masochist? I rolled my eyes as she reached me. I was too fucking hungry to deal with this shit. The high from my good mood earlier was beginning to fade.

"You, me and the janitor's closet," she said with a hurried voice as she gripped my shirt.

I looked down at her hands in disgust. People did not fucking touch me if I didn't grant them access first. I pried her fucking fingers off me in irritation, noticing how her grip had fucking wrinkled my shirt.

"Sorry," I replied coldly. "But you'll have to find someone else to sate your needs."

She gaped at me and I cocked an eyebrow at her, silently challenging her to argue with me.

"But... but... earlier? What the hell, Edward, you can't do that and not finish what you started!" she whined like a damn five year-old.

"Are you telling me what to do?" I asked incredulously. "Instead of complaining what I didn't finish off, you should be grateful that I even give your sorry ass any attention at all. We both know you need me more than I need you."

She narrowed her eyes and stomped her foot. The sight was pretty damn amusing.

"Fuck you, Cullen," she spat and stormed past me.

"Yes please, but not right now," I called after her, and I heard her growl in response.

"Oh man, that was just mean," Emmett said from behind me. I turned my head around and smirked.

"What did I do?" I asked, tilting my head innocently.

"That girl is so fucking in love with you it's not even funny," he chuckled.

"Too bad she's dumb as bat," I replied with a sigh. "But whatever, where're the others? I'm fucking starving."

"Rosalie went after Alice, and Jasper is... well, here he is," he said, looking over my shoulder.

Jasper joined up with us, and then the girls turned up from the direction of the cafeteria, soon after.

"Did you guys forget we had plans?" Emmett asked, putting an arm around Rosalie as we walked down the hallway, towards the entrance.

"No, but Alice was feeling up for doing some charity work before lunch," Rosalie replied with an eye roll.

"Charity work?" Jasper inquired, looking down on his tiny girlfriend, in confusion.

"She's not charity work!" Alice argued with a sigh. "I was just helping her out."

"Her? It's a *person* ?" I asked amused.

"Isabella Swan, she almost choked the other day, remember?" she replied.

I stopped as we reached the doors, and I feigned a look of concern.

"Don't tell me she was almost choking again!" I said in mock horror.

She rolled her eyes and I chuckled as I opened the doors.

"No, I was just being nice. She's a nice person, and I don't understand why people are giving her such a hard time, she hasn't harmed anyone," Alice muttered, and Jasper squeezed her shoulder.

"Maybe because she's a fucking freak? Maybe she keeps away from other people because she knows she doesn't belong on this earth. She belongs on Planet-"

"- Freakazoid," Rosalie said, cutting me off. I smirked at her in appreciation.

"Exactly! Thanks, Rose," I nodded.

"Anytime, Eddie," she smirked back.

"Oh c'mon, she's not that bad," Emmett argued. "Yeah, she's a quiet little mouse, but it's not like she's weird about it. So what if she doesn't talk to other people? Maybe she just likes to keep to herself?"

"Why are you defending her?" Rosalie complained.

"Maybe because I agree with Alice on this one. Isabella might be weird, but I don't think she deserves the bullying and the name calling," he replied with a shrug.

"What? Her name is Swan, and she looks nothing like it, of course people will call her goose and duck, it's just common sense," I argued.

We reached the car, I unlocked it and everybody climbed in. Emmett rode shotgun – since he was too big to fit in the backseat when the others had to fit too.

"You're a jerk, Ed," Alice muttered. "You have no respect for other people's feelings."

I put the car into gear, and drove off, shaking my head slightly. Alice could be so absurd sometimes. Of course I considered other people's feelings, and respected them. I cared about their feelings, didn't I? And what the hell did she think I was anyway? A chick? Why would I care what other people were feeling? Especially someone as worthless as Isabella Swan. Had she done anything to be even worth the air she was breathing? I thought not.

We drove out to the only restaurant in town – The Lodge. The food there was ridiculously overpriced, and totally not worth it. But the town of Forks didn't leave us with a lot of options, since the Lodge was the only restaurant in town. So you were forced to pay for their overpriced, greasy fries if you wanted to have a meal out, whether you liked it or not.

Normally we would drive to Port Angeles if we wanted to eat out, but that was almost an hour drive away, so it was not an option when it came to getting out of school to have lunch.

Was it really that hard to open up a decent burger joint or something in this place? A fucking Mickey D's or some shit. Seriously? I couldn't be the only one growing tired of having to drive all the way to Port Angeles in order to get a decent burger. You simply didn't want to get burgers at The Lodge, since they used the most disgusting fucking dressing ever, and even though you ordered it without it you still got it.

Fucking imbecile idiots can't even get an order right .

We sat down in an empty booth, and picked up our menus. Not like we needed to look at them. We all knew what they had, and we all knew what we would order anyway. I guess it was all a part of the damn act of going to a restaurant, always checking the menu even if you could recite it in your sleep.

The waitress came over to us, asking if we were ready to order. Her apron was greasy and dirty, and her even greasier hair was pulled back into a ponytail. She looked like she could use a fucking shower. Even her fucking forehead was shiny, and I didn't even want to know whether it was because she was sweaty, or if it was grease from the fryer. I assumed that the only reason they hadn't been shut down yet, due to health code violations, was because there simply was no other place to get a fucking meal – other than your own goddamn house - and the department who checked up on these things felt sorry for them and let them keep it open. Even though they should have been shut down a long time ago.

Did I tell you I hate The Lodge?

We all ordered the usual, and I slumped in the booth, playing mindlessly with a napkin.

"So I hear you and Tanya are getting serious," Rosalie smirked, getting my attention.

"Are you kidding me? Where the hell would you hear something so absurd?" I asked incredulously.

"I overheard her talking to Jessica Stanley and Lauren Mallory in the bathroom between periods. Apparently you were so hot for her that you couldn't keep your hands to yourself, and almost fucked her against a locker this morning," Rosalie explained with an amused tone.

"Oh dear God," I muttered, and hid my face in my hands, and rested my elbows on the table.

"I always thought you guys would end up together. So when's the wedding, Bro?" Emmett laughed.

"Oh fuck you," I muttered and let my hands down on the table, "I was just in a good fucking mood, and she happened to get in the way, and I teased her a little before class. And what the hell do I get? A fucking stalker."

"Maybe if you didn't tease them so much, they wouldn't get any ideas," Jasper suggested with a shrug.

"Oh c'mon, how can they not know by now that I don't *do* girlfriends?" I asked, exasperated. "Except *other* people's girlfriends," I added with a smirk.

"You're such a pig," Alice sighed with a frown.

"Yes, I am, and the girls love it," I replied throwing a dazzling smile her way.

"They think they can change you, they think that they will be the one to get you to change your womanizing ways and make an honest man out of you. They're too naïve to know that you're a lost cause," Alice continued. "And you're an ass for getting away with it. I sure hope you meet a girl someday, a girl you really care about, a girl you will actually *love* and then I sure as hell hope she dumps your sorry ass, so you can feel even a dash of what you make the girls at school feel every day when you tease them like that, making them believe they are special."

I scoffed at her comment, letting that be my response. Why did girls always want to change a guy? Why couldn't they be happy with what they got and leave it at that?

Of course I knew where Alice was coming from, and I knew what she was getting at, but come on already. It wasn't like I was stringing the girls along; they knew very well what they were getting into when they went to bed with me. I never gave them a reason to think that they could change me – that mistake was all on them.

"Ah, Alice Brandon, ever the Mother Teresa," Rosalie smiled and Alice frowned.

"I'm serious, you guys, I can't believe we're actually friends with this asshole," Alice replied and gestured to me.

"He's my brother," Emmett replied simply.

"He may be an ass, but he's a great ass," Jasper chimed in, much to Alice's dismay.

Alice turned to Rosalie, and Rosalie laughed.

"I don't know why the hell we're friends with him! I'm with you on this one," she laughed.

"Good, finally someone at this table with an ounce of brain," Alice said with a satisfied smile.

I should have been offended, but frankly I wasn't. We'd had this conversation too many times to count during the past few months. Alice apparently thought I was getting worse by the day. She had taken me aside on more than one occasion, pleading with me to get my act together. But I didn't know what the big deal was; I was acting just like I've always had, so why did it matter so much now?

I enjoyed the ladies, and they enjoyed me. What was so wrong with that?

Alice kept bugging me about getting a girlfriend, and to stick my dick in one girl at a time, and not in five different girls in as many days. She wanted me to settle down a little, so I could experience the

wonderful – her words, not mine – aspects of being in a serious relationship. According to her, the sex was even better when you loved the person.

I wouldn't know anything about that though, since I had never loved a girl, because there was not exactly an abundance of lovable girls in this town. Fuckable? Yes. Lovable? Nope. At least not one I was aware of.

Alice glared at me from across the table; I sighed and looked out the window.

Get a grip, get a girlfriend.

Those were her exact words when we had that conversation a week ago. I swear she just wanted me to get one so we could triple-date, or something equally ridiculous.

The waitress came back with our food, and I stuffed my mouth full, so my friends wouldn't expect me to get involved in any more conversations. I wasn't in the mood for talking. I was just in the mood for eating and stuffing my starving stomach.

I was furious with Alice. This day had started out great, I was fucking flying through my first classes thanks to my mood, but then she had to drag me down with the whole feelings-thing. Who the hell did she think she was? I swear to God, that if she wasn't such a tiny little person, and the fact that she was a girl, I would have kicked her ass a long time ago.

The thing with Tanya was killing my buzz too. I knew better than to tease her like that in the hallway, I knew she would get the wrong idea and become even clingier, but still, I did it for the hell of it.

If I had done the same thing with someone else, say, Lauren Mallory, she would just have begun to admire me more from afar, giving me flirty glances when we passed each other in the hall, and she would

probably beg me to fuck her when she got a little alcohol in her system. But she would not become the clingy mess that was Tanya.

That was weird, to say the least, since Tanya was so much fucking hotter than Lauren, and she didn't need any help landing a guy. Maybe that was why she kept running after me, she liked the chase and the challenge. She knew she couldn't have me, and that drove her mad.

I guess I would feel the same way, if a girl turned me down for no good reason.

But fuck it, unlike Tanya, I had my standards, and I would never stoop so low just to get a girl. I would never beg and plead just to have a girl. That was absurd. No girl would ever be worth the hassle anyway.

Before I knew it, we had finished our food and were driving back to school.

"Did you guys hear that Newton is having that party after all?" I asked, addressing my question to nobody in particular.

"He will? Fucking awesome!" Emmett grinned. "I wonder what secrets you can unravel in his house..." I threw him an amused glance and Jasper chuckled from the backseat.

"The only secrets that guy has is that he probably still wets his bed, and that he sleeps in Star Wars pajamas," Rosalie muttered with a bored tone.

"Guys, c'mon, what is this? Be-mean-to-everybody-day?" Alice complained.

"Sweetie, we're just having fun, don't be a buzz-kill," Jasper murmured in her ear, and I didn't need to see her to know that she melted in his arms. She was so fucking easy. Jasper was one of the

very few people in the world that could manipulate Alice so easily... no, he was the *only one* who could manipulate her. Period.

"Besides, Al, you are usually pretty good at badmouthing people too, so don't pretend you're a saint," I said, glancing at her through the rearview mirror. She met my gaze and narrowed her eyes.

"But when I do, I always have a good reason to," she argued.

"Just because girls checks out Jazzy pant's ass doesn't mean that's a reason to hate a girl and call her a skank behind her back," I replied with a sweet voice. "Maybe you should practice what you preach, Girlfriend."

"Oh shut up," she muttered, snuggling up to Jasper, and we all laughed at her.

Alice may have been good at telling people what to do, but she was also very good at pretending that she wasn't just as good at hurting people like the rest of us were, though she believed she had a good reason to. Then again, who was she to decide what reason was a good one, and what was not? She was a hypocrite, plain and simple, but she wouldn't be Alice any other way.

Alice seemed to be the only one passionately annoyed by my womanizing ways, which was why I didn't let myself get bothered by it. Emmett always had my back, and though he casually told me that he didn't agree with the way I was sometimes, he didn't give me shit about it the same way Alice did. Jasper didn't get involved in the issue at all, since he didn't want to get on either of our bad sides, and I respected that.

Rosalie, on the other hand; I couldn't care less about what she thought. She could agree with Alice just out of spite for all I knew, since we had that good old love-hate-relationship going on. So why would I care?

I parked the car in the lot, and I didn't even care that we were ten minutes late for class. We parted ways when we walked through the main entrance, and I stopped by my locker before heading to class.

I opened the door to the Biology classroom, not even caring what the teacher said about me being late – *again* – and taking my seat without a word.

"... a girl you will actually love and then I sure as hell hope she dumps your sorry ass..."

I scoffed inwardly as Alice's voice echoed in my head.

Did she actually think I would ever fall in love? I didn't even think I was capable of loving anyone other than myself, so the risk of me falling in love was slim to none. Therefore, I would never have my heart 'broken'.

I rolled my eyes at nothing in particular and hid my face in my hands.

Alice always managed to get inside my head, making me think like a fucking girl, and it was driving me insane. Why did I let her get to me like this?

I leaned back in my seat with a sigh and let my eyes wander around the room.

There was only one way to get Alice's words out of my head. To quit *thinking* like a girl, I needed to *nail* a girl. Preferably during the next break between classes.

I looked around, quietly contemplating who to bring to the closet. Tanya was out; obviously, I didn't need her clinginess right now.

As though I had no control, I felt my eyes being drawn to the plain-looking brunette girl in the corner. She sat with her head down and her lips moved infinitesimally as her eyes traveled over the pages in her book.

And Alice said she wasn't weird?

Swan couldn't even read a fucking book in silence without doing something weird.

I turned my eyes to the front with a huff, and slumped even lower in my seat.

I guess I wasn't getting laid today.

Collision

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note : [**Beta'ed by:** Say Goodbye Again & adt216]

Chapter 9 - Collision

Isabella Swan POV

No. No. No. This can't be happening!

I leaned my back against my closed bedroom door, slowly sliding down to a sitting position on the floor. I wrapped my arms around my legs and rested my forehead against my knees. I slowly rocked back and forth, while my entire body was shaking with silent sobs. My throat was closing up, making it impossible for me to take a proper breath and fill my lungs with much needed oxygen.

How could he do this to me? Haven't I been through enough?

I had barely been able to pick up the phone after I dropped it; my hands had been shaking so violently that I had to grasp the phone with both of them. Dad was speaking excitedly about Mom's return, but the words weren't registering with me as he rambled on. Only four small words made their way through the haze.

Mom is coming home.

I couldn't even begin to explain how much I hated my dad at that moment, particularly the way his voice rose in excitement when he spoke about Mom's return. I hated him for sounding the most excited he's ever been since she was admitted. But most of all, I hated him

for not considering what this was doing to me. He didn't even seem to care that I wasn't responding to him on the phone, and that I was slowly falling apart in our kitchen.

He was too caught up in re-telling everything the doctors had said to him. And oh boy, was my father excited, and the excitement made no sense to me.

What was there to be excited about?

I didn't care what he had to say, because no matter what, all I could hear him say in my head was: *"Yay, my crazy wife is coming home. Let's order cake and make it a party!"*

This was not a time for celebration.

I tried to recall what Dad had said about the doctors, and I frowned as his words came back to me. Apparently, Mom was getting better according to the doctors, and they said she had shown great improvement over the past three months. For reasons unknown to me, they were convinced she was ready to get back into the real world, and visit us for the weekend.

Just for the weekend.

I tried to find solace in the fact that I wouldn't be forced to be with her for longer than two days and two nights. Then, she would be sent straight back to the loony bin where her crazy ass belonged. But though it was a short time, I still thought it was two days and two nights too long.

I had my doubts on whether or not I was even ready to face her. I haven't even seen her since she was admitted three months ago. I never joined Dad when he went up to Seattle on his weekly visits. *And for a damn good reason, too.*

Was I ready to face her? No, I didn't think I was. I had serious doubts on whether or not I would even survive a meeting with her, let alone

an entire weekend.

An entire weekend. *Crap* .

Dad wouldn't be there to support me and help me through my weekend either. If I knew my father at all, I assumed he would probably just act like nothing was wrong, and that Mom hadn't been in an insane asylum for the past three months. And most likely, he would act like what happened three months ago didn't happen at all. Then they would both gang up on me and be angry with me for not welcoming my mother with open arms and lots of hugs and kisses.

When it all came down to it, was that what they were expecting of me? Did they really think I would forgive her? Did they really think I *could* forgive her?

What was wrong with these people?

No tears fell from my eyes, and for that I was glad, because she wasn't worth my tears.

She's not worth anything. She doesn't matter at all.

I scoffed at myself, tilting my head up and leaning back against the door.

Who was I trying to kid here?

It didn't matter how much I tried to tell myself that she meant nothing to me. If that was true, why did I still have a hard time breathing at the mere thought of her? She was my mother, for crying out loud, and no matter what she did to me, and no matter how much I hated her, it would not change the fact that she gave birth to me. Her blood pulsed through my veins. Her body gave life to mine. I was the spitting image of her, and maybe that's why she did what she did. I had her chocolate brown eyes and brown hair... I even had the same freaking streaks of red in my hair, which were only visible in the sun.

I looked like my mother.

Did that mean I was like her?

Did that mean I was insane too?

Maybe.

I had been on the quest of finding a way to kill myself for a while now. How could that *not* be crazy? To be suicidal at one point in your teenage life was the rule, not the exception, but it still didn't make it... *okay*. I knew what I was thinking wasn't good, but what the hell was I supposed to do? I couldn't handle the pain anymore, and death was my only way out.

Somehow, for some reason, I had been able to hold on for almost three months now. The pain was excruciating, but I was still managing to hold on and not give up completely. That must mean something, right?

No, Bella, you idiot. It just means you're too afraid, too freaking chicken, to actually go through with it. You always look for excuses to not kill yourself. "It's too messy", "It's too painful" and yada yada yada. Like any of it matters when you're dead.

I stared into space and every time I blinked, I would see my mom's face. It was the good face, not the crazy face. The beautiful face. The face of the mother she used to be. The mother who always used to bake chocolate chip cookies with me on Sundays, even though they always ended up tasting like crap.

The mother who would say she loved me.

The mother I would believe when she said those words.

I gnawed on my lip and tried to gain control over my body. Ever so slowly, the shaking and the sobbing subsided and I was able to breathe properly again.

Dad said he was going to spend the night in Seattle and drive back with Mom tomorrow at noon. They would be here when I come home from school. He wanted me to make the dinner for tomorrow, preferably lasagna since it was her favorite. He was even considering asking the Blacks over.

" *It's been so long since you've seen Jacob, don't you miss him ?*" he had asked, but I was still so bewildered by the situation that I couldn't even cough out an answer to that.

No, of course I didn't miss him. What the hell was there to miss? My best, and only friend in the entire world, stabbed me in the freaking back. How could I ever miss a person like that?

Of course, I couldn't tell my father that. He didn't know the true story about what went down that dreadful night, and maybe that was for the best. Because if he knew all the gory details, Billy Black sure as hell wouldn't still be breathing. Dad would have gone over there so fast, pointing his gun to Billy's head and pulled the trigger without as much as a second thought.

At least that was what I liked to believe he would do.

Billy deserved to die. As did Jacob. As did Mom.

But as life would have it, I was the only one aiming for my own demise. When I was dead. why would I care if they kept on living? Karma would get them soon enough, what goes around, comes around, right? I liked to believe that too.

I stood up on shaky legs and slowly made my way over to my bed. It wasn't even close to my bedtime, but I had no energy left in my body to do anything else.

I removed the clothes from my body and threw them on the floor, before pulling on a worn t-shirt and climbing into bed.

Mom was coming home in less than twenty four hours... Hell, it was more like *twenty* hours.

And then it wouldn't matter whether or not I thought I was ready to see her, because I would be forced to look her in the eyes and know that she wasn't my mom anymore. She would always be my *mother* , the one who gave me life, but she was no longer my *mom* , the one who loved and took care of me.

Ready or not, here she comes.

The blaring of the alarm clock was not a welcoming sound in the morning, and I resisted the urge to just turn it off, turning my back to it and going back to sleep. But I couldn't do that. I needed to go to school because that would leave me with a few hours of peace. Mom would be here when I came home and the longer I could stay in school and put off our meeting, the better.

I did my morning ritual in such a haze that I was surprised to suddenly find myself in the cabin of my truck, and it was already seven thirty. Maybe I would get through the weekend like that too, if I was lucky.

The grass outside our house was covered in white frost, and as I backed the car out of the driveway I saw that the pools of rainwater on the streets had become frozen solid during the night. I was lucky that my truck was such a sturdy piece of metal; it would take a hell of a lot more than a few patches of ice to stop my truck from going anywhere but where I was steering it. Never once had I been even close to getting into an accident with my truck.

All the parents that were scared of their children getting into accidents during the winter should buy them a sturdy truck from the late fifties, since it wasn't affected by anything.

I was beyond frazzled when I reached the school parking lot. I had been checking the rearview mirror every other minute, feeling slightly paranoid and half-expecting to see Dad's cruiser behind me. And

when I climbed out of my truck, I let my eyes wander over the parking lot once, just to make sure Dad wasn't there. It didn't matter if it made no sense for them to come here - I was still afraid they would.

What Mom did three months ago didn't make sense to me either, so it wouldn't surprise me if she made Dad drive her to school just to torture me. Being her, that would only make sense after all, in a weird and twisted kind of way.

Breathe, Bella, it's only eight a.m. They won't be here until noon. That's four hours from now. And you won't be home from school until three thirty. That's another three and a half hours. You have time to prepare yourself. Just breathe.

I closed my eyes and took a deep, cleansing breath. Just as I opened my eyes I found myself a little too close to someone's back, and I didn't have time to stop myself from walking into said someone, making us both tumble forward.

I grasped onto whatever was closest to me, to keep from falling and hitting the cold ground.

The guy I had smashed into was not that lucky.

As if in slow motion, I saw him hit a thin piece of ice, which was covering a puddle of mud. The ice broke under his fall, causing the mud to splash everywhere, but nothing came into contact with me.

"WHAT THE FUCK!" he yelled.

He was practically laying face down in the mud as he growled. He slowly turned his body to see who hit him, and when he noticed me, he gave me the deadliest of glares.

I tried to ignore the fact that Edward Cullen looked good even covered in icy mud.

"Fucking idiot! Look what the fuck you did!" he yelled yet again.

I felt myself blush a millions shades of red, and I gripped harder on whatever it was that kept me from falling over. Then I realized that whatever I was gripping was soft, while still steady.

What. The. Hell?

I looked down at my hand, and my eyes went wide when I saw that I had clutched onto another person. I slowly let my eyes wander upwards. When I saw the face that belonged to the person, I felt myself gasp, but Emmett Cullen just grinned back at me.

"Walk much?" he joked.

I quickly pulled my hand back, as if I had burned myself.

Edward was still sitting in the mud with a furious and murderous look in his eyes.

"Are you fucking insane? Do you have a fucking death wish?" Edward asked, his voice low and menacing.

Death wish? You have no idea.

But of course, I couldn't tell him that. Hell, I couldn't even tell him anything. I became some sort of mute in his present, because at that moment, Edward Cullen scared the crap out of me, especially by the way he was looking at me, like he was trying to kill me with his eyes.

"I'm... I'm sorry," I stuttered, "I was lost in thought."

He stood up, groaning as he looked down at the mud caking on his clothes. He tried to dust it off with his hands, but instead he ended up smearing it even more. He clenched his fists, and his breathing was deep and labored, like he was fighting some inner demon. Then ever so slowly, he turned his glare down at me. He was even more terrifying while standing up, since he was now towering over me like a giant – even if he was only a head taller than me. His emerald

eyes were shooting fire and I felt my breath hitch. *His eyes are beautiful.*

"Yeah, obviously," he spat. "Were you musing over how pathetic you are? And how tragic it is that you have no fucking friends and that a guy would never even touch you with a fucking stick? And that you will most likely die a painful death... *alone*?"

"Ed, c'mon... it's not like she meant to push you," Emmett said, trying to calm his brother down.

"Are you fucking kidding me? These jeans were brand fucking new!" Edward yelled, infuriated.

"I'm sorry! I'll pay for the dry cleaning, I swear!" I said quickly, feeling my throat close up.

Please, no tears in front of Edward. Please. Please. Please.

"Dry cleaning?" he snorted. "No dry cleaning in the world could get this shit out from these pants. And like you could ever afford it anyway," he shook his head. "These pants are worth ten times more than what your car was worth when it was new!"

"C'mon, Ed," Emmett sighed and gave Edward a tired look.

But Edward didn't listen; instead he took a step towards me, now standing so close that I could feel his hot breath in my face. It smelled like a mixture of smoke, mint and... something simply mouthwatering. *Not the time, Bella, so not the time for this...*

"You're fucking dead, Goose," he hissed at me. "I will kill you. Trust me when I fucking say that I will destroy every little part of your pathetic little existence."

"Enough, Edward," Emmett said, this time with a tone of authority to his voice, and grabbed Edward's arm, dragging him off. "Let's drive home and you can take a fucking shower and chill the fuck out."

Edward didn't resist Emmett's pulling, but I doubt he could have made any difference at all if he tried anyway. He glared at me all the way to his car.

Edward promised he would destroy my life. And in a few hours my mom would be home.

Fantastic.

Maybe I should pair them off, since they both seemed to share the same mission in life.

I couldn't have started this day off any worse, even if I had tried.

I hid out in the old music room during lunch, and I sat by the window looking down on the parking lot. I could see the mud pool, where I had pushed Edward, and it was like I could see the whole scene play out again from afar. I saw myself close my eyes, and walk right into Edward, pushing him face first into the mud.

Edward had every right to be angry with me, and I was surprised that Emmett came to my defense. But then again, that was probably just for Edward's benefit, I don't think it would have ended well for him if he would have hit me or done whatever it was that he wanted to do in order to punish me for ruining his expensive jeans.

I looked down on my cell phone, just as it went from 11:59 to 12:00. It was officially noon, and Mom was probably back in Forks now. It was an eerie feeling knowing that she was so close, and in a matter of hours I would see her again.

I tried to imagine what she looked like. For some reason, I imagined her hair to be tangled and frizzy, her eyes would no longer shine with life, and her skin would be pale and pasty. Her lips would be chapped and she would have some dried drool on the corner of her mouth. She would just be skin and bones, he would slouch when she walked, and the proper posture she used to have would be long forgotten... she would be broken and destroyed.

At least that was what I imagined, because that was the woman I wanted to meet. It would make it so much easier to see that she was just as broken on the outside as I was on the inside.

The mother that left three months ago still had life in her eyes, her hair was ever so shiny and her skin flawless. She had the posture of a supermodel and there was no drool in the corner of her mouth. And I did not want to meet that woman, because that would make it much harder for me to keep my head straight and remember that I hated her. I had to remember...

" Mom, are you okay?" I asked slowly, more than a little concerned by the odd look in her eyes.

" Of course, sweetie, why wouldn't I be? This will be a night we'll never forget. Everything will change tonight," she replied, her eyes sparkling by the lit candles on the table. I sat down on the pillow on the floor next to her and looked at her bewildered, her eyes were scaring me, and when she looked at me it didn't even seem like she recognized me. Or even saw me at all.

" Mom," I said, my voice shaking in fear, "What are you gonna do?"

She smiled lazily at me and took my hand.

" We're gonna do this together. We're gonna make everything okay. No more pain and suffering."

" But, Mom, I'm not in pain... I'm not suffering..." I replied confused.

" I know you say that now, but soon that will all change, and better to be safe than sorry."

There was a knock on the front door and I looked at it puzzled. Who the hell was coming over at this hour?

" Come in, it's open," my mom called, without letting go of my hand.

The front door opened and I subconsciously gripped my mom's hand tighter as I watched our guests walk in. They nodded at Mom and closed the door behind them as Mom nodded back.

"I thought you'd never come," she said with a smile.

The bell rang, signaling the end of lunch. I looked down on my untouched food with a sigh; it wasn't the first time the thought of Mom had made me lose my appetite.

I made it down to Biology just in time. I did my best to ignore the glare Edward was giving me from his seat, but I still felt my cheeks blush furiously. He hissed something under his breath when I passed him, but I couldn't make out what it was. I guess I should count myself lucky, he was no doubt muttering a bunch of things I didn't need to hear right now, anyway.

Our teacher, Mr. Melina, was preparing two piles of files on his desk, and then he looked at us from over his glasses, which had slid down on his nose. Nobody was paying any attention to him, the whole classroom was still buzzing with lunchtime talk. I guess people didn't realize that lunch was over, and that they were sitting in a classroom and not in the cafeteria.

Mr. Melina cleared his throat, but still didn't get a response out of his students. I could see, more than I could hear, him sigh as he slowly shook his head, but for some reason he was smiling softly in amusement of this current situation.

"Sexual Education," he said, his voice no higher than normal conversational tone, but still the entire classroom went silent and everyone turned their heads to him. I guess I understood his amusement now; nothing gained the attention of teenagers more than the subject of sex.

"Sexual Education," he said again, smiling at the unusual attention he got from his students. "We will, together with the high schools in Port Angeles and La Push, be a part of a sex-ed project, and the

project will last for four weeks. You will be separated into groups of four, and you will pick a random subject from my cap of topics," he picked up a white baseball cap that was filled with small white notes, "and your project will be based around this topic. You shall discuss within your group, and write down your conclusions and present them in four weeks, together with the kids in Port Angeles and La Push."

"Is this supposed to be purely theoretical, or are we supposed to experience these topics?" A boy asked, with a serious tone, and a few students snickered.

"Ha ha, very funny," Mr. Melina muttered. "No, this is purely theoretical. Our school's official policy is abstinence, and we do not encourage such behavior."

A few students groaned and I rolled my eyes.

"I've already created the groups, when I say your name, I want you to come up here with your group and pick a topic, and grab a folder, which contains all the information you need about the project. And before anyone asks, yes, this will be a big part of your final grade," Mr. Melina said and picked up a paper from his desk. "Okay, so these are the groups..."

He began rambling names and each student walked up to the desk, and grabbed their topic, before walking back.

"... Mike Newton, Lauren Mallory... Isabella Swan..." he said, and I heard Lauren groan loudly, as she left her seat, when she heard my name, "and Edward Cullen," he finished.

My eyes immediately shot to Edward, and he was frozen in his seat. His eyes staring into space.

"Excuse me?" he said between clenched teeth, without moving a muscle, his eyes still staring at nothing in particular.

"Mr. Cullen, you will work with Newton, Mallory and Swan," Mr. Melina clarified, as if he really believed that Edward hadn't heard him.

"Can I please switch groups?" Edward asked, his voice shaking and it was obvious that he was boiling underneath.

"No can do, Mr. Cullen, if you switched, then everybody would switch, and before you know it everybody would be working with their friends, and that is not what this project is about. You will gain so much more if you work with people you do not normally talk to," Mr. Melina replied.

"What if I don't care about gaining anything?" Edward muttered.
"What if I'm happy just the way I am? And what if I don't fucking care what that fucking Goose thinks about anything?" His voice rose at the end and he shot his eyes to me. People gasped at his outburst, and I blushed as they all turned to stare at me.

"Sorry, Mr. Cullen, but I guess you will just have to live with the fact that you will have to listen to what Miss Goose... Miss *Swan* has to say for the upcoming weeks." The fact that he called me by the wrong name did not go unnoticed by anyone, which was proven when the whole class snickered in response.

"Oh fuck it," Edward muttered and left his seat.

Mike and Lauren were already standing by Mr. Melina's desk, and Edward joined them. I was too embarrassed to even leave my seat. They didn't seem to care anyway. Edward put his hand in the cap and picked a topic. He looked down at the note in his hand and snorted.

"What did we get?" Mike asked and Edward showed it to him.

" *True love and one night stands. Discuss the possibility of falling in love at first sight, and the good and bad aspects of having a one*

night stand. Can a one night stand end up being your true love, and how would you know?" Mike read aloud and I frowned.

What the hell kind of topic was that? My eyes were drawn to Edward, as he sat back down in his seat. He didn't look entirely happy about the topic either, but maybe it was mainly because he had to work with me on this one.

Like I would ever want to work with you anyway , I thought, as if Edward could hear it.

Mr. Melina listed the last group, and explained more about the project for the remaining time of class. I couldn't help but wonder how he had created these groups, because some of my classmates had been lucky enough to get paired up with their best friends. And wasn't this project about getting an outside view? That proves how much he knew.

The project and thoughts of Edward had me so distracted that I had almost forgotten all about Mom. The issue she presented didn't even come to mind again until I skipped my last class and went home early, seeing Dad's cruiser parked outside the house. I froze at the sight as the realization hit me at full blast.

Mom was in that house. I was less than thirty feet away from her.

I turned off the engine at the same moment as I saw the front door open. And for the second time today, it felt like everything was going in slow motion and I was extremely aware of every little detail of everything.

Dad stepped out through the front door, followed by a woman. A woman with shiny brown hair and sparkling eyes. The woman pushed past my dad and went straight over to my truck.

I felt my face being drained of blood, and my brain was no longer working.

This was not the woman I was expecting to see. This was not the woman I *wanted* to see. I was prepared to see that broken woman with dried drool on her face. *Not this ... not this at all.*

Mom threw open the car door, and before I had any time to react, she pulled me into her arms and hugged me to her furiously, not minding that I still had my seatbelt on. Her soft hair was in my face, and some got into my mouth. I took a trembling breath, and her scent violated all my senses.

She even smells the same...

"Oh sweetie, I've missed you so much," she whispered softly in my ear.

The sound of her voice was what brought me back and I pushed her away from me.

"Get the *fuck* off of me!" I tried to yell at her, but it came out as a choked sob.

"Oh sweetie," she said, ignoring my outburst, and stroking my cheek. I flinched at the touch and she furrowed her brow in confusion. *In confusion* ! What the hell was so confusing about it?

I undid my belt with shaking hands, and climbed over the seat to leave the car through the passenger door. My mom stood dumbstruck on the other side. She even had the guts to look sad about it. I looked over at my dad, who was still standing by the front door, his arms crossed over his chest. He was frowning and looking at me disapprovingly.

How did he expect I would react at her return?

"I... I can't take this right now," I mumbled and quickly made my way up to the front door. I tried to walk past my father, but he put his arm out to hinder me from going inside.

"I think you owe your mother a proper welcome," he said to me seriously.

I gaped at him and I felt my traitorous lower lip tremble. This was too much.

He put his hands on my shoulders and turned me around. Mom was standing just a few feet away from me, her arms extended and a loving smile on her lips.

"I've missed you so much, sweetie; you don't need to be afraid of me. I'm your mother, everything is going to be okay, sweetie, and there is nothing to be afraid of." Her voice was almost singing in its softness, and I bit down on my lip to keep it from trembling even more.

"You... you're sick," I said with a shaky voice, trying my best to keep it steady enough to make my words comprehensible. "What you *did* is sick, and what you are is sic-"

Suddenly I was looking to the right, and I had a stinging, warm feeling on the left side of my face. Out of nowhere, too quick for me to notice, she had raised her hand and slapped me across my face. I was too shocked to react, move or say anything at all.

"I am not sick. Do you think the people in Seattle would have let me leave if they thought I was sick? No, they would not," she said sternly. "I understand completely that you feel bad about what happened, but you can't blame that on me. It was all on you, remember? Sweetie, I would appreciate it if you didn't paint me out to be the bad guy here, when all I tried to do was help you."

I slowly turned my head to her, and saw that there was no regret in her eyes, and she meant every single word she said. I felt the bile in my throat and I tried to swallow it back down. Dad still had his hands on my shoulders, and much to my annoyance I felt surprised by the fact that he had not intervened and come to my defense when she hit me.

"Apologize to your mother," he said in my ear and I stiffened.

He wanted me to apologize?

She hit me !

My mother's lips twisted into a creepy smile, that probably was supposed to look all loving and sweet, but looked nothing but menacing and sick to me.

"I'm sorry," I muttered, and her smile widened.

"See, that wasn't so hard, now was it?" she smiled.

"Can I go to my room? I have homework to do," I lied turning my eyes down. I just needed a reason to escape from these people.

"Yes, but please come down in an hour to prepare dinner," Dad said and let go of his hold on me.

I nodded once, before quickly disappearing into the house and stumbling my way up the stairs.

I couldn't get away from them fast enough.

I slammed my door behind me and threw my bag on the floor, before I started to pace back and forth, gripping my hair in frustration.

My mom was here now, and I had been in her presence for a mere two minutes before she hurt me again. Where did she get off slapping me like that?

Renée Swan. She looked like my mother, she dressed like my mother, she even smelled like my mother. But the look in her eyes showed me that she was still that crazy person from three months ago, and that person was not my mother.

I thought I could take it, seeing her again, but now in the comfort of my room, I felt my heart slowly break and my insides turn. The pain

was like nothing I've ever experienced before, and it was way worse than what I've been feeling for the past months. She would be the death of me. No doubt about it.

And then there was Dad. He acted just how I feared he would. He was on Mom's side; he was acting like nothing ever happened and whatever *did* happen was all my fault. Mom was an angel, and I was the devil trying to cut her wings.

I could hear my parents move around in the living room, beneath my room, and I heard the distant mumbling of their talking. I lay down and pressed my ear to the floor, trying to make out their words.

" *She'll come around, don't worry. She is just being a teenager,*" Dad said with a loving tone.

" *Oh I hope so, honey. I can't stand her being angry with me. This was not how I wanted our reunion to be,*" she sighed. "*She should really talk to someone... I don't think it's healthy for her to go around with all this anger, especially when she's pointing it all at the wrong person.*"

" *I know,*" Dad replied soothingly .

" *And she looks so broken, haven't you noticed? I think she's hurting herself. Did you see the scars on her arms? They're even worse now... I think she's sick, Charles, she needs help,*" Mom continued, concern lacing her voice. I quickly stood up again and glared at the floor, like it was the one saying the words and not my mother.

Was she actually suggesting I was cutting myself? Was she actually implying I needed help? The same kind of help she was supposed to be getting in Seattle? What the hell was wrong with her?

I stormed out of my room, with the intent of telling her off, and filling her in on every single thing that happened that night, and how none of those things were my fault. I almost tripped on my own feet on my way down the stairs, but caught myself on the banister.

I shrugged it off and walked into the living room, ready to let all of my feelings toward her out in the open, and let her make what she wanted out of it. I couldn't take this anymore. I needed her to know how much she hurt me. I needed closure.

Entering the living room, I stopped dead in my tracks when I found my parents in a loving embrace. Dad had his eyes closed, and a small smile was playing on his lips, as he hugged Mom. He looked genuinely happy, and I felt myself waver. Maybe this wasn't the time. Who was I to deny my father happiness? Just because he never cared for mine, didn't mean I had to become like him and destroy the only thing in his life that seemed to make him happy... no matter how crazy that one thing may be.

I turned around with a sigh and went into the kitchen. *I might as well start dinner ...*

I stared down on my plate of lasagna, and though it smelled delicious, I couldn't find it in myself to pick up the fork and take a bite. My entire body was aware of every single movement my mother made, and every noise that came from her made my skin crawl.

She was evil. Beyond evil, and she was sitting by our dining table, acting like she was the victim...

In the corner of my eye, I saw her put down her fork and put her plate aside, so she could rest her clasped hands on the table.

"Bella, sweetie, how is school?" she asked, tentatively.

"Fine," I muttered.

"And friends? How is Jacob?" she asked eagerly, seeming happy that I was even giving her a response. I turned to glare at her, and the smile that was plastered on her face faltered.

"Jacob? You're seriously asking me about Jacob? What the hell is wrong with you?" I spat.

"Isabella Swan! Language!" Dad barked and I sighed.

Was this how it was going to be this weekend?

"You used to be such good friends. I'm sad to see your friendship go to waste just because you're having a hard time..." she sighed.

"Sweetie, talk to me. What is bothering you? Why are you so angry? You shouldn't shut people out like this... Has something happened? Something at school? Is this about a boy?"

I pushed my chair back so hard it fell over, but I scarcely noticed as I ran up the stairs to my room, grabbing my car keys and my jacket before storming back down, and out through the front door.

"Sweetie! I just want to talk to you! You know I'm here for you!" Mom called after me.

I climbed into my car and turned the key. The engine roared to life, drowning whatever it was she was calling after me. As I put the car into gear, I saw her stand by the front door. The lights from inside giving her an eerie glow, making her look like an angel. Dad stepped up behind her and wrapped his arms around her. The sight made me sick to my stomach, and I drove off as quickly as my car allowed me.

My grip on the wheel was so hard my knuckles were turning white, but I didn't care, because it was the only thing holding me together at the moment.

" Why are you so angry? ... Is this about a boy?"

And the doctors had the nerve to say that she was 'fine'?

I must have been home sleeping the day the dictionary-people decided that 'fine' was synonymous with the word 'delusional'. By the way she was acting, and how sure she seemed to be of herself, I was beginning to wonder if she had actually deluded herself into thinking that whatever story she had come up with in her head was actually what happened.

And that it was all *my* fault.

My head was spinning and I drove aimlessly for a while. It was almost six pm now. I had no desire to go home, therefore I decided to drive to Port Angeles and check into a motel. I had enough cash to afford a night or two. Maybe I could stay the entire weekend there, so I wouldn't need to see my mother again.

I stepped on the gas pedal, steering the car out of Forks, and towards the highway. It was dark outside and there were no street lights on this road, since it was going through a thick forest. This particular road wasn't the one most people used, anyway, when they wanted to get to the highway.

The only lights on the road were the headlights of my car and the only sounds were the roaring ones coming from the engine. That was why when it began making weird sputtering noises I immediately noticed. The car began to shake violently beneath me, and the steering wheel was shaking oddly in my hands. Out of nowhere, the headlights went out and the engine sputtered a few times before it went silent. The car kept rolling, but I pushed down the brakes and it slowed to a stop.

Crap .

"Isn't this the cherry on the crap sundae that is my life," I muttered, as I climbed out of my car.

I looked down the road, seeing nothing but darkness.

"Great, this is just getting better and better. Alone in the dark on a deserted street that nobody ever uses," I said to myself, and felt for my cell phone in my pockets. I picked it up and pushed a button so the display lit up. I scoffed at myself.

Who did I intend to call? My dad? *I don't think so .*

I threw my phone in the car, closed the door, and proceeded to lean my back against the truck. It was freaking cold outside, and the street was slippery with black ice. But somehow, the freezing cold was comforting in a way. At least it made me think of something else for a change. I hugged myself to keep warm, as I kept looking up and down the empty road, in the hopes to see a car...

Am I really hoping for a car?

Freezing to death might be painful. But it's dying just the same. Right?

I don't know how long I stood there, freezing my butt off in the cold wintery night, but soon I saw the headlights of an oncoming car. I stepped out onto the road and waved frantically at it as it came closer. When I thought it was slowing down, I turned to open my car door to grab my phone from inside...

It was the screeching noise that made me turn around. And it was the weird, twisted, angle at which the car was closing in on me that made me freeze in place. I couldn't find it in me to move. Although, time seemed to be moving in slow motion – for the third time today – and I could make out every little detail of the shiny Volvo's front, I stood my ground, and watched it come. I could have made it if I had wanted too.

But the truth was, I simply didn't. This was the exit I had been waiting for.

This was it.

I was finally getting my wish fulfilled.

I was going to die.

You would think that the collision would have hurt, that I would have screamed in pain as I hit the windshield with a deafening crash,

before rolling down to the cold, icy road and landing under the moving car.

But no. It didn't hurt and I didn't scream.

I welcomed the eternal darkness that was sure to follow.

I couldn't even feel the pain.

Maybe death was painless after all? No matter what way you go.

I was unconscious long before the car stopped dead.

The last sound I heard, before I slipped into the eternal darkness, was a desperate cry.

Crash

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by: Say Goodbye Again & adt216]

Chapter 10 - Crash

Edward Cullen POV

I'd been awake for like an hour and the day was already turning out to be a crappy one.

I was flat on my stomach in a puddle of fucking mud. And it was fucking cold. I was surprised the puddle wasn't frozen solid already, seeing as the temperature must have been below freezing point. What a *wonderful* way to start the day! Did I ask for a fucking mud mask? I think not.

"What the fuck!" I yelled, fuming as I turned my body to see who the motherfucker was that I would get the pleasure to beat the fuck up. I felt a lump of mud fall down from my cheek and I growled in disgust.

I looked up and saw a pair of brown eyes looking down at me with a terrified expression.

Oh fuck me backwards.

Isabella "The Goose" Swan. Of course. Who else would be stupid enough to push me into a puddle? And I guess she did the right thing by looking terrified. Her face was paler than a ghost's, her doe eyes were wide, as she gripped on to Emmett's arm. He was looking at

this situation like it was the most exciting thing he'd ever seen - instead of helping me up.

That jackass .

I narrowed my eyes at the stupid Goose and put all the effort I could into making the glare as menacing as possible. Since I obviously couldn't kick her ass – seeing as she was a girl and Chief Swan's daughter – I could at least scare the crap out of her for being such an idiot.

"Fucking idiot! Look what the fuck you did!" I yelled at her, and the paleness of her face disappeared in an instant. It was replaced by a dozen shades of red when she blushed, and she turned her eyes away. I guess she hadn't realized she was holding on to Emmett like her life depended on it because her eyes went impossibly wider as Emmett grinned back at her.

"Walk much?" he joked.

She pulled her hand back quickly and I stared at her, barely keeping the murderous rage inside me under control.

"Are you fucking insane? Do you have a fucking death wish?" I asked, my voice low, and I think my question was justified in that moment. Didn't she have any idea who I was? Clearly not, because if she did, I wouldn't be sitting in a cold puddle covered in mud right now.

I could have sworn I saw her shaking at this point.

"I'm... I'm sorry," she stuttered. "I was lost in thought."

Was she fucking serious? *That was her excuse* ? She was lost in thought? I stood and turned to look down to estimate the damage she had done. The mud was already beginning to cake on my clothes and I made a fruitless attempt to try to dust it all off. But of course, I ended up smearing it out and ruining the jeans even more. I

took a deep breath and clenched my fists. The anger was boiling through my veins; all I saw was red.

Edward, do not hit her. Under no circumstances are you going to raise your fist and hit her straight in the face and make her see stars and cartoon birds.

I tried to get the anger under control, but it was almost fucking impossible. After a few deep, and very forced breaths, I managed to do just that. I slowly turned my head and took a step towards her. I towered over her and her breath hitched as I put all my anger into glaring at her.

Damn straight, goose-girl, you better be scared...

"Yeah, obviously," I spat at her, and she flinched slightly. "Were you musing over how pathetic you are? And how tragic it is that you have no fucking friends? And that a guy would never even touch you with a fucking stick, and that you will most likely die a painful death... *alone*?"

"Ed, c'mon... it's not like she meant to push you," Emmett said.

Really, brother? NOW you decided to butt in? And not when I was lying flat on my face in mud?

"Are you fucking kidding me? These jeans were fucking brand new!" I yelled infuriated.

"I'm sorry! I'll pay for the dry cleaning, I swear!" she said quickly, as she stood up straight and looked me straight in the eyes. The gesture made me snort.

She might have acted all strong and courageous by offering, but her eyes betrayed her and the way she kept swallowing indicated that she was close to fucking tears.

Good job, Eddie, you're about to make a girl cry. You feel like a man now, huh?

Actually, yes. She should count herself lucky that I didn't do something worse than making her cry. This was me letting her off easy, for *crying* out loud.

"Dry cleaning?" I snorted, she couldn't be serious. "No dry-cleaning in the world could get this shit out from these pants. And like you could ever afford it anyway... These pants are worth ten times more than what your car was worth when it was new!"

"C'mon, Ed..." Emmett sighed and gave me a tired look.

I took another step forward and glared down on her. She took a deep breath, and something changed in her eyes. She didn't look to be on the verge of tears anymore, and that pissed me off. She was supposed to cry; she was supposed to be scared.

She wasn't supposed to look at me like I was... I don't even know what the hell that look was.

"You're fucking dead, goose," I hissed in her face, making sure my message was clear; I was someone to be afraid of. "I will kill you. Trust me when I fucking say that I will destroy every little part of your pathetic little existence."

"Enough, Edward," Emmett said, and I could hear in his tone that he was serious this time. And when he grabbed my arm, I just went with it. There was no point in hanging around this bitch, since I couldn't kick her ass. "Let's drive home and you can take a fucking shower and chill the fuck out."

I followed him to the car, but kept my glare on the stupid Goose until she was out of sight. Emmett let go of my arm and I got the keys from my pocket.

"You drive," I said, "and I swear to God I'm gonna castrate you if you-"

"Don't worry, bro," he cut me off, grabbing the keys from my hand, "I have a towel in my bag; you can take that and sit on it so you don't get mud on your precious leather seats."

"Thanks," I muttered.

I grabbed the towel from his bag and draped it over the passenger seat, and when I sat down, I was careful not to come in contact with anything else in the car. I didn't put on my seatbelt, because it would press against my muddy chest, and it would be a bitch to get clean.

"Geez, bro, I thought you were gonna kill her there for a minute," Emmett chuckled as we drove off.

"She's lucky she has a pussy, or else I would have," I muttered.

"Oh? And the fact that her father is the chief of police had nothing to do with whatsoever?" He grinned and for some inexplicable reason, he sounded surprised.

"Please, do I look like someone who would hit a girl? C'mon, I'm not *that* guy," I replied indignantly, glaring at him.

"Yes, and I'm sure our parents are gonna be happy to hear that," he said, glancing at me with an amused smile.

I snorted and looked out the window.

Yeah, I might not be one of God's best children, but did Emmett have to sound so surprised at the fact that I didn't kick her ass? Like I would ever hit a girl, no matter how incredibly annoying she was. Swan was a fucking waste of space, but I would not be the one to get rid of her. Because if I did what I wanted to do with her, I would most likely end up in jail and be stuck there for the rest of my life while being somebody's bitch.

I may be a lot of things, but I was nobody's bitch!

Emmett parked the car outside our house, and I was silently fuming as I went up to the front door. Mom was in the living room when I came in and she made a snorting noise when she tried to hold back her laughter.

"What... happened to you?" she asked, pressing her lips together. I glared at her and saw her shoulders shake lightly as she tried to contain the laughter.

"Laugh all you want," I muttered. "A bitch pushed me into a puddle."

"Please, Edward, language," she chastised, but the message was lost as she tried to keep a straight face. I rolled my eyes and walked up the stairs. "Don't get mud on the stairs! I just cleaned!"

I made a point to stomp a little harder on my way up, and let the dried mud fall off my shoes. I heard Mom groan behind me and I snickered.

That's what you get when you laugh at your son.

When I got up to my room, I was careful not to get the mud anywhere. My room was one of the few areas in our house that Mom didn't clean, simply because she wasn't allowed in here. So if I got dirt anywhere, I would have to clean it. And I was so not in the mood for that shit.

I removed my shoes before entering my room, and then walked carefully to my bathroom.

The mud had dried and caked over my chest and jeans, so it was impossible to walk without having parts of it fall down to the carpet in my room, no matter how carefully I moved.

As soon as I stepped inside my bathroom, I quickly removed my clothes and threw them in a pile. I didn't care if the mud got in the

bathroom, since it was easier to clean than the fucking carpet on the floor in my room.

I turned on the shower and stepped in, hissing when the cold water came in contact with my skin. Luckily, it warmed up quickly, and I relaxed in the spray.

The shower should have taken five minutes tops, but somehow I ended up standing there for like thirty minutes. I didn't leave until Emmett pounded on the door.

"Did you drown? C'mon already!" he called through the door.

"I'm coming, geez," I sighed, stepping out of the shower.

I dried myself off and kicked my clothes aside, deciding to take care of them later. I wrapped a towel around my waist and walked back into my room. Emmett was lounging on my black leather couch, flipping through a magazine.

"You could have taken your own damn car and driven back if you're so anxious to learn," I said to him, and turned to open my dresser.

"Yes, but where is the fun in that?" he asked, shrugging.

I snorted and pulled on a clean pair of jeans and the first shirt in sight, not bothering to care what it looked like. I was one of those lucky motherfuckers who could put on a black plastic bag and still look good, so I didn't need to care about what the hell I was wearing; the girls liked me anyway.

When I was dressed and ready, we went back downstairs, and I noticed that the stairs were already clean of all the mud. I guess Mom wasn't wasting any time when it came to having a clean home, and I almost felt bad for a moment for kicking the dirt around like I did. But that feeling didn't last long when I remembered how she had looked when I first walked in. She had barely managed keep a straight face – *way to fuel the humiliation, Mother.*

Emmett grumbled when I grabbed the keys from him, and I wanted to smack him for being stupid enough to think I was going to let him drive my car twice in one day.

Bitch, please, like I would let anyone drive my car if it wasn't an emergency...

People had no respect for the Volvo, and that's why he should count himself lucky for getting to drive it from school in the first place.

We barely made it to second period, but it wasn't like I cared. Or that it mattered if I had missed anything. Not that I was an under-achiever or anything, but because I had no problem of keeping up at school. I could skip all I wanted, and still managed to get straight A's. I was a smart motherfucker. Who would have thought, huh? Both beauty and brains in one neat little package... not that *my* package is small, but you know what I mean...

The day dragged on and I wasn't really paying any attention. I was still furious with how my day had started. Before I knew it, I was sitting in the cafeteria, and Emmett was in the middle of telling the story of how I got a mud bath, very animatedly I might add, with lots of wild hand gestures and ridiculous faces.

"... and I swear he almost grabbed some mud and threw it in her face like a five-year old!" he laughed loudly.

"I did not," I stated simply.

"Oh you did too. Don't pretend like the thought didn't cross your small-minded mind," he said, still laughing.

But the truth is, I hadn't even thought about it. I had been too occupied with keeping myself from hitting her that it never even occurred to me that I could have thrown some mud at her. God, why didn't I think of that? That would have made me feel so much better... an eye for an eye and all that shit.

"Poor Isabella," Alice sighed. "She must feel so bad..."

"Yes, poor Goose," I scoffed. "Because the Goose was the one who had to drive all the way back home to take a shower and change clothes."

"Oh stop complaining, you got to miss a class, boo-freaking-hoo, I feel so bad for you," Rosalie said with her usual snarky-ass tone.

"Whatever... are we going to that party tonight or what? Who's driving?" I asked, changing the subject.

"Rose and I are gonna meet you there, since we're going to Port Angeles beforehand," Alice told us.

"Shall I get the booze, or should we count on Newton to provide it?" Jasper asked, sounding quite bored by the subject.

"Get some," Emmett replied with a nod. "I don't think I'm in the mood for whatever girly booze he will have available... and I need booze, not some girly sparkling cider or whatever, that won't even get me a buzz."

"Baby, you need to drink a bathtub worth of vodka before you get a buzz," Rosalie cooed and kissed his cheek, and Emmett huffed before kissing her back.

She was right though. Emmett was a big guy and he was one of the few people I knew that could really hold his liquor. It took a lot for him to get drunk, and I had only seen him really wasted two or three times in my life. And that was one of the few things that Emmett hated; he envied the "little people" (his nickname for us) for being able to get drunk without much effort. I, for one, thought it was a good thing that he always ended up somewhat sober, with just a small buzz, because then he could drive home without risking getting pulled over for driving all over the place. Like Jasper once did.

"May I join you girls in Port Angeles then?" Jasper asked, tilting his head to Alice.

"Of course, baby," Alice replied with a smile. "If you don't mind waiting for us, since we're getting manicures and pedicures and the whole nine yards..."

Pain flickered across Jasper's face, but he forced a smile for his girlfriend anyway.

"Sure, no problem," he said, and it was evident that he was holding back a groan, as he slouched down in his seat. I smirked at the sight; I bet he regretted asking. I doubt there was a worse way to spend the afternoon than to watch his girlfriend getting her nails done.

I was just about to open my mouth and ask if he was getting his nails done too, just to mock him, but the bell rang before I had a chance to utter a single word. *Damnit. I never get to have any fun .*

I reluctantly pushed my chair back and dragged my feet to my locker before going to class.

My mood darkened immensely when I sat down on my seat and saw Isabella fucking Swan walk in just a moment before the bell rang. I glared at her, and her cheeks reddened instantly even though she wasn't even looking at me.

"Hope you get shot, you fucking goose..." I hissed quietly under my breath. She didn't even flinch so I guess she didn't hear, and that was just as well, or else she might tell her dad I was harassing her or some shit.

I doodled mindlessly in my notebook, not paying attention to anything around me, wanting to get the hell out of there and get my drink on already.

"Sexual education."

My head snapped up. *What the hell did Mr. Melina just say?*

"Sexual Education." He was smiling now. "We will, together with the high schools in Port Angeles and La Push, be a part of a sex-ed project, and the project will last for four weeks. You will be separated into groups of four, and you will pick a random subject from my cap of topics. And your project will be based around this topic. You shall discuss within your group, and write down your conclusions and present them in four weeks, together with the kids in Port Angeles and La Push."

Some dude made a stupid joke about experiencing whatever topic they got, and I rolled my eyes as the whole class snickered at his joke. When Mr. Melina replied by saying that the school policy was abstinence and that they were not encouraging such behavior, I just wanted to leave the fucking room altogether. Was this project supposed to be some religious wait-until-you-are-married bullshit? Because if it was, then I was out. I was not going to spend four weeks getting brainwashed.

"I've already created the groups, and when I say your name, I want you to come up here with your group and pick a topic, and grab a folder, which contains all the information you will need about the project. And before anyone asks, yes, this will be a big part of your final grade," he said, as he picked up a list from his desk and continued listing the names in each group.

"... Lauren Mallory, Isabella Swan and Edward Cullen..."

Dear God, please tell me that I did not just hear the Goose's name before mine.

I stared in front of me like I'd just been given the death sentence, and I guess in a way I had. I gripped my pen tightly, on the verge of breaking it in my hand. Why did I get the feeling that I was being stalked by that girl... even though she wasn't doing anything?

"Excuse me?" I asked, clenching my teeth.

"Mr. Cullen, you will work with Newton, Mallory and Swan," the idiot teacher replied, proving that I had in fact heard him correctly the first time. *Fuck my life* .

"Can I please switch groups?" I asked, trying to keep my voice nice and even, but probably failing miserably. I couldn't care less.

"No can do, Mr. Cullen, if you switched, then everybody would switch. And before you know it, everybody would be working with their friends, and that is not what this project is about. You will gain so much more if you work with people you do not normally talk to," he replied evenly.

"What if I don't care about gaining anything? What if I'm happy just the way I am? And what if I don't fucking care what that fucking goose thinks about anything?" I shot my eyes to the Goose, and she looked like a deer caught in the headlights, with her eyes widening and her cheeks blushing. What the hell was with her and blushing all the time anyway?

"Sorry, Mr. Cullen, but I guess you will just have to live with the fact that you will have to listen to what Miss Goose... Miss *Swan* has to say for the upcoming weeks..."

I smirked slightly at his miscalling. That was fucking epic.

"Oh fuck it," I muttered, and pushed back my chair and walked up to his desk, where Mike and Lauren were already standing. Without waiting for the Goose, who seemed to be stuck to her seat, I put my hand in that stupid cap of his and pulled out our topic. I unfolded the note and looked down on it. *They have got to be fucking kidding me.*

"What did we get?" Mike asked, taking a step closer to me - a little too fucking close if you ask me. I handed him the note and he read it aloud.

" *True love and one night stands. Discuss the possibility of falling in love at first sight, and the good and bad aspects of having a one*

night stand. Can a one night stand end up being your true love, and how do you know?"

I glanced over at Swan, and she seemed to be frowning at the topic. And who could blame her? She probably didn't have any experience in either of those areas. Frankly, who would ever fall in love with her – especially at first sight – and who the hell would ever want to sleep with her even once? *Disgusting.*

I pursed my lips together and went back to my seat. That topic was fucking ridiculous, and now I had to spend four weeks discussing that shit with Swan of all people? Was this some kind of cruel joke of the Gods or something?

What could she ever have to contribute on the subject anyway? Her thoughts on true love were most likely derived from fairy tales, and she was probably waiting for her knight in shining, silver armor to come and rescue her from her sad, little existence.

I shook my head lightly, trying to get all thoughts of Swan out of my head. One would think I was obsessed with her by the way I could not stop thinking about her. Hello? Could you blame *me* ? The girl fucking pushed me in the mud! And now I was stuck with her for four weeks. Of course, I had to think about her, it was only natural, since she seemed to have become a permanent fixture in all the bad aspects of my life.

What had I ever done to deserve it anyway? I've done nothing wrong to anybody.

When school finally let out for the day, I couldn't get to my car fast enough. This day was turning out to be a fucker, and I needed to get my ass out of here before things really turned to crap.

Emmett decided he would run home. He used to do that occasionally to keep himself in shape, and I didn't mind, because that meant I didn't need to wait for his sorry ass in the parking lot.

I drove home in record time, and the delicious smell of Mom's casserole invaded my senses as soon as I stepped inside our house. I followed the smell to the kitchen, and Mom smiled at me from the stove.

"What? No more playing in the mud? Why, Edward, I'm shocked," she teased, putting her hand to her heart in mock shock.

"Ha ha, very funny," I said, opening the fridge.

"Where's your brother?" she asked.

"He decided to run home today," I replied, grabbing a soda from the fridge and closing the door with my food.

"Oh, I wish he would stop doing that, especially now when it's cold and dark out, he's going to hurt himself... he will get himself hit by a car one of these days," she sighed.

"Don't worry, Mom," I chuckled. "I think he'll do more damage to the car than the car will do to him. He's a sturdy guy."

"Don't make jokes like that," she said frowning.

"C'mon mom, lighten up a little," I smiled, and patted her on the shoulder before going up to my room.

My dirty shoes were still standing where I left them this morning, reminding me about the humiliating experience in the parking lot. *Stupid Goose*. I couldn't even be in my own house without being reminded of her.

I went into the bathroom and grabbed the dirty clothes from the floor. The jeans and shirt were stiff with dried mud, and there was no fucking saving them now. I threw them in the trashcan, under my desk and sat down on my chair. I turned on my laptop, and my leg bounced restlessly as I waited for it to boot up.

I needed to fucking relax. This entire day had been such a trial, and I was counting on Jasper to get us the good stuff for the party. If he came back with flavored vodka, then I swear I would kick his fucking ass so hard that there would be no hope for him ever having children with Alice... or anyone else for that matter.

And I needed to get laid. Fuck. I hoped Lauren would be there, and that she would make good on her promise. And of course, that she would be drunk enough to agree to whatever I asked of her. Not that anyone ever denied me anything, but you can never be too sure, especially not with the fucking day I've had and my stupid luck.

I need to get drunk. I need to get laid. And if I see Isabella fucking Swan again today, I swear to fucking God that I can't be held responsible for the outcome...

"Are you fucking kidding me?" I groaned into the phone, and gripped my hair with my other hand.

"Sorry, man, but we're fucking stuck here," Jasper sighed, and I could hear Rosalie huff in the background.

Jasper had just told me that when they were just about to leave, his fucking piece of crap car broke down and wouldn't start. And of course, this being a Friday night, there were no shops open to help them out, and they had no means of getting out of Port Angeles now.

"Oh fuck," I sighed, pinching the bridge of my nose. "What about the booze?"

"Yeah, your concern for *us* is really heartbreaking, Edward," he mocked. "And don't worry about your fucking alcohol, I took care of it. But you won't have a chance to enjoy it if you don't come and pick us the fuck up."

"Man, seriously? But we won't be back for like two hours, and I need to get my drink on already, for fuck sake," I groaned and he chuckled.

"Dude, if you want to get your drink on at all, you have to come and get us. End of fucking story. So get your ass down here, okay?"

"I hate you, man," I sighed, as I grabbed my car keys and my jacket.

"No, you love me because I bring you the booze," he chuckled back.

"Yeah, and that would be the only reason," I sighed. "I'll call you when I get there."

I hung up the phone and left my room. Maybe I should have just stayed in my fucking bed this morning, since the entire universe seemed to be conspiring against me to make this the worse day ever. I wondered if I could blame this on Swan too...

My parents were standing by the window in the living room, looking out over the backyard, both enjoying a glass of red wine.

"I'm going to go pick up Jasper and the chicks in Port Angeles, tell Emmett that when he gets his ass out of the shower," I sighed.

"Drive carefully, sweetie, it's dark out," Mom said with a soft smile.

"Like I would ever risk the Volvo, c'mon, Mom, you know me better than that," I smirked.

I heard Dad chuckle softly behind me, as I opened the door and stepped out into the cold.

Mom wasn't kidding when she said it was dark out. The sky was clouded over, so there weren't even any stars out. Driving down our driveway, through the forest, turned out to be a bitch. Even if I knew every twist and turn by heart, I still had to drive unusually slow to get out onto the road without crashing.

The roads were slick with black ice, but I already knew that from driving home from school, so I was prepared; and this car was magic on ice, so I wasn't worried.

I decided to take the old road to the highway, since it was the closest from our house.

It was dark as fuck, and the headlights weren't as effective as one would hope. But it didn't matter, since the road was fucking deserted, no one took this road anymore anyw-

What the hell is that?

Something glimmered in the distance and I squinted my eyes to make out what it was.

A street sign? No... a car? No... was it a deer or something? It seemed to be moving...

I slowed down, but not much, and as I came closer I could make out the back of a red truck.

Then suddenly, a figure came into view right in front of my car, and though it was several yards away, I slammed the breaks in surprise, to avoid a collision.

That turned out to be my biggest mistake, and the beginning of the worst event of the day.

The car hit a patch of black ice, and it began to skid to the side. I panicked and gripped the steering wheel tightly, turning it to the left, in order to try to reverse the skidding to the side. After a moment of struggle, I finally gained control of the vehicle.

As I stared in front of me, I realized that the figure was again in front of my car, and I was seconds away from hitting it straight on.

And that was when I recognized her. *Fuck* .

Swan's eyes were wide in shock; she was frozen in place, and it felt like she was staring right at me – though it was impossible, she must be blinded by the headlights.

At one moment, everything was moving in slow motion, and I could see her face so clearly. Her pale skin was shining in the brightness of the headlights, and her mouth was opened in a silent "oh"... then, suddenly, everything appeared to be moving at double speed.

Swan hit the windshield with such force it cracked, then her body rolled off the hood, since the car was still moving she rolled under it, and I could feel a slight bump as I drove over her.

A blood-curdling scream echoed through the night, as I slammed the breaks yet again, and the car skidded to a stop. It didn't occur to me until afterwards that the scream I heard was not from Swan, but from me. The screeching sound from the tires must have drowned any sounds emitting from her.

I stumbled out of the car, racing over to her and I stopped dead as I reached the body.

The taillight of my car threw a red eerie glow over the scene, and the light was enough for me to see her. What I saw made me sick to my stomach, and I hunched over in order to puke my guts out.

I don't know how I managed, but somehow I had pulled out my phone and dialed a number. What number? I don't know. I didn't care. I just needed to call someone. *Anyone* .

"Hello?"

"Dad..." I whispered, and it felt like the word wasn't coming from me. I felt like I was in a bubble and my voice was coming from outside.... *Was this normal* ? My entire body was shaking so violently that I fell down to my knees on the ice-cold road.

"Edward? Is that you?" Dad asked bewildered.

I looked down at Swan, and noticed a dark pool growing around her, and the eerie glow from the taillights enhanced the sight of blood...

"There's blood everywhere, Dad! I don't know what happened! There's fucking blood everywhere!" I cried. My throat was closing up on me and I was hyperventilating.

This is not good, this is not good. This is so not fucking good.

"What happened? Where are you? Are you okay?" His voice rose in alarm.

"I think she's dead, Dad, there's blood everywhere." I was sobbing now, hiding my face in my free hand. It was no longer me sitting there on the ground. Because I would never cry, and I would never hit someone with my car. And... *this was so fucked up ...*

"Son! Where are you? What happened?" he asked again, sounding beyond desperate.

"On the old road to the highway... a few miles in..." I croaked.

"I'm on my way," he said. In the background I could hear my mother ask him what was going on, and he told her to stay home and that he would call her later. I heard him open the front door, and walk down to his car. "What happened? Are you hurt?" he asked again and I shook my head, even though he couldn't see me.

"No, I'm not hurt..." I whispered. I was simply not able to raise my voice any higher than that. I was exhausted. "I was on my way to pick them up...when I... she came out of fucking nowhere, Dad, I didn't see her. I tried to stop but the car hit black ice and I lost control... I fucking hit her, Dad... and there's blood everywhere..."

I heard the engine of his car roar to life in the background.

"Have you called the hospital?" he asked.

"No...I called you first..." I mumbled.

"Then I am going to call the hospital and ask them to get us an ambulance. The old road you said?"

"Yeah..."

"I'm going to hang up now, okay? I'm going to call the hospital, and I'm going to be with you in just a few minutes, okay? So hold on and don't do anything until I get there."

"Okay..." I mumbled.

"Good, see you soon, son," he said before hanging up on me.

I held on to the phone in my hand and tried to keep my eyes off the body.

Was it wrong of me to call her that? *The body*. Like she wasn't even a fucking person anymore.

I tried to snort at myself, but it just sounded like a choked sob. Who was I trying to kid here? I never thought of her as a person before, so why would I begin now just because I hit her with my car...

I just hit a goose.

The thought alone made my eyes water, and then my eyes betrayed me by travelling down her body. Her eyes were closed and I couldn't see her chest move, so I wasn't even sure whether or not she was even alive anymore...

And then my own words from before came back to bite me in the ass.

"You're fucking dead, Goose, I will kill you. Trust me when I fucking say that I will destroy every little part of your pathetic little existence."

I guess I hadn't been lying to her this morning. And now I was probably going to jail for manslaughter or some shit where I would become someone's bitch and my life would be in fucking ruins. All because I ran over a fucking goose...

Her leg was bent in an awkward angle, and I felt the bile rise in my throat.

I reached out a trembling hand and stroked a blood-drenched strand of hair from her face.

She looked so peaceful, like she was sleeping, and her lips had been twisted in an odd way, which made it appear as though she was smiling...

I stood up and began to pace back and forth on the empty road. I gripped my hair and stared at nothing in particular with empty eyes. The shock was apparently beginning to set in, and my mind was slowly shutting down. I was not even there anymore. Only my body was pacing on the road. My mind was somewhere else. Somewhere safe.

This was something I could not handle.

I fucking killed a person!

Everyone was going to believe I did it on purpose. It was a known fucking fact that I hated her. My hatred could not have gotten past anyone. Everybody knew, and quite a few had heard me threaten her in the past. Everybody would believe that the mud-incident and the biology project were what sent me over the edge and triggered me to kill her ...

Nobody would believe it was an accident. Everybody knew I had a temper.

Now I guess I finally got the answer to the question I had been asking myself all day; could this day get any worse?

Yes, it could.

And it did the moment I became a murderer.

Awake

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 11 - Awake

Isabella Swan POV

So this was death, huh? I didn't know what I had expected... maybe white fluffy clouds and a rippling river. At least there should have been something resembling the Heaven from all the movies. But no, instead I was stuck in this weird darkness, hearing phantom voices and sounds all around me. I felt like I was underwater, the noises muffled, but if I concentrated I could make out what was said.

"... you'd quit. You promised me! Yesterday when we left Seattle, you promised me, and still I find these in your pocket. Where did you even get those? Did you hide them in the house before you left?"

The voice was low, almost hissing, and most definitely upset. It reminded me of my father.

I wondered how he was reacting to the news about my death. Was he sad? Did he cry? Most likely not, my dad was not the crying kind.

" It's no big deal, you know that... I just took one to relax, okay? Can you blame me, after everything Bella has put us through? This isn't the first time she has pulled a stunt like this... and she almost succeeded in killing herself this time. When will you open your eyes and see that your daughter is not well?"

Okay, I guess I wasn't in heaven, because I could recognize that voice anywhere, and that voice did not belong in Heaven. That voice belonged to my mother, who belonged in Hell.

" Renée, she was hit by a car! It was an accident! She was not trying to kill herself. She is not sick! And we both know that. So don't you dare put any blame on Bella; she's the victim here. All right?"

I wanted to smile at my dad's sad attempt to defend me. Maybe he cared more than he had let on when I was alive. Maybe that was why I was hearing this now... maybe I was supposed to know what they really thought about me, before I moved on to a better place.

" Oh please, Charles, you are so blind. Even before I left, I could tell something was wrong with her. And I tried to help, but instead she made me out to be the bad guy. Open your freaking eyes, honey, your daughter is not well."

Someone cleared their throat.

" Mr. and Mrs. Swan, I'm Dr. Carlisle Cullen. I was the doctor who took care of your daughter when she came in last night..."

I stopped listening after that. My head was starting to hurt, along with other parts of my body. It felt like my whole body was beginning to wake up, piece by piece, inch by inch. First, I got the feeling back in my fingers and toes, then a prickling feeling flowed through my arms, up to my shoulders, and from my toes to my ankles, to my knee, to my... *oh my god that hurt !*

Was heaven supposed to hurt? I don't think so.

Maybe I wasn't in Heaven. Maybe I went straight to Hell.

Didn't the Bible condemn suicide?

But this wasn't a suicide. It was an accident.

Just because I wanted to die, doesn't make it a suicide ...

I guess it was true what they say about God working in mysterious ways. For months I had been wishing I could be brave enough to commit suicide, and here I was, stuck in some kind of limbo because a car *accidentally* hit me.

But not just any car. It was the shiny, silver Volvo. And it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out who had been behind the wheel. Edward made good on his endless threats about being the end of me, about killing me, removing me from existence.

I wondered if it had been a conscious act on his part, or if it had truly been an accident.

What had I ever done to Edward Cullen anyway? Why did he hate me so much? I couldn't for the life – or death – of me figure it out. I had never done anything to him, and still he acted like I was some kind of bug or something that needed to be killed and made extinct.

The pain was beginning to radiate through my body, and I was squirming in the darkness. The pain seemed to be coming from one part of my body in particular, or rather a *couple* of parts, in my right leg. It felt like someone was picking on me with burning sticks, and it hurt like hell...

There was fire in Purgatory, right? Maybe that's where I was...

"... *gonna wake up? Is she ever going to be okay?*"

The voice of my father seemed a lot closer now, and I didn't need to focus to make out the words. I could make out them fairly clearly now, the sound almost wasn't muffled at all.

" *As I told you before, she suffered serious injuries, and we had to spend several hours in surgery to correct her leg. She will need a lot of physical therapy to get back on track. But it's very unlikely that she will ever get back to where she was... she will most likely never get back the full function of her leg.*"

"What does that mean? Will she become a cripple? Will she need a wheelchair to get around? How is that going to work? This is Forks! We live in the woods! How is she ever going to get around in a wheelchair?" Mom, always with the practical things.

"She has still full use of her other leg, so there is no reason for us to believe that she won't be able to walk again." The doctor had a very soothing voice. *"As to when she's going to wake up, it's hard to say. It's all up to her when she's ready. It can be an hour from now, it can be a day, or even a week. But once again, we have no reason to believe she won't wake up within a reasonable time."*

I felt pressure on my hand. I wanted to squeeze back, but I couldn't. It was as if I wasn't connected to my body at all. My mind and my body were no longer buddies.

The doctor said it was unclear when I would wake up, and that it was all up to me.

So what if I didn't want to wake up? What if I wanted to stay in this dark bubble forever?

They couldn't make me wake up.

They just couldn't.

I relaxed, as much as I could during these unusual circumstances, and felt myself get lost in my own body. It was an unsettling feeling, but somehow I felt an odd sort of comfort in it.

I felt myself slip into deeper unconsciousness and the dark became impossibly darker.

I had no way of knowing how long I was out for, how long I let myself get lost in the dark. But all good things come to an end, and I was jolted awake – or jolted back to awareness in the darkness – by the piercing pain in my leg.

My entire body tensed from the pain, and I was surprised to find my mind was once again somewhat connected to my body. When I gained enough control I clenched my hands into fists in order to endure the pain.

Ever so slowly, I felt my mind attach itself to my body again, and the last parts to attach were my eyes. I felt my eyes flutter a few times before they opened fully, and I found myself staring into darkness yet again. But this darkness was different because there were small sources of lights in it, the main source being the light from the hallway, pouring in through the small gap between the door that was slightly ajar and the wall.

I guess I wasn't in Heaven after all. In what sick and twisted world would Heaven need hospitals? Because that was where I obviously was at the moment, stuck in a bed in a stinking hospital.

Great .

I turned my head to the window and saw that it was dark outside. I had no idea what time it was and how long I've been here. Was it still Friday?

I was half-sitting in the bed. I tried to adjust the way I sat, and the movement shot fire through my leg, making me groan in pain. The leg was wrapped in a cast, all the way from my knee down to my toes. I tried to wiggle my toes – which only led to even more pain.

My other leg was fine though, and I could wiggle those toes without causing any more pain.

The hospital gown I was wearing had short sleeves. I immediately panicked at the thought of having my arms bare and totally exposed, but my arms turned out to be covered in gauze, for which I was grateful. The gauze hid all my scars from view.

I tried to relax, but it was impossible. The pain radiating from my leg was ever present, and made it impossible for me to think about

anything else.

I saw a shadow in the hallway, and then my door was gently pushed open by a man in a white coat. The light flowing into the room from the hall was enough for me to make out his features, and I groaned when I realized who it was. His eyes shot up from the chart he was holding at the sound of my groaning, and he smiled softly at me.

"I assume you've slept enough now," Dr. Cullen said. "Your parents will be very happy to hear that you're awake."

"What time is it?" I asked, my voice hoarse and my throat dry.

"Almost eight thirty," he replied, after glancing at the expensive looking watch on his wrist.

"What... day?" I asked, and he chuckled lightly.

"It's Saturday," he replied.

He went over to the door and flipped the switch for the ceiling light, and I squinted my eyes at the sudden brightness of the room. He walked over to me and began looking me over. He started with shining a small flashlight in my eyes - like he hadn't already blinded me enough by turning on the lights.

"How are you feeling? Do you remember what happened?" he asked, with his serious doctor-voice. I wanted to scoff at that. Did I remember? Of course I did.

I could recall every little detail that led up to me hitting the windshield with such force it knocked me unconscious for twenty four hours.

I recalled the slippery, icy road, the way my breath turned into smoke when I exhaled, the sound of the skidding tires, and how I was blinded by the headlights, but still able to see the Volvo logo on the grille as the car came closer at a frightening speed...

"Yes..." I replied in a shaky whisper.

How was I even alive? Why didn't Edward make good on his promise and kill me?

Dr. Cullen stopped shining me in the eyes, and put the tiny flashlight in his pocket. He was frowning slightly as he looked at me, and I could tell he was silently asking me exactly what I remembered about the night.

"It was Edward," I said, my voice surprisingly strong, yet still a little hoarse. Dr. Cullen didn't say anything, he just kept looking at me with that curious look. "I remember the Volvo. I know it was Edward. Nobody else in this town owns a car like that..."

He sighed and nodded softly, before looking down at the chart again, scribbling something down. I guess it was no surprise to him that it was Edward, and I wondered what kind of bullshit story Edward had told everybody. Maybe he claimed that I jumped right in front of him, that I gave him no time to react and that he didn't mean to hit me.

"Are you in any pain?" Dr. Cullen asked without looking up from the chart this time.

"My leg," I replied. "It feels like someone is poking me with burning sticks."

"That is to be expected," he said. "You broke your right leg in four places..."

Four places? I broke my leg in *four places*? I grimaced at the mere thought of it; no wonder I was in so much pain.

"Give me the verdict, Doc, what exactly are my injuries?" I asked with a sigh. "Something terminal I hope," I added under my breath, looking away from him and out the window.

"Apart from your leg, your injuries include two broken ribs, a sprained wrist, along with cuts and bruises... mainly on your arms and legs," he said, listing whatever was written on my chart, "... and

also you suffered a mild concussion. You came out fairly unscathed, considering the circumstances... I must say."

"Can I get something for the pain?" I asked with a small voice.

"I can ask a nurse to put some morphine in your IV," he agreed, "and maybe something to help you sleep..."

"Can't I get pills or something instead?" I asked, thinking that maybe I could scam the pills I needed this way. If I just pretended to take them, I could save enough up to make a lethal dose. A little pain in my leg was worth it, right?

But of course, Dr. Cullen didn't agree with me on this, as he shook his head.

"No, Isabella, you can't," he sighed, sounding tired. "And I wish you would stop trying to scam pills from me," he added with a sad and amused smile.

I looked at him surprised and he chuckled humorlessly.

"I was not born yesterday," he said. "I may not be a specialist in psychiatry, but I do know when I'm getting played."

Fantastic, and here I thought I had been so clever with the whole thing. What was with the Cullens anyway? Edward did everything in his power to make my life miserable, which ended up with him almost killing me, accident or not, and then Dr. Cullen did everything in his power to keep me alive. In a way, they both lived to torture me.

"I wish your son would have done what he promised... then I wouldn't need to be scamming you right now," I muttered, mostly to myself. "I wish Edward had just done what he said he would and killed me already... but not even his precious car could do the job..." I wouldn't have been able to hide the bitterness in my tone, even if I had wanted too.

Dr. Cullen gaped at me, his mouth open in shock. I had obviously caught him by surprise, and here I was thinking he was always collected and knew everything... I guess I was wrong.

"I'm sad you feel that way," he said finally. "Life is a precious gift, and you shall not waste it."

I smiled humorlessly and looked down at my hands.

Precious gift, my ass .

"I'm going to go call your parents. They will be happy to hear you're awake," he said.

That was when I realized what I had just told him. Did I just admit to him that I wanted to die, that I was scamming pills from him, and that I was mad at Edward for not making good on his promise? I really hoped I had spoken the last part quietly enough for him not to hear it. Oh my God, how hard did I hit my head anyway? I obviously lost a few IQ-points on the way and the inability to keep my freaking mouth shut.

"Are you gonna tell them what I just told you too?" I asked nervously, biting my lip.

"Don't worry, Isabella. We can keep this between us for now, but I really wish you would agree to get help. Suicide is not the answer," he said, and gave me a smile – that was probably supposed to be comforting, but only succeeded in making me uneasy – before leaving the room.

I hoped he was going to keep his promise to not tell anyone, and not be like his son, who only talked the talk, but never walked the walk. The last thing I needed was to give my mom another reason to kick me while I was down. If a doctor told Dad that I was suicidal, then even he would be concerned and probably let himself be even more blindsided by Mom and all her lies.

A nurse walked in and gave me a tightlipped smile before she squirted something into my IV.

"This will take the edge off the pain and make you relax," she explained and I nodded.

She didn't linger after she was done, and that was just as well. I wasn't in the mood for company.

It didn't take long for whatever it was that she put into my IV to kick in, and I felt my eyes droop and the pain subside.

I welcomed the darkness like an old friend.

"Bella! Bella! Can you hear me, Bella?"

I was being shaken by someone, and each movement made the pain radiate in my leg in the most excruciating way. My eyes flew open and I clenched my fists in order to endure it. I was hoping the pain would subside, but as long as I was being shaken that was not going to happen...

"Oh, Bella, baby," my mother cooed. I wanted to close my eyes again, but at least she eased up on the shaking. "How are you feeling? What were you thinking jumping in front of that car like that?"

I turned my gaze slowly to her and narrowed my eyes.

"I did not jump in front of it," I said between clenched teeth.

"Oh, baby, you don't need to hide... we know," she said, tucking my hair behind my ear.

"Renée, if she says she didn't jump, then we should believe her," Dad protested weakly. He was standing by the foot of my bed, with a serious expression on his face. Mom threw him a look and shook her head.

"You are so blind, Charles," she chided.

"Bella would never risk someone else's life like that," he replied tightlipped and gave Mom a stern look.

"Excuse me? I'm right here," I said incredulously. "And I didn't jump in front of that stupid car!" Mom kept stroking my hair and her closeness was putting me on edge.

"Oh, baby..." she cooed, and I lost it.

"Don't fucking touch me," I yelled.

She jumped in surprise and took a step back, her hands leaving me as if she had burned herself.

"Don't talk to your mother like that," Dad sighed, but there was not even a hint of authority to his voice. It was like he was just saying it because he thought he had to.

"Maybe Mom should leave..." I said quietly. "I don't want her here."

"But, baby, I can help you! All I always wanted to do was help you... make you feel better, and get better," Mom protested, squeezing my hand. I looked at her and shook my head slowly.

"No, Mom, all you ever wanted was to make yourself feel better. You never think about anyone but yourself..." I replied, too tired to ignore her and too angry to stay quiet.

"Now you listen to me, young lady," my mom said, all the love gone from her voice, and back was that stern and emotionless tone from yesterday, that had been accompanied by a slap to my face. All I could do now was hope she wasn't going to hit me again. "I always wanted what's best for you, and it's not my fault if you're too immature to see it."

"Renée, let her be. I don't think you should get her upset right now," Dad said, giving her a pointed look. "She needs to rest." Mom sighed

and stepped up to my father.

"Your daughter is sick," she said quietly to him, probably thinking I couldn't hear her. "Maybe she should go with me tomorrow, back to Seattle. She needs help, Charlie."

Something changed in my dad's eyes just then; there was a fire I've never seen before.

"You are not taking my daughter anywhere, you got that?" he said in a hushed tone that held all the authority of a police chief. Mom frowned and clicked her tongue disapprovingly.

"You were always too blind to see what's right in front of you," she sighed. "One of these days she's gonna hurt someone, and that will be on you." She threw a look over her shoulder at me and I cocked an eyebrow at her, silently daring her to say it to my face and not to my father. She huffed and walked out of the room. Dad gripped the iron frame of the bed and sighed deeply.

"Your mother is doing the best she can under the circumstances. It's an adjustment for her to be back home, even if it's just for the weekend," he said to me, but it sounded more like he was trying to convince himself of something.

"She doesn't belong here, Dad. I don't understand what she's doing home or why they let her out anyway," I replied.

"Your mom was not involuntarily committed to the... *place* . She went there on her own free will, and she can leave at any time. The only reason she hasn't come home earlier is because I've asked her not to. I figured you weren't ready for that yet, and the doctors have agreed with me. But when I visited her on Thursday, they thought she had gotten well enough to come home for the weekend, to test the waters... They thought that since it's been three months, maybe you would be okay too..." he mumbled, avoiding my gaze. He was uncomfortable with this conversation, I could tell.

"And what does that mean?" I asked. "Will she be home permanently now?"

"No, I will drive her back tomorrow. We discussed it last night, after you stormed out, and we agreed you were not ready for that just yet. She agreed she would stay in Seattle to complete her treatment," he said, and forced himself to look at me. "And she really does want what's best for you, but she just don't know how to show it," he added. "And I do too."

"Is that why she hit me last night?" I asked, my lip trembling. "And is that why you didn't do anything to keep her from doing it? Because you thought it was for the best?"

"Oh sweetie..." he said, his tired voice laced with pain. "I never thought she would do that. I was just as shocked as you were..."

"That doesn't excuse that you didn't do anything... You didn't even say anything about it, you just let me have it... just like last time..." My voice trailed off, I was simply not ready to open that can of worms again. Not yet. My lip was trembling even more now, and I bit down harder on it.

"Bella, let's not talk about that right now. I wish you would get over it and move on. It's never a good idea to be stuck in the past... it will only end up eating you alive," he sighed.

I snorted and leaned my head back and stared at the ceiling.

"You have got to be kidding me," I muttered. "Move on?"

If it were that easy, then I would have done it a long time ago.

"Did Dr. Cullen say anything about how long I will be stuck here?" I asked, changing the subject.

"He wants you to stay for the remainder of the weekend, and depending on how you feel on Monday, you might come home then,"

he replied. "And you don't need to worry about school. You will get the next week off, so you can get used to the cast and everything..."

"And how the hell am I even supposed to get around with this thing on my leg? I could barely walk without tripping on air before!" I complained.

"I will drive you to and from school, and you can get a wheelchair if you wan-"

"A wheelchair? Sorry, Dad, no deal," I cut him off. I was not about to be the cripple in the wheelchair in school; it was bad enough I was going to have the giant cast on my leg. I would get enough negative attention as it was.

"Well, then you will have to learn to get around with crutches," he replied, "but it would be easier for you and less painful with the wheelchair..." I shook my head no, and he sighed. "I guess it's your choice."

"Where's my truck anyway?" I asked.

"It was towed to the car shop in Port Angeles... along with the... yeah," he said, trailing off and turned to look out the window.

"Along with the Volvo, yeah," I said, nodding. "You don't need to walk on eggshells around me, Dad. I know what happened, and I know who did it."

"That damn boy, I have a good desire to put his sorry ass in jail," he muttered. "Careless driver... and he had the audacity to blame the road..."

"What? You talked to him?" I asked surprised.

"Yeah, he was here last night when you were in surgery.... He had gotten a nasty cut on his forehead. The bastard tried to apologize... like an apology would make it all better," he snorted.

I silently wondered what exactly he was apologizing for – for not killing me or for hitting me in the first place? Either way, Dad was right. An apology wasn't worth much, especially not from him.

Dad shuffled his feet and looked towards the door.

"I should go find your mother, I think you upset her," he said with a deep sigh.

"Yeah, you go do that. Go console the crazy lady, don't mind me," I muttered under my breath.

He gave me a bleak smile and left the room, leaving me to myself and my thoughts.

I hoped that the cut in Edward's forehead was a nasty one, that it ruined his beautiful face, and that he was now so ugly that no girl would ever want him again. The ugliness would force him to rely on his personality; he would realize he had none and then everyone would too. Ever so slowly he would fall into obscurity, and nobody would ever want anything to do with him again... he would become *me* .

If only .

The cut on his forehead was probably the "good kind", leaving him with a sexy scar that would draw even more girls to him, and even more guys would fight to be his best friend. His life would be even greater than before, and he would have only me to thank for it... but of course, he never would.

He would never thank me, and he would never apologize, because I wasn't even on his map. Not even after being one with his windshield... I bet he was going to ask me to pay for the repairs. He probably blamed the accident on me, saying something like " *You were in the middle of the road, not me. So of course it's your fault* ".

I bet he didn't even know it was me he hit.

I wondered what happened after the accident, after I blacked out, what did he do? Did he try to drive away? Did he call 911? Did he laugh? Did he cry? Did he-

"Hi..."

I looked up and jumped slightly in surprise – making a wave of pain shoot through me, though I scarcely noticed, because of the shock of seeing Edward Cullen himself standing in the doorway.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I asked, annoyance lacing my voice.

He had his hands deep in his pockets, and he awkwardly rocked back and forth on the heels of his feet. He had a small bandage on his forehead, hiding away my mark. Because that was what it was, it was *my* mark. If it wasn't for me, then he wouldn't have that cut right there, and that made it my mark. *I was permanently etched on his forehead* .

"I wanted to see... if you were... you know... breathing," he said with an awkward shrug, not leaving the doorway.

"Yes, as you can see, I'm still breathing. No thanks to you," I said, giving him a sarcastic smile.

"It's not like I wanted to hit you," he said, his voice rising slightly in aggravation. "What the hell were you doing in the middle of nowhere anyway?"

"Driving, obviously," I replied icily, "before my car broke down."

"Shouldn't you've been home with your nose in a fucking book or something?" he continued, shuffling his feet as he neared the bed.

"What are you really here for? Are you gonna give me the total on how much it cost to repair your precious car? And you want me to cough up the dough?" I asked him, not even kidding.

Something flickered past his face, shock maybe? No. Annoyance? Yeah, that sounded more likely. Too bad I never got to find out, because at that moment Dr. Cullen walked in. He gave Edward a serious look, and Edward pursed his lips.

"What are you doing here, son? I thought I asked you to leave Miss Swan alone," Dr. Cullen said, giving him a pointed look before looking at me. "Is he bothering you?"

"Nah, he was just going to give me the total on how much it cost to repair his car," I replied coolly. Dr. Cullen immediately shot his eyes to Edward.

"Excuse me, Isabella, but I will need to have a talk with my son," Dr. Cullen said, giving Edward a more than annoyed look, and proceeding to practically drag his son out of the room.

I wanted to smirk at the sight. *That's what you get for being an ass, Edward.*

Not a moment later, I heard an angry voice from the hallway.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" I heard Dr. Cullen hiss. "I asked you to leave her alone and not visit her. You're not doing anyone any favors by coming by here. All right? She's in pain, excruciating pain at that, and you coming here is just rubbing salt in her wounds. What the hell were you thinking? Were you actually asking her for money? Who are you, and what the hell did you do to my son?"

"I was just-"

"I don't care what you 'just'. She could sue you, you know that right? And I would not blame her if she did, and I would actually encourage her to do it. And if she does do it, I can promise you that neither me nor your mother will help you out with it. You will have to get a job and pay it yourself. She will never walk like a normal person and she will never ever run again. Because you crushed her leg. Do you even comprehend what kind of damage you have done?"

" But, Dad, I was-"

" No, there are no 'buts' in this, son, you almost killed her, and it's nothing short of a miracle that you didn't. And if you don't remove yourself from my hospital, and go straight home right now, I promise you that your car will be the very least of your problems."

I didn't hear Edward respond to that, and I guess he did what his dad told him to do, since Dr. Cullen came back into my room alone. His face was a little flushed after the argument.

"So you want me to sue your son? I don't mind, I could use the money," I said, not able to contain the joke. The corner of his mouth twitched, and I could tell he was fighting a smile.

"You'll have to excuse me. I didn't mean for you to hear that," he replied, grabbing my wrist and looking down at his watch in order to check my pulse.

Once again, I was hit by the irony of it all; Dr. Cullen kept taking care of me and excusing himself and his son, and Edward kept making it all about him and making my existence pure hell. Yet, they were both torturing me, but in two totally different ways. Were they even related? Maybe Edward was adopted after all...

"Dad said I could leave on Monday?" I said, making it a question, and Dr. Cullen nodded.

"Depending on how you're feeling," he replied. "We will need to run more tests and make sure there isn't any infection in the leg from the surgery..."

"What exactly happened to my leg?" I asked, feeling a little doubtful about whether I really wanted to know or not.

"As I told you before, your leg was broken in four places, though it's more like two... since three of the breaks were so closely together the bone was all but shattered," he replied, with a slight frown.

So my leg was shattered? I guess there was no wonder why it hurt like hell then. I could only imagine how it looked on the inside...

"And the surgery did... what?" I asked tentatively, trying to remove the image of a shattered bone in my body from my mind.

"We removed the pieces we could not save, inserted a metal rod in its place, and fastened it to the remaining bones," he explained clinically. "We had to do this in order to save your leg."

I was trying to come up with some funny, sarcastic response to that, but my mind was drawing a blank. All I could think about was the fact that now I had a metal rod in my leg. That wasn't natural. I wasn't supposed to have pieces of metal in me. Was I one of those people who no longer could walk through a metal detector at the airport without making it go off?

"You will have to wear the cast for six to eight weeks; it will depend on how well your bones heal. Depending on the healing, we might put your leg in a cast again after that or simply a brace to keep it steady. But you are young, and from what we could tell, you are in good health. It will help you to heal more quickly."

"And then what? You remove the rod?"

He gave me a sad smile and shook his head.

"Your injury was too severe. If your bone hadn't been as broken as it was, then yes, the rod would have been removed as soon as your body had grown enough bone tissue for the bone to be able to reattach itself and replace the shattered pieces we removed. But we can't promise that that will happen, the amount of bone we had to remove was simply too much..." he replied.

I nodded slowly, and let the information sink in.

"I know it's a lot to take in right now, but with some physical therapy after the cast has been removed, you will be able to walk again

without the aid of crutches. It's not that bad..." he said, trying to cheer me up. But it wasn't freaking working, and he couldn't have expected it would.

"But I won't be walking normally, now will I? I will probably have one of those limps that people make fun of... and what did you say to Edward? Oh yeah, that I will never run again... Wow, doc, you're right. It's not that bad at all," I said, my sarcasm losing its edge by the underlying whimpering in my voice and the trembling of my lip.

"Isabella, I know it's hard, and considering how you were feeling before the accident, I really wish you would agree to talk to someone," he said, almost pleadingly. "We wouldn't want you to do something stupid..."

"No, we wouldn't want me to do that, now would we..." I whispered. My throat was closing up on me, and I was slowly breaking apart from the inside. This was it. How much more pain did a person have to endure before God agreed that 'this was it' and helped to end the misery?

That was all I wanted, to end the misery. Was that too much to ask for?

"Please, Isabella, don't do anything stupid..." he said, giving me what appeared to be a hard look, but the pity and pain in them betrayed him.

"I can't even move without burning with pain, let alone getting out of bed in order to do something stupid... I think you're safe, Doc, I'm not dying today, or any other day for that matter..." I sighed, biting down on my lower lip, surprised that I wasn't piercing the skin, I was biting so hard.

"This isn't the end of the world. What doesn't kill you makes you stronger," he said, with a weak chuckle in a sad attempt to cheer me up, and I snorted at his effort.

If that was true, then Edward must have been on the brink of death a million times over.

Outcome

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by: adt216]

Chapter 12 – Outcome

Edward Cullen POV

By the time my dad came to the scene, I was so completely shut down from what happened that I didn't even notice him until he put his hand on my shoulder and I jumped in surprise.

"Son?" he said, and I slowly turned to look at him. He frowned as soon as he saw my face. "Thought you said you weren't hurt."

He pressed two skilled fingers to my forehead and I flinched at the pain radiating from where he touched me. I guess I got a cut after all. But what the fuck was a cut on my forehead compared to losing your life? *Fuck.*

He sighed and pulled his hands back after assessing the damage, before walking over to the body. I didn't want to look at what he did to her, so I just turned my back to him and pretended like the situation wasn't bothering me at all. Because, frankly, why would I care that I ran her over? It's not like she matters to me...

Well, she probably matters to someone. She has a family, you idiot.

I guess her family will have to plan a funeral then. And let's face it, I did them a favor. Putting her out of her misery like this. She even asked me to, that one time in the hallway...

*So killing someone is suddenly okay in your book? Who's next?
Newton?*

I flinched at the harshness of my own thoughts.

I could pretend all I wanted. But nothing about the situation would ever be okay, no matter how much I tried to twist it. I had killed Isabella Swan. I was a murderer. Plain and simple. And just because I didn't like her when she was alive, it didn't give me the right to pretend like this didn't bother me. Of course it bothered me. Hitting someone, no matter whom that particular someone was, had to bother me. Or else I would not be human.

"... lost a lot of blood, but she's breathing and her pulse is alright... lower than I would want it to be, but enough for now..." I just became aware that Dad was speaking to me, and it took a moment or two for me to process exactly what he was saying.

"You mean she's... *alive* ?" I asked, incredulously. I turned around, so quickly it made my head spin, and stared at him; he looked back at me and nodded.

Fuck me backwards. I'm not a murderer!

I don't know what the hell came over me, but relief was running through me like a wild spring river, and without intending to, I began to laugh hysterically.

She is fucking breathing.

Dad paid me no attention, as he continued to look her over. I guess the relief flooding through me was what finally did me in. *She's not fucking dead.*

I was just dimly aware of the lights blaring in the distance and the ambulance coming closer, as my legs gave out, and I passed out.

The first thing I saw when I came to was the cleavage of the young intern who was stitching me up. The way she smiled, when she noticed I was awake, was not one of those you give your patients. No. It was one of those you give a guy when you want to get a ride on his special member. *Trust me, I know that look* . If this had been any other time, I would not have thought twice before I gave her my patented dazzling smile and had her bent over the bed, fucking her to the point where she no longer knew her name; it was fucking obvious that she wanted it.

But even I knew this wasn't the damn time for that.

Running over someone and thinking you were a murderer for a whole ten minutes were not really things that put you in the mood. I wouldn't be able to get hard even if I tried. No matter how hot the boobs hanging in my face were.

"All done, handsome," she said, cutting the thread and putting a bandage over the cut.

"Have you seen my father?" I asked, ignoring the seductive look she was giving me.

"He's in surgery with the girl," she replied, still with that look, like she was already picturing me naked, "but your mother is in the waiting room."

I jumped off the bed and stalked out. The intern looked a little baffled as I passed her without as much as a 'thanks'; I guess she wasn't used to being ignored. But who the fuck cared? The only thing tackier than me having her bent over, was her undressing me with her eyes when she knew I had just run over someone...

Who the fuck hits on patients anyway?

I walked over to the waiting area where I found my mom pacing back and forth. I don't think I've ever seen her so flustered and worried. I honestly didn't understand why – I was not the one who got run over.

She stopped pacing when she noticed me. She quickly made her way over to me and pulled me into a tight embrace.

"Don't you dare scare me like that ever again," she said, her lips by my ear and her voice trembling with worry.

"I'm not planning on running anybody over again anytime soon," I tried to joke, in an attempt to brighten the mood. She pulled back and held her hands on either side of my face. I winced a little when her perfectly manicured finger came in contact with the skin near my cut. She noticed and frowned.

"How are you feeling? Are you all right?" she asked and I nodded.

"I'm fine..." I sighed. "And now I just wanna go home."

"You don't want to wait here until your dad gets out of surgery?" she asked, and I shook my head.

"Why? I'm fine, so I don't need to see him," I replied.

"Don't you want to know what happened to the girl?" she asked, looking a bit confused.

I scoffed and shook my head.

"I couldn't care less."

The words left my mouth before they even registered in my mind, and I felt some sort of weird twinge in my stomach after I said them. The words were obviously some kind of reflex, because had this been a few hours ago, I most certainly wouldn't have cared what happened to her. So what had changed?

Mom obviously didn't agree with my thought process, as I could see the distaste in her eyes.

"She almost died, Edward. How can you not care?" she asked, her voice sad.

"I didn't care before... so why would I now? Nothing has changed," I replied with a tired sigh. "Can I go home now?" She frowned and let me go.

"You surprise me, Edward. This is not the son I raised," she said, disappointment lacing her tone.

"Is that a yes?" I sighed. She sighed in return, but didn't answer.

I took her silence as a yes.

Another doctor had to check me over before I could get out of there, but finally I did.

I stepped out through the hospital doors into the cold, and it wasn't until then that it hit me that I had no car and no way of getting home. I plopped down on a nearby bench and pulled out my phone. I had three missed calls from Jasper.

They must be wondering where the hell I was. I should have been in Port Angeles by now. It had been almost two hours since I left home. Two hours since the accident.

Two fucking hours . How was that even possible? Time had really flown...

I called Jasper back, and he answered after the first ring.

"Dude! What the fuck happened?" he answered frantically, not even bothering to say hello.

"Don't even ask," I sighed. "I figure you guys know you have to find another source of transportation?"

"Yeah, I figured as much when Emmett called. He picked us up ten minutes ago. We're on our way back now," Jasper replied. "So, dude, what the fuck? What did you do?"

"Seriously, man, I'm not in the mood. Can you guys like drive by the hospital and pick me the fuck up? I need to get shitfaced, like... ten minutes ago."

"Emmett wants to talk to you, hang on," Jasper said. I heard the phone change hands, and soon Emmett's loud voice came on.

"Bro, what the fuck?" *Emmett. Always so eloquent.*

"I don't even know where to begin. This is all so fucked up," I sighed.

"Mom said you ran over someone... are you okay?"

"I'm alright, got a fucking cut, and I needed stitches. I bet I'm gonna get a badass scar," I chuckled darkly, and Emmett sighed in my ear.

"C'mon, bro, don't be a douche... who did you hit? Did he or she die?" he asked, with morbid curiosity, and for once I damned the fact that my brother never beat around the bush and got right to the point. He asked what he wanted to know, and that was that. No matter how inappropriate it was. And not caring if I was up for his shit or not.

"No, she didn't die... Dad is working her over in surgery." I leaned back on the bench, pinching the bridge of my nose and squeezing my eyes shut. *I so don't need this shit right now.*

"And you're avoiding the question... who was it?" he pressed, and I groaned.

"Goose," I replied with a tired sigh.

"What? You hit a goose? But you said Dad was in surgery. Why would he operate on a bir-" He cut himself off and gasped as the realization hit him – my brother could be real slow sometimes, "You hit Swan! Dude! What the hell?"

I didn't say anything, and I could hear the others talk frantically on the other side of the line. Nobody missed that particular detail. From

what I caught them saying, I could tell that they were all doubting my sincerity; none of them believed I actually hit Goose of all people.

And of course, when they realized I wasn't joking, the inevitable follow-up question had to follow.

"I love you, bro, you know that, but I got to ask... and don't take this the wrong way... but did you... you didn't do it... you know... on purpose?" he asked awkwardly, and if he had been standing in front of me right now, he would be scratching his head and avoiding my eyes at all cost. And if he had in fact been standing in front of me right now, I would have punched him in the fucking face for even suggesting it – I wouldn't even fucking care that he could beat me down with both his hands tied behind his back. I don't fucking care how bad it all looked; he should know me better than that. I would never physically hurt a girl, let alone hit her with my fucking car, no matter how annoying she was.

"Dude... seriously... you didn't, did you?" he asked hesitantly, when I hadn't said anything for a while.

"It was fucking dark. I didn't see her until it was too fucking late. You really think I'm capable of *killing someone* ? What the fuck, Em?" I said incredulously, though I couldn't be totally insulted by his words, since I knew that it was a fair question given the circumstances. But still, it fucking hurt that my brother thought so low of me that he actually had to ask.

"Chill, I was just asking... can you blame me? You threatened to kill her just a few hours ago, so how can you-"

"Fuck you, Em," I snapped, before hanging up on him.

I don't fucking care if what he said made sense. I already assumed people would make the wrong assumptions when they found out. It was the first fucking thing I thought of, after I realized who it was I had hit in the first place. But c'mon! He was my brother. He should have known me better than anyone, and if Emmett thought I was

capable of hitting someone on purpose, then what the hell was the rest of the town going to think?

My reputation would be ruined. And my life would be over.

Fucking Swa- Goose .

It was all her fault.

What the hell was she doing in the middle of nowhere anyway? Shouldn't she have been at home, thinking about how pathetic she was? Wishing she was cool, and maybe play with her dollies or what the fuck ever it is that geeks like her do for 'fun'.

Maybe she was setting me up... maybe this was her intention all along.

To fucking destroy me before I had a chance to destroy her.

Fuck.

A moving flashing light caught my attention, and I looked up. I first thought it was an ambulance, but I was proven wrong when the car drove up into the parking lot, not to the ER entrance, and parked in an empty space close to the main entrance instead.

It was a fucking police cruiser, and the person stepping out of the car was none other than Chief Swan himself. Swan's father.

Fuck.

For some idiotic reason, I stood up and stepped in front of him just as he was about to enter the hospital. He had a woman with him, whom I assumed was his wife and the mother of Swan, because she looked exactly like her – same brown hair and deep brown eyes – just older.

I didn't know what the fuck I was doing, but this was my moment to prove myself. I did not hit that bitch on purpose, and I was going to

man up and actually apologize to her parents for putting them through all this. I was not going to mention what a waste of space their daughter was. I was simply going to apologize. Nothing more.

It was the human thing to do, right?

The Chief glared at me and I tried my best to show him that he didn't scare me.

But that fucking gun in his holster sure did...

"Move out of my way, son," he said with what I assumed was his frightening cop-voice.

He's not scaring me...

"My name is Edward Cull-"

"I know who you are! Now get out of my way! My daughter is in there!" he snapped.

"I know, and I believe the reason is my fault."

Something shifted in his eyes. The woman grabbed a hold off his arm and looked at me with panicked eyes. I had to look away from them when I started talking. I would not be able to apologize if I had to look into their eyes and see their pain.

"It was fucking dark, and I hit a patch of black ice. And I didn't see her. She was in the fucking way. And she got hit. Sorry," I said, all in one breath, with no ounce of remorse in my voice. I was just going through the motions, doing what responsible people did. My mom should be proud of me for even bothering...

"You... *you* hit my daughter?" the woman said with a shaky voice.
"What...why? Did she jump in front of you? Did she... did she do it on purpose?"

I was a little taken aback by her question and looked at her confusedly. Was it a coincidence that that particular question was the first thing she asked? Or was there more to it? If even her fucking mother had to ask whether or not she jumped, then maybe it wasn't my fault at all, and I had nothing to apologize for.

"Renée! Bella would never!" the Chief said, turning to glare at his wife.

"I don't know. It all happened so fucking fast, she might as well have jumped. I don't know," I said, though a part of me doubted it was true. I remember every millisecond before the accident, and I knew for a fact that she didn't jump in front of my car... she was just standing there even though she had time to get out of the way. But that might as well have been on purpose. Who knew what the fuck was running through that crazy head of hers?

"I will deal with you later," the Chief said to me, before pushing me out of his way and walking inside.

I went back to my bench and sat down. At least I had apologized. I should get some fucking credit for that. It wasn't like it was my fault that their crazy daughter was more or less suicidal.

I played with the phone in my hands, as I silently pondered my next problem: how the hell I was going to get the fuck out of here?

It would be an hour before the guys were back in Forks, and I had no desire to hang out with them now anyway. They would ask for details, and they would ask me again if I did it on purpose. Because it would all sound so unlikely in their ears, they would ask me how the hell I managed to lose control of the car in the first place. I was an awesome driver – that was a known fucking fact. I simply didn't lose control. Not like this.

Could I have stopped? Could I have prevented the accident?

Did I actually hit her on purpose?

That was a question I rather not try to answer, because I simply did not know. The more I thought about it, the hazier became the memory that had been so clear just moments before. Did I in fact see her, but not caring to slow down in time? Because I knew who she was? But what the fuck, why would I actually try to kill her?

She wasn't *that* annoying. She was just... a waste of space.

And that was no reason to hit her on purpose. Even I knew that.

It would do me no good if I continued obsessing over it. I didn't have the energy to deal with this right now. Not tonight.

I scrolled through the list of numbers on my phone and I smirked darkly to myself as I pressed the green button and put the phone to my ear. *Getting out of here would be too easy* .

It didn't take long for the skank to answer.

"Edward," she sang, and I tried not to cringe at her voice.

"Pick me up. I'm outside the hospital. And I don't have a ride to the party," I said bluntly.

"Oh, you're not sick are you?" she cooed, and I rolled my eyes.

"Are you going to pick me up or not? I have a lot of girls lining up to do the job if you're not up for it, Tanya," I said with an annoyed sigh.

"I'm on my way," she said quickly.

"Good," I replied curtly, before hanging up without as much as a bye.

I regretted calling her as soon as I had heard her voice. But I needed a fucking ride, and she was the safest bet – because I knew she would be fucking fast. If I knew her at all she would be here within five minutes.

And I needed a fucking distraction. Tanya was as good as any.

I leaned back on the bench and stretched out my legs. My entire body was stiff and I groaned loudly as I stretched my neck. The doctor said I didn't get a whiplash, but I begged to differ, since it hurt like a bitch.

My phone rang again, and I looked down on the display.

Alice.

I didn't need to think twice before declining the call. I was not in the mood to talk with the overly moral pixie, because her comforting would only make me feel worse. She would tell me shit like, "Isabella is a human being with feelings," and that she was so great, and so nice, and she didn't deserve this. *Like I deserved this ?*

Fucking pixie.

A car honked, and I looked up. Tanya was here.

I looked down at my phone to look at the time and shook my head.

Three minutes.

Too easy.

"Baby, what happened? You're hurt," she said pouting her full lips when I got into the car. I glanced at her and cocked an eyebrow.

"I got into a knife fight." I smirked. "I won."

"You're so bad," she giggled and put the car into gear.

I kept the smirk on my face, because it was the only thing keeping me from going insane at that moment. I tried to act casual and be myself, but as soon as the car was moving I felt an uneasy fluttering in my stomach. And my head began to spin.

"So straight to Newton's or do you want me to stop somewhere and make your pain go away?" she teased and gave me a suggestive

look. I felt the bile rise in my throat and I nodded frantically, as I tried to swallow it back down.

"Pull over somewhere," I managed to reply, my voice hoarse; it didn't even sound like me.

"Why, Edward, you surprise me," she giggled, misinterpreting my tone completely. She probably thought my husky voice was a good thing.

"Just... stop talking," I sighed and closed my eyes. I rested my elbow on the door and pinched the bridge of my nose. This feeling was unsettling. Was I carsick? Fuck no, I never got carsick. Maybe *I have a concussion*. They say that one of the signs of concussions is nausea. But this wasn't that kind of nausea, I just felt... off.

It took forever for her to find a place to pull over, and when she did, I was ready to burst. I needed air. I needed to get the fuck out of this fucking car. I threw open the door, jumped out quickly, and took a few deep and greedy breaths of fresh air. I heard her open her door and the sound of gravel, as she crept up behind me and put her arms around my waist.

"Don't worry, sweetie, I'm gonna make you feel so good," she whispered, and let her hand travel down to my crotch. She began rubbing my dick outside my pants and I closed my eyes, ready to feel the familiar stirring and the pleasure that followed...

Distraction. A good distraction...

Though I tried to let everything go and just enjoy the feeling of her skilled hands on my dick, there still was no fucking reaction from my body. I couldn't get hard.

Because all I could see when I closed my eyes was Isabella's wrecked body and her twisted leg... and the blood. Shit.

Isabella? Since when did I call her Isabella? She was not fucking Isabella to me. She was Goose. Or Duck. Or fucking Turkey.

She was *not* Isabella to me.

"C'mon, boy, you need more help getting ready?" Tanya giggled from behind, as her hand slid inside my jeans and inside my boxers. She grabbed my dick and stroked it a few times.

But my body wasn't fucking working. There was no fucking reaction whatsoever.

It didn't feel good.

Frankly, it felt fucking disgusting.

That's because you are disgusting. You almost killed a girl not two hours ago. And here you are, standing in the dark somewhere with a girl's hand down your pants.

I grabbed Tanya's wrist and pulled her hand out roughly.

"Let's get to the fucking party," I mumbled and walked back over to the car.

"Oh, you're right. It's fucking freezing..." she said and went over to the driver's side.

Freezing. Yeah. Like that was my problem.

I closed my eyes and tried to ignore the uneasy feeling that crept up my spine as soon as the car was moving again. I tried to think positively - we were just a few minutes away from the party. Just a few short minutes until I would get access to alcohol. I was going to drink until I passed out.

And forget this day ever happened.

The party was in full swing when we got there, and I quickly removed myself from Tanya and got lost in the crowd. I made it to the kitchen and grabbed the first bottle of vodka I saw. Cheap stuff, but it would do the trick. At least it wasn't flavored.

My cut drew more attention than I thought it would, and when people asked me what I had done, I just shrugged and took a swig from the bottle. It wasn't their fucking business anyway.

I removed the fucking bandage after a while, because it was itching like hell, and because it screamed, "Hey, look at me." But it was fucking useless, since I couldn't even cover the cut with my fucking hair anyway. At least it was slightly less noticeable, and I guess I should count the small victories in a shitty day like this.

My head was buzzing quite a bit after a while. But it wasn't the good kind of buzz. I wasn't happy and horny; I was anxious and brooding.

I was sitting on the kitchen counter, staring down at the bottle in my hands, when Tyler Crowley walked in with the biggest shit-eating grin ever. I cocked an eyebrow at him as he waved something in my face.

"Haha, look what I found in Newton's room!" he yelled.

"Stop waving whatever it is in my face or I'll punch you in yours," I replied sourly.

His grin faded a little, and when he stopped waving his hands around, I recognized what it was. I smirked lazily at the sight of Tyler holding that bright pink dildo. I wondered if Newton had used it yet...

"A dildo," I said, nodding as I took a swig from the bottle. "I always knew Newton liked it in his ass." Tyler chuckled at my comment.

"By the way, your brother is looking for you," he said and nodded towards the living room.

"Good for him," I replied coolly, without moving an inch.

Tyler gave me an odd look, before leaving the kitchen. I took yet another swig, gulping down the last remains. I threw the empty bottle in the sink next to me and sighed in annoyance. I wasn't drunk enough yet.

"There you are! Fucking ass, why haven't you answered your fucking phone?"

I groaned at the sound of my brother's voice and slowly turned my head to the doorway leading to the living room, and found not just my brother staring back at me, but Alice, Rose and Jasper too, as they were right behind him.

"I turned it off," I replied with a lazy shrug.

"What the fuck are you doing here? Mom is going crazy with worry. She thought you were passed out in a ditch somewhere, when she came home and noticed you weren't there," Emmett said irritated. "Shit, your forehead looks gross," he added, and I rolled my eyes.

"What happened, Edward? How is Isabella?" Alice asked with her gentle caring voice, which reminded me of the reason why I wasn't in the mood to talk to her. She pushed past Emmett so she could walk up to me.

"I wouldn't know. I didn't exactly stick around to find out," I replied with a shrug.

"Are you kidding? What the hell is wrong with you?" Rosalie asked, and we all turned our eyes to her in surprise. Who knew Rosalie of all people would care about this?

"Nothing is wrong with me. I'm fine, apart from this sexy, little cut," I said.

"Seriously, dude, didn't you stay long enough to find out if she's going to be okay or anything?" Emmett asked.

"Mom said she was in surgery. Dad was cutting her open, and if Dad is treating her, I'm sure she'll be perfectly fine. It's not my problem anymore," I replied.

"Oh fuck you, *Cullen*," Alice spat, narrowing her eyes at me. "Is it that hard for you to be human for even a minute?"

I chuckled humorlessly and jumped off the counter, almost falling on my ass in the process. I guess the booze had affected me more than I thought. I couldn't even stand upright like a normal person without holding on to something in order to not fall over.

I could feel the alcohol in my system, and since I had never removed my ass from the kitchen counter, I guess it was the reason why I never felt the alcohol hit.

Because now it did... and then some.

"I am human. See? I bleed and everything," I said, pointing to my cut, accidentally poking it in the process, and making it sting like a bitch. I didn't even have any control of my limbs anymore.

"Christ, you're wasted," Emmet sighed. "Let's get your fucking ass home."

Emmett grabbed my arm and all but dragged me out of the house. I guess I should have been thankful that he was holding on to me, or I would have fallen on my ass.

What the fuck was in that bottle anyway? Who knew that even cheap shit did the trick?

Ha ha, Cheap Trick...

I was just about to get into the car when someone grabbed my arm. I turned around lazily and found myself looking at a very drunk Tanya. And the only thing worse than a sober Tanya was a drunk one. Fantastic. *This day just gets better and better...*

"Leaving so soon? C'mon, Eddie, we never got to finish what we started," she complained, slurring slightly, and tugging on my arm. I looked down on her hands and smiled humorlessly.

"If I couldn't get it up for your sorry ass earlier, what makes you think I would be able to now?" I asked bluntly. Her face fell as she gaped at me.

"But... baby, it was cold..." she said quietly, and I wanted to roll my eyes at her sad attempt to come up with an explanation. If she knew what had happened tonight, then she sure as hell wouldn't be begging me to fuck her right now.

"I guess my cock is just tired of you. Bye, Tanya," I said tiredly, and slid into the car and slammed the door.

"Edward! Please tell me you didn't try to sleep with her after you almost killed a girl!" Alice hissed and leaned forward between the front seats. She glared at me, and I rolled my eyes.

"After you try to kill someone, you always have to sleep with someone else," I muttered sarcastically, and rested my head against the cool car window.

"How hard did you hit your head today, Edward? You seem even douchier than usual," Rosalie commented from the backseat. I wanted to laugh at her comment, because the whole situation was so ridiculous, but no sound escaped me.

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. As I slowly breathed out again, all I could see was Swan and her body. Her body that I broke. All her blood that I spilled...

"I'm fine... but you should have seen Swan. Her leg was twisted in the most awkward way... and the blood... there was fucking blood everywhere... the taillights lit up everything, making everything look like it was covered in blood... quite beautiful really," I murmured to

myself, without opening my eyes. I didn't even know what I was talking about anymore.

"Edward... how serious was this accident?" Jasper asked carefully.

"There was blood everywhere..." I murmured.

And then I passed out for the second time that night.

I woke up again when we got home, and Emmett was trying to help me out of the car. Mom was standing by the front door with her hands crossed over her chest and a disappointed look in her eyes.

"Edward, what are you doing to yourself?" she asked, as Emmett dragged me inside.

"I was drinking... isn't that what kids my age are supposed to do?" I slurred.

Emmett all but pushed me down on the couch in the living room, and the entire room was spinning when I tried to sit up.

Mom sat down beside me and rubbed my knee I didn't like it when she looked at me with those big eyes that held nothing but love and concern for me. I didn't fucking deserve her love. Or her concern.

I groaned, hid my face in my hands, and leaned back on the couch.

"Sweetie, what is going on with you? What were you thinking, going out drinking like this? You should have gone straight home. I've been worried sick," she scolded me, and she sighed softly when I didn't reply. "Your dad called a while ago. He was out of surgery..."

My hands fell down to my lap, and I looked at my mother. I didn't like the tone she was using. The tone she was using suggested that the surgery didn't end well. And I... I just couldn't deal with that right now.

"Did she die?" I asked, my voice empty and barely a whisper.

She shook her head softly and squeezed my knee reassuringly.

"No, she didn't... but her injuries are pretty severe. Your dad doesn't think she will..." Her voice cracked, "...ever get back to normal."

I immediately turned my eyes away. My throat was closing up on me again, and I felt that weird stirring in my stomach again at the mere mention of what happened to her.

"I thought we could go over to the hospital tomorrow and see how she is. Maybe we could buy her a flower or something," she suggested with a choked voice, and I didn't need to look at her to know that she was close to tears. I had apologized to her parents, and that was as far as I would go for Swan. I had done my part. Now I wanted to move on.

I stood up unsteadily. My legs were wobbly and I almost fell over.

"I don't want to see her. Why would I care how she is?" I asked in an emotionless voice.

"Because that's the right thing to do," she replied, a single tear trailed down her cheek.

I wanted to scoff at her words. *The right thing to do, my ass.*

The right thing to do would have been not hitting her in the first place.

"Sweetie, I know this is hard for you... but you can't act like this doesn't matter to you. You were in a serious accident. You are allowed to feel," she said softly.

I finally looked her in the eyes, and she flinched slightly at whatever she saw in my gaze.

"I am feeling, Mother, believe me, I'm fucking feeling. And what I'm feeling right now is annoyance. Because that bitch had no reason to be out there in the first place. I'm annoyed because now I will have

to wait to get my car repaired again. And I'm fucking annoyed because all of you expect me to care what the fuck happens to her now," I snapped at her eyes grew wide.

"Edward..." My name was the only word that left her lips, but all she wanted to convey was within that simple word. The sorrow and the pain in her voice pierced my heart – or at least the area where my heart was supposed to be – and the disappointment in her eyes twisted everything inside of me. She had never looked at me like that before. She was giving up on me. I could tell.

And I was not going to stand there for another minute, just to see how her motherly love for me slowly faded into nothing. I knew I didn't deserve her love, but that didn't mean I wanted to see it leave...

"I'm going to bed, good night," I mumbled.

She didn't say anything. And this time she didn't need to. Her silence said enough.

My head was pounding when I woke up in the morning. It felt like my brain tried to hammer its way out. I don't know whether the reason was the booze or the cut, and frankly, I didn't care. All I cared about right now was getting something for the fucking pain.

I grabbed my pajama-pants, not bothering with a t-shirt and pulled them on, before walking downstairs. I walked over to Dad's office, opening the door without knocking, since I figured he wasn't home anyway. But I was proven wrong, when I found him sitting by his desk, going through his usual shit from the hospital.

"My head is fucking pounding. I need something," I muttered, and he looked up.

His reading glasses were perched on his nose, and the look in his eyes was not kind.

"That's what you get when you are stupid enough to go drinking right after a serious accident," he replied coolly.

"Oh c'mon, I wasn't hurt. I'm fine," I replied with a sigh.

"Yes, and thank God for that," he said exasperated, putting down his glasses. "Do you have any idea how long I spent in surgery last night? Trying to correct the damage you cause?"

I shrugged. I didn't like the way he pinned the accident on me. It wasn't my fault.

"I don't care." For some reason, there was a slight tremble in my voice.

"Of course you don't," he replied harshly. "Why would the big, important Edward Cullen care? He almost killed a girl, but who cares? Right? And I heard you spoke to Chief Swan too. He said you apologized by telling him that his daughter jumped in front of the car... and even if that was true, why the hell would you go tell him that to his face? What is wrong with you?"

I crossed my arms awkwardly over my naked chest and looked away. I tried to look bored, like I simply didn't give a crap about what he thought, and that I was just waiting for him to finish. And I hoped he was angry enough not to notice the slight trembling of my bottom lip.

I'm not about to fucking cry. I'm not a fucking girl.

"I'm gonna go to the hospital today. And tell her I'm sorry, and that I didn't mean to hit her. Will that make you happy?" I asked.

"You will not step your foot in that hospital, you hear me? You leave Isabella Swan and her family alone! You did enough damage last night. I thought you were going to handle the situation like an adult, and at least wait until you found out how she was doing before leaving. But no, going out and getting drunk with your friends was

more important... but not before ripping her parent's hearts out," he snapped. His neck was getting red, and I knew he was about to reach his boiling point.

"Whatever," I snorted, not even caring that I was pushing him.

"You will not put your foot in that hospital, understood?" he said again and I nodded. "Good. I want you to stay indoors today, and I will deal with you when I get back from work tonight."

"What do you mean 'deal with me'? It was a fucking accident! Why am I getting punished for it?" I asked and he tilted his head and gave me a pointed look.

"I will deal with you later," was all he said in response to my question. "Take an aspirin from the bathroom, and put a band-aid back on your forehead. You shouldn't let it be exposed like that. And go back to bed. You look like hell."

I all but slammed the door behind me as I left.

There was a weird ache in my chest, but it didn't feel physical. I simply didn't understand it. I rubbed my chest with my hand, as I walked back upstairs. The ache didn't subside. It felt like a weird pressure, making every breath feel like such a labor.

I went into the upstairs bathroom and grabbed the bottle of aspirin. It felt light, and I heard nothing when I shook it. I opened the bottle and looked inside.

Empty. Of fucking course.

This is what you get when you run over someone, idiot.

You are left with a disgusting cut, a pounding headache and no aspirin.

Deal with it.

I couldn't go back to sleep. My head was killing me – but it wasn't all about the pain anymore. My mind was slowly starting to process the previous day, and everything that had been said and done came back to me. Each memory more vivid and painful than the other. And I hated the way it all made me feel...

I couldn't wipe the sight of Swa- Goose's broken body from my mind, and the way my mother had looked at me in the living room. And now I could add my dad's respect for me to the list of things I managed to screw up. My father might not agree with how I was living my life, but he always said he respected me. When I left his office this morning, I knew that said respect was history.

That hurt more than it should. Why would I care whether or not my dad respected me? He's my dad for crying out loud. He's forced to love me no matter what I did, so I didn't need his fucking respect.

But still, it all added to the weird ache in my chest.

I spent an eternity in my shower, trying to wash off the failures of yesterday, trying not to cringe when the water and soap came in contact with the cut. And I felt just as dirty when I stepped out as I did when I stepped in.

I wrapped a towel around my waist and sat down by my keyboard. I didn't lift my hands from my lap. I just stared at the black and white keys, letting them taunt me with their silence.

Haha, you can't play! You can't play! You're messed up! You're messed up!

There was a knock on my door, and it squeaked open a moment later.

"Morning, bro, what's up?" Emmett said, giving me a smile that I knew was just as fake as Tanya's nose.

"I'm awesome," I replied, without looking up.

He sighed and sat down on my bed.

"Of course you are," he replied with a sigh. "What did you say to Mom last night anyway? I heard her crying in their room after Dad came home, and he had to spend like an hour just to calm her down."

"I was just being honest," I muttered.

"Yeah, and that's what scares me," he muttered.

I shot my eyes to him, and he was frowning at me.

"I told her I didn't care what the fuck happened to the Goose, alright?" I snapped.

"C'mon, bro... don't call her that, what the hell?" he sighed, looking frustrated.

"This accident changes nothing, alright? She meant nothing to me before, and she means nothing to me now. Why would I start caring just because I fucking hit her with my car? It was her fucking fault anyway. What the hell was she doing in the middle of nowhere?" I said, gesturing wildly with my arms, feeling the aggravation pulsate through my body.

"You're a fucking douche, you know that?" he said, standing up. "You almost killed her, and you act like it doesn't even matter that she almost lost her fucking life. I know you don't like her and that it was all an accident, but dude, c'mon! She's a person, just like you. And how can you not care that you almost killed her... accident or not?"

I glared at him without answering, and he sighed, shaking his head, as he turned to walk out of the room. "I thought more of you, bro," he sighed, before closing the door behind him.

I looked back down on the keyboard and I bit down on my tongue - so hard I could taste the blood - in order not to scream out loud.

Dealing with this would be so much easier if people didn't keep telling me to care. Why couldn't they just leave me alone? Why did they have to push me like this and keep throwing shit in my face, as if I wasn't aware of everything they said already?

Of course I was aware I almost robbed someone of their life yesterday. And no, I wasn't fucking happy with that fact. Of course I felt bad...

I squeezed my eyes shut and pinched the bridge of my nose hard between my fingers. The cut was stinging by the way I was squeezing my eyes shut, but I didn't care. The pain was welcome.

I almost killed Swan.

I lied to her dad, by basically saying she tried to kill herself.

I told my mother I didn't care what happened to her.

And I acted like I was fine with it all.

I wasn't okay with it.

The ache in my chest was a painful fucking proof of that.

I was the most skilled driver in Forks.

And I ended up almost killing a person.

How does shit like that even happen?

My hand fell down on my lap and I looked out the window.

If she had died, would I still claim I didn't care?

Or was it easy to say I didn't care because I knew she was still breathing?

"Isabella..." I murmured, and the name alone twisted something in my gut.

I left my place at the keyboard and went back to bed, I reached for the remote control on my nightstand and turned on the flat-screen that was hanging on the opposite wall.

Maybe some TV would get my mind off things...

I stayed in bed for the rest of the day. I didn't even get up to get something to eat. I had no fucking appetite.

Mom always used to make me something to eat and bring it to my room when I was sick. But I guess this didn't count as 'sick', and the fact that she hadn't even been up to my room at all during the day spoke volumes about how much she must hate me right now...

She didn't even call me down to dinner. And neither did Dad or Emmett.

The logical part of my brain told me that they were just trying to give me space and let me deal with things on my own for a while, but the illogical part of my brain told me that they simply didn't care, and that my behavior towards them had been unforgivable.

But I could not believe that, no matter what I said or did, my family would never turn their backs on me. Not even if I had killed her on purpose.

They are just giving me space. That is all.

When the red digits on my alarm clock switched to 8:00 pm, I knew I had to get the fuck out of there. I was beginning to feel claustrophobic in my own room, and that was never a good sign.

I pulled on the same clothes I had on yesterday, and made my way downstairs. The house was quiet, apart from the low voices from the

dining room, and I was actually happy that they hadn't asked me to join them.

I quietly left the house, and walked down the steps of the front porch, quickly running down the driveway into the woods. I didn't slow down until I no longer could see the house behind me. It would take forever to walk to town from here, since I was used to taking the car, but it was alright. I needed the fresh air in order to sort all my thoughts.

I didn't know how long I walked for, and I had no thoughts on where to go either. I just let my feet guide me wherever they wanted. And I guess I shouldn't have been surprised when I found myself outside the hospital. My subconscious was obviously mocking me.

I looked at the clock on my phone; it was after ten. Visiting hours had ended hours ago.

But if I didn't care about what happened to her, why would I care about something as trivial as visiting hours? I scoffed at myself as I walked up the entrance.

I had no idea where her room was, but I figured she was in the ICU. I took the elevator to the fourth floor, and was just about to walk over to the nurses' station, to ask what room was hers, when I saw a familiar woman leave a room nearby. Mrs. Swan. Her long brown hair was flowing down her shoulders, and I was once again struck by just how similar she and her daughter looked.

She walked past me, looking upset, and she didn't even throw a glance my way. Maybe she didn't recognize me, and that was probably a good thing.

I steered myself in the direction of Swan's room. And when I reached the door, I... kept on walking. I just couldn't fucking do it. What the hell was I supposed to say anyway? And what the fuck was I trying to prove by coming here?

I told everybody over and over again that I didn't care. So what the hell was I doing here? I obviously cared about something, or else I wouldn't be here. Maybe I was just trying to prove to everyone that I wasn't as big an ass as they all thought.

I paced back and forth in the hallway, and I saw Chief Swan leave the room shortly after. I stared at the door as it slowly shut behind him, and I sighed.

She was most likely alone now. I could apologize to her, or just make sure she was still fucking breathing. *She fucking owed me that much*

I thought over what I was going to say, and decided on telling her that I didn't do it on purpose, tell her that I was fucking sorry that I was the cause of her injuries, and that I was sorry that she may never fully recover to what she was before.

Whatever that meant...

I took a deep breath and pushed the door open.

She didn't notice me at first. She was looking down on her hands with a strange expression on her face, like she was trying to figure something out or some shit. I took the time to look her over – she had always been small, but her body appeared even smaller in the hospital bed, with all her limbs covered up in gauze and plaster. Even though every single part of her body seemed to be more or less injured, she still had some kind of weird aura or something about her that made her appear strong.

"Hi..." I said lamely. It caught her attention, and she snapped her eyes up, flinching slightly for some reason before her eyes went wide when she met my gaze.

I was struck by all the emotions in her eyes. She didn't look afraid or scared of me, which I had expected, but simply... pissed.

"What the hell are you doing here?"

I was slightly taken aback by her annoyed tone, but I should not have been surprised. There was a fire in her eyes that showed that she was not about to take any crap from me today. I put my hands in my pockets and looked around awkwardly. This would have been so much fucking easier if she had been the shy, little lamb, not talking back like this...

"I wanted to see... if you were... you know... breathing." I shrugged, hoping it looked nonchalant, and that my voice didn't betray me, making her aware of the fact that I was freaking out.

"Yes, as you can see, I'm still breathing. No thanks to you," she replied with a sarcastic smile.

I looked at her incredulously. Was she for real? I was trying to apologize, goddamnit, and I sure as hell didn't need her fucking attitude. This was hard enough as it was, and I guess I simply couldn't contain my anger and irritation, when I lashed out at her and raised my voice. But she didn't seem to be affected at all; she just continued to reply icily to anything I said after that.

Then came the punch line. She asked me if I was there to get money from her for the car repairs. And the comment was like a punch in the fucking gut – though it sounded sarcastic, I was sure she was genuinely asking me.

Did she actually believe I was that damn cold?

I couldn't believe she actually threw that in my face. Who the hell did she think she was?

She should be counting herself fucking lucky that I was even there in the first place to apologize. Edward fucking Cullen rarely apologized to anyone, especially not to people who were such obvious wastes of space.

The shit really hit the fan when my dad walked in and found me there; the anger in his eyes was nothing like I've ever seen before.

"What are you doing here, son? I thought I asked you to leave Miss Swan alone," he said to me, his anger barely contained in his voice, before looking over at Swan. "Is he bothering you?"

"Nah, he was just giving me the total on how much it cost to repair his car," she replied calmly, and Dad shot his eyes to me so quickly I flinched. Before I knew it I had been dragged out into the hallway. I guess I now knew where Emmett got his strength from...

As soon as we were out in the hallway, he began to lash out on me, and I tried to take it like a man, since I knew he was right. I had no reason to be there, and I knew I should have kept my ass at home, and not disobeyed him by coming here. I wasn't helping matters. Fuck. I knew that.

But c'mon, she didn't have to throw me to the wolves like that either. I fucking apologized to her. What more did she want from me?

I tried to cut him off, telling him that I just wanted to see how she was doing, but he never let me finish. Then he told me about her injuries, and I didn't even know how or what the hell I was supposed to respond to that. When he spoke about her injuries, it all became real to me, and reality hit me like a ton of bricks.

" She will never walk like a normal person and she will never ever run again. Because you crushed her leg. Do you even comprehend what kind of damage you've done?"

No. I couldn't comprehend that.

She would never fucking run again . How was I ever going to be able to grasp something like that?

He pushed me out towards the elevators, after he was done lecturing me, telling me to call Emmett or my mom to get picked up.

"And if I see you here again..." he threatened in a low voice, not needing to finish the sentence.

I just nodded, as I stepped into the elevator and pushed the button for the bottom floor.

I closed my eyes, and images of Swan flashed before my eyes. Memories of her broken body on the cold road, and her bandaged up body in the hospital bed, all flashed before me and assaulted all of my senses.

But even though it seemed like there was no part of her that was not bruised or hurt, she still seemed more alive and stronger than I've ever seen her at school. The fire in her eyes had not been there before, and the way she talked back to me and actually lied to my father about the money thing just... wow... she had insane survival instincts. That's for sure. I'll give her that much.

The more I thought about it, though, I came to the conclusion that she only had strong survival instincts and the gut to speak her mind when she was at the hospital, and probably because she knew she was just seconds away from getting saved by a nearby doctor. All she had to do was yell.

There was no doubt in my mind that the fire in her eyes would be gone as soon as she was out. And she would once again become the wallflower at school and she would never talk back to me again...

I picked up my phone when I came outside, calling Emmett and asking him to pick me up. He didn't ask me what I was doing there; I guess it was obvious even to him. I sat down on the same bench that I had sat on just twenty hours before, to wait for my brother.

Swan would go back to being the loser that she was, wasting the space she occupied and annoying me with her mere presence. Yes, of course she would... *this* didn't change anything.

The accident didn't change her, and it most certainly didn't change me. It was just an unfortunate happening that would soon be forgotten and we would never speak of it again.

We would all forget. And there would be no reminders.

" She will never walk like a normal person and she will never ever run again."

No reminders, indeed.

Invalid

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 13 – Invalid

Isabella Swan POV

Dr. Cullen was a liar. Plain and simple.

It had been almost a week since the accident. I was still stuck in this uncomfortable hospital bed, and Dr. Cullen was not showing any signs of letting me go anytime soon.

I've been subjected to two additional surgeries since Saturday, one on my leg and one because of some internal damage in my abdomen. I didn't really pay any attention when Dr. Cullen explained it to me and my dad, because frankly, I stopped listening to him when I realized he was a liar. For all I knew, he could be lying about everything. So why would I listen to him?

Overall, I felt fine – at least physically. At least as fine as I could considering the circumstances. Though the pain had subsided in my leg, I was still bothered by it. If I made any sudden movements or tried to move in a way that my leg didn't agree with, I could be sure that there would be bursts of pain shooting through it. It would be painful to the point of me passing out. But that was something I quickly learned to control, and I never made any sudden movements, or any movements at all really. I never left the bed,

except for the times I had to go to the bathroom, and that turned out to be a pain too – but in a different way.

The cast on my leg had gone all the way from my foot up to mid-thigh, which of course made it impossible for me to bend my knee and sit like a normal person while on the toilet, which in turn made the whole experience worse. They removed a part of the cast a few days later, so the cast just went up to my knee. Apparently the thigh-part was just for stability during the first few days.

I laid in my bed and looked out the window. Earlier this morning, it had been snowing, but now it was raining. Everything felt gray and murky, which suited my current mood perfectly.

I had yet to see Dr. Cullen today, and it was already after three in the afternoon. I figured he might have a day off, but something told me that Dr. Cullen was the kind of doctor who would rather go torture his patients on his days off than spend time with his family. But then again, I couldn't blame him if that were true, considering who his family consisted of – particularly his son.

Speaking of the devil, Edward had not bothered me since Dr. Cullen threw him out of my room on Saturday, and I don't know if I was thankful for that or not. A part of me wanted him to try to apologize like a real person and show some kind of remorse for what he did, while another part of me wanted nothing to do with him. If I never saw him again in my entire life, it would still be too soon.

On Monday, when I woke up after my first surgery since the accident, I was met by the sight of a big, elaborate bouquet of wildflowers on the table next to my bed. It was very pretty and expensive looking, and I knew instantly that it wasn't from my dad. And that assumption proved to be correct, when I noticed a woman standing by the window with a wistful look in her eyes.

Her brown hair had splashes of bronze and was gathered in a messy, yet classy, bun, and she was dressed in a casual, light gray suit. I could only see her profile, but what I could see was enough for

me to gather that she was beautiful. As soon as I saw the color of her eyes, I knew who she was.

Edward's mother.

I cleared my throat to get her attention, and it felt like I was choking on sandpaper, my throat was so dry. She turned to me with a soft smile on her lips.

"Isabella..." she said, my name rolling off her lips like it was something precious. "I'm Esme Cullen... Edward's mother."

I didn't need her clarification; I already knew who she was. But something about her kept me from blowing her off and telling her to go to hell. She had an odd, loving glow about her, and her eyes shone with unveiled love and concern. Everything I needed to know about this woman was present in her eyes; she was a happy person, full of love and concern for everyone, and I almost felt dirty when she looked at me. Dirty and unworthy of her presence. I could tell she wasn't here out of pity, or out of guilt because of what her son had done to me, she was here out of concern for me, and me alone. And what made me unworthy was the fact that I did not want it. I did not want her concern.

"Oh..." My articulate side had never been proven to be more underdeveloped than at that moment. But Mrs. Cullen didn't seem to mind, as she stepped over to me and put her hands over mine on the bed.

"How are you feeling?" she asked with a motherly tone while looking at me like I was her child or something. What I would not give to have my own mother look at me the same way.

"I'm... fine, Mrs. Cullen," I replied, biting my lip self-consciously. "I'm sure your husband could have told you that. You didn't need to come all the way down here."

"My husband is under oath. He can't tell me certain things, but I still would have wanted to see you myself," she replied. "And please, call me Esme. Mrs. Cullen is my mother-in-law and she is, to be blunt, a real bitch."

My eyes widened in shock at her choice of words. Mrs. Cullen – *Esme* – didn't appear to be the kind of person who used such language, especially not in describing someone else. Esme laughed lightly at my reaction and patted my hand.

"She is," she said smiling, "and I sadly believe my son has inherited quite a lot of his personality from her." I could not argue with her on that one. Edward was a real bitch, if a guy could ever be described as such. And it was as if she knew what I was thinking, because she tilted her head to the side and looked at me seriously. "My son is not a bad person. He just makes bad decisions, which more often than not, hurt people around him, even if that is not his intention."

I didn't say anything in regard to that. I didn't know Edward, not really. All I knew about him was the way he treated me, but I did not know him personally; therefore, I should not judge him.

I wanted to scoff at myself for even thinking that.

Of course I was going to judge him, no matter if I knew him or not. Edward ran me over for crying out loud! My body was broken beyond repair, and I would never be fully healed. I had every reason to judge him. He was a freaking jackass, and it pained me that his mother had to actually defend him and his actions.

The thing that bothered me the most was the fact that she seemed to believe every word she said. She really believed that her son was not a bad person, and the only thing wrong about him was that he made poor decisions. Like that would excuse his behavior and make everything okay.

Sorry, lady, no such luck.

"I'm so sorry for what he is putting you through. I always tell him to drive carefully. I know my son is a good driver, but sometimes that's not enough," she sighed sadly.

I could not help but wonder how much she really knew her son. Did she think that hitting me with his car was the only bad thing he had ever done to me? Was she aware of the bullying and the name-calling?

Of course not, why would she be aware of that? I doubt that was something that came up during their perfect family dinners.

"Hi, son, how was your day?"

"It was perfect, Mom, I gave the Goose hell for being such a waste of space and pathetic human being. I think I managed to kill the very little will she still had left to live. If I'm lucky, I'll be able to push her totally over the edge by lunch tomorrow."

Not that I really cared what people at school said about me, since nothing they said could possibly make me feel worse than I already did. But they didn't know that, and honestly, I don't think they would care if they did. They would still get a sick thrill out of kicking me while I was down, and not caring whether or not I even reacted to their bullshit. The bullying and the name-calling made them feel superior, and that was what high school was all about, right? You could never be truly happy until you were standing over someone else and making them feel like crap.

Maybe that was why my life was crap, because there simply was no other person lower on the social ladder than me.

And why was that?

I know I've never been the popular kid, but I had never been a victim to the degree I was now. There had always been someone saying mean things about me, but never as bad as now. I don't think the whole bird-related nicknames even came up until last spring.

I might not have been a popular kid before, but something changed last spring. People began to see me differently and people who didn't even acknowledge my existence before began to say "ugly duckling" to my face. And I don't know why, or where it all came from.

But that was during the time I still had a friend in my life. I still had Jacob Black by my side. Though he went to school on the reservation, we still hung out more often than never and I didn't care about what the kids at school said. The only person whose thoughts mattered was Jacob. So there was no reason for me to let the idiots at school get to me.

But of course that went out the window along with everything else in my life that was even remotely good. God forbid that Isabella Swan would be allowed to catch a break.

And now I was stuck here, with a mom who was certifiably insane – though nobody except me seemed to see it – a dad who didn't know up from down, and a leg that was broken beyond repair.

I wanted to blame my mom for everything, or Billy Black, or even Edward Cullen.

But I knew that putting the blame on someone else would not heal what had already been broken. Blaming someone would not solve my problems, and it would not make me feel better.

Esme stayed with me for a couple of hours, just talking about everything and nothing. She asked me about what I planned to do after graduation, if I wanted to go to college, and if so, where did I want to go, and what did I want to study. She asked me about my family, my friends, and if I had any pets.

I answered all the questions as vaguely as I could, because no matter how friendly she seemed, I still didn't feel comfortable talking about my life with a stranger, especially not if the stranger was Edward's mother and Dr. Cullen's wife. The eagerness she showed

while asking the questions was making me uncomfortable, why was she so interested?

Dr. Cullen interrupted her visit and told her I needed my rest. She promised me that she would be back another day, and she left before I even had a chance to reply. I asked Dr. Cullen to tell her that she didn't need to visit me, and he gave me a look that indicated that he knew what I wasn't saying. I was too polite to tell him to his face that I didn't *want* his friendly and caring wife to visit me, and he knew that. He promised me though that he would tell his wife that I wasn't up for company rather than tell her I simply didn't want her there, and I guess he kept his promise, because she didn't come by again.

I guess Dr. Cullen wasn't totally unreliable, though I still hadn't forgiven him for not letting me go home yet. Not that I wanted to go home. There was nothing there for me anyway, but I rather be stuck in my room for the rest of my life, than in this uncomfortable hospital bed with no means of entertaining myself – daytime soaps on TV are *not* entertainment.

My dad popped in every day after work. He asked me how I was doing and I said I was fine. I asked him how his day went, and he said it went fine. After that, we always fell into an uncomfortable silence that lasted for an hour, before he stood up from his chair and told me he had to leave, because he had to get up early for work the next day, as though I didn't know his schedule had never changed once during the fifteen or so years that he had worked there.

But I didn't blame him. I was just glad he at least made an effort to make up an excuse about why he had to leave, in order to spare my feelings rather than tell me the truth. The truth being that he simply didn't want to be there. But I could not blame him for that because I'm not sure I wanted him there either.

The clock on the opposite wall showed that it was three fifteen. There were still two hours before I could expect a visit from my dad. Another two hours of doing nothing.

"Isabella, how are we feeling today?"

I groaned inwardly as Dr. Cullen waltzed into my room with his usual bright smile. I looked down at my hands so I didn't need to see his face. I was not in the mood for his cheerfulness.

"Just like every other time you've asked me," I sighed in response.

He chuckled and wrote something down on my chart.

"Good to hear it," he replied, as if that was a good thing. "So how would you feel about getting out of here?" I looked up in surprise, almost expecting him to wink at me and tell me he was joking. But he was just smiling genuinely at me. "You have made done great progress, and the surgeries have been successful. I know you hate it here, so I see no reason why you can't spend the rest of your recovery in your bed at home."

"When can I leave?" I asked eagerly, and he shook his head in amusement. I guess this was the first sign of excitement I've shown since... well, *ever* ?

"I'm going to be honest with you. I'm not entirely comfortable letting you go just yet, since you refuse to talk to someone... But since you're psychically as fine as you can be right now, I see no reason to keep you. I will speak to your father when he gets here in a few hours and discuss the details. You'll need a lot of help the first few days. There will be a lot of adjustments for both yourself and your dad. Your inability to move around, because of the cast, will cause a problem for you. But don't worry, you'll get used to it sooner than you think."

I realized that somehow I had managed to block out the fact that I would still be in the same horrible shape when I got home as I was now. A part of me had deluded myself into thinking that as soon as I stepped out through the hospital doors everything would go back to normal. Just the way it was before the accident.

But that wasn't going to happen, because this was just the first step in the horrible and painful recovery I was about to endure.

"And then we have to talk about school..." he said, sounding almost hesitant.

"What about school? Can I drop out? Get homeschooled thanks to my new found disability?" I asked sarcastically.

"Drop out? Don't be silly." He shook his head and smiled as if the thought amused him. "As for homeschooling... I won't even touch that," he said with a weak chuckle. "We'll discuss it all with your father later. But it's very much up to you when you feel physically ready to go back."

"If it's up to me, then I'll never be ready," I muttered.

"Isabella, I know this is hard and it will get harder before it gets better. But you are making this more difficult than it has to be. A positive attitude does wonders for a person's recovery, and your attitude right now is just holding you back. I'm not saying that a positive attitude will have you running by the end of the week, but it might have you walking with crutches. You won't need to be confined to a wheelchair, which of course will make your life easier," he said.

This was one of those things I hated about Dr. Cullen. Sometimes, when he felt I was feeling really sorry for myself, he would go on these rants, talking about positive thinking and having an optimistic attitude about everything.

But that was easy for him to say. *Everything* was easy for him to say, because he wasn't the one who had a life-altering accident, which he would never fully recover from. How could he ever expect me to have a positive outlook on life after something like that, especially since I had not been in the best place to begin with?

Dr. Cullen sat down on the bed and patted my hand. God, I hated it when he did that.

He always talked to me like an equal, like I wasn't just some childish patient of his, that we were somehow friends and that he genuinely care about what happened to me. He had the same friendly and caring demeanor as his wife, though hers had been more raw and palpable. Dr. Cullen seemed to try to hide what he was really feeling some of the time, but Esme had let it all shine through her eyes, not seeming to be bothered that her feelings were exposed for the whole world to see.

That was probably more about Dr. Cullen's profession than it was about anything else. I'm sure he cared, but not in the way he made it appear. His way of closing off his feelings was probably due to the fact that as a doctor he should distance himself from his patients and not get emotionally involved. This was probably pretty difficult for him in our case, since his son was the reason I was here.

It was all a big freaking mess. And I couldn't wait for it all to be over.

Would it ever be over?

Nothing would be truly over until the day I managed to gather up enough courage to kill myself. And with my new found disability, that would probably be easier said than done. Maybe this was God's way of telling me it wasn't really my time to go, and that I had still something to do before I was done for.

Hah. Yeah right.

I'll be damned before I gave into all that religious crap and believed that I was meant for something greater, that my life was not supposed to be wasted, and that my life was precious.

What a load of crap.

Dr. Cullen was still looking at me, probably expecting some kind of answer out of me. The only answer I wanted to give him was to tell him to go to hell – but not before shooting me up with so much morphine that my body would fly all the way to Heaven... or maybe

Hell was more like it, there was no way I was destined for Heaven. Not after everything.

"That's easy for you to say, doc," I replied simply. "It's not in my nature to be optimistic."

"Yes, I have come to realize that, but you do know that it doesn't have to be that way. All you have to do is be willing to get help."

That particular conversation was familiar to us both. A day had not passed without him asking me, at least twice, to go see someone. But each and every time I refused. I didn't want to bare my soul to someone who was only listening because they got paid. How could I ever trust someone like that with all my deep dark secrets? Secrets that I had been lying about for the past three months, because I knew that if I spoke them aloud, there would be hell to pay, and not just for me. But for everyone involved. By keeping quiet, I was keeping everyone safe, including myself... including my mom. Though God knows she did not deserve it. Why did I even want to keep them safe? They didn't deserve it. Maybe I was just keeping myself safe.

"We both know you can't go on like this. I know you were admitted to the hospital three months ago, and the details I've been provided by your old records are vague at best. I'm going to take a wild guess and assume that what happened three months ago is why you're refusing help now," he said, with that caring voice that annoyed the hell out of me, because it sounded so sincere, like he really did care, and not just as my doctor. He sounded more concerned about my well-being than my own father ever had. And it was annoying, as well as devastating. He sighed deeply and studied me in silence for a moment, before continuing. "Isabella, you are a bright young woman. You can have whatever future you want. You can travel the world and visit exotic places. You don't need to get stuck here if you don't want to. It all may feel as if it's too much now, but it can get better if you let it."

"Yeah? And how am I supposed to let it get easier when every fiber of my being tells me to die?" I said, almost snapping at him for pushing me like that. He made it all sound so simple, like everything would be okay if I only got help, as if the world actually worked like that.

"You'll never know unless you try," he replied softly, giving my hand a squeeze. "I understand your reluctance to talk to a professional, I get that. But you don't need to talk to a professional in order to let it out, maybe there is someone else you can confide in. Maybe a friend? Or someone in your family?"

"Yeah? Like my crazy mother or my imaginary friend who lives in the attic?" I snorted.

"In my professional opinion, I think you just need to get your anxiety out. Talk about what it is that's bothering you, what you're feeling and what you think. It doesn't matter who you talk to, as long as you do," he said gently.

"And in my personal opinion, I think you should just drop it already," I replied.

It still surprised me that I didn't feel weird about talking back to Dr. Cullen like I did. I've always been respectful to authority figures. But ever since I woke up after the accident, I have felt a surge of annoyance running through my body, and it made it impossible for me to shut up if someone pushed me enough. And that went for everybody, not just authority figures like my parents or Dr. Cullen. It was like when I snapped at Edward when he tried to apologize – or whatever it was he tried to do when he visited me – and I lied to Dr. Cullen about what Edward had said. Somewhere along the road, I had grown a spine, or maybe I was just sick and tired of everything and everyone always walking all over me.

Or maybe it was the fact that I had woken up at all that was the last straw for me. I could take a lot of crap from a lot of people, but waking up after an accident that should have killed me, yeah, that

was something I just couldn't live with. And after that, everything else seemed to bug me more than usual too.

Mom didn't visit me again before Dad drove her back to Seattle on Sunday. I was partly disgruntled at that, because I wouldn't have minded being able to lash out at her and say exactly what I was feeling to her crazy freaking face, even though I had my doubts on whether or not my new found attitude was able to withstand my mother's presence. Yeah, I might be able to get out a well-deserved comment or two, but I don't think I would ever be able to really tell her what I felt. That was partly due to the fact that I wasn't really sure what I felt, since my feelings towards my mother were conflicted at best. Though I hated her, I still couldn't totally distance myself from the fact that she was my mother.

"Maybe we should drop it for today and just focus on getting you back on your feet," Dr. Cullen said, standing up from the bed.

"Couldn't agree with you more," I replied. "So what is my sentence? Crutches?"

The pain had been outrageous the first couple of times that I had tried to walk with crutches in the hallway, but that was before they gave me some pills for the pain which really took the edge off. Dr. Cullen had, of course, been reluctant to give me anything other than intravenous drugs, but not even he could fight it anymore. But before he gave in, he made a point by asking me not to do anything stupid. He didn't need to elaborate. I knew what he meant: no "fake taking" the pills, just to save them up to use later. I guess I really screwed up any chance of him trusting me with pills ever again.

"The crutches will be suitable for you at home, but the wheelchair will probably be more comfortable for you when you get back to school."

I groaned at his words. A wheelchair at school, I could almost hear the laughing already.

He gave me a sympathetic look, and I wanted to groan again – as if his sympathy was what I needed right now.

"Considering how much you need to walk around between classes at school, I would really recommend you take the wheelchair. Your leg needs to heal, and the less you walk around on it, the better. Especially in the beginning," he said.

"Why don't I stay at home until it's well enough to be walked on? Why can't I stay at home until the cast comes off all together?" I asked, and he chuckled.

"That probably won't happen for another two months, depending on how quickly the bones heal."

"Yeah, so? I could study at home and make someone bring my homework home or something."

He sighed again and shook his head.

"I'm not your dad, so I can't make any decisions regarding school for you."

I huffed and he walked over to the window. It was getting dark, and it was still raining.

"Don't isolate yourself, Isabella. The world always seems darker and scarier if you're all alone."

He threw me a look from over his shoulder, and I looked away.

The world might be dark and scary when you're all alone, but there is nothing scarier than when people you love turn on you and make you lose all grip on reality.

It took another two days before Dr. Cullen finally released me from his care, but not before making me promise that I was going to take care of myself. My dad thought it was very thoughtful of Dr. Cullen to care so much, little did he know *why* Dr. Cullen cared so much. He

didn't think it was weird at all when Dr. Cullen said he was going to call every few days to keep himself updated on my progress.

What doctor did almost daily updates on his patients once they were released, anyway? If a patient was well enough to go home, wasn't a checkup every few weeks after that sufficient? Calling every few days seemed a little too much to me, and it was weird that my dad thought it was normal. But maybe my dad assumed Dr. Cullen's overly caring attitude was due to the fact that it was his son who was the one putting me through all this. And that made the whole situation personal to him too.

Maybe I should have asked for another doctor. That would have made everything a whole lot easier.

We drove home in my dad's cruiser with a wheelchair tucked in the backseat along with a pair of crutches. If I had my way, that wheelchair would not see the light of day and would be forever hidden in a corner somewhere. I didn't need another huge reminder of what a cripple I had become; the crutches were enough to keep me from forgetting.

And the insane pain my leg, of course. Who could forget that one?

Dad helped me out off the car and gave me the crutches from the backseat. The ground was wet and muddy from the rain, and there was no ice or snow to speak of. I wobbled my way over to the steps to our house and groaned as I felt the crutches sink a little in the mud. Dad walked passed me, carrying the folded wheelchair up to the house.

"You need any help?" he asked me, when he came back out.

"No, I got it," I replied with a huff.

Each step was a pain, but not in the physical sense. The crutches kept sliding on the ground, which of course made the walk far more difficult than it should have been.

"You sure you don't want my help?" Dad asked cautiously, as he took a step down from the door.

"I said *I got it* ," I said between clenched teeth.

When I finally made it inside, Dad had wet a towel to clean the now muddy crutches. I smiled meekly at him as he cleaned them. He then removed the plastic that covered the cast, which was there in order to not get the cast dirty or wet in the rain.

"Thanks," I mumbled.

He just smiled awkwardly in return, before going to the laundry room to throw the towel away.

I wobbled my way into the kitchen, and I froze when I saw the pile of papers and books on the table. I knew those books; I knew those papers. But I still felt the need to ask.

"Dad... what is this?" I asked, as he came back into the kitchen.

"Oh, that's your homework. One of your friends has come over every day this week to drop them off," he said.

I don't know what bothered me the most about it; the fact that he just let the pile grow here, instead of bringing them to me at the hospital, so I could have had something to do, or the fact that he said one of my *friends* had dropped them off.

"Who was this... *friend* ?" I asked, trying to keep the sarcasm out of my voice.

"I think she said her name was Alice Branden... or Brandon or something. I didn't catch it, she talked way too fast for me," he said with a light chuckle. "How come you've never introduced her? She seemed like a nice enough girl."

Alice Brandon. Since when were we friends? Just because she saved my life once didn't make us friends. Maybe she offered to take

my homework just because nobody else did, and maybe she introduced herself as my friend so as not to make my dad uncomfortable or something.

I picked up the assignment that was on top of the pile and bit my lip in contemplation.

"Dr. Cullen said you were good to go back to school as soon as you felt like it, so... yeah," Dad said, and scratched his head awkwardly, and when I didn't answer he added, "I will drive you to school every morning, but I don't know how it will work in the afternoons. It would be a huge help if you could get one of your friends to drive you home. I don't think Alice would mind. She said that we could ask her if you needed help with anything."

"Yeah, yeah," I muttered, just to shut him up. "I'll take care of it, you don't need to worry."

"Go sit down in the living room, and I'll order some pizza," he said, his tone suggesting that he was half-expecting me to say no and offer to cook him dinner. But I didn't. And he seemed a little disappointed as he dialed the number to the pizza place. I guess not having had a home cooked meal in a week was wearing on him. As if the hospital food I've been forced to eat was so fantastic. Pizza sounded great in my ears, hell, even dirt would have been considered a gastronomical success compared to that tasteless hospital food.

A while later, the pizza came and we ate mostly in silence. I had nothing to say to my father, not something that would count as good dinner talk anyway. I was still mad at him for what happened before the accident. And I don't know how long it would take for me to get over it.

I knew he was really trying to help me and show me that he cared. His visits at the hospital had shown that he cared more than he let on before. But still, it was not enough for me. He still defended Mom if she ever came up in conversation, though his defense seemed to

have faltered a little since she left again. I wanted to believe that it was because he was beginning to realize that Mom was wrong, at least in some aspects, and that I was not the bad guy here. But the truth was probably that he was tired of having the same fight with me over and over again. He knew I would never change my mind about her, and he realized he was fighting a losing battle by trying to make me.

When I had finished my pizza, I made my way upstairs. It wasn't as difficult as I thought it would be, as long as I held on tightly to the railing, there was no risk of me tumbling down the stairs and breaking my other leg.

While we had waited for the pizza to arrive, Dad had brought my homework up to my room, and now it was neatly stacked on my desk. I barely glanced at the pile, instead I went straight for my bed and laid down. I could almost hear my back sigh in relief when it came in contact with the softness of my bed.

Dad had asked me during dinner if I had given any thought to school, and for how long I had planned on staying home. And I honestly didn't know. A part of me never wanted to go back to that place ever again, and another part wanted to go back there just to show all those people that I didn't break so easily. Then there was a tiny, little part that wanted to know what people were saying. The gossip must be all over the place, and I was curious to see how many people were trying to pin the accident on me. I would not be surprised if the whole "jumped-in-front-of-the-car" theory was being thrown around as a fact. And I don't think Edward would be the first one in line to correct people and tell them what really happened.

It was only Saturday, and I had all the time in the world to decide if I wanted to go back to school – and when. There was no hurry. I could wait a few days or maybe even a few weeks.

Or maybe, just maybe, if I was in a good mood, I would make an appearance on Monday...

Difficulty, part 1

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 14 – Difficulty

Edward Cullen POV

I stared at the car door, fiddling with the car keys in my hand. Emmett was looking at me and tapping his foot impatiently.

"Are you driving or not? I know it's not your precious Volvo, but you always said you enjoyed driving my Jeep. After all, it can take a lot more crap than your car," he said with a chuckle, and I shook my head as I threw the keys back at him.

"Nah, you drive. It would feel like cheating if I drove another car while my baby is in the shop," I replied, walking over to the passenger side of the car.

"Yeah, because your car has feelings," he mocked as he got behind the wheel. "You didn't seem to have anything against driving other cars when your car was in the shop after the incident with Mike. What gives?"

"Maybe I'm not in the mood," I replied with a light shrug.

"Yeah, and Rosalie doesn't swallow," he replied with a laugh.

"Geez, thanks, that was a mental image I could have lived without..." I grimaced.

He chuckled as he drove down the winding driveway to the main road. He glanced at me with a curious look and chuckled again, while shaking his head in amusement.

"Dude, I might not be the world's best driver... but c'mon, you don't need to hold on to your seat like your life depends on it," he commented and I looked at him confused. He nodded towards my hands and I looked down. I hadn't even noticed that I was gripping the seat, with my knuckles turning white because I was holding on so tightly.

"Dude, chill out, why dontcha?" he said. I tried to relax my hands and put them in my lap instead, but I still found my body oddly stiff and on edge.

Emmett kept throwing odd glances at me during the remainder of the drive. When he drove up to the parking lot, I couldn't help but groan inwardly. His glances weren't the only ones being thrown my way now. People were staring, and they didn't even try to hide it. I saw how they huddled together, whispering and pointing, as we drove past them towards an empty parking space.

"I'm so glad I'm not you right now," Emmett said with an amused smile, as he turned off the engine.

"Yeah, because you would have peed your fucking pants if it had been you," I replied under my breath, and it wiped that amused expression off his face in a second.

"Uncool," was all he said, before getting out of the car.

I rolled my eyes and climbed out of that beast of a car, slamming the door hard behind me. I followed Emmett as he crossed the lot, and I did my best to ignore the stares as we went. It was like I was some kind of movie star or some shit, like none of them had ever seen me before.

New drama and fresh gossip were scarce in this town. Of course they would all jump on this piece and rip it to shreds until it was nothing but a bunch of lies floating around. I'm sure that by the end of this week, the accident would be described as a serial collision with ten cars involved; there would be a few casualties, along with several injured. One of the dead would be a young child, maybe even an infant. Of course the Goose would be the one to blame for the accident. People would naturally assume she went berserk for some reason and jumped in front of a car or two or maybe drove like a maniac on the road, making people swerve in order not to crash into her, which in turn made them crash into each other instead.

Yeah, there would be numerous rumors floating around, and none of what was being said would be true. Today was only Monday, and the week would only get worse from here, as would the gossip.

This morning, Mom had suggested I stay home and rest. Normally, I would have jumped on the chance of staying in bed all day, but today was not a normal day. I knew that if I stayed home the attention would be even worse when I finally came back, so I better just grab the damn bull by the horns and hope that the day would pass fairly quickly and leave me unscathed.

But I had a feeling that today would be anything but a good day, especially since I felt like I was dead on my fucking legs. I was beyond exhausted; I hadn't had a good night's rest for the entire weekend, all because of the nightmares that plagued my sleep.

Yeah, you heard me. Edward fucking Cullen was having nightmares.

Fucking *nightmares* . Like I was some punk kid that was scared of Gremlins under the bed or some shit. I didn't do nightmares. So why the hell was I waking up in the middle of the night, drenched in sweat, with my heart pounding like a jackhammer in my chest?

That was fucked up.

This morning I had woken up after a particularly disturbing dream, and when I glanced at the clock on my nightstand, it had told me it was only five am, still an hour and a half before my alarm would normally go off. I had turned it off and rolled out of bed with a groan. There had been no reason to stay in bed any longer. There was no chance of me being able to go back to sleep anyway. My heart was still pounding like crazy, though the memory of the dream had begun to fade, and I could no longer recall what the hell it was about to begin with, and what had made me freak out like that.

The nightmares seemed to have a thing or two in common; they all took place in dark and lonely places. In one dream, I found myself lost in the woods, running around like crazy to find my way out. It wasn't like I was being hunted or anything, but I still had that weird feeling of not being alone. It was very dark. The only light there was the eerie, red light emitting from nothing in particular, and the red glow made it appear as though the trees were bleeding...

Red light and trees bleeding.

Yeah, it didn't require a rocket scientist to figure out where the hell that came from. And I didn't need a fucking dream interpreter to tell me what the fuck it meant. Apparently my subconscious didn't think that dealing with the aftermath of the accident when I was awake was enough, apparently, apparently I should be dealing with it in my sleep too. And never getting a break from it ever .

I had been more dead than alive when I walked into the bathroom to take my morning shower. The cut on my forehead had stung as the water came in contact with it, but I couldn't have cared less. The pain had been welcome; it made me feel like a man. And not like a fucking pansy that got freaked out because of a fucking nightmare. I had pulled on my pajama pants, after I'd dried off my body and walked downstairs. Although it had only been five thirty in the morning, I could still hear noises and low voices coming from the kitchen.

The voices had quieted as soon as I stepped inside. Mom and Dad had been sitting by the breakfast table, both wearing somber expressions.

"Don't mind me, " I had muttered as I opened the fridge door in the hunt for something to eat.

"Maybe you should stay home today," Mom had said softly. "Emmett can bring you your homework. You've had a rough weekend. You deserve a day of rest."

I had turned my head to glare at her, but the glare lost its power when I met her gaze. She had been looking at me with those infuriating loving eyes. It was impossible to glare at her or stay angry with her when she looked like that. She knew this, of course, and she used it to her advantage more often than never. None of us could resist that look.

"I agree with your mother," Dad had said. When I had glanced at him, I saw that he didn't hold the same loving gaze, and for that I was fucking grateful and not even remotely surprised. At least there was one parent I could hate in all this. The next words from his mouth just gave me another reason. "I think you've done enough damage this weekend to last a lifetime."

"Carlisle!" Mom had gasped, her eyes going wide, and I had wanted to roll mine. I had expected to be blamed for this entire situation, so his choice of words did not surprise me as it had my Mom. But though it hadn't surprised me, I was still a little damn irritated by it. Weren't parents supposed to stand by you no matter what kind of shit you got yourself into? My dad apparently didn't get that particular memo.

"I'm not talking about the accident, honey," Dad had said, looking at my mom. "I was talking about how he went over to the hospital and told Isabella to pay for the damages to his car."

"That's bullshit! She was fucking lying!" I had snapped. "She was pissed that I came, and she said that to you just to get me into more fucking trouble, like I wasn't in deep enough shit as it was."

I still couldn't believe she actually pulled that shit on me, and the only thing weirder was the fact that Dad actually believed her. First Emmett had asked me if I hit her on purpose, and now Dad actually believed I went there to get her to pay for my car.

What the hell had I done to my family to have them have such low expectations of me? Did they really think I was such a horrible person, who would hit someone on purpose, and then make that someone pay for the damages done to *my* car? They acted like this was all normal behavior for me, and that it came as no surprise to them. This was the way I was, and they had learned to accept it and made no big deal out of it.

To say I was freaked out by this was to put it mildly.

Dad had looked over at me, something softening in his eyes, but the frustration and anger over the situation were still there. And that frustrated me to no end.

"Go back to bed, son. We'll talk about this when I get home," Dad had said with a deep sigh, before taking a last sip of his coffee and standing up. He had given Mom a quick kiss before leaving the kitchen.

"He's just overworked," Mom had said quietly, after we heard the front door slam shut. I wanted to roll my eyes at her attempt to make up excuses for him. "He's not blaming you for what happened. He's just tired. "

I had given her an incredulous look, and she had just smiled sadly at me.

"Just so you know, I'm not gonna spend my day in my fucking bed. I'm going to school," I had said firmly, before leaving the kitchen and

walking back upstairs. Mom could defend him all she wanted; it still didn't change the fact that she seemed to be the only one on my side in all of this. And if she had not been my mother, I'm sure things would have been different.

Mom hadn't tried to stop me when I walked downstairs a couple of hours later and followed Emmett to the car. I don't know what I would have done if she had tried.

Mom's sad eyes and Swan's broken body were the two things I saw every time I closed my eyes, and it was beginning to wear on me. It was even worse than the nightmares.

I followed Emmett through the halls. I was too lost in thought to even notice the staring and the whispering from the people we passed anymore. We found Jasper waiting for us by his locker, and Alice and Rosalie were with him of course. Alice threw her arms around me and gave me a tight hug as soon as we reached them. I patted her back awkwardly, not really knowing what the hell I was supposed to do. I wasn't the hugging type.

"I'm glad you're okay, even though you're a fucking jerk," she muttered into my chest.

"Okay, well, thanks?" I said, looking down on the pixie clinging to me.

"You're welcome," she said calmly, letting me go before wrapping her arms around Jasper's waist instead. He looked a little more comfortable with her arms around him than I had.

"Your army of skanks has been asking about you all morning," Rosalie said with a bored tone, as she inspected her well manicured fingernails. "I wouldn't be surprised if Tanya drops down on her knees as soon as she spots you."

"Are you high? I don't think she'll ever go down on me again considering the way I blew her off at the party," I said, hoping like hell

that I was right, because Tanya was the last person I wanted to deal with today.

"Don't overestimate her, the girl has no sense of self-preservation, and she doesn't have an ounce of self-respect in that plastic body of hers. You're hotter than Johnny Depp in full Jack Sparrow mode right now, and trust me when I say that she'll be the first in line to ride the Edward pole," Rosalie said. "Though I can't see why..." she studied me for a moment, and then shook her head. "Yeah, I really don't see the appeal."

"Maybe because the appeal is in my pants." I smirked and she stuck a finger in her mouth, pretending to gag. "And don't worry, the feeling is mutual. I can't see what the hell it is you have that makes my brother so eager to put his dick in you. You must have a magic pussy..." I trailed off when I realized Rosalie wasn't listening to me anymore, instead she was looking at something over my shoulder, with a growing smirk on her lips.

"Speak of the whore and she will appear," she said under her breath, and I turned around to follow her gaze. This, of course, turned out to be a big mistake when I saw Tanya walking towards us, with Jessica and Lauren in tow. Tanya's face lit up like a Christmas tree when she spotted me.

"Oh, baby! How are you feeling?" she cooed, hugging my arm as they reached us. It took all of my self control not to gnaw the damn limb off just to get away from her.

"I've been better," I replied honestly, barely containing my irritation at her close proximity.

"Is there anything I can do to make you feel better? *Anything*?" She batted her lashes at me, and I wondered how the hell I had ever let that face even come near my dick. Had my horniness made me blind or something? Blind *and* stupid.

Wouldn't be the first time...

"Yeah... there is one thing..." I said huskily, leaning in a little. She bit her lip, and her eyes shone in anticipation. She looked at my lips and I wanted to roll my eyes at her stupidity. Why didn't these girls ever learn? Did she honestly think I would kiss her after everything I had done to her?

"Anything..." she breathed, when my face was merely an inch away from hers.

"Let the fuck go of my arm," I snapped.

She blinked once. Twice. Before looking up at me.

"What?" she croaked and now I *did* roll my eyes.

"Don't fucking touch me unless asked otherwise," I snarled and pulled back my arm. She looked at me with surprise, but the surprise was quickly replaced by anger and embarrassment.

"Jerk!" she spat, brushing past me.

"Whore!" I spat back.

Lauren and Jessica giggled as they passed me, both throwing me – what I assumed was their versions of - seductive looks and I smirked at them. I even threw a wink their way, making them giggle and blush even more.

"God, you're such a man-whore," Rosalie sighed. "C'mon, Alice, let's get to class."

She dragged Alice off, but not before they both kissed their boyfriends goodbye. Emmett slapped me in the back of the head as soon as they were out of earshot.

"What the hell was that for?" I asked, rubbing the spot where he had just hit me.

"For being a tool," he said. "Grow a conscience already."

"Yeah, and maybe you should grow a pair and don't be such a fucking girl," I snapped.

"Remember the times when you guys weren't at each other's throats all the fucking time? Yeah, good times," Jasper commented with a sigh, before he walked away.

"Wait for me, dude!" Emmett called, as he jogged away to catch up with him.

I flipped them off, though they had their backs to me, before walking over to my locker and grabbing my books for first period. It would be nice to get a break from Emmett. He was being such a girl, and it was working my last nerve. Yes, I admit, sometimes Emmett's girly side could be fucking hilarious. It had been the cause for many great laughs in the past, but this was not the time for his antics.

I needed my fucking brother. *Not* a fucking sister.

You would think that people would get tired of whispering and talking about the accident. But no. It seemed as though the gossiping intensified during the morning classes, and at lunch it was fucking mayhem. The people who were brave enough came up to me, asked me how I was doing, and if they could do anything for me. Those who were too scared just kept on staring, whispering and pointing.

I was a fucking zoo animal for lack of a better term.

I plopped down on my usual seat in the cafeteria. Emmett and Jasper were the only ones at the table when I got there.

"Where are your skanks?" I asked, not really caring but feeling the need to fill the silence. "Shouldn't you guys be off getting head or some shit?"

"Alice had to go to the teacher's lounge, and Rose joined her," Emmett replied. I raised an eyebrow to show him that his answer

didn't really make much sense to me, because Alice had no reason to go there.

"Alice went there to pick up a few assignments and homework, so she could drop them off later," Jasper explained in Emmett's place, and I glanced at him, even more confused now.

"Homework? Can't she wait for her classes before picking up her fucking homework? Since when is Alice such a bookworm?" I asked.

"It's for Swan, you dumbass. You know Alice, she's in charity mode, and she has made Swan her mission," Jasper sighed, and I could hear a hint of disapproval in his tone. I assumed I wasn't the only one annoyed over how Swan seemed to pop up in every corner of our lives. The kicker was that she probably wasn't even aware of it happening. She didn't know how she kept disrupting our lives by just breathing. *Fucking Goose* .

"Why can't Alice just leave her the fuck alone?" I muttered, mostly to myself. "Why does she insist on getting involved with her... you should keep your woman on a leash."

"Because Alice is a saint, and she likes Swan for reasons unknown to me. And I'm not gonna stop her from doing her thing, if it makes her happy," Jasper replied with a light shrug. "I might not be first in line for the Swan fan club, because frankly... the chick freaks me the fuck out... but I won't keep Alice from hanging out with her, if that's what she wants."

Jasper Whitlock – always the fucking diplomat .

"You're so fucking whipped," I groaned, and I had to resist the urge to stab him with my plastic fork.

"At least I have someone to whip me," he replied, with a casual raise of his eyebrows.

"If I wanted someone to whip me, I would have someone. But I don't see why I should be tied down to one single person when I could have all the pussy I want," I retorted.

"No pussy in the world could ever compete with the sweetness that is Rosalie..." Emmett said, with a dreamy sigh, "she tastes like... heaven and vanilla... and she is so fucking-"

"Don't you dare finish that sentence. I have no desire to know any details about your girlfriend... especially not about her pussy... I bet it has teeth," I said, shuddering by the mere thought of Rosalie and her private parts. I wouldn't even touch that with a stick.

"You're just jealous because she chose me and not you," Emmett said, smiling widely. He acted like he had a reason to gloat, like he had won some sort of prize, when in reality he had lost big in the Girlfriend Lottery. Rose might be hot, but it took a great man to ever be able to stick by her for any longer period of time.

"So how was your morning? I bet nobody was staring at you or asking questions they had no right to ask?" Jasper smirked and I snorted.

"You don't even want to know," I replied.

"Em and I had a fun time listening in on Crowley and Newton between first and second periods," Jasper continued. "Apparently Crowley's mother is working as a nurse at the hospital, and she has been taking care of our lovely Swan, so he got the inside scoop from her... or so he claimed anyway. So if you hear any bullshit about her physical well-being, then I think we can safely assume where those rumors started."

"From what I've heard, people didn't even know who was involved in the accident... just that there had been one... then enter Crowley and his big mouth," Emmett added.

"Crowley have been calling around and spreading the rumors all weekend, and it has been spreading like fucking wildfire," Jasper said with a shaking of his head. "You would think his mother would get fired for blabbing to her son like that."

"So what are they saying? Are they saying I hit her on purpose? Do they think I tried to kill her?" I muttered, not really asking, because I did not really care what they thought. Emmett shook his head, apparently thinking I was genuinely asking.

"From what I heard, people are not blaming you at all. You may not be one of God's best children, but even the guys who hate your guts in this school know you would never do that," he said, and I gave him a pointed look.

"Huh, not even the guys who hate my guts, ey? It didn't stop you from thinking just that," I said, not really regretting the words even when I could see the pain flash in his eyes.

"Oh c'mon, bro," he complained. "I never thought that! I was just... asking. I was scared, for fuck sake, I didn't know what happened or what the hell was going on. I was freaking out, okay? And you know I talk before I think when I freak out."

"Does that mean you're always in freak out mode?" Jasper laughed, with his mouth full of food, and both Emmett and I turned to glare at him, which effectively shut him up.

"If they don't think I hit her on purpose... what are they saying? Seeing as this is Forks, I doubt they would just accept it to be a fucking accident," I sighed. "They need drama, and if there is none, they create it themselves."

"No kidding," Jasper said, "They all think Swan is to blame. They're sure she jumped or something. The theories go on and on. I even heard some freshmen talk in the bathroom, and they said she was trying to rob you at gunpoint... I guess that would have been

plausible, considering who her father is... but still... I doubt lame-ass Swan would be able to pull it off even if she wanted too."

Lame-ass Swan, yeah right. She didn't appear so lame when she got me in trouble at the hospital. If needed, Swan could fight back, and when she did, she did it dirty. I guess we had all underestimated her in the past.

"I wouldn't put it past her... she's fucking crazy," I muttered.

"Dude," Emmett groaned. "Why are you still hating on her like that? Give her a fucking break already. What would it take for you to just drop that unfounded hatred you hold against her? Does she need to be actually killed before that happens?"

"I'm just calling it as I see it," I replied calmly.

"Just because she got you into trouble for something you didn't do, doesn't make her crazy. Just fucking genius," Emmett argued and I rolled my eyes. Leave it to Emmett to bring that shit up.

I had told him everything about what happened when I visited her when he picked me up from the hospital on Saturday, and he had a good laugh about it. He kept muttering about her being a genius all the way home, and I guess that opinion hadn't changed.

"Shut up, Em," I said with a sigh.

"Don't mind him," Jasper said to me. "Emmett has been sulking like a fucking kid all damn morning."

"Maybe he's on his period or something," I muttered, and Emmett threw us both the evil eye.

"Fuck you," Emmett spat as he pushed back his chair and stalked off, startling the people sitting by the nearby tables in the process. I followed him with my eyes, a little fucking stunned by his weird

emotional outburst. What the hell got Emmett's panties in a twist this time? It's not like it was the first time we made fun of him.

I turned back and looked at Jasper, raising an eyebrow in confusion, but he didn't seem to share my bewilderment over my brother's odd behavior. He just sighed, and his earlier smirk faded from his face.

"Let's just say your brother isn't coping with the accident as well as you are," he explained quietly, so I only I could hear him. There was no hint of amusement or humor in his voice. "The way he's been acting this morning, it's like he was the one who ran her over and not you."

I groaned and leaned my elbows on the table, hiding my face in my hands. This was so typical Emmett. He was such a fucking teddy bear sometimes. I should have known that this would affect him, and I should not have been surprised when it did.

"He'll get over it. He's just being an overly sensitive girl right now," Jasper said assuredly.

"He better, or else I might have to run him over with my car too," I said, my voice muffled by my hands.

"Dude!" Jasper groaned, not appreciating my morbid joke. I dropped my hands down on the table and looked at him amused.

"What? Too soon?" I asked with a chuckle.

"Way too soon," he agreed. "Don't make jokes like that. It makes you appear like a bigger douche than we already know you are." I smirked and he shook his head at me, his face calm and collected as he looked at me. "I'm sorry, man, but I got to ask... how are *you* coping with all this? All I know is how Emmett is coping. He's been a wreck, and he wasn't even there when it happened."

"I'm fine." I shrugged. "I just wished people could stop bringing the shit up, so we could all just drop it and move the fuck on already. It

was a fucking accident! How long are we supposed to be hung up on it? Let's drop it already. It's not important."

"So... you don't feel bad about what happened... like... at all?" he asked, looking a little confused.

"Bad? Of course I do. Do you even know how much this fucking cut stings?" I said, pointing at my forehead. "And God knows how long it will take for me to get my car bac-"

"Not what I was referring too," he said, cutting me off. "I was talking about Swan. Emmett is a wreck because you crippled her... or so we've been told. And I want to know what you feel about *that* ."

"C'mon, what is this shit? Feelings this, and feelings that. What are you? A girl?" I snorted.

"Just answer the damn question, Ed," he sighed.

I glared at him and he just stared back with a blank expression.

"I'm not saying she deserved to be crippled, but she fucking deserved something," I snarled. "She's the Goose and will always be the Goose. And I will be damned if I feel sorry about anything as far as she's concerned."

Jaspers blank mask fell and he looked almost pained as he stared back at me.

"Dude... do you have a heart like, at *all* ?" he asked, sounding genuinely curious.

"I don't know, why don't we crack open my chest and find out?"

He sighed and stood up. "Why don't you call me when you grow the fuck up," he said, before walking off.

Emmett was being a girl at the moment, but Jasper's hypocritical side wasn't much better.

Emmett might be an evil mastermind when it came to payback, and he could hurt the people who wronged him in ways no other would ever think of. But inside he was a fucking girl, a girl who had feelings. And Jasper might be a cold son of a bitch, but he had a heart somewhere deep inside. Unlike *me* . It was really infuriating at times when Jasper connected to his heart and made you feel like an ass. He had done some really stupid and evil stuff in the past, things I wouldn't even do. But still, here he was, making me feel like an ass for not changing my opinion on the Goose. Or Swan. Or whatever I was supposed to call her now. And when it all came down to it; *he* didn't like Swan any more than I did, but for some reason he thought *I* should lay off her.

Fucking hypocrite.

You could say a lot about me, but I was not a fucking hypocrite. My friends should know that about me, and they shouldn't be trying so hard to try to change me into something I'm not.

Was it just me, or wouldn't it be a tad bit hypocritical to change your opinion on someone just because she was in an accident that you may or may not be responsible for? Just because I hit her with my car didn't change who she was to me or to the world. So why should my feelings change? Why should I feel sorry for her? She's the Goose, and she we will always be the Goose. The accident doesn't change the fact that everybody hates her. The only thing that changed was that she will be a *crippled* Goose when she comes back.

A cripple.

Because of me.

Yeah... and why was I supposed to feel bad about that again? I thought sarcastically to myself.

Why couldn't they realize I too was the victim here?

Just because Swan was on the receiving end of my bumper didn't mean I wasn't hurt too.

She might have to live her whole life being a damn cripple, but I had to live the rest of my life with the knowledge that I made her that way. It was my "fault". Wasn't that enough? Why did people need to hear me say it? Why was it so important to everybody that I acknowledge it out loud?

Why couldn't they just drop it? I hit her. She was hurt. End of fucking story.

If I could let it go, why couldn't they all do that too?

I didn't care about anyone, let alone her. So I'd be damned if they made me feel bad about it.

I didn't bother to eat my lunch. I just threw it in the nearest trashcan and stalked off too. The looks and whispering were almost unbearable as I walked out. I guess our scene at our table hadn't really helped matters. Now they were all probably thinking that Jazz and Em were involved in the accident too and that we were trying to cover up our tracks or some shit.

Even though I left the cafeteria well over thirty minutes before the next class started, I still managed to be late. And that was mainly because I went behind the gym-building to take a smoke, which turned into a couple more. I was too lost in thought, and too far away, to hear the warning bell.

I walked into Biology, ignoring the look Mr. Melina gave me on the way in.

"Go sit with your group, Mr. Cullen," he said. "You're working on the projects today."

I groaned and let my eyes sweep over the classroom, spotting Lauren and Mike sitting in the back of the classroom. I walked over

to them, grabbing a chair and plopping down so I was sitting across from them.

"Hi, Edward," Lauren said leaning forward on the table. "How are you feeling?"

"Never better," I muttered.

"Too bad we're stuck with the ugly duckling, huh? If Mr. Melina thinks she'll get credit for our work when she's not even here, he has another thing coming," Lauren said, throwing her overly bleached hair over her shoulder and smacking her lips. Her words angered me for some reason, and her carefree smile froze when she noticed me glaring at her.

"At least she's known to get an A or two," I replied. "Unlike some people..."

Newton coughed to cover his laugh, and I turned my glare to him instead. He was looking down at his notebook with a fucking smirk gracing his lips.

"I noticed you didn't drive your Volvo today. I'm assuming Swan will have to pay for the damages she inflicted, huh?" he said, still smirking as he looked up at me. He seemed unaffected by my glare, which angered me even more.

"What the fuck did you just say?" I hissed through clenched teeth.

"Well... I was just... I assumed she... you... she has to pay? Right? Like I did? She ruined your car? Didn't she?" he stammered, looking confused and afraid – rightfully so. "I mean, if I had to pay... you're making her pay too, right?"

What happened next was just as much of a surprise to me as it was to Newton. But somehow my chair was pushed back, I stood up, and my fist connected with Newton's jaw, which in turn had caused him

to tumble to the floor with a startled yelp and a cry of agony as he hit the floor.

"Edward Cullen! Principal's office. NOW!" Mr. Melina called furiously from his desk at the front.

I looked down at Newton and his terrified expression. Then I did the last thing I ever expected I would ever do. I spat at him. Literally. The slimy gunk landed on his sweater and he looked even more horrified.

"Watch your fucking mouth, Newton, or it might just be the last thing you do," I hissed.

Mr. Melina gave me a disapproving look when I left the classroom, but I didn't even glance at him. He had no power over me. The worst things he could do was to either fail me or send me to the principal's office. And failing me was not an option, since he knew as well as I did that I was too fucking smart to ever fail his class and a punch in Newton's face could not change that.

Besides, Newton had it coming.

I made the familiar walk over to the principal's office, and the secretary gave me just a look before telling me to go right in.

Mr. Greene didn't look up from his desk as I sat down on the chair across from his desk. My leg began bouncing restlessly as soon as my ass touched the seat. This room always made me feel claustrophobic. Mr. Greene looked up at me with tired eyes, and he sighed when he leaned forward.

"To what do I owe this pleasure today, Mr. Cullen?" he asked, raising an eyebrow at me.

"Does it matter?" I asked, looking out the window. I noticed it was raining again. *Of course* .

There was no snow or ice to speak of anymore. It was like Friday had just been a cruel joke from Mother Nature or some shit. A week ago, it was warm enough to eat outside. A few days later, it was so cold that the water on the streets froze, and now it was raining like nothing ever happened. It was fucking November! Where the hell was the snow?

It was like Mother Nature just couldn't decide. Maybe global warming wasn't just a joke...

"Not really," Mr. Greene sighed, pulling me out of my random musings on the weather. He grabbed my thick file from its permanent spot on his desk. "Let's just get this over with." I wanted to smirk at his comment. He seemed to be just as tired as I was at our constant meetings.

"I may or may not have punched Mike Newton in his face and proceeded to spit on him," I replied, with no emotion in my voice. Mr. Greene didn't even flinch as he wrote it all down.

"I see... and what did Mr. Newton do to deserve such treatment?"

My jaw tensed and I grimaced automatically. Mr. Greene looked up from the file, baffled by my reaction, and I guess he had every right to be. I never showed any emotion regarding what put me in his office time and time again. No anger or happiness. The only emotions I ever showed him were maybe a bit of smugness and pride for even pulling off whatever shit I did. But this was different. This had been fucking personal on a whole other level than ever before.

"What did he do, Mr. Cullen?" he asked again and I glared at him.

"He might have suggested that Swan should be paying for the repairs to my car," I replied with a venomous voice. Understanding flashed in his eyes and he nodded once.

"Why yes... the accident," he sighed. "Talk of the town right now, isn't it?"

"So I've been told," I replied coolly.

He made a note in my file and put it aside.

"I'll let this one slide," he said, and I couldn't have hidden my surprise even if I wanted to. "From what I've been told, the accident was pretty brutal. And Mr. Newton had no right to make immature comments like that regarding this delicate situation. Though I wish you could have handled it better, and that you would have used your mouth and not your fist to settle the situation."

"I did," I replied, with a half-smirk.

"I don't think spitting on someone is an appropriate way to settle an argument," he said, giving me a pointed look. "You can leave now, and I assume you're going to apologize to Mr. Newton."

"I'll get right on it," I replied sarcastically and got up from my seat.

As I left the room I wondered what else I could get away with thanks to my newfound "situation." If the principal let me get away with punching Newton in the face, there was no limit to what else I could get away with.

Maybe the accident wasn't all that bad after all...

"YOU DID WHAT?" I flinched at Dad's voice. I don't think I've ever seen him so angry before, let alone heard him yell like that.

"I punched Newton in the face. What's the big fucking deal?" I replied, trying to keep my voice steady and carefree.

He paced back and forth in front of the desk in his office, pinching the bridge of his nose and squeezing his eyes shut. His neck was growing red, and I could tell he was about to lose it.

He had never lost it before.

Laid-back Dad never lost it. He was the epitome of cool and collected. He never lost it. Never.

This should be interesting.

"Why do you keep getting yourself into these situations, son? Why do you keep trying to sabotage your life like this?" he asked, his voice laced with false calm, and I could feel the anger brewing underneath.

"Excuse me?" I replied, still trying to keep my cool and not let him know he was getting to me.

"I'm not saying he was right in making such stupid remarks. But you could have been the bigger man and just walked away. Why do you insist on making everything such a big deal?" he asked.

"Yeah. And maybe I should just have walked away from the accident too," I snorted sarcastically, "and not made such a big deal out of it."

"Don't even...!" He snarled, and my eyes widened at the venom in his voice. "You can count yourself lucky, son. I won't lie to you, but she probably wouldn't have made it if you hadn't called me. She was losing blood at an alarming speed. We're speaking minutes not hours. And if she had been forced to lay on that cold road for just another ten minutes, there is no saying how things would have turned out," he said, piercing me with his gaze. I looked away at the same moment as his pager for the hospital went off. He looked down on it and sighed deeply in frustration. "Speaking of which... damnit... I have to get back to the hospital."

He looked at me and I could tell this conversation wasn't over just yet. He had a lot more to get off his chest, and I was glad that it had to wait so I could prepare myself for the next load.

I wanted to claim that his words didn't bother me, but that would have been a lie. He said that she would have died within minutes if I hadn't called him, and that bothered me more than I felt comfortable with. I knew the accident had been serious, and I knew she had been severely hurt. Hell, I saw her leg. I saw the blood. Her leg was fucking crushed, and there had been a ridiculous amount of blood on the road. Of course the accident had been fucking serious.

But her attitude at the hospital made it appear as though it wasn't as bad as I thought. She had been fierce, and she had stood up for herself. And would someone who had been in a serious accident just twenty four hours before act so... *strong* ? She made it so easy for me to believe it wasn't that bad.

"Dad... can I ask you something... something that will stay between us?" I asked, my voice cracking in the oddest way, and I shuffled my feet awkwardly in place.

"Of course, son," he replied, frowning a little in concern at my tone.

"Is she... is she going to be alright? She's not gonna die now... is she?" I asked, my eyes darting all over the place and avoiding him at all costs. He was quiet for a long moment, silently telling me to look at him, before he would answer me.

"She has a long road of recovery in front of her. But no, she's not going die..." he said. For some reason he frowned as he looked away with a faraway look in his eyes, and he began shuffling some files around.

I nodded once, satisfied with the answer. I was just about to leave when I heard him again.

"... *at least not due to her injuries* ," he said, almost inaudibly.

I tilted my head as I looked at him confusion. What was that supposed to mean?

He still had his back to me, and he was still shuffling around the papers on his desk. There was nothing in his demeanor that made me think that we were still talking. He was picking up files, putting them in his briefcase, and acting like I wasn't even in the room anymore.

It made me wonder if he even intended for me to hear it...

Difficulty, part 2

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 15 – Difficulty, part 2

Edward Cullen POV

It's a funny thing having people jumping to get out of your way when you walk down the hall.

People no longer stared or pointed at me, although they were still whispering – thinking I couldn't hear them. Did they think I was deaf or stupid or something? Yeah, probably.

At least they weren't fucking pointing and staring. Hell, they didn't even dare to glance my way in fear of me ripping their heads off.

And I couldn't be any fucking happier.

Punching Newton in the face turned out to be the best thing I had ever done in my entire life.

Now, the only thing people talked about was me being unstable and dangerous. There was no talk about the accident anymore. Not much anyway. The accident was no longer news-worthy, but me punching Newton in the face was. The accident was ancient news, and it was officially behind me.

Or so I thought.

Emmett was still being pissy with me, and he wasn't talking to me at all. He just kept shooting irritated glances at me, probably trying to make me feel bad or something. I didn't know why the hell he was taking this whole thing so personally anyway. He was behaving as though I had killed his fucking puppy or some shit. Lunch quickly became unbearable because of it.

Emmett not speaking to me, Alice acting like the mediator between us, Jasper being annoyed, and Rosalie just pissed made for an awkward lunch period.

I knew that Alice agreed with Emmett to a certain point, but I also knew she had my back. She didn't want us to fight, and she did what she could to try to solve it all. Which just bugged me, considering it wasn't her business to begin with. My fight with Emmett was just that, *my* fight. She had no reason to get involved, thinking she could change things. I was not about to change my opinion on the situation anyway, so she was fighting a losing battle.

Jasper was annoyed because he didn't like the tension in the group. He had always been sensitive to the emotions of the people around him, and if it were to become too intense he usually went into what we had come to call "the Jasper-mode".

The Jasper-mode was a pretty damn, frustrating thing. It took a lot of energy and patience for us all to be able to even be near him when he was like that. When he went into Jasper-mode, we all knew we had our shit cut out for us, and if we had grown attached to our balls, we had better stay quiet or solve whatever tension there was, if we intended to keep them.

Let's just say that it didn't take much for him to snap when he acted like that.

But this time, I wasn't going to budge. I was not going to retreat just to make him feel better. I was the fucking victim here. Not him. Nor Emmett or anyone else. So I'd be damned before I changed my mind on the matter.

Rosalie was pissed because... frankly, she was always pissed about something. I'm not entirely sure she was even aware of the tension or that something was off about our group, considering her self-absorbed personality. While we were sitting at the table, quietly seething and wishing we were somewhere else, she was probably thinking about her next appointment to get her pussy waxed or something.

Self-absorbed bitch.

Yeah, she was my friend, but that didn't mean I had to like her all the time. With Emmett being pissed at me, she automatically became my enemy too, considering with whom she was sleeping.

Besides, I only needed a reason to dislike her. It's not like we would hang out just the two of us anyway. We were not that close.

No, scratch that.

We were *not* close. Period.

It was only Thursday. And I couldn't wait for the week to be over.

There were no parties planned as far as I knew, but I didn't need a party to get drunk. All I needed was to get to Port Angeles so I could fetch some booze from our usual supplier. Maybe I could even score some weed or something, just to take the edge off.

It had been a rough fucking week, and I needed to chill out.

Don't fucking judge me .

The school day was cut short, due to some teachers conference or something, and I couldn't have been happier to get out of that dump.

Emmett drove us home. He was still playing the silent game with me, of course, and I wondered if he thought I cared. I honestly didn't. If he wanted to be a big girly baby, he could. That was his problem.

When we drove up to the house, I was surprised to see Dad's black Mercedes parked out front. It was only a little before noon, and he was usually never home during the day.

Maybe Mom finally made him take a day off, or come home for an early dinner, since we usually ate without him on weekdays. But something made me think that his early day had nothing to do with dinner or him having a day off for no reason at all.

We had yet to continue the discussion we had on Monday, which had been conveniently interrupted by his pager. A part of me thought he might just drop it, but when he turned out to be the first person we saw when Em and I walked into the house, I knew I was screwed.

"We're going to Port Angeles," Dad announced, and Emmett scrunched up his face in confusion.

"What? Why? I was going to head over to Rose's later," he complained.

"I was speaking to your brother," Dad replied simply.

Emmett threw a look at me and scoffed. "Yeah, get his ass as far away from here as possible. And preferably leave him there," he said, before trudging up the stairs. I glared daggers at his back, as Dad grabbed my arm and turned me to face the front door.

"Let's go," he said, and nudged me forward.

"Why do I have to go?" I asked, a little confused by the whole thing. "I have shit to do."

"We're going, and that's that," was all he said, and his tone left no room for argument.

I sighed, but did as I was told. I figured I might as well go, I could take the opportunity to stop by James while there and get me some booze so I didn't have to go there again this weekend.

Two birds with one stone.

Whatever that other bird was that my dad needed us to go to Port Angeles for.

I slid into the passenger seat of his Mercedes, and he threw me a look and shook his head softly as he turned the ignition. He was holding his tongue again, I could tell. I frowned and looked out the window. I was not going to crack. If he wanted to talk, he was going to have to open his mouth and talk. I was not going to encourage him by saying anything.

He was the one who said we were going to "talk later" not me.

He drove at his usual careful pace, down the winding driveway, down to the road, and when we reached it, he turned left.

Left.

Left.

Left.

Fuck no.

"Eh... Dad.... Where are we going?" I asked, trying to sound offhand and carefree, though my entire insides were suddenly screaming at me to get the hell out of the car. *Immediately* .

"Port Angeles, I told you that," he replied, giving me a strange look.

"Yeah, I know... but why are we... I mean, why don't we drive through town?" I asked with a light shrug, looking out the window so he couldn't see the terror in my eyes.

"Because this way is the quickest to the highway. What's wrong with you?" he asked.

The tone of his voice made me turn my head and look at him, and when I met his gaze, I realized he knew exactly the reason why I didn't want us to take this route.

My jaw clenched and I narrowed my eyes at him. "Son of a bitch," I hissed between clenched teeth, but he wasn't intimidated.

"This road happens to be the quickest road to Port Angeles. Do you have a problem with that?" he asked, raising an eyebrow at me and acting casual as though he knew I knew what he was doing. "Is there something wrong with this road?" he added, and I huffed and sank lower in my seat.

He might have kept talking after that, I'm not sure. I didn't hear him anymore. All I could concentrate on was the fact that we were getting close. Everything looked different in the daylight, while at the same time oddly the same.

I swear to fucking God that I could pinpoint the exact spot where I had hit that damn patch of black ice.

I didn't hear my dad talking. I couldn't even hear the quiet roar of the engine, or the radio, or anything anymore. I was deaf, except for the phantom sounds that assaulted my mind.

A sound of a car skidding across the road after hitting a patch of black ice. The sound of a girl hitting the windshield. The bumping sound of the car driving over the body. And a blood curdling scream...

I didn't realize I had closed my eyes, until I was brought back to reality by the sound of the engine, which roared louder as we accelerated onto the highway.

My fingers were numb, and when I glanced down, I saw that I was once again gripping on to the seat like it was the only thing keeping me there. I tried to relax and flex my fingers, and it hurt like hell when I did.

I glanced at my dad, and much to my relief, he wasn't looking at me. His eyes were trained on the road – like the good driver he was. I would have snorted at the ten-and-two position of his hands on the wheel, if it weren't for the fact that I was too pissed off, because he was purposely messing with me.

We had rode in silence for what felt like forever when Dad suddenly decided to speak up.

"I'm surprised," he said casually.

"Why so?" I asked with a scoff, keeping my eyes on the moving scenery outside. I could almost feel where this conversation was heading.

"That you have yet to complain about my driving, even though I have purposely driven ten miles under the speed limit for well over twenty minutes," he replied amused.

"Maybe because I know it's a wasted fucking effort. You drive like an old man, and I have learned to live with it," I replied sweetly, shooting him a wide fake smile.

"Yeah, I'm not buying it, but whatever works for you," he said calmly. Something was brewing underneath his tone, but I couldn't figure out what the hell that was. There was something he wasn't saying, and he was acting all superior, like he knew everything.

Why did I even agree to go, again?

Because I'm an idiot for not refusing. That's why.

And the booze. Of course.

"What are you doing in Port Angeles anyway, since you needed me to come?" I asked.

"We're going by the auto shop," he said, glancing at me. "I figured you wanted to come with and take a look at your baby. I haven't seen

it since they brought it from the site..."

I clenched my fist by my side, keeping my eyes forward. I could sense his eyes on me.

"Yeah, that's great," I said, keeping my voice light.

"Yeah, isn't it?" he replied, using that weird tone again.

We rode in silence for the remainder of the drive. And I silently chastised myself for being so fucking slow and stupid. What the hell was wrong with me? Of course he was taking me to see my damn car. Why else would he take me to Port fucking Angeles? We've never had any reason to go there together before, except for the last time my baby was in the shop, so this shouldn't have come as such a surprise to me.

But for some reason, it did.

When we parked outside the shop, my eyes immediately shot to the space where my car had been the last time we were here. But there was no shiny silver Volvo there today. Instead it was occupied by an ugly motherfucking Toyota.

We stepped out of the car, and I followed Dad inside.

A man, dressed in dirty overalls, walked up to us as soon as we stepped inside. His long, black hair was pulled back into a ponytail, his hands and face were dirty with oil, but the dirt almost disappeared in the darkness of his skin. *Almost*.

He tried to wipe his dirty hands off with an even dirtier cloth, and I wanted to roll my eyes.

Fucking moron.

"Hello, Dr. Cullen, I wasn't expecting you until later," he said, holding out his dirty hand to my father.

Dad didn't even flinch before taking the man's disgusting hand in his and shaking it.

"Nice to see you again, Sam. I wasn't planning on coming until this afternoon, but then my son had an early day, so I figured we might as well come by early," Dad replied. "So where is it?"

"It's in our other garage, in the back," Sam said and began walking to the back of the shop, and we followed him. "I won't lie to you, Dr. Cullen. The damages on the car are pretty extensive, and it might take us a while to get it fixed."

"No problem, take all the time you need," Dad replied simply, and I glared at his back.

Take all the time you need ? Was he fucking serious? I needed my fucking car! How else was I supposed to get around? It's not like I could borrow Emmett's car or even Dad's for that matter, considering he was never home to begin with. And what on earth could be so wrong with my car that it would take such a long time to fix it? I really wanted to see the damages for myself, and see whether or not this Sam guy was full of shit.

How long could it take to fix a windshield? It was the only thing she hit, and the only thing she smashed. So what the fuck could take so long? It was not like it needed to be custom made or anything. It was a fucking Volvo for crying out loud! Not some rare European penis car.

Sam opened a wide door, and we stepped through it.

"So here it is," Sam declared.

I brushed past Dad, glaring at him as I did so, before turning my head to look at my baby.

And I froze.

I wasn't even breathing.

Or blinking.

I was frozen fucking solid.

Swan was a small fucking girl. A hundred and ten pounds tops.

So how the hell did she managed to create this much damage?

The hood of the car was a fucking crater. The windshield looked like a spider-web. With a cracked hole smack in the middle where her body had smashed into it. And the car tilted in a strange way.

"... the windshield obviously, and the hood. Then there is the front axis... we will have to change parts of it, or maybe even the whole thing..." Sam's voice sounded like it was coming through a tunnel, and I was only aware of half of what he was saying.

I slowly made my way around the car, checking out every single inch of it.

The front tire on the right side was bent in a weird angle, like it wasn't attached properly to the car anymore. And it was punctured. Of course. Wasn't it enough that it was barely holding on to the car? No, of course not.

I looked down on the hood, and let my hand stroke the dented surface, which used to be so cool and smooth.

My eyes wandered up to the windshield, and from this point I could make out every little crack in it. I could even see the blood.

Blood.

Everywhere.

Blood.

I quickly took a step back, and looked away from the windshield.

But there was no use. Anywhere I looked now I seemed to see blood.

When I looked closely, I could see blood on the front tire, and there was a little blood splattered on the car doors on the right side too.

There was blood fucking everywhere.

"Are you ready to go, Edward?" Dad asked, bringing me out of the daze.

I nodded quickly, without looking at him.

"I'm done here," I choked as I brushed past him. I all but ran out of the shop and into the cold, November air outside.

I walked over to the car and waited for Dad to come outside. I paced back and forth beside the car as I waited, and I kept playing with my fingers. I needed a fucking smoke.

Or better yet – a strong drink.

Dad walked out from the shop right then and unlocked the car. We slid into the car, and after Dad had buckled his belt, he put a file in my lap.

"I got the estimate," he said. "It will cost a pretty penny to get it fixed, but the insurance will most likely cover it."

I didn't open the file. I just kept looking at it like it was about to jump up and bite me or something. Dad leaned back in his seat, not making any move to turn on the ignition and get us out of here.

He sighed deeply, and I stiffened in my seat.

I knew that sigh. It was not a good sigh.

"Son..." he said quietly, his voice barely audible. "You say you don't care, and that you are over it. You act like you're beyond it all and that this doesn't bother yo-"

I began unbuckling my belt when I realized where he was going with all this. I was not going to stay to hear that shit. I needed to get the fuck out. I could take a bus back to Forks. Or take a fucking cab. But I was not going to stay in this fucking car to hear my dad's bullshit.

But he stopped me by grabbing a strong hold of my wrists.

"I know, son! This is awful! I know you're hurt! But you can't pretend like everything is like it was before, because it's not! You will have to learn to deal with what happened, and not push it back like you have," he said, his voice overflowing with a million emotions. "It's okay to feel hurt. It's okay to feel bad! It's okay to feel anything you want to feel! But don't pretend you don't feel anything, because you do. You're feeling it. And you will have to deal with it before it eats you up and swallows you alive." He took a deep breath and was quiet for a moment before continuing. "I didn't take the short road to the highway to hurt you, I did it because I wanted to help you. And that is exactly why we are here today too. It would have been easy for me to tell Sam to just fix the car up, and drive you here to pick it up when it was done. But that would not have helped you. You needed to face reality and the seriousness of the situation. You can't walk around and think that this wasn't a serious accident, because it was. It really was."

I tried to swallow, but it was like there was a big lump of shit stuck in my throat. I wanted to puke.

"Can we go home now, or are you gonna continue lecturing me about something I don't give a crap about?" I hissed.

I was not looking at him, but I could feel his eyes bore into me.

He sighed deeply and let go of my wrists.

"You can't go on like this, Edward. You need to take responsibility for your actions."

I glared at him, and he frowned.

"I don't need to do fucking anything," I spat.

I turned to stare blankly out the window, and he didn't say anything.

There was simply nothing more to say.

Help

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 16 – Help

Isabella Swan POV

This was *not* going to work.

I stared into my closet, trying to find a pair of pants that were loose enough to fit over my cast. I was in no mood for cutting a pair *just* because I had to fit that stupid cast under it, and I didn't want the cast to show either. Therefore, I was in dire need of a loose fitting pair of pants. But it seemed as though I was out of luck.

Why is it that the only pairs of pants I own are skinny jeans?

I wanted to hide the cast because I didn't want to look weaker than necessary. I had a feeling that stumbling down the hallway on crutches would be enough of an attention grabber, without having my bulky cast protruding from my leg adding to it.

I pulled out a pair of jeans that had always sat a little loose on me. I had to sit down on the bed in order to pull the jeans over the cast. The whole procedure was painful, and I gritted my teeth and took shallow breaths to endure it. I stood up, buttoned them, and studied myself in the full-length mirror hanging on the closet door.

This works, even though it looks ridiculous.

It looked like I was suffering from that elephant leg syndrome. But it was a small price to pay for hiding the monstrosity from view. I awkwardly stepped over to my dresser, pulled on a long sleeved top, and grabbed a flannel shirt from the closet.

I had already put all of my books and homework in my book-bag the night before and when I grabbed the bag from my desk, I almost toppled over. The heaviness of the bag alongside my disability was going to make for an awkward walk... *stumble* down the stairs. I threw the bag over my shoulder and grabbed my crutches before carefully making my way downstairs. Each step was more painful than the last.

Dad was sitting by the kitchen table reading the newspaper when I walked – *stumbled* –in. He looked up from the paper and gave me a meek smile.

"How are you feeling, sweetie? Ready to get back to school?" he asked.

"As ready as I'll ever be." I sighed.

I dropped my bag by the door and wobbled over to the fridge to grab some orange juice.

"And you are sure you don't want to take the wheelchair? It's gonna be a long day, and you don't need to make it harder than it has to be with those crutches," he said, turning in his seat to look at me. I sighed and nodded.

"Yes, I'm sure."

I had practiced getting around with the crutches all day on Sunday. The only problem I had was walking up and down the stairs. Otherwise, I was doing just fine. The mild pain killers that Dr. Cullen had prescribed to me turned out to be a lifesaver. Even if I wanted to save them up, I wouldn't be able to. The pain was sometimes too

much to handle, and I had to take them to survive. Or so it felt, anyway.

I didn't have any time to conjure up a lunch to bring to school. That was just as well, anyway— one less thing to balance along with my crutches and book-bag.

Dad looked at me when I tried to bend over awkwardly to grab my bag from the floor. Just as I was about to grab it, he grabbed it instead.

"I'll carry it to the car," he offered.

Wow, Dad, what a gentleman you are.

I didn't argue even though I wanted to. I wanted to show him that I could handle this on my own. I had been taking care of myself for a long time now. He had never been there for me in the past. So, if he thought that carrying my bag to the car was going to change things, then he had another thing coming.

I was still angry at him for the unwelcome visitor he brought into our home the other day. To top *that* off, ever since I came home, he'd been trying to casually bring the topic of *that* visitor up again. He wanted her to come home. *Permanently this time*. But I was *not* about to agree to such a thing. The day she stepped through our front door again was the day that I ran away.

Or, rather, the day that I wobbled away. It would be hard to run with crutches...

I grabbed my jacket from the hanger, pulled it on, and proceeded to stumble out the front door. Dad followed suit and locked the door behind us. I almost fell on the last step down from the front stairs, but managed to catch myself before falling face down in the frosty mud.

"Bella... you sure you don't want to take the wheelchair?" Dad asked almost pleadingly.

I threw an irritated look over my shoulder, and he looked back at me with a pained expression.

"I told you I was fine," I hissed at him, irritated that he'd asked again.

"I know, I just want what's best for you, Bells, you know that. And Dr. Cullen said tha-"

"I don't care what Dr. Cullen said," I snapped, cutting him off. "I know what I can and cannot handle. I *can* handle the crutches. I can *not* handle the wheelchair. So drop it! Okay?"

Dad sighed and nodded reluctantly before coming down the stairs and walking over to the cruiser. He opened the passenger door for me and I all but growled at the gesture.

Did he think that I couldn't do anything on my own anymore?

I knew he was just trying to help me out, but come on already! He hadn't been there for me for the past three months. He chose to believe Mom's lies. He even let Mom come home for Christ's sake! So why was he trying so hard to get in my good graces now? Did he honestly think it would work? He could try all he wanted, but he was not fooling me. He didn't care. He was just trying to resolve whatever was left of his conscience and reputation.

What would his colleagues at the station think if they found out what kind of father he *really* was?

A father who chose to believe the lies told by his wife when his daughter was "found" almost bleeding to death on the living room floor.

I still couldn't believe he actually believed the lies she told. How could he not see through them? Nothing about her lies made any sense. Not only did the details of the story sound absolutely ridiculous, but also the main point itself.

Why would I try to kill myself?

Three months ago, I was happy. I loved my family, and I had a wonderful best friend. Yeah, school might have sucked even then, but I had endured it. I was freaking happy. I had no reason to try to kill myself.

And now she was back to feeding him lies. This accident was the worst thing that could have happened considering the situation. If Mom came home, it would be so easy for her to sway Dad into believing her. Dad might not be the sharpest tool in the shed, but he knew I was not doing well right now. So, it would be easy for him to believe I actually tried to kill myself this time.

That I threw myself in front of Edward's car on purpose.

I slumped in the uncomfortable seat of the cruiser and groaned inwardly as we reached the school. Anxiety and nervousness were beginning to creep up in me, and I bit my lip hard to stop from screaming. What the hell was I doing back here? Why didn't I just stay home?

I was *not* strong. I could *not* do this. They would laugh. They would taunt me. They would punish me for putting their precious Edward through all this, leaving my life even more miserable by the end of the day than it was when I woke up this morning. I had never really cared about the taunting before, but somehow it was different now. Maybe it was because I was physically weaker now.

If driving my loud truck used to get me attention, then it was *nothing* compared to the reaction I got when the cruiser pulled up and drove to the end of the lot, close to the main entrance. I could feel everybody's eyes on us when we stopped. Dad smiled awkwardly at me and scratched his stubbly chin.

"So, I'll pick you up at three?" he asked tentatively. I nodded.

"That'll be fine...", I mumbled in response as I opened the door.

I had imagined this scenario ever since I had woken up from surgery last week. I imagined myself graciously climbing out of the car and walking over to the steps with my head held high. I was not going to let anyone intimidate me. Nobody scared me. I was Bella Swan and I could survive anything.

But reality rarely lived up to my fantasies... at least not the good ones.

Of course I didn't manage to climb out the car graciously. Instead I fell out of the car and almost landed on my face for the second time that morning. But a pair of strong arms caught me just before I hit the ground.

"Whoa, careful there," a loud, deep voice said. I looked up in surprise, and my eyes widened in shock when I was met by the terrifying sight of Emmett Cullen.

Emmett was looking down at me with a sheepish grin on his face as he helped me steady myself. I looked away quickly and felt my cheeks flush in a million shades of red.

"You okay, Bells?" Dad asked from the car.

"I'm fine," I said quietly, avoiding looking at Emmett at all cost.

Graciously and proudly holding my head high.

Yeah right. Why don't you live in the real world, Bella?

I grabbed my book-bag from the floor of the car and my crutches. I put the bag down between my feet as I steadied myself on my crutches. I shut the door, and Dad waved meekly at me before driving away. I tried to balance as I grabbed my bag and threw it over my shoulder. It felt much heavier than it had at home, and I almost toppled over by the unexpected weight.

Suddenly a hand flew out in front of my face and I flinched, which made me almost topple over again from the movement. I looked up, startled, to find Emmett looking at me still.

"Oh, sorry," he said, looking a little startled himself. "But I was just.... You want me to help you with that? It looks kind of heavy."

Okay, what was he trying to pull here? I get it that he tried to act like a good guy in front of my dad. Everybody was scared of my dad because of his profession. But he wasn't here now, so there was no reason for Emmett to be nice to me.

Especially considering who his brother was.

"Eh... what's that?" I asked bewildered.

Way to be eloquent, Bella. What happened to your dignity? Show him who's boss!

"Let me help you with your bag," he insisted again. He yanked the bag off my shoulder without bothering to wait for a response.

"What?" I asked again with a little more force behind the word now. I was not able to grasp the situation at all, and the way he just grabbed my bag irritated me.

Very nice, Emmett. Way to disrespect the crippled girl. The girl your own brother crippled, at that .

"Let me help you with your bag," he repeated yet again. He was smiling at me as he threw the bag over his own shoulder. "You need help up the stairs too?" he asked casually.

And that was what did me in. *Who the hell did he think he was?*

"What do you mean 'too'? I don't need your freaking help! I can carry my own bag and climb these stairs all by myself, thank you very much," I snapped. Much to my surprise he looked oddly hurt by my words, and the grin on his face faded quickly. When he was no

longer grinning, he looked like a hurt and vulnerable teddy bear. It was an odd look on him considering his size and usual appearance.

"I was just trying to help...", he said quietly. "Show me the way to your locker. The least I can do is carry your bag..." He sounded so sad when he said it, and I didn't care if he was just yanking my chain. I just couldn't deny someone who looked and sounded as sad as he did— even if he was faking.

He took a step forward and smiled crookedly, but the smile did not reach his eyes. His eyes were still sad. What was with him? The Cullen family sure was a freakish bunch.

"Fine," I said with a sigh, and he looked like he relaxed when I agreed. I wondered if this was a part of whatever master plan he had conjured up with his brother. Why else would he be so nice to me?

The steps up to the school turned out to be a little harder to climb than those at home. Mostly because people kept pushing past me and knocking into me on purpose as I slowly made my way up. Emmett stepped up beside me after the third person knocked into me and saw to it that nobody else did. He was acting like my own personal bodyguard. When I looked up at him, I saw that he was glowering at all the people who even dared to come close to me.

Seriously, what was with him?

I ignored him as we reached the top of the stairs and the entrance. I figured he would follow me, anyway, so I didn't need to pay him any attention. What was the worst thing he could do? Run away with my bag? *Yeah, knock yourself out.*

I turned out to be right though. I quickly developed a rhythmic pace in which I wobbled my way forward and Emmett never detoured from my side. We reached my locker, and I turned the combination with one hand while I balanced on one crutch. I tried not to put any weight on my injured leg, but that turned out to be pretty hard since I was constantly on the verge of falling over. I had never had a sense of

balance and coordination before, so it was nothing short of a miracle that I was even able to balance on the crutches to begin with.

Emmett put my bag in my locker when I opened it, and he smiled at me.

"There you go," he said smiling, though his smile still looked a little forced and did not reach his eyes.

"Thank you, you didn't need to do that," I mumbled.

"No... I know, but I wanted to... considering... well... yeah....," he said, scratching his neck and looking away awkwardly. I bit my lip and fiddled with the bag in my locker. "Anyway, so... I'll see you around I guess...." I nodded without looking up, and I saw him walking away from the corner of my eye.

I picked up my books from my bag and grabbed the homework assignment that was due first period. I tried to hold the papers under my arm, but they kept slipping from my grasp. I put them back in my bag, before resting my forehead against the top of my locker and closing my eyes. This was not going to work.

How the hell was I going to get to class with my books without dropping them or without falling over like the klutz that I was?

"Isabella?"

I squeezed my eyes shut even tighter and wished for a meteor or something to hit me on the head and remove me from existence. What was this? *Make-fun-of-Bella-by-making-her-believe-we-give-a-damn* -day? Why couldn't they just leave me alone?

"Isabella? You okay?"

I sighed as I lifted my head up and opened my eyes. Alice was looking at me with a concerned look, which looked oddly earnest. Just like Emmett.

Those friends of Edward's sure were great actors. They almost had me fooled.

"What do you want?" I asked, though I had a feeling I already knew the answer.

"We have the same class first period, remember? I could help carry your books for you if you'd like," she offered, holding out her tiny arms. I noted that she had pink nail polish which matched the pink sweater she was wearing perfectly, as did the ribbon she had in her short hair. I had to admit: on someone else it would have looked ridiculous, but on her it worked. This was just another reason for me to hate her. The girl could pull off a freaking ribbon.

I took a moment to consider my options. Either I try to carry the books myself and risk looking like a total idiot when I dropped them and tried to pick them back up. Or I could let her help me and take the risk of her making fun of me.

I bit my lip in contemplation, and she just kept looking at me with that concerned, yet curious, look in her eyes.

"May I?" she asked again, and I felt my resolve crumble.

Pride be damned.

The humiliation of dropping my books was far worse than the humiliation of her making fun of me or whatever it was what she had planned. What was the worst thing she could do, anyway? Run away with my books? Was she going to pull an Edward on my ass? *Yeah, have fun with my homework. Enjoy the easy A.*

"Fine," I agreed reluctantly and handed her the books.

She lit up like a child on Christmas morning, and I wondered if I had just stepped into a trap. I closed my locker and steadied myself on my crutches before slowly making my way down the hall with Alice at my side.

To say that people were looking at us would have been another understatement of the century. I don't know what made them stare more: the fact that Alice was walking next to me, that she was carrying my books willingly, or that she actually looked pleased doing all of it. Then, of course, there was me, stumbling toward class on crutches, and it was just the icing on the cake.

"So how are you doing?" Alice asked politely.

I glanced at her quickly before looking down at the floor again.

"Fine, I guess....," I mumbled.

"How's... you know... the leg? Is it hurting?" she asked. She sounded uncertain as if she didn't know whether or not she should be asking that. I wondered if she had asked out of politeness or if she was honestly curious. I decided there was no reason for me to lie. My leg was what it was, and there was no hurt in responding with the truth. There was no way my answer could be used against me, anyway. *Right?*

"It's fine... Dr. Cullen prescribed me something for when the pain becomes too much," I replied, my voice just above a whisper. Alice's concern was making me uncomfortable, and I didn't know what to make of it, especially since I didn't know if she was sincere.

"Oh, that's good," she said, her voice chipper.

We reached our classroom, and she followed me inside. She put the books down on my desk as I sat down on my seat. Then she surprised me by sitting down on the empty seat next to me. I gave her a weird look, but she just smiled at me.

"So... I'm here if you need anything," she said with a smile, looking oddly excited by the thought.

"Thanks, but I think I'll manage." I forced a smile at her, hoping it would make her leave me alone now that we were in class. But it

only seemed to encourage her further.

"Like, I can be your official book carrier or something. It'll be fun!" she said, leaning towards me excitedly.

"I very much doubt that... but thanks," I said pointedly. Her smile faltered at my tone, but not by much.

"Anyway, we should tota—," she began, but was cut off when our teacher walked in. I could almost hear her groan in disappointment, but I was doing a happy dance on the inside. I was beyond thankful for the interruption. The teacher looked out over the class; when he noticed me, he gave me a smile and a nod. Fortunately for me, he kept his mouth shut and didn't acknowledge my presence more than that. I didn't need any more unnecessary attention. God knows that I was about to have a day filled with it anyway.

I opened up my notebook and began doodling in the margins, silently counting the minutes until I could go home. The whispering of despicable words behind me did not deter me from my doodling. Not even when Alice looked over her shoulder to glare at whoever was sitting behind us did I stop my doodling.

The whispering just gave me another reason to draw a knife through the broken heart...

I had managed to waste four pages on nothing when the bell rang, signaling the end of class.

While the other students quickly gathered their stuff and made their way out, I was still trying to get out of my seat. Ninety minutes of sitting down on one of these generic school chairs was not good for my leg. My entire body was stiff from sitting down so long and it screamed in protest when I stood up. I tried to ignore it the best I could as I gathered my things. As I did, I realized I was once again met with the same dilemma as before.

How the hell was I supposed to get my stuff back to my locker now?

"Official book carrier at your service!"

Of course, how could I forget? Alice was practically bouncing next to me, and she laughed lightly at my doubtful look. She grabbed my things without even the slightest hesitation and smiled brightly at me.

"You don't need to do that," I said, trying to keep some sort of dignity.

"I know," she replied with a shrug, as if it were the most obvious thing in the world.

She walked towards the door, and I had no other choice but to follow.

"What's your next class?" she asked as we walked down the hall for the second time that morning. "It's gym, right?" I looked at her in surprise.

"How did you know that?" I asked.

"You are in the same gym class as Rose. She mentioned once that you were in it too, but apparently you haven't made it there in a while. Have you changed your schedule or something?" she asked casually.

"No, I haven't changed my schedule," I replied slowly as a million questions began swirling in my mind. Why was Rosalie paying any attention to whether I was in class or not? And why the hell were they even discussing me in the first place?

"Huh... you don't like gym or something?"

"Yeah, or something...."

We reached my locker, and she leaned casually against the locker next to mine. She took one of the crutches from me so I didn't need to bother with it when I tried to unlock my locker. When I opened the door, she put the books on the top shelf before leaning back again.

"So... wanna hang out?" she asked with a light shrug.

"Don't you have class?" I asked.

"Yeah, but so do you and I figured since you haven't attended class in months, then why would you start now?" She smiled. She was probably just joking and didn't mean anything by it, but somehow her words triggered something in me.

"Actually... I *am* going to class," I said and had to put a lot of effort to keep the venom from my voice as I steadied myself on my crutches. "But thank you for carrying my books. It was very... *nice* of you."

"It's the least I can do," she said with a smile. I cocked an eyebrow at her.

"Why is that?" I asked curiously.

"Why is what?" she asked, still smiling though looking confused.

"Why is it that it's the least you can do? You don't owe me anything. If anything I owe you, considering you saved me from choking two weeks ago," I reminded her. Her smile faltered a little.

"Because you're a good person, Isabella, and you don't deserve the things people say or do to you," she said quietly, sounding apologetic. I shook my head at her.

"You don't even know me, so don't even....," I said walking away.

"I didn't mean to offend you," she said after me, but made no attempt to follow me.

"You didn't. I need to care about what you have to say in order for you to offend me," I replied over my shoulder. She didn't say anything in response to that and that was just as well.

It took me quite some time to wobble my way to the gym, and the class had already started when I finally got there. That didn't matter considering that I wasn't going to join in, anyway.

Coach Hunter spotted me as I sat down on the bleachers and walked over to me.

"Miss Swan, I'm surprised to see you here," she said with her usual unemotional tone.

"Why, yes, I thought I'd make an appearance," I replied with a weak smile.

"Don't get smart with me, missy," she said, giving me an once-over. "Would I be wrong in the assumption that you won't be joining us today?" I knocked on my cast as a response. She looked down and sighed. "I want you to bring your gym clothes tomorrow and be prepared to join. I will not ask you to do anything beyond your ability, but for now I'm going to ask you to do laps on the tracks. I assume you can do that considering you have your crutches?" she said, raising an eyebrow at me as if she was challenging me or something. And by the way... *was she kidding me* ? I was just hit by a freaking car and now she was asking me to do laps on my crutches? Was she for real? Was that even legal?

Coach Hunter had always intimidated me because she was a tall and strong woman who didn't take any crap from any of the students – or any of the other teachers for that matter. She even made a girl cry once just because she couldn't participate due to serious cramps.

"Dr. Cullen asked me to take it easy, so I don't thin—" I began, and she cut me off by making that zip-your-mouth-shut motion.

"I don't care if Dr. Frankenstein told you to take it easy. I need something to grade you on, Miss Swan. With your poor attendance this semester, it would be very easy for me to fail you. So, you either bring your gym clothes tomorrow and we'll figure something out, or don't bother coming at all. And don't bother coming to graduation either," she said with a stern voice.

She gave me a pointed look before walking away to lead the class again. I sighed, feeling both relieved and full of dread. So, I wasn't going to graduate... no big deal, right?

Yeah, you'll just be stuck with Mom and Dad for the rest of your life. Have fun with that.

I groaned, leaning back on the bleachers, and tried to stretch out my legs in front of me. I let my eyes sweep over the big space and found myself looking into the eyes of none other than Rosalie Hale.

She was standing on the opposite side of the room with one hand propped up on her hip and the second holding a badminton racquet. She was looking at me with a raised eyebrow, as if she was studying me.

Had I walked through some strange portal and entered the Twilight Zone without even noticing?

Since when did the most popular clique in school pay any attention to me?

First, Emmett helped me out and looked hurt when I tried to tell him off, then Alice with her 'Official Book Carrier' job, and now, Rosalie studying me like a weird piece of art... or a zoo animal. Maybe I was just seeing things. Maybe I had gotten some serious head injury that went unnoticed by Dr. Cullen. Or maybe I was correct in my assumption that it was all just a part of their master plan that would bring me down on the behalf of Edward Cullen.

They were screwing with me for hurting Edward.

Of course, that must be it. What else could it be?

They were trying to get to me because I had put him in this situation. I almost made him a killer, and they were looking out for their friend by making me paranoid.

Well, it was working.

I broke the gaze and looked down at my lap.

I wondered what people were saying. Did they say it was my fault? Did Edward tell his friends that it was my fault? What about his brother? If his brother thought that I had purposely thrown myself in front of the car, I doubt he would have been that nice to me this morning. He might have been acting, but I doubt he could have acted that well if he was under the impression that I was the cause of the accident. Everything always came back to Edward.

I bet he was riding around the school on his high horse, enjoying the concern being thrown his way. He was probably reaping the benefits of it too, I'm sure, and putting the blame on me every chance he got.

I felt my throat constrict, and I tried to take a couple of calming breaths.

I couldn't blame him for any of it.

He had every reason to hate me now. I couldn't even begin to understand what he was going through. In a way, it must have been harder to be the driver than to be the one hit. There were always two victims in an accident like ours: the driver and the person hit.

Therefore, I couldn't blame him if he wanted to spread false rumors about the accident and me now. What else could he do? It came as no surprise to me that his friends had his back.

I stretched my leg in front of me and winced a little when it didn't agree with the movement. I chastised myself for leaving the pills in my locker and not having enough foresight to figure I would need them.

It was too long of a walk to go to my locker and walk back here, so I figured I just had to endure the pain and wait until class was over. I had no intention of pissing Coach Hunter off more than I already

had. I had a feeling she would jump at the chance to punish me for leaving in the middle of class. Punishing me would mean failing me. Failing me would be the equivalent of robbing me of my future— if I would even have one. It was a possibility after all, as long as I was too chicken to actually kill myself. If that cowardly demeanor remained, I had to get an education if I expected to have a chance to get away from Forks, and away from my mother.

So, I endured the rest of the class, trying to distract myself by watching the class play badminton. I silently laughed at Tanya's and Lauren's pathetic attempts at looking sexy while throwing their racquets around.

The bell finally rang, and I wobbled my way back to the main building while the rest of the class scurried to the changing rooms.

When I entered the school again, I was bombarded with laughing and talking students. Everyone was hanging out with their cliques and their friends. I had never felt so alienated in my entire life. What I wouldn't give to not have to be all alone.

All I wanted was one friend.

Was that too much to ask for?

I was tired of being alone.

People kept pushing me around as I walked through the hallway, and I did my best to keep up my indifferent façade. I pretended like their pushes and glares didn't hurt me. They were not getting to me. I was untouchable.

I walked over to my locker to grab my wallet and my pills, before heading off to the cafeteria. The strain put on my body due to the crutches and the cast were beginning to take its toll on me. I would need food in my system if I was going to be able to handle the rest of the day without incident.

I went to stand in line to the cafeteria and a couple of girls standing in front of me looked back and giggled.

"What the hell is she wearing? Hello! The 60's called and they want their pants back!" one of the girls whispered before bursting into hysterics. I looked away from them and pretended like I hadn't heard. What would they suggest I wear, anyway? I couldn't fit any other pants over the cast without cutting them.

The line slowly moved forward, and when I came to the point where I could grab a tray, I realized that I was yet again met with another dilemma. How was I supposed to carry the tray with food?

Someone cleared his throat next to me, and I turned my head automatically towards the sound. I hoped the shock wasn't all that evident on my face when I met Emmett's friendly gaze.

"Hey, Isabella, how has your day been so far?" he asked with a friendly tone as he grabbed a tray of his own.

"Fine... thanks...", I mumbled, looking away. He was still just as intimidating to me as ever.

I moved forward and grabbed a bottle of orange juice and a sandwich. I looked on amazed as Emmett put item after item on his tray. Was all of that for him? No, it couldn't be. He was probably bringing food for his girlfriend, too.

I took another step forward in line and grabbed an apple. Emmett reached his big meaty hand in front of me and grabbed two bananas and an apple. He grinned at me when he saw me watching him.

Maybe he was bringing food for his entire table?

"I'm a big guy, I need a lot of food," he said with a grin. I was a little taken aback by his statement and looked at his now overflowing tray with wide eyes. There was no chance in hell that all that food was for him!

"All that is for you?" I blurted out without thinking, my expression clearly showing bewilderment. He didn't look offended by my question; he simply smiled and nodded proudly. I wanted to laugh at his expression— and I would have if he didn't scare the crap out of me. Besides, I still didn't know what his agenda was. So, the safest bet for me was not to show any emotion at all.

"So," he began, "do you want me to carry your tray for you?" he asked when we reached the end of the line to pay. I was once again met with an internal conflict. Would I accept his help or not?

I looked around the crowded lunchroom and came to the conclusion that if he wanted to make fun of me and make me regret the day I was born (like I didn't already), then this was the place to do it. It had everything: a great opportunity and a large audience. Was this what they had been waiting for? Was this a part of their master plan?

I looked up at him with uncertain eyes, and he was just grinning back at me with no sign of malice whatsoever in his big brownish-green eyes.

"Come on, we can sit over there," he said, grabbing my tray and nodding towards an empty table by the windows. He didn't stand there long enough to notice my confused expression. He just walked towards the table as I stood there watching his back like a moron.

I shook my head, in an attempt to pull myself together, before wobbling over to the table.

Emmett put our trays on the table before taking a seat. I awkwardly sat down on the chair across from him, not really knowing what else to do. I stared at him from across the table and watched him as he put everything on his tray in order. He reminded me of a little kid. He looked so innocent.

He looked up at me with that grin that seemed to be permanently attached to his features. I quickly looked down at my tray and fiddled with the plastic wrapper on my sandwich.

I was hungry, no doubt about it, but now I was too nervous to eat. I had a feeling that if I forced that sandwich down my throat, I would most likely end up repeating the incident from two weeks ago. I sure as hell wasn't going to start choking in the middle of a crowded cafeteria when people already were staring at me like I had grown a second head.

The unmistakable sound of someone skipping neared our table, and I was not surprised to see Alice putting her tray down and sitting on the seat next to me. Nothing seemed to surprise me anymore. I didn't even object. Instead I decided to just roll with it.

Did I mention that I had somehow entered the Twilight Zone? Yes, obviously.

"So how was gym?" Alice asked. I glanced up at her from the corner of my eye.

"It was... fine..." I replied hesitantly.

"Well, that's good. Coach Hunter can be such a bitch sometimes," she said with a carefree laugh. She took the lid off her plastic container of chicken salad and smiled at me when she noticed me looking. I quickly looked away again. "Oh, that reminds me!" she said suddenly with a cheerful voice.

She grabbed her purse and rummaged through the contents of it for a while before she found whatever it was she was looking for. She pulled out a couple of colored pens and smiled wickedly at me.

"May I sign your cast?" she asked eagerly. She was barely able to contain her excitement.

"Hey! That was my idea!" Emmett protested, and Alice rolled her eyes at him.

"I think there's enough room for the both of us," Alice replied before looking at me. "So, may I?"

I let my eyes wander between the two and decided that enough was enough. A girl can only take so much Twilight Zone weirdness.

"What do you want from me?" I asked. I tried to keep my voice quiet, calm, and collected, but I had a feeling I didn't succeed. In my ears I sounded almost hysterical. Alice's smile faltered, and she looked at Emmett uncertainly. His grin seemed to be slightly forced now.

"We're just being nice.... We thought we could make this easier for you..." Alice said regretfully.

"Well, *don't* ," I snapped. "I'm not some kind of charity project. I'm not a joke. Are you here to make fun of me because of what I did to Edward? Is that it? Are you here to punish me or something?"

Alice's face fell, and she gaped at me in shock.

"Oh, God, no!" she protested loudly. "Wait, what do you mean what *you* did to Edward? From our understanding, it was *he* who ran *you* over and not the other way around. You have nothing to feel sorry for. You did nothing wrong!"

Okay, what the hell had he been telling people? To say I was confused was an understatement. I was a little irritated, too. Who did these people think they were, anyway?

"And as far as I'm concerned, my brother is the one who should be punished. Just saying...." Emmett remarked gravely, his tone was not even close to matching his carefree and happy grinning from before.

"So, may we sign your cast?" Alice asked tentatively, obviously not letting it go.

She looked so earnest, like she really didn't want to harm me. But I didn't know her. For all I knew, this was her deceiving face that was created for an unsuspecting victim to think she was your friend, while

she, in reality, was actually sharpening her knife before stabbing you in the back.

"C'mon... please?" she pleaded, unleashing the full effect of her puppy-dog eyes and pout on me.

"Fine, whatever," I agreed in a mutter.

I pushed my chair back and lifted my cast to rest my foot on the edge of Alice's seat. She helped me roll up my pant leg and gripped the cap of her pen with her teeth to pull it off.

She smiled brightly at me before she started her drawing.

I let my eyes wander as I let her do her thing and bit my lip to keep from smiling when I saw Emmett's expression. He was practically bouncing in his seat, looking at Alice in an envious way while he waited impatiently for his turn. I didn't care if he was just acting; the sight was funny either way.

My eyes wandered from him and towards the other tables nearby.

It wasn't until then that I realized people were looking at us. Of course they were. Why was I surprised? They didn't even try to hide their staring. They stared, whispered, and looked just as confused as I was that Alice and Emmett were sitting, seemingly willingly, with me. And the most confusing thing of all: Alice was signing my cast with such enthusiasm.

Then my gaze locked with another pair of eyes.

A pair of emerald green ones.

Edward was openly glaring at me. There was no hint of kindness at all in those eyes. There was nothing but pure hatred and scorn in them. I wondered what made him angrier: that I put him in this situation, that I was still alive, or that his friends were sitting with me instead of him.

He was sitting with Jasper and Rosalie, but neither of them was looking at me. Rose was busy staring at Emmett in disbelief, and Jasper was just staring and picking at his food with a deep frown etched on his face.

"All done. You like it?" Alice sang, grabbing my attention.

I looked down at my leg and held back a smile. Somehow, I had imagined she was going to draw or write something mean. Maybe an ugly duckling or some other kind of bird, but it wasn't even close.

Alice had drawn a beautiful bouquet of yellow roses with the edges of their petals faded in pink. She hadn't drawn the stems of the flowers, but simply the flowers themselves. It was very pretty and very detailed.

"Very nice," I said, nodding and Alice's face brightened immensely at my comment.

"Is it my turn now?" Emmett asked, pushing his chair back and walking around the table without waiting for an answer. He grabbed a chair from a nearby table as he rounded the table. He didn't bother asking the students at that table if they were using it or not; he just pulled it up between Alice and me. He grabbed a brown pen and got to work. He was furrowing his brow in concentration as he got into it.

"Why are you... why are you doing this?" I blurted out in a small voice before I even had a chance to think it over. Emmett glanced up at me quickly before looking back down and continuing his drawing.

"Because you don't deserve any of it," Alice replied simply, like the answer was obvious.

"It's not like it hasn't been my life for my entire... well... life," I mumbled before I could stop myself. Emmett dropped the pen at my words and bent over to pick it up before it rolled out of reach. "Forget I said anything. It doesn't matter," I muttered. I felt my cheeks flush an embarrassing tone of red and looked away. Why did I have to say

that? Now I had only succeeded in giving them more ammunition they could use in order to bring me down.

The warning bell rang, and Emmett sighed.

"Well, it's not my best work, but it will have to do for now," he said, grinning at me before standing up. I never got a chance to look at what he had drawn because Alice quickly rolled down my pant leg over the cast. She placed my foot down on the ground, and Emmett grabbed my tray again.

"Do you want to save your food? You haven't touched it," Emmett noted.

I looked at my tray and shrugged.

"Yeah, I guess," I replied, though I wasn't hungry anymore. I didn't care about getting energy in my body anymore. I was too occupied with trying to figure out the situation I evidently found myself in.

Maybe I was dreaming? Or maybe I was in a coma, living in some alternate universe or something.

Emmett went before us to throw his food away and then went over to the cafeteria lady to ask for a bag for my food. Alice handed me my crutches. I gave her a weak smile in response.

Maybe this was some kind of 'kill her with kindness' type of deal?

Alice kept herself by my side as we walked out, and Emmett soon caught up with us, holding the paper bag for me until we reached my locker. He put the bag in my locker as I picked out my books, then waved goodbye before disappearing down the hall.

I emptied my book-bag and put my biology books in. Alice gave me a curious look.

"This way you can resign from your position as official book carrier," I explained.

"I honestly don't mind. I like to do it," she argued.

I threw the bag over my shoulder, thankful that it wasn't that heavy anymore.

"Thank you, Alice, but I can handle it from now on, but thanks anyway...", I said.

"Oh, okay, well... see you later," she said. She was still smiling when she turned to walk away, but it looked a little forced and didn't reach her eyes. It was as if I had offended her or something.

I shook my head at my thoughts and grabbed my crutches.

Why would she be offended? That was just silly.

Besides, why should I care if I offended her? It's not like we were friends anyway, so her feelings meant nothing to me. I wobbled my way over to biology and when I got there, I realized that class had already started. Mr. Melina was sitting by his desk and looked up at me when I entered.

"Ah, Miss Swan, welcome back," he said smiling. "Everybody is working on their projects, so why don't you find your group and..." He trailed off and suddenly looked pained. He stood up and walked around his desk to stand beside me. "If you want to switch groups, it would be completely understandable," he added quietly.

Oh, so that's why he looked so uncomfortable .

"No, it's alright," I said quietly. "I don't mind."

"Well, alright then. Go find your group, and I'm sure they will fill you in on their progress," he said.

I looked around the classroom and found my group sitting in the back. Lauren was twirling a strand of her hair around her finger while looking at Edward longingly, but he seemed to be oblivious to the attention. He seemed to be oblivious to everyone, actually. He was

looking intently at the notebook in front of him, frowning as if he was deep in concentration.

I wobbled my way over to them. Lauren noticed me before I reached their table, and she made a disgusted face when I pulled out a chair to sit down.

Edward looked up, and I could swear that he bared his teeth at me for a second before covering it up and looking back down. Though we only locked eyes for a fraction of a second, I still had chills running through my body by the hatred in his eyes. He loathed me. No question about it.

I still couldn't blame him. He had every reason to hate me.

"So... someone wanna fill me in?" I asked quietly as I picked up my notebook and a pen from my bag, ready to take notes on whatever they wanted me to do. The least I could do for Edward was help out with the project.

"If you bothered to come at all last week then you would know," Lauren sneered.

I looked up at her and cocked an eyebrow.

"Oh, I'm sorry," I replied sweetly. "I was stuck in the hospital getting surgery."

"I think you're exaggerating. I bet you were home eating Bon-Bons and watching soaps all day, just so people would feel sorry for you," she snorted. "We all know the accident was your fault. Besides, you don't look that hurt. What did they operate on? Your brain?" I stared at her in disbelief. Was she for real? I noticed how she glanced at Edward with a glint of hope in her eyes. I guess this whole show was supposed to be for his benefit. Lauren was trying to show that she had his back and hopefully it would lead her to get him on his.

But Edward didn't look as satisfied by this as I would have expected. Instead he glared at Lauren with almost as much hatred and scorn as when he had looked at me just moments before in the cafeteria.

"Shut the fuck up, Lauren," he snarled. "Don't talk about things you know nothing about."

Lauren flushed, looking down, and I dared a glance at Edward. He wasn't looking at me. He was staring intently at the notebook on the desk in front of him. He wasn't doodling, and his hand was still. His face was clouded with anger and an unfathomable emotion.

Maybe I should have taken Mr. Melina up on his offer to switch groups. I didn't want to, though. I didn't want to quit. I needed to stand up for myself. I needed to show some dignity with my head held high. I needed to show Edward that he didn't scare me. He could look at me with those hate-filled eyes all he wanted. I wasn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Even though I had been strong and brave enough to stand up for myself at the hospital, I had my doubts on whether I would be brave enough to do that again if the situation called for it.

It had been easy for me to be brave enough to tell him off when no one was there. Dr. Cullen being close by and my body being slightly high on the drugs in the IV made it very easy for me to say whatever came to mind. I didn't realize that until I had gotten home and no longer had that steady flow of drugs going into my body.

Drugs make you brave. Who would have thought?

There was a slight problem now: I wasn't on drugs this time. I wasn't brave now. Because of that, the hatred that was rolling off of Edward in waves was making me nervous and putting me on edge. I was thankful for Mike when he distracted me by finally deciding to fill me in on what they had worked on during the week I was gone.

They had decided to design a poster with a yin and yang kind of theme. The dark side would represent the one night stands, and the light side would represent love at first sight. We would write down the pros of each situation. For some reason, they had decided to cut the bad aspects out all together.

It sounded kind of silly to me, but it all made sense once Mike had told me that it was Lauren who was the brain behind the whole operation. I wasn't about to argue, though, and decided to just go with whatever they said. I honestly didn't care.

As the class went on, I realized that I wasn't the only one in the group not giving a crap. Edward was slouching in his seat, doodling nothings in his notebook, while Mike jotted down whatever idea Lauren had. I would not be surprised if the yin and yang poster idea would be scrapped by the end of the class.

Every once in a while, Edward would look up from his notebook and meet my gaze. His frown deepened every time he did.

"Okay, we're gonna go to the library and check up on the marriage stats. You guys can proofread this and add whatever you see fit," Mike told us as he pushed his chair back. Lauren glared at me as they walked past. I rolled my eyes and looked down at my notebook. I didn't reach for their notes, and this didn't go unnoticed by Edward.

"What? You're not gonna check up on their work?" he asked darkly. I looked up and met his gaze.

You don't scare me, Edward Cullen.

At least that was what I kept telling myself. His gaze alone could kill kittens.

"No, I trust that whatever crap they came up with is enough for us to pass this assignment," I replied quietly. He raised an eyebrow at me, and I just looked at him defiantly, silently hoping that my nervousness didn't shine through.

"You shouldn't trust people, especially people who aren't your friends," he said pointedly. I had a feeling he wasn't talking about Lauren and Mike anymore. I sighed and looked down at my notebook.

"Whatever you're doing, it isn't working," I mumbled quietly.

"And what exactly am I doing?" he prompted. I didn't know what I was supposed to say, so I didn't say anything. My silence apparently upset him because he snatched my notebook from me. I looked up at him and frowned in irritation.

"I have no homework written in there, so there's nothing for you to steal," I muttered. He looked a little confused for a moment before collecting himself and putting on his usual cold mask.

"And what is that supposed to mean?" he asked, tilting his head and looking at me condescendingly.

"Oh God, how stupid are you? Do you steal other people's homework so often that you can't even keep them apart?" I blurted without thinking.

"What the hell are you talking about?" he asked. He looked honestly confused now, and he didn't seem to bother with his cold mask. "Have you hit your head or something?" As soon as the words left his mouth something flickered across his face. It was there and gone too quickly for me to read. But it was there. He snapped his mouth shut, and I narrowed my eyes at him.

There wasn't a chance in hell that I was letting that one pass, no matter how much the situation was probably hurting him. No matter how much I probably owed him.

Newsflash, Edward Cullen, but you're not the only one in pain.

"Why yes, Edward, I have," I replied calmly.

"So I've heard," he mumbled, looking down. We both turned back to our mindless doodling and ignored the hell out of each other. After a while, I was beginning to feel the familiar feeling of my leg falling asleep, and it was not a comfortable feeling when combined with the pain that followed.

I scrunched up my face in discomfort and tried to adjust my leg under the table, but that turned out to just hurt me further. This observation was evident when a burst of pain shot through my leg and almost made me topple over in pain. I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to breathe through the pain as if I was in labor. After a few minutes, the pain subsided, and I damned myself for getting so distracted at lunch that I forgot to take the pain meds.

When I opened my eyes, I found Edward looking at me. Again.

"Take a picture. It'll last longer," I snapped. Why couldn't he just leave me alone?

He frowned, but he was no longer glaring. The hatred in his eyes was replaced with frustration.

"If you're trying to make me feel bad for you, then don't bother. I don't fucking care about you," he stated calmly, crossing his arms over his chest and leaning back in his chair. I stared at him incredulously.

"I'm not trying anything," I replied. "Oh, and don't worry, I know better than to think you would ever care about anyone other than yourself...." He huffed and I sighed. "But for what it's worth... I'm sorry."

I met his gaze and groaned inwardly. The hatred was back— and then some.

Why couldn't I just leave well enough alone and shut the hell up?

"What the hell are you apologizing for?" he hissed through clenched teeth. I flinched at his harsh tone.

"For the accident," I said slowly, suddenly feeling oddly self-conscious.

His eyes went wide, and his nostrils flared in anger.

"Fuck you, Goose," he snapped. He pushed his chair back so violently that it fell over. He stalked out of the room while silently muttering to himself. The whole class followed him with their eyes and turned to look at me when he was out of sight. The whispering began instantly.

I turned away from them and slumped in my seat.

Why did he get so angry with me for apologizing? Didn't he want me to? I caused the accident, so I apologized. What more did he want from me? Did he want me to pay for the car after all? Maybe he did, but didn't want his dad to know.

I gnawed on my lip, and my eyes landed on his notebook, which he had left behind.

I reached for it without a second thought to see what he had doodled.

And I felt my eyes well up in tears when they landed on the cluttered page.

"Oh my God...," I whispered to myself.

I followed the lines of his doodling with my finger and bit my lip even harder to keep my emotions in check. Who knew such an artist lived inside of cocky Edward Cullen? And such emotions.

I had not been wrong before.

Edward was hurting, alright.

Alone

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 17 – Alone

Edward Cullen POV

I didn't know what point he was trying to prove, but whatever the fuck it was, it wasn't going to fly with me. When Dad grabbed me in the car and yelled in my face like that, I was momentarily speechless. Where did he get off telling me how to feel?

The uneasy knot in my stomach was ever-present on the drive home, and I had a feeling that the only cure for it was booze. *A lot* of booze and maybe a joint or two.

But where the hell was I supposed to get it? My stash at home was beginning to run low, and I doubted I had enough to get high and drunk. I didn't have any means of getting it either, considering I had no fucking car at the moment.

I picked up my phone from my pocket and quickly typed a message. My fingers shook in an odd way, and I had to retype it a few times to get the message right. *What the hell is wrong with me?*

" Still got the shit from last Friday? I need to get wasted asap."

I sighed and closed my eyes. I gripped the phone tightly in my hand as if it were some kind of lifeline while I waited patiently for Jasper's reply. It felt like forever before the phone chirped and vibrated in my

hand. I looked down at the display and my mouth twisted into a lazy smirk.

" *Still got it. Come by?*" was his reply.

" *I'm on my way.*" I sent the text and put the phone back in my pocket.

"You can drop me off at Jasper's," I said with my eyes fixated on the road in front of us.

"I can drop you off at home, and then you can go up to your room and stay there," Dad replied calmly. I raised an eyebrow and shot my eyes to him.

"Are you grounding me? What the fuck are you on?" I snorted incredulously.

"I could ask you the same thing, son," he replied. His voice still carried that calm and collected tone, and he knew how much that fucking bugged me.

"Whatever. Are you dropping me the fuck off or not?" I asked, irritated. "I'm going over there one way or the other, this way just happens to be easier."

He inhaled deeply and breathed out slowly. His grip on the wheel tightened, and he was gritting his teeth. If I didn't know any better, I would have guessed he was having a hard time controlling his anger. Who would have thought that Mr. Perfect-Doctor-Man could even get angry? Let alone have a hard time controlling it. But I guess that was just more proof of why my dad was big fucking loser; he couldn't even let his anger out. He always had to be in such tight control.

"So what will it be?" I asked nonchalantly. "The easy way or the hard way?"

He glanced at me, and I was a little taken aback by the obvious anger burning in his bright blue eyes. Yeah, I got that he was angry, but not *that* angry...

"You have obviously already chosen, son. You decided to do all of this the hard way, and who am I to interfere with that?" He was fucking taunting me now.

"Just drop me the fuck off," I muttered. "What the fuck does it matter to you anyway?"

"I would watch my mouth if I were you," he stated simply. "I think your mother and I have been way too lenient with you. We have obviously failed somewhere in raising you. We never intended to raise our son to become such a cold-hearted person."

"You can't succeed with everything, now can you?" I snorted in an attempt to hide the fact that I was insulted by his words. I was not a cold-hearted person; it just happened that I didn't care about people that didn't mean anything to me. Why did that make me cold-hearted?

He sighed deeply. I was prepared to have him lash out at me again, but no words came from him. He remained silent for the rest of the drive. Notice my surprise when he actually drove me to Jasper's. I was just about to climb out of the car when he grabbed my arm again. I groaned and turned my head to look at him.

"Your mother and I will want to have a calm and civilized conversation with you later, alright? We're tired of this game you're playing. You can't go on like this anymore. You need to change." He sighed tiredly. I narrowed my eyes at him and pulled my arm back from his grasp.

"I'm not playing any games here. I'm just being me, and I'm so fucking sorry that that's not good enough for the doctor and his precious wife," I spat.

The anger flashed in his eyes again and his nostrils flared as he stared me down. "Don't you dare talk to me like that," he said furiously. "You're lucky you're not in a juvenile detention center yet, and yes, I said 'yet' because that's where you're heading if you keep down this road you're on."

I snorted and rolled my eyes. "Way to be fucking melodramatic. Fuck you," I said before climbing out of the car and slamming the door behind me. I heard, more than saw, him drive off, and my entire body was as tense as guitar string when I walked up to the front door and knocked.

Rosalie opened the door a moment later, and I pushed past her without even a glance.

"Why, Edward, I'm just swell, thank you so much for asking," she said with a sweet voice.

"Fuck you. Where's Jasper?" I growled under my breath.

"In the basement with Emmett," she replied evenly, and I followed her down.

Their basement had been transformed into a hanging out area for us with a big flat screen TV on the wall and an Xbox attached to it, and there was a pool table in the back of the room. I plopped down on one of the two couches; Emmett and Jasper were taking up the other one.

"So, dude, where's the booze?" I asked, not wasting any time on pleasantries.

"Take your pick," Jasper replied and handed his bag over to me. I grabbed it, put it on the floor in front of me and took a look inside.

Jackpot .

I grabbed a bottle of Captain Morgan and twisted off the cap before bringing the bottle to my mouth.

"Eww," Rosalie complained. "Drink from a glass for fuck's sake."

"What the hell for? I'm not sharing this shit," I replied and took another deep gulp of the golden liquid. It burned my throat. I winced a little from the taste, but I couldn't fucking care less. I needed this shit.

"So how was Port Angeles?" Jasper asked. "Emmett mentioned your dad dragged you there."

"It was fucking peachy," I snorted as I brought the bottle to my mouth once again. "He brought me there to check out my car," I added after I had swallowed. I winced again, but I'm not entirely sure if it was because of the booze or the memory.

"Was it finished already?" Jasper asked surprised, and I rolled my eyes at his stupidity.

"No, they hadn't even started on it yet. The old man brought me there so I could see the damage the Goose did to my car... fucking... Goose ...," I trailed off, shaking my head again at the memory. The image of my car flashed before my eyes, and I blinked furiously to get rid of it.

Blood fucking everywhere.

I drank greedily from the bottle in my hand as if there was some prize in the bottom of it. I noticed how Jasper and Emmett shared a look, and Emmett just shook his head.

"If you have something to say, why don't you just come out and fucking say it already?" I snapped at my brother, and he narrowed his eyes at me. I was fucking tired of his fucking behavior, and it had to stop.

"You're a fucking joke, dude. You feel so fucking sorry for yourself for what happened to your precious car. Have you even given an ounce of thought to what's going on in Isabella's life right now? Alice told us her father said she hasn't even left the hospital yet... do you even understand how fucked up that is? Are you even aware of the fucking damage you've done to her? And all you care about is your damn car," Emmett rambled and shook his head in disgust. "You're a fucking *joke* ."

I looked at him blankly and took a slow drink from the bottle.

"You're the joke if you think I care. I may be a lot of things, but I'm not a fucking hypocrite. Alright? If I didn't care about the Goose before, why should it be any different now?" I got a weird sense of déjà vu as soon as the words left my mouth. Hadn't we had the same fucking conversation like a thousand times already?

This situation was beginning to wear on me. How many times were they going to try to force me into changing? Why couldn't they just let me be? I was fucking fine for crying out loud. If their only problem with me was that I didn't care enough about Swan, then there was no problem at all! Because who cares if I cared about her?

She survived, didn't she?

An unnerving knot twisted in my stomach at the thought, and I almost felt queasy.

Yeah, she survived, but at what cost?

She would never run again. Hell, she would never even walk like a normal person again and that didn't bother me. I took another drink from the bottle, licking my lips clean.

What did she need to run for anyway? She couldn't even walk on a flat surface without falling flat on her face. Trust me on this, I've seen it happen a crap load of times. This would probably work out for the better for her, I'm sure. She would probably have to learn how to

walk again, and maybe she would gain a sense of balance and not be so vertically challenged anymore.

Yeah, that was it. I did her a favor.

A favor... yeah... Who are you trying to kid here?

I maimed her with my fucking car, and I'm sitting here and honestly thinking that I did her a *fucking* favor? I must have hit my head or the alcohol from the Captain was making me delirious. I might not like the girl, but come on! I can't look at this as a favor. That's just fucked up.

Fucked up and fucking inhuman.

That reminded me of the time she almost choked to death during lunch. I remember thinking that it was inhuman when people laughed and pointed instead of helping her, but now I was practically doing the same thing. I was laughing and pointing at her now, figuratively speaking of course, which made me no better than those fuckers who did the same thing to her when she was choking. But since when did I care about being a better person? I was not a good person, even *I* knew that.

But just because I figured that out doesn't mean I cared about her...

"Where's the pixie? It's weird not having her yapping in my ear about something unimportant," I said in an attempt to change the subject. I was so fucking done with this conversation, and I needed something else to think about. Something that did not include a beat up car and blood... or a crippled girl.

"She's dropping off Swan's homework," Jasper replied, and I groaned inwardly.

Way to change the fucking subject.

I didn't say anything else after that. Everything came back to Swan anyway, no matter the subject. Not that I needed reminders anyway, a part of my brain was on the subject at any given time, and it was slowly driving me insane.

I drank greedily from the bottle, and it didn't take long for me to finish the whole thing. My head was spinning in the most delightful way, and I leaned my head back and closed my eyes to just enjoy the fucking buzz.

Exactly what I needed.

"Dad's gonna kill you when you get home drunk off your ass," Emmett noted, and I snorted in response.

"Then I might get out of the conversation he and mom have planned for me..." I slurred with a half-smirk not bothering to open my eyes.

"I very much doubt it, you just made that particular conversation worse," he continued.

"Whatever. I think I'll live," I said with a half-assed shrug and slumped lower on the couch.

"You disgust me." Rosalie sighed. I would have responded with some smart ass comment, but her tired tone kept me from saying anything. She didn't say that shit to bug me, she was just stating the obvious. Besides, I couldn't give her shit for that because I shared that very opinion.

I'm fucking disgusted with myself too.

"I'm going home," I declared and got off the couch on wobbly legs.

"Yeah, good luck with that, bro," Emmett scoffed.

"What? You're not gonna give me a ride?" I asked sarcastically.

"No."

I rolled my eyes at his blunt tone and made my way up the basement stairs.

"If you end up dead in a ditch don't expect me to cry at your funeral!" Emmett called after me.

"Fuck you too!" I called back.

I silently cursed my brother as I made my way out of the house. It was always nice to know who's got your back; sadly my brother obviously didn't have mine. But why should I care? He could go fuck himself.

They can all go fuck themselves .

I was alone in all of this. My dad thought I was a cold-hearted ass; my mom thought I was a disappointment and my brother thought I was a joke.

Man, did I hit the jackpot in the family lottery or what?

I walked aimlessly from Jasper's house for a while, and after a couple of blocks, I realized I had walked into very familiar territory. I had done the walk of shame down this particular block more times than I cared to count.

If I had been sober, I would have ran away as fast as my legs could carry me and got my ass out of here. This was not a safe place for me, considering who lived in that particular blue house across the street. But I was feeling pretty damn sorry for myself at the moment, and the only person who always had my back no matter how awful I treated her just happened to live across the street.

Tanya.

I blame the alcohol in my system for what I did next.

I pulled out my phone and pushed a few buttons before putting the phone to my ear, and leaned casually against a tree.

"Hello... Edward?" It was amazing how her voice sounded so much better when I wasn't sober. It didn't sound like nails on a chalkboard, and it didn't make my balls want to crawl up into my body.

"Babe... watcha doin?" I smirked and tried my best not to slur my words.

"Ed-Edward?" she stuttered again.

"Watcha wearing?" I asked, ignoring her inability to say something coherent.

"Edward... you can't ignore me for days and call me a skank, and still think I'm up for your bullshit," she complained, but I could still hear that familiar undertone of hope in her voice.

This was Tanya in a nutshell. It didn't matter how much I pushed her away from me. She was like a kicked dog – she looked all sad and pouty when I was mean to her, but she always forgave me in the end even though I never asked for it. She was fucking obsessed with me, and if I had any sense of self-preservation, I would keep my distance from her. Alice kept telling me over and over again that I couldn't keep stringing her along like this and making her believe that we had some kind of future together. But sometimes I just needed a release, and Tanya just happened to be close. She didn't seem to mind, on the contrary, she actually seemed to really fucking enjoy it. She loved whatever attention I threw her way. So why the fuck couldn't that be enough for her? Why did she have to be all clingy and hope to be my girlfriend or some shit? She knew me better than that. She knew I didn't do girlfriends.

Frankly, if I did do girlfriends, then I wouldn't go for someone like Tanya.

Tanya wasn't girlfriend material, even I knew that. She was only good for one thing, and one thing only; she was an easy lay. Nothing else. She was a vapid and shallow bitch, nothing less, nothing more.

So why the hell was she pushing this damn girlfriend business?

"I'm in a really shitty place right now, alright? I just need somewhere to hang. You rather I call Jessica or Lauren? I'm sure either of them would be more than happy to meet my needs," I replied with a tired sigh. I wasn't fighting fair, I knew that, because that argument was always what pushed her over. She was quiet for a moment, probably contemplating if I was worth it this time. We both knew what her answer would be, so it was unnecessary for her to act like we didn't. I should have felt bad for basically treating her like a hooker, but – to be honest – she wasn't anything more to me. She should have known this too by now.

"Fine, whatever. You can come over. My parents aren't home right now anyway. It's just me and my sister... but I doubt she will be a problem," she said, and her voice rose a little in excitement.

Yeah, that was Tanya in a nutshell alright. She couldn't stay mad at me for any period of time to save her fucking life.

"Thanks, babe, I owe you one."

"You owe me a hundred," she replied with a huff before hanging up on me. I pushed myself away from the tree and walked up to the house. If Tanya annoyed me too much, I figured I could always go to the next room and cozy up with her sister.

It's not like I haven't done that before...

I rang the doorbell, and Tanya opened the door just a moment later. She looked surprised to see me.

"Okay, how the hell did you get here so fast? Where were you?" she asked confused.

"Oh, I was just standing across the street watching you..." I said and leaned forward with a smirk. She crinkled her nose at me and took a step back.

"Have you been drinking?" she asked incredulously. "It's like... four in the afternoon... on a *Thursday* !" I rolled my eyes at her, and she pursed her lips as she stepped aside so I could step in.

"When did you become such a goody-goody?" I asked her.

"You're such a douche," she sighed and turned to the stairs.

You got to love her for keeping up the pretense of being annoyed with me.

She wanted this more than I did, and she still had the nerve to pretend like she didn't. If that wasn't enough for me to want to cut her completely out of my life, I don't know what would be. Her fake persona was definitely the thing that bugged me most about her. But then again, I wasn't with her for her persona...

I followed her to her room on the second floor, and I pulled her to me as soon as the door was shut behind us. I didn't want to hear her say another word. I just wanted to have something else to think about for a while, and my own pleasure was just the right thing to get me in a better mood.

She made a moaning, squealing sound as I began nibbling on her neck and let my hands wander under her shirt. I was not about to waste any fucking time. I needed this. *Now* .

I hadn't had a fucking release since before the accident. It had been over a week. No wonder I was feeling so weird with that sick feeling in my stomach and that lump in my throat that sometimes didn't want to go away. I was in fucking sex withdrawal.

What else could it be?

"Edward... what happened to... *God* ..." she was already panting and unable to form any coherent sentences, and that was good. I didn't come here to hear her talk. I unbuckled the designer knock-off belt she was wearing and unzipped her pants. But before I even got

access to the Promised Land, she grabbed my hands and stilled any further movement. "Edward, seriously... What the hell has gotten into you?"

I groaned into her neck before leaning back and meeting her gaze. It was not a pretty sight to see her up close. Her skin was blotchy and caking with make-up and her eye lashes looked like thick, hairy spider legs because of the ridiculous amount of mascara that she had put on.

God, she's ugly . What the hell am I doing here again?

"I was hoping I would get into *you* , but if you insist on talking then maybe I should take my business elsewhere," I replied with a tired sigh.

"Oh baby... you're hurting... aren't you?" she cooed and put her hands on either side of my face. "If you need to talk, you know I'm here for you... you don't need to sleep with me in order for me to listen... I like to believe our relationship runs deeper than that..." I cringed at the mere sound of her saying so much in one single take.

"What relationship, Tanya? This isn't a fucking relationship," I said between clenched teeth.

"Oh, Edward... you always come to me when you've had a shitty day. You always come to me when you need a release. Hell, you always come to me... and you tell me this isn't a relationship? Admit it already. *You love me !*" she said excitedly and threw her arms around my neck and pulled me to her.

I was as still as a statue in her embrace and my mind was working overtime in order to process what the hell she had just said. My mind had a hard time wrapping around her delusions in a sober state as it was, so that bottle of Captain Morgan in my system wasn't really helping matters.

She thought I loved her ?

I quickly unwrapped her arms from around my neck and pushed her away. Any standing ovation going on in my pants was long gone. I would not have been surprised if I was left with a permanent impotence problem after this. The thought of ever loving Tanya was going to give me nightmares.

"Okay, that is fucking it," I muttered and turned towards the door.

"Oh, Edward... c'mon... don't be like that," she whined as she grabbed my arm and tried unsuccessfully to hold me back.

"Tanya, if you enjoy having full use of your arms, you should probably let the fuck go now," I said with an eerily calm voice as I stared her down with drunken eyes. She let her hands fall down to her sides, and then she narrowed her eyes at me.

"Yeah? And what are you going to do? Are you gonna run me over like you did Swan?" she taunted.

It's wrong to hit a woman. It's wrong to hit a woman. It's wrong to hit a woman...

I gritted my teeth to the point where I thought they would actually turn to dust, and my fists were tightly clenched by my sides. I glared at her, and something in my eyes must have frightened her because she took a step back and fiddled nervously with her hands.

"Maybe you should look twice before you cross the road next time," I growled before turning and leaving the room. I regretted the words as soon as they were spoken, but I didn't fucking care. She had it coming.

I quickly descended the stairs and walked out of the house. My angry walk wasn't as confident as I would have liked; instead it was somewhat wobbly. I didn't walk straight, and I almost tripped over a small rock on the ground. I never tripped, for crying out loud. I was no fucking Goose.

Fucking Captain Morgan.

It was all the alcohol's fault. I would never have called Tanya if I had been sober, and I would have been sober if I hadn't gone to Jasper...

Fucking Jasper.

It was his fault! He was the one who bought it and told me to come over. I had not been in any mood to go home because Dad was being a fucking pain in the ass...

Fucking Doctor Know-it-all Dad!

It was all *his* fault! If he hadn't pissed me off in the car and dragged me to Port Angeles to see my baby all bloodied up, then I wouldn't have felt the need to get drunk in the first place.

I stopped dead in my tracks and narrowed my eyes at nothing in particular when the realization hit me.

Fucking freak Goose!

It was all *her* fucking fault! Of course it was! If she hadn't been in the middle of nowhere for no reason at all, then I wouldn't have fucking maimed her, and if I hadn't maimed her, then my life would still be perfectly fucking fine.

I huffed and started walking again.

I reached a crosswalk, and I stepped out onto the street without a second thought. I jumped high when a car suddenly honked at me. I turned my head and felt my stomach drop.

Fuck me backwards with a rusty spoon.

Of all the people in this fucking town, of course the only person driving on these empty streets in this neighborhood was the last person on earth that I wanted to meet.

The door opened, and Chief Swan stepped out of the car, stalking up to me with all the authority in the world in his steps. He didn't trip or falter in his steps at all... for some reason I found that noteworthy, maybe he wasn't his daughter's father? Maybe the Goose was adopted.

Wouldn't surprise me. *What parent wouldn't give up that freak at birth?*

"Mr. Cullen, ever heard of looking both ways before crossing the goddamn street?" he asked darkly.

I couldn't help but laugh at that. Was he serious? I maimed his fucking daughter just a week ago, and he chose to chastise me for crossing a street without looking? That was fucking priceless.

"Something funny?" he asked, and it didn't go me unnoticed how he touched the gun in the holster on his belt.

"No, sir," I replied, but before I knew it, I was laughing like a mad man again. I laughed so hard my stomach hurt, and I had to bend over.

"Are you drunk?" he asked, and he sounded almost as incredulous as Tanya.

"Yes, sir," I replied as I tried to calm myself down, and not until I met his gaze did I realize that I had just admitted to underage drinking. *Wow, way to screw myself over .*

"Maybe I should drive your sorry ass home," he said and grabbed my arm. He pulled me to the car without even waiting for me to respond, and he all but threw me into the backseat before getting in behind the wheel again.

I sat up and tried to push back the wave of motion sickness that seemed to overwhelm me as soon as the car was set in motion.

"You puke. You clean. Got it?" the chief said and narrowed his eyes at me through the rearview mirror. I did a half-assed effort to roll my eyes, but that just added to the spinning that was already going on in my head.

I laid down on my side and groaned when the car shook as it hit a hole in the worn pavement. It was as if he wanted me to puke, just to see me suffer as I wiped that shit up. As if I would ever touch vomit - even if it was my own.

I must have passed out in the car. I'm not sure. But the next thing I knew I was roughly pulled out of the car again. Whoever pulled me out let go of me, and I stumbled a few steps before I regained my balance. I glared at the chief who was the only person in sight.

"Fuck you, you could have at least given me some warning," I muttered.

"Did you give my daughter some warning?" he retorted and glared at me with so much emotion that I had to look away.

"What is going on here? Chief Swan?" Mom's worried tone echoed through our yard, and I saw how she quickly descended the steps from the house and walked over to us. The crunching from the gravel under her feet sounded louder than it should, and I cringed at the sound. It reminded me of Tanya's voice and the thought of her made me cringe again.

Lesson of the day? Just because you don't need to be stuck in school for an entire day, doesn't mean the day can't turn out to be the epitome of *suckage* anyway.

My mouth tasted foul, and I was fucking hungry. I hadn't eaten since... breakfast? Wow, no wonder I felt like shit. I never drank on an empty stomach; even I knew that shit was stupid.

"I'm fucking hungry," I muttered and looked over at Mom. She was looking at me with that disappointed look in her eyes, which seemed

to be a permanent fixture on her face every time she looked at me nowadays.

"Dinner will be ready in an hour. Why don't you go upstairs and clean yourself up while I speak to Chief Swan," she suggested. I could tell she had to try hard to keep her tone all motherly, but she wasn't fooling anybody. The look said it all... and then some.

I didn't give them a second glance as I went up to the house.

If I were lucky I would make it up to my bed before I passed the fuck out.

" Edward Anthony Cullen!"

I groaned at the sound and put my pillow over my face, holding it against my ears to cover the noise.

" Carlisle... don't yell at him... it will only make things worse..."

My bedroom door swung open and slammed up against my wall with a bang. I heard the muffled sound of angry steps nearing the bed and suddenly the pillow was yanked away from me. Dad was hovering over me and glaring at me with a furious gaze.

"What the hell is wrong with you? Getting drunk and wandering the streets?" he yelled.

Mom tugged at his arm and let her gaze alternate between us. She looked very apprehensive. She had never been one for people yelling and fighting. Maybe that was why I've never gotten into any serious trouble before.

I crawled into sitting position and leaned back against the headboard of the bed.

"Nothing is wrong with me... I was just having some fun," I muttered.

He flung out his arms in frustration and pinched the bridge of his nose as he began pacing back and forth.

"You... who are *you* ?" he asked in frustration without looking at me.

"Carlisle, I don't think this is the time," Mom piped up. "I rather our son is sober when we have this conversation."

"Yes, Esme, I would love it, if that was possible. But I don't expect much from my son anymore, and I wouldn't be surprised if he began to be round-the-clock drunk just to get out of it," Dad replied angrily.

"I'm fine... let's have the conversation," I said calmly and clasped my hands in my lap as I looked at them. "I'm sober enough to hear whatever you have to say about me... do you want me to get you started? How about what a fucking disappointment I am and what a cold-hearted person I am... oh wait... you already told me that!" I smiled sweetly at them, and I almost felt bad when I saw the distraught look in Mom's eyes. It was safer for my sanity to look at Dad, because he just looked angry.

"Sweetie, we're not disappointed in you... we're just... disappointed in your *behavior* ," Mom said carefully and sat down gingerly on the edge of the bed. "You have always been an independent boy, and you have never been afraid to speak your mind. But sweetie, there is a limit for everything... the way you have been behaving for the last week is not you."

Suddenly my fingernails were very fascinating, and they needed my utmost attention.

"He doesn't care, Esme! Can't you see?" Dad exclaimed and looked at us with frustrated eyes.

"Of course he cares, " Mom argued and gave him an irritated glance before looking back at me with a sad smile on her face. "You're just scared, aren't you, Edward? The accident... and Isabel-"

"Mention her fucking name again and I'll really give you a reason to be disappointed in my behavior," I cut her off furiously. Mom flinched, and she put her hand to her mouth to stifle a gasp. Her eyes immediately filled with tears, and I turned away my gaze and looked out the window instead.

Why couldn't they just leave me alone? They had never given me much crap for anything I'd ever done before. They always used to leave me to fend for myself. So what was up with this sudden burst of... *parenting* ? I liked the way it was before. Why did everything have to change?

"You're grounded. Two weeks. No exceptions," Dad said sternly.

I held back a snort and settled on just shaking my head. If he thought that that was a punishment, then he was sadly mistaken. There was nothing that held me in the outside world anymore; everything was fucking ruined for me.

"Edward... maybe you should talk to someone," Mom suggested quietly.

I didn't bother to respond in any way at all. Not a sound, not a movement, not even a glance. Nothing. I kept my eyes fixated on the trees outside the window and kept my poker face on. I was sure that they would leave if I just stayed quiet and still long enough.

Everything would get back to normal if they would just leave me alone.

I guess they must have left at some point. I don't know how long I stared out the window, but my neck was a little stiff when I finally turned my head back to my room and found it empty.

I frowned as I looked down on my hands.

I could still feel the alcohol in my system. It would probably be a while before my body had processed it all, but I still felt oddly sober.

Or maybe I was just at that drunken state when you think you're sober, but you realize you're not as soon as you get behind the wheel.

Yeah, maybe I should test that theory.

Getting behind the wheel now would be such a great idea. If I was lucky, I might just maim another innocent girl or cripple an entire family. Yeah... that would be so awesome.

I closed my eyes and was immediately assaulted by the image of another innocent, now crippled, girl and blood... *lots and lots of blood* .

My stomach did a weird flipping motion, and I put my hand to my mouth to stop what I knew was on its way.

I quickly climbed off the bed and stumbled my way into the bathroom. I kneeled before the toilet, and I barely got the lid up before my stomach decided it was time to lose its contents. I held the sides of the toilet in a tight grip as I let my stomach release everything. My stomach was hurting when the dry-heaving began because my stomach had nothing left to lose. But I still felt sick and my body kept up the illusion of puking.

After a while, the feeling subsided, and I collapsed onto the cold tile floor and curled up into a ball. I touched my cheek, frowning as I looked at my fingers.

They were wet. *As if I had been crying* .

Edward Cullen does not cry.

Edward fucking Cullen does not cry.

Then why the hell were my cheeks wet, my body shaking and my breathing coming out in short gasps?

I rocked back and forth on the floor and squeezed my eyes shut in an attempt to keep any more unfamiliar wetness from leaving my eyes. All the while I chanted three words in my head.

I don't care... I don't care... I don't care...

The rest of the weekend went by without much incident, and that was mostly due to the fact that I didn't leave my room once – other than going down to the kitchen to grab something to eat. I didn't go to school on Friday and for some inexplicable reason neither of my parents bugged me about it. They left me pretty much alone – just as I wished – all day, and they didn't disturb me until dinner when Mom came up and asked me – through the door, I might add – if I was hungry. I grunted some incoherent response, and she left without another word.

She didn't ask me to dinner on Saturday or on Sunday either.

Emmett wasn't talking to me either, and that bugged me more than I wanted to admit. He used to be my best fucking friend and now he wasn't talking to me?

Well, fine. If that was how he wanted to play things, then who was I to argue?

I had been feeling eerily empty and hollow ever since I woke up on the bathroom floor early on Friday morning, stiff as a fucking board. My body screamed at me with each and every little move my body made. Most of my Friday was spent in bed, staring out that fucking window.

When Sunday evening rolled around, I had that fucking view memorized. It would be forever etched into my mind. What a pathetic way to spend a weekend.

At least I didn't cry anymore... that would have been more than pathetic, and I would have been forced to admit that Emmett was

right about me being a joke.

But as I thought of it, maybe it wasn't even real tears. I wasn't fucking crying like a girl. I had just puked my guts out for crying out loud, and eyes always water up when you puke and make it look like you cried... so that was probably it. As for the shaking, it was probably just due to the alcohol or the cold – the tiles had been fucking freezing. The under floor-heating must have been broken or something.

I dragged my sorry ass down to the kitchen on Monday morning. No matter how much I enjoyed wallowing in my own misery, I knew I had to get my ass out of the house if I wanted to keep my sanity. My room may be my haven, but there was only so much time I could spend there without going insane.

Mom smiled at me when I stepped into the kitchen, but I didn't even glance at her. I wasn't in the mood for her loving pep-talk. I saw in the corner of my eye how Emmett followed me with his gaze as he shoveled spoonfuls of cereal into his big mouth.

"Nice to see you up and about. Are you going to school today?" Mom asked softly and I nodded. "Well that's good... I'm sure you didn't miss too much when you were gone on Friday..."

"Yeah, because Edward is so serious about his studies, and I'm sure he's absolutely devastated that he missed an entire day," Emmett mocked, putting a hand to his heart and tilting his head as he pouted in the most ridiculous way. I glared at him, but he just glared back before he continued on with his cereal.

"Very well," Mom sighed as she brought her plate to the sink. "I'm going to Seattle for the day. You'll have to make your own dinner tonight... I'm sure you're devastated you'll have to order take-out." She chastely kissed my cheek when she passed me and smiled softly. "Be good today, Edward, please..." She was on the verge on pleading, and I reluctantly met her gaze and nodded.

"I'll be good," I mumbled, and she smiled sadly at me.

"That's my boy," she said quietly and gave me another peck on the cheek before leaving.

Emmett pushed his chair back and walked over to the sink to leave his plate. When he heard the front door close, he turned to me.

"Your ass is mine if you fuck up today," he said gravely.

"And what on earth would I fuck up today?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"Isabella will be back today, at least according to Alice. And if you pull any shit on her today I swear to fucking God I will rip your fucking nuts off, okay?" he continued still with that serious tone.

I wanted to roll my eyes at him and ask him where he kept his tampons, but something kept me from making the joke. Something in his tone stirred something in me, and I didn't like it one bit. The knot in my stomach was back.

I nodded slowly.

"Yeah... of course," I mumbled and his eyes widened slightly in surprise. I guess he was expecting some other kind of response from me.

"Well... okay then... good... awesome," he said as he looked a little baffled.

He gave me a weird look before leaving the kitchen, and I gripped the counter edge to steady myself.

This was going to be a long fucking day.

It felt like something shifted between me and Emmett on the way to school, like he had forgiven me or something. He still didn't talk to

me, but at least he gave me a ride, and that must count for something, right?

When we reached the parking lot, he had barely put the car in park and turned off the ignition before he jumped out and jogged away. I looked at him in confusion until I realized where he was going... or rather, towards which car he was going.

Fuck. I know that car.

The passenger door of the police cruiser opened, and the first thing I saw was an enormous leg. Before I knew it, the rest of the girl tumbled out of the car too. Luckily for her, I guess, Emmett was there to catch her before she fell flat on her face.

She looked utterly terrified at his close proximity, and I didn't blame her. He could be one scary dude. But it wasn't her terrified expression that stayed with me; it was the lack of strength in her demeanor. She looked so small and fragile, and there was nothing left of that scary kitten from the hospital. For some reason that pissed me the fuck off.

I had expected her to be strong.

I expected her to come back with a vengeance .

That would have made shit so much easier for me.

I watched how Emmett grabbed her bag and walked with her towards the school entrance. She seemed to struggle with her balance on the crutches. She really had shit cut out for her since people pushed her on purpose as they passed her on the steps.

I slowly climbed out of the car and shook my head as if the scenery would change and make more sense if I did that. But nothing changed. My brother still walked up the steps by her side and shot daggers at whoever dared to go near her again.

What the fuck is he doing?

I almost felt sick again. It was as if the mere sight of her made me sick, which of course, was kind of understandable seeing how she had managed to screw up my life in a matter of seconds.

I loathe that girl and everything she represents.

I stepped away from the car and made my way up to the school. People were whispering even more than they had before because she was back. When I finally thought people would forget all about it and move the fuck on already, she decided it was a good idea to come back and stir up the talk yet again.

Fucking Goose. She is going to be the death of me, I'm fucking sure of it.

The first few hours of school went by quicker than I thought possible. I spent my time doodling nothings in my notebook and not really paying any attention in class. None of my classmates gave me any shit either, but that wasn't so surprising. I bet they still remembered by that Newton incident and they wouldn't want to end up like him. I had a short temper; they knew that, and today was not the day to piss me off.

I passed Newton in the hallway on the way to the cafeteria, and he quickly stepped aside so he was nowhere near me when I passed. He looked utterly terrified when I glanced over at him, and I swear to God that he was on the verge of peeing his fucking pants.

Fucking loser .

When I reached the line to the cafeteria, I grabbed the first items I saw and paid for them, before walking over to my table. I frowned when I saw that only Jasper and Rose were sitting there. Though it wasn't the first time someone arrived late at our table, I still got a bad feeling about it.

"Sup guys, where are the pixie and the giant?" I asked and tried to keep my tone carefree and relaxed, as if I couldn't give a rat's ass.

"With the cripple," Rosalie replied coolly.

"Rose, c'mon... don't be so fucking blunt," Jasper sighed, and Rose rolled her eyes in response. I plopped down on my seat and scoffed as if it didn't bother me at all. Because it didn't... *I think* .

From my seat I had the perfect view of the other table where Alice and Emmett sat with Swan. I could tell Swan was fucking uncomfortable with them there, and she was probably too scared to tell them to go fuck themselves. She probably didn't want to offend them even though she didn't seem to want their fucking attention.

She looked beyond frustrated when Alice and Emmett began talking about something, and a moment later Alice had her pens ready to draw something on her cast. Swan smiled at Alice, but the smile did not reach her eyes.

While Alice drew on the cast, Swan let her eyes wander, and I could tell it wasn't until then that she realized their little group was quite the attention gatherer. She met my gaze momentarily, and I narrowed my eyes automatically.

I hated what I saw in those brown eyes of hers.

She looked fucking weak. Weak and fragile and just fucking... *broken* .

I did that to her.

The cast on her leg seemed so out of place on her small form. It was nothing short of a miracle that she could even operate those crutches, considering her nonexistent grace and balance.

But it wasn't her injury that caught my attention. It was her eyes.

I've never seen eyes like those before.

I've never believed that shit people say, that you can see a person's soul by looking into her eyes, that the eyes are the windows to our souls or whatever. But something told me I could see hers.

Or some shit like that.

There was an unshielded amount of pain and misery in them. As if she had experienced the greatest pain imaginable in the world, and that she had been to hell and back.

She was in pain. Unspeakable pain.

Something told me that it had nothing to do with me or the accident. Neither was the cause for her pain. It was something else... something bigger, and it made me hate her even more.

Fuck. I'm beginning to sound like a girl again.

"What do you think they're drawing on her cast?" Rose asked under her breath, as she tore her eyes away from her traitor-boyfriend. "A turkey or a goose?" I couldn't help but chuckle darkly at that.

"Maybe a cooked turkey with a thermometer shoved up its-" I said, but was cut off by Jasper.

"Oh, dude, that's uncool," Jasper complained and proceeded with leaning his elbows on the table and rubbing his temples.

Great, Jasper was about to enter the Jasper-mode. Just what I needed.

I shared a look with Rose, and she just shook her head.

"He's been like this the entire weekend..." she sighed. "As have Emmett and Alice... seriously, snap out of it already. I can't fucking take it anymore." Jasper glared at her, and she just stared back. Nobody ever won a staring contest against Rose. Jasper sighed and looked down on his tray and studied it as if it were the most fascinating thing he had ever seen in his life.

"I get why Alice is acting like Swan is her own personal charity project, but what the hell does my brother have to do with it?" I asked and Rose sighed deeply.

"I think that's a question better left unanswered... for your sake," she replied and cocked an eyebrow at me as she gave me a pointed look. I groaned and pushed away my tray. Her response answered the question better than the real answer. He was my brother after all, and I knew him better than anyone. Therefore I pretty much knew why the hell he did it. I didn't even need to ask in the first place.

He did it out of guilt .

"He thinks he owes her," I stated and Rose half-shrugged.

"Pretty much," she agreed at the same time as the bell rang. "Well, this was fun. Let's never do this shit again, okay?" She gave us a wide, fake smile before gathering her stuff and stalking out of the room. I followed her with my eyes and turned to look at Jasper.

"Emmett won't even talk to me." I sighed and Jasper shook his head.

"I'm not getting involved. That shit is between the two of you," he replied curtly.

"Dude, c'mon, you can't leave me stranded like this," I complained, and he shot me a blank look.

"I get where you're coming from, Ed, I really do, but I also get where Emmett is coming from. And I'm not about to pick a side in this fucking mess. Consider me Switzerland, alright?" he said. I groaned and nodded.

"Whatever, dude," I said with a sigh.

We parted ways in the hallway, and I went by my locker before making my way to the next class. I walked over to Newton and Lauren who were already sitting together by a table in the back. I

plopped down on an empty chair and put my books on the table. I grabbed my notebook and a pen and began doodling. There was no way in hell that I was about to participate in the lamest project ever.

"*Ah, Miss Swan, welcome back...*" I stiffened in my seat and I almost broke the pencil in my hand. I had managed to forget that Swan was in my fucking group, and according to the current conversation between her and Mr. Melina she was not about to switch groups either.

Fuck. My. Life.

I frowned and tried to control the irrational anger that was beginning to stir inside of me. I focused purely on the doodling I was doing, though it had become more of a drawing by this point.

The front tire needs a little more shadow....

I let my hand do all the work, and I tried to relax and ignore my surroundings completely. But when Swan pulled out the only remaining seat at our table, my eyes decided to betray me. I locked eyes with her and I gritted my teeth automatically. Some part of me almost wanted to growl at her like a fucking animal.

We didn't lock eyes for long, but it was long enough. I didn't like having her this damn close because up close her eyes were even more expressive, and I didn't like it one bit. I didn't want to see or know what the hell she was feeling.

She quietly asked if someone could fill her in on what we had worked on for the past week, and I almost wanted to snort at that. Maybe I should ask the same thing, because I had no fucking idea either even though I had been to almost every class last week.

"If you bothered to come at all last week, then you would know," Lauren sneered.

Was she stupid or did she honestly think she was funny? I sighed inaudibly and kept on sketching.

There needs to more shadows over here too... there had been a fallen tree beside the road...

"Oh, I'm sorry," Swan replied with a sickly sweet and mocking tone. "I was stuck in the hospital having surgery." I almost dropped my pen at that. Appearances can be deceiving; she might look fragile and weak, but that spark from the hospital seemed somewhat intact. She could obviously fend for herself if she needed too, even though there was no doctor there to save her... or maybe she was counting on Mr. Melina for that this time.

"I think you're exaggerating. I bet you were home eating Bon-Bon's and watching soaps all day, just so people would feel sorry for you," Lauren continued with a snort. "We all know the accident was your fault. Besides, you don't look that hurt. What did they operate on? Your brain?"

I snapped my head up and stared at Lauren. *What the fuck did she just say?* Did she just trivialize the accident and the consequences of it? Lauren looked oddly hopeful as she met my gaze, and I wondered what the hell she was trying to prove. Did she think I was going down on one knee and propose to her just because she defended my honor or whatever it was she was trying to do?

Well, Lauren, you have another thing coming...

"Shut up, Lauren," I snarled, and my anger was barely kept at bay. "Don't talk about things you know nothing about."

Her face fell, and she quickly looked down. I almost wanted to hiss "Good girl" at her. I put my focus back on the notebook in front of me, but I couldn't find it in me to continue to draw. The picture was fucking done. The scenery the way it should have been.

I was momentarily lost in the picture, and it almost felt like I was there ... *again* .

It felt like I stared at the picture for an eternity before the pen began moving aimlessly again. The shadows became darker; the contours more pronounced and the blood smoother.

Every time the pen moved to the picture of *her*, my eyes lifted and met Swan's. For some reason it was important to get every detail right. *I fucked up* . I knew that. It felt like if I at least managed to get this picture right, then it would be okay.

"Okay, we're gonna go to the library and check up on the marriage stats. You guys can proofread this and add whatever you see fit," Newton said. Lauren shot Swan an irritated look as she passed her, and Swan rolled her eyes before continuing whatever it was she was doing with her notebook. She didn't reach for the notes, which I had expected she would.

Didn't Miss Goody-Goody-Goose care about her grades anymore?

"What? You're not gonna check up on the work?" I asked, my voice low and dark. She met my gaze and looked a little surprised at the fact that I had even addressed her. The surprised look in her eyes was soon replaced with something that resembled determination, but it was clouded with something else too.

"No, I trust that whatever crap they come up with is enough for us to pass this assignment," she replied quietly. I cocked an eyebrow at her, and she continued to look me straight in the eyes without batting an eye. I wanted to smirk at her sad attempt to appear indifferent.

"You shouldn't trust people especially those who aren't your friends," I continued. I could tell by the look in her eyes that she knew exactly what I was talking about. This wasn't about the assignment anymore. It was about those two traitors who drew on her cast. I had to resist the urge to ask her to pull her pant leg up so I could see what the hell they had drawn.

"Whatever you're doing, it isn't working," she mumbled so quietly I almost missed it entirely.

"And what exactly am I doing?" I asked calmly and kept my eyes on her. But she did not return my gaze or bother to respond, she just kept her eyes on the notebook in front of her. This irritated me to no end. She couldn't fucking say shit like that and think I would let it go.

I snatched the notebook from her and almost threw it against the wall in the process. She frowned in irritation as she finally met my gaze. For some reason it made me think of kittens. You know when they try to act all tough and scary, but just look pathetic.

If a kitten can ever be pathetic that is, but whatever. You know what I mean.

"I have no homework written in there, so there's nothing for you to steal," she muttered. I cocked my head to the side as I stared at her in disbelief.

"And what is that supposed to mean?" I was not able to keep the condescending tone from my voice, and I frankly didn't care. If she wanted to speak in riddles, that was her choice.

"Oh, God, how stupid are you? Do you steal other people's homework so often that you can't even keep them apart?" she blurted angrily and I wanted to laugh at the ridiculous expression on her face. She looked so... *angry* .

"What the hell are you talking about?" I asked. I really didn't know what she was getting at. "Have you hit your head or something?" I was just about to laugh at her for being so pathetic when I realized what the hell I had just said. The knot in my stomach was back with a vengeance, and it twisted in the most awkward way.

The question didn't go unnoticed by her either, and she narrowed her eyes at me.

"Why yes, Edward, I have," she replied with a calm and collected voice.

"So I've heard," I mumbled and turned my gaze down.

Wow, you really put her in her place with that one, ey, Cullen?

Shut up.

She might not have been my favorite person in the world, but I didn't need to throw shit in her face like that. It was not a good way to go about things if I intended to forget all about it anytime soon. This way the only thing I succeeded, was to remind myself even further about what a fucking screw up I was.

I retraced all the lines in my drawing over and over again, to the point where my pen almost pierced the paper. At the moment, it was the only thing keeping me from breaking down.

A sudden noise got my attention, and I looked up at Swan. I frowned when I saw her face contorted in pain. She was squeezing her eyes shut, and she was breathing in that stupid way that people do when they're in labor. I couldn't tear my eyes off of her even though I didn't want to see this. It was as if I was witnessing something private, something that should not be seen by other people.

The pain must have subsided because her breathing returned to normal, and she slowly opened her eyes and blinked a few times. She locked eyes with me almost immediately, and she looked irritated when she did.

"Take a picture. It'll last longer," she spat. I furrowed my brows and wondered what the hell I was supposed to respond to that. She was right after all. I had no reason to look at her like that or look at her at all for that matter.

"If you're trying to make me feel bad for you, then don't bother. I don't fucking care about you," I said with a collected voice. I leaned back

in my seat and crossed my arms over my chest, to show her that she wasn't getting to me. If this was her way of getting back at me, then she had another thing coming.

"I'm not trying anything," she replied and looked at me incredulously. "Oh, and don't worry, I know better than to think you would ever care about anyone other than yourself." She sighed and was quiet for a moment before she continued, and when she did, it was in a quiet and apprehensive voice. "But for what it's worth... I'm sorry."

Fuck. No.

Now she was obviously messing with me by trying to push my buttons. Suddenly I didn't feel so bad for making that comment about her head. *Fucking Goose*. Who the hell did she think she was? She flinched when I glared at her, and I took silent pride in that.

You should be scared.

"What the hell are you apologizing for?" I hissed and clenched my teeth. She flinched again at my tone, and she looked utterly terrified.

"For the accident," she replied, and she almost sounded confused, as if she didn't know what the hell she was apologizing for and was just taking a wild guess.

That was fucking it for me.

"Fuck you, Goose," I snapped. I pushed my chair back. It fell to the floor with a loud bang, but I didn't fucking care as I stalked out off the room.

"Fucking Goose...thinks she knows everything...thinks she can act like she's all superior by apologizing when she fucking knows it wasn't her fucking fault... fucking Goose... fuck..."I muttered inaudibly to myself.

I was halfway to my locker when I realized I had forgotten my books. I groaned loudly, and the sound echoed through the empty halls.

Fuck. My. Life. Indeed.

I wavered between the choices of going back and getting my shit or just leaving it be and hoping it ended up in a dumpster somewhere. But I figured that if I didn't go back and get my shit then Swan would probably end up taking them for me. She would once again show me what a *great* and *sympathetic* person she was. Exactly what I needed. *Another fucking reminder* .

I growled as I turned back to the classroom and stalked back in. People looked at me, but I didn't even glance at them.

Fuck them. Fuck all of them .

When I reached our desk, I saw that Swan was looking at my notebook. I froze in place and stared at her wide eyed. Who the fuck did she think she was, looking through my private shit like that?

She was tracing the lines of the drawing with her finger, and it pissed me off.

I snatched the notebook from under her eyes and her head snapped up.

"Don't. touch. my. stuff." I said slowly, punctuating every word as her eyes widened.

"I-I... I'm sorry, I didn't mean to... it was just... you're good..." she replied lamely and I rolled my eyes.

"Good? What the fuck are you on? What the hell did my dad prescribe you? This is not *good* . But I can see why the hell you would think that," I trailed off and gripped the edges of the desk to steady myself. My head was fucking spinning, and I was sick to my fucking stomach. I couldn't even see straight. The anger was fading

from my system and was slowly replaced by something else entirely. My body was fucking shaking, and I had a hard time breathing properly. Since when was it so hard to get oxygen into your lungs? It wasn't damn rocket science. It was the most natural fucking thing in the world. *So why was it suddenly so hard?*

"Edward... are you okay?" Swan's voice sounded as if it came through a tunnel, and I slowly looked up to meet her gaze. She even had the nerve to look worried for me.

For *me* . How dare she?

"Peachy," I replied in what came out as a whisper.

She frowned as she pushed her chair back. She reached for her backpack and put away her books. She awkwardly put on the backpack and steadied herself on her crutches.

"Maybe you should go get some air," she said tentatively.

It almost sounded as if she was suggesting we would go together. As if I would ever go anywhere with the Goose.

"Not with you," I hissed.

She gave me a tired look and tilted her head to the side.

"I wasn't suggesting that," she replied calmly. "I was suggesting you should go out. You're pale as a ghost, and you look like you could use some fresh air."

"I maimed you with my car," I hissed quietly. "Why the hell would you care about what I need?"

She smiled sadly at me and looked me steadily in the eyes. We stood there, just looking at each other for what felt like an eternity before she answered.

"Because I'm not the only one who's hurting."

Disposable

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 18 – Disposable

Isabella Swan POV

I decided that I was not going to blame Edward. I was going to be the bigger person and accept the situation as it was. *It was nothing but an accident* . I would gain nothing by blaming it all on him; it was not like he could have prevented the accident anyway. Black ice could be a bitch, even I knew that. He didn't hurt me on purpose, and therefore, there was no reason for me to hold a grudge.

That was why I apologized to him. I wasn't sorry for causing the accident; I was sorry for what he had been forced to go through because of it. The accident was neither of our faults, and I was certain he knew and believed that too... *somewhere deep inside* .

I couldn't even begin to relate to his situation. Even though we were both part of the same accident, he was still the one who had to carry the heavier burden. He was the one behind the wheel after all.

That was probably why I tried to make everything okay with him. I felt like I needed him to know I was sorry. However crazy it may sound; I *needed* him to forgive me. I might not like him, he most certainly didn't like me, but I still felt that crazy need. It was as if it wasn't even about him anymore. I just needed to fix something and make

something okay. I knew I could never fix my past with my mother, but I could fix *this* .

It looked like he was in a lot of pain; he even had to grip the desk in order to keep upright. At that moment I didn't care about what a jerk he usually was, because I knew all about emotional pain and scars. I wouldn't wish that kind of pain on anyone, not even on my worst enemy, which in some ways just happened to be Edward.

The words tumbled out of my mouth before I got a chance to think them through. It was something in Edward's eyes that brought them out, and I could see in them that I had just made a mistake. A *huge* mistake. A mistake I was about to pay for.

Great . Here I was trying to apologize and let him know I knew he was hurting too and what do I get? *Another glare and probably another nickname if I'm lucky* .

"*You're not the only one who's hurting?*" Edward echoed incredulously and piled his books on the desk. "Do you even hear yourself? That must be the most ridiculous thing I've ever heard. I won't even dignify that shit with an answer." He scoffed and shook his head.

"Why? Because it's true?" I asked, and he cocked an eyebrow at me.

"Don't flatter yourself, Goose. Why would I be hurting? I have everything going for me. My life is fucking awesome and is nothing like the pathetic existence that is *your* life," he replied with a sickly sweet voice, which was far more insulting than if he had snapped at me. I furrowed my eyebrows and brought my bottom lip into my mouth. That comment hit a little too close to home for me to just shrug it off, and I could see in his eyes that he knew that too.

That's why he said it, stupid .

"I don't know about you," I continued quietly. "But if I...if I... you know what? Never mind." I shook my head at my own stupidity. Why was I

torturing myself like this? I would never be able to fix this no matter what I said, so why the hell was I even trying?

I wobbled away towards the door and out into the hallway. I thought that would be the end of it and I could get out of the conversation with my pride somewhat intact. Of course I was wrong like so many times before. I hadn't gone far before I heard calm and collected footsteps behind me.

"But *what*?" Edward asked in a frustrated tone as he fell into step beside me. I glanced at him and had to hold back the snort that threatened to escape. Why did he look so frustrated? Was he really so used to getting the last word that it pained him that he didn't get it this time too?

"I'm just saying that it's like you said. You... *maimed* me," I said quietly, and I had a hard time getting the word out because it sounded so wrong, as if the blame was all on him. "And if it had been me behind the wheel, then I know I would have surely been hurting... because it must be a difficult thing to live with..." I was nearly whispering at this point, and I was feeling very self-conscious about having him so close with no other people around. I could almost feel the warmth radiating off of his body.

I glanced at him from the corner of my eye and noticed that a weird half-smirk was gracing his lips. He glanced at me too, and I quickly looked away. The smirk along with the cold stare sent chills down my spine. I should have kept my mouth shut.

"If you ran over a bird with your car... would you be hurting then?" he asked with a casual tone. I frowned at the random question and shrugged awkwardly in response.

"I don't know... I guess? I would feel bad, of course... but I don't know if I would really be hurting because of it," I replied honestly while wondering what the hell that had to do with anything. "If the bird was injured but not dead, then I would feel really bad about it, since there isn't much one can do if you injure a bird... it would have

to be put down... so I guess I would feel worse if the bird lived rather than if it died. If it died, then at least it wouldn't be suffering anymore." I knew I was rambling, but for some reason I felt the need to answer the question honestly and seriously, without any jokes.

I threw another glance at him and saw that he was still smirking. But now the smirk was twisted in an odd way and his face held a mixture of different emotions. I didn't know what to make of it at all; it was as if he was satisfied with my answer but at the same time disgruntled.

"Then you understand why the fuck I'm not hurting. Because all I did was hit a fucking bird, and the bird didn't even die," he replied darkly. I stopped dead in my tracks and stared at him in bewilderment.

Was that what he meant by that?

He took another few steps before he realized I had stopped. He slowly turned to look at me. His face still held that twisted smirk, but for some reason it appeared to be forced, like he had a hard time keeping his cocky and arrogant mask in place.

"So you're basically telling me you wish I had... *died*?" I managed to choke out.

"I'm telling you that I wouldn't have cared either way. You're the Goose. You're a bird. You are *disposable* ." His voice was emotionless and monotone. It sounded like he was reciting something from a book and it didn't matter if he believed it or not. As if this was the truth and there was nothing he could do about it.

"I'm... I'm..." I was at a loss for words. I was literally speechless as I was struck by the weird sense of déjà vu. I had heard those exact words before. He was not the first one to utter them to me.

She smiled at me as I gnawed on my lip. I didn't know what was going on and I didn't like it. She lit another candle, and it was apparently one of those strawberry scented ones because the strong

scent hit me like a ton of bricks. The scent was way too strong, and it was stinging my nose.

" This is going to be great," she murmured to herself. "Everything is going to be exactly like I always imagined." She looked up at me with a serious expression, and I felt my stomach drop. "You are clean, aren't you, Bella?" I didn't know what to say because I didn't know what she was asking me. So I did the only sensible thing; I nodded because that seemed to be the answer she was looking for.

She was smiling as she picked up the sharp kitchen knife from the table. It shone in the light from the candles and the sight sent chills down my spine. I did not want to know what she needed the knife for; there was no food at this table. I wrapped my arms around my legs as I sat on the floor, and I glanced over at Billy Black, who was sitting in his wheelchair a few feet away. He was smiling too.

" Don't worry, Renée. She's clean... and if she's not, that's okay too. She's disposable," Billy replied in an eerily calm and quiet voice. I shot my eyes to my mom in bewilderment. What did that mean exactly? That I was disposable ?

" Mom... what's going on? I don't like this," I said in a shaky whisper and felt a traitorous tear fall down my cheek. I was scared. No, I was beyond scared. I was terrified. I didn't like this.

" Sssh, baby girl," she cooed. "It's all going to be okay...don't worry... we love you, we won't let any harm come to you."

I met her gaze, and I winced at what I yet again found in her eyes. Her eyes were so empty. Her pupils were even more dilated than before, now to the point where you could no longer see her irises at all. There was no emotion in her eyes. She wasn't looking at me like a mother gazes at her daughter. She was looking at me as if I was a stranger to her. Her words of affection did not match the emotionless pools that were her eyes. And never in my life had I been more terrified.

" Jacob... please wrap this scarf around her eyes," Mom said.

Jacob, who had been standing in the doorway for the entire time, took a shaky step forward. The terror I felt was mirrored in his eyes. He took the scarf from my mom's hands, and he met my gaze before he wrapped the thing around my eyes.

" I'm sorry," he said with a pained voice. "I'm so, so sorry."

I choked at the memory and tried to shake my head to clear my mind from it. Edward was still standing in front of me with that emotionless expression. I almost flinched at the way he reminded me of my mother.

Edward was right. Billy was right. *They were all right .*

I am disposable.

If even the person who gave life to me thought that, then it must be true, and I should not have been surprised when Edward shared that particular opinion.

Was it an *opinion* or was it a *fact* ?

Of course it's a fact.

Nobody had ever given me a reason to think otherwise.

Why am I still here, again?

"You... I... I got to go," I mumbled. I turned on my crutches and walked back the other way. He grumbled something under his breath, and I thought he was going to let me leave. I should have known better, considering this was Edward – and his sole purpose in life was to make my life miserable - he spoke up before I could turn the corner.

"Fuck," he growled. "That's not what I fucking meant!"

I stopped and turned my body a little, but not enough so I was facing him.

"Then what did you mean?" I asked in a quiet voice. He sighed deeply and strode over to me with calculated steps. He dug his hands deep into the pockets of his jeans, and his shoulders slumped. I could tell by his stance that he was stiff as a board.

"Let's get one thing straight, alright?" he began, and I nodded uncertainly. "You're the Goose, and you're nothing but the Goose to me, alright?" I nodded again. "I'm not fucking hurting because of what happened, but I am fucking annoyed that people won't let that shit go. I hit a patch of black ice, so fucking what? It could have happened to anyone. And it was just fucking unfortunate that you happened to be in the way. Alright? I don't wish you died, because then I could be convicted for fucking manslaughter or some shit. I wouldn't want to go to jail and become someone's bitch just because I ran over a bird!" He had pulled his hands from his pockets and gestured wildly as he spoke, though his body still appeared to be stiff and tense. The situation was aggravating him to no end, I could tell. I had never considered myself a good judge of character or a people reader, but there was something about Edward and the way he said things that made me wonder who he was trying to convince. Me or him?

I studied Edward as he spoke, and the thing I noticed the most was how he kept dragging his right hand through his hair and how his eyes darted all over the place. He didn't look at me at all. I wondered why that was. Was he afraid someone would catch us and somehow get the wrong idea?

"I'm not a bird," I said calmly when he was done and stared at him with all the confidence I could muster – which, frankly, wasn't much. Edward scared me, especially when he was talking like this. He was unpredictable, and he was violent. During an earlier class, I had overheard a couple of students talking about how Edward had knocked Mike down just because he made some stupid comment about the accident. Therefore, it was impossible for me to know what

to expect from Edward. Was he going to punish me too for even putting him in this situation to begin with?

I could delude myself into thinking I was not afraid of him until I was blue in the face. But the reality was that I was scared of him, no matter how much I tried to ignore it.

"You're the Goose," he replied simply.

"No."

He cocked an eyebrow at me, and I pursed my lips.

"No?" he echoed, and I nodded.

"Yes. No." I replied and shook my head at how stupid I sounded. He shook his head too, and I swear he let out a quiet chuckle. But the small smile that accompanied it disappeared quickly as he met my gaze. The cold mask was back and all the humor was gone.

"You ruined my fucking life, you know that?" he said with a quiet and dark tone.

I knew that was true to an extent. I had told him I was sorry, but I still had a hard time grasping how he could say that to my face like that.

Who was the one wearing the cast, again?

It was not a conscious act on my part, but I found myself bending over slightly, knocking on my cast with a finger. The sound echoed in the empty hallway, and Edward looked down on it.

"I ruined your life, you say?" My voice was quiet and held more emotions than I was comfortable with. "My leg is crushed, and I'm in pain. And you still say I ruined *your* life? What exactly did I ruin anyway? Your car? I'm sorry, but as far as I know you can always replace a car. I can't really replace my leg." He narrowed his eyes at me, and his nostrils flared as he held back his anger.

"Again, Goose , you say that as if I care about you. I don't. All I care about is how this screwed up my life. My parents are on the fucking verge on disowning me. My brother won't talk to me and my friends think I'm a jerk! So excuse me if I don't care about your fucking leg!" he snapped.

That was it? Was that how I had screwed up his life? Really? At least he had parents that cared enough to disown him! At least he had a brother! At least he had *friends* !

I didn't know what to say. He had yet again left me speechless.

"You're... you're cold. I know you don't like me, and that you think I'm some kind of vermin or something... but if it had been me behind the wheel, then I sure as hell would have cared if I had crippled someone for life. No matter how I felt for that person before... because that's the human and considerate thing to do. All you care about is yourself and how this is affecting you. You don't even begin to think about how this is affecting me. Your life will go back to normal. Mine won't." I felt my voice grow weaker with each passing word, until I was simply whispering. My voice was weak and fragile and it took a lot of effort for me to even get the words out. How could he be so heartless?

"This is all your fault," he spat, "because if you hadn't been in the middle of nowhere for no reason at all, then this wouldn't have fucking happened. What the hell were you doing out there anyway? Shouldn't you have been home doing whatever birds like you do? Like eating seeds or some shit?"

What was I doing out there? That was the million dollar question wasn't it? What exactly was my plan that night that led me to that empty road where my truck broke down?

Did Edward deserve to know? Would it make a difference?

I gnawed on my lip and looked down.

"I was making the world a better place," I mumbled and turned away from him. I didn't want to have this conversation anymore. I didn't want to give Edward any more ammunition in his quest to bring me down.

He had other plans, however, and he grabbed my arm roughly and turned me to him. I was prepared to see the hatred and contempt in his eyes but I saw neither.

"Did you jump in front of my car?" he asked. I was surprised by the emotion in his voice. It wasn't cold and menacing at all. In fact, he sounded... *scared* . There was a sense of desperation in his tone, as if his life was hanging on the answer to the question. Like he didn't already know. How could he not know?

I slowly shook my head.

"No, I didn't... but right now I kind of wish I did," I replied honestly. He dropped his grip on my arm as if he had burned himself and nodded.

"Yeah, maybe you should have," he agreed with an empty tone. "It's like you said... it's easier if the bird died. So you don't need to see it suffer."

That was his parting line because as soon as the words left his lips he turned on his heels and walked away. I followed him with my eyes for a moment, before turning too and walking the other way.

Edward was right . *I should have died.*

I swear I could almost feel something break apart in my chest. Even though that would have been impossible - it had to be some kind of phantom pain. There was nothing in my chest that could break. I had no heart. I was disposable after all and no one with a heart could ever be disposable.

I felt my steps waver, and I had a hard time keeping upright. I stumbled into a locker and stopped trying to force my feet forward. I leaned my body against the locker, while my body shook in silent and tearless sobs. I closed my eyes and tried to breathe through the pain, but this time it was nearly impossible.

This wasn't a physical pain; this was an emotional one, and no breathing in the world could make it pass. Everything was too overwhelming. My chest ached, and it felt as if I was breaking apart. Piece by piece.

" Bella... Bella... look at me... Isabella Marie Swan! Look at me!" Mom was yelling at me now and it felt like her voice came from all around me. I tried to keep my head upright, but it felt like I didn't have any bones left in my neck. How did she expect me to look at her when I couldn't even see her with this thing covering my eyes?

I felt lips against my wrist. If I hadn't known any better, I would have believed my mom was kissing me. But I knew better. Even in my dizzy state, I knew better.

" It's not working," she complained.

" Give it time," Billy replied calmly. "It can take days..."

" But there's no difference!" she continued to complain.

" Patience, Renée," Billy chided. "Give it time."

She sighed deeply, and I winced when I once again felt the cold edge of the knife slice my skin. It did so effortlessly, as if my skin was nothing but butter. She must have sharpened it beforehand, I thought.

" Oh, Bella, what a mess you've made," Mom said, and I felt her dab something cold on my fresh wounds. "But it will be alright. It's for your own good..."

" Mom... please... stop... I... I don't feel so good." I tried to keep the whining to a minimum, but at this point I was desperate. The pain from the cuts was beginning to make me really dizzy, and it hurt even though there was a weird dulling sensation radiating from where she dabbed me with the cold cloth.

" Jacob... Jake," I said, but the words came out in a slur. I needed Jacob. He could help me. He could take me to the hospital. I needed the hospital.

" Jacob is otherwise occupied at the moment," Mom said to me firmly. "And please, Bella, be quiet. You're ruining everything. It's like you don't even have a heart."

Somewhere in the back of my mind, I silently registered that the bell was ringing. I was not back from my memory though, until I felt someone tug at my arm. I slowly opened my eyes and locked gazes with Alice.

"You alright?" she asked in concern. I smiled grimly and shook my head. "What is it? Is it your leg? Are you in pain? You want me to take you to the nurse? I can drive you home." Her words came out in a rush, and she almost sounded panicked. I just kept shaking my head.

"I'll be fine. I just need a moment here," I said with a weak voice.

"Are you sure? You look kind of pale," she noted.

"Yes, I'm sure," I said. "Don't you worry about me... worry about Edward instead."

Alice frowned and pursed her perfect, glossy lips.

"No, I'm not going to worry about him at all, because he's not the one on the verge of passing out in the middle of the hallway at the moment," she commented.

"Might be so, but he's still your friend and I am not," I sighed and pushed myself from the locker and steadied myself on my crutches. "Thanks for your concern, but it's not *my* well being you should be worried about."

I wobbled away and silently thanked my lucky stars that she didn't follow me. I went directly to the next class without passing my locker and took my usual seat in the back. I put my backpack on the empty seat next to mine and picked up my notebook. I turned to a blank page and put it down on my desk.

All I could see - even though the page before me was blank - was the drawing that Edward had made. An eerily beautiful, yet scary, drawing of the accident. The details were exquisite, and it had appeared as though every detail had been put down with utmost care and attention. Nothing had been drawn randomly and everything served a purpose.

Maybe that was why it was so scary. While the drawing undoubtedly was a picture of the accident – there was a few details that were changed.

My car might have been there and his car might be beaten up with blood on the hood. Every detail suggested it was our accident – but it wasn't, because my body wasn't the one lying on the road.

It was his.

His eyes had been open, and his face had been drawn so realistically that it felt as if he was looking right at me. I had been so mesmerized by this that I almost missed that he had drawn me too.

I was sitting behind the wheel of the Volvo. My face was partly shadowed by the broken windshield. My face had been drawn with so much care and attention to detail that it was scary. My eyes were big and expressive, and I could almost feel the fear behind them.

The only thing that had felt out of place was the single tear on my cheek.

And he said he wasn't hurting?

Who was he trying to kid with drawings like that? It was as if he didn't even want to acknowledge that the accident had occurred in the first place. The boy was in denial, no doubt about it.

I had been so lost in thought, as I stared down on the blank page, that I didn't notice that class had started until the bell rang, signaling the end of class. I looked up in confusion and saw my classmates leaving the classroom. I quickly gathered my things and wobbled my way out.

The halls were full with the roaming of students, and I was pushed around quite a lot, even though I tried to avoid it by walking as near the walls as I could.

I didn't pay any attention to what I put in my bag when I reached my locker; I just wanted to get the hell out of there. I followed the stream of students towards the parking lot. I tried to spot the cruiser, but it was nowhere in sight.

I guess Dad's not here yet .

I leaned against the stone wall and watched as all the other students said goodbye to their friends and got into their cars.

"Isabella, do you want a ride?" I jumped in surprise at Emmett's sudden voice so close to my ear. I winced at the pain that radiated from my leg when I moved so suddenly. Emmett saw this, of course, and he frowned a little. "Sorry," he said and wrinkled his nose in an adorable way.

"It's okay," I replied automatically.

"So do you want a ride? We have room," he asked again, and I shook my head.

"My dad is picking me up," I replied and forced him a smile.

"You *sure* ?" he asked with a grin. I bit my lip and looked away – just to be met by the sight of Edward. Edward was standing by Emmett's car, which was parked not too far from where we were standing. He was looking at me – not glaring for once – with a frown on his face.

"I think your brother is waiting for you," I said quietly instead of answering his question. Emmett threw a look over his shoulder and scoffed.

"Let him wait, it's not like he's going anywhere without me anyway," he replied and turned back to me. "So... no ride?" I shook my head again.

"No, but thanks."

"Anytime, little one, anytime. See ya tomorrow. Don't get into any more accidents, alright?" He joked with a wink. I chuckled and shook my head at his silliness.

"I'll try," I joked back with a small smile. "But I can't promise anything."

He let out a loud laugh, which made a couple of passing students jump in surprise, which in turn made him laugh even more.

"Well alright there, Isabella... Bella... can I call you Bella?" he asked and I was a little taken aback by the question. Nicknames were for friends and family only, not for people who didn't even know you existed until a week ago.

"Eh... I don't... No... I rather... no," I stuttered uncomfortably.

"Okay then, Isabella it is. See ya tomorrow," he agreed, not seeming bothered at all by my answer. He grinned at me as he walked away

towards Edward, and I sighed in relief at finally being alone again.

The parking lot was slowly being emptied of cars and people, and soon there was none. I was the only one left. There was still no sight of Dad or the cruiser. I had called him, both to his cell and his work phone, but it went directly to voicemail. A normal person would have begun to worry that maybe something had happened to him, but that was the last thing running through my head at the moment. All I could think about was how frustrating it was to wait for him, and I began to wonder if he had forgotten all about me. For some reason that felt more likely than that something had happened to him. This was Forks after all, what the hell could have happened to him in this town? Did he get attacked by a wolf? I don't think so.

The first thirty minutes went by pretty fast, but after a while it began to get a little chilly. My jacket did nothing to keep out the cold. I glanced at the clock again and saw that it had almost been an hour since he was supposed to pick me up.

I grabbed my crutches with a deep sigh and began my walk down the empty parking lot towards the road. I had no other choice but to walk home now. There were no buses that went by my house, and I could not afford a cab either.

Walking with crutches down the road proved to be quite a challenge; it was nowhere near as simple as walking indoors. The ground was too uneven and it was nothing short of a miracle that I was even able to move forward without falling flat on my face; especially since I tripped every other step I took and my death grip on my crutches was the only thing keeping me from falling.

I tried to find a rhythmic pace that worked for me, just like at school, but it was impossible due to the uneven ground. It took me almost fifteen minutes to walk just two short blocks. At this speed, it would take me a week to get home – if I was lucky.

"You're trying to kill me, right? Is that what this is about?"

I froze mid-step at the sudden voice and turned my head towards the sound. Edward stepped in front of me, and I took an awkward step back.

"Excuse me? But I'm just walking here," I said, my voice laced with irritation and frustration. My arms were already beginning to hurt, and my leg did not agree with this way of walking, so the last thing I needed right now was to take anymore of Edward's crap.

"Yeah, exactly. And *why are you walking here?* Didn't my brother fucking ask you if you needed a fucking ride? You fucking declined and said the Chief was picking your sorry ass up and yet here you are, stumbling around like you're fucking drunk or some shit," he spat furiously, and I cocked an eyebrow at his overly enthusiastic use of curse words.

"He was a no show, so I decided to walk home. Is that a problem?" I asked calmly.

"You're walking home? Really? Are you fucking kidding me?" he asked, crossing his arms over his chest. "And when did you plan on getting home? Next year?"

I rolled my eyes at his antics and tried to stretch my fingers without letting go of the crutches. It was painful to stand still for too long.

"Yes, I'm walking home, so if you'd excuse me," I said and took a step forward to pass him, but he just took a step to the side so he was once again standing in front of me. I gave him an irritated look but he just looked blankly back at me. "Haven't you heard? It's mean to harass a crippled girl." Something flashed in his eyes, and I swear I saw him wince for a fraction of a second, before he collected himself and put on his blank mask.

"So I've fucking heard," he almost growled. "Now get in the fucking car and we'll drive your sorry ass home."

"What?" I asked incredulously, it felt as if I was missing something.

He pointed towards the parking lot outside the grocery store and I saw that Emmett's black jeep was parked there. Emmett himself was nowhere to be seen.

Edward grabbed my arm when I didn't show any sign of agreeing with him, and he pulled me roughly towards the car. I couldn't keep up with his speed without tripping – especially not with the crutches in my hands, and my leg screamed at me to stop. I cried out in pain when my leg touched the ground roughly, and Edward immediately stopped. He turned to look at me with a frightened expression.

"What the hell are you screaming about?" he asked. He was trying to sound angry and irritated, but there was an undertone of fear there too.

"Haven't you heard? My leg is freaking crushed, and it hurts like hell to even walk, so when you drag me around like this of course it freaking hurts even more, you idiot!" I yelled, and I didn't even bother to try to keep my voice down. The pain along with my frustration over the situation was enough to push me over the edge. I didn't care who heard or saw me. I was angry and in terrible pain, and I'd be damned if I was going to hide it.

"Well, fuck me," he growled. "But maybe you could have mentioned it before you began screaming like a bitch and scaring the shit out of me. What the hell!"

"You didn't really give me any time to react now, did you?" I snapped back.

We glared at each other in silence. Neither of us wanted to be the one to break down and look away. The staring contest didn't end until Edward was roughly pushed aside by a couple of large hands.

"Dude, what the hell?" Edward complained and glared at his brother.

"I could ask you the same fucking thing. What the hell are you doing harassing her? I could fucking hear her all the way inside the store!"

Emmett said furiously before he turned to me, his expression softening immediately. "Are you okay? Did he hurt you?"

I shot a quick glance at Edward, who was looking at me too and probably expecting me to rat him out or pull a similar stunt like I had while in the hospital.

"Yes, I'm okay. Yes, he hurt me," I replied honestly, and Emmett turned to look at his brother.

"What did you do?" Emmett asked, narrowing his eyes. Edward rolled his eyes and leaned back against the car casually.

"You wanted to give her a fucking ride, so now we're giving her a fucking ride," he replied calmly.

"What did you *do* ?" Emmett asked again, this time with a little more force behind his words.

"He grabbed me without thinking, and my leg just got caught in the middle... no big deal... the pain is gone," I said with a shrug, even though I was lying. The pain was *not* gone; it was still radiating through my leg like small, little explosions. Edward cocked his head to the side as he studied me. I guess I hadn't been far off when I thought he had expected me to pull another stunt to get him into trouble. Emmett furrowed his brows and nodded slowly.

"Okay... if you're sure," he said hesitantly and looked towards the store. "Well I need to go back in because I rushed out before I was finished in there. I'll be back in just a moment. You wait here. Okay?" I nodded, and he sighed in relief. "Okay, good." He walked back over to the store, but not before throwing an irritated glance at Edward – who just ignored it.

I sighed and shifted awkwardly on my legs, and Edward snorted quietly.

"God, you must be the worst liar I've ever met," he said and shook his head.

"How would you know? You have never heard me lie," I retorted.

He cocked an eyebrow at me and smirked. "You just did," he replied simply. "You told my brother that you were not in pain, when it's fucking obvious that you are," he added condescendingly.

"And whose fault is that?" I spat, not able to contain myself.

"Touché," he muttered and pushed himself off the car and opened the car door. "Get in."

I looked at the seat and then at the ground and then at the seat again. Was he kidding me? How the hell was I going to get up there? It was a Jeep, for crying out loud, I couldn't climb up there. It was even higher than the cruiser.

"What the hell are you waiting for?" Edward asked, tapping his foot impatiently. I shot him a humorless smile and resisted the urge to smack him with my crutch.

"Maybe I'm better off walking home," I said. "Because it will probably take me longer to climb into that car than it will take me to walk home."

He looked at me like I was crazy before looking at the car and realizing that I was right.

"Fuck me," he muttered, and before I knew it he had scooped me up in his arms and lifted me into the car. I was so shocked by the gesture that I could easily ignore the pain that radiated through my leg because of the sudden movement.

He let me go and took a step back to pick up the crutches that I had dropped when he picked me up, and threw them on the floor of the car.

"Do you want me to buckle you up too or do you think you can handle that?" he asked sarcastically.

"Oh, I think I got it," I replied with an irritated tone. He rolled his eyes and slammed the door shut. He stalked around the car to the passenger side and got in. He fiddled with the radio and turned up the volume to make conversation impossible. As if I wanted to talk anymore with that idiot anyway. I removed my bag – which I still had on my back – and put it on the seat next to me.

Fortunately, Emmett came out from the store a couple of minutes later. He met my gaze through the rearview mirror as he got in, and I smiled weakly at him. I gave him directions to my house, and ten minutes later we were there.

"Thanks for the ride," I said politely and opened the door. I looked down on the ground and frowned. Was I supposed to jump? Emmett seemed to have sensed my dilemma because he jumped out of the car quickly and was by my side in seconds.

He held out his hands and gave me an awkward look.

"Eh... how can I help you?" he asked uncertainly. I bit my lip and shrugged. I was not about to ask him to put his arms around me and help me out the way Edward had helped me in. That would be too awkward. "Let's just do it like this..." he said and grabbed me by my elbows.

He lifted me out effortlessly by only holding on to my elbows, and I tensed automatically when he did. He was stronger than Edward, that's for sure. He put me down gingerly on the ground and handed me my crutches. He reached for my bag and helped me put it on.

"You want me to help you to the porch or do you have it from here?" Emmett asked, scratching his neck absentmindedly. I smiled weakly at him and shook my head.

"I got it from here, thanks for the ride," I replied, gripping my crutches and making my way up to the porch.

"See ya tomorrow, little one," he called after me. I didn't respond to that, nor did I turn around. I heard him get into the car and slam the door shut behind him. By the time I reached the front door, they were already gone.

I made it inside, I shrugged off my bag and put it by the stairs before making my way into the kitchen. My crutches left small muddy imprints on the floor; it almost looked like animal prints. I considered trying to clean it up, but I decided against it.

First of all, I would have to get down on the floor to clean it, and if I got down on the floor, it would be impossible for me to get back up. Secondly, I thought that the least Dad could do for leaving me high and dry like that was to clean the freaking floors.

I wobbled over to the fridge and glanced at the sink in the process.

Maybe he could do some dishes too while he's at it.

I scoffed at myself for even thinking it. Of course he wouldn't do any dishes. He probably didn't even know how to.

Somehow I managed to pour myself a glass of orange juice *and* take it to the living room without dropping it, spilling it or falling flat on my ass. I knew I should seek comfort in those small victories in my daily life, but not even those could keep that emotional balloon from bursting in my chest.

As soon as I sat down on the couch I was once again overwhelmed with feelings of dread and desolation. It was sometimes easy to forget all the pain and misery in my life when I got distracted enough by good things. I considered Emmett to be one of those things.

At least for now.

He still scared me, though. He was a big mountain of a man. He could scare anyone to death by just looking at them, but he had yet to shoot any deadly glares my way. All day he had been nothing but good to me - helping me with my bag, with my lunch and he even gave me a ride home. The pessimistic and paranoid side of me wanted to believe that he did it as a joke, a joke I would have to pay for later. But there was also a small part of me that wanted to believe he only did it to be nice. Maybe he thought that being nice to me meant less pain for his brother.

For whatever reason he did it, I couldn't help but feel grateful. Even if all those nice things were a part of some big, elaborate joke. I was still going to savor today and feel good about it. Emmett had protected me from humiliation and pain; he had not hurt me today. Therefore, it was a good day in my book, and I was not going to feel bad about it until the day he stabbed me in the back. If that day ever came, that is.

Who was I kidding? Of course it would.

With my past as proof of my luck in life; it was not a matter of *if*, it was matter of *when* . I felt stupid for even considering the alternative.

The familiar sound of the cruiser brought me out from my reverie and I tensed instinctively at the sound. So Dad wasn't lying dead in a ditch somewhere after all.

Good for him.

I heard him turn off the engine and slam the door behind him; he walked in a few moments later. He smiled when he saw me sitting in the living room. The smile was simple and clueless, like nothing was wrong, as if he hadn't forgotten all about me.

"Hey there, kiddo, did you have a good first day back?" he asked while he took off his jacket and put away his gun.

"Yeah, it was a blast," I replied with a sweet voice, "it would have been nicer, though, if someone hadn't forgotten to pick my sorry ass up." I was surprised by my choice of words, and by the looks of it, he was too. I usually never curse or use foul language around my parents, so the fact that I just used the word *ass* to describe myself, was more than a little daunting. The only thing worse than that would have been if I had used something more Edward-like, like... *fuck* .

His movements faltered for a split second, before he hung up his jacket and walked into the living room. He sat down on his usual chair, which was draped with the red quilt that Mom had made for me when I was a kid. That quilt alone was the reason why I never sat in that chair. *Ever* . At least not anymore. That quilt that I used to love so much had become tainted by my mother's betrayal and I couldn't even touch it anymore.

"I've spent half my day on the reservation. I tried to call you, but I had no reception up there. I couldn't leave either, and I figured you would get a ride with one of your friends," he said. He sounded almost sincere in his apology, but I couldn't forgive him for it. The fact that he thought I had friends proved how much he knew about me. *Nothing* that is. The fact that he just assumed I would get a ride was insulting. "But you came home in one piece, so no harm done, right? So who gave you a ride? I bet Alice didn't mind."

I narrowed my eyes at him and shook my head.

"No, it wasn't Alice," I replied. "I got a ride from Emmett and Edward."

He gaped at me at the revelation, and it took a moment for him to collect himself. He leaned forward on the chair and gave me a stern look.

"I don't want you hanging out with those boys, alright? The Cullen boys are nothing but trouble. I caught that Edward kid waltzing around the streets drunk in the middle of the afternoon just last week. And considering the damage he's done to you..." he trailed off, shook his head and frowned. "He's trouble, and I'm just waiting

for the day when I can put him behind bars. I'm surprised that Dr. Cullen and his wife managed to produce such a bad kid, since they're both such good people."

"I don't think you are in any position to judge, Dad," I replied and looked away. "I waited for over an hour for you to pick me up, and they were the only ones who offered me a ride. What was I supposed to do? Walk home? With *this*?" I nodded towards my cast, and I saw him cringe at the sight. I didn't care to mention to him that my plan had been exactly that; to walk home. "Besides... you're not really the best judge of character to begin with anyway, considering who you married."

"That's enough!" he yelled and stood up abruptly. "Go to your room!"

Ah, Mom. Always the deal breaker for my dad. No one would make a better advocate for my mother than my father. I would never understand how one could love someone who was so cruel and heartless – and defend her like he did.

I reached for my crutches and stood up slowly as I steadied myself on them.

"Really, Dad? You're pulling out *that* card? Wow... that's just brilliant," I said.

He huffed and turned to look out of the window instead. I could tell I had hit a sore spot, but I didn't care. He couldn't keep acting like this and think I wouldn't call him out on it sooner or later.

I grabbed my bag when I reached the stairs and awkwardly put it on my back. I was just about to make my way upstairs when Dad spoke again.

"Thanksgiving is next weekend," he said in a calm and collected tone.

"Yeah? Do you want me to cook a huge holiday dinner for the two of us or something?" I asked sarcastically.

"No, it's not just going to be the two of us," he replied. I was quiet as I waited for him to elaborate, but when he showed no sign of doing just that, I knew I had to pull it out of him.

"Then who else is coming?" I asked, though a part of me didn't want to know.

He was quiet for what felt like an eternity then he slowly took a deep breath and let the answer out. He still had his back to me and maybe that was just as well.

"The usual," he said slowly. I felt all the blood drain from my face and my grip on my crutches tightened.

The usual. The usual. The usual .

The usual for any of our holidays had, up until now, consisted of me and my parents, along with Billy and Jacob Black.

Dad scratched his unshaven jaw and turned away from the window so he could look at me.

"I'm sorry, Bells, but you need to get over this and you won't be able to do that until you stop blaming them. They were only trying to help you... Billy has been devastated that you refuse to see him, but he understands that you need time," he said. "This is a family holiday, and they are our family. We can't shut them out anymore because you refuse to see them. They're *family* ."

I wasn't breathing at all at that point, and I could no longer hear anything that he said. I could only see his lips move as he spoke and how he scratched his neck and cheek absentmindedly. He didn't enjoy this particular topic. He never had and I couldn't blame him, because I didn't either.

After all, he talked about things he knew nothing about. He didn't know the whole story, because he had chosen to believe the lie.

He took a deep breath and looked me straight in the eyes from across the room. I knew in an instant that whatever he was about to say next was going to be a low blow. He knew that too. That was why he looked so awkward and sorry.

Please, don't say it, Dad. Please... just don't...

"I hate to say this, but you need to grow up, Bells. Be an adult about this, and stop blaming other people for mistakes that you have made. We don't blame you for what you did, Bella. The situation is what it is, and we need to move past it at some point. You need to forgive your mother, Billy and Jacob... they were only trying to help you."

Help me? *HELP ME* ? Nobody had been trying to help me. I had been on the brink of death and they had not tried to pull me back; because they were the ones who put me there.

I tried to swallow down the lump in my throat, but it was impossible. It felt as if I was choking again. Though, this time it wasn't on a bite of bread. It was on my emotional balloon. An emotional balloon that was filled with disappointment and sadness over my father's lack of support, his lack of knowledge and his willingness to believe the lie. I turned back to the stairs and made my way upstairs as quickly as I could – which wasn't very quickly at all.

I should have known better. This was the punishment I got for thinking I was having a good day, with people who were nice to me and wanted to help me out. People that acted like they really did want to become my friends.

I made it to my room, and I closed the door behind me – with less force than I would have liked – before I wobbled over to my bed.

Mom... and Billy... and Jacob.

I would not survive a dinner with them, considering I almost literally lost my life last time I was even in the same room as them.

And Dad thought this was a good idea?

I took off my jeans, and grabbed my sweats which were lying on the bed, and sat down on my bed in order to pull them on. But before I got anywhere, my eyes caught sight of the pictures that Alice and Emmett had drawn on my cast.

I had yet to see what Emmett had drawn, since Alice had pulled down my pant leg so quickly at lunch. Now I felt an odd mixture of dread and excitement as I bent over to examine the work of Emmett.

I felt a different kind of lump in my throat when I looked at it... a *good* lump.

Emmett did not share Edward's artistic talent, but the childlike quality to the drawing made me love it even more. He had drawn a cute, brown bear, dressed in a blue t-shirt with a print that said "Brother Bear."

I felt tugging at the corners of my mouth, and I tried to fight the sad smile that threatened to escape.

"Brother Bear," I whispered and touched the bear with my fingers.

If only he was real.

Crack

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 19 - Crack

Edward Cullen POV

I thought that I had experienced every type of girl there was. I thought that I had girls down to a science. I thought that I would end up writing the fucking book on girls. Then this fucking chick walks – or should I say crashes – into my life and makes me doubt I knew anything to begin with.

Who the hell does she think she is anyway?

Swan, Goose, Turkey - whatever the fuck her name was - would be the death of me.

She was so fucking unpredictable, and I had no way of knowing what to expect from her. She went from being shy and asking for forgiveness to being all cocky and shit. I tried to find a pattern in her behavior, but there was none. At first, I thought it had something to do with whether or not she had an audience or someone to save her. However, that clearly wasn't the case since she didn't have any trouble talking back and giving me shit in an empty hallway. Then again, maybe she was confident just because we *were* in a fucking *hallway*, surrounded by classrooms that were filled with students and teachers.

Not that any one of those poor suckers would ever step up and defend her fucking honor or anything anyway. *She must have known that too.* She couldn't be dense enough to think otherwise.

Another thing I noticed about her was that she must be in love with that plump bottom lip of hers, because she couldn't keep from biting it. It made her look all insecure and innocent but that was all a charade, because I had come to realize that she was anything but. The action kept distracting me, and the last thing I wanted was to think about her fucking lips.

The last thing I wanted to think about was *her* . Period.

I wanted to move the fuck on already, but nobody seemed to want to let me. I quickly realized something, though, and that was if I wanted them to get off my fucking back I had to act the way they wanted me to. I hated to have to stoop to that, I had my fucking integrity after all, but what other choice did I have? I wanted to move on, and this was my only option.

That was why I made Emmett ask her if she wanted a fucking ride home.

At least that was the reason I kept telling myself, even though it felt like a lie.

I had grabbed Swan's arm without thinking when she made that comment about her making the world a better place. That was the reason why she had been out there in the middle of nowhere that night. I would never admit it out loud, but that fucking comment freaked me the fuck out.

I had sounded like such a fucking pansy – I would have even given pansy-ass Emmett a run for his money – when I asked her if she had in fact jumped in front of my car.

Why was I even asking her this? What difference would it make?

It was as if time stood still as I waited for her to answer me. When she finally shook her head and replied in a quiet voice, I let out a breath I didn't even realize I had been holding.

" No, I didn't. But right now I kind of wish I did."

That was her fucking reply, and I can't for the life of me even remember what the hell I said in response to that. I was too fucking bewildered by the whole situation to pay any attention to the words that left my mouth, but I think I agreed with her.

It's easier if the bird dies, so you don't need to see it suffer.

Even then, as I sat in Emmett's car on our way home from dropping her off, I felt an odd twisting in my stomach. The twisting, turning, and overall unsettling feeling that I had been living with ever since the accident had intensified throughout the day. I almost felt sick.

Maybe I was coming down with something?

The bird flu maybe? Yeah, that would be hilarious.

Or maybe I was just fucking... *bothered* .

For some reason, the conversation I had with Swan in the hallway bothered me. There was no other fucking explanation for why it kept gnawing at me. It was not so much the accident anymore as it was what she had said and what I had said in response.

For some reason, my own words bothered me.

Why the hell did it *bother me* so much that I agreed with her? That the bird was better off dead. It wasn't like it wasn't the truth. I really felt that way, didn't I? There was no reason for me to lie just to make *her* feel better. She meant nothing to me; therefore, it shouldn't matter to me whether or not she lived or died. I should ignore her completely and do or say whatever I had to in order to make *myself* feel better.

That plan obviously backfired, for reasons unknown to me, since nothing I said or did made me feel even remotely better. It was quite the fucking opposite, actually. It all made me feel like shit, and I have no fucking idea why.

I had left her abruptly and stalked down the hallway as quickly as I could without running. I had reached the point where I could handle no more. I needed to get my ass as far away from her as possible if I wanted to remain sane.

I made one pivotal mistake though. I did the last fucking thing I should have done at that very moment. I would have remained sane if I had just kept myself from doing it. But I did it.

I looked back.

I did that just in time to see her stumble into a locker. Her tiny body was shaking as she leaned against it. I couldn't see her face, since she had her back towards me, but I assumed that the shaking was due to the fact that I had made the fucking Goose cry.

That was another thing that shouldn't have fucking bothered me, since my plan from the very beginning was to make her understand that she meant nothing to me. Making her cry should have been the best thing that could have happened at that moment. That meant she finally understood what I was saying. Just because I ran her over didn't mean it would change anything between us. She was just as irrelevant and worthless to me now as she had been before. I didn't give a damn about what happened to her, so she obviously shouldn't give a shit about me either. I needed her to stop saying shit like "I know you're hurting," as if she knew me.

Then why, with all that said, wasn't I pleased when I saw her break down like that? I should have been more than pleased that I had finally managed to get my point across.

I didn't feel pleased at all. *Not even a little bit.*

Seeing Swan break down just gave me another reason to get the hell away from there. I had quickly made my way down to the parking lot. My hands had instinctively gone to my pockets in search of my keys. I had furrowed my brows in confusion when my fingers didn't come in contact with the familiar metal objects. Then I remembered I didn't even have my fucking car.

Because my car was still in the fucking shop because I hit a fucking goose.

I couldn't even go to the parking lot without getting reminded of her.

I had gone over to Emmett's Jeep, figuring I could hide out in there for the last period and wait for Emmett. I had grabbed the door handle and... *fucking nothing* . The bastard had locked the fucking car. I knew for a fact that he never locked his goddamn car, but of course he would on the fucking day that I needed a little space.

At that point, I was fucking sure the day couldn't get any worse.

"Edward! What the hell do you think you're doing?"

I spoke way too soon . I should have known better than to think I was in the clear.

I had turned around to see Alice walking up to me with determined steps.

"What the hell did you say to her? She was a total mess! What did you *do* , Edward?" she had asked in an exasperated tone. Her eyes had been flashing with anger, but the fire seemed to diminish when she saw my face. "Oh, Edward, seriously," she added with a tired sigh.

When she had taken a step forward, I had automatically taken a step back. I didn't want her near me. I needed my fucking space. She could play Swan's defender all she wanted, but I didn't need to stay there and listen to that shit.

"What did the Goose accuse of me now?" My intention had been to sound dark and menacing, but the effect had been ruined when my voice cracked on the word *goose* . Alice hadn't even flinched, she just sighed deeply again and shot me a sad smile.

"She didn't accuse you of anything, actually. All she said was I shouldn't worry about her, and that I should worry about you instead," she had told me with a soft voice. Her words puzzled me, and I had a hard time believing them.

I had given Swan the perfect opportunity to fuck up my life even more and make my friends take an even bigger leap away from me. I had served her the opportunity on a fucking silver platter. And what did she do with said opportunity? She didn't take it! Instead she... *what the hell ?*

Nothing in this fucking world made any sense to me anymore. I thought I had shit figured out but apparently not. Not even my friends or my family were the people I thought they were.

"She said... what?" I had finally managed to croak in response, and Alice had smiled her annoying, all-knowing smile.

"She said that I should worry about you."

"Why?"

"Because you're my friend, silly," she had said and slapped my arm playfully. "We both know you're one of the biggest jerks in this school... hell, on this *planet* . But that doesn't change the fact that you're my friend and that I care about you." Her smile had grown wistful, and she tilted her head to the side as she gazed back at me. "I care about Isabella too, of course, but we don't need to talk about that right now..."

I had snorted at that, as I absentmindedly kicked a small pebble with my shoe.

I don't know why the hell Alice kept pushing this. Her obsession with Swan had gone from quirky and cute to fucking disturbing. What was Swan to her anyway? She was fucking nothing. They didn't know each other. They hadn't been childhood friends that had grown apart. Alice owed her nothing, and it made no sense to me why she suddenly tried to make friends with her. This was even *before* the accident. It would have made a little more sense if it had been after, because then it could easily have been passed off as guilt or some other shit. Although, that doesn't make much sense either, since Alice wasn't in the car – let alone driving it.

Then again, neither was Emmett.

"What else did she say?" I had muttered.

"That it wasn't her wellbeing I should be worried about... and seeing you now, I believe she's right. I might not know her, but if I were a betting girl, then I would bet she is coping far better than you are. You're a mess, Edward. A complete mess. You can deny it all you want, but your mask is beginning to crack, and so are you."

"Sounds to me like you're the one on crack," I had responded darkly, but of course this hadn't deterred her in the slightest in her mission to make me see the light.

Speaking of light, why didn't Swan just walk right into it? *Why did she have to turn her back to it?*

She would have done us both a huge favor walking into it.

"Why do you always have to be so stubborn? Why can't you just admit it? You're neither invisible nor invincible, you know, we can all see you falling apart. You can deny it all you want, but that only means it's gonna be messier when you finally break." She had said it with so much conviction in her voice that she almost swayed me into believing it myself. I probably would have, if I didn't know myself better than that. It took more than a fucking car accident to break me.

"You think you know everything. You can't predict the future."

"Maybe not, but I know you well enough to predict your imminent breakdown," she had replied simply. I had sighed in frustration and started to pace back and forth beside the car.

"Then what the hell do you suggest I do to prevent this imminent breakdown?" I had asked, though it was only partly sarcastic. I had been fucking curious to know what her solution to the problem was.

"I suggest you talk to someone, as in a profession-" she had begun, but I had cut her off before she got a chance to finish the sentence.

"A professional? As in a *shrink* ? I'm not fucking crazy!" If looks could kill, then she should have died at that moment. Alice usually didn't push me past my limits, but even she must have known that she had crossed the fucking line by suggesting such a thing.

"I'm not saying you are. But what happened to you and Isabella is beyond anything any of us know how to handle. You can talk to us, sure, but I don't think we can help you much. You went through a traumatic experience and there are people with special training that know how to deal with this stuff."

She knew she had crossed the fucking line, but she kept pushing me by saying shit I didn't want to hear.

"I'm not gonna see a fucking shrink." My voice left no room for argument. It was fucking final.

"I'm not surprised you feel that way. But can you at least do something else? If not for yourself...then for your brother." I had stopped my pacing mid-step. I had quirked an eyebrow at her, silently asking her what the hell she meant. "Treat Isabella with a little more respect. I'm not saying you need to become her new best friend, but I think a little respect is called for. Stop calling her names. After everything... how can you not see that things have changed?"

"And how exactly is that related to Emmett in any fucking way?" I had asked with anger and frustration lacing my voice.

"Why don't you ask Emmett what he drew on her cast." She had thrown me an *I-know-something-you-don't* kind of smile, before she turned away and strutted her way back up to the school.

Alice was Alice, and I knew better than to let her shit affect me. Still, some of it must have made some sort of impact on me. How else could you explain what I did next? Fuck. Maybe I could claim temporary insanity or something.

Insanity brought on by Swan.

Maybe whatever she had was contagious?

Like I said. *Bird flu* .

" I was making the world a better place."

Her words were still ringing in my fucking ears. Maybe that was why I was so easily affected by Alice's words, though the words meant nothing to me. *Fuck* . It didn't require a rocket scientist to figure out what the hell Swan had meant with those words, and the fact that she said them with such raw sincerity freaked me the fuck out. She wasn't just saying it to fuck with me. She said it because she meant it.

I had continued with my pacing by the car. I hadn't gone back into the school until the final bell had rung for the day, and I went in to grab my shit from my locker. I had met up with Emmett on my way out, and we walked together to the car. But we didn't make it further than to the steps that led to the parking lot before we stopped. I had spotted Swan almost instantly, and it was then that I had done the stupidest thing ever. I had grabbed Emmett's arm to get his attention, and then nodded towards Swan, who was standing alone by the wall at the bottom of the steps.

"Ask her if she wants a fucking ride," I had almost growled at him.

He had looked down on me with a surprised look in his eyes, but the smile that had followed was anything but. He had been standing there, smiling at me like a fucking dweeb, that I had actually been forced to push him forward to even get him moving. By the way he was smiling, you would have thought Rose had just agreed to give him a BJ or something. I didn't understand why he smiled for the opportunity to ask the bird if she wanted a ride. *That's no smiling matter.*

He had finally walked down the steps to ask her, and I had made my way to the car. Not needing to see the shit. I had watched them from the car, and I don't know why I was fucking surprised when he came back without her. Emmett explained that she was waiting for her own fucking ride. For some reason, I was partly disgruntled that she didn't want a fucking ride. Since it would have been the easiest way for me to show to them all, especially Alice and Emmett, that I wasn't the guy that they painted me out to be.

"I must say, bro, I'm fucking surprised," Emmett said suddenly, effectively bringing me out of my musings. I rolled my eyes at his fucking tone, since I knew exactly what that fucking tone meant.

Condescending bastard.

"Why?" I asked with a clipped tone. "I can be fucking human too, you know."

"Yeah, I know, but I never thought I would see the day when you actually tried to be nice to her, even though you failed miserably. But I guess the fact that you wanted me to ask was proof enough. But fuck, man, did you have to pull that shit in the parking lot?" he asked, his pleased smile vanishing in an instant. "You didn't want me to ask her because you wanted to hurt her more, did you? That thing in the parking lot at the grocery store was just an accident... right?" He sounded so unsure it was fucking insulting.

"Of course it was a fucking accident. I just wanted to get her to the fucking car and she thought it was a good idea to scream bloody murder instead of telling me not to drag her," I muttered.

Emmett appeared to think that one over for a moment before nodding once. The pleased smile was back almost instantly.

"Bro, you're making fucking progress. At least you *tried* ," he said.

Yeah, *tried* . I can't believe I actually did that in the first place. If I had known beforehand how it was going to go, then I obviously wouldn't have asked or said anything about it.

I blame the meddling pixie. *Fucking Alice and her mind-fucking.*

Emmett continued talking, but I wasn't paying attention anymore. My eyes scanned the road in front of us, and I was acutely aware of any movements in my peripheral view. My fingers were turning numb due to the death grip I had on the seat with my nails digging into the leather.

"You okay there, bro?" Emmett asked and turned his head fully to look at me.

" *Eyes on the road, you idiot !*" I snapped loudly. He jumped in surprise and immediately turned his eyes back on the road. He gripped the wheel tightly, and he looked a little confused for a moment before he threw me a quick glance.

"Fuck, man," he said and sounded a little breathless. "I thought I was going to hit something. You can't fucking yell like that. What the hell!"

"If you had kept your *motherfucking eyes* on the *motherfucking road* , then I wouldn't have needed to," I replied simply, and it felt as if those words could easily been applied to other aspects of my life as well. If people could just mind their own fucking business, then I wouldn't need to lash out and shit.

It was a damn simple logic; so why did they not get it?

Emmett kept throwing me these weird looks the rest of the way home. When we finally reached the house, I stumbled out of the car before he had even put it in park.

"Fuck, bro!" he called after me, as I made my way up to the front door. "I need help with the groceries!"

I didn't answer him or turn back for that matter. *He could carry the goddamn groceries himself .*

I threw open the front door and stomped my way upstairs to my room.

I needed a fucking shower to wash away all the traces of the epic fail that was today.

Dinner at the Cullen house was not what it used to be. There used to be laughter and talking, but now there was a dark ominous cloud hanging over us, enveloping us in an awkward and uncomfortable silence. I mostly picked at my chicken, not really eating any of it. I was fucking hungry, but I had no appetite. I felt oddly nauseous every time I tried to take a bite of the chicken, which smelled fucking delicious. I ended up just pushing it around on my plate.

Dad was absent since he was working late. *As usual .*

"How was school today?" Mom asked. I could tell she was trying to sound casual, but her voice held a tense undertone, which I did not understand.

"It was... school," I replied vaguely without even glancing her way. I kept my eyes on my plate, where I kept pushing the food around.

"I hope you kept yourselves out of trouble-" she began, but she was cut short by the sound of crunching gravel outside. We all recognized the sound from Dad's Mercedes. I glanced at the

grandfather clock, which stood in the corner of our dining room, and saw that it was barely six thirty. Dad usually never got home before seven pm at the earliest when he worked late.

We had all stilled our movements as we listened to the sound of Dad walking up to the house. Even Emmett seemed to be on edge. Dad walked in, and we heard him moving around in the living room before he stepped inside the dining room.

I couldn't help but look up when he entered, and he immediately met my gaze. His look was stern and serious, and he was frowning when he looked back at me.

I was in trouble again, I could tell.

Dad walked around the table and gave Mom a quick kiss before sitting down in his usual seat.

"How was work, honey?" Mom asked gently. Dad shot me another glance, before looking back at Mom and giving her a tired smile.

"It was work," he replied with a tired sigh and shook his head. "The whole mess with Dwyer seems to be spinning out of control. I've been looking over his old files all day, and I can't believe we let it go on for so long... how could we not see what this man was doing right under our noses all this time?" He sighed exasperatedly and poured himself a glass of wine. He took a deep drink before looking over at Emmett and me. "Speaking of which... care to tell me why Chief Swan called me at work an hour ago?"

Of course he did.

I glanced at Emmett, but he didn't seem affected in the slightest. Why would he though? If Chief Swan called Dad, of course it would have been about me. Something Swan told him I did.

"How would I know? I'm not a mind reader," I replied coolly.

"No, you are not. But apparently the two of you gave Isabella a ride home from school today," he continued. Mom shot me a surprised look.

"You did? That's nice," she said with a smile.

"Not really," Dad said and turned to look at Emmett. "Son, I know you probably only meant well by asking her if she needed a ride, but this situation is complicated enough as it is without you getting involved."

"Hey! It was not my fucking idea to give her a fucking ride!" Emmett protested wildly. Dad raised his eyebrows in confusion.

"Did *she* ask for a ride?" he asked puzzled.

"Hardly," Emmett snorted and pointed at me with his fork. "He was the one who made me ask."

Geez, thanks for throwing me to the sharks, bro.

Dad's eyes darkened instantly as he looked at me.

"And why would you do such a thing?" he asked.

"I figured she needed a fucking ride, since she can't walk worth a damn on those damn crutches. I was trying to do a nice thing, okay?" I muttered.

"A nice thing? A *nice* thing? Really, Edward?" he echoed incredulously. "How many times do I need to tell you before you get it? You are to stay away from her! Chief Swan told me specifically to tell you that, yet again, on the phone today. He doesn't want you anywhere near his daughter. Why can't you respect that and leave her alone?"

"What the hell!" I all but yelled. "Nothing I do pleases you. People tell me I'm selfish and self-centered if I stay away and don't care about her. Then when I try to do a fucking nice thing for her, I get shit for that too. What the hell do you want from me?"

I pushed my chair back and was just about to leave the table when Dad stood up too.

"You sit back down right this minute!" he snapped loudly. "You are not leaving this room until I'm done. *Understood ?*" I slowly sat down on my chair again, and he didn't sit down until I was seated. He sighed deeply and took a deep drink of his wine before speaking again. He had regained his calm composure, and it pissed me the fuck off. Why couldn't he keep yelling at me like a normal person? Why did he always have to be so damn collected all the time?

"Edward, I think we really need to respect their wishes at this point. I know it was an accident. There is nothing we can do about that now, but Isabella is in for a hard and painful recovery. She shouldn't be forced to put up with your crap too. Leave her alone and let her recover in peace."

I scoffed silently and shook my head.

"She doesn't even want to recover..." I muttered without thinking.

"What's that?" Dad asked. I looked up and met his gaze, and I was surprised at what I found there. He looked *surprised* – not confused, which I would have expected - *and not in a good way* .

"I said that she doesn't even want to recover. The chick wants to die, end of story," I spat.

His eyes widened, not in surprise this time, but in shock.

"How... what... why would you say that?" he spluttered.

"Because she fucking told me, okay?" I snapped. He opened his mouth to say something but closed it again. He was quiet for a moment before speaking again.

"I... I want you to stay away from her. You have put her through enough. I don't want to tell you again," he said, and I could tell that it

wasn't what he had intended to say at first. He gave me a stern look and I quirked an eyebrow at him. "You may leave now."

"Thank fucking God," I muttered and pushed back my chair and left the table.

I went up to my room, plopped down on my black leather couch, and grabbed my sketchbook from the floor. *If I couldn't use music as an outlet for my anger, then sketching had to do .*

My entire body was tense, almost to the point of it being painful. And not to be sounding like a girl or anything, but I would not have passed on a massage.

My hand moved freely over the page. I didn't even need to think I let my hand do all the thinking for me. I didn't care what I sketched anyway, as long as I did *something* , instead of staring into space like a fucking crazy person.

As I let the pen dance over the page in a random way, I thought about the look on Dad's face when I told him that Swan wanted to die.

The more I thought of it, I realized that the look of surprise on his face wasn't for what I said, but for the fact that I even said it in the first place. The shock was because he hadn't expected *her* to be the one to tell me that.

Surprise and shock, because I had found out something he already knew.

He already fucking knew.

I don't know why this pissed me off. Maybe because I wouldn't feel this... this... whatever *this* was, if I had known before. If he had told us, then I would have...

What? I would have... what?

Hell if I know, but I figured it would have changed things. It would have changed everything about today, and my interactions with her. If I had known then, what I knew now, then I would have known better than to go to Biology and risk having to talk to her in the first place.

I would have stayed the hell away, let her dwell in her misery and be suicidal.

Suicidal.

Even thinking of the word made me cringe.

What the fuck was up with that?

I don't know why the thought of suicide crept me out so much. Maybe because I just couldn't grasp the fact that someone would willingly end their life, and therefore effectively remove any chance of doing anything ever again. Think about all the things you would miss just because you had a rough month and figured that suicide was the fucking answer.

How much pain do you have to be in to even be considering it?

What the hell could Swan feel so bad about that made her want to die? So what if she was the fucking Goose and nobody liked her. Was that really reason enough to kill herself? I didn't think so. I couldn't give a rat's ass if people didn't like me, and I sure as hell wouldn't kill myself over it. So what was her fucking problem?

I was brought out of my musings by a loud knock on my door. I didn't need to ask or look to know who it was. Only Emmett knocked like that. He entered my room without waiting for a response.

"So, bro... wanna do something?" he asked casually.

I looked up from my sketching and quirked an eyebrow at him. He was trying to look casual as he looked around my room, but it was

too fucking forced for me not to be suspicious.

"What the hell do you want?" I asked.

He plopped down on my bed, and it creaked under his weight. He stared emptily in front of him and sighed deeply.

"Did she really tell you that?" he asked, and I groaned. He didn't need to specify. I knew what he meant. I wanted to fucking scream. Why couldn't we all just let it the fuck go already?

"Yeah, she did," I muttered. "So fucking what if she wants to die? It's not our fucking problem. She's nothing to us, so why should we care?"

"Do you really believe that? Fuck, man. It's fucking suicide. That's messed up," he replied and turned his head to look at me. "Why did she even tell you in the first place?"

"Maybe because she wanted me to help her out. Fuck if I know," I muttered. "Why do you care so much anyway? Before all this shit went down, you were just as quick as I was to call her Goose or laugh when she did something stupid. But now you're like her own personal fucking bodyguard. What's up with that shit?"

"I don't know... I guess I just feel bad for her, ya know? Her leg is seriously fucked up," he said.

"Yeah, and what am I supposed to do about it? You could care about her all you want, but her leg won't get any better," I muttered and returned to my sketching.

"I know that, but we can make shit easier for her, ya know..." he said slowly and gave me a pointed look. I rolled my eyes without looking at him.

"You can do whatever the fuck you want. I'm not even allowed near the chick, and even if I was allowed, I wouldn't want to get fucking

involved with her anyway. So it's a dead end," I replied.

"Yeah, I know but-" He was cut off by a knock on the doorframe. We both turned our gazes to the door and saw Jasper standing there, leaning casually against it.

"Hey, dude, are we doing this or what?" Jasper asked and held up a small bag of weed.

"Yeah, we are. Thank God," Emmett said and stood up from the bed.

"Mind if I join ya? Or is this a dude-date?" I asked sarcastically. Jasper rolled his eyes.

"If you're gonna be all brooding and shit and bring us the fuck down, then no. You're not welcome. But if you can put shit off and just enjoy being high, then yeah, join us," he said seriously.

"Don't mind if I do," I sighed in relief and left the couch.

I followed them to Emmett's room, and Emmett locked the door behind us. I sat down on the floor and leaned back against his bed, and Jasper sat down next to me. Emmett went over to his French balcony and opened the door before he sat down with us too.

We didn't speak as we smoked. I had a feeling we were all thinking about the same thing anyway. The one thing we weren't supposed to talk about.

I took a deep drag of the joint and let the smoke linger in my lungs for a moment before I slowly breathed it out. I leaned my head back on the bed, and my eyes fell on the brown teddy bear that sat on one of Emmett's bookshelves. The teddy bear was dressed in a ridiculously ugly and faded blue t-shirt with the text "Brother Bear."

"That's so fucking gay," I said with a snort and chuckled humorlessly to myself.

"What is?" Jasper asked, before taking a deep drag of the joint.

"That," I said and pointed to the teddy bear. "It's so fucking gay. Why are you keeping that shit anyway?" I turned my head so I could look at Emmett. I was expecting him to laugh with me on this one, and admit it was fucking gay for an eighteen-year-old guy to have a fucking teddy bear on fucking display. Emmett wasn't laughing though. He just looked at it with a contemplative expression.

"Do you remember how I got it?" he asked, without tearing his eyes off of it.

"Yeah," I said with a lazy smirk. "We were supposed to go with Mom and Dad to Port Angeles for that fucking carnival... but you broke your fucking leg when you fell out of a tree... Dad had to take you to the hospital, while Mom took me to the carnival because I wouldn't stop bitching about it..."

I chuckled at the memory. I was five at the time and we were supposed to go to the carnival to celebrate Emmett's seventh birthday. Emmett used to climb trees like a fucking monkey when he was a kid. Just an hour before we were supposed to leave for Port Angeles, he fell out of one and broke his fucking leg. Needless to say, the only trip Emmett got to make that day was one to the hospital. I begged our mom to take me to the carnival anyway, and since Mom is such a pushover and unable to say the word "No," she took me there.

"Yeah..." Emmett said slowly. "Then you won that bear by hitting bottles or whatever it was... You remember what you said when you gave it to me when you got home?" I shook my head. That I did not remember. "You said... with the most serious expression I've ever seen you wear... even to this day... that, 'This bear will always look after you, and see to it that you will never hurt yourself again. Brother Bear is your bodyguard.'" Emmett smiled at the memory, and I couldn't help but smile too. Things used to be so fucking easy when you were a kid.

You were so fucking naïve, and thought for real that a fucking teddy bear could keep your brother safe from being hurt.

"Do you believe that though?" I chuckled. "That the fucking bear is your bodyguard?"

He half shrugged and smiled.

"I have yet to break another bone, right? That bear has some major mojo, so don't hate on the bear. It's got superpowers," he said with a serious tone, while gazing at it with that weird expression of his. I looked over at Jasper who met my gaze with a confused look in his eyes. A moment later, we both burst out laughing at the same time.

"Oh dear God, Em, that's so fucking gay!" I laughed. "That bear doesn't have any power. It's just a fucking toy for crying out loud. A toy I gave you because I didn't want it. I tried to win a dragon, but instead I got that one. The only superpower it has is that it's super lame."

Jasper and I continued laughing, but Emmett didn't join in. Instead, he just took a deep drag of the joint and slowly breathed the smoke out through his nose. All the while his eyes were glued to that fucking bear.

"So has Emmett told you about our trip?" Jasper asked, when our laughter had died down.

"What trip?"

"My family is going to Vermont next week. We're spending the entire week there to celebrate Thanksgiving. Rose and I were allowed to take our respective others with us this year," Jasper explained.

"What? You're all going to Vermont?" I asked incredulously.

"Yeah, we are," Jasper said with a pleased smile. "I get to bring Alice and Rose gets to bring doofus. Feels like a fucking double date or some shit."

"Or some shit, yeah," I muttered. "And what the fuck am I supposed to do for an entire fucking week?" Jasper shrugged and I looked over at Emmett. He looked back at me with empty eyes.

"I don't know," Emmett said with a shrug. "Feel sorry for yourself?"

"Very fucking necessary, thanks Em," I muttered, sarcastically.

"Wasn't that what you had planned on doing anyway? The only difference is that we're not gonna be here to listen to your crap... not that we would have been listening anyway," he continued.

"Are we seriously getting into that again? C'mon," Jasper complained. "Yes, Edward is a self-centered asshole, who thinks only of himself. We knew that already. So why the hell are you fighting about it now?"

"We're not fighting about it. We're not even talking about it anymore," I replied icily and stood up. "In fact, we're not talking at all."

I stalked over to the door, and Emmett chuckled humorlessly as I passed him.

"Yeah, and if you're not talking to me, or us, then who are you gonna complain to?" Emmett asked. "Who are you gonna try to convince that you don't give a fucking crap about Swan when you just spent two hours after dinner drawing a fucking picture of her. Tell me again, brother, how much you *don't* care about her."

I glared at him, but he wasn't even looking at me. He was looking at that stupid teddy bear again.

"I was not drawing *her* !" I argued and he snorted. A somewhat smug smile was his only reply.

I shot him another glare before unlocking the door and walking out. I made a point by slamming it hard behind me. I walked back to my

room and slammed that door too. For some reason, it made me feel better.

I stalked over to the couch and grabbed the sketchbook I left there. I looked down on the picture I had drawn and felt all the blood rush from my face as I looked down at it.

Emmett was fucking right.

I had spent two fucking hours on sketching Isabella Swan's fucking face.

With excruciatingly perfect detail too.

Her wavy hair was covering half her face and her eyes were gazing down. She didn't look sad, she just looked... empty.

I ripped the picture out of my sketchbook and threw it in the trash. I had to resist the urge to light the trashcan on fire in order to remove all evidence of the sketch ever existing.

My heart was pounding like crazy in my chest, and I was sure that it was going to jump right out. I gripped my hair and tried to take a few calming breaths.

That sketch could easily be explained. *I'm sure* .

No. It can't.

Yes. It can!

The only reason I drew her was because I had let my hand do all the walking. I hadn't thought much of anything when I drew. Swan was obviously on my mind because she was fucking up my life, so of course my subconscious mirrored that by drawing her face.

Of course. *My subconscious* . It's a scientific fact that the subconscious can do some crazy ass stuff if you don't pay close enough attention. Even though you know better.

My heart finally eased into its regular speed, and I sighed in relief.

I was not going to let this shit get to me. It meant nothing.

Nothing at all.

Nothing.

But when Swan didn't come to school the next day.

It meant something.

Pain

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 20 - Pain

Isabella Swan POV

Two days had come and gone, and I had yet to go completely insane. Maybe I was stronger than I thought? Or maybe the new *drugs* that Dr. Cullen had given me were stronger than I thought.

Who was I to complain anyway? I was still alive, and I didn't feel more suicidal than usual. That must count for something, right? But, I guess, in the end that didn't matter much either.

Two days was my hard limit. I could not take it anymore. I had to get the hell out of this house soon or else no drugs in the world would keep me from going insane. Even the razors, in the bathroom cabinet, were beginning to call to me. Although, that probably had more to do with my father than it did with me being stuck in this house.

Dad had told me that Mom was coming back on Wednesday. That wasn't even a week from today.

She was going to stay for the weekend, but Dad kept hinting that she might stay longer. Apparently her doctor thought she was good to go and that she didn't need to stay at the institution anymore. I soon realized that there wasn't much I could do about it either. She was

coming home whether I liked it or not. I had no say in this as Dad pointed out to me earlier.

" She has already stayed away longer than necessary because she wanted to make this easier on you. But enough is enough, Bella. Your mom is coming home and it's time for you to grow up and accept that you can't blame her anymore. You need to face and accept reality for what it is."

Yeah, reality. I wondered if either of my parents even knew what that was, considering they both seemed to live in a fairytale land where everything was peachy.

I couldn't really blame my father. I knew that. I had been quiet for too long. If I spoke up about the truth now, he would only think I was making it all up to keep Mom away. I should have spoken up and told him the truth months ago, but I had not been able to. I had been in shock after 'the incident' and it took me forever before I even realized myself what had happened.

Dad would never believe me now – no one would. And could I blame them? No. I could not. The whole situation was so bizarre that I sometimes didn't even believe it myself, until I saw the scars on my body that reminded me that it wasn't all just a nightmare.

I wish I could tell someone.

But the only one who had offered me the chance to talk was the one person who had the power to get me committed. *For real* . And not in some 'come and go as you please' kind of place where Mom apparently stayed. But at a real institution where there was no chance of escape. They would consider me crazy, and I would probably end up even more crazy because of it.

I guess that was the problem.

I wasn't crazy, not even a little bit. Being suicidal doesn't mean you're crazy. It just means you have no reason left to live and ending your

life is the only way to go. Why is that considered crazy?

" You almost killed your mother with that stunt. How would you feel if you came home from a dinner with a friend just to find your daughter with her arms cut open, lying lifeless in a pool of her own blood? And now you're pushing her away and keeping her away from her own home because you can't face her. Are you that ashamed of what you did, Bella? Your mother broke down completely at the thought of her only daughter, her only child , wanting to kill herself. She's killing herself because of what you did to her. Everyone goes through a rough patch in her life. Being a teenager ain't easy, hell, I remember how it was. But that doesn't give you the right to end your life and then make your mother miserable just because you didn't succeed. Grow up, Bella, and take responsibility for your actions. You can't keep hiding from this anymore."

Dad was a man of few words, so when he spoke up you usually listened. Even when what he had to say was all a bunch of lies, but I couldn't blame him for that, since he didn't know any better.

The only reason I didn't have to go through the usual psychiatric investigation after my supposed attempt to take my own life, was because my mom was close friends with the doctor that was assigned to my case. They saw to it that it wasn't made into a big deal, and for some unknown reason, he managed to pull some strings and made the situation go away completely. I still don't know why or how he did it. Didn't somebody notice that there was something wrong with the way he handled things? Shouldn't he be turned in for malpractice or something? I don't care if he was my mother's friend and thought he was doing them both a favor. You don't just make a situation like ours go away just with a snap of your fingers. The health-care system doesn't work that way.

At least, it *shouldn't* work that way. But, apparently, it does.

The mere thought of that "doctor" was still giving me the creeps.

Dr. What's-his-face came to our house a couple of time to take care of my wounds, after that I never saw him again. I never had to return to the hospital again after that initial visit when I was brought in following my 'suicide attempt.'

Suicide.

Three months ago I never would have thought about it. The mere word would have made me cringe and wrinkle my nose. I would not have understood it at all. Why would someone want to end their life when there was so much to live for in this world?

Now I knew better. Now I knew exactly why someone would want to kill herself.

I readjusted my position on my bed. A small burst of pain shot through my leg, but it was nothing too bad. I had grown accustomed to the ever present pain now. I was just glad it wasn't as bad as two days ago, when my house arrest started.

It had all started with a dream.

I don't know where I had been exactly; all I remember is that there had been fire *everywhere* . I had to run to escape the flames, but as soon as I thought I was safe, I had been met by yet another wall of flames. The flames had inched closer to me, and my body became frozen in place. There had been no use to trying to run away anymore, because there simply had not been a place to run to. *I was trapped* . The flames had begun to lick their way up my leg, and I tried to kick them off me. It had only spurred them on even more. Before I knew it, the fire had been practically eating at my leg, and I could do nothing but scream out in pain.

I remember thinking that it was weird that it didn't smell bad. Wasn't burning human flesh supposed to smell really bad? I think I had read somewhere that burned human flesh was one of the worst smells you could ever encounter. So if that was the case, why couldn't I smell anything?

At that time, I hadn't realized it was all just a dream, and now I felt kind of stupid for thinking about what burned flesh was supposed to smell like. I was on fire, and all I could think about was why it didn't smell. That didn't make any sense. But then again, dreams rarely do.

Now when I closed my eyes, I could still see my flesh sizzling and boiling as the flames licked my skin. It was a disgusting sight. But what I remember the most was not the sight, but the excruciating pain of having being burned alive.

It was my own bloodcurdling scream that had woken me up.

Apparently I had woken up Dad too with my screaming, because he came running into my room, looking all panicky. I think he asked me if something was wrong and if I had a nightmare or something. I honestly don't remember.

All I remembered was that my leg was still on freaking fire – not literally, of course, but it sure as hell felt like it. It still felt as though my skin was boiling and I couldn't even speak because of the pain.

A wave of nausea had accompanied the pain in my leg, and I had shot my eyes to Dad in panic.

"Bucket." I had managed to croak out before I put my hand to my mouth to hinder anything else from coming out. Dad had looked at me in confusion for a second, before realization dawned on him. He had quickly grabbed the trashcan from under my desk and handed it to me. A second later, my stomach had heaved, and all its contents splashed into the trashcan. I had ignored Dad's grimacing as my stomach heaved again. After several minutes of dry heaving my stomach finally settled. Afterwards, I had leaned back against the headboard and wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. My face had been sticky with sweat, and I felt utterly disgusting.

And my leg was still on freaking fire.

Dad had asked me if he could do something for me and I wanted to throw that bucket of puke at him. But I had settled on just glaring at him instead. To his credit though, he got the hint fairly quickly and left the room to call Dr. Cullen.

When I had glanced at the clock on my nightstand table it informed me it was only a little after six thirty in the morning. I supposed I should have felt bad for making Dad call Dr. Cullen at that hour, but I decided against it. Dr. Cullen had told me himself that I could call him anytime if I needed anything, and right then I really needed him.

Dad had left for work before Dr. Cullen had shown up.

Dad hadn't left because he didn't care about me and my health; he had left because I told him to. It was obvious that he had been uncomfortable standing around when I was in so much pain. There was nothing he could do for me anyway, so why should he stick around?

The only bad thing about the situation was that he hadn't argued with me at all when I told him to leave. He had protested a little bit, but mostly he just seemed relieved that he didn't need to stand around watching me suffer. An outsider would probably make the assumption that he didn't care enough about me, but I knew he did... or at least, I hoped he did. Somewhere deep inside.

Really, really, deep inside.

He just didn't know how to express it, especially considering how bad our relationship was right now, with the situation with my mom and all.

When Dr. Cullen had shown up he jokingly called out "Marco." I would have laughed at his sad attempt at humor, but the pain made it impossible. Although by some miracle, I still somehow had managed to croak out "Polo" in return. What had amazed me even more is that he heard me.

He had been smiling gently at me when he entered my room – like he didn't mind at all that we had called him at six thirty in the morning – but I scarcely noticed his friendly expression. I had been too hung up on what the hell he was wearing.

He had been dressed in a dark pair of jeans – designer, I'm sure – and a beige pullover. For some reason I had expected to see him in full doctor mode, with his white coat on and his stethoscope around his neck. It felt out of place seeing him in ... *normal* clothes.

Dr. Cullen had done his thing. He had asked me what was wrong, to wiggle my toes, to describe the pain and if I had put any unusual strain on the leg. And while he was busy asking me stupid questions I was ready to ask him to cut the stupid thing off.

I could live with one leg. Yes. I could. As long as it meant that I would be free from any more pain.

Who needs both their legs anyway, right?

At least I could seek comfort in the fact that Dr. Cullen realized I wasn't acting and that the pain was real. He gave me a couple of strong painkillers, which left me pretty much knocked out for the rest of the day.

He hadn't liked it when I told him that I hadn't used the wheelchair to get around in school. He had given me a disapproving look and gone on a rant about not putting unnecessary strain on my leg, because it could mess up the healing process and make it heal incorrectly.

"The healing from this kind of injury is a painful process, and you're only adding to it when you use the crutches, instead of the wheelchair to get around. I really recommend you use the wheelchair from now on, at least until your leg has somewhat settled. If you keep adding strain to your leg like this, it might not heal correctly and you'll end up with even more permanent damage."

Blah, blah, blah...

I realized that the added strain he was talking about wasn't because I had used the crutches; it was because of Edward. My leg had been fine until he decided that it was a good idea to grab me and drag me through on the parking lot by the grocery store.

Edward was a gift that just kept on giving, wasn't he? He couldn't even touch me without physically hurting me and now I may end up even worse than before because of it. First the accident and now this. Maybe the next time he touched me he would end up killing me.

Huh, maybe I should give him a call...

Dr. Cullen had not been pleased to hear about the incident and I surprised myself – and probably him too – by defending Edward.

"He just didn't think..." I had said in Edward's defense, and Dr. Cullen just shook his head.

"My son rarely does," he had replied before he went on another rant about my leg.

He had told me to call him if the painkillers didn't help and if the pain didn't subside. He then told me that the extra pain I was experiencing could be a sign of the bones healing incorrectly. He had basically put me on house arrest and told me that I was not allowed to leave the bed for a couple of days. Another thing he didn't forget to tell me was that he thought it might have been too soon for me to return to school, especially since I refused to use that stupid wheelchair. If most of the pain wasn't gone by Friday, I had to go back to the hospital to get my leg x-rayed.

If it came down to that, I wondered if they could x-ray through the cast or if they would be forced to remove it. What if there was something wrong with the healing? Then they would most likely have to remove the cast and maybe even operate again.

I didn't know why, but the thought of having to remove the cast was more saddening for me than the thought of having yet another

surgery.

It wasn't that I would miss the cast itself. It was the pictures on it. I knew that the pictures shouldn't have mattered to me, because Alice and Emmett weren't my friends. Their pictures shouldn't mean a thing to me and I shouldn't miss them at all when they were gone. It was just pictures, after all, silly drawings they had made because they felt bad for what their friend did.

It was all about pity.

The thought, along with the pain at the time, had weakened the walls I surrounded myself with. And before I knew it, a quiet sob had escaped me as Dr. Cullen was about to leave.

"Isabella... are you alright?" he had asked me, even though the answer was obvious. I had closed my eyes and shook my head slowly.

"Everything... everything is just falling apart and there is no way for me to stop it..." I had whispered without thinking. The pain, the thought of losing the cast and the guilt I felt for putting Edward through this, was all becoming too much.

"I meant it when I said you could talk to me, you know," he had said with a soft voice.

"Yeah, and what good would it do? Talking won't make it go away and you're just gonna write it down in my file and get me committed or something," I had argued in response.

That was the truth. If I talked to him, he would think I was crazy and delusional. I would get committed so fast it would make my head spin. Dr. Cullen had that power and was therefore very dangerous in my eyes. I should watch myself at all times when he was around, but there was something about him that made me want to trust him, which only added to the fact that he was dangerous.

I thought about how Dr. Cullen had reacted when I told him about the incident with Edward. For a split second he had looked absolutely furious. It reminded me of what Edward had said to me, about his parents disowning him or something. I guess the look in Dr. Cullen's eyes proved that Edward had not been full of shit when he said it.

I hated myself for feeling bad for Edward, but I couldn't help it. It seemed as though everyone was putting the blame on him, even his own family and friends too. So how could I not feel bad for him? He was a victim in all this just as much as I was - okay, maybe not *just* as much. He didn't deserve to have the blame pinned on him. It was an accident. Nothing more. Why was I the only one who saw that? *I'm not even sure if Edward saw it.*

I don't care what the guy said. He could tell me he wasn't hurting until he was blue in the face, but it would not change the fact that he was. He was hurting, and he was in denial about it.

I wondered how long it would be before his walls came crashing down on him and as I asked myself that, I wanted to hit myself in the head with a frying pan.

Why was I thinking so much about Edward? Why did I care so much what happened to him? He didn't care about me, which he so nicely pointed out to me. So there was no reason for me to care about him either, which he also ever so nicely pointed out to me. Still, my mind was there. Maybe it was because I felt an odd connection to him now, like we shared something.

I knew firsthand how it felt to have the people you loved turn their backs on you. I knew how it felt to be betrayed by the very people who were supposed to protect you. I knew exactly how it felt to have all of that taken away and doubt that they ever loved you in the first place. I knew. That was probably why I felt I could relate to what he was going through. It was not an easy thing having your life turned upside down.

I sighed loudly in an attempt to clear my head, and let my eyes sweep over my room. My eyes locked on the pile of homework on my desk that Alice had brought over for me. I hadn't even opened the books let alone done the assignments we'd been given, since she came over with them.

I glanced at the clock on my nightstand. I still had ten minutes. Alice was going to pick me up at exactly seven forty five. Yes. *Alice* . Alice was now my private chauffeur, thanks to my dad, at least for the remaining two days.

I didn't care that Dr. Cullen had ordered me to stay in bed for a couple of days. I needed to get the hell out. Besides, isn't two days one day short of being counted as 'a few' days anyway? What did it matter if I went to school a day early? What harm could it do?

I looked down on my leg and smiled humorlessly at myself.

Yeah, what harm could it do?

Other than adding strain on my leg which would lead it to healing incorrectly, which in turn could lead to having it permanently damaged.

What harm, indeed.

I had on the same pair of jeans that I wore on Monday. I still had no other options to choose from. The only other option was to wear sweatpants, but I'd be dead before I ever wore sweats to school. I put my books in my bag, along with the homework I had yet to do, before awkwardly making my way downstairs.

Each step shot flashes of pain through my leg, but I scarcely noticed it anymore. They didn't bother me much, thanks to the pills Dr. Cullen had given me a few days earlier. I thought they were still somehow working their magic, or at least boosting the effects of the weaker ones I was taking. Probably not. Maybe I was just numbing down to the point where I no longer felt anything.

I reached the bottom of the stairs just as the doorbell rang.

The pixie is early.

I made my way to the front door and opened it. Alice was smiling brightly, and I wondered how the hell one could be so happy in the morning.

"Morning, *Bella* , looking forward to school?" she asked with a chipper voice which was a few octaves too high.

"Always," I muttered sarcastically as I followed her to the car.

I still couldn't believe I was actually going to school with Alice. People were going to see us together when we got there and they would begin to talk. Rumors would spread. And before I knew it, I would be screwed.

I blamed Dad for all of this. It was his fault, after all, that Alice was even here right now. And it was his fault that she now was calling me by my nickname.

Alice had come over on Tuesday afternoon to drop off my homework, but it ended with her staying for almost three hours. The first hour was just me and her in my bedroom. She talked on and on about fashion and school. Every once in a while she asked me something and I gave her the same answer almost every time.

' I don't know .'

When Dad came home he was thrilled that Alice was there and he even asked her to stay for dinner. It was during said dinner that it was decided that Alice was going to drive me to and from school if I was to go back again before the weekend. It was also during that dinner that Alice picked up on my nickname and started to call me *Bella* too.

Alice was not going to be in school at all the next week, neither was Emmett, Jasper nor Rosalie. They were all going on a trip somewhere to spend Thanksgiving with Jasper and Rosalie's family. Alice told me all about that too, but I didn't really pay any attention to the details surrounding the trip. All I knew was that she was really looking forward to it.

"I'm so glad you decided to come back. I came up with the best idea ever for a drawing on your cast, if you don't mind." She shot me a smile before putting her attention back on the road. "How long are you gonna have that thing on anyway? Emmett said he wanted to draw more too, but I said we had to ask you first. You don't seem too comfortable around him, you know? You seem more comfortable around me. Maybe that's because I'm a girl and he's a guy. So who do you like? Do you have a boyfriend? I bet you have a boyfriend. You're like, really pretty." She was speaking a mile a minute, and I wondered how the hell she even managed to get so many words out in a single breath. She must have big lungs.

"Eh... six to eight weeks?" I said slowly, feeling slightly unsure if I was even supposed to answer her stupid questions and in what order I was supposed to answer them. She shot me an amused smile.

"You've had a boyfriend for that long, huh? You don't sound too sure... but I guess that's normal, it's hard to tell exactly when a relationship starts. So where is he from? He's not from Forks, is he? I haven't seen you with a guy," she rattled on and I groaned.

"I meant that I'm stuck with this cast for six to eight weeks," I explained with a quiet voice. "Dr. Cullen said it depends on how well it heals..."

She looked a little confused for a moment before going back to being all smiles again. I felt beyond stupid. Of course she wasn't rattling off incoherent questions because she wanted me to answer them. She only did it because she wanted to fill the silence. She wasn't giving me a ride because she wanted to; she did it because she was too

afraid to say no to my dad when he asked her. She was too polite, which of course was the reason why she was even being nice to me in the first place.

Alice was not my friend and Emmett was not my friend. A few pictures on my cast didn't change that. I slumped lower in the seat as I dwelled in my own stupidity for thinking otherwise.

"So...you don't have a boyfriend?" Alice asked gently and threw me another friendly smile.

"Can't say that I do," I muttered. The idea of me having a boyfriend was absurd. Who would want me? It wasn't enough that I was disfigured with scars, now I also had the fact that I'm crippled against me. And I was not pretty. Not even close.

"If you were more outgoing and talked a little more to people, then I'm sure you-" she began, but I cut her off before she got any further.

"I'm not interested in having a boyfriend," I snapped abruptly. "Ever."

Her smile became forced before she let it drop and fade completely.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to offend you... I was just making conversation," she said quietly.

I looked over at her and saw that she was pouting, and it was not a 'forgive-me-for-putting-my-foot-in-my-mouth' kind of pout. It was more real than that, like she was genuinely feeling bad for even saying anything in the first place.

"No , *I'm* sorry," I mumbled and looked down on my hands in my lap. "I just... I'm just sorry."

"It's okay," she replied in a quiet voice. "I shouldn't have brought it up. It's personal, I get it."

I immediately felt bad for snapping at her, but what was I supposed to do? You talked to your girlfriends about boys, not with total

strangers. She didn't know me, so there was no reason for her to ask about my love life... or lack thereof.

We reached the school in record time since her car didn't have any problem going over fifty like mine. Alice waited patiently for me to exit the car and then she walked beside me all the way to my locker. I had been right earlier when I thought that people were going to stare at me if I came to school with Alice. And they did. *A lot* .

Alice didn't seem to notice. She was just smiling brightly as we walked down the hallway. It was as if she didn't even see the other students. She only saw herself and me in the hallway.

What I wouldn't give to have her confidence...

We were halfway to my locker when we spotted Edward and Jasper walking towards us.

Alice's entire face lit up when she spotted them, and she waved at Jasper, who gave her a small wave in return along with a coy, crooked smile.

"Isn't he adorable?" Alice said and startled me by hugging my arm as we walked. I almost lost my balance because of it, and she immediately let go of me. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she said a little panicked.

"Don't worry about it. I was born vertically challenged," I mumbled in response.

Edward and Jasper reached us just as we stopped by my locker. Jasper gave me a quick once-over before he went to stand next to Alice. And Edward was... Edward was looking straight at me.

Looking. Not glaring. There is a difference. Huh.

"You've haven't been here in fucking forever," Edward said with a clipped tone. My eyes widened in surprise at his comment and the

others looked at him too. Why would he care if I was gone? And why the hell would he even notice?

When the surprise settled, I found myself getting irritated. Who the hell did he think he was? He couldn't go around telling me I shouldn't care about him when he obviously was keeping track on my attendance record.

That was why I couldn't help the words that escaped from my mouth.

"What? I haven't? You sure?" I asked with my eyes wide in feigned confusion.

A choked, snorting noise came from beside Alice and I turned my head towards Jasper. I saw him covering his mouth with the back of his hand, and there was a small smile hiding behind it.

"Sorry," he said and I could tell he was trying hard to keep from chuckling. I frowned a little and looked back at Edward.

"So? Where the fuck have you been?" Edward asked expectantly.

"Leave her alone, Edward. Haven't you done enough?" Alice said with a surprisingly stern voice. Edward glared at her.

"What, I'm not allowed to fucking ask where the fuck my lab partner has been?" he asked and raised an eyebrow. "This little fucking goose is putting all the work on the rest of us, so she can walk away with an easy A. Excuse me for not fucking liking it."

Alice snorted and shook her head.

"Leave. Her. Alone," she said again. "And really, Edward? You really think the people in your group are going to get an A on that project you got going on? Newton and Lauren couldn't get an A on a test even if the answers were already filled out for them."

Edward huffed and pushed past us as he walked away.

"That guy has issu-uh-uh-uh-es," Alice sang.

"Can you blame him?" I asked and cocked an eyebrow at her. She studied me for a moment, probably trying to figure out whether or not I was serious before she answered.

"Yes... I think I can blame him, and I think you can too," she replied slowly, almost uncertainly.

I chuckled quietly and humorlessly to myself, as I turned towards my locker to replace the books in my bag with the ones I needed for first period.

Who needs enemies when they have friends like that?

"You... you really don't blame him?" she asked me incredulously.

"Why would I blame him?" I asked as I closed the locker. "He hit a patch of black ice and lost control. It could have happened to anyone. There is nothing to blame him for."

"Yeah, maybe so, but don't you think you deserve to be treated with a little more respect after everything you've been put through?" she asked.

I wanted to tell her I had been through worse and I have not gained more respect from anyone because of it. So why should this time be any different? In a way, Edward was not much different from my parents, except that they used to love me before everything went to Hell.

I looked at her straight in the eyes when I shook my head.

"No, because Edward has never respected me. The accident didn't change that fact, nor should it," I replied. "And if you're his friend, maybe you should treat *him* with a little more respect and not spend so much time pretending to worry about me. I'm not your friend."

"I'm... I'm not pretending," Alice said, looking slightly taken aback by my comment and sounding almost offended by it. My eyes wandered to Jasper, who was looking at me in an odd way. His head was tilted to the side, and he was looking quite amused at what I was saying.

"What?" I snapped, not really liking to be stared at like that.

"Nothing, I'm just trying to figure you out," he replied and his southern drawl rang clearly in every word. It annoyed me even more. He hadn't live in the South since he was a damn kid, so why did he still have that stupid accent?

"Yeah, well, good luck with that," I said sarcastically and gripped my crutches tightly as I prepared myself to leave. "Let me know when you do, because I could use the info."

I walked away feeling a little empowered by the whole encounter. It felt nice to defend myself, and it also felt nice to defend Edward. He might be the biggest jerk on the face of the planet, but he still didn't deserve to be treated like that by his friends. Friends were supposed to have your back, even when they didn't agree with what you were doing.

I could have milked the whole empowerment feeling for an hour or two at least, if it wasn't for the fact that I had forgotten that I shared first period with Alice. She didn't even ask before she plopped down on the empty seat next to me. She turned her entire body towards me and leaned forward as she spoke so the other students wouldn't hear.

"I don't get it, why do you keep defending Edward?" she asked in a hushed tone. "He doesn't deserve it, you know, especially not from you. Do you even know what he says about you behind your back?"

"Let me guess... he calls me goose, turkey, duck... maybe he throws in a few adjectives in there too... like ugly and stupid and..." I trailed off. She looked puzzled by my answer. "He's Edward Cullen. You really think he hasn't said all of that to my face already? He doesn't

care about my feelings, let alone about hurting them... so of course I know what he's been saying."

"And that doesn't bother you? That he calls you those things?" she asked bewildered.

"No, it doesn't. Why should it? Just because we were in an accident together, doesn't make us friends," I replied and she leaned back in her seat.

"You amaze me, Isabella Swan," she declared. "I love Edward. I would jump in front of a bullet for the guy, but I sometimes I just don't get him. I don't get you either. You two are more alike than you'd think."

"Yeah? Why's that?"

"Because...." She seemed to struggle for words, which seemed a little uncharacteristic for someone as talkative as Alice. "Because... you both seem to agree that Edward shouldn't change his behavior because of what happened. You both seem to agree that it's okay for him to treat you like dirt. He also says that the accident doesn't make you two friends. I wouldn't be surprised if he actually used the exact same words as you just did. And you both seem to agree that the accident shouldn't change anything. Whatever was before is now. It's like you're both in denial about the whole thing. Nothing is what it was before, and it will never be."

"That doesn't mean we can't pretend," I replied sourly and turned my head to the front.

I knew nothing would ever be the same again, but things hadn't been the same for a while now. Just because things were different now didn't mean we had to change ourselves too. Who says you have to make friends and create new relationships just because something big and unexpected happened? That didn't make any sense.

Fortunately, Alice didn't bother me with her ridiculous opinions for the remainder of the period. She probably thought she had said something deep and profound, and given me something to think about.

She probably thought she had 'gotten through' to me.

She didn't follow me to my locker after class and that was just as well. I dumped my bag in my locker before I reluctantly made my way to the gym. I wondered if Coach Hunter was going to force me to do those laps that she was talking about on Monday.

Turns out I had nothing to worry about. As soon as I stepped inside the gymnasium, Coach Hunter walked up to me and told me to get lost. Dr. Cullen had apparently called the school and informed them of my injury and that I was not allowed to participate in anything that could cause any strain on my leg. I wondered why the hell he hadn't called sooner, so I could have avoided the uncomfortable and awkward confrontation with Coach Hunter on my first day back.

I guess I should count myself lucky that he called at all. Better late than never and all that.

I did as I was told and I quickly left the gym.

The halls were empty when I got back to the main building, and I could roam around without having to think about anyone else. It was nice to be able to walk down the hallways without having to be afraid of getting pushed and knocked over for no reason at all.

" I don't fucking get it."

I stopped cold and sighed deeply. Not again.

So much for having the halls to myself.

"You're out of school for days, and when you finally get back... you don't even fucking bother to go to class. So what the hell are you

even doing here?"

I slowly turned around and tried to keep my face blank as I stared back at Edward. He had his arms crossed over his chest. He probably thought it made him look all tough and scary.

Okay, he was scary... but not because he was standing like that.

"For someone who says he doesn't care, you sure ask a lot of questions," I replied coolly.

"Well, excuse me for just pointing out the fact that you don't make any fucking sense," he snapped.

"Oh, I'm the one who doesn't make any sense? This coming from the guy who keeps bugging the girl he claims he doesn't care about!" I snapped back and he narrowed his eyes at me, but this time it didn't scare me. It just frustrated me. Why couldn't he just leave me the hell alone already? Like he told me he would.

"I don't care," he said with a huff. "I'm just calling you out on your bullshit."

"My bullshit?" I echoed incredulously. He nodded and I shook my head. "You're freaking insane."

"It takes one to know one!" he taunted and I could tell that he regretted the words as soon as they left his mouth. He wasn't really adding to his bad guy image by saying stuff like that. I tried not to laugh, but my will was not strong enough. A snort-laugh escaped my throat and I quickly covered my mouth to keep from letting it go further. "*Fuck you !*" he snarled.

Everything that was wrong with my life, everything that had gone wrong in the past three months, came crashing down on me like a house of cards. Everything became too much, and it was the furious expression in his face that pushed me over the edge. I couldn't help but...

Laugh.

I almost toppled over because I was laughing so hard. I had to cling to my crutches just to keep myself upright. It had been a while since I laughed. I couldn't even remember the last time. It felt refreshing to let it all go and just... *laugh* .

Why didn't I laugh sooner? Why did I let it go on for this long? A laugh could solve everything. Nothing felt as difficult and hard if you just laughed. Everything just went away.

Edward stared at me with a blank expression. All the anger was gone from his features and all that was left was... blank.

"You're fucking *crazy* ," he blurted when my insane laughing finally died down. I could still hear the sound of my laughing echo through the halls, or maybe it was just in my head.

"Oh, but we all knew that already," a whiny-sounding voice said from behind me. I turned my head and saw Tanya Denali walk towards us. Her heels were clicking on the floor and the sound echoed in the hallway. I was surprised I hadn't heard her approach sooner.

Maybe because you were busy laughing like a hyena?

Yeah, probably.

When Tanya reached me, she made a point by bumping into me as she passed, but I was prepared for that, so I steadied myself on my crutches right before impact. What I wasn't prepared for, however, was that she also kicked me in the back of my knee, on my good leg, which automatically made it buckle. That, along with the push, made me fall face first towards the ground.

I didn't have time to cushion the blow with my hands, since they were still gripping the crutches. I had been too surprised by the kick in my knee to even think about letting them go.

There were a million emotions running through me as my body smashed into the floor.

Humiliation, frustration, anger, sadness...

But none of them called out to me louder than my leg was at that moment. No emotion could override the pain that shot through me. This was even worse than when Edward had grabbed me. This was even worse than when I woke up screaming in pain. This was pure agony. There were not enough words in the dictionary to describe what was going on in my body and in my leg. It felt almost like the leg was trying to detach itself from my body. Like it didn't belong with me anymore.

So much for not putting any strain on it.

I was completely paralyzed by the pain for a moment. I couldn't see. I couldn't hear. I couldn't even think about anything else but the pain. But as I slowly got my senses back there was only one thing I could hear. One single word kept repeating over and over again. First I thought it was 'duck' but then it all became clearer...

" Fuck... fuck...fuck...fuck... fuck..."

Ever so slowly I opened my eyes - I couldn't even remember closing them in the first place – and my view was obscured by my hair.

"Shit, Isabella, are you alright? Shit, fuck..." Edward asked frantically as he kept touching me. *Edward freaking Cullen was touching me* . He stroked my arm gently and he tried to remove the hair that hid my face from view. "Isabella, c'mon... this isn't fucking funny. Talk to me, damnit..." I tried to clear my throat and as I did, I heard him take a sharp intake of breath. "You're fucking insane, you know that?" he blurted but his voice wasn't angry or spiteful, it was scared. He sounded like a scared little boy.

"Sorry..." I replied with a hoarse voice.

"Fuck, you should be," he chided but there was an odd sense of relief in his tone too. "What the hell were you thinking passing out like that?"

Wait... what? I passed out?

"Wh-what?" I stuttered.

"You were fucking unconscious for like an hour...." I saw him glance at his expensive looking wristwatch and then he rolled his eyes, "or maybe it was two minutes. Whatever."

"Tanya?" I didn't even bother to try to form any sentences. My tongue felt numb in my mouth and my entire body was tired. It took a great effort to even continue breathing at this point.

"She ran off like the scared little bitch she is when she realized you passed out," he snorted and shook his head. "You think you can stand? I can help you..." He held out his hand. I wanted to grab it, but my limbs wouldn't let me move them. He frowned when he saw that I didn't make any effort to move. "Come on, Swan, this isn't funny anymore... quit messing around..." He was trying to sound annoyed, but I could tell he was getting desperate. "Please," he pleaded and I tried to swallow down whatever was trying to crawl its way up my throat.

"Pain... it hurts so much," I whispered.

"Oh fuck," he said and grabbed my arms he was just about to pull me up when an angry male voice shouted. A voice we both recognized.

"WHAT THE FUCKING HELL ARE YOU DOING TO HER!"

It was Emmett. And he was furious.

I turned my eyes up, as my cheek rested against the cool stone floor of the hallway. I saw how he grabbed Edward and pushed him

violently against the nearby lockers. Edward didn't even try to fight back; he just took it. Emmett pushed him once more, before crouching down by my side.

"Shit, Isabella, you alright? What did he do? Can you talk? Are you dead?" he chuckled nervously at his last question and I swallowed again.

"She's not fucking dead," Edward snapped, "why don't you fucking call Dad or something and I can help her to the fucking car."

" *You're* gonna help her? Yeah right," Emmett snorted. He grabbed my arm to help me sit up and I winced instantly at the movement.

"Don't. Fucking. Touch. Her," Edward hissed as he grabbed Emmett's shoulder.

"And how am I supposed to help her if I can't touch her?" Emmett hissed back.

"Just call Dad and tell him we're on our way," Edward sighed. They looked at each other for a moment and Edward must have won the staring contest, since Emmett backed off and pulled out his phone. Edward crouched back beside me. "Okay, you have to tell me what I can do here, alright?"

"Just... help me... up," I said quietly.

"You want... you want me to fucking carry you or some shit?" he asked and scratched his neck awkwardly. I shook my head infinitesimally. "Well, you're not much fucking help are you?" he said with a low chuckle. He grabbed my arms, surprising me with the gentle way he did so, and helped me up.

I was dizzy with pain and the entire hallway seemed to be spinning around me. I leaned against him and he put an arm around my waist to help steady me. Emmett looked at us with his phone against his ear.

"Hey, Dad? It's me," he said into the phone without tearing his eyes off of us, "something happened in school... no, I'm fine... Edward's fine too, at least for the time being... it's Isabella... yeah... she's hurt... I don't know... yeah... she couldn't even move... I just found her with Edward.... How the hell should I know?... yeah... we're on our way...." He put his phone back in his pocket and looked at me. "I can carry you to the car. You don't look so good right now, and we'll get to the car faster if I carry you."

I nodded lazily and the movement brought on another wave of dizziness. The only thing missing was the nausea. Edward let go of me as Emmett put an arm behind my knees and one behind my back and lifted me up.

"The fucking least you can do is take the crutches," he snapped at Edward.

Edward glared at his brother, but did as he was told. He picked up the crutches and followed us to the car. Emmett put me down ever so gently in the passenger seat and helped me with my seatbelt, but he stopped his movements when Edward opened the door to the backseat and was about to climb in.

"And where the hell do you think you're going?" Emmett asked.

"I have a feeling Dad might wanna know what happened, and I am the only fucking one who can tell him. I have a feeling Swan isn't in fucking condition to tell the tale," Edward explained coolly as he got in the car.

"Yeah? Then why do I get the feeling that the only reason you want to go is to make sure she doesn't rat you out!" Emmett asked with a scary calm tone.

"Because she wouldn't," Edward said and slammed the door. Emmett sighed and looked at me.

"Whatever he did, don't be afraid to tell my dad, okay? You don't need to protect his ass," Emmett said to me quietly. I smiled sadly at him.

"He was protecting mine," I whispered before it all went black.

Constant

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 21 - Constant

Edward Cullen POV

I leaned against the wall and looked out the window. Why I bothered to stay in school was beyond me. Why didn't I just skip and leave this hellhole since I wasn't even going to class anyway? But, of course, I couldn't just up and leave. Something in my head kept holding me back and I had a feeling it had something do with Swan.

" You haven't been here in fucking forever."

My own fucking words were coming back to haunt me. I didn't know what bugged me more, the fact that she had triggered me to ask her where she had been or the fact that I had even noticed she was gone in the first place.

" What? I haven't? You sure?"

I smirked darkly at the memory. It was fucking impossible to predict her response to anything I said or did. Which just pissed me the fuck off. This whole thing would have been a whole lot easier if she was little more constant and didn't change her personality all the fucking time. It was like she suffered from a multiple personality disorder or some shit.

Alice had acted like Swan's bodyguard and gave me shit for even asking. What the hell was her problem anyway? Here I was, trying to be 'nice' and ask Swan where the hell she had been, and people still gave me shit about it. There was no pleasing these people.

I heard an uneven clinking sound come closer and I threw a look over my shoulder.

Speak of the devil and she will appear.

Swan had just rounded a corner of the hallway and was walking away from me. To me, it looked like she was struggling more with her crutches today than she had on Monday. I wondered if it was because of her leg that she had stayed home or because she was too weak to face the ridicule and bullying.

I frowned when I realized she should have been in class and not doing the skipping thing like I did. What was she doing roaming the halls?

She didn't even bother to show up for days and when she finally did, she didn't even go to fucking class. What the hell was that about? What was she even doing here if she didn't intend to go to class? I pushed myself from the wall before walking up behind her with my arms still crossed over my chest.

"I don't fucking get it," I declared. She mustn't have heard me approach because she jumped a little bit when she stopped mid-step. "You're out of school for days, and when you finally come back... you don't even fucking bother to go to class. So what the hell are you even doing here?"

She slowly turned around to face me and her face was oddly blank as she stared back at me. But it was clear that it was all a façade. Her big brown eyes betrayed her. I don't think she knew how much she gave away with just a glance.

"For someone who says he doesn't care, you sure ask a lot of questions," she replied calmly.

I walked right into that one, didn't I? Fuck.

"Well, excuse me for just pointing out the fact that you don't make any fucking sense," I snapped in frustration and she frowned a little.

"Oh, I'm the one who doesn't make any sense? This coming from the guy who keeps bugging the girl he claims he doesn't care about!" she snapped back angrily. I narrowed my eyes and glared at her. Fucking Goose, who the hell did she think she was?

"I don't care," I argued with a huff. "I'm just calling you out on your bullshit."

"My bullshit?" she echoed and I nodded firmly. "You're freaking insane."

"It takes one to know one!" I said with a sing-song voice before I had a chance to stop myself. As soon as the words were out, I wanted to chop my fucking tongue off.

What the hell did I just say?

Her eyes widened at my words, not in surprise or anger, but in amusement. A snort-like sound escaped from her and she quickly covered her mouth without letting go of her crutch. She looked so fucking amused and it pissed me off even more.

"Fuck you!" I snarled.

She stared at me in amazement, but I don't know if it was because of me or something she was thinking about. A million emotions flashed in her eyes as the snorting sound escaped her again. She brought her hand back down from her mouth and steadied herself on her crutches before she bent over and...

Fucking laughed.

She was laughing at me. *Fucking laughing* . How dare she laugh at me like that? And what the hell was I supposed to do with that?

I tried to glare at her and contain my annoyance, but there was something in her laugh that made it impossible to be truly annoyed. There was something in her laugh that made me want to laugh with her.

Which of course pissed me off even more.

I felt a little puzzled as I watched her shake in laughter. I don't know exactly what I expected her laugh to sound like, but this surely wasn't it. A snorting pig sounding laugh would have made more sense to me than this... this... *what the hell was this ?*

Tanya emerged from one of the nearby bathrooms, and noticing us, she smiled wickedly at me. She didn't hesitate at all before she steered towards us. I didn't pay any attention to her. Instead I kept staring at Swan, letting her do her thing, and when her laugh finally died the hell down, I said the first thing that came to mind.

"You're fucking *crazy* ," I said and meant every word.

Crazy is a relative term after all.

"Oh, but we all knew that already," Tanya replied with a cocky smile. She gave me a – what I assumed was her – seductive look and I cringed inwardly. Her face fell a little when she realized I wasn't going to play her fucking game and she pursed her lips in irritation as she reached Swan.

You know how animals can sense when there is a storm coming? Well, I had the same fucking feeling of dread wash over me as I watched Tanya close in on Swan.

Swan's stance changed, as if she felt it too. It looked like she was preparing for something. I watched as Tanya bumped into Swan as she passed.

We both had seen it coming.

But what neither of us saw coming was what Tanya also did as she pushed Swan – Tanya kicked the back of Swan's good knee and Swan's eyes widened in shock and panic as her leg buckled underneath her. My eyes widened too as I watched the inevitable happen before me.

I couldn't have prevented the crash even if I had wanted to. It all happened too fast – even though as I watched it, it seemed like it was happening in slow motion.

My mind registered every little thing. It registered the panicked expression on Swan's face when she realized what was going on. She met my gaze for a split second and I could almost feel the fear in her eyes. The panic and fear in her eyes intensified when she realized she was still holding on to her crutches, and that she didn't have time to cushion her fall by letting them go.

A soft, yet oddly shrill and unnatural, sound escaped her as her body touched the ground.

Then everything went silent.

Scary fucking silent.

I could hear my fucking heart pounding in my ears as I looked down at Swan's unmoving body. *Shit*. She didn't even make a sound. I wasn't sure if she was even breathing. Or alive. *Shit*. What if Tanya killed her?

I shot my eyes to Tanya, who was looking down at Swan too. At least she had the fucking decency to look nervous about it. But that was probably because she was afraid of what punishment she was going to get for this shit. This wasn't like the accident that my friends and family seemed to want to pin on me – this was on fucking purpose. Tanya kicked a crippled girl on *fucking purpose*.

Who the fuck does that?

"What the hell did you just do?" I snarled at her and she looked at me with frightened eyes.

Yeah, she was fucking frightened alright. Fucking terrified.

"I... I... she's just faking it," she stuttered and touched Swan's leg with the pointy front of her stiletto boots. She pulled her foot back quickly when she realized that Swan wasn't responding. "I mean... she walked into me; you saw it. It's totally not my fault. She like, walked right into me. *You saw it!* She's a walking accident magnet. Just like when she jumped in front of your car... she jumped in front of me. I didn't have time to stop!"

I couldn't believe what I was fucking hearing. A disturbing snarling sound escaped my throat and I bared my teeth at her slightly, making me look like a fucking growling animal. She took a step back and looked even more terrified.

"Fuck, it was her fault! You saw it!" she whined and I shook my head slowly. She took another step backwards before she turned around and ran away as quickly as her high heels could carry her, effectively leaving me to clean up her fucking mess.

Fuck.

I looked down on Swan who had yet to move. I crouched down beside her and gently touched her arm, trying to get a response out of her. The last thing I needed right now was to get shit for something I wasn't even responsible for.

"Hey, Swan... stop playing around... the bitch is gone now, you can wake up, come on..." I said to her jokingly as I shook her lightly. I could just barely make out her face behind the veil of her hair and she didn't even flinch as I shook her. It was fucking starting to make me nervous.

"Fuck, Swan, come on, you had your fun, get over it already," I snapped. "Attention seeker much?" But not even that got a response out of her.

I chuckled nervously and stopped shaking her; instead I tried with a gentler approach. I touched her arms the way you do when you try to heat someone up, as if that would help. With every second that ticked by that she didn't respond, I grew more and more anxious.

What the hell was I supposed to do if she didn't wake up? Nobody had seen what happened except me and Tanya. And if I knew Tanya at all, I was certain that she would pin this entire mess on me.

I looked down on my hands, which were still touching Swan, and my eyes widened in shock.

There was blood fucking everywhere...

My hands were covered in blood because *she* was covered in blood. My breathing became shallow and I squeezed my eyes shut. This wasn't happening. I was just having another nightmare. I just needed to wake up because *this wasn't fucking happening*.

My heart was trying to pound its way out of my chest and I felt myself lose it. *Fuck* .

I slowly opened my eyes, still finding myself in the empty hallway and looked down at the unconscious girl in front of me.

The blood was gone.

I sighed in relief, but the feeling didn't last. The blood might be gone, but she was still fucking unconscious. This was my fault. If I hadn't stopped her in the hallway and bugged her again, she wouldn't be laying here right now.

Why wasn't she waking up? How much damage could that fall have done anyway? People trip and fall every single day and they never

pass out. So what the hell was her deal?

I wanted to be fucking angry at her for putting me through this shit again, but as I looked down at her, I didn't see that ridiculous Goose that was nothing but a waste of space. *I saw a broken girl* . And I broke her.

I frowned and stroked her hair. It felt silkier than it looked.

" *Isabella* ... come on... just wake the fuck up, please... Isabella... come on..." I pleaded quietly. "It's not funny anymore..."
Unsurprisingly, she didn't move or flinch or make a sound. She was as quiet as... well, *death* . *Fuck* . "Fuck... fuck... fuck... fuck... fuck..."

I froze when I saw her back lift a little more as she took a deep breath and through her hair I could see her eyes flutter open.

"Shit, Isabella, are you alright? Shit, fuck," I spluttered and kept stroking her arm with my one hand as I tried to remove the hair that hid her face with the other. She had yet to say anything or move. All she did was look at me. "Isabella, c'mon, this isn't fucking funny. Talk to me, damnit..." She coughed and I took a sharp intake of breath in relief. "You're fucking insane, you know that?" I tried to snap at her, but my voice came out shaky and fucking pussylike.

"Sorry," she said with a weak and hoarse voice. I winced at the sound and it twisted something in me in a weird way.

"Fuck, you should be," I agreed. "What the hell were you thinking passing out like that?"

I wasn't even thinking as I spoke. The words came out at their own accord and I didn't know what the hell I was saying. Hell, I didn't even know what I was thinking. The only thought running through my head was: *Thank fucking God, she's alive* .

"Wh-what?" She sounded confused and I guess that was to be expected.

"You were fucking unconscious for like an hour..." I glanced at my watch that my parents had given me last Christmas and I rolled my eyes at myself. *An hour my ass* . "...or maybe two minutes. Whatever." What was the fucking difference anyway? She had been fucking unconscious, but she woke up. Time doesn't really matter, it was still fucking disturbing and I had a feeling we weren't out of the damn woods yet either.

I looked down at her and met her gaze. Her brown eyes held more than any teenagers eyes should. My mom would have said she had an old soul, because her eyes were so fucking expressive. She could look through me. I was fucking sure of it, because that was how it felt. She saw something that wasn't supposed to be fucking seen by anybody. *Let alone by her* .

"Tanya?" she croaked out and it was obvious that the single word alone was hard for her to get out. *Fucking Tanya* .

"She ran off like the scared little bitch she is when she realized you passed out," I said with a snort. "You think you can stand? I can help you." I held out my hand and expected her to take it, but she didn't even try to move. She just laid there like a clubbed penguin. Now she had to be acting, right? What the hell could be so wrong with her that she couldn't even move? *Shit* . Maybe the fall made her paralyzed or some shit. But that couldn't be, right? She just fell. No biggie. "Come on, Swan, this isn't funny anymore... quit messing around." I stroked her hair again and she frowned a little. "Please..." the plea escaped me, totally on its own.

"Pain... it hurts so much." Something ached in me at the sound of her broken voice. This wasn't Swan. Swan wasn't supposed to sound so defeated. She wasn't supposed to be broken. She was supposed to talk back and irritate me. She was supposed to be a waste of space. She was supposed to be nothing to me. Nothing but someone to annoy me.

At that moment, something changed.

As she lay there on the floor, looking up at me with those brown eyes, I knew she was not a waste of space. Someone so broken could never be. That thought was fucking disturbing, and it was something I would never admit out loud.

"Oh fuck," I said, grabbing her arms to help her up. I needed to take her to the hospital or something. She wasn't fucking alright and the least I could do was to take her there and get her some help. This wasn't my responsibility, but I couldn't just leave her either.

"WHAT THE FUCKING HELL ARE YOU DOING TO HER?"

I froze instantly at the sound and ever so slowly I turned my head towards Emmett. He stalked over to us and grabbed my arms before pushing me hard against the nearby lockers. He almost knocked the breath out of me, because he pushed so fucking hard. I gave him an irritated look and was just about to defend myself – with my words, not my fists – when he pushed me again. This time I did lose my breath.

He nodded once, as if he was complimenting himself for a job well done, before he crouched down beside Isabella.

"Shit, Isabella, you alright? What did he do? Can you talk? Are you dead?" he chuckled nervously and I wanted to kick his fucking face in.

"She's not fucking dead! Why don't you fucking call Dad or something and I can help her to the fucking car!" I snapped and he gave me a skeptical look.

" You're gonna help her? Yeah right," he snorted as he grabbed her arm. My anger flared when I saw her wince at the touch. Was he a fucking moron or something? Didn't he see that she was in fucking pain? *Way to fuel the fucking fire, idiot .*

I grabbed Emmett's shoulder roughly and pulled him back.

"Don't. Fucking. Touch. Her," I hissed through clenched teeth.

"And how am I supposed to help her if I can't touch her?" Emmett hissed back, glaring at me as I narrowed my eyes at him in return.

"Just call Dad and tell him we're on our way," I sighed impatiently. I was fucking ready to kick his ass. I didn't even care that this was neither the fucking place nor time for it. Swan needed to get to the hospital and Emmett wasn't helping matters. I stared him down and fortunately for him, he backed down and did as I told him. He pulled out his phone and pushed a few buttons.

I crouched down beside Swan, and she looked back at me with such sad and pained eyes. I frowned a little at the sight. I didn't like this Swan. I liked the strong Swan.

Wait... what?

I didn't like Swan at all.

Neither one of them.

"Okay, you have to tell me what I can do here, alright?" I said to her quietly.

"Just... help me... up...," she said in a weak voice. I looked at her awkwardly and scratched my neck. I had a feeling I wasn't going to be able to help her without hurting her.

"You want... you want me to fucking carry you or some shit?" I asked awkwardly. I could barely make out the movement she did with her head that probably was supposed to come off as a headshake. *That was helpful*, I thought sarcastically. "Well, you're not much fucking help are you?" I couldn't help but chuckle. I took a deep breath and grabbed her arms gently, but firmly, and helped her up.

I watched her eyes carefully as I helped her up on her feet. Her eyes almost rolled up into her head and she leaned against me as she tried to recover. Her hair was in my face and I was overwhelmed with the sweet smell of fucking strawberries. I put an arm around her waist and held her so she could get her footing back.

Emmett kept looking at us, as if he thought I was going to kill her or something, while he spoke to Dad on the phone. When he hung up, he looked at Swan and ignored my presence completely.

"I can carry you to the car. You don't look so good right now and we'll get to the car faster if I carry you," he said to her and for some reason that annoyed me.

Why was he trying to protect her? If he was going to be her new bodyguard, like Alice, then he should have been there for her before Tanya got a chance to hurt her. He couldn't act like her bodyguard only when he saw fit. I was helping her, because I was fucking there when it happened, and I would be damned if I let him take credit for it. My grip around her waist tightened instinctively at the thought.

Swan nodded and the movement seemed to make her dizzy because she immediately swayed. I reluctantly let her go when Emmett put his arms around her and lifted her up.

"The least fucking thing you can do is take the crutches," he all but spat at me.

Emmett was walking on my last fucking nerve, and if he didn't shut the hell up already, I was going to kick his fucking ass. I picked up the crutches from the floor and followed them out. I kept my eyes on Emmett's back at all times, so I was ready to intervene if the bastard did anything to cause her any distress. But of course he didn't. He took her to the car without any uncomfortable sound escaping from her.

Good for him , I thought to myself sarcastically. *Emmett saves the fucking day* .

I opened the door to the backseat and threw in the crutches before I moved to climb in myself.

"And where the hell do you think you're going?" Emmett asked me and I rolled my eyes.

"I have a feeling Dad might wanna know what happened, and I am the only fucking one who can tell him. I have a feeling Swan isn't in fucking condition to tell the tale," I replied with a collected tone even though I was anything but collected on the inside.

"Yeah? Then why do I get the feeling that the only reason you want to go is to make sure she doesn't rat you out!" Emmett replied and stared at me like he was protecting his baby cub from getting attacked by some predator. Me being the predator and the cub being Swan.

If he only knew what the hell he was talking about.

"Because she wouldn't," I replied confidently and climbed in the car and shut the door behind me. Emmett sighed as he buckled Swan up and I turned my gaze away. I tried to act nonchalant, like I couldn't care less about how he treated her with so much care.

"Whatever he did, don't be afraid to tell my dad, okay? You don't need to protect his ass," he said quietly to her and he was fucking lucky I was sitting in the back seat, because that comment alone would have made me punch him. This was not my fucking fault.

"He was protecting mine," she whispered almost too quiet to hear and I saw how Emmett frowned.

"Isabella? *Bella* ? You okay? Bella?" he asked and shook her a little. The frantic tone in his voice twisted that something that was already twisted in my gut.

"What the hell is wrong?" I asked and leaned forward in my seat.

"She's fucking unconscious, that's what's wrong," he replied with an almost hysteric tone. "What the hell did *you* do to her?"

"I didn't do anything, but that doesn't fucking matter! Get in the car already!" I snapped.

He huffed and slammed her door before quickly walking around the car to the driver's side and got in behind the wheel. The drive to the hospital didn't take long, since Emmett showed no respect for the speed limit. Dad was already waiting for us, along with a nurse, when we reached the parking lot. We climbed out of the car and Emmett picked up Swan from her seat and closed the door with his foot.

"What happened?" Dad asked and his eyes immediately went to me.

"Not my fucking fault this time," I said defensively.

"Why do I find that hard to believe?" he replied sourly. I bit my tongue in order to not let any words slip out that I couldn't take back and followed them inside instead.

Swan was brought into an examination room and neither Emmet nor I was allowed to follow. We had to wait in the waiting area while they did whatever had to be done. I was slouching in my seat and my right leg bounced restlessly on the floor as we waited for Dad or someone to come and tell us how she was.

"What the fuck are you even doing here? It's not like you care," Emmett snorted from beside me.

"I didn't do anything!" I argued and he scoffed.

"Yeah right, like you haven't spent all your fucking time talking shit about her ever since it happened. I'm sure she just fell and passed out all on her own," he said sarcastically.

"She didn't just fell; Tanya pushed her. Okay?" I snapped and shot my eyes to him.

He met my gaze for a moment before bursting into a humorless and menacing laughter.

" *Tanya* pushed her? Are you hearing yourself? Tanya might be a bitch and everything, but c'mon! She wasn't even there!" he laughed and I frowned.

"That's because she ran away like a little bitch with her tail between her legs," I replied through clenched teeth.

"I bet she had a tail between her legs today, but I'm sure it wasn't hers," he mocked and I hit his arm with my fist. He shot me an irritated look but didn't hit back. "Fucking idiot," he muttered.

"Takes one to know one," I replied and the snort that followed almost caught in my throat. The words made the whole scene from earlier replay in my mind and I closed my eyes in an attempt to remove it.

Swan's laughter was ringing in my ears... and I was not entirely sure it was in a bad way.

Her laugh had been fucking invigorating. She laughed in a way that made you think that everything would be okay. It was light and carefree and fucking... *pure* . She didn't laugh like all those fake bitches at school who only laughed because they thought they needed to, because they thought they needed to prove something. The way Swan had laughed made it obvious that she meant it. She didn't care if anybody was laughing with her, because she laughed for her own sake. Not someone else's.

But why would she laugh like that after everything that happened? That made no fucking sense whatsoever. She had no fucking reason to laugh at all, especially not because of something I've said. Yet, *she did*.

Dad came into the waiting room and he raised an eyebrow at me, before turning to Emmett.

"Her father's not here yet?" he asked. Emmett shook his head.

"Haven't seen him. I'm sure he's on his way," Emmett replied. "So... how is she?" he asked tentatively. Dad shot his eyes quickly to me before looking back at Emmett to answer.

"She's semi-conscious and I think that it was the strain on her leg that made her pass out," he sighed and turned to glare at me fully. "I want you to wait in my office, Edward. I have a feeling her father might want to talk to you when he gets here."

"I didn't do anything!" I said exasperatedly. "It was Tanya!"

Dad gave me a look that clearly said that he was beyond listening to any of my explanations, no matter how true they were. He was going to believe whatever it was he wanted to believe.

"My office, *now* ," was all he said and I reluctantly left my chair. "Emmett, you can go home and tell your mother what happened. Edward will stay here with me until I get off my shift."

Emmett nodded and left, while I was forced to follow Dad to his office. Dad closed the door behind us and motioned for me to sit down as he walked around his desk and sat down in his chair. He leaned forward and clasped his hands on his desk.

"Mind telling me what happened?" he asked in his doctor voice and I sighed.

"I was talking to Swan then that bitch Tanya showed up and pushed her. Swan passed the hell out and Tanya ran away. End of story." I sighed as I silently wondered why I even fucking bothered. He was not going to believe me anyway. He tilted his head a little to the side and studied me for what felt like an eternity before he replied.

"You didn't do this?" he asked for clarification and I shook my head.

"No, sir, I did not," I replied calmly.

He sighed deeply and opened the file that lay on his desk and flipped through it.

"What were you two talking about?" he asked without looking at me.

"Nothing..." I replied slowly. He looked up at me and quirked an eyebrow.

"Do I need to ask again?" he asked patiently. I sighed and rolled my eyes.

"Fine!" I snapped. "I asked her what the hell she was doing roaming the halls during class. I asked her why the hell she bothered to come back at all if she wasn't going to class anyway. Happy?"

His patient expression was immediately replaced by irritation and anger.

"No, I'm not happy," he replied, irritation lacing his tone. "I asked you to leave the poor girl alone. I don't understand why that is such a difficult task for you. You are not helping her by treating her like dirt." He sighed deeply and leaned back in his chair. "Are you happy, Edward? Do you like hurting her? She's been through enough, the last thing she needs right now is you giving her a hard time because you think she's to blame for ruining your car."

"I'M NOT BLAMING HER!" I yelled and pushed my chair back violently as stood up.

He flinched in surprise at my outburst and I swear I saw a small smile tugging at his lips before he collected himself and looked at me sternly.

"Of course you don't," he replied coolly. "Then why is it so hard for you to leave her alone?"

I opened my mouth to spew out some profanities at him before answering. But neither profanities nor a fucking answer came out. I had no fucking answer, and judging by the look on his face, he knew that too. He chuckled humorlessly to himself and closed the file on his desk.

"I have to go and check on the girl and you're staying here until I get back, alright?" he said and I didn't even bother to respond since there was no point in trying to argue with him. I would get an update on her condition quicker if I stayed, anyway.

I shook my head at myself, trying to make sense of the way my mind was working right now. Why did I care how she was doing? I got her to the hospital. She was taken care of. End of story. But still I found myself wanting to know what the hell was wrong, what had made her pass out in the first place. I felt all defensive about the whole thing and about her.

If I was freaking out before, it was nothing compared to what I was doing now.

Maybe I just wanted to make sure she wasn't going to pull a similar stunt like she did last time? I frowned at my own thoughts and sighed.

Yeah, like that was the reason why I didn't mind staying. I wasn't afraid of her lying about what happened. She was not going to rat me out for something I didn't do. How I knew this, I'm not sure, I just knew that she wouldn't. Call it intuition or whatever.

I sat back down in the chair and my foot began tapping restlessly on the floor almost instantly. I was fucking restless and I wasn't really looking forward to seeing Chief Swan again. I'd had enough encounters with him in the past couple of weeks to last a lifetime.

I stared at the clock above the door, willing it to go faster. I almost put myself into some sort of weird trance by staring at it for so long, and I jumped high when my phone suddenly buzzed in my pocket.

I blinked a few times and tried to get myself together before pulling out the phone. I held back a groan when I saw Alice's name blinking on the screen.

"What do you want, Alice?" I asked without greeting her.

"What the hell did you do?" she snapped loudly and I had to hold the phone away from my ear to prevent her from damaging my hearing. I opened my mouth to reply, but she didn't let me. "Jasper told me he saw Emmett and you carry an unconscious Isabella to Emmett's car, and I just overheard Lauren and Tanya talking about it in the line to the cafeteria. Tanya said she saw you hit Isabella! She said you knocked her *unconscious* ! What the hell are you doing, Edward?" Her voice was a mixture of pain, anger and sadness. She sounded as if she was on the verge of tears and the desperation and frustration she felt over the situation rang clearly in her tone.

"I didn't do anything," I replied quietly. I didn't feel like explaining it for, what felt like, the fiftieth time since it happened. I had done nothing, and that was the big fucking problem. I should have knocked *Tanya* unconscious for doing that to Isabel- *Swan* .

"So what happened?" she asked exasperatedly. I didn't feel like explaining it again. I was tired of this shit.

"Does it even matter?" I snapped, feeling beyond frustrated. "She was knocked fucking unconscious so Emmett and I brought her to the hospital. Emmett went home and I'm still stuck here. End of fucking story."

"Edward, I promise you that if you did anything to hurt her on purpose... I'm seriously gonna reconsider our friendship," she said gravely.

"Thanks, Alice, that was exactly what I needed to hear right now," I said sarcastically before I hung up on her. I stood up from my chair and turned the phone off altogether before putting it back in my

pocket. I started pacing back and forth and dragged my hands through my hair.

Alice always had my back, she told me so herself, but if she was willing to give up our friendship because of some rumor, then she obviously wasn't worth my time. She obviously didn't know me at all. *None of them did.*

I walked over to the window and peered out. Gloomy-looking Forks was looking back at me. The dark clouds in the sky mocked me with their presence making me feel even worse.

I turned back around and my eyes swept over the room. My eyes caught sight of the file that Dad had been looking in earlier and, since I was bored, I took a step forward and picked it up. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised when I saw the name written on it.

Isabella Marie Swan.

So her middle name was Marie? She didn't look like a Marie to me.

I didn't even think when I started to flip through the file. I immediately recognized my dad's handwriting on most of the documents.

"... shows clear suicidal tendencies. Though, at this point, it would make more harm than good to put her under psychiatric care"

"... in my professional opinion, I doubt the scars are self-inflicted. They are too deep and cut in a way that would have made it awkward, or near impossible, for her to have inflicted them herself ..."

"... Dwyer's notes, from when she was admitted, are diffuse at best. I get no clear view of what really happened or how he proceeded with her care... "

I knew I shouldn't have been snooping around like that. I might even have committed a crime for even looking at the file, but I couldn't

help it. I was confused as all hell and I wanted answers... but I got no answers, instead I grew more confused the more I read.

Confused and... *frustrated* . There was nothing in this life that frustrated me more than when I came across something I didn't understand. Like this. Nothing in Swan's file made sense to me. I didn't understand any of it. And there was a single word that kept popping up on almost all of the pages.

Suicidal.

Over and over again, as if Dad would get a dollar every time he mentioned it.

Swan was suicidal.

I got it.

What I didn't get, however, was *why* she was suicidal and what was up with those scars he mentioned. Suicidal people cut themselves, right? And if they weren't self-inflicted; who the hell cut her? It made no fucking sense.

I wonder how much Dad would hate me if I asked her myself.

Someone cleared their throat and it brought me from my musing as I snapped my eyes up. Dad was standing in the open door, his face clearly showing that he was barely containing his anger.

"Put. That. Down," he said slowly, putting emphasis on each word. I dropped the file quickly, as if I had burned myself, and he stepped over to the desk and picked it up. "You have no business looking through my files. Do you want to get me fired?" he asked furiously.

"Sorry," I muttered.

"Your apologies doesn't count for much right now, son," he replied with a sigh. "Chief Swan just got here, and we had a quick talk. You're coming with me and your mother to the station tomorrow."

"You're fucking joking," I snorted. "What are we supposed to do there? Is he going to lock us up or some shit?"

"No, but he is considering getting a restraining order against you and that is plenty," he replied.

"You're fucking joking," I said, gaping at him in disbelief.

"I wish I was," he replied solemnly. "He doesn't think his daughter is safe around you. Although I might think a restraining order is a little extreme, I still am inclined to agree with him on this one. You won't leave the poor girl alone, so he has to resort to this."

"A restraining order... what the hell for anyway? I didn't even do *anything*," I argued and threw out my arms in a frustrated gesture.

"He doesn't think she's *safe* when you're around," he repeated. "You refuse to leave the poor girl alone and you are not just hurting her mentally; you're also hurting her physically. The Chief is actually worried you might end up killing her."

"Killing her? Are you fucking kidding me? I'm not a murderer!" I snapped.

"I'm just letting you know what he told me. Don't shoot the messenger," he replied with his ridiculous calm and collected tone.

"I didn't do anything... it was all fucking Tanya's fault," I muttered. For some reason, that made a smile tug at his lips and I quirked an eyebrow at him as a silent question.

"Yes, Isabella might have said something along those lines too," he admitted.

"She's awake? Why the fuck didn't you tell me?" I asked, feeling slightly irritated.

"Because it's none of your business? She's no friend of yours, correct? I didn't think you would care," he said, and at that point, I

was sure he was fucking mocking me. He chuckled and shook his head. "I'm going to go finish up with Isabella, then we'll go home. You can go wait in the waiting area; I'm not comfortable leaving you alone in my office again."

I snorted as I followed him out.

So I was getting a restraining order put against me for something I didn't even do?

A restraining order which will keep me away from Swan.

Why did the thought of that bug me so much?

It's not like I wanted to be near her, but that didn't mean I wanted to be forbidden to come near her either. If the Chief decided to go through with it, then how were we supposed to finish our project in biology?

Right, Cullen, like you care so much about that stupid project...

I huffed to myself as I plopped down on one of the chairs in the waiting room.

I would rather think it was about the project than think it was about something else.

Swan meant nothing to me. *Nothing* .

I sat up in my bed and threw the covers aside. The clock on my nightstand told me it was 02:43 am and I was still fucking awake. I had been trying to fall asleep for over three hours and I was getting tired of trying. I was tired yet wide awake at the same time.

My head was still spinning from yesterday's events and my mind kept going back to Swan and her file. I couldn't get her out of my fucking head.

I had a talk with Mom and Dad when I got home. They told me that they had been discussing the option of sending me to live with a few relatives in Chicago for a while, at least until this whole mess had blown over. Mom cried as Dad explained it all to me and I didn't even register what he was saying. All I could think about was that my life was in fucking ruins all around me, and there was no-fucking-thing I could do about it.

First a potential restraining order and now this, maybe having to move to Chicago.

But I didn't have that restraining order against me yet, and I hadn't moved yet either, so they couldn't keep me from doing whatever I wanted right now. In the middle of the night. On a Thursday.

How's that brain working out for you, Cullen?

I grabbed a pair of jeans from the floor and pulled them on, before grabbing the first t-shirt I saw and pulled it on as well. I put on my sneakers and grabbed my jacket before leaving the room. I quietly made my way downstairs. I carefully avoided the second to last step, since it was the one that always creaked, as I descended the stairs.

I walked through the quiet house and towards the garage. I turned on the lights and closed the door behind me. I looked around the large space and spotted my bike leaning against the wall in the back.

I never got any use out of my bike anymore, since I had my car, and I never thought I would use it again. I had even considered selling it, but it turned out to be a good thing that I kept it. I guess I could have stolen Dad's or Emmett's car keys, but I didn't feel like driving. Besides, a car would make too much noise.

I stepped over to my bike and brushed off the dust that had settled on the seat and the handlebars. I checked if the light worked and I sighed in relief when I found that it did. I led it to the garage door. Once again, I had to be careful not to make any noise as I opened

the door and took my bike outside. I silently closed the door behind me before getting up on my bike.

I looked up at the dark house to make sure that no lights had been turned on, at the off chance that someone in my family had woken up. They had no reason to be awake at this hour, and I had left the house almost totally soundlessly. But still, I couldn't help but be a little paranoid. Mom and Dad would freak if they caught me, and I would be fucked.

I glanced at the house one last time, before pushing the bike forward to gain some speed, and quickly moved away from the house towards the dark driveway.

It was fucking freezing outside and the cold air was practically slapping me in my face as I raced down the windy driveway to the main road. It only got worse from there.

I should have brought a thicker sweater.

I didn't know where the hell I was heading. Or maybe I did. I felt like I was a man on a mission. I wasn't really surprised at where I ended up. I needed to get all these questions out of my head before I would ever be able to fall asleep again.

I needed to fucking talk to her... or to see her at least...

Obsessed much, Cullen?

It took me forever to reach the hospital, and I was fucking exhausted when I got there. Who knew biking was so freaking exhausting? I didn't bother to lock my bike before I entered the hospital. Who the hell was going to steal the thing anyway?

It was eerie to walk into the hospital at night. It was quiet and there was not a soul in sight. Which was pretty fucking lucky, since that meant I could get into her room without getting caught.

Since I already knew which room she was in, it made this whole sneaking thing a lot easier. I decided to take the stairs, instead of the elevator, to the third floor. I moved stealthily - I would even have given Jasper a run for his money - towards the room. I was careful not to make a noise, while at the same time trying to not look too suspicious, because if I got caught it would be better if I acted like I had every right to be there than to look like a deer caught in the headlights.

Luckily for me, Swan's room was not far from the stairs, so I didn't need to play ninja for too long. The door was ajar so I pushed it open gently and slid inside before closing it quietly behind me.

I'm not going to wake her up... I'm just going to see her...

The room was just barely lit up by the moon and the streetlights from outside. I glanced at the bed and saw her. Swan and her face were illuminated by the moon. Her brown hair almost looked black and her skin was pale white.

I took another step forward, to get a better look at her, when she suddenly opened her eyes and stared right at me. My heart caught in my throat and I jumped in surprise, as her eyes widened in shock.

"I didn't lie!" she sputtered quickly. "I told your dad the truth!"

"What?" I asked, feeling too surprised by the random outburst that I didn't even register what she was saying.

"I told him what happened, that you didn't do it... please... don't hurt me," she pleaded.

Realization dawned on me and I felt like such an idiot. Of course she would think I was here to hurt her, because I got in trouble for what happened. She thought that I thought she had ratted me out.

"That's not why I'm here," I sighed as I walked around the bed and sat down in one of the chairs by the window. She followed my every

movement with her eyes.

"Then why are you here?" she asked. It was then I realized her words were a little slurred, and I couldn't help but smirk. She was fucking high.

"I have two questions," I said and she raised an eyebrow at me. "One, what have they given you? And two, are you sharing?" She looked at me weird before a snorting sound escaped her.

"You're an idiot," she said and I chuckled humorlessly.

"So I've heard," I replied coolly.

We stared at each other for a moment and I could see that her medicated brain was trying to process the situation she suddenly found herself in. It didn't look like it was doing a good job, and I couldn't fucking blame her. It didn't make sense to me either as to why the hell I was even there in the first place.

"Why are you here?" she asked again.

"I couldn't sleep," I replied honestly and slouched lower in the chair.

"You're here... because you can't sleep? So you figured that 'hey, if I can't sleep, then neither can the Goose,'" she replied skeptically, and I winced a little at hearing her refer to herself as the Goose. It sounded so much worse when she did it than when I did. I didn't have an answer for her, and she sighed and shook her head. "You told me a million times that you don't care about me and that I mean nothing to you. I'm a waste of space and I'm better off dead, right? But still you come up to me at school, asking me where I've been for the past two days... then you give me shit for even being there in the first place, just because I happened to be in the hallway during class... what's your damage, Edward? Why can't you just leave me alone?" she asked with a sad, yet frustrated, tone. She sounded so tired and defeated.

No longer the strong Swan.

I couldn't bear to look at her when I answered. Instead, I looked down on my dirty, untied sneakers, and fiddled nervously with the hem of my jacket.

"Because it fucking meant something, alright?" I muttered without looking up.

She sighed in exasperation and I saw, from the corner of my eye, how she turned her head and looked up at the ceiling.

"Do you know why I like you, Edward?" she asked and the weird question made me look up and raise a skeptical eyebrow at her.

"Like me? You don't like me," I argued skeptically.

"Yeah," she laughed lazily. "I don't like you. I just meant that I like the fact that you're the only constant in my life."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"It means that... people change, all the time, for no good reason... they love you, then they stab you... they hate you, then they wanna help you... but you, Edward... you're the same all the time. And I like that. It's nice having something constant to hold on to... even if it means being called a bird's name every now and again... it's the constant things in your life that keep you sane," she smiled sadly to herself and sighed deeply before continuing. "You didn't let the accident change you... and I think that's a good thing."

I pondered this for a moment. Of all the people in my life, she turned out to be the only one who agreed with me. People expected me to change because, according to them, that was the 'right' thing to do, no matter how hypocritical it was.

But if I'm not supposed to change... then what the hell am I doing here?

"What about you?" I asked quietly and she turned her head to me.

"What about me?" she echoed.

"Did *you* change after the accident?"

"I... I don't know... I don't think I did... I didn't change... but all the people around me sure did," she replied. "I'm still the same old Goose. No one important."

I cringed again at the word and I frowned at myself. Why was I being this affected?

"You really believe that?" I asked. "That you're not important?"

She looked at me before she snorted and laughed humorlessly. I didn't like that laugh at all.

"Are you kidding? You, of all people, should know the answer to that... of course I'm not important. I'm a waste of space, remember?" she argued. I left the chair and walked over to the bed. I didn't know why I approached her, I just felt like I needed to be fucking near her and tell her that... tell her what, exactly? That she wasn't a waste of space?

That's what she was after all. A waste of space. The Goose.

I tilted my head to the side, as I noticed that her arms were showing. She was dressed in a short sleeved hospital gown, and as I stared at her forearms, the words that I read in the file echoed back to me.

"... I doubt the scars are self-inflicted. They are too deep and cut in a way that would have made it awkward, or near impossible, for her to have inflicted them herself ..."

Were those the scars he was talking about?

"What happened to your arms?" I asked. Her eyes widened and she went for the sleeves, almost on instinct. She looked confused for a

split second before she realized she couldn't pull the sleeves down. She crossed her arms over her torso instead, in an attempt to hide them.

"Nothing," she muttered.

"Didn't look like nothing to me," I said casually.

She glared at me and I just stared back at her blankly.

"My father is going to kill you when he finds out you were here," she said.

"I think my own father will beat him to the punch..." I replied with a shaking of my head.

Her gaze softened a little bit and I once again noticed that old soul look in her eyes.

"Why are you here, Edward?" she whispered and I knew that I had to give her an answer this time. I couldn't fucking joke around the issue any longer.

I needed to give her an answer because I needed to hear it for myself too.

I thought about my family and friends and about all the things they had said. They all said I was in fucking denial. That one of these days I would realize exactly what I was doing, and then I would crack and break down like a fucking house of cards.

I didn't want their words to be true. They *couldn't* be true.

I'm Edward fucking Cullen. I didn't give a damn about Isabella Swan. I didn't care about any of this shit...

Then why were you here?

I felt something crack inside me. It was too fucking much. The accident. All the fucking pressure... and now *this* . I couldn't fucking lie to myself anymore. They had been right all along. I was going to break down, and it was going to be ugly.

"Because I fucking changed..." I whispered back. I didn't even care that I sounded like a fucking pansy. I was beyond caring at that point.

Why did I choose to break down here? Why with her of all people?

I didn't even know her and she sure as hell didn't know me.

She grabbed my hand and gave it a light squeeze. I looked down at our joined hands in surprise, before looking back up at her. She smiled at me sadly.

The look in her eyes, along with the words that were soon to be uttered by her, answered the question of why I was here. I didn't know why, or how, but I realized that Swan understood me in a way that nobody else ever could. How was that even possible? She didn't even know me.

"That is okay," she whispered, almost too quiet for me to even make out the words.

"I'm not constant," I whispered, and her smile grew a little.

"That's okay too," she whispered back with a low chuckle.

I looked into her dark eyes and couldn't help but smile crookedly in return.

Blame

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 22 - Blame

Isabella Swan POV

One little push in an empty school hallway, and it resulted in me being forced to stay in the hospital for the weekend. Wasn't that just the cherry on top of the crap-sundae that was my life?

Dr. Cullen had been nothing but kind to me ever since I woke up in the uncomfortable hospital bed, that I was currently laying in, but under that kind exterior, I could tell there was a storm of emotions brewing. He was angry about something, and when he asked me about what happened. I immediately realized why.

He thought Edward was responsible for me being here.

I first thought that it was odd that he had jumped to that conclusion so quickly, but then I remembered that Emmett and Edward were the ones who had taken me to the hospital. So I guess Dr. Cullen just assumed that Edward was involved in this.

I didn't know why it bugged me, but it did. Why did people always have to jump to conclusions? They didn't even want to hear people out before they decided what was right or wrong. I hated to admit it, but Dr. Cullen reminded me about my father in a way. Dad was convinced that everything Mom said or did was the truth and right, and whatever I said or did in response was wrong. Just like how

everything Edward did was wrong in Dr. Cullen's eyes, even if he wasn't involved in the first place.

I told Dr. Cullen what happened and that it wasn't Edward's fault. My memory may have been a little hazy from being knocked out and then passing out again, but if there was one thing of which I was sure, it was this: Edward had done nothing wrong; in fact, he had been the one to help me.

Edward might not like me; I might not like him, but I didn't think anyone deserved to get falsely accused of anything. After everything I've gone through, how could I not believe in the sanctity of right and wrong? Karma might be a bitch, but nothing Edward had done in the past could justify how his family and friends were shutting him out now.

I felt like it was somehow partly my fault. When Edward came to the hospital after the accident, maybe I should have kept my mouth shut and not made that stupid comment about his car, and that he was only there to collect the money for the repairs. If I had kept my mouth shut, maybe Dr. Cullen wouldn't have been that suspicious of Edward and maybe his friends would have been a little nicer.

Why did I have to be so mean to him about it?

Maybe it was the shock of being hit or from being in such a serious accident that made me. Back then, I needed to find someone to blame, but now that need had disappeared. I had seen firsthand what happened when people blamed and accused people, and it wasn't pretty. There was only one person in my life that I could blame without feeling bad about it, and that someone was my mother. I had every right to blame her for what she had done to me, for how she hurt me, because what she did wasn't an accident. She had done what she did on purpose, unlike the accident that had been just that... *an accident* .

I knew I could blame Tanya and hate her for what she did, but I didn't have the energy for it. Blaming her, or hating her, for what she did

wouldn't make me happier. She may have pushed me on purpose, but I'm pretty sure she hadn't expected me to pass out because of it. It was just an unfortunate consequence that none of us had foreseen. Of course, I was pissed that she pulled a stunt like that. She should definitely be held responsible for her actions, but I couldn't find it in me to care. The only thing that worried me was that Edward would have to take the fall for what she did. Other than that, I couldn't care less. I had bigger problems than Tanya right now.

I opened my eyes and it felt as if I just had woken up for the hundredth time that night, or maybe I hadn't even fallen asleep once. The drugs that I'd been given for the pain were seriously messing with my head. I didn't know what was real. Maybe I was sleeping after all?

The room was hidden in shadows, and only barely lit up by the moon and streetlights from outside. From what I could see, the sky was almost completely bare of clouds and the stars shone like a million diamonds.

Twinkle, twinkle little star...

Yeah, the drugs were definitely making my head feel funny, but at least I wasn't in any pain.

I didn't even notice that I had closed my eyes again until I opened them again, and I flinched infinitesimally when I found myself gazing back at a familiar pair of green eyes. Edward looked almost as surprised as I felt and I blurted the first thing that came to mind.

"I didn't lie! I told your dad the truth!"

He cocked an eyebrow at me and tilted his head to the side.

"What?" he asked, sounding both confused and a little amused.

"I told him what happened, that you didn't do it... please... don't hurt me...."

A part of me told me that he wasn't here to hurt me, while another part asked me why he would be here in the middle of the night, if he *didn't* want to hurt me. He probably got into a lot of trouble for what happened. He didn't care about me and the only reason he helped me was because... because what?

My mind was spinning with questions and the drugs weren't really helping matters.

"That's not why I'm here," he replied with a sigh, as he sat down in one of the chairs by the window. I followed him with my eyes while trying to make sense of his presence.

"Then why are you here?" I asked calmly. He smirked a little and his white teeth sparkled in the moonlight; his eyes were shining in all their green glory. It was a fascinating sight.

Then it hit me like a ton of bricks.

Of course, how could I be so stupid?

It was a dream. It was all a freaking dream.

I felt myself relax at the realization. Of course it was a dream. Why else would he be here? *Stupid, silly Bella*. And now that I knew it was a dream, I could use it to my advantage and say everything I ever wanted to tell him, blowing off some steam, if you will, and get some things off my chest, without the risk of making a fool out of myself.

Thank you drugs, you did well.

"I have two questions," he said, still with that smirk plastered to his face. "One, what have they given you? And two, are you sharing?" I snorted at the weird question. Was this my subconscious's way of mocking me for feeling slightly out of it because of the drugs? Maybe.

"You're an idiot," I replied, directing the comment mostly at myself and my subconscious.

"So I've heard," he replied.

I met his gaze directly and neither of us looked away for something that felt like an eternity. I was amazed at how well my subconscious was portraying Edward. He looked so real - apart from his insanely green eyes. I decided I didn't like it. I didn't care if it was my subconscious's way of helping me deal with things or whatever. Edward had no business being in my dreams.

"Why are you here?" I asked, even though I knew I wasn't going to get a real answer. How was dream-Edward supposed to know why he was here? Or maybe he would know, just because he was dream-Edward? This was all so confusing.

"I couldn't sleep."

His answer confused me. It shouldn't have surprised me, though, since dreams rarely made sense. I decided to just roll with it to see where this dream was heading. Maybe I could learn something. I let whatever thought came into my mind, leave through my mouth. This would be the first, and probably only, time that I could speak with Edward without any barriers.

It's like that exercise that psychologists want you to do - *the empty chair* . You speak to an empty chair, pretending that the person you are upset with is sitting in it, and you can lash out and say anything you ever wanted to say to that person. *Blow off some serious steam* . This was just like that, only that my empty chair wasn't empty. I could still see Edward, even though he wasn't really there.

I could definitely benefit from this, even if it was just a dream.

"You're here... because you can't sleep? So you figured that 'hey, if I can't sleep, then neither can the Goose'?" Edward winced slightly. I wondered what I had said that caused such a reaction from him, but

then I remembered it wasn't really Edward. Nothing I had said had caused any reaction from the real Edward. I took a deep breath and continued my rant. "You told me a million times that you don't care about me and that I mean nothing to you. I'm a waste of space and I'm better off dead, right? But still you come up to me at school, asking me where I've been for the past two days... then you give me shit for even being there in the first place, just because I happened to be in the hallway during class... what's your damage, Edward? Why can't you just leave me alone?"

It frustrated the hell out of me that I would never get the answers to my questions. I was talking to myself and not the real Edward. He was just a manifestation of my subconscious. Somehow, I thought this would make it easier. To get everything out and ask the questions that had plagued my mind ever since that morning, when he asked me where I had been. But it didn't make it easier, quite the opposite really; it just frustrated me even more.

Why did he ask if he really didn't care?

He averted his gaze and looked down at his shoes instead, while fiddling with the hem of his jacket. I wondered if that particular tick was another attribute that my subconscious had given him. The real Edward didn't have any nervous ticks.

"Because it fucking meant something, alright?" he muttered, and I could just barely make out the words. What was he talking about? I sighed and turned to stare at the ceiling instead.

How long I had wished for someone to tell me I meant something. That what I did mattered. That someone would notice if I went missing, and that it would mean something if I did.

"Do you know why I like you, Edward?" I asked.

"Like me? You don't like me," he argued and I couldn't help but laugh. At least my subconscious knew me well enough to know that.

"Yeah, I don't like you. I just meant that I like the fact that you're the only constant in my life..."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" he asked, it almost sounded like he thought it was an insult.

"It means that... people change, all the time, for no good reason... they love you, then they stab you... they hate you, then they wanna help you... but you, Edward... you're the same all the time. And I like that. It's nice having something constant to hold on to... even if it means being called a bird's name every now and again... it's the constant things in your life that keep you sane. You didn't let the accident change you... and I think that's a good thing."

The words blurred together in my head, but I knew in my heart that I meant every word. People changed every day for no reason at all. Like Mom. She changed without a reason, or if there was a reason, it was still unknown to me. Everyone changed. Everyone but Edward.

Edward had integrity; he didn't change because society expected him to. He was true to his character and I envied him for it. He was strong in himself and he didn't do things that he didn't want to do. He didn't let people push him around.

I wish I had his strength.

"What about you?" he asked me quietly and I turned to look at him again.

"What *about* me?" I echoed while silently wondering why he suddenly looked so sad.

"Did *you* change after the accident?" he prompted.

What a good question, dear subconscious.

"I... I don't know... I don't think I did... I didn't change... but all the people around me sure did. I'm still the same old Goose. No one

important."

For some reason, he cringed again.

"You really believe that? That you're not important?" he asked. I guess my subconscious didn't like it when I told it as it was, or said something that made me appear worthless – even though I was. My subconscious must have known the words to be true, or else I wouldn't have uttered them. I had accepted the truth a long time ago, so why didn't my subconscious agree with me? Maybe it was in denial.

A subconscious in denial... that's rich.

I looked at Edward for a moment before laughing humorlessly.

"Are you kidding? You, of all people, should know the answer to that... of course I'm not important. I'm a waste of space, remember?" I felt myself growing angry and frustrated with myself. Why did my subconscious push me like this? I didn't matter! People had proven that to me over and over again. Why was that so hard for it to accept?

Edward left the chair by the window and walked over to the bed. He looked like a man on a mission, like he had something really important to tell me. Something big.

He looked at me with those green eyes of his and tilted his head a little. Something changed in his eyes just then; the resolve of being on a mission disappeared.

"What happened to your arms?" he asked out of nowhere.

My eyes widened. I immediately went to grab the sleeves on my shirt, but there were no sleeves to grab. I once again found myself dressed in a short sleeved hospital gown, but this time I had no bandages covering my arms, hiding away my scars. They were on display for everyone to see.

Why, dear subconscious, why?

I quickly crossed my arms over my torso and wondered why I even bothered. My subconscious knew that there was nothing in this world that I was more ashamed of than my scars, so why did I bother hiding them? Was I supposed to face my fears and shames, was that the point of this whole dream?

I didn't care if Edward wasn't really here, but the mere thought of him seeing my scars made my skin prickle. My scars were my shame, *my stigma*, and they were not meant for anybody else to see, not even in a dream. I didn't want to see them or expose them to even myself, so why was I tormenting myself with a dream like this? What good could come of it?

It wasn't even a dream anymore. *It was a nightmare*.

"Nothing," I muttered to him.

I didn't care what the point of the dream was anymore. At that point I just wanted it to be over. It was getting uncomfortable. I was hearing things and thinking things that I wasn't comfortable with.

"I didn't look like nothing to me," he said casually and I glared at him. Dream-Edward was no better than the real Edward. They both kept pressing issues they had no business pressing.

"My father is going to kill you when he finds out you were here," I said, even though it made no sense at all. Was I suggesting that Dad was supposed to kill Edward for appearing in my dream? Yeah. Sure. That wouldn't make me look crazy at all.

"I think my own father will beat him to the punch," he replied with an amused shaking of his head, and the sad part was that he was probably right. If Edward ever did something to me, or if I ever claimed he did, Dr. Cullen would probably end up hurting Edward before my dad even got the chance to load his shotgun.

"Why are you here, Edward?" I whispered. I was hoping my subconscious would be kind enough to tell me what the point of him being there was. Why Edward? Why not Emmett? Emmett would have made more sense.

A million emotions flashed in his eyes and I could see something crumble. Something was wrong. *Terribly wrong* .

"Because I fucking changed..." he whispered back. His voice was raw with emotions that I didn't understand and I didn't know what to make of it. I reached for his hand, to give it a squeeze and as soon as our skins touched I felt myself being jolted back to the real world.

Reality hit me like a bucket of ice-water being dumped over my head.

I'm not dreaming.

This was real. Edward was really here. He wasn't just a figment of my imagination. The drugs must have messed me up even more than I thought.

I smiled sadly at him and wondered how anything would ever be okay now.

"That's okay," I whispered back. I was barely able to get the words out. The realization of him really being here was too overwhelming and I didn't know what to make of it all. This made even less sense now than when I thought it was a dream.

A dream... a nightmare...

I could swear my heart almost stopped beating.

Edward had seen my scars.

The *real* Edward, and not just a dream version of him. My biggest weakness and shame had been exposed for him to see and for him to judge. Edward was the last person on earth that I would ever want

to have seen my scars, and now that he had, I could never take it back.

He had gained ammunition that he could use to bring me down. He could use the scars against me in the cruelest of ways. *And he doesn't even know it.*

"I'm not constant," he whispered back, and it almost sounded like an apology. I chuckled quietly and humorlessly to myself, while biting down on my bottom lip. He was still constant. He just didn't know it and I wasn't about to tell him, either.

"That's okay too," I whispered back.

He smiled crookedly and it reminded me of the way he used to smile at all the girls at school. He used that particular smile to get into their pants. He knew the powers that smile possessed. Although, while it was the same smile he gave them, it was still different. He wasn't smiling at me like that because he wanted to get into my pants – because he had no interest in my lady parts, I doubted he even realized I was a girl – he smiled because... maybe he felt the connection too?

The connection that showed him that we weren't that different from each other after all.

We were both broken but in different ways. Ours parents didn't understand us, and from the looks of it, none of them wanted to either. We were on our own in all of this, no one who was supposed to be on either of our sides were. Our families had turned their backs on us, betraying us. They didn't understand us because they didn't want to listen to what we had to say, and the little they did listen to they simply did not believe. They didn't realize how broken we were because of them. They broke us, without even realizing it.

However, it didn't matter how broken we *both* were. I would never be comfortable with him knowing about my scars. We might have shared a connection with our broken similarities, but that wasn't

enough to keep him from using my past as ammunition to hurt me. Edward was constant, and if he knew exactly how those cuts came to be, then he would have all the ammunition he needed to push me to the point of no return.

But I would never let him get that far.

I'd learned from my past mistakes to never let anyone come to close to me ever again. Edward might have gained ammunition, but he still didn't have the gun to use it with. He didn't know what he had stumbled across, and that made me feel a little safer. As long as I kept my mouth shut about myself, then I would be okay.

Edward might be a cocky son of a bitch to the rest of the world, but to me, he was nothing but a scared little boy who had just found out that Santa wasn't real. My perfect bubble had burst a long time ago, and I had come to accept it. Now it was Edward's turn.

"What time is it?" I asked quietly, my voice just an octave away from being a whisper.

He glanced at his expensive looking watch, turning his wrist a little so the moonlight was reflected on the glass.

"Almost four..." he said, his eyes widening a little bit. " *Shit.* " He looked up at me. "I shouldn't fucking be here." He pulled his hand back and I let my hand linger by my side for a moment, before hugging my arm to my torso again.

"You're right... you have no reason to be here," I replied without looking at him.

"This is fucked up," he said and I nodded.

"I agree," I replied simply, because he was right. This was fucked up.

Probably even more than he realized.

He started pacing back and forth, dragging his hands through his hair while doing so. I gnawed on my lip, silently deciding that my hands were very interesting and that I should study them instead of looking at Edward.

"What did you tell my dad?" he asked, still pacing. "Did you tell him it was Tanya?"

"Yeah, I did. My memory might be a little hazy, but I know it wasn't you," I replied quietly.

He stopped pacing. I felt his eyes on me, but I didn't look up.

"How are you feeling? Besides being high as a fucking kite?" he asked and I could tell he was only half-joking. I smiled sadly and bit down on my lip even harder, suddenly it was so much harder to get any words out. All because I knew it wasn't a dream anymore. All my words would have some kind of consequence.

"You don't need to act like you care," I said with a calm and quiet voice. "We both know you're not here in the middle of the night because you wanted to see how I was doing. You were here to make sure I wouldn't rat you out..."

He didn't answer me, but I could still feel him staring at me. Ever so slowly, and ever so reluctantly, I looked up at him and met his gaze. He was frowning and his green eyes were more livid than ever.

"If I was afraid you would rat me out, then I would have threatened you or hurt you before we even left the hallway," he replied with a clipped tone. I guess he had been waiting for me to look at him before he answered. "What Tanya did was fucked up." *He got that right.* He sighed and dragged his hand through his hair again; it almost looked like he wanted to pull it all out. "What the hell happened, anyway? Why the hell did you pass out like that? I thought you fucking died or some shit!"

It almost sounded like he was accusing me of something, as if I had passed out on purpose. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised. Edward was just that kind of guy that needed someone to blame for things that happened, and this situation was no different. Although, we both knew who was to blame for this particular mess, and that was Tanya.

Blame is a funny thing...

"The pain was pretty bad. But Dr. Cullen said it had more to do with the psychological side of things than it did with the physical," I replied quietly.

"I have no fucking idea what that means," he sighed and threw out his arms dramatically.

I smiled weakly at his antics, but decided that I didn't want to elaborate further. I knew what Dr. Cullen had meant, but I wasn't in the mood for sharing that with Edward. Edward had no business knowing my business. What happened with me this afternoon ran deeper than just a push from Tanya. It ran almost as deep as my scars.

He kept staring at me with that exasperated look in his eyes and I sighed.

"It means that it was psychological, okay?" I snapped, feeling frustrated because he refused to leave well enough alone.

"What? You passed out because you... you went crazy?" he asked incredulously, misinterpreting my words completely. "Your brain couldn't handle the crazy anymore, is that what you're saying? You're fucking *insane*?"

He sounded genuinely upset at the thought of me being crazy. It baffled me, but I didn't know what was more baffling, the fact that he had the nerve to call *me* crazy, since he was the one sneaking into a hospital at four in the morning to visit a girl he hates, or the fact that

he sounded so upset about the whole thing. I didn't know what to say or do in response to that, so I settled with just staring at him.

"Is that it? You're fucking insane?" he said again when I didn't answer. "Is that why you don't talk to people at school? Why you always keep to yourself and why you have those scars? You're *insane*?"

He kept repeating that word over and over again, and it angered me. Who was he to judge me? I had baggage, yes, but I was not insane. Not even close.

"No," I replied with the same clipped tone that he had used earlier. "I'm not insane."

"Then what the hell was it all about?" he asked.

"Edward, it's four in the morning... Why can't you just leave me alone?" I sighed deeply.

"What's with those scars?" he asked again, ignoring my question completely. I really needed him to leave now. His inability to keep away from the sensitive subjects was starting to wear on me.

"Leave. Me. Alone," I hissed. "Or I'll scream."

He cocked an eyebrow and snorted quietly.

"You won't scream," he replied coolly.

"You wanna bet?" I challenged. He opened his mouth – probably to do just that – but closed it back up without saying a word. I smiled humorlessly at him and nodded. "Didn't think so."

"What's the big deal?" he asked after a moments of silence. There was no hostility in his voice, just raw curiosity. "They're just scars."

If someone had told me two weeks ago... hell, if someone had told me *an hour* ago that Edward would be visiting me in the middle of

the night asking questions about me, I would have questioned *their* sanity. And if they would have told me that he would sound genuinely *curious* while doing so, I would have politely asked them to take their crazy pill and leave me the hell alone.

But nobody had told me this so I wasn't prepared for this at all. Why did Edward seem to care all of a sudden? Maybe he had noticed that he had struck a nerve the first time he asked about them, so now he couldn't let the topic go until he found out the truth about them. Maybe he knew he had struck a goldmine.

Well, no such luck, Mr. Cullen.

"It's *not* a big deal," I lied and tried to keep my voice steady, so he wouldn't catch on.

"Yeah, right," he muttered and went to stand by the window. "If someone cut me like that, I would have fucking cut their throats." His voice was quiet, as if he was talking to himself, but it was loud enough for me to hear. His words left me paranoid. Did he know something? Had Dr. Cullen told him about them?

He must have known that I had heard him, because he threw me a look over his shoulder and smirked lazily. "What did they try to do to you anyway, make you the Thanksgiving turkey?" He chuckled darkly at his joke, but it sounded forced and awkward even to me.

"I think you should leave now," I said. I was barely able to keep my voice steady. He couldn't have been stupid enough to not realize he was pushing it. "I'll promise you that I will scream bloody murder if you don't leave."

"Yeah? And what's the worst thing that can happen? Your dad getting a fucking restraining order against me? Oh wait, *that's already happening* !" he replied and turned fully towards me. "But you're right, I should fucking leave. I don't even know why the hell I came here. I must be losing my fucking mind or some shit..."

"Maybe you're the one who's insane," I said. I couldn't help it, but it needed to be said. "And what do you mean 'restraining order'?" Restraining order for what?" He gave me a look that suggested I was stupid – as well as crazy.

"Because our dads are under the impression that I was the one who fucking put you here, okay? And your dad thinks that it's a great fucking idea to put a restraining order on my ass because I was trying to fucking help you," he snapped.

"How is tha-" I was cut off by a sudden light and I had to squint my eyes. It took a moment for my eyes to adjust and I realized that someone had flipped the light switch.

Edward and I stared at each other for a moment; my horror was mirrored in his eyes. We both slowly turned our gazes, almost in sync, towards the door, finding ourselves staring at a short, middle-aged nurse. She was staring back at us in bewilderment and I fought hard to come up with something to say. My mind was drawing a blank and I felt my throat close up.

I didn't understand my reaction. Why was I getting all panicky over this? Edward was the one who shouldn't be here. I couldn't get in trouble for this. I was safe. This was my room. Edward was the one in trouble now.

"And what do you think you're doing here, young man?" the nurse asked with a stern voice.

Edward looked at me, and I could see panic flash in his eyes. I suddenly felt sorry for him. He *would* get in so much trouble when his dad – and my dad – found out that he had been here. He might have been pushing it by coming here at this hour, but he *did* help me out earlier. He helped me and stayed with me after Tanya pushed me. He didn't have to do that, but he did. Maybe it was my time to return the favor. Save him like he saved me.

"He... ehh...he was just..." I stuttered. My mind was completely blank and I couldn't come up with a reason at all as to why he was there. What reason in the world would be good enough to explain why he was there in the middle of the night?

"I'm her... *boyfriend* ," he said in my place, his right eye twitching as he said the word. I shot my eyes to him in shock and he gave me a look that clearly said 'shut up', as he grabbed my hand. "I just wanted to see her and make sure she was doing okay. I... eh... *missed* her and I was worried and I couldn't sleep and I-"

"Yeah, I got it," the nurse cut him off. Her expression a little softer now and not as stern. "But Miss Swan needs her rest. You may visit her again during visiting hours tomorrow."

"Oh... okay," Edward said, scratching his neck with his free hand. "You're not gonna tell anyone, are you?" He shuffled his feet, looking oddly bashful. The nurse smiled and shook her head.

"I've been young; I know how love can make you do stupid things. I'll let you off the hook this time, but if I see you here again in the middle of the night, I will have to report it," she scolded, but the seriousness behind her words was tarnished by her amused smile.

"Yes, of course," he said, shooting her a dazzling smile that would bring even the most prudish of girls to their knees. "May I have a moment with Sw- *Isabella* before I go?"

"Don't stay too long," she chided, before leaving the room.

We listened carefully to the sound of her footsteps disappearing down the hallway. Neither of us dared to even breathe until we were sure that she was gone.

I breathed out in relief and looked away from the door, realizing that I was still holding Edward's hand. I pulled it back quickly and he looked a little startled by the movement.

"What the hell was that?" I hissed at him.

"What? Did you want me to get into trouble or something?" he hissed back. "I'm in deep enough shit as it is. I don't need to add this shit too!" His bashful act from a moment ago was gone in an instant.

"If you didn't want to get into trouble then maybe you shouldn't have come!" I said angrily. "You can't honestly believe that coming here at four in the morning wasn't a risk. It's like asking for trouble."

" *Fuck you* ," he snarled. I raised an eyebrow at him, but kept my mouth shut. "I'm obviously deranged from sleep deprivation; I'm not in my right mind. Hell, I'm probably even more fucked up than you are from your meds."

"Yes, obviously," I replied coolly. "So why don't you go home and sleep it off and we can pretend that this little rendezvous never happened."

He gave me an once-over, before nodding once.

"You got it, *Penguin* ," he agreed. "This never happened."

"Penguin?" I echoed.

"Yeah, penguin. They're like you... they walk funny and they have a hard time getting up when they fall... and they look stupid doing it," he replied with a dark chuckle, as he walked over to the door.

"Wow, Edward, just... wow," I said, giving him a slow motion applause. "Here you had me believing that maybe, just maybe, you had a heart. But then you go and say something as stupid as that. What the hell is wrong with you? Couldn't you save your insults at least until I was out of the hospital? And if you want to keep insulting me with bird names, maybe you should steer clear of the cute ones."

His lips twisted into a sad, crooked smile as he turned his head to me.

"Yeah, maybe I should. But where's the fun in that?" he asked.

Then he was gone.

I woke up the next morning in a daze. I felt disoriented and it took me a moment before I even remembered where I was. Last night felt like a dream, and I wasn't really sure if it even happened. The more I thought about it, the more I became convinced that it really had been all just a dream.

"Good morning, Isabella, did you have a good night sleep?"

I turned my head towards the door, expecting to see Dr. Cullen waltz into the room. But it wasn't Dr. Cullen, it was some other doctor that I had never seen before.

The doctor was a man in his fifties, with dark brown hair with a few grey streaks in it. The streaks looked fake, as if he put them there on purpose to look more 'mature' or something. His skin was almost orange due to his spray-on tan, and when he smiled at me, I was almost blinded by the whiteness of his teeth.

Who does he think he is? Dr. 90210?

I immediately decided I did not like this man.

The way he was smiling suggested that he was very impressed with himself. I could only imagine the conversation he was having inside his head at that moment.

" Oh, I'm so awesome. The chicks loves that I look like a carrot. My ridiculously white teeth aren't at all the cause as for why all my patients are suddenly in dire need of a laser-eye surgery."

I glanced at the name-tag on his chest and frowned a little.

Jason Jenks . Why did that sound so familiar?

I didn't even bother to respond to his smile. I don't think he even noticed anyway, since he kept on smiling to himself as he noted something on my chart. It looked like he was enjoying some inside joke or something, or maybe he was just reminding himself about how awesome he was.

"Did you get any sleep at all? I hope your visitor didn't keep you up too long..." he continued with a teasing tone. I felt the blood rush from my face and was replaced by dread.

This was not good.

He looked up from the chart, still with that somewhat cocky smile and a twinkle in his eyes. His bright white teeth made the skin on his face look even more orange. It made me want to puke, and the dread only added to the nausea.

"Oh, don't be embarrassed, Isabella," he chuckled. "I overheard a couple of nurses talking. One of them mentioned that she caught you and your boyfriend here last night." He paused to chuckle some more, and I wanted nothing more than to sink through the bed and through the floor, disappearing into nothingness. Getting teased about a pretend boyfriend by a guy who looked like a carrot. This was beyond humiliating.

"Yeah, boyfriend..." I muttered as I twisted my finger together in my lap.

"Maybe you should tell him that he's welcome to visit you during visiting hours and not in the middle of the night," he continued as if the situation wasn't uncomfortable enough. "I hope he takes good care of you. I'm sure a girl like you has a lot of-"

"Where is Dr. Cullen?" I said, effectively cutting him off. I wasn't sure if it was a conscious act on his part or not, but he sounded so condescending when he spoke to me, like I was a five-year old who had just found a boy who wasn't afraid of her cooties. I guess that

was what made me snap. I had taken enough crap in my life. I didn't need Dr. Carrot to add to the pile.

A muscle underneath his eyes twitched at the mention of Dr. Cullen, but his smile never faltered.

"Why, I'm sorry, I assumed someone told you," he said, again with that tone that suggested I was five years old. "He's no longer assigned to you. I will take over from here."

"Wait... what? Why?" I asked confused. Dr. Cullen might not have been my favorite person in the world, but I would rather have him as a doctor than this man. Especially since Dr. Cullen was already aware of some of my issues, and the less people that knew about that the better.

Plus, he didn't look like a carrot.

"I'm sure your dad will explain it all to you when he gets here," he replied. His bored tone did nothing to hinder him from smiling. He continued talking about something else, but I wasn't hearing a word of it. My mind was spinning with the different possibilities as to why this was happening. *Why Dr. Cullen was no longer my doctor .*

Dr. Jenks did his doctor thing, by checking my reflexes and making me wiggle my toes on my broken leg, and then asking me to rate the pain. The pain was bad, but also manageable. Though, that was probably due to the drugs that I'd been given by the nurses, that Dr. Cullen had authorized. Dr. Cullen hadn't seemed to have had any issues giving me medication as long as I was in the hospital, and I had planned to milk that cow for all I was worth. I didn't even consider the thought of saving them up for later, right now all I could think about was survive another moment without pain.

Maybe now, with a new doctor and all, I would be able to score some other pills too, pills that I could save up and use later.

Dr. Jenks must have noticed that I wasn't really paying any attention to what he was saying, because he left the room without a word when he was done with his exam. I guess he wasn't used to having patients ignore him.

I wasn't alone for long, though. Only a couple of minutes later, there was a knock on the door again. And when I looked up, I was surprised to see Dr. Cullen standing there. He smiled timidly as he stepped inside.

"Mind if I come in?" he asked.

"It's your hospital," I replied coolly and he chuckled lightly.

"This may be my workplace, but it's hardly my hospital. And you are not my patient," he said as he sat down on the edge of my bed.

"Yeah, Dr. Carrot told me," I replied. "What he didn't tell me was why..."

Dr. Cullen took a deep breath and his shoulders slumped as the air left his lungs.

"Your dad asked me to step aside. He's not comfortable with me treating you, since he's taking legal actions against Edward," he replied with a soft tone, with no trace of anger in his voice.

The anger began to rise in me, however, as I processed his words.

My dad did this? What legal actions? The restraining order?

Dad had gone insane. There was no other explanation as to why he was acting like this. Why would he put a restraining order against a boy who was just as much a victim as I was? Was he really that blind? Was he really looking so hard to find someone to blame, to make himself feel better after being such a lousy father to me, that he was willing to take it out on an innocent boy? What was his damage?

"Edward visited you last night, didn't he," Dr. Cullen said without making it sound like a question. The statement caught me completely off guard, and I didn't know what I was supposed to respond to that.

Was it a trick question?

I gnawed on my lip and took my time before answering – because I simply didn't know what I was supposed to say in response to that. This wasn't freaking rocket science. It shouldn't have been that hard to just squeeze out a 'no' or a 'yes', but it was, since either one felt like a trap.

If I said no, he would know I was lying and then he would jump to conclusions and think that Edward had made me lie about it. If I said yes, he would ask me what he wanted and jump to conclusions and think Edward came to hurt me.

There was no way of winning this one. I was screwed either way, as was Edward.

In the end, I guess Dr. Cullen didn't even need me to respond.

"What did Edward want?" he asked, his smile completely vanishing. He still didn't sound angry or irritated; he merely sounded tired, as if he wasn't surprised that it had come to this.

"Who said he was even here?" I asked with a casual shrug, even though I knew it was no use. There was no reason for me to pretend I didn't know what he was talking about, but I felt obligated to try anyway.

Edward didn't have anyone who stood up for him anymore. Everybody was just assuming the worst as far as he was concerned. It would have been easy for me to be that someone, who had his back, even though I didn't like the guy. After all, I knew firsthand how it felt to be betrayed by the ones you love, and feel that there was no

one there for you anymore. Did I wish that on Edward? No, I didn't wish that on anybody. Not even that douche.

I had to try to protect Edward.

He had been right. He had enough crap on his plate right now as it was. Whatever I said next could set fire to that pile of crap, and nothing good would come of it. And when that fire had burned out, all that would be left would be us, regretting all the decisions that led us there.

While smelling like crap.

Edward had come to me in the middle of the night for a reason. He might have told me it was because he couldn't sleep, but we both knew that wasn't the case. The fact that kept him from falling asleep in the first place was probably the reason why he came.

I just didn't know what that particular reason was.

Edward had inner demons; it was obvious that he did. He was just very good at pretending they weren't there and that everything was just peachy. Denial was a river that ran deep in Edward, and maybe he was finally realizing that.

"This isn't the time for games, Isabella," Dr. Cullen sighed exasperatedly.

"I'm not playing any games," I replied. "I just asked you, who said anything about him."

"I caught him this morning when he came home. He didn't tell me where he had been, but I suspected he had been here... and the way you just avoided the question proves my suspicions to be correct," he replied, almost sounding a little smug while doing so. He quirked an eyebrow at me, silently challenging me to tell him that he was wrong. At that moment, I could see the resemblance between

him and his son. They both had that same look of challenge. It almost made me smile.

"You don't have to protect him," he continued seriously, "if he hurt you in any way, you have to tell me. He may be my son, but I don't agree with the way he has been handling things lately. With everything that is going on right now, I need to know what he's up to."

"I told you before; Edward did nothing wrong! He helped me! It was Tanya who pushed me. It was a good thing Edward was there when it happened, or else I would have been laying there in that hallway for God knows how long before anyone noticed," I argued, feeling frustrated beyond belief. Why couldn't he just listen to what I was saying already? He had told me I could talk to him, but how was I supposed to do that when he didn't want to listen? Or was the offer to listen out the window now, since he wasn't my doctor anymore?

Dr. Cullen's gaze softened immediately, and he looked almost sad now. Sad and tired. I didn't even want to know what this whole ordeal was doing to him. How was it even possible for him to treat the girl that his own son had maimed, while still being a professional about it? Although, he *wasn't* being a professional about it. He had showed me time and time again that he was anything but objective when it came to my health. He was picking my side over his son's, and that was why I chose not to like him and why I didn't trust him. Nobody who picked a stranger over their own flesh and blood deserved my trust.

That was a lesson I had been taught the hard way, and I guess Dr. Cullen reminded me of both my parents in a way. He reminded me of my mother by picking a stranger over his own flesh and blood, and he reminded me of my father by refusing to listen and thinking that they knew best, that nothing anybody could say would sway them from the believing what they thought was the truth.

Maybe it was a good thing he wasn't my doctor anymore.

"You should calm down. Your body has been under a lot of stress, and it will do you no good getting worked up like this," he said and I had to resist the urge to throw my pillow at him. If he didn't want me to get worked up like this, then maybe he should listen to what I was saying instead of making up his own stories.

He sighed deeply and glanced at my leg, a small smile forming on his lips when he looked at the bear that Emmett had drawn. He stood up from the bed and smiled gently at me.

"How's the pain?" he asked.

"Manageable," I replied.

"Good." He nodded. "I should leave now, but remember I'm here if you want to talk about anything, anything at all... even if it's about Edward." He gave me a pointed look, which I ignored, before leaving the room.

After that morning's surprising turn of events and changing of doctors, spending another day in the hospital turned out to be a drag. The TV in my room was broken and I had no books or magazines to read. I spent a few hours literally just staring out into space, silently pondering what the hell I had done in this life, or maybe my past life, to deserve all this crap. Karma was a bitch, they say, but I didn't think I had done anything to deserve this... *right* ?

"Isabella, my Bella, Bobella!" I was caught totally off guard by Emmett bursting through the door with the energy of a hundred hyperactive kids. I would have been afraid of him if he hadn't been grinning from ear to ear. Alice walked in behind him with Jasper in tow.

Emmett kept his grin in place as he plopped down on the bed by my feet. Alice was smiling timidly and Jasper showed no emotion at all. He just stood there awkwardly by the door, his back straight and his hands clasped in front of him.

Jasper would make a good soldier... at least he looks the part.

Alice stepped up to me and put her huge handbag on the bed. She began ruffling through it until she found what she was looking for. She picked up her sparkly pink pen case and smiled brightly at me.

"Can I continue my work?" she asked and nodded towards the cast. I sighed and shrugged.

"Knock yourself out," I muttered.

Alice squealed in delight and walked around to the other side and pulled out a chair, before sitting down and starting her work. Having visitors might not have been on the top of my wish list, but at least it gave me something to do and it killed some time.

Jaspers presence made me uncomfortable, especially since it was obvious that he didn't want to be there. His face may not have shown any emotions, but displeasure was rolling off of him in waves. It was impossible not to be affected by it.

"So..." Alice began, trying to sound casual, "what happened yesterday?"

I glanced at her, but she did not meet my gaze. She was looking intently at the cast as she drew...a little *too* intently for me to be fooled by her casual demeanor. Alice was a terrible actress.

"Are we really doing this?" I asked skeptically. Neither of them said anything and I sighed. "Tanya pushed me. I fell. I passed out. Edward helped me. Emmett found us. I was brought here. End of story," I rambled monotonically. I saw how the flowing movement of Alice's hand, drawing on my cast, faltered a little. I glanced at Emmett, wondering if he was going to argue with me on this one, since he was so hot to blame Edward after it happened.

"Did Edward make you say that?" Emmett asked cautiously, not surprising me at all with his question.

"What do you think?" I asked as I looked him straight in the eyes.

"I... I mean...eh..." he stuttered and looked to Jasper for support.

"Told you," Jasper replied quietly from his place by the door.

"I guess he didn't," Emmett replied with a sigh as he turned back to me. That answer, however, surprised me, and against my better judgment, I looked over at Jasper. He must have sensed my confusion, because he smirked lazily as he met my gaze.

"Edward is a douche, we all know that. But pushing chicks around in hallways is below him. He doesn't hurt chicks, other than breaking their hearts," he replied with a dark chuckle, without moving an inch from where he stood.

"If that's true, what you're saying, then I don't get why the hell you're not blaming him... you know you could ruin his life by lying and saying it was him, right?" Emmett said, and I chuckled humorlessly at that comment.

"Why would I want to ruin his life?" I asked.

"He ruined yours," he replied simply. I shook my head softly.

"No, he didn't," I argued quietly. "We were both just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"I wasn't talking about that fucking accident," Emmett replied with a frown on his face. "I was talking about the way he's been treating you since then. He's been a bigger douche than ever before, and I don't fucking get how you can be okay with that."

"Because that's the way he's chosen to deal with this whole mess," I replied, feeling irritated that Emmett didn't understand his own brother. "If making fun of me, and making my life in school miserable, makes him feel better...then let him."

"I never would have pegged you to be the masochistic type," Alice murmured, without tearing her eyes from the cast and her work. I didn't argue with her on that one, because I couldn't help but wonder if what she said was true.

Was I being masochistic for letting Edward get away with the way he had been treating me, over the past couple of weeks, without any repercussions whatsoever? Or was I merely recognizing he was in pain, and letting him use me as an outlet for said pain?

The thought lingered with me for the remainder of the day, and it was thoughts of Edward that kept me from falling asleep. I watched how the sun set and the world outside got darker. The streetlights came on and the moon graced me with its presence.

A nurse came in around midnight to give me some pills for the pain and to help me relax, but there was no use. My mind was not up for a nap right now. As the pain in my leg lessened, it gave my mind new room to ponder all the questions I had.

I looked out the window; the sky was almost as clear from clouds this night as it had been the night before. It was beautiful, really...

The room was momentarily lit up when the door opened, and the light from the hallway flowed in before the door closed again. I didn't need to turn my head from the window to know who had entered.

Edward moved around the bed and brought the chair from the window closer to the bed. He looked at me and his eyes were once again almost magically green in the moonlight. He picked something up out of his back pocket and held it up for me to see.

"I brought a pen," he said and I couldn't help the smile that formed on my face.

Confused

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

[**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 23 - Confused

Edward Cullen POV

The wind was slapping me in the face as I rode my bike home. I wasn't racing at all. I was actually taking my fucking time, but still the freezing air of a typical Forks morning was bitch-slapping me in the face. I figured I deserved it for being such an idiot. What the hell had I been thinking, going to the hospital to see her like that?

What fucking good could come of it?

Nothing, it turns out. *Nothing* .

I had no idea what I thought I would accomplish by going there, but rest assured that the breakdown had been furthest from my mind. I never thought that that would happen, especially not in front of *her* of all people.

She told me it was okay. It was okay that I changed. It was okay that I wasn't constant. I fucking changed, and that was fucking okay. *Isn't that just peachy?*

I didn't even realize what the hell was going on until she brought me back to reality by asking me what time it was. Then I realized it was four fucking a.m. and I was standing in the Goose's hospital room. I

realized I had actually taken my bike and rode in the freezing cold just to see *her* .

How fucked up is that?

I quickly got my act together and shook that shit off of me. I took a mental step back and tried to distance myself from her, which proved to be impossible. She kept looking at me with a knowing spark in her eyes, as if she was onto something, but I don't think she was even aware that she was doing it.

She had me by the balls now; she could use my random breakdown as a weapon against me. I didn't think she even realized what a goldmine she had stumbled across. Then again, maybe it wasn't so much a weapon as much as it was an inconvenience for me.

If Swan decided to tell people about the breakdown, who the fuck would believe her? The people she could tell would ask themselves the same fucking question I was asking myself as I rode through the freezing cold.

Why the hell would Edward fucking Cullen visit Isabella 'The Goose' Swan in the hospital at four in the morning?

That spark in her eyes angered me to no fucking end. She couldn't look at me like that, as if she knew me. I called her insane, over and over again, just to make her understand that she had nothing on me. She was the crazy one. Not me.

Her scars told me so.

What the hell was the deal with them, anyway? She was oddly defensive about the whole thing, telling me they weren't a big deal even though it was obvious that they were. I had glanced over my shoulder and made a stupid Thanksgiving turkey-joke. The joke had almost stuck in my throat as soon as my eyes landed on her face.

There had been nothing but raw dread and fear in her face.

Dread and fear for whatever was related to those scars of hers. I couldn't help but wonder if there were more, or were her arms the only part of her body that was disfigured like that?

Yeah, asshole. Her leg. Remember?

Fuck you.

The leg was my creation; it had nothing to do with the scars on her arms.

She asked me to leave then. I probably should have, but of course I didn't. Being the idiot that I am, I had to stay put and insulted her some more. I kept pushing the issue though I knew I had no fucking business pushing it – she made that pretty clear - just so we could get caught by the night shift nurse. The nurse wasn't an issue though; she was easily dazzled by my charm and she promised to not report my visit as long as I left immediately.

I wasn't surprised that the nurse didn't give me shit for being there, but what did surprise me was that Swan had actually tried to come up with something to help me out. I obviously beat her to the punch and told the nurse that I was her damn boyfriend. Swan had proceeded to stare at me like I had just grown a second head. The shocked look in her eyes was accompanied by something similar to... *disgust*. She was disgusted by the mere mention of me being her boyfriend. Like I'm *that* repelling?

Fucking Penguin, you wouldn't even know what to do with me.

I shook the thought out of my head as I turned and made my way up the driveway to our house. I didn't know why I felt so offended by the thought anyway. What did it matter to me what she thought? She was not important. Besides, why would she want to get together with the guy that maimed her and crippled her for life?

I shook my head again and groaned inwardly at myself.

What the hell was I doing? Was I actually trying to rationalize with myself why Swan would be so disgusted by the thought of me being her boyfriend? *Really* ? I was obviously more affected by the sleep deprivation than I thought. I was clearly losing my mind, and I had chosen the worst place ever to be at when it did.

Fucking Goose.

I made it up to the house, and I cursed under my breath when I saw that the lights in the living room and the kitchen were on. The gravel echoed like gunshots when I hit the brakes on my handlebars. I cursed again. It probably sounded louder in my ears because I wasn't in the mood for getting caught.

I climbed off my bike, leaned it against the side wall of the garage, and quietly let myself in. By going through the garage, I could easily make it to the stairs without having to pass the kitchen, where Mom and Dad probably were.

I didn't know why I was so afraid of getting caught. It's not like I would get in anymore trouble anyway. What were they going to do; take my car away? Well, too late, I already took care of that myself. Were they going to ground me? Yeah, at this point that didn't sound like such a punishment for me. Besides, this was my parents we were talking about – they didn't know the first thing about punishing their children for doing fucked up things. I got away with smelling like alcohol and weed. So why would they suddenly care if I was out a little late one night? This wouldn't be the first time I stumbled home at almost five in the morning, though it might have been the first time I was actually sober while doing it.

Despite all that, I was still channeling my inner Jasper, moving silently as a ninja towards the stairs. I was almost in the clear. I knew that all I had to do was get up the stairs and I would be fucking fine. I took a step up and then another... *damnit* .

I didn't even think about the creaking step until it was too late. It creaked, and I fruitlessly hoped that nobody would notice it. If

anyone heard it, maybe they thought it was just the house settling or some shit?

Geez, Cullen, paranoid much? Get your fucking shit together already.

I closed my eyes and tried to breathe calmly through my nose. If what happened at the hospital was me breaking down, then I didn't want to know what the hell was going to happen when I entered my room. Something inside me was quivering. I tried to get a hold on it somehow, but the more I tried to pinpoint the feeling, the worse it got. This was more than me being afraid of getting caught, this was something else entirely. Something I didn't understand.

"Welcome home, son. Care to let us know where you spent the last few hours?"

Dad's voice rang out, and when I opened my eyes, I realized I was still frozen on the second to last step of the stairs. I groaned inwardly and turned my head slowly to my father.

He was leaning casually against the doorframe to the living room with a cup of steaming coffee in his hand. I knew my father, and the casual demeanor was just a fucking act. He was angry; the flashing in his eyes and the restless twitching of the pinky, on the hand that held his cup, told me so.

"I was just getting some fresh air, what? I'm not allowed to go out anymore?" I asked, though it came out as a croaked whisper.

"Enjoying the scenery while you can, are you?" he said and took a sip of his coffee. "But I'm sure Chicago has its perks too."

My already frozen body went impossibly even more frozen at his words. *Chicago*. I had managed to block that shit out. I guess my parents did know how to punish their children; they just didn't bring out the ammo often enough for us to know. *But Chicago, seriously?* That's not even a punishment. That's a death sentence.

"I'm not moving to Chicago," I argued, with no emotion in my voice. I was just stating a fact.

"If you keep disregarding the rules in this house as well as keeping this act up, then a move to Chicago will become reality for you, whether you like it or not," he replied calmly. "You still have a chance to get your act together, and your first step could be by telling me exactly where you have been, and who you saw." He took another sip, but never let his gaze waver away from me. I took another deep breath and breathed out slowly through my nose. There was no chance in fucking hell that I was going to tell him the truth of where I had been. I couldn't even admit it to myself, let alone anyone else.

"I couldn't sleep, so I decided to take a *fucking* ride on my *fucking* bike to clear my *fucking* head. I didn't see anybody of importance, okay?" I almost wanted to applaud myself. My answer hadn't contained one single lie. Everything was true. Yes, I had seen Swan – but she was *not* a person of importance.

Yet, you got worked up when she claimed she wasn't important and that she was nothing but a waste of space...

Fuck you.

Dad took another sip and sighed deeply.

"If I got a nickel every time you said the f-word I would be a very wealthy man," he noted solemnly.

"You already are a very wealthy man," I snorted.

"Not compared to what I would be," he replied with a sigh. "Go up and wash your mouth out with soap and get some rest. We're supposed to be at the station at nine. You better be on your best behavior, okay?"

I scoffed.

"What's the big fucking deal if he slams a restraining order against me?" I asked, even though something in my gut told me it would be a fucking big deal, but for reasons I rather not admit even to myself.

"You will have to change schools. You will not be able to get around freely. If Isabella turns up somewhere you are, you will immediately have to leave, even if you were there first... Doesn't sound so nice, now does it?" he replied. "You won't even have the right to take the same bus as she. Your freedom will be limited, as far as she's concerned."

"That shit doesn't matter since you're still probably gonna send my ass to Chicago anyway," I snapped. He pursed his lips and shook his head.

"It all depends on how well you behave today. One word out of your mouth and you can consider yourself gone. You will spend the remainder of the school year in Chicago," he replied sternly.

"Wow, Dad, way to love your fucking son," I replied sarcastically. "It's easier to send my ass away than to fucking deal with the problem, huh? By banishing me, you're banishing the problem. Way to go, what an excellent way of parenting."

"I am dealing with the problem, son," he replied with that calm tone that he knew drove me insane. "You are too busy focusing on yourself that you don't see the bigger pictu-"

"*Fuck you*," I snarled, effectively cutting him off. "Don't talk about my focus, since your own focus is nowhere near where it's supposed to be. You have spent so much fucking time caring about Swan it's like you think she's your daughter or some shit. Newsflash – she's not!" I was basically yelling now. I threw my arms out in a wild gesture at the last statement and Dad frowned at it.

"I advise you to not talk about things you know nothing about," he said with barely contained irritation in his voice.

"What? You're saying she *is* your daughter?" I replied sarcastically and he huffed.

"I know very well that she is not my daughter, thank you."

"Then why the hell have you spent more time caring for her than for your own fucking family? You don't put some random stranger before your own fucking flesh and blood!" I yelled and I could feel my pulse pound in my ears. I was working myself up to the point where my entire body was shaking in anger and pent-up frustration.

The sleep deprivation wasn't really helping with my mood right now. I knew I should just shut the fuck up and go to bed, but the words kept spewing out of me like there was no tomorrow. I couldn't stop even if I had wanted to.

Cue, nervous breakdown number two...

Fuck, I didn't even make it to my room before that happened.

"You care more about her than you do about me. You are willing to send me the fuck away because you think that will protect her from your monster of a son. You talk about seeing the bigger picture... *fuck that* ... open your fucking eyes, Dad, your bigger picture is the *wrong* fucking picture!" My voice was beginning to sound odd in my own ears, like it wasn't even coming from me anymore, and the pounding was intensifying with each word that left my mouth.

Dad put his cup down on a nearby side table and walked over to me. He raised his hand. I thought for a split second that he was going to hit me, but he put it on my shoulder and looked me straight in the eyes.

"Breathe, Edward, breathe. Take a slow breath through your nose and breathe out through your mouth...slowly... Edward, are you listening to me? Do you hear me?"

I gave him a weird look, not understanding why the hell he was so concerned about my breathing all of a sudden, before I realized I was fucking hyperventilating.

And I couldn't fucking stop.

"Edward, listen to me, you're gonna pass out if you don't pull yourself together," he said with an alarmed tone. "Esme! Bring me a small paper bag!" he then called out.

"I don't... need... a... fucking... paper... bag..." I managed to croak out as I tried to get my breathing in order, which was easier said than done. My throat had been twisted into a knot and I couldn't get any air either in or out of my lungs. There was something heavy pressing down on my chest, and it felt like I was being crushed under something. My legs grew weak, and it was only a matter of seconds before I would collapse on the stairs.

Dad helped me down to a sitting position at the same time as Mom came rushing out from the kitchen and handed Dad the bag. I pushed Dad away when he tried to make me breathe through the bag. I leaned forward and rested my elbows on my knees, hiding my face in my hands, and finally getting my breathing under control.

Without a fucking paper bag, thank you very much .

"What's happening? Is he alright?" Mom asked with a voice laced with fear and concern.

My breathing was ragged, but under control. I wasn't hyperventilating anymore.

I was almost too tired to even breathe at all.

"Edward just experienced a mild panic attack," Dad stated without an ounce of hesitation. He was rubbing my back in a comforting way, but his touch was just pissing me off. I wasn't a fucking child to be cuddled after scratching a knee. *Fuck this .*

I pushed him away from me and stood up. My legs almost buckled underneath me and I grabbed the banister for support.

"Maybe you should stay home today. You don't need to come with us to the station," Mom suggested with a weak voice.

"Fine by me," I replied hoarsely, as I turned to walk up the stairs.

"No, you're coming with us," Dad said. "The Chief wants to see you, and by behaving, you might convince him not to get the restraining order against you."

I huffed as I kept moving up the stairs.

"You'll probably make me move anyway... I bet you'll even try to adopt Swan, since you love her so much... and why don't you give her my room while you're at it? She'll be like the daughter you never had... you can even change her name to Edwina," I muttered under my breath as I ascended the stairs. I didn't know if they heard me or not, because I didn't stay around long enough to find out, and it didn't matter anyway.

I walked up to my room on the third floor and collapsed on my bed. I was fucking exhausted and yet my mind kept me from resting by spinning in my head like there was no tomorrow.

I just had a fucking panic attack in front of my parents, just an hour after I had a semi-breakdown in front of Swan. *What the hell is happening to me?*

I didn't even know why I had reacted like I did. Why did I spew all that crap about flesh and blood and me being more important than Swan? Of course I meant more to my parents than a random stranger - or Swan in this case. That was a fact that was so obvious that it didn't need to be stated out loud. It was just there. A fact. They were *my* parents after all. But still those stupid words came out, making me sound like a fucking pansy in the process.

Emotional breakdown? Check.

I was not good with feelings. Feelings weren't my thing. The only feeling I could handle, or even wanted to handle for that matter, was lust. I didn't need more feelings than that. Oh yeah, the occasional angry outburst was okay, I guess, and as was the joyous feeling of getting to laugh at other people on occasion.

That was why this was all so fucking disturbing; my insides were a spinning turmoil of feelings, and I didn't understand half of them.

Love was not one of those feelings I was comfortable with. That was probably due to the fact that it was so fucking alien to me. I had never been in love so I didn't know first thing about it. Yeah, sure, I loved my family and my friends... but that kind of love was a given. Your family could screw up all they wanted, but you would still love them. It was constant. You couldn't do anything about it. But real love, *romantic* love... that was fucking different. Real love wasn't constant.

Constant.

Swan.

" It means that people change, all the time, for no good reason. They love you, then they stab you. They hate you, then they wanna help you... you're the same all the time It's nice having something constant to hold on to... It's the constant things in your life that keep you sane. You didn't let the accident change you and I think that's a good thing."

She was wrong. I was wrong. We were both fucking wrong.

Nobody was fucking constant. Nobody in the history of the world had been constant. Nobody woke up every morning being the same person they were when they fell asleep. Everything we experience changed us in minuscule bits, and then they came together to

become something bigger. The small changes will creep up on you without you realizing it until it was too late to do anything about it.

One day, you will find yourself staring at a person you don't recognize in the mirror, and will ask yourself what the hell happened and how you came to be this way. You won't have any means to get back to where you were, because you were too fucking blind during the ride that you don't even know how you ended up there or why. You just were and you're weren't constant. There was no such thing as a constant human being. Everybody changed, whether they liked it or not.

And I was no different.

I liked to believe that *feelings* were the culprit for most of those changes. Just look at Emmett, he used to be so fucking badass until he fell in love with Rosalie, and he changed into a fucking pansy right in front of my damn eyes.

Feelings were not a good thing to have if you wanted to remain constant. No matter what those feelings were, you were due to undergo some changes. Having nervous breakdowns because you couldn't handle shit wasn't a good way of going about it either - if you wanted to remain constant. Spewing shit around your parents that made you sound like an abandoned little boy – nah, not a good idea either, if you wanted to remain constant.

Feelings were only good if you could control them, but most feelings were beyond being controlled. Every single one of them could spiral out of control without warning. Even the good ones - like lust. You could get totally blindsided by that shit and only think about whose pussy your dick was going to visit next, or whose tits your hands were going to fondle.

Lust could be a dangerous thing, but nowhere near as dangerous as love.

Love. Fuck that shit. Who needs it?

You need it, asshole.

Fuck you.

Besides, you want it, just look at Mom and Dad - you want the very same thing that they already have. You're just too big of a pussy to try to find it.

Fuck. You.

I must have dozed off at some point, because I was woken up by Mom shaking my shoulder. I was still laying sprawled in the same position that I had fallen in when I collapsed on the bed earlier. She smiled timidly at me as I tried to sober up from my nap.

"We have to go in twenty minutes, but you have time to freshen up a bit," she said quietly and smiled at me. "And don't you worry; it's going to be alright. As long as you keep yourself in check, there is no reason to believe that this won't end well today."

"And what if he slams that restraining order on my ass anyway? What's going to happen then?" I muttered as I sat up.

"We'll cross that bridge when we get to it, but you don't need to make matters worse by showing the Chief that colorful language of yours," she said with a pointed glance.

"Where would the world be without a little color?" I asked sweetly.

"Just go take a shower, sweetie, and meet us downstairs," she replied with a light chuckle and ruffled my hair before leaving the room.

I climbed out of bed with a groan and made my way to the bathroom. I didn't spend too much time in the shower; I just stayed there long enough to wake my sorry ass up. I changed my clothes before going downstairs.

The drive down to the police station was quiet and tense at best. I sat in the backseat of Dad's Mercedes, and with every turn he made, my stomach lurched even though he was a careful and slow driver. He was driving way below the speed limit, but I still had an uneasy feeling in my stomach. I was gripping the seat, and I was sure that the indentions from my nails would be forever etched into the leather seat. Luckily for me, Dad would probably never notice it.

My fingertips were numb from gripping the seat so tightly when we got down to the station, and my legs felt like jelly. I didn't like being stuck in a car if I wasn't driving. I had no control if something was to happen, and I got claustrophobic. I couldn't escape and my life laid in the hands of whoever drove the car. Yeah, Dad was a terrific driver and all, but that didn't mean I liked sitting in a car with him while he drove.

I followed my parents into the station, and we were ushered by some intern to a small office. The door, which had Chief Swan's name on it, was ajar and we were let right in. The Chief was already sitting behind his desk, which was cluttered with piles of files. The bigger pile was labeled 'animals' and I wanted to snort at that. Being a small town cop couldn't be all that exciting, since they never got any real action around here; animal attacks didn't count.

Dad and the Chief exchanged pleasantries and talked about the latest animal attack, before getting down to business. As soon as we did, the Chief's eyes clouded over and he glared at me before looking over at my dad. This was not a joke to him, that much was clear. He was going to protect his daughter by any means necessary. I wondered if my dad would have acted the same way, if the roles had been reversed.

If I had been the one in the hospital, and if Swan had been the one driving...

No, not likely. If Swan had driven the car, she probably would have killed herself out of guilt soon thereafter. I don't think she was the type that would be able to live with something like that. She would

find a reason to blame herself, even if the accident wasn't technically her fault.

"I've said this time and time again; I do not want your son anywhere near my daughter. I don't understand why that is so difficult for him to understand. In two weeks, he has managed to put my daughter in the hospital twice. He's dangerous and volatile, and I don't want him to have anything to do with her," the Chief stated calmly, but the anger behind his voice was evident.

"Yes, and I respect that. That's why I've asked Edward to keep his distance as to not make the situation worse," Dad replied. "But what happened yesterday is not my son's fault-"

"No? Then whose fault is it? Didn't your other son find Edward crouched beside my unconscious daughter in an *empty* hallway?" the Chief prompted.

Dad glanced at me and I cocked an eyebrow at him. Dad knew the truth; he knew I had nothing to do with it. Both Swan and I had told him that I was not to blame. This was the moment of truth, would Dad stand up for his son or would he choose someone else over his own flesh and blood, yet again?

He sighed deeply before looking back at the Chief.

"Edward was helping your daughter after she was attacked by another student. It was just an unfortunate coincidence that he was there when it happened. Anyone could have been there; it just happened to be Edward," Dad replied. I felt a small smile tug at the corner of my lips. Maybe my little speech from this morning did have some fucking impact on him after all. I hadn't been full of shit and maybe he had realized that too. I'm guessing, though, that the panic attack didn't really hurt matters either. Dad took a deep breath before continuing. "And with that said, I wish you would reconsider the restraining order."

Mom squeezed Dad's hand that rested on the armrest of his chair, and he shot her a reassuring look. She was nervous, no doubt, but *what* she was nervous about was beyond me. I was the one who was a step away from getting a bucket full of shit poured over me after all.

"Is there anything Edward could do to make you reconsider?" Mom asked in a soft and quiet voice. "You do realize what kind of impact such a thing would have on his life-"

"Yes, I'm very well aware of that," the Chief cut her off brusquely, "just as I'm aware of what impact he had on my daughter's life when he ran her over."

The silent tension in the room that followed could be cut with a knife. I don't think any of us had expected him to be so damn blunt about the fact that I crippled his daughter. I clenched my teeth and tried to count to ten in my head, but what good would it do? I knew I was going to lash out anyway. That shit wasn't right. He had no fucking right to speak of the accident like that, just because it was *his* daughter.

"I hit a patch of black ice, get the fuck over it," I snarled.

"Watch it, boy. You're walking a very fine line right now," he shot back.

"Edward, why don't you go wait by the car and we'll finish this up," Dad said to me with an eerily calm voice, and when I met his eyes I could almost swear I saw fire in them.

Oh boy, was he angry.

I pushed my chair back with a huff and left the office, walking out to the car. I had a feeling Dad wasn't all too pleased with my outburst and I couldn't care less about it.

I kicked a pebble in frustration and watched it bounce off a tire of a nearby police car.

Who the hell did he think he was, anyway?

Yeah, I crippled his daughter. Did he think I didn't know that already? Why did he have to rub it in my damn face like that? I hit black ice. End of story. It was not my fucking fault it happened. If Swan, herself, didn't blame me, why should he?

I paced back and forth beside Dad's shiny Mercedes for almost half an hour before my parents finally came out. Dad unlocked the car, and we all got in without a word. I put on my seatbelt and waited for Dad to turn on the ignition, but he just sat there with his hands on the keys, not moving.

"Congratulations, son, you're changing schools," he declared after a moment.

"I... what?" I asked confused. "So... what? You're gonna send me off to Chicago now? Just because I made one fucking mistake? How the fuck is that fair?"

"Shut your mouth," Dad snapped, finally letting his calm demeanor fall and his anger show as he turned in his seat to look at me. "Don't you dare speak to me like that again, especially not since I just saved your ass in there. You will not get a restraining order put against you. How about a little thanks, huh? He agreed not to take any legal actions against you yet, on the condition that you change schools. Which we agreed to since it's the least you can do for that family after everything you've put Isabella through." I gaped at him. I was totally fucking speechless. "Maybe if you're lucky you'll be able to go back to Forks High next fall, and graduate with your friends. Hopefully this storm will have blown over by then. You can choose to go to school in Port Angeles or to the small school in La Push for now."

"What? You're actually giving me a choice in this?" I asked incredulously.

"Your mother is the one who is giving you a choice. If it were up to me, then you would have been on the first plane to Chicago," he replied curtly before turning back towards the front and turning on the ignition. The car roared to life and we were soon on our way back to the house.

Port Angeles or La Push. So those were my choices? Maybe I should have moved to Chicago after all, since either choice was shit. If I chose Port Angeles, I would be forced to spend two hours every day driving back and forth. If I chose La Push, I would be stuck in a small-ass school with a bunch of inbred dogs. It was like being forced to choose between getting a leg cut off or an arm. Either way you were screwed. What was the better choice in this? Was there even one?

Fuck me if I didn't already know the answer. I don't even know why the hell I pretended that I didn't already know what choice I was going to make. Inbred dogs be damned; I was going to choose La Push. That way I wouldn't be stuck in a car for hours every day, and I would be able to take my bike if worse came to worst. La Push was only a few miles away, and maybe I could benefit from the exercise.

Yeah, like I cared about exercise. Who was I kidding here? I just didn't want to drive.

I went back to bed when we got home, and I didn't wake up until hours later when it was time for dinner. It turned out to be another quiet affair since Dad wasn't home from work yet. Mom didn't say much. she was too lost in her own thoughts and Emmett kept his mouth shut probably because he had nothing to say to either one of us. He didn't want to disturb Mom, since she was obviously distraught over the day's events, and he wasn't talking to me because he still thought I was a douche.

But he surprised me when he stopped me after dinner, when I was going for the stairs.

"I'm going over to Jasper's," he said. I cocked an eyebrow at him and he just stared back at me with empty eyes. I guess this was his fucked up way of asking if I wanted to come with. Maybe it also was his fucked up way of telling me that we were alright. For now. I went upstairs to grab my jacket, before following Emmett outside. He drove like a maniac to Jasper's house, and I didn't even bother to try to hide my annoyance over the fact. I clung to the handle above the door while I shot daggers at my brother. He didn't seem to notice, and if he did, he surely didn't care. This was probably his sick way of punishing me. I probably should have stayed home.

I wasn't surprised that Emmett disappeared into Rosalie's room when we got there, so I got to chill with Jasper alone for a while. I didn't mind though; after the wild car ride over, I was happy to get rid of Emmett for a while. Besides, Jasper was cool. He said he was Switzerland in this whole mess, so he wasn't going to give me shit for this.

We played GTA for a while, neither of us saying much about anything, but I got the feeling that he had something on his mind, because he kept glancing at me from the corner of his eye. But it wasn't so much the glancing as it was the feeling I got every time he did. It was something weird with the way he kept looking at me.

The dude had some serious issues.

"Just spit it out already," I sighed in frustration, without tearing my eyes off of the screen.

"I went with Alice and Emmett to the hospital today," he began and I immediately lost all focus on the game. I dropped the controller and turned to him.

"What the hell for?" I asked, feeling more than a little irritated. "What the hell happened to all that crap about you being Switzerland?"

"I was going to hang out with Alice this afternoon, but she wanted to drop by the hospital first, so I had no other choice but to join her and Emmet, so...", he explained with a half-shrugged, like it wasn't a big deal. But it was; it was a big fucking deal.

"Well, isn't that just peachy," I scoffed.

"Don't be a douche, man. You should actually be glad that they did. I think Swan actually convinced them of a thing or two... she's like the Devil's Advocate or some shit," he chuckled as he shook his head to himself. "She got upset when Emmett refused to believe that you had nothing to do with what happened yesterday."

"She... she got *upset* ?" I echoed skeptically. I had a hard time believing that and Jasper chuckled again at my expression.

"You betcha," he replied. "She actually told us that she thought it was okay that you kept treating her like a pile of crap, because that was the way you had chosen to deal with the situation or some shit. She said something about, if making fun of her and making her life miserable would make you feel better, we should let you do that. Whatever floats your boat."

I cocked an eyebrow as I looked at him skeptically. She had told me something similar, but it still surprised me that she had pulled that one out on them too.

"You serious?" I asked after a moment of silence and he nodded.

"Yeah, I didn't really believe it either. Alice thought she was being fucking masochistic. Which I'm inclined to agree with... have you seen her arms? She was trying to hide them by hugging them to herself, but I saw them... There's some serious scars going on there... Maybe she *is* masochistic... just in more fucked up ways than we would think."

"Maybe she is, maybe she isn't... but she didn't inflict those scars on herself," I said without thinking. Jasper gave me a weird look and I

realized there was no way for me to explain myself out of this shit.

"And how the hell would you know?" he asked, as predicted.

I sighed deeply and glanced towards the basement door, making sure that Emmett and Rosalie weren't about to burst in here, before turning back to Jasper. I leaned forward a little bit and he mirrored my movement.

"I may or may not have stumbled across her file when I was at the hospital yesterday. I was alone in Dad's office and her file was on his desk. I figured I'd take a peek to see what crap was in there, and let me tell you, there was a lot of it. Seriously, her file was thick as shit," I explained in a hushed voice.

"Yeah? Did they mention her scars?" he asked, sounding reluctant to ask, but his curiosity got the best of him on this one.

"According to my dad's notes on the whole thing, he thinks that they were inflicted by someone else because of the way they are cut... freaky huh?" I explained.

"Wow, that's some fucked up shit. Those scars were like massive," he replied in awe as he leaned back on the couch.

"Tell me about it," I muttered.

We sat there in silence for a bit, as we both let that sink in a little. I still couldn't believe it. Who the hell would cut another person like that? It didn't make any fucking sense, and I felt a little relieved to actually get it out in the open and have someone to discuss that shit with. I couldn't go around carrying that knowledge with me without getting to talk about it with someone, and Jasper was good enough as any. Jasper was always objective, and he didn't get personal if the situation didn't specifically require him to. I assume that he had inherited that trait from his father, who was in the Navy.

Jasper made a chuckling noise and I looked up at him.

"Between you and me, bro," he said with a lazy smirk, "you are not even close to being that careless douche that you pretend to be, and Swan isn't that innocent, insecure Goose that we all thought she was... that girl can hold her own when she needs to."

"Don't I know it," I snorted quietly.

"For what it's worth, I never thought you did it," he said then. He didn't need to elaborate. I knew what he was referring to. I smiled crookedly and nodded.

"Yeah, I know," I replied.

Because I *did* know. Emmett and Jasper were my closest friends. They knew every little shit there was to know about me. The only reason Emmett was so quick to pass judgment on me was because he was pissed at me for not changing and becoming Swan's best friend after the accident. Jasper didn't expect that shit from me. He could still look at the whole situation objectively; therefore, he would never think I would do a shitty thing like pushing a crippled girl in a hallway. That shit was below me. Yeah, I called her names and whatnot, but crossing the line to hurt her physically... no, I would never.

I had hurt her physically enough.

"Did you hear that Coach Hunter got suspended?" he asked, taking me a little off guard by the sudden change of subject. I shook my head and he smiled. "Yeah, that bitch had it coming. Rose told me that Angela Weber had fallen down during gym today and sprained her ankle pretty badly; it swelled up to double its size and everything... and Coach just told her to 'shake it off' and keep running. Apparently she also tried to make Swan make laps on her *crutches* when she first came back. Rose figured enough was enough, so she reported her and got her crazy ass suspended."

"Rosalie did that?" I asked surprised and Jasper nodded.

"Yup," he said, "she may be a bitch, but I think there is a heart in there somewhere. Though I think she did it mostly for selfish reasons... she was tired of the shit Hunter made them do... talk about a sadistic bitch, Rose told me it wasn't the first time it has happened either. She always used to push the students beyond their limits and if they got hurt she just yelled at them even more. Fucking insane."

I just nodded in agreement, and surprised myself by feeling angry about the whole thing.

The Coach made Swan do laps when she had just come back from the hospital after having major fucking surgery on her crushed leg? How the hell did she even manage to keep her job long enough to make that happen? I wondered what Swan did; did she do the laps? I doubted it. How could she? She could barely walk on a flat surface at a snail's pace without wincing in pain every time she had to move her leg.

Yeah, I notice that shit, so sue me.

"So Swan... what else did she say when you guys saw her?" I asked casually.

"Not much. I don't think she likes Alice and Emmett very much though," he replied.

"Yeah? Why's that?"

"Because she thinks it's stupid and wrong for them to pay so much attention to her and not you and blah blah blah... I didn't really pay attention. I've heard Alice recite Swan's speech to me before. I don't think Swan wants them around, and I can't blame her... They both treat her like they've been friends forever, and I can see why that bugs her. But I guess *they* just can't take a hint," Jasper sighed.

I had heard *that speech* before too. On many occasions it felt like Swan really was the Devil's Advocate. One would think a girl like her

would like getting some attention from the popular kids at school, but no. Instead she tried to shy away from it by basically telling them to fuck off. All this, while making a case for me – that I was their friend and that I was the one needing the attention and support.

How could someone be so fucking selfless?

Then again, maybe it wasn't selflessness, maybe it was just stupidity. She had no fucking sense of self preservation. Just look at how she ended up on an empty dark road in the middle of nowhere, running out in front of a car without a second thought, even though she knew the road was slippery with ice. She didn't want any friends, and she was totally closed off from the world, for reasons unknown to me. And if I had any sense of self preservation, I wouldn't get involved by trying to found out why the hell she was that way. It's not like it mattered to me.

I glanced at my clock, realizing it was already past eleven, and I figured it was time for me to head back home. Emmett had already let me know that he was going to spend the night with his girl. He had offered me to let me borrow his car, but I declined.

I wasn't in the mood for driving a car I wasn't used to driving, especially not when it was still icy out and it was dark as shit. Besides, it was only a few miles from Jasper's anyway. I had walked home from there before.

I said bye to Jasper, not even bothering with the two lovebirds upstairs, before making my way out into the cold, dark night.

Since Jasper lived at the opposite side of town from us, I needed to walk through town to get home. This also included a walk past the hospital. I tried not to glance at the building as I passed. It was just a fucking hospital after all. It wasn't relevant to me, but somehow I found myself slowing down to a complete stop when I passed it.

I sighed deeply and turned my head and looked up at the sad-looking building. Most lights were out, not very surprising since it was

almost midnight, and Isabella was probably asleep.

Isabella? So now she's 'Isabella'?

Shut up.

She was probably asleep, and even if she wasn't asleep, it didn't matter to me. Why would I care whether or not she was asleep? That was none of my concern. It was her fucking problem if she couldn't sleep.

None of my concern. Yes. Then why the hell were my feet steering me towards the entrance without me telling them to? *Fuck this shit.*

I turned around before I even reached the automatic doors and stalked back down the parking lot towards the road. I looked down at the ground as I walked, and a small black object caught my eye. For some reason, I stopped and picked it up.

It was just a fucking pen. A worthless piece of shit pen.

I took off the top and tested the pen by writing on my hand. It worked. The black ink flowed easily over my skin. It would be the perfect pen to use to draw on Swan's cast...

... hold on a minute... wait, what?

I did not just suggest to myself that I was going to draw on Swan's cast. That was ridiculous. Why the hell would I do something like that? I put the top back on the pen and put it in my back pocket.

I snorted at myself and the ridiculous thought, and began walking back towards the road. But just as I reached the end of the parking lot, I found my feet frozen to the ground. It was as if they didn't want to leave. I threw a look over my shoulder, and I could see the moon being reflected in one of the windows on the third floor, and not just any window. I was pretty sure that particular window belonged to one Isabella Marie Swan.

Maybe it was a sign. Maybe I was supposed to go in there and see her one last fucking time, since we weren't going to go to school together anymore. If I were lucky, I would never have to see her again after this day. The least I could do was to say goodbye or something. Just to be polite...

The groan that escaped me echoed in the empty, silent, parking lot as I turned around and walked back towards the entrance. Maybe I should just have written her a note or some shit. Wasn't the breakdown from last time enough to want me to keep away from this place forever? Apparently not, it turns out.

I didn't even need to think as I took the stairs up to the third floor and walked through the hallway to her room. I was on fucking auto-pilot; I didn't even care to be sneaky and stealthy about it. I wanted to be caught, because that would mean I wouldn't be about to crash into Swan's room again and effectively lose all the respect I had for myself.

No such luck. The hallways were just as empty as last time, not even the nurse that caught us this morning was there. *Fuck.*

I reached Swan's door, and I stood outside it for a few moments just to collect myself – and give the nurses a chance to catch me – before I manned up and opened the door.

I stepped inside and closed the door quietly behind me before walking over to the window and grabbing a chair. I moved it closer to the bed. I looked down at Swan; her brown eyes were open and shining in the moonlight. Her skin was white as a ghost's in the dim light.

She didn't look surprised to see me, and she didn't look angry – though she didn't exactly look thrilled either. My hand was fucking shaking as I pulled out the pen from my back pocket and showed it to her.

"I brought a pen," I declared and a smile tugged at her lips for a second, before she gave in and let it break out. It was a timid smile, but it was good enough for me. At least she wasn't threatening to scream bloody murder.

But wasn't that what you wanted? You wanted to get caught... remember?

Shut up.

I sat down on the chair and removed the cap from the pen with my teeth.

"What are you doing?" she asked, even though she knew damn well what I was doing. I snorted as I lifted up the blanket that covered her cast.

"I figured I had a right to sign this stupid thing too," I muttered as I put my hand on the cast.

"Yeah? Why's that?" she asked. I had just been about to start drawing, but her question caught me off guard. It was a valid fucking question, and I had no fucking answer for it.

I removed my hand from the cast and looked at her instead.

"Because I marked you," I said, leaning back on my chair. I put the cap back on the pen and played with it in my hands.

"Does that mean I get to draw on your forehead?" she asked, raising an eyebrow at me.

"My forehead?" I echoed in confusion, and she raised her scarred arm and poked my eyebrow. It took me a moment before I realized what she was referring to.

My scar.

"I marked you too," she concluded. I chuckled humorlessly and nodded.

"I guess you did. Does this mean we're even?" I joked, even though I knew we were far from it. She didn't answer me until I looked her in the eyes again. She was frowning a little and I had no idea why. Was she really surprised by my morbid jokes? She couldn't be and she shouldn't be.

"I never said we weren't," she said after a moment of silence. We stared at each other until she broke the gaze by looking down at the pen in my hands. "I have no friends, like you so nicely pointed out to me... and if Alice and Emmett got to draw on my cast, you might as well too... since you came all the way down here with a pen and everything," she sighed with a semi-sarcastic tone.

The way she spoke to me was refreshing. My friends frequently called me out on my bullshit and all the shit I've done wrong, but somehow it was different when Swan did it. When my friends did it, they did it because they were annoyed with how I acted and were tired that I never changed, but when Swan did it, she was just stating a fact. She wasn't complaining, because she obviously couldn't care less about my behavior. Probably because she had much darker demons than me to fight. I could only imagine what kind of demons lurked behind the secret that were her scars...

I scooted my chair closer to the bed and looked at her leg. Fortunately, I didn't need to turn on the lights in the room. The dim light, from the moon and the streetlights outside, was enough for me to see the cast clearly.

I tilted my head as I studied the creations that were already drawn on it. For some reason I felt oddly jealous of how much thought Alice had put into the details of the flowers and butterflies she had drawn. I didn't even need to ask who had drawn them because they had Alice's name written all over them – figuratively speaking, of course.

Then I saw a big brown mess that couldn't have been made by someone other than my brother. The bear with a t-shirt that said 'Brother Bear'. I looked up at Swan, but she wasn't looking at me; she was looking out the window.

I knew the significance behind that particular bear, and I wondered if she did. Probably not, because if Emmett had told her the significance behind that bear, she probably wouldn't have been so opposed to the idea of letting him in and becoming her friend. That bear wasn't a joke to him.

"... this bear will always look after you, and see to it that you will never hurt yourself again. Brother Bear is your bodyguard..."

I knew that the bear was special to my brother, and the fact that he had drawn that on her cast made me realize this shit ran even deeper than I thought. Emmett wasn't just fucking around with Swan, he was seriously looking out for her. Yeah, I knew he had been looking out for her after the accident because he was feeling guilty, but I never thought it ran *this* deep. Emmett was more attached to Swan now than he had admitted, and probably ever would admit.

It frustrated me to no end that he was so fucking attached to her. It felt like she had robbed me of my brother. She had fucking robbed me of my life.

Why am I sitting here again?

"Trying to figure out what kind of bird you're going to draw?" Swan teased softly, effectively bringing me from my musing. I looked up at her and met her gaze. The anger I felt towards her almost clouded my sight. *Who the hell did she think she was?*

"No, I'm just trying to figure out if I'm gonna draw the goose with or without a cast," I snapped. Her eyes widened a little, but otherwise there was no reaction from her. She didn't say anything in response; she just turned her gaze away.

I looked back down on the cast and sighed deeply. I had yet to draw something, and maybe that was just as well. There was no fucking reason for me to draw on her cast. I wasn't her Brother Bear. I put the cap back on the pen and put it in my pocket. I sensed, more than saw, how Swan followed my movements with her eyes.

"You didn't draw anything," she said quietly.

"Nothing gets by you," I snorted in response. I pushed my chair back a little, so I could lean back and prop my feet up on the bed. I made myself comfortable and crossed my arms over my chest. Swan was still looking at me and I had no other choice but to look back.

"I won't even ask what you're doing here tonight... because I get the feeling you don't even know that yourself," she said with no trace of humor in her voice.

"You know you can always tell me to fuck off," I replied coolly.

"Yeah, but would you do it if I did?" she asked, cocking her eyebrow just a little. "As I recall, you didn't leave last night when I asked you to." I guess she had me there. I chuckled darkly to myself as I slouched lower in the seat. I closed my eyes and yawned.

I don't know for how long I sat like that, but after a while, I heard her sigh. I opened one eye and peeked at her. She was looking at her hands. The moonlight was shining right on her arms, and the shadows, made by the unevenness on her skin, made her scars look even worse than last night.

"Do you want me to ask you to leave?" she asked quietly, without looking at me. I pondered that question for a moment and she slowly turned her gaze to look at me. I sighed finally, and shook my head.

"Nah, I'm fine here, thanks," I replied and closed my eyes again.

"You don't want to go home?" she questioned, though it sounded more like a statement to me. She was just making conversation with

the semi-stranger that was chilling in her room in the middle of the night for no apparent reason. The question, or statement, was innocent enough. She probably didn't mean anything by it, but it still made me think...

Why wouldn't I want to go home? My bed was a hell of a lot more comfortable than this plastic piece of crap chair I was currently sitting in, and yet, I chose the plastic crap and the company of Swan over my bed. In what reality did that make sense?

"I didn't get a restraining order," I said instead of answering her question. I still had my eyes closed, so I couldn't see her reaction, if there even was one.

"That's... good?" she replied, sounding quite unsure.

"I guess it depends on your point of view," I replied. "Your dad agreed not to go through with it on the condition that I changed schools... so apparently I'm going to La Push. Isn't that just peachy?" I scoffed to myself at the thought.

I had yet to get comfortable with the idea of changing schools. Mom had told me before dinner that she had already made the calls and arrangements, and that I was going to start school in La Push after the Thanksgiving weekend. I was not going back to Forks High before then. I had already had my last day there without even knowing it.

"La Push? I have a friend there... I mean... I used to have... I... never mind," she mumbled uncomfortably. I opened an eye and peered at her.

"A friend, huh," I echoed, without tearing my one-eyed gaze off of her.

"He used to be...," she mumbled. The subject was clearly very uncomfortable for her, but I didn't really care about that as I chose to pry further. It would be interesting to know what kind of friends a

person like Swan would have, seeing as mine wasn't good enough for her.

"What happened?" I asked. She looked up at me with a frown.

"Don't ask questions you don't want to hear the answers to," she replied. She was obviously shooting for me to get off the case, but her defensive nature just made me want to know more, even though I shouldn't have cared less about her friend... or ex-friend, as the case may be.

"How do you know I don't want to know? You think I would have asked if I didn't want to know?" I asked, almost confusing myself in the process by my oddly worded question.

"He was a friend of mine, until he... until he wasn't any more," she replied, her voice trailing off into nothing.

"Wow, way to clarify the situation. Now I'm all caught up," I muttered sarcastically, as I closed my eyes again.

"I don't need to clarify, because it's none of your business," she snapped.

"Fine, whatever. But would you mind telling me the guy's name, or is that confidential too?" I asked, without opening my eyes.

She was quiet for so long that I didn't think she was actually going to answer me. I had almost dozed off when she uttered two simple words.

"Jacob Black..."

It was nothing more than a whisper; but that whisper alone held so much pain and anguish that I had to open my eyes to see if her face mirrored those feelings.

It did.

She looked at me with eyes too old for her age and I frowned at the sight. It wasn't fucking possible to be in so much pain just because of a simple name. At least I now knew who to stay clear from when I got there. I didn't really feel like making friends with the Goose of La Push.

"He really fucked you up, didn't he?" I asked quietly, and there was no malice or bad intent behind my question. It wasn't even a question; I was stating a fucking fact. She turned her gaze away before answering.

"It doesn't matter now anyway... whatever happened happened. There isn't anything I can do about it now," she whispered with a light sigh. She met my gaze again and a sad smile graced her lips. "Are you gonna sleep here tonight?" she asked.

I crossed my legs by the ankle on her bed and nodded.

"Yeah, I'm too tired to move," I replied with yawn that proved my point.

"Good night, Edward," she whispered before closing her eyes and settling in to sleep.

"Night, Swan," I replied, before letting my exhaustion get the best of me and bring me into the darkness and relief of unconsciousness.

Trustgiving

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216 & vasweetpea07]

Chapter 24 – "Trustgiving"

Isabella Swan POV

I had not been surprised by Edward's impromptu visit, nor was I surprised that he had stayed the night. I should have been, I guess, but I had been through too much to be surprised by anything anymore. Especially as far as he was concerned.

It didn't take long for him to fall asleep, and I could hear him snore softly from his chair. He still had his feet propped up on my bed, his feet crossed at the ankles. He also had his arms tightly crossed over his chest. A light frown was gracing his features.

I didn't question him being there. I got the feeling that he had enough inner demons to deal with, and I didn't need to add another by getting involved. Even though he was involving me by coming here.

I watched him as he slept, unable to tear my eyes off of him.

Edward Cullen was nothing short of an enigma; nothing about him made sense to me.

I remembered when I had been sitting in the window of the music room, a few weeks back. I had watched him as he parked his car in the principal's space before walking up to the main entrance. He'd had his shoulders slouched and his hands deep in his pockets. I

remember thinking that the posture didn't make any sense. Why would he walk like he was trying to hide?

He was Edward-freaking-Cullen.

Why would he want to hide?

Was that what he was doing here? Hiding?

" *Fucking blood... everywhere...* " he muttered. I thought for a second that he had woken up, but his eyes were still closed and the light snoring continued.

Who knew Edward was a sleep-talker?

I bit my lip and scratched my arm mindlessly, but stopped my movements when I felt the unevenness of my skin. Dread immediately washed over me, as I realized I hadn't even tried to hide the scars from Edward when he came in. I had once again given him a show, letting him see them and judge them, without even realizing it.

" *Blood* ," he muttered again, adjusting a little in his seat, and tilted his head to the side.

I pulled up the blanket to my chin and kept my arms under it. I wondered if I was supposed to be concerned by his weird obsession with blood. What was he dreaming about anyway?

I took a deep breath and closed my eyes. Maybe it would all make sense in the morning.

A bang echoed through the room and my eyes flew open. The room bathed in light and I blinked a few times in confusion. My eyes immediately went to the chair beside the bed – only to find it empty. The light wasn't coming from the lamp hanging from the ceiling but from outside.

It was already morning. How did that happen?

I turned my gaze to the door, realizing the bang had been from the door hitting the wall when Dad had entered. He shot me an apologetic look before stepping into the room.

"Oh, sorry, sweetie. I didn't mean to startle you," he apologized. I looked away from him and frowned. Where was Edward? "How are you feeling?" he continued.

"I'm... fine," I replied slowly, still a little confused from being startled awake like that.

"I spoke to Dr. Jenks. He says the ex-rays on your leg shows that it's healing quite nicely. That's good news." He smiled, but I didn't respond. "He also said you should steer clear of stairs for a while, so I prepared the guest bedroom downstairs for you. I even brought down your computer."

I shot my eyes to him, giving him an incredulous look. Was he kidding me? The spare bedroom downstairs was the size of a closet. It might even have been a closet once. It had just enough space for a bed and a small nightstand. Nothing more. And now he was going to lock me up in there? Why didn't he lock me up in a cell at the station instead? I bet I would be more comfortable there anyway.

"Thanks, but no thanks, I think I'm gonna stay in my room," I replied curtly.

"But Dr. Jenks said it's not good to put strain on your leg right now, especially not after what that no-good-boy Cullen did to you," he replied softly. "I'm only doing what's in your best interest."

I scoffed.

"What's in my best interest is to not be treated like a child. I can take care of myself. As for the no-good-boy Cullen... I told you, he didn't do anything! He helped me! Why can't you listen to what I'm telling you? Why is it so hard for you to believe me?" I asked, my body basically shaking in pent-up frustration. It was like talking to a wall,

only the wall wasn't just quietly listening – it twisted your words before throwing them back at you, and making you think you were stupid for trying to convince it of anything else.

"Trust is something you earn," he replied.

"What is that supposed to mean? I have done nothing to *not* deserve your trust!" I argued. "I'm your daughter, for crying out loud!" I was basically yelling now, and he was beginning to look more than a little uncomfortable. He walked over to the door and closed it, before stepping up beside the bed.

"Sweetie, how can you expect me to trust you when you don't trust me?" he asked quietly.

He made a valid point, and I resented him for it. We looked at each other, neither of us saying a word for several moments. We were stuck in the saddest staring contest in the history of the world.

"Why... why do you think I don't trust you?" I asked with a light shrug, pretending like I really didn't know. He sighed and scratched his scruffy cheek, before looking away and stepping over to the window instead. He had his back turned to me, as if he didn't want to look at me when he replied.

"If you trusted me, Bella, if you trusted your mother, then you wouldn't have tried to kill yourself. You would have come to us and let us help you. Instead you did the worst thing you could ever do to the people who love you," he replied quietly.

There were so many things wrong with that statement that I didn't even know on which end to begin. If he truly believed I tried to kill myself, how could he speak so freely about it? As if it wasn't a big deal at all, and that it had no effect on him other than to make him not trust me anymore.

I was tempted to yell at him and tell him what *really* happened that night, but I knew it would make no difference to him. He had no

reason to trust me. After all, I was nothing but his suicidal daughter with a crushed leg, who was trying to defend the boy who put her here.

I was clearly the insane one.

He was right. He had no reason to trust me, because I had not given him a reason to. At least not during these past few months when I had lived in silence.

Maybe it was time to give him a reason?

I opened my mouth to speak, but he beat me to the punch.

"I spoke to your mother last night. She's very excited to come home," he said, his voice holding so much love that it made my stomach clench. If he knew the truth, would he still sound so loving when mentioning her? I realized that there was no sure answer to that question. I wouldn't put it past him to try to defend her and try to rationalize her behavior if he knew the whole story.

He turned around and faced me with a somewhat expectant expression. I sighed deeply. I knew he wanted me to tell him that I was excited too, but I also knew that he knew that would have been a lie.

"You know how I feel about her," I replied instead. He frowned and shook his head.

"As you keep telling me, but it doesn't mean I understand it or approve of it," he sighed.

"You don't need to approve of my feelings. I have the right to feel whatever I want to feel," I argued in my defense. I crossed my arms over my chest, feeling slightly childish by my behavior, but I didn't care.

"Yes, you do. But you still have to respect your mother and treat her accordingly; she's not the bad guy. She is coming home now, and she will stay home, whether you like it or not," he said sternly.

"As you keep reminding me," I scoffed silently.

He threw out his arms in a wide gesture and sighed in frustration.

"Isabella Marie Swan, what am I supposed to do with you? I really don't understand why you hate your mother the way that you do, so why don't you explain it to me?" he said exasperatedly.

I narrowed my eyes at him, but he didn't even flinch.

"You really want to know?" I dared him.

"Yes!" he yelled in frustration. "Because I don't understand how you can hate someone for trying to save your life."

Who cared if he was going to believe me or not? I had enough. I had to get it out.

" Because she's the reason why I almost died in the first place !" I snapped.

This made him flinch. He blinked a few times and his face was completely void of all emotion.

I stared him while wondering what kind of reaction I was going to get from him. After a moment, when he had let the information sink in, his expression changed and became one of outrage.

I should have known.

"I don't know what you're trying to pull here, Isabella, but to stoop so low as to suggest that she's the reason why you tried to take your own life... that's just wrong. This is not the daughter I raised. I'm ashamed of your behavior, and I'm ashamed of *you* ," he said, putting real emphasis on the last word and barely keeping his anger

in check. "There is nothing your mother could have done to you to make you think it was worth taking your own life!"

He had clearly misunderstood what I was saying. He thought that I was suggesting I had tried to kill myself because of her – and not that she had been the one trying to take my life.

I looked away from him. I tried to keep my face blank as to not let him in on how badly his words hurt. He was ashamed of me. Of course he was. Why wouldn't he be? I was a disgrace to the family. I must have done something wrong. Why else would she have done what she did to me in the first place? I refused to believe it was about love, because there was nothing loving about it.

Dad glanced down at his watch. He forced a smile when he looked back up at me. It looked awkward, as if the smile knew it had no reason to be there, and that it wanted nothing more than to go away.

"I have to get back to the station," he said, sounding tired.

I tilted my head to the side and snorted quietly.

"Dad... it's Saturday. Since when do you work on Saturdays?" I asked quietly. "If you don't want to be here, why can't you just come out and say it? You don't have to lie to my face."

"I'm going over to La Push," he muttered, the anger somewhat back in his voice. "I figured I would spare us another humiliating moment, since it seems as you don't like Billy and Jacob anymore either, for reasons unknown to me... and I have a feeling I don't want to hear them anyway."

"Have fun!" I said cheerily as I plastered on a fake smile for his benefit, but he obviously didn't buy it since he glowered at me, before leaving the room and muttering a lame 'bye' on his way out.

The door swung shut behind him and I stared at it for a moment as I tried to get my mind together.

What the hell just transpired?

Did I just tell my dad that my mother, his *wife* , was responsible for what happened, and he responded by telling me that he was ashamed of me? Really?

I had been right all along. Nothing good could come from spilling the secret now. He would never believe me. I knew that. Too much time had passed. Anything I said now would make him believe that I was crazy and making stuff up only to hurt my mother. Even though that didn't make any sense. Why would I want to hurt my mother for supposedly saving my life? Isn't saving someone's life supposed to be a good thing?

It was probably a good thing that all I said was that she was the reason I almost died. If I had given him any details on the whole story, he would have had me committed so fast I wouldn't even realize what was happening, before I was sporting a cozy straightjacket.

A movement in the corner of my eyes caught my attention, and I jumped in surprise when the door to the small closet by the corner of the room opened, and a very familiar bronze haired head peeked out. My breath caught in my throat and I gaped at him in shock.

"Is it safe?" he asked, looking at me. I didn't respond. I didn't even flinch. "I'll take that as a yes..."

"Wha-what are you doing here? Yo-you...Wha-what are you doing in the closet? Wh-wha-what?" I stuttered in bewilderment. I couldn't form a coherent sentence to save my life, and at that moment, I didn't want to anyway. Save my life, that is. I wouldn't have minded to die right then and there.

If he had been standing in the closet all that time, that meant that he had heard everything.

Everything.

If he had ammunition against me before, it was nothing compared to what he had now. I had given him an entire army's worth of ammunition. I bet I even threw in a few soldiers for him. Maybe even an atomic bomb.

This was going to be the end of me.

He scratched his neck as he peeked towards the door. For some reason he looked nervous.

"I woke up earlier," he explained, without looking at me. "I was just about to leave when I saw your dad in the hallway. I didn't have any choice but to hide... if he had seen me here, he would have had a restraining order put against my ass before I was even out of the room."

He put his hands in his pockets, slouching his shoulders a little, before looking at me. I was sure the horror was clear on my face.

"That was... eh..." he began and I swallowed thickly. It felt as though I had tried to swallow a baseball, and it was now stuck in my throat. It was uncomfortable, and I found it hard to breathe. Panic was beginning to set in, and if it had been possible I would have run away as fast as my legs would carry me.

But of course, my leg prevented me from doing that.

I opened and closed my mouth like a fish on dry land. I wanted to ask him what he had heard – had he heard it *all* ? – and what he thought about what he heard. I was sure that he had a bunch of theories going through his head at the moment, which of all revolved around the fact that I was clearly insane. He already thought that about me, and this would obviously just fuel the already raging fire.

"I don't know what I should say," he said with an awkward crooked smile. "Thanks? Thanks for defending me?"

I furrowed my brows in suspicion. Was this how he was going to play it? Was he going to pretend he hadn't just heard all that, and that the only thing he was going to take from it all was the fact that I had defended him? No. I didn't buy it.

"Edward... don't...." My tone was almost pleading. I hated myself for stooping so low. I was supposed to be strong, damn it. Edward wasn't supposed to see me like this.

He shook his head quickly and gave me a somewhat reassuring smile.

"Don't worry... I won't say anything," he mumbled. I don't know why I believed him, but there something in his tone that made me relax. He rubbed his neck and chuckled. "My fucking neck is killing me. I guess I'm paying the price now for falling asleep in that damn chair." He stretched his neck and I smiled timidly.

"You have only yourself to blame. You probably have a more than decent bed at home you could have slept in."

"Yeah, but where is the fun in that?" he asked with a light shrug.

"I guess that depends on what you do once you've climbed into it," I mumbled in response.

His eyes widened in surprise, before he threw his head back and burst into carefree laughter. I couldn't help but smile at the sound. It reminded me about the time I heard him laugh in the parking lot at school. Such a joyful sound, and it still made me jealous. Although, I guess I should have known better than to be jealous of him now. He had demons of his own to deal with, and I had just been too ignorant to notice it before.

I'm not the only one who's hurting.

He met my gaze again. His laughter died down and his smile faded.

We looked at each other in silence. It felt as if we were having a silent conversation with our eyes, and when his signature crooked smile graced his lips, it felt as though we had come to an understanding.

"What happened in this room stays in this room," he declared.

I frowned and bit my lip.

"You don't have to do that... you don't owe me any favors," I replied, even though I had no reason to argue with him. Why didn't I just shut up? Why did I have to push my luck? Hadn't I pushed it enough for one day?

And it's not even noon yet.

I glanced at the clock on the wall and almost rolled my eyes at myself.

Correction, it's not even ten thirty yet.

He looked down at his shoes and scoffed.

"Let's just say that I know one thing or two about parents' lack of trust," he admitted, and shuffled his feet awkwardly. It was evident that it wasn't easy for him to talk about, especially not with me. He looked up and snorted softly with a light shaking of his head. "But I guess you know all about that... seeing as my dad suddenly thinks you're the daughter he never had." His tone was resentful. I could see a flash of anger in his eyes as he mentioned it, but it was gone just as quickly as it came.

"I'm sorry, Edward, but I never asked for your father to care so much, and I didn't ask for your friends to care either. I didn't ask for any of this! I wish it would all just go away so I could.... I could..." I didn't know how to end the sentence, because I didn't know what the end was.

"Kill yourself?" he ended it for me. I sighed and looked down at my lap – just to find my arms on display again. I quickly hid them under the blanket again, even though it hardly mattered anymore. He had seen them, and by hiding them now, I would only bring more attention to them. He seemed to agree with me, because he shook his head. "You are one freaky pigeon," he said.

"Are you seriously insulting me... *again* ? Seriously, Edward, did you come here and spend the night just so you could insult me?" I asked incredulously.

"No, I didn't mean it like that, fuck," he said defensively. "I was just making a damn observation. You are one freaky bird, you know. It's just you who chose to see it as a bad thing. That's not my damn fault."

"Yeah? You're saying that being a freaky pigeon is a good thing?"

"Who's to decide what's what?" he retorted.

I quirked an eyebrow at him and pursed my lips together in contemplation. If I didn't know any better, I would have thought he had found some weird pills in that closet, because he didn't make any sense.

"What happens in this room, stays in this room, right?" I asked just to make sure.

He nodded.

"I was never here," he clarified. "I have a reputation to uphold."

I had no reason to trust him, I knew that, but I still chose to believe him, because it was better than the alternative.

"Anyhow, I should go," he said, turning and walking over to the door. He grabbed the door handle, but he didn't open it. Instead he just stared at it for a moment before throwing a look at me over his

shoulder. "Between you and me, pigeon... don't waste your breath by trying to make your dad believe something he doesn't want to hear. I've been there, done that. There's no fucking use. Parents will believe what they want to believe, no matter what you say."

"It's all about trust, isn't it?" I said softly.

"Yeah, and our dads obviously don't think we deserve it... but who says they deserve *our* trust? I sure as hell don't trust my damn father anymore, and from what I gathered from your conversation with yours, I don't think your dad deserves your trust either." He was looking down at his feet, and sighed deeply before looking back up at me. "I know that was fucking private, and that I shouldn't have eavesdropped, but I really didn't have a damn choice in the matter... it was either that or getting arrested."

"I guess you really didn't have that much of a choice then," I agreed. "My dad is just looking for a reason to bust you for something. It doesn't even need to be illegal. He's on a mission, you should watch your back."

He smiled crookedly and nodded.

"I will."

I returned his smile, although a bit timidly.

"This was awkward for you, wasn't it?" I said, not so much a question as it was a statement. He scoffed quietly and rubbed his neck again.

"You have no idea," he granted with a sigh as he looked at me. "I guess I'll see you around..." He didn't let his eyes waver away from me, and he didn't show any signs of leaving either. It was almost as if he didn't want to.

"I should mention that this is my last night here," I said, in order to break the somewhat uncomfortable silence we were embedded in, since he kept looking at me like that. "I'll be going home tomorrow."

So you should probably find another patient to harass if you want to keep sleeping here instead of in that decent bed of yours." I laughed uncomfortably at my half-hearted attempt to joke. He chuckled to himself as he shook his head softly. He gripped the door handle a little more tightly and tilted his head as he gazed back at me.

"I rather not waste my time on vermin," he replied.

"Then what are you doing here with me?" I questioned, quirking an eyebrow at him.

His crooked smile grew into an amused smile. He opened the door before answering me.

"You're not vermin, Ducky," he chuckled, before looking out into the hallway. He looked both ways before throwing me one last glance and one last smirk. "You're a bird."

Those were his parting words, and he snuck out into the hallway and disappeared from sight.

The day passed in an excruciatingly slow pace. I had no visitors, other than my dad who came to visit me again for an hour in the afternoon. He didn't tell me about his day, and other than him asking how I was feeling, there wasn't much talk at all. He just looked out the window, fiddled with the busted TV in my room, and paced around sighing. It was the most uncomfortable I had ever been. I wanted nothing more than for him to leave. When he finally left, it felt as if we had been stuck together for an entire day, but it had only been fifty-eight minutes. Yes, I kept count. Staring at the clock was the only thing that kept me from going insane in his presence.

When midnight rolled around, I found myself darting my eyes to the door every other second. Every time I heard footsteps outside my room, I felt the beating of my heart accelerate, but it died down just as quickly when the sounds of the footsteps passed my door without a stop. For some reason I had expected *him* to come.

But he wasn't coming.

And I couldn't understand for the life of me why that disappointed me so much. I shouldn't have been surprised, not at all. Edward Cullen wasn't my friend, far from it actually. He had no reason to come visit me in the middle of the night.

Then why had he already visited twice? And stayed the whole night last night?

I chose to ignore those questions, because I didn't want to hear the answers. For all I knew he was only doing it so he could get more dirt on me, which he could later use to hurt me. I was more than afraid of what he was going to do about what he heard that morning, and I doubted if I could trust him. What guarantee did I have that he hadn't already spread the rumor about me trying to kill myself or that I blamed my mother for it? What guarantee did I have that what had been said in this room really stayed in this room?

The answer was that there was no guarantee.

I remember looking at the clock one last time before I fell asleep. That was at three thirty. I was woken up by a nurse at seven. The lack of sleep had given me a hell of a headache and the throbbing pain in my leg was even more noticeable than usual.

I was rolled out from the hospital in a wheelchair at noon. Dad was smiling at me when he helped me into the cruiser, but I didn't even spare him a glance. He wasn't worth it.

We stopped by the pharmacy on our way home. Dad picked up the new, stronger pills which Dr. Carrot had prescribed me. Dr. Carrot might look like a vegetable, but how could I hate the man when he was willing to prescribe me drugs that were way stronger than the crap that Dr. Cullen had given me?

Maybe the release of death was finally within my reach.

I let Dad help me out of the car when we got home too. There was no way I could have climbed out on my own. My brain was a little foggy, and my body felt weird from the dose of drugs I had been given before they discharged me. It was nothing short of a miracle that I managed to get into the house without help. I almost felt drunk – although, I had never been drunk, I figured this was similar to how it would feel.

I steered towards the stairs, but Dad caught my attention by clearing his throat loudly.

"I thought we agreed that you would stay in the guestroom for now," he said. I shot him a tired look and sighed. I was too tired to argue with him, so I wobbled my way towards the tiny guestroom without a word.

The days passed, and I spent most of my time in my room. I didn't do much; I didn't even do my homework. All I did was lay in my bed, while slowly breathing through the shooting pain in my leg. I had found that as long as I lay absolutely still, the pain was nothing more than a numbing sensation radiating up and down my leg. It felt as if it was falling asleep, and though that was an uncomfortable feeling all by itself, it was still easier to handle than the pain.

I did my best to keep myself from taking any of the pills, because I knew I needed to save up on those. I figured I would wait until Dad had to refill my prescription before I tried to do anything. The more pills I had, the better chance I had of never waking up again. But that also meant that I had to spend so much more time in pain, and I did fall for the temptation once or twice, by taking a pill for the pain. But it was worth it.

When Wednesday rolled around, I was experiencing another type of pain. Mom was coming home in just a matter of hours. Dad had left early in the morning to go to Seattle to pick her up. It had been made clear that this was going to be it. She was coming back for real, and there was no chance of her going back there. From this day forward, we were going back to being a happy little family.

Or at least that was what Dad was expecting.

For all I cared, they could live their happy little life together and pretend that there was nothing wrong with them but I was not going to be a part of it. I was going to remove myself from the equation. I bet they would be so much happier anyway, without me dragging them down by refusing to 'grow up' and not 'getting over myself.'

The sound of crunching gravel outside made me tense, and the ever so familiar sound of Mom's laughter, when she stepped out of the car, made my stomach turn.

My body was still as a statue, and I didn't even allow myself to breathe as I listened to the sounds of my parents nearing the house. The front door opened and I heard them come in.

"Bella? We're home!" Dad called out and I didn't even need to see him to know that he was smiling like a lovesick fifteen-year old.

"Where is my baby-doll?" Mom sang with a smile in her voice too.

"Maybe she's sleeping those pain meds she's been taking knock her out cold," I heard him reply.

I scoffed silently to myself. His words just proved how much he was aware of me. He didn't even notice that I hadn't been taking my meds; he hadn't noticed I was still in excruciating pain. And why was that? It was because he simply didn't pay any attention to me, and he trusted me to take the pills on my own.

So I guess he did trust me after all, only it was with the wrong things.

"I should go down to the station and make sure nothing bad happened while I was gone," Dad chuckled, before I heard their lips smack together in a kiss.

"I will miss you," she cooed.

"Oh, I think you will survive a few hours without me," he replied teasingly.

It made me sick to my stomach to hear him talk like that partly because he was my father, but mostly because of the woman that brought it out of him.

I heard the front door open and close again, and my heart stopped with it. A moment later the cruiser roared to life and drove off. And I was finding myself stuck in a house with a crazy woman, with no means of escape.

I heard light steps as she moved away from the hall, and the floor in the living room creaked when she moved through the room towards the guestroom. My fingers dug into the mattress and I felt like a trapped animal. At first I didn't understand the feeling that was washing over me. It wasn't until she was standing in the doorway that I recognized it for what it was. It was stronger than I had ever felt it before.

Dread.

"Maybe we should talk," she began with a soft voice. I tried to swallow down the lump that was forming in my throat, and get control over the turmoil of feelings inside of me. There were so many things I wanted to tell her – yell at her – and so many things I had planned to get out of my system when I finally saw her again. But now, when I finally had the chance, I felt my entire system close down. No words could leave my lips.

I was afraid of what would happen if I let them out.

I am afraid of my own mother.

She smiled at me and I tried to keep my face clean of any emotion.

She looked lovely, dressed in a casual pair of jeans and an over-sized button-up, plaid shirt with a beige top under it. Her hair looked

as if it was newly cut; it was short and beautifully styled.

She looks like my mother.

She reminded me of the good old days when she used to smile at me like that and *mean it* . I didn't want her to know what effect that smile, and her overall new look, had on me. I tried to ignore the mixed feelings that it brought, and I tried my best to hold onto my hate since it was easier to deal with than all the rest. Hate and disgust were the only feelings I was able to handle when it came to my mother. Mixed feelings and confused love were not something I could handle, nor did I want to, because she didn't deserve it. She didn't deserve my love.

"I-I-If you come any closer... I'll scream," I warned her in a pathetically shaky whisper.

I didn't want her to come any closer; I was confused enough as it was. Her being here, looking and sounding, like *my* mother wasn't really helping matters. Not to mention the pain in my leg on top of that.

Her smile grew and became more sinister looking. *The* dark look formed in her eyes, effectively removing all doubt that she was cured from whatever mental disorder she was suffering from. She looked nothing like my mother anymore, which made it so much easier to hate her.

She took another step into the tiny room, closing the door behind her, before moving towards me with slow, deliberate steps. The sinister smile never wavered from her lips and she tilted her head to the side as she watched me.

"Tell me, sweetie, are you still... *pure* ?" she asked, her voice almost cooing.

My eyes widened and I struggled to breathe. Was there a right answer to that question? What answer could I give her that would

make her leave me alone? And was there maybe an answer that would make her kill me quickly and painlessly? Or would any answer just leave me with new wounds and more scars?

I must have been quiet for too long, because she nodded to herself, looking fairly pleased while doing so. As if my silence had been answer enough for her.

"I thought so, good girl," she said, patting my head.

I looked up at her and met her gaze.

"You... you are crazy... you can't do that to me again," I croaked. My intention had been to sound threatening and scary, but instead it came out as a cracked and whiny whisper. She sat down beside me on the bed, and I flinched away from her. She looked at me and shook her head in a disapproving way.

"Bella, I was only trying to help you. How is it that you can hate me so much for trying to save your life? I was trying to help you, and you repay me by shutting me out and blaming me for something that wasn't my fault," she murmured as she stroked my hair. "You almost died, sweetie, and it almost killed me too. I could never live without you in this world."

"If that's true, why did you cut open my arms and... and...." I couldn't even finish the sentence because it was too disgusting to even think of. She grabbed my chin roughly, forcing me to look at her.

"Sweetie, I did no such thing. You did that all on your own, and if you honestly believe that I would do such a thing, then maybe we should get you some help. You are clearly not well," she said sternly.

She let go of my chin and stood up abruptly.

"Your father mentioned to me that you were blaming me for what happened, but I thought you were only blaming me for not letting you die. Not in my wildest dreams would I have believed you blamed me

because you thought *I did this* to you!" She grabbed my wrist roughly and pulled up the sleeve of my shirt. The scars were painfully obvious in this light and I squeezed my eyes shut. I didn't want to look at them, but even with my eyes shut I could see them etched on the inside of my eyelids. " *This* is not my fault. *You* did this. And if you try to convince anyone otherwise I will make sure you will be taken care of." She all but threw my arm back at me when she let go, and she took a step back. I wrapped my arms around my torso and fought the sobs that threatened to escape. "You disappoint me, Bella."

She gave me one last disapproving look before she left the room, closing the door again on her way out. I held my breath until I heard her climb the stairs, and the floorboard in the upstairs hallway creaked as she walked into their bedroom.

I didn't try to hold back the sobs anymore; I let them escape, making my body shake and convulse in the process. I wrapped my arms more tightly around my torso as I rocked back and forth on the bed, wishing that some of the pain would leave. Instead the ache grew even more powerful, ripping through me like shards of glass. I was surprised that I wasn't breaking apart from the pain. How much could one person endure before her body shut down?

I wished for the silent relief that tears would bring me.

But the tears never came.

I wasn't surprised.

Thursday. Thanksgiving. The day I had dreaded the most was upon me, and the people I never wanted to see ever again were currently sitting in the living room, chatting and laughing like nothing was wrong. All the while I was hiding away in the downstairs bathroom, trying to come up with a working excuse to change clothes.

I was dressed up in a simple white button-up shirt and a black pencil skirt. My hair was pulled back into a ponytail and a few hair strands

were hanging loosely around my face. Of course, it wasn't my choice to be dressed like this. Mom had bought be the clothes in Seattle, and she wanted me to wear them. Why did I care what she wanted? Because I was too scared for what she would do to me if I refused.

But I guess the clothes weren't the problem here. There would not have been an issue if this had been any other time. But this wasn't any other time, this was now, and I felt horrible.

It didn't matter what I was wearing. I could have been dressed in a top and skirt made of leather and latex and nobody would have noticed. All that they would see would be my cast, because that was all I could see when I was looking at myself in the full-length mirror hanging on the bathroom door.

It looked ridiculous in combination with the knee-length pencil skirt, and when I had mentioned it to Mom – in a lame attempt to make her let me wear something else – she just said it matched my shirt.

Because they were both white.

Clearly, she was both insane *and* stupid.

It knocked on the door and I groaned inwardly.

"Are you done, Bella? We're waiting for you," Dad asked.

"I'll be right out," I replied, without raising my voice. He muttered something under his breath as he walked away. I sighed deeply and adjusted my skirt for the fiftieth time.

Why couldn't they just forget I was even here? Why couldn't they do their thing without me? Or was I supposed to be the sacrificial lamb again? Maybe they had even come up with a new Thanksgiving-menu, instead of a turkey as the main course it would be...a goose .

I took a deep breath and breathed out shakily. I had a bad feeling in my gut that wouldn't go away.

I reluctantly opened the bathroom door and grabbed my crutches, before wobbling my way towards the living room. The pain in my leg was on the brink of being ridiculous, but I was not about to take one of my pills to get rid of it. I rather save that one up for later, so I could use it in order to knock myself out cold in case the dinner became to be too much.

I froze in the doorway to the living room, not able to take another step. Mom and Dad stood together by Billy, who sat in his wheelchair, while Jacob was looking at whatever he found interesting on our bookshelves. I thought I could handle seeing them again, but it was obvious that I couldn't. The mere thought of seeing these people again, together in our living room, brought back memories that I had worked so hard to push back into the darkest corners of my mind.

They all stopped what they were doing when they noticed me, and I felt like a deer caught in the headlights.

"Ah, Bella, how good it is to see you again, my dear. How are you?" Billy said enthusiastically, as he leaned forward a little in his chair and rested his arms against his legs. I swallowed thickly and darted my eyes to Jacob and met his gaze. He gave me a wry smile before looking away.

"She's making very good progress; her doctor said her leg is healing just as it's supposed to. Despite all the incidents with that Cullen boy," Dad explained with a smile, though his tone turned bitter at the mention of Edward. I couldn't hold back the glare that escaped as I looked at Dad. He noticed this, of course, and sighed before looking down at Billy again, while shaking his head. Billy gave him a sympathetic smile. I bit my tongue to keep myself from saying something I would later regret.

A musty, smoky smell reached my nostrils and I wrinkled my nose at the stench.

"Eh... why does it smell like something burning?" I asked cautiously, and Mom's eyes grew wide.

"The pumpkin pie!" she exclaimed and ran past me to the kitchen. A moment later we heard her growl loudly in frustration, and the faucet in the kitchen turned on. She walked back out with a disappointed expression on her face. "I guess there won't be a homemade pumpkin pie this year," she sighed. "I forgot to put the timer on."

"That's okay. I'm sure the kids can drive to the store and pick one up. Of course, it's not as good as yours, Renée, but at least it's something," Billy suggested.

"That's a great idea," Dad agreed. "I'm sure Bella is dying to get out of the house, anyway. Right, sweetie?" He looked at me with bright eyes and I pursed my lips.

Yes, I was *dying* to get out of the house – since I hadn't been allowed to go outside since I came home from the hospital - but going to the store with Jacob wasn't really worth it.

But staying behind with two crazy people and an ignorant fool wasn't really an option either.

Maybe being stuck in a car and in a store, with a disloyal and untrustworthy ex-friend was the better choice here.

I glanced over at Jacob and found him staring awkwardly at his feet, as they waited for me to make a decision.

Okay, maybe not.

I sighed and shrugged.

"Whatever," I sighed, and turned towards the door. Jacob followed me and he stood by and watched as I opened the front door and walked out. He didn't even offer to open it for me; instead he let me balance weirdly on my crutches as I pushed the door open.

At least he had the decency to help me put the crutches in the small backseat when we reached the car.

We rode to the store in silence. I kept my eyes forward, never once glancing at Jacob, but in the corner of my eye I noticed how he kept glancing at me and my leg. He cleared his throat a few times, as if he was going to speak. But after every time he remained quiet. I almost wanted to ask him if he was choking on something – and if I could help it do the job.

Jacob grabbed my crutches when we reached the store, but he avoided all contact with me when he handed them to me. It was almost as if he thought I was contagious with something, and any skin to skin contact would kill him.

I steadied myself on my crutches, before we started walking towards the entrance. He glanced at me again and I kept my eyes staring right ahead, while gritting my teeth. The silence was even worse than talking. If he said something, at least I would get the chance to assault him verbally, but I needed him to say something first before I started. I was not going to be the one to break the silence. I was not going to be the weaker one. Not with Jacob.

He was the weak one.

He grabbed a shopping basket before looking up at the signs for the different sections and aisles of the store. He glanced at me before deciding where to go.

"You think we should buy a mix and make it, or should we just get a frozen one?" he asked me. His voice was light and carefree, but it was obvious – by the way he was shuffling his feet where he stood – that he was anything but.

"Does it matter?" I sighed. He looked at me in surprise, as if he hadn't expected me to answer, and a small smile tugged at the corners of his mouth.

"I guess not," he smiled and started walking towards the section for frozen goods. He glanced at me every once in a while, but he didn't try to hide it this time. He must have thought that my answering his question meant that we were friends again, and that everything in our past was forgotten. His face became a little more relaxed and his posture too. "So...does it hurt?" he asked casually, and nodded towards my leg. I snorted.

"It was crushed and I can't go on a plane because I'll set off the metal detectors because of all the scrap metal I have in my leg. What the hell do you think?" I snapped.

A light blush crept up his dark skin, and he looked abashed.

"I'm sorry, I was just... you know," he apologized, with a sheepish shrug. We reached the frozen goods section and we started looking in the aisle for frozen pies. "My dad tells me that the guy who did it has been giving you a hard time... you want me to kick his ass for you?" He chuckled the last part, as if it was a joke. *As if we were still friends.*

I stopped searching for the damn pie and turned to glare at him instead.

"You know nothing about what has been happening, Jacob, and don't you dare pretend like you care. Edward is a nice guy... okay, well... that's a freaking lie. He's not a nice guy. But he's a better person than most people I know. He stays true to who he is and he doesn't conform because people expect him to," I all but spat at him. "As a matter of fact, Edward isn't my friend, far from it actually, but he still has treated me a hell of a lot better than someone who I used to call my *best* friend."

"Bella, you have no idea how hard it's been for me for the past few months," he began but he silenced himself when I put more power behind my glare.

"Hard on you, huh? Screw you, Jacob, you weren't the one who was left for dead that night!" I snapped. Jacob suddenly looked unsure, not because of what I had just said, but because of something behind me. I looked at him confused before slowly turning around and following his gaze.

My stomach dropped.

"Why hello, Isabella, fancy seeing you here," Dr. Cullen smiled at me. "Also doing some last minute adding to the Thanksgiving menu?"

I forced a smile at him, because I was too terrified to do anything else. How much had he heard?

A movement behind him caught my eye and I saw none other than Edward himself standing at the end of the aisle.

"Yeah, something like that," I replied, as I looked back at Dr. Cullen, who was looking at Jacob with a smile.

"Hi, I'm Dr. Carlisle Cullen. I used to be Isabella's doctor," he greeted, holding out his hand to Jacob.

"Jacob Black, I used to... I mean, I'm her friend," Jacob greeted, giving him a firm handshake.

"Nice to meet you," Dr. Cullen nodded. "I'll let you get back to your shopping, but it was nice seeing you again, Isabella. I hope you're taking good care of your leg. Happy Thanksgiving!"

"Yeah... you too," I mumbled awkwardly, before he turned around and walked back to Edward.

I looked at Edward, meeting his gaze for a split second, and he grimaced as I did so. From someone else's point of view, it probably looked like one of disgust or pity, but I knew better. I bit my lip and

did a semi-grimace-smile at him in return and he scoffed before turning around and following his dad.

"Carlisle *Cullen*, huh," Jacob said from behind me. "Does that mean that the douche behind him with that ridiculous excuse for hair was the kid who hit you?"

I turned around slowly and narrowed my eyes at him.

"Don't talk about things you know nothing about," I growled at him.

"Whatever, Bella, I think your dad is right... that kid is bad news. I could smell his rotten scent all the way over here," he sighed, in a way that made it apparent that he was trying to be nice about it, as if he was my friend and that he was only looking out for me.

I shot him an incredulous look, but decided to let the subject go. There was no point in trying to argue with him, and there was no use anyway. What did it matter to me what Jacob thought?

I scoffed inwardly as I wobbled my way down the aisle toward the ice cream. Who the hell did he think he was anyway? Where did he get off calling Edward a *kid* ? Edward was two years older than him, for crying out loud!

I picked up a pint of Ben & Jerry's Cookie Dough ice cream and made my way towards the check out. I figured Jacob could find that stupid pie himself. I'm sure he would have no problem finding it, while looking down the aisle as he was sitting on his high horse and all.

But when I reached the checkout, I realized I didn't have my wallet on me.

Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.

I looked down on the ice cream in my hand and wondered what the hell I was going to do. I didn't want to have Jacob pay for it,

especially not after storming away like that. But I didn't want to leave it either.

"Brain freeze, penguin?"

I snorted, as I kept my eyes down, staring at the ice cream in contemplation.

"You bet," I replied, without looking up. "I forgot my wallet..."

A ten dollar bill came into my view and I looked up in surprise. Edward smiled crookedly as he held it out to me, and when I made no motion of taking it from him, he just stuck it between my hand and the crutch I was holding.

"I can't take your money," I protested. I tried to hand it back to him, but he just crossed his arms over his chest and backed away. I gave him a tired look, and he just smirked at me.

"It's Thanksgiving," he shrugged.

"Thanksgiving means you give thanks, not give money... you must be thinking of Christmas."

"No, I'm giving thanks by giving you money."

"That doesn't make any sense."

"Does too."

"Does not! Because you have no reason to thank me for anything," I sighed as I gave him an exasperated look. His smirk faded and the carefree mask of his was replaced by one of seriousness. I thought it was because of what I said, but I should have known better; he wasn't even looking at me now. He wore a similar expression to what Jacob had when Dr. Cullen had shown up in the frozen goods section.

My guess now was that he had turned up again. This time at the checkout.

"Are you bothering Isabella again, Edward? I thought we talked about this."

His tone was clipped and I didn't turn around to face him. I closed my eyes and took a deep breath, fruitlessly wishing that I was someplace else. Anywhere but here.

Preferably six feet under somewhere.

I heard Dr. Cullen walk around me and when I opened my eyes I found him looking at me.

"You okay there, Isabella? You look kind of pale. Did he do something?" he asked in concern.

"I'm fine; he's fine. He was just giving me some cash so I could buy some ice cream," I replied with a tired sigh. But this was apparently the wrong thing to say. Flames of fury flashed in his eyes, though he tried to keep a calm exterior.

"Is that so?" he asked with forced calm, as he turned to look at Edward. Edward shrugged in response and that seemed to anger Dr. Cullen even more. Dr. Cullen turned to me and forced a smile. "Well, we should get going. I hope you have happy Thanksgiving."

I nodded, as he gave me one last glance before grabbing Edward roughly by the arm and practically dragging him off.

"You're giving her money now?" I heard Dr. Cullen say as they walked away. "Are you trying to pay off your bad conscience? News flash, Edward, you can't buy your way out of this one..."

Dr. Cullen kept scolding him, but they were too far away for me to hear. I immediately felt badly. I should have known how bad this would have looked from the outside. Edward giving me money for no

reason at all. It didn't really sound like something someone would do for someone who wasn't his friend.

I looked down and realized I was still holding the ten dollar bill.

I smiled sadly to myself and wobbled away to the checkout counter. It would have been wrong of me to not buy the ice cream now, since he had already gotten in trouble for it. I owed him that much.

Wow, that's a crazy thought. *I owed it to Edward to buy myself some ice cream.*

I paid for the ice cream and wobbled my way to the car. Jacob showed up only a couple of minutes later. I got a weird satisfied feeling by watching him come back empty handed. Maybe his high horse wasn't all that great after all.

He didn't say anything to me as we got into the car. He probably sensed that I was in no mood to talk to him again. Ever.

We reached the house, and he helped me with the crutches. Once again he was careful not to touch me. After I had steadied myself, I wobbled after Jacob up the house stairs. Laughter and clinking of glasses were heard from the living room when we got inside.

"Did you get the pie?" Mom's slurred voice called out.

"No, they were all out," Jacob replied, as he went to join them in the living room.

I made my way into the kitchen and put the ice cream in the freezer, before leaning back against the kitchen counter. The kitchen table was already set with all the delicious food that Mom had been making all day. Sans the pie.

If this had been a year ago, I would have been smiling now. The thought of Mom's cooking would have left me drooling.

But this wasn't a year ago, and the only effect that Mom's cooking had on me now was that it made me nauseous. How could I be sure she hadn't put poison in the food? For all I knew, she was going to try to kill me again.

I stayed in the kitchen until it was time to eat. I didn't want to join them in the living room, and I couldn't go to my room because they would complain and have me join them. As long as I stood silent in the kitchen, I couldn't pretend I was somewhere else.

They were all laughing and talking as they came into the kitchen to get seated for dinner.

Their smiles and laughter made me sick to my stomach, and I couldn't eat even if I had wanted to.

The food would not have stayed in my stomach for very long.

"Bella? Aren't you joining us?" Mom sang, before bringing her glass of wine to her lips.

"I'm... I'm not feeling very well..." I whined. It wasn't even a lie.

"Bella, your mom has spent all day cooking this feast for us. The least you can do to repay her is to join us," Dad chastised.

"But Charles, if she's not feeling well, maybe she should rest?" Billy argued softly to him, before turning his gaze to me. "Is it your leg, sweetheart?"

Chills ran down my spine and I had to close my eyes to remove the memory that his words brought.

"Are you alright, sweetheart? You're doing great... it's almost over now... just a little more," he cooed, as he stroked my arm. "Soon it will all be over... soon it will all be okay. You hear me, sweetheart? This will bring our families closer together..."

I shook my head to clear it from the memory, and when I opened my eyes, I found them all still staring at me. There was a silent warning in Billy's eyes, and I could see a similar one in the drunken eyes of my mother. Dad just looking annoyed.

I guess I didn't need to get committed to a mental institution since I was already living in a nut house.

"My leg is really hurting... I don't feel good at all," I mumbled, not lying even a little bit.

"Go to bed, sweetie," Mom cooed, and I tried not to grimace at the sound. "I'm sure you'll be well enough to join us all for brunch tomorrow instead."

"Br-brunch?" I stuttered.

"Yes, Billy and Jacob are staying over tonight. We don't want them driving home on this cold, dark night. We wouldn't want them to get into an accident now, would we?" Dad explained and shot me a pointed look. I didn't understand the look he was giving me, but for some reason I got the feeling that it was supposed to be some backhanded shot at me, and somehow blaming me for the accident I was in.

And the father of the year award goes to...

"I think I'm going to bed," I mumbled and wobbled my way past the table and towards the living room.

"Poor girl, she's not doing very well is she? She looks so thin. She's too small; it can't be healthy," I heard Billy say as I reached the guest room.

I closed the door behind me and damned it for not having a lock. I sat down on the bed and stared in front of me at nothing in particular. I heard them laugh and talk, and then there was more clinking of

glass. I was afraid of what would happen when they'd had too much to drink.

Would they come in here? Would they hurt me?

I tried to swallow back the sobs and feelings of panic that welled up inside me, but it was near impossible. I grabbed my pillow and buried my face in it, in order to muffle the sound of my panic-stricken sobs.

All I needed was a few more days, and then Dad would go to the pharmacy and refill my prescription.

Then I could die. And leave this mess behind me.

A sudden knock woke me up and my heart caught in my throat. I stared at the door, waiting for it to open. They were coming for me. I knew that they would. And now they were.

God, I hope they will kill me.

There was another knock. It was then I realized the sound wasn't coming from the door, but from the window. I sat up and strained my eyes to make out where the sound was coming from. There were no trees or bushes outside this window, so what was making that knocking sound?

A figure came into view and I yelped in surprise.

It knocked again.

"It's just me..." I didn't need to ask who 'me' was. I recognized that muffled voice.

I reached to turn on the lamp on the bedside table, before sitting up straighter so I could reach to open the lock on the window and push it open. The window was right above the bedside table and the head of the bed, so I didn't need to reach far.

"What are you doing here?" I whispered in bewilderment as I found Edward smirking back at me.

I furrowed my brows as I studied his face. His smirk was forced. His eyes looked pained and little bloodshot too. At first glance I would have thought he was drunk, but the look in his eyes was too clear and focused to be intoxicated.

Had he been crying?

"I was just in the neighborhood, so I thought I would stop by for a fucking visit. Haven't seen you in ages, wanted to see how you were doing," he replied with a cherry and fake tone. I cocked an eyebrow at him and gave him a pointed look, showing him that I didn't believe that for a second. He let his smirk fade and the pain in his eyes became even clearer.

"Edward... my father will kill you if he finds you here," I whispered. I looked up at the ceiling, almost as if I could see my father from here. I listened for a moment, just to make sure that my parents hadn't woken up. I relaxed when I made out the muffled, yet distinctive, sound of my father snoring.

"Please, Penguin... I have no other fucking place to go," he whispered, the pain palpable in his voice.

I looked up at the ceiling again, pondering what the hell I was going to do. I looked back at his face and realized there wasn't even a choice to be made here. I couldn't deny him when he came here looking like that. No matter his intentions.

"You're going to hell for this," I warned him while I scooted away on the bed, so he could climb in.

He smiled a sad crooked smile as he hoisted himself up, through the window.

"I was already on my way there anyway."

Damnsgiving

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 25 – "Damnsgiving"

Edward Cullen POV

I adjusted my black tie and frowned at my reflection in the mirror.

I looked like a fucking joke, a damn *penguin* for God's sake.

I hated to be dressed to the nines. All for some fancy-schmancy dinner in Port Angeles. Granted, it was Thanksgiving. But come on already, what the hell was wrong with a simple pair of jeans and a t-shirt? Sure, I could have thrown a clean button-up shirt over it if my t-shirt had a too offensive print on it, if that would have made it more acceptable. So was it really necessary for me to wear a damn *suit* ?

I took a step back and gave myself an once-over. I shook my head as I began pulling at the tie to remove it. I was going open collar to this shindig. I was *not* wearing a goddamn tie. I undid the tie and threw it on my bed, before unbuttoning the two top buttons of my shirt.

I dragged my hands through my hair and studied my reflection.

Yeah, that will do.

I made my way downstairs. I found Dad fidgeting in front of the mirror in the hall. He was muttering under his breath as he tried to

adjust his own tie. The sight almost made me smirk. I guess I wasn't the only one hating on the tie.

He met my gaze through the mirror and sighed.

"I see you disregarded your mom's wishes for us to wear the ties she bought us," he noted, and I shrugged lazily in response. He sighed again and shook his head before turning towards me. "I don't want a scene tonight, Edward, so please try to behave."

"What? You're saying I don't always act like a goddamn saint?" I replied sarcastically.

"Edward," he chided, giving me a pointed, yet tired, look. "Don't embarrass us tonight, alright? Try to act like an adult for once."

I snorted and turned to walk into the kitchen. I grabbed a glass from the cupboard and filled it with cold water. My hands were basically shaking and I had a hard time trying to keep them still. I knew I had to get my damn temper under control, but Dad wasn't really helping by making stupid comments like that. What the hell did he think I would do?

Jump on the table and fuck the turkey?

No thank you, I don't do birds.

I put the glass down, grabbing the edge of the counter and taking a step back. I stretched my back and groaned before straightening up again. I looked through the window above the sink. The window faced the backyard, and I could see a few pigeons eating away at the super-fancy birdhouse that Mom had designed and built herself.

Pigeons...

Turkey...

Swan.

Damnit.

I groaned to myself as I turned away from the window. I covered my face with my hands, massaging my closed eyes with the heels of my hands.

No matter what I did, no matter what I said, everything always came back to her. I couldn't even look out the goddamn window without thinking about her. That wasn't normal. That wasn't sane.

Another thing that was neither normal nor sane was to think that you had a guardian angel looking out for you, which is something I was convinced I had. I was fucking sure of it.

How else could I explain how I managed to wake up no more than two minutes before Chief Swan stomped into the room when I visited Swan at the hospital?

I smiled humorlessly at myself as I dragged my hands down my face, almost as if I wanted to rip it off, before letting them fall down to my sides.

I remembered that I had woken up feeling confused, having no idea where the hell I was or why the hell my entire body was stiff and hurting.

It had taken me a moment to realize I had fallen asleep in the chair in Swan's room at the hospital. I still couldn't believe that actually happened; I really hadn't meant to do that. I had figured I would just stay there for a while, just to relax or some shit. I never intended to *actually* fall asleep and spend the fucking night.

Another thing I never intended to do? Eavesdropping while I was hiding in the closet.

The conversation had been a private one, between a father and his daughter, and it was never intended for anyone else to hear. He even closed the damn door to keep the people outside from hearing

what was said. I still hadn't decided if it was a good or a bad thing that I had overheard their cryptic exchange.

I didn't really know what the hell to make of what I had overheard, but one thing was for certain: Chief Swan was a fucking ass-hat. Yeah, that might not have been news to me, but I had always thought he had reserved that side of him just for me and not his own flesh and blood. What the fuck was his problem, anyway? So far I had always gotten the impression that he did what he did, no matter how stupid it was, just for the sake of his daughter. But now I doubted it, considering the conversation they had. He was just acting the role of the perfect, over protective father, when in reality he was probably just protecting his own ass for God knows what reason.

It was clear as fucking day - even to me who had been standing in that damn closet trying to breathe as quietly as possible and not make any noise – that Swan's health and wellbeing were not high priorities to him. His priority was to make people *think* that it was, and that was a completely different thing.

He had prepared some guestroom for her, and even though it was obvious that she didn't want to stay there, he still insisted she would. If she had been my daughter, I would have given her every single thing she asked for. Hell, I would have carried her up those goddamn stairs myself if that were the case.

He said he did it with her best interest in mind, but I would have begged to disagree. What was in her best interest was for him to listen to whatever the hell she wanted and make it happen.

Not ignoring her wishes just because it was more convenient for him.

"What's in my best interest is to not be treated like a child. I can take care of myself."

If that wasn't the truth, I didn't know what was.

"... as for the no-good-boy Cullen... I told you, he didn't do anything! He helped me! Why can't you listen to what I'm telling you? Why is it so hard for you to believe me?"

Her words still lingered in my mind and it stirred something in me. This was not the first time she had defended me like that, and I didn't understand it. Why did she go out of her way to make people change their minds about me? Why did it matter to her what people thought about me? What difference did it make for her if her dad believed I was a tool that deserved no better fate than to get locked up for life?

Why was it so important for her to make me out to be the good guy in all this? When in reality I was nowhere near that. Even I knew that.

At least there was one thing that the jerk-face had gotten right, and that was that *trust is something you earn*, though I had almost wanted to snort when he said that; I probably would have if it wouldn't have given me away.

Swan asked him what she had done to not deserve his trust, and I had found myself feeling kind of curious about the answer. What the hell could someone as innocent and meaningless as Swan ever do to lose someone's trust? She was too pathetic and weak to ever do something wrong, especially if that meant hurting someone else.

But apparently, there was one thing.

She could try to kill herself.

I still had a hard time believing it after reading it in her file, but hearing them talk about it made it even more unbelievable.

It felt as if I was being pulled into her dark little world, bit by bit, every time I saw her, even though it would have been so easy for me to just ignore her and move the fuck on already, especially since our parents didn't want us to see each other. Still, there was something that kept pushing me towards her. Something I didn't understand. And I had a feeling that I didn't *want* to fucking understand it either.

Being drawn to the Goose could not be a good thing. *Ever* .

I hadn't even fucking bothered to be all sneaky when I had entered the house that morning when I had come home from the hospital. There was no fucking use, and I didn't care if I got caught.

I had found myself face to face with Dad as soon as I stepped through the door. He had already been all dressed up in his doctor gear. I guess I should have considered myself lucky that he hadn't gone to work earlier, because bumping into him at the hospital would not have ended well.

"Care to tell me where you spent the night?" he had asked me, as he adjusted the collar of his shirt. He hadn't sounded angry; he had sounded merely curious.

"With a girl," I had replied with a shrug.

He had quirked an eyebrow at me, studying me for a moment, probably trying to figure out whether or not I was telling the truth. I had been, technically. I *had* spent the night with a girl, just not in the way he had probably been thinking.

"A girl, you say?" he had scoffed lightly, almost sounding amused. "Usually when you spend the night with a girl, you always come home before five in the morning... you never spend the *entire* night with a girl. She must be a special one if she managed to keep you this long."

I snorted at the memory and looked down at my fancy, shiny, and ridiculously uncomfortable shoes. I sighed and shook my head at myself.

Special . Yeah, Swan was special alright, just not in the way Dad had suggested with his comment.

At least I had managed to realize a few things by sleeping at the hospital and by overhearing that private conversation. It made me

understand Swan better, but for what purpose did I need to understand her better? Hell, if I knew. But there was something about her that I just couldn't let go. I needed to figure her shit out.

She was like that TV show *Lost* . Every time you watched it, you were left with more questions than answers, questions that whirled out of control in your head and slowly drove you mad. But you kept watching in hopes of figuring the shit out, and maybe – finally – understanding what the hell that black smoke monster was.

Maybe it was a fucking polar bear in a penguin suit.

Or a freaky pigeon... *in a penguin suit*.

My entire body had been stiff as a fucking board and my neck had been sore for days after sleeping in that damn chair all night. Still, I couldn't find it in me to regret it and that bugged the shit out of me.

"Edward? Are you coming? We have to leave now," Dad called out. I pushed myself away from the counter with a sigh and dragged my feet to the hall where my parents were waiting.

Mom smiled at me and I tried to force a smile in return. She was beautiful in a wine-red dress that complemented her hair perfectly. My mom was fucking gorgeous, and why the hell she was with an idiot like Dad, I would never know.

I followed them out to the car and got into the backseat without a word.

We had barely made it to the main road before my mom gasped and put her hand to her mouth. I immediately stiffened in my seat and darted my eyes all over the road in front of us to find the source for her reaction.

"Carlisle, I forgot to bring the flowers," she said and turned to look at my dad.

I stared at the back of her head and narrowed my eyes. My fingers were digging into the seat's upholstery and my fingertips were going numb again.

What the hell was that?

She can't gasp like that just because she forgot the damn flowers. It's not the end of the fucking world.

I huffed and tried to relax, but it was as if my fingers refused to let go of the seat.

Instead of going back to the house, they agreed we would stop by the grocery store, since it would save us some time. Dad offered to go in and pick out a nice bouquet – at least, as nice as they come at a damn *grocery* store.

Dad had barely put the car in park before I was out the door. Dad didn't question it as I followed him. The less time I had to spend in that damn car, the better.

"Maybe we should pick up something more than just flowers... maybe some chocolate?" Dad said, mostly to himself since I wasn't listening.

There was an even clink-clank sound coming from somewhere in the store and I recognized the sound immediately...

Clink-clank-thump, clink-clank-thump, clink-clank-thump...

I stepped away slowly from my father to follow the sound, frowning as I tried to pinpoint where it was coming from. The sound was a little muffled, and it echoed through the aisles. It didn't take me long to spot the source. After all, it wasn't a big store.

There she was. The ever-present cuckoo bird of my thoughts and dreams.

Dreams as in nightmares, that is.

I watched her from afar and noticed that she wasn't alone. She was walking with a big dark-skinned guy. His hair was cut short, almost to the point of being a buzz-cut, and he kept stealing glances at her.

I cocked my head to the side and studied them as they moved. They hadn't noticed me, and I had a feeling they weren't going to either. I found the way she kept glaring at him funny, especially since he kept smiling awkwardly at her, as if he was trying to smooth something over with her.

She wasn't buying it, and for some reason, that pleased me.

Who the hell was this kid? I didn't recognize him, so he was clearly not from Forks.

He strolled casually down the aisle for frozen goods, and he smiled at her as he said something I couldn't make out. What I could make out, however, was the nod he did towards her leg and the look she gave him afterwards. *If looks could kill...*

"It was crushed and I can't go on a plane because I'll set off the metal detectors with all the scrap metal I have in my leg. What the hell do you think?" she spat at him, and it was almost as if she had slapped *me* in the face with her words.

I felt the anger surge throw me like a brewing storm that was just waiting to get out of hand, and I clenched my fists at my side to try to keep it under control.

She's a goddamn actress .

She had told me over and over again that she didn't blame me for what happened, that it was all just a fucking accident and all that shit. She even kept defending me when people said something bad about me.

Yet, here she was, sounding so fucking bitter about the whole thing... how could she not blame me? Everybody else was, so why

the hell had I let myself believe that the fucking Goose was any different?

Maybe she hadn't been sleeping when I woke up that morning; maybe she had known all along that I was hiding in that closet. Maybe she was just acting surprised and scared when I came out because... because... *because what* ? Was she trying to get back at me? How exactly would she do that? *By getting my family and friends to believe in me again* ?

Wow, what revenge for crushing your leg, Goose. Maybe you should look into a career as a torturer... you really know how to hurt people. Way to go!

I snorted inwardly at the thought, as I listened to the guy trying to apologize; apparently he noticed he had struck a nerve with whatever he had said that I hadn't heard. "My dad tells me that the guy who did it has been giving you a hard time... you want me to kick his ass for you?" he asked her with a chuckle.

I prepared myself to hear her agree to it; I didn't expect anything less from her now.

I wasn't afraid though. I could take that punk. Easy. He might be bigger than me physically, but I doubted he had ever been in a real fight. *I'll show him ...*

Swan turned to him; her back was to me so I couldn't see her face anymore. I wondered if she was smiling at him, just as she was about to thank him for offering...

"You know nothing about what has been happening, Jacob..." So *that* was Jacob? I thought she said they weren't friends anymore? Huh, funny, another lie from the bird. "... and don't you dare pretend like you care. Edward is a nice guy... okay, well... that's a freaking lie. He's not a nice guy. But he's a better person than most people I know. He stays true to who he is and he doesn't conform because people expect him to. As a matter of fact, Edward isn't my friend, far

from it actually, but he still has treated me a hell of a lot better than someone who I used to call my best friend!"

My anger disappeared, and it dissipated into nothingness. It was as if someone had poked my bubble of anger. The bubble burst, and everything just... washed away. Leaving nothing in its wake but... nothingness. I wasn't angry anymore. I was nothing.

Here she was defending me again. Even though I didn't deserve it. Not even a little bit. She was the only one who was on my side, even though she had no reason to be. She had done nothing but defend me as if her life depended on it, ever since the accident. Yet, I was so quick to jump to conclusions and think that she was just out to get me.

I was no better than the idiots in my life that refused to listen to me and hear *me* the fuck out.

I frowned and was just about to turn away and leave when something she said made me stop dead in my tracks.

"Hard on you, huh? Screw you, Jacob, you weren't the one who was left for *dead* that night!" She sounded outraged and relieved all at the same time. As if she had waited forever to get that off her chest.

A movement in the corner of my eye caught my attention, and I realized that I wasn't the only one who had caught the conversation. Dad stepped up to them and Swan slowly turned around. She was pale as a fucking ghost as she gazed back at my dad.

I shuffled my feet awkwardly, moving forward from my hiding place a little. I figured I should leave, this wasn't my business.

Swan looked past my dad and noticed me. She didn't even flinch before looking back at my dad. They exchanged a few pleasantries, before Dad walked away. He shot me a look, and I didn't even need to ask what he was thinking. The look was obviously telling me to

follow him, and that if I refused, there would be hell to pay... as if Swan would burst into flames if I came too close.

Jackass.

I glanced back at Swan. For some reason a guilt-like feeling crept up my spine, and I tried to give her an apologetic smile. As if I had to apologize for my earlier doubts and thoughts. As if I ever needed to apologize to the Goose . As if I cared what she thought.

She bit her lip, looking amused as she mirrored my awkward expression. I scoffed as I shook my head, turning away to follow my dad. He threw me a look over his shoulder, as if making sure that I was indeed following him.

"I need to use to the bathroom, why don't you go pick out some fancy box of chocolate," he suggested.

"Fancy chocolate? Yeah, good luck with that," I muttered. He gave me a pointed look, but didn't say anything, before he walked over to the bathrooms that were reserved for customers.

I walked over to the candy aisle and let my eyes wander over the rows and rows of sugary sweetness. Nothing looked even remotely okay to give someone on Thanksgiving.

Clink-clank-thump... clink-clank-thump...

I turned my head just in time to see Swan walk past the aisle. She was holding onto a pint of ice cream while she tried to balance on her crutches at the same time. I wondered where the hell that Jacob punk was and why he wasn't helping her out.

I stepped away from the chocolate and walked up to her instead. She was looking down at the ice cream with a frustrated expression.

She looks like a pissed of duck ...

"Brain freeze, Penguin?" I teased.

She snorted quietly. She didn't look up to meet my gaze, but she wasn't ignoring me either.

"You bet," she replied. "I forgot my wallet..."

I didn't even think as I picked up my own wallet from my back pocket and handed her a bill without even checking what it was. For all I knew I might have just handed her a hundred bucks. She looked up and met my gaze; surprise was evident on her face. I smiled crookedly and tried not to get annoyed when she made no motion to grab the bill from me. I sighed quietly and tucked it between her hand and the crutch she was holding.

It was a ten dollar bill. It was nothing.

"I can't take your money," she protested and tried fruitlessly to give it back to me. I smirked as I took a step back and crossed my arms over my chest. She sighed and gave me a tired look.

A tired duck ...

"It's Thanksgiving," I replied with a light shrug, like it wasn't a big deal, but it was. Then I realized what the hell I had just done. *I just gave her money.*

What the hell was wrong with me?

"Thanksgiving means you give thanks, not give money... you must be thinking of Christmas," she snorted and I chuckled lightly. Maybe she wasn't all that dumb after all.

"No, I'm giving thanks by giving you money," I replied with a smile.

"That doesn't make any sense," she argued with a tired voice.

"Does too." I smirked. She raised an eyebrow and looked at me incredulously, as if she couldn't believe I actually used that 'argument.'

"Does not!" she argued again. "Because you have no reason to thank me for anything..."

Her words muddled together into a soundless mess, as I noticed my dad standing ten feet behind her with a furious expression on his face. My smile disappeared in an instant; there was no use in even trying to keep it in place.

He walked up to us, keeping his eyes on me.

"Are you bothering Miss Swan again, Edward? I thought we talked about this." He was furious. That much was obvious. He was barely containing his anger, and it was nothing short of a miracle that he managed to keep his voice as calm as he did.

Swan closed her eyes and her lips moved infinitesimally. I didn't need to be a mind reader to know what the hell she was thinking...

"You okay there, Isabella? You look kind of pale. Did he do something?" His voice held nothing but concern for her, and I was once again reminded of why I should hate her. She was not *his* daughter. His concern should have been reserved for *me* .

"I'm fine; he's fine. He was just giving me some cash so I could buy some ice cream," she sighed in response and all blood rushed from my face as soon as the words left her lips. I resisted the urge to punch something. That was the last thing she should have said – and I could see it in her horrified expression that she had realized that too.

There were no words to describe the anger that flashed in my father's face as he turned to look at me.

"Is that so?" His voice was eerily calm, and if I hadn't known that he was a pacifist, I wouldn't have been surprised if he fucking punched me in the face. He was beyond furious.

I shrugged awkwardly in response, I knew better than to open my damn mouth and answer verbally.

I don't want to go to Chicago, I don't want to go to Chicago...

"Well, we should get going. I hope you have a happy Thanksgiving," he said to Swan, before grabbing my arm roughly and dragging me off. "You're giving her money now?" he hissed angrily at me. "Are you trying to pay off your bad conscience? News flash, Edward, you can't buy your way out of this one. You made a mistake, and you will have to live with that. You can't throw money around and think she'll forgive you or that it will go away. The world doesn't work that way."

He dragged me all the way out of the store, and it didn't escape my mom's notice that we came back empty-handed. Dad opened my door and all but threw me inside before slamming the door and stepping over to the driver's side. Mom looked confused and concerned as Dad got in behind the wheel.

"What happened? Didn't you find any flowers?" she asked softly. Dad took a deep calming breath, but the anger was still clear in his face.

"Edward happened, that's what," he muttered. "I guess we'll have to go empty-handed. Hopefully Aro won't see it as a sign of disrespect."

"We still have time to stop by the house and pick up the flowers," Mom said with a reassuring tone. "Don't worry."

The tension in the car after that was palpable, and none of us said anything. When we got to the house, Dad got out before Mom had a chance to unbuckle her seatbelt. He disappeared into the house, and Mom shifted in her seat so she could look at me.

"Sweetie, what happened?" she asked softly, nothing but concern in her voice.

"Swan was there," I mumbled with a deep sigh. "I may or may not have given her some money..." I figured there was no fucking reason to hide it from her, since I rather have her hear the story from me than from my dad. Dad would give her the wrong impression, and I would be in even more trouble.

Mom's expression changed. It was still one of concern but also something else. Confusion? Pity? *Disgust* ?

"Why... why would you give her money?" she asked puzzled, before furrowing her eye brows. "Honey, if this is your way of making-"

"She forgot her fucking wallet, okay?" I snapped, not letting her finish her damn sentence. "I was just trying to be nice. She wanted to buy some fucking ice cream so I handed her a ten dollar bill. I wasn't buying her a damn car for fuck's sake!"

She huffed and shook her head.

"Edward, language," she chided before turning back in her seat, just as Dad emerged from the house with the flowers in a tight grip in his hand. Mom turned her head and glanced at me again, and said in a soft voice, "Sweetie, please stay away from Isabella. Nothing good will come of it. Her father wants you far away from his daughter, please respect that. I understand that you want to make up for the mistakes you've made in the past, but throwing money at her won't help you... nor will it help *her* . So please, Edward, I beg you, stay away from Isabella Swan."

She gave me one last pleading look before turning back to the front as Dad opened the door and got into the car. He handed her the flowers and turned the key in the ignition. He didn't say anything, but by the way he was holding his hands on the wheel, it was clear he was still furious.

He shot me a glare in the rearview mirror, and I looked away with a scoff. Did he think his glares were scary or something? I couldn't care less about him glaring at me. My biggest concern right now was

whether or not he would send me off to Chicago. All else meant nothing to me.

Dad made a left turn at the end of the driveway, and I shot him a look. He didn't even flinch as he met my gaze through the mirror. I gritted my teeth, and I could see a flash of victory in his eyes. Taking this road to the highway, *this* was his punishment to me.

I tried fruitlessly to swallow the damn lump that was forming in my throat. I didn't know why the hell I was reacting so strongly to this. Why would I care if we took this route? It was just a fucking road. Nothing more.

But the closer we came, the harder I gripped the seat.

Fuck this shit.

It's just a damn road.

It means nothing .

I stopped breathing all together as we passed the point where I had hit the black ice. I could almost feel myself lose control of the car, even though I wasn't even driving...

"LOOK OUT!"

Mom's shout brought me back to reality and kicked me into total panic mode. I stiffened in my seat – as if I could get any tenser than I already was – and looked out on the road in front of us.

Dad stomped on the breaks as a goddamn *dog* ran out in front of the car.

The car skidded to a stop, and I couldn't hear anything but the pounding of my heart in my ears.

"Wow, that was close," Mom said, bringing her hand to her chest.

"Yes, it was," Dad mumbled in response, he glanced at me in the rearview mirror again. His eyes were anything but angry now; concern was the only evident feeling in his gaze. I stared blankly back at him and he frowned. "Are you okay, son?" he asked softly.

I didn't respond. I turned my gaze away and looked out the window instead.

Dad took a deep breath before stepping on the gas softly, leaving the incident behind us.

I kept my gaze out the window, paying extra attention to the side of the road – in case we got another surprise visit from some animal. I was leaning forward slightly, my hand clutching the seat and my entire body was stiff as a board. At least I was prepared if something was to happen.

Dad kept throwing glances at me, but I ignored every one of them. It didn't escape my notice, though, that he was beginning to look quite concerned. I guess the man wasn't used to me being this damn quiet. He had probably expected me to throw a fit about the damn dog.

"Edward? Edward...?" Mom's soft voice rang out, and I looked up. I met my mom's gaze as she stood by the open car door, holding her hand out. "We're here, sweetie, are you coming? Or do you need a minute?"

I swallowed thickly, and it felt like I was choking on sandpaper. I hadn't even noticed that we were there already, let alone that my parents had both left the car and were now waiting for me to leave it too. I nodded and climbed awkwardly out of the car.

"Are you alright?" Dad asked, frowning in concern.

"Yeah, I'm fine, why wouldn't I be? Let's just get this shit over with already," I replied, my voice cracking and weird. It didn't even feel like the words were coming from me.

"Edward, we can leave right now if that's what you need," he said seriously as he put a hand on my shoulder and squeezed lightly.

"I said I'm fine," I snapped, but my voice still didn't carry the power I was hoping for.

My parents shared a knowing look, which just pissed me off.

"Are we going to stand here all fucking day or are we going to get some stinking turkey?" I spat, finally gaining some power and venom lacing my voice. Dad sighed as he put an arm around Mom's waist.

"Alright then," he sighed.

We made it up to the most impressive house in all of Port Angeles. I kept my head down and my hands in my pockets as my parents made their way through the ridiculous crowd of people. They shook hands with everybody in sight, but nobody as much as looked at me. I guess my stance made it pretty obvious that I wasn't in the mood to be bothered. I didn't care about these people, and I sure as hell didn't want to touch their disgusting hands.

We made it over to the man of the house, Aro. He was a dear friend of my father's, and we had spent many Christmases and Thanksgivings with him and his family.

"Edward, it's so nice to see you again." Aro smiled at me in greeting. "I hear you've had a rough month..." I scoffed in response and shuffled my feet as I looked around the room at anything but him. I saw in the corner of my eye how he raised both his eyebrows, his smile never faltering, making him look like he was messing with me. I knew that he wasn't though; this was just how he was; always smiling and looking creepy. When he realized he wasn't going to get any more out of me than a scoff, he turned back to my parents. "So where is the big one? I was looking forward to hear about Emmett's plans for college."

"Emmett is spending Thanksgiving with his girlfriend's family in Vermont this year," Dad explained. They walked away into the big living room, still talking about Emmett and stupid Vermont, while I stayed behind. I sighed deeply and dug my hands deeper into the pockets of my dress pants as if I could disappear if my hands got in deep enough.

The guests around me started to annoy me with their stupid laughter, making them sound like retarded hyenas, so I decided to hide out in one of the bedrooms upstairs. Nobody was allowed upstairs, so there was no reason for anyone to come looking for me there.

I knew this house well. I knew exactly which rooms belonged to whom, so I strode over without any hesitation to the blue guest bedroom that was facing the street. Why it was called the Blue Room was pretty fucking obvious. It was decorated all in blue. From floor to ceiling, everything was blue. The only thing that wasn't blue was the furniture, but that fact was made up for by the countless other blue items. It was ridiculous; it was as if a bunch of Smurfs had a party in there and puked all over the place.

I closed the door behind me and walked over to the bed. I plopped down on it unceremoniously and dragged my hands through my hair. It wasn't until then that I realized they were shaking.

I held out my hands in front of my face and stared at them as they shook like I was having a fucking seizure or some shit.

I tried to calm myself down, but it was a fucking waste. I groaned and stood up abruptly from the bed. I started pacing back and forth in the room, trying to pull myself together, but it only got worse. The feeling of panic that I had felt in the car was creeping back up, and I felt fucking nauseous.

I tried to breathe calmly through the panic, but it was fucking impossible. It was like my body wasn't in the mood to calm down, as if it *wanted* to break down and lose all sanity.

I felt my thigh vibrate, and I froze mid-stride.

If you were having a heart attack, you would feel a shooting pain up and down your left arm, right?

So what did it mean when your left thigh was vibrating?

I looked down as if I would see what the problem was by just looking at my leg, and it was then I realized where the hell the vibrating was coming from.

My phone .

I pulled it out of my pocket, rolling my eyes at myself before glancing at the screen.

Dad?

Why the hell was Dad calling me?

I flipped the phone open and put it to my ear.

"What?" I barked.

"Where the hell are you?" he asked with both concern and annoyance in his voice. "The dinner is about to start."

"I'll be right there," I muttered with a sigh.

I walked downstairs to the big living room, where a large, long table had been set up to accommodate the thirty or so guests that were there. I got a seat between an old man I didn't know and a woman who'd had too much plastic surgery done on her face. Mom and Dad were sitting across from me with Aro a few seats down.

I stared down at my plate and pushed my food around with my fork. I wanted nothing more than to get out of there and just get drunk off my ass, effectively forgetting about everything that was fucked up in my life. Of course, I couldn't do that.

"Edward, I hear you are starting a new school after the holidays. Are you excited?" Aro asked. I looked up from my plate and found that most of the people sitting near me were looking at me. I snorted and shook my head.

"Not really."

"Changing schools in the middle of the semester? Isn't that a little... unconventional?" the man next to me asked. I didn't know what to respond to that. Was I supposed to respond with the truth, that I didn't really have a say in it?

Dad cleared his throat and forced a smile at the man.

"We really didn't have a choice in the matter. Edward has gotten himself into some trouble and changing schools was the only option we had at the moment," Dad replied with an awkward smile, as he tried to make it sound far less serious than it really was, as if it wasn't a big deal at all.

"Oh, this isn't related to the accident is it?" the man continued, paying no attention to the fact that it was obvious that this subject was off limits. "I read in the newspaper that you got into an accident with the Chief's daughter... how is she doing?" the man asked, looking at me.

"She is doing as well as can be expected," Dad replied in my place, his smile so forced that it was almost painful looking.

"Oh my, that was you?" some random woman, who sat across from me a few seats down, exclaimed loudly and interrupted all other conversations going on at the moment. All attention was now on me. "I heard she was injured badly. My brother-in-law works with Chief Swan in Forks." She pointed at me with her fork and I narrowed my eyes at her. "You have no respect for the road. I heard they smelled alcohol on your breath. How dare you get behind the wheel after drinking? You could have killed that innocent girl!"

My jaw dropped, and there were gasps heard from around the table. I gripped my fork tighter in my hand, and I would have stabbed her forehead with it, if she wasn't sitting so far away.

"Maybe you shouldn't fucking talk about shit you know nothing about," I snarled at her.

"What a potty mouth," she sniffed, nudging the person next to her.

I pushed my chair back violently and glared at her fully.

"You have no fucking right to say anything about it. You have no fucking idea what went down that night. I was not fucking wasted or drunk or anything. I hit a patch of black ice for crying out loud! It wasn't my fucking fault!" I yelled loudly.

"Edward!" Dad said furiously.

"What?" I snapped back, still loud. "She can't fucking talk to me like that!"

"Oh, you hear the language on this boy?" the woman said and shook her head. "And no showing of remorse whatsoever, trying to blame the circumstances." She sniffed again before looking at me with condescending eyes. "Accidents like yours could be easily prevented if people just paid more attention to the condition of the road."

"Are you fuckin-"

"EDWARD!" Dad cut off. I shot my eyes to him, and his eyes were flashing with anger.

"He doesn't even seem to care that he crippled the poor girl..." someone muttered.

That was fucking it for me. I stalked away from the room and didn't look back.

I managed to get to the front door before my dad caught up to me. He grabbed my arm and turned me around to face him.

"What the hell was that?" he hissed in my face.

"Yeah, I was asking myself the very same fucking thing. Who the hell does she think she is?" I replied, even though I knew he wasn't talking about the woman.

"Don't you dare embarrass me and your mother like that again," he said sternly. "I asked you specifically to not make a scene tonight. To behave and act like an adult, but instead you bust a tantrum like a little child."

"What did you expect me to do? I had to fucking defend myself from that stupid bitch!" I snapped and gestured towards the living room. His eyes widened at my choice of words, and his eyes clouded over. All the concern from earlier in the car was long gone now.

"Who *are* you?" he asked, as if he really wanted to know. "I don't recognize this person at all."

"Maybe if you got your head out of your ass and didn't work all the fucking time, then maybe you would know who I am. I'm your fucking *son*, and you're supposed to be on *my* side! Not on everybody else's! I should be able to commit murder and still know that you had my back!"

His eyes widened even more, and his eyebrow rose to an unnatural level. He looked scared all of a sudden, as if I had said something that had him really worried.

"Edward... I'm just going to ask you this once... Emmett told me about what happened at school that day and he told me you threatened to... to... to *kill* her. He was afraid you would do something to punish her-"

"You're asking me if I hit her on *purpose* ? If I *meant* to kill her?" I cut him off incredulously. I took a step back and dragged my hands through my hair. "I can't fucking believe this. You seriously think that I'm capable of that?"

"Of course not, don't be ridiculous," he said calmly, trying to smooth things over.

"Then why the hell did you even have to *ask* ?"

"Edward... we're worried about you. You need help that we can't provide," he said softly, bringing back the fatherly love in his tone. His mood swings were starting to become ridiculous. Couldn't he just pick an emotion and stick to it? Did he want to be angry with me or not?

"I don't need help. All I need is to know that my family and friends got my back. But apparently I already know that they don't. I have nobody! I'm all fucking alone in this bullshit! Maybe I'm the one who should do the world a favor and cut my own throat and not Swan!"

I turned to the front door and threw the door open, storming out into the cold.

"Edward! Where are you going? Come back here!" Dad called after me. I ignored him, and he made it easy by not showing any pretense to go after me. It was either because he figured I wanted to be alone, or because he needed to clean up the mess I had made by opening my mouth at the table.

I passed the parked cars and kept on walking. I needed to get the fuck away from this place, and as far away as possible. I needed to be with someone who didn't judge me, who accepted me for who I was. No matter how fucked up I was.

But there was no such person. I was all fucking alone.

I had nobody.

Where the hell was I supposed to go?

A sudden, shrieking noise made me jump in surprise. I looked around to find the source of the noise and felt slightly disoriented. I spotted the culprit, standing in the middle of the dark, empty road. It was looking around as if it was all innocent and hadn't just scared the living crap out of me. I narrowed my eyes and resisted the urge to spit at it.

A fucking goose.

Goose...

Swan .

Fuck.

The goose made another noise, but this time it was a softer sound and not some war cry like before. I shook my head at myself and threw out my arms in a frustrated gesture.

Was this a sign?

Was I supposed to go to the Goose? To *Swan* ?

I pulled my wallet out of my back pocket and checked how much cash I had on me.

Enough for a cab ride back to Forks... barely.

Maybe I should just go home and forget this *life* ever happened. Maybe *Swan* had it right. Maybe life just wasn't worth living. Why bother when all the people around you sucked? What's the point?

I kicked a small rock on the street and kept on walking towards the bus station, figuring that I could find a cab there.

The streets were ridiculously empty; it was as if I was walking through a damn ghost town. It was cold as all fuck, and I would

consider myself lucky if my balls didn't fall off.

As if I would ever get to use them again, anyway. I hadn't gotten laid in weeks, not since before the accident. Hell, I hadn't even gotten *off* since that time with Tanya in the janitor's closet. A much needed release would have felt good right about now. But it was as if my dick had lost all its purpose, as if it didn't know what the hell it was made for anymore. Up until now, if there was one thing I knew I could always count on, it was that my dick would do its job. But apparently those days were over too. I couldn't even picture myself fucking a girl anymore.

I could *always* picture my dick being deep inside a girl. What the fuck changed?

You changed, asshole.

Not constant anymore.

I made it down to the station and found the taxi queue. I strode over to the first one in line and jumped into the backseat without a word.

"Where to?" the driver asked with a bored tone, putting away the newspaper he was reading.

"Hell," I replied sourly as I slumped in my seat. He chuckled and turned the ignition.

"Forks it is," he chuckled, probably thinking he was fucking funny. I didn't respond, and I guess he took that as a sign that he had gotten it right.

He drove fast, and he drove like he was still getting his learner's permit. He had no damn respect at all for the traffic laws. I knew I was a fucking hypocrite, because I had no damn respect for those either, but at least I had control when I drove. Not like this madman that didn't pay any fucking attention at all...

Control...

Yeah, you got control alright, that's why Swan's leg is currently wrapped up in a nice little package, and why your life is in ruins and why you're all fucking alone with no one to turn to .

Yeah, great control you've got there.

"So where to, exactly?" the driver asked as we neared Forks' town limits.

I sighed deeply while I thought that shit over.

Where the hell *did* I want to go?

"Hey, you awake back there?" he asked again, sounding irritated as he glanced over his shoulder. "I'm not a mind reader. Where do you want to get dropped off?" He glanced back at the road, but shot his eyes back to me with pitying look. "Rough Thanksgiving...?" he asked.

I glared at him as I felt something drop from my eyes. I frowned as I touched my cheeks in confusion and looking down at my fingers. They were wet.

I was fucking crying like a girl.

In a *cab* .

Who the hell was I? *Emmett* ?

I was losing my mind.

I wiped my damn cheeks dry from tears and cleared my throat.

"Take a left at the grocery store and take right at the junction..."

He nodded once and did as he was told, a couple of minutes later he dropped me off a few blocks away from my destination. I threw a

couple of bills at him, tipping him way more than he deserved, before climbing out of the car.

I didn't want to get dropped off right outside her house. The Chief would kill me if he saw me. I didn't think for a minute that he would hesitate to put a bullet through my head if I even came near their damn house.

Yet, here I was. Ready to take that bullet. And for what? For Swan?

I glanced at the house while hiding behind a parked car. The house was dark, and the only light was from the porch. I picked up my phone to check the time; somehow it was already past midnight. How the hell did that happen? Where the hell had the time gone? It felt like it was only an hour ago I was sitting in that stupid dining room, getting chastised by some woman who didn't know her ass from her brain.

I was clearly losing it. I couldn't even keep track of time, let alone keep track of my own mind. I was fucking lost.

I moved closer to the house, careful not to make any noise. I was sure the Chief was one of those people who slept with one eye open and I didn't want to give him a reason to open the other one.

I was wondering what room was hers when I remembered the conversation she'd had with her father. The guestroom she was staying in was downstairs, that much I knew, so it wouldn't be that hard to get in.

Assuming she'll let me, and not scream bloody murder...

The first window I peered into showed the living room. I could make out the dark silhouette of a man sleeping on the couch. I moved away from the window and rounded the corner so I was now in the backyard of the house.

I peered into another window and sighed in relief.

Jackpot.

This was the guest bedroom; at least I assumed it was. It was small as fuck. If this had been another time, during different circumstances, I probably would have made an inappropriate joke about the room being so small that I couldn't even fit my dick in there. But this wasn't the time.

You're an idiot.

Yes, I know.

Swan was sleeping in the bed, which was right beside window, and her cast was glowing and was illuminated by nothing at all. It was as if it was shining all on its own, reminding me about what a screw-up I really was.

She didn't look peaceful as she slept. She was hugging her arms to herself, as if she was trying to keep herself together. Her face was not relaxed, she looked pained and on edge even when she was sleeping.

What the hell was going on with her that she couldn't even relax when she was unconscious?

I leaned casually against the wall, figuring I could at least do this as a man. She didn't need to know the real reason I came here. *She doesn't need to know ...*

I knocked softly on the window frame, and her eyes flew open immediately, terror was clear in her face. I didn't know what confused me the most – the fact that she looked so scared or the fact that she was now staring at the door as if it was going to kill her.

She was gasping for air so loudly that I could hear her through the window.

I knocked again, this time on the glass, and she shot her eyes to me. I pushed myself from the wall and stepped in front of the window so she could see me better. She yelped and put a hand to her heart in surprise. I knocked again just for the hell of it.

"It's just me..." I said softly, feeling the strange urge to calm her.

She turned on the lamp on her bedside table, before reaching to open the lock on the window and pushing it open.

"What are you doing here?" she hissed in a whisper. I forced a smirk and shrugged lazily.

"I was just in the neighborhood, so I thought I would stop by for a fucking visit. Haven't seen you in ages, wanted to see how you were doing," I replied cheerily with a wide smile.

She scoffed softly, cocking an eyebrow at me and giving me a look that clearly said she wasn't buying it. I didn't even expect that she would. I let the smirk fall; there was no use for it anymore.

"Edward... my father will kill you if he finds you here," she whispered. Her tone suggested that she wasn't really telling me to go away. She was just giving me a warning of what would happen if I stayed.

"Please, Penguin... I have no other fucking place to go," I whispered back, my voice cracking in the most embarrassing way.

"You're going to hell for this..." Another warning, but it was more like a statement. She scooted away to the bed, and I smiled crookedly at her, a silent thanks.

I hoisted myself up and climbed as soundlessly as I could through the window.

"I was already on my way there, anyway," I replied as I stepped down onto the floor. I shot her a dazzling smile. "I just figured I

wanted company on the ride there." I winked. She rolled her eyes, but the blush that followed didn't escape my notice.

I let my eyes sweep the small room, which appeared even smaller in the soft light from the lamp on the bedside table than it had when it was dark.

"This is a small-ass room," I said as I turned my eyes to her again. She didn't say anything in response. She just adjusted her seat and leaned back against the wall. I sat down and scooted my way up so I was sitting next to her. She leaned her head back against the wall and turned her face to me.

"You've been crying," she noted, without sounding teasing or mocking about it. She was just stating a fact that I was already aware of. I wiped my cheeks again, even though I knew I had not shed anymore tears since I left the cab.

"Yeah... allergies, you know." I shrugged nonchalantly and she scoffed lightly.

"Yeah, allergies," she mumbled and looked away. "I wish I had allergies..."

She sighed and closed her eyes.

"Did you have a nice Thanksgiving?" I asked, bending my leg so I could rest my arm on my knee.

"Did *you* ?" she retorted harshly, as if the question had offended her.

"No, I can't say that I did," I replied honestly.

"Is that why you came here? To make it worse? Or figuring that if you had a bad Thanksgiving you had to drop by the Goose's house and make hers worse than yours? So you could feel better about yourself?" She sputtered out the words so quickly it was hard for me to keep up. She took a deep breath after her rant and hid her face in

her hands. "God, I'm sorry... I shouldn't have said that... I just... things are..."

"Yeah... I know... don't sweat it," I replied, taking her hand and squeezing it softly between us.

I don't know who froze first. We looked at each other wide-eyed, and we quickly pulled our hands back, turning our gazes away. We were both staring at the wall in front of us instead.

.Hell.

"You don't need to apologize," I said quietly after a few moments of awkward silence. "For some reason, I can take that shit from you, because it's *about* you. But I can't fucking take it when other people talk like they know everything about some shit, even though all they know is what they've heard from fucking rumors."

She turned her head and looked at me with mixed confusion and concern.

"You wanna talk about it?" she asked softly.

"You wanna hear about it?" I replied, mirroring her soft tone. She pursed her lips in annoyance, and I couldn't blame her. I needed to change the fucking subject and move it the hell away from me. "So... I figure that guy who's sleeping in the living room isn't your father? You got a bodyguard or something, seeing to it that you don't run away?"

Something changed in her eyes then, and the vulnerability I had seen in her eyes at the hospital was back. She shot her eyes quickly to the door, once again looking at it as if the door itself would kill her.

"Bodyguard my ass," she muttered under her breath.

"Wanna talk about it?" I asked, nudging her playfully in a sad attempt to remove that look in her eyes. I didn't like it one bit; it made me feel

even worse, and that was the least thing I needed.

She quirked an eyebrow at me.

"You wanna hear about it?" she mimicked me, and I chuckled quietly.

She smiled sadly in response. She shifted a little where she sat, and pain flashed in her face almost immediately. She tried to cover it up, but I fucking saw it.

"Aren't they giving you any meds for that shit?" I asked, surprising myself by sounding so fucking concerned.

"Yeah, they are." She nodded as she took a labored breath. The pain must have subsided because I could see her body relax. "Dr. Carrot was nice enough to give me even stronger ones than your dad did..."

"What? My dad gave you weak shit? What the hell?" I asked incredulously. She gave me a pointed look, as if I was missing something obvious.

"Dr. Cullen was afraid I would OD on them. Luckily for me, Dr. Carrot doesn't see that as an issue, and he prescribed me some seriously strong stuff."

"Why aren't you taking it then?" I asked confused.

She raised an eyebrow, giving me yet another pointed look. This time I didn't need to have it spilled out for me. Realization hit me like a fucking slap in the face.

"You're gonna OD," I stated without any uncertainty. It wasn't a question.

She smiled sadly and half-shrugged.

"I'm a waste of space... the world would be better without me in it," she mumbled quietly.

"Penguin... c'mon..." I said, almost pleadingly. I leaned my head back. My entire body felt drained and this was too fucking much. Her eyes held no fucking hope for the future; it was as if she didn't even see a tomorrow. "What happened to you?"

She looked down at her clasped hands in her lap while gnawing on her trembling bottom lip.

"Thanks for the ice cream," she whispered, her voice shaky. I smiled crookedly at her sad attempt to change the subject. I couldn't blame her since it was obviously something utterly private that I had no reason to stick my nose in.

"So you didn't give the money to charity or some shit?" I joked.

"Buying myself some ice cream should be considered charity, since I'm a charity case and all," she joked half-heartedly in response.

"You're not..." I protested. She looked at me and held my gaze for a moment before answering.

"Edward, you have told me over and over again that I don't matter, that I'm a waste of space... I'm the Goose, or have you forgotten that? So why do you seem surprised now that I am this way?" she asked.

"I didn't know you-" I began.

"You still don't know me," she cut me off.

I smirked at her 'angry kitten' look and she looked even more annoyed because of it.

"You're right," I granted. "I don't know you, and you don't know me. And yet, here we fucking are."

She furrowed her eyebrows and brought her bottom lip into her mouth again, gnawing on it in thought.

"What brought you here tonight?" she asked almost too quietly for me to hear, as she turned her gaze away again, as if she was afraid of the answer. "You have loads of friends, a bunch of people who would be there for you if you *really* needed it... but instead you turn up by my window in the middle of the night... why *me* , Edward?"

I felt that stupid lump form in my throat again, and I tried hard to swallow.

"For some unknown damn reason I don't mind wasting space with you." I shrugged awkwardly.

"That didn't answer my question," she replied quietly, still not looking at me.

I took a deep breath and dragged my hands through my hair. When I breathed out, the whole story about my evening came spilling out with it. I told her everything. About what I had heard in the grocery store. About the damn dog. About the dinner. About my fight with Dad. I even mentioned the fucking goose. The words spilled out of me like I had no control over them, and it was a fucking relief to get it all out.

She didn't interrupt me when I spoke. She didn't ask any questions. She just sat there and listened to my crap, and that was exactly what I needed. I just needed someone to fucking listen to me without judging me, because I knew she wasn't.

When I was done I felt like I had talked for hours. I gave her an apologetic smile as I glanced at her.

"I'm sorry you had to go through that," she said softly after a moment.

"Yeah, me too." I chuckled humorlessly.

"I guess that just goes to show that parents suck." She sighed. "No matter how perfect they may appear from the outside, they still suck

on the inside."

"Isn't that the truth," I agreed. "That's the funny thing though, I actually thought he gave a crap for a while there. He kept throwing me these concerned looks on our way to Port Angeles... but they were gone almost as soon as we got there and sat down for dinner... he didn't even fucking defend me when that bitch began blabbering about shit she knew nothing about." I turned my head to her; she was looking straight ahead at the wall in front of us. I studied her profile and noticed how soft it looked; she had the dream profile for an artist to draw. Her nose was straight, but not unnaturally so, and the tip of her nose was pointed up just a little, just enough to give the nose some character. "Can I ask now how your night was?"

She smiled crookedly, still not looking at me.

"I came out alive," was all she said.

"But in your book, that's not necessarily a good thing, right?" I said, nudging her again.

"In this case, it was," she replied with a weird tone. "I won't let them kill me... that would make it too easy for them."

I gripped her wrist gently and pulled at her arm so it was held between us. I calmly pushed up the sleeve of her shirt. The scars were almost screaming at me in this light.

She made no attempt to pull her arm back. She just kept her eyes at my face, silently asking with her eyes what the hell I was doing.

I traced her scars with my fingers, pondering how they came to be here. The thickness and the texture of them made it obvious that they had been deep cuts. Though I was no fucking doctor, I was still inclined to agree with my father on this one. She did *not* make these herself.

"What happened?" I asked her again, not talking about her night anymore.

I traced another scar, as I looked up to meet her gaze. .

"Trust is a funny thing, isn't it?" was her response.

Such a simple sentence, yet I knew it held much more meaning than those words implied.

I looked down at her arm again, pulling down her sleeve and letting go of her. She pulled her arm back and hugged it to her.

"I hate you, Swan." I sighed. It felt like I had never said anything so true – and so false – before in my life. She chuckled humorlessly and nodded.

"I know," she replied simply.

"You have no idea how hard this shit is for me," I continued. "My entire life changed because of you. Nobody who used to have my back has it anymore. I'm all fucking alone. My life is so fucked up that the only person I keep going back to is ... *you* . You have any idea how fucked up that is?" She didn't say anything in response to that, so I continued. "You should be the one to hate me, the one to badmouth me and blame me and doubt every fucking thing I do. But instead you're the one sitting here listening to my crap without judging. You let me visit you in the middle of the night, and while you ask why the hell I came over... you still don't push it when I don't give you a straight answer. You just accept whatever I throw at you... how can you do that? How can you be so... forgiving?"

She pondered that for a moment, and I actually leaned my face closer to her so as not to miss a single word of her answer.

"I'm holding so much hate inside me right now that there simply is not room for me to hate another person, especially someone who doesn't deserve it..." She looked up and met my gaze. "I have no

reason to hate you... not even the name calling and the threats at school are reasons enough for me to hate you, because I know firsthand what people can do to deserve my hate. And what you've done to me are hugs and kisses in comparison to that. So it's easy for me to be so forgiving when it comes to you, because you haven't done anything for me to really forgive..." she trailed off and looked down at her hands again. "I'm alone too. I've been alone for a while now... I should say that it gets easier... but it doesn't... it will eat you up inside until you can't breathe anymore..."

"Since I'm going to school with that punk... Jacob Black? That was his name right?" She nodded hesitantly. I smirked as I nudged her softly. "You want me to kick his ass for you?" She chuckled at me echoing Jacob's own offer to her.

But the carefree sound soon faded away, and she threw me a look.

"Have you ever done anything for anyone but yourself?" she asked.

"No, but there's always a first for everything, right?" I joked.

We were quiet for a moment. The muffled sounds of people snoring and our own breaths was our background music.

"Even though I know you're not serious, I would still want to ask you to keep away from him. He's bad news... in more ways than one. And I would hate it if you got into more trouble because of me," she said softly.

"Trust me, Penguin, I couldn't get into more trouble even if I tried," I sighed.

"For some reason I don't find that hard to believe at all."

I glanced at her and smiled crookedly.

"Mind if I stay here tonight?" I asked. "I don't feel like going home."

"If anyone finds you here... you're toast," she warned, but she was still not telling me no.

"I'll set the alarm on my phone... don't worry," I said as I pulled the phone out from my pocket and set it to five a.m., figuring that was early enough. I put the phone on the bedside table, and when I turned back, I found her looking at me. "What?"

"What's been said in this room stays in this room, right?" she said. I nodded.

"Trust is something you earn," I replied, and she smiled timidly.

"I'm sorry you have to go through this, Edward. You might be a douche, and you treat people poorly... but you don't deserve any of this," she said with so much emotion in her voice, and it stirred something in me. She was speaking from the heart; she meant every single word. It was evident in her tone.

"Neither do you, Isabella. You're so fucking innocent and pure... you couldn't harm a fucking fly. You don't deserve any of this crap," I replied, speaking from my damn heart too – if there even was such a thing in my body, that is.

She smiled at me and a soft giggle escaped her. What did I say now? She must have sensed my confusion because she giggled again.

"Don't call me Isabella; it sounds weird coming from you," she said with a smile.

"I'm not calling you Goose anymore," I argued, and she rolled her eyes in response.

"Swan works too, you know."

I gave her a once over, before climbing onto the bed and sitting next to her again.

"Penguin... Pigeon... Ducky... take your pick," I offered.

"Does it have to be a bird?" she asked, and I nodded. "Why?" I shrugged and she sighed. "This is ridiculous." I nodded again without answering. She smiled and shoved me playfully. I couldn't help but smile in return, and I found myself itching to see her smile again. There was something honest and genuine about her smiles. Her smiles were rare, so therefore, they had to be genuine. They couldn't be fake because there wasn't a fake bone in her body.

Except the metal ones...

Something twisted inside me at the thought, as I was reminded about what had brought us to this point in time. Something I couldn't undo. This was on me. Even if she didn't blame me, I knew this shit was on me.

"I'm sorry," I said.

Her smile faded as she gazed back at me.

"Please, promise me to never ever say that to me again until you actually do something you have a reason to be sorry about," she said sternly.

"I promise... if you can promise me something in return..."

"What?"

"Keep your window open for me..."

The corner of her mouth lifted into a crooked smile, but she didn't try to hide the sadness in her eyes.

"Why?"

"I have a feeling I'll need it," I replied honestly. I was quiet for a moment and took a deep breath. "Do you have my back, Penguin?"

She didn't even hesitate before she nodded softly.

"Yeah, I do. Do you have mine?" she asked in return.

"Yeah, I do." There was no uncertainty in my voice either. "We just need to keep this shit on the down low... nobody can know. This is our secret."

"I'm an excellent secret keeper," she said.

As if on cue, we both gazed down at her arms at the same time.

"I don't doubt that for a second."

End

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 26 – "End"

Isabella Swan

He had grabbed my arm. He had pulled up my sleeve. He had traced my scars with his fingers.

And I let him.

I didn't think he realized what a big deal that was. I actually thought I was going to pass out when I first felt his fingertips grace my skin. Nobody had ever been allowed to even see my scars, let alone touch them. I could hardly touch the scars myself – so to have someone else do it was monumental.

And to have *him* do it was something else entirely.

Why had I let him do that?

I guess that was why when he asked me if I had his back, I couldn't *not* say yes.

He had seen a part of me that I had never shown anyone, and he didn't even realized it.

The moment he had grabbed my arm – and I had let him – was the moment I knew that I was already in too deep with this boy. We were

so similar, while at the same time, we couldn't be any more different. We had lived such different lives though we had both grown up in boring, old Forks.

We had basically 'known' each other for our whole lives, but it wasn't until today that I think Edward had finally seen me as a human being, and not some waste-of-a-space bird. He had proven that by showing up at my window instead at some friend's house. He said that he had no other place to go, and for some reason, I believed him.

That was another reason why I didn't hesitate to have his back.

How bad had his life become if I was the only one he could turn to? He didn't even like me; he still hated me. He said so himself. I couldn't blame him for that. A normal person would have hated him back, but I wasn't a normal person. I couldn't hate him, because I simply didn't have the energy for it. Besides, there really wasn't any more room left in my body for hate. I was already consumed with hate, and I couldn't add any more to it even if I had wanted to.

Maybe I would feel better if I had someone to like, or at least not hate.

Hating people was tiresome, and even though I was angry with Edward when I had first woken up at the hospital after the accident, I still couldn't find it in me to hate him. There was only one reason for me to hate him – and it had nothing to do with the mean things he'd said and done to me in the past; it wasn't even about the fact that he had hit me. The only reason I would hate him was because he hadn't killed me that night.

Edward was still staring at my arm, even though the sleeve was down and he couldn't see my scars. It was almost as if he was trying to see through the fabric.

"Hasn't your mother taught you that it's impolite to stare?" I asked softly.

He looked up at me and smirked lazily.

"Yeah, but it's like an eclipse... you know your eyes will burn if you look at it, but you can't fucking help it," he replied. I bit my lip as I let my fingers play with the edge of the sleeve. I looked down on my lap as I tried to make sense of the thoughts flying through my head. And the feelings that followed.

"Was it a big deal?" I whispered.

"Was what a big deal?" he asked, puzzled.

"When you... when you came to the hospital..."

"Which time?" he huffed, and I chuckled humorlessly. *Touché*.

"The time when you realized you weren't constant... was that a big deal for you?"

I turned my head and met his gaze. His eyes were the only way I could tell if his answer was going to be a lie. It's amazing how much you can find out by just looking into someone's eyes, and this was one of those times I really needed to find it all. His answer was important, because it would help me settle a few things.

He rested his head against the wall as he stared back at me calmly.

"What the hell do you think?" he replied coolly.

"I don't know what I think, that's why I'm asking," I replied honestly.

We looked at each other, both daring the other one to break the silence. But I was not going to budge, and I guess Edward realized that.

"Yeah, it was. I usually don't break down in random people's rooms... hell, I usually don't break down. Period." His voice was tired and drained. He wasn't even trying to cover it up. "Why do you ask?"

I swallowed thickly and pulled at my sleeve. He looked down and followed my movements with his eyes. Neither of us said anything as I pulled the sleeve up all the way to my elbow. The scars were screaming at me with their presence, but I knew I had to do this. *Again* . I had to have him realize what a big deal this was for me.

I squeezed my eyes shut so I didn't have to look at them. I didn't want them. They shouldn't be there. Why was I even doing this?

Trust is something you earn.

It's not easy if the person already hates you.

Why do you need Edward's trust?

Because he asked for mine.

He lifted his hand and once again started to trace the oddly shaped scars on my arm with his finger. I tried to keep my breathing under control by breathing through my nose. I could feel my heartbeat pick up. I was pushing it; I knew I was. I was going into panic mode, and there was nothing I could do to stop it. I could feel Edward's eyes on me; he was looking at my face, not my arm, but he kept tracing the scars.

"This is a big fucking deal to you," he said quietly, almost to himself.

"You have no idea," I whisper-hissed through my teeth.

He immediately stopped tracing my scars, and before I had time to react, he pulled my sleeve down roughly.

"No wonder you're fucking suicidal. You're fucking masochistic," he spat, almost as if he was offended by the fact that I had let him touch my scars. This wasn't about me being masochistic; this was about me trying to make him understand. Because how could we trust each other if we didn't understand each other first? You can't trust something or someone you don't understand.

In a way, I guess he was right. Considering I was still breathing, I must have been somewhat masochistic.

"Did you get some kind of sick kick out of that? Did that shit turn you on or something?" he said as he wrinkled his nose in disgust. I felt my throat close up, and I choked on a sob.

I really wanted to hate him in that moment. That would have made things so much easier.

Why was I so desperate to have him understand? Just because he came here crying in the middle of the night? Was I so desperate to have someone to lean on that I didn't even care about who it was? Did I really need someone that badly that I was prepared to settle for the biggest self-centered jerk on the planet just because he had no other place to go but to my window?

"Fuck," he mumbled and nudged me. "I'm fucking sorry, alright? I'm not one to judge. What turns you on is your fucking business... if you like pain and suffering then that's your thing, I've experienced worse. You know Tanya? Of course you know Tanya. Anyway, that bitch likes feet... like, reeeally likes feet. Once she even asked me to-"

"God, Edward, I don't want to hear about that!" I cut him off annoyed. He looked embarrassed for a second, but collected himself quickly.

"My point is, you're free to like what the fuck you want. I guess I'm just fucking surprised you were that... kinky," he chuckled awkwardly. I gaped at him in shock – was he really talking about my sexual preferences? He must have been seriously uncomfortable by my silence, because he kept rambling. "But I guess I can't fucking blame you...I guess everybody likes a good spanking once in a while-"

"I don't get turned on by my pain! What the hell is wrong with you?" I hissed.

"Then what the hell was that with your arm about?" he asked, almost offended. "At the hospital you looked like a turkey caught in the headlights when you saw me noticing your fucking scars... but now you let me trace them? What the fuck is that *about*?"

I narrowed my eyes at him, not liking his tone one bit.

"Do you want me to close the window?" I asked, knowing he would get the hidden meaning behind my words. His offended expression quickly faded, and for a second there, I was certain that I had seen a flash of panic in his eyes.

"I'm just trying to figure your shit out, alright?" was all he said.

"By talking about my sexual preferences?"

I would have been mortified if it weren't for the fact that I was too shocked to feel anything else. Were we really talking about what turned me on? As if there was anything in the world that would ever turn me on.

Sex was not a good thing in my book. Having sex was something you were to be ashamed of. Sex was bad. So very, very bad. Having sex was dirty – and not in a good way – and it ruined your soul. You could only have sex when you were married – and not for pleasure, only for reproduction.

I didn't even touch myself for 'pleasure' because that was considered bad too.

Sex was not for pleasure. A girl was not supposed to feel pleasure.

Sex is bad.

You had to stay pure for as long as you could, and no one should even come close to my lady parts. Not even myself.

Pleasure is bad.

As the words echoed through my mind, it was as if it wasn't me thinking them. The whole subject of sex always echoed like a robot voice in my head. It wasn't really me thinking them; it was Mom. Mom had told me throughout my entire childhood all about how bad sex was - before she had almost killed me.

"Maybe we should just go to sleep," I suggested in a tired whisper.

"Sounds like a good idea," he agreed, sounding relieved.

The bed was small, and he tried to make himself comfortable by sitting by the foot of the bed while I laid under the covers. He could have slept beside me; there was just enough room for him to do that. But it would also mean that we would have been forced to sleep closer together than either of us was comfortable with. It was one thing to sit beside each other on the bed; it was something else entirely to sleep together in it.

Sleep together ... I wondered if Edward had ever slept with a girl without having *slept with* her first. Edward didn't come off as the type that stayed long enough to cuddle afterwards, let alone fall asleep with the girl.

I tried to make myself as small as possible on the bed, which was nearly impossible with my injured leg.

Edward looked really uncomfortable as he crossed his arms over his chest and leaned back against the wall, his legs stretched out in front of him and over the edge of the bed.

Our eyes met for a brief moment, and I smiled sadly at him.

"Sweet dreams, Edward," I whispered as I remembered how he had talked in his sleep at the hospital, mumbling something about blood. He smiled crookedly and nodded once before closing his eyes. I reached to turn off the lamp before closing my eyes.

I'm already dreading tomorrow.

I was abruptly awakened by someone shaking me. I was already panicking when my eyes flew open and a terrified scream escaped me.

Edward was quicker than the scream. He quickly put a hand over my mouth to muffle the sound.

"Jesus Christ, Swan, it's just me," he said with an annoyed tone. "I just wanted to tell you that I'm leaving." He removed the hand from my mouth, and I could almost taste him on my lips.

"What time is it?" I asked with a hoarse voice.

He glanced down on his cell phone in his hand.

"Barely four thirty... I couldn't fucking fall asleep, and you were right... your dad is going to kill me if he finds me here, and I rather stay alive for while longer than have to die just because I had no other fucking place to go." He smiled darkly as he shook his head to himself. "Some of us don't have a death wish."

I bit my lip and felt oddly offended by his words. He trivialized something that was so very deeply rooted in me and made it out to be some kind of joke.

"Maybe you should find another window... mine might be closing very soon," I whispered, as I bit down on my trembling bottom lip. I looked away, but he grabbed my chin and made me face him.

I was still lying flat on my back on the bed, and he towered over me.

It was an awkward position to be in.

He was frowning as he stared down into my eyes. His intense green gaze was hypnotizing, and I couldn't look away even if I wanted to.

"Swan, I have no fucking idea what the hell you've been through or what the hell is going on in that stupid head of yours... but I know one thing. Nothing is worth taking your own life over. You hear me?"

Nothing . People suck. We both know that. But don't fucking give them that kind of power over you! By taking your life, you let them win." He was almost snarling at me, and I got confused – as well as annoyed – by his speech.

"You wouldn't know the first thing about that," I replied coolly, trying to ignore the fact that he was still holding my chin. "By killing myself I win. They lose. It's as simple as that."

"No, it's fucking not," he argued. "I know this will sound like a damn Hallmark card, but it's the fucking truth... life is fucking precious, and if you're willing to take your own just because you think life sucks right now, then you clearly didn't deserve to be born in the first place."

I narrowed my eyes at him, but he didn't even bat an eye. He thought he had me in a corner, ready to bend to his will. As if he had any power over me or my life or my choice to take it away. It annoyed the hell out of me that he thought he could just come in here and start ordering me around. What gave him the right? A few weeks ago, he was standing on the parking lot threatening me to take my life himself. Was he now angry that I would beat him to the punch?

"Edward, you may think that life is all butterflies and rainbows, but you're wrong. People are evil. People do evil things and they hurt you. They will break you down to the point where you have no reason to continue breathing, even if you want to."

"Oh please, don't give me that shit! People suck, yeah, I know! But high school ends, you know. You will never have to see those people again."

I tilted my head to the side, still with his grip on my chin.

"I couldn't care less about the people at school. This is not about them."

He smirked darkly and he nodded.

"Don't I fucking know it. It's about your mother." My face fell, and his smirk grew. "You talk in your sleep," he explained. I opened my mouth to say something, but no words came out. What had he heard? His smirk faded when he saw my frightened expression, but that did nothing to calm my nerves. When he spoke again, his voice was quiet and almost pleading. "Swan, I'm fucking serious. I swear to fucking God that I will tell my dad, or even your dad, about your plans if you don't..." He trailed off, giving me a pointed look.

"If I don't what?" I croaked.

"You will not kill yourself. It's as simple as that. There's no 'if' in that equation," he replied simply.

I finally felt the hatred I wanted to feel for him. He was standing in the way of my only way out. He wasn't going to let me die, even though he hated me.

He called me a masochist, but he was a sadist.

He knew he was torturing me by threatening to tell our parents about my plans. He knew he would get me in trouble. *He knew* .

Was this his revenge? Not letting me die?

"Edward..." I pleaded, but he just shook his head.

"I didn't kill you that night, okay?" he said quietly, almost whispering. "I don't know why the hell you told me about your plans, and I honestly don't doubt you for a second that you will actually go through with them. But if you killed yourself, it would be as if I did it myself... since I knew about it and let you go through with it anyway... you make me responsible because I could have fucking prevented it. Is that fair? Making me a killer just because you think your damn life sucks?"

In a weird and twisted way, his words made sense. Of course, that made me hate him even more.

"Trust is something you earn," I whispered in return. A flash of recognition lit up in his eyes. He knew exactly what I meant by that, it answered his question about why I had told him.

"Why are you even bothering with that if you're not gonna live long enough to benefit from that shit, anyway? You're just wasting our fucking time... or is this your last chance at getting back at me for what happened? Pretending like you don't blame me when in reality, you blame me for *all* of it."

I shook my head, and I guess he finally realized he was gripping my chin. He let go of me and sat down on the edge of the bed instead.

"Damn it, Swan, what the hell do you want from me?"

"Nothing. I want nothing from you."

"Well, there is something I want from you... and that is that you keep on breathing. Is that too much to ask for?" His voice rose in frustration, and I glanced passed him at the door afraid that someone would have heard him. But the house remained silent, and the door remained closed. I turned my eyes back to Edward and gave him a sad smile.

"I can't live just for you, Edward," I sighed.

He smirked at me and leaned forward. Our noses were practically touching, and for a fleeting moment, I almost thought he was going to kiss me.

"Yes, you can. I'm not going to be your murderer," he breathed in my face.

"I'm just making some space for the next goose whom you are sure to torment," I replied in a shaky voice.

"Use that fucking word again, and I swear to fucking god that I will kill you myself," he snapped, still with his face so eerily close.

"Is that a promise?" I mumbled.

"Yeah, it's a fucking promise," he spat. I couldn't help but smirk as the next words left my lips.

"I'm the *goose* , and I'm a waste of *space* . That is what I will always be. Nothing will ever change that." He narrowed his eyes at me as I mocked him, his nostrils flaring in anger as he stood up abruptly from the bed.

"I'm so fucking done with this shit. Fuck you, Swan. Fuck *you* ."

I could almost see the waves of anger that rolled off of him. He pushed open the window roughly. I almost expected it to break by the force. He didn't glance at me before climbing out without a word and disappearing into the darkness of the early morning.

I sighed deeply as I sat up and reached to push the window down.

It closed with a low thud, and it felt like I was closing more than just a window. Edward would not come back. I had pushed him too far. Trust may be something you earn, but I had pushed it too far by giving him too much. He knew about my plans, and I guess that was wrong.

How could I tell him? It didn't matter if I wanted him to trust me, so I could trust him, or whatever. Trust wasn't the issue here. Telling someone else about your plans to kill yourself had nothing to do with trust. Edward had it right – it was wrong to tell him. When I finally kicked the bucket, he would always have to live with the fact that he had known about my plans, indirectly making him my killer by letting me go through with it.

How could I put him in that position? It was wrong. It was beyond wrong. It was... *wrong* .

I laid back down on the bed and stared at the ceiling.

I can't do anything right... I keep pushing people away...

I closed my eyes when I felt them well up with tears that would never fall. I was both physically and mentally exhausted, and it didn't take long for me to fall back into a restless slumber.

I awoke a few hours later to the sound of chatter and laughter from the other room. I tried to ignore the feeling of normalcy it brought me. As if everything was exactly like it used to be.

I winced in pain as I sat up in my bed. I must have slept in an awkward position, because it felt like my leg was bent the wrong way or something, which of course only led to more pain. A soft cry escaped me as I carefully tried to slide my legs over the edge, so I could leave the bed.

The chatter from the other room quieted immediately, and I heard someone near the room. A soft knock on the door was followed by it swinging open.

"Sweetie, you okay?" Mom asked softly as she entered the room. She raised her hand to stroke my hair, but I flinched and leaned back so her hand was touching nothing but air. She frowned and shook her head disapprovingly. "Are you in pain? Where do you keep your medication?" she asked, and I quirked an eyebrow at her. Was I in pain? Was she freaking kidding me?

"I'm fine," I replied through clenched teeth. "Leave me alone."

"Let me help you to the bathroom. I figure you might want to take a shower," she said, still with that disapproving frown on her face.

"I can help myself, thank you," I muttered.

"Oh, Bella, always so stubborn." She laughed and waved dismissively at me as she left the room. I almost growled as I

watched her retreating back.

I grabbed my crutches, which were leaning against the foot of the bed, and wobbled my way out.

Mom had joined the others in the living room. I threw a glance at the clock above the fireplace – which we hadn't used in years – and noticed it was barely after ten. No wonder I felt drained, I hadn't gotten much sleep at all, and the sleep I did get was mostly restless and uncomfortable.

"Morning, Bells, you're just in time for brunch," Dad said with a smile. I pretended as if I hadn't heard him as I made my way towards the stairs. "I thought we agreed that you wouldn't go upstairs," he argued when he realized where I was going. I sighed deeply and turned to him.

"I need to take a shower. As far as I know, we have only one shower, and it's upstairs. So excuse me for not wanting to take a bath in the kitchen sink!" I snapped in annoyance.

"I'll help you!" Jacob said, jumping up from his place on the couch. He was by my side in an instant. I gave him an incredulous look.

"If you think I'm going to let you help my daughter take a shower, then you have another thing coming," Dad said to Jacob, but I saw in his eyes that the situation amused him.

"Of course, Chief, I would never take advantage of your daughter until we're married," Jacob replied with a wink. Everybody laughed, thinking it was funny.

But I didn't.

I glared at Jacob with narrowed eyes, and he smiled as he looked back at me, as if he thought I was joking and was not really annoyed by his stupid remark.

"Let's get one thing straight, Jacob, you and I will never ever be together," I said, barely able to keep my voice level and calm. There was no limit to the anger that surged through me at that moment.

"Oh, Bella, don't be ridiculous. You guys were made for each other," Mom laughed from the couch, and I didn't even bother to glare at her too. I turned around and made my way upstairs instead. I ignored Jacob when he asked me if I needed help, and luckily for me, he took the hint and let me be.

Taking a shower isn't the easiest thing when you almost pass out from the pain of undressing. And when you're undressed, it's a whole different pain - trying to wash yourself clean without getting the cast wet. Even if I had covered it with a plastic bag or something there was still a risk it would have gotten wet.

I still felt an odd attachment to the pretty flowers and my Brother Bear, and I didn't want to get water on them and risk the drawings being ruined.

It took me forever, but I finally managed to get cleaned up. I put on my bathrobe and put my pajamas in the hamper before leaving and wobbling over to my room.

I tried not to wrinkle my nose when I saw my unmade bed. There was a distinct smell of... *guy* in the room. My room was not big by any means, so of course the smell of Jacob would linger in my room after he spent the night sleeping in my bed.

I made a mental note to burn the sheets later.

I dug out a few pieces of clothing to wear and went back to the bathroom to get dressed. By now I had become somewhat of an expert at pulling on my pants without causing too much distress to my leg. But I guess it was easier now – since I had found that Mom had taken it upon herself to cut several pairs of my pants. I guess the crazy woman didn't realize that this cast was going to come off

eventually, and I would be forced to buy new pants because she thought it was a good idea to cut the leg off of almost all of them.

By the time I 'finally' made it back downstairs, it was already past noon.

Taking a shower in my condition may have taken forever, but I didn't mind at all. It just meant I didn't have to spend as much time with the lunatics downstairs. But I also knew I couldn't stay hidden forever.

What was supposed to be the brunch became my lunch. The kitchen table was overflowing with food, even more so than it had been during dinner last night. Mom heard me come down the stairs, and she ushered me to a seat before I had even stepped off the last step.

She pushed me down on the chair, without much consideration for my leg, before she began shoveling food onto my plate.

"Where are the others?" I asked confused as I looked around. The house was quiet except from the sounds of her shoveling food around. She turned to me, and I looked up to meet her gaze.

I stopped breathing.

Her eyes were empty, and the pupils were dilated.

"Oh, sweetie," she cooed and stroked my hair. "You are so beautiful... but why do you keep insisting on making things so difficult?"

I swallowed thickly, my mind going a million miles a minute as I tried to figure out what I had done wrong now. What had I done to upset her? What had I done to make things 'difficult'? What had I *done* ?

"Billy mentioned he heard that you had company last night... he said he heard a boy. Who is this boy, sweetie? And why does he visit you in the middle of the night?" she asked, her voice was a weird mix of

love and menace. As if she was asking because she was concerned about me, but also as if this was something really bad.

I felt all blood rush from my face when I realized that Edward's visit hadn't gone unnoticed after all. He was going to get into so much trouble.

"Well? Who was it?" she asked again, her face and eyes totally void of all emotion. It was like talking to a robot. The only thing giving her away was the scary tone in her voice.

I felt an odd sense of relief when I heard her ask again, and it took me a moment before I realized why. It was because she didn't know who had visited me, and that meant I could lie. Edward didn't need to get into trouble for this after all. I could still save him. He might have been an ass before he left, but he had every right to be. And keeping his visit a secret from my mother was the least I could for him in return, especially if I was going to make a killer out of him soon.

"It was just... a friend," I croaked.

"Tsk ts, Bella. It was a boy, and a boy is never *just* a friend," she chided, her voice still not matching the emotionless pools that were her eyes. "Are you not pure, Bella?" She had been stroking my hair, and when her hands reached the back of my head, she grabbed my neck tightly. "We will have to make arrangements if you're not pure. You know this, Bella, you *need* to be pure!"

Her grip on my neck tightened and I felt panic surge through me like a wildfire.

Please, just kill me. Kill me. Kill me. Kill me.

I had always wanted the ending of my life to be my choice.

I wanted to decide when and where and how.

And I had decided.

This was when. This was where. This was how.

"Please, just kill me already," I whispered, the words barely audible to my own ears.

Her grip tightened again, and I could feel her sharp nails dig into my flesh. She would once again draw my blood if she just squeezed a little tighter, piercing my skin with her nails.

"Bella, you know what's been decided, so why are you making this so difficult? You know the rules," she chastised. She removed her hand from my neck - I could still feel her fingers and nails digging into my skin – and gripped my chin instead. She turned my head roughly so I had no other choice but to meet her empty gaze. "You are to stay away from that boy. You hear me?"

If she had been a normal mother, I would have ignored her order. I would have nodded and agreed just to get her off my back, and then I would have seen the boy behind her back instead. Because what was the worst thing she could do to me if I didn't do as she told me? Ground me?

Yeah, a normal mother would have. But I didn't have a normal mother, and I knew all too well what she was capable of.

"I hear you," I whispered in agreement.

"Good, why don't you eat something," she said with a wide smile that didn't reach her empty eyes, as she pushed the overflowing plate of food in front of me. She stepped away and towards the sink. I didn't let my eyes waver from her for a second; I was too scared about what she would do if I didn't pay attention. She turned slowly towards me with an innocent smile on her lips. "Oh, I almost forgot. You need to take your medication. Where is it? I can go get it for you."

"I've already... erm...taken it," I mumbled, even though it was a blatant lie.

"But where do you keep it? I think it's for the best if I keep an eye on it for you since the pills that Dr. Jenks prescribed for you are pretty strong. You need to be careful with those," she continued.

Careful. Yes.

I had to be careful not to take them until I had enough of them to kill myself.

"Don't worry, I got it," I replied with a forced smile as I tried to appease her. It would not end well if she had access to my pills, and I had to get her mind off of them. "This smells... delicious." I nodded towards the food, without tearing my eyes off of her, and she smiled at me.

"You are so sweet," she cooed and stepped over to me. She pulled out the chair next to mine and sat down. She smiled in anticipation, but her eyes were still dead. "Eat. You are too skinny; you need to eat and get more meat on your bones. Nobody wants a skeleton."

I ignored the urge to roll my eyes at her. Two minutes ago she had told me that I was not to hang out with any boys, and now she was telling me that nobody would want me if I was too skinny?

But I knew who she was talking about when she said "nobody". And he wasn't just anybody.

He was Jacob Black.

I made no motion to pick up the fork. Just the thought of eating something she had made had my stomach turning. And the thought of eating anything with her sitting next to me wasn't appealing either.

Mom sighed and picked up the fork. She stabbed a few pieces of food on my plate before raising the fork to my mouth.

"Eat!" she demanded.

My mouth opened automatically, and she shoved the food into my mouth so quickly I almost choked. I tried to chew, but she was already waiting with another fork full of food. I swallowed thickly, and I coughed when a too big piece stuck in my throat. Mom looked annoyed, but waited patiently with the fork. She didn't even pat my back or anything to help me out.

She just waited.

I opened my mouth, and she shoved in another mouthful.

Choking didn't sound like such a bad way to go anymore...

Mom kept feeding me until there was no food left on the plate. As soon as she left the kitchen and gone upstairs, I rushed as fast as my legs could carry me to the toilet downstairs and proceeded with puking my guts out.

She had forced so much food down my throat that it was nothing short of a miracle that my stomach hadn't exploded. And it was nothing short of a curse that I hadn't choked. I should have, considering the amount of food she managed to cram into my mouth in such short amount of time.

I was drained, and it felt like every inch of my body was on fire. I was in excruciating pain, and I barely made it back to "my" room before I collapsed in the bed. I was sobbing as I tried to breathe through the pain, and I knew this was one of those moments where a pill would have made a difference.

One pill. Then it would all be gone.

But what if I would be one pill short of having a lethal dose when *that* day arrived?

The day when I would need *everything* to be gone.

I put my pillow over my face, and it muffled the sound of my anguished cry.

Between the shovels of food that she crammed into my mouth, she had been muttering incoherently. I couldn't make out most of it, but I did hear her mention the word "pure" more than once. And once or twice I heard her say "it's almost time." But what she meant by that, I had no idea.

I never saw any life in her eyes, and her movements were almost robotic.

I managed to ask her again where Dad was, and much to my surprise, she was coherent enough to actually respond. He was in La Push with Billy and Jacob; they had left when I was in the shower. She didn't tell me why they left, and I had a feeling I might have been better off not knowing anyway.

I stayed in my room for the remainder of the day, and Dad came home when it was almost dark out. I heard him talk to Mom for a bit in the kitchen. There was a rustling noise, and I heard him huff as he neared my room.

He opened the door and gave me a timid smile as he walked up to the window.

I noticed he didn't come empty-handed. In his hands he had a hammer and a few nails. The rustling sound I had heard must have been from him looking through his toolbox.

I was confused about what he was going to do, until he put a nail down against the frame of the window and hammered it down. I gaped at him as realization shot through me.

He was nailing the window down, so it would be impossible to open.

"No more boys," he said as he noticed me staring at him in bewilderment. He hammered down a few more nails before he made

sure that it was enough by trying to open the window. It wouldn't budge. He looked pleased with his work, but I was not. "This way you can still sleep downstairs, and your mother can rest peacefully." He smiled in amusement as he put the remaining nails in his pocket and left the room.

So *she* could rest peacefully? Was he kidding me?

I looked at the window longingly, as if I could will it to open.

It was just a window. Why did it matter if it couldn't be open? What difference did it make to me? Yeah, I added to the feeling of being trapped in my own house – but it wasn't like I was ever going to climb out of it and run away anyway. I couldn't climb out a damn window with my leg.

But if the window is closed, Edward can't climb in...

I shook my head at myself. Edward wouldn't come back considering the way we had left things.

He would never come back.

I was all alone again.

I had been right. Edward didn't come back. The nails had been unnecessary. Mom would not have needed them to sleep peacefully. Her daughter was not going to have any more nightly visits by some boy. The boy had abandoned me now, and I didn't know why that hurt.

Of course he didn't come back. Why would he? I was the Goose, after all. He probably thought he had done enough to get rid of the guilt now. Maybe he figured that my will to kill myself was enough reason for him not to try anymore? Why would he bother trying to make up for his guilt, if I would die in the end anyway? Why waste his breath?

Why waste his breath on a waste of space bird...

On Sunday, Billy and Jacob returned. We were back to having our Sunday night dinners with them. Apparently it was now four months ago – at least that's the impression I got by the way they all behaved.

I watched them interact with each other during dinner, and I didn't know what to make of it. It was as if I was looking into a mirror that showed me the past. Because how could they all act the same after everything that happened?

Yes, I had accepted the fact that Mom was clearly insane; she had every right to act like the loon that she was. But what about Billy and Jacob? Okay, maybe Billy was insane too... but Jacob?

When dinner was over Mom told Jacob and me to sit down in the living room, and she would bring us ice cream for dessert. I was sitting down on the small loveseat, and Jacob didn't even bat an eye at the other places to sit before he sat down beside me. He smiled widely at me and rested his large arm on the back of the couch.

"Ever heard of personal space?" I hissed at him.

"Yes, but your personal space is my space too." He grinned.

"Remember when we were kids and we used to take one of my dad's shirts and put it on together and pretend we were Siamese twins? You had no issues with personal space then," he rambled without even taking a breath, "... and if I remember correctly you didn't have any issues with personal space last New Year's either..." he trailed off suggestively. I gave him an incredulous look.

"Are you kidding me?" was all I managed to come up with in response to that.

"Oh c'mon, why are you so bitchy? We haven't seen each other in months, and now you're all high and mighty? What the hell?" he said with a frown. He really looked like a kid at that moment. A kid

throwing a tantrum because he couldn't have his toy back. *Me* being his toy. "Is this about that guy?"

"What guy?" I echoed with an innocent expression.

"That guy my dad said he heard visit you, who is he? Are you dating him?" He lowered his voice and threw a glance over his shoulder before looking back at me and continuing in a low voice. "Are you *sleeping* with him?"

"So what if I am?" I challenged him, crossing my arms over my chest and leaning back on the couch. "So what if I *am* sleeping with him? What's it to you?"

He looked frightened as he threw another glance over his shoulder. He leaned closer to me, and I could feel his breath on my face.

"Bella, c'mon, you know you're not supposed to do *that* ," he said with a shaky voice. "The legends say-"

"I don't care what your stupid legends say! I'm not a Quileute!" I snapped. "And if you want to believe that crap, that's up to you. It was fun when we were kids, but not anymore. Don't involve me. I'm *done* ."

"But we're supposed to be together!" he argued. I looked away and shook my head.

"No, Jacob, we're not. Once it might have been a possibility, but not anymore. Not after what you did," I said quietly.

He didn't have a chance to respond, because Mom entered with two bowls of ice cream that she handed to us. She smiled, her eyes shining with excitement when she noticed the arm Jacob had on the back on the couch – and indirectly around me. Her eyes were not empty today; she almost looked like my mother.

"Have you drawn something on Bella's cast yet, Jacob? You better hurry up or all the good spots will be taken," she smiled. "I'll go get some markers..."

Jacob glanced down on my cast, wrinkling his nose in disgust at the pictures that I had grown so attached to.

"Who the hell drew that crap?" he said disapprovingly. "Did your *boyfriend* do it?" He said the word as if it was diseased and contagious, and I almost wanted to say yes to his accusations. Just so I could see his face when I did. But of course, I knew that the satisfactory feeling wouldn't last, and I would get into even more trouble if I did.

"A couple of friends did," I mumbled in response. I played with the spoon in the bowl. The ice cream was already melting. That didn't matter though, since I was not going to eat it anyway.

Mom came back with markers and put them on the table.

"Make it permanent," she winked at Jacob, and he chuckled in response, as if they were sharing some inside joke. Jacob nodded towards my leg as he looked back at me.

"Mind resting your foot on the table? It will make it easier for me to draw," he said, as he put the bowl down.

"You're not defiling my cast," I warned him.

"You want me to tell our parents about your *boyfriend*?" he replied casually as he picked up a pen and played with it mindlessly with his thick fingers.

"He's not my boyfriend!" I hissed, feeling the panic grow. I knew he wasn't playing me; he was really going to tell them if I didn't do what I was told.

"Who are they going to believe? Me or the girl who tried to *off* herself?" he mocked.

My jaw went slack as I stared at him in shock. *He did not just go there* . He smirked a little at my reaction, before looking down at my cast. His smirk wasn't even half as charming as it was on Edward. Jacob just looked ridiculous, like a kid who thought he was so cool and bad-ass. Yeah, Jacob might have the physique of a twenty year old. But he was still just fifteen at heart.

He pulled of the cap of the pen with his teeth and leaned forward.

"This is not going to hurt," he joked as he put the pen to the cast.

I squeezed my eyes shut, preparing myself for the pain. It felt as if I was preparing myself for a tattoo. As if his drawing on my cast would be permanent on my skin. I couldn't see what he was drawing, but it was almost as if I could feel the pen through the cast, piercing my skin, inch by inch.

I was in pain. Not *physical* pain. But pain nonetheless.

I wanted to cry when I opened my eyes and saw the picture he had drawn.

"Now it's permanent." He smiled. "Nothing can break us apart."

I met his gaze and did my best to keep my face void of all emotion. His entire face was smiling; his eyes were lit up like a child's at Christmas. He looked like a puppy-dog waiting for approval from his master, telling him that he had done well.

But he had not done well. Not even close.

"I'm tired... I think I'm going to bed now." My voice betrayed my emotionless mask, and it cracked in the most humiliating way. I stood up and steadied my shaking body on the crutches.

I walked away, and I could feel his eyes follow me.

"I love you, Bella; we'll be together forever," he said in a soft and adoring tone.

My only response was the slamming of the door behind me.

I grabbed the small pin chair, which I had brought into the room to have something to keep my clothes on, and put it against the door so nobody could come in. I made it over to the bed and plopped down. The pain that shot through my leg by the motion was easy to ignore.

I stared at the small drawer in the nightstand, almost as if I could see through it with my imaginary ex-ray vision. That particular drawer held my pills. *The pills.*

Maybe they were enough... maybe...

I opened the drawer and picked up the orange colored container. I leaned back against the wall, and stared at the container as I played with it in my hand. I knew what kind of relief one single pill gave me, maybe it would be enough to kill me if I took them all?

Was it worth a try?

There was a knock on the door; my eyes didn't even waver from the container.

My life and death was in that container.

"Jacob and Billy are leaving now. You don't want to come out and say goodbye?" Dad asked through the door. I was glad he had the decency not to try to open the door.

"I'm already in bed, I'm tired," I replied, without raising my voice.

"Alright then, night, Bells," he said softly. I heard him walk away, and my body relaxed immediately.

Maybe it's worth it...

I must have dozed off at some point, because when I opened my eyes the house was quiet – apart from Dad's snoring. My body was stiff from falling asleep sitting like that, and my hand was cramping. When I looked down I saw why.

I was still holding on to the container as if my life depended on it.

And I guess, in a way, it was.

I removed the lid and shook out the pills in my hand. I counted them silently in my head.

There were fifteen of them left. There used to be twenty.

Fifteen should be enough...

I inhaled deeply and breathed out slowly.

Fifteen *had* to be enough.

I was not taking this crap anymore.

I didn't have any water, and I didn't have the energy to go get any either. So I knew I had to take the pills slowly, just a couple at the time. I smiled sadly, silently hoping that this would be the last thing I would ever experience. This was my last day on this earth.

I raised my hand and was just about to throw three of the pills into my mouth when a sudden noise scared the crap out of me. I looked at the door on instinct, but I recognized the noise. It wasn't a knock on the door. It was a knock on the... *window* .

I slowly turned my head and saw a very upset Edward staring back at me.

"Swallow those pills and I swear to fucking God I will kick this window in and stick my arm down your throat and pull them back up myself!" His angry voice was barely muffled by the glass. The

snoring upstairs never skipped a beat, so I guess his voice hadn't carried far.

"I can't open the window," I said to him, and he rolled his eyes.

"I fucking know that already. Those fucking nails speak loud and clear, thank you. Now, tell me how the fuck I can get inside."

"You're signing your own death sentence," I warned him.

"Yeah, and by not coming in, I'm signing yours. So, let me the fuck in already," he replied calmly.

"There's a turtle by the backdoor to the kitchen," I said, and he nodded once before disappearing out of sight. He didn't need me to elaborate.

I strained my ears as I tried to hear him get into the house. But there was no sound whatsoever. I frowned as I wondered if he had changed his mind and maybe gone home.

"Open the door..."

His voice was barely audible – and it was behind the door. I looked at it in surprise, before I finally got my senses together and made my way over to the door, removing the chair and opening it.

He gave the chair a curious look as I walked back to the bed. He closed the door behind him and put the chair back. He gave me a crooked smile as he noticed me looking.

"You seem paranoid," he mused. "Nailing down the windows and barricading the door like this." He glanced at the pills that were now spread out on the bed. "I guess you didn't want to get interrupted."

"What do you want, Edward?" I asked with a tired sigh as I collected the pills and put them back in their container. "I thought you were done with this... with me...whatever..."

He plopped down on the bed and leaned back casually against the wall as if it was the most natural thing in the world for him to be there. He almost looked comfortable. I put the container back in the drawer before sitting down on the bed. I was careful to keep my distance this time.

"So, Swan, what brought you over the edge tonight?" he asked, clasping his hands in his lap. "Why tonight? Why not Thanksgiving? Why not yesterday? Why not this afternoon? Why *fucking* now?" He sounded so clinical when he spoke, as if he was a doctor asking a patient where she was hurting.

I looked up at him, feeling defeated. His gaze was hard, but the cold melted away almost instantly as he met my gaze. My desolation must have been plain on my face. "C'mon, Swan, what the fuck?" he almost groaned as he leaned his head back against the wall.

"I could ask you the very same thing," I sighed. "You said you were done, why did you come back? Why tonight?"

"I asked first." He smirked sadly. "C'mon, Swan, what do you got to lose? Your heartbeat is all you got left to lose... right?" He had a point. "Trust, remember? I got your back..."

I smiled sadly at him. I wanted to believe him so badly, but I was so unsure. How could I trust him? He had said such horrible things. He had said he was done.

Does it matter? He came back.

How could I trust him not to abandon me again?

Does it matter? You got your pills.

"Jacob drew on my cast," I replied with a quiet voice. "I guess I just didn't agree with what he drew."

He frowned and looked down on my cast. He leaned forward to get a better look, and he was quiet for a moment before looking back up at me.

"Okaaay," he said, dragging the word out slowly. "What the hell was he thinking? Was it supposed to be a fucking joke or some shit? Because I can't see the punchline. It's not fucking funny." He spoke the words I was already thinking, and I bit my lip as I fought the tears I knew damn well would never fall anyway. He sighed deeply and looked back down. "This shit won't fucking do. This shit is fucked up."

"There is nothing I can do about it now anyway, is there? It's not like I can wash it all away and pretend it never was there in the first place. It's permanent."

He took a deep breath and breathed out slowly.

"I'm a fucking douche," he mumbled, almost to himself. I couldn't help but chuckle humorlessly at that.

"Don't I know it," I replied honestly. He smirked darkly at me and chuckled as he shook his head.

"I guess there is fucking more to some people than I thought," he said, almost as if he had just found that particular thing out. "All people aren't shallow fucking pools, like Tanya or Lauren or anyone else in the Skank Pack."

"You have been living in a bubble, Edward. A bubble made of titanium or something," I said with a half-smile. "You never had a reason to see past the looks of people; you never needed to really get to know anyone. You are popular. People love you. They let you get away with your douchy ways because they love you. I would never have gotten away with behaving like you do."

"And that's what's fucked up," he muttered. "Some things wouldn't have happened if some people had some fucking backup." I met his

intense green eyes. There was so much conflict in there. He had so much stuff to figure out, and he had no idea where to start.

"And by some people you mean me," I sighed. He gazed back at me for a long moment before answering.

"That's exactly what I mean."

We both looked down on the cast. Jacob's drawing didn't fit with the others. Not even a little bit.

"Did he used to be your boyfriend or some shit?" he asked, with a weird tone that I didn't understand.

"No... we used to be best friends... then he did some things that... well... things that friends just don't do. I haven't spoken to him in months... and now he waltzes into my life, acting like everything is alright and that nothing ever happened." I sighed and shook my head. "I hate that guy. I loathe him with every fiber of my being."

"He must have really fucked up," he noted, and I snorted quietly.

"You have no idea," I whispered.

"But if you guys were only friends, why the hell would he draw something like *that* on your cast?" Edward asked confused and gestured towards the drawing.

I looked down on the cast, and I squeezed my eyes shut almost immediately. I couldn't even look at it.

It was a simple drawing, but it stood out like no other. It was a picture of two rings joined together, with 'B + J' written inside one of them and 'Forever' written inside the other. Jacob had really taken my mom's words literally – to draw something "permanent." And what was more permanent than *forever* ?

"You wouldn't understand," I whispered.

"Try me," he said, crossing his arms over his chest.

I shook my head and smiled sadly at him.

"No."

"Trust me."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you left. You said you were done."

"I came back."

We stared at each other in silence, and he smiled his crooked smile. It was a genuine smile.

"Edward... why do you even care?" I sighed. "Why *tonight* ?"

He frowned a little and looked down. Ever so slowly he put his hand between us, palm up. He was looking down at it still with that crooked smile in place. I didn't even think as I put my hand in his. Our hands fit together perfectly.

"I was supposed to drive to the store today to pick some shit up... I... I didn't even make it down the driveway," he mumbled. "My dad thinks I need help... professional help. He thinks I'm suffering from post traumatic stress disorder... he doesn't know how to help me, because I'm his son and it's not his area of expertise." He swallowed thickly before looking back up at me, and meeting my gaze. "He thinks I've gone insane or some shit..."

"Have you?" I asked softly, silently hoping he wouldn't take it the wrong way. He sighed and nodded.

"I think I have. I keep coming back here, for crying out loud... how is that not fucking insane?" he asked with a humorless chuckle.

"Billy Black, who was sleeping on the couch when you were here the last time, heard you. He told my parents that you had been here, that's why my dad nailed down the window," I told him quietly. "I didn't tell them it was you, though. I figured it was the least I could do if I was going to make you a killer..."

"You're not going to make me a killer," he replied calmly, sounding so sure of himself.

"How can you be so sure?" I asked, almost getting lost in his green eyes in the process.

"Because you let me in."

Start

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 27 – "Start"

Edward Cullen POV

I was furious. Beyond fucking furious. I was... *pissed* .

No fucking wonder that chick didn't have any friends – she was fucking insane. And what did that make me? She was the only one I had felt I could turn to tonight. I showed her a side of me that nobody had ever seen, a side I didn't even know existed, and she re-paid me by telling me she was going to make me a killer soon. I almost wanted to kill her myself for even suggesting that.

The way I felt when I was with her was like nothing I've ever felt before. And I didn't like it one bit. She was such a fragile thing. I had not a fucking clue about what she had been through, but it was obvious that it wasn't just some normal heartbreak kind of thing. I almost wanted to... *help her* or some shit. At least do something to get those stupid suicidal ideas out of her head. People shouldn't be fucking killing themselves, especially not when they already had survived so many times... was it three times already?

Maybe the fourth time would be the charm for her?

I plopped down on an empty bench by a bus-stop. I leaned forward with my elbows on my knees and hid my face in my hands.

What the fuck was I going to do?

This shit with Swan was about her mom. So much was clear to me now. Swan had talked in her sleep, and it was what had woken me up.

" Mom... don't do it... Mom... please... make him stop... Mom... you can't do this... Mom, it hurts... Mom..."

The anguish in her voice had given me goose bumps and I had watched her face contort in pain. It was an awful sight, and I never wanted to see that expression on her face again. If that was her just dreaming, I couldn't even begin to grasp what the reality had been for her. The conversation she'd had with her dad at the hospital made more sense now.

Swan had not tried to kill herself – and I would have bet a lot of money on the fact that her mother was somehow involved in what happened to her. This hadn't been just some family argument gone wrong, this was something else entirely.

But that didn't mean Swan had a right to act like such a bitch toward me. She called herself the Goose and a waste of space, because she knew that bugged the hell out of me. It shouldn't though, since that was what I had been hammering into my own mind for so long. She was the Goose, and she *was* a waste of space, and she *would* make the world a better place for everyone if she just jumped in front of a freight train.

So why the hell did the mere thought of it make me nauseous now?

It didn't make any sense to me. Nothing made sense to me anymore.

I looked down on my phone and bared my teeth in annoyance. I had several missed calls from my dad from the past few hours. I had put my phone on vibrate before I had entered Swan's house, since I didn't want to wake someone up by my phone ringing, and I didn't want to talk to my dad anyway.

I stared at the phone, just as the display lit up for the fiftieth time with one word. *Dad* .

I declined the call again, before putting the phone in my pocket and standing up from the bench. It was cold as fuck, and I just wanted to go home and get some fucking sleep. If I was lucky, my parents wouldn't be home yet. But since it was already past four thirty, and considering how the hell I had left things in Port Angeles, they were probably already home and waiting for my arrival.

I took my sweet time, walking casually back home. I wasn't surprised to see Dad's shiny Mercedes parked in front of the house, and that the house was all lit up. I dug my hands deep in my pockets, preparing myself for Operation Ignore-the-Shit-Out-of-My-Parents so I could hide away in my room without being fucking bothered.

Of course, nothing was ever *that* easy.

I hadn't even taken a step inside the house before my parents came rushing out from the other room. They were still in their fancy Thanksgiving clothes, and both wore worried expressions. Mom's makeup was ruined; she had clearly been crying.

"Where the hell have you been? You have any idea how worried we've been?" Dad yelled, but the anger in his voice was nothing compared to the panic in his eyes.

"Why the fuck would you give a damn about where I've been? Shouldn't you be kissing some rich doctor's wife's ass or some shit?" I spat back, totally forgetting about my plan to ignore the shit out of them.

"Sweetie," Mom said softly, her voice a total contrast to Dad's yelling. She stepped up to me and put her hands on my shoulders. "We've been worried about you. And not just tonight... you're not yourself, Edward. We want to help you, but you won't let us in."

I gave her an incredulous look, shaking her hands off my shoulders and taking a step back.

"I don't let you guys in? You serious?" I snorted. "You won't even fucking listen to me! Dad even asked me if I hit the fucking Goose on purpose! How the hell can I let you guys in if that's what you guys think of me?"

Mom looked confused and turned to look at Dad.

"What is this about a goose?" she asked. Dad sighed and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"It has come to my attention that 'Goose' is what they call Isabella at school," Dad replied in an aggravated, yet soft, tone. Mom looked back at me with a light frown.

"Honey, of course we don't believe you did it on purpose. It was slippery and you hit a patch of black ice; we know that. And we need to move past it," Mom said softly, "but we can't move past it until you open up and realize that you have a problem."

"A problem? So now I've got a problem? Fuck you!" I spat and turned towards the stairs.

"Don't talk to your mom like that!" Dad yelled. I snorted as I started upstairs. "Edward! You can't walk away from this anymore. It's time for you to take responsibility for your actions!"

I didn't answer him; I just kept on walking upstairs.

"Carlisle, it's late; we all need sleep. We can talk about this tomorrow," I heard Mom say softly. Dad just huffed in response.

I didn't slam my door when I reached my room. I was too drained to even make an effort and I found that disturbing.

"It's time for you to take responsibility for your actions..."

I grabbed my hair and pulled at it as I paced back and forth in the room.

Taking responsibility; wasn't that what I had been doing? I kept going back to Swan after all, and I was not going to let her fucking kill herself. Wasn't that taking responsibility? I was trying to be nice to her, but her damn attitude wasn't really helping. She would kill herself, and I was sure that the whole damn world would somehow pin that on me and make it my fault. If – or rather *when* – she went through with it, the rest of the world wouldn't know that I had known about her plan, but they would still blame me. Why wouldn't they? They knew I had threatened to kill her; they knew I had crippled her for life. They probably thought she had killed herself because she couldn't continue a life as a cripple. And that shit was on me.

I would be her killer in everyone's eyes. No matter what they knew about the situation.

How was I supposed to take responsibility for that? It was a fucking accident that I hit her that night, but it would be no fucking accident if I let her go through with her plan.

I had to fucking keep her alive.

I would not live with her life on my conscience. I deserved better than that.

My eyes caught sight of my trashcan – and the crumbled up paper that laid on top.

I picked the crumbled mess, unfolding it and trying to smooth it out. I already knew damn well what it was, and I knew that shit belonged in the trash. But I kept smoothing it out anyway.

It was the drawing I had made without thinking – the drawing of Swan's face. It felt like forever ago, even though in reality it was only a couple of weeks ago.

Weeks.

It had been weeks since the accident. It felt like days. Or maybe even years.

A lifetime.

I plopped down on the black leather couch by the window and stared at the picture. Now after spending so much time with Swan I realized the drawing was all kinds of wrong – as well as all kinds of right. This was Swan. Not the Goose.

I sighed and folded it nicely, and putting it beside me on the couch.

I was not going to throw that shit away. I had to have it as a reminder of how much she had screwed up my life, and how much power she still held to screw it up even more. I had to keep reminding myself. This wasn't about her – this was about me.

I glanced at the folded piece of paper and frowned.

Denial is a river in you too, douche.

I huffed and rolled my eyes at myself, as I stood up from the couch and walked over to sit by my keyboard instead.

Denial. Responsibility. *Idiot* .

They were all just words. They had no fucking meaning to me. Nothing had any fucking meaning to me. Everything was what it was and none of it meant anything.

I let my hands hover over the keys, moving them slowly but never touching. Music had abandoned me, just like everything and everyone else. I had fucking nothing. The only constant thing, or person, I had was Swan, and she wasn't going to fucking last. She had an expiration date, and her days were fucking numbered.

I let my hands fall to my lap, and I leaned forward to slam my forehead against the keys instead.

The keyboard wasn't plugged in, so no distorted tones rang out. Just a low thud.

I guess that was my fucking life in a nutshell now: a low thud without meaning or purpose.

Maybe I could strike a fucking deal with Swan – maybe we could do a fucking murder suicide type of deal. I could murder her and then kill myself. Since I would be her murderer anyway, I might as well save her the hassle by taking her life myself.

"Fuuuuuck!" I groaned as I slammed my forehead against the keys again.

I didn't even bother to lean back again. I let my forehead rest against the keys as I felt my heartbeat pound in my ears like a fucking drum.

I promised myself I would never move from that spot. If I stayed in that position for the rest of my life there was no fucking way I could screw my life up – or anyone else's for that matter. If I stayed right there, I would be fine.

And if you stayed right there, Swan would die. So yeah, awesome plan, dude.

So what if Swan died? What difference would it make to me? She's Swan. The Goose. The Thanksgiving-freaking-Turkey. She meant fucking nothing.

Yeah, if that's true... why do you keep going back to her? Why was her window the only place you could think of going when all hell broke loose?

Because I'm clearly fucking insane. That's why.

I didn't know how long I sat like that, like the pathetic, stupid idiot that I was, but at some point I had moved to my bed and passed out. I didn't wake up until hours later. Sunlight was shining into the room through the big window, mocking me with its brightness. I grabbed a pillow and put it over my face to keep the light away. It was then I realized it must have been a knock on the door that had awoken me, because there was another knock.

"Sweetie, you up? You hungry? I've made lunch," Mom said quietly from behind the door.

"Fuck you," I muttered, but my voice didn't carry because it was muffled by the pillow.

"Sweetie, you need to eat, and your father and I would very much like to talk to you," she continued when she didn't get an answer. That annoyed me and I threw the pillow aside.

"GO AWAY! If I want to talk, I'll talk, I just want to be left the fuck alone. Is that too much to ask?" I yelled.

"Edward, why are you making this so difficult?" she sighed.

I didn't have a response to that. I heard her sigh again before walking away. Her steps were muffled by the carpet in the hallway, and soon I couldn't hear her at all. She wasn't even fucking trying. Why didn't she come in, put her hands on my shoulders and just shake me? Why was it so easy for her to give up?

I was once again alone.

Exactly like I was supposed to be.

A few hours later I was so damn hungry that it was to the point of being painful. I had no other choice but to go downstairs to grab something to eat. I made it to the bottom of the stairs when I overheard my parents talking in the living room.

"... don't know, Carlisle, I really don't think Chicago is the right choice here," Mom argued softly.

" I spoke to Aro about it and he knows people in Chicago that are very good at treating these kinds of things... Edward could get help; he could get well. Don't you want that ?" Dad replied.

" I don't want to send him away. Why can't he get help here? He's not crazy. He's just going through a phase ," Mom argued with an edge to her voice.

" This is not a phase, if he doesn't get help with his PTSD. He needs help. I don't want to send him away any more than you do, but at this point it might be the only thing that we can do in order to help him. It might benefit him to get treatment away from home. He can get away from everything that reminds him about what happened."

" NO! You're not sending my son away, Carlisle. I don't care if it will speed up his recovery. I need my son and he needs me. I can't abandon him. I just can't. He's not going to Chicago. I'm not discussing this anymore. "

" Please, honey, be reasonable..., " Dad pleaded.

" Reasonable? I'm a mother and this is me being reasonable. Did the scene yesterday go unnoticed by you? Edward is falling apart, Carlisle, and sending him away won't help him. It will tear him apart! If you send him away, then I'm going with him. We're his family, we're not abandoning him!" Mom was crying now. Her voice was shaky and it kept cracking on her words.

" We're not abandoning him if we send him to Chi-"

" No, Carlisle! We're not sending him anywhere. We're a family and we'll get through this as a family. Why don't you take a step back from being a doctor and think like a father for once." Mom sounded pissed now.

" I am a father and I'm trying to do the right thing here ." Great, now Dad was getting riled up and angry too.

" No, you're a doctor. You're thinking like a doctor and you're talking like a doctor. You're not thinking like a father at all . We're not sending our son to Chicago. End of discussion. "

By this point, I had made it to the living room. I leaned casually against the doorframe as I waited for them to notice me. They were standing by the window. Dad had his arms crossed over his chest, leaning forward a little as he stared down at my mother. Mom held her one hand on her hip and the other was wiping her cheeks of tears. They were too busy being stuck in their bubble to even notice me.

I cleared my throat and they both turned their heads to me.

"Oh sweetie," Mom croaked and she immediately walked over to me. I shook my head as a silent hint that she was not to fucking touch me. She was frowning as she stopped a few feet away from me. "How are you feeling? Are you hungry? I was just about to start dinner. Is there anything special you'd like?"

"How about a Chicago deep dish pizza?" I snorted. Mom turned her head to glare at my father, which surprised me. She never glared at him. They never even fought for crying out loud.

Until you decided that it would be a good idea to kill a turkey...

I flinched automatically by the thought, and the movement didn't go unnoticed by my parents.

"Are you okay, son?" Dad asked.

"I don't know, you tell me," I replied coolly. "Why don't you call the people in Chicago and ask what they think? Huh? Since I'm insane and all."

"Don't be ridiculous, Edward, you're not insane. You're just going through something," Mom said and held out her hand. "Come on, let's get some food in you."

"We're still not done talking about this," Dad said, without moving from his place by the window.

"Yes, we are, Carlisle. I'm putting my foot down on this one," Mom replied in a tone that left no room for argument on his part. He shook his head disapprovingly, but didn't say anything.

I entered the kitchen with Mom. I sat down by the kitchen island and she started to prepare something for me to eat. I watched as she moved around fluidly in the kitchen. She was such a mom sometimes. She always looked so at home in the kitchen.

I wondered how Swan's mom was in the kitchen. Did she make a killer cheesecake too?

Or was she just a killer?

"Where were you?" Mom asked, as she put a glass of water in front of me, before going back to preparing the food. I took a sip of the water and held the glass between both my hands on the counter. I looked down at the glass and huffed.

"Nowhere," I muttered.

"You were gone all night," she argued softly. "How did you get home? Where did you go? Your father and I were home by midnight... and you weren't here... where were you?" She put a plate in front of me with two sandwiches and I didn't hesitate before grabbing one and stuffing my mouth full. She sat down next to me and put a hand on my shoulder. I shook it off me and she sighed deeply. At least she didn't try to touch me again. "Where were you?" she asked again.

"Nowhere important," I muttered with my mouth full.

"Your dad mentioned you stayed with a girl last week... did you go to her?" she asked.

I could answer that question without getting caught. A simple 'yes' would suffice, because it was the truth. But for some reason I couldn't even nod.

"Edward, sweetie, you can't keep locking people out like this. You need to let someone in," she pleaded. Her broken tone made something snap in me and I turned to glare at her. She flinched at the hostility in my eyes and I couldn't find it in me to care about that.

"Let someone in?" I scoffed. "How the hell am I supposed to fucking do that when everybody is refusing to fucking listen to me? My brother thinks I'm a fucking emotionless douche, my friends are turning their fucking backs on me, my father thinks I'm fucking insane and cares more about some other kid than about me, and you... you..." I gestured with my hand in her direction, trying to come up with what the fuck was wrong with her, but I was coming up short.

"And me?" she echoed softly, with a sad smile on her face. "What have I done, Edward? What have I done since you are unable to let me in and let me help you?"

"Nothing," I said with a monotone voice as I pushed my chair back. "You have done fucking *nothing* , and that's exactly why I can't let you in."

Her eyes welled up immediately and it just pissed me off. What the hell was with women and crying all the fucking time?

Swan doesn't cry...

I froze in my movements as the thought hit me. How the hell had I not noticed that before? Swan had been on the verge of tears a ton of times, but she had never actually shed a fucking tear. What the hell was up with that?

I shook the thought out of my head as I stood up from the chair, grabbed the remaining sandwich from my plate, and started to walk out.

"Edward, I don't know where you went last night... but you did go some *where* , and probably to some *one* . I know you, you wouldn't have gone to just anybody in the state you left the party in. It must have been someone you trusted..." she said quietly.

I stopped dead in my tracks. *Trust* .

"Cherish that, Edward. If you went to someone last night, it means you have already let someone in. Deeper than anyone else. Don't throw that away."

I huffed as I left the kitchen and went back up to my room.

What the hell did she know? She knew nothing. She didn't fucking know me.

You have already let someone in...

I refused to believe that. I refused to believe that I had let Swan, of all people, in. Especially considering her current plan.

When I got to my room, I grabbed a DVD without looking at which one it was, and put it in the DVD-player. I needed a fucking distraction. I needed to get the hell out of my head for a while.

I laid down in my bed, and I didn't even notice the movie starting. I was staring into space like a moron. It was ironic, really. I was too distracted to appreciate the distraction from what I needed a distraction.

When I finally began paying some attention – the end credits were already rolling, and the DVD soon set back to the start menu. I grabbed my remote and turned off the TV, before getting up from the

bed. I grabbed my jacket, which was thrown over the foot-end of the bed, and left my room.

I walked downstairs and I had not even put a hand on the doorknob before a voice rang out.

"Where are you going?" Dad called from the living room. I turned my head and saw him sitting in his favorite chair – he had a clear view of the hall and the stairs from there.

"Out," I muttered as I opened the front door.

"You want me to drive you somewhere?" he continued without getting up.

I snorted in response and stepped out before letting the door shut behind me.

I walked around aimlessly for a while. I went by the park where I used to play with my friends as a kid. I remembered how Jazz, Em and I used to throw sand at Rose and Alice. They didn't appreciate it, to say the least. And then I went by the school. I sat down on the bleachers by the football field. I leaned forward, as I rested my arms on my legs and stared emptily in front of me. My mind was assaulted by all the "wisdom" people were throwing at me.

"Cherish that, Edward..."

So now I was supposed to cherish whatever I had with Swan? In what fucking universe did that make sense? I groaned loudly and the sound echoed through the empty field.

I leaned back and looked around with frustrated eyes.

Okay. I was going to cherish what I had with Swan. I was going to take responsibility. And I was going to keep Swan alive. Simple enough, right?

I looked down on my watch and rolled my eyes at myself. It had been hours since I left the house. Maybe my dad had it right after all – I was clearly going insane. I kept losing track of time. Blacking out in my own mind. Not able to grasp reality.

Maybe I should go to Swan... she was clearly insane, and I was clearly insane too. Maybe we could be fucking insane together?

It took forever to walk to Swan's house from school – mainly because I managed to get lost. But I finally made it just in time. It was midnight. It was our damn time of day, or *night* if you will. We always met at night. This was fucking perfect.

No lights were on, other than the porch light again, and I took it as a sign that I was in fact, just in fucking time.

I walked around the house and stepped up to the window of Swan's new room. I could see her sleeping form already and she was back to having that pained expression. Her lips were moving, as if she was mumbling something, but I couldn't make out what.

I was just about to knock when I noticed something.

Nails.

There were several nails hammered down in the window's frame, making it impossible to open. The sight made my stomach drop, and I took one wavering step back.

She wasn't fucking kidding when she said that her window might be closing soon. I guess I just never thought she meant so literally. I never thought she would actually keep me out like this. I shouldn't have been surprised though, considering how I had left things.

I took a step back toward the window and rested my forehead against the cold glass. I stared at the sleeping form as if I could will her to wake. I supposed I could knock, but I wasn't going to do that. I

would let her sleep. The nails were her sign to me. She was fucking done, just like I had said that I was.

It was at that moment I realized I wasn't done. Not even close. I hadn't even started yet. I needed to get inside and I needed to fucking talk to her. Not just to save her damn life, but to save my own damn life as well. The only way I could keep myself from losing my mind completely was to talk to someone who wasn't judging me.

Swan never judged. She got angry and shot back when she needed, but she never judged me. Never. And I fucking needed that. I didn't fucking care if she was the Goose, or the Turkey or a fucking Seagull... she was what my mind needed to get some damn peace. And I would be damned if I let that go.

I touched the cold glass with my fingertips and sighed.

I guess I *had* let that train go. I had messed up one too many times.

I couldn't blame anyone but myself for this one. Swan was fragile and broken, I should have known better than to push her like I had. I had pushed her and been mean to her for too long, I should have *fucking known better* .

"Fuck, Swan, I'm sorry," I whispered, my breath making the glass fog up for a moment.

I sighed as I took a step back.

I had just managed to close the only window to my salvation.

There was no patch of black ice I could blame this shit on. The only thing I could blame it on was the black hole in my body where my heart was supposed to be.

I dragged my feet as I walked back home. I was so fucking screwed.

Emmett came home on Saturday night. He had a ridiculous goggle-tan on his face after skiing all week. He made wild arm gestures as he told our parents about his adventures and mishaps on the slopes, and he was so animated when he talked – even though it was clear that he was dead on his legs.

I leaned against the doorframe to the living room as I listen to his crazy story. Apparently Jasper and Rose's uncle managed to break his leg. Emmett thought that story was particularly funny.

When he was done with his story, I followed him upstairs to his bedroom. I had decided to swallow my damn pride and try to be his brother again, even though he was a freaking idiot.

Emmett put his duffel bag on his bed and began unpacking. All his clothes were wrinkled, and it was obvious that he hadn't put any effort in trying to fold any of it before packing.

"So, how was your week?" Emmett asked, without looking up at me.

I was standing by his window, so I turned my head to look at him.

"Fine," I replied with a shrug.

"Yeah, and that's why Mom called in tears in the middle of the night when you decided it was a good idea to go MIA," he snorted, still without looking up from his unpacking.

"Did she tell you why?" I asked with an annoyed huff.

"Actually, yeah, she did," he replied, looking up as he scratched his neck awkwardly. "Some bitch was giving you shit at dinner? Right?"

"Yeah, something like that." I nodded and turned back toward the window.

We were quiet as he continued emptying his bag.

"So where did you go?" he asked after a moment.

"Does it fucking matter?"

"Yeah, it does," he said, grabbing his bag and throwing it into his open closet. "We're worried about you, bro. So where the hell did you go?"

He stepped up to me and I looked up to meet his penetrating gaze. He was in Big Brother mode now. He was looking down at me and expecting me to cave to his will just because he was bigger. What a fucking joke that was.

"Nowhere," I said, feeling annoyed. "Let that shit go, already."

He smirked humorlessly and shook his head.

"When Mom called me to ask if I had heard anything from you, I was honest with her. I said you probably just went to some friend or some chick to fuck the angst out of your system... but in more cleaned up language of course. And that would have been fucking fine if she hadn't told me what happened on the way over to Port Angeles." He took a deep breath and sighed. "You didn't get laid, did ya?" It wasn't so much a question as it was a statement.

I scoffed and shook my head.

"Not really," I replied honestly.

"So where the hell did you go?" He threw out his arms in exasperation, almost knocking down a pile of DVD's from his desk in the process. I quirked an eyebrow at him and shook my head.

"It matters so little that it's not even funny."

"If you say so," he sighed, stepping away from me. "So how was your week other than your meltdown?" He smirked at me as he went over to his bed and collected his piles of dirty clothes. "No school... must have been cool? You need a ride on Monday by the way?"

"God, don't remind me." I sighed and pinched the bridge of my nose. "Going to school with a bunch of inbred dogs, this is going to be awesome." I groaned at the thought and Emmett chuckled.

"Just let it blow over, and if you get your shit together I'm sure Dad can make arrangements so you can go back to Forks. I don't think the Chief can say much about that. It's not illegal for you to go there."

"No, but he can put a restraining order on my ass," I muttered. *So? It's not like she wants to see you anyway.* I squeezed my eyes shut and pinched the bridge of my nose harder between my fingertips. "And if I get a restraining order on my ass, I'll be forced to change schools anyway."

"That shit is messed up." Emmett nodded. "But if you just let Swan be, then he'll have no reason to do that. He'll have no grounds for a restraining order. He can't hit you with one if you stay the hell away, right?" I sighed and he must have misinterpreted the sound because he rolled his eyes. "Yes, Edward, I know you love to torture the girl, but if you want to get your normal life back, you have to find someone else to annoy or find a new damn hobby. Swan is off limits. You shouldn't mess with her anymore, okay?"

I looked up and met his gaze, once again feeling annoyed by what I could see in his eyes. He was really taking this damn bodyguard and Brother Bear thing too far. But this was the first time that I didn't blame him for doing it, even though I was annoyed by it I also felt oddly grateful for that fact. Swan needed someone to have her back, and Emmett was as good as any for that job, especially since I wasn't allowed to have her back in public.

Have her back in public? Yeah, that almost sounded dirty.

It didn't matter. She didn't want me to have her back anymore. She was done.

"I'm done with her," I said, trying to ignore the weird feeling in my stomach that the words brought. "I don't want anything to do with

her." Talk about a lie.

"Sounds good." He nodded and yawned. "It's been fun catching up with ya, bro, but now, get the fuck out. I need my beauty sleep. I'm exhausted."

"Yeah, whatever." I chuckled as I left his room.

I went back to mine and closed the door behind me. My eyes immediately landed on the black leather couch – and the folded drawing of Swan that was still laying there.

I shook my head and smiled sadly to myself as I made it over to my bathroom.

I was done with Swan. Swan was done with me. Everything was exactly like it was supposed to be. I decided that was why I had decided to keep the drawing. It was a reminder of my short period of insanity.

I brushed my teeth and I felt restless as I got into bed, almost as if I was waiting for something. I expected that I was going to toss and turn all night and never get any sleep. Notice my surprise, however, when I opened my eyes and found that it was already morning. I wasn't feeling so good, though. I still felt restless and a feeling of dread was consuming me, as if I had just woken up from a nightmare or something, even though I couldn't remember having dreamed anything.

I went downstairs after my morning shower, and as I walked towards the kitchen, I heard voices coming from Dad's office. I couldn't make out what they were saying, but I could tell it was Dad and Emmett.

I didn't bother to stay and eavesdrop; instead I kept walking to the kitchen. Mom was there, leaning casually against the counter, reading one of her usual magazines about interior design. She looked up and smiled at me.

"Morning, sweetie, how you doing?" she asked softly, though she sounded somewhat hesitant, as if she didn't want to know – or as if she was afraid of the answer. I muttered an incoherent response and stepped over to the fridge. I groaned when I didn't find anything good enough to eat... hell, I couldn't find *anything* to eat.

"Why the fuck don't we have anything to eat in this fucking house?" I asked irritated.

"Language!" she chided with a smile, and shook her head. "Emmett was hungry when he woke up this morning. I guess he might have gone a little overboard."

"I'll say," I sighed and slammed the fridge door closed.

"Why don't you go to the grocery store? I was going to go, but I'm swamped. I have to prepare for a presentation I have tomorrow," she said and put her magazine down. I glanced at it and smiled crookedly when I saw what page she had been reading. It was an article about the concert hall she had designed the interior for. At least she was good at something.

She walked around the kitchen island and grabbed her purse. She rummaged around for a bit before picking up a hundred dollar bill. She handed it to me and nodded towards the fridge.

"Grab the list. I think this should cover it," she said with a smile.

I took the list from where it sat on the fridge door and frowned.

"Eh... Mom? I can't take all this shit on my bike," I said hesitantly.

She tilted her head to the side.

"I'm sure your father won't mind if you borrow his car," she said.

She left the kitchen and I stared at the hundred dollar bill that I had in hand and the grocery list in the other. So I was going to drive to the store. No biggie.

I rolled my shoulders a little as I kept telling myself it was no big deal. Yeah, Dad's car was a piece of shit car and didn't drive as well as my Volvo. But I didn't have much of a choice in the matter now, did I? I needed to go grocery shopping, because I was fucking starving and I needed food.

I walked to Dad's office and pushed open the door without even knocking. Dad was sitting behind his desk, and Emmett was sitting in one of the visitor's chairs. Both looked up in surprise when I barged in.

"Mom wants me to drive to the *goddamn* store since Emmett ate us out of the *goddamn* house, can I borrow your *goddamn* car?" I asked with a tired sigh. Dad looked surprised but nodded.

"Yes, of course, the keys are in the bowl by the door."

I walked back out, grabbing the car keys from the bowl. It was cold, and my breath came out as puffy clouds. I walked casually towards Dad's shiny Mercedes, while trying to ignore the uncomfortable feeling that I got in my gut as I came closer.

I pressed the button on the automatic keys and the low sound of the car being unlocked was followed by a couple of flashes of the lights.

I tried to swallow down the lump in my throat that I didn't even know was forming, as I stepped around the car to the driver's side. I didn't know why I was feeling so uneasy; it was just a damn car. I should have been happy to get behind the wheel again – even if it was in my dad's lousy ass Mercedes and not my beloved Volvo. This way I had full control over the situation. My life would not be in the hands of someone else.

This was *great* .

My hand was shaking as gripped the door handle and opened the door. I got inside and slammed the door shut, all in one fluid

movement. I adjusted the seat, set the mirrors to my liking and put on my seatbelt, before putting the keys in the ignition.

My fingers were ready to turn the key and let the engine roar to life with a soft purr. But my fingers weren't complying. They didn't want to turn the damn key.

"It's just a fucking car. *Fuck* ," I groaned to myself. "Just turn the damn key, drive to the damn store, buy some damn food, then drive the fuck home. How *fucking* hard can it *fucking* be?"

It was nothing but the pure frustration I felt for my stupid reluctance that made me turn the key. My body froze almost instantly as the car roared to life with me inside. I took a deep breath and breathed out slowly. *This is ridiculous ...*

I put the car into gear and put my foot on the gas.

My hands gripped the wheel tightly as the car slowly moved forward.

Suddenly I was not on the driveway anymore. It was dark and I was moving forward on an empty, dark street. The street sparkled occasionally, where the ice and frost had settled. I tried to squint in the darkness; it was impossible to see anything in front of the car. I sighed and turned on the high beams, hoping that would clear the darkness in front of me, helping me see more clearly.

That was when Swan suddenly appeared right in front of the car.

I stomped on the breaks just as Swan hit the windshield with a deafening crash.

I didn't even realize I had stopped breathing until I was beginning to see black spots. I tried to blink and shake myself out of it, but it was fucking impossible. I was losing all sense of my surroundings, the dark road was gone as was Swan – all I could see was the windshield.

Is that blood on the windshield? That's fucking blood. There's blood fucking everywhere...

A weird, claustrophobic feeling washed over me with such power that it rendered my mind blank and frozen. I was not aware that I had let go of the wheel, and my fingers were now tightly gripping my hair. I should have felt pain by the way I was pulling at my hair, but I couldn't feel a fucking thing.

Did I kill her?

A high-pitched shriek echoed in my head and I squeezed my eyes shut, as if that would shut out the sound. I rocked back and forth, the shrieking in my head blending together with a low whining noise. Panic surged through me and the harder I squeezed my eyes shut the more vivid the image before me became.

There was blood fucking everywhere. *Her* blood. *My* blood. *Our* blood.

My throat was hurting and it felt as though my heart was beating its way out of my chest – or as if it had stopped beating altogether. It was hard to tell.

There was another whine.

"Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck..." I think it was coming from me, but I couldn't be sure. It didn't sound like me. I couldn't even hear properly anymore. It felt as though I had been engulfed in a bubble. The outside world didn't matter anymore. The only thing that mattered was me and the image on the back of my eyelids.

Swan... fragile... broken... blood everywhere...

She's making me a killer. She's going to kill herself. There was so much blood, so much damage done, but she fucking survived. She *survived* ! That must fucking count for something!

But there was so much blood... she shouldn't have survived... so much blood...

There was no more shrieking in my ears there was no sound at all. The echo had died down, and the only thing I was hearing was... nothing. It was a dull silence.

She fucking survived... she shouldn't have. But she did.

There was a whimper.

I was no longer aware of my own damn body. I wrapped my arms around me in my mind and tried to keep myself together. It felt like something was about to break away, and I had to fight to keep it in place. I couldn't lose anymore. I wouldn't survive. And if I didn't survive, neither would Swan.

The only thing that mattered was me... and Swan.

I was assaulted by the image of her broken body with a leg twisted at an awkward angle, all covered in blood. I wish I could have said that it was just a flash of an image, but it wasn't. This image was kept in place, and I couldn't look away from it. I couldn't look away from my own mind.

I had broken her. Mentally. Physically. I had almost killed her, but she survived.

She had to continue surviving.

Nails be fucking damned. She was not going to keep me the fuck out. She didn't have the right to do that. The day she told me she was going to take her own life was the day she gave me the right to stop her. The right to keep her breathing.

I tried to take a deep breath, but my lungs didn't agree. It almost felt like they didn't know what they were supposed to do with the air. It felt weird. Almost as if the air wasn't supposed to be there. There

was a pressure against my chest and it kept the air from filling my lungs fully, leaving me breathless, weak and drained.

I was exhausted. I just wanted to curl up in my bubble and never leave.

If I just somehow could bring Swan into this place, then I would be fucking fine. That way I could keep my eyes on her and make sure she didn't screw my life up any more than she already had.

I could keep myself safe from the scrutiny and doubt of my family and friends, and I could keep her safe from her fucking family too, and from vicious bitches like Tanya. I could keep us both safe from life that was only waiting to screw us over even more. Like we both hadn't been through enough already.

I can keep us both safe...

Safe...

I wanted to keep the Goose safe.

For some reason that thought didn't bother me so much anymore. It was just... natural. She was going to die if I didn't do anything, and it would make me responsible. It was like the time she had almost choked during lunch, and people had just stared at her, laughing and pointing. She could have died that day too. And if she had, then it would have been on all of us. Everybody that had been sitting outside, watching her choke, would have been responsible for letting her die. Everybody had a fucking choice to take a step forward and help her. But no one did. Except Alice.

Alice had saved her life and Emmett was protecting her.

I wanted to do both.

I took another breath; this one easier than the last. It didn't feel like there was a pressure on my chest anymore. I could fill my lungs with

the air that they so desperately craved. I breathed slowly, and with each breath I became more aware. My senses were coming back and my bubble was slowly losing strength. I was no longer protected.

I could hear a soft humming sound, and as I slowly was brought back to the surface, I could feel someone softly drag their fingers through my hair, trying to smooth it out. I frowned at the feeling.

Where am I?

I slowly opened my eyes and blinked a few times. I was surprised to find my mom looking back at me.

"Hello, sweetie. Welcome back," she said softly.

I looked away from her and realized I was in my room and in my bed. I looked back at her with a confused expression and I could see tears welling up in her eyes.

"What the fuck?" I groaned, my voice hoarse.

"Oh sweetie," she whispered. "You had... you..." her voice cracked and she brought her free hand up to her mouth to cover her light sobs.

I was beyond confused. *I had what ?* At that moment Dad entered the room. "Is he awake?"

Mom smiled and nodded as she reluctantly left the bed. I tried to sit up, but Dad was quickly by my side and pushed me back down.

"No." He gave me a look that showed that he meant business. I sighed and laid back down. He smiled a tightlipped smile and frowned a little. "How are you feeling? Dizzy at all?"

I took a moment to feel whatever my body was feeling, and realized that I was indeed a little dizzy. And my head hurt like all hell. I groaned again and tried to massage away the headache by massaging my temples.

"Yeah, I figured." He sighed and handed me a glass of water and a couple of pills. "Take these. It will help with the headache and it will help you get some rest... I think that's the best thing for you right now."

I threw back the pills and swallowed them with a deep gulp of water. My headache was no joke and I needed to get rid of it. I wiped my mouth with the back of my hand before giving him a puzzled look.

"What the fuck happened?" I asked. His frown deepened and he looked as if he was in pain. He sat down on the bed and turned his body toward me, clasping his hands in his lap.

"Edward, I really wish you would agree to go into therapy," he began softly, and he quickly continued when I opened the mouth to speak. "Now, listen to me, Edward, you need help with what you're going through. This is not my area of expertise, and I would not be able to be objective if I was to help you myself... you are my son. I want to help, but I can't. The only way I can help you is to have you speak to someone else."

"What is there to talk about?" I muttered and Dad sighed.

"You have no idea how much I would have liked to bring you straight to the hospital, but I had a feeling that would have made it even more difficult to convince you," he said as he looked at me. He smiled sadly when he noticed that I didn't have a fucking clue about what he was talking about. "Edward, son, are you aware of what happened?"

At first I didn't know what the hell he was referring to. He couldn't have been talking about the accident, because there was no reason why he would ask me that. So he must have been talking about something else... but what?

Shit, wasn't I supposed to go somewhere?

How the hell did I end up in my bed, anyway?

As if on cue, my stomach grumbled and it all came back to me. It was as if someone had tipped a bucket of ice water over my head. Dad saw realization hit me, and he nodded softly to himself.

"It wasn't very pleasant, was it, Edward." It wasn't so much a question than it was a statement. I usually hated when he acted as if he knew everything, but I was too tired and confused to argue with him this time. "That will continue to happen to you if you don't get help."

"I'm fine," I argued, even though I didn't even believe it myself.

"No, you're not."

"Of course I'm fucking fine. I was just... just..." I didn't know how to end the sentence. How the hell could I explain why I had blacked out behind the wheel and succumbed to the darkness of my own mind? There was no reasonable explanation for that. My mind was fucked up.

"Why don't you rest, and we'll talk about this later?" he suggested, patting my leg.

He stood up from the bed and walked over to the door. He was just about to exit when I opened my mouth.

"How long was I out?" I asked in a quiet voice.

Dad looked back at me with a sad smile.

"About two hours," he replied softly. "Now, sleep."

He left the room and closed the door behind him.

I felt the pills take effect, and it didn't take long for me to once again fall into the darkness. But this was the good kind of darkness. It was the darkness of unconsciousness. I didn't feel a thing there...

The pills knocked me out cold for hours. When I did wake up, the blaring red digits of my alarm clock told me it was already after six in the evening. I climbed out of bed, my body still feeling a little off after the sedation. My mouth was dry and it tasted like shit, so I went into my bathroom to brush my teeth and get some water. I didn't feel so hungry anymore; the hunger was just a dull ache in my stomach now. Which was good, since I really didn't feel like eating right now anyway.

I stared at my reflection in the mirror above the sink and snorted at the sight.

I was a fucking mess. My hair was standing in every direction, my skin looked pasty and disgusting, and my eyes were bloodshot. It looked like I had been partying for two days straight.

Yeah, what a party, alright.

I dragged my hands through my hair and sighed deeply. I tried to remember what had been running through my mind when I had blacked out, and all I could see was Swan.

" Cherish that, Edward, if you went to someone last night, it means you have already let someone in. Deeper than anyone else. Don't throw that away. "

As I looked at myself in the mirror, it was almost as if I could see her face too. As if she was standing right behind me. I looked at the spot where I imagined she was standing and smiled sadly.

How things had changed ...

I exited the bathroom as I figured I might as well go downstairs and get something to eat. It didn't matter that I didn't feel like eating; I knew I had too. I needed food in my damn stomach if I was supposed to have the energy to go over to Swan's place later.

I chuckled and shook my head at myself, as I walked down the stairs.

I'm actually going to force feed myself, so that I won't pass out on my way to Swan's house.

And that was a sentence I never thought I would say... or think...

My parents must have heard me coming, because they were both standing in the living room and looking at the doorway when I entered on my way to the kitchen.

"We have any food?" I asked. Mom nodded and walked before me into the kitchen. I realized that they had already eaten an early dinner, which we usually did on Sundays. I let Mom prepare a plate for me, and I sat down by the kitchen island.

"How are you feeling?" she asked. "You feel like talking?"

"I feel like eating," I replied with a casual shrug.

She threw me a glance over her shoulder and smiled sadly.

"Edward..." she began and I shook my head. I tried to smile to show her that I was not ignoring my issues; I was just hungry. She smiled softly back at me, and I knew I had appeased her.

Mom put down the plate of food in front of me and I devoured it as if I hadn't seen food in days. She didn't leave the kitchen and she just watched me eat. Dad entered too but didn't say anything. I saw them share a look, and Mom shook her head at whatever silent question Dad had asked.

When I was finished eating, I muttered a thanks and left the kitchen. I heard them speak when I left, but I didn't stay behind to eavesdrop. I had somewhere more important to be.

I went back to my room to grab my jacket, and I met Dad on my way back downstairs. He looked confused when he saw my jacket.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"Out," I replied. I put on my jacket as I walked down the stairs and Dad followed.

"No, you are not. I thought we were going to talk about this," he argued.

"Nah, I'm not really feeling it," I said with a smirk, feeling amused by the anger that I saw flash in his eyes before he covered it up with his concern. I was feeling giddy for some reason, and I guess that was why I decided to fuck with him, just for the hell of it.

He didn't seem to enjoy it, though.

"Edward, you're not leaving this house. You need to rest and we're going to talk," he said as he grabbed my wrist on my way out. I tried to pull my arm back, but his grip was surprisingly strong.

"Yeah, I *am* going out," I said. "I need some fresh air."

"There is fresh air on your balcony or in the backyard. But I have a feeling you're going somewhere further than just the backyard. Am I right?" he asked with a frustrated voice.

I tried again to pull my arm back, but he kept his grip. I sighed and glared at him. He didn't even flinch and just stared emptily back.

"Stop running away, Edward," he sighed.

"I'm not fucking running away!" I snapped, all giddiness gone and anger taking its place.

"Go to your room, or do you want me to ask Emmett to carry you?"

I looked at him incredulously and he just quirked an eyebrow at me, silently challenging me to challenge him. It was all fucking backwards. I groaned and tried to pull my arm back a last time. This time he did let me go.

"Fine," I snapped and stomped my way up the stairs. He muttered something under his breath, and I was sure it had taken a lot of effort on his part to keep from saying whatever he wanted to say out loud.

I slammed the door when I got back to my room, and I started pacing back and forth. I needed to get the fuck out of this house. I needed to see Swan.

But just as the thought hit me I realized that it wasn't fucking possible for me to see her now anyway. It was six thirty. There was no way for me to see her at this time. Her parents were most likely awake, and if her dad spotted me I would be fucking dead meat.

I had to wait.

And wait I did.

It was just past eleven when I couldn't take it anymore, and decided to get my ass out of the house. Once again I was forced to play ninja, because my parents had yet to go to bed. I could hear them watching a movie in the living room, so I quietly moved to the front door and opened it quietly. I didn't bother to stick around to make sure they hadn't heard me – I all but ran down the damn driveway and into the woods.

As I made it down to the main road, I got a weird sickening feeling in my stomach – but it wasn't the usual nausea, it was something else. I soon recognized it as dread.

I had to move quicker.

I didn't even need to think what way to take to Swan's house now. I didn't need to worry about getting lost again. My body and my mind knew the route by heart, and it was good that they did. Had I gotten to the house only five minutes later, I would have been too late.

The light was on when I neared the window; I took that as a good sign and tried to ignore the feeling of dread I had in my gut. She was

awake; that was good. It meant I wouldn't need to wake her and risk having her parents wake up as well.

I walked up to the window and found Swan sitting on her bed. She was awake, but that was not all. She had propped a chair up against the door – hindering anyone from coming inside, and she was looking down on a bunch of white pills in her hand.

She looked... defeated. And not just the "I'll-come-back-around" kind of defeated, but "this-is-fucking-it-I'm-giving-up-now" kind of defeated.

I just stared at the sight before me, unable to move or speak or do anything. I was staring at her like she was staring at her pills. Neither of us was moving; it was as if time stood still.

She picked up a few pills from her hand and my eyes widened when I realized what she was going to do. She raised her hand and was just about to throw the pills into her mouth when I finally got control over my body again. I slammed my hand against the window; it was nothing short of a miracle that it didn't break.

Her eyes first flew to the door before she turned her head to me. She looked terrified.

You better be, you stupid goose!

"Swallow those pills and I swear to fucking God I will kick this window in and stick my arm down your throat and pull them back up myself!" I was barely able to get the words out. I was so fucking pissed that I was consumed by it. I gripped the window sill and almost bared my teeth at her.

"I can't open the window," she said.

As if a window would keep me out.

"I fucking know that already. Those fucking nails speak loud and clear, thank you. Now, tell me how the fuck I can get inside."

"You're signing your own death sentence," she warned me with a sigh.

So now she was worrying about my life? Pft, yeah right. If she was worrying about me and my life or my death sentence, then she wouldn't be fucking doing what she was doing right now. I took a deep breath and tried to get the anger under control.

"Yeah, and by not coming in I'm signing yours. So, let me the fuck in already," I replied with the calmest voice I could muster.

"There's a turtle by the backdoor to the kitchen," she sighed. I nodded and stepped away from the window.

The turtle by the kitchen door was easy to find and I turned it over, grabbing the key from its place. I quickly unlocked the door before putting the key back.

I barely glanced around the Swan house as I moved towards Swan's room. It was a sad excuse for a house; it was small and cluttered with stuff. But somehow it felt homey too. Homey but empty. If that made any fucking sense. Almost as if they strive to get a homey feeling, but the family that lived there couldn't bring it to life completely. It all felt... fake.

Swan's dad snored loudly upstairs, and I was glad that we would at least get a warning if he woke up. I made it to the room and I didn't dare to knock this time.

"Open the door," I whispered against the door.

I waited patiently as I listened to Swan move around in the room and remove the chair. She opened the door and walked back to the bed. I looked at the chair, almost wanting to smile at the cliché of it all. I closed the door and put the chair back in place.

We're in our bubble now.

We're safe.

I noticed Swan looking at me and I smiled crookedly at her.

"You seem paranoid... Nailing down the windows and barricading the door like this." I glanced at the pills that were now spread out on the bed. I was almost too late. Five minutes would have been enough. The thought made me sick. "I guess you didn't want to get interrupted."

She looked uncomfortable and started to collect the pills, putting them back in their container. "What do you want, Edward? I thought you were done with this... with me... whatever."

Defeated . There was no other word to describe her at that moment. Everything about her screamed defeat.

I sat down on her bed and scooted back so I could lean against the wall. I watched her every movement as she put the pills back where they belonged – in the drawer, and not in her system. She sat down on the bed, and I tilted my head as I looked at her.

"So, Swan, what brought you over the edge tonight?" I clasped my hands in my lap. Trying to channel my inner shrink in a sad attempt to lighten the mood a little. But as I asked, I felt that there was nothing light about the situation at all. It just frustrated me because I really needed to know. "Why tonight? Why not Thanksgiving? Why not yesterday? Why not this afternoon? Why *fucking* now?" I tried to keep my voice calm and detached. I needed to look at this from an outside point of view, or else it would fucking eat me up inside. I didn't know how to fucking react to the fact that she had actually tried to... *shit* . I couldn't even think it. It was all so fucked up. There was one thing to know about her suicidal thoughts in an abstract way; it was a totally different thing to actually witness her trying. It made it real. Before it had been just a silly thought, and now it was reality.

She looked up to meet my gaze and I tried to keep my eyes cold. I needed her to understand that I was fucking pissed that she was going to give up. But her face was enough to make my resolve crumble, and I felt almost as defeated as she looked.

"C'mon, Swan, what the fuck?"

"I could ask you the very same thing. You said you were done, why did you come back? Why tonight?"

"I asked first." I smirked softly. "C'mon, Swan, what do you got to lose? Your heartbeat is all you got left... right? Trust, remember? I got your back."

She smiled sadly, and I could feel her reluctance to trust me. I couldn't blame her for it either; she had no reason to trust me. Especially not after leaving like I did. She seemed to have an inner argument with herself, and when she opened her mouth, I was prepared to hear her tell me go to hell.

"Jacob drew on my cast... I guess I just didn't agree with what he drew."

I was momentarily confused at her random comment, and then I realized what the fuck she had said. And why. She was letting me in. She had forgiven me for being such a fucking ass-hat a few days ago. This was a breakthrough.

But then I realized *what* she had said, and my eyes immediately went to her cast. I leaned forward to get a better look and I pursed my lips as I studied the drawing. For some reason I found it fucking disturbing. Who the hell draws two rings and writes "Forever" on someone's cast when they're only teenagers... and not even together?

She didn't like the drawing, and that meant I didn't like it either. She almost killed herself over whatever feelings this shit brought her – and I wanted to strangle the dog for it.

"Okaaaay... What the hell was he thinking when he did it? Was it supposed to be a fucking joke or some shit? Because I couldn't see the punchline. It's not fucking funny." I tried not to let my anger shine through again. I met her gaze and saw that her eyes were watery with tears. But no tears fell over. She didn't cry. I couldn't stand to see her like this, so I looked back down. "This shit won't fucking do. This shit is fucked up."

"There is nothing I can do about it now anyway, is there? It's not like I can wash it all away and pretend it never was there in the first place. It's permanent."

She gestured to the cast with a disgusted look and I wondered what had happened between them to make her feel so strongly about this. He must have really fucked up if this was what pushed her over the edge. Nothing had been easy for her. Somebody should have been there for her.

I'm a douche.

She chuckled humorlessly and I looked at her.

"Don't I know it," she said. I smirked darkly and chuckled too. I shook my head at myself as I realized I had spoken the words aloud and not just in my head.

"I guess there is more to some people than what I thought. All people aren't shallow pools, like Tanya or Lauren or anyone else in the Skank Pack."

"You have been living in a bubble, Edward. A bubble made of titanium or something. You never had a reason to see past the looks of people. You never needed to really get to know anyone. You are popular; people love you. They let you get away with your douchy ways because they love you. I would never have gotten away with behaving like you do."

"And that's what's fucked up. Some things wouldn't have happened if some people had some fucking backup," I muttered, and she looked up to meet my gaze.

"And by some people you mean me."

"That's exactly what I mean."

We both looked down on her cast, and I resisted the urge to spit on it. That Jacob punk had defiled my mark on her. *My* mark. She didn't want it there, that much was obvious. And I sure as hell didn't fucking want it there. His drawing didn't belong on my mark.

Why did she let him draw that shit? Who the hell was he to her anyway?

"Did he used to be your boyfriend or some shit?" I was beyond annoyed. And the annoyance was mixed with a feeling I didn't recognize. Whatever it was, though, it wasn't pleasant.

"No... we used to be best friends... then he did some things that... well... things that friends just don't do. I haven't spoken to him in months... and now he waltzes into my life, acting like everything is alright and that nothing ever happened... I hate that guy. I loathe him with every fiber of my being."

"He must have really fucked up," I noted, as my mind tried to come up with something bad enough that he could have done to make her hate him so much. But I couldn't come up with anything that sounded plausible, especially since he hadn't been her boyfriend. If he had been her boyfriend, it would have left him room to betray her in more ways than one.

"You have no idea," she whispered.

"But if you guys were only friends, why the hell would he draw something like *that* on your cast?" I asked, gesturing towards the

disgusting image. She squeezed her eyes shut, not even wanting to look at it. *Why the hell did she fucking let him draw that shit?*

"You wouldn't understand," she whispered.

"Try me," I challenged.

"No."

"Trust me."

"No."

"Why not?"

"Because you left. You said you were done."

"I came back," I concluded, smiling crookedly at her and hoping that she wasn't going to close the window on me again.

"Edward... why do you even care? Why *tonight* ?"

There was a hidden meaning behind her words that did not go unnoticed by me. She wasn't asking why I had come tonight; she was asking why I had stopped her. Why I didn't just let her die.

Was it all about the fact that I didn't want to be a killer? Or was it about something else?

I put my hand between us, palm up. I didn't dare to look at her. Mom said I had let Swan in, maybe it was fucking time to show her that too. I needed her, and I needed her to know that. This was all I had to offer. She put her hand in mine and a weird feeling of finding home washed over me. I felt oddly at ease.

"I was supposed to drive to the store today to pick some shit up... I... I didn't even make it down the driveway... My dad thinks I need help... professional help. He thinks I'm suffering from post traumatic stress disorder... he doesn't know how to help me, because I'm his

son and it's not his area of expertise." I swallowed thickly before finally meeting her gaze. "He thinks I've gone insane or some shit."

"Have you?" she asked, but not in an offending or judging way. She was just asking.

"I think I have. I keep coming back here, for crying out loud... how is that not fucking insane?" I chuckled humorlessly and shook my head at myself.

"Billy Black, who was sleeping on the couch when you were her the last time, heard you. He told my parents that you had been here, that's why my dad nailed down the window. I didn't tell them it was you, though. I figured it was the least I could do if I was going to make you a killer."

My heart skipped a beat and an overwhelming feeling washed over me like a tsunami. I didn't know what the hell it was, but I took it. She hadn't shut me out – her Dad had. And she had protected me even though I said I was done. She still had my back, despite it all.

She had fucking let me in.

"You're not going to make me a killer." There was nothing I had ever felt so sure about in my entire life. Swan was not going to kill herself, because she would not make me a killer. Not after tonight. Not after this.

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because you let me in." *In more ways than one.*

She gave me a sad and pathetically weak, incredulous look.

"Dad would have heard you crash the window. You would have been caught. Dad would have probably found a reason to arrest you and throw you in jail... he would have thought you were breaking in and

maybe even assaulting me... then he would have found the pills... it would not have ended well for you," she sighed.

I shook my head as she spoke.

"That wasn't it," I argued.

"Of course it was."

I groaned and rolled my eyes.

"Fine, it was you protecting me. You're Saint Swan," I replied sarcastically. "Look, let's make a deal, alright? You stop doing shit like this and I promise I will... ehh..." I didn't know how to end the sentence; I had no fucking clue what to offer her. I had nothing.

"You promise you will have my back." Her voice was barely a whisper, but I caught it.

"I already do."

"But you said you were done... and I can't...", she sighed and was quiet for a moment to collect herself a little. "I've been through stuff that really messed me up. I'm not a person anymore. I'm just a shell, and you're fighting a losing battle by refusing to let me die. I'm not saying this to be morbid or to make you feel bad; I'm just telling you how it is. People have done things to me that had made it impossible for me to trust anyone, and I don't think you can even grasp how big this is." She squeezed my hands between us to emphasize her point. "I don't trust easily. Hell, I don't trust at all. And the fact that I'm even sitting here and telling you, of all people, all this... that is also messed up... I have your back, I told you I did. And you said you had mine... but then you left... I don't think I can take another person abandoning me again."

"I promise you, I will not go anywhere this time. I know I was a fucking douche last time, but I'm not leaving now. Not again." I tried to put all the conviction I felt into my voice to make her realize that I

was serious. She met my gaze and she still looked doubtful. I couldn't blame her. "I fucking need you, alright?" The words left my lips without me even realizing it until they were out. Her eyes widened and she looked almost scared.

"What do you mean by that?" she asked. She tried to pull her hand back, but I squeezed it tighter in mine. I couldn't let her back away from me now. We were onto something here.

"Exactly what I said," I said, trying to sound confident even though my voice was shaking and I felt anything but sure. I had never felt so fucking exposed in my entire life. I felt naked. And not in the "I'm-about-to-get-some-action" naked, this was "tear-my-fucking-heart-out-and-piss-on-my-soul" kind of naked.

"You need me? For what?" she asked hesitantly.

I smiled crookedly. I knew the answer to that, and I had nothing to lose by saying it out loud. I had nothing to lose and everything to gain. I had already lost everything. She was all I had left. She had my back, even when I had not had hers. She was trustworthy. She had already proved that to me. Even despite everything.

"Surviving," I replied, shrugging lightly in an attempt to make the answer less serious.

"You don't need me to survive, Edward," she said, slowly shaking her head. "Nobody needs me to survive." For some reason those words made her snort and she let out a sad laugh. "But I guess it all depends on how you chose to look at things."

"You wanna talk about it?" I asked hesitantly. "I'm not the world's best listener, but I can try, if you want to share? I'll fucking listen." She shook her head and smiled sadly. "You can trust me, you know. I'm not going anywhere this time. I promise. We're both fucked up, and I bet we could help each other to be less fucked up..."

She looked at me straight in the eyes and sighed.

"Four months ago, my world completely fell apart," she began. "I've never had many friends, and my life in Forks has always been awkward and weird... but I was fine with that. Because I had my family and I had the Blacks. I had Jacob, my best friend. I had everything that would make me happy, so I was... but then it all fell apart like a freaking house of cards... and I was crushed in the rubble... not a moment goes by without me being reminded of it... I continued going to school anyway, letting it be my distraction... I was fine having people call me names, because I didn't hear them... not really... you guys were constant. You guys didn't change..."

"You are really hung up on having people staying true to themselves," I noted quietly.

"That's because I know what happens when people do change... and from my experience that's not a good thing," she mumbled.

"Who changed to make you believe that?"

"Everybody."

I scoffed. "Way to narrow it down."

She gave me a tired look and I could once again see her internal battle in her eyes.

"My mom... but also Jacob... and his father... and my father... but mainly, my mom. Mom ruined me. She's sleeping upstairs as we speak, and I have no other choice than to accept her presence in my life even though I want nothing more than to see her die a painful death."

"Why don't you run the fuck away or something?" I asked. "I know I would." She quirked an eyebrow and knocked on her cast. *My mark* . But I didn't accept her answer. "So fucking what? People break bones all the fucking time. You know I didn't mean run away literally, right? You don't need to run; you can take a fucking cab or train or some shit too."

"I'm tired, Edward. I couldn't run away even if I wanted too. I don't have the energy and I'm just... I'm just done. You know? Besides, I have no money. I wouldn't survive. And where would I run anyway?" She had a point. I guess her lack of money never occurred to me, since I never had to worry about shit like that.

"You can't stay here if that makes you want to kill yourself either," I argued. "You can't stay with people that take away your fucking will to live."

"So? What are you going to do about it? Are you going to save me like a knight in shining armor, pick me up on your black horse and ride us off into the sunset? I have no choice, Edward! This is my freaking life whether I like it or not," she said, her voice shaky. "It doesn't matter if I run, my past will always haunt me because I will always be reminded of it!"

"What the fuck happened to you?" I asked exasperated. "All I hear is that your family and friends changed and broke you. But *what* did they do? What the hell could be so bad that you want to kill yourself because of it? What the hell could they have done to break you down to this?"

I struggled with keeping my voice low. I wanted to fucking yell at her. She frustrated me so much. I could see my own frustration being mirrored in her eyes. She was feeling just as frustrated as I was.

"I haven't told anybody, because they would have me committed. They would think I was insane!"

"Are you?"

"NO!"

"Then tell me."

"You wouldn't believe me even if I did..."

"Tell me what the fuck happened! And I'll tell you one thing: I don't care if you don't have any money. I still believe you could always run away if it's as bad as you make it out to be. You can *always* run away! You can forget all about it! Run the fuck away and forget it all. There will be nothing to remind you of it."

She took a deep sigh; frustration and annoyance were clear even in that simple sound. She removed her hand from mine and pulled up her sleeve. I frowned and wondered if we were going to have a repeat of last time...

"I will *always* be reminded of it. I will never be able to forget because I bare the marks that will always remind me of the night that ruined my life." She stared me dead in the eyes as she said the last part. "The reason I will always be reminded is because my own mother gave me these scars. She cut my arm and drank my blood. Yes, you heard me. She freaking drank my blood like a damn vampire! And that was just the appetizer! She hadn't even begun torturing me yet!" She took a deep breath and tried to collect herself. I kept my eyes on hers, seeing all the emotions flashing past. Horror. Shame. Pain. *Relief ...*

She was practically panting. Her eyes were welling up with tears and I swallowed down the lump that was forming in my throat. What the hell was I supposed to say in response to that? If I hadn't known any better I would have thought she was making the shit up, but she had the scars to prove it... and Dad's file too. *The scars are not self-inflicted...*

"She... you... *fuck* ," I muttered, hating myself for not finding the words. "That's fucking crazy."

"I'm not crazy!" she snapped, her voice cracking on the last word.

"Fuck, no! I'm not saying you're crazy. I'm saying that the situation is crazy. Because it is. Okay? I believe you. I swear to fucking God I believe you."

I grabbed her hand again and it felt as if we both relaxed as our hands came in contact with each other.

"Why don't you tell me the whole story," I suggested softly, and she shook her head.

"I have kept it inside me for too long, I don't even know where to start... it's all insane."

"I'll believe you."

She met my gaze, looking so doubtful.

"I have your back, Sparrow, I promise you I do," I said, trying to reassure her.

"I'm not ready," she whispered.

"Don't worry, I'll be here when you are."

Backbone

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 28 – "Backbone"

Isabella Swan POV

We didn't talk much after that. We were both trying to grasp the situation we now found ourselves in. Edward had brought my hand to his lap and he traced my fingers with his own; it was kind of weird, but I let him. I had a feeling that he needed it in order to come to terms with everything. He stopped tracing my fingers and put his palm against mine for a moment, before letting our fingers braid together, joining our hands in a sweet embrace. He frowned a little as he stared down at our joined hands.

"Having fun?" I asked him gently. He glanced at me and chuckled, his frown fading.

"Not particularly," he replied with a lazy smirk. He looked into my eyes and cocked his head to the side. "You have golden flecks in your eyes," he noted, almost sounding amazed. I looked away as I felt my cheeks blush.

"Yeah... my mom used to call me star Eyes when I was little. She always said I had all the universe's stars in my eyes... they're only visible in certain light... just like stars," I mumbled, embarrassed. He frowned at the mention of my mom, but he didn't say anything. For

that I was grateful. "So... school tomorrow," I said, breaking the somewhat uncomfortable silence.

He groaned and leaned his head back against the wall. "Fuck, don't remind me," he muttered.

I bit my lip and looked away. I tried to pull my hand back, but he kept it in a steady grip. I looked up and saw that he was staring at me; his eyes were filled with so much sadness. I didn't try to remove my hand from his again. I had a feeling he needed it.

"Are you going back tomorrow?" he asked and I nodded. "Can you do me a favor?"

"That depends on the favor," I replied hesitantly. He chuckled before his face grew somber.

"Can you please just..." he trailed off and took a deep breath before continuing. "Can you please just humor Emmett and Alice tomorrow and let them do their shit?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, now feeling slightly on edge.

"They want to fucking protect you, alright?" he snapped, almost sounding angry about the whole thing. I didn't blame him; he probably still held a grudge against his friends for abandoning him.

"Why-" I began, but he cut me off.

"I told you, I have your goddamn back, but I can't have your back at school... or in public at all, really." He looked pained when he said the last part, and I didn't understand it at first.

"But-" I tried again, but he didn't let me finish this time either.

"I made a fucking promise. I have your back, but I can't help you at school or in public. Because we both know that we're both screwed if anyone finds out, alright? But I do have your back, and this is my way to do that. Okay? Let Emmett be your damn bodyguard, and

humor Alice by listening to her crap, is that too much to ask for?" he said, sounding aggravated. I guess he really meant it when he said he had my back. It wasn't just words with no meaning. He really *did* mean it.

But even though he sounded sincere, there was still a part in the back of my mind that kept nagging at me to not trust him. *He's Edward Cullen. Why would he of all people care about me?*

"Edward," I protested, but he just shook his head.

"Just fucking do it, alright?" he sighed exasperatedly. I quirked an eyebrow at him and his tone, and he just looked back. "Trust me, Sparrow, you will need someone at school now. You can't go around undetected anymore. Tanya will fucking kill you."

"I'm not afraid of her," I said, my voice betraying me by cracking.

"Of course you're not," he said, rolling his eyes. "But that bitch is fucking crazy, alright? A fucking psychopath. Everybody probably knows that I had to change schools because of you. You won't be safe there anymore."

"You really think people care? You really *do* think highly of yourself," I replied dryly.

He snorted. "I don't think anything. I just know how these fucking people work. Alright? Maybe I'm not the only one who has been living in a damn bubble, if you don't even know what role I played in that damn school. I was fucking *it*, okay? And Tanya is fucking obsessed with me, and she will probably try to avenge me by going after you."

"It's just high school, Edward, it's not a movie about some crazy avenger," I sighed.

"Just high school? C'mon, Sparrow... it's not just high school. Were you not there when she knocked you unconscious? Because I was,

and it was fucking brutal. So don't you dare say this was nothing, because it fucking was. Tanya is a crazy bitch who I made the mistake of stringing along for too goddamn long. This is on me, and the only way I can fucking protect you from her is to have Emmett by your side. Alright? You think you can do that for me?"

I gave him a tired look and he gave me an innocent smile.

"Is it just me, or are you demanding quite a lot?" I asked with a light snort.

"Demanding? Fuck you! I'm only trying to keep you safe. What the hell is so wrong with that?" he asked.

"Safe? Are you kidding me? Two weeks ago you wouldn't even bat an eye at my damn safety, and now it's suddenly your only concern? What the hell are you smoking?"

He looked oddly hurt by my words, but he quickly covered it up with an emotionless mask.

"I'm just trying to do the right thing, alright? I'm just trying to fucking survive. And this is how I'm doing it. I don't fucking know why the hell I need you alive, all I know is that I do. Your safety is my fucking concern because things *changed* and now we both have to live with that damn change, alright?" His voice began to crack, and his breathing became shallow. He dragged his free hand through his hair, and his other hand gripped mine more tightly. I swallowed thickly and the voice in the back of my mind quieted. This was Edward. He wasn't playing me. This was him in his most naked form. I had to trust him. He wanted me safe, because things had changed. It didn't matter how much I hated change, especially in people, but maybe this was one of those better changes. Maybe having Edward change wasn't such a bad thing.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled. "For putting you through this."

He shot his eyes to me, and if looks could kill, he would have killed me right then and there.

And made him a killer, how ironic...

"What the fuck are you apologizing for? None of this shit is your fault," he growled.

"But it is-"

" / hit a patch of black ice, how the hell is that your fault?" he spat.

"I refused to get out of the way!" I spat back. I was irritated now because he never let me finish a damn sentence. "I had all the time in the world to jump out of the way. I even thought about it. But I didn't, because I wanted to die, and you gave me an easy out!"

All the blood rushed from his face as if someone had pulled a plug. As the color left his face, I felt the irritation leave my body. Damn it, this was not how I had planned this to go. Hell, I hadn't even planned it at all. I never thought I was going to admit that to anybody, and now that I had admitted it to the only person that was by my side, he would leave. He had no reason to look out for me anymore. He had no fault in this, and no guilt he had to carry. This was all on me, and he would realize that and not give a crap about me anymore. He would have no reason to care anymore.

"Are you... are you fucking serious?" he said slowly, his voice shaking. I couldn't tell by his tone whether or not he wanted it to be a lie, so I had no other choice but to nod and confirm it as the truth.

"Yeah, I am," I confirmed quietly. "I almost made you a killer by my own choice. This mess is all on me." He gaped openly at me now and his mouth opened and closed like a fish on dry land. I would have laughed if the situation had allowed it. But it didn't.

"You... you could have gotten out of the way... but you stayed put because you wanted to die," he echoed mostly to himself; all the

anger from before was gone. "You could... but you didn't... you stayed where you were... you could have jumped... but you didn't..."

"I'm sorry," I whispered, my voice cracking at the simple words. He turned his head slowly to me and I was afraid of what I would find when looking into his eyes. Anger? Frustration? Disgust? His mouth was twitching and I didn't know if that was a good thing. But then I finally looked up and saw his eyes.

It was a good thing.

"It wasn't my fucking fault," he said, breathlessly. I smiled crookedly and shook my head softly.

"No, it wasn't... and I'm sorry... this is all on me... people should hate *me* . People should blame *me* . People should turn their backs on *me* ," I whispered. He looked at me in silence for so long that I had to look away. His intense gaze grew uncomfortable rather quickly.

"Is it wrong for me to be relieved by that shit?" he asked, somewhat hesitantly.

"No. Definitely not." I smiled softly, trying to pull my hand back again. But once again I was met with resistance. He narrowed his eyes at me and pursed his lips.

"Are you fucking lying to me?" he asked, now sounding suspicious.

"What? Of course not!"

"So you're not trying to con me into believing some shit just so you can get rid of me?"

I looked at him confused. "What do you mean 'get rid of you'?"

He sighed and rolled his eyes at me.

"Did you say that shit just so I would go away? You think I'm here just because I feel guilty about what happened?"

"No!"

He looked at me for a long time, before a tired and sad smile graced his features. He sighed deeply and shook his head softly. I could see in his eyes that he had chosen to believe it, and I was surprised that he didn't show any signs of wanting to leave. He stayed sitting, as comfortable as ever. My confession hadn't scared him off at all.

"I guess it makes fucking sense if you did," he agreed finally. "You wanted to die... Hell, you still do ... you almost died tonight...and I can't fucking blame you... Your mom fucking cut you."

I was momentarily speechless, and I didn't know if it was because of what he said or the way he said it. I had yet to get used to him being nice to me, let alone talking to me like I was an equal and not just the Goose. Even after hearing that I was responsible for ruining his life, he still didn't sound as if he hated me. He didn't yell at me, telling me that I was a waste of space or that I should have died for putting him through all this. Instead his tone suggested that he didn't trivialize the thing with my mom or my suicidal thoughts, unlike the way everybody else had trivialized my supposed suicide attempt. Edward didn't trivialize me or my experiences at all. While I didn't understand it, I sure did appreciate it.

I smiled sadly and looked away from him. He sighed again and squeezed my hand in both of his.

"That's so fucked up, you know that? And nobody knows?" he asked and I shook my head. "But... but... I don't fucking get it. How can people not know? What about your dad?"

"He wasn't home," I sighed. "And when it all came down to it, and Mom realized she had cut too deep and that I was bleeding out, she made it look like I had tried to kill myself... and that was the story my dad chose to believe." He didn't look at me with an incredulous look,

which I had expected him too. Instead he just nodded in understanding.

"You didn't try to convince him otherwise either, huh," he stated more than asked.

"I was in shock. It took a while for me to even understand what had happened, and when I finally got my senses together, I just couldn't get it out... and the few times I have tried, Dad has just shut me down, telling me that she tried to help me..."

"So that's what you guys were talking about at the hospital?"

"When you hid in the closet? Yeah... pretty much..."

He frowned for a bit then his eyes lit up with anger. I first thought the anger was directed at me, but the words that escaped him proved me wrong.

"When you had that spat with that punk at the grocery store, you said something about being left for dead... I thought it was just a figure of fucking speech or some shit... but you were fucking serious, weren't you? He was there; that's why you hate him so much!" He barely took a breath between sentences, everything coming out in a jumble. I looked away, but not quickly enough. He caught the confirmation in my eyes. He took a deep labored breath, breathing out slowly as he slumped where he sat. It was as if everything had left him with the air he exhaled.

"Fuck me backwards," he said.

"I'd rather not," I joked half-heartedly.

"No fucking wonder you are such an easy target at school. Why you don't defend yourself and why do you let people treat you like crap? You... *Fuck me* !" He sounded so amazed at the fact, and I couldn't do anything but shrug again.

"Still, I'd rather not," I said again. He quirked an eyebrow at me with an amused tint in his ever so serious eyes.

"You're not as weird as I thought you were, well, yeah, you're fucking weird as all shit, but not in the way I thought. I figured you were just some loser girl that had no fucking friends because you were too weird... but fuck, there is so much more going on with you," he said, and I couldn't help but laugh.

"Yeah, and I thought you were just a shallow guy who spent all his time banging random girls in the janitor's closet, or drinking his ass off with his cool buddies," I snorted quietly, and he scoffed.

"Trust me, you're not the only one thinking that about me," he said, dragging his free hand through his hair again. "I can't blame people though. I've never given anyone any fucking reason to have any other opinion about me. And up until the accident, that was pretty much all there was to me anyway."

"You're saying there's more to you *now* ?" I asked, trying to sound teasing and not condescending.

He tilted his head to me and half-shrugged. "You tell me. I don't fucking know."

I didn't respond to that, because I wasn't entirely sure yet. Or maybe I was sure, I just didn't want to tell him that. Not yet. He smiled crookedly at my silence and squeezed my hand again.

"It's okay, I don't expect anything," he said with a sigh. "But I should probably go now."

"Yeah, you should," I mumbled.

"But before I go, I think there is something I need to do," he said, gripping my chin to make me look at him. His gaze was intense and I felt my breath hitch. He smirked and I stopped breathing altogether. What the hell was he doing? "You have a pen?"

I blinked. I blinked again. Wait... *what* ?

"A pen?" I echoed confused.

He chuckled and nodded towards my cast. "You don't want that shit there, and neither do I. So mind if I draw something over it?" he asked.

"You would do that?" I asked surprised and he rolled his eyes, as he let go of my chin.

"Duh," was his answer. "So, you have a pen or what?"

"Yeah, there should be a few pens on the table in the living room if my mother hasn't removed them," I replied. He swiftly left the bed and walked over to the door. He quietly removed the chair before walking out.

He returned a few moments later with a few colored pens in his hand. "Found 'em."

I smiled weakly as he closed the door behind him again, before walking to sit back down on the bed. He looked at the cast for a moment, probably contemplating what to draw, and then he picked up a black pen, removing the cap with his teeth.

I watched him as he drew, but I wasn't looking at *what* he drew. I just watched his face as he worked. He looked so serious and focused, and every once in a while he sighed and frowned.

I lost track of time, but finally he leaned back and put the pens aside.

"Done," he said, sounding fairly pleased with himself.

I smiled at his expression, before looking down on the cast. I didn't know whether to laugh, cry or to punch him in the face. I decided to laugh, because it was funny... sort of.

"You think you're funny, huh," I teased.

"Why yes, I do think that," he replied with a smug smirk.

I looked back at the drawing and rolled my eyes.

It was a bird. And not just any bird, it was an owl. Somehow he had managed to use the form of the rings to use as its eyes, and it looked totally fine. The words that Jacob had drawn were now hidden in the feathers of the owl. It was as if Jacob never happened.

"Why an owl?" I asked him. "I can understand penguin... or turkey... or goose... but why an owl?"

He smiled a genuine smile at me. "Because owls are night creatures, and we always meet at night, right?" I couldn't help but smile at his analogy. It fitted so well, and I was moved by the fact that he had put some kind of symbolism into the drawing. It wasn't just some meaningless cover-up; this had a meaning. This was us.

"Thank you," I whispered and he chuckled softly.

"Don't mention it," he replied, as he stood up from the bed. "See ya tomorrow?"

I shrugged and nodded. "I guess?"

He nodded too, before turning around and walking over to the door to leave. He put his hand on the doorknob but turned back to look at me before opening.

"Please, promise me you'll let Emmett and Alice do their shit tomorrow, alright? And don't let that fucking bitch get to you," he said, almost pleadingly. I sighed deeply and rolled my eyes.

"Fine," I agreed and I could see him visibly relax.

"Thanks, Sparrow," he smiled softly. "Sweet dreams."

"Yeah, yeah, whatever," I muttered, and he chuckled quietly as he left the room and closed the door behind him. I stared at the closed

door for a moment before getting under the covers, and turning off the lights. It didn't take long for me to fall asleep.

I woke up the next morning because Dad was knocking on the door, telling me to get up. I left the comfort of my bed to get ready for school. Mom was still sleeping when Dad drove me to school, and I was happy I didn't have to deal with her crap the first thing in the morning. It was enough that I was stressing out over school. I was beyond nervous. I didn't know what to expect. What if Edward was wrong? What if Emmett and Alice were done with me? What if they didn't want to protect me anymore, especially after how I had treated them the last time?

Dad pulled up in the school parking lot; he hadn't spoken a word to me since we got in the car. He sighed and looked over at me.

"Will you be okay, kiddo?" he asked with a soft smile. I nodded.

"I'll be fine," I mumbled in response, as I opened the door and climbed out. I grabbed my crutches and steadied myself on them as I turned to look back at my dad. "Eh, Dad? Can you do me a favor?" He raised an eyebrow at me, but didn't nod or shake his head. I sighed. "Can you please remove the nails from the window? I like to sleep with the window cracked open a bit. The room is so small and it gets too hot during the night." The lie rolled off my lips easily. I didn't even need to think about it. Dad cleared his throat and scratched the scruff on his cheek.

"I'll see what your mom says," he mumbled. I glared at him and huffed in annoyance.

"Her opinion is more important than me getting a good night's sleep, huh?" I muttered.

He opened his mouth to respond, but I didn't wait around long enough to hear it. I slammed the door shut and wobbled away. I wasn't surprised that he didn't step out of the car to stop me; he just drove off.

I kept my eyes on the ground as I made my way towards the steps, and I ignored all the looks and whispers that were thrown my way.

"Hey Bella!" Both relief and dread washed through my body at the sound. I slowly looked up and met Emmett's gaze. He was walking towards me with a big grin on his face. "Nice to see ya up on your legs again. How ya feelin'?"

"I'm... good," I replied, forcing a smile for his benefit.

"Happy to hear it. C'mon, lemme walk you to your locker," he said.

To say that people were staring at us, as we walked together, was the understatement of the century. People whispered, pointed and gaped at us like we were on a freaking exhibit at the zoo or something. While it bugged me, it didn't even seem to register Emmett. He was just grinning as he walked down the hall with me by his side. Emmett was weird.

We reached my locker, and I expected him to leave me after that. But instead he leaned casually against the locker next to mine; his grin never leaving his face.

"So... eh... how was your trip?" I asked awkwardly. He looked confused for a moment before grinning even wider. I noticed then that he had a light tan on his face, and I could make out where his snow goggles had been. It was pretty adorable for a big guy like Emmett to have a stupid tan like that.

"It was great," he replied, before going into a detailed rant about everything they had done. I couldn't help but smile at his enthusiasm, and I felt myself relax slightly. Emmett was such an open person, and I found it almost impossible to not be comfortable around him. Maybe Edward had it right after all, maybe it was worth it to humor Emmett by letting him do his thing?

Emmett was in the middle of telling me about someone breaking their leg, when Alice showed up.

"Hey, I stopped by your house, but your mom said you had already left for school. I thought we had a deal," she said, pouting. I raised an eyebrow in question, not understanding what she was talking about, and she rolled her eyes. "We agreed we would drive to school together, remember? Since you can't drive?"

"Oh... yeah... I didn't think you... I mean... I forgot?" I stammered.

She waved it away casually with her hand. "Don't worry about it, but wait for me tomorrow, alright?"

"Yeah... sure," I replied, gnawing on my lip. While I had accepted that I could be comfortable around Emmett, I had yet to decide what I really thought about Alice. Even though she had been the one to save me from choking, I still hadn't decided if I liked her. There was something about her that I simply couldn't grasp. Or maybe her overly enthusiastic nature was more than I could handle?

My morning classes passed without much incident. Alice sat with me during the one we had together, and while the rest of the class was getting acquainted with the new teacher in gym, I went to the library to catch up on some homework.

I had to do an assignment for my English lit class that the rest of the class had already done the previous week. Halfway through I realized I had to find two books for reference, and I awkwardly moved through the aisles of the library in search of them. The sound of my crutches echoed in the silence, and it made me cringe every time. Libraries were supposed to be quiet places, and here I was being as graceless and soundless as an elephant in a china store.

I finally found the books I was looking for, but I couldn't do anything but stare at them in frustration.

I couldn't grab them from the shelf, because the shelf was too high up. *Damnit* .

"Are you practicing your telepathic powers, or do you want some help with that?"

I turned my head with a sigh and smiled crookedly at Jasper, who was looking at me with a lazy smirk of his own.

"If it isn't too much to ask," I said.

"No problem," he replied and took a step closer. "So, which one do you need?"

"Those two," I said, pointing.

Even though Jasper was easily five inches taller than me, he still had to stand up on his toes to reach the books. I guess I wouldn't have been able to grab them myself even if my leg had been well. Good thing he was there to help.

"Here ya go," he said, handing me the books, but stopping in mid-movement when he realized both my hands were busy clutching the crutches. He chuckled. "I guess I can carry them to your table."

I smiled softly at him and turned around to wobble back to my table.

"Thanks," I said, as he put them down next to my homework. I sat down and grabbed one of the books, ready to continue with the assignment. But Jasper was still standing next to me and I looked up at him with a confused smile. "Eh... what?"

He chuckled again and scratched his neck awkwardly. I guess the chuckling was a nervous tic of his. He didn't look comfortable at all. He threw a look over his shoulder, to make sure nobody saw us talking. I guess just because his girlfriend had taken me under her wing, so to speak, didn't mean he was okay with it. Jasper wasn't going to pretend he was my friend just because that was the right thing to do.

The guy was no hypocrite, and I respected him for it.

"What?" I asked again.

"Damnit," he muttered and took a step closer to me. He squatted down beside me and looked me sternly in the eyes. I almost got the feeling that he was angry with me, but when he gently touched my arm, I realized that was not the case. "Watch your back, alright? Lauren and Tanya are on the warpath."

I chuckled without thinking; he sounded so much like Edward. They really believed that Tanya was out to get me. Jasper gave me a funny look and I quickly collected myself.

"I'm sorry, didn't mean to laugh, but you're not the first one to warn me about that... and I can't help but be a little skeptical... they've always been on the warpath as far as I'm concerned, so I don't see what the difference is now," I replied honestly.

"The difference is that Tanya is addicted to Edward's dick, and since he's not here to give it to her, she's getting aggravated. She's going to lash out at someone... and that someone is you, I'm afraid," he warned with a tired sigh. He squeezed my arm a little and I looked down on it automatically, as did he. Something changed in his eyes right then, and I wondered what he was thinking.

"Why are you telling me this?" I asked suspiciously and he looked up from my arm.

"People like Tanya have too much damn power, that's why I'm telling you this," he replied as he stood back up. "Keep your head up, Swan. Don't let that bitch get to you."

I watched him go before turning back to my assignment.

"I wasn't planning on it," I mumbled to myself.

Before I knew it, it was time for lunch. I made it to my locker and stuffed my books inside. I hadn't thought much of what to do during lunch hour, so I decided to go back to the old music room. But of

course, I never even got the chance to leave my locker before Alice popped up out of nowhere.

"You're sitting with us today, right?" It sounded more like a demand than it was a question. I smiled weakly in response, resisting the urge to say no. But as I thought about it, Edward's voice echoed in my mind. *Just humor them ...*

I didn't have much of a choice in the matter, so I let Alice drag me off towards the cafeteria.

When we got there, we found Emmett, Jasper and Rosalie in line already. We stepped up to them and I tried to ignore the look that Rosalie was giving me. She didn't need to speak up about what she thought about my presence, her disgust was evident in her eyes.

Alice helped me out by putting our food on the same tray and carrying it to the table. If I thought people had been staring at me this morning, when I had walked with Emmett, it was nothing compared to what they were doing now when I was actually sitting with them. As if I belonged there.

Alice and Emmett pretended like there was nothing out of the ordinary going on. Jasper looked down at his plate, frowning and slumping in his seat; he didn't look comfortable with the new attention. Rosalie was pissed. She kept shooting irritated looks at Emmett, but he kept ignoring them. This, of course, didn't please her at all. She sighed deeply and shook her head.

"I don't understand what she's doing here it's like we're in the goddamn zoo by the looks people are giving us. It's humiliating," Rosalie complained, when she could no longer contain herself.

"Rose, c'mon," Emmett sighed, giving her a pointed look.

"What? What's she to me?" she snorted.

"She's my friend, as well as Emmett's," Alice said with a calm voice, while putting her hand over mine on the table. "And our friends are your friends, right? So that's what she's to you. She's your friend."

Rosalie gave Alice the deadliest of glares.

"The Goose is not my friend, thank you very much. Besides, she might be contagious, and from what I hear, bird flu's a bitch," Rosalie replied with a snarky tone.

Yeah, and so are you...

Silence fell over the table, and I looked up for my food just to find everybody looking at me. I realized then that I had spoken my words aloud.

"Excuse *me* ?" Rosalie looked shocked beyond belief, as if nobody had ever stood up against her before. I saw Emmett fighting a smile beside her, and from the corner of my eye, I could see that Alice didn't even try to fight hers.

"I'm sorry?" I croaked, hating myself for making it sound like a question.

"Fuck you, Goose ," Rosalie spat, as she stood up from the table and walked away with her head held high. We all watched her go, and the others surprised me by not calling after her.

When the cafeteria door had closed behind her, we all turned back to the table.

"That was fun," Emmett said cheerily. "I guess I'm not getting any lovin' tonight."

"God, I'm sorry," I said weakly. "I didn't think-"

"Don't apologize," Alice said, patting my hand on the table. "She does this all the time. Edward is usually the one to give her grief for being such a bitch, and I guess she wasn't expecting someone to

take his place." She looked over at Emmett and smirked. "Besides, Emmett can live without a little lovin' for a while..."

"Thank God," Jasper sighed. "Maybe a brother could get some sleep for once."

"Shut up! Like you're not loud when you're banging Brandon?" Emmett said, slapping Jasper jokingly in the back of his head. "Sometimes I need to bang Rose so much harder just to have her override the sound of your lovemaking."

The rest of lunch continued in the same fashion, having to listen to Emmett and Jasper bicker about who had it worse. They were such guys, and I didn't know whether to envy them for their casual outlook on sex, or to be disgusted. It was as if sex wasn't a big deal to them at all, they didn't worry about being pure...

I guess the explanation to that was simple; they had no reason to be. They had no reason to be pure because they didn't have crazy people in their life. Crazy people who thought they belonged with someone and that you needed to stay pure because the legends said so.

Legends, yeah, what a load of crap...

The bell rang, signaling the end of lunch, and we all parted ways and went to our separate classes. It was once again time for me to enter biology. I wondered how much was done on the project. Had Mike and Lauren finished it already? Turns out, they had not.

I sat down by the table they occupied in the back of the classroom. Mike was concentrating – at least I assumed that was what he was doing, since he had his tongue out a little as he bit down on it, and his eyes were narrowed as he stared down on the paper in front of him. He was busy gluing poorly cut hearts on a big sheet of paper. I guess they had to be glued on perfectly, or else Lauren would through a hissy fit.

"You think you're cool now, huh... just because they talk to you doesn't mean you're anyone special, ya know," Lauren said to me as I sat down. Her voice held so much venom and disgust.

"I don't think anything," I replied calmly, trying not to let her get to me.

"You're such a loser," she said, condescendingly, and threw her hair over her shoulder, probably thinking she looked good, but it only made her look like a sad parody of a shampoo commercial.

"So... what do you need me to do?" I asked with a sigh.

"You can finish cutting these out," Mike said, pushing a pair of scissors and a pile of paper my way. I picked up a sheet and wrinkled my nose. These were the most poorly drawn stars and hearts I had ever seen. Had they gotten a kindergartener to draw them or something?

I didn't voice these thoughts aloud since there was nothing I would gain by doing it. So I just shut up and cut the stupid hearts and stars. Lauren kept shooting glares at me whenever she wasn't busy texting. It was easy to ignore her, though. Looks were always easy to ignore.

But something that wasn't easy to ignore was what happened later.

I had to stay after my last class; my teacher wanted to talk to me about my grade. When I finally got out, the halls were almost empty, and only a few roaming students were left. I made it to my locker and was just about to pick up my bag when I was suddenly pushed forward. I lost grip of one of my crutches and it clattered to the ground.

"WHO THE FUCK DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?"

I turned around slowly and found Tanya fuming at me. She looked absolutely livid, her eyes wide and furious. Lauren was standing a

few feet away, arms crossed over her chest and with a pleased expression gracing her features. A small smirk was gracing her lips; she was clearly enjoying this.

"What?" I asked, trying to ignore the pain that was radiating through my leg from the sudden push, as I tried to focus on the crazy girl in front of me instead.

"You waltz back here, acting all high and mighty, sitting with the cool kids and pretend like you're their friend or something. You're so fucking delusional! They hate you for having Edward expelled. And Edward hates you too! He wishes you were dead! He hates you for putting him through all this, and I don't blame him. What did he ever do to you anyway? Why are you such a loser bitch?" she continued her furious rampage, her voice reminding me of nails on a chalkboard.

I didn't know what I was supposed to say, and that seemed to anger her, because she pushed me again. The edge of my locker door pressed into my back, and it hurt almost as much as my leg. I groaned at the added pain, and I tried to breathe through it.

I'm not going to pass out, I'm not going to pass out, I'm not going to pass out...

Not again.

"Don't let that fucking bitch get to you..."

I smiled inwardly as I heard Edward's voice echo in my mind. I took a deep breath and tried to push the pain aside. Instead of being consumed by it, I let another feeling wash through me instead. A feeling I hadn't let myself feel in a long time – at least not like this...

Anger.

"What the hell! Stop that!" I snapped. Tanya narrowed her eyes at me and took a step closer. Her face was just inches from mine, and I

got a close-up view of her skin. Her pores looked disgusting up close.

"Why don't you just all do us a favor and go kill yourself!" Tanya spat. "It's your fault Edward has to stay away, all because your stupid dad is the chief of fucking police! Why didn't you change schools instead? Nobody wants you here anyway." She took a deep breath to collect herself, before taking a few steps back and smoothing out her hair. She gave me a smug smile and laughed. "You're such a joke," she said with a menacing voice. "Thinking that they actually want to be your friend. But you know what? They laugh at you behind your back. Edward told me all about it; they're just messing with you. They want nothing to do with you. You're so gullible."

I swallowed thickly and tried my best to ignore her words. But it was nearly impossible. She was voicing the fears I had held ever since Edward first visited me. I had promised myself, and Edward, to trust him. Edward didn't lie. You couldn't fake the pain in the eyes. You just couldn't. *Edward wouldn't ...*

"Whe-when did he tell you this?" I stammered and her smirk grew.

"Last night, before he made love to me for hours," she said smugly.

"Hours?" I echoed and she rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, he can't get enough of me."

"Last night?" I said, wanting to clarify. Something was off about her story...

"What kind of sicko are you? You want to know what positions we did it in too? Geez, he came over to my house at ten," she said, holding up all ten fingers, "then he snuck out at four this morning," now she was only holding up four fingers to make her point, "but not before rocking my world. Is that enough for you?" she explained, and Lauren was beaming by her side - as if she thought that the event made her cooler by association. Tanya tilted her head to Lauren and

rolled her eyes, and Lauren did the same, as if she was saying, '*yeah, I know, she's such a loser.*'

But I didn't mind that, because Tanya's story made the knot in my stomach dissolve, and I felt myself relax. *She was lying. Edward didn't visit her...*

"You're such a loser," Tanya said. "The sooner you realize that the better."

I didn't even think as I gripped my locker door for support before hitting her leg with my crutch as hard as I could. She cried out before falling to the floor, breaking the high heel of her shoe in the process.

"I may be a loser, but at least I'm not a liar," I replied calmly.

"You're such a crazy bitch!" Lauren yelled. "We're so going to report this!"

Someone cleared his throat, and the three of us all turned towards the sound. Jasper was standing there, his eyebrow quirked and his head tilted slightly to the side. His smirk suggested he was amused by the situation, but the look in his eyes told a whole other story.

"Hello, ladies, what's going on here?" he asked, with his lazy southern drawl more prominent than usual. It was as if he was enhancing it on purpose.

"That bitch attacked Tanya without any reason at all; she's fucking crazy," Lauren said. She was trying to sound upset, at the same time as she batted her long, fake eyelashes at Jasper, probably bouncing on the inside at the fact that he was even speaking to her.

"Yeah?" Jasper said, his smirk slightly strained and his eyes narrowing just a little.

"Fuck, she ruined my shoe! These are 300 dollars a pair, you bitch!" Tanya shrieked from the floor.

"I'm sure you can afford it," Jasper sighed and stepped up to me and picked up the crutch that I had dropped. "The chief is waiting outside for you. Alice asked me to find you," he then said with a soft voice to me.

"Thanks," I said quietly. I grabbed my bag from my locker and threw it over my shoulder, before kicking the locker shut with my foot. Tanya was still sitting on the floor, fuming over her damn shoe. Lauren gaped at me as I walked away with Jasper.

When we were out of earshot, Jasper glanced at me, his eyes no longer held the cold from before.

"You okay? I didn't catch all of it," he said softly.

"Yeah, I'm fine. She just pushed me around a little... nothing she hasn't done before, at least I didn't pass out this time," I sighed, and I winced a little when my bag bounced against the sore part of my back. He chuckled at my words, but it didn't sound like the nervous one from before.

"I liked the part where you hit her with your crutch. That bitch had it coming," he said, as we reached the main entrance, and he held the door open for me.

"I guess even the Goose has a boiling point," I replied quietly.

"It was about goddamn time too, if you ask me," he agreed.

We walked towards the parking lot, and I immediately spotted the cruiser in the almost empty parking lot. Before we reached it, Jasper grabbed my arm and stopped me. I turned to him in surprise and he was back to looking awkward and uncomfortable.

"Tanya is full of shit, you know that right? I heard she said we were just messing with you, I know you have no damn reason to trust me on this, but I promise you, Alice and Emmett aren't messing with you."

"I guess only time will tell," I replied with a light shrug.

He sighed and gripped my arm tighter, and his gaze made me uncomfortable. His thumb stroked the inside of my wrist, close to the deepest of my scars. I wondered if he could feel it through the fabric.

Did he know it was there?

He gave me a look, and I was sure he was trying to tell me something by it. He didn't voice whatever it was he wanted to say aloud, so I couldn't be sure. I wasn't a mind reader.

He let go of my arm and put his hands in his jacket pockets instead.

"Alice means well, so does Emmett. They're not bad people. People assume we're all bad people just because people have decided we're popular," he sighed.

"I feel so sorry for you," I replied sarcastically.

He groaned and shook his head. "Don't even pretend you were offended by that. What I mean is that just because Edward can be a real douche sometimes doesn't mean we're all like him. Yeah, he's our friend, but Alice and Emmett are the non-douchiest people you'll ever meet, trust me on that."

"I should go," I replied instead, and he nodded. I made my way down to the cruiser and climbed inside. Dad glanced at me before turning the key in the ignition.

"Is that the boy?" he asked.

"Huh?"

"The boy. The boy that visited you. The boy Billy heard."

I gaped at him and I couldn't stop the nervous laugh that followed.

"Jasper? God, NO! He's Alice's boyfriend and we're not even friends," I explained quickly.

"Tell me, Bella, was there really a boy in your room that night?"

I glanced at him, surprised that he was even asking, but also surprised by the doubt in his voice. He was genuinely asking me, like he doubted it himself. I didn't know whether to punch him or hug him for that fact. Punch him, because he didn't think I could ever have a boy in my room, and hug him for the fact that he hadn't let himself be totally blindsided by Billy and my mom.

"No, it wasn't... I was probably just talking in my sleep, you know I do that a lot... and maybe the meds are making me talk more than usual," I lied and Dad nodded.

"Yeah, you always were a talker," he agreed with a soft smile.

We made the rest of the drive in silence. When we come home and found the house empty, I turned to Dad and asked him where Mom was. He got a weird look in his eyes and muttered something about her spending the night in La Push.

I knew that nothing good could come from her spending any more time there than necessary, but I tried to find comfort in the fact that I at least would get a break from her now. I got to feed myself that evening; I didn't have to endure another force-feeding from her. That was always a good thing. But no matter how grateful I was for a night off from her crazy ass, I had a gut feeling that this was only the beginning of something worse. Her being gone, spending time in La Push, was not good. The way Dad kept glancing out the window, and stiffening every time he heard a car approach, was another sign of that.

When I entered the small guest room that evening, I definitely knew something was wrong.

Dad had removed the nails from the window.

Push

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : blahblahblah & ElleCC]

Chapter 29 – "Push"

Edward Cullen POV

I should have been angry with her. I totally should have. I actually sat there, waiting for the anger to drown me and cloud my sight. It was just like the time when she had accidentally pushed me into that puddle of mud. But there was no anger. *No anger what-so-fucking-ever* . But the lack of anger wasn't what surprised me the most: it was the lack of surprise all together. I didn't feel even the slightest surprise when she admitted to standing her ground and not getting out of the way, even though she knew she'd had time. She had stood her ground because she wanted it. I wasn't surprised. Instead, it felt like she was just confirming something I had known all along. In the back of my head I had *always* known.

The accident wasn't my fucking fault.

And I wasn't angry about it. I should have been; it would have made more sense if I had been. But no, there was no fucking anger. All I felt was hopelessness.

What the fuck happened to her?

She almost killed herself tonight. If I had arrived just a few minutes later, she would have been dead now. Like real dead. Not just "shit,

I'm going to die, I'm so damn hungover" kind of dead. But the real dead. Like, six-feet-under kind of dead.

It's funny how destiny works sometimes. It was as if I was meant to stop her or some shit. I was meant to help her. For the first time in my life, I actually had something important to do. I had to fucking *save her* from the demons that were haunting her.

But did I really *have* to, though? Or was this strange feeling I had the product of *wanting* to help her? But why would I *want* to help her? Swan was noth-

Finish that sentence and I will kick your fucking ass. Douche.

I groaned at the ridiculous thought as I kicked a pebble in frustration.

I had no fucking clue as what the hell I was supposed to do now. I was so damn confused. How could I even begin to help her when she didn't even want to help herself? And *why* should I help her? Why did I suddenly care whether or not she continued breathing?

Because whether or not you want to accept it, you've changed.

So...what now? Was Swan my buddy? Was that it? Was she like, my confidant or something? Was she my new Jasper? My new Emmett? My new everything? Who was she to me? And why did it have to change? Why couldn't she just continue being The Goose?

Because you hate that stupid nickname even more than you used to hate her.

And why the hell was that? Did she mean something to me now? Was that it?

Yes.

Why?

My mind was blank. My brain didn't answer me. It had no fucking answer. I was alone on this one. *Thanks for nothing, damn good-for-nothing brain .*

I sighed and thought of Sparrow. A small smile crept up my lips as I did.

Sparrow.

I could totally get used to calling her that. It fitted her. Sparrows were small birds, right? Small and fragile, but they could probably be ferocious if they wanted to be, and they probably had mad survival skills...

I snorted at myself and shook my head. What the hell did I know about birds? Nothing. For all I knew, sparrows might be one of those crazy-ass birds that laid eggs in other birds' nests and then eat their kids or some shit.

But still, Sparrow sounded a hell of a lot better than Goose. And I couldn't care less about whether or not they ate their young. It's not like she would do that just because I called her that.

Maybe Sparrows did eat their young – her mom fucking drank her blood, right? Maybe she was just having an appetizer before digging in on the flesh...

Fuck, that shit was so fucked up there were no words to describe it, and I knew there was more to the story than just that. I didn't know whether or not I would stomach hearing the rest. If the blood thing was the "easy" thing for Sparrow to tell me, then God knows what other fucked up things her mom had done. Sparrow had no one. Everyone she had loved had fucking stabbed her in the back... *and drunk her blood ...*

That. That right there. That's why she means something now.

That her mother drank her blood? That's why she means something?
Because her mother is a damn vampire?

No. Because she needs someone, asshole.

I nodded to myself. I couldn't fucking argue with that. She needed someone, and why the fuck couldn't I be that someone? Yeah, she might have been nothing but The Goose to me a few weeks ago. But shit had changed. She meant something now. Besides, Alice and Emmett couldn't help her. They might want to be there for her: Alice as her friend and Emmett her bodyguard. But they could not really be there, because Sparrow didn't trust them. They lost their chance at her respect and trust the day they proved that they cared more about her than about me. And I respected *her* all the fucking more for it.

I was going to have her back. I was going to be there for her. Shit had changed, and I was going to accept it. Sparrow needed me, and I fucking needed her alive. And this was what I had to do to make it happen. I was going to be there for her.

I could totally do that. I could do that without screwing anything up. I could handle this. I could prove to people I wasn't just some emotionless douche with no heart. I could do good shit too if I wanted to. I just never had a reason to do anything good before, because I never thought I had to prove myself to anyone. I thought people knew me, the *real* me. I didn't think that I needed to prove anything to anyone. But during these past few weeks *I* had been proven wrong.

People didn't fucking know me at all.

How's that for ironic? With all the friends and all the people surrounding me in my life, there was still no one that really knew me.

Fuck'em. I don't need'em. I don't need anyone...

... except Sparrow.

I didn't even cringe at the thought, for some reason it made me feel...good? Albeit, a little confused, maybe. But I would choose confused over fucked up any day.

It didn't take long for me to walk home; at least it didn't feel like it did. My mind had been too occupied with processing my new life's order to even notice that I was home until I walked up to the house. I was so lost in thought that I jumped in surprise when I spotted Dad on the front porch. He was sitting on the steps, watching me in silence as I neared the house, and when I did spot him, I almost crapped my damn pants.

"Jesus fucking Christ! What the fuck are you doing sitting in the dark like that?" I snapped in annoyance and put a hand to my chest, feeling my pounding heart. "You scared the crap out of me!"

"Edward," he sighed. "I think the more appropriate question here is where the *hell* have *you* been?" He sounded so distraught and tired, and by the look of his hair, he must have dragged his hands through it in frustration more than once. The fact that he had used a semi-curse did not escape my notice, and I wasn't dumb enough not to realize that he meant business.

"I was out." I shrugged lazily, trying to act casual, as if it wasn't a big deal at all, when in reality, I was anxious to get the hell away from him. I was so fucking tired of pretending.

In more ways than one...

"Yes, I'm very well aware of that. And that's why I'm sitting here at"—he glanced down at the expensive watch that he had gotten as a gift at a hospital thingy a few years ago—"2:30 in the morning. Jesus Christ, Edward, what are you doing?" He wasn't asking about my whereabouts anymore, this wasn't even about tonight. This was about... *everything* .

"I was out, okay? What the hell do you want from me?" I asked, ignoring the fact that I knew what he had really been asking about.

"You know what I want," he said with a pointed look, which earned nothing but an eye-roll from me as I stepped past him, up the steps and to the front door. "Edward, do you want me to ground you?" It wasn't even a threat, it was just a lame last resort for him. He knew as well as I did that grounding me would do nothing. If I wanted to get out of the house, I would find a way.

"Why don't you send me off to Chicago instead? That will save you the trouble of grounding me." I snorted as I walked inside. Dad left his place on the porch steps and I almost expected him to follow me upstairs and bug me some more, but he made his way to the kitchen instead. I made it up the stairs and into my room, passing out on my bed as soon as my head touched the pillow.

The next thing I knew, my alarm clock was blaring at me and I reluctantly left the bed. I got dressed and ready for school before dragging my feet downstairs and to the kitchen to get something to eat. Mom and Emmett were sitting by the table; Dad was probably already at work. I made myself a sandwich, and Mom asked me if I wanted a ride. She frowned a little when I muttered a "no" before leaving the kitchen with my sandwich.

I rode my bike to school, and it didn't take me that long to get there – even though the bike ride was several miles long. I still had fifteen minutes to spare when I arrived. I had never been at La Push High before, and I snorted quietly at its pathetic size. The school only consisted of one building, and considering the size of the almost nonexistent parking lot, they didn't have many students.

I went to get my schedule and all that other crap they wanted you to read, like the school policy handbook and shit like that, before heading to my locker. It wasn't that hard to find since there was only one hallway with lockers and they were all numbered. There were exactly one hundred of them, which was nothing to me. I wondered if that meant the school only had one hundred students, or if some students had to share lockers. I had always thought that Forks High was a small-ass school, with its five or six hundred students, but I guess I was wrong. There were smaller and more pathetic schools.

Like La Push. I knew there was a lot of shit in my life that I had taken for granted, but I never thought that the size of my old, stupid school would be one of them.

I thought about all the *stupid* paperwork we had been forced to go through for me to even be able to transfer to this *stupid* school. The La Push tribe had gotten bigger, and they couldn't afford to keep their old school running because of some serious repair issues. They sought help from the town of Forks, and we agreed to pitch in for the renovations. The newspapers said that it was about "helping keep culture alive" or some shit. And since Forks helped out, they made an agreement to let students from our town go there as well. Under the laws, it was called a Charter school or something, and it allowed for outside students to attend as long as they adhered to the laws of both the state and the reservation, as if you were some kind of immigrant. It was all fucking ridiculous. It would have been easier for me to just transfer to Port Angeles.

I made it to my first class and tried to ignore the looks people were giving me. It wasn't the curious kind of look people gave new people, instead they were looking at me like I was something their dirty, wet dog had dragged in or some shit, like I wasn't even worthy to go to their stupid-ass school.

Do they think I want to be here? Bitch, please.

When I entered my first class, I almost thought I had the wrong room. The room was ridiculously small, with only fifteen seats that formed a semi-circle in front of the blackboard. It felt like I was in one of those "special needs" classes. Did they think I was retarded? Had they even read my transcripts? I may not have had A's in every class, because I hadn't really bothered with it, but even so, my old teachers had known I was fucking smart. So why the hell would they put me in a special needs class?

Turns out... they hadn't. This wasn't a special needs class. It was just a regular class in a charter school. Apparently, there were only fifteen people in my grade, and the school wasn't just for high

schoolers, it was for junior high, too. Fifteen was considered a lot for a class in this school.

I took the seat by the end of the semi-circle, by the windows, and watched the other students as they took their seats. Soon, our teacher walked in; he was a middle-aged guy with long, black hair pulled back into a ponytail. According to my schedule, his name was Mr. Ateara.

"Welcome, class, I see we have a new student today. Welcome," he said with a somewhat clipped tone and without letting his gaze linger on me for too long. I quirked an eyebrow at his obvious hostility. "Let's get started with today's class, shall we?" People opened their notebooks, and he sat down on the edge of his desk. I sighed and turned to a blank page of my own notebook.

"Thanksgiving is behind us and we all know what that means..." Mr. Ateara said with an amused smile, "... Quileute Appreciation Week."

The others students leaned forward in their seats as if they wouldn't dare miss another word. *Quileute Appreciation Week* ? And the people at Forks thought *I* was a self-centered douche- bag? I leaned back in my seat and waited for Mr. Ateara to continue with what I assumed was going to be the most ridiculous thing I'd ever heard.

I was correct.

Quileute Appreciation Week was apparently a yearly occurrence. It always took place the week after Thanksgiving. They read their stupid legends and analyzed them to pieces. It was never said, if there was going to be a test on all that shit at the end of the week, but I wouldn't be surprised if there were. They really took that shit seriously.

I doodled in the margins of my notebook as the other students scribbled down whatever Mr. Ateara said. I thought I wasn't going to give a crap, but as he started talking about a few legends, I found myself listening in...

"... of course, Quileute women have always been searching for the cure for aging. Nukpana has not been the only one trying. And women learned from her mistakes," he said.

"What happened to the other woman? Did she have her baby?" a girl asked.

"Yes, she did. She gave birth to a son, and Chunta couldn't have been happier. The line of Chunta's son leads us directly to Ephraim Black. Whom we all know." Mr. Ateara smiled, and the others nodded.

"My mom used to tell me about this legend when I was a kid," another girl said, "but she never said anything about Nukpana going to another tribe for help."

"Why yes, this legend exists in many different versions, but the intent is always the same. Nukpana wanted eternal youth and beauty, as well as a child. And it was her greed that became her downfall," Mr. Ateara explained. "Many of our most popular legends have been passed down through generations, and of course some details change with time, but the point behind the stories remains the same, just like the legends of future bonds..."

The girls giggled as they leaned forward in their seats, and the guys just rolled their eyes. Mr. Ateara chuckled again, and I couldn't help but wonder if I was missing out on a private joke or some shit.

"My mom says you can't affect who becomes your future bond. Is that true?" one of the girls asked, and Mr. Ateara did a semi-shrug-nod motion.

"Yes and no. If there is a legend that speaks about you and your future imprint, then no. But if there is no such legend, then yes," he replied.

"What the fuck is an imprint?" I blurted without thinking. All eyes shot to me. I felt like a deer caught in the headlights by the way they were

all glaring at me. All except one girl at the other end of the semi-circle. She was just smirking coldly.

"An imprint is what we call the people who the legends speak of," Mr. Ateara explained with a tired voice. I could almost feel him rolling his eyes in his mind. "Some couples were destined to be together, and those people are called imprints."

"Like... soulmates?" I asked dumbly.

"Yes, I suppose you could say that," he said, and the girls actually *did* roll their eyes at me now. "But an imprint is so much more than that." I didn't ask him to elaborate. I figured I had already asked too much. Why would I care about their stupid legends anyway? "As I was saying," he continued, "an imprint can't be changed. If it was destined to be, it will be. You can't change destiny."

"What happens when you've found the one?" the girl asked. "When can you do the bonding ritual?"

"The bonding ritual can't be done unless both imprints are older than fourteen, and it's very important that the girl is pure," Mr. Ateara said and shot me a tired look, as if he thought I was going to ask what the hell he meant. "Pure means that the girl is not allowed to have had any sexual relations with anybody. It's not enough that the girl is a virgin," he explained while looking straight at me, even though I hadn't asked him to elaborate.

"What exactly does a bonding ritual entail?" a small girl asked.

"Blood is drawn from both imprints, and it's blended with a few herbs that are only grown here on the reservation. The blood needs to be drawn during a new moon, and the elixir that is created is to be drunk by both imprints during a full moon, and it will bond them and their families together forever..."

"So, what happens if the girl is a dirty slut?" I asked with a smirk. Mr. Ateara shot me an irritated look, and a couple of the girls gasped at

my question.

"If the girl happens to be *impure* , she simply has to go through a cleansing ritual," he replied.

"Which entails...?" I prompted. He sighed deeply again and shook his head slightly before answering me.

"The girl has to stay at our sanctuary, the House of Quileutes, and she may not see sun or go outside for a month. Blood is drawn from her every day, and she's not allowed to eat or drink anything but water, a special kind of bread and blood from her imprint. This purifies her contaminated body, and once the thirty days are up, she will once again be pure."

"That's stupid. So what happens if the guy is 'impure'?" I asked, rolling my eyes at the stupid word. Mr. Ateara didn't seem to enjoy my mockery considering the look he gave me. The guys snickered at my comment.

"A guy can't be impure, stupid," a guy said as he nudged his friend, who cracked up laughing.

I quirked an eyebrow and looked at them incredulously. Where they *serious* ? Yes, by the looks of things, they *were* serious. Were they living in the Stone Age or something? I may have treated girls poorly in the past – and in the present – but at least I wasn't living in some delusional world where I thought that guys could do no wrong and the girls were to blame for everything. Just because a girl decided to have sex before marriage, or whatever they did in this crazy-ass place, she had to be locked up in a house for thirty days and practically starved to death?

How the hell was this legal? It was fucking crazy.

And Sparrow was a part of it all...

No wonder she hated Jacob Black and La Push. *No fucking wonder, indeed ...*

We were stuck in that damn classroom for the entire morning. Mr. Ateara told us more legends and showed us some slides with drawings of the most famous ones. I didn't make another comment for the rest of the lesson. I didn't see a reason to. I doubted they even realized how crazy they all sounded. They actually believed in all this crap. They thought all of it was real. So no matter how much I mocked them, they wouldn't give a crap.

The girl who sat at the other end of the semi-circle in the classroom kept looking at me with emotionless eyes. But it didn't feel like the cold was directed at me personally.

I was beyond relieved when we were finally allowed to leave for lunch. Some dude from the class pushed me on the way out, and I glared at him.

"Really, shithead? Are you in the fifth grade or something?" I snapped at him. He laughed darkly and pushed me forward again.

"You better respect the rez, or we'll make your stay here more miserable than it has to be," the guy replied. I snorted at his antics and walked away. But apparently he wasn't finished, because he shouted after me. "You have no business being here! You messed with one of ours when you almost killed her!"

I stopped and turned around slowly. "Excuse me?" I asked.

"The girl you ran over, Isabella Swan? She's one of ours. You almost killed her. That stuff doesn't fly with us," he said menacingly. "If I were you, I would watch my back." He pretended he was pulling back an arrow from an imaginary crossbow, and sent the invisible arrow my way. I smirked humorlessly and stepped aside, as if it was really coming for me.

"I'm not afraid of you, douche," I said before turning my back on him.

The line to the cafeteria was short, and I soon realized why. None of the shit they served here looked like food. The dishes had weird names, and they were probably Quileute specialties. I wondered how many virgins they had drawn blood from to make half of it. I shuddered at the thought.

I bought the only thing that looked even remotely edible. *A damn sandwich* .

I paid for it and a bottle of water before finding an empty table in the back of the small cafeteria. I let my eyes wander as I sat down, and my eyes almost immediately found a target.

Jacob fucking Black.

I recognized him immediately, even though I had only seen him once, from afar. He was sitting a few tables away with a few of his friends, laughing and talking like he wasn't the biggest tool in the box. I didn't know the guy – I'd never even spoken to him – but he still made my blood boil and made me see nothing but red.

And I still didn't know the full story of what he had done.

What the fuck was that about?

"What did the Golden Boy do to deserve that look?"

I turned my head and found myself looking at the girl from class. She was smiling in amusement, but her eyes were still a little too cold. She sat down beside me at the table without another word, and I looked back at the other table.

"So, did he piss you off or something?" she asked as she removed the lid from her container of salad.

"It's all relative," I replied slowly. "The guy messed with a fr- *friend* of mine." I almost choked on the word, and I realized it was the first

time I had acknowledged her as that out loud. *Things are changing, indeed ...*

"I'm not surprised," she said, rolling her eyes. "Jacob is a screwed up kid. As is his entire group... see that tall guy at the end of the table?" She pointed with her plastic fork, and I nodded. "Yeah, that's Sam Uley. He used to be my boyfriend."

I groaned inwardly. Of course. Her boyfriend. This was a woman scorned; she didn't hate these people because they were insane, she hated them because Sam was her ex. *Of fucking course*. She noticed my change of demeanor and huffed.

"Don't look at me like that," she said, apparently offended. "This isn't about me being a pathetic, whiny ex-girlfriend. This is about him being a complete idiot. He actually believes in these stupid legends... they all do."

I scoffed and shook my head incredulously.

"They believe in all that crap? Seriously? I was kinda hoping our class contained the only idiots."

She smiled and shook her head.

"No such luck. Those guys over there think they're so special because they're under the impression that some of the legends are about them. That's why Sam broke up with me... because the legends said that the boy of U belonged with the girl with lines... or some crap like that," she said, snorting. "Some legends were written by five-year-olds, I swear to God."

"The girl with lines'? What the hell does that even mean?"

Her lips twitched into a dark smirk.

"My cousin, Emily. She was attacked by a bear when she was a kid. It almost ripped her face right off. But instead, she ended up with five

scars right down the side of her face... and Sam thinks she's the one the legends are talking about."

"That's shitty. What about that Jacob punk? What do the legends say about him?"

"Oh yeah, Jacob," she said, shaking her head and smiling as if enjoying a private joke. "From what I hear, the pack thinks that the legend about the swan is about him..."

I don't like the sound of that...

"The Swan?" I echoed, my voice ringing oddly in my ears.

"Yeah," she said, stabbing a piece of tomato with her fork and bringing it to her mouth. "He's convinced that Chief Swan's daughter is his soulmate."

"Don't you mean imprint?" I mocked with a singsong voice.

"Touché," she chuckled girmly. She held out her hand and smiled crookedly. "I'm Leah, by the way, Leah Clearwater."

I took her hand and smiled softly. "Edward Cullen."

We both turned back to our food. I took a bite of my sandwich at the same moment I saw Leah freeze beside me from the corner of my eye. I quirked an eyebrow at her before following her gaze. I noticed quickly what the cause of her reaction was.

A girl had walked into the cafeteria, and I didn't need to be told who she was. *A girl with lines indeed*. Emily's entire face was dominated by those five line; I wondered how anyone could ever look past them.

But her face was not what held my attention as she got closer. It was her arms.

She was dressed in a tight, short-sleeved top, that left her arms bare. Everybody could see them – and the deep cuts and scars that covered them. I had seen arms like that before. Sparrow had arms like that. The only difference between the two was that even from this distance, I could tell that Emily had both fresh and healed cuts, as if she was in the process of getting more, and she wasn't afraid to show it. It was as if it was something to be proud of.

"Please explain her scars to me," I croaked.

Leah looked at me, confused. "I just did? A bear attacked–"

"I'm talking about her fucking arms," I cut her off through clenched teeth as I felt anger surge through me again. This was the anger I should have felt when Sparrow had told me she could have saved herself from the accident if she had wanted to, but instead I felt it now because I was angry *for* her. Not *at* her.

Leah's face softened, and the side of her mouth lifted into a sad smile.

"She's in the process of being bonded to Sam... it takes awhile. They've been doing that to her since this summer..."

"How much fucking blood are they drawing from her? I thought they just needed enough to blend together with his shit and some herbs and that would be it?" I asked confused.

"Yeah, well, what Mr. Ateara didn't tell you is that the bonding ritual is more than just that... The girl needs to be marked, and everyone in her new family and her old family has to help to mark her... Her arms are supposed to be a sign to other men that she is taken and that she is not to be touched. If another guy so much as hugs a girl that has been marked, the guy risks being banished from the tribe."

"You do realize how fucking crazy this all is, right?" I asked. "This can't be legal."

Leah snorted quietly. "Of course I know this is fucking crazy, I'm not an idiot. And don't ask me about the legality of the whole thing. They have the authorities wrapped around their fingers."

"You're saying they know what's going on here?"

"I tried to file a report once... but they didn't care. Jacob's family rules this town. Ephraim is a legend all on his own around here."

"Bu what about the police department in Forks?"

"What happens on our land stays on our land. Their police have no say in what happens here, which is why it's so scary that Ephraim's descendents have so much power... When I called a week after filing my report, in order to get an update on what was going on, I was told they had no record of me ever reporting anything. They had made it all go away. That was the first and last time I ever tried to do anything about it. You can't trust anyone."

"Is everybody this crazy about the legends?"

"No, they're not," she said, shaking her head with a light laugh. "Most people don't really believe them, they just consider them a nice little touch to our history. They retell the legends as stories, not as the truth. But then there are the crazies who think that every legend holds the truth and that we should all do our best to uncover all the secrets – The Blacks, Uleys, Calls and Atearas are amongst those who do. Their families have always been the ones tried to convince people that the legends are real and should be taken seriously... But no, most people don't believe all this crap."

As if on cue, Jacob turned his head to us and looked me straight in the eyes. I raised an eyebrow at him, and he gave me what I assumed was supposed to be a superior look. He leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest, smirking darkly at me. He nudged the guy sitting next to him and nodded towards me. Soon they were all looking at me and Leah.

"Are they supposed to be the popular crowd in this place?" I asked without tearing my eyes from Jacob.

Leah sighed and nodded. "Yeah, pretty much. Mostly because of Jacob and his family."

I stared at Jacob for the rest of lunch – another ten minutes – while silently wishing there was a legend that would allow me to cut his fucking throat and see the blood squirt out like a fucking fountain without getting punished for it.

He was the reason Sparrow was broken inside and out. He was the reason she hadn't gotten out of the way. He was the reason she was defeated. He was the reason both our lives were fucked up. I was going to kick his fucking ass. *It was all his fucking fault.*

The afternoon classes mirrored the morning ones. Mr. Ateara shoved more legend propaganda down our throats. Apparently, I was stuck with him for the remainder of the week... *and beyond.* He was going to teach all of my classes except for P.E.

Just my luck, getting stuck with the one teacher who actually believed all the crap he was spewing.

I pretended I didn't give a shit, even though I secretly soaked up every word he said. I wanted to know more about the legends and how they were connected to Sparrow. If I knew what legends the Blacks thought were about her, or what legends could be used against her, it would be easier to save her. To protect her. *To have her fucking back .*

Just like I'd promised.

Yes, I admit. When Mr. Ateara had mentioned the purity part, I had let my mind momentarily drift to the possibility of just popping her cherry myself... but then when he'd said that she'd have to be locked up for thirty days and drink some filthy mutt's blood, I'd realized it might not have been the best idea.

Then, I had gotten creeped out for even thinking it. Wasn't it enough that I considered her my... *friend* now? Did my mind really have to assault me with mental images of fucking her, too? Just because she was my friend now didn't mean I had to fuck her. I didn't fuck Alice and Rose, right? And they were my friends. So why should Sparrow be any different?

Sparrow wasn't even all that attract - I snorted at myself and shook the thought out of my head without even finishing the sentence. School was not the time for me to ponder whether or not Sparrow was attractive or good-looking enough to be considered fuckable. That shit was wrong on so many levels.

I thought I had hit some kind of milestone when I had finally admitted that she meant something to me now, and that whatever we had was not something that was just going to blow over. I thought that admitting it would keep my mind from spinning with all the denial. But instead, the only thing that happened was that I had opened another door altogether, which gave me a new crapload of weird thoughts to figure out.

So all I could do now – since I couldn't fucking hide behind my wall of denial anymore – was figure out a way to save her. If I focused my attention on that problem, I could easily ignore all the other stuff that didn't matter.

By saving her, I could save myself too.

Finally, school ended, and I could get the fuck out of there.

I made it to the parking lot, and as I unlocked my bike, Jacob walked passed me and purposely knocked into me.

"What's your damage?" I snapped at him. He scoffed and took a step closer, his face barely inches from mine.

"You should count yourself lucky that you made it out alive today," he growled in my face. "You almost killed Bella. How the hell do you live

with yourself?"

I smirked darkly at him as I narrowed my eyes. "It's very easy to live with myself, thank you for asking," I replied coolly. "And how do *you* live with yourself... since you almost killed her, too?"

His face fell and he gaped at me.

"Wh-what? I never did that!" he spluttered, and I chuckled grimly at him.

"Yeah, I'm sure you didn't," I replied calmly and pushed him away, just enough so I could get my bike out. "Now, if you'll excuse me, I want to get the fuck out of here."

He shot me a somewhat confused and cautious look before walking toward the parking lot. I jumped on my bike and followed him with my eyes, but didn't pedal away just yet. I watched as a familiar woman threw her arms around him and gave him a tight hug and a kiss on the cheek. When she pulled back, I recognized her.

It was Sparrow's mother.

A guy was standing by her side with his arm resting loosely around her waist. I knew I recognized him from somewhere, but I couldn't for the fucking life of me place his face.

Sparrow's mother was smiling brightly at Jacob, and he was saying something to them. Her smile faded as she and the guy looked over Jacob's shoulder, right at me. As soon as I met her gaze, I felt my skin crawl and goose bumps erupt all over my body. She looked fairly normal, but her eyes were insane. Even from this distance, I could tell that they were crazy. There was no other way to describe them. I could see how the guy's grip around her waist tightened, as if she was the one who needed protection from me and not the other way around.

She quickly put an arm around Jacob's shoulder and pulled him toward a car. I watched them go before pedaling home on my bike.

The rest of the afternoon and evening dragged like a fucking bitch that refused to leave. I had decided that I wasn't going to take no for an answer from Sparrow. I was going to ask her about her mom and Jacob, and I was going to demand the whole story. No excuses or withheld details. I needed to hear the full story from her. I fucking deserved to know.

Whatever happened to Sparrow was the reason she was even out there in the woods in the first place, and that was the reason I had hit her. So of course I deserved to know. I deserved to know why my life had been thrown upside down.

But most of all, I wanted to fucking *understand* . I wanted to fucking understand what in the world Sparrow thought was worth dying for, and what exactly her mother thought she would accomplish by drinking her blood. And what the hell was the Chief's problem?

I wanted to understand why my life had to be fucked up. Why did I have to suffer for other people's shit? And why did Sparrow have to suffer? What the hell had she done to deserve it?

Karma was a bitch. I guessed this was me getting my punishment for being such a douche to people, but what the hell had Sparrow done? As far as I knew, she was a fucking saint.

She didn't deserve it... and neither did I. Not really. Being a douche in high school didn't warrant getting your life being fucked over. Where was the balance? Just because I was a douche, I suddenly deserved to run someone over and be abandoned by my friends and family for it? Was that how karma worked? You did something wrong, and got something even more wrong handed to you. Was *that* how it worked?

Fucking karma.

Mom and Dad asked me how my day had went, and I humored them by telling them about it. Or maybe I was humoring myself. That stupid crap about the legends was eating me up inside, and it bugged the hell out of me. Mom didn't like the sound of things when I told her about Mr. Ateara, and she wondered if La Push really was the place for me. I didn't tell them about the shit with Jacob, because I had a feeling I might slip up and say something about Sparrow, and I sure as hell didn't need to deal with *that* right now.

By telling them about the other shit, maybe that would get them off my damn back a little. Maybe they would think I was beginning to trust them with my issues or some shit, and that way I might gain some more space. The very last thing I needed right now was to have them pay even *more* attention to me, since it would most likely come back and bite both me and Sparrow in the ass. And the only one allowed to bite her in the ass was me.

So you're going to bite her ass now, huh? I thought you were a boobs-man.

Fuck. You.

Mom and Dad got to bed early. I stayed downstairs and watched a movie with Emmett. We were still somewhat awkward with each other, but it was starting to get better.

"She hit Tanya with her crutches today," he said suddenly. I looked over at him in confusion and saw him grinning in amusement when he saw my face. "Bella. She hit Tanya with her crutches. Jasper told me all about it. Tanya even broke her fucking heels. I would have paid to see that shit go down." I gaped at him and he chuckled.

"Spar- *Swan* did that? Seriously? What the hell for?" I asked, not able to hide my curiosity.

He shrugged. "Jasper didn't catch the whole thing, but apparently Tanya was spewing crap about you visiting her last night and making

love to her or some shit, and for some reason that pissed Bella off and she smacked her right in the leg. Fucking epic!"

I tried to contain the smile that wanted to escape.

Sparrow hit Tanya because Tanya was spewing crap about me... interesting...

"But is it crap, though?" he continued. "I mean, you have been sneaking out of the house... so are you sneaking out to see Tanya? I thought you were done with her."

I think I just threw up in my mouth a little.

"Sweet mother of God, Emmett. Fuck you, of course not," I protested, shuddering as I did.

"Yeah, thought so." He nodded. "I highly doubt anyone would go to her for comfort willingly. That bitch deserved to get her ass kicked. Not because she talked shit about you, but because she fucking pushed Bella again." All the humor had disappeared from his voice, and I clenched my fist in my lap.

"Did she pass out again?" I had to force myself to keep my voice light and carefree, as if I didn't really care, when in reality I was fucking boiling inside. Emmett shook his head.

"Nah, I think she learned her lesson the last time," he joked half-heartedly. Suddenly, his face broke into another smile. "She even called Rose a bitch. It was fucking hilarious. That girl can show some serious attitude if she just puts her mind to it. I don't understand why she doesn't have any friends; she's awesome!"

"Maybe because she doesn't like people? Or maybe because people haven't given her a chance? Maybe she likes to be alone," I muttered, turning my eyes away. I felt him give me an odd look, but he didn't say anything about it.

"Your head is so far up your ass you can taste your own brain," he said calmly. "It's because people like *you* never gave her a chance."

"Oh please," I scoffed. "I don't remember you bending over backwards to become her friend until after the accident. So who the fuck are you trying to kid? You're no better than me."

"Yeah, but sometimes serious shit needs to happen before you finally have a reason to open your eyes and realize that shit is fucked up. But apparently your head is still so far up your butt than it doesn't matter if you open your eyes or not – you're still blind as a fucking bat," he retorted.

"Hypocrite," I muttered.

"At least I'm trying to do the right goddamn thing. What are you doing? Nothing. You just run away in the middle of the night to random people because you can't fucking handle being in your own head. You always look for distractions because you can't handle yourself. Maybe you should take Dad up on his offer and get some fucking help." Those were his parting words. He stood up and left the living room without looking back or waiting for a response.

That was just as well. I was tired of having the same conversation with him over and over again.

I glanced at the clock on the wall, and saw that it was almost eleven p.m. *Finally*. I quickly turned off the TV and ran upstairs to grab my jacket and keys. I decided to take my bike to her, since it would be a hell of a lot quicker. I didn't even try to be all sneaky about leaving the house; they all knew I was going to leave, so there was no reason to pretend otherwise. This was easier anyway.

I made it to Sparrow in no time.

I hid my bike behind some bushes a few houses from hers before sneaking up to her window. I was momentarily confused when I saw that the window was partly opened already.

What happened to the nails?

I didn't know if I dared to look in. What if it was a trap?

I peeked inside and immediately spotted the chair against the door.
Safe.

Sparrow was sitting on her bed, her eyes closed and her lips pursed. She was hugging a pillow to her chest as if her life depended on it. I wondered if she even realized that the window was open.

I knocked softly on the window before pushing it open, but she didn't even flinch. I climbed inside and closed the window behind me before sitting down on the bed. She didn't move then either.

I smiled crookedly and stroked a few stray strands of hair from her face. *She was sleeping* .

Her breathing was a little uneven, and she was frowning a little. I put my finger between her brows to smooth out the soft line there. It disappeared almost instantly. She took a shuddering breath and opened her eyes, blinking a few times before meeting my gaze.

"Jesus, Sparrow, you couldn't even stay awake long enough for me to get here?" I chuckled and I felt her relax beside me.

She rolled her tired eyes at me. "Shut up," she groaned with a yawn.

I chuckled again as I made myself more comfortable on the bed.

"So I heard you finally grew some balls," I noted.

"Yeah, says who?" she asked, yawning again as she rubbed her eyes with the heels of her hands.

"Emmett."

"Yeah? And what did he say?" she asked, now sounding a little cautious as she let her hands fall to her lap.

"He told me you kicked the crap out of Tanya and made her break her ridiculous fake designer shoes." I smirked, leaving out the reason why she did, silently hoping she would tell me the story herself.

"All in a good day." She shrugged. "How about you? How was your first day back?"

I sighed deeply, feeling a little disappointed that she didn't choose to elaborate on her day first, but decided to let it go. I took one of her hands in mine and began tracing her fingers with my own. There was some weird comfort in that. It felt nice holding her hand.

She relaxed even more and leaned her head against my shoulder. I glanced down at her, and I felt myself relax when I saw that she had closed her eyes. It made me smile. For someone else, this might not have seemed like a big fucking deal, but for the two of us, it was.

Maybe it was a fucking sign. Maybe she would trust me enough tonight.

"The people on the reservation really take their goddamn legends seriously, don't they?" I asked quietly.

"Wh-why would you say that?" she stuttered awkwardly, pulling her head back up and opening her eyes.

"Quileute Appreciation Week, or whatever the fuck they call it." I sighed. "All we're doing this week is reading and hearing about their stupid history. It was so fucking boring I almost wanted to stab myself with a goddamn pen just to get the suffering over and done with."

"You're so melodramatic," she teased.

"Says the girl who could have jumped out of the way, but didn't," I replied without missing a beat. She looked away from me and brought her bottom lip into her mouth. I knew what I had said was a

low blow, but it was the fucking truth. And we needed to be able to say the truth without having to worry about stepping on toes. Or else this shit would never work. "Do you know a girl named Emily from La Push?"

She nodded hesitantly. "If you're referring to Emily who got attacked by a bear, then yes; she's friends with Jacob."

"Yeah... but the two of you have more in common than just a friend," I said quietly, pulling up the sleeve of her shirt. She didn't fight me at all. "She shares your scars, too. The only difference is that hers consist of both newly cut ones as well as healed ones."

I looked up at Sparrow's face and saw that she was pale as a ghost.

"They're... they're actually doing it to her," she whispered, mostly to herself, even though she was looking at me.

"Yeah, they are... and she was walking around showing off her scars like they're something to be proud of, but I don't fucking get it; it's like all the people at that damn place are fucking insane. And according to Leah, Jacob Black's family is one of the crazier ones." I sighed deeply and tried to squish down the anger that threatened to boil over at the mere mention of it.

I closed my eyes and took another deep breath. She was looking at me when I opened my eyes. I leaned my head towards hers and our foreheads rested against each other.

"I'm so fucking sorry, Sparrow, for fucking everything, but I'm so damn confused I don't know what I'm supposed to do. Help me understand; please, just tell me what the fuck happened to you. What did they do? I promise you that I won't think you're crazy. I know what crazy is, and that is the shit I encountered today. People thinking they can gain eternal life by drinking blood, or that you can purify someone by locking them up for a month ; *that's* crazy. You're not. So please, Sparrow, tell me; what the fuck happened to you?"

She took a deep, shuddering breath, and exhaled slowly. Her breath washed over my face, and I was momentarily dazzled by it. It was a nice combination of mint from her toothpaste and... *Isabella* .

"I need some fucking answers," I pleaded.

"Yes... No... To get to the other side..." she joked with a sad, quiet chuckle, and I couldn't help but chuckle sadly, too. At least she had some humor left.

"I'm afraid, Edward," she whispered. "I'm not afraid that you'll think I'm crazy... I'm afraid of what will happen when the truth comes out... what will happen to me."

"I won't let anything happen to you, I swear to fucking God. I have your back," I whispered back.

"You don't need to... you don't have to," she protested weakly.

"I *want* to."

She leaned back so she could look me properly in the eyes. I smiled crookedly at her, trying to show her that it was okay. It was all fucking okay. It was just the two of us now. She could tell me.

"I trust you, Edward," she said quietly, and it felt like my heart skipped a beat from the simple words. I felt an odd – but pleasant – feeling wash through my entire being, almost a feeling of relief... but stronger. *Better* . I didn't know what the hell the feeling was, but I liked it. I liked it very fucking much.

"I trust you, too, Sparrow," I said just as quietly with a soft smile. I grabbed her hands and held them both in mine. I gave them a gentle squeeze, and I could see in her eyes that she had made her decision. She was going to tell me.

"Just promise me one thing," she said.

"Anything."

"When I'm done telling my story... please don't tell me it wasn't my fault." I frowned and opened my mouth to protest, but she pulled one of her hands back from mine and put her finger to my lips to shush me. "I don't want to hear it. I've lived with this secret for months now. I don't want to hear it wasn't my fault. You can tell me anything, as long as you're not telling me that. Can you promise me you won't say it?"

I nodded reluctantly, and she removed her finger from my lips.

"I promise I won't tell you it wasn't your fucking fault." I sighed. She smiled softly and nodded.

"Okay, well... where do you want me to start?"

"The beginning."

Speak

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 30 – Speak

Isabella Swan POV

August, 2009

I rolled my eyes at Jacob, and he nudged me playfully.

"C'mon, Bella... please? For me?" he pleaded, smiling at me again with his adorable grin. I rolled my eyes for the tenth time in just as many minutes.

"I said no!" I laughed. "I'm not going to that stupid thing!"

"Why not? We had a blast the last time," he said, pouting now. I gave him a tired look. I didn't need to answer him with words; he already knew what I thought about the whole thing. "But it's important," he argued. "Sam is going to let Emily in tonight. It's a big deal. So why wouldn't you want to go?"

"Because it's weird!" I said, exasperatedly. "I don't believe in this stuff, you know that."

He pouted even more as he grabbed my hand and held it between his big ones.

"I don't understand why you're not, though," he mumbled, sounding sad. "You saw firsthand what happened to Paul and Rachel... how can you still not believe?"

"Can't we talk about something else? It feels like all we've been talking about this summer is legends this and legends that... I'm tired of it... what happened to us just hanging out?" I sighed, no longer amused by his obsessive pushing.

"Fine, I just don't understand why you're being so difficult about this," he muttered. I turned my gaze away and looked out over the ocean instead. My legs dangled over the edge of the cliff, and my hair was blown back by the light breeze.

"Mom is acting weird again," I said quietly, without looking at him. "Even Dad is beginning to notice... she keeps disappearing and we don't know where... and when she's home, she's not really there... you know?" I turned my head to look at him again, but he wasn't looking at me. He kept my hand in his and looked down at them in his lap. He looked guilty, but he wasn't showing any signs of listening to what I was saying. "I think she might be cheating on him." I didn't really think that. I just said it to get a reaction out of him, but there was none. "Did you hear me?" I asked and he huffed lightly.

"She's not cheating on Charlie, don't be ridiculous," he said, his voice monotone and not convincing in the slightest. I frowned.

"What's up with you?" I asked. "You know you can talk to me..."

"It's nothing... it's just... Bella, you know how I... I... you're my best friend, you know?" He sighed, still staring at our hands like they were the most interesting things he had ever seen.

"Yes, I know. And you're mine. What's your point?" I asked impatiently.

"You trust me, right?"

"Of course I do," I replied, feeling slightly confused. "What is this about, Jake? Why are you acting so weird?"

"I just..." he trailed off with a sigh as he let go of my hand, "I just wish you could come tonight... it would mean a lot to me..."

I groaned as I pulled my feet from the edge and stood up. I brushed the dirt off my jeans as I walked away from the cliff-edge.

"I'm tired of this, Jake. It's always about those stupid legends with you nowadays. Why can't we just be us?" I complained. "We used to have so much fun, and now those stupid legends are all you talk about. It's getting on my nerves, to be honest. You didn't think much of them before. You always said they were jokes... but you behave like you actually believe them now. What the hell?"

"I'm getting older," he mumbled, as if it was an excuse.

"Whatever, Jake," I said. "I'm going home. See you later."

I made my way through the woods, towards the field that worked as a parking lot for the people going to the cliffs. I climbed into my truck, but I didn't turn the ignition and drove away. Instead I took a moment to collect myself.

It felt like my world was falling apart around me; this past summer had been so weird. My mom had begun disappearing, sometimes for days at a time, and when she was home, she wasn't really there anyway. Her gaze was always faraway, and her eyes were empty. She had lost some weight too, and I was afraid she might be sick. Maybe it was serious? Did Dad know?

I sighed deeply as I turned the key, and the engine roared to life.

When I came home, Mom was sitting in the kitchen, staring into space like so many times before. She didn't hear me come in; she didn't even react until I stood across from her at the table, clearing

my throat. She looked up and met my gaze. I swallowed down the lump that quickly formed in my throat at the empty look in her eyes.

"Oh, Bella... my sweet, sweet, Bella," she cooed, raising a hand and stroking the air, as if she was really stroking my cheek. I smiled awkwardly and gnawed on my lip.

"How... how are you feeling?" I asked, shuffling my feet, and looking away.

"I feel wonderful," she said, her words almost slurring together. She pushed her chair back and stood up, before walking around the table and stepping up to me. She put her hands on either side of my face and pressed her lips to my forehead. "We're going to be wonderful. Everything is going to turn out just like it's supposed to," she said, still with her lips against my skin. She pulled back and smiled at me. "Are you looking forward to tonight? It's going to be beautiful."

"I told Jake I'm not going," I replied. Her empty eyes looked surprised and her mouth formed a silent "oh." Her face soon showed her obvious disappointment.

"Why not?" she asked, sounding eerily similar to Jake. "It's going to be beautiful. It's a special night, we have to celebrate... it's a big night for all of us. Of course you have to go. We're all counting on you. We can't do it without you there."

I rolled my eyes and stepped away from her.

"I don't want to go, Mom, and that's that. Jake said it was for Sam and Emily, and I don't get along well with Sam anyway...he doesn't like me, so I don't see why I have to go to their celebration or whatever," I said.

"It's not just for them," she said, her voice lowering.

"I don't care. I'm not going," I argued. I turned around and walked upstairs. I could feel Mom following me with her eyes. I closed the

door behind me when I reached my room, and I plopped down on the bed. I lay back down and stared at the ceiling, sighing deeply.

I was seriously worried about Mom; she was not well. The empty look in her eyes was beginning to freak me out, and I wondered what the hell was going on. Dad should take her to see a doctor or something.

But even so, it would have to wait, since he was spending the weekend in Seattle for some stupid conference. This was a yearly deal; the people at the station went to Seattle every August for a weekend to participate in a police conference. He wouldn't be back until the day after tomorrow.

We could wait that long.

I went to bed early that night. Between Jacob walking on my nerves, and Mom being weird, I found myself exhausted. It took a lot of energy trying to keep up with all the changes, never knowing what to expect from people.

The summer was almost over now, and I hoped that once school started again, things would go back to normal. Mom would stop disappearing, her eyes would shine with life again, and Jacob would stop obsessing about those stupid legends of his.

And Mom will stop encouraging him.

For the past couple of weeks, I had grown confused. Mom and Jacob were not the only ones acting weird. Billy was acting weird too, especially as far as the legends were concerned. I had always believed he was with me on this one, that he didn't think they were true either. He had always told us about them in a tongue-in-cheek way, but ever since he told the one about eternal youth and beauty on Mom's birthday, I had noticed a change in him as well.

If this had been under any other circumstances, I wouldn't have cared much. What was it to me if they believed in those crazy legends? It wasn't any crazier or weirder than other religions and beliefs. But I did care, because the beliefs in this case were changing the people I loved. I didn't recognize them anymore, and it scared me.

So, what had changed? Why did Jacob suddenly take all the legends crap seriously? He never did before. We always made fun of the legends when we were growing up. At the special Quileute Days on the reservation, where we were exposed to more legends, we always snickered and rolled our eyes at the stupidity of it all. But now... not so much.

There was a Quileute fair a couple of weeks back, and that was when I truly realized that Jacob had changed. Usually we would walk together and make fun of everything, but this time was different. Jacob walked around with a serious expression on his face for the entire day, and every now and again, he would stop by some woman selling home-made Quileute bracelets and necklaces, and listen intently as she told him about the legend that she held closest to her heart.

He never did that before. He never stopped to listen – the only times we did was when we accidentally heard one of the more outrageous legends, and we stopped just long enough to get a good laugh out of it.

It was all fun and games.

Until it wasn't anymore.

Mom encouraged his new obsession with the legends, since she was so fond of them herself. Then Billy started to show signs of believing them too, even though he never did before.

Something had made them change, and I didn't know what or why.

It was with a heavy feeling in my stomach that I finally drifted to sleep. My dreams were foggy and uncomfortable. It was as if my subconscious was trying to tell me that things weren't quite right.

As if I didn't already know.

My dreams became even foggier right before my body was shaken awake. I blinked a few times, feeling disoriented for a moment at being brought out of my sleep so abruptly. I turned my head and found myself looking at whomever had woken me up.

Mom .

Her usually blue-gray eyes looked almost black in the dim light that was flowing in from the hallway. I tried to focus on her face, and I realized the light wasn't the reason her eyes were weird. It was because her pupils were dilated to the point where it could no longer be considered normal.

Goosebumps erupted over my skin as she smiled down at me. There was no ounce of love in there; there was nothing but pure evil.

"Bella, sweet, sweet, Bella, come with me," she said.

"I wanna sleep," I protested with a yawn. I glanced at the clock on my nightstand; it blinked 3:05 am.

"I can't let you sleep. We need to celebrate!" she said as she pulled me up into a sitting position. I groaned and huffed.

"But Mom...!"

"No buts! We need to celebrate!"

"It's three in the morning. Can't we celebrate whatever you wanna celebrate tomorrow?" I sighed. I was too tired to deal with my mom, especially when she was acting weird like this.

"No, we have to do it now. It's the best time!" she said excitedly.

She pulled me to my feet and dragged me out of the room. I was too tired to protest, and I had a feeling she wouldn't listen even if I did. It was easier to humor her and let her celebrate whatever she needed to celebrate at three in the morning. The less I protested, the quicker it would all be over, and I could go back to bed. I knew this from experience.

This was not the first time she had dragged me up in the middle of the night to show me something or do something. But this was the first time had used the term "celebration." Usually she just wanted to show me the night sky, or have me help her out with a new and amazing cookie recipe she had come up with.

The lights were off when we reached the bottom of the stairs, but I could see the dim light from candles flowing out from the living room. It gave the room an eerie feeling, and I knew for a fact that this wasn't right. Why would she light candles in the middle of the night?

"Come with me, sweet Bella," she cooed and pulled me into the living room. I gaped at the scene before me. This wasn't happening. This couldn't be happening.

What the hell is all this?

"Sweet, sweet Bella," she said, kissing my temple gently, "it's time."

I swallowed thickly as Mom brought me forward. She all but pushed me down on the couch, and my eyes widened as I looked down at the coffee table. Several shiny knives were lying in a neat row on the table, as well as a bottle of red wine and a glass. Two roses – one red, one white – stood in a vase without water.

There were candles everywhere, and it almost looked like the room was on fire. The air was heavy, and it smelled faintly of strawberries.

What is going on? What is all this?

"Mom... what... what are we celebrating?" I asked cautiously.

She smiled at me, and I flinched at the empty look in her eyes.

"We're celebrating the Black Swan, of course," she said, and the excitement in her voice was weird in combination with the expression on her face.

"The...what?"

"The Black Swan... the union of two souls... two families..." she explained with a faraway voice, "... and eternal happiness..." She picked up a knife from the table and pressed the tip of it against her thumb; the edge sliced the skin easily. She smiled as she brought her thumb to her mouth. "Perfect," she said, and her pupils were practically vibrating as she sat down on a pillow on the floor.

"Mom... are you okay?" I asked slowly, more than a little concerned by the odd look in her eyes and the overall weird situation.

"Of course, sweetie, why wouldn't I be? This will be a night we'll never forget. Everything will change tonight," she replied, her eyes sparkling in the light of the lit candles. Her pupils were like black holes - sucking all the light in. I slowly moved from the couch and down to the floor so I was sitting next to her. She turned her head to me, the smile still in place, but her eyes were beyond empty now. It was as if she didn't recognize me. Or even saw me at all.

"Mom," I said, my voice shaking in fear, "what are you going to do?"

Her smile was lazy, and her eyes darted all over the place for a moment before they settled on me. She took my hand and held it softly in hers.

"We're going to do this together. We're going to make everything okay. No more pain and suffering. We will both find peace."

"But, Mom, I'm not in pain... I'm not suffering," I replied, confused and a little scared. I didn't like the sound of this.

"I know you say that now, but soon that will all change, and better to be safe than sorry." It looked like she was about to say something else, but there was a knock on the front door.

Who the hell is coming over at this hour?

"Come in, it's open," Mom called without letting go of my hand.

I heard the front door open. There was immediately a shift in the atmosphere of the house, and I automatically gripped my mom's hand tighter. We watched our guests walk in, and my eyes went wide. A weird mixture of confusion, fear and relief washed through me, and I didn't know what feeling to linger on.

Jacob was pushing Billy in his wheelchair, and another man stepped in after them and closed the door behind them. The man and Billy nodded at Mom, and she nodded back with a smile. I couldn't make out the unknown man's face, because he was standing in the shadows with his face down.

"I thought you'd never come," she said with a smile, as she stood up from the floor.

She walked over to Billy and kissed his cheeks before walking over and giving the faceless man a hug.

"I'll be in the kitchen," the man said as she let him go. He turned around and walked out of sight. Jacob walked up to me with a soft smile. He crouched beside me and held out his hand.

I took it.

"What are you guys doing here? What's going on?" I asked.

"I'm sorry you didn't come tonight; you really missed out," he said, grabbing my hands and holding them between us. He ignored my questions completely.

"Jake," I said, almost pleadingly.

"You should have come; it was beautiful," he murmured.

"Enough, you two," Mom said, pulling us apart. "We don't have all night..."

Jacob stood up and stepped aside, as Mom stepped forward.

"Is it time?" she asked, turning to Billy. He didn't look at his watch or anything; he just nodded. Mom smiled as she looked back at me, and I gnawed on my lip.

I had no idea what the hell was going on, and I didn't like it one bit.

Mom lit another candle and put it on the table, and it was obviously one of those strawberry scented ones because the strong scent hit me like a ton of bricks, as if the air in the room wasn't hard to breathe as it was already. The scent was way too strong, and it was stinging my nose.

"This is going to be great," she murmured to herself, "everything is going to be exactly like I always imagined." She looked up at me with a serious and frightening expression and I felt my stomach drop – she had never looked at me like that before. "You are clean, aren't you, Bella? You must be pure." I didn't know what to say, because I didn't know what the hell she was asking of me. So I did the only sensible thing – I nodded, because that seemed to be the answer she was looking for.

She was smiling as she picked up the sharp knife from the table – the very same one she had cut her thumb with earlier. It shone in the light from the candles, and the sight sent chills down my spine. I did not want to know what she needed the knife for; there was no food at this table. Was she going to cut her other fingers as well? For what purpose?

I wrapped my arms around my legs as I sat on the floor, and glanced over at Billy. I was hoping he would shed some light on the situation,

but he was just smiling. It was the very same smile that my mom was wearing. Sinister and terrifying.

"Don't worry, Renée. She's clean... and if she's not, that's okay too. She's disposable," Billy replied in an eerily calm and quiet voice. I shot my eyes to Mom in bewilderment. What did that mean? I was *disposable* ? "There are always ways to clean up that mess."

"Mom... what's going on? I don't like this," I said in a shaky whisper and felt a traitorous tear fall down my cheek. I was scared. No, I was beyond scared. I was terrified. I didn't like this, because I didn't understand it. Mom, with her empty eyes and sinister smile. Billy, just sitting there... smiling. Jacob, standing there, doing nothing. And an unknown man in the kitchen.

What the hell is going on?

"Shh, baby-girl," she cooed, but her face did not match her tone. "It's all going to be okay... don't worry... we love you, we won't let any harm come to you."

I met her gaze, and I winced at what I yet again found in her eyes. They were so very empty; her pupils were now even more dilated than before, now to the point where you could no longer see her irises at all. There was no emotion at all there. She wasn't looking at me like a mother gazes at her daughter – she was looking at me as if I was a stranger to her. Her words of affection did not match the emotionless pools in her eyes. She didn't see me. She didn't recognize me. Never in my life had I been more terrified. I hugged my knees tighter to me as I rocked back and forth on the floor.

Mom picked up a scarf from the chair next to her and held it out to Jacob.

"Jacob, please wrap this scarf around her eyes," she said.

Jacob stepped up to her. When I met his gaze, I saw my own terror reflected in them, but his face did not mirror it. He took the scarf from

my mom's hands, and he swallowed thickly as he wrapped the thing around my head, covering my eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said with a pained voice. "I'm so, so sorry... but this is the only way for us to truly be together. You will thank me later..."

I felt him take a step away from me. I grabbed the scarf, ready to remove it from my face, but someone grabbed my arms and stilled my movements.

"No, the scarf stays on," Mom said. "There is no need for you to see this."

My heart was pounding in my ears, and I was beginning to get dizzy. What exactly was there no need for me to see?

She took my hand and pulled at it so my arm was held straight in front of me, then suddenly I felt a cold, sharp pain shoot through my arm. I cried out in agony and Mom sighed.

"Sweet, sweet, Bella, it's all going to be alright. You have nothing to fear. Everything is going to be alright..." I could almost feel the smile in her voice, and I imagined her eyes to be faraway and empty. "But I need you to be quiet..."

She cut me again, and I bit hard down on my lip in order not to cry out again. My body spasmed.

"But Mom... this isn't right... it's insane," I replied in a shaky whisper, as I felt my throat close up and tears fall from from my eyes, soaking the scarf. "You can't do this!"

"My sweet Bella," she cooed, and I felt her hand stroke my cheek. "It's all quite alright. Nothing will ever hurt you again, I promise."

"But nothing has hurt me, Mom... but you are hurting me now! Please, stop it, you're scaring me!" I sobbed.

"Now, now, Bella, we don't want to upset it," she replied. "The spirit of the Black Swan would not approve of your behavior. And we need not to upset it."

"But, Mom!"

"No buts! Be quiet now, Bella!" she snapped, no love was left in her voice now.

I choked on a sob and felt the blade slice my other wrist, but I was too shocked and numb to feel anything. I couldn't even find it in me to move to fight her off. I was too shocked.

What is going on?

"The wrists... the heart is next?" She was talking to herself. I felt the sharp tip of the knife press faintly against my skin, grazing the top of my chest.

"No, the heart is last," Billy said. "Wrist. Ankle. Stomach. Temple. Heart. Remember? But you need to cut deeper before you proceed. You need to have a clean wound. The Black Swan demands more than others... "

"Oh, of course, silly me," she giggled, grabbing my arm, and I felt the knife slice my skin again.

And again.

And again.

If I had been standing, I would have fainted by now.

If I had been sane, I would have fought her off by now.

I screamed out in bloodcurdling agony, and someone was quick to cover my mouth. It made it almost impossible to breathe. I tried to kick myself free, but someone had a steady grip on my shoulders and legs, keeping me in place on the floor.

The more she cut, the less energy I had to fight back, and I soon stopped altogether. I don't know how many times she sliced my skin, but it didn't take long for me to feel the blood pour down my arms and drop down on my pants. I slumped backwards against whoever was standing behind me and felt myself step into a deep fog. This was not good.

"Bella? *Bella* ? You okay? Bella?" Jacob's voice was near my ear, and I assumed it was him that held me in place by my shoulders. His voice was concerned, and it was shaking slightly – he was afraid.

"Damnit... I haven't even begun yet... is she awake?" Mom said frantically. "Bella... Bella... look at me... Isabella Marie Swan! *Look at me !*" She was yelling at me now, and it felt like her voice was coming from all directions, kind of like surround sound in a movie theater. I tried to keep my head upright, but it felt like I didn't have any bones left in my neck, and my head kept falling back.

How did she even expect me to look at her when I couldn't even see anything with this thing covering my eyes?

Jacob disappeared from behind me, and I was now resting against the side of the couch instead. I felt lips against my wrist, and if I hadn't known any better, I would have thought my mom was kissing me. But I did know better. Even in my dizzy state, I knew better.

"It's not working," she complained with a childish voice. "I'm supposed to feel rejuvenated and she's supposed to glow... she's supposed to be the Swan!"

"Give it time," Billy replied calmly. "It could be days."

"But there's no difference," she continued, still with that childish voice.

"Patience, Renée," Billy chided. "Give it time. I told you before, this takes time. The process takes 72 hours... it can be a while before there are any visible signs."

She sighed deeply, and I winced when I once again felt the cold edge of the knife slice my skin. It did so effortlessly, as if my skin was nothing but liquid. She must have sharpened it beforehand. I wondered how my arms looked – did she create new cuts every time, or did she continue cutting the same ones? I guess it hurt just the same... it hurt so much...

"Oh Bella, what a mess you've made," Mom said, and I felt her dab something cold on my fresh wounds. "But it will be alright. It's for your own good... it's for all our good. This is what will lead us into the next part."

"Mom... please... stop... I... I don't... I don't feel so good." I tried to keep the whining to a minimum, but at this point I was desperate. Desperate and weak. I felt myself slipping deeper into the fog of unconsciousness, and I tried desperately to keep myself awake. The pain in my arms had subsided to a weird and uncomfortable dull sensation. "Jacob... Jake..." My words were nothing but a slur. It was as if I was drunk.

I needed Jacob. He could help me. He would never let any harm come to me. He could take me to the hospital. I needed a hospital.

"Jacob is otherwise occupied at the moment," Mom said to me firmly. "And please, Bella, be quiet. You're ruining everything. It's like you don't even have a heart." She sighed deeply and pressed her lips against my wrist again, I could actually hear her gulping. My heart stopped right then and there.

She's drinking my blood.

She's *actually* drinking my blood.

I tried to keep myself conscious, but I kept slipping into the fog. There was no turning back.

"There's too much blood... damnit... there shouldn't be this much blood... I can't cut the other spirit points... There's too much blood!"

Mom's voice carried through the fog, and I heard the muffled sounds of someone leaving the kitchen and stepping into the living room.

"Is she awake?" the man from the kitchen asked.

"Of course she is, don't be silly," Mom said, sounding offended.

"Right, Bella?"

I didn't reply; there was no energy for it. I was still in the fog, unable to respond even if I had wanted to. I was just vaguely aware of them even being there. There was a deep sigh and someone removed the scarf from my eyes. My eyes fluttered, but never opening fully.

"Bella!" Mom said sharply, as if all she needed to do was to tell me to wake up and I would.

I felt the man's strong hand touch my neck, and two fingers pressed against the part where you check someone's pulse.

"Her pulse is weak... damnit," he groaned. "You were supposed to call for me before you started on the other arm." He sounded tired but not surprised.

"I know, but I was in the zone. I'm sorry, sweetie," Mom said with a sigh.

"It's okay..." he trailed off and gasped. "What... where the hell is all this blood coming from?" I felt him lift something from my arm – I assumed it was the cloth Mom had dabbed me with earlier. "You cut too deep! I think you nicked the vein!"

"Is that... bad?" It was Jacob who asked. It sounded as if he was standing at the opposite side of the room now.

"Yes, it's bad!" the man growled. "We need to get her to the hospital! I can't fix this here. She's going to bleed out!"

"What does that mean?" Mom asked dumbly.

"That means she will die, and all our earlier preparations will be for nothing," the man replied. "Jacob? Please clean up in here, remove all the candles... but leave the blood."

"What? Why?" Jacob asked, sounding confused.

"Because we will have to make it look real. People will ask questions otherwise, and we don't need questions, okay?" the man replied impatiently.

He lifted me up from the floor, and the sudden movement was what finally pushed me over the edge. I didn't try to resist the fog as it swept over me one last time and made me one with the darkness.

I didn't know how long I was out, but when I woke up I found myself in a hospital room. My arms were wrapped in gauze, and Mom was pacing back and forth by the foot of the bed. She was biting the nail on her thumb, and she glanced at me when she noticed me move.

"Thank God," she sighed. She was relieved, but for some reason I had my doubts on whether or not it was because I was awake and alive. She stepped up to the side of the bed and took my hands in hers. "What happened tonight did not go according to plan. And now we have to wait another few weeks before we can try again... you and Jacob will be united, as well as our families, so you don't need to worry. Phil managed to draw some additional blood when you were brought in so Jacob and Billy will have some later-"

"Are you crazy?" I hissed. "What the hell was all that? You cut your own daughter! I almost died! I will not let you do that to me again. Never! I'm going to tell Dad and he will never let you go through with it. You stay away from me... Jacob and Billy too... you're crazy!"

Her eyes clouded over with anger, just as the door opened and a man in a white coat walked in. He looked at us and nodded as he made sure the door was safely closed behind him.

"She's awake, that's good," he said, and his voice was vaguely familiar.

"Yes, but she's not being cooperative. She is threatening to tell Charles, and we both know he's not ready yet." Mom sighed.

The man stepped up to the other side of the bed and narrowed his eyes at me. His gaze was murderous and his eyes shot fire, as if I had personally offended him. Who was this man?

"You will shut your mouth and do as we say, understood?" he said with a low, scary voice. I nodded numbly in response, too scared to say anything. "You tried to commit suicide tonight, you hear me? You cut your arms because you wanted to die. Stick to that story, and we will all be fine."

"But... but... I didn't," I protested weakly.

"Yes, we know that, but there is no reason for other people to know that. The Black Swan won't rise tonight," Mom said. "We need to do it this way, okay?"

"All this was because of a stupid legend? Are you serious?" I asked.

"It's not stupid," Mom said, sounding offended. "What happened tonight... or what was supposed to happen tonight has been written in the stars for thousands of years. Tonight was the night it was all supposed to come together...but again, we were hit by another curveball from destiny."

"So... what does it mean?" I asked.

"It means we have to make arrangements so we can try again. It took us months to prepare this one, so we need to do it again," Mom sighed. "Phil... what are we supposed to do?"

Phil sighed and rubbed his forehead.

"I guess you will have to go with me to Seattle. This is my last week here, and if you want me to help you with the preparations, you will have to come with me." He sighed and looked deep in thought for a moment. A small smile crept up his lip as he nodded at whatever he was thinking. "But I don't think that will be a problem." He met my mom's gaze and she looked at him expectantly. "Your daughter just tried to commit suicide..." he trailed off, giving Mom a pointed look, and soon a smile of understanding crept up her lips as well.

"Of course...it broke my *heart* ," she said, putting a hand to her chest. They shared another look before they both turned to look down at me. The look in their eyes sent shivers down my spine and left an uneasy feeling in my stomach.

"I di-did not tr-try to commit suicide," I stuttered, and Mom almost smirked at that.

"Of course, you did, sweetie... of course you did." She stroked my cheek softly, but there was no love behind the gesture.

"Nobody will believe it," I said.

"Of course, they will," she said, still with that soft and loving tone.

"Charles will be here at any moment now... maybe you should prepare yourself," Phil said, and Mom nodded.

"Thank you, Phil... for everything," she said, giving him a look that held more than I was comfortable with.

"I'd do anything for you, you know that," he said, smiling in response. "I'll go prepare the paperwork. I will make this go away so you don't have to worry about it."

He left the room, and Mom took a deep breath, while gazing down at me.

"It's going to be fine, my Bella, we will all be fine. We just need to make some arrangements because of this unfortunate detour of the original plan. But we will make it work, don't worry," she said, stroking my cheek again. "You better stay quiet about this, or you will get hurt. And you don't want to get hurt now, do you?"

"But Mom..." I protested, but she put a finger on my lips to shush me.

"No buts," she said. "You tried to commit suicide tonight. You tried to take your own life, and that's the only thing people will know and think about tonight. Okay? The Black Swan is sacred and is not to be spoken of... especially not since the ritual didn't go as planned. Alright? You keep your mouth shut, and I promise you that everything will be fine." She took a step back, while taking a shuddering breath. Her eyes immediately filled up with tears. "And if you still choose to tell someone about what happened tonight... then I can't promise that it will all end well for you." She smiled through her crocodile tears, and it felt as if the blood in my veins froze to ice. "Your father must not know... it's not time for him yet."

November, 2009

I sighed deeply before meeting Edward's gaze for the first time since I began my story. His face was white as a ghost's and his eyes wide. I couldn't even begin to imagine what was going through in his head at that moment.

His Adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed and a million different emotions flashed in his eyes before he settled on... I didn't even know what that was. He opened his mouth, but closed it again with pain flickering across his face. I couldn't help but chuckle at that.

I knew what he was thinking.

"You want to tell me it wasn't my fault," I noted quietly. He tried to scoff at that, but that simple sound was shaky and nervous. I

immediately hated myself for pushing all that shit on him. He didn't deserve to have to carry this with him. This was my burden to carry, not his.

"What happened to your mom? I mean... she's here, right? You've mentioned her before, and I met her at the hospital after the... accident." He winced slightly at the mention of it, and I felt even worse because of it. "Also I saw her at school today... so did she go away? When did she come back?"

I nodded.

"She went to Seattle with Phil... She managed to fake a breakdown and got herself admitted to a mental health clinic in Seattle... She told my dad that she didn't want to come home until her doctors said she was ready... and when she was home for the weekend after the accident, she said she wanted to go back there because I wasn't ready." I sighed deeply and shook my head. "She's home now... for good... she said that the doctors had said they saw no reason to keep her... I wondered how she managed to fake it for so long... or maybe the doctors saw that she really was crazy and that she wasn't pretending... I don't know..." I trailed off with a crooked smile and shrugged softly. He glanced at me with a weird look in his eyes. "What?" I asked.

"You said she said something about them preparing for that thing for months... right? What if that's what she was waiting for? The right time to get back so she could finish what they started? Maybe the preparations weren't done yet and that's why she stayed away? And maybe she couldn't risk coming back sooner because it would fuck everything up?" He sputtered out theories, barely taking a breath in between sentences. He sounded genuinely concerned. It was obvious that he had really listened to my story and taken it seriously.

"Maybe," I replied weakly. "There is no way of telling what she's thinking. She's freaking crazy. For all we know, she might be back just to get her flying pink elephant and use it to fly to Lollipopland." Edward groaned at my joke and rolled his eyes.

"You can't fucking stay here, you know that, right? We need to get you the fuck out of here before she guts you like a fucking fish or something," he said, and there was nothing in his tone that suggested that he was anything but serious.

"Yeah? Are you suggesting that I run away again?" I sighed. "Do I need to remind you about why that won't work?"

He glared at me, but I just quirked an eyebrow at him. I was not afraid of him.

"Do you want to die or something?" he snapped, but then he caught himself and rolled his eyes. "Of course, you do." I couldn't help to chuckle at that. He sounded so frustrated. He really wanted to fix this. Fix *me* .

"Are you blaming me yet?" I asked softly.

He squeezed my hand and shook them between us, as if trying to shake some frustration out.

"I'm not blaming you for anything! God damnit!" he groaned. "It wasn't your fau-" I quickly cut him off by putting my finger to his lips. My face somehow ended up a little too close to his by that movement.

"Don't say it," I said quietly. "You promised me you wouldn't."

The frustration faded from his face, and his lips twisted into his signature crooked smile.

"But why don't you want me to say it?" he asked quietly, his lips moving gently against my finger. "It's the truth."

"Because it's not about that," I replied with a sigh, letting my hand fall to my lap. "It's about... I don't even know what it's about... this happened to me because they believed I was a part of some stupid

legend. So how can that not be my fault? I must have done something to make them believe that... right?"

"That's bullshit, and you know it. Those people could have twisted a story about a damn flamingo in someone's backyard to fit into their fucking reality, if they wanted it. I have no fucking idea what the concept behind the Black Swan is, but it's not rocket science... it's in the damn name. You're Swan and he's Black... together you make Black Swan... So the only thing you're guilty of is having the wrong last name. And that's *not your fucking fault*, damnit!" The frustration was back in his voice. I narrowed my eyes at his words, but he just stared back at me with equal force. "I'm not going to apologize for saying it, because it's the fucking truth."

I sighed and looked away, but he wasn't having it. He grabbed my chin roughly and turned my face to his. Our faces were once again a little too close, but he didn't seem to notice.

"Your mother betrayed you in the worst way possible... she hurt you... almost killed you... and I don't fucking blame you for wanting to die anymore... I can't even begin to imagine what the fuck that's like... the ultimate betrayal... but you can't die. You need to tell people, you need to get those crazy people behind bars. Who says they won't find another victim to torture if you died? What if they find another Swan to fill the void? And torture her instead? You need to stay alive and fucking fight this. How can you just give up?"

"Because I can't take it anymore! Dad would never believe me if I told him now, and with Jacob participating in the whole deal... I have no friends to turn to, I have no other family. I'm alone. Okay? I have no one!"

He let go of my chin, smiling sadly at me. There was a flash of something in his eyes, which made me believe that I had somehow hurt his feelings, but I didn't understand how the hell I had managed to do that.

"I thought we had covered this already... You have *me* ." *Oh, that's how* . "And if you ask me... I think I'm a pretty kick-ass person to have on your side." I chuckled at that and his smile grew. "C'mon, Sparrow, I have your back... I can help you through this. Let me fucking do this."

"But it's not like there's anything you can do about it," I said. "It is what it is."

He frowned for a moment, probably trying to come up with something he could do. Judging by the look on his face, he was coming up short. *At least he tried* . I patted his leg and smiled softly. "Don't worry about-"

"We can tell my dad," he said, cutting me off. My eyes widened, and he looked at me like he had just hit the jackpot. "He already knows something is off about your scars. He wrote that down in your file himself. He fucking *knows* already! All we have to do is fill in the blanks!"

I gave him a tired look and shook my head.

"I'm sorry, Edward, but you don't trust your father. You said so yourself... so what reason do I have to trust him?" I asked. "And I don't trust doctors either. I don't trust the health care system... For all we know, your father will just think we're crazy and have *me* committed."

"But isn't that better than living like this? In constant fear? You put a fucking chair against for your door, for crying out loud," he said, gesturing towards it. "You're not safe here."

"I'm not safe anywhere," I replied softly, and the corner of his mouth lifted up.

"You're safe with me." There was no special tone behind those words - it was just a simple statement of a fact. I was safe with him – *when we were alone*.

"What happened to keep this thing a secret? You were supposed to stay away from me, remember? What if your dad gets the wrong idea about us? What if he thinks you're manipulating me in a sick way to get people on your side again... or something?" I was voicing the words I already knew he was thinking.

The look in his eyes confirmed it.

"But you... you can't stay here... you will die if you stay," he protested quietly.

"And if we tell people, you will get shit for it... people will get the wrong idea, you know they will. And there is no reason to screw up your life any more than necessary, right?" I said. "And by screwing up your life, we screw up mine even more... it's connected. I'm screwed no matter what we do."

"We're fucking stuck," he concluded.

"That, we are."

He turned his head to me, smiling despite it all, and I smiled back.

"I'll find a way, Sparrow, I promise I'll save you."

He grabbed my hand and raised it to his lips, kissing my knuckles softly.

"Don't make promises you can't keep. How the hell are you going to save me if we can't even be seen together? If my dad finds out, we both know that he will put a restraining order against you, and no matter how much I protest, we won't be allowed to see each other..."

"I'll find a way," he repeated, and kissed my knuckles one more time – this time letting his lips linger against them for a moment longer – he had a light frown on his face when he pulled back. He looked a little confused, as if he was pondering something. "Hand me your cell phone, would ya?" he asked suddenly. I gave him a weird look,

but did as he asked. I reached for the phone on the night stand and handed it to him. He quickly punched something in, before handing it back to me. "There, now you have my number. I put it under 'Tony'... I figured using my real name wouldn't end well if someone were to find your phone."

"Why 'Tony'?"

"My middle name is Anthony."

"Oh... I guess you could put my number under Marie then... since it's my middle name."

"Forget it."

"What? You don't want my number?" I felt an odd twinge of disappointment at that, and I also felt a little offended, for some reason. He picked up his phone from his pocket and started playing around with his phone, and I stared at him in confusion. Why didn't he want my number? Did he think he had no use for it?

"Of course, I do, I even sent a text from your phone to mine so I have it..."

I sighed and almost rolled my eyes at myself. *Way to jump to conclusions, Bella .*

"Then what was the 'forget it' about?"

"You won't be Marie in my fucking phone. You're no Marie."

"You can't very well put Bella or Isabella there, or even Swan, now can you?"

"Those aren't your damn names, anyway..."

"Now I'm confused," I said, grabbing his phone from his hands in frustration.

I looked down at the screen and saw that he had just saved my number into his phone. I couldn't do anything but smile at the name he had picked.

"That's who you are now... okay?" he said quietly, sounding almost embarrassed by it.

Sparrow.

"Nobody knows about that name... it's ours, ya know? Even if some fucker stole my phone and looked up the numbers in it, they would have no fucking clue who Sparrow is. You're safe in here."

"And if someone asks you about the name... what will you say?"

"That it's a guy I ran into in Port Angeles, who thinks he's Jack Sparrow." I quirked an eyebrow at him, and he laughed. "Don't worry, if someone asks I will tell them the truth."

"Which is...?"

He took his phone from my hands and put it beside him before turning to me.

"That Sparrow is a fucking amazing person with a fucked up past... someone whose past I'm partly responsible for fucking up... someone I've wronged, but who I want to help out but don't know how... and someone who just gets me. Someone who calls me out on my fucking bullshit and doesn't judge." He smiled crookedly. He stroked away a strand of hair that had fallen in my face and tucked it safely behind my ear. "And what will you say if people ask you about Tony?"

"That he's a douche that gets away with way too much... but some of the grief he's getting is not deserved... I would not say he's misunderstood; I would just say that the people in his life don't have enough faith in him, and they always expect the worst from him... and even though he doesn't deserve any better, considering the way

he has treated people in the past... he still doesn't deserve the grief he gets when he does try to help people every once in a while."

"I'm sorry for the way I've treated you, I really am," he said quietly.

"It's high school," I said, shrugging. "If it wasn't me... it would have been someone else. Besides, you were never that bad... yes, you spat out the occasional Goose at me if I was to pass you in the hallway, but other than that, you didn't do much..." I trailed off as I realized it wasn't the truth. I met his gaze and saw in his eyes that he was thinking the same thing. "It wasn't until the week of the accident that you changed... it just went downhill from there... almost as if we knew that the accident was coming... like when you told me you would kill me after I accidentally pushed you into that puddle of mud..."

"And I almost did," he said quietly. "Both Emmett and Dad have asked me if I hit you on purpose... because Emmett told Dad about what I said that day... and that's why I have no fucking reason to trust either of them. If they actually think I'm capable of that shit."

"And that's exactly the reason why I'm not comfortable going to him with all this... not yet anyway... it's weird enough as it is that you of all people know," I said. "I don't even know how to feel about this... *us* ... yet. I don't even know what we are." My eyes grew wide when I realized how that must have sounded. "Not that we *are* anything," I recovered quickly. "I mean... we're like friends? Right? No? I mean... acquaintances? Buddies? Pals? Associates? Partners in crime? Hunting buddies? Shooting birds?" I chuckled awkwardly.

Edward gave me an odd look. I felt the blood rush to and away from my face at the same time. As if it didn't know if it was supposed to blush or be drained all together.

After an eternity of silence, he finally responded.

By bursting into laughter.

"Good lord... *hunting buddies* ? Seriously? Have you always been this funny?" he asked, still laughing. "Don't sweat it, Sparrow, we're *friends* ." He put emphasis on the word, and it rolled easily off his lips. When I said it had just sounded awkward and wrong, but when he said it, it sounded just right.

I met his gaze, and smiled.

We're friends.

He said so himself, and there had been nothing in his tone that suggested he thought otherwise.

So why did I get this weird feeling that he was still not completely convinced? Something in his eyes made me wonder if he was still conflicted. He was still battling something within himself, I was sure of it.

I just hoped I was going to end up on the winning side.

Quiet

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : HEAR and Amore]

Chapter 31 – "Quiet"

Edward Cullen POV

Insane. Demented. Mad. Psychopathic. Loco. Loony. Nuts. Bonkers. Deranged. Mental.

Batshit. Fucking. Crazy .

Who the hell were these people?

To say that I was disturbed by Sparrow's story would have been an understatement. I didn't know what to think. It all sounded too incredible to be real, but I had seen the news on TV and I knew for a fact that shit like this happened behind closed doors every damn day. I guess I had just been an ignorant fool to think that this couldn't happen here too, just because it was boring-ass Forks.

Sparrow's voice had been emotionless and detached as she told me about what happened, and I couldn't blame her. The only way she could get through it was probably by detaching herself and pretending it wasn't really her story she was telling. This was the first, and only, time she had told someone about what happened. I may have been an ignorant fool before, but I wasn't ignorant enough to not realize that this shit was huge for her. The fact that she told someone.

The fact that she told *me* .

When she was done with her story, I really didn't know what the fuck I was supposed to do. I couldn't very well tell her that I was 'sorry' because that was pathetic. It's not like that would be the magic word to fix this. To fix *her* .

I had a strange, almost overwhelming, feeling of really needing to protect her now. Before it had just been about protecting her from killing herself, and saving myself from getting blamed – now it was all about protecting her from those insane people. I didn't even care what happened to me. If they got their hands on her again, there was no fucking doubt that they were going to kill her. They would go too far.

And none of this was her fucking fault. I wanted to tell her this, but I bit my tongue.

I didn't know why she made me promise not to tell her that. She couldn't honestly believe it was her fault, could she? Apparently, she did. She thought she was to blame, that she had done something to make them believe she was someone she was not. And that was why they hurt her like they did.

But of course it wasn't her fucking fault. She hadn't asked for the last name she was given.

And I told her that when I couldn't hold my tongue anymore.

She was not very pleased.

I didn't fucking care.

I couldn't take the defeated look in her eyes, but I didn't know what I could do to remove it. At least I understood it now, and I didn't blame her at all. Still, I needed her to fight back, but as long as she felt defeated she would never do it. There was nothing I could do for her, nothing I could say, to make it all okay.

So I did the only little thing I could do. I tried to appeal to her empathetic side. If she didn't fight, they would kill her, and if they killed her they would find another Swan to take her place. And the vicious circle would continue. More people would get hurt. I knew she would never allow that to happen. She didn't want other people to get hurt. Granted, I didn't know her that well – if at all really – but I fucking knew her *type*. She would rather die than have anyone else get hurt.

We needed to tell someone. Anyone. Someone had to believe us.

I didn't care if I would get into trouble for it. It would be worth saving a life for, right? It would be the ultimate proof of the fact that I was not as bad as people thought that I was.

But right now it wasn't about what other people thought, it was about what Sparrow thought. It was about how I could help her out of this shit-fest and how to make her feel better. The better she felt, the less suicidal she would be... and the greater my chances of keeping her alive would be. No biggie, right? Wrong.

Since my words didn't do much to comfort her or ease her worries, I did the first thing that came to mind.

I kissed her fucking knuckles.

It was such a pussy move I almost wanted to throw up on myself. Who the fuck kisses someone's knuckles? Who was I? Some Shakespeare-douche? I might as well have been dressed in tights. I figured I did it because all girls liked cheesy moves like that, and I thought she would blush scarlet and be all giggly. And if I could produce a giggle out of her I knew I was in the clear... for now. A giggle, a blush and embarrassed look in her eyes would have been a good thing, it would have proved that all was not fucking lost yet. And I would have picked embarrassed over defeated any day, anyway.

But then, as I met her gaze, all those thoughts and hopes disappeared. She looked so defeated.

After she reminded me about the possibility of her dad getting a restraining order put against me, I felt a sudden rush of panic shoot through my body. I tried my best to shove that shit aside. Who cared if he pulled that shit? We just had to be sneakier about our nightly meetings...

A restraining order against *me* would be the least of our problems. It was a small price to pay if that meant keeping Sparrow alive for a little while longer.

I kissed her knuckles again. For some reason it felt like I didn't do it for her this time. It was fucking weird. Why would I kiss her knuckles if it wasn't for her benefit?

I tried to shake the weird, uncomfortable, feeling off by asking for her phone. I figured that if she had my number she could text or call me whenever her crazy-ass mother decided to try again. This way I didn't need to worry so much.

And we finally established out loud, between the two of us, exactly what we were.

I, Edward fucking Cullen, was now *friends* with Isabella 'The Goose' Swan.

And it didn't bug me in the slightest.

The past couple of weeks had put everything on edge. I shouldn't be happy about befriending The Goose. I should be worried about my reputation and the fact that she was a freak.

But I wasn't. I wasn't worried at all, and I was... well... maybe not *happy*, per se, but I wasn't *unhappy* about it either. It was all just so fucking confusing and I didn't understand it at all. Maybe I wasn't supposed to. Maybe I was just supposed to roll with it.

Friends... huh...

I glanced at Sparrow and noticed her looking at me. Her big, brown eyes were intense and it made me uncomfortable. I hated when she looked at me like that. It almost felt like I was naked – and not the good kind of naked. Not the "I'm about to get laid" kind of naked. This was "You can't hide" kind of naked. I looked away and down at our hands instead. I realized then that we had made a habit of holding hands when we met.

Correction; I have made a habit out of it.

"You think you'll be okay?" I asked quietly, still not looking at her.

She sighed deeply and shrugged. "I don't know."

"If you're ever in trouble or if she tries something with you... just call, okay?" I continued with the same quiet tone.

"Edward." she said, and I could already hear her protesting. "You're fighting a losing batt-"

"At least I'm fucking fighting, unlike some people," I snapped in frustration. "Just do this shit, okay?" I shot my eyes to her, blinking in surprise when I noticed that she was looking kind of amused. I quirked an eyebrow at her in question and she smiled.

"What? I'm not allowed to make a joke?" she asked calmly.

"That wasn't fucking funny," I replied, my voice shaking in frustration. "It took me forever to get you on the right side of this shit, so don't even joke about giving up again. Okay? Just... fucking... don't..."

I pinched the bridge of my nose with my free hand and took a deep breath. She was going to be the death of me, before she became the death of herself. What a fucking mess this was. She squeezed my hand and gave me a gentle nudge.

"C'mon," she said weakly, and I sighed again, squeezing my eyes shut.

"You have any fucking idea how much this shit is stressing me the fuck out? My nerves are practically fried by now and I can't... *you* can't make jokes about giving up after telling me a shit story like that, okay?" I almost hissed through clenched teeth.

I opened my eyes and let my hand fall down to my side. I turned my head toward her. The amused look was gone from her face.

"I'm sorry," she said, but I didn't want her to be fucking sorry. None of this shit was her fault. I sighed and stood up from the bed. She surprised me by holding onto my hand and holding me back. "Don't go... I'm sorry... I can't... please... Don't go... I don't want you to leave... I... don't... my mom..." she rambled.

I looked back at her at her, and I tried to ignore the pained expression in her face. "I'm not going anywhere, I fucking told you that already. But right *now*, I need to get home," I said. "I'll be back tomorrow. I *promise*."

"You promise?" She sounded so desperate, and it was instinct more than anything else that made me sit back down on the bed. It was nothing but instinct that also put my arm around her and pulled her closer to me. She stiffened for a moment, before relaxing.

I ignored the fact that I relaxed the moment I touched her.

This should be uncomfortable... why on earth isn't this fucking uncomfortable?

"Maybe I can stay a little while longer," I replied quietly. "Why don't you try to sleep?"

She nodded softly and closed her eyes. It didn't take long for her breathing to even out, and I assumed she was asleep. Her back was against my side, and she rested her head against the arm that I held around her. Her hair was practically in my face, and every time I breathed I smelled that soft scent of strawberries. I leaned my head

forward so my face was just an inch from her hair and took a deep breath. *Yeah, strawberries... and freesia... Maybe even a little lilac...*

So now you can name a bunch of pansy-ass flowers? Did you forget your dick at home or something?

I leaned back slowly, staring at her head as if I had never seen it before. What the fuck was I doing? Sniffing a girl's hair, holding her hand, kissing her knuckles... what the fuck was happening to me?

She stirred in her sleep, nuzzling her face in my arm and hugging it closer to her. I felt that ridiculous stirring in my stomach again, and it felt like it was spreading to other parts of my body too. What the fuck was this? Disgust? No. That wasn't it. I knew disgust. Disgust is what I felt when Tanya threw herself at me, trying to make me her boyfriend. *That* was disgusting. But *this* was... not. It felt kind of... *nice* .

I looked down at her head again and stroked some hair away from her face. I couldn't see the expression on her face from here, but it was fine. I didn't fucking need to. She was relaxed. She was fucking safe.

That was all that mattered.

"I'll protect you, Sparrow," I whispered, before pressing my lips to her hair, and it felt just as natural as kissing her fucking knuckles. Kissing her felt... natural.

What the fuck is going on?

I closed my eyes for a moment. At least I thought it was a moment. I must have fallen asleep because I felt all groggy and weird when I opened my eyes again. Sparrow was looking at me with a sleepy smile.

"You should leave... I heard Dad wake up a few minutes ago. He's in the shower now, so you better run," she said quietly. I nodded with a

yawn as I got up from the bed. I stretched, and my back protested immediately. It was a bitch to sleep in a sitting position... especially if you sat like a fucking sack of potatoes.

I walked over to the window and pushed it open. I glanced over at Sparrow and found her looking at me. I smirked at her and a light blush crept up her cheeks.

"Stay out of trouble today. Okay, Sparrow?" I said to her.

She rolled her eyes and crossed her arms over her chest. "Right back at you, *Tony* ."

I met her gaze and my smirk faded slightly. "I'm going to the same school as Black. You can't expect me to stay out of trouble."

Her amused look faded too and was replaced by a frown. "Leave him alone. You're not going to say or do anything to him or anyone else for that matter."

"We can't stay quiet about this... you have to tell someone... *we need to tell someone*," I said.

"No. I want us to keep quiet. No one is going to believe us anyway. Just leave it the hell alone, Edward, it is what it is. This is not your choice to make, it's mine. And I'm saying we're keeping quiet," she said sternly.

"Nobody will think you're insane! I don't think you're insane, and shouldn't I be the first one to jump on that train, anyway, huh? The only thing that's insane is that you want to keep quiet about the damn thing. We need to stop your crazy-ass mother, and the only way to do that is by telling someone," I spat in frustration. She looked away and pursed her lips. She knew I was right, but she wasn't going to budge. *We had to tell someone* .

"Stay away from Jacob, and keep your mouth shut, and we won't have a problem," she mumbled quietly, without looking at me.

"Until your crazy-ass mom comes home and decides it's a good idea to try to kill you again!"

The plumbing in the house suddenly made a weird noise and Sparrow looked up at the ceiling.

"Great," she sighed, as she looked back at me. "He's done in the shower now. You better go. *Now*."

"See you later," I muttered and quickly climbed out the window.

I didn't bother to try sneaking in today either. The clock on my phone told me it was already past seven, and my whole family would be up by now. When I entered the house I went straight for the kitchen. I was starving and there was no damn use in trying to beat around the bush.

When I walked in, I found them all sitting by the kitchen table. They were the picture perfect family. Dad was reading the paper, dressed in a casual suit. Mom was sketching something on her inspirational pad - which she carried around almost everywhere, so she was ready whenever inspiration struck. And Emmett was shoveling food into his mouth at a frightening speed, as if his life depended on it. They all looked so fucking perfect.

Despite Emmett's lack of table manners.

I wondered how breakfast at the Swan house looked. What did she prefer to eat in the morning? Did the chief read the paper? And what did her mom do? Did she just sit there and stare longingly at Sparrow's neck while daydreaming about her blood? What did crazy people eat for breakfast? Babies?

"Edward? Are you listening to me?" Dad's voice woke me up from my musings and I looked at him.

"What?"

"I said that your car is ready to be picked up today," he said.

I narrowed my eyes at him, and my hands curled into fists by my side. "I don't fucking want my car back. You can drive it off a fucking cliff for all I care," I muttered, and turned toward the fridge.

He frowned and put the paper aside. "Don't worry, I'm not asking you to drive it, or even go with me to pick it up; that's why your mother is coming with me," he replied, still with that annoying calm tone.

"Then what the fuck are you even telling me this for?" I asked. Mom and Dad shared a look before looking over at Emmett. He stopped shoveling food into his mouth and huffed.

He swallowed and pushed his chair back. "I guess that's my cue to leave," he said and left the kitchen.

Dad sighed deeply before looking back at me. "We need to talk," he said.

"Oh, fuck this," I sighed and turned to leave.

" *You're not leaving this room !*"

I froze in my spot for a moment, before slowly turning around and staring at my mother. From the corner of my eye I could see that Dad was gaping at her as well. Mom never raised her voice, and I do mean *never* . Especially not at me or Emmett. This was... *weird*.

She took a calming breath and nodded towards the chair that had been occupied by Emmett.

"Sit," she said evenly and I did as I was told. I didn't dare disobey her now. An angry mom was a scary fucking mom. "I'm going to give you the benefit of the doubt and assume you're not off doing something stupid when you leave the house every night. I believe we have cut you enough slack. We need to see a change in you. That's why your

dad is going to take you to the hospital tomorrow and see a colleague of his."

I shot my eyes to Dad and he just nodded.

"I'm not fucking crazy!" I snapped.

"We know you're not," Mom said softly, and patted my hand on the table in a condescending manner. I snorted. It was almost as if I could read their minds at that moment. Their thoughts were so fucking obvious. They wanted me to go into therapy and take meds for whatever they thought was wrong with me.

Meds and therapy were for crazy people. Why did they think I was insane? So what if I didn't like driving or riding in cars anymore. It was understandable, right? I almost killed a girl the last time I drove; of course that made me a little anxious to be around cars. It didn't make me insane enough to require meds and therapy to get better.

I can get over this on my own, thank you very fucking much.

I looked down at the table and I could suddenly feel myself relate to Sparrow's fear. She thought that they would think she was insane. Maybe it wasn't such a farfetched fear in her case either. Her story was so fucking unbelievable, it was possible no one would think it was true. They would lock her up in the loony bin instead of her mother, and she would rot away like a bird in a cage.

In Sparrow's case, one would probably think that ending up in the loony bin was a good thing, considering what she had waiting for her at home. But I knew better than that, I knew *her* better than that. The loony bin would be a death sentence. Nobody would ever take her seriously again. Everything she said would be considered a joke. And what would happen the day she finally got out? Her mom would *kill* her.

Staying was a death sentence; speaking up was a death sentence, and the fact that she already *wanted* to die wasn't really helping me

out either. Everything was a fucking death sentence.

I rested my elbows against the table and hid my face in my hands.

If we told someone about her situation and they didn't believe us, did that mean people would think I was crazy too? Would they think I lost my mind in the accident and that I needed to be locked up? My parents already thought I had issues. Maybe this would only fuel *that* fucking fire.

What the fuck am I going to do?

"We're not crazy... we're not fucking crazy," I muttered into my hands.

"Edward... who are you talking about?" Dad asked, sounding confused and with serious concern lacing his voice. He touched my shoulder and I made no move to try to shake it off. I let him be. This must have made him even more concerned because I could almost feel his hand shake as he squeezed my shoulder softly. "Edward...?"

"If someone told someone else something... something fucking horrible... but that someone wasn't allowed to tell someone else because people would think that someone was fucking insane and that it would get someone committed... what the fuck would you do?" I groaned into my hands. Neither of my parents said anything. I let my hands fall down to the table and I slumped in my chair. They shared a concerned look before they both looked back at me.

"Edward, this wasn't a hypothetical question, was it?" Dad asked, and I clenched my jaw and looked away. He sighed. "Damnit, Edward."

"What have you gotten yourself into?" Mom asked worriedly. "You can tell us, you know that. We won't judge, we just want to help."

I just shook my head and looked down at my hands.

"If something is going on, if someone's in trouble or if *you're* in trouble, you have to tell us," Dad said. He was trying to keep his voice stern, but his worry overrode everything. I shook my head as I pushed my chair back and stood up.

"I need to take a shower before school," I muttered, ignoring the looks they gave me. Dad sighed and nodded reluctantly. I quickly left the kitchen and ran up to my room.

I barely had enough time to close the door behind me before I collapsed on the floor. I leaned back against the door and pulled up my legs, resting my arms against my knees and my forehead against my arms. I just wanted to curl up and disappear.

Is this how Sparrow felt every fucking day?

I wasn't saying I wanted to die, because that shit would have been messed up. I just wanted to disappear, and that was a totally different thing.

How could she tell me such a fucked up story and expect me to keep quiet? Yeah, I was all for letting people's business be their fucking business, and not getting involved. If Emmett told me that some dude was cheating on some chick, I would just scoff and change the subject. It wasn't my fucking business, so why should I care?

But this was fucking different. I didn't know exactly why it was different, but it was. Maybe it was because they had broken the law.

Yeah, because you're such a fan of 'the law'.

At least I've never tried to murder anyone!

You just tell people that you will.

Fuck you.

I made it to the shower and relaxed in the warm spray of the water. I closed my eyes and rested my forehead against the cool wall.

Was this how it felt when your entire being was being broken apart and you had no way of stopping it? Was this how it felt when your worst nightmares became your reality? Was this how it felt when your view of the world blurred into nothing and became something else? Was this how it felt when you realized that karma really was a bitch?

If Sparrow really didn't want any help she never would have told me. She would have told me to fuck off from day one. She would have killed herself a long time ago. She wanted my help. She wanted *anyone* 's help. She just didn't know it. She also didn't know how to ask for it because of her fucking fear of not being taken seriously.

She had too many damn fears.

No wonder she has no friends.

I straightened up and stared at the wall as if it had been the one saying it.

She had never had any friends at our school, not that I was aware of anyway, and for the first time I actually wondered why. For as long as I could remember she had been The Goose to everyone. People called her that, amongst other things, in the hallways or in the line to the cafeteria, but other than that they mostly left her alone. She was invisible, until she came into their line of sight and they needed someone to put down.

She was nothing to people. *Why* was that? She wasn't that weird. Honestly, she wasn't weird at all. She could stand up for herself if she needed to, and she was *funny* . She had a wicked sense of humor and she was honest. Honest and trustworthy.

But people never saw that because none of the bastards who went to Forks High had ever given her a chance. Sparrow wasn't that kind of person who struck up a random conversation with just anybody, and maybe that was why she had fallen into obscurity. She wasn't forward enough, and people saw that as a weakness. High school

was all about survival of the fittest, and Sparrow's weakness was enough to become her downfall. Her strengths never had a chance to surface.

I cursed under my breath as I left the shower and went to get dressed. Mom and Dad had already left when I came downstairs. My stomach grumbled, reminding me that I never got anything to eat before my shower. I entertained the idea of maybe skipping school and sleeping all day instead, but I pushed that thought aside. I wanted to find out more about Jacob, and if there was anything else they had done to Sparrow, or any information of value. Maybe I could even find out what they were planning on doing to her next. And *when* .

To say that I was late when I finally made it to La Push would have been an understatement, but I couldn't care less. Mr. Ateara was reading from some old book, and the class turned their heads to stare at me when I walked in.

"Why, Mr. Cullen, I'm glad you finally decided to honor us with your presence," Mr. Ateara said. His dislike for me couldn't have been more obvious even if he had been wearing a damn "I hate Edward Cullen" t-shirt. Leah gave me an amused smile and I smirked back. I guess I wasn't the only one noticing.

I assumed today was going to be just another day where I had to be force-fed a bunch of ridiculous legends. Turns out, I was only partly right. After Mr. Ateara had finished reading whatever-the-fuck he had been reading when I walked in, he began telling us about the history of the town. Real fucking facts at that, shit you could look up in a book at the library, or Google or whatever. Who knew Mr. Ateara knew *anything* about real stuff? I had assumed he was too caught up in his stupid legends to know anything else.

Leah was waiting for me outside the classroom when it was time for lunch, and we walked together to the cafeteria. The line was short and we went to sit at the same table as yesterday.

The 'bad-ass' table was empty. None of the mutts had arrived yet, and that was just as well. I wouldn't have been able to eat if they had been there. I glanced at Leah, and saw her staring at the cafeteria doors.

"Waiting for someone?" I asked casually. She quickly looked down and I swear to God that she blushed, even though her dark skin covered it pretty well. "Sam?"

"No, I'm not waiting for *Sam*." She spat his name, sounding offended. I rolled my eyes and took a big bite of my sandwich. We ate in silence for a moment, and it didn't take long for her eyes to wander back to the doors. She quickly looked back down when the doors opened and none other than scar-girl herself walked in. Leah muttered something under her breath and I pursed my lips.

This is going to be interesting...

I put down my sandwich and leaned back in my chair. I crossed my arms over my chest as Emily walked toward us. Leah kept her eyes steady on the table, the cafeteria doors holding no interest for her anymore.

"Hi, Leah, how are you doing?" Emily asked with a light voice. She was hugging a couple of books to her chest, and I cringed at the obvious display of her arms. They were even more disgusting this close.

There were cuts and scars everywhere. The cuts were not limited to the inside of her underarms – they were all around it. One cut in particular looked severely infected, but she didn't seem to care. If she was going to let people cut her like that, why wasn't she taking better care of the wounds afterwards? Dad had told me horror stories about how bad infections could be. Didn't she care that she could get blood poisoning and that she could be forced to amputate her arm? Apparently not. Then again, what did her health matter if she got to spend the rest of her life with her 'imprint'? Fucking idiot.

Leah did what she could to ignore Emily, but Emily kept talking about some gathering.

"... and Jacob will bring Isabella, it's going to be great," she said excitedly.

I tensed at the mention of Sparrow. "Isabella?" I croaked, even though I tried to keep my voice calm and nonchalant, like I really didn't care.

"Yes, Isabella. She's Jacob's girlfriend. But I'm sorry, you can't go. It's Quileute exclusive," she said sweetly, but there was something in her voice that clearly said that she wasn't sorry at all. She looked back at Leah. "We start at eleven, but I think you would want to be there before ten. I hope we'll see you there. Everyone is coming!" Emily's smile was beginning to look awfully fake and forced, and Leah kept staring at the table without a word. "Well, anyhow, that was all... see you tonight!" Emily walked away, and I turned to look at Leah.

"What was that about?" I asked.

"Just more stupid legends crap... nothing to worry your pretty little head about," she said, and patted my head condescendingly. I assumed she was trying to be funny, but I wasn't having it.

"What. Was. That. About?" I asked again. She rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"Nothing! It was just one of those stupid things they do when they think the time is right, and they want to celebrate love or whatever... I don't know what they do at gatherings anymore, I haven't been to one in years. They have a habit of spiraling out of control and they're not what they used to be," she replied with a deep sigh. "Why do you care so much anyway? For a guy who thinks all of this is crap you sure ask a lot of questions."

I pushed my chair back and grabbed my tray. I leaned forward just as I was about to pass her.

"And for someone who says she's not waiting for Sam, you sure do stare at that door and at that empty table a lot," I replied, with my voice close to her ear. She huffed and I chuckled humorlessly as I walked away.

I tossed my entire tray in the garbage before I left. I picked up my phone from my pocket as I walked out from the cafeteria. My fingers flew over the keys as I quickly wrote a text.

" Shit is going down. Stay clear from crazy moms. Be safe or I swear to fucking God..."

I pressed 'send' and sighed deeply.

Shit was about to hit the fucking fan.

And I hoped Sparrow was somewhere safe when it did.

Sparrow never replied to my text. I tried to tell myself that it was because she was in class, or that she had left her cell phone in her locker or something. Or maybe she just read the text and didn't bother to respond. It wasn't like I had ended it with a question or anything, so maybe she thought she didn't need to reply?

But at the end of the day I was more than a little anxious. I told myself she was safe. Why wouldn't she be? She was at school. What could happen to her there? Nothing would happen to her there, especially not with Emmett by her side. She was safe.

Safe.

When I got home I was met by yells and shouts from the living room. I walked in there to see what all the commotion was about. I was not surprised when I found Jasper and Emmett playing their usual video

game. I plopped down on an empty chair to watch Jasper kick Emmett's ass, since that's what he usually did.

"Hey, bro," Emmett said, without tearing his eyes off the screen. "Mom put your baby in the garage, so if you want to go *fuck* the Volvo you're all clear."

"Shut up," I said, rolling my eyes.

I watched them play, and we talked shit for about an hour. It was nice to have a normal moment for once. Just being a fucking teenager, talking shit and playing video games with friends. No worries in the world. It was a nice distraction from the hell that was my life.

"... good thing Bella wasn't in school." Emmett chuckled.

I turned my head to him. "What?"

"Not that you'd care, but apparently Tanya was ready to have her revenge on Bella today, so it was a good thing she wasn't in school. Rosalie heard them plotting in the girl's bathroom... fucking hyenas," he explained, sounding irritated. "Not like *you'd* care," he pointed out again. I felt the blood rush from my face and I stood up quickly. Emmett rolled his eyes at me. "C'mon, don't even act like you're offended." He scoffed as I ran out of the room.

But I wasn't offended. Not even close. I ran up to my room and picked up my phone again. Still no message from Sparrow. No sign of life. She wasn't safe. *Fuck* .

I stared at the phone for what felt like an eternity. Finally, I scrolled down to her name in my address book and pressed the green call button. Text messages be damned, I needed to hear her voice.

But I never got the chance. The call went straight to the pre-recorded voicemail.

What the fuck did that mean?

Maybe it meant nothing. I shouldn't be jumping to conclusions. She was probably fine. Why wouldn't she be? Maybe she was just feeling a little under the weather; there was no reason for me to think anything else. Last time she was home from school, when I still went to Forks High, it was because her leg was bothering her. Maybe her leg was back to being a bitch.

Yes. Her leg was bothering her. Of course it was.

I took a deep, calming breath and clutched the phone tightly in my hand.

My first instinct was to run to her house to see for myself that she was okay, but even I knew that that idea was stupid. What if it turned out that she was fucking fine? What the hell was I going to do then? That was like asking for trouble and getting caught for nothing. *Fuck*.

I would have to wait till midnight like always, and then I would give her a piece of my mind. I would fucking tell her that if I send her a damn text she'd better answer it.

Who the hell did she think she was anyway? Did she enjoy torturing me like this?

Oh, I get it. This is her way of finally getting back at me! By driving me fucking insane!

I'm on to you, Sparrow...

I didn't even realize I was pacing until I jumped in surprise when someone suddenly cleared their throat. I turned my head to the door and found Jasper smirking at me.

"Jumpy," he noted. I snorted and started pacing again. "Why so anxious?"

"Nothing," I muttered. "Just realizing that people are out to get me."

"Wow, since when are you paranoid?"

"Since now, apparently." I picked up my phone again, glancing at the screen even though it would tell me nothing. Jasper frowned and sat down on my couch.

"Seriously, dude, what's up? You're kinda freaking me out here... are you tripping on some bad shit or something?"

"I can't fucking tell you," I said, biting the nail on my thumb. "I can't fucking tell anyone because I promised... and because it would kill her if I did... fuck I don't know... maybe she's just messing with me... not answering my texts... calls just going to voicemail..."

"What the fuck are you talking about? What the hell is in the water in La Push?" he joked, with a humorless chuckle. "And what is this about a girl? Who's the girl?"

"I can't fucking tell you," I said again.

Jasper sighed. He leaned forward where he sat and gave me a stern look. "Seriously, dude, tell me. What the fuck is going on? I hear this shit about you having panic attacks while driving a car... you freak out even when you're near a car... and now you're rambling nonsense about a girl. *What the fuck is going on ?*"

I stopped pacing and stared at him.

Jasper was a trustworthy guy. I could trust him. Totally. I could tell him about Sparrow. He was always Switzerland, so he could give me an objective opinion on the whole thing. He could tell me what the fuck I was supposed to do. He could help out.

Jasper quirked an eyebrow, almost as if he could hear my thoughts, and I shook my head. No, I couldn't fucking tell him. There was nothing he could say or do to help.

"You are going to drive yourself insane with whatever thoughts are running through your head, you know," he said, sighing. He stood up and walked over to my keyboard. "So... are you playing again yet?" I shook my head without looking at him and he smiled crookedly. "Yeah, it figures. Four months and still not a tune. You were never one for getting help," he said, mostly to himself. I wondered if he even intended for me to hear.

"Help for what?" I muttered. "I woke up one morning and there was no muse anymore... so fucking what? Maybe I just outgrew it."

"You? Outgrow music? C'mon, don't be an idiot." He snorted. "You outgrowing music is like... I don't know... Emmett being into dudes?"

I scoffed and shook my head. "I don't think you're too far off there... I've seen the way he's been checking out Newton."

"Be serious, man, what the fuck," he said.

"I *am* serious," I replied as I checked my phone again.

"You're so messed up," he said. "Maybe you will get your head out of your ass one of these days and realize you need help."

"I'm not fucking crazy!" I snapped and he flinched in surprise. He stared at me wide-eyed and I looked back down at the floor.

"I never said you were," he said slowly. "I just said you need help. You're pacing a hole in the floor right now, so you obviously have issues with something. And I'm just assuming you need help with those issues, or else you wouldn't be pacing. Am I wrong?"

"Fuck you."

"Thought so." He turned and walked towards the door, leaving me to dwell in my own misery. He threw me a look before exiting. "When I say that you need help I'm not talking about shrinks or whatever. And

bro, you know that whatever you tell me stays with me. I'm no Emmett. I'm not going to spill the beans to my girlfriend."

"Yeah, I know." I sighed.

"My advice to you is to stop thinking so much. Whatever you're obsessing over can't be worth all the anxiety." He grabbed the doorknob and closed the door behind him, letting that become his parting words.

I stopped pacing and stared at the closed door.

Not worth it? *Not worth it ?*

So saving a life wasn't worth obsessing over? What the hell did he know?

I looked at the phone again. No message. No calls.

I guess I had to continue pacing. At least it killed time.

A while later Mom called me down for dinner. Dad had not come home yet, which was nothing out of the ordinary.

I tuned Emmett and Mom out as they discussed their day's events. Every so often I glanced at the clock on the wall, groaning inwardly when I realized only a minute had passed since the last time I checked. Once, I was even sure the stupid arm went backwards.

Half-through dinner, Dad walked in. He looked tired but content. He gave Mom a kiss before sitting down at his usual place.

"How'd it go?" Mom asked quietly.

"It went very well... she'll live," he replied timidly. "But it was touch and go there for a while..."

"Poor girl," Mom said, nodding.

"What girl?" Emmett asked, with his mouth full.

"I was just ready to leave when a girl was brought in, and I had to perform emergency surgery," Dad said, shaking his head at the memory. I swallowed back the bile that quickly rose in my throat.

"Who was the girl?" I asked, my voice barely audible.

"You know I can't disclose that kind of information," he said, looking at me surprised.

I stared down at my plate. Appetite gone? Check.

Dad continued talking to me, telling me something about something, but I didn't listen. I tuned him out completely. All I could think about was how I had failed Sparrow. I was absolutely certain that the girl who had been brought in was her. Who else would it be? All the signs were there. She wasn't in school. She didn't answer her damn phone...

But dad said she would live and that was always something. But at what cost? What did they do to her *this* time?

"I'm going to my room," I muttered, cutting Dad off mid-sentence. I ignored the looks they gave me as I stumbled out of the dining room and toward the stairs.

I failed her. I fucking *failed* her.

I failed myself. I fucking failed everything.

I couldn't even keep her safe.

I was soon back to pacing in my room, shutting out the outside world completely.

My plan was still to leave at midnight that was for fucking sure. And I guess I would have to sneak in at the hospital again.

Just like in the good old days...

I tried to distract myself by watching TV for a few hours, but it was fucking useless. I zapped through the channels, and every single one reminded me of Sparrow. If it wasn't a nature show about birds, it was a fucking hospital show with some girl who was abused by her parents.

Was some higher power trying to tell me something?

I glanced at the clock for the fiftieth time in ten minutes. I groaned when I realized not even a minute had passed since the last time I looked. This was fucking it. I needed to get the fuck out of the house, but Mom and Dad were still up. I was obviously not in the mood to have them question where I was going tonight, and if Emmett caught me I knew I was fucked. He would surely follow me and then the secret would be out. Tonight was the night I really had to be sneaky about it. I couldn't risk getting caught.

Fuck.

I rolled out of bed and left my room. If I was going to wait I might as well go downstairs and get something to eat, since I hadn't eaten much at dinner and it would kill some fucking time.

Eating always killed time.

I came downstairs and found not only Mom and Dad, but also Emmett and Rosalie, sitting in the living room, watching a movie. It was disgusting. It was like they were on a double date or some shit.

How pathetic, having a double date with your parents.

"Hey, sweetie, we're watching a movie, do you want to join us?" Mom asked timidly and I shook my head.

"No thanks," I mumbled.

My phone buzzed in my pocket, and I almost crapped my pants in alarm. I was just passing the couch, where Mom and Dad were sitting, and I stopped as I quickly picked the phone up to read the text .

My eyes went wide and I felt all the blood rush from my face.

"Son? You alright?" Dad asked, and it was almost as if his voice came through a tunnel. I wasn't hearing him right. I didn't answer him. I couldn't even see him; my eyes were focused on something I couldn't even see.

Sparrow .

I turned around quickly and ran towards the front door, with my cell phone tightly clasped in my hand. Dad called after me, but I still ignored him. I just threw open the door and ran out into the cold. Not even bothering to grab my jacket. I had no fucking time. I knew this was fucking it.

The cold air was burning my lungs as I ran down the driveway, but I scarcely noticed.

The text had only contained one word, but it was enough for me to decide that I couldn't wait until midnight.

" Help!"

Tears

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 32 – "Tears"

Isabella Swan POV

I shut the window after Edward had left, before removing the chair from the door and stepping out of the room. I made it to the kitchen and was looking through the fridge when Dad came in. I frowned when I saw how tired he looked; it didn't look like he had gotten much sleep either.

He muttered something under his breath as he prepared his morning coffee, but I couldn't make out what it was. He kept avoiding my gaze at all costs, and I wondered what that was about. At that moment, we heard the front door open, and soon Mom walked into the kitchen with a bright smile on her face. Dad visibly relaxed at the sight of her, and she gave him a quick peck on the cheek.

They exchanged a few words, and Dad smiled softly at her. He soon left for work, and I tensed as Mom turned to me. The first thing I noticed was that her eyes were normal. Her pupils were not dilated at all. *She looked absolutely normal* . Dared I hope that *everything* about her was normal today?

"I bought you something," she said, her voice excited. She walked out of the room and came back a few moments later with two bags, a small plastic one and one with a fancy logo from some designer

store in Port Angeles. She put the small bag on the kitchen table, before stepping up to me and picking up something big and white from the bigger bag. She held it in front of her, and I realized it was a dress. "I thought you could wear it tonight. Isn't it beautiful? It's silk... touch it, it's so soft."

I had to admit that the dress was beautiful. It was a simple, white, knee-length dress with beautiful embroidery by the neckline and the short sleeves – but there was no chance in hell that I was ever going to wear it. Not tonight or any other night for that matter.

"What's tonight?" I asked in a small voice.

"Celebration in La Push, silly," Mom said. "I already called your school on my way home, so they know you won't be in today."

"Excuse me?"

"We have to prepare you for tonight. This is *it*, baby." She smiled and pulled me into a tight hug, pressing the dress between us. "You'll finally be whole. No more heartache and pain. *We'll* be whole." I was absolutely frozen in her embrace. I wanted to hit her with my crutch, just like I had done to Tanya, but I couldn't even move. She pulled back and put her hands on my shoulders. "Let's get you ready... but first, you need to eat a strong breakfast."

"I... I... I just need to take my meds... they're in my bedroom... I'll be right back," I mumbled and she stepped aside, letting me go.

I made it to my room as quickly as I could on my crutches, and I snatched my phone from where I had left it on the bedside table. I tried to compose a text to Edward with shaky fingers, but I kept pushing the wrong buttons. I didn't know what she was up to today, but whatever it was, it couldn't be good. Her eyes may look normal, but *she* was clearly not.

No more heartache and pain, my ass.

"Bella, I think we need to- *what are you doing ?*" Mom had suddenly appeared in the doorway, and she looked absolutely furious when she noticed I was fiddling with my phone. She snatched it from my hands and threw it at the wall. The back panel of the phone broke loose, and I saw how the battery flew under the bed. "You're coming with me." She grabbed my arm, and I did my best to keep upright on the crutches. She stopped in the living room and gave me a frightening stare. "You're really disappointing me, Bella. Why do you insist on disappointing me all the time?"

"I... I..." I stammered, but she didn't let me finish. Before I knew it my face was turned to the side with a burning ache in my cheek. *She hit me. Again* . Tears sprung to my eyes because of the sudden burst of pain, but they never fell.

"What happened to you, Bella? All you do is lie and deceive," she said. "You have strange boys over at night. and you act like you don't love Jacob. The celebration tonight couldn't have come at a better time. We have just enough time to prepare you and clean you of the demon that has clearly possessed your soul. At midnight you will be reborn and you will finally be able to drop this act."

She pushed me down onto the couch and gave me a stern look. "You stay there and don't you dare move. Don't you *dare* ruin tonight for me!"

I was visibly shaking in fear when she left the living room. I was too afraid to move. I didn't want to know what she would do with me if I tried to flee. Maybe I should scream? What would happen then? Nothing, probably. Even if the neighbors heard my screams for help, they wouldn't come. They didn't come running when I screamed four months ago. They wouldn't come running now either. The only one who would come running was my mom - and who knew what she would do.

It would not end well.

Mom soon came back with a wooden box in her hands, along with that small plastic bag. She put them down on the living room table and gave me a tightlipped smile before opening the box. My morbid curiosity got the best of me, and I leaned forward to see what was in it.

I shouldn't have.

A shiny dagger was lying on a dark blue fabric, and it shone as Mom picked it up.

"What... what are you do-doing?" I stammered, my eyes widening in fear.

She smiled lazily as she looked at the blade. "Don't worry, sweetie. It's all good now." She smiled and touched the dagger as if it was something precious. The handle looked old and handmade. It appeared to be made out of leather and wood, with various symbols carved into it. I recognized the style of the symbols immediately; they were all from the Quileutes.

I swallowed thickly, and she smiled again. "Billy gave it to me last night. We spent the entire night purifying it; it's spotless. Clean. Pure. We will use it tonight when we unite you." She sighed deeply in contentment and the sound only fed my fear. "Your father is going to be there. We will all finally be together."

"Dad is never going let you go through with this," I protested.

"Oh, don't be silly. He was the one who found out about the Black Swan and put the pieces together. You should thank him. He *knows* ." I gaped at her, and she smiled as she leaned forward to stroke my cheek softly. "He loves you so very much. He can't wait for us to be together as a family again." She straightened up and put the dagger back in the box and shut it with a click. "But now, we have to get you ready for tonight."

She picked up the small bag and pulled out a container. She opened it up and held it out to me. *Quileute Bread*. I relaxed a little at the familiar sight of it and took the piece that Mom offered to me. I used to love this bread when I was a kid; it was one of the few things I missed about La Push. I always used to say that I could live on that bread alone for the rest of my life, because it really was *that* delicious.

After a few bites I began to feel weird, and when I looked over at Mom, I realized I had made a mistake. My head was spinning, and I couldn't even sit up right. I could hear Mom chuckle lightly, as if she was amused.

"Sweet Bella, good job," Mom cooed and kissed my head.

"I feel weird..." I complained weakly.

"Don't worry, sweetie, it's just the cleansing."

"The cleansing? What the *hell* was in this?"

"The first step to cleaning your soul, silly," she said with a light laugh.

Then everything went dark.

The darkness was a weird thing. I wasn't completely out of it, but I wasn't really lucid either. Every now and again, I would wake up and react to what was happening, but then as quickly as it came, I was back in the darkness.

I didn't know what I had expected her to do to me while I was unconscious. I guess I somehow imagined her cutting me again, making some weird potion out of my blood and then forcing me to drink it or something. Nothing would have surprised me.

Except for what she did.

When I first became somewhat lucid, I was finding myself in the bathroom upstairs. Mom was undressing me, and I tried my best to fight her off, but it was as if my limbs were not up for it. Even though I clearly couldn't fight her, she still got upset with me for trying. I had been sitting on the lid of the toilet, and when I tried to fight her, she got upset and pushed me down on the floor instead. My cast hit the floor so hard that I once again blacked out for a moment. But even in the darkness I could feel the pain, and it was *excruciating*. I cried out just as she grabbed my neck and pushed my face into the water in the tub. I immediately started to choke and her grip loosened a little as she pulled my head back up.

I spit out the water and coughed as I looked at her in horror. Her eyes were completely void of all emotion. It was like she wasn't even there. She said something about me behaving and I couldn't do anything but nod. That was when I decided that it wasn't worth it to try to fight. I would not win. I would lose. I was too weak. I was always too weak.

There was only one reason as to why I should have kept fighting her despite my weakness – and that was that she would have kept my head under water for as long as I fought. And if I fight long enough, maybe enough would be just that... *enough* .

I would have drowned. I would have died.

But I couldn't. Because I promised Edward.

So I didn't fight her. *I promised Edward* .

I soon blacked out again, only occasionally being lucid because she slapped me or did something to keep me awake. I vaguely registered that she had let me keep my underwear on, and she didn't force me to lie down or get into the tub completely. She just made me sit on the edge of it, with one leg in the water and the cast on the floor.

She washed my hair and scrubbed my body with such force that it made my skin red. It was as if she thought I had been contaminated

with something. She didn't care that she got water on the cast. She just muttered something about me not needing it after tonight. I didn't even want to know what the hell that meant.

I blacked out again, and when I awoke, I was back to sitting on the toilet lid. She was blow-drying my hair now. I was even lucid long enough to have her finish my hair and start putting make-up on me instead. I closed my eyes as she began putting on some eye shadow.

When I entered the darkness again, I decided I wasn't going to try to keep myself lucid and awake anymore. What the hell was I supposed to do anyway? I had no strength left. It was as if my body wasn't even my body anymore. In the darkness I pondered her behavior and tried to make sense of it. Why was she so cruel to me? If this was all about us being united as a family with the Blacks, then why did she behave as though she hated me? Why did she keep torturing me, hurting me? Why did she behave like she was punishing me for something? In her head, wasn't this supposed to be all about love and unity? And if it wasn't about love, then what the hell was this all about?

I don't know how long I was out for this time, but all good things come to an end. Soon the darkness ceased, and I was able to feel my body properly again. My head was pounding, and it felt like my brain was trying to claw its way out. I blinked a few times, thinking for a moment that I had gone blind because it was so dark. It wasn't until I looked around that I realized it was dark because it was nighttime.

I was lying on the bed in the guestroom, and I wondered if I had been passed out all day. Was it even Tuesday anymore? Was it midnight? Had Edward been here?

Edward.

I became overwhelmed with emotions at the mere thought of his name. I felt completely drained. There was not an inch of my body

that didn't ache, and I was so very tired. It didn't take long until my body was shaking in tearless sobs.

Edward.

I sat up slowly and looked around the room while trying to pull myself together. The door to my room was open. I tried to listen to see if I could hear anyone being home, but the house was quiet. Totally and utterly quiet.

I spotted my broken cell phone that was still lying on the floor, and I knew that this was my chance.

Edward.

I awkwardly got on the floor, trying to ignore the pain in my leg, and picked up the back panel that had broken off. I then looked under the bed to see if I could grab the battery. I saw the black object near the wall. I got covered in dust as I tried to wiggle my way under the bed to grab it. It took me a few moments, but finally my fingers grasped the object. I pulled myself out again.

I put the phone back together and said a silent prayer before I tried to turn it on.

It worked.

Thank God!

With shaky fingers I sent the quickest and shortest text I had ever sent in my entire life.

Help!

I didn't dare to call him. What if I had been wrong, and someone was still in the house and overheard me calling him?

I sent the text, and I could feel my heart pounding in my ears. It felt like I was underwater.

I almost jumped when the phone suddenly chirped, reminding me that I apparently had one missed call and a text.

The missed call was from Edward from this afternoon, and the text was... *Oh my God ...*

" Shit is going down. Stay clear from crazy moms. Be safe or I swear to fucking God..."

It was sent around noon, and I swallowed thickly. Somehow he had known that something was going to happen today. How the hell did he know? And why wasn't he here? Why hadn't he come by yet? What was he waiting for? He knew something was going to happen, so *why wasn't he here ?*

I stared at my phone as if it was the only thing keeping me alive, and *Edward* was the only thing keeping me here, so why wasn't he answering? He knew that he was the only thing keeping me from dying. So why wasn't he here when I needed him the most? Did he try? Did he get in trouble? I realized then that maybe he had been here. Maybe he got caught. Maybe Mom got a hold on him. *Oh God, no ...*

I was all alone. He wasn't coming.

Whatever was going to happen tonight was my problem now.

I managed to stand up and I managed to keep upright even though I was a little wobbly. I pulled out the drawer in the nightstand and picked up the container of pain meds. I threw two of the white pills into my mouth before putting the container back.

No pain, no gain... I should be gaining a lot...

I looked down on my body, and it was then that I realized Mom – or maybe someone else - had changed my clothes. I was now wearing that white dress that she had bought me, and from this angle it

almost looked like a damn wedding dress. A modest and simple one, perhaps. But still a wedding dress.

Was I getting married today?

My phone chirped in my hand, and I jumped in surprise.

I took a shuddering breath of relief when I saw that it was a text from "Tony."

"Where are you? I'm coming."

I quickly typed in my reply. *"Home. Alone. Hurry."*

I sat down on the bed again. My body was still too weak to stand up for too long. I looked down on my cast, and I choked on a sob when I saw that it was ruined - *it* being the owl. The pictures were absolutely ruined. There was nothing left of them but smudges. Even though it hurt that the pictures that Alice and Emmett had drawn were ruined, it didn't even compare to what I felt for the loss of the owl. Edward's picture meant something because it was personal for the both of us. *It meant something* .

And now it was gone.

I was so lost in thought as I stared down at my cast, that I jumped and shrieked in fear when I heard a loud bang from the front door as it slammed into the wall.

"SPARROW?" Edward called out. I tried to answer him, but I choked on my own words. I heard him run through the living room and soon he appeared in the doorway. He looked absolutely disheveled. "Oh, sweet baby Jesus," he exclaimed and wrapped his arms around me, hugging me close, another round of sobs shook my body. "You had me scared shitless. Are you alright? Did they hurt you?" I was unable to speak; the tearless sobs were hindering me from making any coherent sound. *He's here* . He leaned back, leaving our embrace,

and put his hands on either side of my face instead. "Sparrow, talk to me..."

"They're coming for me," I sobbed. "Mom... I don't... they're coming for me."

"The only one who's coming for you is me, so let's get the fuck out of here. Have you taken your pain meds?" he asked, and I looked at him awkwardly.

"Yeah, I have... why do you ask?" I asked him.

"Because I wanted to make sure that this wasn't going to hurt you too much," he said, and without another word, one of his arms was behind my back, and the other behind my knees, and he lifted me up. I looked at him in shock and he forced a smirk at me. "What? You thought I was going to let your inability to walk fast slow us down? Puh-lease."

My weight didn't seem to bother him at all as he carried me through the house and out the door. I put my arms around his neck to keep steady and he smiled at me.

"Where are we going?" I asked in a small voice. "You can't carry me forever."

"I'm carrying you to that car over there," he replied, nodding towards a car that I could barely make out where it stood parked in the shadows.

I looked at him confused. "But I thought you didn't drive anymore?"

"I'm not," he said with a crooked smile. "Jasper is."

Edward chuckled at my puzzled expression, and I looked over at the car. The driver's door opened as we neared it, and Jasper stepped out. He opened the door to the backseat and looked at Edward with an unfathomable expression.

"I guess you weren't kidding," he said quietly with some unknown emotion in his voice.

"Told you," Edward replied as he tried to figure out how to put me in the car. I rolled my eyes at his predicament.

"Put me down, Edward. I think I can manage to get into the car on my own," I said, my voice still quiet and small even though I tried to keep it light. He frowned as he put me down reluctantly. I climbed into the car, and Edward's frown deepened as I winced in pain when my leg accidentally brushed against the door a little too roughly.

"You okay?" he asked, and I forced a smile through the flash pain.

"I'm fine," I replied automatically and settled in the seat. I expected Edward to take the passenger seat, but instead he climbed into the backseat with me as Jasper took the seat behind the wheel. Jasper gave him an odd look in the rearview mirror, but didn't say anything.

Edward turned in his seat so he was facing me straight on as Jasper pulled out from the curb. I met Edward's gaze and smiled weakly, but he wasn't smiling back. "Are you okay? What happened? Did she touch you?" he asked and grabbed my arms. He studied my bare arms until he was sure that I wasn't injured. He let go of my wrists and grabbed my hands instead. I looked down at them, and my forced smile faded. It wasn't worth faking it. He knew I wasn't fine.

It wasn't supposed to end like this...

"Bella, you alright?" Jasper asked from the front seat. Edward turned his head and glared at him, as if he had asked me something offensive.

"Yeah, I'm fine," I replied, but my voice cracked on the last word.

"Don't pull that shit on me. I clearly see you're not fucking fine!" Edward snapped.

"HEY!" Jasper protested loudly.

"It's okay, Jasper," I sighed quietly. "It's what he does..."

He gave us a weird look in the mirror again, but didn't say anything else. Edward rested his arm on the back of the seat and kept his eyes trained on me. He was waiting me out.

"Why didn't you answer my texts? I tried to call you, but the call went straight to voicemail... what was that about? I was scared shitless!" he complained when I had been quiet for too long. I saw Jasper's eyes widened at this, and I wondered what I was missing.

"Mom got back this morning... she threw it at the wall," I mumbled.

"Fuck, I knew something was up when you didn't reply. I should have come earlier. I should have done something... *fuck*," he said quietly. "I'm so, so sorry."

Jasper braked suddenly, making us jolt forward. I felt Edward's hand tense in mine, and his entire demeanor changed. His face lost all its color, and he was still as a statue. I met Jasper's eyes in the mirror, and I couldn't read his look at all. Jasper was like a closed book to me.

"Sorry," Jasper muttered apologetically. I smiled weakly and nodded, showing him that it was okay, but when I looked back at Edward, I knew it wasn't. I raised my hand and stroked his cheek.

"Edward? You okay?" I whispered so Jasper wouldn't hear. I bit my lip as I watched Edward squeeze his eyes shut. I knew he hated cars... and I just made it worse. *Way to go, Bella*. "Jasper, please stop the car," I said, trying to keep my voice steady, and he nodded.

When the car stopped and the engine cut off, Jasper turned around in his seat to look at us. I still had my hand on Edward's cheek. Neither of us said anything. Jasper and I waited him out. We would not benefit from pushing him at this point.

After a moment Edward finally opened his eyes, and he instantly locked gazes with me. I smiled sadly at him, and he smiled back sadly.

"You okay now?" I asked him softly.

"Does it matter? I'm not the one who almost got kil-" he said, but I cut him off by putting a finger to his lips. I narrowed my eyes at him and gave him a pointed look. I saw a flash of realization in his eyes, and he sighed. "Sorry."

"Yeah, I know." I nodded.

"Are you okay?"

"I am now."

"Good."

He turned to look at Jasper. "I'm taking her home, but I need you to distract the others so I can get her up to my room without someone noticing."

"Hold on a minute! Can someone please tell me what the hell is going on? Are we running from someone? Are you hiding her? Isn't this like... kidnapping or something?" Jasper sputtered as he had apparently hit his boiling point.

Edward rolled his eyes. "It's not fucking kidnapping if she comes willingly, you idiot."

"Well... is she? Coming willingly, I mean," Jasper asked and they both turned their heads to me. Edward quirked an eyebrow at me.

"Yeah, I guess I am. I don't have much of a choice here," I replied honestly.

"You always have a choice," Jasper replied and turned back to the wheel. "But I'll let the two of you figure that one out." He shook his

head as he turned the key. "I think you guys have a lot of shit to figure out..." he added under his breath.

Edward stiffened as the car started moving again, but I tried to give him a reassuring smile, showing him that he had nothing to be afraid of.

"You sure you're okay?" Edward whispered quietly. I shook my head a little and he sighed. "What happened?"

"I'll tell you when we're alone," I replied quietly. He nodded once and squeezed my hand.

We stopped a mile away from Edward's house, and Jasper cut the engine again.

"So what do you need me to do?" he asked, without turning in his seat.

"I need you to distract them. They're probably wondering why the hell I ran off like I did and where I went, so they're going to play twenty questions with me when I get in," Edward replied.

"Maybe I should take her to my house," Jasper suggested, but Edward barely let him finish his sentence before he responded.

"No, she's coming with *me* ."

"Okay, so how the hell do you suggest we do this then?" Jasper sighed.

Edward looked at me and smiled sadly.

"You don't need to save me, Edward," I said quietly, suddenly feeling overwhelmed with guilt for ever dragging him into this mess. This was my battle, not his. He shouldn't be involved. "Maybe you should just... drive me home." I didn't want to go home; I'd rather have them leave me in the woods somewhere. Maybe, if I was lucky, a wolf would come by and put me out of my misery. As long as it kept

Edward safe, I was fine with it. He shouldn't get in trouble because of me. He had already gotten in enough trouble because of me, and I had messed his life up enough. I didn't need to add more to the ever-growing list of things I had done wrong.

"No." His response was firm and left no room for argument. He and Jasper began talking about strategies, but I just tuned them out. This was all too ridiculous. It felt like they were going to do something illegal, when in reality they were just trying to keep me safe.

They finally settled on a plan – Jasper was going to take me to Edward's room while Edward distracted his family. They figured that would be most effective, since there was no reason for them to be distracted by Jasper. And apparently Jasper also possessed "serious ninja skills."

Whatever the hell that meant.

We drove the rest of the way toward Edward's house, and Jasper parked the car before we had even reached the house. That way the car was hidden by the trees. Nobody would be able to see it from the house. He climbed out of the car, opening my door to help me out, and I smiled at him in gratitude.

Edward walked around the car and stepped up to me, taking my hands in his.

"I'll be right there, alright? You hungry or anything? I can get some food," he said.

"Nah, I'm alright, thanks," I said with a timid smile.

"Okay," he said, nodding. We looked at each other for a minute, and he sighed as he somewhat reluctantly took a step back, letting go of my hands. "I'll fix this, I fucking promise you."

He jogged away to the house, and I followed him with my gaze. When he was out of sight, I turned back to Jasper, who was looking

at me with that unreadable expression again. He held out his arms and smiled softly.

"Mind if I carry you?" he asked. "It will probably be less noisy."

"Yeah, that's fine," I sighed. "Just watch the leg."

He picked me up like Edward had done and carried me soundlessly to the house. He didn't stop to ponder how to get into the house; he just stepped right up to the door that led to the garage. He managed to open it without any problem, even with me in his arms. We stepped inside, and my eyes froze on the shiny Volvo that stood there.

I hadn't seen it since the accident. *It looked flawless* .

"He wants nothing to do with that car," Jasper said almost inaudibly.

"I thought he loved that car," I replied quietly.

"Yeah. He *did* ."

He opened another door at the end of the garage, and we stepped into a small hallway that led us to a few steps. I could hear the muffled sounds of voices. I looked at Jasper in panic, but he didn't look even remotely disturbed by it. He just gave me a reassuring smile and kept walking.

Soon the voices became clearer, and I was convinced that we were going to walk right into the room where they were. Jasper opened another door, and I assumed we now had stepped into the foyer of the house. The stairway to the next floor was right in front of us, but to get there we needed to walk past an open entryway that led to the room where the voices were coming from. I swallowed thickly, and Jasper quickened his steps.

"... SO FUCKING WHAT?" Edward yelled.

"I've tried to be understanding with you and give you time, but it clearly isn't working. What do we have to do to get through to you? We have had enough of your behavior. You need to change, and you need to change *now* ." I recognized that woman's voice. It was his mother.

"We've had enough with your disrespect. It's time to make a change, son," Dr. Cullen replied with a serious tone. "We can't you have you running around town in the middle of the night anymore. We need to know where you're at."

I never got the chance to hear Edward's reply because Jasper was quick up the stairs, and soon we were finding ourselves on the third floor of the house. He walked to the last door in the hall and pushed it open. He kicked it closed with his foot before stepping over to a black leather couch that was standing by the window, and put me down.

Jasper sat down beside me and turned his body so he was facing me. He rested his arm on the back of the couch and kept his eyes trained on me as he studied me. I quickly grew uncomfortable under the scrutiny of his gaze. He smirked lazily when I shifted in my seat and soon he chuckled quietly.

"Sorry," he said lightly. "I didn't mean to make you uncomfortable. I was just trying to figure out why you're here, but I'm coming up short."

"I had no one else to turn too. I only have Edward," I said, feeling a weird need to apologize for it.

"Yeah, and that's the part I can't figure out. Since when do you *have* Edward?" he asked, sounding mystified and curious.

"Since we realized we were both alone," I mumbled to myself. I gnawed on my lip and glanced at the door. I was just waiting for the crazy lady to come barreling through with that knife in her hand, telling me it was "time." Or maybe I was just waiting for an excuse to

not talk to Jasper. I didn't know what he knew, and I didn't want to accidentally slip and tell him something that Edward didn't want him to know.

We heard footsteps, and I tensed immediately. Jasper stood up from the couch and stepped in front of me, so whoever walked through the door wouldn't spot me immediately.

The footsteps stopped by the door. Ever so slowly the knob turned and the door creaked open. I peeked from behind Jasper and saw Edward walk in. He gave Jasper an irritated look before closing the door and locking it behind him.

"Never thought of locking the damn thing, huh?" he snapped at Jasper, and his eyes were absolutely livid. Edward walked over to the couch, every step dripping with fury, and I wondered what had him so upset. Did he regret taking me here? Did he get in trouble and realize it wasn't worth it? That / wasn't worth it?

He sat down on the couch, leaning forward to rest his elbow on his leg, and pinched the bridge of his nose with his hand. He grabbed my hand with his free one and squeezed it tightly. He took a few calculated breaths and squeezed his eyes shut. He almost appeared to be in pain.

"You okay, Edward?" I asked quietly. He snorted and shook his head, but not in response to my question.

"I should be asking you that, Sparr- *Swan* ," he muttered. "Just give me a fucking minute..."

I nodded, even though he didn't see, and let him be for a moment.

"You were talking about Bella earlier, weren't you?" Jasper asked suddenly.

I looked at him confused, and I heard Edward sigh.

"Isn't that fucking obvious by now?" he asked. I gaped at Edward and pulled my hand from his quickly, making him look up. He dropped his hand from his face and looked at me with surprisingly pained eyes.

"You promised me," I mumbled.

"I didn't fucking tell him anything!" Edward snapped quickly, when he realized what I was thinking.

"Then why did he just say you talked about me?" I asked.

Edward looked completely distraught, and I felt betrayed. I knew I shouldn't have trusted him. What was I even doing here? Why didn't I just wait for my mom? She could have ended my misery tonight.

"Edward was on the verge of a total breakdown. He was basically pacing a hole in the floor, while muttering about someone not answering texts and calls going straight to voice mail," Jasper explained. I kept my eyes on Edward, trying to decipher if I could catch the lie in his eyes, even though Jasper was the one talking. "I asked him who he was talking about, but he said he promised not to tell."

I tilted my head to the side and gazed at him.

"You told him that?" I asked.

Edward nodded. "I tried to warn you. Emily came up to Leah and me at school today... shit is going down in La Push. I got worried when you didn't answer my text or calls. I knew I should have come earlier, but I was an idiot and didn't." He grabbed my hand again, and this time I didn't pull it away. "So for fuck sake, tell me, are you okay?"

"I am now."

"No, you're fucking not," he growled. "I can see in your fucking eyes that you are still terrified. You're tense as a damn guitar string and

everything about you screams defeat. So don't fucking tell me that you're alright!"

"Then why do you keep asking me?"

"Because I want to hear it from you."

"Okay, then. I am not alright. Not even close."

"Thank you," he sighed. " *Fuck* , was that so hard?"

"Yes."

We stared at each other for a moment, totally oblivious to the looks that Jasper was giving us. It wasn't until he cleared his throat that we even acknowledged his presence again.

"What the *fuck* is going on?" he asked. Edward chuckled humorlessly and rubbed the top of my hand with his thumb.

"Don't ask that question, it will only give you nightmares," Edward replied with a small smile, as he looked at me. I couldn't help but smile back. It felt like we were sharing some inside joke, even though whatever we shared was anything *but* a joke.

"Has it given *you* nightmares?" I asked.

"You have no idea," Edward replied.

I turned my head to Jasper, giving him pleading look. "Don't tell anyone about tonight. Please..."

"I wouldn't even know where to begin," Jasper said and looked at Edward. "I thought you hated her?"

I couldn't help but chuckle despite it all, and Edward did too. "Yeah, I *do* ," he replied with a soft smirk and shrug. Jasper dragged his hands through his hair in a frustrated manner, and I bit my lip to keep from smiling. If Jasper, Edward's closest friend, couldn't understand

how on earth Edward and I suddenly had become friends, what were the odds that the rest of the world would?

"Thanks for helping out tonight, Jazz. I really fucking appreciate it. But I really need to talk to Sparro- *Swan* ," Edward said, giving Jasper a serious look. "And I don't think she's comfortable having you here."

"So, basically, you're kicking me out?" Jasper asked and Edward nodded.

"Yeah, pretty much."

Jasper snorted but didn't appear to be too offended by it. "I'm really looking forward to an explanation though," he said as he started towards the door.

"Yeah, and you'll fucking get it, but not right now," Edward replied. "Now, please, get the fuck out." Edward stood up from the couch and followed Jasper to the door, so he could close it and lock it after him. He then came back to sit with me on the couch.

His entire demeanor changed, and the strong façade he had put up when Jasper had been with us was now gone. He looked just as scared as I felt, and I once again felt guilty for putting him through all this crap.

"Tell me," he said quietly. "Don't leave any fucking details out. What the fuck happened and why the hell are you wearing a fucking wedding dress?"

I snorted quietly, feeling inappropriately amused by the fact that I wasn't the only one noticing the wedding-like quality to the dress.

"Sparrow, tell me," he said again, and I sighed deeply before I began my story.

I told him everything I remembered; only leaving out the parts where I had wished I would have fought more when Mom was "cleaning" me. Hoping she would have drowned me. I had a feeling that particular detail wouldn't have gone over well with him. The rest of the story was enough for him to get angry about; I didn't need to put that particular one on him too. I didn't need him to be angry with me. I was still afraid that I would soon tell him something that pushed him over the edge, and he would realize he wasn't built for this. That he simply couldn't help me, and that it was all too much for him.

I sighed deeply as I reached the end of my story, telling him how I had woken up in my room and found myself in that stupid white dress. I told him about the burning pain, and even though the pain meds had made it manageable, I still felt that dull ache radiate through my body.

"Was Jacob there?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied honestly. "I only have a few, vague memories of Mom..."

"But... he could have been, right? I mean, since she wasn't there when I got there, maybe they left together?"

"I suppose so... where are you going with this?" I asked, confused.

He groaned and dragged his hands through his hair. "Fuck, is it possible that they... I mean he... God, I can't even fucking say the words... Fuck, I'm just gonna go out and say it... Is it fucking possible that Jacob fucking Black was there and... *fucked* you?" He sounded so frustrated, and his voice almost cracked on the last couple of words. His hands were fisted in his hair and there was nothing I wanted more at that moment than to shake my head no and tell him he didn't. That there was no chance of that happening, that there had been no way that Jacob had done that to me. It was all about being pure. They wouldn't. *He* wouldn't. I hadn't even considered it being a possibility until he asked me.

The dull ache in my body brought me back to reality, and I realized I couldn't shake my head and tell him no, because the truth was... I wasn't sure. How could I ever be sure? There was no way for me to know. Maybe they had changed their stupid rules?

"I wish I could say he didn't... but how could I be sure? I must have been out for hours after that last lucid moment. I want to doubt that Jacob would ever do that to me... and they're all about me being pure, and if tonight was supposed to be our wedding or union or whatever, then why would he do that to me before the ceremony? It would go against everything they believe in," I mumbled, as if I was trying to convince myself. Edward pulled me into a sudden hug, resting his chin on top of my head as he hugged my head to his chest.

"You're fucking right. I'm sorry I even asked," he mumbled. "I was just... you have any idea how many scenarios have gone through my head today? Emmett told me you weren't in school, and since you didn't answer my text, I had no way of knowing if you were even alive. I imagined you being gutted like a fucking fish and feasted on... I imagined you being cut... I imagined you being gang-raped by those mutts and..." He took a shuddering breath. "I imagined you dead." There was a raw sadness in his voice that I simply didn't understand. Not even now.

"I considered fighting her in the bathroom... I considered fighting her until she drowned me," I finally confessed and I wasn't surprised when I felt Edward stiffen.

"But you didn't..." he said after a moment of silence.

"I promised you I wouldn't... I promised I wouldn't give up... and fighting her at that moment would have been like giving up." My body shook in a sudden sob that I wasn't prepared for, and Edward hugged me even closer.

"It's fucking okay. Cry, Sparrow. Get that fucking shit out of your system. Don't let that crazy bitch linger. Get that shit out. It's fucking

okay ."

I wanted to smile at his choice of words; it was such an Edward thing to say. But I couldn't smile. My mouth wasn't cooperating. Instead my mind and body agreed that the only thing they could do was to follow his advice and let that *shit* out.

"It's okay, Sparrow, you're fucking safe now..." he mumbled, and I felt him press his lips against my hair. "Nobody is going to hurt you here."

I'm safe.

My body shook violently as a wave of sobs rushed out of me, and I cried like I had never cried before. I cried because I was alive. I cried because I was scared. I cried for me. I cried for Edward. I cried for my mother. I cried because I had been alone too long. I cried because I was angry. I cried because I was relieved. I cried because I managed to survive. I cried because I was *safe* .

The last thought lingered in my mind, and I felt a weird wetness against my face on Edward's shirt. I pulled back slowly, and Edward eased his grip on me. I looked at his shirt and saw that it was wet. I softly touched my cheek and realized it was wet too.

I was crying.

Really crying.

With real tears.

Edward smiled softly as he cupped my face, wiping the tears away with his thumbs.

"You feel better?" he asked.

"I cried," I said in awe.

"Yeah, I noticed," he chuckled.

"I never cry... not with tears..."

"There's a first time for everything," he replied with a simple shrug.

I took a shuddering breath and felt myself relax. I was safe.

"Do you want to take a shower and get cleaned up or something?" Edward asked. "I'm sure I can grab something from my mom's closet that you can wear."

I looked down on my clothes, and I wanted to puke on that stupid dress. Better yet, I wanted to cut it into pieces and burn it. Then I noticed my cast, and once again felt that stab of pain in my chest because of the ruined pictures.

Edward followed my gaze, and I swear that he growled.

"She fucking ruined it," he snarled. "I don't fucking care if that bitch is your mother, but I want to fucking kill her."

"Because she ruined your owl?" I asked with a sad, humorless smile.

"No, because the way you look *because* she ruined *our* owl." I looked at him confused, and I wondered what the hell he meant. He was still staring at my cast, gritting his teeth.

Maybe my mind wasn't cooperating because I had been slipping in and out of consciousness all day, but I really didn't understand Edward. The only thing weirder than the things he said was the way in which he said them. So now he wanted to kill my mother because of the way I looked when I looked at Edward's drawing that she had ruined? He didn't want to kill her because she basically drugged me and did God knows what to me while I was asleep. He wanted to kill her because she ruined a drawing.

I didn't understand Edward at all.

"You were worried about me today," I said quietly, instead of voicing everything else that was going through my mind.

"Of course I was," he said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, and looked at me as if I had gone insane.

I smiled at his reaction. "It's been a while since I had someone worrying about me."

"And that's the most fucked up thing of all in this mess."

"I suppose it is," I replied with a sigh.

He got up from the couch and ruffled through his drawers for a moment, before pulling out a long-sleeved shirt and a pair of sweatpants.

"You can borrow these for tonight...nothing fancy, but I'm sure it's more fucking comfortable than that damn dress... and see? Long-sleeves," he said, grabbing one of the sleeves of the shirt to show me. I stood up from the couch and reached automatically for my crutches, when I realized they weren't there. I frowned and wondered where they were, when I remembered we hadn't even brought them. We had left the house so quickly, with me in Edward's arms that we hadn't even thought about the crutches.

"I can go pick something from my mother's now, if that's more comfortable, I just thought that... you know... fucking simplicity and all that crap. I rather not have another run-in with my parents tonight," he said, misinterpreting my silence.

"No, no, that's fine," I protested. "I just remembered we forgot my crutches." He blinked in surprise, and I shrugged. "No big deal, I'm sure I can get around without them by now... I'm a pro, after all."

I tried to put some pressure on my bad leg, as I attempted to take a step forward. I lost my balance when a sudden shot of pain burst through my leg, and Edward quickly grabbed a hold on me, to keep me from falling.

"Yeah, you're a pro alright. A pro at getting hurt," he muttered. "I'll help you to the bathroom."

I didn't protest, and let him lead me in. He put the clothes on the counter before looking at me awkwardly. "Do you need help getting dressed...?" I swear he blushed, and if it had been under any other circumstances, I would have laughed.

"No, it's fine," I replied. He nodded, seeming relieved, before leaving the bathroom and closing the door behind him. I undressed and threw the disgusting dress on the floor, before pulling on the shirt and pants. Even though the clothes were clean, they still held a scent that could not be described as anything but pure Edward.

Musky, manly and... delicious?

I shook the ridiculous thought from my head as I awkwardly tried to take a step to the door. The pain in my leg told me that I wasn't going anywhere. I sighed deeply and looked up at the ceiling, as if praying to God.

"Edward?" I asked, not raising my voice.

"You decent?" he asked, his voice coming directly from outside the door.

"Yeah."

He opened the door and froze for a split second when he first saw me. He quickly shook his head as he stepped up beside me to help me out. I'm sure he thought he was being sneaky about it, but I noticed that he kept throwing weird glances down at me and my body.

What was with him today?

"You can sleep in my bed. I'll sleep on the couch," he said as he led me to the bed.

"What? I can't take your bed!" I protested.

He gave me a look and snorted. "Yeah, good luck sleeping comfortably on that damn thing with *that* damn thing on your leg," he said, nodding towards my cast.

"And what about you? Aren't you supposed to be comfortable?" I asked, quirked an eyebrow.

"Trust me, Sparrow, knowing that you're fucking safe in my bed is more comfort than you'll ever know. I don't need to fucking worry about a goddamn thing tonight. We don't need to worry about people hearing us or whatever. We're safe here."

"What about your parents?" I asked, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

"They never, and I repeat *never*, come into my room without permission. It's an unspoken rule. They respect Emmett's and my privacy. They knock, yes, but they never enter. So you don't have a fucking thing to worry about. Besides, the door is locked... You're safe."

"You keep saying that, but I'm not sure I believe it yet," I said and he sat down beside me.

"That you're safe?" He smirked and leaned forward, his face so close that I could feel his breath on my face. *Musky... manly....* "You're fucking safe. We'll get your crazy-ass mother locked up. And you can finally live your fucking life and get everything you deserve."

"Yeah, and what exactly do I deserve?" I asked, honestly curious because I didn't think I deserved anything. Edward's smirk faded, and I guess he had caught on to my doubt.

"Fucking *everything*. Whatever you want, you deserve it. So tell me, Sparrow, if you could choose anything in this fucked up world to have, what would that be?"

I smiled sadly at him, already knowing what I wanted. There was only one thing. There had always just been *one* thing. I always thought I would get it someday, but then Mom decided to cut me, turning my view of the world upside down and making me doubt everything I had ever known. And of course, effectively removing my will to even breathe anymore.

There was only thing .

"I just want to be loved."

Safe, part 1

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : Voluptuous Vamp & Sandicarr]

Chapter 33 – "Safe, part 1"

Edward Cullen POV

I looked at her, not really knowing what the hell I was supposed to say.

She just wanted to be loved. Such an easy fucking concept, right?

Apparently not easy enough.

What kind of fucked up wish was that, anyway? I mean, wasn't being loved one of those fundamental things that everyone got, no matter how horrible or how good they were? I guess I couldn't blame her though; her family and friends had clearly showed her that they didn't fucking love her or that she was worth loving in the first place. Why else would they treat her like they did? It was like they thought that the only reason why anyone would ever want her or love her was if a stupid legend told them so.

I didn't even need to ask her if she meant loved as in loved by family and friends, or loved as in... *romantically* . Her tone and her fucking situation answered that damn question for me. She wasn't asking for romantic love. She just wanted to be loved. Period.

I didn't know what to say so the words lingered between us like a thick blanket. She looked away, probably growing uncomfortable with

the silence too. I sighed and left the bed, even though every fiber of my being told me to just fucking stay.

"I'm sorry, that was stupid," she mumbled. I turned my head to glare angrily at her, but she was just looking down at her hands in her lap.

"What the fuck are you apologizing for? Are you apologizing for wanting something that everyone else takes for granted? Are you apologizing for wanting something that you should already have? Fuck you, Sparrow, don't you dare fucking apologize for shit that's not your fault," I snapped.

She looked up, shrugging sheepishly. "Can you blame me?" she asked softly.

"No, I can't. And that's the most fucked up thing of all," I sighed, running my hands through my hair. "How are you feeling, though? You sure you're not hungry? Are you in any pain?"

She bit her lip and shook her head. She opened her mouth to speak when the sound of my cell phone suddenly rang out. I pulled the phone from my pocket and looked at the screen. I frowned.

Sparrow ?

"Who is it?" she asked.

"It's you."

"What?"

I held up the phone so she could see the screen.

"Your phone is calling me... did you pocket dial or something?" I asked confused. The little color she had was drained from her face and realization hit me like a fucking kick in the nuts. I looked down at the phone in my hand and swallowed. "You didn't fucking pocket dial me, did you?"

She slowly shook her head and I pressed the red button, declining the call.

"I... I... I must have forgotten it... she must have found it... what... what are we gonna do? She's gonna find me!" she said frantically, her voice cracking and shaking through her erratic breathing. She put a hand to her chest to try to calm her breathing, and I saw how her eyes immediately filled with tears. The sight was fucking horrifying. I had never seen someone as terrified as she was at that moment. There was nothing fake or overdramatic about her appearance; this was fear in its purest form. She feared for her life.

She was fucking petrified of her own *mother* .

I quickly made it back over to the bed and sat down beside her. I grabbed her hand in mine and gave it a tight squeeze.

"Don't fucking worry, Sparrow. I told you, you're safe here."

"Are you kidding me?" she said, looking at me with an insultingly doubtful look. "Sh-she has your phone number, Edward. She can have Dad trace it... or look it up or just... anything. She's gonna find me!"

I tried to give her a comforting smile, nudging her gently. "I told you, don't fucking worry about it," I replied calmly.

"Seriously? Are you *stupid* ?" she asked, anger now lacing her voice. Her emotions were all over the place.

"No," I replied coolly. "They can't trace my number because my name isn't registered to it."

"What? Is it registered to your dad or something?"

I shook my head. "This little baby right here," I said, showing her the phone, "is a product I gained from an... *acquaintance* in Port Angeles. We needed a way to stay in touch, a way that my parents

couldn't trace, and nobody else either. So, for all I know this number is registered to some random dude in Florida."

"So, what you're saying is that your number is practically untraceable?" she asked, still sounding doubtful but also a little relieved.

"Yeah, pretty much. The only way for your dad to find you via my phone is if he could track the signal, and that's not happening. So, you see, you have nothing to worry about."

Her entire body slumped in relief and she leaned her head against my shoulder. A small smile tugged at the corners of my mouth as I put an arm around her, pulling her a little closer to me. I turned my body to her, resting my chin on top of her head. She snuggled closer, gripping my shirt in her hands and practically burying her face in my chest.

We sat there in silence for a while. Soon my phone rang again and I didn't even bother to look at the screen long enough to see who it was. I just declined the call before shutting the phone off all together. I threw it away and it bounced on the couch a couple of times before falling down on the floor.

A random thought came to mind and I voiced it before I even had time to consider it. "Why the fuck did you eat the bread?" I asked.

"How was I supposed to know she was going to drug me?" she replied, turning her head a little so her cheek was resting against my chest. "I used to love that bread. I ate it all the time when I was younger. How was I supposed to know it had been... *poisoned*?"

"She's fucking crazy," I spat, feeling angry at Sparrow for being so damn naïve. "You should have just assumed there was some shit in it."

"I can't really change the past now, can I?" she mumbled, her voice cracking a tiny bit. "If I could, there are so many things I would do

differently..."

"I think we should tell my dad tomorrow," I said seriously. She pulled back to look at me. I mentally prepared myself for the protest that I knew for damn sure was coming. I tried not to take it personally when she pulled away from me and moved closer to the head of the bed. Even though the space between us was no more than a few inches, it still felt like the fucking Atlantic.

She was too far away.

"And what exactly are we going to tell him?" she asked quietly.

"Everything. There's no fucking way that he wouldn't believe us... Besides, he already knows that there's something iffy about your scars. And if he still doesn't believe us, I'll give him witnesses," I replied.

"Witnesses? I'm sorry, Edward, but I don't think Billy or Jacob or that Phil guy would ever testify against her," she mumbled, the disappointment was clear in her voice. She had almost looked hopeful for a moment, probably wishing I had been on to something.

"We have Leah. She knows about the shit that is going down in La Push. She would testify. She would stand up for you."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Because she's fucking bitter. Those legends took her boyfriend away from her, and I'm sure she wouldn't mind getting back at him for it."

She bit her lip, looking up at the ceiling as I scooted myself closer. I couldn't fucking take the space anymore. I needed her close enough that I could feel the heat radiating from her body. She turned her head.

"Are you in any pain?" I asked again, quietly.

"Nothing I can't handle," she replied.

I frowned. "That's not what I asked."

She sighed deeply, turning her head to look at me with tired eyes. "Yes, Edward. I'm in pain."

I couldn't help but smile. "Thank you."

I looked down at my hand and saw that my fingers had somehow braided themselves together with hers. Her hand felt tiny and fragile in mine but also as if it belonged there. I raised our hands and held them to my chest. She looked at them, before looking up and meeting my gaze again. The raw pain in her eyes made my smile fade and disappear.

"It hurts," she whispered, once again her eyes welled up with tears. "It hurts so much." She took a shuddering breath and the desperate sound made something ache in *me*. Her pain was suddenly my damn pain too.

"I'm so fucking sorry I didn't come sooner," I apologized quietly. "I fucking knew something was up when you didn't answer my text, but I was too damn stupid. I thought you were alright. I thought you were in school..."

"Don't apologize. You did nothing wrong," she sighed. I squeezed her hand tighter in mine and rubbed the top of her hand with my thumb, it seemed to relax her. "How did Jasper get dragged into this?"

I kept rubbing soothing circles into her hand, but this time it felt like it was more for my benefit than for hers. I could still feel the terror that had run through my body as I ran down the driveway after receiving her text.

It wasn't until I had reached the main road that I realized that I had no fucking idea where she was – and I had no means of getting there anyway. What if she had been in La Push? There was no

chance in hell that I could have run that far. That was when I had picked up my phone again and sent her another text, asking her where the hell she was.

Home. Alone. Fucking perfect.

But still too fucking faraway.

"I had talked to Jasper earlier that day. He wasn't fucking joking about the pacing," I ended with a sigh. "Jasper may be a moody bastard, but he's fucking reliable. He was the only one I could call. Hope that's okay?"

The corner of her mouth lifted into a sad smile as she nodded. "Of course it's okay, I'm just glad you found me in time."

"Speaking of which, where the hell was the crazy bitch? Leah said that the shit in La Push started at eleven. Shouldn't your mom have been at the house with you before then?" I asked, suddenly feeling slightly paranoid. What if she *had* been there? Sparrow's eyes mirrored my thoughts exactly and I tried to calm her down by kissing her knuckles again. "Don't fucking worry, I promise to fucking God that she won't get to you. You're safe here. *I'll* keep you safe."

She bowed her head and sighed, before looking up at me through her lashes with a soft frown. She looked fucking uncomfortable all of a sudden. Uncomfortable and... something else. I had never seen that look on her face before, was she even aware that she was making it?

"What's wrong now?" I asked, feeling a little uncomfortable myself all of a sudden.

"I need to... you know... erhm... use the bathroom?" It came out as a question, and her words didn't even register with me at first. I was too preoccupied with watching her eyes as she continued looking at me through her lashes.

"Bathroom?" I echoed dumbly. "Oh... OH! Bathroom, okay. Sure. Let me help you." I stood up quickly and helped her walk. I didn't ask if she needed my help in there because I had a feeling that even if she did she wouldn't admit to it, and I wasn't too sure I would have been able to do it anyway. There were some lines you simply didn't cross, and helping a girl out while she relieved herself was one of those lines.

I found myself staring at the closed bathroom door, just like I had when she changed clothes earlier. I had stared at the door so intently it had been as if I was trying to burn a hole right through it, just so I could see her undress. I still wanted to fucking kick myself for thinking that. I felt like such a teenage boy. Maybe it was because I was a fucking teenage boy. Even worse was when she stepped out, all dressed in my clothes, and my body decided to fucking betray me.

Apparently, my body seemed to have thought that seeing Sparrow in my clothes was a good thing. I had felt some weird - but somewhat pleasant - tugging feeling in my stomach as I looked down at her, and the mere memory of it made the feeling return.

Fuck me for saying it, but she looked pretty damn good in my clothes. The sweatpants were too long for her, and the long-sleeved t-shirt too big, but she looked... *good* .

Even though I felt some odd sense of satisfaction from seeing her in my clothes, I still couldn't get past how destroyed she had looked after her breakdown. I actually thought she was going to break apart in my damn arms because she had been crying so hard, her body shaking so violently.

At least she got that shit out and she was now ready to deal with whatever load of crap destiny decided to hit us with next. When she told me that all she wanted was to be loved I seriously wanted to break something.

I wondered what was going through her head. Was she still scared? Did she trust that I would keep her safe no matter what? Did she still think that suicide was the answer? Was she going to give up?

I had a feeling that only one of the answers was no.

Soon, I heard her flush the toilet and wash her hands. She stepped out a few moments later and I offered her my arm in a gentlemanly way. She rolled her eyes at me, but I could see an amused sparkle in them.

"Is it okay if I go to sleep? I'm tired," she asked quietly as she sat down on the bed.

"No, it's okay."

She made herself comfortable, and I pulled the covers over her. She gave me another amused, but sad, smile.

"What?" I asked, chuckling a little at her expression.

"Are you the same guy that called me Goose for almost ten months, and who stole my homework even though he clearly had the knowledge needed to do it himself?" she asked softly. "Are you the same guy that promised me that he would make my existence miserable... that he would kill me?"

My smile froze on my face, before it slowly dropped.

"I don't fucking know who the hell I am anymore," I replied honestly. "So much for being constant, huh?"

"It's okay, some changes are alright, I suppose," she said shrugging a little.

"Yeah, some changes..." I muttered, as I walked over to my new sleeping area.

I tried to make myself comfortable on the couch, but I guess there was a fucking reason why I never slept there. It felt like I was always on the verge of slipping off because of the damn leather. But who was I to complain? At least I could move when I slept; Sparrow couldn't because of her damn leg. Besides, she got the bed, I got the couch. That was the deal.

We said our goodnights and then we laid there in silence. It was pretty obvious that neither of us were going to sleep anytime soon, even though we were both tired as shit. Her crazy mom had gotten too close today, and there was no chance in hell that I was going to rest peacefully until I knew for sure that Sparrow was completely safe. And she wouldn't be safe until crazy-bitch and her followers were behind bars. Or six feet under. Or chopped into a million pieces and fed to the wolves.

Maybe they should just make the entire reservation into one giant prison or institution for the criminally insane, considering they all seemed to be crazy there. There must be some pretty weird shit in their water.

My body was restless, and I never really fell asleep because my body kept waking itself up every time I was on the verge of slipping into unconsciousness. Every time it happened, I heard the shallow, and somewhat labored, breaths from the bed. Sparrow was sleeping but it was clear that she was still in pain. Every now and again a whimper would escape her.

I sat up on the couch, leaning forward and resting my arms on my legs. I looked over at the bed, getting a clear view of Sparrow's sleeping form. She was in fucking pain, and there was nothing I could do about it. Not physically. Not emotionally. Nothing.

I don't know how long I sat like that. All I know is that I should have felt like a goddamn freak, but I didn't. Edward fucking Cullen was watching a goddamn girl *sleep* and it didn't feel even remotely weird. And that still wasn't the worst part. The worst part was that I actually fucking enjoyed it. Somehow it made me feel...safe.

Or whatever.

Suddenly she scrunched up her face, and an agonized sound escaped her. I was kneeling down beside her before I was even aware that I had moved off the couch. I touched her face and I stroked her arms as the whimpering continued. Her eyes shot open and there was no other emotion but raw pain in them.

"What's wrong?" I asked in alarm.

"Pain... cramp... it hurts...", she whimpered.

"Should I get my dad?" I asked nervously. "He usually has some damn good prescription pills locked up in his office. He could give you something for the pain." She shook her head.

"I'm not ready yet," she said with a pathetically weak voice. She whimpered again. "Stupid... cramp..." She squeezed her eyes shut and moved her leg a little; the simple motion made her entire body spasm. She threw the cover off herself and grabbed her thigh with both her hands. She tried to massage it to help with the pain, but since she was lying down it looked pretty uncomfortable for her.

"Let me do it," I said, replacing her hands with mine on her thigh. I started making soft circular movements and her breathing evened out almost instantly.

"You have magic hands," she sighed, her voice no longer full of pain. She opened her eyes slowly and I looked back at her with a sly smirk.

"Yeah, you're not the first girl to tell me that," I teased, winking at her while still massaging her leg.

"You're such an ass," she sighed, closing her eyes with a content smile.

"Yeah, I know," I agreed.

She made a humming noise and the content smile on her lips grew as I kept massaging her leg. I didn't even realize my damn hands had moved higher up on her thigh. She made another noise of contentment, and I groaned inwardly at myself. My fucking body was about to fucking betray me. I felt my lower region react to the damn sounds she was making and there was no fucking way for me to stop it.

"Just try to relax... go back to sleep," I said, hoping as hell that she wouldn't open her damn eyes again, or else she might notice the uncomfortable situation currently going on in my pants.

Why the hell did my body react like this? It was Sparrow for crying out loud, so what the hell was I suddenly turned on for? She was in *pain*, so since when was I some sadistic douche that got turned on by that? What the fuck was wrong with me?

And why the hell was I still touching her?

"Thank you," she whispered, it wasn't much more than a breath. She was close to falling asleep again. I sighed as I kept massaging her thigh. My hands refused to leave it, or travel down back to a safer area by her knee. My hands knew where they were, what they were doing, and they weren't leaving.

I'm so going to hell for this.

Like you're not enjoying it...

Fuck you.

"Anything for you, Sparrow," I whispered back so quietly that I doubted she heard me.

She sighed, her breathing evened out even more and it was clear that she was sleeping again. I kept massaging her leg with one hand as I tried to adjust my situation with the other.

I was still fucking hard. And not just "wow, she's cute" kind of hard, but a "goddamn, I'm going to fuck that pussy from here to next week" kind of hard. *What. The. Flying. Fuck.*

It was Sparrow.... Swan... Turkey... the fucking Goose . What the hell was I getting hard for her for? Or was it just that my body knew it was close to a goddamn pussy, and the natural instinct was to give me a damn boner? It didn't matter whose pussy it was, it was pussy nonethefuckingless.

Yeah, because you're not attracted to her at all...

I looked up at her face. Her hair was flowing out on the pillow, framing her face, like waves of fucking chocolate. Her face was fucking *perfect* . Her skin was like porcelain, and she looked like a doll with her eyes closed.

Had she always looked like this?

Yeah, not attracted at all...

Shut. The. Fuck. Up.

I sighed as I noticed that my hands had once again traveled a little too high on her thigh. I forced them into the safe territory right above her knee. I was fucking disgusted with myself; I was moments away from practically finger-fucking her in her sleep.

Yeah, that would be bad, wouldn't it? Since you would rather just fuck her. With your mighty dick.

Fuck you.

I looked up at her face again, noticing just how fragile she looked.

The skin around her left eye and on her neck had begun to darken. Her mother hadn't been very careful with her today, that was for sure. Maybe it was a good thing that Sparrow had been unconscious

for the most part; I didn't even want to know what the hell she had been subjected too.

The mere thought of her mother made my hard-on deflate like a fucking balloon.

Normal people thought of baseball, their dead grandmothers or dead puppies or some shit – I thought of Sparrow's mother, and it did the trick better than thinking about dead grandmothers playing baseball with dead puppies as balls.

Even though I was fucking relieved that the boner was gone, I still felt like a dick.

I sighed and removed my hands from her leg altogether, watching her face for any sign of distress before standing up. I didn't get back to the couch; instead I walked around the bed, climbing in on the other side. I laid down beside her, grabbing her hand and holding it to my chest.

I wasn't fucking sleeping on that damn couch tonight.

I was too fucking confused for that shit.

Because you rather sleep as close to Sparrow as you can... so you can touch her... feel her...

I growled inwardly at my stupid brain, hating it for messing with me when I already was so fucking messed up.

I turned my head and looked at her, noticing that she had turned her head to me in her sleep. I smiled crookedly and stroked her cheek with my finger.

Fucking perfect.

I sighed exasperatedly as I gripped my damn hair. I threw an annoyed glance at Sparrow, but she was just looking back at me blankly, which frustrated me even more.

"You're in pain, aren't you? Fuck, Sparrow, I think it's time for you to let someone in. And not just me, because we both know that at the end of the fucking day, I can't fucking do anything for you. The only damn thing I can do is get my dad involved," I sighed, feeling more than a little frustrated that we were yet again having this fucking conversation.

It was a little past six am and she had woken us both up half an hour earlier when another wave of pain washed over her. I had spent the better part of that time trying to convince her to let me get my dad involved, but she wasn't budging. My frustration was rolling off me in waves at this point, just like hers was.

"Let's just fucking tell him. Or anyone. Just... someone. You can't hide anymore, it's just getting worse. They're cutting people, Sparrow. They're fucking *killing* people!"

"Yes, Edward, I know that," she replied calmly. "But do you even realize what it means if we tell people? I..." she trailed off, just shaking her head as she turned to stare at the wall. *Again*. She had stared at that stupid wall more than she had looked at me during our discussion... or fight... or whatever the hell you wanted to call it. It was like she was fucking in love with it or some shit.

"You what?" I asked with a frustrated sigh.

"What will happen to *me*?" she whispered, her calm façade completely gone.

I sighed, feeling the frustrated anger leave me, and being replaced by frustrated... *frustration*.

"You will be safe."

"How can you be so sure?"

"Someone has to be the damn optimist," I sighed, smiling crookedly.

She returned my smile, but I could also see that she wasn't agreeing with me. Not yet anyway.

"Please, don't get your dad involved... not yet..." She looked at me all pleadingly and how the fuck was I supposed to deny her? This was what she wanted, and this was what I could give her.

"Fine," I sighed. "But one of these days we'll have to get someone involved, because you can't fucking return to that house."

"Thank you."

"Don't fucking thank me, I haven't done anything yet," I muttered, as I plopped back down on the bed beside her. I rested my elbows on my knees and hid my face in my hands. I didn't have the energy for this shit, especially not this early in the fucking morning.

"I'm sorry that I'm being difficult," she said and nudged me playfully. I turned my head to her, seeing her smile tentatively at me. I succumbed to the freaky power she had over me, feeling the frustration melt away as I smiled back at her. How could I not? That damn smile was fucking contagious.

I took her hand, and brought it to my lips. Kissing her knuckles like so many damn times before. She frowned and pulled the hand back quickly. I quirked an eyebrow in confusion while trying to ignore the uncomfortable feeling in my gut.

"I can't be fixed with kisses, Edward," she whispered with a broken voice while staring at the wall. "I'm too broken... kisses won't heal me."

"I know," I replied, but it was nothing more than a breath. Why was I feeling so weird? Why did it feel like she was... I didn't even know

what the hell that was. I frowned and looked away.

As soon as she had let go of my hand it almost felt like I fucking lost something. I felt some weird urge to just grab her and... I didn't fucking know. Grab her and do *something*. I didn't know what the urge was for, but it was there nonethefuckingless.

Sparrow was being so damn stubborn, and it frustrated me to no end. She wanted help; we both knew she did. But she was so damn afraid that people wouldn't believe her crazy story. Fear can be a dangerous thing, sometimes even more dangerous than what you're afraid of. Her fear was what was keeping her from being safe. She had hid herself behind her secret for so long that she no longer knew what the sensible thing to do was. She was so far gone at this point that she wouldn't even recognize her salvation if it jumped up and bit her in the ass.

Maybe you should bite her ass...

I was her fucking salvation. But she couldn't fucking see it. She *refused* to see it.

A normal person would have told her to just pick herself up and ignore whatever shit had her down. But how the hell do you tell someone who's suicidal to just pick themselves up? Answer is: you don't. So that's why I didn't. I understood why she was feeling this way, and I allowed her to feel like shit, I fucking allowed her to want to die. All I expected from her was that she wasn't going to do anything reckless about it. That she would keep breathing, keep her heart beating, even though everything fucking sucked and hurt.

I looked at my alarm clock and sighed.

"I should get ready for school," I groaned. She immediately shot her eyes to me.

"What?"

"School... you know... where you go to... eh... learn?" I replied, confused.

"But... what about me?"

"Sparrow, c'mon, if I don't go to school then people will know something's up. And they will definitely know something is up when you're reported missing. I will keep you safe, and this is how I'll do it," I said. "Okay?"

"You promise?" she asked weakly.

I smiled at her and put my hands on either side of her face.

"I fucking swear to God and all that is fucking holy that you will never have to go back there again. Your mother will never lay another hand on you. Neither will those stupid mutts in La Push. Okay?" I said, trying to put as much conviction behind my words as possible. "You are fucking safe now, Sparrow. I *promise* you." She smiled sadly at me and I resisted the urge to lean in and kiss her forehead.

I went downstairs, finding only Mom and Emmett in the kitchen. I didn't ask where Dad was because, frankly, I didn't fucking care. It was good that he wasn't there since it meant that there was one less person I had to act around. Mom looked up from her notebook and gave me a timid smile.

"Don't forget about what we agreed on last night," she said. "You're wanted at the hospital at noon. I will call your school and tell them you're not coming in today."

I froze with my hand on the handle of the fridge. *Fuck*. I had totally forgotten about all that crap. I slowly turned to look at my mother. She gave me a look that clearly said that I shouldn't bother arguing. *Double fuck*. I knew the deal, arguing now or fighting it would only lead to them forcing me to move to Chicago. I couldn't have that.

"Fine," I huffed.

"Your car keys are in the bowl by the door," she continued, "if you want to take your Volvo later."

I huffed again, not giving her a verbal response. I grabbed a container of yogurt and an apple from the fridge before leaving the kitchen and going back upstairs. I picked up my key from my pocket and unlocked the door before walking in. Sparrow was still sitting on the bed and she looked a little startled when I walked in. I guess I should have knocked or something.

"Sorry," I mumbled, and she frowned.

"What's wrong?" she asked.

"I forgot that I had to stop by the damn hospital today, so I'm not going to school. I have to see some random dude that works with my dad. It's either that or go to Chicago, and I'd rather not move there," I sighed, handing her the yogurt and the apple. "Figured you might be hungry."

"Thanks," she said, turning the apple in her hands. "So... when will you be leaving?"

"I'm supposed to be there at noon, so I'll leave around eleven thirty," I replied. I sat down on the bed and grabbed the remote control before leaning back against the headboard. "Wanna watch some TV?"

She shrugged, before moving so she was sitting next to me, with her legs stretched out before her. It wasn't until then I really noticed how awful her cast looked; it was dirty, discolored and it looked like it had crumbled a little in some places.

That can't be good...

"Don't worry about it," she said as if she could read my mind. "It's fine."

"It doesn't look fine," I muttered. "Maybe you should come with me to the hospital later..."

"Are we really discussing that again?" she asked.

"Apparently not."

She sighed and I turned on the TV. I zapped through the channels until I settled on some boring sitcom. Neither of us said anything, I didn't think we even registered what the hell was on. We were both busy trying to sort out whatever crap was going on in our heads.

I tried to come up with a way to convince her to let me tell someone at the same time as I was trying to ignore the feeling of having her so close. Every time she readjusted the way she sat, her arm would brush against mine and it was like there was an electric current between us or some shit. I wanted her fucking *closer*. I didn't want the occasional brushing; I wanted the *constant* touch.

I glanced at her, seeing her frown as she kept her eyes forward. I saw how she clenched and unclenched her jaw and I knew exactly what that meant.

"You're in pain," I noted.

"I'm always in freaking pain," she muttered, sounding annoyed. "I'm used to it."

"I don't have any meds here, and I can't get away with raiding Dad's office but I do have..." I trailed off with a groan. I didn't want to fucking end that sentence.

She turned her head to me. "You have what?"

"Weed."

"You're suggesting I get high?"

"I'm not suggesting anything. I'm just saying that weed relaxes you, and the less fucking tension you have in your damn body the less pain you'll be in... it's fucking science, Sparrow."

"But... *pot* ? Seriously?"

"What's the difference between being high on pot and high on pain killers? Do you remember how you acted that one time at the hospital? You were high as a fucking kite, and you probably didn't fucking realize it."

Something flickered past her face, and for some reason she blushed a little. "Yeah, I remember that. I thought I was dreaming."

"So you see pot is no fucking difference. You have three choices here, Sparrow, you either smoke some damn weed, let me take you to the hospital or just sit there and be in unnecessary pain. Your choice." I quirked an eyebrow at her as she met my gaze, silently daring her to pick option number three.

"Fine," she grumbled. "Give me the damn weed."

"That's my girl," I said with a smirk, before climbing off the bed to get my shit.

I sat on my bed, with a joint between my fingers, smiling at how quickly it had affected her. I took one last long drag from it, as to not waste any good weed, before putting the small butt of the joint in her empty yoghurt container.

"See? Are you feeling any better now?" I asked, feeling pretty damn fine myself.

"Feels like I don't have any bones in my body at all," she replied with a fascinated tone. I smirked at her as I climbed off the bed and stepped over to my desk. I pulled out a drawer and ruffled around a little before finding a few colored pencils. I went back to the bed and

I was acutely aware how she followed my every movement with her eyes.

I sat down and picked out a black pen, uncapping it with my teeth. She quirked a lazy eyebrow at me as I started drawing on her cast.

"We need a fucking owl... or maybe a penguin... or a fucking flamingo. We need a bird," I explained to her, as the pen started moving fluently over the ruined parts of the cast. I didn't even need to think, it was as if my hand was doing all the work for me.

I heard Sparrow giggle and I looked up at her. I couldn't help but smirk at the sight.

She's fucking perfect.

"I think I've finally figured something out," she said, her voice lazy as if she couldn't really lift her tongue.

"Yeah, and what's that?" I asked amused, without tearing my eyes off her. The way her lips moved when she talked was utterly fascinating.

"You asked me once if pain turned me on," she began, and I frowned as I wondered where the hell she was going with bringing that shit up again. "And I have now figured out what turns *you* on." My jaw dropped in surprise and she giggled again. "*Birds* ." She looked at me with an amused sparkle in her eyes, and even though I was fucking happy that she could actually smile despite all her shit, I still got annoyed by what she was saying. Annoyed and... embarrassed?

I quickly glanced down at my crotch, wondering if she had noticed something I hadn't. I relaxed when I found that there was no awkward boner this time.

"I don't get turned on by birds. Fuck you, Sparrow," I snarled, feeling slightly offended and yes, a little fucking humiliated.

"Oh, you wish you could, don't you?" My jaw basically hit the floor as she giggled again.

Did she just say that?

"Fuck, Sparrow, you're doped out of your mind," I said, feeling somewhat uncomfortable all of a sudden. Had she noticed that me touching her had caused a serious hard-on last night? Was this her way of telling me that she noticed? "Do you even realize what the fuck you're saying?"

"Nah, probably not," she agreed, her eyes rolling in an adorable way. She was completely done for. A small part of my brain told me to take advantage of that and maybe ask her a few things...

"So, since you brought the subject up... have you ever been... okay, I know you're a fucking virgin and all that, since your crazy mom wants you to be fucking pure, but that doesn't mean you haven't experienced some other crap... so... have you ever... done stuff?" I asked, my rambling confusing even myself. What the hell was I asking her that for? And why the hell did I even care?

"Define... stuff..." she mumbled lazily.

What. The. Fuck.

Okay, so she wanted me to define it? That could only mean one thing, and that was that she had indeed done shit. With *who* ? And *what* ?

"Just... whatever," I replied with a shrug.

"Last New Year's Eve... Jake managed to snag a bottle of champagne from our parents... I didn't drink any of it, but he did... he downed the whole bottle and he got a little handsy..." she said, and for some reason she smiled at the memory. But I wasn't fucking smiling. Not even close.

"What did he do?" I said, but it came out as a snarl.

"He...he..." The smile on her face faded and was replaced with a frown as she looked back at me. "He was my first kiss... my first... whatever..."

He was my first kiss. Never had I heard five simpler words to make me angry. I felt the anger surge through me like a fucking wildfire. Why was the thought of Jacob fucking Black being her first kiss so damn offensive to me? It was like he had... *contaminated* her or some shit. She wasn't fucking pure anymore. As soon as Jacob Black had pressed his lips to hers, and put his tongue in her mouth, she was fucking impure to me.

And it infuriated me to no end. It was almost as if I wanted to do some weird cleansing ritual on her now, to get rid of all the leftovers from him. Which of course would make me no better than her damn mother.

"Fuck him," I muttered mostly to myself as I looked back down at the cast to continue my drawing.

"Never. Jacob always felt more for me than I did for him... but I was always certain that I would never sleep with him... a New Year's kiss and some groping doesn't change that..."

"Why not?" I asked. I really wanted to know what the hell had been so wrong with Jacob since she had let him stick his damn tongue down her throat and grope her, but she refused to sleep with him. What if whatever she disliked about him was what she disliked about me?

Yeah, so now you want to grope her?

"Because he's not my type," she replied with a shrug.

Oh, so she has a type...

"So what is your type?" I asked, because apparently I was a masochist. She smiled lazily and shook her head. "Why won't you tell me?"

"Because I'm... I'm afraid."

"You're afraid? You're afraid of *me* ? Why would you be afraid of me?" I asked, bewildered.

"Because I trust you."

"And that scares you? I thought trust was a good thing."

"Of course it scares me... I trust *you* . Everything you have ever said to be has turned out to be true, and every promise you've ever made you've stuck with. You even said you would kill me, and that very same night you ran me over with your car. Even if it was an accident, the point is still there..."

"I would never hurt you. Not now. Not ever."

"And that's what scares me the most. Only the people you trust can hurt you," she replied with a sad voice. I opened my mouth to speak, but no words came out. I didn't fucking know how to respond to that. I sighed.

"For what it's worth, Sparrow, I like having people that I can trust and those people are my type." I don't know what the hell I meant by that, but apparently she found it amusing since she started giggling. I smiled at the sound. At least I cheered her up.

"Does that mean Jasper is your type?" she teased.

My smile dropped immediately. " *Fuck you* , Sparrow. Here we are, sharing a god damn moment, and you ruin it by making stupid jokes like that."

"What? I'm not judging, if that's what worries you," she said, still with that damn giggle in her voice. "You like Tanya and you like Lauren..."

both blondes... as is Jasper... so maybe blondes are your type?"

The only thing Tanya or Lauren had that was my type was a mouth that knew how to work a dick. Nothing else about Tanya was even remotely interesting, and right now, I would rather cut off my dick than have her come anywhere near it.

I snorted, shaking my head as I looked back down at the cast. "I prefer brunettes," I muttered.

She continued her light teasing about me being gay or whatever. After a while I couldn't help but tease her in return, suggesting that maybe she was gay too, since she had never had a boyfriend and refused to sleep with Jacob. She laughed, said that I seemed ridiculously interested in Jacob all of a sudden, and that maybe I was gay for him too.

And that was when I decided I needed to change the fucking subject. It was as if we both had forgotten about what he had been involved with. Teasing each other about fucking him was disgusting. Nobody should be forced to fuck that son of a bitch, not even Tanya deserved that fate.

I didn't want to leave, but when my alarm clock told me it was almost eleven I knew I had to get ready. I reluctantly left the bed. My high had faded; I was just left with a lingering feeling of euphoria. But I didn't know if that was the weed's doing, or Sparrow's. She had some kind of effect on me that was for damn sure. But I had yet to figure out what the hell it was she stirred in me.

"I'll be right back," I said. "And smoke up if you want. I don't care. I have more where that came from."

"Why, Edward Cullen, you are a bad influence on me," she teased, it was clear that she was still a little high. I smirked as I shook my head.

"Trust me, Sparrow, it's the other way around. See you later."

I left my room and made sure to lock the door securely behind me before walking downstairs. Mom had left me a note by the phone, telling me that she had gone to Port Angeles. I stared at the bowl of keys that was next to the phone. My keys to the Volvo laid there just waiting for me to pick them up.

But I didn't. Instead I just walked right out, taking my bike instead.

I was never going to drive that motherfucking car again.

I walked through the hospital doors fifteen minutes later. I was early, but I didn't care. Hopefully I could get this shit over and done with and be home with Sparrow in an hour.

I went straight for Dad's office. I knocked on the door and he looked surprised to see me.

"Sit down," he said, nodding towards the chair across from his desk. "Dr. Randall will be here soon."

I closed the door behind me and sat down on the chair. I glanced at the paperwork he had in front of him and spotted the file with Sparrow's name on it, and when I focused on the paper in front of him I could vaguely make out her name on top of it.

"I didn't know you were still her doctor," I commented, trying to keep my voice light.

"I'm not," he replied with a sigh, "but I'm trying to find something that might help..." He shook his head. "I can't discuss this with you."

"Of course you can't," I sighed in a bored tone.

He looked up from the paper, staring at me from over his reading glasses that were perched on his nose. "Are you aware that she was reported missing this morning?"

I tried to keep my face clean of any emotion, but I wasn't prepared for the onslaught of panic that came over me. Hearing him say the

words out loud made it real somehow. This wasn't a fun game of hide and seek, this was fucking real. Hiding Sparrow in my room because her mother was crazy was not a game. I had been so caught up in trying to protect Sparrow and do whatever would make her feel better that I hadn't even considered the consequences.

The panic and the anxiety over the situation that I had tried to stifle for all this time, was starting to show its ugly face. All because Dad told me she had been reported missing. All because he fucking made it real.

Why wasn't it real until someone else told me it was?

Maybe because it was here it all started... it was in this office you realized something was off.

I have to tell him.

You promised her you wouldn't.

But this isn't a fucking game.

She'll hate you.

Yeah? So fucking what? She can hate me all she wants when her mom's ass is put in jail.

Suit yourself.

Dad quirked an eyebrow at me and cocked his head to the side as he removed his glasses.

"Edward, I just want to make something clear, I'm not *accusing* you of anything... I just want to ask you if you know something about this?" he asked with a concerned tone.

I swallowed thickly. I wanted to fucking remove my sweater. *Why was it so damn hot in here ?* I fidgeted in my chair and my eyes kept darting all over the place, settling on anything that wasn't my father.

Why was I panicking? Why couldn't I fucking pretend anymore? I had done it for weeks, damnit!

"Where did you run off to last night?" he asked, his tone now cautious, as if he was afraid of the answer. My leg started bouncing restlessly on the floor. I was about to fucking break. He had just asked one simple question, and it was going to break me. When the hell did I become so easily manipulated? When did I lose my cool?

When you decided it was a good idea to get in over your head.

"Do you really want to know the reason to why I'm sneaking out in the middle of the night? Do you want to know why the hell I've been acting the way I have? Do you want to know why I can't even stand to sit still right now and why I just want to get this shit over with so I can run home? Do you? The reason is currently locked up in my damn bedroom."

Dad's eyes widened at my words and I almost wanted to fucking smack him.

"And what exactly is this 'reason'?" Dad asked, making quotation marks in the air with his fingers. "And where did you get *it*?"

I rolled my eyes and sighed exasperatedly. Of course his mind went directly to drugs. Maybe I should have been flattered by that; drugs were nothing compared to keeping someone -who had been *reported missing* - hidden.

"It's not a fucking it. Girls aren't objects, isn't that what you've always told me?" I snapped. His jaw dropped, and I would have smirked in amusement if this had been under any other circumstances.

"A girl? A girl as in... who is this girl?" Dad asked, now looking genuinely afraid of the answer.

I took a deep breath. I had to do this. I had to fucking tell him.

I'm fucking sorry, Sparrow.

"It's her ."

He stared at me with wide eyes for an eternity before he finally managed to find his voice again.

"Please tell me you didn't kidnap her, Edward," he said almost breathlessly.

If he had to ask me if I hit her on purpose, of course he would also have to ask me if I kidnapped her. It made total sense. Fucked up sense, obviously. But sense nonetheless. I should have been offended, I guess, but I wasn't. I didn't really have the best track record as far as Sparrow was concerned.

"You can ask her yourself," I replied with a sigh. "She needs to get her leg checked out... her cast is pretty beat up."

Dad pushed his chair back and grabbed his jacket that was thrown over the back of it.

"I'll tell Dr. Randall we'll reschedule," he said, as he put his jacket on and started to shuffle the papers together on the desk and shoved them back into Sparrow's folder.

"When did you find out she was missing?" I asked.

"The Chief called the hospital last night, and this morning... her mother even came by. They thought she might have gotten into an accident since she didn't come home."

"She got into an accident alright," I snorted. Dad stilled his movements as he was about to put the folder in his briefcase. He slowly looked up at me. I could almost see how hard his brain was working to try to make sense of it all.

I know the feeling...

"All these times when you have snuck out in the middle of the night, you've gone to Isabella?" he asked, wanting to clarify. I nodded, even though he already knew the answer. "And last night when you ran off... you went for Isabella?" I nodded again. He sighed deeply as she closed his briefcase. "And this morning she was officially reported missing... but all this time she was in your bedroom?"

"Yeah, pretty much."

He studied my face, probably trying to see if I was full of shit or not, then finally decided that I wasn't. He shook his head and sighed.

"Edward, how well do you know Isabella?" he asked.

"Well enough."

"How well?"

I dragged my hands through my hair and sighed in frustration. I had already betrayed her by telling him where she was, I might as well put the final nail in the coffin by answering his question. She might hate me for it, but soon enough she would realize that it was for the best. This wasn't a game, this was literally about life and death. I had to tell him. Telling him meant keeping her safe.

And keeping her safe was all I fucking wanted.

Yeah, it would burn like a fucking bitch to know that she would hate me for it. But that would pass, just like everything else. Nothing remains constant.

"Well enough to know how she got those scars," I replied, my voice hollow and empty.

He met my gaze. "She didn't inflict them herself, did she?" he asked, swallowing thickly as if he knew what was coming.

I shook my head.

"No, she didn't."

I'm sorry, Sparrow.

Unsafe, part 2

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : adt216]

Extra note: *Special thanks* to **ericastwilight** for helping me out and providing me with information about child protection. Also, I do not own the moral story about the bird, the cow and the cat that is mentioned in this chapter.

Chapter 34 – "Unsafe, part 2"

Edward Cullen POV

Dad's eyes went wide and I couldn't even look at him. Confirming the horrible things that he had always suspected was fucking horrible. Being the one to betray Sparrow's trust was even worse.

"Who did?" he asked.

I shook my head and turned towards the door. "I'm not fucking answering that."

"But you know...?"

"Yeah, I know. She told me everything."

He studied me for a moment, probably contemplating whether or not he should press the issue. Luckily, he didn't. Instead he left the room, and I followed him closely behind. I didn't even glance at my bike when we walked out of the hospital; instead I walked with him to his

car. I had to just toughen up and be a damn man; a five-minute drive wouldn't kill me.

The car ride back to the house was awkward and tense at best. I knew he had a million questions he wanted to ask me, but I couldn't answer any of them. I wanted to spill the whole story. I wanted to get it out of my system, but I fucking couldn't, because *that* wasn't my damn story to tell. I had already betrayed her; I didn't need to rub salt in her wounds too. God knows she was already in enough pain without me adding to it.

When we got back to the house, I stopped Dad before he could open the front door.

"I just want to get something straight, alright?" I said in a quiet voice. He gave me a cautious look but nodded at me to continue. "When you enter my damn room, you will not be a doctor who happens to be my dad... you will be my dad who happens to be a doctor. Okay?"

He pursed his lips into a tight line and frowned. I knew I was asking a lot from him, but I also knew he was asking a hell of a lot from me. For him to take a step away from his role as a doctor was huge, but for him to take a step away under these circumstances was even bigger. Even I knew that.

He had treated Sparrow when she was first admitted after our accident; he had read her file. He knew she was hurt four months ago. He knew her injuries weren't self-inflicted, no matter what her file said. He knew something was off, and he probably wanted nothing more than to solve that puzzle. That was why me asking him to be a dad, and not a doctor, was going to be a difficult task for him. That was also why I wouldn't let him come near her if he said that he couldn't do it. If he entered as a doctor, it wouldn't matter what we said. He would do the "right thing," and that wouldn't end well for us.

I needed him to understand the situation before he did anything stupid. I couldn't do that if he was in doctor-mode. If he was in

doctor-mode, I knew shit would end badly, and I would fail her.

I couldn't fail her.

Failing her was not a fucking option.

"Alright," he agreed finally. I nodded once, before letting him open the door and stepping inside. I walked toward the stairs, ascending them before him, and when we reached my room, I turned to him again. "Stay here, I need to talk to her first."

I was surprised when he didn't argue with me. He just nodded and took a step back. I gave him a curious look, before pulling the key out of my pocket and unlocking the door. I stepped inside and closed the door behind me. I couldn't help the smile that formed on my face when I found Sparrow sound asleep in my bed. I carefully stepped over to her and crouched beside the bed, taking her hand in mine. I didn't want to wake her up just yet, because I didn't want to tell her what I had just done. Things had been fine this morning. I didn't want to fucking ruin that. Not yet, but I had to.

She's really going to hate me.

I stroked her cheek and the corner of her lip lifted a little before she opened her eyes. She smiled a genuine smile at me when she spotted me, and I couldn't help but smile back. I had to savor that smile, because it was probably the last one I would get from her in a while.

"Hey, Sparrow, how you feeling?" I asked quietly.

"Like a bulldozer ran me over and took me to Heaven. I'm still flying," she said with her lazy smile and I almost wanted to slam my head into the wall; I had totally forgotten that she was high. How the hell was I going to explain *that* to my father? He was going to have a fit.

The shit just keeps piling up.

"I... I did something," I said, still with my quiet voice, "and you're gonna hate me for it."

"I very much doubt that," she replied, seriously. "You have my back, I trust you."

She just has to rub it in, huh.

"I told my dad and-"

"You what!" she shrieked, her voice terrified. She sat up so fast in the bed that I almost toppled over in surprise. Her face contorted in pain, but it was nothing compared to the anger and fear that flashed in her eyes. "How could you do that? You promised me, Edward! You promised me you wouldn't tell!"

"I know, I know, calm down," I said with a sigh. "I promised I would keep you safe, didn't I? And that's exactly what I'm doing. You can't hide here forever, Bella. You're already reported missing."

She took a deep breath, and I could almost see the anger leave her body as she breathed out. The anger was replaced with deep sadness as she looked back at me. "So I'm Bella now, huh?" she asked with a shaky voice.

I smiled crookedly at her as I stood up so I could sit down beside her. I cupped her cheek and she leaned into my hand. Tears were forming in her eyes, just waiting for the right moment to fall over.

"No, you'll always be Sparrow to me."

"You promise?"

My smile widened and I put my other hand on her other cheek. She felt so fragile in my hands, like all I had to do to ruin her perfect soul was to touch her, but I *needed* to fucking touch her.

She met my gaze as I leaned forward.

"I fucking promise you, *Sparrow* , you'll always be my bird," I whispered.

She licked her bottom lip, before biting down on it and I couldn't help but lean forward even more at the sight. Her bottom lip looked absolutely delicious.

I wonder what it tastes like...

I had subconsciously moved forward even more. I didn't even realize how close we were until we were interrupted by a knock on the door.

"Edward? Can I come in?" I groaned at Dad's voice, and Sparrow smile sadly at me. I wondered if she was even aware how close I had come to kissing her.

I pulled back quickly and dropped my hands to my lap. "Yeah, fine, come in," I grunted. The door slowly opened and Dad stepped inside.

Even though I wasn't touching Sparrow anymore, I could still feel her tense up. Her tension was my tension. I automatically reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze. Dad looked confused when he found her in my bed, in my clothes, holding my hand. He looked even more confused than Jasper had when he found out.

"Hello, Isabella," he said tentatively. "How are you..." He trailed off as he scrunched up his nose a little bit and looked around, then he shot his eyes to me and I could see the familiar irritation in them. "Weed, Edward, really?"

I snorted and rolled my eyes. "Weed fucking relaxes you, alright? She was in motherfucking pain all night and I wanted to help her out, okay? I didn't want to go raiding your damn medicine cabinet, so I gave her the only thing I could. Do you hear her complaining?" I snapped.

Dad sighed and took a few steps closer to the bed, for some reason it put me on edge to have him this close to her.

"Can you please step aside so I can take a look at her leg?" he asked me. I reluctantly left the bed and Dad took my place.

Sparrow reluctantly threw the covers aside and pulled up the pant leg. Dad touched her gingerly around her knee and the lower part of her thigh, which for some reason irritated me. What gave him the right to touch her leg? He was like inches away from doing what I was thinking about doing not too long ago.

He's a doctor, remember? He's not dreaming about finger-fucking young girls, you moron.

I snorted inwardly, watching my Dad's face intently, as if trying to find any sign of him enjoying whatever the hell he was doing. Luckily for him, he wasn't. He had his clinical face on and every time he squeezed her leg in a certain way he looked up to study her face.

"We need to get you to the hospital," he said to her. She shot her eyes to me before looking back at him.

"Why?" she asked, even though we both knew why.

"We need to change your cast, and we will need to take another x-ray. There's swelling around your knee which suggests there has been additional trauma to your leg," he explained, all in a very doctory-voice. *Way to be a dad, Dad.* "May I ask... what happened?" Sparrow looked at me again before looking down at her lap.

"I don't know," she said quietly.

"What don't you know?" he asked gently. She bit her lip and refused to look at him. She wasn't going to answer either, I could tell. She shook her head infinitesimally, and he sighed. "Please, Isabella, tell me..." But she shook her head again, a little more noticeably this time. "Please..."

"Don't fucking push her!" I snapped, taking a step forward to pull him from the bed. He realized what I was going to do and stood up.

"I'm not pushing her," he said calmly, putting his hands up in front of him in surrender. "I'm just trying to understand."

"Yeah, as a doctor or as a dad?" I spat.

"Calm down, Edward. You were the one who brought him here. You're not helping anybody by yelling," Sparrow said with a deep sigh. I looked at her and her tired eyes, as I reluctantly tried to do as she told me. I knew I wasn't helping by getting upset like this, but what the hell was she expecting from me anyway? She kept looking at me until I wasn't shaking in frustration anymore, then she cracked a smile. "See, that wasn't so hard, now was it?"

"Fuck you," I muttered, trying to contain my own smile. She must have known by now what her fucking smile did to me, so of course she was going to take advantage of that. Dad cleared his throat, reminding us that we weren't alone. I sighed and turned around.

"Edward, Isabella... we need to get to the hospital," Dad said.

Sparrow reached for my hand and I took it.

"What will... what will... my parents? Will you... will they know?" she asked, every word punctuating just how scared she was. She couldn't even form a coherent sentence.

Dad nodded slowly. "Yes, we will call them when we get there. You have been reported missing, and we're obligated to tell them." He furrowed his brow, then shaking his head as if he shook a thought away. "Do you have your crutches?" he asked instead, she shook her head and I shrugged.

"We didn't really have time to grab them," I muttered, meeting Sparrow's gaze as her stomach grumbled. "Still hungry, huh?"

"Yogurt and an apple doesn't last long," she replied.

I didn't tear my eyes from hers as I asked my dad. "Do you mind if we stay long enough so she can get some damn food in her?"

I heard him sigh. "Yes, that is quite alright. Let me carry her." He took a step closer and I snorted as I looked back at him.

"You're not fucking touching her," I said matter-of-factly.

"She can't walk without her crutches, Edward. It will put too much strain on her leg," he said with a tired sigh, as if I was stupid. I rolled my eyes at him as I stood up.

"Who says she's walking?" I asked, as I put my arm behind her knees and the other one behind her back. She wrapped her arms around my neck and I lifted her up. I quirked an eyebrow at my dad and he looked even more confused than before. "I'm just saying that *you're* not fucking touching her."

Dad shook his head as he left the room before us, and Sparrow clung tightly to me as I carried her.

"What will happen now?" she asked quietly, so her voice wouldn't carry to him. "Why did you tell?"

"I broke," I replied with a sigh. "I didn't fucking mean to, I swear to God I didn't. It was just... I sat in that damn room, where I first found out about your iffy scars and... I couldn't fucking take it. He was looking through your file when I came in even though he's not your doctor. I think he might have been doing some off-the-record investigations on his own."

"Why would he do that?" she asked. "Why didn't he just accept what was reported? Why is he suddenly so curious and suspicious?"

I looked at Dad's back as he descended the stairs, and I stopped.

"I don't know, Sparrow. Maybe he wants to do right by you or some shit. Maybe he's trying to make up for what I did to you... just like Emmett is. Maybe he doesn't seriously think something is wrong. Maybe he just wants to make himself feel better by getting involved... suicide attempt or abuse... both are pretty messed up and he probably figures he could help you out either way."

She frowned and I looked back down at her. "How do you feel about that?" she asked quietly, softly stroking my jaw line with her thumb. I chuckled humorlessly and shook my head.

"If you had asked me a couple of weeks ago, I would have said that it pissed me off, that you're not his daughter, and that he shouldn't care," I began and she rolled her eyes.

"I did ask you a couple of weeks ago, and you already told me that when I asked you. That's why I'm asking you *now* ."

"Now? I don't mind," I replied honestly. "As long as you're safe, I don't really give a fuck about who gets involved. I don't give a damn if my dad has to fucking adopt you and make you his daughter to make that happen... as long as your fucking safe, that's all that matters."

"But how can we be so sure we can trust your father with this?" she asked then. "You told me you didn't trust him anymore, so how can we trust him with *this* ? How do you expect *me* to trust him?"

"Because we have no other choice, Sparrow," I said with a deep sigh. "He's all we got. He's a doctor, he's got connections... he has probably been down this road before, having to testify or shit like that because he has treated kids who were abused... he's all we got."

"I miss having someone," she said quietly. "I miss my family... or maybe not *my* family, but a family... just a family."

I hugged her closer as we descended the stairs. I leaned my head forward a little bit so my lips were by her ear.

"Families keep each other safe," I whispered. "So I'll be your family. I won't let those crazy people near you again, I swear."

"You promise?" I could barely hear her asking; her voice was so quiet.

I reached the bottom of the stairs, and I saw Dad waiting for us by the doorway to the kitchen. I met his gaze for a moment before looking down at Sparrow, my eyes fixating on her lips for a moment too long. I looked up at her eyes and nodded.

"I promise. I'll never hurt you again," I replied firmly in a quiet voice. She smiled sadly and nodded, accepting my proclamation of her guaranteed safety.

We walked over to the kitchen, and Dad turned to the fridge.

"What would you like to eat?" he asked her, and she shrugged. "Is a chicken sandwich alright?" She nodded and he grabbed the necessary items from the fridge, as I walked over to the breakfast bar and put her down on one of the high stools. I sat down beside her, bringing my chair close enough that I could rest my arm on the back of hers. I didn't know what that was about; I just needed her to be close.

Dad put the items on the counter and began preparing the meal. Every so often, he would look up at us, frowning in confusion when he noticed my arm on the back of her chair.

"What will happen to me now, Dr. Cullen?" Sparrow asked, breaking the silence with her sad voice.

I looked at Dad, who had stilled his movements. He sighed and looked up to meet her gaze.

"That depends on what has happened to you," he replied.

"Let's say... erm... *someone* is being abused by one of her parents... what would happen then?" I asked, feeling Sparrow kick my ankle with her good foot. I gave her an annoyed look, which she returned with a vengeance. Dad looked at us for a long while before answering.

"There will be an investigation, of course, and if there are visual signs of abuse, then Isabella... I mean, *someone* will be removed from her home," he explained as he continued with the sandwich. "But if that's the case with Isabella-"

"Bella," she corrected him. I gave her a weird look, and he smiled softly.

"If that's the case with *Bella*, it won't be that easy."

"Why the hell not? She's being abused, and she has the motherfucking scars to prove it!" I argued loudly.

Sparrow grabbed my hand in my lap, giving it a squeeze and she didn't need to tell me with words to calm down. Her simple touch did the job for her.

"When she came in three months ago, she was reported as someone who had attempted suicide," Dad explained.

"Yeah? So fucking what?" I argued again, trying to keep myself from raising my voice again.

"Her injuries were reported as self-inflicted, Edward. She is already filed as someone who has attempted suicide, and Child Protective Services won't ignore that. It's not unusual for depressed teens to lash out and accuse their parents of abuse, or relatives of sexual assault... and the CPS will recognize that."

"You wrote in her file that you didn't think her cuts were self-inflicted, right? So why can't you just tell them that they aren't? They should

fucking believe you, right? You're a motherfucking doctor, for crying out loud!"

"Because you are my son, Edward. They won't believe that my opinion on the matter is objective. They might believe I'm somehow trying to protect *you* because of your involvement with Bella. I can't be trusted to be objective," he explained with a tired sigh.

"Where does that leave... me?" she asked quietly.

"Like I said, there will be an investigation because they have to do one if abuse is reported, no matter if the claim is false or not. And they will have a doctor take a look at you and your injuries again," he said before frowning. "I don't see how that will be a problem, however..." he trailed off and stepped around the kitchen island to her. He gently put his hands on her jaw and tilted her head so he could see her throat. His frown deepened. "No doctor in the world would claim that these bruises are self-inflicted or made by accident. The color suggests this happened recently, most likely within the past two days..."

"Yesterday, if you want to be precise," I replied coolly.

Dad let go of her and took a step back. He put a hand on the counter and leaned against his arm. He looked frustrated.

"I'm really trying to understand, and I'm really trying to be patient. But you need to give me some answers. Edward, you asked for my help for a reason, and if you want my help, you have to trust me with details about what's going on," he said.

"They're not my damn details to share," I said as I looked at Sparrow, who sighed deeply. "He's right, you know... the more he knows, the better he can help," I said quietly to her, squeezing her hand.

Dad pulled up a chair next to hers and sat down.

"Bella, I don't know what has happened to you, but I do know it's something you think is worth dying over. But it doesn't have to be that way," he explained quietly. "How many people know the true story behind your scars?"

Sparrow gazed quickly at me, before looking down at the table.

"Just one, just Edward... I'm not counting the ones who were there when it happened," she admitted quietly.

"Tell him, Sparrow," I told her, nudging her gently. "He'll help."

She took a deep breath, and as she breathed out I could see her eyes being emptied of all emotions. She was detaching herself. She was going to tell him, and I was so fucking proud of her.

"I was sleeping when she woke me up. It was the middle of the night..."

Dad sat quietly, staring at his hands on the counter, and Sparrow picked at the sandwich I had made for her while she told Dad her story. I thought hearing it a second time would be easier, but no such fucking luck. Her story still got to me, and I had to fucking leave the damn room when she got to the part where her mother started cutting her. I couldn't fucking hear it because it left images in my mind that I'd rather live without.

Her voice was the worst part; she was so fucking detached, and it was even more painful to hear *that* than the words she spoke. When she was done, she disappeared into her own mind, the feeling in her eyes still detached. She wasn't coming out anytime soon.

"And you've only told Edward this?" he asked softly, wanting to clarify. She nodded. "It's been four months, and the only person you've told is *my* son?" She nodded again. He leaned back; his eyes were pained as he gazed at us. He was quiet for a moment, probably

trying to find the right words. I tried to soothe Sparrow by stroking her back, but she just shrugged it away. *Yes, that hurt* .

"I need to use the bathroom," Sparrow whispered, turning her head to me but keeping her eyes down.

"No problem," I replied with a soft smile, jumping on the chance to help her with something I could handle. I picked her up and she clung desperately to me. We didn't even make it out of the kitchen before her body started shaking violently with sobs. I stepped over to the couch in the living room and sat down on the armrest, hugging her closer to me.

I didn't say anything to soothe her, because my words would mean nothing to her. Words were just that. *Words* . Words weren't going to change anything. Words wouldn't take away all her pain. Words would not change the fact that her mother almost killed her. Words would not change the fact that I had betrayed her. Words did nothing.

That was why I didn't use them.

I didn't even want to know how painful it must have been for her to relive that story again, and this time without even getting the proper time to prepare. I just threw that shit at her, almost forcing her to tell him without even letting her get used to the idea. At least with me she got some time. She knew I wanted to know and she said she was going to tell me when she was ready. And that, she did.

This time, she wasn't ready. Not even close. She came here last night, thinking that it was over, thinking that she would never have to deal with that shit again, that I would keep her safe from all of it. But instead I did the last thing she wanted – I stabbed her in the back and threw her to the wolves.

"Why couldn't you leave well enough alone?" she asked, but I had a hard time making out the words because she was sobbing so hard. I

sighed and squeezed my eyes shut, resting my forehead against her hair.

"When I was a kid, my grandmother used to tell me stories... and one of those stories was about a bird. It was flying south for the winter, but it was so fucking cold that it froze and fell to the ground in a large field. While he was lying there, a big-ass cow came by and took a dump right on him. But as the frozen bird laid there in the pile of shit, he began to feel warm and cozy. The shit was thawing him out. When he realized he could move again in the shit, he began to sing in joy. A passing cat heard him and went over to the pile of crap to investigate... the cat found the bird and dug him out. Then he ate him."

Sparrow's shaking subsided during my story, until she was strong enough to tilt her head up and look at me. I gave her a gentle smile, but she merely looked confused.

"Why would you tell me a story about a bird getting crapped on?" she asked in confusion, her voice still shaky from the sobs.

"Because not everyone who gives you crap is your enemy, and not everyone who gets you out of it is your friend. And when you are in deep shit, it's better to keep your mouth shut," Dad answered for me. We looked up and saw him leaning against the doorframe to the kitchen. "But I'm afraid the moral of the story doesn't really help our situation here."

"Of course it does," I argued indignantly. Dad shook his head, looking amused and sad at the same time. "Of course it does!" I argued again.

"No, it doesn't, Edward," Sparrow said softly. "Because that means you're not my friend, because you're the one getting me out of trouble, right? And since I am deep in crap, I should have just kept quiet. Not telling anyone."

I looked at her, trying to make sense of her logic and realized soon that she was right. I just made myself into the bad guy. I groaned and rested my forehead against her head again. She smiled weakly and stroked my cheek.

"It's okay," she whispered. "Consider me the bird that got crapped on... just try not to eat me, and we'll be fine."

"Are you sure, Sparrow?" I asked quietly. "I didn't fucking mean to push you like that."

"Do I have any choice? Without you, I have no one," she said, and the eternal sadness had returned to her voice. "Can you please take me to the bathroom now?"

"Yes, of course," I replied, standing up and carrying her to the downstairs bathroom. I put her down gingerly on the floor and gave her a crooked smile. "Just call me when you're done."

I closed the door and went back to the living room where Dad was still standing.

"Bella has hid behind the truth for four months, trust doesn't come easily to her," he began and I narrowed my eyes at him as he continued. "She's been hiding because it's been easier for her than to deal with it, so when we force her to deal, she reverts back into her mind and hides. And you can't help someone who hides from her past. She's been through a horrific trauma and she doesn't know how to deal with what she experienced. There is no doubt that she does want our help, but she's also afraid of getting hurt... by keeping quiet while being covered in crap, like your metaphorical bird, she won't get hurt, but she doesn't get better either. She'll still be covered in crap, but she's used to the smell, so to speak. She'd rather live with the pain that she's used to than risk feeling something worse."

"You think you know her just because I forced her to tell you her story? Fuck you! You don't know anything about her!" I spat angrily. "Where do you get off analyzing her like that?"

"It's a textbook reac-"

"SHE'S NOT A TEXTBOOK CASE!" I yelled. "She's a fucking human being who's been to hell and back and then back to hell. She's not someone you can analyze because of some stupid examples in some stupid book! And if that's the way you're gonna handle this, then I really fucking regret that I pushed her into telling you. She's not a fucking textbook case, so don't you fucking dare treat her like one!"

Dad didn't even flinch when I yelled, he just kept looking at me with that stupid calm and collected gaze of his.

"Are you done?" he asked, and I rolled my eyes. "I know she's not a textbook case, Edward. If you had let me finish I would have told you that she had a textbook *reaction* to a trauma. Nothing else."

"Fuck you," I spat.

He sighed and crossed his arms over his chest. "Why do you call her Sparrow?" he asked, ignoring my comment.

"None of your fucking business," I muttered, leaving the living room to see how Sparrow was doing.

"Edward," Dad said. Something in his voice made me stop and turn my head to look at him. I quirked an eyebrow at him, silently telling him to continue. "Please, don't go breaking the poor girl's heart. She's been through enough, don't you think?"

I narrowed my eyes at him, feeling pretty damn offended at what he was implying.

"She's my *friend* !" I clarified angrily.

He smiled knowingly and shook his head.

"But is that all she is to you?" he asked.

I didn't even dignify that with a response; instead I left the room without looking back.

I sat in Dad's office at the hospital, my leg bouncing restlessly on the floor. Dad had told me to wait there while he got everything sorted out. I didn't want to leave her. I wanted to be by her side at all times, but he wasn't having it. He said that either I wait in his office or I could go home. That was a damn easy decision to make.

It had been over an hour since we got here and the last time I had seen her. To say that I was beginning to get paranoid would have put it mildly. I was on the verge of freaking out. It had been an hour, which meant that her parents must have been here by now. Maybe they had taken her home already? What about the CPS?

I heard a familiar sound from the hallway, and my leg stopped bouncing immediately.

The familiar sound was from someone walking with crutches. Even though I was at a damn hospital, and there were probably more people walking with crutches there, I still knew it was her.

I knew *her* sound.

I looked up from my lap just as she pushed the door, which was already ajar, open with her crutch. I slowly stood up, not tearing my eyes of her. It was as if she would disappear if I did. She pushed the door behind her with her crutch, and it clicked shut.

Her leg was now sporting a new, bright white cast.

A new, clean canvas for me to draw on .

She was wearing my mom's jeans. Dad had offered them to her before we left the house, since my sweatpants had been too long for her, and she would have tripped if she had tried to walk in them. But

she kept my long-sleeved shirt, even though Dad had offered her a whole outfit from Mom's closet.

"How are you feeling?" I asked, stepping closer to her.

"Good, Dr. Carrot gave me a miracle pill, so I'm fine... have you seen my parents yet?" she asked, I shook my head. "Good, so can we leave now?"

"We can't... we can't run, Sparrow. We need to stay and fight," I argued reluctantly. "Things will only get shittier if we run. And not just for us."

"But you promised me, Edward. You promised me I would never have to go back there... you promised I would be safe. You *promised* me!" she said, her voice cracking as her strong exterior began to crumble again. I frowned and pulled her to me. She buried her face in my chest, and I hugged her tightly, resting my chin on top of her head.

"You will be safe," I whispered. "There will be an investigation. People will find out. You'll be safe."

"But you promised me I would never have to go back," she sniffled against my shirt. "I will die if I have to go back there. I can't... I can't go back there, Edward... I can't survive anymore... I just can't..."

"I didn't know," I whispered. "I thought... I thought this would be it. That you would be taken into protective custody or some shit. How was I supposed to know that they were gonna..." I squeezed my eyes shut, not able to even finish the damn sentence. "I'm so sorry."

She pulled back from my arms. I opened my eyes slowly as she looked at me steadily, her eyes brimming with tears. A single tear fell, and I wiped it away with my thumb. She smiled sadly through her tears, and I was once again overcome with the feeling of wanting to comfort her.

Fix her.

Kiss her.

A real fucking kiss. Not some pansy-ass knuckles kiss either.

A real one.

On the mouth.

On her full lips.

Real.

The sudden urge freaked me out, considering I didn't kiss girls on the lips. It was too intimate. Too personal. Too fucking close.

But with Sparrow I didn't mind that shit. I wanted to kiss her and tell her that everything would be all right even if it didn't seem like it right now. I wanted her fucking *close*. The whole day had been about me wanting – no *needing* – her close. I didn't know what the fuck that was about; a few weeks ago, I couldn't get away far enough from her, but now I needed her so close it was as if we were molded together. Even hugging her to me wasn't enough anymore, and I couldn't make sense of it.

What changed?

"I'm sorry," I said again, but it was nothing more than a breath. I leaned in before I had time to think it over.

I had to fucking do this.

I kept my eyes open, gazing intently into her eyes, prepared to stop as soon as she showed any sign of being uncomfortable. But right now, all I could see in her eyes were fear, confusion and sadness.

I wanted to remove all of those things.

My lips touched hers gingerly, her bottom lip fitting between mine like a missing piece of a puzzle.

She shuddered in my arms and I pressed my lips more firmly against hers; I could tell she wasn't breathing anymore. But even though I was acutely aware of how tense and afraid she was, I still couldn't get over the fact of how soft her lips felt against mine. I wanted her to open her mouth so I could taste her... just for a little bit...

But I didn't get to enjoy the feeling long enough, because she pulled back with a gasp. I frowned and immediately felt bad – I knew she wasn't fucking ready. Hell, *I* wasn't fucking ready.

Then I realized she hadn't pulled back because of me. She had turned to the side to look at the door. I slowly turned my head and followed her gaze to see what caught her attention.

Or who.

"Bella, your parents are here," Dad said, his voice tight. "They have come to take you home."

I pulled Sparrow to me, her back flush against my chest, and put an arm around her protectively. She held on to my arm, and I narrowed my eyes as I stared back at my father.

"No," I said it firmly, leaving no room for any fucking argument. I thought I was fine with the development of things. I thought it would be fine having her leave with her parents, because she wouldn't last there long enough for her mom to hurt her again. The investigation would prove that her parents were unfit to take care of her, and she would be fine.

But now, standing there with my Sparrow in my arms, I couldn't fucking let her go. I didn't fucking care how "fine" I was with it. I knew I had crapped in my bed, and now I had to lay in it. But that didn't mean I was going to lay in it willingly. I wasn't going to let her go.

I promised to keep her safe. I promised her she would never have to go back there.

I fucking *promised* her.

"Edward, don't worry. She will be fine. No harm will come to her. The social worker is on her way to Forks from Port Angeles right now," Dad said, then looked at Sparrow. "You have nothing to worry about, Bella. They won't hurt you."

Sparrow turned her head, and I met her frightened gaze. "Don't make me go," she pleaded.

I was just about to agree with her when Dad took a step forward and touched my shoulder.

"By not letting her go you are making things more complicated than they have to be," he said to me quietly. "Let her go, Edward. It's the right thing to do here." He sighed deeply and took a step back towards the door. "They're in the waiting room. Let's go."

Sparrow stepped away from my embrace, and my arms fell to my side as if they were nothing. I had no fucking strength left. She steadied herself on her crutches and bit her lip.

"You promised me, Edward," she said quietly, her voice hollow and empty, as if she didn't care what the hell she was saying. As if the words meant nothing to her. As if *I* meant nothing to her.

I followed her out. I tried to reach out to stroke her arm, but she just jerked away from me.

And it hurt.

It fucking hurt like hell.

We reached the waiting room, and there they were.

The vampire herself and her idiotic husband. I almost wanted to growl at them.

Sparrow must have sensed this, because she turned her head to me and shook her head softly without looking at me, silently telling me to give it a rest, that it wasn't worth it because *she* wasn't worth it.

But of course she was. She was worth it all.

I put my hand on Sparrow's shoulder, trying without words to tell her I was sorry. I didn't fucking mean to fail.

"Don't touch my daughter, if you know what's good for you," the crazy bitch said with a scarily calm voice. She made the word daughter sound like an insult to Sparrow. The crazy bitch had another thing coming if she thought I was going to let Sparrow go without a fight. "Let go of *my* daughter! It's your fault she's here!" She started towards us and I stepped in front of Sparrow, blocking her from view.

"Fuck you, bitch!" I spat. She stopped in her tracks and looked at me incredulously, before turning to look at her husband.

"Are you going to let him talk to me like that?" she asked and the Chief sighed with a frown. I quirked an eyebrow at him, wondering what the hell his deal was. Why wasn't *he* fighting me? Why hadn't he taken Sparrow from me already? Why was he just standing there like a fucking donut-machine?

"Calm down, Renée, fighting won't solve anything," he replied with a sigh, almost sounding bored or some shit. He grabbed his crazy wife's hand, pulling her back, and I met his gaze. "Now, let my daughter go so we can go home... it's been a long day... and night. I'm sure she's tired as well... Come on, Bella. It's okay." He held out his free hand to her, and I looked at it like it was fucking diseased.

Which it fucking was.

Diseased with the inability to take proper care of his daughter.

I turned my head and looked down at Sparrow, who had stepped up beside me. She shook her head again as she met my gaze. Once again telling me she wasn't worth it. Her eyes were so empty...

What am I supposed to do?

I had stared at her for so long that I didn't notice that her mom had moved until Sparrow was suddenly pulled away. I watched as her mom dragged her away to the Chief. Sparrow's eyes were emotionless and empty as she stared back at me. It was as if she wasn't even there anymore.

She fucking gave up !

I didn't know what the hell I was supposed to do. I couldn't just grab her. Could I? What would happen if I did?

I didn't fucking care.

I took a step forward, but felt myself being held back. I turned my head in confusion, just to find my dad holding me back by gripping my shoulder.

"There's no reason to make it more complicated," he said quietly to me again. "Let her *go* ."

I looked at Sparrow, and she looked back at me over her shoulder. She was trying to walk and balance with her crutches as her mom pulled her away with a steady grip on her arm. Her mom showed no consideration for her leg. Her mother didn't fucking care.

As Sparrow stared back at me, it was clear that she didn't either. She didn't fucking care anymore. I failed her in the one area where I promised her over and over again that I would *never* fail her. But I did, and she wasn't going to keep up her side of the bargain anymore.

I failed her, so she was going to fail me.

" *I'm sorry* ," I mouthed to her.

Her eyes were empty, her face clean of all emotions as she mouthed back.

" *Good bye* ."

Escape

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : sandicarr & StoryPainter]

Extra note: Again, a *special thanks* goes to **ericastwilight** for helping me out and providing me with information about child protection, and procedures regarding the issue. I have taken creative liberty to tweak some things (nothing major) to fit the story.

Chapter 35 – "Escape"

Isabella Swan POV

Looking out the window had become my favorite pastime in the last few days. I still had a hard time coming to terms with everything that had happened. All the good things. All the bad things. So much had happened that I didn't even know where to begin in order to process it all.

If I closed my eyes, I could see Edward's face.

I inhaled deeply and breathed out slowly. The air tickled my lips and I could almost taste him.

He kissed me.

Edward Cullen kissed *me* .

It came out of nowhere. One moment he was apologizing, and the next he was pressing his lips to mine. I didn't know why he was doing it or what he was trying to prove. All I knew was that I had

become acutely aware of my own body – it felt as if I had been shaking and standing still at the same time. He pressed his lips firmer against mine, and I hadn't known what to do. What was he expecting of me? Why was he kissing me? Was he even *aware* that he was kissing *me* ? Had he lost his mind completely, maybe thinking I was someone else?

Did he like it?

Did / like it?

I still hadn't decided, and it had already been four days since it happened.

Four days since the kiss. Four days since I last saw Edward.

Four days.

And I was still alive.

There was a knock on the door and I closed my eyes, taking a deep breath, before saying anything.

"Come in," I replied quietly.

The door opened and I turned back to the window. I didn't want to look at her. I had looked at her enough and she just reminded me about everything that used to be.

"How are you feeling, sweetie?" she asked.

"Fine."

"Are you in any pain? Have you taken your meds?"

"Yes."

"Yes to pain or yes to the meds?"

I sighed and rolled my eyes. "No, I'm not in pain. Yes, I have taken my meds."

"Good," she said. I could hear the smile in her voice.

I looked down at my hands.

"When will I get my stuff back?" I asked quietly.

"I thought we got the things you needed... was there more?" she asked confused.

"My phone... my journal... I wouldn't mind getting my laptop back either, but I suppose he would refuse to give it back to me," I said.

"Oh, Bella. Why didn't you say something earlier? I'll make the call right away," she said quickly.

I forced a smile at her and nodded. "Thank you, Kate," I said.

"Anytime, kiddo, anytime," she said, smiling back at me before leaving the room and closing the door behind her. I turned back to the window and sighed.

It had been four days.

Four days since the kiss.

Four days since I saw Edward.

Four days since ...

I closed my eyes and took a shuddering breath.

Four days since I had last seen or talked to my parents.

I didn't care that Dr. Carrot's nametag said his name was still Dr. Jenks. I had been hoping he would have changed his name by now

to the more appropriate Dr. Carrot. Even though his skin wasn't as orange as the last time I saw him, he still looked ridiculous.

He X-rayed my leg, and Dr. Cullen asked if he could be present when he changed my cast. I didn't mind. Edward told me I should trust him, and since I trusted Edward I decided that was the route I was going to take.

I still felt a little weird after the weed I had smoked. And I wondered if that was part of why I wasn't angrier with Edward. I was mad at him for betraying my trust and for not keeping his promise to not tell anyone. But at the same time I was oddly grateful that he dared to do the one thing I never could.

Ask for help.

Dr. Cullen leaned casually against the wall as Dr. Carrot examined my leg. Having the cast removed felt very odd; it felt like he removed the entire leg with it. My leg was numb and light; as if it had lost all density. Dr. Carrot carefully squeezed and touched it, making me flinch and gasp a couple of times. The pain was bad, but not excruciating.

I scrunched up my nose as I looked down at my leg. It looked weird. So small and fragile compared to my left one. A long, bright red scar was now my leg's most prominent feature. The scar was a little crooked in places, and it was pretty thick. It almost looked like they had put a seven-inch string under my skin.

Dr. Carrot put some soothing gel on my leg and gently massaged it in, it cooled my skin and I immediately felt better. Dr. Cullen was looking at the X-rays on the board and I couldn't read his face to determine whether or not the scans were good.

When the gel was completely absorbed, Dr. Carrot prepared my leg for the new cast before putting it on. When he was done, Dr. Cullen turned to us and frowned a little in genuine concern.

That guy had no fake feelings. Everything was genuine.

"Bella, would you mind if Dr. Jenks examined your arms now?" he asked gently.

"Her arms?" Dr. Jenks echoed, looking down at my covered arms in confusion. He cleared his throat and looked at me uncomfortably. "Have you... injured yourself?"

I guess he believed the lie too.

Kate put the bag down on my bed before walking over to me. She held out her hand and I smiled softly when I saw the object she was holding. My phone.

"Thank you for getting it for me," I said, as she handed it to me.

"It was my pleasure," she replied. "Your dad didn't mind me getting your laptop either. I guess he realized it was necessary for your education." She turned to leave and as she walked towards the door she said, "Dinner will be ready in an hour. I think we have a few things to discuss."

I looked at her retreating back and swallowed thickly. "Have I done something wrong?" I asked nervously. "Are you... are you sending me back?"

She turned her head, smiling sadly and shaking her head.

"Never, Bella. The thing I want to talk to you about is a good thing, don't worry," she replied softly. "So, dinner in an hour." I nodded and she smiled before leaving.

I turned on my phone and waited for it to load. A few moments later it chirped and I looked incredulously at the screen.

This can't be right...

Dr. Cullen stepped up to us and smiled softly at me. "May I show him?" he asked, and I nodded. He pulled up the sleeves on my arms and showed the scars to Dr. Carrot. "Look closely, and tell me what your professional opinion is. What would you say about these scars?"

Dr. Carrot frowned and put on the glasses he had in his pocket. He gripped my wrist, turning my arm softly so he could see it from all angles. He did the same with the other. He obviously took Dr. Cullen's question seriously.

"I would say that... they look odd," Dr. Carrot concluded. "Like this one right here." He pointed to one of the deeper ones, near the crook of my arm. "The angle from which it is cut, I can't imagine how she managed to do it." He let go of my arm and scratches his neck absentmindedly. "What is this about, Dr. Cullen?"

Dr. Cullen smiled crookedly, his smile reminding me of Edward.

"She didn't do them herself," Dr. Cullen said, and my stomach clenched at his words. I still couldn't believe I had actually told him my story. All because Edward told me to. How Edward managed to get such power over me I would never know. Was this how it felt to trust someone? You blindly let them lead you anywhere because you believed they would never hurt you.

And apparently I trusted Edward like that.

Edward freaking Cullen!

In what reality did that make sense?

Dr. Carrot sat down on the stool he had been sitting on while examining me, looking completely baffled. I guess he wasn't prepared for this. He probably thought I was just one of those generic suicidal teens that weren't really suicidal at all. Someone who just cut herself for the attention.

I didn't want to stay long enough for him to decide what kind of nutcase I was. Maybe he thought I was in some kind of ritualistic gang or something? Maybe he would believe another lie. Besides, I still didn't know if Dr. Cullen believed us, or if he was just doing this to prove a point now. Maybe he thought I was crazy and this was his way to make sure of it. Also, he probably wanted to make sure that I would be taken care of.

"Can I... can I leave now?" I asked in a shaky voice.

Dr. Carrot nodded. "Yes, but please try to keep off your feet for a few hours, give the cast some time to harden completely," he said, waving me away as if he wasn't really listening to me at all.

"Will do, thanks," I mumbled, climbing off the examination bed. I grabbed the new crutches that Dr. Cullen had provided me when we got to the hospital and quickly left the room.

In only four days, I had managed to get ninety-seven missed calls and twenty text messages. I pushed some buttons and my heart swelled in my chest when I saw that all the missed calls and all the text messages were from Edward. I checked my voice-mail and I closed my eyes as I held the phone to my ear with both my hands. My heart ached as the automatic voice told me how many messages I had.

Soon the voice was replaced by a warmer, softer one.

"Sparrow... hearing your fucking voice is like music to my damn ears. Even if it's just your recorded voice telling me to leave a message... I have no idea if you'll ever hear this... I don't fucking care... I just..." He paused, and it sounded as if his voice almost cracked as he breathed. "I needed to call you... to hear your voice... I need to know that you are okay... that you didn't do anything stupid. I know I failed, I know that... but please... if you hear this... call me. Let me know that you're okay."

I felt tears slip from my eyes as the messages continued to play in my ear.

Edward was waiting in Dr. Cullen's office. The door was ajar when I got there and pushed it open with my crutch. Edward stood up slowly as I closed the door.

I looked at him and almost smiled at the sight. His hair was a complete mess. It looked like he had tortured it or something. He asked me how I was feeling. I didn't know what the answer to that was, so I just said I got some meds and that I was fine. I wanted nothing more than to get out of there. Just run away and never look back.

But Edward wasn't letting me. He said I had to stay and fight. I didn't want to listen. He promised I would be safe, that I would never have to go back to Hell again. I had already been there, then Edward saved me, and now he expected me to return even though he promised me I was safe?

He promised me.

I was going to give up. What good would it do to fight? I had fought enough. This was it. I was done. I had been to Hell and back and to Hell again. I couldn't take it anymore. Edward promised he would keep me safe and that I was not going to return. He didn't keep his promise.

He hugged me to him and I buried my face into his chest. I wanted to believe that he had done it to hurt me. This was the ultimate payback after all, sending me back to the place where I was hurt the most. This would end me; he knew that. I wanted to believe that this was the last step in his master plan to bring me down for messing up his life.

But I couldn't.

I couldn't believe that, no matter how much I wanted to.

Edward didn't hate me anymore. He cared for me. He wanted me to be safe. I could see it in his eyes. And I could hear it in his voice when he spoke to me. There was no faking that.

Edward cared about me.

And I cared about him.

But that didn't change the fact that he promised he would keep me safe... and failed.

" It's four in the fucking morning and I can't sleep. It's weird that I've never slept better than when I slept with you... even though I never got more than a couple of hours the times we did sleep together... not sleeping together like... fuck... you know what I mean..."

I chuckled at the pure Edwardness of it all. He was himself even at his worst.

Message after message played and they were all very much the same. He mentioned my voice a lot. He told me to call him. He wanted to know if I was okay. But as the messages went on, the emptier he sounded. When I reached the last message – which was received no less than three hours earlier – he sounded as if he was on the verge of a breakdown.

" Sparrow... I don't fucking know what to do anymore... I... I feel fucking lost. I don't know what to do with myself. There is nothing I can do... I... I fucking miss you." His voice broke and he took a few shuddering breaths before continuing. *"Okay? There. I said it. Is that what you've been waiting for me to say? That I miss you? Fine. There you fucking have it. I MISS you, Sparrow. I fucking need you here."* He was mad, but the sadness overruled his anger. He wasn't angry with me, I knew that. He was upset with the situation. He was quiet for so long but I could hear his ragged breathing. He took a

deep breath and I could almost hear him prepare to say something important. But the words never came. Even though he did nothing but breathe, I still couldn't hang up on the message. His breathing was all I had. His voice soon broke the almost-silence, and my heart ached as the last words rang out. *"Just call me back... please, Sparrow...I fucking need you."* It was a whisper. But it was enough.

When the automatic voice told me that I had no more messages. I also had no more tears to shed.

I turned my head to the only person in the room – in this world – that I trusted. It was his fault that we were here right now. He told his father even though I asked him not to. But that didn't matter right now. What mattered was that he held his arms around me protectively, not wanting to let me go.

"Don't make me go," I pleaded. I saw in his eyes that he was going to.

Dr. Cullen took a step forward, putting a hand on Edward's shoulder, and as soon as he did, I could see something change in Edward's eyes.

No...no... no, Edward... NO!

"By not letting her go you are making things more complicated than they have to be. Let her go, Edward. It's the right thing to do here." He said it all quietly, as if he didn't want me to hear. I guess he didn't realize I was in Edward's damn arms and, of course, I heard every damn word he said! "They're in the waiting room. Let's go."

Edward's grip had lessened around me. I wondered if he had even noticed. I could easily step out of his embrace; he wasn't holding me back at all. That hurt. A lot.

I steadied myself on my crutches and I bit hard on my lip to keep from crying.

" You promised me, Edward," I told him, feeling my heart close in on itself. This was what I got for trusting people. I got my heart broken. Why didn't I listen to myself before I let Edward in? Why did I even let him in, in the first place? He was Edward. Of course he would hurt me. This should come as no surprise to me.

But it did come as a surprise. A huge surprise.

And it hurt.

It hurt so much.

When we left the room, he tried to reach for me, but I wasn't having it. I jerked away from his touch as if he had burned me. When we reached the waiting area and noticed my parents, I could feel Edward tense beside me. I shook my head at him, not wanting him to bother with it. If he had let me go in Dr. Cullen's office, then he could surely let me go now too.

He touched my shoulder and it was like he had sent a shockwave of electricity through me. I lost my breath for a moment, feeling dizzy and confused.

I barely even heard how my mom yelled at him to not touch me. Edward moved to stand in front of me when Mom started walking towards us.

" Fuck you, bitch!" he spat, his voice pure venom.

" Are you going to let him talk to me like that?" Mom asked, turning to my father.

" Calm down, Renée, fighting won't solve anything," he replied with a tired sigh, pulling back my mom by gripping her hand. He gave Edward a tired, yet stern, look before continuing. "Now, let my daughter go so we can go home. It's been a long day... and night. I'm sure she's tired as well..." He held out his hand and looked at me. "Come on, Bella, it's okay."

I stepped out from behind Edward. He looked down at me with more pain in his eyes than I thought possible.

You can't keep me safe and let me go at the same time, Edward. You have to choose, I thought. I shook my head, silently trying to convey my message, hoping he got it.

Mom had released herself from Dad's grip and was now walking over to me, grabbing my hand. She pulled me away from Edward and I had to fight to keep upright. I wonder if my mom was even aware of my injuries. Did she think the cast was just for show? That it was some new kind of trendy accessory? Probably.

I looked back at Edward and I could see his hands twitch at his sides as if he longed to reach out for me. I wanted to tell him not to bother; he couldn't save me now. Mom had me. He took a step forward, but was held back by his father. Dr. Cullen whispered something to him and Edward winced.

"I'm sorry," he mouthed to me.

Of course he was.

"Good bye," I mouthed back.

At that time, I really thought it was goodbye. I thought I was going to die that day. That I would be taken back to my parents and I would never be safe again. Mom would cut me again; sacrifice me to her gods or whatever the hell she believed in. And I would die.

I didn't die. It had been four days, and I was still alive.

All thanks to Dr. Carrot and Kate. I obviously didn't believe it then. Someone from the CPS could never be a good thing. I watched TV. I read the news. They were not to be trusted. Even though their sole purpose was to keep children from harm. Considering my past

experiences, how could I expect anything to turn out for the better? Even if I had the "good" guys on my side?

I was glad I was wrong.

I turned away from Edward, grasping my crutches more tightly in my hands as my mom loosened her grip on me. When we were far enough from Edward, she only let her hand linger on my shoulder. She probably felt that I had given up. She saw no reason to hold me back anymore. I wasn't going to run.

I tried to push all my emotions down, ignoring the tugging feeling in my stomach that told me to get back to Edward, to run into his arms and never let go. I tried to become the emotionless shell I had been for the past few months, but that was impossible. Something had changed, and I couldn't go back completely. Edward had changed it all.

And it hurt.

Something inside me that I didn't even know was there was aching, and breaking, and it hurt! It hurt so much. Dr. Cullen told Edward to let me go...and he did. Edward didn't fight him at all. He just stood there, watching me go. He could have tried more than he did, but he didn't.

I followed my parents towards the entrance, letting all the positive feelings that Edward had brought with him drop behind me. As soon as I stepped out of that hospital, I was not going to let anything hold me back anymore. I wasn't going to let Edward's words mess with my mind again. I wasn't going to let myself be fooled into believing I actually had a future.

Of course I didn't.

I was destined to die, one way or another. And, if I were lucky, I might just make that happen soon.

I still had the pills. Maybe the misery could end tonight?

We were just about to leave when a voice rang out.

" Excuse me, Chief Swan!"

We stopped and turned around, seeing Dr. Carrot jogging towards us from down the hallway. When he reached us, he shook Dad's hand.

" Sorry, you can't leave yet. There are a few things that I still need to talk to you about. You can join me in my office," he said, smiling. Mom sighed and rolled her eyes.

" Can my husband take care of it? I just want to take my daughter home," she said, but Dr. Carrot shook his head.

" I'm afraid not. Please follow me ."

I never got to Dr. Carrot's office. I never went inside. Mom had looked almost terrified when Dr. Carrot said that I had to wait outside, but she didn't argue with him. I had seen how Mom clenched her fists by her sides as she went into the office and I wondered what she was thinking. I suppose she knew when she should shut up and not show how crazy she really was. Acting like a possessive mother would not have worked out well in her favor. Even I knew that. But did she know she was in trouble? Or was I the one in trouble?

I sat in a chair outside his office, weighing my options. I seriously considered running away. This was something I never even thought of before Edward entered my life as my knight in a shiny Volvo. But, somehow, I now considered it an option. Running away was *always* an option.

Edward taught me that.

" No, she's not going anywhere!" I heard Mom protest loudly. "She'll only go back to that good-for-nothing boy. It's his fault she's in here!"

" With all due respect, Mrs. Swan, we both know that's not true," I heard Dr. Carrot reply with a stern voice, and I almost wanted to smile at the barely masked condescension in his voice.

My leg was aching again. I closed my eyes and breathed slowly through the pain, and while I did that I felt someone sit down in the chair beside me.

" How are you feeling, Bella?" Dr. Cullen asked his voice soft.

" Confused... empty... lost," I replied, without opening my eyes. "Where's Edward?"

" He's... occupied at the moment," he replied vaguely. "My son has a temper, as you probably know, and his presence right now would not help you."

" What does that even mean?" I asked, sighing exasperatedly and opening my eyes. "What is going on?"

I saw that he was reluctant to tell me, but something also very clearly said that he didn't want to keep me in the dark. He knew the past few months of my life had been pure hell; I didn't need to be pulled through any more shit.

" I talked to Dr. Jenks after you left, we discussed your scars and I took the liberty to tell him what you told me. Not the whole thing, obviously, but the necessary part that your mother was the one who hurt you. We called the CPS and they sent over someone to take care of this," he explained.

" And... what does that mean? Take care of this?" I asked.

" Chances are that you won't need to go home today," he replied.

My eyes went wide and I looked at him in shock.

"What?" I asked dumbly. He chuckled softly and took my hand in his.

"Bella, a child who has been abused can't stay in her home, for obvious reasons. You will most likely be placed in protective care until we can find a more permanent solution. You need more care than most children because of your leg," he explained softly. "So a normal foster family won't do. Your case worker will explain everything to you once she gets here."

"I'm still confused... this is all too much," I said quietly.

"I understand, it must be very overwhelming for you to accept that you are safe after living all these months in fear of your mother," he replied softly.

Always with that stupid word.

Safe.

I didn't feel safe. Not yet.

Suddenly the door to Dr. Carrot's office flew open and Mom stalked out. She grabbed my arm, yanking me from my chair and I tumbled to the floor. I swear to God that she would have dragged me away if she could, not caring if I was lying flat on my face and not caring about hurting my leg. But she never got the chance, instead a couple of security guards came faster than a speeding bullet and grabbed her, pulling her away from me. Dr. Cullen helped me up on my feet but I couldn't even stand upright. I was shaking uncontrollably and I was so close to bursting into tears.

"LET GO OF ME!" Mom yelled, kicking and screaming in the grip of the security guard. "SHE'S MY DAUGHTER! YOU CAN'T TAKE HER! YOU CAN'T TAKE MY DAUGHTER! SHE'S MINE!"

People in the hallway had stopped to stare at the commotion, and I couldn't do anything but to look at the scene unfolding before me.

Dad stood in the doorway to Dr. Carrot's office looking at me like I was the freak here.

" Bells, is it true?" he asked, his voice was quiet and I just barely heard him over the commotion.

I had a feeling I didn't need to ask him to clarify, so I just nodded, not trusting my voice enough to answer for me. Something shifted in his eyes at my response and he looked at me like he didn't even know who I was anymore. This, I guess in a way, was true. We had all lived a lie for the past four months. And the look in his eyes now told my why that was. He was taking her side. He always took her side, which just proved to me, once again, why I never dared to tell him what happened. He wouldn't believe me because he didn't want to believe me.

He stepped away from the door and followed the security guards as they took Mom away.

I felt my throat close up on me and I tried to breathe, but it was impossible.

Mom wanted to hurt me. Dad didn't want me.

I had no one.

Everything that happened after that was all a blur to me. Four days worth of... *blur*. Too much happened in such short amount of time. Dr. Cullen took me to his office while someone else took care of my parents. I stayed there until there was a knock on the door and Dr. Cullen entered with a woman trailing behind. She was just a few inches taller than me and she appeared to be in her mid thirties. She introduced herself as Katherine Peters, from CPS, my new caseworker.

She asked me to call her Kate because she wanted us to be equals, or something like that. She asked me a bunch of questions, but I

couldn't remember half of them. I didn't even remember my answers. My mind was spinning a hundred miles a minute, trying to process what was happening.

It wasn't until she got my file from Dr. Cullen and had a talk with Dr. Carrot that it was decided I wasn't going home. She spoke to one of the hospital's security guards in the hallway while I waited in the office. I don't think she intended for me to hear what they said, but I did.

I heard it all.

Mom had gone completely mental when the security guard pulled her away. Kicking and screaming while Dad followed. According to the guard, Dad didn't ask about me. All he kept asking was about what was going to happen to Mom.

He didn't ask about me at all.

It was dark out when I was finally allowed to leave the hospital. I was told that my dad had packed me a bag and that we would stop by the house to pick it up. Dad wasn't home when we got there and neither was Mom. I didn't ask where they were, but I still wondered. He must have been around somewhere, since he had the time to pack me a bag with the things he figured were necessary for me.

But since he didn't ask about me, I wasn't going to ask about him either.

After we picked up my bag, everything seemed to fall apart even more. Kate was told that there were no foster homes available in Forks that could take me in on such a short notice. Although, the foster parents who could were not comfortable with having such an old teen in their house. Apparently, they thought I was a drug addict or something and that was the reason why I was abused by my mother.

Kate yelled into the phone when she found out. She was very upset, which I found kind of funny since I wasn't feeling anything at all. I had slowly retreated into my old shell and I didn't feel much of whatever Edward had left in me anymore. I was back to being empty.

After she was done yelling at whoever was on the phone, she took a deep breath and turned to me, telling me that I had a choice to make. I could either go back to the hospital or go with her. She didn't care about the rules, and she wanted to take me home with her. She said she was tired of seeing older kids getting thrown around and slipping through the cracks just because they were just that... old. There was too much focus on younger kids, because they were more vulnerable.

Kate later explained to me that she always wanted to work with troubled teens and that if breaking the rules meant helping someone out, she would do it in a heartbeat. Apparently, I wasn't the first case she broke a few rules for, and she still had her job, her license and the right to work with troubled teens... so whatever end result she got, the rules she broke on the way were easily dismissed by the other CPS people.

Kate was an approved foster parent and had hosted a bunch of kids before, but never the ones she was a caseworker for – like me. But that didn't mean that the CPS wasn't annoyed when they found out that Kate had brought me home. Something about "keeping her distance" and not getting "emotionally involved." It almost sounded like something someone would say on Grey's Anatomy. However, I totally got what they meant. Because if they got emotionally involved, their judgment would be clouded and the kid in question could end up even more hurt than before.

Eventually, they finally agreed to let me stay with Kate – just until they found me a more permanent solution. They were trying to find a foster home for me in Forks, so I wouldn't need to move. So far, they hadn't gotten anywhere as far as I knew. I guess they finally realized that if the choice was between the hospital and Kate, I would be

more comfortable at Kate's. I'd had enough of hospitals in the past few months to last a lifetime.

Kate spoke to my school and I was told that I could make up for the missed schoolwork come January. Since Christmas was only a few weeks away anyway, there was no reason for me to stress about it now. I had enough on my plate as it was already.

I tried to ignore the feeling of abandonment that assaulted me as I thought about my parents. How not even my dad had called me, or tried to contact me at all. It was as if he really didn't care. He didn't even care enough *to pretend* to care.

I closed my eyes and took a cleansing breath.

There was only one person I wanted to see. One person I really, truly, missed.

And that person was *not* my father.

I scrolled through the address book in my phone until I found *him* . My thumb hovered over the green call button, but I never pushed it. I stared at his name and number as if that was enough to make the call.

I sighed and pushed a button. Not the green one. Instead I pushed the button that left the address book and sent me back to the main-screen.

I was going to call him, but not right now.

It was still too much.

I stared out the window, thinking about Edward, until it was time for dinner. The delicious smell of chicken and rice had made its way to my room, and my mouth was watering. It was a nice change to be able to eat good food without having to make it myself.

Kate prepared a plate for me as I sat down at the table. She prepared a plate for herself before sitting down across from me.

"How old are you, Bella?" she asked me, smiling as she cut her piece of chicken into smaller bits.

I looked at her, feeling confused. She knew how old I was, so why was she asking me? And why was she smiling like that when she did? I was still thinking about Edward, and I was not in the mood for mind games right now.

"Seventeen," I replied slowly.

"How long have you been seventeen?"

"A while...?" I replied, still confused.

She chuckled lightly. "I mean, when is your birthday?"

"September 13th. Doesn't my file say when and where I was born?"

She smiled. "Yes, it does," she replied simply as she picked up a folder that had been lying on the chair beside her. She put it on the table and pushed it across to me. I quirked an eyebrow at her before opening the folder. My heart stopped beating, and I quit breathing as my eyes landed on the first page.

"Are you serious?" I asked in a shaky voice, looking up at her with wide eyes.

"Definitely," she replied, smiling sadly. "I won't lie to you, Bella, the process takes a while and there's no guarantee that you will win. There are several different things you need to do to be eligible, and with your medical past with a suicide attempt on record..." She sighed and shook her head, as if wanting to put that thought out of her head. "But it's always an option. It may not work out, but it will still be worth a shot, even if it's a long one and even though you're turning eighteen soon. Everything is worth a shot."

My emotionless mask was fading and her smile grew when she noticed. I had to bite my lip to keep from smiling too. I looked back down at the folder in my hand and flipped through the fifteen or so pages in it. I went back to the first page and stared at as if it held the key to my salvation.

Emancipation of minors in Washington State.

Closet

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 36 – "Closet"

Edward Cullen POV

I fucking failed her.

Maybe people had been right about me after all. Maybe I was a fucking failure. Everything I touched turned to crap. How fucking hard was it to keep a girl safe from her mother? It should have been piece of fucking cake, but I even failed *that* . It wasn't fucking rocket science! I should have kept my damn mouth shut and just done what she told me.

But instead I went to my damn father, and had to watch as she was dragged off by her parents. Seeing the life leave her eyes as she gave up. All hope she had felt, all hope I had given her, was gone within seconds. Just because *I* fucked up.

I fucked up, and now I was going to become a murderer. Her mother was going to kill her, and it would be all my fault. Everything would become full circle, and the promise I had to her the day of the accident would be fulfilled. I would end her existence.

Not being at all overdramatic.

Fuck you. It is all my fault.

I looked up, feeling confused as I found myself in Dad's office again. How the fuck did I get here?

Dad was standing by the closed door and he was frowning when he looked down at me.

"I need to get her. I can't fucking let her leave!" I said, standing up and stepping towards the door.

"No, Edward," he said, putting his hands on my shoulders and pushing me firmly towards the chair.

"But she can't leave with them! Did you listen to me at all? Her mother is going to fucking kill her!" I replied loudly with a shaky voice.

"Edward, no harm is going to come to her. Trust me. She is safe now. People are going to take care of her and see to it that she'll be alright. Don't worry," he replied calmly.

"Don't worry," I echoed with a snort. "That's easy for you to say! You don't fucking care!"

He gave me an odd look as I tried to stand up again, but he kept me in place with his hands.

"I do care," he replied. "But I don't think you're at the right mindset to see that right now." He took a deep breath and looked at me for a moment before continuing. "I'm going to page Dr. Randall. Maybe you should see him today after all."

"I don't need a damn shrink! *I'm* not the insane one here!" I yelled.

"Please, Edward, keep your voice down," he muttered. "Yelling won't help you." He paused. "Or her."

"Fuck you," I snarled, but it wasn't loud. "You don't care... you never cared. You told us they had come to take her home! *HOME* ! Why

the hell would you let that happen? Why are you letting them take her back to the place where they hurt her the most? She'll die!"

"She's not going home!" he protested, sounding irritated now. "She's being taken care of by child protective services."

"Then why did you say that her parents had come to take her home?"

Something changed in his eyes and he looked almost uncomfortable. I quirked an eyebrow at him and he sighed.

"Because I walked in on you kissing the girl who you have claimed to hate for so long, I was caught off guard. I wasn't paying attention to what I was saying."

I swallowed thickly as he reminded me about what I had done.

I had fucking kissed her.

I kissed Sparrow.

I kissed Isabella Swan.

I kissed the Goose.

And as I thought about it, I realized I... I... *I fucking liked it* . Her lips and mine had been molded together perfectly. Her lips had been fucking delicious. I may not have kissed many girls in my days, since it was against all my principles, but no one had even come close to Sparrow; even though the few that I had kissed in the past was far more experienced than she was. Sparrow was innocent, inexperienced and completely lost in this world. But she was still superior to everyone else.

I had been so wrong about her.

"I'm going to call Dr. Randall," Dad said. "I need you to talk to him, especially after everything that has happened in the past couple of days. I know you think you don't need it, but this isn't normal,

Edward. What you've been through, and what you've been through because of Bella, isn't normal. And you're not expected to be able to handle it on your own."

I looked up and met his gaze. He wasn't going to let this go. I knew that. Fighting was futile. And I didn't have the energy for that shit anyway.

"Fine, whatever," I muttered.

How bad could it be?

I slammed my door and locked it behind me. My body was shaking with anger and I urged to hit something. *Someone* . Anything. *Anyone* .

Who the hell did Dr. Randall think he was? I didn't spend more than twenty minutes with the guy, but that was enough for me to come to the conclusion that he was full of shit. He hadn't known shit about what he was talking about. I didn't know what my dad had told him, but considering the shit Dr. Randall spew while I was there, one would think he had been told I had lost it completely.

When he asked me about the accident, without any warning at all, I knew that the dude was insane if he thought I was going to talk with him about anything. I shut up completely. When I didn't answer him, he had gone on a rant about self-preservation mechanisms, and how people put up walls of indifference in front of them, to keep from being hurt.

Apparently he knew about how I had felt about Sparrow before the accident, and how I had acted after it. How I claimed I didn't care. Apparently, this was a natural reaction to a traumatizing experience. Of course, the dork-doctor had explained this to me like I was a fucking toddler or something. He thought I was fucking stupid, and when he began prodding more about the accident I decided that

enough was enough. I had enough to deal with, and I didn't need his condescending bullshit to add to the pile.

So I stalked out, and I didn't stop moving until I was home.

My heart was racing and my mind was spinning; and it had nothing to do with my walk home. Going to Dr. Randall, in all his idiotic glory, just minutes after losing Sparrow must have been the stupidest thing Dad could have thought of. I was fucking traumatized. There was no other way to put it. And going to a shrink right after something like that was like getting behind the wheel after having a few beers. You think you'll be okay, and that you're fine enough to handle it. But then you hit a fucking tree, and end up more hurt than you were before.

I let my eyes wander over my room. I locked sight of the unmade part of the bed where *she* had slept just hours before. I slowly crawled onto the bed and buried my face into the pillow she had been using. I inhaled deeply, a mixture of her scent and mine assaulting my senses. I closed my eyes and hugged the pillow to my face, as if trying to suffocate myself.

How the hell did everything turn out so shitty?

I pulled out my phone from my pocket, and turned my head on the pillow. I tried to send her a text, cursing the way my hands were shaking. It was as if I was fucking epileptic or some shit. I finally gave up and decided to call her instead.

Moments passed and she didn't answer, instead I was greeted by her recorded voice. And the mere sound of it broke my damn heart.

"Sparrow... hearing your fucking voice is like music to my damn ears. Even if it's just your recorded voice telling me to leave a message..."

I didn't sleep well that night. I kept waking myself up. I had nightmares of Sparrow's mother doing horrible things to her. In one, I

had been standing outside their living room window, looking in, just to see how the crazy bitch cut Sparrow's arm so many times it wasn't even attached to her body anymore when she was done. It was fucking disgusting, and when I woke up I had to run to the bathroom to throw up.

I glanced at my alarm clock on the way back to my bed, frowning when I saw it was just past four in the morning. I groaned and reached for my phone as I laid back down in the bed.

I wasn't going to sleep any time soon, I knew that. Maybe Sparrow had a hard time sleeping too? And if not, I could always leave her a message. I called her up, trying not to get disappointed when she didn't answer. Instead I smiled a little when I heard her recorded voice.

"It's four in the fucking morning and I can't sleep. It's weird that I've never slept better than when I slept with you... even though I never got more than a couple of hours the times we did sleep together... not sleeping together like... fuck... you know what I mean..."

What the fuck was I saying? When I lost my mind, did I lose my brain filter too? Apparently, I did.

My mind wasn't working, that was for damn sure. I could always blame the early hour.

I spent the next two days in my bed. I just couldn't find it in me to leave it. I was tired and drained, but I couldn't sleep. Mom came in and asked me if I wanted breakfast, but she didn't ask me if I wanted to go to school. I ate the food she brought up to me, just to appease her, even though I had no fucking appetite. But I didn't need to fail her too. The food didn't stay with me long, though. It came up as quick as it went down.

I didn't fucking eat, I didn't fucking sleep. All I did was stare at the phone, waiting for it to come alive with a text or a call. I waited for

her to get back to me. I needed to know that Dad hadn't been full of shit when he said she was safe. I needed to know she was okay.

But she never called.

But I did.

Fourty times.

After two miserable days, by some weird miracle, I managed to leave the comfort of my bed and drag my sorry ass to school. All night I had been trying to convince myself to just let it go. To let Sparrow go. I told myself that she would contact me when she got the chance. And there was nothing I could do about it until then. I didn't know where she was and there was no way for me to find out, so there was no reason for me to obsess over it.

She was fine.

I had to keep telling myself that.

Lunchtime in La Push was always an interesting thing, and if it weren't for the fact that I was worried shitless about Sparrow – no matter how much I told myself to let it go - I would probably have enjoyed the things I got to witness a little more. Leah had been absent all day, and I wasn't expecting to see her at lunch. I wanted to ask her how things had been at the gathering, or whatever they called it. They had expected Sparrow to be there, and I wondered what happened when she didn't show up. How much did I have to worry about the La Push freaks hurting her when she came back?

" Emily is still at the hospital... the doctor said she got blood poisoning or something... "

I looked up from my wrapped, untouched, sandwich. The pack was sitting at their usual table, but unlike all other times I've seen them,

they were looking pretty gloomy now. Everybody was looking at Sam, and he looked the most miserable of the bunch.

"She'll be okay," Jacob replied, giving Sam a pat on the back.

"I'm not too sure about that," Sam muttered, turning his head towards me and looking me straight in the eyes as he said the next part. "Her doctor is Cullen's father."

I pushed my chair back, grabbing my sandwich and walking towards the exit. I was so not in the mood for whatever crap they had to spew about my father. I threw my untouched sandwich in the trash on the way out. I went outside to take a moment to get some fresh air. I contemplated taking a smoke, but for some reason I wasn't feeling it. I needed some kind of distraction, some kind of release. But I didn't fucking know what. All I knew was that a damn smoke was nothing going to cut it.

I picked up my phone, my heart sinking as I saw that I had no missed calls or texts. I guess I was still hoping for her to contact me, and I shouldn't have been so disappointed when she didn't.

My fingers moved fluently over the keys as I dialed in her number, which I knew by heart by now, before holding the phone to my ear. I wasn't expecting her to answer; I just waited for the seconds to pass before I heard her recorded voice play in my ear.

"Hi, you've reached Bella. I can't get to the phone right now, so you know what to do."

I waited for the beep before I started talking.

"Fuck it, Sparrow. Where are you?" I mumbled. "I haven't seen or talked to you in three days." I paused, pinching the bridge of my nose as I sat down on a nearby bench outside. "Three days, Sparrow. Where the fuck are you? How are you doing?" I sighed and closed my eyes. "I don't think I can do this shit anymore." I ended the call and put the phone back in my pocket.

I rubbed my eyes with the heels of my hands. I didn't trust my eyes anymore, I wouldn't have been surprised if they had betrayed me again by shedding tears. But this time, they hadn't.

I took a cleansing breath, before leaving my spot on the bench and walking back inside the school. My hands were shaking with irrational anger. I didn't know why exactly I was so angry all of a sudden, but I was.

Then I spotted Jacob fucking Black, and my vision went red.

Of course I knew why I was fucking angry, and I knew exactly what to do to let it all out.

It was all his fucking fault.

"HEY IDIOT!" I called, furiously.

He stopped and turned around slowly. He narrowed his eyes in suspicion when he spotted me.

"And what can I do you for, Mr. *Cullen* ?" he asked, spitting my name as if it was an insult. He shared a look with one of his friends, who chuckled darkly in response. I was obviously missing out on some inside joke.

Jacob crossed his arms over his chest, probably thinking he looked more intimidating that way. As if he wasn't as scary as a damn puppy. I wasn't fucking afraid of him. He had no power over me. I snorted as I stalked towards him. He quirked an eyebrow at me, still acting as if he wasn't afraid. He probably figured he didn't need to be afraid of me because of his army of mutant dogs standing behind him.

"This is what I want," I replied when I reached him. I raised my fist and before he had any time to react, my fist connected with his nose with a satisfying crack.

He reached up to touch his face in shock, just as I threw another punch. His hands immediately went up to block it before he threw himself at me, throwing me backwards. I got the wind knocked out of me as my back slammed down on the floor, but I didn't even fucking notice. All I could see, or feel, was Jacob's huge form on top of me as he pinned me to the floor, ready to pounce me. He pulled his fist back, preparing to punch me in the face. But I was quicker. I threw my fist against his face again and it connected with his jaw. His head flew back and he rolled off of me. I quickly moved and got up on my feet. I put my foot on his chest, holding him down as he cradled his ugly face with his hands.

He whimpered. But that wasn't enough for me.

I removed my foot from his chest and I kicked him straight in the crotch instead. The sound that followed wasn't fucking human. It sounded as if someone was torturing an animal or something. Which I guess was true. I was torturing a damn dog. He was a filthy dog. And he was worth nothing.

He removed his hands from his face to hold his crotch instead. He curled up into fetal position, and continued his whimpering. I collected as much mucus and snot I could in my mouth, before spitting on his pathetic form.

"That's for her, you son of a bitch. You can-" I began, but I was cut off by a loud voice from the end of the hallway.

"Mr. Cullen. My office. NOW!" I turned my head to the sound, seeing Mr. Ateara standing there. I rolled my eyes and looked down at Jacob again.

"This ain't over," I spat at him.

"You bet your stinking ass it ain't," he muttered back, the whimpering in his voice did nothing to help his attempt to sound threatening.

I snorted and left his sorry form on the ground, walking towards Mr. Ateara and his office. It wasn't until we reached the room that I noticed that his name wasn't the only thing on the sign on the door. The word "Principal" was also there.

What the fuck? I thought he was a teacher.

Mr. Ateara smirked at my expression as he led me into the room, closing the door behind us.

"Oh, did I forget to mention to you that I'm also the principal of this school?" he asked. "I'm not only a teacher." I plopped down on the chair across from his desk, as he took his designated place behind it. He was smirking at me when he leaned forward, clasping his hands on his desk. "So, Mr. Cullen, mind explaining to me what you were doing hitting one of our students?"

"He had it coming," I muttered.

"I don't know what kind of things they tolerate at Forks High, but this kind of behavior won't fly with us. Jumping other students, abusing them like you did, is not an acceptable behavior at our school. I need to consider the other students' safety, and having a student with such violent tendencies as yourself, I'm afraid I have no other choice but to expel you. I'm sorry." He talked so fast it was almost as if he couldn't contain himself. He had never liked me, so of course he jumped on the chance to expel me.

Sorry, my ass.

"Expel me? For what? For one fight? In case you didn't notice, he was ready to fucking punch me himself. What is *his* punishment?" I snapped.

"From what I saw you were the one who initiated the fight, and Mr. Black was only prepared to defend himself from you. We have a zero tolerance policy against violence at this school, and I have a feeling

that this won't be a onetime thing if you were to stay with us," he replied.

"You got to be fucking kidding me," I muttered, rolling my eyes.

"You can gather your things from your locker, but I expect you to be off school grounds, as well as the reservation, within the hour. You are not welcome here anymore," he said. I could tell he was trying to keep his voice stern and detached, as if he had to deal with this shit every damn day. But I could tell he was fighting hard to contain his smirk. He was fucking enjoying this. He had been waiting for the damn day when he could expel me and banish me from the reservation.

But I couldn't even find it in me to care. I punched Jacob Black's face in. It was fucking worth it.

"No worries," I said, standing up. "I'll be out in five minutes. Why would I stick around longer than necessary?" I walked over to the door and he cleared his throat behind me.

"Have a nice day, Mr. Cullen," he said, the amusement and malice clear in his voice.

"Go fuck yourself, Mr. Ateara," I replied, before throwing the door open and stalking out.

Dad looked at me, and I kept my eyes trained on a spot on the wall behind him.

"You got expelled," he said, making it a statement. I nodded in confirmation. "Because you got into a fight with another student." I nodded again. "Because you got into a fight with *Jacob Black* ." He sighed and shook his head, moving to lean back against his desk.

"So what is my punishment? You're grounding me or something?" I muttered, still not looking at him.

"No, I'm not grounding you," he replied calmly. "To be honest with you, I'm glad you got expelled. That way we won't need to transfer you." That comment made me look up and meet his gaze in surprise.

"What?" I asked.

"I have been talking to your mother, and we both agreed that you going to school on the reservation maybe wasn't the best idea. From what you've told me, I'm beginning to think that that school is being run by a cult. Teaching the legends to the students as if it were the truth, I'm not really comfortable with that. Those people are taking their legends too seriously, and I don't want my children to be in an environment like that," he replied. "It's not healthy. Believing is one thing, being fanatic about it is quite another. I'm honestly scared for the students and the children at that school. Especially after what you and Bella told me about what happened to her. I'm shocked and disgusted."

"So I'm not going to be punished for getting expelled or for fighting?" I asked, now confused.

"I'm not saying I agreed with what you did, but no, I'm not going to punish you for it. I don't think violence is the answer, and I don't think you should have hit Jacob. But there's nothing we can do about that right now," he replied with a deep sigh. "I'm going to ask your mother to call Forks High tomorrow, maybe they won't be too reluctant to let you back in." He took a step towards me, gingerly taking my hand, turning it so he could look at it from all angles. "Does it hurt?" he asked. I shrugged in response.

Yeah it fucking hurt, but it was fucking worth it. Besides, it was nothing compared to the shit Sparrow had been through. So who was I to complain? It was just bruised, maybe sprained.

"It will heal faster if you let me take care of it," he said.

I didn't protest, I let him take care of my hand. It stung as a sonofabitch when he cleaned the cuts with alcohol. He wrapped the

hand up in gauze and gave me a comforting pat on the shoulder when he was done.

"I'm proud of you, son," he said quietly. "You may make mistakes, and questionable choices, in life. But with all that said... you did good. With Bella, you did good."

I looked at him and began feeling paranoid, thinking this was his way of telling me she died or some shit. Maybe he was trying to soften me up and telling me I wasn't a complete failure, before hitting me with the news of her decease.

"Is she dead?" I asked bluntly. "Did she fucking die? Did they murder her? Or did she take her own life? When did she die?"

Dad's soft smile faded immediately and he shook his head quickly.

"No, no," he protested. "She's not dead. Why would you think that?"

"Because you told me *I* did good. I fucking *failed* her, and you still say I did good. And why the hell would you say that if she wasn't dead?" I snapped.

He opened his mouth to reply, but I didn't wait long enough to wait for his answer. I left Dad's office and went back up to my room, slamming the door behind me. He said she wasn't dead, and that was good enough for me right now. I didn't need him to elaborate. As long as she was breathing, I would be okay too.

I hoped.

I was fucking exhausted. I was totally drained.

This shit was wearing me out.

I plopped down on my back, on my bed, staring at the ceiling. I tried to relax, and get rid of all the tension in my body, but as I did, everything just came crashing down on me. The emotional

rollercoaster I was on was beginning to pick up some serious speed, and I was freaking out.

I picked up my phone, dialing Sparrow's number without looking.

I was immediately sent to voicemail. Her phone wasn't even on anymore.

"C'mon," Jasper said. "Why don't you join us to the exhibition? It will get your mind off things."

"Maybe I don't want to get my mind off things," I muttered, staring out the window in my room.

"Yeah, well, maybe you can keep me company then?" he continued. "Alice and Rose are going to want to go Christmas-shopping afterwards, and I could use some moral support."

I glared at him and he raised both his eyebrows, giving me an innocent look. What the fuck was he trying to pull here?

"I'm not going to Port Angeles," I replied. He rolled his eyes and threw a small container at me. I caught it and looked at it in confusion. *Pills* .

"I had a feeling you would say that, that's why I scored you those. A mild sedative that won't make you too drowsy but it won't make you panic either," he explained.

"If my dad finds out that you're giving me sedatives he'll fucking kill you," I said with a dark chuckle.

"Who do you think gave them too me?" he replied with a lazy smirk. "C'mon, now, let's go."

I popped open the lid of the container and shook out a couple of pills in my hand. I threw them into my mouth and swallowed them dry. I

grimaced at the bitter aftertaste as I grabbed my jacket.

"Fine, whatever," I muttered.

I followed him down to the car. The girls were taking Alice's car to Port Angeles.

The exhibition was for the sex-ed project we had been working on in biology. Everybody in school was allowed to go, and all classes were cancelled for the day. I groaned when I realized that the La Push mutts were probably going to be there too, since their school was also in on the whole thing. It had only been a day since I was expelled, and I had a feeling Black hadn't forgotten about how I punched his damn face in. If he saw me now, he would probably pummel me by pure instinct. But I wasn't afraid. If he did pummel me, it would only give me a reason to hit him some more and get some anger out.

Jasper and I didn't speak much on the ride over, and that was just as well. I was not in a speaking mood. Instead I took the time to send a couple of texts to Sparrow. I didn't want to call her with Jasper so close, but I couldn't *not* try to contact her either. Lucky for me Emmett wasn't going to the exhibition, he was going to train with the rest of the jocks instead. They were allowed to skip, apparently.

I was tense and aggravated when we reached Port Angeles. The pills had done nothing to help me relax on the ride over. Jasper parked his car next to Alice's yellow Porsche in the parking lot. When we climbed out, Alice immediately came over to me and gave me a tight hug.

"I've missed you, Ed," she said in my ear before letting me go. I huffed in response. Why the hell would she miss me?

"Sure you did," I snorted sarcastically.

" *Of course* I did, you dork," she said, pouting her lip gloss-covered lips.

We started walking towards the entrance and Alice hugged my arm to her, but I shook her off me and stepped aside. She frowned at me and hooked arms with Rosalie instead as they walked in. I stopped by the curb, not wanting to go in quite yet.

I kicked a pebble with my foot and Jasper stopped beside me.

"How are you doing?" he asked quietly.

"Craptastic," I muttered.

"Seriously, dude. What's up? What's going on with Bella?" he asked.

I huffed and glanced at him. He was looking at me as if he was in pain and I almost wanted to punch him because of it. What the fuck did he know about pain? Nothing, that's what.

"I thought you didn't give a flying fuck? I thought you were Switzerland!" I growled. He rolled his eyes at my hostility, and I didn't blame him.

"Yeah, in your damn fight with Emmett, not about this. I helped you *kidnap* her, I think I'm entitled to some damn information," he said. "What. The. Fuck. Is. Going. On?"

I met his penetrating eyes and his gaze softened as he noticed the emotions in my traitorous eyes. I quickly looked away from him.

"Dude," he said with a pained breath.

"I don't fucking know what's going on. I've tried to fucking call her a million fucking times, but she won't answer the damn phone. I think it's turned off," I mumbled. "All Dad could tell me is that she was taken away, and that he doesn't know any more than that. Dad says she's fine, but I won't believe that until I hear it from her."

"You... you really care about her, huh?" he said in awe.

I turned my head back to him and glared.

"Someone fucking has to," I spat. "Nobody fucking cares about her. If she died or disappeared nobody would fucking care. Like now, does anyone care that she's gone?"

Jasper crossed his arms over his chest as he took a step back and quirking his eyebrow.

"Are you kidding me?" he asked. "Were your memories left behind along with your inability to say a sentence without the word fuck? What the hell, man? You're not a saint just because you care all of a sudden."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "Low blow, dude. Low blow."

"I'm not telling you this to be mean, Ed," he said with a sigh. "I'm just saying that it's a mighty fine glasshouse you're sitting in, and it would be sad if you broke it with all those stones you keep throwing around."

"Don't you think I fucking know that? Don't you think I get reminded of all the shitty things I did to her every time I look into her damn eyes? Don't you fucking think I *know*?" I replied furiously.

He sighed and scratched his neck awkwardly. "Maybe this place isn't the best time for this conversation. Why don't we take a rain check and go inside and check out this train wreck of an exhibition."

"Yeah, can't wait," I muttered and followed him inside.

The area was filled with students. It was easy to get lost in the crowd, so it didn't take long for me to lose Jasper. I walked aimlessly for a while, until I reached a display I recognized all too well.

Ours.

Lauren and Mike were standing by their station, and Lauren's face lit up when she noticed me.

"Edward!" she said, beaming. "I can't believe you're here!"

I ignored her completely as I neared the display. I looked at the posters they had put up on their wall. It all looked choppy and pathetic. It was clear that it was all Lauren's doing.

I stepped closer to one of the posters, smiling a little when I spotted Sparrow's name next to a quote.

" One night stand or love it at first sight? Isn't it all just different levels of lust?"

She always had such reasonable opinions about stuff. This was no different. But for some reason her quote bothered me. Did this mean she didn't believe in true love? Or even the concept of love? Did she think it was all about lust? Maybe she was right. After all, I had never been in love, for me it had always been about lust.

Maybe love was just that. A different - *stronger* - level of lust.

My smile faded and I shook my head. No, I didn't want to fucking believe that. Sparrow deserved better. She deserved something more than glorified lust. She deserved love. And if what she said was true, then what the hell were we even doing here?

I read another quote on the poster, this one was courtesy of Lauren.

" One night stands are TDTT... Tempting, Dangerous, Tacky and Taboo. Love at first sight is MFLT... Magical, Fulfilling, Loving and True."

I quirked an eyebrow, totally baffled at the idiocy of that quote. Was it supposed to be a poem or something? I was fucking sure I lost ten IQ-points by just reading it. What the fuck was with the abbreviations? Those weren't even real abbreviations! Was she really *that* stupid?

I threw a look at Lauren, who was pretending that she hadn't been ogling my ass when my back was turned. I rolled my eyes and

walked away, leaving the idiot and her partner to fend for themselves.

I stopped briefly at a few other displays, but nothing really caught my eye. Some group did a thing about the kings and queens of the world, and how inbred the royal families in Europe really were. It was almost as disgusting as it was hilarious.

I stayed clear of the La Push-ones, which weren't that many, and they were all in the back of the area anyway. I didn't stick around long. We left for the mall only an hour later when Jasper found me in the crowd. Alice and Rosalie took the lead when we got to the mall. Jasper and I had no other choice but to follow. For some reason, the first stop was the toy store. Why? Hell, if I knew. Alice probably needed to stock up on Barbie-supplies, or dolls that she could beta-test her new make-up on.

I shared a look with Jasper on the way in, and he rolled his eyes. The girls disappeared quickly down an aisle. Jasper disappeared too – probably to the game section - so I walked down an aisle alone. I let my eyes wander over the shelves that I passed, and I stopped as I reached the section for stuffed animals.

I picked up a stuffed penguin and smiled crookedly to myself. Sparrow would get a kick out of this.

"Aren't you a little old for stuffed animals?" Jasper asked. I jumped in surprise when he snuck up on me like the ninja he was. I rolled my eyes at him and put the penguin back in its place on the shelf.

"Fuck you," I muttered, walking away.

"Are you going to buy her something?" he asked me. I shrugged, knowing which *her* he was referring to.

"I don't know... what am I supposed to buy her anyway?"

"What does she like?"

"I don't know? What the fuck do girls like her like?" I asked.

"How about this?" he asked, grabbing a pink elephant from a nearby shelf. I rolled my eyes at him.

"What the fuck is she? Five? Why don't I just get her one hundred monkeys made of porcelain or something? Or why don't I just buy her this so she has something to snuggle with in bed?" I suggested sarcastically, grabbing the nearest stuffed animal my hand connected with and threw it at him. He caught it before it hit him in the face. He looked at it for a moment before bursting into laughter. I glared at him as he held it in front of him. My eyes were drawn to the weird, grey shape in his hands and I couldn't contain my laughter either. "What the fuck is that? It looks like a damn whale's penis!" I blurted.

"I think it's supposed to be an eel or something... I don't know? It doesn't have any eyes," he replied, turning it in his hands. He was right, it was just a grey, long and thick shape. Who the hell would buy that to a child? Or anyone else for that matter. I couldn't even tell what the hell it was.

Maybe I could buy it to Sparrow as a joke. Tell her she was getting a penis for Christmas.

Hell, maybe I should buy her a dildo. She could use a nice release.

Maybe I could show her how to use it too...

I grabbed another whale's penis from the shelf and weighed it in my hands. Would it really that bad if I helped her out? I mean, where was the harm in that? I bet she would rather have it be me than anyone else. And she deserved to feel good after all the shit she had been pulled through. And according to her it was all about lust anyway. There was no difference.

I shook my head, trying to get rid of the thoughts. What were the odds of her letting me do anything of the sorts with her if she didn't

even answer my damn calls? It had been four fucking days, for crying out loud. She wasn't going to let me come near her anytime soon. If ever. Especially not after failing her like I did.

And why the hell was I even thinking about doing something like that to her anyway? She was *Sparrow* ! My... *friend* . Nothing more. So why did these thoughts of lust keep popping up? And why did I keep thinking about her damn lips, moving against mine. If that ever were to happen again, just insert incoherent moans of delight on her part, and I would be a fucking goner. If she had moaned during our first kiss I would have fucking done her right there in Dad's office.

Maybe trying to buy her a Christmas present was a bad idea. Our friendship had always been a weird one, especially since nobody – except our parents now, I guess, and Jasper – knew about it. And since we did nothing the traditional way, maybe I shouldn't get her a gift. Maybe I should do some kind of reverse Santa kind of thing.

And what does that mean? You take something from her, instead of give?

I smirked inwardly at the thought.

I wouldn't mind taking something from her. *Something that could only be taken once* .

And the fact that I was even thinking about *that* irritated me.

Why couldn't I just leave well enough alone? How hard was it to just be her friend. Period. Why couldn't she be another Alice or Rosalie to me? Why did I have to complicate things? Doing anything with, or to, her now would ruin everything.

And I didn't fucking want that.

But I had already ruined everything. By kissing her I opened a fucking closet that I had no business opening. A closet that was filled with stuff that was better left untouched. But I couldn't fucking close it

up now. The shit was out, and I just had to deal with the aftermath. Even if it included being freaked out by all the overwhelming, and unfamiliar, feelings that were fighting for dominance inside of me.

Feelings. It was what it all came down to in the end. Fucking *feelings* .

I couldn't even figure out if I was sad or angry or happy or whateverthefuck. I was so confused that I might as well be all three... or four. Maybe it was neither? Maybe I was just... whatever.

I followed my friends out from the toy store, and towards Jackson's Jewelry. I shared a look with Jasper, and he just rolled his eyes again. He had been through this before. We both knew what was going to happen now.

Alice and Rosalie was going to "ooh" and "aah" over the jewelry, in their very subtle way of telling Jasper what they wanted for Christmas. I guess they both just assumed that Jasper was going to remember what the hell they wanted, and then tell Emmett so they could both buy their girls some jewelry for Christmas.

The girls immediately went to the display of necklaces. Alice squealed and pointed on the glass.

"Look! I want that one!" she said, bouncing where she stood. I sighed as I followed Jasper to the display to look at what she was pointing at. "Look!" Alice said again when we looked down. "That one, the crystal bird. Isn't it beautiful? I want that one."

"Eh... Alice, sweetie, isn't it a little pricey? I mean... 200 dollars for a necklace? Can't you find something... more affordable?" Jasper asked sheepishly. Alice turned to glare at him.

"But... I like *that* one!" she protested, sounding like a damn baby. It wasn't as if she couldn't fucking afford the damn necklace herself. Her family was loaded. Jasper sighed and turned his head up to the ceiling, as if asking God for strength.

"My brother is a cheap bastard," Rosalie stated with a teasing smirk.

"I know, right?" Alice huffed, turning towards a display of earrings. I took the opportunity to step closer to the display of necklaces, and looked down at the one Alice liked.

She was right, it was beautiful.

The crystal bird was just barely an inch big. I tilted my head a little, reading the note next to it and smirking to myself as I read the name of the necklace.

' *Small Sparrow*'.

Were they freaking kidding me? It was like a damn sign from the Gods or something. It couldn't get more perfect. Sparrow was going to love it. It had her name on it for fuck's sake!

"Edward? Are you coming?" I looked up and saw that my friends had already moved to the exit. I looked down at the display again.

"Yeah, I'm coming alright," I mumbled while smirking to myself.

She was going to love it.

I got back to the store, and bought the necklace while the others were busy looking at expensive watches in the next store. And I put the little box with the necklace in my pocket, so they wouldn't know I had bought anything. This was a secret. My gift to Sparrow.

It was private.

It wasn't until I got home that reality hit me again.

I had bought the damn necklace with the intention of giving it to Sparrow as a Christmas present. I had imagined how she would tell me how much she loved it, and that she would never take it off. But I guess my mind had forgotten one little detail. How on earth was I

going to give her a present if I didn't even know where the hell she was? And how was I supposed to even get a hold on her if she refused to talk to me, or even text me? She wanted nothing to do with me.

She hated me for failing her. She had given up. I know she had. I had seen her eyes.

Somehow I had managed to create fiction of my own reality. While walking in that mall I had gone back to feeling somewhat normal. I was hanging out with my buddies, buying shit and eating junk food, it was no big deal. Everything was normal. I even bought a gift for a friend.

All normal.

Except that... it wasn't.

Nothing was normal.

Because Sparrow resided in the back of my mind. Every step, every breath, every thought. Everything I did, I did with Sparrow in thought. And it didn't matter how much I tried to squish down all thoughts of her; she was still there.

I put the box, and the necklace, in the drawer in my nightstand.

Out of sight, out of mind.

I took a shuddering breath and squeezed my eyes shut.

I couldn't fucking take it anymore.

I couldn't get rid of her. I fucking needed her.

I pulled out the phone, dialing her damn number for the umpteenth time. Shivering as I heard her recorded voice yet again. When the beep sounded, I didn't fucking know what to say. I plopped down on the bed, staring emptily in front of me.

"Sparrow... I don't fucking know what to do anymore... I... I feel fucking lost. I don't know what to do with myself. There is nothing I can do... I... I fucking miss you." My voice broke as I tried to contain my tears. The tears wouldn't leave me the fuck alone. Since when was I such a cry-baby? Since when did I break so fucking easily?

I got angry again. I was angry with her. Why was she torturing me? Why couldn't she just tell me she was alright? If she was alright, then she wouldn't have any problems getting back to me. By not reaching out to me, she was basically telling me she was dead.

Thank you very much for giving up, Sparrow. Fuck you!

"Okay? There. I said it. Is that what you've been waiting for me to say? That I miss you? Fine. There you fucking have it. I MISS you, Sparrow. I fucking need you here."

I had nothing else to say. I missed her, and I finally admitted to that out loud. But it wasn't going to make a difference. She wasn't going to call me back. So why was I even bothering anymore?

Because she means something.

Because she's all you have.

"Just call me back... please, Sparrow... I fucking need you."

I hung up the phone, dropping it beside me before grabbing a pillow and pressing it to my face.

There was a hurricane of emotions running through me.

Anger. Sadness. Loss. Loneliness. Ache. Hate. Lov-

I sat up straight in my bed and threw the pillow at the wall.

I was not feeling... *that* . I had never felt that. So why the hell would I feel it now? I didn't even know the first thing about... *that* . So why did I think I was feeling *that* all of a sudden? How would I even know

what that feeling felt like? How would I even know that was what it was?

And who exactly did I feel *that* for?

Sparrow?

Did I...?

No, of course not.

She was a friend.

A friend .

"I do not... *love* Isabella Swan," I whispered to myself.

If that was true, then why the hell did it feel like such a lie?

I didn't know how long I stared at the ceiling. All I know is that my room grew darker as the sun set outside. Soon my room was embedded in darkness, and I was still lying on my back on my bed.

I was never going to move again. I was going to lie there until I felt the sweet relief of death.

Suddenly, there was a weird dim light from beside me and a second later my phone chirped. I turned my head and reached for the phone.

A text.

My heart stopped.

Sparrow!

My hands shook as I opened the text. My stomach turned as I read her two words.

" *I'm fine* ."

Not safe, but *fine* .

I immediately dialed her number, hoping she would pick the fuck up. I had a feeling she wouldn't, though. I pinched the bridge of my nose as I waited. My heart sank as the seconds past, I was fucking sure she was going to let it go to voicemail. I had called her so many times before that I knew exactly how long it took before her voicemail was activated. I had called her so many times that her battery had fucking died on me, for crying out loud.

"Edward." I gripped the phone tighter as she answered her phone, breathing my name into my ear.

"Sparrow," I croaked. It was a good thing I was already lying down, or else I would have been sinking to the ground right now. It felt as if I had no bones left in my body. My throat constricted and I had a hard time breathing, let alone speak. I didn't even try. It wasn't worth it. I could hear Sparrow's soft breathing through the phone. I tried to find comfort in the fact that she was alive, and fine enough to call me. All else could wait. As long as she was alive, I was fine too.

"How are you doing?" she asked, and I wanted to snort. She was asking *me* that? "You called me ninety-seven times, Edward... you... you had me worried." Her voice shook on the last word and I squeezed my eyes shut.

Way to fucking go, you idiot. Make her feel worse. Like she hasn't been through enough.

"I'm supposed to ask *you* that," I replied, my voice strained.

"Edward... don't," she whispered.

"Where are you? Are you okay? Can I... can I see you?"

I could almost see her shake her head before she answered me.

"No, I don't think I'm ready for that yet," she replied quietly. "I... I need to figure some things out."

"Then fucking figure it out with me!" I growled. "You don't need to fucking do it alone! I'm here for you! I know I fucking failed when I told my dad... but... I'm here. I promise you, I'm *here*."

She was quiet for a moment, and when her voice came back it was barely audible.

"You didn't fail, Edward."

"Of course I did," I argued. "You don't even want to see me, so of course I failed you."

"You did exactly what you promised me you would. They took me away. I haven't even seen my parents since the hospital. I'm safe... or as safe as I could be considering the circumstances. I can sleep without having to worry about my mother... not that I'm sleeping all that well," she said with a sigh. "Or at all," she added.

Maybe I should have bought her a dreamcatcher... to keep all the bad dreams away.

"Join the club... I haven't slept in days," I mumbled.

"Maybe it would be easier if you didn't get up to call me at four in the morning," she joked, half-heartedly. I rolled my eyes at her sad attempt to cheer up the situation.

"You can't ignore me forever, you know," I said seriously. "You're fucking stuck with me now."

She chuckled softly and I smiled crookedly at the sound. It was a beautiful fucking sound.

"You look like a mess you know," she said, her voice serious now.

"How would you even know how I look?" I snorted. "Or are you just pointing out my general appearance?"

She sighed, and I could feel her roll her eyes at me. "No, I meant today. I saw you in Port Angeles, at the exhibition for the project... you... you didn't look so good."

My heart stopped in my chest and I stared into space, trying to imagine her in front of me. "You were there?" I asked incredulously.

"Yes and no... yes, I was in Port Angeles, but no, I wasn't at the exhibition," she replied.

"Why didn't you fucking come and say hello or just a 'look I'm alive'? Is that too much to ask for?" I asked.

"No, it isn't... but I told you, I'm not ready yet."

"Why were you even in Port Angeles in the first place?"

"I live here now, at least temporarily. I live in the apartment building across the street from the place you were at today. So I saw you from the window."

"Are you coming back to Forks soon?" I asked.

"I don't know... I don't even know if I want to return."

"Fuck you, Sparrow. Why wouldn't you want to return? What about me? Or am I so unimportant to you that you can just ignore me and pretend that what we have doesn't mean anything?"

"Edward... what exactly is it that we have?" she asked, her voice shaky and I could tell she was crying now. *Fuck* .

"I don't fucking know! Okay?" I replied, frustrated. "But how the hell are we even supposed to fucking find out if you're not here? I fucking need you, Sparrow."

"You keep saying that, but what does it even mean? Why... why would you need me? What am I to you, Edward? Why am I so important that you need me so much?"

"Because... because..." I couldn't even end the damn sentence. Because I didn't fucking know.

Was it because I felt lonely or was it because I... *loved* her?

Only an one hour drive was separating us, but it might as well have been the Atlantic. I was never going to get to her.

"I miss you," I said with a deep sigh. "I fucking miss you."

She was quiet for a moment, her breathing was uneven and I wondered if she was in pain. Did her leg still hurt?

"I miss you too," she whispered back.

"Will you come back?" I asked quietly.

"I... I don't know yet," she replied just as quietly.

"For me... Please," I pleaded.

"Why do you even care so much anymore, Edward? You got what you wanted. I'm not dead. I'm not dying. I'm safe from my parents. What more do you want?" she asked with an exasperated sigh.

At that moment, I hated her. I hated her with every fiber of my being. How dare she question me like that again, after everything I had done for her? Hadn't I proven myself enough? Did she honestly still think I was doing this out of guilt and that I didn't care for her? That she meant *nothing* to me?

"Why do you ask?" I asked, my voice cold. "Do you want me to fuck off? Just say the word and I'll do it." Okay, that was a lie of epic, Olympic sized proportions, but she didn't need to know that. I wasn't going to leave her alone when her dad threatened with a restraining

order, so why would I leave her alone now, just because she said so? I don't know why I had such a hard time letting go of her, but just because I didn't understand it didn't mean I was going to.

"Why is your hand wrapped up in gauze?" she asked, out of nowhere, instead of answering my question. I frowned in confusion, until I realized what she meant. I had forgotten all about my hand. I chuckled humorlessly as I held it in front of me.

"I punched a werewolf," I said.

"You punched a... *what*?" I chuckled at her confused tone.

"Jacob Black. He's a fucking dog, and he's even fucking crazier when it's a full moon. And I punched his fucking face in."

"Why would you do that?"

"Because he hurt you."

"You punched him because he hurt me?"

"Yes."

"Are *you* hurt?"

"No, just my hand. I almost got attacked by the rest of Team Jacob, but the principal caught us before it escalated. I got expelled, and they were stuck in class when I left so they never got the chance to touch me."

"You... you got expelled? You punched Jacob, and you got *expelled*? All because of me?" she asked bewildered.

It was when she put it like that when I realized how fucked up it all was. I punched another guy for a girl that I couldn't even stand being in the same room as just a few weeks ago. A girl who used to mean nothing to me, but somehow had grown to mean... *everything* .

All without me even noticing.

This wasn't just about me caring about a friend, or that I wanted to her alive so I wouldn't feel like a murderer. This was so much bigger than that. It was so much more. And it wasn't glorified lust. This was something else.

"It wasn't *because of* you, it was *for* you. And I would do it again in a heartbeat," I replied honestly.

"You're crazy." I imagined her shaking her head at this, not wanting to believe it. She was used to people doing things *to* her, and not *for* her. This was a huge adjustment for her, and not just for me. And I figured we could get adjusted together. This was just as new to her as it was for me. I had never felt or experienced anything like it before. I was so confused.

"I may be crazy, but all the best people are," I replied solemnly.

"I suppose you're right," she replied. I could hear the smile in her voice.

"So... when am I seeing you again?" I asked.

"Edward, please..." The pain was back in her voice, and I groaned. *Not again* .

"'Please' what? We're talking in circles here, Sparrow. Explain to me why you don't want to see me, and I'll fucking leave you alone."

"Because I need time!" she replied loudly in frustration. "I was removed from my home, I was betrayed by my family and I don't know how long I'll be staying here. My life has been turned upside down and I don't know how to process it all. It's all too much, Edward. *Too much* ."

"With all that said, don't you think you could use something familiar? Something constant?" She didn't say anything, she just sighed.

"Sparrow, I could be your constant if you'd let me."

"'Even a grey cloud can hide a blue moon'," she mumbled. I groaned loudly.

Now she's speaking in riddles, perfect.

"What?" I muttered. "What does that even mean?"

"It's nothing, it's just something my mom used to tell me when I was a kid. It means that you shouldn't judge people right away... you should stick around long enough for the grey clouds to pass, so you can see what's hiding behind them. Maybe there's a blue moon, maybe there will be nothing. Either way, you'll be glad you stuck around and gave it a chance," she mumbled.

"I guess your mom had her moments too," I said. "So, does that mean I'm the cloud?"

"No, it means you're the moon."

"Does that mean you're glad you stuck around and waited for the grey clouds to pass?" I prodded.

She was quiet for a moment before she replied with a sigh. "I am."

I closed my eyes, inhaling deeply and breathing out slowly through my nose. How two such simple words could have such an effect on me, I would never understand.

And there was something else that I would never understand either.

The way the sound of her voice made my heart swell and my insides ache.

I fucking longed to touch her. And not in a sexual way. Just... fucking *touch* her. Her hair, her arms, her fingers, her knee. *Anything*. As long as it was her.

I could deny it all I wanted, but *now* I knew that I felt something else for her.

This wasn't just some friendship growing in an unusual way because of the way we 'met', this *really* was something else entirely. I felt something for her that I had never felt for anyone, not even Alice or Rose. She meant something to me in a way that neither of my friends did.

And that pained me to realize, because it would hurt so much more when I lost her.

Because one thing was for sure, I was going to lose her. Of course I would. One way or another, I would lose her. Black ice and grey clouds be damned. I was fucking glad I hit her with my car. We had both been hit by destiny that night. Everything changed.

For the better.

"You're my blue moon too, Sparrow."

Need

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 37 – "Need"

Isabella Swan POV

It had been a couple of days since I talked to Edward, and it still hurt to think about it. Talking to Edward turned out to be harder than I thought it would be; we were on the phone for almost two hours. I thought this would be the last time we talked, at least for a while. That maybe it would be a good thing for him if we didn't see or talk to each other until I came back to Forks. I felt so bad for all the crap I had put him through, and he didn't need more of it. Everything I touched turned to crap. He deserved better. I know that must sound idiotic, considering how he had acted in the past. But that wasn't who he was. Not really. That was not the Edward that I had come to know, and like, in the past few weeks.

I spent much of my time just sitting by the window in my room, overlooking the street below. I watched the people passing on the street, wondering if anyone of them had a crazy mother too. If any one of them was suicidal. And if they had a friend who kept calling and leaving heartbreaking messages.

Then, one day as I sat there by the window, I spotted a very familiar head of brown hair that had a bronze-colored quality to it when the sun hit it. I smiled sadly to myself as I saw him walk with Jasper. They stopped outside the building across the street, and I noticed

that Edward's hand was wrapped up in gauze. What happened to him? Why was he hurt? He had turned his head, making it possible for me to see his face, and it broke my heart again. Even from this distance, I could see that he wasn't doing very well. His face didn't hide his pain.

I had tried to ignore him for as long as I could, but I guess four or five days were my hard limit. Or maybe seeing Edward so hurt and broken was my hard limit? Since he kept calling and texting me, I knew I had to get back to him eventually, and maybe his broken demeanor was what finally made up my mind. The messages that he had left on my voice mail were heartbreaking, and I knew I was hurting him by not calling him back. All I did was hurt him. So I chose the chicken thing to do.

I texted him.

I sent him a text, telling him I was okay and hoping it would be enough for him to leave me alone and give me the extra time that I needed to think. I knew it was selfish of me to behave like that, especially since he appeared to be in so much pain too. All he seemed to want was to know that I was okay, so I figured maybe a text would be enough for him. Maybe it would be just enough to appease his obsessing. Maybe it would remove some of the pain for him. By telling him I was fine, he would know that he hadn't failed. Maybe it would be enough to make him let go.

I was wrong, of course.

No time passed between me sending him the text and him calling me. I didn't want to answer the phone, but it was as if I could feel him through the ringing. I couldn't refuse him. I had to take the call.

So I did.

As soon as I heard his voice, I knew all was lost. I may have thought I could take a break from him, like he didn't matter to me, but the truth was he *did* matter to me. He mattered more to me than anyone

ever had. No matter what I did from this point forward, I knew he would always be a part of me. He had helped me so much; he had been there for me when nobody else was. Even back when he didn't even like me, he was there.

He helped me survive, so how could I just cut him out after all that?

I didn't care that he deserved better. I needed him just as much as he said he needed me. He couldn't explain why he needed me, probably because he didn't know why. But I knew why *I* needed him, and that was enough.

When I was with Edward, it was as if I was sitting in a safe, little bubble. I enjoyed our bubble. I *did* feel safe there, even though it could burst if anyone else came too close, and people who looked at us from the outside probably thought we were weird. People looking in probably wondered what on earth we could ever have in common. I'm sure both Jasper and Dr. Cullen had been scratching their heads a lot after they found out about us.

Although, just because I knew I needed Edward, that didn't mean I didn't need some time alone. So much had happened in such a short amount of time, and I needed to process it all. I also had a feeling that I wouldn't be able to do that properly with him around. Edward may have been my constant, but he also confused me. The last thing I needed right now was to be confused. I needed to have control over all aspects of my life if I intended to survive, and Edward was not something (or someone) I could control.

Besides, I had a feeling he had a few things to sort out himself before he could be there for me again. If a few days of radio silence on my part were enough to drive him up the wall to the degree that he basically called me a hundred times in the span of a few days, then he probably had some stuff to deal with as well. All his calls seemed a little too obsessive to me, and I had a hard time believing that it was all about me. Something was going on with Edward, and he was probably projecting that into obsessing about my safety. I didn't think he was even aware that he was doing it.

Edward had issues that weren't related to me. I didn't know if they occurred before or after the accident, but that didn't matter either. He had them, and he had to work through them. Maybe I could be there for him as he had been for me. I had to pay him back somehow for saving my life.

Not that my life was worth that much. *But still ...*

I had been talking a lot with Kate too. I had told her a little about Edward, but not much. She had told me the day before that she had found a foster family for me, and it was only a matter of papers being signed and final approval of the family before I could move in with them. I hadn't even met them, but apparently, that mattered little considering the circumstances.

I was going back to Forks whether I liked it or not.

It had been two days since I had talked to Edward. I didn't know if he had called me, anymore after that, because I had turned off my phone. I still needed time, and ignoring him was the only way I was going to get it. He knew that too.

I didn't wake up until noon, and I reluctantly left my bed, making my way towards the door. I could hear Kate's voice, and when I opened the door, I could also make out what she was saying. I glanced out and saw that she was pacing in the living room, talking on the phone.

"I don't care what he says," she said with an annoyed tone. "She doesn't want to see him, and I'm pretty sure she's not ready for it at this point anyway. I'll tell her about it, I promise." She paused, and I saw her body tense. "I said I'll tell her! She doesn't want to see her father, and I doubt she would want *this* news from him! Their relationship is strained as it is."

My eyes went wide. "What news?" I blurted without thinking.

Kate whirled around, noticing me standing in the doorway. Shock was clear on her face.

"She just woke up," she muttered into the phone. "I'll call you back later." She hung up the phone and put the cordless receiver down on the nearest side table. She sighed and looked at me. "How long have you been standing there?" she asked.

"A moment or two," I replied warily. "I heard you say something about me not being ready... but what news? What are you gonna tell me?"

"You better sit down for this," she said, and there was something in her voice that told me that she was absolutely serious. I sat down on the nearest chair. She sat down on the couch, leaning forward towards me and resting her arms on her legs.

"Now, I don't want you to worry. We got this covered. You are safe here and you've got nothing to worry about, okay?" I nodded slowly, chills of horror creeping up my spine at her words. "I got a call this morning from one of my superiors. She told me that your mother has... well, disappeared," she explained. My body froze, and I stared at her in absolute shock.

"What the hell do you mean disappeared? How? From where?" I asked bewildered.

"Your parents were both interviewed by the authorities after I took you away. It didn't take long until it was made clear that your mom wasn't stable. We had her recent stay at the mental institution on record, and it was decided that she was to be taken back there for further evaluation."

"But she was there willingly," I argued. "She went there the first time by her own free will."

"Yes, but that's beside the point at this time. What matters is that she thought that she needed help when she admitted herself four months ago, and maybe it went downhill for her from there. I don't know."

"But... what about now? You said she disappeared?"

"Yes, she was taken to Seattle. Your dad joined her and spent a few days there as well... I'm sure they had a lot to talk about. He didn't come back to Forks until yesterday, and it was last night that your mother escaped from the institution. Nobody knows where she has gone, but they think she had help since she was being kept in a locked ward."

I was utterly speechless, and I leaned back in the chair. I accidentally knocked over my crutches, which I had leaning against the chair, and they fell to the floor with a clank.

I didn't even notice.

"The police are looking for her, and it doesn't look all that good for her. Escaping an institution like that does not help her case. So in a way, you're safe now, this will help you," Kate explained, breaking the silence.

I gave her a doubtful look and snorted. "Are you kidding?" I blurted. "I'm not safe, especially not if she has suddenly disappeared. Who knows where she's going? What if she comes here and kidnaps me? It's not like I can fight her off, especially not if she has someone on her side helping her out!" I reached for my crutches on the floor, grabbing them with shaky hands and standing up just as shakily.

"Bella, calm down!" Kate ordered. "I promise you, nothing will happen to you. There are people looking for her, and you always have people looking out for you. You'll be fine! She can't touch you."

"Yeah? Then why is it I don't feel even remotely safe?" I replied in frustration as I left for my bedroom.

"They'll find her," Kate said, without leaving her seat.

"I know my mother," I muttered. "They won't find her unless she wants to be found."

There was a soft knock on the door and I pulled the covers tighter around me, pulling it completely over my head. I had no idea what time it was, but that didn't matter either. Time held no importance when your crazy mother was on the loose, itching for your blood.

"Bella?" Kate said my name as I heard her opening the door. "You have company."

I stiffened, and I could almost feel how my blood turned into ice in my veins. This was it. My mom had found me. I was going home, and she was going to kill me. I would fail Edward by not being able to stop her from stopping my heart from beating. My mom had already found me, because the crazy lady simply didn't waste any time. I was going to die.

"Wh-who?" I whispered from under the covers, preparing myself to hear her say the last name I ever wanted to hear again. The name of the person I hated most in the world. The name of the person I used to love the most in the world.

"He says his name is Edward," she replied softly.

I didn't relax at this; I stiffened impossibly more.

Used to love...

"I don't want to see him. Tell him I'm sleeping. Tell him to go away. Tell him... anything. I don't want to see him," I whispered.

I could almost feel her frown. "If that's what you want," she replied quietly.

She closed the door and walked away, her steps muffled by the thick carpet in the hallway. I tried to relax, but it was impossible. It was as if my body could feel Edward being close by, my body itched to throw the covers off of me so I could get to him. But I didn't, instead I curled into a ball under the covers, glad that my leg didn't hurt as

much anymore when I moved around, making it possible for me to lie in the fetal position.

"FUCK THAT!" I jumped in surprise at the sudden – and very *Edward* – voice. There were quick, angry steps nearing my room. I didn't need to look as the door flew open, slamming into the wall, to see who it was. I knew who it was. Edward. Who else would behave so irrationally?

His angry steps didn't stop until he was right next to my bed. He breathed loudly and I felt his hand grip the covers, slowly tugging them down, uncovering my face. I didn't even try to stop him.

I looked up at him, his gaze pained and his eyes bloodshot.

"Fuck you, Sparrow!" he spat as he looked down on me. "Fuck you a million times over. What the fuck?" He looked me dead in the eyes. I noticed now his eyes were not only bloodshot, but also kind of glazed over. They were so pained that it physically hurt me to even look at him. I tried to tug at the covers, so I could go back into hiding. But he wasn't letting me.

"What are you doing here?" I whispered.

He sat down on the edge of my bed and gestured for me to scoot closer to the wall, so I did. He lay down beside me on his side, propping his head up on his arm and leaning his head on his hand. I noticed he had several cuts and bruises; the small cuts weren't just on his hand though, they trailed down on his arm too. He flinched a little when his other hand came up to stroke a few hair strands from my face. It was still wrapped up in gauze, which had been discolored by a few bloodstains.

"What happened to you?" I asked in concern, meeting his gaze again. He shook his head, closing his eyes. I raised my hands, stroking his cheek gently with my finger. "I told you I needed time, Edward. I told you I wasn't ready."

He opened his eyes again, looking at me with a weird expression and a soft, sad smirk gracing his lips.

"You've had a week, Sparrow. You've had enough time," he replied quietly. He scooted closer and carefully put both his arms around me, pulling me to him. We lay so close together that I would have felt the warmth radiate from his body if it weren't for the blanket that was pressed in between us. I felt oddly safe not having his body directly touching mine. I was thankful for the barrier.

I closed my eyes as I felt his fingers rub circles into my back.

"A week is not enough," I whispered.

"A week is what you got. You're not getting anymore. Deal with it," he replied quietly, an odd emptiness lacing his tone. I opened my eyes, just to find his closed. His hand had stopped rubbing circles into my back and his breathing wasn't as labored as it was before. It took me a moment before I realized he had fallen asleep.

That was quick .

"Bella?" I turned my head a little, trying to look over Edward's body towards the door. I saw Jasper standing there with an uncomfortable look on his face and his hands in his pockets. I gave him a confused look, and he chuckled quietly. "I drove him here," he explained, answering my unasked question.

I looked back at Edward. His face was relaxed and he seemed to be at peace now. It was weird.

I tried to shift a little where I was laying, so I could sit up, but Edward's arms constricted around me, holding me closer to him. Jasper noticed this, and he tilted his head to the side as he gazed at his friend.

"What happened to his hands and arms? All these cuts and bruises?" I asked him.

Jasper looked down at his hands just as Kate stepped up behind him.

"Did you call him?" Kate asked, Jasper nodded.

"He's on his way," Jasper replied. "He said he was leaving the hospital right away."

"Good," Kate replied, looking at me. "You okay, sweetie?" she asked.

"What is going on?" I asked, now feeling frustrated. Jasper stepped inside the room, and I followed him with my eyes.

"Let's wait till Carlisle gets her," he replied.

"What? Dr. Cullen is coming here too?" I asked in confusion.

"Just be with Edward, okay? He needs you right now," Jasper said quietly, before leaving the room and closing the door behind him. I sighed and looked at Edward. He was frowning now, though he still appeared to be sleeping. I tried to smooth out the wrinkle between his eyebrows with my finger, but he refused to give in. He sighed in his sleep, and his grip on me tightened.

He needs me.

Edward Cullen needs *me* .

That was an odd concept.

I leaned in, pressing my lips to the wrinkle between his eyebrows. This made him relax and his grip on me loosened, and his face smoothed out.

"I need you too, Edward Cullen," I whispered to him. "I'm not going anywhere without you."

It didn't take long for me to fall asleep too. When I awoke, I was laying with my head on Edward's chest. His arm was around me, and my arm was laying lazily across his torso. I took a deep breath, and all my senses were bombarded with the wonderful, musky scent of Edward. I let my finger trail down his chest, and I looked up to see if he noticed. I didn't think he did. His eyes were still closed, his breathing even. He was still asleep.

There was a soft clearing of a throat by the door, and when I looked up, I saw Dr. Cullen standing there. He smiled softly at me, and I turned my gaze away, looking back at Edward instead.

"My son is looking more relaxed than I have seen him in a long time," Dr. Cullen noted as he slowly stepped over to us.

"What happened to his arms and hands? What are all these cuts and bruises?" I asked quietly, touching the cuts on his arms gently.

"He tried to drive here."

My eyes went wide and I sat up. "He got into an accident?" I asked in shock.

Dr. Cullen shook his head and smiled softly. "He never got out of the garage," he replied with a sigh. "Jasper was the one who found him."

"But what happened?"

"Jasper told me he found Edward curled up on the floor, all bloodied up. He had been hitting his car so badly he even managed to crack one of the windows."

"Wh-why would he do that?" I asked, trying to erase the mental image his description gave me.

"Because he wanted to see you," he replied. "But he can't drive anymore. I wish my son would let me help him, but he has closed himself off completely. He doesn't trust anyone."

"Can you blame him?" I asked him dryly. "You guys turned your backs on him after the accident. You blamed him for it. As if he was the one who put the black ice on the road, or as if he meant to hit it. Of course he doesn't trust anyone, because for the past few weeks nobody has given him a reason to."

"I never blamed my son for the accident. But I didn't agree-"

"... with the way he handled things," I ended the sentence for him. "Yeah, I got it. But that doesn't excuse the way you have been treating him. You never let him breathe and sort through everything. Instead you all just pressured him about doing the right thing that he never got the chance to figure out what the right thing was for *him*."

"It was for his own good that we pressured him, Bella," he replied with a sigh, shaking his head. "I asked Jasper what Edward had said when he found him curled up beside his car, and according to him, Edward didn't even remember how he got there. Which is why I have been trying to get through to my son. I don't know if he has told you, but Edward might suffer from a disor-"

"The only thing I suffer from is your bullshit." Edward's voice cut him off. I turned my head, meeting Edward's gaze. I smiled softly at him, but he didn't smile back.

"Edward, maybe I should take you home," Dr. Cullen said quietly. "Bella has been through enough she-"

"I'm not going any-fucking-where," Edward growled, sitting up in the bed. Dr. Cullen sighed again and ran his hand through his short, blond hair.

"Edward," he said with a warning tone, but Edward wasn't having it.

"I'm not going anywhere," he repeated. "I'm staying right here."

Dr. Cullen looked at me, and I looked at Edward.

"I don't mind," I replied honestly. "I don't mind if he stays..."

"Jasper is still here. I'm sure he can give you a ride home later then," Dr. Cullen said to him. He put his hands in his pocket and pulled out a small container with pills. "Take them if it gets to be too much," he said with a stern voice, looking at Edward. Edward rolled his eyes, and Dr. Cullen shook his head. It was as if they were having a silent conversation. "Call me if something happens. Call me if nothing happens. Just call me so I know you're alright."

"Whatever," Edward muttered, as Dr. Cullen gave him one last warning look before saying goodbye and leaving the room. I turned my head and looked at Edward.

"You tried to drive here," I said. It wasn't a question. I was just stating a fact.

"I got something for you," he said, ignoring my comment completely. I frowned in confusion, and he smirked lazily. "Close your eyes." He almost sounded proud when he said it, so I did as I was told. I soon felt something being dropped in my hand. When I opened my eyes, I found myself looking at a beautiful silver necklace with a small crystal bird that glittered in the light. It looked very expensive.

"Edward... I... I can't take this. It's too much," I protested, trying to hand it back to him.

Edward snorted and made me curl my hand around the necklace, not letting me give it back.

"I got it from a damn gumball machine. It cost me like fifty cents," he replied.

"Really? But it looks so expensive," I argued.

He looked me dead in the eyes, and his smirk grew.

"You really think I would buy you... what? A two hundred dollar necklace just for kicks?"

"I guess not," I replied, feeling embarrassed. "But it's nice... thank you."

At that moment, there was a knock on the door, Edward quickly grabbed the necklace from my hand and put it back in his pocket. I frowned in confusion as the door opened, and Jasper peeked in.

"Can I come in or do I have to spend another hour having a stilted conversation with the social worker? I mean, she's nice and all, but she's making me think maybe I'm the one needing help," he joked.

I rolled my eyes and gestured for him to come inside. Edward and I shifted on the bed, so we sat with our backs against the wall. Jasper sat down on the chair by my desk. Edward took my hand and held it between us. I rubbed soothing circles on the back of his hand, and he smiled as he looked back at me.

"So, I've been patient. I wouldn't mind getting an explanation," Jasper said nonchalantly, making us turn our heads to him simultaneously.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"An explanation for... *this* ," he replied, gestured to us holding hands. "What are you guys? Are you like a thing now? Like boyfriend and girlfriend crap?"

I felt Edward's hand stiffen in mine, and I felt myself blush scarlet.

"No...no... no, no, no... Of course not," I protested quickly, not wanting Edward to be the one to do it. I didn't want to hear the disgust in his voice as he denied the accusations. "We're just... friends. And seriously, Jasper? A couple? Are you crazy?" I chuckled nervously. "Please, we're only friends. Nothing more. Just friends."

Never more. Just friends. Don't be crazy. We're just friends. *Friends* ."

It felt as if my face was on fire, and I quickly looked down at my lap.

"Yeah," Edward mumbled after a moment of silence. "Just friends."

I looked up, feeling confused at his tone. There was something there that he wasn't saying.

"Yeah, alright," Jasper said, probably sensing the weird tension too. "So, Ed, how long are we staying?" he asked. The corner of Edward's mouth lifted into a sad smile, as he looked at me. I could tell what he was thinking without needing to ask. I smiled sadly at him.

"Edward is staying here tonight. I think we need to... talk," I replied in his place. "I'm sure Kate and I can drive him back to Forks tomorrow."

"Well, okay. That's sounds fine to me," Jasper replied. "So, Bella... how have you been doing? I'm not gonna lie, but the school is buzzing with gossip about you and your mom," he said, effectively changing the subject with a sheepish shrug.

"Those motherfuckers don't know when to shut the hell up," Edward muttered. "Their own fucking lives are so terribly fucking pathetic that they need to fucking make shit up about other fucking people's shit just to have fucking something to fucking feel better about. Fuck."

I gaped at him and shook my head.

"Seriously, Edward. Cut down on the f-word, would you? Half of those weren't even necessary," I said. Jasper choked on a laugh and Edward glared at him.

"Fuck you, fucker," Edward spat.

"He's just mad because I told him almost the exact same thing when we were here in Port Angeles a few days ago. Apparently, I'm not the only one noticing his lack of verbal skills. 'When in doubt, throw in a fuck,' that's his motto," Jasper chuckled.

"Fuck you," Edward muttered.

"My point exactly," Jasper replied, gesturing to Edward with a smile. I laughed softly and gave Edward a gentle nudge.

"C'mon, Eddieboy, don't be mad," I teased and he turned his head to look at me.

"You ignored me for five days and then ignored me for another two. So yes, excuse me, but I'll be mad at you for a little while longer," he replied. My smile faded at the seriousness of his voice. There were a million things I wanted to tell him in response to that. But nothing came out. Instead, I decided to take the coward's way out by not taking his words seriously.

"You said all that without the f-word. You're improving," I joked. He gave me a look, and I tried to force a smile at him, pretending I didn't notice anything weird about him.

"Will you be coming back to Forks?" Jasper asked, getting my attention. I looked at him and nodded.

"Kate has been in contact with a foster family for me, and if all goes well, I'll be moving there in a few days," I replied. "I'm not really looking forward to it, obviously. School is going to be hell."

"I won't let those bitches touch you," Edward said, lifting his hand that was wrapped in gauze and stroked my hair behind my ear. I smiled softly at him, silently wondering how he was going to react when he found out that my mom was gone. He couldn't protect me from everyone all the time. He had to live his life too.

"How long have you guys been *friends*?" Jasper asked.

Edward and I looked at each other at the same time, and I couldn't help but smile. Even though we had never really talked about it, we both knew what time had sealed the deal and made us friends, even though it took us a while before we admitted it out loud. We had become friends long before we were even aware that we were.

"He brought a pen," I replied, smiling at the memory.

"And what does that mean? Is it code for... you know? He brought a 'pen' to your 'pen case'?" Jasper asked, making quotation marks in the air with his fingers, looking obviously confused.

"We haven't fucked," Edward snapped.

I felt myself blush again. "We wouldn't... do *that*," I agreed quietly. "It's not like we're... never mind." I shook my head, as if it would help with how stupid I felt. Why were we even having this conversation?

"I was walking around in the middle of the night, and I found a pen on the street right outside the hospital. I took it as a damn sign that I was supposed to go in there," Edward said, sounding annoyed.

"Right after the accident?" Jasper asked.

I shook my head again. "No, it was when I was admitted after I passed out when Tanya pushed me in the hallway." I cringed a little at the memory; it was almost as if I could feel the pain again. It really had been excruciating.

"Why have you been keeping it a secret?" Jasper asked then.

"Because it was easier that way," Edward replied with a shrug. "We knew that people were going to get the wrong idea. They were probably going to think I was using her or some shit and she was going to get in trouble with her parents and... it wasn't fucking worth it." He looked down at our hands, and the crooked smile graced his lips again. "Besides, it has been fucking nice this way. Not needing to explain ourselves to anyone. Just enjoying each other's company."

I squeezed his hand to get his attention, and he looked up.

"Are we really enjoying each other's company though?" I asked. "All we do is be emo and feel sorry for ourselves. How is that enjoying each other's company?"

"Misery loves company," Jasper mumbled, and when he noticed us looking at him, he chuckled. "Or so I've heard."

"I beg to disagree though," Edward said to me. "I remember us having quite fun the morning after we kidnapped you..." He gave me a pointed look and I felt myself blush again. Jasper quirked an eyebrow at us and shook his head slowly.

"I don't think I even want you to elaborate on that," he said with a chuckle. His cell phone chirped, and Jasper sighed as he pulled it out of his pocket. He pushed a few buttons and sighed again. "Okay, that's my cue to leave," he said. "Alice has her house to herself tonight so we're..." He looked up from the phone and smiled sheepishly at us. "Let's just say I'm planning to bring her a pen."

"That's disgusting," Edward complained.

"This coming from the dude who gets BJ's in a closet that holds shit that would make him sterile," Jasper replied with a smirk and got up from the chair. "Call me or text me if you want to be picked up tomorrow." Edward nodded, and Jasper turned to me. "Glad to see you're okay, Bella. Take care of my man here. Alright?"

"I will," I replied with a smile. "Thank you, Jasper."

"Anytime," he replied before leaving the room.

Edward and I looked at the closed bedroom door for a moment, before turning to look at each other at the same time. Edward smiled as he picked up the necklace from his pocket. I turned around so he could put it on me. The small bird felt cold against the top of my chest.

"Thank you," I said quietly, and he smiled.

"Thank you for still breathing," he replied.

"My mom is gone. She escaped from the institution," I blurted. I bit down on my tongue as if that would help taking the words back. He gaped at me and dragged his hand through his hair.

"Of fucking course, she did. When?" he asked.

"Last night, according to Kate," I replied quietly. "She was locked in a closed ward, so they think she had help breaking out."

He sighed deeply and shook his head. "We just can't catch a break," he muttered.

"We?" I echoed. He gave me an incredulous look and snorted.

"Of course we ," he replied. "We're in this shit together. Remember?"

I smiled and leaned my head against his shoulder. I felt his lips press against my hair, and I sighed in contentment.

"I missed you," he admitted quietly. "These past few days have been killing me." He shifted a little, so I had to sit up straight. I looked at him and found him gazing at me intently. "Do you really need more time?"

"I will always need more time," I replied with a soft shrug.

"I can't give you more time, because I fucking need you, Sparrow," he said, almost sounding reluctant. He wanted to give me time, but he couldn't. And even though I knew I *needed* time, I wasn't so sure I *wanted* it anymore. Being with Edward was better than being alone. Even though he left me confused. Although, confused was better than lonely.

"Yeah, I know," I whispered. I turned my face to him, and suddenly his was very close.

"I really missed you," he whispered back.

"I've missed you too." I didn't know if he even heard the words, or if I merely mouthed them.

He raised his hand and stroked my cheek, and I smiled sadly at him.

"I'll keep you safe now," he murmured. "Don't worry... I'll keep you safe."

"But who'll keep *you* safe from all the dangers in the world?" I mumbled.

"You, of course," he replied with a crooked smile. "You said you had my back, so I'm counting on you to kick people's asses if they ever give me shit."

I chuckled and rolled my eyes at him.

"Yeah, I'll clonk them with my crutch," I replied with a smile.

"You've done it before," he replied, leaning his face close to mine. "And I've never been prouder of you... except for now."

"Why now?" I asked.

"Because your mom is on the loose, and you're still fucking breathing. You're still sitting here. *Breathing*. And you have yet to tell me to leave," he replied.

"I told you to leave when you got here," I argued with a sad smile.

"No, you told Kate to tell me, so that doesn't count. Because I know that if you had been the one answering the door when I got here, then you wouldn't have told me to leave. It's easy to say something when you don't have the person right in front of your face."

"You're basically telling me I'm a chicken, you know that right?"

"You're not a chicken. A chicken would have killed herself a long time ago. You're my sparrow."

There was a knock on the door, and I quickly moved away from Edward. I felt as if we had almost been caught doing something naughty. The door opened, and Kate peeked in.

"I hear you're staying here tonight," Kate said, looking at Edward.

"Yeah, he is," I replied in his place. "I hope it's okay."

"If that's what you want, then yes, it's okay. But I don't want any funny business, okay? Edward is sleeping on the couch," Kate said, giving him a pointed look, before closing the door and leaving.

I chuckled to myself and shook my head.

"This is what we get for going public," I mumbled. "People immediately get the wrong idea."

"Who the fuck cares what they think?" Edward replied. "If they want to think that we're screwing like bunnies or that we are a fucking couple. Who gives a shit? Let 'em. People will always talk, so let them fucking talk. It doesn't matter what they think."

"What about your reputation?" I couldn't help but ask.

"What *about* my reputation?" he echoed. "What's the big deal if people think I'm fucking you? It's not like I'm fucking a mountain goat for crying out loud."

"Just a goose," I replied dryly.

He narrowed his eyes at me, and I looked away. Of course, he wasn't having any of that. He grabbed my chin roughly and turned my head to his.

"You're not the fucking goose anymore. And if anyone ever calls you that I will bash his fucking head in. You hear me?" he snarled, his

breath washing over my face. His lips looked wet and soft up close. I couldn't help but be slightly mesmerized by them, remembering how they had touched mine just a week earlier.

"Wh-wh-why did you kiss me?" I stammered without thinking. He blinked in surprise, and I felt myself blush again. Why did I always have to blurt stuff before thinking it over?

He didn't answer me at first; he just looked at me with an unfathomable expression on his face. Maybe he had just wiped the kiss from his memory altogether, and now I was reminding him about it, causing him pain. It probably meant nothing to him. Why would it mean something? I was his friend. People didn't kiss friends. Not like that.

"Because I...", he began, but trailed off. He frowned, and his grip on my chin tightened. "Because maybe I just wanted to fuck a mountain goat."

I sighed and grabbed his wrist, pulling his hand from my chin so I could look away. Of course, he was going to make a joke out of it. How could I expect anything less? He was Edward. Of course, the kiss meant nothing to him. He probably just got scared, and thought that maybe a kiss could help him.

"Are you hungry?" I asked him, scooting away on the bed so I could reach for my crutches. "I'm starving."

"I could eat," he mumbled as I climbed off the bed.

I didn't even look at him as I left for the kitchen.

The rest of the afternoon and evening was weird to say the least. Edward and I were together at all times. We cooked together, ate together and watched TV together. But we never said a word. Not since we had left the bedroom. Something I had said or done must

have upset him, because he kept that frown on his face, and every time I looked at him he appeared to be in pain.

I waited for him to break the silence, just as he probably was waiting for me, but I didn't know what to say. I still felt awkward for asking him about the kiss.

A kiss that meant nothing.

I always got hung up on the little things. That was my biggest problem. Reading too much into things where there was nothing to read into. It was as if I wanted to make a fool out of myself. As if I wanted to be a joke.

Because that was exactly what I was.

A joke.

Kate went to bed at ten after giving Edward some bed sheets and a pillow. She said goodnight, and I was left alone with Edward in the living room. We had spent the past two and half hours watching a movie, but I had no idea what it was about.

"I'm going to bed now too," I mumbled, getting up from the couch. "Good night."

He mumbled something in response, but I couldn't make out what it was. I stopped by the bathroom, washed my face and brushed my teeth, before going to my room. I changed into my loose fitting pajamas and got into bed.

As soon as my head touched the pillow, the tears came. They welled up in my eyes so quickly that they blurred my sight completely. I tried to muffle the sound of my sobs by putting a pillow over my face, but every so often there was a sob I just couldn't muffle. I tried to relax and just let it run its course, but that only seemed to make it worse. My body ached. My mind ached. Everything ached. And there was nothing I could do but cry.

There was a tugging at the corner of the pillow that I held on my face, and soon it was removed altogether. I looked up through my tears, just to find Edward looking down at me. I hadn't heard him come in.

He smiled sadly at me as he gestured for me to scoot over, so he could lay down next to me again. He propped his head up on his hand just like last time, so he could look at me as I laid there on my back. I turned my head away from him, because I didn't want him to see me cry, but he just grabbed my chin again. He looked deeply into my eyes, searching for something. Something sparkled in his, and I wondered if he had found whatever it was he was looking for in mine.

"I kissed you because I wanted to kiss a mountain goat," he murmured, stroking my cheek with a finger. I looked at him confused, wondering what he meant, before he leaned down and pressed his lips to mine.

Goat

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 38 – "Goat"

Edward Cullen POV

To finally get to speak with Sparrow was like having a damn weight lifted off my shoulders. I felt relieved and – for some weird reason – hopeful. Hopeful about what? I had no fucking clue.

My stomach growled just as we hung up, and I decided to go down to the kitchen. On the way down, I passed Emmett's room, and I stopped as I heard the sound of his TV.

"... is fiercely protective of their space, food and offspring. The mountain goat is pretty much harmless unless it's provoked. And it's not unusual that they fight to the death to protect what's theirs..."

I slowly made my way back to his room, giving him a weird look from the open door. Emmett was hanging out on his bed, watching a nature show on TV. At least that was what it looked like.

"What the fuck are you watching?" I asked, raising an eyebrow.

"This is fucking hilarious, bro," he replied with a wide grin without tearing his eyes from the TV. "They've showed wolves fucking... damn reindeers fucking... and look... hahaha... mountain goats!" He almost choked on his own laugh as I stepped over to the bed and sat down. I looked at the TV just as the goats started going at it. They

made the most ridiculous sounds, and Emmett practically wet himself because he was laughing so hard.

"That's fucking stupid. Are you getting turned on by animals now or some shit?" I snorted, shaking my head. "Please tell me you aren't making Rosalie dress up as a damn goat just so you can get a boner."

"Oh, c'mon. Wouldn't you want to fuck, or at the very least kiss, that fluffy goat?" he said, bursting into laughter again.

"The day I feel like kissing a mountain goat is the day I become a one woman man," I snorted.

"So you'll get exclusive with the mountain goat, how sweet. I bet she'll feel very special," Emmett replied with a sweet voice. I rolled my eyes again.

"You're fucking retarded," I muttered, as I stood up from the bed.

"Takes one to know one, brother," he replied.

I flipped him off, but he just laughed.

Maybe there was still hope for the two of us patching shit up. Maybe he could become my damn brother again, and we could leave all the fucking shit and drama behind us already.

Little did I know that there was more shit flying my way... and this time I was the only one getting hit.

Her phone was off. Why the hell was her phone off? Had something happened? I dialed her number again, even though I already tried to call her ten times in the past minute. I growled and sent the phone flying as I was once again greeted by her voice mail.

Something had happened. I was fucking sure of it. Why else would she turn off her phone? We had ended our last conversation on a good note; there was no fucking reason as to why she would be avoiding me now.

I gripped my hair and started pacing.

It had only been a day, but that didn't matter.

I fucking needed her. She knew I needed her.

I grabbed my car keys from my nightstand before rushing out the door. I almost tripped on my way down the stairs, but I didn't fucking care. It only made me rush even more. I made it to the garage, and I... fucking froze.

I stared at the Volvo as if it was the first time I'd seen it. It looked absolutely spotless. It was clean and shiny. There were no blemishes at all. Not even a damn leaf stuck to the windshield wipers or anything. It was fucking perfect.

I looked down at the keys in my hands and ever so slowly pressed the unlock button. I heard the familiar sound of the car being unlocked, and the lights flashed a couple of times. I swallowed thickly and took a step closer to the car without looking up.

It felt wrong being this close to the car.

So... fucking... wrong .

I took a deep breath and gripped the door handle, opening the door. I got in behind the wheel and closed the door behind me. I put the key in the ignition, but I didn't turn it. I just let it sit there. I put my hands on the wheel, looking out in front of me.

I didn't see the garage anymore. All I saw was Sparrow... Swan... Goose...

Isabella .

I gripped the wheel, squeezing my eyes shut, and screamed.

My throat is fucking sore. Why the fuck is my throat sore?

I opened my eyes, blinking a few times in the harsh fluorescent light of the garage. I turned my head and found myself looking at Jasper. He was staring at me without blinking.

"Hey, you okay?" Jasper asked, frowning a little at my confused expression.

"What the fuck, dude?" I muttered, my voice hoarse and my throat hurting as I tried to speak.

"I could say the same thing," Jasper replied evenly. "How are your arms? I'm no doctor, so I had no idea what the fuck I was supposed to do, so I tried my best to clean you up. I've called your dad, he's on his way."

"What are you talking about?" I asked, looking down on my arms. My eyes widened as I saw the bloody mess. I had cuts everywhere. My shirt and the bandage on my hand were stained red.

"Did you get into a fight with your girlfriend?" he asked, raising an eyebrow.

Girlfriend? Is he talking about Sparrow? She's not my fucking girlfriend.

"Your car," he clarified when he noticed my confused look. "You beat it half to death. I assume it did something to piss you off. What did it do? Insult your hair?" He was trying to make a joke, but I still had no fucking clue about what he was talking about. What the fuck was he going on about my car for?

"What the fuck are you talking about?" I snapped, getting up from the floor. "What *about* my car?" I turned around, looking towards the car.

Whatever I planned to say next stuck in my throat.

The windshield was cracked, and there were several small dents on the hood. I walked over to the car and noticed that the driver's side window was completely shattered, and the door had several big dents in it. There was blood on the door. And on the floor.

I looked down on my arms again, slowly putting the pieces together.

"What happened?" Jasper asked, all humor gone from his voice now as he came up behind me.

"I... I don't know," I replied slowly, still staring at the car door. "I... can't... remember." I tilted my head to the side, as my eyes zeroed in on the keys that were still in the ignition. What the fuck happened? How did I manage to create such a mess?

"C'mon, dude, let's get out of here," Jasper said, patting my back. I nodded and followed him back into the house.

We just barely made it to the living room before Dad came home. He was wearing his serious face, and I sighed as I plopped down on the couch.

"What happened?" Dad asked as he sat down beside me and immediately started going over my arms.

Turns out it wasn't that big of a deal. Most cuts were superficial, and the ones that were cut a little deeper didn't need stitches. Dad asked a bunch of dumbass questions, and I didn't know what the fuck I responded with. He talked to Jasper too, but I didn't listen. I was so lost in my own little world that I didn't even notice when Jasper left.

Dad squeezed my shoulder, and I turned my head to him with a blank expression.

"What happened, Edward?" he asked. I could tell by his tone that he had asked me several times already and was still waiting for an

answer.

"I needed to see her," I replied with an empty tone. "She won't answer the phone, and I need to fucking see her. Make sure she's alright."

"Bella?" he asked, and the corner of my mouth lifted a little at the mention of her name. "Why don't you get some rest and try to call her tomorrow."

"And why don't *you* go fuck yourself and leave me the hell alone," I muttered under my breath as I got up from the couch. "It might be too late tomorrow..."

I heard him sigh, and he didn't speak again until I'd reached the doorway.

"Edward, I spoke with Dr. Randall, and he's not very happy with how your session went the other day. He would like to see you again... *soon* ," he said quietly. "And this time we expect you to stay for the entire session."

"What the fuck for? That guy doesn't know what the fuck he's talking about," I replied.

"When was the last time you had a blackout, Edward?" he asked evenly, completely ignoring my comment. I froze. "Are they becoming so frequent you don't even notice them anymore?" he continued.

"I don't know what you're talking about," I muttered.

"Yes, you do," he argued softly.

"Fuck you," I muttered inaudibly as I continued my way towards the stairs.

Blackouts . I snorted. I didn't suffer from any damn blackouts.

Yes, of course you don't. And that's why you often lose track of time, ending up places you have no memory of going, doing stuff you have no memory of doing...

Those aren't blackouts. That's just me being scatter brained.

If you say so.

If I could kick my own ass, I totally would.

I was starting to piss myself off.

I went back to my room, plopping down on the bed and staring up at the ceiling.

Blackouts.

Yeah right.

I reached for my phone and looked at the screen.

No, Sparrow hadn't tried to call me. Of course she hadn't. I was not surprised.

I was not suffering from blackouts. I was suffering from other people's bullshit.

And it had to fucking stop.

I tried to call Sparrow one more time.

This time I didn't even wait for the automatic message to finish before I hung up.

"Drive me to Port Angeles," I said, gripping the phone tightly in my hand, leaving no room for argument. I needed to fucking get to Port Angeles, and I needed to get there now. I had tried to call her for the

past two days, and she had yet to answer her damn phone – or turn it back on. And I was done waiting for her. I needed to see her. *Now* .

"C'mon," Jasper replied with a deep sigh. "Maybe you should just kick back and relax for a bit. You had a fucking breakdown yesterday. You really think running off to find *her* is such a good idea right now?"

"You have two choices: either you drive me or I'll drive there myself. You chose," I replied coldly.

"Yeah, because we will all win when you drive your ass off a cliff and kill yourself," he replied sarcastically. He sighed again, and I could almost see him shake his head. "Fine, I'll pick you up," he agreed finally. "I'll be there in ten." He hung up without waiting for an answer.

As I put the phone back in my pocket, my eyes zeroed in on the small box from Jackson's Jewelry on my nightstand. The small box that contained the necklace I had bought for Sparrow. I contemplated bringing it with me, because maybe I could give it to her now and buy her something else for Christmas. Maybe she could use a pick-me-up, and girls loved jewelry, right? Girls were always cheered up by jewelry.

I removed the necklace from the box, and put it in my pocket before heading downstairs. Eight minutes later, I was standing outside the house, watching Jasper pull up the driveway. I got into the passenger seat, and he gave me a once-over before backing the car back out.

"You are wearing the same clothes you had on yesterday," he noted.

"I couldn't sleep," I replied. "So why change my fucking clothes if I never got out of them."

"Maybe because they're covered in blood," he suggested.

"A few tiny stains, big deal. I've had worse."

"I'm sure you have." He glanced at me again. "Dude, your hands are shaking... you sure you don't want me to take you to see your dad at the hospital instead?"

I looked down at my hands, realizing he was right. *Huh, I didn't even notice.* I was so damn used to something being wrong with me that I didn't even notice it anymore.

"I'm fucking alright, but *she* might not be," I snapped. "So just shut the fuck up and drive the fucking car."

I slouched in my seat, which was a semi-difficult thing to do since my body was stiff as a fucking board and refused to relax. *Damn car .*

I closed my eyes and tried to breathe slowly through my nose. If I could try to get over the fact that I was in a moving vehicle, then maybe I wouldn't lose my mind. Maybe I would be sane enough to make it to Port Angeles without freaking out.

"You like her, don't you?" Jasper asked quietly, his tone suggesting he wasn't talking about me liking *her* as a friend. He was suggesting something else entirely. I was too tired to come up with a snarky response. I just sighed and shook my head.

"I don't know anything anymore," I replied with a tired voice.

"But you do, don't you?" he prodded, glancing at me again. He wasn't kidding around; he wasn't asking just to mess with me. He was asking because he was concerned, and I couldn't blame him for that. Of course, he was concerned. Edward fucking Cullen wasn't supposed to like Isabella "the Goose" Swan. I turned my head to Jasper and shrugged. He smirked lazily and nodded. "Thought so," he replied.

"If you tell anyone about this I'll rip your nuts off, you know that, right?" I threatened.

"Please, like anyone would believe it if I told them anyway. Edward Cullen doesn't *like* girls."

"Are you suggesting I'm a fag?" I snorted.

"Oh c'mon, I've seen the way you look at me. You want me. I can tell," he said, his smirk growing.

"Fuck you," I muttered.

"Oh, you wish," he chuckled. I rolled my eyes at him, and he laughed even more. "You're not even denying it. You want me so *bad*."

"Just shut up and drive."

Jasper was the best bud a dude could ask for, that was for sure, but in the end, not even his jokes could help me relax. As soon as we hit the highway, I was back to being the tense motherfucker who was afraid of cars. My body was aching because I was so tense, and it felt as if I couldn't even breathe properly. Jasper asked me if I had taken any of the meds that Dad had given me to help me relax, but I told him I hadn't. Which I guess, in retrospect, would have been a good idea to do.

When we finally made it to Port Angeles, my nerves were practically fried, and I felt like shit. I almost fucking stumbled and fell on the sidewalk because my body wasn't cooperating when I got out of the car.

"Dude, seriously, I'm calling your dad," Jasper said.

"I'm alright. I'm fucking alright," I argued.

"Yeah, sure you are. If I didn't know any better I would think you were drunk. You can't even walk straight," he noted.

I ignored him as I crossed the street. We had parked the car outside the place where the project exhibition had been. Since she said she lived across the street it shouldn't be too hard to find her. I walked

from door to door, checking the listings for the people who lived there. Jasper followed a few steps behind me without saying a word.

The third door listed a K. Peters. Didn't Sparrow mention something about living with someone named Kate? And K. Peters was the only K that I could find.

"You sure this is it?" Jasper asked as I opened the door. I didn't reply as I stepped inside and turned towards the stairs. K. Peters lived on the third floor.

When we reached the door, I was shaking so much I was practically having a seizure. I knocked on the door and took a step back. Jasper put a hand on my shoulder, probably in a sad attempt to calm me down, but it did little to help me.

The door opened, a woman looking back at us with a smile.

"May I help you?" she asked.

"Is Spar -*Isabella* here?" I asked.

Her smile vanished in an instant. I wondered if it was a conscious act on her part or not; but she took a step forward, making the gap between the door and the doorframe smaller. She was basically shutting us out.

She's in there.

"May I ask who you are, and what your business is with her?" she asked.

"I'm Edwar-"

"Edward?" she echoed, without even letting me finish. *So she's heard of me?* "Wait right here, and I'll ask her if she's in the mood for company." She closed the door in our faces, and I turned to look at Jasper.

"I think she's heard of you," he noted, taking the words out of my mouth.

A moment later, the door opened again. I automatically took a step forward, assuming I was going to be let in, but she stood in my way, giving me an apologetic smile.

"I'm sorry, but Bella is sleeping and she's not... she's not in the mood for company right now. I'm sure she'll call you later and expla-"

"FUCK THAT!" I said, cutting her off. I pushed past her and stepped into the apartment.

I had no idea where Sparrow's room was, but since it was a small-ass apartment, I bet there weren't too many places for her to hide. I passed an open door, revealing the master bedroom. So I assumed the closed door, right in front of me, at the end of the hall was where Sparrow was hiding.

I threw the door open, and I saw the shaking form hidden under the covers. Was she hiding from *me* ?

I walked over to the bed, prepared to just rip the covers right off her body. But as I reached her, I couldn't find it in me to do just that. Instead, I just gripped the covers with one hand, then slowly tugged them down, giving her a chance to react. Soon I was looking down at the face of that pretty, little brunette.

She met my gaze, and she looked terrified.

Is she afraid of me?

Why the fuck is she afraid of me?

The thought pissed me off.

"Fuck you, Sparrow!" I spat at her, as an irrational wave of anger surged through me. "Fuck you a million times over. What the fuck?" When she started to tug at the covers again, I gripped them even

more tightly. She wasn't going to hide from me anymore. She was fucking fine. So why the hell had she been ignoring me?

"What are you doing here?" she whispered.

And there it was. The broken voice that could melt a fucking iceberg. The broken voice that drained all the anger out of me like someone had pulled the plug. Did she know what that voice could do to a person? Was that why she was using it against me now? I sat down on the edge of her bed, gesturing for her to scoot closer to the wall so I could lay down. I propped my head up on my arm, looking at her while trying to read her, to see if she was hurt in anyway. Not physically, maybe, but mentally. Had something happened? Something in her eyes told me yes.

I reached up to stroke a few stray hair strands from her face. My hand was hurting again. I guessed it wasn't a good idea to beat up your car after kicking the shit out some idiot just days before.

"What happened to you?" she asked. Her eyes were filled with so much concern for me that I had to close my eyes. I couldn't fucking take it when she looked at me like that. Did she even know that she was looking at me as if I was the most important person in her life? Did she know that she was looking at me as if her world would end if something happened to me? Did she *know*? I felt her stroke my cheek gently. "I told you I needed time, Edward. I told you I wasn't ready."

She didn't know.

I couldn't help but smirk a little. Of course, she didn't know. She was too innocent and pure to know anything. I opened my eyes slowly, meeting her gaze. "You've had a week, Sparrow. You've had enough time."

I scooted closer to her, carefully putting my arms around her and pulling her to me. I started rubbing circles into her back, and as I did,

I felt myself relax. This was what I fucking needed. Sparrow was safe. Nothing had happened to her. If she was safe, I was safe.

"A week is not enough," she whispered. I wanted to snort at that.

"A week is what you got. You're not getting anymore. Deal with it," I replied.

I must have fallen asleep without even noticing – but then again, when the hell did you ever notice when you fell asleep? – because I woke up to hear Sparrow talking to my dad. When the hell did he get here?

"...because he wanted to see you," he said. "But he can't drive anymore. I wish my son would let me help him, but he has closed himself off completely. He doesn't trust anyone."

"Can you blame him?" Sparrow replied, and I could almost hear the snort that was begging to escape from her. "You guys turned your back on him after the accident. You blamed him for it. As if he was the one who put the black ice on the road, or as if he meant to hit it. Of course he doesn't trust anyone, because for the past few weeks nobody has ever given him a reason to."

"I never blamed my son for the accident. But I didn't agree-"

"... with the way he handled things," she said, ending the sentence for him. "Yeah, I got it. But that doesn't excuse the way you've been treating him. You never let him breathe and sort through everything. Instead you all just pressured him about doing the right thing that he never got the chance to figure out what the right thing was for *him*."

I almost wanted to smile. She always defended me even though God knows I didn't fucking deserve any of it.

"It was for his own good that we pressured him, Bella," Dad continued with a sigh. "I asked Jasper what Edward had said when he found him curled up beside his car, and according to him, Edward

didn't even remember how he got there. Which is why I have been trying to get through to my son. I don't know if he has told you, but Edward might suffer from a disor-

Oh, hell NO!

"The only thing I suffer from is your bullshit," I cut him off. Sparrow turned her head and smiled softly at me, but there was nothing to fucking smile about. I wasn't suffering from any fucking disorder, and if Dad thought he was going make her believe the shit that he was spewing, then he had another thing coming. I didn't want her to think I was some sick fuck, just because Dad was trying to find faults in me. As if claiming I had some sort of disorder would make up for the fact that he had done a piss poor job raising me.

"Edward, maybe I should take you home," Dad suggested. "Bella has been through enough she-"

"I'm not going any-fucking-where," I growled, cutting him off again as I sat up in the bed. Dad sighed and ran his hand through his short hair. His entire demeanor screamed of frustration.

"Edward," he said with a warning tone, and I resisted the urge to roll my eyes at him. Did he think saying my name like that would get him anywhere? *Puh-lease.*

"I'm not going anywhere," I repeated. "I'm staying right here."

"I don't mind," Sparrow chimed in. "I don't mind if he stays..."

Dad gave me a look, clearly trying to convey something without having to say it.

"Jasper is still here, I'm sure he can give you a ride home later then," he said as he pulled out a container with pills from his pockets. He put them down on the nightstand next to the bed and gave me a serious look. "Call me if something happens. Call me if nothing happens. Just call me so I know you're alright."

If something happens . Yeah, I'll call him if I wake up and don't remember where the fuck I am.

"Whatever," I muttered, ignoring the last look he gave me before leaving the room.

I turned to Sparrow, and she mentioned me trying to drive here. I guessed they had told her about my breakdown. I was not very pleased about that fact. I effectively changed the subject when I was reminded about the necklace in my pocket. I told her to close her eyes, before putting it in her hand. I watched her eyes carefully, trying to gauge her reaction to it.

I was not disappointed. Her eyes shone, and it was clear that she loved it.

"I can take this. It's too much," she protested, trying to hand it back to me. I almost wanted to roll my eyes at myself. Of course, my Sparrow was going to be one of *those* girls. You know the kind who can't accept a gift like a normal person? Of course, she would think she wasn't worth it, but I needed her to accept it, even if it meant I had to lie.

I made her curl her fingers around the necklace, securing it in her hand.

"I got it from a damn gumball machine. It cost me like fifty cents," I lied, hoping that that would be enough for her to accept it. Because who the hell was so proud that they wouldn't even accept a damn gumball machine necklace?

"Really? But it looks so expensive," she replied skeptically.

Please, Sparrow, just fucking take it!

I looked her straight in the eyes as I lied to her once again. "You really think I would buy you... what? A two hundred dollar necklace just for kicks?"

"I guess not," she replied quietly, her cheeks flushing in embarrassment. "But it's nice... thank you."

I studied her face for a second, wondering if I had somehow insulted her. Her smile seemed a little too forced for my liking. Too bad I didn't get a chance to ask her, because there was a knock on the door. It was Jasper. I could tell by the sound of his knock, and I promised myself to never divulge that piece of information to him. If Jasper ever found out that I could tell his knock apart from someone else's, the gay jokes would never end.

I grabbed the necklace from Sparrow's hand, and she looked at me confused as I put it back in my pocket. I didn't know why I did it. Maybe I was afraid that Jasper would recognize it. He already thought I liked her, and if he found out that I had bought a damn two hundred dollar necklace for her, he would probably think there was more to it than that.

"Can I come in, or do I have to spend another hour having a stilted conversation with the social worker? I mean, she's nice and all, but she's making me think maybe I'm the one who needs help," Jasper joked, as he peered into the room. Sparrow gestured for him to come inside, and I took her hand in mine as we shifted our positions on the bed. I couldn't help but smile at her when she looked at me.

"So, I've been patient. I wouldn't mind getting an explanation," Jasper said nonchalantly. I groaned inwardly as Sparrow and I turned our heads to him.

"What do you mean?" Sparrow asked.

"An explanation for... *this* ," he replied, gestured to us holding hands. "What are you guys? Are you like a thing now? Like boyfriend and girlfriend crap?"

Oh, fuck you, dude! What the fuck are you doing bringing that shit up?

It took all of my will power not to voice my thoughts.

"No...no... no, no, no... Of course not. We're just... friends. And, seriously, Jasper? A couple? Are you crazy? Please, we're only friends. Nothing more. Just friends. Never more. Just friends. Don't be crazy. We're just friends. *Friends* ." She spluttered the words out quickly, chuckling nervously as she did so. I frowned a little as I looked down at our clasped hands.

Just friends. *Never more* . Why the fuck did she almost sound insulted when he asked? And how many "no's" did she think she needed before he got the point? Maybe friends was all there was to us. Maybe we weren't supposed to be more. She shouldn't mean more to me than Alice or Rosalie did. I should have been happy that Sparrow wasn't going to turn into another stalker-girl, like Tanya or some shit.

I should have been.

But I wasn't.

Instead, it felt like she grabbed my sorry excuse for a heart and stomped all over it.

It fucking hurt.

And I didn't understand it.

"Yeah," I mumbled, hoping I sounded indifferent. "Just friends."

I sensed her looking at me, but I ignored it by keeping my eyes steadily on our hands instead.

"Yeah, alright," Jasper said. He probably knew that he had stepped over the line by mentioning it. I couldn't blame him; he probably thought Sparrow was just like all the other girls. "So, Ed, how long are we staying?"

I looked over at Sparrow, smiling sadly. We were friends. Just friends. But was that enough for her to let me stay? I needed her. She worked better than any medication ever would. She soothed me, and I needed to fucking relax for a while. I couldn't do that without her.

"Edward is staying here tonight. I think we need to... talk," she replied, still looking at me. "I'm sure Kate and I can drive him back to Forks tomorrow."

"Well, okay. That's sounds fine to me," Jasper said. "So, Bella... how have you been doing? I'm not gonna lie, but the school is buzzing with gossip about you and your mom." He changed the subject because he probably sensed he was walking in dangerous territory, little did he know that he was stepping into bullshit territory now.

Why the fuck is he still here anyway?

"Those motherfuckers don't know when to shut the hell up. Their own fucking lives are so terribly fucking pathetic that they need to fucking make shit up about other fucking people's shit just to have fucking something to fucking feel better about. Fuck," I muttered.

They made some joke about me never being able to say a sentence without cursing. I wasn't amused. They were fucking ganging up on me, and when she laughed with him, I almost wanted to bash his fucking face in. Was that why she was so quick to deny his accusations about us being a couple? Because she liked *him* ? I glanced at her, seeing her smile at him again.

Fuck. She likes Jasper.

"C'mon, Eddieboy, don't be mad," she teased, and I glared at her.

"You ignored me for five days and then ignored me for another two. So yes, excuse me, but I'll be mad at you for a little while longer." *And because you're fucking in love with Jasper, I'll stay mad at you for even longer.*

I saw her smile fade, and I didn't even feel bad about it. I almost expected her to apologize or something, but instead she turned it around and made a joke. She was going back into hiding again. By making jokes, she wasn't exposing herself. I was a fucking jerk. I accused her of pushing me away and hiding, when in reality I was the one making her do it.

Jasper asked her when she was coming back to Forks, and she mentioned something about a foster family. "I'm not really looking forward to it, obviously. School is going to be hell," she mumbled.

"I won't let those bitches touch you," I said to her, stroking her hair and tucking it behind her hair. She smiled softly at me, but it didn't feel the same anymore. When she smiled at me now, it just hurt.

"How long have you guys been *friends* ?" Jasper asked. Now he was really starting to piss me off. Why the fuck was he pushing his luck? I looked at Sparrow again, and when she met my gaze, she smiled. A genuine fucking smile. As if the memory of us becoming friends was precious to her.

Friends .

Fuck that shit.

"He brought a pen," she replied, with a smile in her voice.

"And what does that mean? Is it code for... you know? He brought a 'pen' to your 'pen case'?" Jasper asked, sounding confused as he made quotation marks in the air with his fingers.

I'm gonna kick your fucking ass, Jasper Whitlock-Hale.

"We haven't *fucked* ," I snapped, tired of his fucking bullshit. Was he trying to be a dick, or did it come naturally to him now? Had he been hanging out too much with his fucking bitch for a sister? Did he have to keep rubbing it in that I hadn't gotten any action at all in *weeks* ?

"We wouldn't... do *that* ," Sparrow agreed quietly, almost inaudibly. "It's not like we're... nevermind." I glanced at her, seeing her blush and shake her head at herself. *What the fuck?*

"I was walking around in the middle of the night, and I found a pen on the street right outside the hospital. I took it as a damn sign that I was supposed to go in there," I continued, just wanting to end the fucking story already so maybe Jasper could drop it and go home.

"Right after the accident?" Jasper asked.

"No, it was when I was admitted because I passed out when Tanya pushed me in the hallway," Sparrow replied, cringing at the memory.

"Why have you been keeping it a secret?" Jasper continued.

I shrugged. "Because it was easier that way. We knew that people were going to get the wrong idea. They were probably going to think I was using her or something, and she was going to get in trouble with her parents and... it wasn't fucking worth it." *Wrong idea* . If the wrong idea really was the *wrong* idea, then why the hell did the wrong idea feel like such a good idea? I looked down at our joined hands, and the corner of my mouth lifted into a smile. "Besides, it has been fucking nice this way. Not needing to explain ourselves to anyone. Just enjoying each other's company." I added, not caring if that made me sound like a fucking pansy. Sparrow squeezed my hand, and I looked up to meet her gaze.

"Are we really enjoying each other's company though?" she asked, her question stabbing me in the chest. *Was she fucking serious?* "All we do is be emo and feel sorry for ourselves. How is that enjoying each other's company?" I guess she had a point.

"Misery loves company," Jasper mumbled, but he quickly backtracked when we glared at him. "Or so I've heard."

"I beg to disagree though," I argued, smirking at Sparrow. "I remember us having quite fun the morning after we kidnapped

you..." I quirked an eyebrow at her, and a blush quickly crept up her cheeks. Jasper shook his head slowly, saying something about him not wanting us to elaborate on that.

I *wish* there was something on which to elaborate.

He was being summoned by Alice when she sent him a text, and he made some stupid joke about bringing her a pen. *Disgusting pig* . When he finally left us alone, Sparrow and I turned to look at each other at the same time. I smiled at her as I pulled out the necklace from my pocket again, putting it on her. I didn't know shit about fashion and accessories; all I knew was that that necklace fucking belonged on the hollow of her throat.

"Thank you," she said, touching the delicate sparrow with her fingers.

"Thank you for still breathing," I replied.

She looked at me for a moment, her smile gone in an instant as she suddenly blurted out that her mom had escaped. At first I thought she was joking, but then she said something about someone helping her out. It was all so fucked up. We couldn't catch a break. I told her that.

She almost seemed surprised when I said we were in it together, as if anything else was even possible for us anymore. Live together, die alone, and all that crap.

She leaned her head against my shoulder, and I pressed my lips to her hair, wishing I could press my lips to other parts of her body instead.

"I missed you," I mumbled quietly. "These past few days have been killing me. Do you really need more time?" I stared at her to the point of it being uncomfortable, but I needed to know where she stood.

"I will always need more time," she replied with a shrug.

"I can't give you more time, because I fucking need you, Sparrow."

"Yeah, I know," she whispered, and when she turned her head our faces were so close I could feel her breath on my face.

"I really missed you."

She mouthed something to me, but I didn't know what it was. My mind came up with many different interpretations – all ranging from "I love mushrooms" to "I love your bro" - but I decided not to ask her about it. If she mouthed them, she had probably not intended for me to hear it anyway.

"I'll keep you safe now. Don't worry... I'll keep you safe," I murmured to her.

"But who'll keep *you* safe from all the dangers in the world?"

"You, of course," I said, as if it was the most obvious thing in the world. "You said you had my back, so I'm counting on you to kick people's asses if they ever give me shit."

"Yeah, I'll clonk them with my crutch," she said, rolling her eyes.

"You've done it before. And I've never been prouder of you... except for now."

"Why now?"

"Because your mom is on the loose, and you're still fucking breathing. You're still sitting here. *Breathing* . And you have yet to tell me to leave."

"I told you to leave when you got here."

"No, you told Kate to tell me, so that doesn't count. Because I know that if you had been the one answering the door when I got here, then you wouldn't have told me to leave. It's easy to say something when you don't have the person right in front of your face."

"You're basically telling me I'm a chicken, you know that right?"

"You're not a chicken. A chicken would have killed herself a long time ago. You're my sparrow."

We were interrupted by Kate when she knocked on the door. Apparently, I was allowed to stay the night as long as I slept on the couch. She didn't want any "funny business." I wondered if she even knew Sparrow. Did Sparrow seem like a "funny business" kind of girl to her? *Fucking idiot.*

"This is what we get for going public," Sparrow mumbled. "People immediately get the wrong idea."

"Who the fuck cares what they think?" I snorted. "If they want to think that we're screwing like bunnies or that we are a fucking couple, who gives a shit? Let 'em. People will always talk, so let them fucking talk. It doesn't matter what they think."

"What about your reputation?"

"What *about* my reputation? What's the big deal if people think I'm fucking you? It's not like I'm fucking a *mountain goat* for crying out loud."

"Just a goose," she replied dryly.

Was she looking to piss me off? Because she was doing a pretty damn good job doing it. I grabbed her chin roughly, turning her head when she tried to look away from me.

"You're not the fucking goose anymore. And if anyone ever calls you that, I will bash their fucking heads in. You hear me?"

I didn't know what I expected her to say in response. Maybe an "okay" or "whatever you say," but instead she asked, "Wh-wh-why did you kiss me?"

I was not prepared for that. I was not prepared for her to ever mention it to me again. I didn't know if I even wanted her to mention it. She saw me as nothing more than a friend, and friends didn't kiss each other like that. I had probably confused her. Hell, I had confused myself.

Why the fuck did I kiss her?

Because you want to kiss a mountain goat.

Just like I told Emmett.

"Because I...because maybe I just wanted to fuck a mountain goat."

She didn't look amused by my answer, as she pulled my hand from her chin. I didn't even realize how the fuck that sounded until after I said it. She didn't understand what the fuck I meant by that since she didn't know the meaning behind it, so to her I just basically called her a mountain goat.

Nice, Cullen, real nice. Make her feel special.

Fuck you.

"Are you hungry? I'm starving," she said, changing the subject abruptly as she got off the bed.

"I could eat," I mumbled in response.

She barely looked at me for the rest of the afternoon. I tried to come up with something to say or some way to explain the mountain goat thing, but I was coming up short. She wasn't really helping matters either, because she wasn't saying anything at all. I kept myself close to her, because it was all that I could do since I couldn't fucking speak. I wanted to explain to her that she was more than just a friend. I didn't want her to think she was just that to me. She was *Sparrow*, and that meant something.

But how the hell was I supposed to explain that to her? *Without* freaking her out, or have her getting mad at me because she got it wrong after I explained it in some backwards way, accidentally comparing her to a hyena or something.

I wouldn't want another mountain goat fiasco.

I glanced at her as we sat together on the couch in the living room watching a movie. She was gnawing on her bottom lip, and I was struck by how something so simple could look so perfect.

How had I never noticed *her* before?

Sparrow was beautiful.

So... fucking... beautiful.

"I'm going to bed now too," she mumbled suddenly as she got up from the couch. "Good night."

"Good night?" I mumbled, confused. She didn't even look at me as she left.

Fuck. I must have screwed shit up even more than I thought.

What the hell had I said or done that got her *that* upset?

I heard her go into her bedroom after leaving the bathroom, and I stood up from the couch. I needed to talk to her. Apologize or whatever. I slowly made it to her door, and a moment later, I heard a strangled sob. And then another. *And then another.*

She was fucking crying.

I silently opened the door. The sound of her sobbing was even more heartbreaking when it wasn't muffled by the door. I made it to the bed and found her with a pillow pressed over her face as her entire body shook with sobs.

Fuck. Did I do this?

I tugged at the corner of the pillow, hoping she would let me remove it from her face. Her eyes were puffy, her cheeks wet, but she was still beautiful. So fucking beautiful.

I made her scoot over so I could lay down next to her. She turned her head away from me, but I wasn't having it. I needed her to look at me. She finally met my gaze with more pain in her eyes than any person her age would be allowed to have. If it hurt *me* to even *look* at her, I wondered how painful it was to *be* her. I needed to set shit straight. I needed her to know how I felt.

I needed *her* .

But how the fuck was I supposed to explain that to her?

"I kissed you because I wanted to kiss a mountain goat," I murmured, stroking her wet cheek with my finger. She looked confused I didn't blame her for that. But I was hoping the tone behind my words would be enough for her to just... *get it* .

I leaned down, pressing my lips firmly against hers, and my body reacting accordingly. It seemed as though I had forgotten during these past weeks that I was no more than a damn teenage boy, and of course I would pitch a tent when I was kissing some girl.

Not that Sparrow was just *some* girl... she was *the* girl.

I noted that her lips weren't moving as frantically as mine. She seemed hesitant in her movements, and other than the occasional, erratic raising of her chest, she was laying completely still. I stroked her cheek, trying to make her relax and just go with it, but it did nothing to calm her. I took it as a good sign that she at least wasn't pushing me away. She was letting me do this, even though she was not doing much to reciprocate.

"C'mon, Sparrow, I don't bite," I mumbled against her lips before sucking lightly on her plump bottom lip. "Unless you want me to," I added with a lazy smirk. My hand trailed down her stomach, gracing the hem of her top before softly touching her skin underneath. It was as if I had no control of what my hand was doing as it crept higher up under her shirt, and my fingers soon touched her breast.

Fuck, she's not wearing a bra.

My pants suddenly felt ridiculously tight, and I couldn't fucking wait to *really* touch her. It was as if I didn't even realize she had fucking boobs until that very moment. My hand palmed her breast; my thumb gracing over her nipple, and I was in fucking heaven. My eyes were closed, and I swear to God I growled as I squeezed her breast gently. *She's fucking perfect .*

She gasped, and her lips parted a little, just enough for me to try to stick my tongue in her mouth. But as soon as my tongue touched her, she recoiled and pushed me away. My hand left her breast, and I felt somehow cheated on the candy.

"Edward, wh-what are you doing?" she asked, sounding a breathless and fucking... *scared* .

"I'm kissing you. What does it look like I'm doing?" I asked, trying to keep it light by smirking a little as I leaned down to kiss her again. She turned her face away at the last second, so my lips touched her jaw instead. I gripped her chin, turning her head to me so I could meet her gaze. She looked back at me helplessly.

"Please stop... just don't," she whispered, her voice pained.

"Why not?"

"Because I don't want you to... I don't want you to kiss me... to touch me like... *that* ... I just... don't..."

Because she fucking likes Jasper, you idiot. You saw how she looked at him.

"Why not?"

She gave me a tired look and bit her lip for a moment before answering me. "Because you want more than I do. You want to go further... but I can't go further."

Told you, she likes Jasper. She can't go further because she wants to go further with Jasper.

Shut. The. Fuck. Up.

"Why not?" I sounded like a damn broken record, but she just kept giving me answers that didn't leave me much else to say. If she liked Jasper, I wanted her to fucking say it. Or maybe she liked Emmett? Or maybe she found me so repulsive that she rather fuck a dog than me. I didn't fucking care if I was being irrational – she was the one pushing *me* away. I had every right to be irrational.

How are you any better? You said you wanted to fuck a mountain goat, so what does that say about her?

"I need-"

"If you say you need time one more fucking time I swear to God I'll-"

"I need to be *pure* , Edward!" she cut me off.

I blinked. Then I blinked again. Then I fucking growled. For real this time.

Fucking... Jacob... Black.

"What the fuck for? For *him* ? You want to stay pure so *he* can fucking pop your cherry or whatever?" I snapped. "You want *him* to be your first or some shit?"

Her bottom lip quivered, and she bit down on it. Her eyes welled up with tears as she turned her head away. She refused to look at me.

"I need to be pure..." she whispered, her voice barely audible.

"Why?" I asked with a deep sigh.

"Intercourse is dirty. You should only have intercourse if you're married. Being impure leads to consequences," she mumbled. It was as if she was reciting a book.

I sighed again and sat up on the bed, turning my back to her.

"Your mom is crazy. I've slept with more girls than I care to count, and nothing bad ever happened to me," I argued. She mumbled something in response, but I couldn't make out what it was. I turned my head to look at her.

"Black ice," she said, her voice clearer now. "Black ice happened."

I smiled humorlessly. She was fucking right. *Black ice happened* .

"But that had nothing to do with me fucking girls just for fun," I replied, and something shifted in her eyes. The pain was replaced by an empty mask. It happened so quickly I barely even noticed the shift.

"Maybe you should go," she replied coldly, holding my gaze.

Something inside me twisted again, and I didn't fucking like it.

"I'm not going anywhere," I replied.

"If you're expecting to sleep with me *just for fun* , then maybe you *should* go."

" *Bella* ," I sighed. "That's not what I meant."

"How long has it been since you've been with a girl? A week? Two weeks? Since before the accident? Maybe you feel you need some release, and the only reason you're here, right now, in my bed is because I'm the closest girl here. Not counting Kate, of course." She sounded so cold, almost cruel, and it fucking hurt to hear her talk about me like that.

"You know it's not like that with you."

"How would I know that? What makes me different from all the other girls? Do tell, Edward, I'm dying to hear what you have to say," she replied cruelly. She sat up and scooted away from me on the bed, leaning back against the headboard as she crossed her arms over her chest. I gave her a tired look.

"You should already know what makes you different," I mumbled awkwardly. I had never felt awkward around a girl before. I got girls. Girls were my thing. So how was it that she managed to screw me up completely by just... *sitting there* ?

"You ran me over. That's what makes me different," she muttered.

I glared at her and she met my gaze with teary eyes. She didn't believe what she was saying. She was just trying to hide again. She kept saying she needed time, but the only reason she needed time was so she could hide away for a little while longer. Hide from the chance of feeling better; hide from the risk of getting hurt. Hide from everything. As long as she was hiding there was no risk of unexpected surprises. She felt safe there, because she knew what to expect in her safe bubble. But I wasn't going to let her fucking hide anymore. And by saying all the things she knew would piss me off she was just trying to push me away. Push me away so she could hide. She was a fucking textbook case.

"You're my Sparrow. That's what makes you different," I replied quietly. "It's just sad that I had to run you over to realize it." A tear slipped from her eyes, and she quickly wiped it away with the back of

her hand. "You're afraid, I fucking get that. Don't you think I'm fucking afraid? So why the hell can't we be afraid together?"

"Because *you* 're afraid of being *alone* . I'm not."

My lips twisted into a sarcastic smirk, and I turned around on the bed. I slowly made my way to the top of the bed, basically straddling her when I reached her. She swallowed thickly, her eyes wide as they showed how uncertain and afraid she was now. I was getting under her skin, and she didn't like it. My smirk grew as I hovered over her. My face barely inches from hers as I stared into her eyes.

"I don't kiss people," I told her. "I can't even remember the last time I kissed a girl on the mouth. Someone other than you. So please tell me, *Bella* , how are you not different?"

"Why do you keep calling me B-Bella?" she stuttered.

"You prefer Sparrow?" I asked, quirking an eyebrow.

"Y-yes."

I leaned in, my nose touching hers. She looked down, but I kept my eyes on hers.

"And how can you not see you're different?" I mused. She looked up again and I smirked. "Can I kiss you now?" She blushed, and that was answer enough for me as I closed the distance between our lips and kissed her again. This time she wasn't as frozen; she hesitantly moved her lips with mine. She was an inexperienced kisser, but then again, so was I. Only difference was that she was insecure and self-conscious while I was not.

It didn't fucking matter. Inexperienced and insecure or not, it was fucking perfect.

I grabbed her hips, pulling at her a little so she would lie back down. Our lips never parted. I laid down with my one leg between hers. I

was careful not to touch her injured leg, since I didn't know how sensitive it still was. I stroked her cheek before burying my hand in her hair and firmly holding her head so I could press my lips harder against hers.

Her hands slowly made it up my chest. I expected them to continue upward, but instead they stopped there; she ever so gently pushed me away.

"Time?" I sighed.

"Please?"

"Fine."

I rolled off her, trying to adjust the situation in my pants a little as I sat up. I glanced at her and saw that she noticed. She quickly looked away, a blush creeping up her cheeks within the fraction of a second.

"Why do you keep calling me a mountain goat?" she asked, careful not to look at me. "Am I supposed to expect new nicknames in the form of other animals now? What's next? Piglet?"

I chuckled lightly and laid down beside her again.

"No, you're Sparrow," I replied.

"Then what was with the mountain goat thing?"

I stroked her cheek with my finger and smiled at her.

"Has anyone ever told you that you ask too many questions?" I asked.

"Has anyone ever told *you* that you avoid too many questions?" she retorted with an eye roll.

She gave me a tired look, and my smile faded. A blanket of seriousness was laid over us, and I knew this was one of those time

when I had to keep the bullshit to a minimum.

"I like you," I said.

"Well, good, I like you too. What's your point?" she asked, looking confused.

I sighed at her for being so naïve. She really *didn't* know. She didn't have a fucking clue.

"I *like* you."

She still looked confused for a moment before realization finally dawned on her. Her eyes went wider than I had ever seen them. Then, just as quickly as realization hit her, she was back to hiding behind that empty mask of hers.

"Ha ha, very funny. You're a real firecracker, Edward," she said slapping my arm and rolling her eyes. "Is that the kind of crap you pull on all the other girls too, just so they will unbutton their pants for you?" She shook her head. "Jesus, Edward... you almost had me fooled," she muttered. She turned to lie on her side with her back to me. "You should go back to the living room. Kate will kill you if she finds you in here."

"Bella..." I began, but she just shook her head.

"Good night, Edward."

I knew there was no point in arguing with her right now. She was tired. I was tired. We were both fucking *exhausted*. We could put off the fight until tomorrow.

I left the bed, and I threw her one last glance before turning away from her.

Even with her back to me, the tears that were now streaming down her face did not escape my notice.

Regret

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 39 - "Regret"

Isabella Swan POV

My entire body was shaking, or maybe it was just my insides? It felt like I was convulsing and laying still all at the same time. What just happened?

Edward kissed me.

Again.

But this wasn't been something that I could pass off as a friend kissing another friend. This had been a real make out session. He had even touched my... my...

I couldn't even finish the sentence in my head. My face was practically on fire as I hid it in my hands. Tears were silently falling down my cheeks, and I hiccupped on a sob.

I need time. I need time. I need time.

Edward wasn't giving me time. He was pushing me toward unfamiliar territory. I was afraid. No – I was *terrified*. He made it very clear tonight that if I hadn't stopped him he would have done more than just touched my breast.

I was surprised that it took me so long to react. He had his hand on my *chest* for crying out loud, but I didn't react until he stuck his tongue down my throat. The look of hurt in his eyes had been indescribable. When I had told him not to touch me, that I didn't want it, it was as if I had ripped his heart out. He got upset – of course he did. He was a teenage boy; he needed his release. I could understand that, but what I couldn't understand was why he looked so... hurt.

I was scared. I was confused. And then I panicked.

Mom's voice started ringing in my head, reminding me of the importance of being pure. How nobody would ever want me if I wasn't pure. How *he* would never want me if I wasn't pure. I needed to be pure. I needed to remain a virgin until after I was married. Sex wasn't for pleasure. At least not for the girl. The pleasure was supposed to be left for the man, so he would get a release and get the girl pregnant. It was absolutely irrelevant if the woman enjoyed it or not. As long as the man got what he needed, that was all that mattered.

I should have let Edward continue his ministrations with my body – as long as he let my virginity remain intact. If he could get a release without actually having intercourse with me, then maybe I would have done something right.

A small part of me had hoped that he had been kissing me, touching me, because he wanted *me*. That my mom had been wrong, that it wasn't just Jacob who wanted me. Maybe someone else did too. But when he had said that he'd had sex with many girls just for fun without anything happening to him, I realized that I had been wrong. He was just in it to get off. He was pressuring a girl who had been taught that sex was bad, because he was so eager to get his own pleasure that he didn't care about how I felt about it.

I had told him that if he was with me just because I was the closest, available girl, then maybe he shouldn't be there. I was no different to him than any other random girl, I told him that too. Another flash of

hurt had crossed his face then. He insisted that I was different, and not only because he ran me over. The accident had nothing to do with why I was different to him. So he said, anyway.

Somehow, I had found myself kissing him again. Somehow, he had found the words to make it all okay.

Then he found the words that took it all back.

I like you.

It was clear in the way he said it the second time that he wasn't talking about just liking me. He *liked* me.

And I could not process that.

I couldn't process that at all because he sounded so... honest. There was a raw intensity in his voice that couldn't be interpreted any other way. I trusted Edward. I trusted him with my life. So why was it so hard for me to trust what he was saying now? Why couldn't I trust him when he said that I was different and that he liked me? Why did I doubt him?

I couldn't take him seriously, even though a part of me said that I should.

What was I most afraid of? Him lying about the fact that he liked me, or the chance that he actually did?

I told him good night, and he left without a word.

I cried myself to sleep that night. I couldn't even remember the last time I cried myself to sleep, or rather, the last time I cried myself to sleep because of a *boy* .

Maybe because that had never happened before.

When I woke up the next morning, I got dressed and left my room. I frowned as I passed the living room, finding the couch empty. I went

to the kitchen, thinking Edward was there, but only finding Kate.

"Hey, where's Edward?" I asked. She looked up from the paper, seemingly confused.

"I don't know. I thought he had gone to sleep in your room when he wasn't on the couch when I got up," she replied.

"He's not in the bathroom?" I asked, as I felt my heart sink. Somehow, I already knew he wasn't in the bathroom.

She shook her head.

I sat down on a chair, leaning my crutches against the table. Kate put the paper away, giving me a soft smile.

"What happened, sweetie?" she asked.

"I don't know," I mumbled. "He said things... he... did things... and I just don't know."

Her face grew serious immediately, and I bit down on my lip, looking away from the intensity of her stare.

"What did he do?" she asked, her voice tense. "Did he force you to do something?"

"No, no... it wasn't like that... it was just... I don't know," I said quietly, shaking my head.

"Maybe it was for the best that he left then," she said, softer now, but still with a little bit of an edge to her voice.

"Maybe." I fumbled with my crutches and got back up. Not feeling hungry anymore, I decided to head back to my room.

"Bella?" I stopped by the door, turning my head to Kate. "Maybe you should start packing your bags."

"Why?"

"I talked to your new foster family an hour ago; they're ready for you tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" I echoed. "So soon?"

She nodded. "If you want, I'm sure it can also be arranged that you can return to school on Monday."

I forced a smile at her, waiting until I was back in my room before letting the tears from panic spill. I wasn't ready for this; I hadn't prepared myself. I knew it was going to happen soon, but not *this* soon. I wasn't ready yet!

Ready or not, back to Forks I go.

"... and you have your own bathroom right in here," she continued, opening a door to my left. I forced a smile and nodded as I wobbled my way there to check it out.

Kate had dropped me off at my new foster family's house – my new *home* – half an hour earlier, and I was now getting the grand tour from my foster mom, while Kate updated my foster dad about the current situation with Mo- *Renée* .

The mere thought of that woman gave me goose bumps, and it felt wrong to call her *Mom* even in my head now. She wasn't my mom. Not anymore.

"You have everything you need?"

I turned to Mrs. Weber and nodded.

"Yeah, I do, thanks," I replied quietly, before wobbling to the bed.

"I do want to remind you that you are not allowed upstairs," she said and I nodded again. She had already pointed that out to me several

times. I was not allowed on the second floor since there was where the family had their rooms, and that area was off limits to the foster kids. I didn't mind though. I was just grateful that I wouldn't need to climb any stairs.

"I will go talk to Ms. Peters, so feel free to take a look around and get yourself settled in," Mrs. Weber said, before leaving the room.

I looked around the room and quickly decided that I could have done a lot worse. The walls were light blue; the room had a hardwood floor with a small, fluffy carpet that was just a few shades darker than the walls. I had a nice queen sized bed, a desk, a bookshelf, a closet and a bathroom. It was a little crowded, but it was nice.

I wobbled over to the window, looking out. My window was facing the house next door, and my eyes widened as I spotted a familiar face in their backyard. It was as if he could sense my eyes on him, because he looked up and met my gaze head on. I thought for a moment that he was going to flip me off and turn his back to me. I bet he thought I deserved it. I wouldn't have been surprised if he did.

I didn't live up to my promise, after all.

However, he didn't flip me off; he didn't turn his back. Instead he raised his hand in a small wave, gesturing for me to come outside - and for some reason I did.

I turned around, making my way out the room and through the living room toward the patio. I slid the door open, stepping outside and sliding the door closed behind me. I awkwardly made my way from the patio to the fence where he was waiting. My crutches sank in the cold, wet grass.

"Hey, Bella, what are you doing here?" he asked, giving me a small smile but also sounding confused. His breath made puffy clouds in the cold air.

"I kinda... live here now, I guess," I replied with an awkward shrug, biting down on my lip. "Have... have you talked to Edward?"

Jasper sighed, before nodding softly. "I did," he replied slowly. "He told me about what happened when he stayed over."

My cheeks flushed instantly, and I had to look away. Of course, he would tell Jasper. He probably told him all about how lame I was for not putting out and how I didn't cater to his every need. I felt like such a loser. I never really cared about boys, or what they thought of me. But for some reason the thought of Edward making fun of my chastity ways made me embarrassed and sad. I didn't want to be that person. I wanted to be so much more for him, but what exactly was that? Did I want to be someone he could do that stuff with? Did I want to be *everything* for him? His... toy?

"I should... I should have let him... maybe he would have stayed if I did," I mumbled, looking at my feet.

"What?" Jasper blurted, sounding bewildered. I looked up confused, meeting his aggravated expression.

"What?" I asked in return.

"Bella, what Edward did was wrong, and you should not have let him continue. Hell, even he knows what he did was wrong, and he feels like an ass for doing it."

"Oh," I mumbled, looking down again. Of course Edward thought what he did was wrong. He was probably highly disgusted with himself right now. I was his friend. Nothing more. Friends didn't do that. Of course, he regretted it and felt bad about it. He had been desperate; he hadn't been in his right mind. He had a blackout; he was injured. He had been so confused. He probably didn't know what he was doing – or with whom. He said he liked me, but it was probably just words. He didn't mean them because he didn't realize to whom he was saying them. Jasper obviously thought that the idea of Edward doing anything of the sort with me was bad as well.

I felt so bad for Edward.

"Hey," Jasper said suddenly, just as I felt a tear drop from my chin. I hadn't even noticed I had started crying. "What's wrong?"

"Edward."

"What about him?" he asked, now sounding cautious.

I took a deep breath, closing my eyes. "He said he liked me," I admitted with an even voice. "I trust him with my life, but I can't trust him with those words. Not if he thinks what he did was bad. If he regrets it."

"Bella," Jasper said with a pained voice, "he said he liked you?"

I nodded without opening my eyes.

"Before or after?" he asked, his voice tense.

"After."

He sighed deeply. "Stupid idiot, fuck him backwards with a rusty chainsaw," he muttered under his breath. I looked at him, not able to keep the hurt off my face. I thought Jasper was different, but apparently he was just like all the others. I was the Goose to him too.

"I... I should go back inside," I mumbled, turning around.

"Bella, wait!" Jasper protested, and I reluctantly turned my head to look at him.

"What?"

"What did you tell *him* ?" he asked.

"I asked him if that was the usual line he used to get girls to unbutton their pants for him. I told him that he should leave, and then I told him good night," I replied quietly.

The corner of his mouth lifted into a sad smile, and he nodded.

I didn't even want to know what that smile meant.

Angela glanced at me for the fifth time in just as many minutes. Her dad, Reverend Weber, was driving us to school. Angela and I had never been enemies, but we had never been friends either. She never joined in when people called me names, because she was never mean to anyone, but she never defended me either. Just because she never called people any names didn't mean she liked everyone. I could tell by the way that she kept glancing at me that she was worried about how this new arrangement would hurt her reputation at school. If somehow she fall lower on the social ladder by association.

She was an only child, and I never known that her parents were certified to take care of disabled kids, or that they were foster parents at all. I guessed that wasn't so weird, since there never had been a reason for me to know about that. It was also weird to think of myself as disabled, but that was what I was now. I had come to accept it. It was no big deal.

Reverend Weber dropped us off outside the school, telling us to have a good day. He let his eyes linger on me for a moment before telling that I had nothing to worry about. I forced a smile at him before climbing out of the car. It was easy for *him* to say that; he wasn't the one with a pack of crazy people running after him, itching for his blood.

I got out of the car, seeing how Angela was half-way up the steps already. She was not going to wait around for me. I didn't blame her.

People were looking at me and whispering, more than usual. I guess the secret was out. Well, at least the part about me being removed from my home and how I was now living with the Webers instead of my own family.

Something else I noticed was that nobody ever addressed me personally. They just whispered and talked amongst themselves, giving me the occasional glance as I passed them. No one called out Goose. Or Turkey. Or even Ugly Duckling.

They were leaving me alone.

That's... different.

I made it to my locker before someone addressed me by my name.

My *name* , and not some birdy insult.

"Bella!" I turned around to see Alice walking toward me. She wasn't overly excited to see me, like all those other times. This time she seemed a little more reserved. I smiled timidly at her before turning to my locker. "You're back."

"Yeah, I guess I am," I replied with an awkward shrug. I grabbed the things needed for my first class, before pushing the locker door closed with my crutch. Alice was holding her own books to her chest, and she didn't even blink as she grabbed my bag from me so I wouldn't need to carry it. I didn't object because I knew she wouldn't listen.

"Let's get to class," she said. "I'll let you copy my notes from what you've missed."

When we passed Tanya by her locker, I quickly looked down. I felt her eyes on me all the way to the classroom.

I couldn't concentrate in class at all. Instead, my thoughts kept going back to Edward. I hadn't seen him yet, so I wondered if he was back in school or not. Maybe they didn't let him in after all. Maybe getting expelled from another school for hurting another student was a deal breaker for them.

Alice asked me to eat lunch with them, and I couldn't find it in me to decline. I may not have liked her very much, because of the way she had behaved toward Edward during these past few weeks, but I also knew all about survival. I couldn't risk being alone. Who knew who was lurking in the shadows when I wasn't looking? Maybe *Renée* was here somewhere, just waiting to grab me.

Chills ran down my spine at the thought, and it was terrifying that I could actually think of my own mother like that. To actually believe she was capable of doing something as ludicrous as kidnapping her own daughter from school. The reality was that I didn't know my mother anymore. I didn't know *Renée*. She had clearly gone insane for some reason, and I had no idea what I could expect from her. If she was insane enough to escape from a locked ward in an insane asylum, then who knew what else she was capable of? We already knew she was itching for my *pure* blood.

I sat down across from Emmett at their table in the cafeteria. This way I had my back turned to the rest of the room. I could look out the window instead of all the people. I didn't feel like watching them watch me. It was enough that I *felt* their eyes on me. Alice sat down next to me, and Rosalie was already seated next to Emmett. Jasper had yet to join us.

"So, where is my cowboy?" Alice asked, looking at Emmett.

"He's talking to Edward," Rosalie replied, her voice tired. As I looked closer at her, I noticed that she had circles under her eyes, which her makeup hadn't been able to cover up completely.

"Edward's... here?" I asked, fingering my necklace nervously. Nobody answered me, and they all frowned as they looked down at their trays.

"What are they talking about?" Alice asked, instead of changing the subject.

"I'm sure the Jazzspazz is just helping him find his mountain goat," Emmett chuckled to himself, trying to lighten the mood. My eyes widened at his choice of words, but he didn't notice.

"What did you just say?" I asked.

"Mountain goat," Emmett replied. "He's all about the goats. I think my brother likes animals."

"What are you talking about?" Alice sighed. "You're not making any sense."

"Well, I was watching a nature show on TV the other day. It was fucking awesome, showing all kinds of animals going at it. You wouldn't believe the sounds they were making! It was hilarious! And a boar even-

"Emmett! She didn't ask about the boar or the sounds they were making," Rosalie cut him off.

"Sorry," he replied sheepishly. "Anyway, there were mountain goats too. And he made some comment about the day he wants to kiss a mountain goat is the day he'll become a one woman man."

Rosalie snorted, shaking her head. "The day Edward becomes a one woman man is the day I'll fuck a mountain goat."

"Oh, baby, would you really break up with me for a mountain goat?" Emmett asked, throwing his meaty arm around her shoulders and hugging her to him. She huffed in annoyance, but it was clear in her eyes that she enjoyed his display of affection. She turned her head to meet his gaze, and she smiled at him.

"No, you big dork," she replied.

"Good." He leaned down and pressed his lips to hers and I looked away quickly, feeling uncomfortable.

I kept playing with the sparrow on my necklace as I poked at my salad with my plastic fork. I noticed, from the corner of my eye, how Alice was looking at my necklace.

"I love that necklace!" she exclaimed loudly.

I quirked an eyebrow and snorted quietly to myself. Alice liked a gumball machine necklace? Yeah, right.

"Isn't that the same one we saw?" Rosalie asked, forgetting all about Emmett now.

"Yeah, it is," Alice said with a sigh, before looking at me. "Did you buy it yourself?"

"No, I got it from... erm... a friend," I mumbled.

"Some friend," Rosalie noted, leaning back in her seat. "I wish I had friends who gave me two hundred dollar necklaces. Hell, I wish I had a *boyfriend* who gave me two hundred dollar necklaces." She nudged Emmett, hoping he'd take the hint, but he didn't seem to notice at all.

"What are you talking about?" I asked, not able to contain my snort. "He got it from a gumball machine. He said it cost him fifty cents."

"Hah! Fifty cents my ass. That, my friend," Alice said, gesturing towards the sparrow, "is a two hundred dollar necklace from Jackson's Jewelry. And trust me, I would know, because both Rosalie and I were drooling all over it last week."

I looked down at the sparrow, trying to keep the shock from my face.

"So, yeah, you got yourself a very nice *friend*," Rosalie said. "Maybe I should expand my circle of friends too. What's his number?" she joked.

"He's just a friend," I mumbled, looking down at my food, and putting the sparrow underneath my shirt so they couldn't see it.

"Oh, girl, if a guy buys you jewelry... no matter if it's for fifty cents or two hundred dollars, he's not just a friend. Trust me," Rosalie said with a condescending tone. "I should know," she added, nodding discretely towards Emmett.

It took a moment for Emmett to realize that was a jab at him, so soon they were arguing whether or not he was a pansy or a pushover or something. I don't know, I tuned them out pretty quickly.

I ate my lunch, and Alice helped me with my tray when we were done. When she left for her next class, I was left to fend for myself again. With a sigh, I went back to my locker to grab my books for biology. I wobbled my way to the classroom, only getting bumped into by accident a couple of times, and I entered a second before the bell rang.

"Welcome back, Miss Swan," Mr. Melina said. "Please take a..." he trailed off and looked out over the classroom. I let my eyes follow his gaze, seeing that all the seats were already taken except for one. Mr. Melina cleared his throat and looked down at his papers. "I'm sure we can have someone change their seat."

"No, it's okay," I replied quietly. "I don't mind."

"Well, if you're sure," he replied with a nod.

I made it to the empty seat, glancing quickly at my partner before leaning my crutches against the table and sitting down. I felt his eyes on me, and when I turned my head, he didn't look away.

I met Edward's gaze, and we held it there, until Mr. Melina started speaking.

"Turn to page 271 in your textbooks. Today we're going to talk about species and animals that are on the verge of being extinct. We'll start with the birds," he said, turning towards the blackboard. A smile tugged at the corners of my mouth, and when I heard Edward make a snorting sound, I turned my head to him.

He was looking down at the book in front of him; his lips were also forming a small smile. He held out his hand between our chairs, and I took it without a second thought. His smile grew, but he still didn't look at me.

I turned my gaze toward the front.

We were going to be okay.

We didn't talk. We didn't even look at each other, but Edward kept holding my hand so tightly it was almost painful. As the class neared its end, I felt a weird sense of fear wash over me. I didn't understand it. What was I afraid of now?

Edward's hand left my grasp, and before I knew it, he was gone too. My heart ached at the sudden loss of his presence, and it took me a moment before I could find it in me to move.

I threw my bag over my shoulder and grabbed my crutches. The halls were roaming with students, they were talking, shouting and laughing, but it was as if I didn't hear any of it. Instead, I felt as if I was walking in a fog that only I could see.

Suddenly someone grabbed my arm and pulled me away.

I opened my mouth to scream, but the shriek was cut short when a hand was slapped over my mouth. I was disoriented by the quick movements that I jumped in surprise when I heard a door slam and found myself in complete darkness. I was standing still now, the hand still on my mouth as I was pressed up against a cold wall.

My breathing became labored, and I felt the bubble of panic pulsate in my gut. I wanted to throw up. This was it. I was going to die. Renée had found me.

"Calm down, Sparrow, it's just me..."

I heard the sound of a light switch, and I blinked at the sudden light. A few quick glances were all it took for me to realize that we were in the janitor's closet, and it was Edward's hand pressed against my mouth. I looked at him, and he removed his hand. I wanted to snap at him, or say something sarcastic, but the panic was still surging through my body, the bubble still pulsating. I couldn't find it in me to say anything. Instead, my eyes betrayed me by welling up with tears. I had honestly thought it was Renée who had grabbed me. I thought I was done for. It was impossible to go from being utterly terrified to feeling safe in two seconds flat without getting emotional or anxious.

I'm safe .

Edward put his hands on either side of my face, stroking away with his thumbs the tears that had welled.

"I didn't mean to scare you," he whispered softly. "And I'm so sorry I hurt you. I didn't mean to... do *that* ."

"You wanted to kiss a mountain goat," I replied with a shaky voice, trying to pull myself together by making a joke. He smiled crookedly, shaking his head at himself.

"I know it doesn't make any fucking sense. I'm fucked up, I kno-"

"Emmett told me what you said."

He froze. I could see a flash of panic in his eyes, but it was gone as quickly as it came.

"What did he say exactly?" he asked cautiously.

I opened my mouth to tell him all about the mountain goat, but the words refused to get out. I couldn't utter them, and it took me a moment before I realized why that was. It was because I didn't understand them. Edward may have called me a mountain goat; Emmett may have explained it to me, but it still didn't make any

sense. Did this mean Edward wanted to be a one woman man... for *me* ?

I swallowed thickly, and I was sure than he could sense how tense I was.

"You didn't get me a necklace from a gumball machine," I said instead.

He sighed and shook his head.

"Who told you?" he asked with a tired sigh.

"Alice."

"Of course."

"Did she know you bought it for me?"

He shook his head again. "No, they weren't even in the store when I bought it. I waited until they had left."

Another tear slipped from my eye, and he gently stroked it away before letting his thumb grace over my lips. He looked down at my lips, and I swallowed thickly again. I wasn't sure if I liked that look in his eyes. He looked... hungry.

Before I knew it, his face was starting to come closer to mine.

"Jasper," I blurted right before his lips were going to touch mine. He froze. He *literally* froze. He didn't pull back or let me go. He just stood there – frozen – without moving a muscle. Not even blinking.

"You like Jasper," he said, almost too quiet for me to hear.

"What?" I asked, totally dumbfounded as to how he even came to that conclusion.

"You like Jasper... that's why you don't want me to fucking touch you or kiss you or any fucking thing. You fucking like *Jasper* !" His voice grew louder as he stepped away from me, letting his hands fall down to his sides where he clenched them into fists.

"What are you talking about?" I asked, completely lost. "I don't like Jasper!"

He dragged his hands through his hair and gripped it. It looked painful.

"If you don't mean what you say, Sparrow, shut the fuck up," he growled in warning.

That pissed me off. He was the one who always talked about trust, how we should trust each other and always have each other's backs, but now he was the one putting words in my mouth out of nowhere, and having the nerve to tell me I was lying.

"Where would you even get a stupid idea like that?" I asked, steadying myself on my crutches so I could stretch my back. "What on earth gave you the impression that I like him? And why would you care if I did? Why is it important?"

His nostrils flared in anger, but for once I wasn't afraid of his imminent outburst. He was losing it, that was for sure, and I was more concerned about his mental health at that moment than anything else.

"Of course it's fucking important!" he snapped, seething.

I let go of one of the crutches, letting it clatter to the ground, before reaching out and grabbing his wrist. The closet was so small I had no trouble reaching him. I pulled him to me, and he didn't fight me. I pulled him as close as he could get, before letting go of the other crutch and wrapping my arms around his waist, resting my head against his chest.

"You were gone," I whispered. "I woke up in the morning and you were gone."

"I know," he replied, kissing the top of my head.

"Why did you leave? Why didn't you stay so we could talk about what happened?"

"Because I felt like shit. I don't fucking deserve you or your forgiveness," he muttered.

"And yet you ask for both," I replied quietly.

"That's because I'm a selfish creature."

We were quiet for a moment, I could feel Edward's breath against my head and ever so often he would kiss my hair. The bell rang, but neither of us moved. We weren't going to class. We were learning something far more important right here.

He pressed his lips harder against my head, and I felt the little hairs in the back of my neck stand up from the intensity of it. I almost shivered at the feeling.

"It's like... once I've kissed you, I can't fucking stop," he murmured before pressing his lips a little closer to my hairline, tilting my head up a little with his hands. "Ever since I kissed you that time in my dad's office, it's like all I can think about is your damn lips." He pressed his lips against my forehead. "And fucking perfectly your bottom lip fits between mine." He kissed both my eyelids. One on each of my tear-streaked cheeks. "One fucking kiss and I crumbled. I'm addicted, Sparrow. I'm fucking addicted to you. You're like my own personal brand of heroin." He put my face in his hands, tilting my head up so I would meet his gaze. "So why don't *you* tell me why it's not important that you don't like Jasper." He smiled crookedly, almost looking sarcastic. He wasn't happy right now. He stroked his thumb over my lips and I shivered from the touch. "You're stronger than I am... smarter... braver." He sighed. "You're so fucking brave,

Sparrow." He rested his forehead against mine and sighed deeply. "And you're so fucking beautiful without even knowing it. Everything about you is fucking beautiful. Your *soul* is beautiful. *You* are fucking beautiful."

He made a sound that almost sounded like a held back sob, and when I pulled my head back, I realized that he was indeed crying. Tears were filling his eyes and I felt a pain in my chest that couldn't be compared to anything I had ever felt before. I would choose being kicked around in the hallway by Tanya a million times over if it meant that I would never feel this pain again.

I held his face in my hands and stroked away his tears with my thumbs just like he had done mine.

"You are brave. You're trusting the *Goose* , for crying out loud. How is that not brave?" I whispered. "You are strong. You've just lost yourself a little." I paused, taking a deep breath before adding, "and you are beautiful, Edward. So beautiful."

"I fucking need you," he mumbled.

"No, you don't. You can survive just fine without me," I replied with a small smile.

"Survive," he snorted. "I don't want to just survive. I want to *live* . Don't you want that? These past few months, all you've done is survive... but you haven't *lived* ."

"So you need me to live?" I asked.

He nodded.

"I'm sorry I went too far with you the other day... I didn't fucking mean it to happen... my body has a mind of its own, and it felt so fucking good just having you near. You have no idea what effect you have on me. It's like I'm your fucking puppet or something," he muttered, sounding annoyed, but whether it was aimed at me, or

himself, I didn't know. Then I felt the blood rush to my face, making me blush like a mad woman, when I realized exactly what he just said. He had basically just admitted that he was attracted to me. I mean, if he didn't find me attractive, he wouldn't have had any problems stopping, right? But he did.

"I can't..." I began, squeezing my eyes shut so I didn't have to look at him when I said it. "I can't sleep with you... if... if *they* find out, I will be in trouble. I need to stay... clean and pure and... untouched." Did I really believe that though? Or was I just afraid of him being that close? What happened if I wasn't good enough for him? Would he leave?

"They will never lay their disgusting hands on you. I could fuck you right in front of them and make you scream my damn name, and they wouldn't be able to do shit about it." He sounded so sure of himself that it scared me. Confidence was one thing, but being overly confident about unpredictable people was another.

"You have no idea what these people are capable of. Who knows what their new plan is? Who knows if they even have a plan? Right now, I'm living in the dark. My mom is on the run, and I don't know if she's coming back for me or if she's just going to join some crazy cult somewhere. Maybe she'll come back, maybe she won't... but I can't take the risk of being impure and her finding out."

"So you're gonna live the rest of your life as a scared virgin?" he asked skeptically. "Or maybe I should say, you would be *surviving* as a scared virgin. You wouldn't be living."

"Why are we even having this conversation?" I asked, practically shaking in frustration. "You could sleep with anyone you want. You don't need me to get off!" I snapped, hating him for pressing the issue.

His face went blank as he stared at me, and I was too scared to even breathe.

Then, ever so slowly his lips twisted into that irresistible smirk he always used, and the look of hunger was back in his eyes. He leaned in, his mouth by my ear.

"I could sleep with anyone I want?" he asked, his voice low and husky. "Well, I want sleep with *you* . I might not *need* you to get off. I have my own two damn hands, thank you very much. But trust me when I say that you would it make so much better... and besides... I could get *you* off."

I blushed again, the thought of him pleasuring me never entering my mind until now.

He leaned back, just enough so he could look me in the eyes. His gaze was even more intense this close. I felt my body tremble, and I had to grip his shirt to keep from falling. He stroked my cheek with the back of his hand.

"We would be so fucking good together, Sparrow," he said, pressing my body against the wall so his was flush against mine. He took a step to the side so his one leg was between mine, and when he pressed himself up against me, I could feel him. Really *feel* him.

I swallowed thickly, and an unfamiliar feeling started to run through my body, making me dizzy and excited all at the same time. Suddenly his lips were looking very, very appealing.

"So good," he whispered huskily.

As if our minds were connected, we both zeroed in on each other's lips. Both thinking the same thing. He gently put a hand on the back of my head, pulling my face closer to his, pressing his lips firmly against mine.

This time I knew he wasn't kissing me as a friend.

Loophole

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 40 – "Loophole"

Edward Cullen POV

Jasper's words were still ringing in my head, but I couldn't concentrate on them. It was like a useless noise in the back of my head. I knew he had made a valid point when we had our talk during lunch, but with my hands roaming the body of Bella, I just couldn't find it in me to care. What the hell did Jasper's words matter when Bella was shuddering beneath my touch? Practically shaking while I kissed her and touched her. Shaking, shuddering, crying... wait, *what* ?

I pulled back so I could see her face. My hands were under her shirt – but in safe territory. I was only touching her waist. Tears were streaming down her face, her body practically convulsing as she shuddered. *What the hell is going on ?* Was she having some kind of episode or something?

I removed my hands from her waist and put them on either side of her face so I could force her to look at me.

"Sparrow, hey... what's going on? What's wrong?" I asked softly, stroking her cheeks with my thumbs. I fucking hated to see her cry. I hated to see her vulnerable, because I knew she was better than that. She was fucking strong.

"I... I can't... I can't do this," she whispered, sounding so ashamed.
"Not now... not here."

"Why?"

She gave me a tired look and sigh. "This is where you bring all the other girls. I don't want to be like them. I'm not gonna get down on my knees for you in here, because... well, I'm not even physically capable of doing that."

I frowned as I studied her face. There was something she wasn't telling me.

"Cut the crap, Sparrow. Tell me the truth. What. Is. Wrong?"

I let my hands leave her face, stroking her arms on their way back down to her waist. She fisted my shirt in her hands and stared into my chest as she replied.

"You grabbed me," she whispered, almost too quietly for me to hear. "You grabbed me, and I thought it was my mom... the entire day I've been waiting for something to happen... for her to come back. For her to find me. In Port Angeles I was safe. She didn't know I was there, but she knows Forks. She may very well know I'm here now... she can come back... and... I thought she had... but it was you and... I'm scared." She buried her face in my chest, and I wrapped my arms around her tightly.

"You have no fucking reason to be scared," I assured her. "She will never get close to you again. I fucking promise you. You're safe."

"You can't just grab me like that," she continued, her voice still small and broken. "You can't just jump out of nowhere, surprising me like that. Don't scare me like that again. Ever."

My heart fucking broke. How the hell could I have been that stupid? Why didn't I fucking think first? It should been obvious that you don't just jump out and grab a girl, pulling her into a dark closet, when said

girl has just been through the worst thing possible. When she's already afraid, looking over her damn shoulder all the time because she's afraid of the boogeyman coming back to haunt her.

"Fuck, Bella, I'm sorry. I didn't think. I just... I didn't think," I said, shaking my head slowly, pulling her impossibly closer and pressing my lips to her hair. "I would never hurt you. You know that, right?"

"Not intentionally, maybe," she mumbled into my chest. She was still shaking.

"You want to get out of here?" I asked quietly. She shook her head no, and I smiled. "Me neither."

"Can we stay like this forever? She would never come looking for me in here," she mumbled.

"Whatever you want, Bella, whatever you fucking want," I replied, kissing her hair again.

"And another thing," she began, pulling her head back and looking up at me. "Please, don't call me that." I looked at her confused, until I realized that I had called her Bella again. *Twice*. I chuckled and kissed her forehead. She was so fucking adorable. I leaned my head so my mouth was by her ear.

"Sparrow," I breathed, feeling her shudder in my arms. This time, it was a good shudder. Who knew such a simple word would come to mean so fucking much to her? Although, I guess it meant something to me too. Sparrow was more than just a nickname. It showed how far we had come since the accident.

I pressed my lips to the skin right below her ear, and she sighed in contentment.

The bell rang again, signaling that we had officially missed a class. We didn't move.

"Will your parents be mad at you for skipping class?" she asked.

I shook my head.

"No, they're already mad at me for so much other shit, skipping class is the least of my problems," I muttered.

She pulled back, giving me a sad smile as she met my gaze.

"When your dad was in Port Angeles, he said something about you suffering... he said something about a disorder. Was he talking about the post traumatic stress that you told me about that night you stopped me from..." she trailed off, not wanting to finish the question. I cringed at the memory. It fucking pained me to know I had been minutes away from losing her. The only damn person that ever understood me, and I almost lost her. If I had been only a few minutes too late, all could have been fucking lost. I smiled crookedly, stroking away a strand from her hair from her face and tucking it gingerly behind her ear.

"He thinks I'm suffering from all kinds of things," I said with a deep sigh. "But it wasn't the PTSD he was talking about. I'm pretty sure he was talking about my blackouts."

"You've had them before?"

I nodded.

"Are they dangerous?"

I shrugged.

"As far as I can remember, this is the only time I truly hurt myself during one... I didn't even know I was having them until he pointed it out to me the other day. I think he's known for a while, he asked me if they were becoming more frequent," I muttered, rolling my eyes as I continued with a snort. "Great fucking dad, huh? Letting me fucking suffer without telling me I was. Who the fuck does that? He's a

doctor for crying out loud. But instead of telling me that something was wrong with me, he just kept quiet and let me suffer. Fucking sadist."

"How long have you been having them?"

I shrugged again. I didn't fucking know. How the hell do you remember something you can't remember? I hated not knowing, and I could tell by the look in her eyes that she didn't like it either.

"And... you say you weren't even aware of having them until he told you a few days ago?" she asked, and I nodded, wondering where she was going with all this. "You think that maybe he's just... making it up so you'll get paranoid and worried, to make you accept the help he's offering? So you can get help with the PTSD instead?"

Her words made some weird sense, but at the same time I didn't want to believe them. Was my dad seriously trying to trick me into therapy by making me think I was more insane than I already was? Who the fuck does that?

She stroked my cheek, and I felt myself relax. "Or maybe I'm the paranoid one, because my parents are the ones who suck," she said with a sad smile. I chuckled lightly, leaning into her touch. "Maybe we could do some research. There are plenty of good medical books in the library. Maybe we can check it out ourselves, to see if your dad is full of crap or not before jumping to conclusions."

"Sounds good to me," I agreed.

I took a step back. She gripped the shelf next to her instead of me as I bent down to retrieve her crutches. I handed them to her, and she gave me a small smile in response.

"I can't wait to get rid of these things," she said. "My arms are killing me."

"You want me to carry you?" I asked, quirked an eyebrow.

"You would like that, wouldn't you?" she teased, rolling her eyes.

I took a step close to her, finding pleasure in the way her breath hitched as my face came closer to hers.

"Oh yes, I would," I said, chastely kissing her lips before taking a step back, giving her some space. I turned towards the door. I was just about to open it when her crutch clattered to the ground again, and her hand flew out to grab my wrist.

"Wait!"

"What?"

"Maybe we shouldn't leave together," she said quietly, avoiding my gaze. "Maybe we should, you know... maybe you should go first, and I'll follow in a few minutes or something?"

I frowned at her words. "Why? You don't want people to see us together or something?"

She smiled humorlessly, letting go of my wrist. "I don't want people to make assumptions."

"Who the fuck cares what they assume?" I almost snapped.

"Please, Edward. Just this once," she pleaded.

I inhaled deeply in frustration and breathed out heavily through my nose.

"Fine," I agreed. "But just this once." I gave her a pointed glance before picking up her crutch and handing it to her again. I resisted the urge to kiss her again too.

I opened the door and peeked out, luckily the halls were empty again, and we could escape together without having anyone seeing us. She kept her distance when we reached the library. There were a few students there, but not as many as she had probably feared.

She seemed to know her way around, because she knew exactly where the medical books were. I had no fucking idea what we were even looking for, and since it was pretty clear that she did – and that she was uncomfortable having me around in public – I decided to take a stroll around on my own.

Yes, I had been in the fucking library before, but I had never really checked it out. What was there to check out, anyway? Dusty, old books? Wow, interesting. Almost as interesting as when I got a BJ from some freshmen in one of the aisles with books that nobody ever read. Like ancient shit about myths and legends and...

I stopped.

Legends .

I made my way back to the ancient shit and let eyes wander over the shelves with books. It didn't take long for me to find what I was looking for.

" Quilute Legends – a Piece of History."

I grabbed the book from the shelf and quickly made my way back to Sparrow. From the looks of it, she'd had some luck in the books department too. She had already found four books that she was trying to balance with one hand as she studied herself on her crutch with the other. I grabbed them from her, and she gave me a timid smile.

"Where were you?" she asked, glancing at me before continuing her search.

"I found a book," I replied.

"Yeah? Where?"

"In the ancient shit section."

"What? You found a medical book there?"

I shook my head.

"Quileute legends," I replied. Her hand, that had been moving to grab a book from the shelf, froze in the air, before she slowly turned to me.

"Why would you be looking for books about... *that*?" she asked, sounding cautious.

"Maybe we could find a loophole or something," I said, shrugging. "Couldn't hurt to look into what the hell that Black Swan crap is all about, right?"

"A loophole... a loophole for *what* exactly?" Her voice was tense. She avoided looking at me as she pursed her lips, and I wondered what she was thinking.

"A loophole for anything. A loophole as to why you're not the Black Swan or whatever. Maybe we can find something in this that proves to everyone that you're not the one they're looking for, and your mom will leave you alone," I said.

"You have no idea who you're dealing with, Edward," she said angrily. "You really think these people don't know their own legends? They're the ones that created them for crying out loud! They live and breathe their stupid stories, so of course they know them inside and out. And no freaking book will save me from that."

"But... we can at least look. Where's the harm in that?" I asked.

"The harm in that is getting my hopes up for something I already know won't work out," she replied curtly. She sighed and pulled out another book from the shelf, putting it on top of the others in my arms. She grabbed her crutch that she had leaned against the shelves and steadied herself. "We're done here."

"I'll meet you by your locker?" For some reason it came out as a question, and she barely even nodded at me before she wobbled off.

I didn't fucking understand her. Why was she so opposed to finding out more about the legends? Did she even know what the Black Swan was about, or did she just assume she fit the criteria because the crazy people told her so? To me, it didn't even matter if the book spelled out that Isabella Swan was the Black Swan. There were hundreds, or probably even thousands, of Isabella Swans out there. So what exactly did the legends say that decided that it was *my* girl that they were looking for?

The librarian looked confused when I put the pile of books on the counter. I left the library and made my way to Sparrow's locker. She was already there waiting, but she was not alone.

Of course not.

Jasper quirked an eyebrow at me as I neared them. Sparrow threw a glance at me over her shoulder before turning back to him. I felt a flash of something highly uncomfortable flaring in my gut, but I tried to squish it down and pretend that it wasn't there. Even though it was.

It really fucking was.

"... to ask them." I only heard the end of Sparrow's sentence, and when I got to them, I narrowed my eyes at Jasper. I remembered our conversation during lunch, so having him talk to her now was a little unnerving.

"Yeah, I think you should," he agreed. "I mean, they should appreciate the help, right?"

"What are you guys talking about?" I asked.

"Jasper just asked if I wanted to ride to school with him from now on, since we're neighbors and all," Bella replied, looking at me. "So the reverend or his wife won't have to."

"That's... nice," I said, forcing a smile as I clenched my teeth. *What the fuck is he doing ?*

"We're all *friends* here. Right, Eddie?" he said, smirking at me.

"Fuck you, Jazz," I muttered.

"Aren't you a ray of sunshine," he said sarcastically. "Anyway, I'll see you two later."

As he walked passed me, he smirked and gave me a pat on the back. *What the fuck was that for ?*

I turned to Sparrow. "So what did he want?" I asked, my voice harsher than intended. She noticed my tone and raised an eyebrow at me before turning to her locker.

"I told you," she replied, sounding frustrated. "And what is up with you? You're being weird."

"I just don't understand why he would offer, that's all," I replied, again harder and colder than intended. She turned her body to me and looked me dead in the eyes.

"He's your friend, and if you don't want me to ride with him, then I'll tell him so. If that makes you uncomfortable or-"

"It doesn't make me uncomfortable!" I cut her off with a hiss. "I just don't understand why you have to ride with *him* ."

The corner of her mouth twitched, and she had to bite her lip to keep from smiling. The sight annoyed me. What the fuck was she smiling about now?

"Please, tell me this isn't about what we already covered in the closet," she said, raising an eyebrow.

"I can fucking drive you," I muttered, ignoring her comment, and her smile faded.

"Can you?" she asked softly. Even though she was just making a point, it felt like she fucking kicked me in the nuts with that comment. I couldn't fucking drive her. I knew that. But that didn't mean I didn't want to. I did. I wanted to do shit for her. She smiled sadly and turned back to her locker. "Didn't think so."

"You're being a real bitch, you know that?" I asked in annoyance.

"And you're being a douche. What's your point?" she muttered without turning around.

"Fuck you!" I snapped and started walking away from her.

"Edward, c'mon!" she sighed, but I ignored her.

Why the fuck did she have to throw that in my fucking face? Nobody understood my situation, or my aversion to cars, better than she did. So why the hell would she use it against me like that?

Maybe, just maybe, she's trying to help you.

Yeah, right. Helping me how? By pointing out everything that was wrong with me? My father was doing a mighty fine job with that himself, thank you very much.

I passed my locker and grabbed my stuff before heading to the parking lot. I could wait for Emmett in his car. Luckily for me, he hadn't locked it today, and as I got in, I thought back to the conversation I had with Jasper at lunch. I gritted my teeth from the mere memory of it...

Jasper looked furious, and when he told me to join him behind the gym, I knew that this was not the time to make gay jokes. I followed a few steps behind, and when we were out of sight from the rest of the school, he pushed me against the wall. Hard .

"Are you fucking insane?" he said through clenched teeth. "You violate her... then you say you like her? You make me drive you to

Port fucking Angeles just so you can violate her and crush her! Was that your plan all along? To destroy her? I find it so funny that you actually looked offended when she denied so profusely that anything was going on between you two. You looked disappointed. Or like the time we picked her up. You were so gentle with her, so caring. I've never seen you look at a girl like that before... Hell, I've never seen you look at anyone like that before. So was that all for show? Damnit, Edward. Maybe you should win an Academy Award for the shit you just pulled."

"What are you talking about?" I managed to croak out before he pushed me again. I hit the wall so hard I almost got the wind knocked out of me. He took a few steps back, and he was fucking seething. He glared at me like I had just killed someone or some shit. He crossed his arms over his chest, his body rigid as he started pacing. I had never seen him like this before.

"I'm talking about Bella. What the fuck did you think I was talking about?" he snapped. "She's my new next door neighbor you know. She lives with the Webers now. And she told me what the fuck you did."

"I already told you what the fuck I did," I retorted, rubbing the spot on my chest that he had hit. He glared at me, and I glared right back.

After the incident with Bella at Kate's house, I had gone back to the couch. I had sat there, listening to her sobs until they quieted down. When they had been completely replaced by her soft breathing of her sleep. I quietly left the apartment and called Jasper. It had been sometime after midnight, but the bastard drove all the way to Port Angeles to pick my sorry ass up anyway. And I told him everything.

Well, not everything.

I told him what I did. How I had basically attacked her, and how I left her lying there, crying all alone. How I felt like shit for doing it. I left out the part where I kind of admitted to her that I had feelings for her, but apparently she had filled in that part for him.

"What did she say?" I asked with a subdued tone.

"She pretty much told me how you told her you liked her after you had already violated her. And how she told you that she wasn't falling for it. At least the chick ain't stupid," he muttered, and he was quite for a moment before he continued. "But you know what the real kicker is? The fact that she is stupid, because she's so attached to you that she trusts you with her life. She told me she regretted not letting you go further, because maybe you would have stayed if she did. How fucked up is that? I don't know how the hell you managed to screw with her brain so badly that she actually believed you, but this shit has got to stop!"

I put all the force I had behind my glare as I stared at him.

"I'm not screwing with her," I growled.

"Your track record with the ladies speaks for itself, Ed," he replied solemnly.

I narrowed my eyes at him. "You've seen us together. You've seen how we fucking are together. You know I lo- like her. So what the fuck are you bitching about now? What changed?"

Jasper looked at me, his lips twisting into a dark version of his usual lazy smirk.

"Nothing changed, except that you thought it was a good idea to get intimate with a traumatized girl. You really think it's a good idea trying to get into her pants just because you've realized you have feelings for her? You ever heard of taking it slow?" he asked.

I snorted. "I like the girl, alright? It's fucking natural to be screwing like bunnies if you like someone. You're fucking Alice, aren't you?" I retorted.

"Oh, you're so fucking blind," he sighed. "And stupid. Relationships aren't about screwing like bunnies!"

" We're not in a relationship!" I argued.

He shook his head as he said, "Relationships are about ... just hanging out and enjoying each other's company. And wasn't that exactly what you said you guys were doing? Just enjoying each other's company? And now you have feelings for her... so why the hell wouldn't you be in a relationship?"

" I don't understand why the hell you're so upset," I said with a deep sigh. "This doesn't even concern you."

" Well, when you told me what you did on the ride back, I assumed you were exaggerating, because that's what you do. But when she told me, it was pretty clear that you weren't," he replied. "And I assume you know how I feel about situations where girls are... I don't even need to end that sentence, do I?" He raised an eyebrow at me, almost as he was daring me to disagree.

I didn't.

He was right. I knew. I knew exactly how he felt about girls being taken advantage of, or girls that thought they had to do something to keep the guy around. I knew all about it, because that was exactly how Rosalie lost her virginity. She was practically raped by a guy she thought was the love of her life. It was a sore topic for Jasper, and he rarely talked about it. Rosalie pretended that it never even happened at all. It was easier for all of us if we just pretended.

So when he talked about me like I was no better than the guy who did that to Rose, it was like a kick in the fucking nuts – or like he had ripped them off altogether.

I was not a fucking rapist.

" You take advantage of girls, or at least you used to," he continued with a faraway tone. "But those girls knew exactly what they were doing. You took advantage of them just as they took advantage of you. But this is different. Bella is different. She may know about your

reputation, but I doubt she knows exactly how you work in that department... she doesn't know, and by not knowing you can easily take advantage of her innocence and hurt her. She's been hurt enough."

He shuffled his feet and took a deep calming breath. All the earlier anger and aggravation was gone, and he was back to being Jasper. He looked at me, and he smiled darkly – but not in anger this time.

" You should have heard the rumors," he said. "The things people say about her mom and dad. About her . So damn vicious. Tanya was being extra mean about it, so I told her off. I told her to shut her trap, or I would shut it for her. I told her that if anyone ever said anything about Bella again, or as much as looked at her when she got back, they would have to answer to me... and that she better spread the word." His smirk grew darker. "And I think I succeeded, because nobody has said a word to her today. Everybody left her alone. One less problem for her to think about."

" So, what now? You're taking Emmett's place as her bodyguard or something?" I asked sarcastically. "What happened to being Switzerland?"

He rolled his eyes and sighed.

" I'm Switzerland in the fight between you and Emmett. I've already told you that a thousand times," he said. "This is bigger than just some petty fight between two brothers about who has the most pride. This is about a girl who needs some damn support."

" I thought you agreed with me a few weeks ago that we weren't supposed to get involved," I muttered. "That we should keep our distance and just let her fucking be."

" Yeah, and how did that work out for ya?" he replied smugly.

The driver's door opened, and I jumped in surprise. The sound effectively removed me from the memory of the conversation.

Emmett got in and gave me a curious look.

"Jumpy," he noted as he started the car. "What are those?" He nodded towards the books in my lap as he pulled out from the parking space.

"They're called books, Emmett. You read them," I replied sarcastically.

"Wow? You can read? No shit." He laughed.

"Har har, very funny, dickface," I muttered.

We stopped by the store first to pick up a few things, and when we were back on the road, I realized he wasn't driving us home.

"Where're we going?" I asked.

"Jasper's," he replied like it was the most obvious thing in the world. "We're hanging out, and I just assumed you were in. Or you want me to drop you off at home or something?"

"No, it's cool."

On the drive there, I noticed how careful Emmett was when he drove now. He kept below the speed limit. He made soft turns, and he never just stomped on the breaks as he usually did. Everything he did was smooth and soft. I gave him a weird look, but he didn't notice because he kept a serious eye on the road. I wondered if I was supposed to ask if he was all right or something, because my brother never drove like this.

Had he driven like to school this morning too? I couldn't remember. I guess I just never thought about it. I had been so tired this morning, my mind preoccupied with more important shit – like Bella – and not passing the fuck out because I was sitting in a damn car. The last thing on my mind was *his* driving skills.

When we got to the Jasper's house, I glanced at the Webers' house next door, wondering what Bella was up to. Was she home yet? Was she studying? Was she watching TV? Was she... crying? Did I hurt her? Was she mad at me?

I sighed and looked away as I followed Emmett to the Hales' front door. He rang the doorbell and it didn't take long for Rosalie to open it. She grabbed Emmett's hand and immediately dragged him upstairs. I didn't comment on them because Rosalie looked like crap, and she never looked like crap unless something was wrong. I knew better than to get in her way then.

I heard that the TV was on in the basement, and I figured Jasper was there. When I reached the bottom of the stairs, I noticed that he wasn't alone. Bella was sitting across from him by the seating area, her casted leg rested on the coffee table between them. They both looked up when the last step creaked under my weight.

"Hey, dude, didn't know you were coming," Jasper said casually.

"Me neither," I replied. "Emmett drove me here." I frowned as I looked at Bella. "I didn't know you'd be here." Hurt flashed across her face, and she immediately looked down at her hands in her lap.

"I can leave," she said with a quiet voice. Jasper glared at me, and I sighed. I didn't fucking want her to leave. I didn't say anything as I walked over to the couch she was sitting on and sat down next to her.

"You're not leaving," I replied, putting my feet on the table and crossing them by the ankles. "I'm sure this couch is big enough for the both of us."

"I'm gonna go and get us some snacks. I'll be right back," Jasper said, not very subtly as he was obviously going to give us some privacy. I sat still until I heard the basement door shut, and then I turned to her.

I didn't even think as I put my hands on either side of her face and leaned in. I pressed my lips to hers, and I didn't force her to make it evolve into something else. I just needed to kiss her.

I leaned back and took her hand in mine, holding it in my lap.

"That's my way of telling you I'm sorry I was a douche," I explained to her.

"Apology accepted," she said, giving me a nod. I quirked an eyebrow at her, and she looked back innocently.

"What? You're not gonna apologize too?" I asked.

"What do I have to apologize for?" she replied, looking at me confused. I opened my mouth to reply, but no damn words came out. What the hell *did* she have to apologize for? She smirked at me. She fucking *smirked* at me. "Thought so," she said.

"You think you're so smart, don't you?" I muttered.

Her smirk faded, and she looked away.

"Can't say that I do," she replied.

I rested my arm on the back of the couch, stroking her neck with my fingers.

"Should we take a look at those books? You have them with you?" she asked quietly, changing the subject. "Maybe we can find out something about your blackouts."

"Yeah, they're in the car. But I'd rather look in that other book," I said, nudging her.

"We've been through this," she said with a deep sigh. "Give it up. Stop being so stubborn."

"You're one to talk," I muttered.

"I'm stubborn because we can actually help yo u. But me? I'm already a lost cause. Why should we waste our time on something I already know won't work out?" she asked.

"C'mon, Sparrow, don't be like that," I sighed, stroking her cheek.

"Be like what? Realistic?"

I groaned. There was no winning with her. I pressed my lips to her hair, before getting up from the couch.

"Where you going now?" she asked.

"Getting the damn books," I said. "Because apparently you want to become a doctor," I added under my breath.

I went back to the car and got the books. When I passed the kitchen on my way back down to the basement, I found Jasper taking his sweet time making us sandwiches. He was going so slow he was practically doing it in reverse. He gave me a lazy smirk, and I scowled at him.

"Have the lovebirds made up?" he chuckled.

"Fuck you," I muttered. "What is she even doing here?"

"Alice asked if she wanted to hang out," Jasper replied with an innocent voice.

"And where *is* Alice?"

"At home," he replied, smiling.

"You're an idiot," I muttered, turning around and heading back to the basement.

"At least I'm not blind!" he called after me, and I rolled my eyes even though he couldn't see me.

Bella hadn't moved from the spot where I'd left her, and I put the books on the table before plopping down next to her. I rested both my arms on the back of the couch as I glanced at her.

She was staring at the pile of books – the one about the legends was on top. Her bottom lip quivered as she stared at it, as if it was insulting her by just being there. By the way she was looking at it, you would have thought that she thought that it was going to catch on fire if she just stared at it long enough.

"It's not gonna bite ya," I told her. She glanced at me, fear evident in her eyes.

"You really want to read it?" she asked in a small voice. "You really want to know exactly how crazy these people are?"

"I want to know what the fuck we're dealing with. I want to know why the fuck they think you're the Black Swan. What it entails and why your mom had to cut you because of it. What it was in the legend that said that it was okay to almost kill your own damn daughter."

"Edward..." she said almost pleadingly.

I reached for the book and put it between us so it was resting on her leg and mine. I smiled reassuringly at her.

"There's no harm in looking, right?" I said, stroking her cheek.

"We're only reading to find out what it's about... right?" she asked.
"No loopholes. Just... facts."

I smiled at her and nodded.

"Just facts."

She took a deep breath and her body tensed, almost as if she was preparing for battle. I opened the book, silently hoping that it would give us something to smile about.

I turned the pages, which had turned yellow with time, until I found what we were looking for. I threw a glance at Bella before reading the first passage out loud.

"The daughter of the Wise One will be the one to form an unbreakable bond between the family of the Swan and the family of the Alpha. The daughter of the Wise One will wear feathers which are not her own. The son of the Alpha will wear black as it is his own," I read, furrowing my eyebrows in confusion. What the hell did that mean?

"The Spirit of the Black Swan cannot rise until a sacrifice has been made. When the Spirit is satisfied, it will grant eternal happiness and health to the family of the Swan and the family of the Alpha. When the families have been united, the Spirit will rise. A baby will be bo-"

I never even got to finish the sentence, because Bella grabbed the book and closed it so fast that the dust that had been covering some of the pages flew up in our faces. Bella threw the book away; it landed on the other couch, bouncing a few times before it hit the floor with a loud thud.

"Please, please, please... please tell me that I did not just read what I think I just read. Do they honestly think I'm going to have a baby with Jacob? Is *that* the Black Swan?" she asked, her voice barely audible, she was speaking so quietly.

"Oh, please," I said, grabbing her chin so she would look at me instead of the book on the floor. "You'll never have his puppies. Don't worry."

She met my gaze.

"I don't want to read anymore. I don't want to read that book ever again," she said. "I don't even understand it... all I understood was baby. Who is the wise one? And why would I be his or her daughter?"

"Yeah, these legends are starting to make less and less sense," I agreed. "But you have nothing to worry about, because they're all bullshit. The La Push morons are just a bunch of crack pipe hippies, making shit up to entertain themselves. Not caring that people get hurt because of it."

I looked her straight in the eyes, hoping that my words would comfort her some, but what left her mouth next proved the opposite.

"Did you find your loophole?" she asked, sounding bitter.

I smiled crookedly and shrugged.

"Depends on if you're the daughter of the Wise One or not. For some reason I don't think either of your parents fit that description. Your mom is batshit crazy, and your dad is an idiot. There is nothing wise about them."

"They haven't always been like this, you know," she mumbled. "They used to be good."

"Yeah? But now they aren't. Who cares about the past? It's what happens now that matters. We can't change the past. The past is fucking irrelevant. *Now* is important."

She sighed, and I let go of her chin, luckily she didn't turn away her gaze.

"Maybe you're the wise one," she said with a sad smile.

"Fuck that, no daughter of mine is ever breeding with a damn dog," I snorted.

She slowly lifted her hands, letting them rest by my neck, and she softly stroked the sides of my neck with her thumbs. It felt good. Her hands felt fucking fantastic, and she wasn't even doing anything. Not really.

"Kiss me," she whispered.

"My pleasure," I replied, closing the distance between us in no time.

A part of me told me that she was just trying to change the subject, but another part of me said, "Screw that." I kissed her as passionately as I dared, but my body kept screaming for more. It didn't take long at all until my dick was straining, almost painfully, against the confines of my jeans. It was fucking embarrassing. No girl had ever made my body react this strongly before.

I *really* tried to keep my hands in places that were totally Disney, but when Bella accidentally moaned into my mouth, it was fucking impossible to think about appropriate places to keep my hands, especially when they were itching to go somewhere a little more south of the border.

The way we were sitting, with her leg still resting on the table, made it impossible for us to go horizontal. Which was probably a good thing. But fuck, we didn't *need* to go horizontal...

"If we fucked against a wall, we wouldn't need to think about your leg." I moaned into her mouth.

She froze instantly, her mouth not responding to my kisses anymore. I slowly pulled back and looked at her, suddenly feeling terrified myself as I realized exactly what words just left my mouth.

"Oh, fuck, Sparrow... I didn't mean... fuck... yeah I meant... but not now!" I spluttered.

I stared at her, anxiously waiting for her response, when I realized she wasn't even looking at me anymore.

"Oh, sweet Lord, I sure hope not. But if you do, please make sure it's your own damn wall."

Now it was my time to freeze. My eyes were still on Bella and I didn't need to turn around to see who had caught us. I took a shaky breath,

and without turning my head, I said as casually as I could, "Ever heard of knocking, Rosalie?"

Decision

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 41 - "Decision"

Isabella Swan POV

I didn't know what compelled me to say it, or how I even dared to put my hands around his neck in such an intimate way without him taking the first step. I tried to tell myself that it was okay, because this was Edward and he had clearly shown that it was okay for us to be... intimate. But I had never taken the initiative before. So when I asked him to kiss me I mostly did it as an experiment. I wanted to know what my boundaries were, was it okay for me to ask for a kiss? Or did he always have to be the one initiating it?

Turns out, it was okay for me to initiate it too, based on how eager he was once we started kissing. He said that my kisses were like a drug to him, and I had come to feel almost the same way. His kisses made me feel things I had never felt before. Yes, it scared the hell out of me because I didn't understand half of it - but it was nice too. I still wasn't sure what exactly we were or what we were doing, but I liked it just the same.

I just didn't expect the kiss to get so... *passionate* .

I didn't want it to get so passionate; I just wanted a simple kiss. I should have known better than to think that anything with Edward could ever be *simple* . I knew what kind of life he had lived, or at

least what type of relationships he had with girls before me. He expected things. Therefore, it shouldn't have surprised me when he got so passionate, gripping my waist under my shirt almost to the point of it being painful so quickly.

He sucked on my bottom lip in a way that made an embarrassing moan escape from me. I didn't understand where the hell that came from, but the noise seemed to urge him on even more. He was excited; he was aroused. I could tell when I "accidentally" glanced at his crotch.

I felt embarrassed for being pleased with the fact that I could get that kind of reaction from him. I wasn't completely worthless. Yes, Edward was a guy with a reputation of sleeping with anything that had a hole for him to stick his penis, but I knew I was different. He found me... attractive. My mom had been wrong; Jacob was not the only guy out there for me. Maybe Edward was too?

Edward's grip tightened again, and I groaned in discomfort. He must have misinterpreted the sound, however, because soon all the wrong words escaped him.

"If we fucked against a wall, we wouldn't need to think about your leg," he said randomly. Or I should say moaned, because all those words came out as a series of strangled moans.

I did not appreciate his words. Not even a little bit. I had made it clear to him that I was not ready for anything of the sort, and he understood. At least I thought he did. Why did he have to blurt those words? They didn't even make any sense. I froze, because there was nothing else I could do, and he pulled back completely to look at me. At least he noticed that I wasn't responding. I was surprised to see that he looked absolutely terrified as he looked back at me.

"Oh, fuck, Sparrow... I didn't mean... fuck... yeah I meant... but not *now* !" he spluttered quickly, sounding so ashamed. As he talked, I looked over his shoulder, finding myself staring right into Rosalie's eyes. When did she get here? How long had she been standing

there? She was looking at us with a mixture of confusion, amusement and annoyance in her eyes, and I wondered if I should say something.

"Oh, sweet lord, I sure hope not. But if you do, please make sure it's your own damn wall." She smirked as she said it, crossing her arms over her chest and looking very pleased with herself. Edward stiffened beside me – and no, not *that* part of him.

"Ever heard of knocking, Rosalie?" he asked, his voice laced with false calm.

"Yes, but I didn't think I needed to when Jasper said that Bella was down here with *you* ," she replied. "But apparently I was wrong. My bad."

"What are you even doing here?" he asked, turning his head to glare at her.

"Excuse me?" she replied, sounding offended. "I *live* here."

Edward rolled his eyes and had yet to remove his hands from my waist. At least he wasn't gripping so tightly anymore. I put my hands on his to remove them from me, and he turned his head to me, giving me a weird look that I couldn't read.

"Anyway, Bella," Rosalie said, looking at me now. "Mrs. Weber came by and wanted you to go home. She said it was important."

"Oh, okay," I said, feeling confused. I grabbed my crutches, smiling at Edward as he helped me lift my leg down from the table without me even having to ask. He smiled timidly in response as he helped me stand up. He stroked my arm, and I looked away before I started walking towards the stairs. I felt Rosalie's eyes on us, and soon she walked up behind me.

"You have some explaining to do, little girl," she said quietly, her voice scarily close to my ear. I turned my head as we reach the top

of the stairs, and she opened the door for us. She smirked as she noticed my terrified expression. "Emmett is going to get a kick out of this."

"Please, don't... don't tell him. Don't tell anyone," I pleaded.

Her smirk faded, and she looked mystified. "You are aware of the fact that it was *Edward Cullen* you were making out with down there, right? You had *Edward Cullen* apologize for making some crude comment about fucking you against a wall," she said, raising her eyebrows. "Why *wouldn't* you want to tell people?"

"Because it's none of their business," I replied quietly.

"So, nobody knows?" she asked, skeptically.

I shrugged. "What's there to know?" I replied weakly.

"Don't play games with me, Swan," she said, rolling her eyes. "You know what I mean."

"Yes, Jasper knows," I admitted with a sigh.

"Figures that bastard wouldn't tell me," she said, sounding annoyed. "Well, you should leave now, and I'm going to have a talk with my brother."

She disappeared into another room, and I walked over to the front door. As soon as I stepped out, the first car I noticed was the last car I wanted to see. I recognized the license plate number; I knew exactly who this car belonged to.

A police cruiser. Dad's police cruiser .

I reluctantly made it over to the front door of my new home, feeling awkward. Was I supposed to knock or walk right in? I lived here now so I shouldn't need to knock. But my nerves got the best of me, and I knocked anyway.

The door opened, and Mrs. Weber gave me a weird look before stepping aside and letting me in.

"Why are you knocking, Bella?" she asked. "You live here now."

"My dad is here," I said, and she nodded.

"Yes, he's in the living room," she replied softly. "He wants to talk to you."

"Is that... you know... allowed?" I asked, and she nodded again.

"It's allowed, but if you don't want to see him, you don't have to. It's completely up to you."

I took a deep breath and pondered her words. Did I want to see him? He turned his back on me at the hospital; I hadn't even spoken to him since. Why *would* I want to see him?

To show him you're not weak. You're not afraid.

I almost wanted to laugh. Those words weren't coming from me. It was like Edward was sitting on my shoulder, whispering in my ear and telling me what to do. It was kind of comforting.

I steadied myself on my crutches, trying to keep my back straight as I made my way into the living room. Dad was sitting in a chair, and when I came in he immediately stood up. He looked at me with a world of unsaid apologies in his eyes. I took a shaky step, slowly turning my head to meet his gaze.

"Hello, Bella," he said, the corner of his mouth lifting into a sad smile. He looked uncertain, and that made me feel a little better. At least he had the decency to be nervous. "How are you?"

I shook my head. I wasn't answering that.

"How's Mom?" I asked instead. I saw him tense where he stood, and I quirked an eyebrow at him.

"She's..." He coughed and looked highly uncomfortable now. "She's still at large."

"Of course she is," I replied dryly. "Cops are blind as bats."

"Now, Bella, I know you are upset, but there's no reason to stoop to that level," he chided.

I snorted quietly, looking at him incredulously. Was he lecturing me about stooping to low levels? This coming from the man who didn't even notice his wife was insane.

"Why are you even here?" I asked with a tired sigh. I just wanted it to be over with already.

"I came here to ask you if you wanted to spend Christmas at home," he replied. "I doubt you would want to spend it with strangers," he trailed off, giving Mrs. Weber an apologetic smile. "No offense, Mrs. Weber."

"None taken, Chief Swan," she replied with a strained smile.

"I know it won't be a normal Christmas, since I'm also still under investigation by the CPS, and your mother won't be there. Still, it's Christmas. So, what do you say, kiddo?" he asked, turning to me again.

There were no words to describe how much I hated my father at that moment. I slowly let go of one of my crutches, leaning it against the nearest side table. Then I, ever so slowly, pulled up the sleeves on my shirt. I don't know what possessed me to do it, but he hadn't seen them since it happened. He had only seen the wounds – not the scars. I had always been so protective of them, careful not to let them show. It had always been clear that he also wanted to pretend they weren't even there. Who was I to deny him his perfect delusions?

I wasn't ashamed of my scars anymore. I was only ashamed of the fact that I had been so weak. If I had been stronger I wouldn't have gotten them in the first place. I should have fought her off. But I didn't.

"This," I said to him, holding out my arms, showing him and Mrs. Weber my scars, "is why I will never set my foot inside *your* house again. Your wife is crazy, and you were too blind to see it. I will forever carry with me what *your* wife did to me."

"Your mother isn't coming back, Bella," he replied cautiously. "She's not allowed to see you."

"Yeah? You think that's gonna stop her?" I asked, snorting.

"Bella, I am your father," he said. I could tell he was getting frustrated. "I haven't done anything to you."

I smiled darkly and picked up my crutch again. "Yes, *Dad* , you haven't done *anything* to me. And that's the whole point. If you take a look back on these past few months... can you honestly say you ever did anything to or for me? You always cared more about Mom. I mean nothing compared to her."

"You know that's not true. You're my daughter. I love you."

"Well, you're *not* my *father* ," I said coldly. I meant it figuratively of course, just like I didn't consider Renée to be my mother anymore, but the reaction I got from him was weird. All the blood drained from his face, and he looked like he had seen a ghost.

"I am," he said, but his voice held no authority. It was almost as he was uncertain himself, which made no sense to me. Why would he be uncertain about being my father?

"Just because it walks like a duck and quacks like a duck, doesn't mean it is a duck," I replied. "Besides, you don't walk like a duck... you only speak like one when you're being cornered."

"What exactly happened that night, Bella?" he asked with a tired sigh.

"You don't know?" I asked skeptically. "Well, Mom decided to play with Jacob and Billy in the middle of the night. They brought me down to the party, and Mom sliced my arms open and drank my blood directly from my veins. That's what happened."

"Billy and... *Jacob* ?" His eyes widened.

"Oh dear God," I complained, rolling my eyes. "I thought somebody would have filled you in on everything by now."

"I suppose the version you told Dr. Jenks didn't cover everything," he replied. "Have you even spoken to the police yet?"

I sighed. Yes, I had spoken to the police, and the doctors, and the CPS, and... a hell of a lot of people. Kate helped me through it all. She sat by my side and talked when I couldn't, when it all became too much. Those four days after I was taken away were a blur, maybe my mind decided to make them a blur because it was easier to handle than reality. To speak openly about what happened with people that believed every word I said was frightening and unnerving. I kept wondering when it would fall down on me, and I would wake up to realize it was all just a dream.

I shook my head.

"I'm not celebrating Christmas with you. I don't care if it's supervised or anything. I'm never gonna spend another holiday with you. Or anything else for that matter," I said quietly, looking down at my feet.

"Bella, be reasonable... don't be a child about this," he pleaded.

I smiled humorlessly and shook my head to myself. He was so blind and stupid. Did he even realize exactly what kind of trauma I had been through? What exactly I had *lived* through? What almost *killed*

me? He didn't understand, because he was blind. He only saw what he wanted to see.

"Have you spoken to Mommy Dearest?" I asked.

He nodded. "I've spent some time in Seattle. She escaped shortly after I left."

"And you saw her... what, daily?" I asked, and he nodded again.

"Wow, and how many times did you call *me* ?" He didn't answer, and I chuckled darkly. "Exactly, and now you want me to spend Christmas with you? What are you trying to prove, *Charlie* ? Are you trying to show the town that you're not a complete fuck-up? That you are the picture perfect dad? That you didn't turn your back on me at the hospital after you found out? That you spent days with your crazy wife instead of with your daughter? What is *wrong* with you?"

"Maybe you should leave now, Chief," Mrs. Weber intervened, putting a hand on my shoulder.

"Yes, you should," I said, walking over to my bedroom.

"Bella, be reasonable," he pleaded, and I scoffed before slamming my door closed behind me.

The next morning, I ate breakfast together with Angela. The reverend had already left for the morning. He seemed thankful that he didn't need to drive me today – he had already made a point of thanking Jasper himself over the phone the night before. Mrs. Weber was also out.

Eating breakfast with Angela was, well, weird. She didn't speak, but she kept glancing at me and opening her mouth as if she was about to say something. But each time, she caught herself and decided to bring her spoon to her mouth instead.

I was almost done with my breakfast when she finally decided to speak.

"Is it true?" she asked.

"Is what true?"

"The thing you said yesterday when your dad was here... did your mother really... drink your blood?" she asked, sounding nervous. She tried to meet my gaze, but as soon as she did she looked back down. I bit my lip and wondered what I was supposed to say. I didn't realize she had been home, but it only made sense. Why wouldn't she have been home? I guess I had been too occupied with the current situation to even consider the fact that people could overhear us. I sighed deeply and nodded.

"Yeah, it's true," I admitted. There was no reason to lie.

She looked up again, this time her eyes wide with shock.

"How... how is that even possible?" she asked.

I shrugged.

"Ask her. She's the crazy one," I replied.

I grabbed my empty mug, wobbling my way to the kitchen sink and put it there along with the other dirty dishes, before making it to my room to grab my book bag.

A few minutes later, there was a knock on the front door. I went to open and found Jasper leaning casually against the wall, smiling at me.

"Ready to go?" he asked, and I nodded. Angela was getting a ride with Ben, so we didn't need to wait for her.

Jasper didn't ask if I needed help to get in the car. All he did was take my crutches and put them in the backseat before getting in

behind the wheel. Not that I had any trouble getting in, I was just surprised he didn't offer me any help. If it had been Emmett – or even Edward – he would have been all over it.

I smiled at the thought. Yes, Edward. He would most certainly have helped me.

"Did Rosalie talk to you yesterday?" I asked, breaking the silence. He chuckled and nodded. "Was she angry? What did you tell her?"

"No, she wasn't angry. She was more surprised than anything else. I don't blame her. It's all very... surprising," he said, smirking a little. "She said she caught you guys making out."

I felt myself blush, and he chuckled quietly when he noticed, but it soon died out along with his smirk.

"She also said Edward made a comment about... well, yeah," he said giving me an awkward glance, and I slumped in my seat.

"Yeah, he did," I admitted. "He keeps pushing it even though I've already told him I won't go *there* with him."

It was weird that I could speak openly about this with Jasper. For some reason I almost felt as if I trusted him now too. Jasper had never played any games; he always spoke his mind and never lied. If he didn't like something, he would say so, just like he had by the fence the other day. I felt myself shrink inside; did he still think what Edward and I was doing was wrong? Was he still opposed to our relationship – if that was what this was?

"What's wrong?" he asked, noticing the change.

"Can I ask you something?" I asked.

"You just did," he replied with a smile. I rolled my eyes at his joke. "But feel free to ask something else too," he added.

"When we spoke the other day, in the back yard, you said that what Edward did was wrong... does that mean you're not really... accepting of whatever the hell it is that he and I are doing?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, sounding puzzled.

"I mean, you said it was wrong. Did you mean that we were wrong? That we shouldn't be together?"

"No, not at all," he protested. "I meant that what he *did* was wrong. He shouldn't be pressuring you about that stuff. He should have pushed you so far to the point where you actually considered giving him what he wanted just because you thought that was the only thing keeping him with you."

"Oh."

He glanced at me quickly. "In all honesty, Bella, I have nothing against you personally, and if you want to pursue a real relationship with the guy, then more power to you. You got him by the balls, so to speak. I've never seen him act like the way he does around you. You own him, and whatever you chose to do, he will be right there with you. He's not leaving your side."

"How can you be so sure?" I asked, feeling doubtful.

He smiled again, looking content. "Because the way he looks at you is the way Emmett looks at my sister, how I look at Alice. There is no faking that. It's love in its purest form."

I looked at him incredulously as the L word left his lips. "Love? Edward doesn't *love* me. He likes me, sure. But love?" I snorted and shook my head.

The whole concept was ridiculous. I could barely entertain and accept the idea of Edward liking me, so to throw love into that equation was just insanity.

"How do you feel about him, if you don't mind me asking," he asked.

I opened my mouth to reply, but no words came out. How *did* I feel about him? I had never even really thought about it like that. I never considered I had feelings too in all of this; I had always been thinking about Edward's point of view and whatever he was thinking or feeling.

"I... I... I don't hate him?" I replied, feeling confused by my own feelings. What *did* I feel?

Jasper laughed and nodded. "Always a start." He chuckled again, shaking his head to himself. "So, does that mean you want a friendship with him, or do you want... more?"

"I don't even know what more would entail for me," I replied honestly. "All I know is that Edward wants more, and I know I'm not the one that can give it to him."

"Why is that?" he asked. "I mean no disrespect, if you don't want to have sex with him that's cool. I'm just wondering why. When Edward told me what he did, I was mad at him for pressuring you because you've been through hell... but now, when you say it like that, it makes me wonder if there's more to it. Is it sex with *him* that you're opposed to or sex all together?"

I wanted to roll my eyes. Sex. It felt like that was what it would always come down to. Sex was all that mattered to people, and if you didn't want to have it you were a freak. I already knew I was a freak, so my issues with sex were only adding to the quota.

"I'm sorry if my questions are making you uncomfortable," he said when I had been quiet for a few moments. "I didn't mean to, I was just... you know, making conversation."

I smiled weakly at him and sighed deeply.

"My mom is crazy, and maybe she's always has been, but I didn't realize that until a few months ago." I sighed; dread washing over me as the words spilled out of my mouth. "During my whole upbringing my mom taught me that sex was bad, and that sex was not for pleasure... at least not for the girl. Sex is for reproduction, and for the man's pleasure. I never questioned it because it made sense... sex *is* for reproduction and only the man needs to get pleased for babies to happen." I shrugged, trying to act casual even though it hurt to admit all this out loud to him.

He was quiet for a moment before replying.

"You really believed her? That sex is... bad? That pleasure isn't for the girl?" he asked, sounding confused and not judging. "I mean, that's ridiculous. Why would you believe something like that? This is the 21st century. Sex is not taboo anymore."

I shrugged again. "She taught me that from a young age... she didn't speak of it every day or anything like that. It wasn't a bigger deal than her teaching me about the importance of brushing your teeth. It was just that, every time the topic of sex ever was brought up, she made sure I knew that sex was not for my pleasure. Even when I wasn't in the conversation, like when she was speaking to a friend or something, she would still say it... so why wouldn't I believe her?" I sighed deeply. "And I can't say that anything has ever told me differently. I mean, Edward used to take random girls into the janitor's closet just so he could get some pleasure. He didn't give a crap about the girl. So, yeah... sex benefits the guy, never the girl."

Jasper was quiet, and I smiled sadly as I looked out the window.

"All parents teach their kids different things and beliefs. This was my mother's," I added.

"So you agree that it is a belief and not the truth?" he asked. I shrugged. "It doesn't sound like you believe it though... you sound skeptical. Maybe you're just looking for an excuse to keep yourself

safe from harm? Because I don't get it. If sex really is just for the guy... then why wouldn't you give it to him?"

"Because I need to be pur-" I cut myself off before I ended the sentence. What was I doing?

I glanced at Jasper with panic-stricken eyes, and he was staring at me too.

"Pure?" he ended it for me. I bit down on my lip, not saying anything. "What does *that* mean?"

There was a knock on my window, and I jumped in surprise. It didn't occur to me until then that we had reached the school already, and were now parked outside, right next to Crowley's big, dark blue van. I turned my head and found Edward looking back at me with a confused expression. He opened the door for me and held out his hand.

I forced a smile at him.

Yes, I had been right. Edward would help me.

I got out of the car, and Jasper followed suit. Edward got the crutches for me from the back, and when I had steadied myself, he leaned in to kiss me. Just as his lips were going to connect with mine, I turned my head away from him. He pulled back, giving me a hurt look, and I looked away again. I couldn't stand the hurt.

"Thanks for the ride, Jasper," I said turning to Jasper. He threw his bag over his shoulder and nodded.

"Anytime, Bella," he said, sounding honest. "And if you don't mind, I would like to continue the conversation sometime... it was interesting."

I smiled and shook my head. "It was not interesting," I argued.

"Yes, it was," Jasper argued back softly with a smirk. "It's always interesting to see how the human mind works. Yours especially." He scanned the parking lot, smiling as he probably spotted Alice. He glanced at me again, his smile genuine. "I'm not judging you or anything. I just find it fascinating what you said because it was so obvious you didn't believe it."

I felt Edward's hand on my lower back, and he took a step closer to me. I kept my eyes on Jasper.

"Why so?" I asked, not liking what he had suggested in the car about me wanting to hide.

"Because you're smarter than that. I'm sure you didn't even believe it when you were growing up. I bet you were always doubtful. But this is maybe the first time you're getting some firsthand experience on the subject, and that scares you, so you decide to hide behind those beliefs to keep from being hurt," he rambled.

I wrinkled my nose to show my displeasure, and he chuckled.

"See, I'm right, aren't I?" he asked. I didn't answer, which he obviously took as a yes. "I'm going to see my lady now. I'll see you two at lunch." He winked at me before walking off, and I followed him with my eyes until Edward couldn't take it anymore and tugged at my arm.

I turned my head to him, and if eyes could pout I was pretty sure his were.

"What did I miss?" he asked quietly.

"Jasper thinks he knows everything," I muttered.

"Tell me about it," he snorted. "The man knows fucking nothing." He pressed his lips to my hair right above my ear.

"Please, remind him of that," I said. "I don't appreciate his insinuations."

"What did he insinuate? You want me to kick his fucking ass for you?" he asked, sounding completely serious. I shook my head. "So what did you guys talk about? Should I be worried?"

I smiled and shook his head.

"I'm fine; he's fine. Everything is fine."

"Good," he said, leaning in again to kiss my lips. But also this time, I turned my head just as he was about to touch mine. He pulled back, frowning deeply and looking frustrated. "All is fucking fine, huh? What the fuck?"

"Edward, not here," I pleaded with him. He took a step away from me, no part of him touching me any longer.

"Not here," he echoed. "So we're still gonna play the hiding game?" he said, sounding mean. "Fuck that."

He stormed off, and I closed my eyes, taking a few calming breaths before opening my eyes and stepping out from the safe spot behind the van. I spotted Jasper and the others as I stepped out into the open. They were looking at me, and Jasper was looking concerned.

I looked down and made my way towards the stairs. I hoped they weren't going to follow me.

They didn't.

For some reason I was disappointed.

First period with Alice was bearable. She didn't ask me any questions about Edward, or anything else for that matter. But I could

tell she was having a hard time keeping silent. I wondered what Jasper had told her and the others. Had he told them everything?

Soon, lunch rolled around, and I was nervous. I hadn't seen Edward since this morning, and I didn't know where his head was at. Was he still angry?

Jasper and Alice met me by my locker. Alice left for the bathroom as Jasper, and I continued toward the cafeteria. I decided to take the moment to ask him.

"Have you told anyone?" I asked quietly. "Have you told Alice?"

He chuckled quietly.

"I haven't told anyone, and I'm pretty sure Rosalie hasn't either. But I'm also pretty sure that Alice already knows something is up. As for Emmett? He thinks Edward was threatening you again this morning. So he's probably still in the dark."

"Have you seen him? Edward, I mean? He got mad at me this morning... haven't seen him since."

He shook his head. "No, haven't seen him," he said, frowning a little. "Why was he mad?"

"Because I didn't let him kiss me," I mumbled. "I told him I didn't want to go public with whatever it is that we have, and he doesn't agree with me..."

"You're afraid of what people will say and think," he noted, not making it a question.

"My life is complicated enough as it is... I don't need the added scrutiny," I muttered.

We got our lunch, and he helped me carry my tray to our table.

Yeah, *our* table.

We sat down by the round table and were soon joined by the others. I was surprised when Rosalie sat down next to me, but I didn't say anything about it. Emmett was sitting next to her, with Jasper next to him. The seat between me and Alice remained vacant. I wondered if that was done on purpose. *Did Alice know?*

I had no appetite. I mainly picked at my food while the others talked about nothing in general. It wasn't until the talking ceased – and not just at our table – that I looked up. Edward stood by the empty chair, looking down at me. His eyes told me he was sorry, but his face did not.

"If you're here to cause more trouble, bro, maybe you should keep on walking," Emmett warned him.

Edward quirked an eyebrow at me, almost looking amused.

"Am I causing trouble, Sparrow?" he asked me. I smiled at the nickname, and that he dared to use it in front of his friends and brother.

"No, I don't think you are," I replied.

"Good." He pulled out the chair and sat down on it. It did not escape my notice that he pushed it a little closer to mine as he sat down. He rested his arm on the back of my chair, still looking at me with those apologetic eyes and cold face. It was such a weird combination.

"We're good," I told him, accepting his unsaid apology.

"Good," he said again, licking his lips and looking at mine. I almost wanted to laugh. Did he really want to kiss me *that* badly? I shook my head at the thought, as I turned my gaze back to my food.

"So, you guys have made peace or something?" Emmett asked, pointing at us with his spork while looking highly confused. A snort-laugh escaped Rosalie, and she covered her mouth up with her napkin.

"Yeah, or something," she mumbled, smiling from behind her napkin.

Edward smiled crookedly at me. "Mind taking a walk with me? Or you wanna stay and finish your lunch?" I shook my head and pushed the tray away.

"I don't mind a walk... or a wobble in my case," I replied.

Edward got up and pulled my chair out for me. I grabbed my crutches and got up. Emmett stared at us as we left, but he was not the only one. The amount of people following us with their eyes on our way out was even worse than when I got back from the hospital after the accident. These people were confused, and I didn't blame them.

We made it out of the room alive, and as we walked down, the people we passed looked at us in fascination. Since we weren't holding hands or anything, and Edward looked unhappy. I bet they assumed we were fighting, and that things soon would turn very ugly.

"I don't know where we can go where people won't spot us." He sighed after a moment.

"I think I know a place... but it does involve stairs," I replied.

"I won't let you fall," he said seriously.

"I know you won't," I said, smiling softly at him. "C'mon, let me show you."

I led him to the second floor and towards the restricted wing. Edward gave me a curious look as I snuck under the restriction tape - which was kind of awkward with my crutches and all. He followed, not saying a word as I led him to the music room. It looked exactly like I had left it all those weeks ago. I hadn't been here since those few days before the accident.

Edward looked around, looking amused.

"The old music room," he said, his voice echoing in the almost empty room. "I haven't been here in years."

I sat down on the bench by the piano. Edward soon joined me. He straddled the bench and looked at me. I turned my head to meet his gaze.

"What did you and Jasper talk about this morning?" he asked. "You seemed upset."

"You."

"Me?"

I nodded.

"What about me?"

"Sex... pressure... relationships..."

He looked confused and aggravated. I put my hand on his cheek and stroked it gently with the back of my hand. He hadn't shaved in a few days. I smiled. I liked the scruff.

"I don't mean to fucking pressure you," he said in his defense. "And that comment I made about fucking you against the wall in the basement was... that was just shit that came out because my brain filter obviously wasn't in effect."

"So you didn't mean them?"

He groaned.

"Of course I fucking meant them. I won't lie. I want to fuck you. But I'm not gonna pressure you about it. I want to do it your way... whatever way that may be. I'm not gonna hurt you, and pressuring you is hurting you, I know that."

I frowned. "Do you? Do you *really*?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that you are pressuring me. Every time you lean in for a kiss and get mad at me for not following through... that's pressure. It's like I have to play it your way, or you'll get angry. And I don't want you to be angry with me."

"Fuck that. You actually want me to apologize for wanting to kiss my fucking *girlfriend* ?"

My eyes widened, and he looked back at me in horror. We stared at each other for what felt like an eternity. Did he just utter *that* word? Did he just utter *that* word in association with me? Did he mean it?

Neither of us dared to say anything. The silence was growing more and more awkward.

We had not been "intimate" for very long – the kissing thing had not been going on for that long. And he was already referring to me as his girlfriend? Wasn't this getting a little too serious too fast?

Yes. Yes, *it was*.

I could not be his girlfriend and be everything that that entailed. Not yet. I was not ready for that role. I was not ready for that kind of responsibility.

"I... I need to go," I said, stumbling to my feet.

"Bella," he pleaded. "Don't... I didn't..."

I inhaled deeply and breathed out slowly before looking down at him.

"I can't be that girl for you, Edward, I just can't," I mumbled, feeling my throat close up and my eyes welling up with tears. "I want everything for you, but I can't give it to you. I'm damaged, and you deserve better than damaged."

"Bella." His face contorted in pain, as if my name alone caused him pain.

I shook my head, but he wasn't having it.

"I'm fucking damaged too! I'm fucking broken. My brain isn't working right and all I fucking do is screw shit up. I'm not fucking perfect, and I don't deserve anything better than damaged. And I know that you are more than what I deserve. But I want you. Only you."

My lip quivered, and I bit down on it. Hard. I hated to hear him sound so desperate. He didn't use the word *need* today; he used the word *want*. There was a big difference, and maybe that was why it was going to be easier for me to let the next words out.

"I'm not going to lie to you, Edward. I think you need help. I think you should talk to your dad and get in contact with a professional. Those blackouts can't be healthy, and you need help with that, along with your PTSD," I said, as gently as I could.

"Are you saying you don't... want me?" he asked, his voice barely audible.

"I can't be your girlfriend, Edward."

"Can't be, or don't want to be?" he asked, sounding so vulnerable that it almost killed me.

I didn't know how to answer that question, and apparently my silence was even worse of an answer for him. He got up on his feet, staring at me with a mixture of anger and pain in his eyes. I hated myself for making him look at me like that. I had promised myself to never see him in pain again, and here I was, making it happen all by myself. This was all on me.

"I guess it's not just guys who play around with other people's fucking feelings, huh?" he spat. "For someone so fucking innocent, you sure know how to crush someone. I fucking admitted to you that

I liked you, and you let me believe you felt the same way. But now you don't. What the fuck changed?"

"I spoke to Jasp-"

"Jasper? *Jasper* ? Again with his shit!" He threw out his arms in a wide gesture, and I took a stumbling step backwards as I was afraid of him hitting me. "This is between you and me, Sparrow, so why the fuck would anything that he says matter to you?"

"If this is all between you and me, then why is it so important to you that you can kiss me in public?" I retorted.

He inhaled deeply, breathing out slowly through his nose. His nostrils flaring in anger; his eyes absolutely livid. There had only been a handful of times that I had been genuinely afraid of Edward. This was one of those times.

"Why? You're asking me fucking *why* ?" He took an angry step towards me, and I took one back. "You're fucking priceless!" He was yelling now, gesturing so wildly with his arms that I was sure he was going to hit me now. I closed my eyes, just waiting for the blow. "I want to fucking do all that shit because I lo-"

"EDWARD!" We snapped our heads in the direction of the voice. I almost wanted to cry in relief when we spotted Jasper. He quickly walked over to us, stepping in between and pushing Edward back.

"Back off, dude, this doesn't concern you," Edward said through clenched teeth. "This is not your business."

"Edward, man," Jasper said slowly, his voice calm. "You do realize you were about to hit her, right?"

Edward looked at Jasper as if he had just grown a second head.

"No, I wasn't," he protested, but then as he met my gaze he realized it was true. His angry mask fell, leaving nothing but pain and

sadness in its wake. "God, Sparrow, I'm sorry... I didn't mean to. You know I would never hurt you!"

"I know," I replied, forcing a smile, but it probably came out as a grimace. "But you need help. Help that I can't give you. And I can't... I can't be what you need me or want me to be before you do."

"Sparrow," he pleaded, but I shook my head. I wanted to give him the world - but I could not give him this. I wasn't ready yet – and I doubted he was either. He may act like he was, but he had so many issues to deal with first.

"I'm not leaving you, Edward," I said, trying to find a way to reassure him. "I'll be with you every step of the way if you want me to. But I can't be *that* person for you."

Jasper had taken a step back, knowing now that Edward wouldn't hurt me. His eyes darted between us as if he was watching a tennis match.

I had a feeling Edward would never get help for all his issues if he wasn't forced to. He needed to be forced the right way by the right person. I had a feeling that I very well could be that person. Maybe my words would be enough for him to finally get better. Even if it hurt us both in the process.

He took a step back, then another.

"I'll be here, I promise," I told him again. "I'm here for you."

He slowly shook his head.

"No. No, you're not."

"Edward, you know me. I just want what's best for you."

"*You're* what's best for me!" he protested loudly, his voice echoing in the room.

"No, not right now I'm not."

He was slowly breaking apart in front of me. Piece by piece he broke. I tried to tell myself that it was for the best, because if he didn't break apart we wouldn't be able to build him back up. We needed to get him better. Right now, all the pieces were glued together in a form that made no sense. We needed to break all those pieces down. Glue him back together the way he was supposed to be.

"Edward, do you care about me?" I asked quietly. He nodded without hesitation. "Would you do anything for me if I asked you to?" Again, a nod without hesitation. "Then please, do this for me. Get help."

His entire demeanor changed. His shoulders slumped and it almost looked like he was going to fall down. The last piece had been taken away. All pieces were around him now.

"I love you," he whispered.

My breath caught in my throat at his words, tears welling up so fast in my eyes that I had to blink to get rid of them. I tried to find the right way to respond, but he never gave me the chance. He was out of the room before I even got the chance to process what had happened. Jasper looked at me, his eyes pained too.

Jasper sighed quietly.

"I told you so."

Faith

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 42 -"Faith"

Edward Cullen

" And how did that make you feel?"

" How the fuck do you think it made me feel? I got pissed off!"

" And were there any grounds to his accusation?"

" What? NO! Of course not! I was fucking upset. Hell, am I the only one gesturing with my arms when I get upset?"

" So you weren't going to hit her?"

" I would never hit her. I would never hurt her... She's too important."

"Edward! Edward! Slow down for crying out loud!"

I tried to ignore the voice, but soon I felt the owner of said voice grabbing my wrist and pulling me back. I stopped and turned to glare. Rosalie wasn't having it. She just glared right back.

"Let me the fuck go," I snarled.

"What happened?" she asked. "And why on earth are you crying?"

"I'm not crying," I argued.

She raised her hand and wiped my cheek, showing me her wet fingertips.

"Really? I guess your eyes are just sweating then," she replied sarcastically.

I rolled my eyes and yanked my wrist back. She sighed as I wiped my cheeks dry from traitorous tears.

"Talk to me, Ed, you know you want to," she said, crossing her arms over her chest. I clenched my jaw and shook my head, turning my gaze away from her. "Talk," she demanded.

"Talking gets me nowhere," I muttered. "Talking leads to shit." She didn't say anything; she just quirked an eyebrow at me, waiting patiently for me to continue. "She fucking turned me down, okay? Are you happy now? Alice is gonna be thrilled. Finally, Edward fucking Cullen gets his fucking heart broken. Oh wait, who even knew the bastard had a heart. HUH!" I said, throwing my arms out in frustration.

"She... *what* ? Bella turned you down?" Rosalie echoed incredulously. "Seriously?"

"The Goose turned me down," I said, closing my eyes and pinching the bridge of my nose. "The fucking *Goose* turned *me* down." Before I knew it my shoulders were fucking shaking, and I felt my cheeks getting wet again. Fuck. What was I? A girl? Since when couldn't I handle a little rejection?

"Oh, honey," Rosalie said surprisingly softly. "What the fuck did the bitch say? You want me to kick her ass? Because I will. I don't care if the girl is a cripple; I can beat her ass down."

I turned my head up, glaring at her as I let my hand fall to my side. I knew that she was just kidding and trying to cheer me up, but I didn't

appreciate it. Threatening to hurt the girl I loved – no matter how much she had hurt me – wouldn't cheer me up. It would only bring me down further.

"You think it's funny, don't you?" I snarled.

"No, I don't," she replied, sounding both honest and tired. "But you must admit that the situation is pretty amazing. You do realize that you, Edward Cullen, are standing here in a parking lot *crying* over some girl."

"She's not just *some* girl." *And I'm not crying* .

Rosalie rolled her eyes and smiled. "Yeah, I figured that when I caught you guys making out, and when I talked to her on our way upstairs."

"You talked to her?" I felt my anger flare.

If Bella turned me down because of something Rosalie had said to her, I swear to God I would... would what? Damn it. Why the fuck did everyone have to keep interfering anyway? First Jasper and now Rosalie. No fucking wonder Bella wanted to keep us low key – if we ever went public then everybody would want to have their say in it, trying to control what we had.

"I just asked her what you guys were doing," Rosalie replied as she inspected her well-manicured fingernails. "She got a little flustered when I asked her why she wasn't bragging about banging you. Why she wasn't telling the world."

"She's not banging me," I muttered.

"Anyway, apparently she doesn't want people to know. And that's all I know. I had to go and beat up my brother for keeping it a secret after that."

I sighed. "Did she tell you why she doesn't want people to know?"

"She said it was because it's none of their business, and I can respect that. I'm just surprised she's the one wanting to hide it, since she's the one who would gain the most by going public with you." She laughed an empty laugh and it was like nails on a chalkboard. "You're ruining your reputation for the girl, and she still turns you down. That girl is a mystery. Maybe she is as insane as people say she is."

"Have you told Emmett?"

"No, I had a feeling it wasn't my place to tell."

With that, I turned around and walked away. Rosalie was not the first person I would go to for a pep-talk. She didn't know how to help or cheer people up. It was as if she couldn't decide which route to take – was she going to tear Bella down just to make me feel better? Or would she focus on what Bella did to me instead. Apparently, she couldn't choose – so she decided to say good things about her at the same time as she tore Bella down. I didn't like it. Though, I did appreciate her not telling Emmett. At least the woman had some integrity.

It didn't matter if Bella had just turned me down – very thoroughly too, I might add – just minutes ago. Hearing people talk shit about her would do me no good. If people put emphasis on her flaws it would only put emphasis on my flaws too.

If I was in love with someone so full of faults, what did that in turn say about me?

I walked all the way home – ignoring the rest of my classes. It didn't even occur to me that I forgot all my shit in my locker until I was basically home already. I was only wearing a button up shirt and tank top underneath, so I was more than freezing when I finally entered the house.

The house was quiet as death, and neither of my parents' cars had been parked out front. So I guessed I was about to have a few hours

to myself.

I ascended the stairs, feeling dread wash over me with each step. It was like a storm was brewing, and it would hit me any second now. I frowned as I reached the third floor and slowly walked towards my room. I pushed my door open and slammed it closed behind me.

And then I fucking crumbled.

Before I knew it I was rocking back and forth like a crazy person; my legs were bent and I was hugging them to me. I rested my forehead against my knees as I rocked – occasionally hitting my back against the door.

I wanted to throw up. Or maybe pass out. Maybe both? Or maybe just pass out.

Waking up covered in vomit would be disgusting.

Darkness and unconsciousness both seemed pretty appealing right about now.

It fucking hurt.

A strangled moan escaped me before I had any chance to stop it. My hands found their way to my hair, and I gripped it so tightly that my head started to hurt too. Although that pain was nothing compared to the ache in my chest. It was as if something was eating me up from the inside. I couldn't even begin to understand how something in my head could give such a strong physical reaction.

Bella hadn't hurt me physically – she had just spoken words. Words that logically only should be affecting my brain – not my chest. But her words fucking hurt more than anything I've ever experienced before. And they were all rushing back to me, assaulting me all over again.

Never letting me forget.

Bella could have fucking stabbed me with a knife, and that probably still would have hurt less than her words did.

I tried to rub my chest with my knuckles, while the other hand still gripped my hair, but it did nothing to soothe the ache. It fucking hurt, and I didn't know what to do to ease it. I could barely fucking breathe.

" You need help. Help that I can't give you. And I can't... I can't be what you need me or want me to be before you do."

I clenched my hand into a fist over my chest, resisting the urge to just hit myself where it hurt the most. *My heart* . I had a fucking heart. Who the fuck knew?

I fucking loved her, and there was no denying it either. I loved Isabella Swan. I couldn't believe I actually told her - especially in front of Jasper of all people.

I told her, and never had I spoken three simpler words that rang more true than those did at that moment. I loved her. Nothing would change that. Not even the way she so thoroughly rejected me by spitting my issues in my face like she did.

How could she use things that I could not control as reasons as to why she wouldn't be with me? I mean, it was almost like me saying that her mother was crazy and that was why I couldn't be with her.

She couldn't help that her mother was crazy any more than I could help that I...

I groaned.

Fuck, she was right.

I was a fucking mess. I could barely ride in a car – let alone drive one – like a normal person. I had blackouts and freak outs and I... I was a fucking mess.

And I *could* change that. All I needed was to say the word and my dad would call up the best shrink he could get a hold of. It didn't matter that I thought she needed help too. She had so many fucked up ideas about love and sex and life; still, she had yet to really talk to someone about *that* night. How the hell would she ever get past it if she didn't talk about it?

I loved her, and I would continue to love her even if she never got help.

She would always be my Sparrow.

" She's a fucking hypocrite. She wants me to get help when she's the one who's fucked up."

" So you don't understand where she is coming from?"

" Of course I fucking understand her. Her mother was crazy. I don't expect butterflies and fucking lollipops. I just expect her to trust me."

" Seems to me that she does trust you, otherwise she wouldn't have told you the truth."

" Truth... what fucking truth?"

" She recognizes the fact that she can't be your girlfriend. And by taking a step back she's allowing you both a chance to breathe and consider where you're going."

" She's a fucking hypocrite."

" I didn't say she was without faults. I just said that she may have helped you both."

" She needs help."

" I don't doubt that for a second."

She was a fucking hypocrite.

Or maybe she was just blind... and broken. She was so fucking blind and broken that she couldn't even see herself anymore. She was so blind she couldn't even see the darkness.

I resented her for it, or maybe I was resenting myself? It wasn't her fault that she was this way, but it was her fault that she *kept* being this way. She refused help. She wouldn't even acknowledge that she had a problem.

A huge fucking problem.

And I did too.

I remembered a cheesy-ass movie I watched with my family once. There was some woman in it, saying that if you truly loved someone you would let them go. Because if it's meant to be, she'll come back... if not, well, then it wasn't. Or whatever. Some shit like that. And if that was true, did it mean I had to let Sparrow go? Let her spread her wings and fly so to speak? If she really loved me, and if it was meant to be, she would fly back to me?

I didn't believe in fate or destiny. I didn't believe in shit like soul mates and people that were "meant to be." I only believed in what I was feeling, and what I was feeling right now was love. Love for her, and I didn't fucking want to let her go.

But what was the point in fighting for someone who didn't love you back?

" Tell me about how you act towards girls."

" What do you mean?"

" I mean, are you very physical or are you more verbal? Do you like being intimate?"

" I'm a guy, of course I like being... intimate."

Dad came into my room later that afternoon. I was sitting on my couch, staring out the window as if I was catatonic or some shit. I didn't even realize I had sat like that for almost four hours, until he cleared his throat and I glanced at my alarm clock.

Time sure does fly when you're feeling sorry for yourself.

"Mind explaining why your school called today, saying you skipped a bunch of classes?" he asked with his serious father-voice. I sighed and shrugged, looking back out the window.

"I wasn't feeling it," I mumbled.

"Wasn't feeling what, Edward? You weren't feeling like going to class? Well, I don't feel like going to work every day, but I have to because it's my job. And going to school and attending your classes is *your* job," he said, and I couldn't find it in me to even roll my eyes at that statement. "So, is there a real reason why you decided to skip?"

I inhaled deeply, preparing myself to give him an honest answer. But as the air left my lungs, no words came with them. I had to settle with just shaking my head and shrugging. As if that was answer enough.

It wasn't.

Dad sighed deeply, and I could feel his disapproving eyes on me.

"You can't continue like this, son," he said.

"I know," I mumbled.

"So what do you suggest we do?" he asked. I knew that he wasn't really expecting an answer.

I turned my head and met his gaze.

"I need help."

Bella didn't come to school the next day.

I was standing with Emmett, Rose and Alice, watching as Jasper's car pulled up. He parked behind Crowley's van as usual, and when he appeared from behind it, I frowned when I realized he was alone. I figured she maybe had gotten a ride with someone else.

"Hey, sweetie," Alice said, giving Jasper his usual morning kiss. "Where's Bella?"

Jasper's eyes flickered to me before smiling at Alice.

The smile was forced. I wondered if I was the only one who noticed.

"She didn't feel that well," Jasper replied. "Her leg was bothering her, and her doctor thought that it might be best if she spent the day in bed to keep the pressure off."

Why did it sound like he was lying? *Was* he lying? It sounded like to me like he was making it up. But the others just nodded, accepting the explanation without further questions.

If he was lying it was probably because *she* asked him to lie.

I clenched my jaw and stared at the ground as I started walking away.

Fine, be that way.

So much for still being there for me, for still being my friend, even though we couldn't be together. *Wow, I mean really, Bella ?* You can't live up to your promise, and now you're avoiding me because of it.

I snorted quietly to myself as I made my way inside.

If Bella was going to ignore me now, then I could ignore her right back.

Two can play this game .

I turned my head up, glancing at the girls as I passed them. Maybe I would feel better if I just got off. Maybe I was feeling like shit because I hadn't gotten laid in weeks. And why hadn't I gotten laid in weeks? Because Bella was a fucking prude. She was a fucking cockblock with a cast and crutch.

I did some inventory of the girls at our school, trying to decide what skank would get the honor of having my wonderful dick shoved up her pussy today.

Lauren? No, too blonde. Tanya? No. *Just no* . Irina? Yeah, maybe. Irina had dyed her hair brown. She had also cut it short and her eyes were blue, not brown...

What the fuck does it matter if her eyes are blue? You're not gonna fuck her eyes!

Bella's eyes are brown.

I groaned inwardly at myself.

Fuck my heart.

" Have you always used sex as a way to escape your problems?"

" I never used to have any problems."

" I'll take that as a yes."

Bella was a stubborn bitch, and some of her stubbornness must have rubbed off on me because I was feeling pretty damn stubborn right now. I wanted nothing more than to grab Jasper, throw him

against a wall and demand him to tell me the real reason she wasn't at school. But I didn't. I managed to keep my feelings in check.

I didn't throw him against a wall; I barely even spoke to the guy, let alone asked him about Bella. He gave me a few weird glances during lunch, but he never said anything. I silently wondered if he was feeling good about himself. Did shit turn out to his liking? I mean, how different would Bella's and my conversation have gone if he hadn't interrupted us? He had no business being there, yet he had been. Screwing shit up and making her afraid of me.

Like when he mentioned how close I was to hitting her, even though that wasn't the case at all.

I never thought I would resent Jasper.

But I did now.

Shit would have gone completely different if he hadn't been there to affect her decisions. It was pretty clear that he had some kind of influence on her. I mean, he must have, right? Considering how much she seemed to trust him now, speaking to him about stuff she barely spoke to me about.

How did that even happen?

Hell, if I know.

School ended. Thankfully.

I grabbed my stuff from my locker before meeting up with Emmett. We walked in silence to the car, and I was surprised he hadn't asked me once about Bella. He hadn't even asked me why I wanted to take a walk with her. He didn't ask or say anything.

I wondered if Rosalie had filled him in on what she knew now, even though she said she wouldn't. Or maybe Emmett simply didn't care. Maybe he was over the whole bodyguard bit.

I glanced at him, snorting and shaking my head.

Who was I kidding? That was Emmett in a nutshell. He was a damn bodyguard. Protecting people with his scary fucking attitude.

We got in the car, still not speaking, and drove off.

I glanced at the speedometer, noting that we were going way too slow, and he was keeping his hands glued to the ten-and-two position on the wheel.

"Why the fuck do you drive like an old man for?" I blurted.

Emmett jumped at my sudden question but collected himself quickly.

"Shit, dude," he yelled. "You can't be quiet all day and then scare the crap out of me like that."

"Well, sorry," I said, rolling my eyes. "But would you mind answering the damn question?"

He sighed deeply, glancing at me, before focusing his eyes on the road again.

"Because you hate cars. You hate riding in them. You can't even drive them. I figured I would try to make shit easier for you by not driving like a mad man. I was hoping you would stop killing the upholstery if I did." He glanced at my hands and rolled his eyes. "But I guess that was a wasted effort."

I looked down at my hands to see what he was referring too. I almost groaned when I realized I was holding on and digging my fingers into the seat so tightly my knuckles were turning white. How could I not notice I was doing it?

I tried to let go, flexing my fingers, but I soon found myself gripping the seat again. But not as tightly this time. I sighed and tried to relax, another wasted effort considering I was sitting in a moving vehicle. I couldn't relax.

Emmett made a left turn, and I resisted the urge to tell him to just turn around and drive back. This was starting to feel like such a bad idea. The car soon came to a stop, and he glanced at me.

"So, you want me to pick you up later or...?" he asked, trailing off.

"I'll call you when I'm done," I replied as I got out of the car.

"Good luck," he said, giving me an awkward smile and wave. I rolled my eyes before flipping him off. That made him burst into laughter.

I turned towards the building and sighed.

The hospital.

I couldn't seem to get enough of this place.

Dr. Randall asked me about my blackouts. I wanted to tell him to fuck off.

But that wouldn't have been a "productive" way to spend our hour.

At least that was what my dad so nicely pointed out to me after making the appointment for me.

I didn't know what to tell Dr. Randall, so I decided to just shut up. He didn't seem to mind since he proceeded to tell me about the different kinds of blackouts there were instead. I wanted to ignore him and roll my eyes at his little lecture. The whole concept of having blackouts still sounded so insane to me. But the more he talked, the more I found myself listening – even though I pretended I wasn't by looking out the window.

"...is like being unconscious. That's not always the case. Some blackouts are purely moments of memory loss. You are still yourself, acting like yourself, but when it's all over you have just forgotten about it. They are pretty much no different than suffering from

memory loss due to alcohol consumption. But also, they can be moments when you act out in fits of rage for example, and act completely out of hand, only to have your brain block it all out when it's all over," he explained, his voice calm.

"There are several reasons why your brain would decide to shut some memories out. Some may have been too traumatic for your brain to process, but some may also be just random. It can be genetic depending on the type of blackouts you're suffering from. But it's more likely that you've suffered from some kind of trauma to the head, which has caused these to occur. You may always have suffered from mild blackouts without knowing it before the added trauma made them worse. Drugs and alcohol can worsen the condition, of course, and there is no known way or cure to permanently get rid of the disorder."

I turned around, giving him a skeptical look. It all sounded like bullshit to me.

"So, if I'm suffering from that shit, why should I even care about it if I can't do shit about it?" I asked.

"Studies have shown that meditation *can* help, as well as exercises for the mind. Your father tells me you used to be into music. What changed?" he asked, letting his hand rest on the notepad in his lap.

"I woke up one morning, and I just wasn't anymore," I replied, turning back to the window.

"Do you remember how the music made you feel?"

"Free," I replied without even needing to think. "Music was liberating. I could play piano for hours. Guitar too. I completely lost myself in my music. Hours could pass, and it would feel like minutes."

"Would you say it made you enter a trancelike state?" he prodded.

I snorted and shrugged.

"Are you saying I blacked out when I played too?" I asked after a moment.

"Do you remember any time except for when you played music that you lost track of time?" he asked, ignoring my question.

"Are you asking me if I can remember forgetting shit?" He chuckled lightly, and I rolled my eyes. "No, I don't," I replied with a sigh.

In the reflection in the window, I could see him jot something down on his notepad.

"How about now? Since you've stopped with your music."

I shrugged again. "I can only think of the time I beat up my car... I don't know..."

He made another note and glanced at the clock.

Our time was up.

I called Emmett, and he came to pick me up. He asked me how it went, and I just shrugged. What was I even supposed to respond to that? I listened to a dude talk shit for an hour. How is that either good or bad? It was just another hour of my life that I would never get back.

We passed the school on our way back home, and my eyes widened when I spotted a very familiar face.

"STOP THE FUCKING CAR!" I yelled. Emmett jumped, almost swerving into the other lane, before getting his shit together and pulling up to the curb instead.

"What the hell, dude?" he complained, turning to me, but I wasn't listening. I was already out of the door, stalking up to the fucker who was hanging out by the entrance to the school's parking lot.

He must have heard me approach, because he turned around. Fear flickering past his face before it was replaced by a smug-as-shit smirk.

"Edward Cullen, long time no see," Jacob said, crossing his arms over his chest, leaning back against his crappy motorcycle as I reached him.

"What the fuck are you doing here?" I asked, my hands clenching into fists at my sides.

"Ah, you know, just checking out the neighborhood," he replied with a lazy shrug.

"Checking out the neighborhood, yeah right." I snorted. "You're gonna leave my girl alone. You got it, mutt?" I said, cutting right to the chase. He narrowed his eyes as he pushed himself away from his bike. His hands were clenched into fists at his sides now too.

"Your girl? *Your* girl? Bella is not *yours* . Just because you ran her over doesn't make her yours. What kind of delusional world are you living in? Some kind of 'you break it, you buy it' kind of place?" he spat.

"If that was the case, then you would already own her, since you were the one who fucking broke her in the first place!" I spat back. He opened his mouth to reply, but no words came out. I chuckled darkly at him. "Hit a nerve, did I?" I mocked.

He responded by raising his fist and pulling it back. He was too slow though, because I ducked and punched him in the gut instead before running straight into him, pushing him against his bike. It toppled over with us, and Jacob did his best to block my advances as I punched him in the face.

"Edward! What the fuck are you doing!" *Damn Emmett.*

He tried to pull me off Jacob, but it was as if my fists couldn't get enough of punching that idiot in the face. How dare he show his disgusting face in my town? Wasn't the reservation good enough for him anymore?

"STOP! Bro, calm the fuck down!" Emmett yelled, effectively pulling me off Jacob.

"He deserved it!" I spat, tasting blood in my mouth.

"I'm sure he did," Emmett replied, pulling me away. "But I have no idea who this dude is."

I glared at Jacob, who was massaging his jaw. He didn't look nearly as beaten up as I would have liked. Did I even hit him at all? Yeah, his nose was bloody, but it didn't look broken.

Damnit, I should have broken his jaw.

"She'll never be yours," Jacob muttered. "You just want her because you know she's meant to be with someone else. Want what you can't have. The story of an asshole."

"If you even come close to her I swear I'll snap your fucking neck," I threatened, trying to get to him again, but I was held back by Emmett.

"Like she would even want you. My Bella has better taste than that," he said, glaring at me as he pulled his bike up.

"Bella?" Emmett echoed, and I could sense his confusion – or maybe it was shock.

"Yeah, Bella Swan," Jacob said. "Ever heard of her? You might want to remind your friend here that she's mine. She was mine even before I was born. We're meant to be together. With me, it would be as easy as breathing for her. Unlike with this shithole." He nodded

towards me. "She would have to duck punches on a daily basis. Always living in fear of when he would snap."

"Hey, who the fuck are you to talk about my brother like that?" Emmett snapped, letting go of me as he stepped up in front of me instead.

"Your brother? He's your *brother* ? Oh sweet Jesus, I feel sorry for you. I really do," Jacob said, putting a hand to his chest and giving Emmett a very condescending and pitiful look.

"Get your disgusting face out of here before I *rip it* off," Emmett threatened, taking a step closer to Jacob. I smirked at how Jacob couldn't hide his fear any longer as he quickly climbed on his bike.

He could talk the talk, but he couldn't walk the walk.

Coward.

"You're fucking crazy. You both are," he sputtered, before turning the engine and driving off.

We stood there, looking at him go. I wasn't going to move until he was completely out of sight.

"You beat that sorry shit up... for *Bella* ," Emmett concluded after a moment. I turned my head to look at him, but he was still looking down the road.

I didn't reply.

"Shit, you got it bad for her, don't you?" he asked then.

I smiled sadly to myself and nodded.

"Yeah, I do."

"When the fuck did that happen?"

"I brought her a pen."

"What?"

I chuckled. "Come on, brother, let's get out of here."

It was almost eight pm when there was a knock on my door. Dad entered without waiting for me to tell him he could. I wanted to bitch at him for it, but something in his eyes made the comment stuck in my throat.

"It's Bella," was all he said.

I felt my stomach drop and the blood drain from my face.

"Wh-what about Bella?" I stuttered. "She okay?"

He frowned.

What the fuck was he frowning for?

"Would you mind very much if I drove you to see her, right now?" he asked hesitantly.

"What? Why? What is going on?" I asked, rising from the bed. I was seriously not appreciating the look on his face or the tone of his voice.

"Mrs. Weber said she is... well, she's asking for you," he explained. "I think it would be beneficial for her if she got what she's asking for right now."

"What *the fuck* happened?" I asked, my voice tight.

I swear to God, if the asshole Black got his hands on her...

Dad didn't answer me, instead he just nodded toward the door before leaving. I quickly grabbed my shit and followed him.

This was not about her leg .

Mrs. Weber pointed me in the direction of Bella's room, and I barely muttered thanks before walking over there. Her bedroom door was slightly ajar, and I gently pushed it open. Bella was lying in bed, shaking like a damn epileptic.

"Sparrow?" I said quietly, moving towards the bed. "You okay?"

She sniffled and slowly sat up in the bed. Her eyes were bloodshot, and her hair was a mess. It looked like she had been crying for hours.

"I-I-I'm sorry," she whispered. Her voice fucking broke me. I quickly made it over to the bed, sitting down so I could wrap my arms around her and hold her to me. I stroked her back and kissed her head, doing the little I could to soothe her.

"It's okay," I whispered back. "It's fucking alright."

"Don't... don't turn away from me, please," she whispered into my shirt. "Don't leave me. I need you. Don't shut me out. I need you too much. I c-can't do this without you." She sniffled. "You can't leave me, Edward. I'm sorry that I can't be what you need me to be, but you can't... you can't leave me. Not again."

"I'm here, don't worry... I'm always here for you, Sparrow," I reassured her softly, rocking her gently back and forth. Her shaking and sobbing subsided some, and was soon replaced by the occasional sniffle. She was still distraught though. "What happened?" I asked quietly.

I pulled back so I could put my hands on either side of her face. I needed to see her eyes.

"M-my mom happened."

" You say that Bella is important to you. Why?"

" Because she never judged me. Even when I threatened to kill her, and almost made good on my promise, she never judged me. It's like she just... she just fucking gets me."

" Do you treat her differently from all the other girls?"

" Is it wrong that I want to be with her?"

" That's not what I'm asking."

" Yes, I treat her differently. I want to take care of her. She's fucking important."

" How do you show your affection towards her?"

" Kisses... innocent touches. She doesn't want to go further."

" But that's not enough for you, is it?"

" It's hard to stop."

" Have you ever considered that there are other ways to show your affection towards her besides sex?"

" Sex is all I know."

Home

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Beta'ed by : adt216]

Chapter 43 - "Home"

Isabella Swan POV

Thirty hours. Forty hours. Two weeks. A month. Three months? Time had no value anymore. It felt as if I had been awake for years, but it had probably only been a day and a half. I didn't dare to fall asleep because who knew where I would be or what shape I would be in when I woke up?

Who knew if I would be waking up at all?

It had been a little over a day since I last saw or heard from Edward, but it might as well have been a month. I hadn't seen him since he left the music room. I had wanted to go after him, to apologize and make everything all right again, but Jasper had held me back, telling me that Edward needed some space. I may or may not have hit Jasper on his shin with my crutch when he said that. I had been so frustrated with the whole situation that I needed some kind of outlet for it. Jasper had been close, and my crutch was my weapon. He had cursed and glared at me, but he didn't say anything about it. I guess he understood why I did it.

I had tried to call Edward when I got home – he never made it to any of his other classes – but he never picked up. I wondered if he was

ignoring me. As I kept calling him, and my calls remained unanswered I took that as my answer.

Edward wanted nothing more to do with me.

It felt wrong to jump to conclusions like that. Maybe he just needed time to cool off, but if that was the case, then why couldn't he just tell me? I would have given him space. By ignoring me he just made matters worse.

I cursed myself. I hated myself for pushing him away like I had in the music room, but what other choice did I have? He kept pushing for something neither of us was ready for. We would break each other's hearts if we got romantically involved before we had settled our issues. A part of me was afraid that he didn't mean it. His mind wasn't where it was supposed to be. Who knew if he really meant what he said? Maybe his declaration of love and desire to be with me were just a product of his messed up mind, and as soon as he got his stuff figured out he would realize he didn't want anything to do with me. He told me himself that he knew he was messed up and that his mind didn't work right. So what happened the day when it got "fixed?"

He would leave.

Again.

I closed my eyes and hugged my pillow to my chest.

But he said that he loved me .

His soul had been naked; his eyes completely open for me to read when he told me that he loved me. It wasn't a lie. It couldn't have been. No matter how messed up he was, there was no way he couldn't have meant what he said while looking at me like that. He had been completely exposed.

He loved me.

But did I love him?

I had never really considered it. It had always been about Edward and what he was feeling. But what about *my* feelings? Edward wanted me to be his girlfriend – but did *I* want that? Did I want Edward as my boyfriend? I doubted it mattered now. I pushed him too far. He wanted nothing to do with me. I crushed him. He said so himself.

I could hear my cell phone ring in the other room, and soon I heard the familiar steps from the police officer. He pushed open the door and handed me the phone. He smiled at me with a pitiful gaze as I took the phone. I took a deep breath before pressing the button to answer.

"Hello?" My voice cracked on the simple word. It hurt to even say.

I could hear her breathing being mixed with the sound of traffic on the other end.

"Bella? My baby," my mom cooed. I looked up at the officer and he made a gesture that told me to keep talking, to keep her on the line. I needed to have her talk for at least ninety seconds, or else they wouldn't be able to trace the call.

"M-Mom," I stuttered. "Wh-what do you want?"

"We're preparing for the big ceremony. We will come and get you as soon as everything is done. I'm afraid that we will have to do the cleansing ritual, just to make sure. I know about the boy, who visited you at night, and the Black Swan cannot rise unless you're clean, you know that." She sighed deeply. "I can't believe you didn't protect your virtue better. You know how important this is."

I hated her voice. I hated her words. I hated *her* .

I squeezed my eyes shut.

"I got to go now, sweetie," she said. "But don't worry, everything will be alright. You will be pure again and we'll be a family. I forgive you for lying to the doctors and the police. I know you're just afraid of the future... but you don't need to be. Jacob will take good care of you. See you soon, baby."

She hung up and the phone slipped from my hand.

"Was it enough?" I asked quietly.

The officer glanced out the door, asking his partner who sat in the living room with the equipment. He sighed before looking back at me.

"I'm afraid not," he replied. "But we'll get her next time."

Next time. Yeah right.

Mom wasn't stupid. She knew they were trying to trace her calls, and that was why she kept them short. She had kept them short ever since she started calling me yesterday when I got home from school. She had called ten times since then.

Ten times and we still hadn't gotten a fix on her location.

My mom wasn't stupid.

And now it was just a matter of time before she got me.

Mom started calling me an hour after I came home from school the day before. It was always the same thing. She told me about how happy we were going to be, how everything would be all right, and how she had forgiven me for lying. She mentioned Jacob a lot too, telling me how he could take care of me and how wonderful it would be once our families were reunited.

Never once did she mention my father.

It was as if he wasn't included when she mentioned our families.

Mrs. Weber called the police after the first call. They concluded that the call was made from a disposable cell phone. It sounded like something taken straight out of a cop show or something. Didn't criminals use disposable cell phones to keep from being caught? I guess that was what my mother was now. A criminal. If I wasn't so scared I would have rolled my eyes at the whole thing.

When Mom called again, the police decided to set up a trace station - or whatever it was called - in the living room, so they could try to trace the call when she called again. They were sure she would, since she had already called twice. I guess they were right – only one hour later, the third call came in.

There was always at least one cop at the house at all times, and I kept myself wrapped in a blanket in my bed. Mrs. Weber brought me food that I didn't eat, and she called my doctor when she got worried about my health. Kate stopped by once too. My mind was too far gone to register anything she was saying, but I appreciated that she stopped by.

I didn't sleep at all the following night.

When Jasper came by the next morning to pick me up for school Mrs. Weber took him to my room, figuring that I wanted to tell him myself what was going on. He asked me if I wanted him to skip and spend the day with me, because he would if I needed it. I told him no. I didn't want anyone around me right now. Especially not him. Besides, he needed to go to school and see if Edward was there. I needed to know if he was all right or not. I still hadn't heard anything from him at that point.

The day only got worse from there.

Edward broke down yesterday, so I guess today was my turn.

The fifth call came in a little after noon, and I hated the officer for forcing me to answer it. He explained and said that she's more likely to stay on the line if I was the one talking to her. She would have hung up immediately if someone else answered. I hated him for that.

Her voice became more and more sinister with each call; by the seventh call, I was sure she was high. Her promises about a better future were beginning to sound more like threats.

Dr. Jenks told me to try to sleep a little; he even gave me pills that would help me relax. I didn't take them. I was too afraid to sleep. If she was coming for me, I needed to be awake for it.

When the tenth call rolled around later that evening, I was sure I was done for.

My nerves were fried and my mind was venturing into dangerous territory. I was starting to consider ways to end my life before my mom ended it for me. I was alone again. Edward may have loved me, but he still left. He wasn't there for me anymore. So what did it matter if I died?

What did I have to live for?

I tried to snap out of it. I mentally slapped myself for even thinking it. Edward may have been the reason I was still alive - but he was not the only reason that I kept on breathing. He was not the only thing that kept me in this world. *Right* ? It would have been silly if I lived just for him, and decided to kill myself just because he turned his back on me.

But did he? I mean, did he really turn his back on me or did I turn my back on him? Maybe he thought that was what I did when I rejected him; but I didn't reject him, I just said "not now."

Didn't I ?

Maybe it was the new situation with my mom, maybe it was the whole deal with Edward, or maybe it was the sleep deprivation, but nothing in my head was making much sense anymore.

I curled into a ball under the covers, letting my body shake as the sobs overtook me. I was so scared. I was scared of my mother. I was scared of my future. I was scared of Edward. I was scared of being alone. I was scared of everything.

I was also confused. Confused about my feelings and my thoughts. I didn't understand myself anymore. I didn't understand my actions at all.

"Bella, can I get you anything?" Mrs. Weber asked me later that evening.

"Edward." Even that simple word cracked as it left my lips. I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to breathe through the pain that I knew would follow. It wasn't my leg this time. It was a part of me that I didn't even know was still functioning . *My heart* . I didn't want to cry anymore. I didn't want to be in any more pain. I had been through enough.

Mrs. Weber sighed and left the room, probably frustrated that I didn't give her a better answer for what she could do for me. But I didn't need food. I didn't need sleep. I didn't need anything unless I had Edward. He was my oxygen. He was my sleep and he was my food. As long as I had him, I knew I would survive.

He was my everything.

I didn't know how long I hid out under the covers, but soon I heard a velvety, soft voice that couldn't belong to anyone else but Edward. *I must be dreaming* .

"Sparrow? You okay?"

I sat up and looked at him. He looked uncertain as if he didn't know why he was here. I didn't know why he was here either, but I knew better than to question it. He came back and that was all that mattered.

"I-I-I'm sorry," I whispered. The words had barely left my mouth before he was sitting on the bed and holding me to him.

"It's okay. It's all fucking alright," he whispered as he stroked my back and kissed my head.

"Don't...don't turn away from me, please," I pleaded as I fisted his shirt in my hands. "Don't leave me. I need you. Don't shut me out. I need you too much. I c-can't do this without you. You can't leave me, Edward. I'm sorry that I can't be what you need me to be, but you can't... you can't leave me. Not again."

He started rocking me back and forth, and I was comforted by the motion.

"I'm here, don't worry. I'm always here for you, Sparrow," he reassured me with a soft voice. I couldn't believe he was here. How did he even know I needed him? "What happened?" he asked then. He pulled back and put his hands on either side of my face, stroking away my tears with his thumbs.

"M-my mom happened," I replied with a shaky voice. His eyes clouded over and I could feel his body tense.

"What the fuck did she do now? Did she hurt you? Are you hurt? Are you okay? I swear to God if she fucking touched you I'll-"

"I'm fine!" I cut him off. "She's just... she's been calling me. A lot. They're trying to trace the call, but she keeps hanging up before they can get a fix on her location." It was odd how calmly I could explain it to him. It was as if all the tension in my body faded as soon as he touched me. As long as he was here, I knew I was safe. He really was my everything. *My savior.*

My savior that I treated like shit. My savior who I kept pushing away because I was afraid.

The fact that he was sitting here with me now was nothing short of a miracle. If he had been the one pushing, I would have hit the road a long time ago. I wouldn't be able to take the rejection, but he did – *he came back* . Even though I rejected him, he still came back because he cared. He cared enough about me to ignore what I did to him.

Which made him even more amazing in my eyes.

He frowned and continued to stroke my cheeks with his thumbs, even though there were no more tears to wipe. I smiled sadly at him.

"I'm sorry," I whispered.

"For your mother? C'mon, you didn't pick your parents," he said with a snort.

"You know what I'm apologizing for," I said, giving him a pointed glance. He sighed and nodded, letting his hands fall down to his lap instead. Never once did his eyes waver from mine.

He didn't say anything.

"Edward, please... talk to me," I pleaded.

"I talk in therapy. That's enough," he replied with a tired voice.

"You're... you're getting help?" I asked, looking at him in surprise.

"Yeah, someone I care about asked me to."

We looked at each other for a moment in silence, until his face practically crumbled in pain and he looked away. He was frowning deeply as he fiddled with his fingers in his lap.

"I'm sorry," I said again.

"What for this time?" he asked without looking at me.

"For what happened... for what I said... I didn't mean to hurt your feelings. I didn't mean to... hurt you...I didn't even know I could," I said, my voice barely audible when I reached the end of the sentence.

"Why wouldn't you?" he asked with a snort. "We're... *friends* . Of course you could hurt me. Just like I could surely hurt you too."

"You would never hurt me," I argued softly, and that made him look up, meeting my gaze once again.

"You're right," he agreed. "I would never hurt you... but I did." He sighed, closing his eyes. "I hate you, you know," he added quietly and I nodded.

"Yeah, I know."

"My life was a fucking cake walk before you stumbled into it. And now I have to deal with shit I never thought I would have to deal with. I have to deal with the constant worry that something will happen to you. I have to deal with the constant, nagging feeling that one day you will fucking say yes to some douche that ain't me. And I have to deal with the possibility that I might never fucking stop feeling like this." He groaned and hid his face in his hands, resting his elbows against his legs. He looked so defeated. I hated seeing him like this. "And I hate you for telling me that your mom is harassing you, and all I can think about is how this will affect me... what will happen to me if she hurts you? I will fucking die."

His body was trembling, and I scooted over so I could hug him from the side and rest my chin on his shoulder.

"So there is only hate left?" I asked softly.

He shook his head.

"I hate you the most because I fucking..." He paused, taking a deep breath before answering. "... love you." He turned his head towards me, and I bit my lip to keep myself from kissing his. "You can't have it both ways, Bella," he said with a quiet voice.

"What ways?" I asked, confused.

"You can't keep pushing me away when I need you, and then pull me back when *you* need *me*. It's not fucking fair. Either you'll have me... *all* of me... or you don't have me at all. I can't be your crutch if you won't be mine too."

"I never asked you for both ways. I was only asking you to be my friend. You were the one who wanted to promote me to girlfriend. I never asked for that. And as long as you keep pushing the issue, you know I'll push you away just the same," I replied honestly. "I'm not ready." I paused and closed my eyes. "Please, don't make this an ultimatum."

"Ultimatum? Is that what you think this is?" he asked, his voice suddenly cold. "You're so fucking blind you can't even see the darkness."

"It's what you make it out to be, yes," I replied patiently, pulling back so I could get some distance. "You ran away from me, leaving me, because I told you no. I've called you so many times during the past twenty four hours that I'm pretty sure I have reached stalker status, and you still didn't pick up. So how is this *not* an ultimatum? I'll either have you as my..." I took a deep breath, shaking my head. I couldn't even finish the sentence in my head. "... or not at all."

He stared at me, not moving a muscle. "You can't even say the fucking word." His voice was so quiet and broken that it broke me too. "Is the thought of me being your *boyfriend* so offensive to you that you can't even say the damn word?"

I shook my head. "Just terrifying."

He sighed and shook his head. "I'm not making you choose. You're the one making the choice, you know. And you chose to not have me at all. Which pretty much proves I mean nothing to you, unless you need someone to comfort you when shit gets too much."

"Edward... you mean *everything* to me," I argued.

"You have a funny way of showing it," he replied sourly.

I sighed and laid back down. This was too much. It felt like my chest was closing in on itself. I couldn't breathe. I squeezed my eyes shut, pressing the heels of my hands into my eyes as I tried to control my breathing. Hyperventilating now would not get me anywhere.

Images of my mom assaulted my mind, and it felt as if I was going to suffocate. Why did everything have to turn to crap at the same time? I couldn't deal with my mom's crazy phone calls and the possibility of Edward leaving at the same time. I couldn't deal with any of it.

"All those weeks ago, you told me that all you wanted in life was to be loved. And here I fucking am – *loving* you. And you don't want it. It's not enough. What's so wrong with me? I have been there for you. We've grown so fucking close. You know me. I know you. How can my love not be enough for you?" he mumbled, almost as if he wasn't talking to me. "Is my past finally catching up with me? Is my past the reason you won't even consider the idea of being with me? Did I hurt you too much? Did I burn all my bridges? Am I never going to enter anything other than the friend zone with you?" He sighed. "Maybe we should... take a fucking break." His voice a little louder now as if he was finally addressing me.

I slowly removed my hands from my eyes, finding him looking at me. He looked tired, like he hadn't been sleeping much either. I swallowed thickly. This was what I was afraid of.

"You're... you're leaving me?" I asked with a shaky voice. "You can't be my friend anymore?"

"That's not what I'm saying. I'm always gonna be your friend," he replied. "But I just need time."

I furrowed my eyebrows and sat back up. I grabbed his arm and held on to it.

"No," I said firmly, which made him quirk an eyebrow at me.

"No?" he echoed incredulously.

"No. When I told you that I needed time: you told me no. So I'm telling you no too. *No*. You won't get any *damn* time. We're *not* taking a *damn* break!" I said, gripping him harder.

" *Excuse me ?*"

"You're not leaving me. All people ever seem to do to me is leave. They love me, then they hurt me, then they stab me in the back, then they leave. But you're not gonna do that. You hear me? You can't leave me, Edward. I'm sorry that I can't be what you need me to be, but you can't... you *can't* leave me." Tears filled my eyes, and he frowned at the sight. I hated that I couldn't even get this off my chest without crying. My nerves were so fried it was a wonder that I hadn't experienced a panic attack yet. I knew it was approaching, and it was only a matter of time before it hit.

"Please, don't turn away from me," I whispered. "Don't leave me. I need you. Don't shut me out. I need you too much. I c-can't do this without you."

He smiled softly and stroked my cheek with his finger. "You made it for three months without me, what's three more?"

My stomach dropped at his words, and I swallowed thickly. "With just a couple of butchered suicide attempts in the mix," I replied. He winced. "Yeah, forgot about that little detail, huh?" I couldn't help but comment.

"Your mood swings are giving me a whiplash. You don't know what the heck you want. You don't fucking know what you need. You keep jumping back and forth, never able to make a damn decision and stick to it. One moment you're pushing me away, telling *me* to get help – then in the other you're sitting here, crying your heart out while telling me you can't do shit without me. Decide already!" He sighed and dragged his hand through his hair. "I want to help you. You know I do. But how the hell do you help a hypocrite? You ask me to get help when it's clear as day that you're the one who's in dire need of it."

"I can see why you would think that," I mumbled.

"You don't agree?"

"I... I just want what's best for you. I've seen you coming apart at the seams for a while now. I've been afraid for you, Edward. You even hurt yourself beating up your car."

He turned so he was fully facing me now, looking me intently in the eyes.

"Over a month ago, you were standing in front of my moving car. You didn't get out of the way. A few weeks ago, you were sitting on your bed with pills in your hand. Ready to overdose. You wanted to fucking *die* . You still think I'm the one you should be afraid for? For all I know you might still be plotting your suicide."

"I know what I'm doing. I know where I am at."

"Do you... do you *really* ?"

"Yes."

"Then tell me, where the fuck are you at when it comes to me. Where do you stand?"

I opened my mouth, ready to answer him, but no words came out. I frowned and tried again, but still no words. Why was his question so difficult for me to answer?

"You don't fucking know, do you? Have you even considered it?"

"I want what's best for you," I whispered.

"Fuck that. I'm not asking about what you *want* , I'm asking what you *feel* ."

"I care about you..."

"Not good enough."

"You mean a lot to me."

"Still not good enough."

I sighed deeply and rested my forehead against his shoulder.

"We need to figure this out, don't we?" I said quietly. "This new... development."

"It's not new," he argued. "It's just that I'm finally voicing what we both already knew was on its way. What the hell did you expect? The way we've been acting... how could we *not* have been moving towards something more serious? This can't come as a surprise to you."

I turned my head a little, and I felt him follow my gaze. I was looking at where it all began.

My cast.

I could see him frown from the corner of my eye.

"What are you thinking?" he asked, and I turned to look at him.

"I can't help but wonder if you... if you are doing all this because you're feeling bad," I whispered almost inaudibly. "The accident, the pressure from everyone around you... the pressure to change... to care..."

"You can't honestly believe that," he said incredulously. "Not after every-fucking-thing we've been through since then." He took a deep breath. "You can question and doubt a lot of shit, Sparrow, but you can't question *that*."

I forced a smile at him, but he wasn't fooled.

"I don't want to, but it's all I know... people don't love me, people don't care about me. Of course I get self-conscious and paranoid when you do. Especially when you say things like... *that*," I mumbled.

"And you know what makes me paranoid?" he asked, and I shook my head, feeling confused. "You and Jasper. And the fact that you're suddenly all buddy-buddy. If you need a friend, you can always turn to him now, right? What difference do I make in your life, anyway?"

There was a weird stirring in my stomach when he said that, and for some reason it made me smile. I bit my lip, and he raised an eyebrow when he saw that I was trying to contain a smile.

"Are you... jealous?" I teased with a nervous edge to my voice. This was no time for jokes. Edward was talking about leaving me, and my mom was plotting my demise. Still, here I was, making jokes because the thought of Edward being jealous made me smile.

God, I'm sadistic .

And messed up.

"Are you seriously asking me if I'm jealous? Seriously, Sparrow? Way to rub it in," he muttered.

"I'm sorry, I was just joking," I mumbled in response. He grabbed my chin and turned my face to him when I tried to look away.

"Yes, I know, and if you really want to know, then yes. Yes, I'm fucking jealous. And yes, frankly, a little fucking hurt too. You're obviously close to him for some goddamn reason. You tell him shit, right? Why aren't you talking to me instead? Are you already trading me in for a newer model?" I could tell he was only half-joking.

I sighed and shrugged. "I think, he gives me perspective, you know? Everything he says is objective. When I talk to you, we're always subjective. We only care about *us*. But Jasper is able to look at things from outside the box and give me a new point of view, without being condescending or mean about it. And you told me once that he was trustworthy, and I think I can see why. He's kinda like you in a way. He didn't change after the accident like Emmett or Alice did. He didn't immediately like me just because I was hurt. I don't even think he likes me that much now either. He's just being nice... he's a very considerate person, and it's easy to talk to him."

For some reason a smile was now creeping up his lips, and he was looking pretty damn smug all of a sudden. I looked at him confused and he just smirked.

"Do you realize what he is to you?" he asked casually.

"No, what? A friend? A brother?" I replied, confused.

"He's your shrink." I blinked in surprise while he was just smiling smugly at me. As if he had just solved some great puzzle or something. "I should have known that you wouldn't go about getting help the normal way," he said, leaning towards me and pressing his lips against my forehead.

I tilted my head up when he pulled back, seeing him still wearing that obnoxious smirk.

"You think you're so smart, don't you?" I muttered.

"Why yes, Sparrow, I do," he replied and I rolled my eyes. "Oh c'mon, don't be upset," he teased as he leaned forward and pressed his lips to mine. I parted my lips slightly, letting him suck on my bottom lip for a moment. He pulled me a little closer and I opened my mouth more. Just as our tongues were about meet – we both froze.

We were completely still for a moment, before slowly pulling back at the same time, just staring at each other.

My shock was mirrored in his face. Kissing seemed to come more and more naturally to us now, we didn't even second guess the instinct anymore. The fact that I let it happen surprised me the most, especially considering how averse I was to the idea.

I kept saying that I couldn't be his girlfriend. That I couldn't be *that* girl for him.

And yet, here I was, kissing him like it was the most natural thing in the world.

Maybe I was *already* that girl for him?

"We seriously need to figure this out," I said firmly.

"I already have a solution," he replied with a crooked smile.

I shook my head. "No."

"Why not?" he groaned, almost sounding like a whining five year-old that couldn't have his favorite toy.

I sighed. "People will talk."

"So let them."

"Your friends will not approve."

"Emmett, who is your personal bodyguard, Alice, who wants to make you her own Barbie, or Jasper, who's already your shrink?" he asked

with a snort. "And who the fuck cares what they think anyway? What else you've got? Are you still gonna stand by the ridiculous 'you need help' argument? Because, seriously, that's the most ridiculous shit for an excuse I've heard in my life. We're both fucked up. Everybody's fucked up. What difference does it make if we're in a relationship or not? How hard can it be?"

I smiled sadly at him. "Edward, sometimes you surprise me with how naïve you are. Of course it's gonna be hard. Relationships *are* hard!"

"Puh-lease," he said, rolling his eyes. "Have you ever been in a relationship? Yeah, neither have I. So we have not a clue what we're talking about. We're only making assumptions because of other people's experiences. My firm belief is that it's only going to be hard if we make it hard!" A smile crept up his lips again, turning into a smirk, and I gave him an incredulous look since I knew exactly where he was going next. Edward could be so transparent sometimes. "And some things in a relationship need to be hard for everyone's pleasure..." he trailed off suggestively and I slapped his arm. He chuckled.

"This," I said, poking him in the chest, "is exactly the reason why we shouldn't. You're already expecting things. I can't be *that* girl. How many times do I need to tell you that before you get it?"

"C'mon, I'm only joking around," he replied.

"Please, Edward, *don't* ."

He stroked my cheek with the back of his hand; his smirk was fading and soon replaced by a soft smile.

"So you're only turning the notion down because you're afraid of the sexual aspect of it all?" he asked. I tilted my head to the side, not understanding what he was getting at. He sighed and looked at the ceiling for a second before turning his gaze back to me. "You're... *rejecting* me... rejecting *us*... because you're afraid I'll pressure you into having sex with me? Or is there another reason? I mean..."

do you... what do you feel... do you feel... what I feel... what do you feel... about me? Am I just a friend... or do you see me as something more... like, at all?"

He cupped my cheek with his hand, and the vulnerability in his eyes made my heart ache. Edward had a certain way with words, and this was the first time I've seen him be completely lost as to what to say. He didn't know what to say or how to phrase what he needed to say, because he had never been forced to say anything like this before. He couldn't make a sarcastic remark and overuse the F-word with this. He couldn't joke while baring his soul. This was difficult for him, and he looked just as exposed now as he had done in the music room when he confessed his love to me.

It was terrifying.

He waited patiently for my answer. He knew it wasn't a simple question for me to answer. So many things had to be considered. I didn't know up from down when it came to my emotions and feelings. I had been betrayed in the worst way possible by the people I loved. How could I even consider opening up to someone after that?

But you already have.

The corner of my mouth lifted into a sad smile, and I leaned into his touch.

Yeah, I had already let him in. I had already exposed every part of me to him.

Almost every part.

"We need to put you back together in a way that makes sense," I said. He chuckled darkly.

"Right back atcha. But that doesn't answer my question."

"I feel safe with you."

"Still doesn't answer my question."

I sighed and leaned forward, cupping his face in my hands. He let his hand fall down to his lap.

"I feel safe with you. My mom could stand in this room right now, holding a damn knife, and I would still feel safe as long as you'd be here with me." I bit my lip and contemplated my next words. I wanted to give him a better answer, but I was still too lost in my own head to be able to do that. I couldn't give him a better answer because I didn't know. His green eyes stared at me with such intensity that it made me nervous. "But it still doesn't answer your question," I ended with a sigh, feeling dejected.

He leaned forward to rest his forehead against mine and we kept our gazes locked, my hands still cupping his face. It was as if the rest of the world didn't matter anymore. Nothing mattered. Not my crazy mother. Not Jasper. Not Edward's shrink. Not the Webers. Nothing.

"That *did* answer my question," he replied quietly. "And I promise I won't pressure you about it again."

His words were final.

And I didn't like it.

It was as if his words put a weight on my chest, and suddenly I was struggling to breathe. It sounded to me as if he had taken my words as a final rejection, when in reality I didn't mean it like that at all. I wasn't rejecting him. I just didn't know how to... *not* reject him. What did it mean when he said he wasn't going to pressure me anymore? Did he mean that he was giving up on me completely? Would we even still be friends? Or was this it? When he would be walking out this room, he would be walking out on us.

I couldn't handle that. Not after everything.

"Calm down, Sparrow," he whispered, and it wasn't until then that I realized I was hyperventilating. My hands fell to my lap, and it was his turn to cup my face instead. He made sure that I was looking him in the eyes before he continued speaking. "It's all good, Sparrow. Don't freak out. Everything is fucking fine. We're fucking fine. Alright?"

I tried to calm my breathing, but it was as if I couldn't find the switch to turn my breathing into normal. My chest rose in rapid movements, and his grip on me tightened.

"You... you know when you reach that point... where you just can't take it anymore?" I managed to gasp out. He nodded hesitantly, not getting where I was going. "I think I've reached that point."

"What... what point is that exactly?" he asked, now sounding concerned and scared. "You're not talking about jumping in front of a speeding truck now, are you?" It was sad that he wasn't even joking. He was genuinely asking me. I wondered if he would always worry about me wanting to kill myself.

Did he have a reason to?

Yeah, he did. Those thoughts didn't just go away. Not if you had lived with them for months and tried acting upon them. I didn't blame him. Hell, I considered it just hours before he got here today. I would always consider it, for some reason or other. But I didn't want to.

"I don't want to hide anymore," I said, my breathing still erratic. "I don't want to be scared. I'm sick and tired of being scared. I don't want to live in fear anymore. I just... I just want to live."

He sighed in relief. "So live."

"I don't even know at which end to begin."

"At whichever end you decide to roll with, I'll be there every damn step of the way," he replied with a smile.

"You promise you won't leave?"

"Promise."

He pressed his lips against my forehead, and it was as if I finally found my switch. Ever so slowly, my breathing returned to normal and my body relaxed. It didn't occur to me until then that my entire body had been tensed up, and my leg ached at the added strain.

"You good, Sparrow?" he asked, smiling gently at me.

I nodded and when I met his gaze I knew exactly what I needed to do.

What I needed to say.

It didn't matter if I wasn't ready. It didn't matter if I did it for the wrong reasons. When was one ever ready anyway? And when did anyone ever make decisions for the right reasons?

I needed to take a leap.

Not a leap in front of a truck, but a leap of faith.

He stroked my cheeks with his thumbs, wiping away tears that I didn't even realize I had shed.

"Ask me," I whispered.

He furrowed his eyebrows in confusion. "Ask you what?"

"Ask me," I said again, but he still looked confused. I put my hands on his on my face, giving him a forceful look. "You still want me to be that girl? Ask me."

His lips twisted into an uncertain smile, and I could see how he slowly realized what I was telling him. His eyes shone in anticipation, and I couldn't help but smile at the sight. I hated seeing my Edward broken, and if this was what needed to be done to keep him from

falling apart and to keep him in my life, then this was what I was going to do.

I smiled through my tears as he wiped away another streak from my cheek.

"Will you... will you be my girlfriend?" he whispered, his shaky voice was barely more than a breath. Fear was clear in his eyes along with uncertainty and hope. While he was afraid that he had asked the wrong question, he was also afraid of the answer. As well as hopeful.

He hadn't asked the wrong question.

It was the right one.

Another tear fell from my eyes, but this time he didn't wipe it away. I took a shaky breath before leaning in to press my lips to his. He shuddered at the touch, and I took my hand to stroke his jaw gently. I noted that he hadn't shaved in a few days. I liked the scruff.

The kiss didn't deepen, and when I pulled back it didn't seem like he minded.

There were so many things that were wrong with my answer to his question, but there were also so many rights. There was never a right time to enter a relationship – and it was most likely never a good time when you didn't even know what you were feeling toward the other person. All I knew was that Edward had those feelings for me, and the prospect of him giving up on us pained me more than anything. I didn't want him to give up. I wanted him to keep fighting for me. For us. I was confused about my feelings, but I had time to figure them out.

Right?

Despite everything that was going on. Despite the fact that my mom was probably going to turn up to hurt me again soon. Despite the fact that I didn't know anything anymore.

Despite *everything* , I still didn't feel like the next word leaving my lips was even remotely wrong. It felt more right than anything I had ever said before.

Maybe I was doing it for some right reason too.

How else could you explain why it felt so good to say one simple word?

"Yes."

Hypocrite

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – *all errors are mine*]

Chapter 44 – "Hypocrite"

Edward Cullen POV

Yes? Yes ? A motherfucking yes ?

Was she serious? I looked into her eyes, wondering what she was thinking. I had never wanted to be able to read her mind more than in that moment. None of her words or actions made any fucking sense to me. She was going back and forth so much that I had no idea where she was anymore. One moment she wanted me – the next she didn't. Was this her way of finally settling on one side? Was she seriously my girlfriend now? Did she even want this?

"You... what? Yes?" I echoed. "Are you serious?"

She nodded. "I'm... I'm serious," she replied, trying to smile but her nervousness shone through.

"No, you're not," I argued weakly, giving her a doubtful look. I was suddenly afraid. But I didn't understand why. What the hell was afraid of now?

"Yes I am," she argued back, the nervousness in her voice was now replaced by aggravation.

I frowned and held her hands between us.

"You do realize why I'm unconvinced right?" I asked and she nodded.

"Yes, and... and I don't know what to say. I just don't want to lose you," she said with a tired sigh.

"Lose me? Who says you're losing me? I told you already, this *wasn't* a fucking ultimatum. I just needed some time to sort shit out if this wasn't what *you* wanted too. I'm never gonna leave you either way, I would just have needed some time. No biggie," I explained in frustration.

She sighed and rolled her eyes before cupping my face with her hands, staring me intently in his eyes.

"Do you want me as your girlfriend or not?"

"Yes, you know I do."

"Then why can't you not accept the fact that I just said yes to you? Why can't you accept a good thing?"

I smiled weakly. "Because as far as you and I are concerned, nothing is ever a good thing. And if it is, it doesn't last."

"I suppose you're right. But... but this will last... right?"

She gave me an uneasy look and I wanted nothing more than to reassure her. I wanted to tell her everything would turn out alright and that we were forever. But I couldn't because I didn't want to lie.

"It will last as long as we want it to last?" I said slowly, somehow making it a question.

"You know what?" she asked, and I shook my head. "It doesn't matter. But... but maybe we should, you know, talk... talk about what this all means? So there won't be any future misunderstandings?"

"You're my girlfriend. I'm your... boyfriend..." I trailed off, my eyes widening slightly.

Jesus fucking Christ, I'm Isabella Swan's boyfriend.

She giggled a little at my expression, biting her lip in an adorable way.

"It just occurred to you that's what this means, huh," she said with a teasing tone.

"Yeah," I said, dragging the word out. "This is so weird... I've never been anyone's boyfriend before."

"But that's not because of lack of candidates for the girlfriend part," she said, still teasing. I rolled my eyes.

"Are we gonna settle this or what?"

"Yes."

"So... we might as well cover one of the big ones first," I said. "PDA. Yay or nay?"

She smiled softly and much to my surprise she shrugged, instead of dismissing the idea completely. She looked a little uncomfortable though.

"It's what couples do, right? I'm just... I don't know how that would work. It's not people's business to know what we are or what we aren't. So if you want to kiss me in public, or hold my hand or hug me... only do it because you want to do it for *you* ... and not to prove some point to other people, alright? People will assume you're only with me because of the accident, and you will get crap for it. So please don't touch me or do things to me, just to prove a point to them. Okay?" It was as if she rambled everything in one breath. When she was done she took another deep breath before biting down on her lip, looking at me apprehensively.

"So, yay on the PDA?" I asked, ignoring what she said about the other people completely.

She sighed and nodded. "Yes, I guess." She gave me a look that clearly said everything that she didn't. She didn't want us to be overly close or intimate in public. And I respected that.

I couldn't help but reach out and stroke her cheek, slowly tucking a piece of hair behind her ear. My Sparrow was growing. She was opening up and trying to do things that were outside her comfort zone. I didn't know what brought this on, but I would have been lying if I said that I didn't appreciate it.

"Do I have to ask?" I smiled at her, raising an eyebrow. I only assumed she knew what I was talking about. She smiled softly, shaking her head.

"No, you don't have to ask."

"Good." I pulled her closer and pressed my lips to hers. She hummed and I smiled against her lips. I could seriously get used to this. I wouldn't have minded to be glued to her lips for the rest of my existence. Her lips were made for me – and me alone.

She opened her mouth a little, and I immediately took the opportunity to get a better hold on her bottom lip, sucking on it lightly. It elicited a soft moan from her and I smiled as I got a little braver, letting my tongue slip inside her mouth, briefly touching hers before I pulled back completely. I didn't want to push her.

I smirked as I looked into her half-opened eyes.

"Still think pleasure is a bad thing?" I couldn't help but ask.

"Don't ruin a good thing, Edward," she said, giving me a pointed look.

"I wouldn't dare," I said, leaning in to kiss her again.

She rolled her eyes and was just about to lean forward too when a sudden sound rang out. She froze instantly, her eyes suddenly wide with fear.

Damnit, her phone.

She picked up her phone, staring at the screen as a cop walked in. He looked at her, nodding at her to answer.

"Ask her questions," I told her. She frowned in confusion as she pressed the green button and answered the phone. She held the phone to her ear with a shaky hand, and I put my hand on her knee to comfort her.

"H-hello?" she stuttered. I could hear the low buzzing of someone talking on the other end, but I couldn't make out what was being said. 'Ask questions' I mouthed to Sparrow and she nodded. "Eh... Mom... so... when will I see you... again? I m-miss you. I miss J-jacob too. I c-can't wait to see you again." We both cringed at her words, and she squeezed her eyes shut. Just hearing her say it made my stomach lurch. "Uh-huh," she said, still with her eyes closed. "What about Dad? Will he be there?" She opened her eyes, frowning as she looked at me. "Yes, *Dad* ," she said again. "Charlie? You know, the guy who fathered me?" Her eyebrows knitted together in confusion as her mother babbled on the other end. A shiver ran through her and a quiet sob escaped her as she squeezed her eyes shut even harder. It was as if it physically hurt her to hear whatever it was her mother was telling her on the other end.

I glanced at the cop who was looking out the door at his partner outside. Soon a small smile appeared on his lips and he turned to Sparrow, giving her a thumbs up. Sparrow relaxed instantly when she noticed and a tear slipped from her eyes.

"Well I don't care, you crazy bitch," she snapped suddenly. "You can live in your world of delusions all you want, but I want no part of it. Go to hell!" She hung up the phone and threw it on a small pile of folded clothes that lay on a chair.

I pulled her to me as the cop walked over to us.

"You did very good, Isabella," he said. "We got a fix on her location, and it won't be long now until we catch her."

"Where is she?" she asked in a small voice.

"We are still processing the signal, it will only take a few minutes. But we got a fix on it," he replied, leaving the room. I smiled at her but she didn't smile back.

"See? You're okay now. She's gonna get caught and you and I can live happily ever after," I said. "This is the best news I've heard since you said yes." She bit her lip, still not smiling. "Why aren't you happy?" I asked after a moment.

"Because she's not caught yet. As long as she is running around free as a bird, then I have no reason to be happy. I won't be happy until she's locked behind bars. For real," she replied.

Mrs. Weber came into the room and Bella shifted a little in my embrace. She looked at Mrs. Weber, who smiled softly in response.

"Phoenix," Mrs. Weber said. "The police say your mother is in Phoenix."

"What the hell is she doing there?" Bella asked confused. "Why would she bother to go all the way down *there*?" She looked at me as if I knew and I shrugged.

"How am I supposed to know how a crazy woman's mind works?" I asked in response.

She sighed; her face unreadable.

"You okay there?" I asked, tucking a stray hair strand away from her face. She looked at me and smiled ever so softly.

"I think... I think so, yeah... how far away is Phoenix?" she asked.

"Far enough so you don't need to worry about your mother for a while," I replied. "She can't get on a plane without getting caught, and driving back her will take her at least a couple of days... assuming she won't get caught before she gets away, which is not going to happen."

I felt her relax a little more, and Mrs. Weber smiled at her.

"Maybe Edward should leave so you can get some rest since you didn't sleep at all last night," Mrs. Weber said.

Bella didn't even look at Mrs. Weber as she shook her head. "I don't want him to leave."

"That's not really your decision to make, Bella. You're living under my roof an-"

"I don't care!" Bella snapped as tears were suddenly falling from her eyes. "My mother may be in Phoenix but what about the other whackjobs? Billy? *Jacob* ? They're still here for all we know. I need Edward here."

"Bella, you have two police men right outside your door. People are watching the border to the reservation to see if anyone is passing, since the police can't cross the line without a warrant. Edward doesn't need to stay," Mrs. Weber replied with a calm voice.

"I want him to stay and I *need* him to stay," Bella argued. "And he's not leaving unless he wants to leave!"

I couldn't help but smirk a little. My Sparrow was growing alright. She was talking back to people who were supposed to be authority figures. She argued for what she wanted and she was completely stepping out of her comfort zone by doing it. I couldn't have been prouder of her.

"Now you listen to me, young lady," Mrs. Weber said, pointing at her in what was supposed to be that intimidating parenting way, but I

could tell Bella couldn't have cared less about it. "As long as you live under my roof, you will abide to my rules."

"You're not my mother," Bella hissed through clenched teeth. I didn't understand her sudden anger. I was all for her standing up for herself, but this was almost getting ridiculous. Why were she suddenly stooping to *that* level?

"Oh sweet child," Mrs. Weber said, shaking her head. "Do you have any idea how many times I've heard that during my twenty five years as a foster mom? I don't think so. You're angry, I recognize that. You're hurt, and that's understandable. But neither of those are excuses for you to show me disrespect. You are living under my roof, and as long as you do I expect you to treat me with just as much respect as you would any other authority figure."

"Respect is a two-way street," Bella replied. "I want Edward to stay and if you make him go, I will go with him." Mrs. Weber sighed again.

"He can stay, for now. But he's not spending the night," Mrs. Weber said before leaving the room.

I slowly turned towards Bella, who was looking at the open door as if it had insulted her personally.

"Can you please close the door," she asked, her voice suddenly low and quiet.

"Yeah, sure," I replied, getting up and walking over to the door, closing it.

I turned back to the bed and I noticed then how tired she looked.

"You really should get some sleep," I said as I sat back down.

She bit her lip and shook her head.

"No, I don't want to wake up alone," she replied. "I can't sleep."

I took her hand, raising it to my lips so I could kiss her knuckles.

"I won't leave," I said. "That bitch can't make me."

"You promise?"

"I promise."

I stood up and let her get comfortable under the covers, before laying down next to her, putting my arm around her and snuggling as close as I could get. She took my hand and held it with both of hers against her chest.

"I'm touching your boobies," I couldn't help but tease.

"You're such an idiot," she muttered, but I could hear the smile in her voice.

I snuggled even closer, making it so that my face was by her neck. I inhaled deeply – she smelled so good. I pressed my lips against her skin, letting my mouth open a little so I could taste her with the tip of my tongue. She tasted delicious and I could only imagine how *other* parts of her tasted.

I groaned at the direction that my thoughts were taking, and my body responded accordingly.

If I didn't love my dick so much I would have considered chopping it off at that moment. This was so not the time for begging for attention.

I shifted a little so my erection didn't press against her. The last thing I wanted right now was to make her uncomfortable by reminding her that I was a hormonal and horny teenage boy who liked to get his dick wet.

"I love you," I murmured with my lips still on her skin.

She didn't reply. The only sign that she even heard me was the deep sigh that escaped her.

She didn't tell me that she loved me back.

That shit stung.

I must have fallen asleep, because the next thing I knew I was startled awake by a knock on the door.

"Time to get up," Mrs. Weber said through the door.

I groaned and rolled to my back, checking the alarm clock that stood on the nightstand.

It was seven am.

What the hell?

I turned back to Sparrow, gently shaking her awake.

"Hey, Sparrow, baby, you awake?" I asked softly.

"Mmm... chicken," she mumbled, but didn't open her eyes.

"Hey, c'mon," I said with a smile, shaking her again.

This time she groaned and opened her eyes. She looked confused when she saw me.

"Wh-what time is it?" she asked.

"Seven am."

"You stayed?" she asked surprised, sounding more awake now.

"Yeah, I fell asleep too I guess," I replied with a light shrug before getting up to stretch my body. I had slept with my body completely wrapped around her all night, and my body was stiff as a board because of it. She slowly sat up too and I smiled as I saw her hair. It looked like a haystack.

She asked me to hand her the pile of clothes on the chair and I turned my back to her as she got dressed. She chuckled softly, probably finding the situation quite funny. I didn't however – since she was probably almost naked just a few feet behind my back and I couldn't enjoy the damn view because I didn't want to make her uncomfortable.

Damnit, since when had I become such a gentleman?

After she got dressed, we left for the kitchen together. When we got there, Mrs. Weber was preparing breakfast, and Angela was sitting by the table. Her eyes practically fell out of its sockets as she spotted me.

Bella sat down by the table, and I took the seat next to her. I scooted my chair a little closer to hers so I could rest my arm on the back of her chair. Bella smiled timidly at me and I smiled back.

"What do you like for breakfast, Edward?" Mrs. Weber asked, her voice laced with false calm.

"Whatever you have to offer," I replied, without taking my eyes off of Bella.

We ate in silence, both ignoring the looks Angela was giving us.

"Are you going to school today, Bella?" Mrs. Weber asked.

"Yeah, why not?" she replied, giving me another smile.

"That reminds me," Mrs. Weber said, turning her attention to me. "Your father wants you to call him before you leave. I talked to him last night."

I sighed and gulped down the last of my orange juice, before getting up.

"I suppose I should call him then," I said. "Can I borrow the phone?"

"Yes, you can use the one by the stairs," she replied.

I leaned down and pressed my lips to Bella's hair, before leaving to call my dad.

The call was quick. I almost expected him to be annoyed that I had stayed, but apparently he wasn't. He told me that Mrs. Weber had called him last night when she had found me asleep in Bella's bed. She had made a point by telling him that I had been above the covers, while Bella had been underneath. I guess that simple gesture made them trust me with her. Dad told me to get home right after school – no exceptions – since I had an appointment with the shrink later. I decided not to argue with him on that, since he had brought me to Sparrow when she needed me. The least I could do to return the favor was to give him this.

I returned to the kitchen where Bella was finished with her breakfast. We moved towards her bedroom and I was just about to ask her how we were going to school when the doorbell rang. Since Bella and I were already by the front door, she turned to open it.

"Oh, hi Jasper," she said.

"I wasn't sure if you were going to school today either, but I figured I would..." he trailed off when he spotted me behind her and he looked at us in confusion.

"Is there room for me too?" I asked, smirking at his expression.

"Yeah... sure," he replied slowly. "You ready to go?"

"Let me just grab my bag," she said, turning around. I rolled my eyes at her, stopping her from going anywhere.

"I'll get it," I said, quickly moving to her room and grabbing her bag. She gave me a semi-annoyed look when I returned. "What?" I asked.

"I can do stuff myself you know," she said.

"Yeah, I know. But where's the fun in that?" I replied, leaning in to kiss her. She rolled her eyes, but didn't protest. When I pulled back, Jasper's eyes were even wider than before.

"Let's go," he croaked, before turning around and heading for his car. I chuckled as I followed Sparrow out the door. A light layer of snow was covering the ground, and I was worried about the possibility of ice hiding underneath. Sparrow was going to have a hard time getting around on those crutches today. Lucky for her, I would be with her every damn step of the way.

"When are you getting rid of the crutches?" I asked, as I joined her in the backseat of Jasper's car.

"Dr. Carrot said that they might replace the cast with a supportive brace in January. The bones have healed way better than they expected. Apparently I have supernatural healing abilities," she said with a roll of her eyes.

"That's awesome," I said, holding her hand between us as the car started moving.

Jasper didn't say anything and neither did we. Every so often I felt Bella squeeze my hand and when I turned my head at her she was giving me a reassuring smile.

'You'll be okay' she mouthed. As always, it didn't occur to me that my discomfort with cars was so obvious to other people. But Sparrow wasn't just anyone, of course she would notice if something was wrong with me even if other people didn't. She always saw stuff that nobody else saw.

We ignored Jasper, barely thanking him for the ride when we got to the school. We basically left him behind before making our way towards the main entrance together. I felt like a dick for ignoring

Jasper, but I still kind of hated him for implying that I was going to hit Bella in the music room. That shit was insulting.

I held open the door for her, and let her walk in first before I followed.

People looked at us weirdly as we walked together down the hallway.

Of course they did.

I wondered how they would have looked if we had walked hand in hand.

I kind of wished that was possible – but it wasn't, because of her crutches.

Sparrow was uncomfortable, I could tell. Her unease was practically rolling off of her in waves. She didn't like the attention. She never did.

We stopped by her locker and she smiled timidly at me before she started fiddling with her lock.

"So, you... me... lunch?" I asked and she nodded.

"Maybe we can buy something and eat in the music room," she suggested.

I grimaced and she looked confused at my reaction.

"I don't really like that room to be honest," I said. "Bad memories."

"Oh, okay," she said, nodding. "I guess that's fine then. We'll eat wherever you want to eat."

I leaned forward a little bit – but not to kiss her.

"The cafeteria," I said quietly. This was her time to knit her eyebrows together.

"Are you trying to prove a point?" she asked.

I shook my head. "No, but I would like it if you did."

She sighed, putting her books in her bag and throwing it over her shoulder.

"Fine," she agreed reluctantly.

"But we're not eating with my... or are they *ours* now?... anyway, our friends today. I rather have you to myself if that's alright," I continued and she sighed, nodding again.

"That's fine too. I'm not too fond of them right now anyway," she said, not needing to elaborate since I understood why. She was still not comfortable with them. They weren't constant enough for her to be comfortable with them quite yet. Except for Jasper, but he seemed to be the exception to every damn rule.

"So, see you at lunch?"

"Yeah, see you."

I leaned in again, wanting to kiss her goodbye but I thought better of it and pulled back. She gave me an appreciative smile, and her smile was worth skipping a kiss over.

I turned around.

The fact that I was basically counting the minutes till lunch did not gain me any macho points.

My class before lunch was cancelled, so I had nothing better to do than roam the halls. After leaving my books in my locker I started to walk aimlessly in the halls. I was so caught up in my own thoughts that I didn't even think to look up from the floor as I rounded the corner and collided with someone.

Luckily, my reflexes worked faster than my brain, and I reached out to grab the other person to keep us both from falling. A weird clattering sound echoed through the hallway. I looked up to see who it was that I had crashed with, when I found myself looking at those beautiful, brown eyes that I had come to fucking worship.

"We really need to stop hitting on each other," she said, groaning a little but forcing a smile anyway. The weird clattering sound had been from when she lost grip of her crutches.

"You okay? I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking," I apologize and she dismissed my words with a weak wave of her hand.

"It takes two to tango... or crash as the case may be," she replied.

"Are you okay though? Are you in any pain?" I asked and she shrugged.

"I've had worse, at least I didn't fall down this time" she replied with a light shrug.

"What are you doing roaming the halls anyway?"

"I usually have gym during this period, but I don't anymore. Remember?"

"Oh yeah, I forgot about that."

She leaned against the wall and I quickly picked up her crutches, handing them to her.

"Wanna go and check out if the cafeteria is open yet?" I asked and she nodded.

Luckily for us – it was.

A few burnouts were already seated at their table in the back. I bought and paid for our food, and I was surprised when Sparrow

didn't object to this. I took our tray to a table by the window. She sat down and I took the seat next to her instead of one across from her.

She played with the plastic wrapper on her sandwich as I took a bite of my slice of pizza.

"So, I was thinking," she began and I almost choked. I didn't like the sound of that. She smiled softly at my terrified expression and shook her head. "No, it's nothing bad. It's just that I was wondering if you... if you still had that book... about the legends."

I swallowed and took a drink from my coke before answering her.

"Yeah, I do," I replied. "Why you asking? You want me to burn it or something?"

"No, actually... I was thinking that maybe we could... could look into it," she said with a quiet voice, staring intently on her still wrapped sandwich that she was picking away at.

"What changed your mind?"

"I want to find that loophole. It doesn't matter if we don't need it once my mom is finally behind bars. But I want to know."

"Again, what changed your mind?"

She slowly turned her head to me and smiled sadly. "Someone I deeply care about wanted to look into it."

"So you care about me, huh?" I teased.

"Very much so," she almost whispered, as if she was afraid to say it.

I leaned forward, grateful that our only audience was the burnouts at the opposite side of the room. I kissed her softly, scooting my chair closer to her so I could put my hands on her hips, pulling her ever so slightly closer to me. Her hands wound up in my hair and she gripped it as I let my tongue sneak out and trace her bottom lip. She

let her mouth open, the tip of her tongue meeting mine halfway. She tasted like mint and strawberries. And Bella.

She tasted like Bella.

I wanted to say that she tasted like Sparrow, but that would have sounded wrong even in my head. Who the fuck knows what a sparrow tastes like? Does it taste like chicken?

I put my hand on her thigh on her bad leg, slowly massaging her and silently hoping that her leg was fine. I didn't mean to hurt her. She moaned quietly, practically shivering at my touch when I realized my hand wasn't just on her thigh anymore, it was practically in wonderland.

Damnit, brain.

I stilled my hand's movements, before letting it go back to safer territory closer to her knee. We stopped kissing for a moment, resting our foreheads against each others as we caught our breaths.

"You make crazy shit happen to me. I'm losing my mind," I said, completely breathless.

"Ditto," she whispered with a soft sigh. I smiled at her, chastely kissing her lips one more time before turning back to my pizza. She smiled as she turned towards her food as well.

I was just about to raise my pizza to my mouth when I noticed that we did indeed have an audience this time. I gulped and forced a smile.

"Dude, I thought you were fucking joking!" Emmett exclaimed, slamming his tray down on the table and sitting down across from us. Bella flinched at the sudden sound, her eyes wide as she looked at him.

"What did I miss?" she asked, looking at me in surprise.

"Yesterday, after my lil'brother kicked some punk's ass, I asked him if he got it bad for you. He said yes. I thought he was shitting me because he said something about bringing you a pen and it didn't make any damn sense to me. But apparently he wasn't joking. Damn," Emmet explained in one breath, slouching in his seat as he finished. He looked at us as if we were a confusing piece of art that was far too sophisticated for him to understand.

Bella turned to look at me. "You beat someone up?" she asked confused. "Why?"

"Apparently the dude wanted to claim you or something. Piss on your leg or whatever," Emmett said. I wanted to fucking smack his head. There was a reason why I wanted to keep that particular fight from her. The last thing she needed right now was to worry about that mutt wanting to get into her pants, or drink her blood or whatever.

"Edward?" she asked, now sounding scared.

I sighed deeply, turning to her and holding her hands between us. "I saw Jacob outside the school yesterday, and I beat his sorry ass up. He's not going to come around her anymore. He's not a problem. I dealt with him."

The blood rushed from her face so quickly it looked like she was about to pass out.

That shit couldn't be healthy.

"And you didn't think this was something you should have told me about?" she hissed.

"And why should I have done that?" I asked. "Nothing good would come of it. You would only have given you another damn reason to worry, and we both know you already have enough of those. "

"Damnit, Edward," she sighed. "You can't keep stuff like that from me. You're not keeping me safe by keeping secrets, it only makes me question what else you might be hiding from me."

"C'mon, I'm not hiding anything from you," I said softly, cupping her face in my hands. "It was only this one lousy thing. I promise." I kissed her chastely and I could tell that she accepted my apology, even though I wasn't really apologizing.

"But from now on, you're not keeping any more secrets from me. Okay?" she said. "I don't care what it's about, I don't care about how irrelevant you think it is. I still don't want any more secrets. I hate secrets."

I couldn't help but smirk darkly at her words. The hypocrite rears her ugly head again.

Or, *beautiful head* in her case.

She said she didn't like secrets – yet, her entire life was basically a secret. Everything she did was a secret. Hell, *I* was one of her fucking secrets. So how could she ask other people to be honest with her when she wasn't being honest in return?

Emmett had watched our exchange with his mouth hanging open.

"What?" I asked him, taking another bite of my pizza.

"Someone seriously needs to explain what's going on here," he said, as if he had a right to know our business. Just then, we were joined by the others as well. I guess we weren't going to get to eat our lunch in private after all. Bella tensed as the others sat down. It bugged the shit out of me that they didn't even ask if it was alright that they sat down, considering this wasn't even our usual table.

"We don't need to explain a thing," I replied coolly. "It's none of your fucking business." Bella slapped my arm. "HEY!" I protested. She

gave me a look and she huffed when she realized I didn't understand what the hell it meant.

"So I guess the bird is out of the cage," Rosalie said, smirking at me. "So how is the new couple?"

"Shut up, Rose," I muttered.

"Oh, c'mon," she said, rolling her eyes. "You have always mocked your brother for being pussy-whipped, now it's our turn to mock you for finally settling on one pussy to fuck. Who knew you could pick a partner?"

"I'm not pussy-whipped," I argued.

"Of course you aren't," Emmett said with a smirk.

Bella put her sandwich – that she hadn't even unwrapped yet – back on the tray before pushing her chair back. She grabbed her crutches and stood up.

"Where are you going?" I asked.

She didn't answer me, she just shook her head as she wobbled away. I glared at Rosalie as I pushed my own chair back.

"You don't even fucking know her, and you still think it's appropriate to speak about being pussy-whipped in front of her? Maybe you should get to know her before making stupid jokes and comments like that, alright?" I said and she looked at me with a blank face. "Fucking bitch."

I walked away, following Sparrow out. I didn't speak and neither did she. I just followed her to wherever she planned to go.

A few minutes later, I had followed her to the music room. It didn't matter how much I didn't want to be there. What I wanted was completely irrelevant at the moment.

She sat down on the piano bench, straddling it before throwing her crutches away. They skidded across the dirty floor, leaving trails in the dust. I slowly sat down and straddled the bench too, so I could look at her face.

"You okay?" I asked softly.

"Why is it so important?" she asked.

"Why is what so important?"

She slowly turned her head to me.

"Sex."

"It's not important," I replied with a crooked smile.

"Yeah? So if I tell you right now that I'm never ever going to have sex with you, would you accept that and still be with me?"

My instinct told me to say that of course I would stay with her no matter what, but another part of me told me to just shut the fuck up. If I said that I would accept it, it would be like I was lying even though I wasn't. I loved her. Wasn't that enough?

"It's a big deal to you... I get that," I began but she didn't let me finish.

"It's not that it's a big deal, it's just that I can't... I just can't do it."

"Because you need to be pure? Damnit, Sparrow, you know all that crap is a load of bullshit. And you're fucking smarter than that, you don't believe that stuff. Right?"

"No, I don't... but I... I don't know... I just can't."

I sighed and dragged my hands through my hair.

"Please don't hate me for what I'm about to ask you, okay?" She looked at me suspiciously and I took a deep breath. "Why the fuck aren't you in therapy? I mean, your whole view of the world is so fucked up. Your view of *everything* is fucked up. Aren't the social services people required by law to put you in therapy or something?"

Her bottom lip quivered and she bit down on it. She swallowed thickly, probably collecting her thoughts before answering me.

"I discussed it with Kate when I lived with her and I told her that I would never enter therapy. I would never be comfortable to talk to a complete stranger about my past, especially not with a stranger whose only reason they even talked to me was because they got paid to do it and not because they cares. How could I trust someone like that?"

My brain coughed the word 'hypocrite' in my head.

"Yeah, and yet you expect me to talk to a professional about my shit?" I said, not bothering to hide my irritation. Her double standards were starting to fuck with my head. "And don't fucking tell me it's not the same, because I know it's not. Your shit is way worse than mine, I know that. But the principle of it all is still the same." I gripped my hair with my hands, just staring at her for a moment. "You said you wanted me to get better, well, I want *you* to get better. The difference between the two of us seems to be that I fucking realize that I have a problem while you act like you're all good. But you're not. You're not good at all."

She glared at me with teary eyes, biting hard on her lip. She didn't like it when I threw the truth in her face like that.

"And what exactly is so wrong about me? Are you saying I'm insane just because I don't share your views on sex?" she asked defensively.

"What? No! This has nothing to do with sex."

"Then what is it about?" she asked, angrily wiping away the tear that fell down her cheek. "You're Edward Cullen, all you ever care about is sex. So of course your girlfriend has to be the one girl that won't do it with you. Maybe that's why you chose me. Because I'm a challenge for you."

"You did not just fucking say that!" I snapped. "You can doubt a lot of fucking things, Sparrow, and you can spew a lot of fucking shit, but don't you fucking dare doubt or spew shit about my feelings for you. I have no idea how you feel about me and to be honest it's fucking freaking me out. But at least I'm honest with you. I love you. You hear me? I can say that again if you want, if you didn't hear me the first trillion times I've told you already. I. Love. *You*. Now, why don't you pull out that fucking stick you have shoved up your ass and stop being so damn ignorant!"

A sudden burning sensation was radiating from the left side of my face and I was practically seeing stars. Sparrow gasped and when I looked at her I saw that she was covering her mouth with her hands.

"I'm so sorry," she said, her voice muffled by her hands.

It took me a moment to realize what just occurred.

She hit me.

My Sparrow just hit me.

"You... you hit me," I said dumbly, massaging the side of my face. "That fucking hurt."

And why the fuck am I finding that hot?

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to... it just... I just... I don't... I'm sorry!" she rambled, reaching out to touch my other cheek, and letting her other hand rest on mine on the side where she'd hit me.

She scooted forward on the bench, practically sitting in my lap as she wrapped her good leg around mine. By the way we were sitting now our crotches were merely inches apart. My dick was acutely aware of that fact. Especially after her hitting me.

She cupped my face with her hands and started to kiss me all over my face as I let my hand fall down. I gripped her thighs as she continued to kiss me.

"I'm so sorry, I didn't mean to do it," she said between kisses. She pecked my lips a couple of times before I got enough of the chastity of it all. I pressed my lips hard against hers and she gripped my hair tight. The urgency and passion behind our kissing now was nothing we had done before. I was surprised by the way her mouth and tongue moved with mine; I wondered what had possessed her to be so brave all of a sudden.

My hands tightened on her thighs and she scooted closer – which was a bad fucking idea, since she practically rubbed against my boner now. I stopped thinking about how I didn't want to make her uncomfortable, instead I decided to just go with my instincts. If she told me to stop, I would stop. But until then I might as well enjoy the fucking ride.

I put a hand on her lower back as I slowly pushed her down on her back. Our lips never parted, and I wondered if she even realized she was now laying down. By the way she was kissing me it was as if she wasn't even aware of the rest of the world anymore.

Her legs were spread, resting on each side of the bench. When I hovered over her I pressed my body against hers, but trying to keep most of my weight off by leaning my arm against the piano.

I didn't want to crush my girlfriend.

I could feel my dick twitch as it came in contact with her body, and I couldn't help the groan that escaped me. Her fingers starting scratching my scalp and pulling at my hair, and it was driving me

crazy. I started to move on top of her. I needed friction. My *dick* needed fucking friction.

Dear Dick, meet Bella's wonderful crotch. Sorry about the clothes.

I slowly started to dry-hump her, my entire body rejoicing in the feeling. A moan escaped her, and it was like damn music to my ears. A moan was always better than a 'stop'. And *that* moan was almost better than dry-humping.

Almost .

I started to move faster on top of her, and I swear to God I was going to come. I usually had a pretty decent amount of stamina, so the fact that I was so close already – without even *fucking* her – was fucking ridiculous. If it had been some other girl, then this would have been embarrassing. But somehow, with Sparrow, it wasn't.

My dick came in contact with her again, and a strangled moan escaped her at the contact.

I groaned and did it again, harder on purpose this time. I was granted with another moan.

But when I did it a third time, she removed her hands from my hair, pushing me away by placing them on my chest.

"Stop," she said, her voice so breathless and soft that I almost didn't hear her.

I reluctantly sat back down on the bench. My erection fucking painful against its confines of my jeans. She didn't sit up. She just stared at the ceiling. Her cheeks were flushed and she was fucking glowing.

She liked it. I was sure she fucking liked it.

"I don't have a problem," she said with a weird, empty tone. She didn't look at me. "See? I can be normal too. I'm not insane."

Her words pierced through me, and I felt myself deflate. *Fuck* .

"You... you did this to prove a point?" I asked slowly.

She bit her quivering lip and I wanted to fucking slap myself.

"You told me today that you wanted me to prove a point."

Of course she did it to prove a fucking point.

"You're going with me to the hospital today. We're going to get you professional help."

"I don't need help, I'm fine."

"In what universe?" I asked, grabbing her hand and pulling her up.

"You said that I'm falling apart in front of you, when in reality it's *you* that is falling apart. You were so fucking broken when I came to your house last night, and ever since then it's only gone downhill. You agree to shit you wouldn't normally agree to, and you act like you wouldn't normally act. Something is fucking up and I need you to get help."

"I don't need help. I'm... fine." Her voice was weak, I doubted she believed her own words.

"Yeah? But you said yourself that talking to Jasper helped because he wasn't judging or whatever. So why are you talking to *him* if you're fine?" I could see in her eyes that I had her. She couldn't argue with my logic. "Sparrow, please. You're not yourself... something is going on with you and I don't fucking understand what, and I can't help you." I sighed and cupped her face. "Would you do anything for me if I asked you to?" I was throwing her own words in her face and I was hoping it would be enough.

"Yes," she whispered.

"Then please, do this for me. Get help. We could be great together. But maybe we both need some fucking help to make that possible..."

or else we'll just ruin each other. And I don't want to ruin you. You mean too much to me."

"You're everything to me," she replied with a quiet voice.

I wanted to ask her in what way I was her everything, as she kept phrasing it that way.

Was I her everything as a friend? As a *brother* ?

I didn't ask her though. This was neither the time nor place.

"I love you," I told her with a sad, crooked smile.

She didn't say it back.

Pleasure

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : MrsDazzled & CapriciousC]

Chapter 45, "Pleasure"

Isabella Swan

I wanted to push him away. I wanted to pull him closer. I wanted him as far away from me as possible and as close to me as he could get. I somehow couldn't do any of it. Instead, I was playing yo-yo with him. It was a miracle that he was still with me. How was he putting up with all this crap, and *why*?

He loves you, dumbass.

I groaned and closed my eyes, hiding my face in my hands as I started rocking back and forth. I was glad that Edward didn't touch me. It would only make matters worse if he touched me now.

I hated myself and I hated him.

It was as if Edward was acting like my conscience or something. He said everything that I already knew but refused to acknowledge. I hated this.

I also hated my mother for making me like this. This was all her fault. Her and her stupid mind games. Why did I even listen to her? I knew she was crazy and every word that left her mouth was crazy. So why the hell did I listen to her? Why did I let it affect me like it did?

Letting her words affect me like that made me no better than her.

Maybe I was insane. Maybe I was just as crazy as they come.

There was no doubt that I was my mother's daughter.

But who was my father?

Edward mouthed to me to ask questions. I figured that maybe was a good idea. I could ask her things and pretend that I had changed my mind. I could pretend that I wanted nothing more than to live with her in her delusions. Maybe she would give away something that I could use to free myself from her.

" Eh... Mom... so... when will I see you... again? I m-miss you. I miss J-Jacob too. I c-can't wait to see you again." It was amazing how painful it was to utter those words. Nothing could have been further from the truth. I wanted nothing to do with them.

" Oh, I imagine you do," she replied sweetly, with a weird edge to her voice. "The ceremony will be perfect and it's almost time."

" Uh-huh," I said. "What about Dad? Will he be there?"

" Your... dad? You're asking me about your father ?" she asked with laughter in her voice. It was like I just said something hilarious. "That's a first."

" Yes, Dad. Charlie? You know, the guy who fathered me?" I was still confused by the whole father issue and Dad's strange reaction when we spoke about it earlier. What weren't they telling me?

She laughed quietly, menace clear in her voice.

" You listen to me now, Bella," she began in a low voice, talking quickly and quietly. "Don't play games with me. I know what's going on. I know what happened to Jacob earlier and who did it. Don't you

think for a minute that we won't deal with this. That we won't deal with him. Edward Cullen will be dealt with accordingly because of what he did to us . Let's pray to the gods that he hasn't screwed everything up already. I know you don't share our view on this, but that doesn't matter right now, because in time you will. The legend always said that the Daughter of the Wise One would be reluctant." She paused for a second before continuing. "We will deal with Edward, and you will do best by not telling the police any of this. Yes, I know you have been talking to them. To be honest with you, I don't understand it because I would never hurt you. You know that. But that's not important right now. What's important is that you stop talking to the police, and if you mention any of this to them, or anyone else for that matter, we will have to do more than just deal with Edward. If you tell anyone, we will kill him. He will not stand in the way of our happiness. If you tell him any of this, we will know, and we will take precautions."

My heart was breaking in my chest at her words, my mind reeling with the possibility of Edward dying because of me. There was no doubt in my mind that she would go through with it, either. She was going to kill him. I had to stay quiet. I couldn't tell anyone.

How on earth could the legends be so important to her that she didn't even mind sacrificing another person's life for them? How could she kill someone just so she could successfully live out her delusions? How was it possible that a human life didn't matter more to her than that?

I glanced at the door, seeing the cop giving me a thumbs up. They had found her. They got a fix on her location. Finally. A tear slipped from my eyes. Maybe, just maybe, they would be able to catch her before anything happened.

But I wasn't going to talk until I knew she was behind bars. I was not going to risk Edward's life.

" Well, I don't care, you crazy bitch," I snapped into the phone. I was not going to play by her rules anymore. She had done the lowest

thing possible – she threatened to kill Edward. There was no playing nice anymore. The moment she threatened to hurt the only person I... I... cared deeply about, that was the moment she made me decide. I was going to kill her before she ever got close enough to kill him . "You can live in your world of delusions all you want, but I want no part of it. Go to hell!"

Where you belong.

"I only want to help you. Why the fuck can't you let me do that?" Edward asked, sounding aggravated, effectively bringing me out of the memory.

"Because I don't *need* help, I can do this on my own. There is nothing wrong with me."

And that was the God awful truth. There wasn't anything wrong with *me*, per se. Not really. I just needed to keep quiet for as long as my mom was on the run. I couldn't risk going into a shrink's office now. I knew how they played, they were better at mind games than my mother was. They played mind games for a living, for Heaven's sake. They'd have the truth spilling out of me like candy from a piñata before I even realized what was going on.

I couldn't risk it. No matter how much Edward wanted me to get help, I just couldn't risk it.

Not when his life depended on me keeping my mouth shut.

I looked up, meeting his pained gaze. I hated that I was the reason he was looking like that. I was hurting him. I didn't want to hurt him. But what were my choices here? It was either hurt him or have him killed. It was Morton's Fork. One choice worse than the other, but hurting him now would save him in the long run. Even if he ended up hating me, as long as he was alive, I would be fine too.

And he was right. He was painfully right.

I was a hypocrite.

Everything I ever said was contradictory, and all my actions screamed of double standards.

But I had no other choice. Before it had been about me protecting myself; now it was about protecting him. My mother's words were ringing in my ears, and I swallowed thickly.

Edward was already so confident that he could protect me, but could he protect himself when it came down to it? Protecting me could hurt him. Even kill him.

I didn't want that.

The logical thing would have been to break up with him, go back to how we were before the accident. *Strangers* . But I didn't want that either. I didn't want to break up with him. I didn't want the fear of my mother to rule my life anymore.

I wanted Edward. I wanted all of him.

My body was still pulsating after what we did on the bench just a few minutes ago. How he made our bodies connect. Even through our clothing, I felt that unfamiliar tingling sensation. A tingling that I wanted to feel again. A tingling that felt *good* .

Pleasure .

My crazy mother always said that pleasure wasn't for the girl, but I never shared that belief... I *think* .

If Edward said that he wanted to make me feel good, who was I to deny him? I mean, if pleasuring me pleased him, then who was I to argue? That way I was still technically living by my mother's words and beliefs.

As long as I remained pure.

I could not *not* be a virgin the day she caught up with me.

I guess I was a weird teenager for never giving much thought to sex. For some reason, it never really appealed to me. If sex wasn't supposed to be good for me, then there was no reason for me to think about it. Why should I think about something that I couldn't enjoy anyway?

With Edward, it was different. Completely, and utterly, different.

It was no news to me that he was a very sexual being, and he was very casual about it, which was both good and bad news for me. Good news because he made me see things in a different light, and bad news because he made me feel inadequate and abnormal. I wasn't like him. I didn't share his casual views and opinions. I hated that I couldn't be more for him.

I knew that I didn't believe my mother's words anymore – I don't think I ever did, it was just easier to go with the flow, never questioning her.

Every time Edward kissed me, I wanted nothing more than to be closer to him. When he had been lying on top of me on the bench, his body pressed to mine, he had still not been close enough.

Every time he touched me, it felt as if I was going to explode. I was surprised that my skin didn't catch on fire from the pure intensity of it all. It felt so good. Even when he was just tucking my hair behind my ear, it felt good! How could that be a bad thing? That was pleasure too, right?

I wanted to be that girl for him.

But I knew I couldn't. Not yet. I wasn't ready. I still had issues I had to deal with.

How were we ever going to be able to be intimate, if all I could think about was my mother? I don't think it would have been very nice for

either of us if I was thinking about my mother while in that... *position*

.

Despite what Edward – and everyone else - was thinking, I was still convinced that I didn't need a shrink's help to figure it all out. I could solve it on my own. What could a shrink do that I couldn't do myself? It wasn't necessary for me. Not really.

The difference between me and Edward – and why I didn't think that pushing him towards getting professional help was hypocritical – was that his issues were partly physical, and not just psychological. Depending on how you were looking at it, I suppose.

I mean, his blackouts weren't something he could fix on his own. That was something he needed professional help with. My issues were completely within my head, so there was no reason why I couldn't fix it on my own. It wasn't like I was crazy or anything. I knew I had issues, and I was dealing with them in my own way. Wasn't that enough?

I was dealing, I really was.

And a part of me was currently trying to figure out how I felt about Edward. I knew he was disappointed in me because I hadn't said those three words to him yet.

I could hear it in his voice, and I could see it in his eyes, every time he said them to me.

He was saying it a lot now. Like he just couldn't help himself.

It was unsettling.

It felt like he was further along than I was; which put our entire relationship off balance.

He took my hand, lifting it to his lips and kissing my knuckles gingerly. It reminded me of a simpler time, before we had a label.

Back when we were just friends. Back when a kiss on the knuckles didn't mean anything. Back when it was just a kiss...

I smiled and the corner of his lips turned upwards as well.

"It was never just a kiss," I mumbled to myself.

"What was?" he asked.

"When you used to kiss my knuckles. It was never *just* a kiss." It wasn't a question, and it didn't need to be either. We both know it was true.

"What can I say, I flew right into your cage, and you locked it behind me. Bringing the pen at the hospital was the point of no return," he said with a smile.

I smiled sadly and sighed deeply.

I was frustrated with the fact that he didn't tell me that he beat up Jacob earlier. Did he even realize what doing that meant? Did he not realize that as soon as his fist connected with Jacob's body, he was putting his own life in jeopardy?

I was such a bad person.

I kept giving him crap about keeping secrets, when I was no better myself.

By not telling him about what my mother said, wasn't that putting his life in jeopardy too?

Yes, yes it was. Edward needed to know what was going on.

I just needed to make sure he wasn't going to tell the police.

I could trust him. If I told him to keep quiet, he would. I was sure of it.

I trusted him.

"When did you get so smart?" I asked softly, not referring to anything in particular.

He shrugged. "I was just born this awesome."

I rolled my eyes and jokingly slapped his arm.

"I want to tell you what's going on... but not here," I said quietly.

"So there *is* something going on?" he asked. "Your mom said something, didn't she?"

I nodded. "Yeah."

He kissed my knuckles again, before pulling me to him. I put my arms around his neck and wrapped my good leg around his waist. I was as close as I could be. But it wasn't close enough. It never was.

He nuzzled his face into my neck, kissing and sucking lightly on my skin.

"I'm sorry I'm not better. I'm trying, I really am, but it's hard. I've never had a reason to be better before. But I want to... I want to be better for you," I told him quietly with my lips by his ear.

"Me too," he said with a sigh, his breath tickling my skin. "God knows I want to fucking try for you. But you're not making it very easy on me."

"I know," I whispered as a sob threatened to escape me. Edward was too good to me. I didn't deserve him. I didn't deserve his love. I didn't deserve anyone's. I squeezed my eyes shut as my grip around him tightened. "I don't want to see a shrink." I whispered it so quietly I wasn't sure he even heard me. He sighed, but didn't say anything. "I don't want you to look at me as a hypocrite... but I can't see a shrink. I just can't."

"You have this strange notion of not being able to do shit. You can't see a shrink, you can't have sex... what else can't you do? Should I

make a fucking list?" he asked dryly.

"Edward, c'mon," I said, pulling back so I could see his face. He looked at me with tired eyes and I tried to smile at him. "I want to deal with this on my own. It's all in my head. I can sort things out. I promise. Please, trust me."

He was quiet for a moment, just studying my face, before sighing and nodding.

"Fine, you'll get till after New Year... if you're not normal by then, I'm fucking dragging you to see someone," he threatened. "No fucking excuses will work. I don't care if you don't think you can do it, but you have to fucking deal. Your mom will be locked behind bars by then, and you'll have time to come to terms or whatever. And if that ain't enough, you'll get help. Deal?"

"Deal."

I smiled in relief and he smiled too in response. I loved his smile. He wasn't happy with the deal, but it was what I wanted. It was what I *needed*. But it would have been worth nothing if he didn't support it. And he did, even though he wasn't happy about it.

Edward really did have my back after all.

I looked into his eyes, feeling a strange stirring in my stomach as my heart started to pound like a jackhammer in my chest. I was scared. There were so many things I felt for him at that moment. It felt like my emotions would take me under and drown me – but it didn't matter, because those feelings were good. My feelings for Edward were *definitely* good.

"How did you know?" I asked before I had the time to change my mind.

"How did I know what?"

"How did you know... that you *loved* me?" The L-word came out as a whisper. For some reason it felt wrong to say it out loud. The corner of his mouth lifted into a sad smile.

"I just did. I can't explain it."

"But... was it like something that just happened? Like a lightning strike? One moment there's nothing, and the next it's there?"

He shook his head. "I loved you even before I knew I loved you. I just didn't want to admit it."

"Yeah, I can imagine that loving a goose isn't something you'd accept just like that," I said with a half-shrug and a smile, so he would know that I was joking. He smirked darkly, lifting his hand to trace my bottom lip with his thumb.

"Yeah, but I can't imagine it being any easier for you... if you were to love me, that is," he said, pain flickering across his face when he said the word, and his Adam's apple bobbed as he made the assumption that I didn't return his feelings. Maybe thinking that I never would.

"You can't love someone who stole your homework and called you names. Who almost fucking let you choke to death. And crippled you by hitting you with his car. I get it." His voice was wavering and he swallowed thickly again. I put my hands on either side of his face, making sure he was looking at me before I spoke.

"Please, don't add that to the list of things that I can't do. Because I'm pretty sure I can," I told him, making sure that every word got through to him.

"Good to know," he said, his voice still weird.

I sighed and leaned in to kiss him, letting the taste of him calm all my senses.

The way our mouths moved together, and how he pulled me impossibly closer as they did, I knew for certain that I could do it. I

could return his feelings. I really could.

The question was just *when* .

Edward had an appointment with his shrink that afternoon, so I had no other choice but to go "home." I spent my time by trying to do my homework, but my mind was always somewhere else. With Edward. Of course.

I doodled little hearts in the margins of my notebook, and I rolled my eyes at myself. It was ridiculous. Soon I was going to start writing our names – and then add his last name to mine.

Maybe I'd even write Mrs. Edward Cullen.

I ripped the page out of my notebook, scrunching it into a ball and throwing it in the trash basket. I was being ridiculous.

I didn't even know how I felt about him yet, and now I wanted to marry him?

Maybe I *did* need a shrink.

When Edward was done, he came to pick me up. Emmett was driving, and he cast a wary glance at us in the rearview mirror as we settled in the back seat. I dragged my hand through Edward's hair and he sighed in contentment. I wondered if my presence did anything to help with his anxiety.

"Do you talk to him about it?" I asked him quietly. He made a humming sound that told me to elaborate. "Your shrink... do you talk about the anxiety?" He nodded softly.

"I did today," he said.

"And?"

"And nothing," he replied with a semi-clipped tone.

"Sorry I asked," I mumbled.

When we got to their house, Edward helped me out of the car while Emmett watched in utter fascination. I felt like a freaking zoo animal. Edward noticed and snapped his eyes to him.

"I've never seen you look so fucking fascinated by anything since you found out how to order pay-per-view porn!" Edward snapped, but Emmett was completely unaffected.

"Well, sorry," Emmett replied calmly. "It's not my fault that hell has frozen over."

"What the *hell* is that supposed to mean?" Edward asked angrily.

Emmett chuckled, crossing his arms over his chest. "Is she the mountain goat?" he asked.

"Oh God," I mumbled, hiding my face in my hand as I steadied myself on one of my crutches with the other.

"Go fuck a chainsaw," Edward muttered, before handing me my other crutch so we could get away from Emmett.

Walking up the stairs to Edward's room on the third floor was painful – but not as painful as being ridiculed by Emmett. He probably didn't mean anything by it, he was just joking around with his brother, but it still bothered me.

Edward closed the door and locked it behind us. He didn't seem to relax until the lock clicked and we were safe. Safe from Emmett. Safe from everyone. Safe from the world.

Yeah, I liked that.

I went to sit on his bed, and he looked down at the floor as he followed me, slowly shaking his head and smirking. I didn't need to be a mind reader to know where his mind was.

I put the crutches on the floor and fiddled a little with the sparrow around my neck.

I had never taken it off since he gave it to me. Once I found out about its true value, my first thought had been to give it back to him. I saw no reason for him to buy me a two-hundred-dollar necklace. He obviously knew this. He had known when he gave it to me that I would never have accepted his gift if I had known its true value. The fact that he made up some cheesy lie about it being from a gumball machine made me love it even more.

I couldn't give it back now, even if he had wanted me to. I loved it too much. It was the nicest gift anyone had ever given me. It was thoughtful and it meant something. Nobody knew its meaning besides us, which only made it even more significant.

He sat down beside me and looked down at his hands in his lap.

"So... are we gonna talk now?" he asked cautiously, he glanced up at me and I nodded. He relaxed, and I realized he had probably thought I was going to go back on my word. I wasn't. Not this time.

I took a deep breath and he looked up to meet my gaze.

"She's going to kill you," I blurted.

He furrowed his eyebrows in confusion, his eyes wide in surprise.

"What?" was all he said.

"My mom... that's what she said on the phone. She's going to kill you." His eyebrows furrowed even more, and I told him everything that my mother said on the phone, not leaving one bit out. Edward didn't say a word, he didn't ask any questions. "So you can't talk to the police, and you have to watch your back. Jacob is still around, the police can't touch him unless he does something off the rez... but by then it might be too late. And who knows who else on the rez he's going to send to hurt you. You're a target now."

He was quiet for a moment. Then he nodded slowly.

"That's why you want to find the loophole," he mumbled, mostly to himself. "Not to save yourself, but to save me. If we can find that fucking loophole, you'll be free and they will have no reason to hurt me because I'm not screwing their delusions up."

I nodded. "Something like that."

I flinched when he shot his eyes to me – glaring.

"I can't believe you," he said, his voice low. "You didn't even want to look twice in the book when it was about saving *you* . But now, when I'm suddenly at risk of getting hurt, then it's okay to look. What the hell, Sparrow? Why don't you ever want to save *yourself* ? "

He sounded so worn out, so tired. It felt like we'd had this very same conversation so many times before. Even though it was in different versions, the point remained the same. He didn't understand why I didn't want to save myself.

"The next time I see my mother, I won't care if she chops my arm right off if it means that no harm will come to you. Because if you get hurt, I just won't care anymore. If you die, I die. I don't care if it makes me sound melodramatic or like a lovesick teen. It's the truth. You saved me, Edward. And I can't let her hurt you. Not after everything."

"And I can definitely not let her hurt you. *Not after everything* ," he replied simply. He reached out and put his hand under my jaw, right where he could feel my pulse. "This," he said, "is the most important thing you can ever do to me. I don't fucking care if you ever see a shrink, I don't even care if you go completely insane and run around dressed in a pink tutu while singing songs in jibberish. As long as you have a pulse, as long as your heart keeps beating, you're fucking mine. Okay? Keep your heart strong, because it's all I want. I will love you even if you go insane."

My bottom lip quivered, my eyes welling up with tears. I hated it when he talked like that. Like I was all *he* was living for now. Like I was his everything. His love scared me. He loved me on levels that were completely foreign to me. He loved me on levels that I couldn't even comprehend. I knew he wasn't faking, either. I had grown to know his eyes, and I could tell when he was lying. When he told me he loved me, he wasn't lying. Not even close.

He leaned over, pressing his lips softly against mine.

I choked on a sob and the tears fell from my eyes as I squeezed them shut.

I wanted to say it back.

I really wanted to.

But I couldn't.

The last person I ever said those three words to stabbed me. She literally stabbed me. She sliced my arms open, almost letting me bleed to death on the living room floor.

How could I ever say those words without being reminded of her and the pain she caused me?

Edward leaned his forehead against mine and I could feel his breath on my face.

"You are something else," he murmured.

I opened my eyes, looking straight into his beautiful, green ones.

"You are too."

He smiled.

"I like you," he said, and I wanted to laugh as he decided to switch the L-word to another.

"I like you too," I replied with a shaky voice. It didn't escape my notice that his breathing hitched. "I really do, I promise," I added.

"Good to know, Sparrow. Good to fucking know," he said, pressing his lips to mine again.

He left the bed then and I looked at him confused, watching as he walked over to his desk and picked up a book. He showed it to me and I sighed as I wiped my tears from my cheeks.

The legends.

He walked back over to the bed. I scooted up and rolled over to my stomach, and he joined me. He put the book between us, glancing at me with a soft smile.

"Let's find that stupid loophole, shall we?" he said, and I laughed bitterly at his cheery tone.

"Maybe we can find a legend that will say you and I are destined to be together," I mumbled.

He glanced at me with a smirk. "You'd like that?"

I looked back at him and shrugged. "I could do much worse."

"You really know how to flatter a guy, Sparrow," he said, rolling his eyes as he opened the book.

I nudged him and he smirked.

I wasn't really looking forward to reading the book, but I guess I had a good reason to. I needed to find a loophole so I could save Edward, and Edward needed to find a loophole so he could save me.

We read in silence for a while, until I just couldn't take it anymore. I rolled over to my back and grabbed his pillow, pressing it over my face. Edward put his hand on my stomach, slowly rubbing soothing circles around my bellybutton with his thumb. He didn't say anything.

When I removed the pillow, I saw that he was still reading the book, deep in concentration.

The things I had read were disgusting. It was amazing how many legends they could come up with that involved blood in all its forms. If it wasn't about draining and drinking, it was about painting your face with it and taking a swim in the dark water of La Push Beach at midnight.

There were no scales to rate this kind of crazy.

"When I went to school there they talked about the phases of the moon," he said suddenly and pointed at something on the page he was reading. "They mention it here too. Draining of blood for bonding rituals has to be done during a new moon, and the bonding ritual itself must be done during a full moon. But the markings of the girl can be done in between these... and they can wait months between the rituals to make it more effective..." He was almost mumbling to himself and I looked at him with tired eyes.

"So, how is that helping me?" I asked.

He glanced at me. "It helps you because it means we can figure out when they are going to try next. We can google it and see when the next new moon is and when the next full moon is." He sighed when he saw my doubtful expression. "C'mon, it's something, alright? Knowing when they want to strike gives us an advantage."

"Fine," I said. "But what about the rest? Did you find anything that can get me out of this permanently? My mom said something about the Daughter of the Wise One being reluctant, maybe if I play along I won't be reluctant... therefore cancelling out the legend?"

"Yeah, but I'm sure that if you did your mom would realize you were only faking, therefore cancelling out your reluctance and making the legend true," he said, making it all sound confusing and logical all at the same time. "Besides, you're not going to fake any-fucking-thing. I won't let you go near them, or them you. It's not worth the risk."

He turned the page and continued reading. I put my hand on his, which was still on my stomach.

After a few minutes of staring at the ceiling, I heard him mumble to himself again.

"... the Daughter of the Wise One will wear feathers which are not her own ..."

I turned my head to him.

"Maybe it refers to me being a Swan... you know? Bird? Feathers?" I said, trying to be helpful.

"Yeah, but what is this part about not wearing your own feathers?" he asked.

"Maybe I'm not a real Swan," I said without thinking.

He turned his head to me. "What?"

"It would make sense," I said as my mind suddenly started to put the pieces together. "The way my dad has been acting... the things my mom has said..." My eyes went wide – as did his – as realization hit me like a ton of bricks. "My dad is not my dad."

"Then who the fuck is?" Edward asked, looking bewildered.

"Who the hell knows where my mom has been?" I asked, throwing the pillow at the wall in frustration. "I don't know!"

"But is it even possible... I mean, maybe it's possible that your dad *is* your real dad," he said.

"Do I look like Chief Swan's daughter to you?" I asked, quirking an eyebrow. "Do I look like him at all? All I ever heard while growing up was how much I looked like my mother. Not once did anyone tell me I looked like my dad."

"I don't know... I'd rather not look for similarities to Chief Swan in the face of my girlfriend. It would make future fooling around very fucking awkward," he said. I laughed at his ill placed joke, appreciating that he never let the seriousness of whatever situation he was finding himself in get the best of him. He was always true to himself. Never changing.

I gestured to him to get closer, and when he was close enough, I grabbed his shirt and pulled him to me. I pressed my lips to his, and I felt him smirk.

"Yeah, I was right... all I can think about is Chief Swan and his sexy-ass mustache... maybe you should grow one?" he said against my lips.

"You're such a dick," I replied before kissing him a little more deeply.

"You would love my dick. My dick has yet to receive a bad review," he said as he pulled back, planting a kiss on my nose. He reached for the book, putting it next to my head. He was still lying half on top of me as he started to skim through the pages.

"What are you looking for now?" I asked.

"The legend that says that you need to have sex with The Man With The Great Dick, otherwise the world will end," he replied, giving me a serious look. "You don't want to have the end of the world on your conscience now, do you?"

"What happened to no pressure?" I asked, feeling only a little annoyed that he kept pushing the issue. He smirked.

"The fact that you haven't pushed me off yet, and the fact that you haven't hit me again, lets me know that you don't mind it as much as you say you do," he said, sounding very confident in his words.

"Is that so?"

"It's so so." He tucked a piece of my hair behind my ear, smiling softly at me. "I think that you like that I pressure you about it, because if I stopped you would have no reason to fight to get better."

I looked at him in amazement, wondering for real when the hell he got so smart. He knew things about me that I didn't even realize, and when he voiced those thoughts I couldn't do anything but agree with them. I guess I did enjoy his pressure on some level, because it made me want to fight so much harder to be normal and be better for him. Without his pressure, I didn't really have the proper motivation to get better. Not that Edward himself wasn't motivation enough, but his pressure kept me aware that I was trying to get well for a reason.

For a very *good* reason too.

For us.

And as long as he was pressuring me, I knew he cared. The day he stopped would be devastating. It would be as if he gave up on me. On us. And that would be worse than any pressure he could ever put on me.

He smirked, kissing my nose again before putting his focus back on the book.

I smiled to myself as I watched his eyes travel over the page. The thought of how far we had come in these past few weeks was still hard for me to grasp. It was all so surreal. No wonder I had issues dealing with my feelings for Edward – and trying to get a grip on my urge to just give up, commit suicide and let everything go. My life for the three months before the accident, and my life for the past month, were starting to collide, and my two selves from those times were trying to merge together. Of course it was going to be a bumpy ride, nobody could have expected it to be easy.

I reached out, letting the back of my hand travel down Edward's side. I could see his mouth turning upwards in a smile, but he kept his eyes focused on the book.

Edward was an amazing human being.

How come nobody had ever seen that before?

I glanced at his butt, feeling my face flush as I thought about how perfect his butt looked in those jeans, and I wondered how it looked without them. I wanted to feel his body. All of his body.

Without his clothes.

"What is their definition of the word pure?" I had barely thought the words before they came tumbling out of my mouth. Edward looked at me in surprise, a pleased smirk gracing his lips.

"Saw something you liked, huh?" he said, nodding towards his butt.

"Just answer the question," I said with a sigh.

"Well, according to the crap in this book along with what I heard from Mr. Crazy-Teacher in class, being pure is not just about fucking. Even fucking masturbating can be considered impure... but only if you have fingered yourself," he said.

"What? Please tell me the book didn't use *that* term," I said, wrinkling my nose in disgust.

"No, but it said something about objects not being allowed down there or whatever. I figure fingering counted too," he said with a shrug.

"What does it say about... pleasure?" I asked, biting my lip in embarrassment. Why were we talking about this? Why the hell did I bring the topic up? He looked away from me, a frown covering his features. "The book did say something... didn't it?"

"Yeah," he admitted reluctantly. "It said that pleasure for the girl was up for the man to decide. If the guy didn't want his girl to get off, then she had no say in it. Female masturbation is frowned upon, but I

guess it's nothing they can control... unless the chick has fingered herself or played with toys that aren't Barbies."

"They check if the hymen is intact?" I asked incredulously. "God, how thorough are they?"

"I know, it's insane," he said with a sigh. "It's like they're idiots or something, since the hymen can fucking break without sex even being involved anyway. A girl can break it when she's riding a damn horse." For some reason that made him chuckle as he glanced at me with his playful smirk. "I mean when a girl rides a horse... not when she's *riding* a horse."

When I realized what he was saying, I couldn't do anything but slap his arm and scrunching my face. That was probably the most disgusting thing he had said all day.

"Ew, Edward. *EW*!" I shuddered and he laughed. "You are a freak," I continued. "First mountain goats, and now this?"

He closed the book and put it aside, before focusing all his attention on me. He rested his arms on either side of my head and he smiled down on me.

"Horses and goats got nothing on my bird," he said with a smirk.

"Oh, how could I forget about your bird fetish?" I teased, raising my hand and fisting his shirt in my hand. "Come here, birdboy." I pulled him down to me, his mouth to mine. I finally understood what Edward meant when he had said that my kisses were addictive – because his mouth, his lips and the way they moved with mine, were pretty damn addictive as well.

I felt high in his presence – and not like when I was high on the weed he gave me the last time I was here, or when I was hopped up on pain killers – this was another kind of high. A better one.

"God I love you," he mumbled against my lips, as he let one of his arms leave its place next to my head, and instead went to the hem of my shirt. He slowly let his hand venture underneath the fabric; his hand directly on my skin was like fire. Amazing, wonderful fire.

My breathing picked up and he shifted on top of me, so my good leg was between his. He covered me with his body. I could tell he was trying to keep most of his weight off of me, but I didn't like it. I pulled him closer, feeling more of his weight. I didn't mind, it wasn't uncomfortable. Quite the opposite really. The closer he got, the better.

He started to move a little on top of me, and I felt that tingling again.

Pleasure .

"I think you should spend Christmas with my family," he said suddenly.

I gave him a weird look and he pulled back so we could look at each other clearly.

"What?"

"Christmas. You should spend it here. I mean, you're not gonna spend it with the crazy people, and I doubt Christmas at a reverend's house can be all that fun. Besides... I'm your boyfriend, which technically makes me family, and you should spend Christmas with your family," he rambled, rolling his eyes as if he didn't mean every single word he said.

I smiled and nodded excitedly.

"I'd really like that. A lot," I replied.

"I guess Santa thinks I've been good this year," he said.

"Yeah? Why's that?"

"Because he just gave me the most fuckawesome Christmas gift," he replied, and I rolled my eyes at his cheesiness. I stroked his cheek with my finger, enjoying the scruff that he had yet to shave.

I wanted this to last forever. I never wanted to leave. I was safe here.

I knew every good thing came to an end eventually, but if I wanted the end to this to be far, far away into the future, I knew what had to be done first. The Blacks and my mom had to be dealt with.

"We should look up when the next new moon is," I said reluctantly.

He nodded and rolled off me – but not before giving me a quick peck on the lips.

He got off the bed and walked over to his laptop on his desk. He turned to me as it booted up. I was still lying on my back on his bed. He smirked at me and I smiled back.

"You know what we should do?" he asked, I shook my head. "Do something outrageous during the next blue moon... just to fuck with them."

"What does a blue moon mean to them?" I asked.

"The most epic of full moons. A ritual taking place during a blue moon is considered to be the most binding one. Shit like that goes down in their fucking history books because blue moons are so rare. It only happens every few years," he explained, sitting down by his desk.

My smile froze on my face.

My mind reeling.

Did I just find my loophole?

"Edward," I said slowly, he turned around to look at me. "Maybe we should ... you know... have sex during a blue moon?" His eyes went

wide and he couldn't have looked more surprised even if he had tried. "I mean... if we... do that during a blue moon... maybe no purification ritual would work on me? Maybe I would be considered damaged goods and a lost cause? If a blue moon is so important to them as you say it is, then maybe... just maybe... it would work? Maybe that's our loophole?"

He opened and closed his mouth a few times.

Much to my surprise he shook his head.

"No."

"What?"

"No," he repeated, shaking his head. "I'm not going to fuck you just so they will leave you alone. I most definitely won't take your virginity just because it would be considered a loophole. That shit is all kinds of wrong. So no. I'm not going to fuck you during a blue moon."

He turned back to his computer and started searching for the upcoming phases of the moon.

I tried not to feel bad about the way he just shot me down. I had to keep telling myself that he didn't reject me – he was just rejecting the idea of having sex with me for the wrong reasons. Which was a pretty admirable thing, if you thought about it. But it didn't do much to less the hurt. I knew he wanted to have sex with me – he kept pushing for it all the time – but that didn't mean I didn't feel rejected when I just gave him an opportunity to do it, and he didn't take it. A part of me - the very insecure part – wondered if he really did want me that much, or if all he was after was the chase.

I shook my head at myself. Of course he wanted me. How many times did he have to prove it to me before I accepted the fact?

He typed away at his computer and soon he spoke.

"According to this, there will be a new moon...hrm... what date is it today? Whatever, it doesn't matter. There's no way they will get to you in time to do it, so the next new moon is in the middle of January. So we have time," he told me without tearing away from the screen. I nodded; that was a relief. Kind of.

Suddenly, a dark laugh escaped him. I didn't like the sound of that.

"What? What did you find?" I asked, sitting up.

"Do you know when the next blue moon is?" he asked, and I shook my head.

He turned around, smirking.

"You should rethink what you just offered me," he said. "Because the next blue moon is on New Year's Eve."

Dinner

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : CrimsonIceGoddess & Maxipoo1024]

Chapter 46, "Dinner"

Edward Cullen POV

Bella was coming over for dinner, so I was helping Mom out by chopping the vegetables for the salad. I didn't do it out of kindness of my heart; I did it because I was bored. Bella was spending her afternoon in Port Angeles with Jasper and Alice, while Emmett was up in his room, doing the nasty with Rosalie. So, my choices were to either help Mom out or to stare at the wall in my room, and God knows I had already stared at that wall far longer than I cared to admit.

It was the first day of winter break. The last week of school had passed quickly, and the past few days had been alright, I suppose. I had made the mistake of sneaking up on Bella in the hallway, when she was standing by her locker one day. I kissed her, and she didn't mind, but someone else sure did.

I hadn't given much thought to Tanya or what her reaction to us would be. I had been too caught up in more important things, like keeping Bella safe from crazy mothers and delusional motherfuckers that wanted to hurt her. I guess I shouldn't have been surprised when Tanya chose to corner Bella again.

Bella refused to report to a teacher what happened, of course. She said it wasn't a big deal, and I suppose it wasn't compared to all the other shit she had going on right now. At the same time, it wasn't an uncommon occurrence that she said that something wasn't a big deal. It was like her new catchphrase or something. Nothing was ever a big deal to her.

Tanya didn't hurt her physically; she only used words this time. I guess she had learned her lesson the last time. Bella never elaborated on what Tanya said exactly, but it didn't take a rocket scientist to figure it out. It was about me, obviously.

But whatever she said, it didn't seem to have done much harm, because the next day Bella didn't mind leaning in for a kiss in a full cafeteria where everybody could see us. Even Tanya.

I wondered if that had been her way of peeing on my leg or some shit.

I didn't mind. Whatever made her happy made me happy – and kissing in public definitely made me happy. I didn't want us to be a secret, and if Bella was comfortable with PDA now, then who the hell was I to say no?

Bella and I hadn't discussed the whole blue moon issue, or anything related to the legends at all really, since that night in my room. The topic of sex never came up either. I think I freaked her out when I told her when the next blue moon was. I was right when I figured she would change her mind about doing the deed during a blue moon. She must have thought that the next blue moon was far into the future; far enough for her to get used to the idea.

But what good would a blue moon do in a year or two ? By then the crazy people would be caught and shit would have gone back to normal. Hopefully Bella would be normal by then too.

I was worried about her. She was calm, like fucking *ridiculously* calm; but the calm wasn't normal. She had nothing to be calm about. She

kept saying she was alright, and I didn't bring up the topic of therapy. I had promised her I wouldn't nag her about it until January, and I didn't want to break that promise. Yet at the same time, it hurt to see her like this.

Bella wasn't hiding stuff from me, and she didn't keep any secrets. We talked about everything. But that didn't mean I knew everything that was going on in her head. Maybe she was more nervous and anxious about things than she let on.

Things didn't get better when the cops let us know that they hadn't caught her mother. The police had busted the crazy woman's hideout in Phoenix, but she wasn't there. According to my dad, who kept himself updated on the progress, they were only a few minutes too late. She had been drinking coffee as if she was normal; it was still been hot when the cops got there. She must have known that they were on their way and disappeared within a few minutes' notice. She was sneaky, that one.

I had figured this news would send Bella into a downward spiral of anxiety and depression, but it didn't. She took the news like a champ because she wasn't surprised. I guess I wasn't either. I had been right when I had said that as far as she and I were concerned, good shit never lasted. So of course this didn't come as a surprise to us.

I continued going to Dr. Randall and for the first few sessions all we had talked about was the situation with Bella. Every now and again we also talked about my blackouts. We had talked briefly about the night when my music muse went out the window and never looked back. He was been scribbling away more than usual when I talked about that night. I wondered if he knew something I didn't.

We didn't speak much about the blackouts after that. I wondered if it had to do with what I told him about that night, and about what I remembered –or didn't remember, as it were.

Then, during one of our last sessions before my winter break, he suddenly asked me about my family. We *never* talked about my

family. So of course I was surprised me when he asked me about them out of the blue....

"How would you describe your relationship with your mother?" he asked after we spent twenty minutes discussing Bella.

"My mother? I don't know... non-existent?" I replied, shrugging.

"What makes you say that?"

"I have barely spoken to the woman since the accident. I mean, if I hadn't pulled my shit together, I don't doubt for a second that she would have agreed with Dad eventually and sent me off to Chicago," I said. "It might even still be a possibility. Who the fuck knows?"

He scribbled something down on his notepad before looking up at me again.

"How was your relationship with her before the accident?" he asked in response.

I shrugged again. "I don't know? Fine?" I sighed and looked out the window.

He didn't say anything as he let me ponder the question for another moment. He always did that. It was as if he sensed what questions were hard for me to answer, and he never pushed me to answer. He always let me take my goddamn time. One thing was for sure, that man was patient.

"Mom is a pushover," I said, still looking out the window. "She never raises her voice, and she rarely has an opinion of her own. When Dad says something, she usually agrees with it. Our relationship before the accident was simple. She let me get away with my shit and she never fought with me or bitched at me for anything.... Our relationship was fucking easy. She used to show me her new designs and ask for my opinion and shit. She was a fucking saint."

"You used past tense," he noted. "You don't consider your mom to be a saint anymore?"

I shook my head.

"She's a pushover. Not a saint," I said. "She didn't defend me at that damn Thanksgiving dinner, and I know she was almost about to agree with my father to send me off to Chicago. A saint would never send her son away, and a saint would defend their flesh and blood to the end. A saint would fucking care, she doesn't."

"What about your dad? How is your relationship with him? Has it changed much since the accident?"

I snorted at that. "Don't even get me started on that motherfucker," I muttered. "The only good thing he has ever done for me was when he brought me to Bella when *she* asked for me. Other than that, he can go to hell for all I care."

I told Dr. Randall all about how I felt about my dad, and how I resented him even more than my mom for not sticking up for me during that Thanksgiving dinner. I hated him for threatening to send me off to Chicago even when he fucking *knew* that I was suffering from shit that I wasn't even aware of. The bastard even kept shit about my health from me. It was as if he wanted to have something on me that he could later use to his advantage. I didn't trust my dad at all anymore. He was just as manipulative as Bella's mother. Maybe they were both crazy?

"You told me how he cared for Bella after the accident. How can someone like that be a bad person?" Dr. Randall asked with an even voice. "It's hard to be a parent, especially to teenagers. It's not easy to communicate. Don't you think that most of the issues between the two of you are based on misunderstandings and miscommunication?"

"Miscommunication my ass." I snorted. "It's impossible to talk to the guy. He doesn't listen. It's like talking to a damn wall."

Dr. Randall sighed and made another note. "Let's leave your father for a moment. Let's talk about your brother instead. How is your relationship with him? You used to be close, correct?"

I groaned and leaned forward in my seat, resting my elbows on my knees and gripping my hair. "I don't even know what to think about Emmett anymore. Bella doesn't like him."

"And that means you can't like him either?"

"That's not what I meant. It's just that..." I trailed off and frowned. "Bella's reasoning as to why she doesn't like him is fucking valid, and her reasons are fucking real. If she dislikes him for those reasons, then why can't I?"

"And what are those reasons?"

"He's not constant," I mumbled, massaging my eyes with the heels of my hands as I leaned back in the chair.

"What does that mean?"

"Aren't we done yet?" I asked.

He sighed in response as he checked his watch. "We still have five minutes," he said.

"Fine," I said, letting my hands fall to my lap. "It means that he lets shit alter him. He changes because that's what the society is expecting of him. He changes because that's what *people* are expecting of him. Some shit happens, and he lets it change him."

"Why exactly is the society expecting him to change?"

"Don't you fucking get it?" I snapped. "People expected me to change just because of the accident. People expected me to become Bella's best friend just because I crippled her." I dragged my hands through my hair, gripping it tightly. "Emmett changed overnight. Suddenly he was all up in my face because I didn't let the

accident change me. He became her bodyguard and was completely on her side just because I hit a patch of black ice."

"I'm still not sure that I'm following..."

"Why the fuck am I supposed to change who I am because I got into an accident? And why the hell should my *brother* change because of it? He wasn't even in the damn car!" My grip on my hair tightened even more. He frowned as he studied me for a moment.

"Do you consider yourself to be the same person you were when you were five years old?" he asked and I raised an eyebrow in confusion.

"What? No," I replied, not sure what he was asking.

"But by your logic, you should be. Correct?" He smiled softly as it was evident from my face that I had no idea what he was getting at. "From what I understand, you're saying that the accident didn't change you, nor should it. Correct?" I nodded hesitantly. "Then by that logic, you should be the very same person you were when you were five years old, or even when you were born. Because if events in your life don't change you, then how do you become who you are?"

I opened my mouth to answer and he smiled at me.

"Time's up," he said, not letting me respond. That was just as well, because I doubt any words would have left my mouth anyway. He probably knew that too. I glared at him as I got up, grabbing my jacket from behind my chair. He made another note on his notepad, before standing up as well.

"We won't be seeing each other again until after the holidays, so please, think about what we talked about today. Life is not as black and white as you might think," he said, which earned him nothing but an eye roll from me as I left his office.

I was so lost in thought, remembering my session with Dr. Randall, that I momentarily forgot what I was doing and accidentally cut my finger.

"Fuck," I cried out, quickly letting go of the knife and putting my finger under cold running water. Mom glanced at me from the stove, smiling softly.

"Are you okay?" she asked. I gritted my teeth, hissing as the cold water came in contact with the cut. "The first aid kit is-"

"I know where it is, thank you very much," I snapped. She laughed and rolled her eyes. She was used to my outbursts, yet again more proof of what a pushover she was. She didn't even react when her own son snapped at her.

It was ridiculous how much Dr. Randall's words stayed with me after our sessions. It was fucking with my head. I was starting to consider how my words and actions were affecting other people. *I didn't like how it made me think about other people's points of view and their fucking feelings. If I never cared about that shit before, why did it have to change now?* There was only one person's point of view that I cared about, and she wasn't even here yet.

Other people's feelings. The world not being in black and white. My blackouts . All these thoughts swirled together in my head into an impossible mess.

Maybe Mom wasn't so much a pushover as she was... well, a *mother* . This was the first time Bella was coming over for dinner, so my behavior could easily be passed off as nerves. My mom probably thought it was hilarious that her youngest son was so on edge about bringing his first girlfriend home for dinner with the family.

I had yet to introduce Bella as my girlfriend, but I didn't doubt for a second that Mom and Dad knew that was what she was to me now. I hadn't asked them yet if it was okay for Bella to spend Christmas with us. I didn't see why I had to ask for permission for that shit

anyway. She was my girlfriend - she was my fucking *family* – so of course I would want to spend my Christmas with her. My parents couldn't deny us this, especially considering her situation. They couldn't deny my Bella a nice family Christmas when the alternative was to spend it with her foster parents.

There was a sound of a car driving up the driveway, so I immediately turned off the faucet, grabbing the nearest towel and wound it around my finger. I walked over to the front door and opened it just as Bella climbed out of Jasper's car. She looked up and met my gaze, smiling and waving before steadying herself on her crutches. She said something to Jasper, and I saw Alice waving from the passenger seat. I raised my hand and gave her a weak wave in response.

Bella walked up to the porch as I watched the car turn around and drove away. I couldn't help the smile that formed on my face as she came closer. I put my hands on her waist and pulled her close, leaning my head down so I could meet her lips with mine.

"Did you have fun with the Spazz and the Pixie?" I asked against her lips.

"I've been through worse," she replied with a smile.

"That bad, huh?" I asked, pulling back a little. "I thought you were fine with them."

She sighed and shrugged. "Jasper is fine, I guess. I just... I don't know what to make of Alice. She's too hyper."

I snorted. *That was true* . "Come on, let's go inside. It's freezing out here," I said, stepping aside so she could walk inside.

The sound of Jasper's car faded completely as I shut the door behind us. I was glad that Jasper and Alice didn't invite themselves over for dinner as well. Not that we weren't cool – we were, I guess. I somehow managed to solve some of my issues with Emmett and

Jasper. After Bella had left on the day that we found out about the blue moon, they came into my room and we talked for a few hours. Or rather, *Emmett* talked for hours. Jasper and I just listened. *Maybe Emmett could benefit from a few sessions with Dr. Randall as well.*

I hadn't spoken with the girls much since Rosalie made that stupid joke and sent Bella running for the hills. Bella and I didn't eat lunch with them anymore after that. We made it clear that we weren't ready for that shit yet. I didn't care much though. For me, right now, it was more important to sort shit out with my brother and my best friend than their stupid girlfriends.

Also, I needed to get shit straight with Jasper, because I knew how much his support meant to Bella – even if she would never admit it. Bella might still not like him, and he might not like her, but they worked together in a way that was too good to just throw away. They had formed a friendship despite it all. I told her this, of course, which probably was why she had asked him if she could join him and Alice when they went to Port Angeles.

"So, what did you guys do?" I asked, as I helped her take off her jacket.

"Last minute Christmas shopping," she said, sounding reluctant.

"Did you find anything good?"

She bit her lip and did a semi-shrug. "I... I think I did... might be a little cheesy, but... it was funny... I think... Alice didn't get it, but I didn't expect her to... but Jasper did... I think."

I raised my eyebrows in amusement.

"What?" I said, a smile in my voice.

"I didn't have much money, but I bought you something," she explained. "You might think it's stupid and stuff but-"

"If it's from you, then I'll fucking love it," I assured her, kissing her forehead.

"I'm going to love seeing you fake excitement when you open it," she said.

Rolling my eyes, I led her toward the kitchen.

"I'm sure my mom wants me to introduce you," I told her.

"But she's already met me," she argued.

I snorted. "Yeah, but not like this."

"I suppose you're right."

I wanted to hold her hand as we walked toward the kitchen, but her crutches made that impossible. I couldn't wait for her to get rid of that shit.

I cleared my throat as we entered the kitchen. Mom had her back to us as she stood by the stove. She turned around, her face practically breaking in two because she was smiling so widely. The scary thing was that there was nothing fake about her smile at all. She was genuinely *that* excited about this.

She walked over to Bella and pulled her into a hug. Bella yelped in surprise, and I resisted the instinct to pull my mom away from her. Bella forced a smile – probably for my mom's benefit – as Mom let her go.

"It's so good to see you again, Bella. How are you?" Mom asked.

"I'm fine," Bella replied in a small voice. "Thank you. It's nice to see you too."

"Dinner will be ready in an hour or so," Mom said. "And I think Edward has helped me enough." She gave me an amused smile and I rolled my eyes.

Bella looked at my hand, not noticing the blood on the towel until now.

"What happened?" she asked.

"I cut myself. No biggie," I said, throwing the towel on the counter. "Come on, let's go to my room."

I swear I could hear my mom chuckle as we left the kitchen.

As we passed the second floor, we heard loud music playing from Emmett's room. It just barely muffled the excited grunts from my brother. I couldn't help but smirk. Bella gave me a weird look but didn't say anything. We made it to my room, and I closed the door behind us. Bella wobbled over to my bed and plopped down, putting her crutches on the floor before laying down with a sigh.

"My whole body aches," she said. "Alice insisted on us going into all those stupid stores in that stupid mall. We even went into a hardware store. Who the hell buys Christmas presents in a hardware store? Answer is: not even Alice. I think she might have some OCD about it. She can't leave a mall without stepping into every single store first... I didn't go with them for the last five. Instead I sat outside on a bench and waited for them. My body couldn't take the abuse."

I laid down beside her, propping my head up on my arm and putting my hand on her stomach. She turned her head to me and smiled.

"All those stores, and I still couldn't find the perfect gift for you," she said, sounding apologetic. "You gave me the necklace. It was perfect... how am I ever going to top that?"

"It's not a competition," I replied. "Besides, I was just lucky I stumbled across that necklace in the first place. And I told you already, if it's from you, then I'll fucking love it. You could give me a bag of bird shit and I'd still put it on display on my damn bookshelf."

"Gosh darn it," she said. "If I had known that you were that easy to please, I would have stopped by the pet store and asked them for some bird crap. Cheap and easy."

"Just like me," I said and leaned in to kiss her.

She hummed against my lips and when I pulled back she was smiling sadly.

"Do you really consider yourself cheap and easy?" she asked.

"Only for you," I replied.

Her smile got a little happier and I leaned in to kiss her again.

"I missed you today," I admitted. "I thought that I was going to see you more now that school was out, but instead you left me to hang out with Jasper. I'm almost hurt."

"I promise it will never happen again," she said, braiding her fingers with mine on her stomach. "It's not worth the anxiety."

"You were anxious?" I asked, frowning in concern.

"I wasn't with you. I didn't know where you were or what you were doing. For all I knew, you might have crossed paths with Jacob again... or maybe my mom had already cut your throat, and there would have been nothing I could have done about it," she said with a quiet voice.

"C'mon, Sparrow," I said, gripping her hand more tightly. "You know what the police said. They're keeping tabs on everyone entering and leaving the town and the border to the rez. They're also on the lookout in town and around your house. This is the most excitement these cops have had in decades. They're taking this shit seriously. I know, I know, the cops are fucking idiots... but still, we have to have a little fucking faith that they're at least not blind."

"I know, but still... it makes me anxious to be away from you. I don't feel safe anywhere else," she said with a sigh.

"So it was for purely selfish reasons then," I noted. She rolled her eyes and turned to her side, mirroring my position. I scooted myself closer and put an arm around her waist to pull her closer.

My instincts told me to tell her that I loved her. It was an overwhelming feeling that washed over me more often than not; especially when she was this close. But I had to bite my tongue to keep the words from spilling out. I didn't want to say them – and not because I didn't mean them. I didn't want to say them because it hurt like a son of a bitch when she didn't say them back. It hurt more and more each time she didn't say it. I knew she wasn't ready for it – maybe she'd never be, but that didn't mean I had to like it.

She hummed quietly as she let her finger trace my jaw.

"I can't wait to get this stupid cast off my leg. It's really starting to be a pain in my ass," she mumbled. I ignored the pang in my chest that followed her words. The pang that always appeared when she spoke about her leg, the cast, or the accident. It didn't matter that it was the accident that brought us together – I still fucking crippled her. I would take it all back if I could, if it meant that she would be alright again. I didn't want to see her suffer anymore.

She must have sensed the change, because she smiled sadly at me and put her finger between my eyebrows to even out a frown I didn't even realize was there.

"You always do that," she murmured. "You always frown and look like you're in pain every time I even mention my leg or the cast. Please tell me you're done blaming yourself."

"I will always blame myself," I argued.

"Please," she said with a soft smile. "Remember when you kept saying it wasn't your fault? That it could have happened to anyone?"

You hit a patch of black ice. You lost control. It's not your fault. We both know that. So what changed?"

"You know what," I said, unwilling to say the words.

She shook her head, sighing. "That's not a good enough reason though. The facts of the accident remain the same no matter your feelings for me."

"Tell that to my heart," I said.

"You're impossible," she said, sitting up with a groan. "Stop being so damn masochistic."

"This coming from the girl-"

"Oh, shush you," she cut me off. I sat up and looked at her incredulously, but she was completely unaffected by my gaze. "Stop saying stuff like that, like I'm not entitled to have an opinion about you because I'm a certain way or whatever. You annoy me."

"Well, right back attcha, smartiepants." Leaning forward, I rested my chin on her shoulder. She turned her head to me, glaring. This was not the first semi-fight or argument we'd had in the past few days, or for the past month and a half that we'd 'known' each other for that matter. It seemed as though we couldn't really get along for long periods of times – or maybe this was just the way we were with each other, always bickering about something.

I would be lying if I said that I minded it. Every time she stood up to me, or said something to put me in my place, just proved that she was stronger than she thought. Yes, that shit turned me on just a little. I liked that she wasn't afraid of saying stuff just because it might hurt my feelings. She wasn't a wuss.

I licked my bottom lip and leaned in to kiss her. She rolled her eyes as my lips connected with hers. When I leaned back, she smirked.

"You always do that," she said.

"Do what?"

"Kiss me after we fight and stuff," she said with a shrug.

"Your lips are just so kissable after we fight... not my fault," I said with a smirk as I leaned in to kiss her again. She kissed me back, and I smiled against her lips.

"You are so cheap," she mumbled.

"Cheap *and* easy," I corrected.

She rolled her eyes and pushed me away. I fell back on my bed. I expected her to follow, but instead she leaned forward to pick up her crutches. She got up and wobbled over to the window, looking out. I could tell by the way she kept adjusting her hold on her crutches that her arms were sore.

I closed my eyes and rested my arm over my face.

If her body was sore – then my mind was too. Dr. Randall was a major mindfuck.

"Have you read any more of the book?" she asked. I shook my head without removing my arm.

"Have you talked to your dad?" I asked. She snorted.

"Which one?"

I rolled my eyes behind closed lids. "The Chief."

"No, I haven't. According to his former co-workers, he's been spending most of his time on the rez during his suspension... he never leaves. I wonder what they're doing to him there."

"Who the fuck knows," I said. "Have you thought any more about asking for a paternity test?"

I heard her sigh. "I've been thinking about it, yeah. But how are we even going to do it if the guy refuses to leave the rez? The cops can't go over there and take him."

I sat up and turned to her. "We could go."

She gave me a skeptical look. "Edward, have you forgotten that you're banned from the land?"

"So fucking what?"

"And do you really want us to go there? Me, the sacrificial lamb, and you who has a damn bounty on your head? I don't think so," she said. "We might be stupid, but not *that* stupid."

"Like they would ever touch us," I muttered. "They wouldn't dare."

"Oh, here we go again. Macho E rears his ugly head," she said with a sigh. I glared at her and she just quirked an eyebrow. "You seriously think you could take them all down? It's on their land for Christ's sake. They all want this to happen. You really think you can take twenty or thirty big guys on your own? When the hell did you turn into an idiot?"

"Well, excuse me for trying to help and getting this fucked up situation over with already. The paternity shit is the loophole, right? So why the fuck are we even arguing about this?"

"We are not arguing. *You* are arguing," she corrected.

"Semantics," I muttered as I got off the bed. I walked over to her, stepping up behind her and wrapping my arms around her. She leaned her head back and I rested my cheek against her hair.

"I wish they could catch *her* already," she mumbled. "She is the mastermind behind this, after all. I don't think the rez people would

continue to pursue me if it wasn't for her."

"At least we know she's probably heading back to Forks, and then it's just a matter of time before they catch her. There are only so many places she can hide here," I said quietly.

"I was thinking... maybe they're not going to wait until the next new moon..."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that maybe they'll try again with something on the blue moon. You said so yourself that no time is more powerful to them than the blue moon. So maybe that overrides everything? Maybe they don't even need to drain my blood or whatever on a new moon. Maybe all they need is a blue moon? Maybe they can finish the ritual then?" she said.

"Fuck," I muttered, my arms tightening around her. "I guess they have their fair share of their own loopholes as well." I sighed and nuzzled my face in her hair. "I bet they have a plan b for everything."

"So why are we even bothering coming up with our own?" she mumbled quietly.

"Because the only way to beat them is to beat them at their own game. If we can find a loophole that makes the Black Swan invalid, then there is nothing they can do about it. No fucking loophole can save them if you're not the girl the legends speak of."

"Edward?"

"Mmm?"

She turned her head so she could meet my gaze.

"Can't we just... take a break from all of this? At least until after Christmas?"

"Yeah, sounds good to me," I said.

I rested my cheek against her hair as we looked out the window in silence. It had been snowing relentlessly for the past few days. It was the perfect weather for a snowball fight. I would have loved to tackle Bella in the snow. It would have been fucking hot... and cold.

But her cast prevented us from doing just that.

"Mrs. Weber wants me to go with them to Seattle over Christmas," she said suddenly.

"What?"

"I told her that I didn't want to. I told her that you asked me to spend Christmas here, but since they're spending a few days up there there's the issue of... well, sleeping arrangements. They're not comfortable leaving me alone at the house. And frankly, they're not comfortable leaving me behind at all. Not when all this stuff is going on," she said with a deep sigh.

"You can stay here," I said without thinking.

She glanced up at me with an amused smile. "Yeah? Because the Webers and your parents would surely go along with that."

"I can kidnap you," I said, kissing her hair. "We could check into a hotel somewhere. Just you and me. We could run away."

"As romantic as that may sound, I still don't think it's a good idea," she said softly, turning her head up. "But I appreciate the sentiment." I smiled crookedly and leaned down to kiss her.

"Let's ask them about it first and then book the hotel *after* they've denied us the opportunity to spend Christmas together," I said.

"Sounds good to me," she said with a smile.

There was a knock on the door, and I turned around, my arms still wrapped around Bella and she turned with me. Emmett peeked in with his hand over his eyes.

"Mom said dinner is ready, so why don't the two of you get dressed and get your sweet asses downstairs," he said. I quirked an eyebrow at him as he peeked through his fingers. He grinned. "Wow, you get dressed fast."

I rolled my eyes and stepped away from Bella. She gave me a look that clearly said she still didn't know what to make of Emmett. I had started to wonder if she disliked him because she thought she had to and not because she genuinely didn't like the guy.

It was as if she was happy with me being her only friend, not counting Jasper of course.

We went downstairs and into the dining room. Mom had just prepared the table and she smiled as we entered. I pulled out a chair for Bella and she gave me an amused smile as she sat down. I leaned in and kissed the top of her head before taking the seat next to her. Emmett entered a moment later with Rosalie in tow. They took their seats across from us.

Dad had yet to come home from work, so I guessed he wasn't going to join us for dinner.

Mom was nice and all. She asked Bella about school and how her leg was doing. Bella was as polite as they come; she answered every damn question as if they didn't bother her at all, even though I knew she didn't like answering shit.

Emmett followed the conversation with an amused grin. Rosalie couldn't have looked more bored even if she tried.

A dreadful hour later, the dinner was finally over. I had just brought my and Bella's empty plates to the kitchen when Dad came home. Bella wobbled over to me by the sink just as Dad walked in.

He spotted us and smiled.

"Just the two people I wanted to see," he said. I pulled Bella to me, not liking the tone in my father's voice. He noticed the cautious look in my eyes and he smiled. "Don't worry, it's not a bad thing." I leaned back against the counter and Bella leaned back against my chest.

"Mrs. Weber called me at work today. She wanted to talk to me about Christmas," he began and I groaned.

"Yeah? And you all want Bella to go to Seattle with them? Fucking perfect," I said. He sighed and gave me a tired look.

"No," he said. "We discussed the option of her staying in Forks, but I think we all agreed that she can't stay at their house all alone. Especially not considering the current circumstances. I did offer to let Bella stay here while they're away, but I'm not too sure that's a good idea either."

I narrowed my eyes at him.

"May I please ask why?" I asked politely. He glanced at me, then at Bella, and then at me. He raised an eyebrow and gave me a pointed look. I rolled my eyes at that. "Give me a fucking break." I snorted. "You really think we're gonna fuck like bunnies just because she's staying here?" Bella stiffened in my arms, and I made a mental note to apologize for it later. "You do know her history right? You really think I would do that to her?"

"I think the question is, does he really think I would *let* you do that to me," she said, turning her head to me. She smiled crookedly at me, before turning her gaze to my dad. "With all due respect, Dr. Cullen, do you really think Edward and I are going to have sex after everything we've gone through in the past month and a half? You really think that sex is that high up on our list of priorities right now? I'm sorry, but I'm more worried about staying alive and not be abducted by my crazy mother than I am about Edward jumping me in my sleep."

Dad chuckled lightly and scratched his neck absentmindedly.

"I suppose you're right," he agreed. "I will have to talk to Mrs. Weber again, and I will have to discuss it with my wife." He sighed as he studied us for a moment. "You two sure have come a long way, haven't you?"

"It took forever to get here," Bella said solemnly.

"I imagine it did," he said with a soft smile. "I'll see what I can do about Christmas."

He left the kitchen and Bella sighed in my arms.

"Wanna go up to my room?" I whispered in her ear. She nodded, but didn't move. "What is it?" I asked.

"Is it weird that I'm disappointed?" she asked quietly.

"About what?"

"That they have nothing to worry about. They have nothing to worry about *at all* when it comes to us and sex. I kinda wish they had a reason to be worried, because that would mean I'm not a freak," she said. "If I had been any other girl, then they would never have let me stay. If I had been any other girl, then they would have been worried about you knocking me up. But I'm not any other girl. I'm not normal. There is no risk of you knocking me up because I can't even imagine doing anything that would lead to that."

"What happened to the blue moon loving?" I teased.

She turned her head to me. "Do you have any idea how hard this is for me?"

I sighed. "Sparrow, the reason I'm even with you is because you're not just any other girl. You're *my* girl. I couldn't care less about whether or not you're normal. If I wanted normal I would have been with... hell if I know. What the fuck is normal anyway, right? I want

you. Only you. And the sex can wait for as long as it needs to. I'm in no hurry... okay, that's a lie. I'm frustrated, yes. But you're more important than my hormonal needs. Alright?"

She looked doubtful and I rolled my eyes.

"Trust me, Sparrow. Normal is boring. Why would I want someone boring? I'm too awesome for boring. Besides, do you consider me to be normal?" That earned a smile from her. She shook her head. "Exactly. We're both fucking abnormal. And I fucking like it. So there. Now turn that fucking frown upside down, and let's go up to my room and make out for a few hours."

I stepped away from her and she steadied herself on her crutches. I had reached the door before I realized she wasn't following. I turned around and, when I looked at her, I noticed she was frowning.

"What now?" I asked, worried that I had put my foot in my mouth again. She bit her lip and was quiet for a moment before answering. Each passing second felt like a fucking eternity. If I had said something wrong, then why couldn't she just come out and say it? Why let me suffer like this? "Come on, what the hell did I say now?" I asked aggravated.

Much to my surprise, she cracked a smile.

"Making out in your room, isn't that kind of a... *normal* thing to do?" she asked.

I sighed and dragged my hands through my hair. Figures the birdlady was just messing with me. She had become a pro at it – how come I could never read her well enough to know when the hell she was yanking my chain? She could read me like a goddamn book, but I couldn't read her at all. Not *that* well, anyway.

"Okay, how about I pour some glue over us, then cut a pillow and throw the feathers over us? And then make out. We could call it

pecking or some shit. Like birds do, right? Would you consider that to be normal?" I asked.

She laughed. "No, not even a little bit. It's perfect. Where's the glue?"

Snowball, part 1

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [**Beta'ed by** : ShowTunesJesus & idealistic4ever]

Chapter 47 – "Snowball, part 1"

Isabella Swan POV

"...and I have given the numbers to Dr. Cullen, but I also printed them all out for you here," Mrs. Weber said, handing over a piece of paper with a bunch of names and phone numbers on it. "Every number you'll ever need in any circumstance is on that paper. If, for whatever reason, you want to leave the Cullens, we have made sure that you can stay with Kate in Port Angeles until we get back. We all agreed that would be for the best. She's only a phone call away, and she promised she'd drop everything if you need her." I folded the paper and put it in one of the pockets of my bag. "Do you have everything you need?"

I nodded and zipped my bag closed. On my desk laid the gift that I had bought for Edward. It was neatly wrapped in red and green Christmas paper and tied with a nice, curled ribbon. I was so nervous about giving it to him. What if he didn't like it?

I may not have had that much money, but that still hadn't been my biggest problem when I went shopping with Jasper and Alice. My biggest problem had been that I'd never had a boyfriend before. I had no idea what the hell you were supposed to buy your significant other for Christmas. Yes, Edward had bought me the sparrow necklace, and given it to me early, so I guess jewelry worked. Did

that mean I was supposed to give *him* jewelry as well? He didn't seem to be the jewelry-wearing type of guy anyway. The difference was also that the necklace had a meaning; it was special to the both of us. There was no jewelry I could ever buy for him that held the same significance.

That was the thought that kept me going through all of those stores. I needed to find something significant. It didn't matter if it cost me five dollars or fifty dollars. I was only looking for the significance. And then I found it. But now, as it lay on my desk, all wrapped up, I was starting to get nervous. I had worked on it for the past few days to get it perfect, but now it just felt childish and ridiculous. Cheesy even.

Mrs. Weber picked up my bag and grabbed the gift from the table.

"Jasper is already waiting for you," she said.

I nibbled on my lip as I wobbled my way towards the front door. The snow was falling heavily outside, and I silently cursed my cast again. I couldn't get it off soon enough. Jasper smiled at me as Mrs. Weber handed him the bag, and he put Edward's gift under his arm.

"You ready to go?" he asked me, and I nodded silently.

I muttered goodbye to Mrs. Weber before slowly making my way over to Jasper's car. As I came closer, I noticed that Rosalie was sitting in the passenger seat, and Alice was in the back. Alice waved at me, and I bit down harder on my lip. Jasper nudged me gently with his arm.

"She's not that bad, is she?" he asked me quietly.

I glanced at him, giving him a look that said it all.

He sighed. "She really isn't that bad," he said, defending her. "She's just more intense than other people. She has a lot of energy, and she doesn't know what to do with it... so she's... well... excited."

"Are you sure she's not on drugs?" I asked.

He laughed as he opened the door for me. I put the crutches on the floor before getting in. Jasper handed me my bag, and I held it in my lap. He closed the door and as soon as I settled in my seat, Alice was yapping in my ear.

"Are you excited about spending Christmas with Edward? It's a big deal, you know. You're practically spending Christmas with your in-laws! I remember the first time I was over for dinner with Jasper's family. I was so nervo-"

"Alice, give it a rest," Rosalie said with a tired sigh.

Alice pursed her lips and scowled at her – who seemed completely unaffected. During all this, Jasper had gotten in the car and began driving down the snowy street.

"Perfect weather," Rosalie noted. *She liked snow?* She didn't come off as a snow-person.

"Absolutely," Jasper replied. "Emmett and Edward won't know what hit them this year. This year, girls, is our year."

"Damn straight," Rosalie said, still with her calm and collected voice, but with a smirk gracing her lips.

"Should I be warning Edward about something?" I asked, wondering what the hell they were talking about.

Rosalie turned in her seat, looking at me with a threatening glare. "No. You're not saying a word."

Jasper laughed, as Rosalie turned back around. "Every year we have a major snowball fight in Ed's and Em's backyard. Me and the girls versus them. They win almost every year."

"Yeah, because Emmett's a freaking cheater," Alice huffed.

"Puh-lease," Rosalie said, waving her hand dismissively in Alice's direction. "Edward is the cheater, and he is corrupting Emmett. My man just wants to win so badly, it's not his fault he can't stand up to him. Edward is a class-A manipulator, and he can trick anyone into doing anything he wants."

"Edward isn't like that at all," I said, the words tumbling out of my mouth before I even realized I had thought them. "He's not some soulless monster. He's a great guy."

In the rearview mirror I could see Rosalie roll her eyes.

"Oh, girl," she said with a sigh. "He's got you so tightly wrapped around his pinky that he's cutting off circulation... more blood for his dick, I suppose," she added under her breath.

Jasper glanced at his sister, shaking his head. "I think you're wrong on this one, sis," he said. "Edward doesn't have anyone wrapped around his pinky... but Bella sure does."

I gave him a tired look. "That's not even the least bit true," I said with a sigh.

Jasper met my gaze in the rearview mirror, smirking. "You sure about that?"

I rolled my eyes and decided to keep out of the conversation until we reached Edward's house.

Soon, we were pulling up in front of their house. I couldn't help the smile on my face when I saw that Edward was already waiting for us outside. But the smile froze on my face when I met his gaze. He wasn't happy. Something was definitely wrong.

He was wearing a turtleneck with his usual black leather jacket over it. His hair was hidden beneath a tight, black beanie. He looked absolutely gorgeous and absolutely wrong at the same time. He was quickly by my door, opening it for me, and holding out a hand to help

me out. When I was out, I tried to smile at him when he leaned down to kiss me, but it felt wrong.

"Four days, just you and me," he murmured against my lips.

"And the rest of your family," I added, kissing him again like nothing was wrong, before pulling away. I leaned down and retrieved my crutches, as Edward threw my bag over his shoulder.

I jumped in surprise, when Jasper was suddenly by our side, holding a big lump of white fabric. It looked... fluffy. Edward smiled crookedly at me, and I looked at Jasper confused.

"Wanna try it on?" Jasper asked.

"Eh... what is it?" I asked.

He held out the fabric in front of him, and I realized quickly what it was. It was a bright white, one-piece snowsuit.

"Rosalie bought it last year, but she never used it. She's taller than you, so it might be a little big, but hopefully your cast will fit," he explained.

"A snowsuit? What the hell am I supposed to do with a snowsuit?" I asked just as Emmett appeared out of nowhere, throwing an arm around my shoulder so hard I almost lost balance.

"Because my brother said he didn't want to be in the fight this year, unless you were too," Emmett said, and Edward rolled his eyes.

"Ehh... you do realize that my leg is in a cast right? I can barely walk with crutches in this snow as it is. What makes you believe I'll be able to be in a snowball fight at all?" I asked.

"That's what I said," Edward smiled softly at me. I smiled back, thankful that he at least knew how impossible the idea was. No matter how fun it sounded.

"And that's when I said that you'll just be purely defense. You'll be behind the wall, making snowballs. You won't need to move around," Emmett said.

I looked back at Edward, silently asking with my eyes what I was supposed to do. Edward gave me a look that clearly said that there was no way out of this one.

"Well, I guess I'm defense then," I said with a sigh. "So, I'll be on Edward's and your team then?" I asked, looking at Emmett.

"Oh, God no," Emmett said, shaking his head violently. "You'll be with me and Rosalie."

"Y-you and Rosalie?" I asked, confused. "But Jasper said that you and Edward always teamed up."

"Yeah, but I decided that we're doing things differently this year," he said. He leaned closer to my ear and stage-whispered, "And with Jasper and Alice on the same team, we'll only need to worry about Edward. Never put couples on the same team... if you know what I mean." He wiggled his eyebrows at me, and I scrunched my nose. That was a mental image I could have lived without.

"What about you and Rosalie? You guys are a couple too," I argued.

"Yeah, but we have our hormones under control," Emmett said proudly, which earned a synchronized snort from Edward and Jasper. "We do!" he argued. "We're in it to win it."

"You're deluded," Edward said, grabbing the snowsuit from Jasper. "We'll see you guys in the backyard in two hours. Until then... back the fuck off."

Emmett removed his arm from around my shoulders, holding his hands up in mock surrender.

I bit my lip to keep from smiling, and Edward scowled at him. We walked up the steps to the house, and Edward helped me brush off the snow from my shoes. He told me his parents were in Port Angeles for the day and wouldn't be back until later.

"So, you wanna sleep with me?" he asked out of nowhere as we walked up the stairs to his room.

"Wh-what?" I spluttered in shock, my eyes wide.

He chuckled quietly, shaking his head. "I meant, do you want to sleep in my room or in the guest room? My mom prepared the guest room for you. I'm pretty fucking sure my parents want you to sleep there, but I'd rather have you sleep in my room. And as you so nicely pointed out to my dad the last time you were here, they have no fucking reason to worry about us being in the same bed anyway. So I see no reason as to why you can't choose for yourself." He stopped in the middle of the stairs to the third floor, and I turned to him.

"Besides, Rosalie sleeps in Emmett's room when she's here. They never question it. So why should they question you sleeping in my room?"

I smiled. I rested my right crutch against my left hand, so I could reach out and touch his cheek. He automatically leaned into my touch.

"Are you trying to convince *me* or your parents?" I asked with a smile in my voice.

He rolled his eyes. "Both?" he replied. "So what do you say? My bed, yay or nay?"

I imagined sharing four nights with Edward in his bed, having his arms securely wrapped around me. Nobody could touch me. I would be safe.

"Yay," I said, nodding. "Absolutely yay."

His smile was so wide I was sure it was going to break his face. Yet, it was still wrong. Something in his eyes kept me from believing his smile. I turned around, and we continued our journey up the stairs to his room. His room was home to me. When we walked in, daylight was pouring in through the wide windows, the snow outside making the room appear even brighter. Then there was the boy. The boy who made even the darkest room appear brighter

My boy.

Edward put my bag on the floor and the snowsuit on the bed before turning to look at me. He gave me a confused look and chuckled awkwardly.

"Why are you looking at me like that?" he asked.

"Like what?"

"Like you... I don't know, just like that," he said, gesturing towards me.

"I'm sorry, I guess I'm gonna stop looking at you from now on then," I said with a sad smile.

He gave me another weird look but didn't say anything else. It reminded me about that time in the cafeteria at school, a few days before winter break. I had kissed him in front of a room full of people, not caring what anyone thought. He had looked just as confused then. But also pleased. Definitely pleased. But today, his confusion seemed off. And so very wrong.

Tanya had cornered me in the girl's bathroom the day before I surprised Edward by kissing him in the cafeteria. She cornered me after seeing Edward kissing me by my locker. She didn't like it obviously, so she attacked me, telling me how much of an idiot I was for letting Edward fool me. She asked me how I could be so stupid as to believe that Edward really wanted me and, blah, blah, blah. Yeah, the usual routine. It didn't bother me then and it didn't bother

me now. Not even a little bit. It surprised me at first before I realized why that was.

I felt sorry for Tanya. How desperate and lonely does a person have to be before she resorts to stuff like that? How sad was her life if she found pleasure in trying to ruin a beautiful thing between Edward and me? Was she really that jealous? Or was she just *that* pathetic?

Another reason as to why her words did nothing to affect me was the fact that I trusted Edward – with my whole heart and with my life. There was no one in this world I trusted more, so of course a few random insults from Tanya wouldn't change that. *Nothing* would change that.

And with all that other stuff going on in my life – with my mother on the loose, and the question of who my real father was – high school drama was not high on my list of priorities. Tanya needed a reality check, something to show her that there was life outside of high school. High school drama was a drop in the ocean compared to what I had to deal with, which made it so much easier to ignore her hurtful words. They only reminded me that I had bigger issues to deal with, which made it easier to just relax and enjoy Edward's company even at school. It was amazing how such a trivial event could change so much.

Edward removed his beanie and put it on his desk. His hair was disheveled, and got even worse when he dragged his hand through it. I loved it when his hair looked like that.

A complete mess.

Just like us.

"So, tell me about the big annual snow fight," I said, wobbling over to the couch by the window. "The brothers versus the others, but not this year?"

"Yeah, something like that," he said, sitting down next to me. He pulled up one leg underneath him, sitting sideways on the couch so he could look at me. He rested his elbow against the back of the couch, leaning his head against his knuckles. "We've done it for years. At first it was just the guys, but then the girls said they wanted in. Emmett and I were a team because Emmett spewed some shit about us having to defend our land since we always have the fight in our backyard."

I smiled. "It sounds awesome," I said honestly, silently wishing I had siblings to share stuff like that with. But then I remembered that I used to have Jacob, and we used to share similar stuff. Edward reached out and tucked my hair behind my ear.

"We don't need to do it unless you really want to, you know," he said. "With your leg and all..."

"And you don't need me to be in the games for you to join in either, right? You can be in the fight without me," I pointed out.

"Yeah, I know," he said with a half-shrug.

"I guess we're playing in the snow then," I said.

He chuckled. "I guess we are." He reached out to touch me again, and I leaned into his hand. He smiled crookedly at me. "You still don't like Emmett though," he said with a sigh.

"Does that bother you?" I asked.

"No... well, yeah, I guess it does," he said with a sigh. "I mean, he's my brother, you know? And I know he's a fucking meathead who doesn't know left from right, but I've forgiven him for taking your side after the accident. Frankly, there was nothing to forgive. He did what I was supposed to do—"

"What happened to not letting random events in your life affect who you are as a person?" I asked, cutting him off. I frowned as I looked

at him. He looked tired as he replied.

"We all change, Sparrow. Every fucking day we change. So of course the accident changed me. Didn't it change you too?" he asked, almost sounding desperate. "Can you honestly say that you're the very same person you were the night of the accident as you are now?" I didn't have an answer for that, and he knew it. "Thought so," he said when I didn't reply.

He let his hand fall down to his lap as he gazed at me.

"I haven't changed that much," I said weakly, not liking the turn this conversation was taking. Was he trying to tell me something? Something bad? What was it? I nibbled on my bottom lip and felt it quiver slightly. Why was I suddenly feeling so afraid?

"Yeah, you have," he said softly, with a smile in his voice. "The girl from before the accident would never have let me go to second base with her. The girl from before the accident would never have grabbed *me* for a kiss. And the girl from before the accident would definitely never have fucking kissed me in front of a cafeteria full of people. So yes, Sparrow, you have changed... *a lot*."

"Is that... bad?" I asked, feeling unsure.

He smiled, shaking his head. "No, it's fucking good. *You're* fucking good." He scooted closer to me, putting his hands on either side of my face and pulling me in for a kiss. His lips were soft and perfect against mine.

At least that was something that would never change.

I knew there was a "but" to his little speech, but instead of asking him for it, I decided to get lost in the kiss. Kissing Edward was easier to handle than talking about the things that were wrong. We were always focusing so much on the things that were wrong that I wanted this weekend to be different. For once, I wanted to concentrate on the good things.

And currently, the good thing was the feeling of his wonderful lips against mine.

"It's not funny," I muttered, clenching my fists in the white mittens that Edward said were his mom's. Edward stifled a laugh, and Jasper was trying hard to keep a straight face.

"Never said it was, sugar," Jasper said, his voice too collected and calm to be natural. I glared at him, and Edward pressed his lips together hard as he stepped over to me. He was trying not to smile or laugh, and it was starting to piss me off.

"You're beautiful," Edward assured me, kissing my temple. But his words did nothing to settle my annoyance, since they were bubbling with laughter underneath.

"Since when is the Pillsbury doughboy beautiful?" I asked, throwing my arms out in frustration. I jumped awkwardly on one leg over to the full body mirror that was hanging on the door to Edward's bathroom. "I look ridiculous!"

Edward made a snorting sound, and I could tell he was trying very hard to contain his laughter. I looked at my reflection, groaning as I clenched and unclenched my fists at my sides.

Rosalie's white snowsuit was big on me, definitely, and wasn't flattering at all. It wasn't hugging to me anywhere – except a little around my cast – and it was impossible to believe that Rosalie really was that much bigger than me. I thought she was just taller, but apparently she also had more meat on her bones. I guess that wasn't so surprising though; I had lost a lot of weight over the course of the past few months. I guess I hadn't really noticed.

The snowsuit was warm and cozy, though. Alice had been nice enough to alter the snowsuit a little too; she made it so there was no hole for my foot at the bottom of the leg where my cast would be. This way, I wouldn't need to worry about getting snow on my cast

because no snow could get inside. But no matter how cozy the snowsuit was, no matter how perfect it was made so no snow would get inside and ruin the cast, it still didn't change the fact that I looked like the Pillsbury doughboy. Very white and very fluffy.

And so very cozy.

Edward chuckled again, and I glared at him in the mirror.

"Laugh it up, Cullen," I said. "You won't be laughing when my team kicks your ass."

He stopped laughing, and he smirked at me instead.

"Oh, bring it, Swan. Show me what you got," he teased.

I stuck my tongue out at him, and he rolled his eyes as he handed me my crutches. I looked at them and then at him.

"What am I even supposed to do with them in the snow?" I asked.

He made a point by sighing dramatically and rolling his eyes slowly before he surprised me by picking me up. With his one arm behind my back and the other under my knees, he was going to carry me downstairs. I put my arms around his neck, and he smiled.

"You're so easy, Sparrow," he murmured. "If you wanted me to carry you downstairs, all you needed to do was ask." I gave him a weird look, and he laughed. "You didn't want your crutches," he clarified.

"You're an idiot," I said softly, and he laughed.

I hadn't meant it like that when I asked him what I was going to do with my crutches in the snow, I was just pointing out the problem. I figured I would leave them by the door or something and then jump on one leg to the middle of the yard. But who was I to argue if Edward wanted to carry me?

When we got outside, two walls of snow had already been created about twenty-five feet away from each other. Alice was making snowballs behind one of the walls, while Emmett put some extra snow on the wall on his side, to make it more stable.

Edward put me down on my feet, and I turned to him.

"So I guess this makes us enemies again," I said, and he nodded seriously.

"I promise to go easy on you," he said, leaning in to kiss me. I put a hand on his chest and slowly shook my head.

"Give me your best, or don't give it to me at all, okay?" I said, quirking an eyebrow.

He smirked, and I could tell that his mind was going somewhere else. My boy really did have a one-track mind. I rolled my eyes and pushed him a little harder, making him step away from me.

"Don't be a douche," I told him.

"What? I didn't say anything!" he protested.

"No, but you were thinking it."

"So now a guy's not allowed to think?"

Rosalie walked up beside me, giving Edward a snotty look. "It shouldn't be a problem for you though. It's not like you do it very often anyway, so won't make much difference to you."

"Ha ha, very funny," Edward muttered.

"Good luck, sweetie," I said teasingly, before turning around and following Rosalie back to our side of the yard.

Walking in the snow without my crutches was an interesting thing. I half walked and half jumped my way over to our wall. My leg wasn't

bothering me much at all anymore. It didn't even hurt too much when it came in contact with the ground as I put my weight on it for the fraction of a second it took me to take a step. I fell into the snow behind the wall, where Emmett was done with his preparations and was now putting snowballs in a pile. He looked at me and grinned widely. His cheeks were flushed, and he looked like a grown child. He was having a blast, I could tell.

"Bella, you'll be in charge of making sure this pile never gets emptied, alright?" Emmett said hurriedly, as if we were in a real war. I nodded. "Rosalie and I will do what we do best." *Have sex?* "And that's to shoot through their wall before we hit their asses. Rosalie is our best wall breaker. It's a pain to never get to be on her team, she always breaks our walls."

Rosalie snickered as she put another snowball on the pile. "But you always win anyway because your aim is impeccable," she said to Emmett. "But together, they don't stand a chance."

"Damn right, baby," Emmett said, reaching out to grab hold of Rosalie's snowsuit before pulling her to him roughly and smashing his lips to hers. They were passionate those two, no doubt about it.

Before the fight could start, Emmett stood up and explained the rules to everyone. Even though the others already knew what the rules were, they still listened as Emmett spoke. Maybe this was one of the traditions too. They didn't have many rules, but the ones they did have made sense. One was that you were not allowed to go over to the other team's side – that would be an automatic forfeit. Another was that you were not allowed to use ice in the snowballs – Edward told me later that that rule came about because one year Emmett did use ice in the snowballs, which resulted in him giving Jasper a concussion.

Soon, the fight started and Emmett started throwing snowballs at an amazing speed – and Rosalie wasn't far behind. I didn't see much of what was going on on the other side, so I just made snowball after snowball as quickly as I could, considering the pace at which they

were throwing them. Laughter and yells echoed through the yard, and it didn't take long for me to get caught up in the excitement of it all too. When Emmett got hit in the head, I laughed. He glared at me, but I could see the grin that he could barely contain.

Eventually, I peeked out behind the side of the wall and saw Edward. Or part of him anyway, he was hunched behind the wall, and I could tell he was making snowballs. I grabbed one from our pile and did the last thing I thought I would do today.

I actually threw a snowball.

Emmett laughed at me as he watched my poor throw. Not only did I have the worst aim, I also had no sense of coordination when it came to the strength behind the throw. The snowball landed a foot or so in front of their wall, and then ever so slowly rolled its way to Edward, lightly touching his leg where it stopped.

"Nice," Rosalie said. "Maybe you should stick to making snowballs. Okay, hun?"

Edward looked out from behind the wall, noticing me. He was smirking and chuckling at the same time.

"Did you just try to throw a snowball at me, Sparrow?" he called out.

"Maaaaybe?" I called back.

"Oh, this is so on!" he called back, and suddenly my team had to duck behind the wall as it was peppered by snowballs.

"Damnit, the wall is breaking," Emmett said as he pointed out a big crack that ran down the middle. "We need to do something! Quick!"

"We're almost out of snowballs, what the hell do you suggest we do?" Rosalie hissed.

They looked at each other, daring the other one to be the first one to voice a bad idea.

That's when it hit me.

"I know," I said, a smile creeping up my lips.

"Yeah? And what's that? Surrender? Don't think so," Rosalie replied annoyed.

"Oh, quite the opposite. Get your snowballs ready. Edward is about to come running," I said.

"Yeah? Why so?" Emmett asked.

"Because I'm going to do this," I said before collecting myself so I could yell out, "DAMNIT! MY LEG! IT HURTS... OH GOD IT HURTS...!"

"EDWARD! EDWARD! IT'S A TRICK! EDWARD!" I heard Jasper call, but from the sounds of it, Edward didn't listen, and I could hear him run from his side. Emmett and Rosalie quickly peppered him with snowballs, and he cursed like a sailor before he made it to behind our wall and to my side.

"You okay!" he asked, putting his hands on either side of my face and staring at me intently. His face was flushed and wet with snow and he looked absolutely gorgeous.

"We win," I said to him.

He looked at me incredulously and dropped his hands from my face.

"You serious? You used *that* against me?" he asked.

"What? My team was losing, and I needed to help out the only way I could," I said, biting my lip, hoping his anger was fake and that he would lose his façade and laugh it off like the rest of us. "Are you mad?" I teased.

"Mad? Of course I'm fucking mad! You can't use that shit against me like that!" he yelled, clearly showing me that his anger wasn't fake.

Not even a little bit.

"Edward, calm down," Rosalie said, surprising me by coming to my defense. "She was just playing the game like the rest of us. Remember the year when I pretended that Emmett had hit me with one of his iceballs? Nobody threw a fit that time, so you don't need to get your panties in a twist over this one either, okay?"

"But this is fucking different," Edward spat, getting up on his feet and brushing off the snow from his pants. Unlike me, he wasn't wearing a snowsuit.

"Yeah, and why is that?" Rosalie asked with a sweet tone.

"Because your head wasn't already fucking crushed because of something Emmett did," he snapped. He walked away, kicking the snow as he went. Before I knew it, the door to the patio slammed behind him as he disappeared inside.

I stared at the house and felt the tears well up in my eyes. I hadn't meant to hurt him. It was just a joke. But I should have known that jokes related to my leg wouldn't go over well with him. I was so stupid. He had told me over and over again how much he blamed himself for what happened. And now I do this? And for what? To win a stupid snowball fight? What kind of person was I?

"Don't worry, Bella. It will blow over," Rosalie said, giving me the most compassionate look she'd ever given me. "Edward will know he overreacted, and then he'll come back and apologize."

"But that's the thing," I said. "He didn't overreact. He had every reason to react like he did. I'm the idiot here. I know him, and I know that my leg is a sore topic to him... it was wrong of me to use it as a way to win a stupid game."

I scrambled to my feet and began my awkward journey to the patio. An arm wrapped around my waist, and my arm got slung around someone's shoulders. I turned my head to see Jasper.

"Let's not give Edward another reason to get angry. Walking without crutches is probably not a good idea," he said, and I snorted.

"Who the hell cares about my leg," I muttered. "They should have chopped it off at the hospital. That way I wouldn't even be in this mess."

"Yeah, and if they had chopped off your leg, how do you think Edward would be feeling right now? You really think a chopped off leg would have been easier for him to deal with than the temporary pain and discomfort you are in now?" Jasper asked. I didn't answer because the man had a point – and I was not about to tell him that.

"He hates me now," I said when we reached the door.

Jasper sighed. "Bella, listen to me. Edward loves you. Very much so. He doesn't hate you, I'm pretty sure he was just caught off guard by your stunt. He wasn't prepared for it because he didn't think you of all people would fight dirty. He knows you didn't mean anything by it, and that you definitely didn't mean to hurt him. He's just being Edward. He doesn't like to lose, and he's a stubborn son of a bitch."

I sighed and felt a tear slip from my eye. "I just hope he doesn't give up on me. He has given me so much, and I keep hurting him and pushing him away. I can't help it. He means so much to me, and I appreciate every moment that I have with him. But it's just a matter of time before he gets fed up with me and decides that I'm not worth the trouble," I rambled in one breath. It was amazing I could even get all those words out. It also amazed me that I said them at all; I didn't even realize I was thinking them until they were out. Another tear slipped from my eye, and I choked on a sob. "But that won't matter... because in the end, I would rather have had a little time with him than no time at all."

Jasper chuckled sadly and rubbed my arm. "C'mon, Bella, when did you become such a Hallmark card?" he asked. "What's up with all this 'better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all' bullshit? Seriously."

"Because it's the story of my life," I sniffled.

"Don't go all pessimistic on me now, gorgeous," he said, squeezing my waist a little as we walked. "If he breaks your heart, I promise you, I'll break his balls."

I sob-snorted, and he smiled. "Now *that* should be a Hallmark card," I joked, and he laughed.

Jasper helped me upstairs, but I made him leave before I even entered Edward's room. I didn't know if I dared to enter. What if he was really mad? I raised my hand and knocked on his door tentatively.

"Edward, it's me... can I come in?" I asked, resting my head against the doorframe and tracing the lines in the door with my finger. The door opened wide, and I smiled softly at him before walking past him. I didn't dare to go to his bed, so I made it over to his couch instead, where I started to pull off the snowsuit.

"I'm really sorry," I began, when I finally got the top part off. "I didn't mean to upset you. It was just that our wall was breaking and we were losing and... I wanted to help. You saw how ridiculous it looked when I tried to throw a snowball at you. I *rolled* a snowball at you. How pathetic is that?"

He didn't answer. He was still standing by the door he just closed. His hand was on the doorknob. He was still as a statue.

"Edward, talk to me," I pleaded.

"It's okay," he said quietly. "I'm over it."

"You are? You don't seem like you are," I argued.

"Let's just forget it, okay?" he said.

"Okay."

"Good."

He nodded and stepped over to his desk, fiddling with a few CD's as I tried to get the snowsuit off. The snowsuit was wet and bulky, and it was difficult to get off of me; it had been much easier to get on. I sighed and gave up.

"Can you please help me take off my clothes?" I said, before I realized how idiotic that sounded. "I mean the snowsuit."

The soft smile he gave me as he walked over to help me proved that he was in fact *not* over it yet. If he had been truly over it he would have made another tasteless joke about removing my other clothes as well. Maybe making a comment about being thorough.

I put my hands on his shoulders as he crouched in front of me and helped me tug off the snowsuit. Finally, when I was free from my snow white cozy shell, I wrapped my arms around Edward's waist and rested my cheek against his chest. He pulled me closer to him without any hesitation and kissed the top of my head.

"Are we still enemies?" I asked. I felt his chest vibrate as he chuckled.

"No, we never were... we were spies," he joked.

"Mmm... undercover spies, I like that," I said. "So what team were we really on?"

"Neither, we were our own team," he said.

I looked up at him and smiled softly.

"We cool?" I asked, and he nodded.

"We cool."

I didn't believe him. His eyes were still wrong.

Another dinner with the Cullens. The difference between this dinner and the one from a few days ago was that we now had the company of Jasper and Alice, as well as Dr. Cullen. The focus was not on me, and I could eat in peace without having to worry about being questioned about... well, anything. It was weird. But what was even weirder were the looks that Edward and Dr. Cullen kept exchanging. It was as if they were having some kind of silent conversation by reading each other's minds. At one point I was even sure Edward shook his head at a question that hadn't been voiced out loud. What was that about?

I sighed and poked at the food on the plate. I was stupid to think that the good part would last. The good part where we could just enjoy each other company and not worry about other stuff. But then, of course, I had to open my stupid mouth and complain about a non-existent pain in my leg and now he was having silent conversations with his father right in front of my face. Was this my fault? Was it about me?

When we were finished, I decided that I needed to speak to Edward. But he beat me to the punch by taking my hand and holding it in his lap as the others started clearing the table.

"Wanna go play in the snow?" he asked gently.

"You really think that's such a good idea?" I asked cautiously.

"I'm not asking you to join another snowball fight," he said, letting go of my hand and pushing his chair back in frustration. I didn't understand why that upset him, and I quickly grabbed his arm before he got away from me completely.

"Okay," I said. "Let's go outside. Just you and me."

"I'll go get your snowsuit," he said, and I reluctantly let go of his arm.

I sighed as I watched him go, and I slumped in my chair. Jasper gave me a comforting smile as he took Edward's plate and mine.

"Don't look so glum, Bella. It doesn't become you," he said teasingly.

"I don't care," I said. "I'm pretty sure Edward hates me for what happened today, so I couldn't care less about what I look like right now."

"Remember what I told you earlier, don't be so pessimistic. When it comes to Edward, you don't need to worry," Jasper said, before leaving the dining room.

At that moment, Edward walked in with the white, fluffy snowsuit in his arms. He had already put on his jacket and beanie. I forced a smile at him, but he barely even looked at me. I quickly wiped the tears I hadn't even realized I had shed before letting him help me get the snowsuit on.

We walked outside, and I had my crutches with me this time. It was an interesting thing to wade through snow that was over a foot deep by using crutches, but it was no more awkward than jumping on one leg, that was for sure.

We made it over to a part of the yard where the snow was still untouched. We sat down, and I couldn't help but giggle as Edward practically disappeared as he laid down. The snow was much deeper there.

He spluttered some profanities when he got some snow in his mouth and face, and I laughed even more. I rolled over, removing the thin snow wall between us and nuzzled close to him. He put his arm around me and hugged me to him. It seemed to be an automatic reaction for him.

"Aren't you cold?" I asked, noticing his jeans were getting wet by the snow.

"I have a hot girl in my arms, how can I be cold?" he answered quietly.

I tilted my head up and met his gaze.

"Talk to me, Edward," I pleaded. He sighed but didn't say anything. "Something is going on in that beautiful, bronze-colored head of yours, and I need to know what. I'm not the only one acting strange on occasion, you know," I added.

"I love you, Sparrow," was all he said.

I sighed and furrowed my eyebrows.

"I know you do," I replied quietly.

The corner of his mouth lifted into the saddest of smiles, and it broke my heart.

"Too fucking bad it's not mutual, huh?" he said.

I had no answer for that.

With Edward acting so weird, I decided that maybe it was for the best if I slept in the guestroom after all. Maybe he needed some space. Something was bothering him, and something was telling me that my stunt today was only a part of it.

Edward didn't even fight me on it, which made me wonder what exactly was going on with him.

I tossed and turned in the bed, trying to fall asleep but not succeeding. I had no idea what time it was, but I figured it was late. After what felt like hours of trying, I decided it was no use. I needed to talk to Edward. *Really* talk to him. I threw the covers off me, and just as I reached for my crutches I heard a door open down the hall. There was only one other bedroom in this hallway – and it was his parents'. The sound of steps passed my door, and I judged it to be Dr. Cullen; the steps were too heavy to belong to Esme.

I waited a moment, making sure Dr. Cullen was gone, before moving out of the room. Luckily for me, the thick carpet in the hallway muffled my steps.

I was just about to turn for the stairs to the next floor when I heard voices.

"... can't sleep either?" I heard Dr. Cullen ask.

"Why fucking bother," I heard Edward mutter in response.

The voices seemed to be coming from the kitchen. I slowly sat down on the top of the stairs, not feeling even a little bad about eavesdropping.

"Bella seems to be doing well," Dr. Cullen said. "A little too well even..."

"She's not doing well at all. She's in denial or some shit. Nobody with her life can be this fucking calm about what's going on. It's like she's not even aware of what's happening anymore. She lives in a damn bubble," Edward replied. "I fucking hate it."

"Have you talked to her about... well, what you and I talked about the other day," Dr. Cullen asked, and I frowned. I didn't like the sound of that at all.

"I planned to do it, but I kept putting it off because shit got in the way... it never felt like the right time, and then I decided to do it after dinner. But I just couldn't," Edward said, his voice empty.

"Why, Edward? We both know she needs therapy, and at this point I'm fairly certain that you are the only one that can convince her of that fact," Dr. Cullen said. "She was the one that convinced you to seek help, correct? Then why can't you see to it that she gets help too?"

"Because I can't give her the same ultimatum as she gave me," Edward replied, his voice barely audible to me now. "Because if I do, I'm pretty damn sure she won't pick me... and I'd rather have her fucked up and crazy, than have her leave me."

My bottom lip quivered as I got up on shaky legs. I couldn't stand to listen to this anymore. Was this what had bothered Edward today? Had he been obsessing over how to ask me to seek help? Did he honestly believe I would *not* pick him if there ever was a choice?

I turned towards the stairs, deciding to go to Edward's room. I knew I wasn't going to get any sleep in that hideous guest room, and I needed to do something. I needed to do something that would let Edward know that he had no reason to doubt me. I hated that he didn't know me better than that. But what I hated more was that I had never given him a reason to.

I got into Edward's room, getting into his bed, curling into a ball and silently hating the bulkiness of my cast. I stared at his alarm clock, watching as the numbers slowly changed. Minutes passed slower than what could be considered real.

Soon, I heard footsteps in the hallway, and the door pushed open. I sat up, meeting Edward's confused and surprised gaze. I wanted to tell him how much he meant to me, how I would sacrifice and give up everything for him. I wanted to tell him anything in order to ease his worries and doubts. But nothing of the sort came out.

Instead I said, "I couldn't sleep either."

He smiled crookedly, walking over to the bed and crawling in beside me. He wrapped his arms around me and I snuggled into his naked chest. He was only wearing pajama bottoms. We laid there in silence as I kept going over my options. What could I do to make him not doubt me? How could I convince him that I trusted him with all my heart, and that I would give up anything for him? How could I do that... without using the L-word.

I swallowed thickly as I realized what I could give him; what would make him realize what he meant. Something that we had gone over so many times before, but that I always refused. Maybe this was the one thing I could give him.

"Touch me," I whispered before I had any time to regret it.

He leaned his head back, looking at me with a confused frown.

"What?" he asked, his voice hoarse.

"T-touch me," I whispered again. "Please."

He slowly put a hand on my hip. "Why?" he asked.

I leaned forward and placed a kiss on his lips. "Don't ask why, just... do," I replied.

"You sure?" he asked, his voice so unsure and confused it almost made me think he didn't want it. I nodded again, and he inched his hand higher on my hip and towards my waist. Slowly, he let his hand go under my over-sized t-shirt, stroking my skin gently.

I rolled over to my back and he scooted closer, so he was flush against my side. He let his hand wander upward under my t-shirt, up over my stomach and toward my breasts. I wasn't wearing a bra since I thought it was too uncomfortable to sleep in, and it appeared to have been a good decision, considering the current situation. There was no extra obstacle for him to cross in order to touch me. He put his hand on my breast, and just kept it there without moving. I looked up and met his gaze. I couldn't read his eyes at all.

"Why are you doing this?" Edward asked, his voice lower than usual. "Why are you letting *me* do this?"

I silenced his questions with my lips. I put my hands on either side of his face and pulled him to me. His hand tightened on my breast and moved a little, so half his body was covering mine. I didn't know what

possessed me to do it, but my good leg found itself hitching over his thigh. This elicited a guttural groan from him, and he pushed himself closer to me. Like he could even get any closer now.

Our lips smashed together, our tongues moving together so ferociously it was almost as if we didn't know what the hell we were doing. We were both looking for something, but neither of us knew what that was. And we couldn't help the other one find theirs either.

Edward played with my breast, rolling his thumb over my nipple. It felt good. *I think* . I didn't even know. My body was experiencing things I had never experienced before, and I didn't know what was good and what was not. But it was Edward doing it to me, how could anything he ever did be a bad thing?

A silent moan escaped me as some part of him rubbed against my underwear. Why wasn't I wearing any pants? Maybe sleeping in only a big t-shirt was a bad thing. Where was that snowsuit?

Another touch and another moan. Edward's hand left my breast and trailed down my stomach. I didn't need to be a genius to know where his hand was going. My breath became labored, and I stopped breathing altogether when he palmed me outside my underwear.

My eyes went wide and he pulled back and looked me steadily in the eyes. But his hand was still on my underwear.

Panic was rising inside of me.

I couldn't even see Edward anymore. Everything around me ceased to exist as I fell down into a deep pit of thoughts that weren't even my own.

I needed to be pure. Why? I didn't know! I just needed to be pure. This was wrong. So wrong. If Edward touched me with his hands meant that pleasure was going to be given to me – not him. Which went against everything I believed in. No. Not me. My mother. I didn't

believe this. I didn't need to be pure. Pleasure was not a bad thing. Pleasure was for both the girl and the boy. It was not exclusive to the boy. Pleasure was *not* a bad thing. But this was bad. Touching me would make me impure. I... I...

His hand disappeared from my underwear, and he started stroking my cheek instead.

"Sparrow, breathe... it's okay," Edward said, his voice sounding as if it came through a tunnel. "It's okay. I won't do anything. I won't touch you... I won't... do anything. Please, Sparrow. I'm sorry."

I didn't even realize I was crying until my body started shaking in sobs. Edward sighed and pulled me to him, and I rested my forehead against his chest as I tried to make sense of my thoughts.

How could those thoughts possess me like that? How could I let them overwhelm me when I didn't even believe them? I didn't share my mom's crazy beliefs. I didn't believe that what she used to say was true. I didn't believe any of it. But still, those thoughts echoed in my head, paralyzing me and making me push Edward away. Again.

With my mom in my head, how could I ever open up completely and let Edward in? How could I ever give myself to Edward... *all* of me... if I let Mom screw with my head? She wasn't even here!

Maybe this was bigger than I thought. Maybe it wasn't just some things going on in my head that I could figure out and deal with on my own. This was too overwhelming. I couldn't deal. Not on my own.

"Make the ultimatum," I sobbed into his chest. Edward didn't reply, but I knew he heard me. I also knew that he knew exactly what I was talking about.

"I don't want to," he replied eventually with a quiet voice.

"You do, you *do* want to. Please, make the ultimatum," I pleaded.

He hugged me closer and kissed the top of my head. I almost went limp in his arms. I was so exhausted. I was tired of being so broken. Why couldn't there be anything good about me?

"I love you too much," he whispered, almost sounding apologetic. "I won't make the ultimatum, but I will help you get help if that is what you want."

My heart broke at his words. He said want. Not need. The choice of the word changed the whole point of the sentence.

"I would pick you," I whispered. I was too tired to even talk now.

Edward sighed, and I felt his breath against my hair. He didn't answer me because he didn't believe me. Had I pushed him away for the last time?

Avalanche, part 2

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – *all errors are mine*]

Chapter 48 – "Avalanche, part 2"

Isabella Swan POV

I was exhausted. My body was exhausted. My mind was exhausted.

But I still couldn't sleep. How could I sleep when the boy holding me, loving me, didn't trust that I cared about him too? There was no sleeping now. I sighed and rolled over to my back. Edward eased his grip on me, but I still lay on his arm.

"I can't... I can't sleep," I said. He smiled and sat up before throwing the covers off him. I looked at him as he climbed out of bed. He held out his hand to me and I took it without a second thought. He could be dragging me back to the guest room – or maybe kick me out in the freezing cold - but I didn't care because it was his hand being held out for me to take.

"Let's go outside. The sky is fucking amazing," he said randomly. I couldn't help but smile. Who was I to argue with a pretty boy when he wanted to show me the sky?

We got dressed and he helped me put on the snowsuit. We silently walked downstairs – he didn't carry me this time. And we walked into the kitchen, to the door that led to the backyard. Edward opened the door, and I wobbled out into the cold.

We made it to the middle of the yard, where the snow had been somewhat disturbed by the snowball fight. We lay down and I put my crutches beside me. We looked up at the sky and I gasped. The sky was beautiful!

Thousands upon thousands of stars were spread across the crystal clear sky. There were no clouds to speak of. It was perfect.

"What time is it?" I asked.

"A little after three, I think," he replied, moving away from me in the snow. I gave him a look, which he ignored. Then he started flailing his arms and legs around.

"Edward? You okay?" I asked, but he just kept moving his arms and legs, and it took me a moment before I realized what he was doing. I sat up and grinned at him. He was making a snow angel. "It's three in the morning, and you decide that this is the time to make a snow angel?"

"Yeah, there's no time as the present," he said, keeping his eyes at the sky as he moved. "Nobody fucking knows where we'll be tomorrow. Who knows if we'll even be alive? So, if you want something, you better do it now. Tomorrow might be too late."

My grin faded and he ceased his movements.

"Talk to me," I said with a deep sigh.

He sat up slowly rubbing his face with his hands. But he didn't say anything.

"I overheard you talking to your dad," I said, and he looked at me. "You... you said you didn't want to give the same ultimatum that I gave you, because you didn't think I would chose you. Why would you think that?"

There was no reason to beat around the bush. I needed straight answers from him. I had no idea where his head was at, especially since everything about him had screamed that something was wrong ever since I had gotten here yesterday.

Edward chuckled darkly, picking up some snow, squishing it in his hand and throwing the tiny snowball away. I knew I wasn't asking a fair question, and I guess I already knew the answer. But I needed to hear him say it.

"How can you even fucking ask me that? We both know why the fuck I can't make the ultimatum. Because we both fucking know you *wouldn't* pick me. There is no reason to pretend otherwise," he replied. "And when you ask me to make the ultimatum... it makes me believe that all you fucking want is an out."

"That's not true," I protested.

"Isn't it?" he said, shooting his eerily green eyes to me.

His words hurt, but no more than the way he was looking at me. He looked at me as if I had betrayed him, even though I hadn't. He looked at me like I had broken his heart, and that I kept breaking it even though all I was doing was sitting here.

"If you want me to leave, I'll leave. I'll go to Kate and spend Christmas with her in Port Ang-"

"You aren't even fucking listening!" he growled, kicking the snow where he sat. "You don't fucking get it, do you? You... me... what the fuck are we even doing? I can't even... *fuck* ... Do you have any idea how much I want to hate you right now? But I can't, because my fucking heart tells me that you're the most wonderful person I'll ever know, and I can't fucking kick you out of my life because I'll fucking *die* if I do." His voice shook and since my eyes were trained on his face, I immediately noticed when his eyes shed the first tears.

My boy was crying.

I quickly made it over to him, wrapping my arms around him because there was nothing else I could do. He rested his forehead against my shoulder and I closed my eyes.

"This isn't just about me," I said softly. "Something else is bothering you." He didn't make a sound or movement, but that didn't matter. I knew I was right.

"I... I tried so fucking hard. I wanted to give you the perfect gift. I wanted to write a piece and play it for you on the piano. I wanted to give you another piece of my heart, as if you didn't already own it all," he said quietly without raising his head. "And I tried, I tried so fucking hard, but I couldn't even make my hands touch the keys and I don't fucking get it. I don't understand what fucked me up so badly that night that made my muse leave." He took a deep breath, his body shaking violently as he exhaled. "My mind still wants to play. In my head, your lullaby is already written... but I just... can't translate it to the piano. I just... fuck."

He pulled back so roughly I almost tumbled over. He looked me straight in the eyes.

"I don't know what the fuck happened to me that night. I can't remember, and it freaks me the fuck out. Alright? How do I know it hasn't happened before? What if I hurt someone and black it out? What if I *killed* someone?" his voice was urgent, as if he had waited a long time to get it all out. "What if it happens again and I hurt you? What if I'm a bigger threat to you than your mom?"

I stroked his cold cheek and slowly shook my head.

"Never, Edward," I said. "You would never hurt or kill someone. And you would never hurt me. We both know that."

"I have already hurt you," he said through gritted teeth, as if my words upset him even more. "I fucking crippled you for life. I keep pushing for sex and traumatizing you further. How is that not hurting you?"

I smiled sadly, shaking my head again. " *I'm* the one pushing for it, because I want to try. What happened tonight was my fault. I thought I was ready when I wasn't. I thought I could handle having your hands on me, but when you touched me... there... it just..." I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. When I had calmed down, and found the words to explain, I opened my eyes again. "I wasn't prepared for the emotions that followed. I didn't expect that your hand outside my underwear like that would be so... intense. It made my mind flood with memories of my mother's voice, telling me how important it was that I'm pure and that pleasure isn't for the girl and... all that other crap that I really don't believe, but which flooded my mind anyway. I can't even explain it."

I hated myself at that moment. Edward was the one breaking down, and yet here I was talking about myself and my issues. It was never about Edward and his demons.

"Why did you choose to push it? Why tonight?" he asked. "When you didn't even want to sleep in the same room."

"Because I want to be better for you, I want to give you something I know you want. And I want to be normal," I explained, leaving out the part about how I thought this was the one thing I could give him that would prove how much he meant to me – even though it blew up in our faces.

"You were willing to give me your body, but you can't say that you... you know what? Never mind," he said, shaking his head and looking away from me.

I took his hand, and held it to my heart.

"I know you think that I don't feel the same for you as you do for me, but that's not true," I protested and he shook his head.

"Then why won't you say it? It's just three fucking words," he said, sounding bitter.

"Because the last person I said those three simple words to ended up almost killing me," I said in frustration. "I know you want me to say them, but what I don't know is why it's so important to you to hear it."

He looked at me for a long while before answering.

"I've done a lot of shit in my life. I've treated people badly. I've been known to be a bad person. But if you could love me, then maybe all that other stuff would go away, you know? If someone like you could love someone like me, that would mean I'm not as bad as people think I am."

"You're not a bad person, Edward," I argued. "You're wonderful. Impossibly so."

"Not wonderful enough to love," he muttered.

I sighed and the gift I had bought him came to mind. Maybe it wasn't a bad idea after all. Right now it felt like the perfect gift. He would get it, and then he would... just *get* it. At least I hoped he would.

"I adore you," I said quietly, looking down at his hand in mine. "I think you are an amazing human being. The way you treat me, the way you love me... it's nothing I've ever experienced before. You are my family, you are my home, you are my heart. Nothing in this world keeps me here but you. If it weren't for you I'd be dead a million times over by now. You gave me a reason to stay alive. I know you blame yourself for what happened to my leg, and I know you beat yourself up over it all the time... but I don't. I really don't. I can't say that my cast isn't an inconvenience, because it is. Taking a shower is a real drag..." I paused, taking the moment to look up at him and smiling at him softly, "So maybe you could help me out with that tomorrow?" I teased. He rolled his eyes as I continued my speech. "So yeah, the cast is a drag, but it will come off in a couple of weeks. I'll be as good a new. And besides, how can I hate on something that gave you a reason to carry me downstairs today?"

He snorted and shook his head. "You're so full of shit, Sparrow," he said, but with a smile in his voice.

"That might be true, but what I'm saying is still true too," I said with a light shrug.

"After the accident, my dad told me you might not ever run again," he said, sorrow clear in his voice now. "You'll never be as good as new."

"Oh please, like I ever run before?" I said, trying to dismiss his words. "Did you ever see me walking before the accident? I tripped on air on a daily basis, so running wasn't even an option back then. Besides, what would I be running from anyway?"

He shook his head slowly, squeezing his eyes shut before removing his hand from my grasp so he could rub the heels of his hands against his eyes.

"There was blood fucking everywhere, you have any idea how... how... you were so fucking broken when you laid there on the road. But you looked so peaceful too, as if you knew how close you were to death... as if you thought you were dead already," he said as he started rocking back and forth. "But then you woke up at the hospital, probably fucking depressed over the fact that I didn't kill you. I remember the look you gave me when I came to apologize... or whatever the fuck I was gonna do... and I thought you were mad because I hit you, but you were probably mad because I didn't finish the job that I said I would. I would kill you. I fucking said I would kill you. And now, every time I see you, touch you, kiss you, I'm reminded of how fucking badly I treated you. How I actually wanted you dead. And now, that's the worst case scenario for me. Your death means my demise too."

"How did we get here?" I asked, my shoulders slumping. I was so tired.

He let his hands fall to his lap, before he slowly looked up at me.

"I have no fucking clue," he said. "But it sure isn't where I thought I would end up."

"Do you hate that you love me?" I asked, grimacing.

He shook his head. "I just hate that I didn't realize it sooner. If I had, then maybe you would have been in the car with me instead of in front of it."

I smiled sadly, silently considering the possibility. *What if* Edward and I had become friends before the accident? What if he had been my friend when my mom drank my blood? What if I had stayed over at his house that night? *What if* ...

I shook my head, trying to clear it from those thoughts. Asking 'what if' never resulted in anything but grief. Especially if they were impossible ones.

"Are you angry with me?" I asked.

"No, I'm angry with myself," he replied softly.

"Are we okay?" I asked, biting my lip.

He nodded. "Yeah, we are."

This time, I believed him.

"What does your shrink say about your blackouts?" I asked. "Have you talked about that night at all? Maybe you can try hypnosis or something. I hear hypnosis can make repressed memories resurface."

He shrugged. "We've talked about it. He has talked about what kind of blackouts there are, and stuff but I... I don't fucking know. Last week we talked about getting me an MRI or some shit. Supposedly, meditation could help... but what the fuck am I supposed to do? Sit with my legs crossed and say 'um'? How is that going to help me?"

"Have you tried it?" I asked gently. He gave me a tired look and I smiled softly in return. "I was just asking..."

"He says I need to relax," he continued. "Relaxing my body and relaxing my mind, or some shit like that... that way I'm supposedly leaving the gates to my memories weaker, and I'll be able to access whatever memories I've forgotten... but I don't know. Maybe I blacked out for a reason. Maybe I'm not supposed to remember. Maybe I *did* kill someone, and if I did, I really don't want to remember."

"First of all," I said. "Have there been any reports of dead bodies turning up in Forks in the past few months that haven't been related to animal attacks? And have there been any reports of missing persons? No, there haven't. So you haven't killed anyone."

As I talked I realized my teeth were starting to clatter violently, and it didn't occur to me until then how freezing it was outside. Even though I was dressed in that cozy snowsuit. I looked at Edward, noticing how his lips were starting to turn blue. His jaw was shaking, as it was clear that he was even more freezing than I was.

I leaned forward and pressed my lips against his cold ones. It was like kissing a snowman.

"We should go inside," I said. "Or we'll turn into snow angels ourselves."

"I suppose you're right," he said, getting up on his feet. He pulled me up and handed me my crutches, before we made our way toward the house. We walked in silence and we had almost reached the house when Edward decided to speak again. "I keep reminding myself that hitting you is something I can't regret, because I can't regret doing something that gave you a reason to be in my life. I just... I honestly don't know if I'll ever get over the fact that you're broken because of me. I know that you don't agree and that's fucking fine... it's just... it is what it is, and I'll have to deal with it somehow."

I frowned. I didn't know what I was supposed to respond to that.

He smiled crookedly and stepped in front of me so he could look me in the eyes as he continued.

"I know you're fine with the accident and all that it brought with it. I know you don't blame me for crushing your leg. That's the one thing you're not just deluding yourself with, because I know you really don't blame me. But you should know that it does bother me, and it always will, so the stunt you pulled today fucking hurt, alright? I seriously thought I had hurt you. I didn't care that Jasper said it was a trick, because what if, at the off chance that it wasn't? Please, Bella, don't use that against me again."

I felt like an ass and my heart broke for the umpteenth time today at his words. How many times could I break him before I broke myself? What was I? Some kind of masochist? Did I find pleasure in hurting him like this?

"I'm sorry," I whispered. "I didn't mean to hurt you, I just wanted to help Emmett and Rosalie. They were stuck with the lousiest team member, and I didn't know what else to do to help out." I sniffled and wiped my nose with the back of my hand. "Why are you still with me? I keep hurting you, pushing you away... I don't deserve you. You deserve someone better. Someone who's not broken beyond repair because her mother ruined her."

"This isn't about who I deserve," he argued. "This is about who I want. And I want you. I love you, and I'll always fucking love you. I could give two shits about who I deserve; all I know is what I want." He reached out and tucked my hair behind my ear, smiling gently. "I just wish it was mutual. But you can't have it all, right?"

I sighed. I was so tired of this conversation. Tired of him doubting me.

But most of all, I was tired of the fact that I keep giving him reason to do just that. Doubt me.

"Let's go inside, my bed is warm and waiting," he said, smiling softly. "Unless you want to go back to the guestroom... I mean, that shit's alright too. Whatever makes you comfortable. I don't want to push you to do shit you don't want to do."

I shook my head. "I want to sleep with you. That's the only place where I'm safe," I replied.

We headed back to his room and I thought about what he just said.

He didn't want to push me to do stuff that I didn't want to do, but wasn't that what he was doing every time he tried to force those three words out of me? It wasn't making me comfortable, and he should have known that by now too. So maybe I wasn't the only one being unfair. Maybe I wasn't the only one being a hypocrite.

Edward had his moments too.

Waking up with Edward's arm lazily thrown across my stomach, and knowing it was okay, was probably the best way I had ever woken up in my entire life. We didn't need to worry about people finding us here together, we didn't need to worry about it being wrong. We didn't need to worry about that one of us wasn't supposed to be there.

This was exactly how it was supposed to be.

I was supposed to wake up on Christmas morning, with my boyfriend drooling on his pillow next to me. This was the best Christmas present ever.

I didn't mind just laying there, watching my boy sleep for a while. Before we had to wake up and get up, and deal with the world. I always appreciated our little bubble more. Who needed the outside world when you had a bed and someone you... enjoyed hanging out with?

I sighed and dragged my hand through my messy locks.

Enjoyed hanging out with . What kind of joke was that?

I thought about the gift I was about to give him and I almost wanted to snort at myself. I was a joke. Nothing but a good-for-nothing joke. Everything about me was a joke, and I didn't deserve the drooling boy next to me.

"Mmm... Penguin... a duck," Edward mumbled, before turning his head and sighing in his sleep.

My heart expanded and I bit down hard on my lip.

He was beautiful. Utterly perfect.

A strange pang of jealousy hit me out of nowhere and I almost wanted to throw up. He was too perfect. I wasn't the only who had noticed either. Everybody knew he was perfect – but everybody didn't know he was perfect in the ways that I did. Nobody knew him like I did, and that should have been enough for me not to be jealous at other people, but instead it did nothing.

I thought about Tanya, and all those other girls that knew him too. Girls who knew him in ways that I didn't know him at all. I may have known his mind, but those girls knew his body. They had brought him pleasure on frequent occasions, while I had lain alone in my bed and plotting my suicide.

I wanted to know him. All of him. Everything.

And why was that?

I took a shuddering breath as a feeling so overwhelming, I couldn't even describe it, washed over me.

Three words.

I loved him.

Why else did it hurt so much to see him suffer? Why else did it pain me to know that I would never be good enough for him? How else do you explain the fact that he was the only thing keeping me alive? Every breath I took was for him. Every passing second that I was alive was for him.

I loved him.

I really did.

The realization hit me like a cannonball in the stomach and my eyes welled up with tears before I had any time to stop them. I climbed out of the bed as quickly and carefully as I could, and made it over to his desk where my gift to him was. He had been glancing at it a few times, but he never touched it. I guess he wanted it to be a surprise too.

I opened the gift and slid it out, careful not to ruin the wrapping paper. I threw a look over my shoulder before turning back to the gift. I bit my lip and picked up a red pen. This idea had been growing in my mind ever since I bought the gift. But I had decided I wouldn't do anything about it unless I was one hundred percent sure. And now I was. Definitely.

I made the alterations for the gift, taking my time so I knew it would be perfect. When I was done, I looked at it for several minutes with a smile on my face. I could barely see through my tears.

The gift may not have been perfect before, but it was now. There was no doubt that he would *get* it now. And hopefully, he would love it too.

I wrapped the gift and made sure that there were no signs of me opening it. Then I wobbled my way back over to where my boyfriend was still sleeping.

My boyfriend.

Who I loved.

I wiped my tears and swallowed back the lump in my throat as I got back down under the covers.

Before she died, my grandma always used to say that the best moments in life are those who hit you out of nowhere and makes you realize that everything you'll ever need is in front of you. I never really understood what she meant by that, until now. I didn't understand why it took me so long to realize it, since it didn't long at all for Edward to admit to his feelings.

Who knew that all it really took for me to realize it was seeing Edward drooling on his pillow.

I wondered if I should tell him that.

Sometimes I didn't understand my mind at all. Where was all this coming from? I wasn't prepared for the onslaught of new emotions. Although, they weren't really new. They felt familiar, only more intense. How long had I felt like this before realizing it? How long had I loved Edward without being able to admit it to anyone – not even myself?

I snuggled up next to him and closed my eyes.

Maybe I could catch another hour of sleep.

Maybe my dreams would make sense of it all.

I sat on the couch, watching as the Cullens pimped their tree. Emmett was all smiles and jokes, putting decorations in the tree without even looking, then Esme rearranged whatever he had put in the tree and made it beautiful instead. It was funny to watch, especially since Emmett didn't even notice what his mother was doing behind his back. Edward was sitting on the floor, a few feet away, trying to untangle the Christmas lights. Dr. Cullen was holding

the box with decorations, so Emmett could just pick whatever he wanted to hang in the tree.

This was so different from what I was used to. At my house, it was always me who decorated the tree. The only thing Dad did was cut down the tree and put the star at the top – since I couldn't reach that high. Mom didn't help at all, she just smiled and told me I was doing a great job.

I guess my family wasn't such a good family after all. I had grown up thinking I could have done a lot worse. My dad provided for us, and my mom was more of a friend than a mother to me. They used to be the imperfect dream.

Now they had become the perfect nightmare.

I sighed and Edward looked at me.

"Wanna help?" he asked, nodding towards the lights. I smiled and left my place on the couch, sitting down on the floor next to him. I didn't reach for the lights, instead I just leaned my head against his shoulder, hugging his arm a little. He smiled and kissed me on top of my head, as he continued trying to sort the mess out.

I closed my eyes and smiled softly as Esme started humming Christmas songs.

"I like your family," I told him quietly so the others wouldn't hear.

"They like you too," he replied just as quietly.

"I like you the most," I said. He chuckled and I felt his lips against my hair again.

"That's good to hear, because I would hate it if you ran off with Emmett," he joked.

I opened my eyes and looked at him surprised.

"Emmett? Oh, sweetie, I think you should be more worried about your father," I replied seriously. Edward gave me an amused look and I tried my best to keep my serious expression in place.

"In that case, I better fucking tie you to the bed so you can never leave me," he replied, before pressing his lips to mine. "On second thought, I might just do that anyway." I smiled against his lips, resisting the urge to moan as he sucked on my bottom lip. Did he know how much I liked it when he did that?

"Oh, stop it you two," Emmett complained, interrupting us. Edward and I turned our heads to find Emmett looking at us. I also noticed that Esme and Dr. Cullen were very careful *not* to look at us, but their amused faces did not escape our notice.

"Welcome to my world, brother," Edward replied calmly. "You have any idea how disgusting it is to hear *you* moan and groan every time Rose as much as enters a room? Didn't think so."

"Hey, at least *we're* cute!" Emmett argued and Edward quirked an eyebrow at him.

"Are you saying my girl ain't cute?" he asked.

Emmett opened and closed his mouth a few times, and I enjoyed seeing him at a loss of words. I wasn't offended by his comment, because I knew he didn't mean anything by it.

"Yeah, but you're pulling down the average," Emmett muttered, trying to save face.

"Stop it, you two," Esme said, cutting in. "It's Christmas." She smiled at us as she rearranged the decorations on the tree and I leaned my head back against Edward's shoulder. Everyone got back to what they were doing and I looked up at Edward.

"You're not pulling down the average," I whispered to him. He snorted, shaking his head with a smile. He continued trying to

untangle the lights and I almost told him those three words right then and there. Luckily, I managed to keep my mouth shut.

It would be better this way.

This was easily turning out to be the best Christmas ever. While Esme and Dr. Cullen prepared the Christmas dinner, Edward, Emmett and I were outside playing in the snow. Emmett was making a snowman and I tried to make a snow angel, but it was difficult with my leg. So, I decided to only make it half a snow angel. As I got up on my feet I almost wanted to snort at the angel I created. It really did look half good and half bad. It was fitting in a way. It was a glass half full, half empty, kind of deal.

Suddenly, something very cold hit my neck and I turned my head to see Edward standing a few yards away, whistling innocently and looking at the sky.

"Did you just throw a snowball at me?" I asked incredulously.

He looked at me with innocent eyes. "Who? Me? Never," he replied, feigning shock.

I narrowed my eyes at him and reached down to make a snowball, but before I even managed to stand up again another snowball hit me. I glared at Edward who was openly grinning at me now.

"Are you *kidding* me?" I asked.

He shrugged. "You threw a snowball at me yesterday, I'm just getting even."

"What?" I snorted incredulously, shaking my head. "It barely even touched you!" I threw my snowball at him, but since he saw it coming – and since I still had the worst aim in the world – he had no trouble dodging it. I growled. "I hate you."

"No, you don't," he replied with a smirk. "You lo- *like* me."

My heart sank as he caught himself mid-word.

"That I do," I replied honestly, wondering if he could sense that I was referring to the word he didn't say. He walked over to me and I held out my arms so he could embrace me, but just as he was about to he raised his hand and threw some loose snow in my face. I spluttered and looked at him in shock. Where did that snow come from?

"What the hell?" I spluttered, spitting out snow.

He smiled and put his hands on either side of my face, wiping my cheeks with his thumbs. I wanted to continue to glare at him, but it was impossible. I couldn't stay angry with this boy.

But I could stay frustrated and annoyed.

I put my hands on his chest and then put all my strength behind shoving him away. He wasn't prepared for it, obviously, so he stumbled backwards before landing on his ass in the snow. Now it was my time to smirk.

" *Now* we're even," I said.

Emmett laughed as he put the head on his snowman.

"What are you? Five years old? It's like watching kids teasing each other on the playground," Emmett noted, but then he just shrugged. "I shouldn't be surprised though, my brother is just as emotionally evolved as a five year old, so of course he's acting like one." It was like wasn't even talking to us, because he didn't turn around or look at us as he talked. Was he getting friendly with his snowman?

I reached down to pick up my crutches as Edward got to his feet. Just as I was about to grab one of the crutches, he swept me off my

feet, and then throw us both together in an area of untouched snow. He still had his arms around me and I smiled at him.

"You really are five years old, aren't you?" I asked, wiping some snow from his cheek before tracing his scar with my finger. *My mark.*

He didn't answer, instead he just pressed his body to mine and kissed me. I put my arms around his neck and let him do whatever he wanted to do to me in the snow.

Making out in the snow was definitely on my list of new favorite winter activities.

Like I said; best Christmas ever.

Esme smiled at me as she handed me a plate to dry with a towel.

"Thank you, for letting me spend Christmas with your family," I said to her.

"We are happy to have you here," Esme replied. "You have no idea how happy I am that you and Edward found each other."

I gave her a curious look, feeling slightly surprised at her words.

"Really?" I asked. "Why?"

"You are bringing him out of his shell. He has pretended to be someone he's not for so long that we were almost starting to believe it was him," she replied with a sad voice. "My son is not a bad person, he's never been. He's just been very good at making bad decisions and choices in life. But he hasn't given me a reason to be disappointed in him for a while now. He's changing and becoming the person I knew that he was deep inside, thanks to you. You have given me my son back."

"I can't take all the credit," I mumbled, feeling embarrassed. "Maybe he just realized that... you know... enough is enough and all that."

She shook his head. "No, it takes more than that for Edward to change his ways. Falling in love was probably the only thing that kept him from continuing down that road of self-destruction."

I didn't know what to say in response to that, so I said nothing; I just continued wiping the plates that she handed me. I sighed and felt her eyes on me.

"How are you dealing, sweetie?" she asked softly. I knew she wasn't asking about Edward now.

"I'm... dealing," I replied vaguely. "I don't really know what I'm supposed to say or think or do about any of it. And I rather not talk or think about it at all."

"Don't you think it would be good for you to talk about it with someone? Someone that isn't Edward," she clarified. "You've been through a lot, Bella, nobody expects you to process it all on your own. We are all here to help you through it."

"I know, and I appreciate that... I just... I don't even know what anyone could do to help me, since I can't even pinpoint the problem," I mumbled.

"And that is exactly why you need to speak to someone," she said, pushing the one issue she had no business pushing. I closed my eyes and my grip tightened on the plate in my hands. "Emotional and physical trauma leaves scars that may never fully heal, but by not seeking help, it might even get worse. It might manifest in ways you can't expect or foresee." She sighed and I could feel her turn her entire body to me, even without opening my eyes. "Abuse is a very sensitive subject, and everybody reacts differently in the aftermath. I had a friend once, in high school. She was abused by her father on a daily basis. Nobody knew anything, because she was good at hiding it. One day, she got a boyfriend. She flinched every time he tried to

touch her; she even slapped his hand away when all he wanted to do was tuck some hair behind her ear. He didn't understand her reaction, and neither did she. She knew that her boyfriend would never lay a hand on her, he would never hurt her like her father did, but she still flinched. She was still afraid. And if she hadn't gotten help for it, it might have gotten worse. It could have gone so far that she would be afraid of all human contact and not being able to even shake someone's hand."

I swallowed thickly. I didn't want to stay here and listen to this anymore. It was Christmas, for crying out loud, it was supposed to be a joyous occasion. I wasn't supposed to be bombarded with sob-stories about people being abused and how it scarred them for life.

"I'm not telling you this to be cruel, Bella, I'm telling you this so you can understand that you're not alone. There are people out there that are trained to handle this sort of situations, and help you through it," she said softly.

I opened my eyes and met her gaze. "Wh-what did you mean that it might manifest in ways that I can't expect or foresee?" I asked, my voice shaky.

"Take Edward as an example. As you probably know, he can't drive anymore. It takes a lot of effort on his part to even be in a moving vehicle. It was to be expected that he would be uncomfortable driving again after what happened, but to feel so strongly about it to the point of having panic attacks... that's something nobody could have foreseen," she explained.

I put the plate on the counter and dragged my hands through my hair.

"He hit me with his car... he crippled me... of course he reacts strongly about cars," I argued weakly. "By that logic, I should have issues with kitchen knives and candles. I should pass out every time someone slices a piece of bread." She smiled sadly and sighed.

"It manifests differently with different people," she repeated. "Bella, can you honestly say that nothing your mother did to you still holds you with an iron grip? Something you just can't get past?"

I bit my lip, considering my next words. "Maybe," I said slowly. "But it has nothing to do with what she did, it has to do with what she said."

"But in the end, those are the same things. Words aren't empty, they can hurt you too, you know," she said.

"But I don't even believe what she said," I argued in frustration. "My mom was so full of shit and crazy beliefs that it was impossible to believe anything she said. I don't believe any of it, yet it's stuck in my head. Please explain *that* !"

Esme's smile was sad, and her gaze not at all condescending as she looked at me. Instead, she looked at me with nothing but love and concern in her eyes. As if my well being was just as important to her as Edward's or Emmett's.

"I don't know what your mother said to you, or what her beliefs were, but it's clear that those beliefs did have an impact on you in some way, even if you don't believe them. She's your mother, so it's only natural that her words influenced you and there are some reactions you simply cannot control, no matter how much you try to rationalize them," she said.

I swallowed again, trying to get rid of the lump in my throat.

"Where's Edward?" I whispered.

"I think he's talking to Carlisle in his study."

"Can I be excused?"

She smiled and nodded. "Of course, sweetie."

"Thank you."

I grabbed my crutches and wobbled my way out of the kitchen. I walked past the living room where Emmett was playing video games. I stopped in the doorway, watching him being deeply focused on the screen in front of him. It looked like he was killing zombies.

"Wanna play?" he asked, without tearing his eyes from the screen.

"I don't think I would be any good," I replied.

"All the more reason to play," he said with a grin, "so you can get better."

"Nah, but thanks anyway," I said, turning to leave.

"Hey, wait," he said, stopping me. I turned back around and saw that he had paused his game and he was now looking at me. "You don't like me very much, do you?"

I shrugged awkwardly. "It's not that I don't like you... I don't really know you."

"Well, Edward says you don't like me, so..." he said, trailing off. He stood up from the couch, digging his hands deep into his pockets and smiling at me.

"I don't know you," I repeated.

"Yeeeah," he said slowly. "That might have worked as an excuse if it weren't for the fact that you're not really trying to get to know me either." He had me there. "Please, tell me. Did I do something to offend you or something? Did I make a piss-poor joke that was offensive? I mean, ever since the accident I've tried to make shit right by you since it took a while for Edward to get his head out of his ass, you know?"

"There's your answer," I replied. He looked so confused and lost that I felt sorry for him. "You tried to make things right by me, when you had done nothing wrong. The accident was between me and Edward

and that patch of black ice. You had nothing to do with it, so yeah, I guess you did offend me. You offended me when you took my side instead of Edward's."

He pulled out his hand from his pocket and scratched his neck absentmindedly.

"Yeah, I've heard that one before," he mumbled.

"So, do you get it now?" I asked.

"Yeah, I suppose," he said shrugging. "I just don't understand how you've been able to defend him ever since it happened. Not once did you blame him for what happened. You must be a very forgiving person."

I snorted. "Not even close. I'm not forgiving," I replied. "But Edward hadn't done anything to me to forgive, so it was easy to take his side and defend him. He was just as much a victim in all of this as I was... even more so, considering he's still dealing with what happened while I was over pretty much as soon as it happened."

He nodded and I felt a little lighter. Emmett finally got it.

"You sure you don't wanna play?" he asked, nodding towards the TV. I smiled at him and shrugged.

"A few minutes killing zombies can't hurt, right?" I replied. His face broke out into a grin and I made my way over to the couch. He handed me a controller and soon we were both immersed in the game.

"So, are you and Edward going to the Christmas Day Market tomorrow?" Emmett asked after a moment just as he managed to cut the head of yet another zombie.

Forks' Christmas Day Market was an annual tradition for almost everyone in Forks. It took place every year on Christmas Day –

hence the name. There were market stands for everything, selling anything from handmade Quileute bracelets and dreamcatchers, to food and baked goods from our local bakery. Every year there was also a bunch of street performers – like people swallowing knives, or breathing fire. It usually was pretty fun.

I half-shrugged, not really knowing since I hadn't talked to Edward about it. It hadn't even crossed my mind until now. I guess I had had other, more important, things on my mind lately.

Emmett and I didn't talk much after that, instead we got completely lost in the game.

If someone had said two months ago that I would spend Christmas Eve killing zombies with Emmett Cullen, I wouldn't have believed them. And for every zombie I killed, I imagined it being my mother... or Jacob... or Billy... or my father.

Whoever my father may be.

Christmas Day. I woke up to slow kisses trailing down my jaw and my neck. A hand sneaking in under my t-shirt, which had risen up to my waist in my sleep. I smiled sleepily, and without opening my eyes I let my hand find his hair so I could drag my hands through it. There was a growling in his chest as I gripped his hair and I opened my eyes so I could guide his lips to where they belonged. With mine.

His hand on my naked breast wasn't uncomfortable. I wondered how I could be so okay with him touching me there, since as soon as he got anywhere near my southern regions with his hands, I froze up. For the first time in my life, I wished I was Tanya. Because, if I was, I wouldn't be freaking out and I could enjoy giving myself to him just as he would be giving himself to me.

He played with my nipple with his thumb, and I felt embarrassed by the moan that escaped me by the sensation. He smiled against my

lips before deepening the kiss. Worrying about morning breath was the last thing on my mind.

A loud knocking on the door reached us through our bubble and Edward sighed as he rested his forehead against mine.

"Wake up, lovebirds. Merry Christmas! If you don't get your asses down to the living room right this instant I will claim all your gifts as my own!" Emmett threatened through the door with the excitement mirroring a five year old. I guess Edward wasn't the only five year old in the family.

"Thank you, Emmett," Edward replied his voice just a little louder than normal speaking tone. Emmett laughed and we heard him walk away. Edward sighed and kissed my nose before reluctantly pulling away. "Who needs gifts when I already have the best one in my bed... but if he ever touches you, I'll cut his dick off."

I rolled my eyes at him as I sat up. I stretched and yawned before getting out completely. We brushed our teeth and got dressed – meaning, I pulled on a pair of pajama bottoms and he pulled on a t-shirt - before going downstairs. The rest of his family was already sitting in the living room - Emmett hadn't bothered to get properly dressed either, he was just wearing a robe and pajama bottoms, not even bothering with a t-shirt. Esme had set the coffee table with lots of yummy treats for breakfast.

Edward and I sat down on the floor, leaning back against one of the couches. Edward held my hand in his lap and I smiled at him. Emmett pulled on a Santa hat and declared himself to be one of Santa's little helpers. It made me giggle. If Emmett was a *little* helper, then I didn't want to know what size a regular helper would be.

He started giving out gifts, and I enjoyed the look on everybody's faces as they opened them. Everybody looked thrilled no matter what they got. Dr. Cullen even enjoyed the joke when he opened one of his gifts from Emmett – it was a t-shirt with the print 'Trust me, I'm a doctor' on it.

"And here we have...", Emmett began, picking up my gift for Edward.

"That's mine," Edward interrupted before Emmett had even found the little note telling him who the gift was for. Emmett smirked.

"It's yours, ey," he teased. "How can you be so sure?"

"Because it's been taunting me from my desk ever since she got here, so hand it the fuck over," Edward said, holding out his hands.

"Eager, eager," Emmett said, clucking his tongue. "What do you think she'll give you? A box full of porn?"

"Emmett!" Esme chastised and I felt myself blush.

"Sorry," Emmett mumbled.

I looked at Edward, biting my lip so hard I was sure I was going to break the skin. Edward smiled his crooked smile at me before he carefully started to remove the wrapping paper.

"A book?" he said, sounding surprised and confused, as he kicked the paper aside and turned the book over. When he saw the cover his face broke into the brightest of smiles.

He got it. He totally got it.

"Better than porn," he said sincerely, leaning over and kissing my temple.

"What did you get?" Dr. Cullen asked and Edward showed them the book.

"' *Birds of the World*'," Esme read out loud, and shared a confused look with her husband. Emmett laughed out loud - I guess he got it too.

Edward started flipping through the pages and he stopped when he realized I had written notes for many of the birds. He landed on the

page for the Little Blue Penguin and he snorted at my note.

" So the Little Blue Penguin is also known as the Fairy Penguin. So I guess it's no wonder he's blue," he read quietly, then looking at me. "You're hilarious, you know that?" I shrugged and he chuckled as he continued flipping the pages. He reached the page for the bird "Edward's Pheasant" and his smile grew somber as he saw what I had done to the page.

I had crossed out the word pheasant and replaced it with sparrow instead.

He looked at me and my heart swelled in my chest.

He totally got it .

"Page 213," I said so quietly I almost didn't hear it myself.

He gave me a curious look, before turning to the page. When his eyes landed on the page I referred him to, his grip on the book tightened.

There had been quite a few sparrows to choose from in the book – and I had decided to print this particular message on the page for the Great Sparrow. It may have been a little narcissistic of me, but I figured he would get it.

The title that was formerly just "The Great Sparrow" now said "The Great Sparrow loves you".

That was the last minute addition to the book I had done the day before. Edward swallowed thickly and turned his head to me. He was searching my eyes and I couldn't help the tears that welled up. I wished his family wasn't around to see this, but they were, and there was nothing I could do about it.

"Really?" he whispered. I nodded.

"It's mutual," I whispered back. "I'd choose you a million times over."

He put the book aside and leaned in to kiss me. I didn't care anymore if his family was there.

Edward got it .

When he pulled back he grabbed the book and got to his feet.

"We're gonna... eh... Merry Christmas," Edward said to his family, before pulling me up from the floor and handing me my crutches.

"But we're not done handing out the presents yet," Emmett argued.

"I got the only one I needed, thanks," he said, holding up the book.

I followed him back up to his room, and Edward locked the door behind us. He put the book aside, as well as my crutches, before putting his hands on my hips and pulling me to him.

"I want to hear you say it," he said, pleading now. I knew reading the words wouldn't be enough for him, but I didn't mind. I knew what I felt, and I trusted Edward. Telling him that I loved him out loud would not change anything. He wouldn't hurt me. Those three words would not bring down the world. We would be alright.

"Edward," I said quietly.

"Yeah?" he replied even more quietly.

"I love you."

The smile on his face and the look in his eyes could not be described with words.

"I love you too, Sparrow," he said before crushing his lips to mine. He backed us up to the bed and my knees buckled as the back of my legs hit the mattress. I laid down and he followed, without ever letting our lips part. "Best... gift... ever," he said between kisses as his lips started trailing down my jaw.

"You're... telling... me," I panted, unable to catch my breath. He peppered me with kisses with such urgency that I wondered if he was really alright. Then, all of a sudden, he stilled on top of me. The only sound in the room was my labored breathing and I started to get scared.

What did I do? Why did he stop?

"I want to... damnit," he mumbled resting his forehead against my collarbone. "I know this will sound like shit and that I'll come off as the biggest douche on the planet, but do you have any idea how much I want to fuck you right now? No... not fuck... make love... no, not make love... that's too fucking cheesy. I want to... I fucking want us to feel good. I want you to feel good. I want to feel good. I want... I just *want*."

I dragged my hands through his hair, softly letting my nails graze his scalp.

"I think.... I think I can... you know... make you feel good?" I said, making it sound like a question. He pulled back, meeting my gaze in confusion. "I mean, I can touch you... I don't think that will be a problem for me... I can... I can make you feel good."

Who was I trying to convince here? Me or him? And what the hell was I doing? Was I seriously suggesting I was about to touch him... *there* ?

Oh God, Oh God, Oh God.

"You can't offer shit like that to me and expect me to say no because it's the noble thing to do," he warned me, something in his gaze was turning animalistic and I would have been a total liar if I said that I wasn't intrigued by what I saw.

"Then don't say no," I said, before I had any time to change my mind.

He growled and rested his forehead against my collarbone again. He kissed and nibbled on my skin and I sighed in contentment. It felt good.

"I talked... to my dad... about... this shit," he mumbled against my skin. "I didn't know what to do to help you... and he's been around this shit, I figured he'd know..."

Now it was my turn to freeze.

"You spoke to your dad about us and... sex?" I asked, my voice shaky.

"What the fuck was I supposed to do?" he asked in aggravation, pulling his head back again. "It's not supposed to be this fucking complicated. We should be able to get off anytime we fucking want to. But how the hell are we supposed to do that when you freak out every time I try to lend you a hand?"

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. He was right. Of course he was right. But that didn't mean it hurt any less to hear it. Hearing him put it like that made it even more obvious that there was something wrong with me. I would never be normal.

"It might manifest in ways you can't expect or foresee."

I opened my eyes slowly, trying to keep the hurt from my face as I met Edward's gaze.

"I love you," I whispered. "And it's because I love you and trust you, that I want to try... I might freak out, I might not. But I want to try. Because, what other choice is there? I can't give up."

"You want to touch me," he said and I nodded. "And *why* exactly do you want to do that?"

"Because I want to be better for you, I want to give you something that proves to you how much you mean to me and... I just want to be

better and I want you to feel good."

"You have any idea how sexy that is?"

I rolled my eyes. "It's not sexy. It's pathetic. If I had been Tanya I would already have slept with you and done all kinds of stuff with you. But I'm not Tanya, and this is a struggle for me."

"Tanya is not sexy. Nothing Tanya ever did was sexy. So please for the love of all that is holy in the world, do not ever compare yourself to her. You'll win every time anyway."

He placed his lips right below my ear and I hummed. He smiled softly against my skin.

"But if you want to touch my dick and make me feel good, who am I to deny you?" he whispered in my ear, his voice husky. I bit my lip in nervousness as he grabbed my wrist gently. Slowly he put his hand on the back of mine as he led it to his crotch. He was hard. Of course he was hard. The light fabric of his pajama bottoms didn't hide that fact very well. He pulled back for a moment, letting go of my hand, so he could pull off his t-shirt. Then he laid on his side, propping his head up on his hand then taking my hand again and placing it on his erection. He kept his eyes on mine the whole time.

"Is this okay?" he asked and I nodded. There were no words echoing in my head, because a part of me knew that this wasn't wrong. Pleasure was for the boy, therefore, this was not wrong.

I could do this.

He made me grip him through his pants and *my* breathing hitched. This was new. Ever so slowly he started moving my hand up and down his length and he started to have a difficult time keeping my gaze.

"You... you want me to.... Eh.... To put my hand down your pants?" I asked bluntly.

"If... if that's what you want, yeah," he said calmly but his eyes betrayed his eagerness.

He completely let go of my hand, and let me proceed on my own. This way, he couldn't push me. A few moments later, my hand had found its way down his pants and inside his underwear. My hand was shaking as I put my hand directly on his...

"Jesus fucking Christ and his mother and his father," Edward mumbled almost incoherently and squeezed his eyes shut as soon as my hand grasped him. I assumed this was a good reaction. But what was I supposed to do now? Just move my hand up and down? Would that be enough?

"A little help... please?" I asked awkwardly.

He didn't need to be asked twice. He put his free hand down his pants and wrapped his hand around mine and his shaft.

"Just do it like this," he said, as he started moving up and down just like I had already figured I should do. Every so often he would trail all the way up to the head, my finger getting a little sticky before going back down. I think I was starting to get a hang of it and started moving my hand on my own, but I was glad that Edward kept his hand on mine as we went. It felt safe that way. That way I knew he could stop me if whatever I did felt wrong or was... just wrong.

It didn't take long before Edward's breathing became labored, and he was moving his hips to meet our strokes. I was completely mesmerized by the whole thing – mesmerized by how he moved, mesmerized by how he looked and mesmerized by the sounds he made.

His grip on my hand tightened, and soon I had no say in how fast or how slow I was going to stroke him – because he was pretty much doing it himself now, but with my hand. A few moments of fast strokes, and a guttural groan later, my hand got even stickier as Edward came in his pants.

Edward's eyes were closed, and we were still holding on to him as he deflated.

I couldn't help but giggle at the thought. Deflated. Like he was a balloon or something.

Ever so slowly, Edward opened his eyes and met my gaze. I couldn't get over the fact that my hand was still in his pants. Still touching Mini-Edward.

For some reason, I had never been happier. This must be proof enough that I was normal. Or at least, *normal enough*. I could help my boyfriend getting off without freaking out. This was normal.

Edward's gaze was intense as he searched my eyes for something, and he was quiet for so long that I started to get nervous. Did I do something wrong after all? Wasn't I good enough?

"Was it... bad?" I asked, feeling unsure.

"Bad? You... you just gave me a fucking handjob, and you ask me if it was *bad*?" He removed our hands from his sticky pants and pulled both of us up into sitting position. He pressed his lips to mine so hard I thought he might crush my nose in the process. "That was fucking perfect," he said when he pulled back. "Thank you. I mean it. *Thank*. Yo u." He started peppering my face with kisses again and I couldn't help but giggle now. "I love you so fucking much it's almost impossible," he said.

"I think you should change your pants," I said. He laughed and laid back down, showing no signs of changing. I didn't bother him about it though. If he could smile that widely and look so at ease even with sticky pants, who was I to argue with him?

Edward held my hand as I wobbled forward with only one crutch. It was an awkward walk, but I wasn't complaining. Nothing about today

was worthy of complain. Everything was good. Beyond good. Things were... perfect.

Nothing could ruin today.

Edward raised my hand and kissed my knuckles for the umpteenth time ever since we got here and he kept that stupid grin on his face. It was merely hours after our adventure in the bedroom, and we were now walking through downtown Forks, wadding through the crowds.

We bought some cotton candy and walked over to the only café in Forks. We sat down on the bench outside and started stuffing each others' mouths with pink, sticky fluff.

"I love you," he said, his eyes no longer displaying any hurt or fear as he licked his fingers clean. He had no reason to be hurt or scared, because he knew I felt it too.

"I love you too," I replied, feeling ecstatic that I could finally say it back. I stuck a piece of cotton candy in his mouth, and his warm lips wrapped around my finger, licking it clean. I smiled at him and he gave me a wicked smile back.

This was how it was supposed to be when you're young and in love. You're supposed to give your boyfriend hand jobs, hear him thank you over and over and making it sound silly. Then you're supposed to eat cotton candy and smile and make jokes and just enjoy each others' company. You're supposed to kiss each other and appreciate each other. You're not supposed to worry about anything else, because nothing else matters. This is what is supposed to matter. Just you and your boy. Being together.

Nothing could touch us now. Together, we could conquer anything. I had no reason to be afraid as long as I had Edward.

"Damnit, I need to take a leak," he said. "You wait here?" I nodded. He stood up and leaned down to kiss my sugarcoated lips before

stepping away. "I love you, gorgeous."

"It's mutual," I replied with a grin so wide it was starting to hurt my cheeks. But I couldn't help it.

Edward grinned back, looking just as foolish, before turning around the corner to the entrance of the café. I sighed in contentment and slumped where I sat.

I was so happy. This was the most perfect Christmas ever. I never wanted it to end. I wanted to spend the rest-

I didn't even get to finish the thought, because a hand was suddenly put over my mouth, a strong scent filling my nose and my mouth as I tried to gasp for air. I tried to get it off but I wasn't strong enough, and whatever it was that was held against my nose and mouth was starting to overwhelm my every sense. My body began feeling sluggish and I could barely keep my eyes open.

With the last piece of my strength, I turned my head.

I wasn't even surprised by the face I saw before my entire world went black.

Aftermath

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – *all errors are mine*]

Chapter 49, "Aftermath"

Edward Cullen POV

My leg bounced restlessly on the floor. My body slumped in the chair as I rested my elbow on the armrest, leaning my head against the tip of my middle finger. I was glaring at nothing in particular as I waited for my dad to exit the office across from me.

According to the clock on the wall, I had been sitting here in the local police station for only thirty minutes, but I was pretty damn sure that clock was broken and that every minute was probably more like twenty.

Thirty minutes at the station.

Another fifteen since I last saw Sparrow.

It hadn't even been an hour and yet it felt like she had been gone for weeks, months or even years.

Maybe it felt like this because I didn't know when I was going to see her next. She didn't just go back to the Webers' to pick something up, so that she could then return to me. She didn't just go to the bathroom, so that she could then return to me. She didn't just go to any-fucking-where so that she could then return to me! She didn't go anywhere willingly. She didn't leave me willingly. Therefore, she

would not return to me either. She was fucking gone, and it was all my fault.

I turned my gaze toward a couple of cops that were hanging out by the water cooler at the other end of the waiting area. One of them was leaning casually against the water cooler, sipping from his cup. They were talking about the kidnapping as if it was the most fascinating thing they had experienced in their very few years of being cops. They were both in their twenties – *early* twenties. They had that cocky rookie cop thing about them. They thought they were kickass, immortal and that every criminal would pee their pants in their mere presence.

They talked as if they knew exactly what they were talking about, when in reality they knew fucking nothing. They were using stupid cop lingo that no *real* cops used. It was all from cheesy TV-shows that made real cops cringe. They were living in clichés, not the reality.

It was clear that even though they might have wanted to take the kidnapping seriously, and do their damn job, they still cared more about how cool it made them look, to be a part of one of the biggest crimes this town had seen in years. Although, to me it only looked like they were a bunch of kids playing cops. They had no fucking clue about what they were doing.

I wondered what made this particular crime so interesting – the fact that it was a kidnapping, with attempted murder attached to it, or the fact that the victim was the police chief's daughter. Oh, sorry, I meant the *former* police chief's daughter.

It didn't look like he was going to get that job back any time soon.

The front door opened, and in walked the last people I wanted to fucking see at that moment.

Mike fucking Newton and his skank girlfriend, Jessica Stanley.

The cops by the water cooler straightened up immediately, puffing out their chests as if that made them look all badass and not at all bloated. Mike walked up them nervously, Jessica standing a few feet behind, fiddling with the hem of her jacket.

"Eh... the... eh... they told us to come here, to give our report as... eh... as witnesses... the kidnapping of the goose... NO! I mean the Swan... eh... NO... eh..." Mike stuttered. The rookie cops shared an amused look, and one of them nodded toward a short hallway.

"The kidnapping of Isabella Swan, I got it," he said calmly. "Follow me."

Mike's eyes darted all over the place as he followed the cop, and they landed on me for a brief second. I tensed immediately in my chair and I swear to fucking God that *he* almost peed his fucking pants at the mere sight of me. Maybe *I* should become a cop. I would be good at scaring the criminals.

Mike quickly darted his eyes to the floor as he and Jessica disappeared out of sight.

I wish I had fucking bashed his head in when I found out what they had seen.

This was all *his* fault.

" I love you," I said, licking my fingers clean from the sticky pink fluff. I was tempted to let her do it for me, but I figured that would be a slippery slope and I would end up going too far. Having her lick and suck my fingers would only give me mental images of her licking and sucking other parts of me.

Uh-oh, too late.

" I love you too," she replied, honestly sounding both excited and relieved which made me feel excited and relieved. Such a simple

fucking thing, but it meant everything.

She surprised me by sticking a piece of cotton candy in my mouth. As is she could read my mind. I wrapped my lips around her finger, letting my tongue lick it clean. She bit her lip as she stared at my mouth and I held back a groan. Did she know how fucking sexy she was when she looked at me like that? Like I was the center of her universe? It was hard to believe that just hours earlier she'd had her hand down my pants. The memory would be forever etched to my mind as one of the hottest things I had ever experienced. It didn't matter she had never done it before, it didn't matter that she was still a virgin. Being jacked off by a girl you loved was way hotter than fucking a girl in a janitor's closet, that's for sure.

I could almost feel mini-me twitch in my pants, poking at me for attention. This was so not the time for an awkward boner. Sparrow had too much goddamn power over me. And to add it all off, I needed to take a leak.

"Damnit, I need to take a leak," I said, not wanting to leave her. I was pretty damn content having her finger in my mouth, just licking and sucking and... I wanted to roll my eyes at myself. My thoughts were not a safe territory anymore.

"You wait here?" I asked and she nodded. I stood up reluctantly, leaning down and kissed her sugary lips before stepping away. "I love you, gorgeous", I said, not able to help myself anymore since I knew that I would hear her say it back every time I said it.

She did not disappoint. "It's mutual," she replied with a wide grin. I grinned back, feeling like a giddy schoolgirl, before I turned around the corner and walked over to the entrance of the café.

The café was crowded as I made my way to the bathrooms in the back.

I walked over to the nearest urinal, motherfucking whistling as I grabbed my dick. I turned my gaze a little, nodding and smirking at

the guy next to me. I recognized him from school and when he noticed me he flinched in surprise, almost peeing on his shoes in the process. It took me a moment before I realized why.

I had no business greeting this guy! I didn't know him. We didn't run in the same circles at school.

But that mattered little, apparently, because I was too fucking happy to care. Besides, I had probably just made that dude's day. It's not every day that you get a nod from Edward fucking Cullen.

I turned my gaze to the wall in front of me, snorting quietly at the poorly drawn picture of a pair of boobs on the dirty wall. I finished up, washing my hands before leaving the bathroom. The smirk was ever present on my face, as if it was permanently attached. I couldn't stop smirking even if I wanted too. Not that I did. Why would I? I was happy, and I'd be damned if tried to hide it. This was the first time in forever that I was fucking happy.

Happy.

All thanks to Sparrow

I wiped the corner of my mouth with my thumb. I could still taste her on my lips... or maybe it was the cotton candy. It was hard to tell since they were both sugary sweet and delicious.

It was a sickly cheesy thought, so I was glad that I hadn't thought it out loud. No matter how true it was. My sparrow was sugary sweet and delicious.

This was turning out to be the best Christmas ever.

She told me she loved be by giving me the most perfect gift ever, and I wasn't talking about the hand job – although that was pretty damn amazing too. But the book, that was something else entirely. It was clever, funny and perfect. Just like her. And I loved her too. It was fucking scary how much. I mean, how on earth did I never

notice her before? We had 'known' each other basically our whole lives, and I had never thought about her twice. Why was that? How could I have ignored (and treated her badly) for so long, only to end up falling so madly in love with her that it hurt to even look at her?

Just as I left the café, I bumped into Mike and Jessica on my way out. Mike had his skinny, little arm wrapped around Jessica's waist. Good for him. I was prepared to just ignore them, but his voice rang out, stopping me.

" Good job on the Goose," Mike said, laughing.

I slowly turned around to face him.

" I beg your pardon ?" I asked through clenched teeth.

" The Goose," he said again, ignoring my tone and my hand twitched at the nickname. "What did you do? Poison the cotton candy or something?"

" What are you talking about?" I snapped.

" Oh please," he said, laughing again. "I'm talking about how she just puked her guts out, some dude even held back her hair." He laughed loudly at the memory, and I didn't understand what could possibly be so fun about a poor girl puking. No matter whom she was, then I realized exactly what he was saying.

Sparrow puked – and some guy held her hair back. Wait... what?

" She... what?" I was too confused to be angry now.

" Yeah, we saw the whole thing go down. You missed a show, that's for sure," Jessica chimed in, hugging herself to Mike. "We saw you leave, and then some guy walked up behind her, hugging her or something... I don't know... why someone would hug her is beyond me, so I can't be sure. Anyway, then she leaned into him, and

freaking puked! He had to push her away and she puked all over the place! It was hilarious!"

" And nobody did anything?" I asked, bewildered.

" Yeah, some old lady asked if she could help but the guy said that he was going to take her to the hospital, or something... I didn't really pay attention," Jessica explained with a shrug.

My eyes went wide as the pieces started to fall into place.

Oh no, oh no.

God, damnit. No!

I quickly left them, all but running to the corner, rounding it and going back to the bench where I had left her.

I stopped as I saw the empty bench. She was gone. The only sign of her ever being there was her crutch that lay in the snow. Some of the snow in front of the bench had been colored pink by cotton candy vomit. Just like they said.

There was a searing pain in my heart, panic was settling in and I felt like I was going to puke pink too. Whoever had helped her was not someone good. If that person was just trying to help, she would still be sitting here. There was no chance in hell that she would have left with someone random just like that, especially when she knew I would be back in just a few minutes. She would have waited for me. She would.

She was gone.

And it was all my fault.

What happened next was a blur. It all happened so fast. I called my dad, he called the cops. They all came running and the area was

closed off with restriction tape. All while I just stood there, staring at the vomit in the snow as if it was all there was left of her. As if that was the only sign of her ever existing in the first place. My mind shut off and it didn't turn on again until I was in the police station, waiting for... I didn't even know what the hell I was waiting for. A miracle? Yeah, that was probably it.

The door in front of me remained closed, and I could only hear a slight murmur from inside. What the fuck were they talking about that was so bad that I couldn't be in there too? It was *my* girlfriend for crying out loud, not my dad's. So why were they talking in there... without me?

The waiting was killing me, so I got up and went outside to grab a smoke instead. I walked outside, patting my pockets on my jeans and my jacket, only to come up short. Damnit, no smokes.

A middle-aged cop was standing to the side, smoking away and I gave him a look.

"Can I bum one?" I asked. He furrowed his eyebrows, not making a move to give me one. I sighed, rolling my eyes. "I'm over eighteen," I lied.

He snorted, chuckling darkly as he pulled out his pack from his pocket.

"No, you're not, Mr. Cullen," he replied. "But I won't tell if you won't." He held out the pack to me. "Take it, I only have few left and I promised my wife I would quit." He gave me a sad smile and I guess he knew why I needed the distraction. He knew that the reason to why this station was finally getting some action was because of *my* girlfriend. He probably felt sorry for me.

I nodded, using the lighter that was still inside the pack to lit my first smoke. I took a deep, relaxing drag of the cigarette, letting the smoke linger in my lungs a moment longer than necessary before I slowly breathed it out through my nose. The cop went back inside,

letting me keep both the lighter and the pack. I sat down on the steps in front of the entrance.

My leg was back to bouncing restlessly and my hand shook as I held the cigarette between my fingers.

I finally understood why people became alcoholics after experiencing traumatic events. The pain was almost unbearable. Alcohol would have made this a hell of a lot easier to handle.

As I studied the cigarette in my hand, I realized I was doing one of the few things Sparrow had mentioned she disliked about me. She didn't like it that I smoked – and I hadn't even realized I had cut it down almost completely ever since we became friends.

"Well, you're not here now, are you?" I said out loud as I exhaled the smoke. I took a few more drags, before throwing the butt away, glaring at it as it disappeared in the snow. "You'll never fucking be here again, will you?" I said, my voice broken.

I wondered why I was still sitting there. Why wasn't up and about and doing something? Why wasn't I trying to find her? Why was I just sitting here, feeling sorry for myself?

Because if I tried to stand up right now, I would fall down and never get up again.

The idea of sneaking off to La Push had crossed my mind quite a few times during this past hour, but there was something holding me back. I had overheard a cop saying that they were on a look out for a blue Honda, and that there had been no vehicles crossing the borders to La Push since *it* happened. No in. No out. No anything.

So that meant one of two things: either they had taken her into La Push some other way, maybe through the woods, or they took her someplace else entirely. They weren't idiots, they knew they were being watched. They wouldn't be stupid enough to take her to La

Push, especially not right away. They knew they had to be sneaky about it.

Which was exactly why I had to be sneaky about whatever I had to do to get her back.

Which meant I had to have a plan before I ran off doing something stupid.

I was not about to risk her life just because I didn't think shit through. Of course I wanted her back as soon as possible, but not at the cost of her getting hurt because of it.

News flash, she's already hurt.

Damnit, they were going to kill her.

A thought occurred to me as I took another drag. Maybe going to La Push *would* be a good idea. Maybe it didn't matter if she was there or not, if there were any clues at all, then La Push should be surrounded by them. Maybe I could talk to Leah, maybe she had heard something? After all, Leah was living smack dab in the middle of it. Leah would be the perfect spy. Why hadn't I thought about that before? We should have talked to her a long time ago. Even if she didn't believe in all that legend-crap she must still know when the big ceremonies were about to take place. Or say, when people planned to kidnap innocent girls and force them together with someone they didn't even like. Let alone loved.

Sparrow loved me, not Jacob – who was nothing but a pathetic and disgusting excuse for a person.

Person.

I snorted. Yeah right. Calling that mutt a person would be a compliment he didn't deserve. He was nothing but a worthless piece of shit, and when I got my hands on him, he would be a *dead* piece of shit.

They all were.

I didn't care if they returned my Sparrow in perfect condition, the fact that they took her in the first place was reason enough to kill them all. They had hurt her enough, why did they have to put her through more of their shit? She didn't love him. She didn't love them either. She had even made this painfully clear to them, so why did they keep torturing her? Why couldn't they just leave her be?

I lit another cigarette, holding it between my lips as I put my palms together, pressing them between my legs. It was fucking freezing. But the cold was the least of my problems, since there was something picking at my chest, slowly prying it open with a rusty crowbar. I wondered if it would ever reach my heart. Did I even have one? Could one love without a heart? And if I didn't have a heart, did that mean I didn't love Sparrow?

I closed my eyes and shook my head at myself.

There were many things in this life that I could doubt and question, but my love for that girl was not one of them. Not anymore. *I loved her*. There was nothing in this world that I had ever been more sure of.

I loved her, and now she was going to die.

If they hadn't managed to cut her wrists and let her bleed to death already. Maybe she was already dead.

It was a wonder that I could still think so rationally about all of this. How I could keep so calm. How was that possible? Why wasn't I freaking out yet?

I opened my eyes and flinched as I found my friends looking back at me. Emmett was standing right in front of me with Alice, Rosalie and Jasper a few feet behind. I hadn't heard them approach.

"It's not your fault, ya know," Emmett said, his voice uncharacteristically quiet with his breath making smoky clouds in the cold air. I took another deep drag, holding the cigarette between my fingers, ignoring him. I was not in the mood for this. I didn't need a pep-talk. I needed to hear that I was my fault – because it was. If I hadn't left her, she wouldn't have been abducted. Emmett sighed, shaking his head. "The police are looking, and they have witnesses and leads. They *will* find her."

I didn't answer this either, instead I kept working on my cigarette.

There was no hope. I felt no hope. All I felt was... nothing.

No wonder I felt so calm. There was nothing to feel about this.

Sparrow was kidnapped, it was all my fault. And now we were both going to die.

Fantastic.

I wasn't an idiot. I knew that this wouldn't have happened if I hadn't left her. What were the odds that she would get sick from cotton candy while I was in the bathroom? And what were the odds that she would get sick but not me? I had eaten that pink fluffy shit too, and I was fine!

Somebody must have been watching us; somebody must have waited for the moment that I turned my head, or left her for a few minutes. Somebody saw the opportunity and took it. I wondered how long we had been watched. Had someone followed us as soon as we got there?

In the end, I guess it didn't matter. Sparrow had been abducted, and nobody as much as batted an eye as it happened. A poor, crippled girl got kidnapped in a crowd – and people just let it happen.

I remember turning around as I told my dad on the phone what happened. I had watched the people walking past the area, they had

all been smiling and laughing, only paying attention to the people they were walking with. They didn't see – or care about – anything but themselves. *Self-centered assholes* .

This was my punishment for enjoying myself and getting caught up in the moment. Somehow we had both managed to forget all about reality. How could we not? She said she loved me for crying out loud. How could anyone expect us to care about reality after that? Shit between us had finally been perfect, and we were stupid enough to think that the rest would follow. That reality would stop sucking just because we figured shit out. But we were wrong. Boy, were we wrong.

"Dude, seriously, they'll find her," Emmett said again, interrupting my thoughts by nudging my leg with his foot. "And Bella is a tough chick. She can handle herself."

Against knives, drugs and poison? I don't think so , I wanted to snap at him, but I didn't.

Instead I said, "I love her."

A weird whimpering sound came from Alice, and Jasper pulled her to his chest. I hated that. He was just reminding me that I couldn't pull *my* girlfriend to my chest to comfort her.

Emmett smiled sadly, taking my cigarette and putting it to his lips, taking a drag and slowly blowing out the smoke through his mouth before handing it back to me.

"I know," he said simply. "It's so obvious now that I'm surprised you two managed to keep it a secret for so long."

The corner of my lip lifted. "She didn't even tell me that she did until this morning," I said quietly. "She wrote it in the book. I had been dying to hear her say it because I thought I needed to hear the words in order to know that shit between us was real. To know that I was worthy of her love even though I've hurt her so much... then she

finally said it... and what happens? She gets kidnapped just hours later." I knew I was rambling, but I couldn't help it. My calm was beginning to fade and the panic was starting to set in.

"So you liked the book?" Jasper asked with a smile. I looked down at my hands and nodded.

"It was fucking perfect," I replied quietly.

"I thought you might," Jasper said. "She was freaking out over the gift, you know. As if you wouldn't have liked whatever the hell she gave you. She could have given you a key ring with a flower and you would have liked it just the same."

"Is it that obvious?" I mumbled.

"Gifts are pretty meaningless when you already got the girl," Jasper said, making one of his usual deep observations. I sighed, my heart tightening in my chest. Jasper's words weren't helping. Because I didn't have the girl anymore. So what the hell *did* I have? A fucking book that served as nothing but a reminder of what I used to have.

I felt a tear slip down my cheek, and I quickly wiped it away.

"Dude," Emmett said with a pained voice and I snapped my eyes to him.

"I wished I fucking killed her," I said, standing up abruptly, throwing the butt of the cigarette in the snow. "I wish I could back to that night so I could kill her. I would hit her, then I would fucking put that car in reverse and hit her again. I would run her over. Over and over again, until I was sure she was dead."

"Duuude," Emmett whined.

I glared at him. Or at least I *tried* to glare at him.

"Trust me, Emmett. She would be better off dead than where she is now," I said grimly, before turning around and heading back inside.

I went back to my chair, sitting down. I tried to ignore the feeling of having the walls cave in on me. The room was suffocating me. I leaned forward in my seat, resting my elbows on my knees and hiding my face in my hands. The sound of murmuring voices from the office aggravated me; what were they still talking about? Why didn't I get to hear anything?

I felt – more than heard – someone walk over, sitting down in the chair next to me.

"Emmett is driving the girls home." It was Jasper. I didn't respond, so he kept talking. "Emmett feels bad."

"Of course he does," I groaned into my hands. "All he ever does nowadays is feeling bad."

"Yeah," he said with a sigh. "He is going through some shit."

I let my hands fall and turned my head to him.

"Are you fucking kidding me?" I asked incredulously. "Are we seriously gonna talk about Emmett and his problems right now?"

Jasper smiled sadly. "You'd rather we talked about yours?" he asked.

"You think you're so smart, huh?" I muttered, glaring at him.

He shrugged lazily, slumping down in his seat and clasping his hands on his stomach.

"Meh, I try," he said, half-smirking at me.

I huffed, leaning back and turning my head to him.

"Wanna do me a favor?" I asked him.

"Of course," he said, nodding without any hesitation.

"Drive me to La Push."

He sighed deeply and I prepared myself to hear him tell me how that was a stupid idea and that he couldn't help me. I prepared myself to hear him protest in every way possible.

That was why his next words surprised me.

"Okay," he said, pulling out his keys from his pocket. "Let's go."

We got in Jasper's car, and we drove off. The tension in the car was palpable and there were a million things I wanted to say. This was such a fucked up situation and I felt like shit for pulling Jasper into it.

"Thank you," I mumbled.

He glanced at me, the corner of his mouth lifting. "No problem. I don't want any harm to come to her either." He sighed, frowning a little bit as he glanced at me again. "She'll be alright, don't worry."

"How can you be so sure?" I asked.

"Because she's a fighter."

"What makes you say that?" My voice was empty. There was no life left. I leaned my head back against the headrest, turning to look at him.

"Because she fell in love with *you* of all people. It takes a fighter to put up with your shit and you know it," he replied simply.

"Maybe she's just masochistic," I muttered, remembering back in the early days of our tentative friendship where I had wondered what exactly her deal was. How she could let me touch her scars like that, when other people weren't even allowed to see them.

"Makes for an interesting sexual relationship," he said with a smirk, nudging me with his elbow.

I sighed and closed my eyes. All I could see was my Sparrow.

"She'll be alright," he said again, this time his tone was a little more subdued. A little more serious.

" *How* can you be so sure?" I asked again, feeling aggravated that he kept feeding me the delusions that it might all turn out alright in the end.

"Because hope is the last thing that will leave you," he replied as the real life fortune cookie that he was.

Hope.

I suppose that was what it all came down to.

"I guess I have nothing left to lose then," I replied just as my phone started vibrating in my pocket. I pulled it out and an irrational flash of hope surged through me. *Sparrow* ?

I looked at the screen, feeling the hope fade. Of course it wasn't Sparrow.

It was my dad.

I sighed deeply before answering. "Hello?"

"Edward? Where are you? I thought I told you to wait outside," Dad said, his voice a mixture of emotions.

"I'm with Jasper, we're... just driving around. I need to clear my damn head," I said, not really lying. We *were* just driving around and I *needed* to clear my damn head.

"I want you at home, son. Right now. I know you're upset, but I really need you to go *home* ." He punctuated every word, as if it was of utmost importance that I went home right this very minute. I glanced at Jasper.

"Yeah, sure, I'll be right there," I lied before hanging up.

"Your old man?" Jasper asked and I nodded.

"He wants me home."

"You want me to turn around?"

"Fuck no," I said. "We're going to La Push. I need to speak to Leah."

"Okay, but if they're watching the borders, we need to find another way in," he pointed out.

I groaned. Damnit, I hadn't thought of that.

He suggested we'd park the car on an off road, a few miles from the border, and then walk through the woods, pass the border and enter Hell – I mean, La Push. It sounded as a good idea in theory – I guess we had both forgotten all about the snow and the freezing cold. Luckily, the woods were thick so there wasn't that much snow to walk through; only a few inches was covering the ground.

We walked in silence for about ten minutes. I was silently thinking that it was probably a good thing that there was some snow on the ground – that way we could follow our steps back if we got lost.

"Eh... Jazz? Do you know where we are?" I asked, chuckling nervously as I realized I had no sense of direction whatsoever. For all I knew, we could be well on our way to Port Angeles.

He looked at me and snorted quietly.

"You think I would suggest this if I didn't know what I was doing? C'mon, give me some credit, will you?" he said.

"If you say so," I muttered.

We continued walking in silence and I tried not to think about... well, anything. I tried not to think about what I might find out. Or what I wouldn't find out.

My phone vibrated again in my pocket, I pulled it out looked at the screen before denying the call from my father. I sighed and trudged after Jasper, trusting him that he knew where we were going.

Out of nowhere, I stumbled on a tree-root, hidden by the snow.

"Shit," I hissed as I fell forward, landing on my knees in the cold snow. I groaned at the shooting pain, cursing that I didn't react fast enough to cushion the blow with my hands. I dragged my hands through my hair, pulling at it as if that would help. Jasper turned around and looked at me wide-eyed for a fraction of a second before he stepped over, crouching in front of me.

"You alright?" he asked, putting a hand on my shoulder.

I squeezed my eyes shut. It was all too overwhelming. The shooting pain in my knees. The searing pain in my chest. The knowledge that Sparrow might be lost forever. All because I had to take a fucking leak.

Or was I just too fucking horny and I used the need-a-leak as an excuse so I wouldn't jump her right there on that bench, making her as impure as me?

That thought depressed me.

I didn't want her to be as impure as me. I didn't want her to be impure at all. My Sparrow would always be pure to me – even if she let me have sex with her, I would never consider her to be impure. She was perfect. *Fucking perfect* .

"She's fucking gone." My voice was barely audible to my own ears, so it surprised me that he heard me at all. He was quiet for a moment; I could feel his eyes on me.

"Ed, you can't take the blame for this," he said quietly, squeezing my shoulder. "I know you want to, but you can't. We don't have time to deal with your self-blame right now anyway. We need to get to La

Push. We need to find Bella. The longer we wait, the longer it will take before she's safe. Every second counts, right? So, let's keep walking. We can talk on the way."

I squeezed my eyes shut, not making any motion to stand up. I just sat there, trying to block it all out. As if that would change reality. News flash – *it didn't* !

"Trust me," Jasper continued when he realized I wasn't going to move, "the irony of this situation isn't lost on me either."

That statement confused me, so I looked up at him with a frown. "What?"

"This," he said, gesturing to nothing in particular. "You are blaming yourself for all of this, but as I remember you refused to blame yourself for the accident that brought you here in the first place. Funny how that stuff works out, huh?"

"Probably because the accident wasn't technically my fault," I muttered. " *This* , however, is."

He smirked darkly, shaking his head. "Oh, no you don't," he said almost as a threat. "This is not *your* fault, and I know you, Eddie, you are blaming yourself for the accident now too. It just took you a while to get there. And honestly? That shit has to stop. Blaming yourself won't help you... or her. So quit feeling so damn sorry for yourself and pull yourself together."

I narrowed my eyes at him.

"I'll keep that in mind the next time *Alice* gets kidnapped by a crazy sect who wants to drink her blood and marry her off to a fucking mutt," I said.

Jasper rolled his eyes, standing up from his crouch and holding his hand out to me.

"C'mon, let's save your girlfriend. I think I'll let *her* give you this lecture instead. I figure she's the only one who can get through to you when you're like this," he said. "You won't listen to anyone else."

I took his hand, letting him pull me up. "Maybe because she's the only one I *love* ," I spat.

"Oh, dude, I'm crushed." He put a hand to his heart all dramatically. "I thought we shared something special!"

"Oh, fuck you," I muttered. "Are we going or what?"

"Yes, let's go save your girl. The sooner she can kick some sense into you, the better," he said as we started walking again. "Emo is not a good color on you."

I snorted. "You know what would be a good color on *you* ? My fist in your fucking face if you don't shut the fuck up."

He looked at me from over his shoulder, smirking. "You couldn't take me even if you tried."

"Don't tempt me, Whitlock."

"I wouldn't dare, Cullen."

A few hours later, we finally spotted civilization through the woods. If you could call La Push *civilization* that is – since there was nothing civil about those people. We didn't leave the woods right away, we stopped so we could make a plan.

"I don't think we should enter the town," Jasper said. "It's too risky considering how you left things when you went to school here. People know who you are, and they probably know why you're here too. Do you have Leah's number? Maybe we can call her and ask her to meet us here?"

We looked at each other, and I could tell that the ridiculousness of our plan occurred to us at the same time.

Her fucking phone number. Why the fuck didn't we just call her right away instead of walking through the woods for hours? That way we would have been safe from getting caught in La Push, and we could still get the information we needed.

"We're idiots," I said as he chuckled darkly.

"Yeah, we are. I guess this is what you get when you get too caught up in the bigger picture to see the details," he said with a sigh. "So, let's call her now then."

"I don't have her number, but I can probably google it... depending on whether or not this shithole gets any damn service," I said, pulling out my phone and sighing in relief when I noticed the three bars signaling that I did indeed have service.

I opened the internet app on my phone, preparing to Google her. Before I got anywhere, though, I groaned in frustration as I realized I couldn't remember her last name.

Fucking details .

Was it something with sea? Water? Seawater? Sewage? I sighed and turned my head up and looked at the tree tops as I tried to think – Jasper gave me a weird look.

"I can't remember her damn last name," I spat, as if it was his fault.

"Wow, you guys must have been really close then," he joked.

"Seriously, *fuck* !" I literally stomped my foot in frustration as I racked my brain for her name.

Water. Wet? Wetfield? Wetwater? Darkwater? Lightwater?

" *Clearwater* ," I said, sighing in relief as I punched in her name in the search box. A couple of moments later, I had her address and her phone number on my display. I didn't waste any time before calling her, pacing in the snow as I waited for her to pick up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, this is Edward... eh... Cullen, remember me? We used to make fun of your ex," I said, chuckling nervously. *Why the fuck was I nervous ?*

"Oh, yeah, *Edward* , thanks for reminding me. It's so hard to keep all the Edwards straight. There are so many of you with a prize on your head," she replied sarcastically.

"Yeah, yeah, that's all good," I replied impatiently, rolling my eyes.
"But I need your help. Like, right fucking now."

She was quiet for a moment, before sighing deeply. "What do you need?"

"I need you to come meet me in the woods."

"That sounds... safe." I could almost hear the eye roll in her words.

"I'm serious, Leah," I said, my voice unnecessarily needy. "I'm in the woods, near the main road. I can see two red-brownish houses from here."

"With a windmill in the backyard?" she asked.

I strained to see, and yep, there it was. A tacky fucking windmill, moving softly in the light breeze.

"Yeah," I said.

"Then I know where you are," she said.

"So, you'll meet us?"

"Why don't you come down here instead?" she asked.

"What?"

"Look toward the backdoor," she said simply.

I did as she said, seeing her standing by the door, leaning casually against the doorframe and waving discreetly.

"You alone?" I asked.

"Yeah," she said, "and I have a feeling the reason I'm alone is the reason you're here." I didn't like the sound of that, she must have sensed that too, because she said, "Come down, I'll explain it all."

I nodded, hanging up and turning to Jasper.

"Her house," I said pointing. He nodded, following me down the slight slope of the woods, down to her backyard. She was waiting for us by the backdoor. She gave me a sarcastic smile. I hadn't expected anything less. She was one bitter, *bitter* girl.

She let us in, and I quickly introduced her to Jasper. They just nodded at each other as we walked into their very tiny living room. Jasper and I sat down on the couch while she took the recliner across from us. I let my eyes wander the room and I tried not to cringe at all the obvious artifacts related to their Quileute ways that cluttered the room.

"I thought your family wasn't crazy?" I blurted without thinking.

Leah raised an eyebrow at me. "Excuse me?"

"This," I said, gesturing to nothing in particular, "I thought your family wasn't crazy?"

"My family doesn't take the legends literally, like other people do, but that doesn't mean my family isn't a part of the community. My dad is in the council."

Jasper cleared his throat. "Ed, a word of advice? If you want someone to help you, maybe you shouldn't open with insulting her family. Alright?"

He gave me a pointed look, but it felt like he was trying to tell me something else than his words. I rolled my eyes and Leah leaned back in her chair, looking pleased.

"So, Edward Cullen, what can I do you for?" she asked.

I sighed. "They took her, and I want her back. Help me," I said simply.

"And by *her* , you mean Isabella Swan," she said, not making it a question.

"Yes."

She sighed and pulled her leg up, tucking it under her. "Well, I can begin to tell you that she's not here in La Push." These news didn't surprise me, but I didn't say anything. "And from what I hear it's not about binding her to Jacob anymore. There have been a few secret meetings between the crazies, and from what I hear... they're done."

"Excuse me for asking, but how would you know? I mean, if they're *secret* and you're not into this?" Jasper asked, his voice calm and polite, but his eyes cold.

"Well, I have a *brother* . He's been recruited and he's a believer. He's been a part of these secret meetings, and he tells me stuff... well, not really. But he keeps notes, so I've been keeping myself updated," she replied simply.

"And what do you know about Bella?" he continued, suddenly taking over completely.

"I know that they have been planning to take her. But I also know that the reason they want to take her isn't because they want to bind

her to Jacob anymore, well, at least not now. Their main priority is to... well, to be blunt, they want to brainwash her."

"Too late," I muttered.

"What do you mean *brainwash* her?" Jasper asked, ignoring my comment.

"They want to turn her into a believer. She needs to be a believer before the council can officially accept her as a member of the Quileute community. They thought she was a believer during the last ritual, since she was such good friends with Jacob, but apparently not. Once it got out that she's dating you," she gave me a pointed look, "they realized they had a problem."

"And how exactly are they going to make her into a believer?" Jasper continued.

She shrugged. "I'm not an expert on brainwash, so I have no freaking idea. But I figure they'll lure her just like they lured my brother. It's all about tempting and scaring with the right things, and not overdo it. It's a fine line to walk. And if they do it right, they'll get to her eventually."

I groaned and hid my face in my hands. "Why can't they just let her go?" I asked, my voice muffled by my hands. I let them fall to my lap and I looked at her. "Why the fuck is she so important to you people?"

Leah tilted her head to the side, sighing and looking at me as if I was a complete moron.

"Because she is missing piece in the Black Swan legend," she said. "If she doesn't get together with Jacob, then the Black Swan won't rise and our people will be doomed." I could tell she tried very hard not to roll her eyes. She thought it was all ridiculous – and I did too, obviously – but this was not an eye-rolling matter, considering my girlfriend was in the middle of it all.

"I'm not following," Jasper said. "Why would your people be doomed?"

"According to our very old book of legends, the existence of the Black Swan will either grant us with eternal happiness and health... or, utter destruction. Basically, Isabella holds the future of the Quileute community in her hands. And they need to get her on their side before she turns eighteen, or else they're all screwed. According to the rules of imprinting, the bonding rituals always has to take place after the imprints has turned fourteen, but not after they've turned eighteen. So basically, we have a window of four years to find our imprint if we want to be bonded to them."

"So when she turns eighteen... she's fair game for anyone to grab?" I asked.

"Yep," she confirmed, nodding.

This was the best news I've heard all day – well, apart from the news of Sparrow loving me. All I needed to do was to keep her safe for another few months – when was her birthday anyway? As boyfriend I should have known this, but I didn't.

"I guess I just need to keep her hidden from them until then. Piece of cake," I said, leaning back in my seat.

Leah shook her head, sighing. "Yeah, that would be a great plan, if you *had* her," she said pointedly.

Damnit.

Jasper patted my knee and turned to Leah.

"So, where is she?" Jasper asked.

"Not here," Leah replied.

"Yeah, we already figured that since they're watching the borders," Jasper replied, sounding annoyed. "Do you have any idea where

they might have taken her?"

She frowned, and I half-expected her to shake her head, but instead she semi-shrugged.

"I can't be sure, obviously, but I'm only assuming they're not gonna take her back to her house. So maybe they're took her someplace Dwyer has access too," she suggested.

Dwyer? Why did that name sound so familiar?

"Who the hell is Dwyer?" I asked.

"You don't know? Geez," she said, rolling her eyes. "What the hell *do* you know? Dwyer is the all-mighty doctor, he's-"

"God fucking damnit," I cut her off as the word *doctor* triggered my memory. "Phil!" I turned to Jasper who looked at me confused. " *Phil* ! He was there the night they cut her. He was there to take her mother to the insane asylum in Seattle. He was the one to fuck up the records when Bella was first admitted. I know it because I heard my dad mention him! Fuck. It was *him* ! Of course it was him! He took her! The cops are on the lookout for her mom and her dad, and the borders are under surveillance... it was him! *Dwyer* took her!"

"Okay, good, this helps," Jasper said, nodding. "This helps a lot." He looked at Leah. "Has he been staying here? What else do you know about the guy?"

Leah opened her mouth to reply, just as my phone started vibrating again. I sighed and pulled it out of my pocket, looking at the display.

"Damnit, it's my dad," I muttered, sighing as I pressed the green button before putting the phone to my ear. "Yeah?"

"Edward, where the hell are you? I told you to come right home," he said, sounding frustrated.

"What's it too you? I'm getting some shit done, alright?" I snapped back.

He was quiet for a moment before he found his voice again, this time it was low and anxious. "Please tell me you're not in La Push," he said.

"So what if I am?" I asked, trying to sound nonchalant.

"Edward. Please, get out of there as soon as you can. You cannot stay there. Okay? Listen to me, those people are dangerous. You need to leave right this minute, alright?" he said, talking slowly and carefully.

"Don't worry," I said. "I'm with a friend."

"In La Push, you have no friends," he replied.

I looked up, meeting Leah's gaze.

"I'm pretty sure I do. Not all these people are crazy you know," I said. Leah's lips twisted into a dark smirk and I felt my stomach drop.

"Get out of there, Edward," Dad pleaded again. "Please!"

An unmistakable sound of a gun being cocked behind me.

"I think you should hang up now," someone said from behind me. I turned my eyes to Jasper, seeing him frozen in place. "It's time to make my girl a believer."

I slowly turned around, dropping the phone on the floor, facing the gun being pointed straight at my head. Then ever so slowly letting my gaze wander upward to the face of the person holding the gun.

"She'll never be your girl," I growled as I met Jacob's gaze.

"You sure about that?" he asked, smiling darkly. "It's like Leah said, it's all about luring her with the things she wants the most and

promises that her deepest fears won't ever come true."

"Leah, how did they manage to brainwash *you* ?" I asked, my eyes never leaving Jacob.

Leah laughed lightly, and I heard her get up from her seat. She stepped around the couch, standing next to Jacob, and then pulled up her sleeves. They were cut and scarred and fucking disgusting.

"I trusted you," I growled.

"And there's where you made your first mistake," she said with a sinister smile, putting her hand on Jacob's arm. "Let him go, Jake. He's nothing to us. You got the girl now. He doesn't. So, let him go."

Jacob cooked his head to the side.

"Nah, I'm not feeling it," he said. "I want this dude to suffer. Killing him is the obvious choice here, but killing him won't make him *suffer*. That would be too easy. I want him to wish he was dead. I want him to experience the pain of losing someone he loves to someone he hates. I want him to see me with her. I want him to see me kiss her. I want him to hear her say she wants me and only me. I want him to hear her say she loves me."

"No brainwashing in the world would ever make her want to spend more than a few seconds in the same room as you, let alone love you. You really are fucking crazy!" I snapped.

"Edward. Shut. Up," Jasper hissed. From the corner of my eye I could still see he was sitting completely still. I turned my head to him, suddenly feeling brave because I was pretty damn certain that Jacob wouldn't shoot me.

Not because he said he wanted to see me suffer, but because I didn't think he had it in him even if he wanted to anyway. Jacob was all talk and no action. He was a kid wearing shoes too big. He was harmless, even with a gun in his hands.

"C'mon, Jazz, what's he gonna do?" I asked.

Jasper narrowed his eyes at me.

"Yeah, what am I going to do?" Jacob mocked. "I'm just the dude with the gun. No mind me."

Jasper sighed and turned slowly so he could look at Jacob. He slowly stood up and Jacob followed his every movement. "Listen, if you really love Bella, then why would you want to hurt someone she loves? Don't you want her to be happy?" He was talking calmly, holding his hands in front of him in a very submissive position, as to acknowledge that Jacob had all the power.

"She used to be happy... with me! Then *he* happened and destroyed her!" Jacob snapped.

"I didn't destroy her! I kept her from killing herself. I've kept her alive for the past month and a half. I fucking *saved* her and we love each other. Why can't you just fucking accept that? Why can't you let her go?" I asked, slowly standing up during my little speech and when I was done I was standing tall.

Jacob's hands on the gun were shaking, and he pointed it at Jasper, before pointing it at me, before pointing it back at Jasper.

"You don't know what you're talking about," Jacob said through clenched teeth, glaring at me.

"Don't I?" I asked.

"Shut. Up," Jasper hissed at me again. "Don't say another word."

I decided to ignore him.

"You guys almost killed her and you know what's the worst part of it all? She never understood why until afterward! She didn't understand why the hell she was being cut and drained for. She didn't understand! If you really loved her so much why didn't you just

explain to her what you guys wanted to do? If you really loved her, why couldn't you tell her that you wanted to go through a fucking bonding ritual so you could be together forever? Why didn't you tell her? I'll tell you fucking why: because you knew she didn't love you like that. She wasn't in love with you. Not even close. And she'll never be. And that's why you didn't explain to her what you wanted to do to her, because you know she wouldn't have agreed. She would have run for the hills. She'll never love you again, not even as a brother. You ruined her and now you have to live with that. She loves *me* . And she'll be mine fore-"

"Fuck you, Cullen," Jacob cut me off as he pulled the trigger.

The sound of gunfire made me stagger back in surprise. My ears were ringing and I couldn't hear anything but my own breathing.

He actually pulled the trigger. It all felt so surreal. Dreamlike.

Shit felt fucking foggy.

"Jake, what the fuck did you just do?" Leah yelled, cutting through the silence.

I stared at Jacob who looked back at me with fear written all over his fucking face.

He hadn't meant to do that.

He hadn't meant to do that *at all* .

I turned my eyes to meet Jasper's.

My heart dropped.

"Oh fuck."

Cut

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – *all errors are mine*]

Chapter 50. "Cut"

Isabella Swan POV

I could hear voices, but I couldn't make out the words. My eyes refused to open and my body felt heavy, as if I had gained a thousand pounds in the last... hour? Day? Week? How long had I been out?

"... be kidding!" I vaguely made out the words from someone snapping. "You *shot* him? What were you *thinking* ?" I couldn't decide whether it was a man or woman's voice. The words almost muddled together completely. I heard a distant murmur of someone answering and then a loud sigh. "You do realize what this means right? You might as well have ended it all."

"What the fuck was I supposed to do?" someone snapped in return. "That Edward shit refused to shut the fuck up. He provoked me. I was the one with the gun, and he still kept pushing. You would have pulled the trigger too, and you know it."

At the mention of Edward, my mind starting working overtime in order to pull me to the surface. It became easier for me to make out the words, and I was pretty certain that it was Jacob who had mentioned Edward's name.

Did Jacob shoot someone? Did he shoot Edward?

I mentally shook my head. Jacob may be crazy, but *not* that crazy.

"Yes, and about that, what the hell were you doing with a *gun*?" the other voice continued – it felt vaguely familiar, but I couldn't for the life of me place it. "As far as I know, Quileutes aren't known for being hostile. So why on earth would you harm an innocent? Doesn't the BMC mean more to you?"

"He wasn't innocent," Jacob spat.

"Okay, let's pretend for a moment that you're right," the other person said. Was it female? "What if he wasn't innocent? You really think shooting him was the right course of action here? You really think shooting him will gain you any brownie points as far as *she's* concerned? You really think you helped the situation? What were you even doing there?"

"I was on my way here when I spotted them in the woods, so I decided to follow them instead."

"Where the hell did you even get a gun?"

It was quiet for a long moment and there was a loud sigh before Jacob replied.

"The body," he said, almost sounding reluctant.

The woman (was it a woman?) muttered something in response that I couldn't make out, and I felt my head spin. I didn't know if my body was coming or going – was I going back to the blackness and numbness, or was I waking up?

I felt pins and needles in my fingers, as if I had been fallen asleep on my arm, and there was something irritating my throat. I coughed and my eyes fluttered open as I did. I groaned as I tried to stretch my body. My eyes couldn't focus and everything was blurry, as if I was going blind.

"Damnit, she's waking up," the woman said. "It's not time yet."

A blurry form came into my field of vision, and I felt a stinging in my arm.

"There, that should do it for a while," she said, her words blurring together completely as I fought the overwhelming lethargy that washed over me within seconds.

The blackness was just as comforting as it was unsettling. I felt numb in the darkness. Nothing could touch me there, and that was comforting. The unsettling part was that I had no idea what was going on in the real world – I didn't know what was going on with Edward. Was he looking for me? Was he also surrounded by darkness? Was he shot? Was he hurt? Was he dead?

The numbness subsided some as I thought about Edward – even the numbness couldn't save me from the pain that surged through me at the possibility of him being hurt... or worse. Edward couldn't be dead. He just couldn't. I tried to find comfort in the fact that if he was indeed dead, I would feel it. I was certain of it. A part of me would be lost forever, and I would feel it.

A felt a weird pressure against my cheek, someone squeezing my hand and breathing in my ear. The numbness subsided even more – even though I was still embedded in darkness.

"... love you, Bells. You know I do... you're beautiful... you always were... I can't wait to marry you... I can't wait to see you pregnant with our children... I can't wait to grow old with you... I can't wait to live my life with you... I just can't wait..."

I wanted to cry. I wanted so much for the voice to belong to Edward – but it didn't. Of course it didn't. It belonged to Jacob. He continued to talk to me and the pressure on my hand increased. I didn't want his hands on me – so even in the darkness, I tried to move. I heard him sigh.

"She's twitching," he said, it sounded as if he had turned his head. A moment later I could feel that stinging in my arm again. "How long now?" he asked then.

"Not long," an unfamiliar replied. *The female ?*

The darkness became more tangible again, and the numbness returned.

I was glad. I could use the numbness.

This time, it was only comforting.

I woke up eventually. It was like waking up from a deep slumber. My body was tingling and my throat felt dry. I had no problem opening my eyes, but it took me a few seconds to focus. I was finding myself staring up at the ceiling, and when I turned my head I realized I was in a bedroom. It was dark outside – at least I assumed it was, since there was no light coming in from the window. The only light was from a small lamp by a desk at the opposite side of the room. Books and papers overflowed the desk, and some of the sheets had fallen down on the floor. I sat up slowly, so I wouldn't get dizzy.

I looked down at my body, seeing my arms on display since I was wearing nothing but a white, short-sleeved, dress. What was with these people and changing my clothes when I was unconscious? My scars looked hideous in comparison to the clinically white fabric, and I spotted several small dots on my upper arm. *Shot marks* . They must have drugged me... several times. *How long had I been out?* Was Edward okay?

There was a bandage around my left wrist, and I pulled it back a little – noticing an inch long cut. It looked fresh. A shiver ran through me and a small sob escaped me.

They were doing it to me again.

I heard the sound of a lock turning, and turned my head toward the door – seeing it open. Jacob stepped in with a small tray in his hands. He smiled at me when he noticed I was sitting up.

"Hey stranger," he said, still smiling. "I know you're probably hungry, but this is all I've got for you for now. The bread will be done soon." He closed the door behind him, and I could hear it being locked from the other side. He stepped over to me, putting the tray down on the bedside table next to me. The tray only contained a glass of water and three pills lying on a napkin. "You've been out for quite some time, so you shouldn't walk around. You need rest."

I narrowed my eyes at him, but he seemed oblivious to it. He sat down next to me, resting his hand on the small of my back.

"How are you feeling?" he asked in concern.

I glared at him, trying not to flinch at his close proximity.

"How am I *feeling*?" I spat. "Are you kidding me? Where am I? Where's Edward?"

His eyes hardened, wincing a little as I said his name.

"Are you thirsty? I got you water," he said, ignoring my questions. "Can I get you anything else?"

"Edward. You can get me Edward," I said without missing a beat.

He groaned and dragged his hand through his short hair.

"What is it about that guy that makes you so... so... irrational?" he asked with a low voice, almost as if he was asking himself and not me.

I had no answer for that. *Irrational* ? Was he kidding me? Was I being irrational for wanting to be with the boy I loved? Was I being irrational for wanting to know what happened to him?

"Did you hurt him?" I asked, looking him straight in the eyes.

He raised his hand and tucked some hair behind my ear. The gesture made me sick. How could he think it was okay for him to touch me like that after everything he'd done?

"I guess it's all a matter of definition," he replied with a light shrug, as if it didn't matter.

"Please, tell me, what did you do?" I asked, my voice more shaky than I would have liked.

"I did what I had to do to claim what was mine," he muttered in response.

"I was never yours," I said, moving away from him. "There might have been a possibility once, but not anymore. We're not friends. We're not star-crossed lovers. We're nothing. So please, stop pretending that we are."

He looked at me. "Bella, remember when we were kid-"

"I'm not doing this," I cut him off. "We're not going to reminisce about the past and pretend that this isn't happening. That you didn't just kidnap me. What day is it anyway?"

"Sunday," he replied.

Sunday? *Sunday* ? I had been out cold for two days. How was that possible?

"You drugged me," I said, looking at him.

"Yeah, Dwyer thought we'd better take precautions until things had settled a little," he mumbled almost apologetically.

"What needed settling? You really think the police will stop looking for me if you keep me locked up for *two* days?" I asked

incredulously. "You really think I'm that insignificant in the eyes of... well, everybody?"

He gave me a look, and I could almost hear him snort.

"Bella, you know I love you. But we both know that people don't give a shit about you. They never did. But *I* do. I love you. So why are you turning your back on me? The only person who will ever love you for who you are, and not someone I want you to be?" he asked. He took my hand squeezing it in both of his. "You wouldn't have to change for me, Bella."

"I don't have to change for him either," I said simply, not needing to say *his* name.

"That's what you think," he said, his jaw tensing. "But you'll always need to be someone else around him. You don't belong in his world, Bella. Why can't you see that? You're not like those people."

"Then tell me, what am I like? You? Am I supposed to cut my daughter up and drink her blood too? Or am I supposed to just cut her up and serve her meat as lunch? Is that who you think I am?" I asked. "If you do think that, you obviously don't know me at all."

"Bella, that has nothing to do with this. You and I belong together, it's as simple as that. Legend or no legend, I would still fight for you," he argued.

"You're fighting a losing battle," I told him. "You're not going to win me over. You are dead to me, Jacob. You all are. So maybe you should act the part."

He stood up abruptly, the anger coming off him in waves as he stepped away from the bed. He was pissed and I didn't care.

I was pissed too.

"Ask me what I did two days ago," he said quietly, crossing his arms over his chest, glaring at me.

"Other than kidnapping me?" I replied sarcastically.

"I shot at him," he snapped.

I stopped breathing as I stared at him in shock. My jaw went slack and I looked at him wide-eyed. I guess I hadn't misheard him when he spoke earlier – he really did shoot somebody. And not just anybody – he shot *Edward* !

"P-please tell me this is some kind of sick joke... please... please tell me Edward is alright," I pleaded, reaching for him before I was even realizing what I was doing. A flash of something flickered past his face as he watched me reach for him. My eyes were welling up with tears, and his eyes hardened when he met my gaze.

"What is his well-being worth to you, Bella?" he asked, his voice low. "No, screw that... what is his *life* worth to you?" He yelled the last part, and his words made me shiver.

"Everything," I answered him, as a silent tear fell down my cheek. "It's worth everything."

He smiled humorlessly, his posture tensing even more.

"Everything," he echoed. "I guess you know what to do now then, huh?"

My bottom lip quivered as I realized what he meant, but I couldn't speak the words. I could barely think them.

"We'll wed at the BMC, and you'll realize that this is where you belong," he said. "Our families will finally be together and everything will be just... right."

"They got their hooks in you so deep," I said quietly, not letting my eyes waver from his. "You really believe that all of this is real? You

really think that marrying me will change anything? You really think that a simple ceremony will make me love you? The more you push me toward it, the less likely I am to see you as anything but a heartless monster ever again. Wouldn't you rather marry someone who loves you for you? Do you really want to force me into it?"

"You love me, I know you do. You're just too... clouded and distracted right now. He confused you," he mumbled. "You love me... the legend says that the mother would be reluctant." He said the last part mostly to himself – and I realized I recognized the words. My mom had told me something similar. It was something about me being reluctant because the legend said so. But what part of the black swan legend said that I was going to be reluctant? What was I missing here?

"What will happen now?" I asked. "Will you cut my arms open again? Will you let me almost bleed to death... *again* ?"

"We won't let it get that serious again, we have taken precautions this time. Dwyer checked you out, and he knows you're not pure anymore, but we also don't have time to put you through the regular purity ritual. We don't have a month, we only have a week, so we need to...well, extract some blood," he said, almost sounding apologetic, but as he met my gaze it felt like he thought I deserved it, and the next words out of his mouth confirmed it. "I want to be wrong, but the reputation of Mr. Won't-Shut-The-Fuck-Up speaks for itself. You know how much this means to the people who love you, and yet you give the biggest give of all to *him* of all people. What is it about him that makes you think you love him?"

I tried to understand what he was telling me. They had 'checked me out' down *there* ? And because of whatever they found, they now thought I wasn't a virgin anymore? And now they would cut me again – *extracting* blood. The pain would never end.

I had spent so many nights thinking about what happened, reliving the pain. I had spent so much time thinking of all the ways I could take my life because of it. But then, destiny intervened. Edward

intervened. He changed my life, made it worth living again. And now, because I was stupid enough to think that things would be alright – history was going to repeat itself.

All because I had been too weak to take my life when I had the chance.

"I don't think anything, Jacob. I *know* I love him," I replied quietly, feeling my throat constrict.

"But that doesn't make any sense! Why would you love him? He's a douche," he argued.

I shook my head, I wasn't going to have this discussion with him. I didn't see the point.

"I'll leave you alone, you need to rest," he muttered, turning towards the door. "Take the water and the pills. Your body needs it." He walked towards the door and I followed him with my eyes.

"Why are you doing this, Jacob? You know I will never love you," I said quietly, not bothering to raise my voice since I knew he would hear me anyway.

"Some people just need a little convincing, is all," he said, his hand on the doorknob and with his back to me. "I know you love me. We both know it. The difference is just that you refuse to admit it. Sometimes desperate times call for desperate measures. You can't live in ignorance forever."

"Who's the one living in ignorance, Jake? You're the one refusing to accept reality for what it is. You and I will never be together, and we will never be friends again. You have burned all your bridges, so I don't even know why you continue to fight the inevitable."

"Because we belong together," he said through clenched teeth.

"Do we? Do we *really* ? What makes you think that? A stupid book? A stupid legend?"

"It's not stupid," he said, snapping his head around to glare at me. "The legends are real. I've seen them come to life before my own goddamn eyes. I'm the last person that will ever question them. I've seen stuff, Bella. And if you had seen what I have, you wouldn't be acting like this. You wouldn't have turned your back on your family. On me. You would have run toward us with open arms, ready to make the legends come to life."

"You're insane. You all are. I wouldn't run toward you even if my life depended on it," I replied coolly.

The corner of his lips lifted into a humorless smile. "Yeah, but what if Edward's life depended on it?" he asked, sounding a little smug. I had no answer for that. He huffed. "That's what I thought."

He turned back to the door, knocking once and I heard the lock turn so he could open the door. As soon as it closed behind him, I heard it being locked again. They were keeping me prisoner.

A sudden wave of tears fell from my eyes, and my shoulders slumped. It felt as if all my energy was being drained from my body all at once. Like I had nothing left. They had me right where they wanted me. They knew they I wouldn't fight as long as Edward was at risk.

What was I going to do? Did I even have a choice? I had to go through with whatever they wanted from me in order to keep Edward safe.

But by keeping Edward safe, I was making myself miserable and ending up with the life that made me try to commit suicide before. The life I didn't want in a million years.

I took a shuddering breath, another wave of tears and sobs overwhelming me.

Would Edward hate me if I went through with it? Would he hate me if I ended my life?

We wouldn't be together either way. Whatever we had was over and it would never be again. So right now, my choice was either keeping Edward safe by living a miserable life with people that hurt me beyond repair – or keeping Edward safe, by killing myself.

Edward would be safe either way.

While I would only end up happy in one.

But Edward would never forgive me if I killed myself, and he would never forgive himself either. He would probably find a way to blame himself for all of this, and in the end it would destroy him.

I wished I had never opened the window for him. I wished I had swallowed those pills and fallen asleep for eternity.

But most of all, I wished I had stayed in bed this morning with Edward. Instead of going to the market we could have made love for the first time. I could have let him make me impure, since the crazies already thought I was anyway. So what difference did it make now?

I wished I would have taken the opportunity to be *more* for Edward. To really show him how much he meant to me. I wished I hadn't let him down.

But in the end, it didn't matter how many wishes I made. They still wouldn't come true. Reality was what it was – and right now, it wasn't very good at all.

I moved off the bed, walking awkwardly over to the window. I pushed the curtains aside, feeling my heart drop as I was met with the sight of... nothing. There was a window – but it was barricaded from the outside. There was nothing to see, and I could not escape.

There was no way for me to even tell what time of the day it was.

I was completely lost.

I looked over at the nightstand, seeing the water and the pills. It all lay untouched. I wasn't going to eat, drink or take anything they gave me. I wasn't going to cooperate. Not until I knew Edward was safe. His safety was everything.

I sighed as I made my way back to the bed – it was awkward to walk without my crutches or Edward by my side.

I scooted back on the bed, leaning back and resting my head against the wall. I was tired – but not sleepy. I tried to listen for any noise from outside the room, but I heard nothing. I didn't know if it was because the walls were thick, or because there was nobody that was close enough to hear. Was I in a house or an apartment? Was I even still in Forks?

Every time I closed my eyes now, all I saw was Edward and the way he looked at me when I told him I loved him. His wonderful smile as he left me on the bench, walking away so he could visit the bathroom. His eyes had been shining, he'd almost looked goofy. We'd both been so happy.

I guess I should have found comfort in the fact that one of the last things I ever said to him was that I loved him. At least we had a happy goodbye.

Get it together, Sparrow. Fuck! Pull yourself together and stop moping. Moping around won't get you anywhere. You need to fight!

A sob surprised me as the thought ran through my head. It was almost as if he was sitting right next to me, I could hear his voice so clearly in my head. I imagined that was what he would say if he saw me now. He would not approve of my moping. He would have wanted me to fight.

My stomach grumbled, reminding me that I had been without food for two days. It was painful to say the least, and my throat felt dry. I

turned my head to the glass, glaring at it. It didn't matter how thirsty or hungry I was – I was not going to consume what they had given me. Who knew what they had put in the water? Maybe it was water from La Push – and Edward always said there was something fishy about the water there.

There was a sound from the other side of the door. I quickly wiped my tears with the back of my hands as I heard the door unlock. I expected it to be Jacob, so I was a little confused as I watched a man walk in with a plate in his hand. He locked the door with a key, putting it in his pocket, before turning to me fully. I recognized him immediately.

It had been months since I saw him last – but I would forever recognize this man.

Phil .

He tilted his head a little as he gazed at me. He was watching me like a scientist watches his rats in his experiment. Was that what I was to him? An experiment? I pulled my good leg up, hugging it to me, and he walked over, putting the plate next to the glass on the tray. The plate held a questionable looking piece of bread – it was reddish and it looked disgusting.

I thought I would have so many things to say to this man once I met him again, but as I found myself in his presence I realized I had no words to say. Instead, I studied his face, his movements and his features.

Could I see myself there? Could I see myself in his eyes? His jaw? His lips? His ears ?

Was I related to this man? Was this man my father? Was he the reason why I wore feathers that were not my own? Was he the reason why I wasn't technically a Swan?

Something in his gaze twisted and changed, and with it something changed in me too. Somehow I felt oddly certain that the man before me was not my father. There was no chance in hell that he was.

"You should eat," he said quietly, his voice emotionless. As if he didn't give a crap about what I did. "And take those pills."

"Where's Edward?" I asked instead. He groaned and walked over to the desk, turning his back to me as he flipped through some papers.

"Someone got hurt because someone put their nose where it didn't belong. So right now, as far as I know, Edward is at the hospital. He's paying the price for your mistakes, as well as his own," he replied somberly.

"Is he alright?" I asked, trying my best to keep my voice even. Phil turned his head and looked at me from over his shoulder.

"That's not the question you should be asking. The question is: *will* he be alright," he replied. "And that all depends on your cooperating right now."

"What do you want me to do?" I asked with a tired sigh.

"I want you to do as you're told. Be the daughter your mom expects you to be, the girl Jacob wants you to be, and the woman the tribe need you to be," he replied. "Simple."

I took a shuddering breath. "And we all live happily ever after," I said quietly, mostly to myself. He chuckled, but he didn't sound amused.

"Yes, that would be the plan," he replied.

"Like a big happy family," I continued.

He turned around fully, crossing his arms over his chest, leaning back against the desk.

"Exactly," he said, nodding. "You're catching on."

"So where do *you* fit into all of this?" I asked, looking at him with empty eyes.

"Oh, Bella, I *am* family," he said, almost sounding loving if it weren't for the strange undercurrent of something else in his voice.

"Yeah, but you're not *my* family," I said.

He stepped over to me, crouching next to the bed and I curled up closer to the wall. I wasn't comfortable with having him so close. He reached out and touched my cast, and I flinched as if I could feel his hand on my leg.

"*The daughter of the Wise One will wear feathers which are not her own*," he said, and I recognized the quote very well. It had been forever etched into my mind, but I refused to believe what the legend suggested.

"You're not my father," I hissed and he smiled, looking at me as if I had just said something precious.

"But you *are*," he argued softly.

"So, what now? I'm supposed to call you daddy? What about Charlie?" I asked, my voice shaking as my mind worked overtime to process all the crazy. It wasn't until now that I realized *just* how crazy it all was. If this man before me really was my father – how come he hadn't come forward about it until now? Something wasn't adding up, and I was still certain that we didn't share a single gene.

"Daddy... Dad... Father. Whatever floats your boat, Bella," he replied with a chuckle, but it didn't sound genuine. Not even a little bit. It held an empty quality to it, and I didn't like it. If he truly believed that I was his daughter, shouldn't he be acting a little warmer toward me?

"Your mother will be happy with whatever you chose," he added.

"She will be delighted to hear you've taken the news of your heritage well."

Well? *Well* ? I wasn't taking the news well! Mostly because I didn't believe them, but I held my tongue about that. Snapping and yelling about how crazy they were would not benefit me right now. I had only one choice if I expected to get anywhere and that was to play along in their crazy game.

I could probably brush over my earlier argument with Jacob, and blame it on disorientation, hunger and trauma. I could make this right.

My mission right now was to get out of this room – this house and this building, or wherever the hell I was. If I could only make it *out* , I would be fine.

Or so I hoped.

I sighed inwardly.

Hope. Yeah, that was probably all that I had left.

I hoped to see Edward and I hoped he'd be all right.

I had to hold onto that feeling. The feeling of Edward. I could not succumb to the overwhelming need to give up. I couldn't give up. I couldn't fail Edward like that.

God, this was so frustrating! To care about someone else more than I cared about myself was turning out to be a pain in my ass, and yet I couldn't stop. I couldn't just turn off my feelings.

Edward was important. So I had to do this.

I had to play along.

"Where's Mom?" I asked, trying to sound neutral because I didn't want to raise suspicions. I couldn't sound all lovey-dovey over my mother just yet, it wouldn't be realistic. Nobody would be fooled. It had to happen gradually.

I sighed inwardly again. This was going to be tough. I was not an actress – Edward had told me so himself. I couldn't lie convincingly to save my life. But I had to in order to save *Edward's* life.

"She's on her way. She hasn't made it back from Phoenix just yet," he replied.

He stood up from his crouch and I bit my lip.

"So... what do you need me to do?" I asked quietly, pretending to sound defeated even though I didn't need to pretend much at all.

"Eat the bread, take the pills and drink the water. That's all we need you to do right now," he replied simply. "Jacob will be back later for another extraction."

He patted my leg and walked over to the door.

"Where's Charlie?" I asked when he turned to unlock the door. He sighed deeply, shaking his head a little bit but didn't turn around when he answered me.

"I took care of him," he replied somberly. "Charlie won't get in the way again."

"What does that mean?" I croaked.

"It means he tried to get in the way, and he ended up dead. Good night, Bella."

He killed Charlie. The crazy man who thought he was my father – actually *killed my father* ! My plan to cooperate and play along with these people felt like it was starting to slip through my fingers. There was no way that I would be able to play along now, knowing what they had done. There was no way that I could pretend that I was okay with all of this.

Phil killed somebody and Jacob shot Edward.

Just shot, though, not killed. According to Phil he was in the hospital – so Edward couldn't be dead, right? But didn't Phil say *at* the hospital? If Edward was *at* the hospital, didn't that mean he was visiting someone? Damn it, what difference did it make? I couldn't get hung up on semantics here. Either way – Edward was at (or in) the hospital for some reason, and even if he wasn't the one still hurt... someone else was. Why else would he be there?

So now, my mind was reeling with all the other possible scenarios. What if Jacob didn't shot Edward? What if he shot someone else? All Jacob said after all was that he shot *at* Edward – not that he actually hit him. But who would Jacob shoot if it wasn't Edward? Who was hurt, and how badly? If Edward was the one being shot – did someone else get hurt too? What if there were several people hurt because of me?

Why me ?

I left the bed, feeling restless. I couldn't just sit around. I needed to *do* something. I sighed and walked awkwardly over to the desk, curiosity getting the best of me as I wondered what the books and papers were about. I figured they couldn't be of much importance if they left them here with me.

Turns out I was wrong.

There were five books, all of them differed in size and age. One was almost falling apart, it was so old. The titles told me they were all about the Quileute history, and their legends. I picked up some of the stray sheets of paper, recognizing my mother's handwriting immediately.

"... eternal youth = virgin blood. Important. Must drink at full moon and midnight. Drink fresh? New moon? Mix with own blood for best effect..."

I cringed at her words as I sat down on the chair, staring at her notes and picking up another sheet.

"... beauty = biological. Fresh blood = fresh beauty. Routine. Green herbs, fall or early winter. August ritual for best effect..."

I read note after note, sheet after sheet. With each written word, I realized I didn't know my mother at all. Whoever had written these notes, I didn't know.

"... Black Swan Spirit must rise soon. Bella's the key. If pregnant on a full moon, more power to the Spirit (ref, p. 185 of QHL). BMC is of importance. New year? Bonding ritual must take place. Jacob Black. BMC..."

It was somehow easy to see where she was starting to lose her mind – if someone who had already lost it could lose it again, that is. The writing that covered her notes on the Black Swan was sloppy at best, her handwriting wasn't at all the neat and tidy one that I was used to.

I nibbled on my lip as I read the last one again.

BMC .

What the hell was that? Wasn't that what Jacob had said earlier? That we were to wed at the BMC? What did it mean?

I made a neat pile of the sheets that I had read, and then reached for one of the books instead, deciding to flip through them. I reached for the nearest one, flipping it open to the first page. Something fell out from between the pages and I picked it up. I turned the small piece of paper over – realizing it was a photo.

It was old – fourteen or fifteen years old to be exact. I was just two or three years old, I was sitting in my dad's – *Charlie's* – lap and he had his arm around my mother, who was holding baby Jacob. We were sitting in front of the Christmas tree, and we were all smiling – even baby Jacob.

I narrowed my eyes, studying the smiling faces of my parents. Dad had a mustache even then. He looked younger though, not as worn out, and Mom was beautiful, of course.

I wondered why the picture had been tucked away in one of the books, and why the edges were worn out. Like someone had been looking at it quite a lot.

A tear slipped from my eyes as I studied my father's smiling face.

My heart broke when I realized I would never see him smile again. Was he really dead? Or was Phil just trying to scare me into submission? Was he trying to prove a point? Maybe he was just trying to tell me that he wouldn't think twice about hurting the people I loved if worse came to worst and I didn't cooperate.

But why did the death of Charlie upset me so much? For the past few months he had been so adamant to take my mother's side. Everything I did was wrong, and when the truth finally came out – he still abandoned me.

I couldn't even find comfort in the fact that he tried to reconcile with me by asking me over for Christmas. Not after the fact that he spent days with my mom in Seattle, not even calling me to see how I was doing.

He hadn't cared about me.

Yet, here I was: spilling tears for that dead son of a bitch. As if he was worth it.

Parents are supposed to protect their children, and he didn't. Even when he was given the chance, he still chose wrong. So how on earth could I be crying over his death? It didn't make sense to me. I hated him!

I put the picture back between the pages in the book. I rested my elbows on the desk and hid my face in my hands. The tears were

flowing freely as sobs shook my body. I didn't even know what I was crying for now.

For Charlie? For Edward?

For my mother?

For myself?

I sniffled and let my hands fall down as I heard the lock being turned again. I looked toward the door, and saw Jacob peek in. He looked confused when he found me by the desk, but he recovered quickly. He was holding a folded piece of fabric in his hands, which he gingerly put on the bed before walking over to me.

"Hey, don't cry," he said, reaching out to wipe my tears away with his thumbs. It didn't feel as good as when Edward did it, and I had to resist the urge to recoil from his touch. "Phil said he told you about Charlie... I'm so sorry."

Another sob escaped me and before I knew it, Jacob had pulled me to my feet and hugged me to his chest. I wanted nothing than to claw at him, knee him in the groin and use my nails to destroy his pretty face. But I couldn't. That would have to wait until I knew for sure that Edward was safe.

A part of me didn't want to pretend, it just wanted to give up. Another part of me just wanted to get back to Edward by any means necessary. And another part just wanted to kick Jacob to a bloody pulp.

I was so confused. This was all too much for me to handle and process.

I just wanted to sleep.

Jacob seemed to relax when he realized I wasn't pulling away, and he hugged me even tighter. I felt him press his lips against my hair

and he started rubbing my back soothingly.

When I took a shuddering breath, I was overwhelmed with the scent of Jacob. He didn't smell any different at all – he smelled just like he used to. Pure Jacob. Which made it even more confusing. He smelled like the boy I used to be friends with. He held me like the boy who I used to consider my best friend. He cared about me like the boy who... *wanted me to be bound for him for the rest of our lives, because a stupid legend told him so* .

I pulled back and he eased his hold of me, but he didn't let me go completely. He put a finger under my chin, tilting my head up.

"It was an accident, Bella," he said quietly. "It wasn't meant to happen. I'm so, so sorry." I almost believed him, he sounded so sincere. "But maybe it's better this way, you know? Our families can finally be together. We'll finally be alright."

I licked my bottom lip, before biting down on it. Jacob must have thought something else of it – because suddenly he was leaning down and pressing his lips to mine.

I couldn't help it - but I pushed him away. I couldn't pretend I liked it. Or that I wanted it either for that matter. I couldn't even muster up a sorry face when he looked back at me in surprise. I wasn't sorry. No, scratch that. Hell yes, I was sorry. I was sorry I didn't kick him in the groin for that.

"Oh, I'm... I didn't... too fast, yeah," he mumbled, shaking his head at something. He stepped over to the bed and glanced at the untouched tray, before picking up the fabric he had brought in. "You should eat before it goes bad. You're supposed to eat it when it's fresh. Otherwise it won't work," he said, nodding towards the bread.

I sighed and made it over to the bed to sit down. I picked up the questionable bread, turning it over in my hand. I couldn't get over the fact of how odd it looked.

"I know it looks weird and it doesn't taste all that yummy either," he said, smiling apologetically, "but it's a necessary evil so you'll be ready for the BMC."

Evil was the keyword here. *Evil* . This was all evil.

"What's the BMC?" I asked, breaking the bread into two pieces. I brought it to my nose, sniffing it a little and crinkling my nose at the weird smell. I couldn't even tell what it smelled like. A mixture of herbs and rust maybe?

"Our... wedding," he said, chuckling nervously. "In lack of better words."

Another round of tears threatened to escape me at his words. Wedding. I couldn't even understand why the word affected me so much this time. It wasn't news to me that they wanted to bind us to each other for eternity. That they wanted to *wed* us. But still, somehow, this time it was different.

"What does it stand for?" I asked, trying my hardest to keep the tears at bay.

"Blue Moon Ceremony," he replied. "It's an important date. Especially this year. It's a full moon on new year's eve. It doesn't get any more special than that. Which is why we could shorten down the purifying to only a week instead of a month. You'll be pure once the BMC is over anyway, we're just taking precautions."

He unfolded the fabric, and sat down next to me. My stomach clenched as I saw what the fabric held – a knife and a small, glass vial.

"This won't hurt," he promised, reaching for my bandaged wrist. I dropped the bread and tried to pull back my arm, but he was stronger than I was. He quickly removed the bandage without any trouble at all.

"Wh-why can't you use a needle or something?" I stammered, hoping it would stall him. He looked up at me with a sad smile.

"This is how they did it in the old days. Traditions," he explained. "Now hold still, I don't want to cut too deep."

He held my wrist tightly, as he pressed the knife to my skin. I didn't care about his warning about sitting still – before I knew it I had grabbed the knife with my free hand. I got up and stumbled a few feet away while Jacob still sat on the bed, looking dumbstruck as he tried to understand what just happened.

I didn't point the knife at him. I wasn't that stupid. Instead I was holding it down my side; that way I didn't look all too hostile.

"Bella—" he began but I shook my head.

"You're not cutting me, Jacob. Please, if you love me, you won't cut me again," I pleaded.

"But I have to," he argued softly. "It's a part of the ritu—"

"Screw the ritual! I don't care! Please, Jacob. If the blue moon is as powerful as you say it is, then don't you think we can cheat a little bit and *pretend* you drew my blood?" I asked, grasping for straws.

"No, I have to," he said. "I'm sorry. There is no way around it. We have to do this. You're impure, we need to purify you the best we can in the limited time that we have."

"I'm not impure," I protested. "I haven't had sex!"

Jacob sighed, and scratched his neck.

"I told you, Phil checked you out and he knows for a fact that you're not a virgin. So please, don't make this harder than it has to be," he said, letting his voice drop as he continued. "Your mother wants this done by the book, I can't go against her wishes... it won't end well

for anyone." It was a warning and it was clear that this for some reason scared him too. Was he afraid of my mother?

He got up and moved slowly towards me, one hand extended toward the knife.

"Please, Bella, hand me the knife. I promise I'll be quick," he said.

"No," I said firmly, stepping back.

"Please," he pleaded again. "Is there anything I can do to make you change your mind? Please?"

I swallowed thickly, taking another step back and finding myself backed into the desk. Jacob had stopped a couple of feet away, waiting for my response.

"Edward. I need to know that he's safe and he's not going to be harmed. I need to *know* ," I replied, sounding pathetically weak as I pleaded with him.

He took a deep breath, breathing out agonizingly slowly as I waited for him to respond. I needed to know if he was hurt or not. Any answer was better than no answer. *I needed to know.*

"Did you shoot him?" I asked, since he wasn't answering.

I stared at his face as I waited for his answer. I was so hypnotized by whatever word his mouth was about to form, that I was too slow to react when he suddenly lunged at me – grabbing the knife from my hand and rendering me powerless.

"How about we stop playing this damn game right now, Bella," he said, barely containing the anger in his voice. "Edward is nothing. You hear that? Nothing! And I don't want you ever say his name ever again or I'll swear to God I will cut his fucking throat." He took a deep, calming breath and when he looked back at me, he looked

content. "One more mentioning of his name, and he's dead... just like his friend."

Blood drained from my face as I stared at him.

"A-and wh-who is his friend?" I stuttered.

"Some blonde dude. Collateral damage," he said, shrugging.

I gripped the desk behind me as I felt my knees buckle.

I gasped. " *Y-you killed Jasper ?*"

A playful smile graced his lips as he played with the tip of the knife. It was almost as if we were just playing some game from the good old days. He looked so much like my Jacob – but at the same time, he was someone completely different.

Who was this boy who spoke so callously about murder and death?

"I can't imagine anyone surviving a hit like that..." He continued talking but I couldn't hear him anymore. My knees buckled completely and I couldn't even keep myself upright by holding onto the desk. I fell to the floor and I watched Jacob's mouth move – but there was still no sound.

First my father and now Jasper? *They killed my dad and Jasper ?*

For what? What on earth could they be gaining by killing innocent people? Was this my fault? What could I have done to prevent it from happening?

Jacob moved closer to me, with the knife still in his hand.

Still talking – still no sound.

I had never wanted to die more than at that moment.

Guilt

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – *all errors are mine*]

Chapter 51, "Guilt"

Edward Cullen POV

If I'd been a girl or something, I would have been crying like a baby right about now. But I wasn't. Therefore, I wasn't crying or sobbing uncontrollably. There were no tears on my cheeks, no snot in my nose. I should have been crying, but I couldn't find it in me to do it. I *wanted* to fucking cry, so I could show people I wasn't some emotionless douche that only got people hurt. I didn't care that the waiting room was full of people – I still wanted to fucking cry. I wouldn't even have cared if it made me look like a fucking pansy in their eyes. I had all the good reasons to cry – yet, I wasn't.

What the hell was wrong with me?

My best friend was shot – just because I couldn't keep my stupid mouth shut.

Jasper was hurt – badly – and I prayed to all that was holy that only the best of the best was working on him in the OR. But considering that this was Forks, the odds weren't really in my favor. If you were a good surgeon, you got a job at a fancy-schmancy hospital in Seattle. Not in Forks. Only the rejects took a job in Forks – and that went for all professions, not just doctors.

Did that mean I was saying that my own dad was a reject too?

Yeah, probably .

I barely acknowledged their presence, when a couple of familiar faces suddenly walked into the waiting room. I didn't even look at them as they approached me.

"Edward, is it true?" Alice asked as she sat down beside me. "Is he... is he... is he dead?"

I was amazed that she managed to keep herself together. If it had been my Sparrow in there, I would have been fucking hysterical. The mere thought of her dying made me suicidal. So how on earth could Alice be so calm about it? Jasper was her world.

"I don't know," I whispered, unable to talk any louder. My voice was completely gone. "They have worked on him for the past hour... I don't fucking know if he'll be okay. It was... it was fucking bad... there was blood everywhere and... I don't fucking know!" My throat closed up and I couldn't have said another word, even if I had wanted to.

Emmett had sat down on the chair on the other side of me. I tried not to look at him. Of all the people in this room, Emmett was the last person I wanted to face right now. First Sparrow. Now Jasper. He could have a field day with all the people I had almost gotten killed in the last month and a half.

For all I knew, both of them could be dead right now. Maybe the doctors were telling Jasper's parents, and Rosalie, right this minute that he hadn't made it. Maybe Sparrow had been cut so badly that she finally bled out, getting her wish of finally dying too.

"How's Rose?" I asked, hating the way my voice sounded. So empty and detached.

"She's with her parents," Emmett replied, with a tone that was so not his usual happy-go-lucky type. "She didn't want me around right now.

She said she needed to be with her family. I thought I was her family too."

"I'm sure she didn't mean it like that, Em," Alice said, reaching for his hand over my lap.

I stared at their clasped hands, wondering how the hell I even got to this place. I had just managed to get my best friend shot, my brother's girlfriend's brother and my friend's boyfriend. He played so many roles in our lives, and just because I couldn't shut the fuck up – maybe his role had ended.

"What if he dies?"

I didn't even realize I said the words out loud until Alice burst into tears.

I guess not even Alice could keep up the calm façade for long. Alice always saw the positive in everything. So if Alice didn't see anything now, how could anyone expect *me* to see it? There was no fucking silver lining to hold onto. There was nothing positive about this situation. Even if Jasper came out of surgery with the doctors telling us that he would be as good as new after a few weeks recovery; it still wouldn't change the fact that I got him shot. This shit was on me. Just like the disappearance of Sparrow.

All shit was on me.

Every. Fucking. Thing.

And there was not a thing I could do about it.

Someone cleared their throat, and I looked up to find my dad looking down at me.

"Edward, mind coming with me to my office for a moment?" he asked.

"Is it about Jasper? Is he okay?" Emmett asked immediately.

"No, it's not about Jasper. I'm sorry, but I have no news on his condition right now. I promise you that I will keep you updated," he replied, giving Alice a reassuring look even though it was Emmett who asked.

I stood from the chair, feeling like my body weighed a thousand ton. Like my body simply didn't see a reason for standing. I felt drained and tired. When was the last time I slept? This morning. It wasn't all that long ago, yet it still felt like I had been awake for a week.

I followed Dad to his office, and when I stepped in behind him I wanted to jump at the person who sat in one of the visitor's chairs.

Leah .

"What the fuck is *she* doing here?" I spat, though it sounded pretty weak and pathetic even in my own ears.

"I know what you're thinking, Edward," Dad said.

"And what the hell am I thinking?" I asked.

"Sit down and we'll explain everything," he said. "I think it's time for us to put all the cards on the table. It's way overdue."

I gave him a suspicious look, before meeting Leah's gaze. She didn't look mean or evil – she simply looked sad, tired and apologetic. What the fuck was this?

I glanced at her arms, seeing the edge of some gauze peek out from under her long sleeved shirt. She noticed me looking and pulled a little at her sleeve to cover what I had just seen. She looked embarrassed. It didn't make any fucking sense. Wasn't she supposed to be proud of how chopped up her arms were?

"I'm not proud of this," she said, as if she could read my mind. "But it was a necessary evil. It was either that or my brother would have been hurt... amongst other people."

"I don't understand," I said, clenching my fists at my sides in frustration. "You changed sides. You're a fucking believer now, aren't you? You let them brainwash you into believing this shit was real. So what the fuck are you doing here, talking about necessary evil as if you didn't want it? You fucking wanted this! Why else would your damn arms look like they do?"

Dad sighed again, nodding toward the empty chair – indicating for me to take a seat - as he walked around his desk to sit down.

"Edward, this conversation might take a while, you better sit down," he said, an edge of authority to his voice. He wasn't forcing me to do anything, but I knew that fighting him on this would be ridiculous. I plopped down on the chair, slumping in my seat and waiting for them to continue.

"So, tell me? What the fuck am I missing? Did you or did you not call me when I was in La Push just to tell me I had no friends there? And did she or did she not encourage Jacob to shoot my ass?" I asked, almost growling the last part. Leah stiffened at my last statement and turned to glare at me. Her earlier embarrassment about her arms was long forgotten.

"Encourage? *Encourage* ?" she said, her voice rising. "Are you freaking kidding me? I told him to let you go! I told him that you were nothing and that he already had the girl. There was no point in shooting you. He had the girl. He won. End of story. But then you had to open you big fat mouth, spurring him on. So don't you *dare* put that on me. *You* made him pulled the trigger. If it weren't for you, your friend wouldn't be fighting for his life right now, and if it weren't for you my cover wouldn't almost have been blown. Why on earth did you come to La Push, Edward? Why couldn't you just let things run its course? Why would you do something so *stupid* ?" Her voice had gone from absolutely furious to absolutely devastated, and I swear her eyes became glossy with unshed tears.

I opened and closed my mouth a few times, trying to find the words. I didn't know what part of her little speech to address first. After a

moment I realized exactly what part to focus on.

"Your cover?" I asked dumbly. "I don't understand."

Leah looked at my dad, who leaned forward in his seat, clasping his hands on his desk.

"Yes, Edward, that's the thing with you," he said with a deep sigh. "You *don't* understand."

"Then fucking help me understand," I growled in annoyance.

"A few weeks ago a girl was brought to the hospital from La Push," Dad began. "Her arms were so severely infected after so many cuts that we had to perform emergency surgery on them in order to keep the infection from spreading. It had become so severe that if she had come in just a week later, we would have been forced to amputate."

"Why are you telling me this?" I asked as my stomach tightened. His story allowed my imagination to run wild with worst-case scenarios – what if they were doing that to Bella again right now, what if they had to amputate both her arms? Then where would she be? An armless girl with a chronic limp from her leg. Was that the moral of this story? So that I would get a chance to prepare myself for the possibility of my Sparrow being broken beyond repair once I got her back?

"It was Emily," Leah said quietly. "My cousin. She was the one who was brought in."

I swallowed thickly. Of course it was. I remember hearing Jacob and Sam, and their gang, talking about it in the cafeteria that day, and how Sam was annoyed that my father was her doctor.

"Leah came to visit her, and I found her crying in the hallway," Dad continued. "I took her to my office, letting her calm down. And then she told me everything." I furrowed my eyebrows, but didn't say anything. "She told me about what was going on in La Push, and how they used to have a doctor here at the hospital that they always

went to when their girls' cuts got infected, but their doctor didn't work here anymore. She told me all about the legends that so many of her people believed in, and that was when I put two and two together. I already knew from before that Bella didn't cut herself, that she hadn't attempted suicide. But it wasn't until Leah said the name of the doctor that it all fell into place."

"Dwyer," I said dryly.

"Yes." Dad nodded as he fiddled with a pen in his hands. He looked at it, contemplating something before continuing. "I've been looking into his work for a couple of months now, ever since he left us so abruptly back in August. Something wasn't quite right about the man, I never liked him very much even though he was nothing but friendly to me. By looking through old records for his patients, I could tell he had been sneaking out drugs. He was giving stronger drugs than necessary to patients that didn't need them. It wasn't until he left, and I really started looking into it that I realized he never even gave it to the patients. He kept them for himself. I gave all my findings to the hospital board, and they have been – along with the proper authorities – investigating it ever since. We found out that Dwyer had been hired at one of the Seattle mental health facilities as one of the attending physicians there. And do you know who else we found?"

"Sparrow's mother," I mumbled. Dad looked at me confused, as did Leah, until I realized why. I sighed and dragged my hand through my hair as I said, "*Bella's* mother."

Dad still looked a little confused as he continued. "Yeah, that's right. Needless to say though, before the board or the authorities even had a chance to get to him, he went off the grid. Since he had been so good at faking the documents of Bella's mother, it didn't take long for the staff to decide that she was fit to go home."

"*'Fit to go home'*, my ass," I said. "She's fucking crazy."

"There is no doubt in my mind that she's not mentally well, I agree," Dad replied simply. "Since there aren't any *real* records of her mental

health, I can't say for sure what is wrong with her. But in my professional opinion, from what I've heard and witnessed, she might suffer from a delusional disorder. And from the drugs that Dwyer took from the hospital, it's possible that he has fed the disease by providing her with drugs that would only enhance the symptoms."

"What does that mean? Don't you dare tell me that her mother is fucking innocent, because she's not. Her mother is fucking crazy and it's all her fault that Bella is God knows where, being tortured by God knows what," I said.

"I'm not saying anything of the sorts," Dad replied, looking at me offended. "All I'm saying is that there is a lot to this situation that you don't know, and there is a lot to take into consideration."

"But none of this is helping us," I said. "We need to get Bella back. Now . Who the fuck cares if Dwyer – or Phil or whatever the fuck his name is – is providing that crazy bitch with drugs? It doesn't help us get to Bella."

"There is no way to get to her before New Year's Eve," Leah said and I snapped my head to her.

"I hope for your sake that you're wrong. There is no fucking way she'll survive that long in their *care* ," I said, spitting the last word. The word was a fucking joke. They didn't *care* .

"Edward, I wasn't joking at the house. I have no idea where she is and from I've heard around town, not even Jacob's friends know. She's being kept somewhere really hidden, to prepare her for the BMC. They're not going to risk anyone finding out where she is. From what I can tell, only Dwyer, Jacob and Billy knows where she is... the council should know too, I guess, but I can't be sure."

"What about her mother?" I asked.

Leah shrugged. "We haven't seen her around since she left for Phoenix. I have no idea where she's at, and neither does the

police... as far as I know." She looked at my dad. "Or have they said anything?"

Dad shook his head. "No, they haven't been able to locate her again since they busted her hideout in Phoenix."

"Of course they haven't," I said, leaning forward to hide my face in my hands and rest my elbows against my knees. "That would mean something positive was happening, and we can't have that now can we? God forbid we're allowed some good news in this fucking black hole of despair that is our life." I could feel my composure crumble, and I was closer to a complete breakdown than I was comfortable with. I needed to stay strong for my Sparrow. I couldn't allow myself to break down or feel anything until she was completely safe. Then, and only then, was I allowed to succumb to the pain.

"After I met with your dad, I decided to play along with the crazies," Leah said, her tone was uncharacteristically soft. I always viewed her as snarky and bitter, but I guess even the hardest stone had a brittle side. "It didn't take long for them to find the legend that spoke of me. Crystal clear and jaded, something about moonless skies and jaded cliffs... It's quite a love story, actually. We're not supposed to give eternal happiness to the entire tribe or anything, it's just about me and my imprint. So it's not all bad, there are no expectations to live up to. It's not like the Black Swan, where Bella is supposed to be the mother of the spirit that will give prosperity to the entire tribe. The Black Swan is *it* for the tribe. It's like *the* end. If the Black Swan doesn't rise, the tribe is doomed. *Very* anticlimactic."

I frowned as I looked at her arms. It was almost as if I could still see her scars.

"Why would you do such a fucked up thing?" I asked, ignoring the crap she said about the Black Swan. I couldn't deal with *that* right now. "Why the hell would you join in on the crazy? Wasn't it enough to see it happen before your eyes? Did you really have to join in too?"

"I figured that if I couldn't beat'em, I might as well join'em. Besides, nothing is as effective as infiltrating the enemy's camp. That way I could get to know their secrets, plots and plans. I was always a step ahead of them," she explained.

"Yeah? And getting your arms cut up was worth it?" I asked, feeling slightly disgusted.

She sighed. "I wasn't lying before, Edward. They got to my brother, and I had to keep him safe. But I also knew that the only way to keep him safe was to play their game. I didn't even know Jacob was in the house until I saw him sneak up on you with his gun." She paused for a moment, shaking her head at something before continuing. As if she tried to get rid of some nasty thought. "And that's what I meant when I said I almost blew my cover. After you left, I had to convince Jacob that I had only played along, pretending to be your friend and giving you information so you guys would think you had a friend on the inside. The only reason he even believed me was the fact that I had let myself be marked. I have proven my loyalty; I have proven that I am indeed a believer. He had no reason to doubt me. But make no mistake, Edward, it was a really close call. It doesn't matter that Jacob believed me, he'll probably be suspicious of me now. He probably figures I was a little *too* generous with the information."

I looked over at my dad. "Then why did you tell me I had no friends in La Push? You have any idea how fucking creepy that was to hear? And have that followed by a fucking gun being cocked behind my head."

"Because I didn't know where in La Push you were, or if you had met anyone. All I wanted was to get you out of there, and like Leah so nicely pointed out, she's supposed to be on the other side. We would gain nothing by giving them a reason not to trust her. You put everything at risk by going there," Dad said.

"Then why the fuck didn't you fill me in on this shit sooner? Why the fuck am I only finding all of this out when it's already too late? If I had known what was going on, I wouldn't have taken Bella to the damn

fair. I would have kept her locked up in my room for eternity if that's what it took to keep her safe," I said, angrily. "And what about all that other crap, why didn't you tell Bella all about Dwyer and her mother? Bella has been a wreck, fearing for her damn life because of those people, and you have been sitting on information that might have lessened that fear. What the fuck are you? Some kind of sadist? Did you enjoy watching my girl suffer?"

Dad sighed. "The reason I haven't told you any of this is because I judged it to be unnecessary. All I wanted for you two was to focus on getting better. You were finally giving therapy a chance, and Bella was leaning on you for support. You really think either of you would have benefited from me telling you this? You really think Bella would have felt better if I told her that her mother most likely suffer from a mental disease, and that a doctor – a man who was supposed to heal people, not destroy them – helped feed that disease? From my standpoint, I saw no reason to divulge that information to either of you just yet. You both had to focus on getting better. Stronger. And none of this *crap* would have helped you."

"If I would have known, I would have locked her up," I said again. "She would've been safe."

"Edward, one of the key points of moving forward is to enjoy the moment. In order to move forward and get past all the bad hands you've been dealt, you need to enjoy what you have and when you have it. Locking Bella up might have kept her safe physically, but it would not have kept either of you safe emotionally. Living in fear is no life," he said seriously. "Nobody could have predicted what happened at the fair. Yes, there was a lapse in judgment when we let you two wander off all on your own, and I admit it was naïve of us to think that a fair would be a safe place just because there were many people there." He sighed and put away the pen he had been playing with. He looked at me straight in the eyes for a moment before continuing. "Please tell me, Edward. Up until the point where Bella disappeared, did you enjoy your day? How did you feel? Did you have fun?"

Despite the situation, I felt the corner of my lips lift into a half smile. Did I have fun? Yes.

"Yeah, we were having a great time," I admitted. "We fed each other cotton candy and we were talking and we... we were just being us. It was perfect. The whole morning was fucking perfect, all up to the point where I had to take a leak... and I left her and she... I... gone." I couldn't even end the sentence in a way that made sense. My smile vanished, the small feeling of giddiness from remembering the day faded with it. I had nothing to feel giddy about.

Dad smiled sadly at me. "Until we find Bella, please focus on the good parts. Remember her smile, her laughs and the cotton candy. Don't dwell on the negative, because you can't change that now anyway, so there is no point to dwell on it either. We will find Bella, she will be returned to you. You just need to be patient."

"Patient?" I snorted. "Why the hell do we even need to wait till New Years Eve? Who says we'll even get to her then?"

Something flashed in my dad's eyes and his gaze flickered to Leah. I turned my head to look at her as well, and she was smiling sadly at me.

"Like I said, they're performing the BMC, that's Blue Moon Ceremony, she's basically getting married to Jacob-"

"I'm not letting her get married to that fucking mutt!" I yelled, standing up so abruptly my chair fell over. Leah rolled her eyes at me before giving me an annoyed look.

"May I finish?" she asked.

"Fine," I muttered, as I picked my chair back up and sat back down.

"As I was saying," she continued, daring me to cut her off again.

"They want to wed them, and they want to do it on the BM since it's

the most powerful and most binding time. The ceremony will take place on one of the highest cliffs at midnight."

"So we get there and grab her and everything will be alright?" I asked, doubtfully. It sounded too easy even for me.

"Actually, a part of the ceremony is for them to cut each other with a sacred dagger, and drink each other's blood. And we *need* for Jacob to do that to Bella before we can do anything."

I almost threw up at the mere thought of it. "Are you crazy? What the fuck would we need him to hurt her more? You sure you're not as insane as the rest of them?"

"Dr. Cullen, can you please continue for me? I just can't," Leah said, shaking her head at me. She hid her face in her hand and I wondered for a moment if I had made her cry.

"The cliff she's talking about is not within La Push borders, it's in Forks territory. Which means that our laws rule. We can't touch them as long as they're in La Push, our police aren't legally allowed to cross the border, and they have no authority there anyway. So the fact that they are performing the ceremony on our land is perfect. The police will surround the area, while they perform the ceremony and break it up when they reach *the point* ," Dad explained.

"What point?"

"The point where what they're doing isn't legal anymore," he said. "And then it will all be over. Bella won't have to live in fear anymore. She'll be safe. For good."

I could tell he was trying to make me feel better and optimistic about the situation. But I wasn't sure he was really succeeding. It still felt all too easy for me. How could they be sure that the mutts weren't going to take precautions as well? What if *they* surrounded the area, and overpowered our cops? Did they even know they were going to be

on Forks territory? If so, why the fuck didn't they just move it to La Push territory?

I knew that the biggest threat to my Sparrow was her mother, and I didn't even want to consider the possibility of what would happen if she got away. If our cops ambushed the ceremony, there was a chance of her being able to slip through the cracks and get away in the tumult that would surely follow.

Sparrow wouldn't be safe.

Maybe we could run away somewhere. Keep hidden until the day she turned eighteen. Leah said so herself that they were free once they turned eighteen.

I wondered if the mutts would still chase Bella even at the off chance of her mother being captured. I wondered if Jacob could be charged with anything, since he was still a minor and all that. Maybe he would get lucky with a few months in juvie or something.

"So we have to wait until New Years Eve?" I asked glumly, desperate to hear him deny it even though I knew he wouldn't.

"I'm afraid so," Dad affirmed. "But the cops are on a constant look out, they'll be ready to hit as soon as anyone slips up. Don't worry, Bella will be okay."

I decided not to crush his delusional bubble of hope.

Because his constant reaffirming was just that: *delusional* .

Back in the waiting room. It was way past visiting hours now. It was dark out and the hospital was quiet. We could hear the occasional shuffling of a nurse's feet as she made her way past the waiting area. All the doctors and nurses that passed us glanced at us, but didn't tell us to leave. I guess they knew exactly who we were, and they weren't about to kick Dr. Cullen's kids out... or their friend.

Alice was snuggled up next to Emmett, who had wrapped his big arms around her. She was sleeping with a frown on her face, while Emmett just stared into space like a zombie. We hadn't moved or said anything in the past two hours. It was all fucking surreal. Like we weren't really sitting here.

It felt like a dream.

Or a fucking nightmare.

I glanced at Emmett, seeing his chest rise and fall as he sighed.

"You think he'll be okay?" I asked, and even though I kept my voice low, it still carried in the empty room. Emmett glanced at me and shrugged. Defeat was not a good color on my brother.

"Who the hell knows?" he asked. "He's Jasper though. He can't fucking die on us. He's... he's *Jasper* !"

"Yeah, but maybe not for long," I replied under my breath.

My dad had come by earlier to tell us that Jasper was out of surgery, but that he was still unconscious. He hadn't regained consciousness since I dragged his sorry ass out of the house. I thought back to the event that lead us to this place, thinking of Jasper's pale face as he clutched his stomach with blood pouring through his fingers.

I had picked up my phone and realized that Dad had been on the line through the whole ordeal, and he was already speeding toward La Push. Since he wasn't a cop, he didn't need to worry about crossing any boundaries. He had made it to us in no time, and Jasper had been out cold in my arms by then. He was a heavy motherfucker, but somehow I had managed to carry him for quarter of a mile before my dad found us beside the road to Forks.

I remembered back when we were going to Port Angeles for Thanksgiving. How I had made some serious indentions in the upholstery in the backseat of Dad's Mercedes, since I had gripped it

so tightly. I guess those indentions weren't going to be a problem after all, since the entire backseat was now covered with Jasper's blood instead. I didn't even want to know how much blood he had lost.

There had been blood fucking everywhere, and I had been amazed there was even any left in his body once we got to the hospital.

Blood. Fucking. Everywhere.

Why did that feel so familiar?

A quiet chuckle echoed through the room. And then another. And then it started gaining in volume. Before I knew it, the chuckle turned into full blown hysteric laughter. It took me a while to realize it was coming from me.

I was fucking laughing.

Hysterically at that.

I didn't know why or where the hell it was coming from. All I knew was that I couldn't fucking stop.

"Dude, what the hell are you laughing at?" Emmett growled from beside me. "What about this situation is fucking funny to you?"

I couldn't answer him because I was laughing so hard it was starting to hurt. I saw Alice stir as she woke up, she looked at me with sleepy and confused eyes.

"What's so funny?" she asked, looking at Emmett.

"Who the hell knows? I think my brother finally lost it."

I looked at them through my laughter-induced tears, clutching my stomach as it started to hurt. It didn't take long before my hysteric laughter changed into something else.

Sobs .

I started crying like a little girl, still clutching my middle as if it was the only thing keeping me together. I rocked back and forth in my seat as my body shook. This was not one of my manlier moments, but then again – my manliness was the least of my problems.

Alice shifted in her seat so she could embrace my shaking form, and Emmett stood up so he could sit down on my other side. He put an arm around my shoulders, being there for me the only way he knew how. By just being.

"This is so fucked up," I said, when I finally regained enough control of my body. "My girlfriend is kidnapped, probably being brutalized and cut open like a fucking fish, and maybe forced to do unspeakable things to...to... mutts. And to top it all off, I get my best friend shot when I force him to go with me to find her. He's fighting for his life, and who the fuck knows if *he'll* survive?" I gripped my hair in my hands, pulling so tightly it hurt my scalp. "In what fucking universe does shit like this happen?" Alice rested her cheek against my arm and Emmett sighed. "Shit like this doesn't happen," I continued almost inaudibly. "Mom's doesn't cut their daughters open and drink their blood. It just doesn't happen."

Neither Alice nor Emmett said a word, and I realized now that this was probably the first time they ever heard about it. They didn't know what Bella had been through, unless Jasper had told them. But I doubted he had. He was great like that. He kept the secrets that he was told. Which was probably why he was such an awesome guy to vent to, because you knew that whatever you said would stay with him. He would take it to his grave.

I guess no one thought that he would take it with him so soon .

I sighed, trying to relax my grip on my hair, before leaning back in the chair.

I stared emptily in front of me. Not really seeing.

I wasn't crying anymore. I wasn't laughing.

I just was.

Alice sniffled next to me, and I could feel her tears wet my shirt. Emmett sighed, and I could tell it was his way to keep himself together. What a sad bunch we were.

"I fucked up," I said emptily.

They didn't argue with me.

When you wait for time to pass, it passes oddly. One moment it feels like it's dragging forward, then, if you aren't paying attention you'll find yourself hours from where you were, wondering where the time went. Of course, I wasn't lucky enough to experience any more of my blackouts. I would have welcomed them. Maybe time would have passed quicker that way.

The following days, I spent most of my time at the hospital. We were all sitting by Jasper's side, praying for him to wake up. His parents were a mess, and Rosalie wasn't any better. I didn't feel like I even deserved to be in his room, since I was the reason he was there. His parents hadn't told me to leave, but I could see the judgment in their eyes.

They blamed me – as they should be.

I walked out to roam the hospital halls for a while, not able to take any more of the tension in Jasper's room. I tried to think about all that was happening, trying to rationalize it. But it was pointless. Just like everything else.

The closer we got to New Years Eve, the more anxious I got. I hadn't made any attempt to go back to La Push, or anywhere else for that matter. I didn't even know in which end to begin, and maybe that was just as well. There was no use in me trying to do anything. I only got

people hurt when I did. Maybe it was time for me to trust other people to do stuff instead. But then again, I didn't trust the Forks Police Department. They were bunch of fucking imbeciles.

Then who the fuck *did* I trust to bring my Sparrow back to me?

Nobody.

Dad spotted me in the halls when he exited an exam room.

"How are you doing?" he asked, stepping up to walk beside me.

I shrugged in response. "Who the fuck cares how I'm doing?" I asked. I stopped, and turned to him. "How's Jasper?" I swallowed thickly, afraid of the answer. The doctors had been vague at best when they talked to his parents about his current condition. I didn't want vague. I couldn't take vague. I needed straight facts. No matter how bad they were.

Dad sighed deeply, looking up and down the hall quickly before looking back at me.

"He's in bad condition, Edward. The fact that he hasn't woken up yet doesn't bode well," he explained quietly. "He's stable, and he has been ever since the surgery. But still, he should have woken up by now."

"Will he die?" I asked.

"I don't know, Edward. I don't know," he said, shaking his head.

"Have you heard anything more from Leah? Or the police? Do they know anything?" I asked.

He shook his head. "No, so far there is no news on that front either. Apparently, neither Dwyer nor Jacob has been on seen on the reservation lately. And Leah hasn't been able to find out where they are."

"Is the stupid full moon shit still in affect?" I asked. "Or have they changed that shit too?"

"No, as far as Leah could tell, the preparations are in full swing. Apparently, they are already setting up the cliff. They're taking this very seriously," he said. "She will be there, and we will get her. Don't worry."

Don't worry? That was easy for him to say.

It was still two days before New Years Eve.

I wondered if she would even make it that long.

Who were to say she was even still alive?

If she wasn't, would they even find her body?

I wondered if Jasper would wake up in time to see the fireworks.

Or if he would wake up at all.

How's that for happy holidays?

Nightmares plagued my sleep every night until New Year's Eve. You would think that I was going to have nightmares about the shooting, or about Sparrow's kidnapping. But I didn't – well, I did, but there was mostly about other shit. Mostly I dreamt about stuff that made no sense – like me being at parties, or me hooking up with random girls. Yes, they were nightmares, because they all ended the same.

Blood everywhere.

Some of the dreams felt familiar, but I couldn't pinpoint why that was.

I didn't sleep at all the night before New Year's Eve. How the fuck could I with nightmares like that? I tried to kill some time by taking a long relaxing shower. I even rummaged through my damn closet to

find good clothes to wear. If today was the day I got Sparrow back, I wanted to look good for her. Which was fucking ridiculous, since she had never cared about my appearance. And after almost a week with those people, my looks would be furthest from her mind once we finally got together again. My looks meant nothing, and I knew it didn't matter, but I guess I just needed something else to focus on.

I pulled on a pair of jeans, and grabbed a white button down shirt.

It was good enough.

The house was quiet as I descended the stairs. The big grandfather clock in the living room said it was only a little after six a.m. My family had yet to wake up. Dad had come in late from the hospital last night, so I guess it would only be natural for him to sleep in today.

I stepped into the living room, seeing my grand piano stand on its small platform. It looked so deserted and alone. I hadn't touched it in so long.

Slowly, I walked over to it, letting my fingers touch the smooth surface as I walked around it to sit down. I opened the lid to the keys, swallowing thickly.

"I've missed you," I whispered to the inanimate object as I let my fingers ghost over the keys. "How I wish I could touch you... make you come to life... just like old times."

I let my fingers fly over the keys – never touching – pretending that I was playing. I didn't know what was keeping me from pressing down on the keys. It was as if I couldn't bring myself to do it unless I had a very good reason to. When I tried to use my keyboard in my room, at least I could touch the damn keys – even though it didn't sound any good. But not on the grand piano. Why the hell was that?

Where the hell did my muse go ?

Thinking back to that night when it disappeared, I tried to remember once again what the hell really happened. But my memory was foggy. Just like it had always been. I tried to take deep breath as I closed my eyes, clearing my mind. Remembering again.

It was an awesome party. I was drunk and high on God knows what. I was having a great time. Girls were all over me. They all wanted to be the girl I took home tonight. I was the man. Everybody wanted me. Jessica Stanley was looking mighty fine this evening. Maybe she would get the honors to get a ride on my disco stick...

I opened my eyes. Jessica Stanley. I had totally forgotten that I slept with her. Or maybe I just repressed the memory. I furrowed my eyebrows as I stared down at the keys in confusion. Jessica Stanley? Really? Did I *really* sleep with her? I know I slept with *someone* that night, I just couldn't tell when or where it happened. All I know is that I did. Was it Jessica? I thought she only gave me a blow job, just like Tanya's younger sister...

"C'mon, Edward, please stay... the night is still young," Irina said, pulling at my arm where she still stood on her knees in front of me. I growled at her, swaying where I stood.

"Sorry tuts," I said. "But I'm way too drunk to deal with you right now. Maybe some other time."

I left the bedroom, leaving her behind, and made my way to the living room where the party was still going on. I found my brother and told him I was going to head home. I was too wasted to deal with any more of this shit; he laughed and slapped my back. Saying something about me being a wimp, before I wobbled off.

I made it to the front door, where Tanya was. She was biting her lower lip, looking at me through her lashes. She was too fucking drunk to pull it off. It wasn't sexy at all. And even if she had been sober, I would have been too fucking drunk to notice.

"Hey handsome, want to party?" she asked.

" Sorry, but I'm heading home. Your lil'sister and I already had a party," I replied with a smirk.

She pouted. "You're no fun, Eddie," she complained just as Jessica walked up to us.

" Hey, where are you going? You can't leave yet!" Jessica said, her eyes wide and almost desperate. I wondered what the hell she was tripping on. Her eyes were crazy. I guess Crowley was providing the entire party. Fucking A.

I pushed them both aside so I could get out. I needed air. Fresh fucking air.

" Please, Edward, you promised," Jessica whined, as I slammed the door shut behind me.

It took me a while, but I finally made it home. My parents were spending the night in Port Angeles – or something – so I didn't need to bother to be quiet when I stumbled up the stairs to my room. I was out cold before my head even touched the pillow.

I watched my fingers move over the keys, smiling humorlessly at the memory. There was nothing new there. I remember how I had left. I had turned down two girls because I knew I was too drunk to enjoy it anyway. But then again, Jessica already had her turn with her mouth on my dick, so maybe that it didn't really count when I turned her down before I left.

Jessica.

There was something I was missing.

I looked down at the keys again. My fingers weren't moving anymore, they were completely still.

Damn it.

I muttered and growled as an annoying shrilling sound pulled me out of my slumber. The shrilling continued, along with a muffled voice. I couldn't make out the words though. What the hell? I sat up in my bed, looking around. My head was spinning and I felt even drunker than when I went to bed.

There was another shrilling sound, and I realized it was the doorbell.

I groaned and left my bed, reluctantly making my way downstairs. Who the fuck was at the door at whatever-the-hell-it-was in the morning? I reached the front door, opening it and glaring at whoever was at the other side.

"What?" I snapped.

Jessica bit her lip nervously, twirling a strand of her hair around her finger.

"Can I come in?" she asked.

"What for?"

"You made a promise tonight, and I expect you to keep it," she said, reaching out to touch my chest. I glanced down on her hand, then at her.

"Yeah? And what was that?" I asked with a tired voice.

"You told me you'd be my first," she said. "Tanya said you wouldn't do it... I need to prove her wrong... I want you to sleep with me. I want you to be my first." She pulled her hand back and unbuttoned the first few buttons of her shirt, showing of her cleavage. I automatically licked my lips.

She was offering, who the fuck was I to say no?

"Get in here," I snapped, grabbing her hand and pulling her into the house.

It all went very fast from there. I pushed her towards the living room, as we both started removing our clothes, throwing them around us like there was no tomorrow. By the time we made it to the piano, we were already buck naked...

And that was that.

I fucked Jessica-fucking-Stanley on my precious piano.

I popped her fucking cherry on my fucking piano.

I swallowed back the bile that rose in my throat. This wasn't fucking happening. I defiled my piano. The only thing – other than my Volvo – that I took excellent care of. If the Volvo was the love of my life, then the piano was my baby, and you can't love anyone more than your baby. And I defiled my baby. I had defiled the only thing that was my own – *my music* . By taking Jessica on my damn piano, I had ruined everything. I ruined the atmosphere around the piano, I ruined the feeling I got when I sat down. I may have popped her cherry – or picked her damn flower, if you will – but she had stolen my muse. When she left, she brought my muse with her.

I quickly stood up and went to the kitchen. I went straight to the cleaning supply closet, looking for anything I could use to clean the piano. It had been months since it happened, so the cleaning was obviously way overdue. I spent the next hour scrubbing the keys and the seat, and the whole piano. Not a spot was left unclean. I knew my mother dusted and cleaned the piano when she cleaned the living room on a regular basis, but I still needed to do this.

When I was done, I put the supplies away, going back to sit by the piano. It smelled of strawberries now from the cleanser I had used. *Strawberries* . Sparrow.

Now that I remembered what happened. Now that I knew what the fuck happened between my bed and the guest bedroom. Did that mean that I could finally touch the piano again? Could I play? Some part of me must have known all along what I did on that piano, which

was probably why I never allowed myself to touch the keys. I didn't deserve it. The piano used to be a clean and sacred space, free from all the bullshit in my life, until I decided to fuck a girl on it.

I always thought it was something terrible that my mind was trying to block out, that maybe I had killed someone or something that night. And that was the reason my muse left. Who the fuck knew that something so trivial as sex would be the reason for my muse leaving me? I suppose in a way it made sense. I ruined my sacred place by doing something disgusting there – using a girl for my own pleasure, and not giving a shit if she was enjoying it or not.

What the fuck was wrong with me?

I took a deep breath, closing my eyes.

There was only one girl I would ever fuck on this piano. And that was Sparrow. Nobody else deserved to be in my sacred bubble. If I had fucked – no, *made love* to – Sparrow on the piano, I wouldn't have defiled it. We would have fucking *blessed* it. Like holy water or some shit. Making love to Sparrow on my piano would have been a good thing. I loved her and she loved me. Making love on the damn piano would have made so much sense. My sanctuary would have become even more sacred.

I smiled sadly to myself, letting my fingers ghost over the keys as I pretended to play.

Making love to Sparrow *once* was going to be better than all the fucks in the world. I just knew it.

In less than seventeen hours, we would be reunited. We would never be apart again. I would keep her safe this time, if it was the last damn thing I ever did. I couldn't care less about my music, my Volvo or my piano. They all paled in comparison to my Sparrow. She was my sacred place now. Free from all the bullshit. She was my sanctuary.

I could almost hear the music my fingers itched to play as I thought of her.

How did I ever manage to go so long without her in my life? How could I go so long without her love?

Shit sure was different now. Nothing was what it used to be. All was new.

And I never wanted to go back.

" I used to rule the world, seas would rise when I gave the word. Now in the morning I sleep alone, sweep the streets I used to own ." I sang so quietly I could barely hear my own voice. The music speed up, getting louder. I smiled to myself, letting myself get lost in the imaginary tones in my head. *" For some reason, I can't explain. I know St. Peter won't call my name. Never an honest word... but that was when I ruled the world ."*

I sighed, opening my eyes. My smile grew wistful as I noticed my fingers playing. They weren't ghosting over the keys – they were actually touching them, pressing down and creating tones. The music wasn't all in my head. I was creating it. It was really there. I watched in fascination as they played the music I wanted to play for so long. When one song ended, another one began. In an endless chain. I didn't even need to think, this was all second nature to me. A nature that my mind had repressed for the past few months, but which it was finally letting free again. My fingers were moving fast over the keys, making up for the months of no play. My hands were starting to cramp up, because they weren't used to the abuse. But I couldn't find it in me to stop, not now, when I finally got it back.

I didn't know how long I sat there, just playing, but eventually my hands got too tired to continue. My mind was at ease, and I slowly ended the last song. I pressed one key, making the tone linger before finally fading out.

I sighed deeply, putting my hands in my lap.

"For you Sparrow," I said quietly. "Only for you."

I closed the lid over the keys, and with that I closed the door on the old Edward. The Edward that hurt people, the Edward that fucked random girls at parties, the Edward that screwed with people just because he knew he would get away with it. I closed the door on everything he stood for.

And all that was left was me.

Ceremony

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – all errors are mine]

Chapter 52, "Ceremony"

Isabella Swan POV

Time passes. Even when it seems impossible. Even when each tick of the second hand aches like the pulse of blood behind a bruise. It passes unevenly, in strange lurches and dragging lulls, but pass it does. Even for me.

Have you ever been so hungry that you stopped feeling hungry? Well, I have. I was so hungry that it was a struggle to keep upright while sitting and I kept shaking as if I was having a seizure. I had refused to eat their disgusting bread and I didn't take the pills. The only thing I would let myself consume of the things they gave me was the water. A human could go days – or even weeks – without food. But if you ever tried to go without water, you might as well kill yourself right away, just to get it over with. Without water you're a dead man (or woman, in my case) within a week. Plain and simple.

I completely lost track of time. I didn't know if it had been hours or days since the incident with Jacob. I didn't know anything.

I remembered the feeling of the knife in my hand. How easy it would have been for me to just lunge at him – despite my leg – and stab him in the throat. I could imagine how the blood would splutter from

the wound, painting the walls and the floor with the red liquid. And I wouldn't have cared.

Because he killed Jasper.

Despite everything, I had come to consider Jasper a friend. I could see why Edward had respected him so much, because Jasper had integrity. Something most people lacked these days. Especially teenagers. Most people at our school probably couldn't even spell integrity, let alone knowing the meaning of the word.

I hoped that I was one of those people that *did* have integrity, and maybe that was why I didn't lunge at Jacob. Or maybe it was because I was afraid. I couldn't stab another person, no matter how evil. I'm sure that if I were left in a room full of knives, with my mom tied to a chair, I would probably end up using one of the knives to cut her loose. I couldn't hurt people intentionally. It wasn't in my nature. No matter how evil they were, or how badly they had treated me. I just couldn't hurt them back. I couldn't stab someone just because they stabbed me.

I hated that about myself, because it made me weak. It made me pathetic. I couldn't even defend myself. Instead I just passed out, giving the enemy another chance at hurting me.

I hated everything about myself. How on earth could Edward love me? What was it about me that he found lovable? How could he look at me with that look in his eyes, as if I had finally made him see the light or something? I didn't understand. I didn't deserve him. He deserved someone strong. Someone who wasn't afraid to defend or stand up for themselves.

Someone who wasn't me.

The hunger-induced fatigue only got worse, and I lay down on the bed, curling into a ball. My cast felt almost too big on my leg, as if I could slide my leg out if I wanted to. I knew it was just a phantom

feeling, but it was still irritating since it made the cast all the more uncomfortable.

My head was spinning and I wondered for a minute if I was going to pass out again.

I sighed when I realized I wasn't. My exhaustion wasn't going to bring me into darkness just yet.

I had to wait.

My ears barely registered the door lock being turned and the door being opened; and my eyes barely moved to see who it was. I couldn't even find it in me to care when my mom walked in. She closed the door behind her and walked up to the bed. She crouched next to me, lovingly caressing my cheek with the back of her hand.

"Oh sweetie," she cooed. "I know this is hard, but it's necessary."

I didn't answer her. I hadn't uttered a single word since Jacob told me that if I said Edward's name again, Jacob would cut his throat. That threat alone was enough for me to not want to speak ever again. Not that I had anything to say to these people anyway. I had quickly realized that protesting was futile. Crazy people didn't listen to sane people. I would have been more than surprised if they actually said 'hey, she's right. Let's not do this' after one of my protests. I wouldn't have believed it even if they let me go. If they let me go now, I would be paranoid forever. I would forever be looking over my shoulder, waiting for them to strike me with something worse.

I suppose that even if I somehow came out alive after all of this, the paranoia would still be a side effect. How could it not be? Let's just add that to the list of things of reasons as to why Edward shouldn't love me.

A normal person would be trying to focus on the people they loved, trying to conjure their faces and seek strength from their memories. A normal person wouldn't be listing reasons as to why their significant other shouldn't love them. I was just adding insult to injury by thinking like this, but I couldn't stop. It was my sick way of coping.

Coping by moping. How fitting.

I was nothing if not masochistic. Maybe Edward had it right all along, maybe all this pain was a turn on for me. Maybe I got a sick kick out of being tortured. Or maybe I was too afraid to be happy, and I was so familiar with the pain now that it was considered a safe territory for me. By being happy I risked more things than being in pain. With happiness came the risk of being hurt. When you're already hurt, another dash of hurt can't touch you.

"I hate that we were apart for so long, but I will make it up to you. I promise," my mom continued as she stroked my hair. "I'm sorry it took so long for me to get back here, but there were... obstacles. Nothing you need to worry about now, though. It's all fine."

She smiled at me and I looked into her eyes, trying to decide who the woman was in front of me. Was it my mother – or was it the crazy woman? I wanted to snort at myself. Who was I kidding? The woman in front of me was not my mother, it didn't matter if she wore her crazy eyes or not – which, evidently, she wasn't right now. Her eyes were normal. I hated her normal eyes almost as much as her crazy eyes. Her normal eyes made her look... well, *normal*. Even though I knew she was anything but.

"You're so beautiful, my sweet Isabella," she said. "I know you've been having a hard time these last few months, but I also know that everything will be alright now. You have finally come to peace with your destiny. You know that this is where you belong. *The mother of the spirit will be reluctant, but she will find peace* ." She sighed deeply, before standing up and walking over to the desk. "Have you looked at our research?" she asked over her shoulder. "It's amazing how important you are. *My daughter will be the catalyst that will*

make all our wishes come true. Prosperity, health, youth... everything we could ever want and more." She flipped through a few pages as I stared at her back. "I'm so glad Phil decided to look into all of this in the first place. Who knew that the legends could reach well outside the tribe itself? Who knew that the key to their salvation would be *my* daughter? It would have been a tragedy to us all if he hadn't found this out in time."

I hated how she kept stressing the fact that I was *her* daughter. She must be so proud.

I sighed and she turned around at the sound. She smiled at me.

"I'm so happy that you finally changed your mind," she said. "The legend never said how long you would be reluctant, so this was a nice surprise."

I wanted to scoff. Reluctance wasn't a strong enough word to describe what I was feeling. But I wasn't going to tell her that, because what was the point? She wouldn't listen, and pretending that I wasn't opposed to what was going on anymore was helping me gain their trust. Arguing would lead nowhere, so why waste my breath? They trusted me now, kind of. You should have seen the look of pure bliss on Phil's face when he came into the room to give me more bread to eat, pills to swallow and water to drink – and find that I had eaten the bread and taken the pills he gave me earlier. It was like I had given him the most precious gift ever by eating and doing what I was told.

Little did he know, I had hidden both the bread and the pills in my pillow.

I didn't even flinch when Phil had come in later to 'extract' some more blood from me. My body felt numb, and the slicing of my skin was nothing but a soft sting. Nothing I couldn't handle. I didn't try to take the knife from him or fight him off, because I knew – once again – that it was futile. Even if I had managed to get a hold of the knife, I still wouldn't have used it against him.

I could have used it against *myself* , however. But something kept holding me back. Just like when I held the knife during the incident with Jacob. I could have so easily cut my wrists or my throat or whatever, and just bled out. But I couldn't do it. It was as if I... *I didn't want to die* . The realization was frightening to me, because I had lived every day for the past few months with the wish to die. And now, I didn't anymore? No, I wanted to fight; I wanted to live. And the only way I could do both was by just going through the motions that they wanted me too, and sooner or later they would let their guard down and I could escape.

As my body started wearing down by the lack of food, my mind became slow and irrational thoughts were starting to enter my mind. Many of the things I thought about didn't make much sense, and I was starting to lose grip of reality. It was like everything was a dream now. I didn't know if it was the irrational part of me or not, but eventually, I figured that maybe it wouldn't be such a bad thing going through the ritual after all. I knew for a fact that they didn't want me dead – quite the opposite really, if they wanted me to be the mother of some spirit, they had to keep me alive for at least another nine months. So I would survive their sick little ceremony, one way or another. And maybe then, I would get some freedom... maybe then, I could escape.

Sooner or later, I would get back to where I belonged.

With Edward.

Even if it meant that I had to be pregnant.

I had never given much thought on whether or not I wanted to become a mother, all I knew was that I never intended Jacob to be the father of my child. Not even back when we were friends, and our parents kept joking about us getting married eventually.

As I thought all of this, I realized my mother was mumbling nonsense to herself as she went through her notes. I couldn't make out many

of her words, because they were all incoherent, but there was one sentence rang through.

"... Charlie had it coming. He shouldn't have tried to protect what wasn't his... "

Biting my lip and closing my eyes, I tried to tune her out. I refused to believe that Phil was my father, and hearing my mom speak of Charlie like that made my skin crawl. Did she mean he was trying to protect me? Or was he trying to protect someone or some *thing* else? And how could she speak so coldly about the man she married and lived with for almost twenty years? Didn't he mean anything to her? He had worshipped the ground she walked on, and what did he get in return? A stab in the back.

Not like he didn't deserve it. But still.

My feelings about Charlie's demise were still muddled at best. I didn't know how to feel about it at all. He was my father, for all intents and purposes. I didn't care that these crazy people were under the impression that I shared DNA with Phil Dwyer. My gut feeling still said that Charlie Swan was my father, and no one else. I wondered if they were going to let Charlie have a proper burial, or if they would just dump his body and hope nobody would go looking for him. Maybe they would dump his body somewhere random, getting rid of all the evidence, and maybe make it look like a bear attack or something.

There had been many animal attacks around Forks, and there were always a few cases of fatalities reported each year. Would they somehow make my dad a part of those statistics?

I closed my eyes again. My mom's nonsense mumbling nothing but distant hum in my ears.

Sleep came fast – and the nightmares followed.

Time held no meaning anymore. None at all. So when my mom danced into the room – not even closing the door behind her – I knew that the day had come. It was my wedding day.

Daylight poured into the room through the open door, and I was oddly fascinated by the way the light lit up the entryway. I never thought daylight would be one of the things added to the list of things I took for granted.

Mom grabbed my hand, pulling me up and my head spun worse than ever. If today was New Years Eve, that meant I had gone without food for... when was I taken? Christmas Day? I wanted to shake my head; I refused to believe it. I had been stuck in this room for the last seven days. No wonder my body was shutting down on me. No wonder I had no strength left. It was nothing short of a miracle that I was even able to stay awake.

I swayed on my feet when Mom pulled me off the bed, forcing me to stand. She frowned at the sight.

"We will need to pretty you up, sweetie," she said. "You look like a corpse. And no daughter of mine will look like a corpse on the day of her bonding ceremony."

She helped me out of the room, and I hated the way I clung to her for support. Without her by my side I would have fallen to the floor, unable to get up. My body was drained completely. How was I even still awake?

I looked around, trying to take in my surroundings. I concluded that we were in some small cottage somewhere. The room right outside the bedroom where I had been locked up, was a combined living room and kitchen – the only thing dividing them was the breakfast bar.

Through the windows, all I could see was snow and trees.

I didn't even care where we were anymore. I didn't care if we were in the middle of nowhere – or if we had somehow shrunk and been placed in a snow globe. I simply. Didn't. Care.

Mom pulled me toward the breakfast bar, telling me to sit. She then grabbed a small bag from the counter, pouring out its contents in front of me. Make-up. *Of course* . The jumble of colors made my head hurt, and I closed my eyes in order to block the dizziness that followed.

"You'll be so pretty, sweetie," she said, as I heard her push the objects around on the counter, trying to find the right product to begin with. "Jacob is lucky to have you."

I felt her dab something on my skin with a small sponge. I didn't open my eyes to find out what it was; I just let her do her thing. I didn't care anymore. Maybe, if I was lucky, she was painting me like a clown. I would be okay with that. It would just make the ceremony a bigger joke than it already was.

Ten minutes – or an hour, who knows? – later, a phone rang, and Mom stopped what she was doing to my face and went to answer.

"Hello?" she said sweetly. "Oh, hi Hank... uh-huh... no, we're preparing everything now. They're at the cliff... no, I'm at home with Bella... yes, she's going to be very pretty... what?... WHAT? Say that again please?... how?... why? I thought you talked to him?" She sighed deeply. "Now you listen to me, Hank. I trusted you to keep things under control without raising suspicion now with Charlie gone. Why on earth would you be talking to Dr. Cullen about this?... I don't care!... what? Five days ago? And you're calling us *now* ?... No, damnit, Hank. You were supposed to keep them out of it. You were supposed to keep them away. What the hell is wrong with you? If they interrupt us tonight, everything will be ruined... Sue won't be happy when she hears about this." She hung up the phone, and all but threw it at the wall before stepping back to me, picking up where she left off. She smiled sweetly at me, but I could tell by the movements of her hands that she was trying to keep her anger at

bay. Whatever Hank had said on the phone, it obviously upset her. I wondered what Dr. Cullen had to do with it. My mind was too tired to come up with any ideas. My mind couldn't even figure out who Hank was – even though his name sounded familiar. But then again, there were many Hanks out there. It was a common name after all.

When Mom was finished with my face, she went over to fix my hair. She used a curling iron, a straightener and different kinds of hair products to get my hair the way she wanted it. She was in the middle of curling a few strands of my hair when the front door opened. Phil came in, shaking the snow off his jacket as he pulled it off and hang it on the rack. He walked up to Mom with a smile, kissing her cheek.

"How are my beautiful girls?" he asked with so much love in his voice that it was almost sickening.

"We're fine," Mom replied, her voice clipped. "Care to tell me what has been going on lately? Here I am, finally home with my daughter, preparing her for the biggest day of all our lives. Everything is fine... and then Hank calls."

Phil's smile wavered. "Hank called? What did he want?" he asked, even though it sounded like he already knew. Mom pursed her lips, frowning as she put the curling iron away.

"Hank informed me that people *higher up* are somehow getting involved. Apparently someone has been talking, letting some things slip, and word has it... information has spread. Care to tell me how that happened?" Mom asked. "I thought you said you had everything under control and that Hank knew what he was doing? I thought you said we could trust him!"

"Don't worry, sweetie. I *have* it under control," Phil said, stroking Mom's arm reassuringly. "I'll take care of everything."

Mom sighed, wringing her hands together nervously. "I swear to God, Phil, if this doesn't go according to plan, I don't know what I'll

do. They must be bonded, they must be together. And it must happen tonight. It's our last chance."

"Don't worry," Phil said again, still stroking both her arms soothingly. "I told you, I'll take care of everything. I'll call Hank and get the details, and if it's true that the people in higher places are getting involved *now*, there is nothing we need to worry about. The ceremony is taking place tonight; there is no way for them to find us before it happens. And by then, it will be too late for them anyway. The ceremony will have already taken place, and it will help us fight whatever happens next. The spirit will protect us."

"Now, tell me, what else did Hank say?" Phil asked.

Mom sighed. "Apparently he has been talking to Cullen... a lot. When you picked up Isabella, Hank was the one talking to Cullen at the station. I don't like that he knows so much, Phil."

"Well, that's not a big deal. As long as Hank sees to it that he's the only one Cullen continues to talk to at the station, then we have no problem. Hank has been with us since day one, you know we can trust him. Hank promised me that he has made sure that Cullen isn't going to talk to anyone else, that it was going to be kept on the down low. I must say, for a doctor, that man isn't the brightest crayon in the box." Phil leaned in to kiss my mother on the cheek, and she visibly relaxed. "Things will be okay. We just need to reach *the point* then it will all be okay. Besides, they don't know squat. Who knew, you marrying a cop would end up being a good thing for us? Without him we wouldn't have gotten away with any of this."

Mom tensed at again, scowling at Phil. "Don't remind me of Charlie, please. I'm still disappointed at what he did... for all we know this might be *his* work."

"Which is why I took care of him. For you, my darling," Phil pulled her to him and pressed his lips to her. I turned my head away. Eating their disgusting rust-bread would have been less disgusting than watching these two crazy people suck face.

When they were done, Mom sighed deeply, sounding content, before turning her attention back to me. She smiled at me when she gripped my chin to turn my face to her.

"You're so pretty, my Bella," she said, stroking my cheek with the back of her hand. "You and Jacob are going to be so happy together. And I promise you, nothing will ruin tonight."

Phil leaned against one of the counters, watching us with a serious face.

"I wonder who slipped," he said, talking to himself. "Hank said he had it under control, so how on earth did the feds get a whiff of it? They have no proof to go on anyway. I made sure of that," he muttered under his breath, still talking to himself.

"How about you call him and make sure everything is under control?" Mom suggested, who had also heard every single word. "And maybe you can call Sue too, maybe she knows something? You know she's not going to perform the ceremony unless everything is safe and under control."

"Okay, will do, honey," he said, kissing her cheek again before stepping into the bedroom so he could make the call in private.

They talked about feds and the police like they were discussing dinner plans. Every day talk. Even though they didn't sound happy about how things were going. I should have been happy that the feds were getting involved, but what did that really mean for me? Was I going to be saved or not?

Mom was humming some random song as she continued her work on my hair. If I closed my eyes, I could pretend that she was just my mother playing with my hair for no reason at all. Just another lazy Sunday, where we were both out of things to do. A happy mother and her daughter. Just hanging out.

But I guess I had no strength to even pretend anymore. A dream like that was so far beyond my reach that I might as well be shooting for the moon. She was lost forever now, just like my dad.

I suppose I could officially consider myself an orphan.

The white dress they had been forced me to wear for the past week was replaced by another white dress. This one wasn't as loose as the other one had been – this one was strapless, with a built-in corset, keeping my stomach and my breasts in place, so I wouldn't need a bra. The skirt was made out of layers of thin fabric, and it shifted beautifully with every move I made. If it weren't for the fact that I was wearing it to my execution – oh, I'm sorry, I mean my *wedding* – I might have liked it.

When everything was done, and Mom had made the final adjustments to my hair and makeup, it was already dark out. I didn't know what time it was, since I hadn't spotted a functioning clock anywhere. The clock on the ancient VCR, underneath the ancient TV, was blinking 12:00, and that wasn't really helping.

I couldn't stand up at all without support anymore. I felt completely drained, and I wanted nothing more than to go to sleep. I wasn't even hungry anymore; I couldn't have cared less about food. All I wanted to do was sleep.

It hadn't escaped my notice that I hadn't seen Jacob in a while, and I wondered where he was. Phil and Mom were discussing something in the bedroom, while they left me unattended in the living room. I didn't even attempt to make a break for it. The thought itself was absurd. How on earth was I going to make a break for it if I couldn't even get off the couch without falling over? My cast was still not helping matters, though there wasn't any pain at all anymore. I wondered if it was because it had reached the point in the healing process where there was no point for pain anymore, or if it was because the rest of my body was numb too. It was something to think about, while my 'parents' spoke in the other room. Every now

and again, my mom would raise her voice, but my mind was too tired to make out the words. And I frankly didn't care enough to try either.

Finally, they emerged from the room. Phil put on his winter jacket, before walking over to me and picking me off the couch.

"Time to go, sweet child of mine," he said, kissing my cheek.

I closed my eyes, feeling the movements as he walked over to the front door. Mom opened it for him, and we stepped out into the cold. The freezing cold was like fire on my skin. I wanted to ask why I didn't get a jacket, but even as I opened my mouth, I had no strength to actually get the words out.

I kept my eyes shut, trying to go back to the numb state where I couldn't feel anything that was happening to my body. Not even the blistering cold that felt like fire.

I must have fallen asleep – or maybe I passed out – but somehow I was now finding myself at the edge of the woods. In front of us was the highest cliff in La Push. The cold air from the ocean swept over us, and my body was shaking worse than ever now.

I guess I really was a goose – I had the goose bumps erupting all over my body to prove it.

The sky was crystal clear, no clouds in sight. A million stars blinking back at me, with the big, full moon right there, staring me in the face. The cliff had been decorated with several big candles lighting up the small area. Beautiful flowers had been put in vases in the snow. A small altar was there, with a few objects on top that I couldn't make out. The scene before me was almost beautiful.

Jacob was standing on the cliff, with a woman I didn't recognize and another man. The man looked vaguely familiar – he wasn't a Quileute – but I couldn't for the life of me place him. Where had I seen him before? Billy wasn't there, probably because of his

wheelchair. Jacob smiled widely as Phil stepped out through the woods with me in his arms; Mom was walking next to us.

"Finally, I thought you'd never make it," Jacob said as Phil put my shaking body down. My legs gave out the second my naked feet touched the snow. Jacob put a strong arm around my waist, holding me to him. "Oh, baby, are you as excited as I am?" he asked me, kissing my cold cheek. I barely felt his lips against my skin. I couldn't feel anything.

My teeth clattered, and I envied how much clothes Jacob was wearing. Why the hell did I have to be the only one who was basically naked?

"I love you so much, Bella," he said to me quietly, pressing his lips against my forehead.

In the distant, above the trees, I could see the occasional firework. I wondered how far from town we were. Or *where* we were at all, for that matter.

Mom stepped up beside the woman and the man, and Phil stepped up next to my mother, clasping her hand in his. Both smiling widely in anticipation. The other woman and the man showed no emotions on their faces.

Mom glanced at the woman. "Sue, I hope everything worked out earlier," she said.

The woman – so this was Sue? – nodded. "Hank has seen to it that Dr. Cullen is otherwise occupied. There will be no interruptions tonight. Any *leaks* have been taken care of as well. There is no reason to worry." She looked back at Jacob and me with a smile. With an ominous tone she said, "It's time."

I closed my eyes, leaning against Jacob as I shook. He had to tighten his grip on me, or else I would have sunk to the ground. My mind started slipping in and out of consciousness. One moment the

cold was unbearable, the next I barely felt it at all. I wondered if this was my body's way of telling me that it was time to go.

Sue started the ceremony with a speech. I didn't register much of what she was saying; all I knew was that her voice was soothing.

"... with the dagger to your heart, a dagger to your mind, a dagger to the essence of your life, tell me, are you prepared to make the final sacrifice? A spirit will be awakening ..." Sue's voice was soft, almost a purr to my ears. I smiled. She would make a good teacher for kindergarten; her voice was perfect for telling the kids a story before their naps.

"Hey, Bella?" Jacob shook me, and I forced my eyes open. "You have to say it." I looked at him confused, I could barely focus on his face. What did he want me to say? "You have to say 'I do'."

I closed my eyes again. I couldn't say anything, let alone 'I do'. I didn't want to get married to Jacob.

Their voices muddled together as I once again drifted into semi-consciousness.

"The reluctance ends here, Bella!" My mom's voice snapped me back, and she was gripping my arms so tightly it should have hurt – but again, my body was too cold and too numb to feel anything. "Do you hear me? Stop this nonsense right now!"

"You can't force her, Renée." I didn't recognize the voice, and when I opened my eyes, I saw that the other man had stepped forward. *Huh, was he going to be my savior ?*

"But she's the mother!" Mom yelled, pushing me aside. I fell into the snow as Mom started yelling louder and louder at the others. Her words didn't even make sense. I didn't care... the snow was so fluffy. So soft.

Maybe I could rest my eyes for a little bit ?

I felt someone grab my arm roughly; I didn't react at all as a knife suddenly sliced my skin. The cold was my very own sedative.

"Drink it, Jacob," Mom said sternly, holding my arm out to Jacob. "We don't need her to agree, we just need to complete the ritual. Drink hers, then she'll drink yours, and everything will be peachy."

"Renée," the man said warningly.

"WHAT? We have to do this! The tribe needs this! We're not going to be young forever. We're gonna grow old and *die* unless we do this. The whole tribe will be dissolved by the misery that will follow. The spirit will not be happy," Mom yelled. "Drink, Jacob, *DRINK* !"

Jacob got down on his knees in the cold, taking my hand and raising my wrist to his lips. Behind his head, I could see the moon. It was beautiful. Somewhere in the distance, I could still see fireworks. There were more of them now.

I glanced at the mystery man; he had his hands on his hips. The moon was reflected on something on his belt, and I would have gasped if I'd had any energy left to react. I recognized the badge on his belt – because my dad had one just like it. All the cops from Forks Police Department did.

I realized then why I recognized the man. I had seen him at the station. He had been working with my father. His name was... of course , *this was Hank* . If I hadn't been so drained, I would have figured this out way earlier.

I almost wanted to laugh. Everyone was corrupted. You couldn't even trust the police anymore. What did they know, and how had they managed to make it go away without alerting people in higher places? No wonder the crazy people had been able to get away with so much. With the police on your side, how could you ever go wrong?

Laugh. Cry. Shut down. All three were things I wanted to do in reaction to my newfound realization. This was insane, so very insane, and I was tired, so very tired.

Just as Jacob was about to touch his lips to my skin, there was a loud bang that echoed through the area. Jacob dropped my arm and quickly scattered to his feet. Everybody was looking around, watching the woods, trying to find out who were shooting at them.

"Who's there?" Phil called out, sounding demanding but he didn't fool me. He was scared.

Another bang and Hank staggered back, clutching his shoulder.

Someone shot him , a part of my mind slowly registered.

Good for him , another part of my mind added.

Suddenly they were all moving, realizing that this was not a safe place. Just as Phil was about to pick me up, two dark shapes emerged from the woods, one of them clearly holding a gun in Phil's direction; the other one was holding... what the hell was that ? A *camera* ?

"Touch her, and that will be the last thing you do. I promise you that," the shape with the gun snarled as they came closer. Another person emerged from the woods behind them, with long hair blowing in the slight breeze. A girl. She looked young too, maybe around my age.

Phil raised his hands in surrender, slowly stepping away from me.

"Seth, what on earth are you doing!" Sue snapped, taking a step forward. "You don't interrupt a ceremony like this, especially *not* this one. Do you have any idea how important this is?"

I zeroed in on the man with the gun, noticing that the person holding the camera was just a boy.

"Yes, we're well aware how important this is, *mother* ," said the boy – whose name was Seth. He had a very boyish voice, as if he was right in the middle of puberty. He didn't look older than fourteen.

The girl took a step forward, placing a hand on his shoulder. "But human life is more important," she added in his place, giving Sue a disgusted glare.

One by one, more people stepped up behind the trio. From what I could tell – in the weak state that I was in – they were all people from La Push. They were all Quileutes.

I didn't understand. Why were they interrupting the ceremony? Didn't they want the spirit to rise? This was their legend. This was their stories coming to life. So why were they interrupting us? Why did they act like they didn't want this to take place? I didn't understand. It didn't make sense.

Did they want to do even worse things to me? Was slicing my arms open not enough for them?

The threat of the torture was worse than the torture itself. Not knowing was always worse. I didn't know who wanted to hurt me this time – or why or how. I didn't want to be afraid anymore. I didn't want to be scared of getting hurt again. Tortured. Why couldn't these godforsaken people leave me the hell alone already? I hadn't done anything to them, so why did they insist on torturing me like this?

I wanted to curl up and cry in the snow, but instead I just laid there, not moving an inch as I watched the stars above me. If I pretended that I was dead, then maybe they would let me be. What use was a corpse to them?

A loud yell brought me from my musing, as my mom started running in the opposite direction, trying to get away from them. She didn't stand a chance, however, as a tall guy took after her. He was *fast*. We could all hear her yelling as he captured her in the woods.

Ever so slowly, the rest of the pack moved in on us, trapping Phil, Sue, Jacob and Hank. There was only one way out for them – and that was jumping. And no one in their right mind would go cliff diving now. That was one jump you had no chance of surviving. I noticed that several in the pack were armed. So Phil, Sue, Jacob and Hank were all screwed no matter what they did. There was no escape for them now.

They all shot each other desperate glances, hoping that someone would come up with some way of getting out of it. But they were all coming up short. There was no one there to rescue them.

A man crouched next to me, putting a blanket around me before picking me up from the ground.

"It's over now, Bella," the man whispered to me.

I looked at him with empty eyes. I tried to understand what he was telling me. By saying it was 'over' he was suggesting that I didn't need to worry about getting hurt anymore. By saying it was 'over' he was suggesting that I was safe. But that didn't make any sense. I couldn't be safe. The entire area was filled with people from La Push. They would never let me go. Whatever was over was probably not in my favor. I was still going to be hurt, I was sure of it. I wouldn't trust these people with my garbage.

"Shh, Bella," the man said quietly, even though I hadn't said anything. He held me to his warm chest as he started walking away, with a couple of people in tow. "We're going to take you to the hospital now, everything will be alright." Something in his voice made me trust him. Or maybe I was just clinging for any kind of sign of rescue. *Maybe I would trust him with my garbage.* "There is a boy there who's been dying to see you," the man continued, chuckling lightly. "Dr. Cullen said he'll be there waiting for you. What's his name again?"

I smiled the first smile I had in a week, and uttered the first word in days.

"E-Edward," I managed to croak out, the word no louder than a whisper.

The man smiled down at me. "That's right, that's his name. Edward. He'll be happy to know you're safe." *Yes, I definitely trusted this man with my garbage, maybe I would even trust him with my mail .*

"I'm glad I'm not Dr. Cullen right now," one of the guys behind us said. "He's so gonna lose his license to practice medicine for this... He'll probably end up in jail."

"I wouldn't be so sure about that, Paul. He's going to have one of the best attorneys by his side, who will help anyone who doubts him realize that he was saving people. Even though he might have broken a law or two," the man – who carried me – replied.

"You want me to call and tell them we're on our way?" Paul asked.

"Yeah, you might as well," the man agreed. "Then you can go home, take care of your wife. Being pregnant is a bitch... or so I've been told."

Paul chuckled. "Yeah, I'll be sure to tell Rachel tha–"

Their laughter was interrupted by two loud bangs, echoing through the field and making me flinch. I looked up at the man, asking him with my eyes what the hell just happened. He didn't look amused anymore, his eyes were sad as he shook his head. I decided that was my sign.

I didn't need to see or know the rest. It was okay to sleep now.

It was over.

Reunion, part 1

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – all errors are mine] | **Please note:** some creative liberties has been taken with the law in this chapter, please suspend disbelief.

Chapter 53, "Reunion, part 1"

Edward Cullen POV

The day progressed fairly quickly after my epiphany at the piano. I tried not to dwell on all the memories, and instead I tried to focus on the here and now. If I had been a better person, maybe I would have called Jessica and apologized or some shit, but I didn't. First of all, it happened months and months ago, and chances were that she didn't even want a fucking apology from me. Besides, popping Jessica's fucking cherry on my damn piano was the least of my problems right now. How could any of that shit matter when Bella was still missing?

I decided to take a walk after breakfast. I assured my parents that I wasn't going to do something stupid. What the hell did they expect me to do? Go to La Push? Yeah, because that worked out so well for me the last time. I told them this, of course, and something in my voice and demeanor must have made them realize that I wasn't kidding. I wasn't going anywhere.

I took a walk toward town, letting myself get lost in thought. There was so much shit going on, that I didn't even know what to focus on. Should I dwell on Sparrow and the possibility of never getting to see

her again? Should I dwell on Jasper and the possibility of him never waking up again? Or should I dwell on my dad and Leah - and how some parts of their "plan" simply didn't add up?

I dragged my hands through my hair as I walked, then grabbed my neck, massaging it.

The more I thought of Dad and Leah, the surer I became that something wasn't quite right, although, I couldn't figure out what it was. There ball of doubt in my gut grew stronger the longer I thought about it, and I realized I was walking into some dangerous paranoid territory.

I re-played the conversation I had with Dad and Leah in my head, over and over again, trying to figure what the missing piece of the puzzle was. I was pretty damn sure there was more to their plan than what they let on - or maybe there was something in general that they were keeping from me. A part of me figured that their plan was a little bit too convenient - and *messed up* . How could they let Bella get even more hurt before getting involved and saving her? Where the hell was the logic in that?

I would have been lying if I said that the urge to run to La Push and go through every damn house wasn't overwhelming. I needed to get Sparrow back, and I didn't know if I could really trust Dad, Leah or the cops to do the job. What if they broke up the ritual too late? What if they cut too deep again? What if she bled out?

Or better yet, what if they changed the location of the ceremony? What if the cops didn't find them at all?

I didn't know what to do - other than to stay put. I knew that running after Sparrow now would be a disaster waiting to happen. God only knew who I would end up hurting if I did. I couldn't risk Sparrow like that. I tried to seek comfort in the fact that they needed her alive - they would never kill her... literally, that is. They might kill her spirit, and will to live, but they would never physically kill her. Still, the possibility was there. They could still cut too deep. Just like last time.

The only thing keeping me from running to La Push like my ass was on fire was the memory of what happened the last time I did. Jasper got shot because I let my heart do the talking, instead of letting my brain do some thinking. I couldn't work on impulse anymore, I had to be smart about this, and there was nothing smart about running to La Push without a game plan.

Then again, how the hell was I supposed to even create a game plan in the first place if the people around me wasn't being honest with me? The fact that I hadn't gone insane yet was nothing short of a miracle. Although, what is it people say about insanity? Once you start going insane, you think you're getting saner. So maybe I was already insane?

It wouldn't have surprised me if that were the case.

I strolled into the hospital at noon - because where else would I go? Home wasn't an option. One of the first people I met as I exited the elevator on Jasper's floor was Emmett.

"Hey, man," Emmett said as he spotted me. He was grinning at me like the cat that got the canary. I growled at myself. Canary. Bird. *Sparrow*. "You've been here long?"

I shook my head as I fell into step beside him. "Just got here," I replied.

"I'm on my way to Jasper, wanna come?" he asked, still grinning. *What the fuck was he up to now?* I grimaced and shook my head. Emmett sighed and rolled his eyes. "C'mon, be a dude, man."

I quirked an eyebrow at him. "'Be a dude, man?'" I echoed.

"You know what I mean, c'mon, let's go," he said, nodding toward the hallway when I turned toward the waiting area. He grabbed my arm, practically dragging me down the hall, when he realized I wasn't coming with him.

"What the hell have you been smoking?" I muttered. "Why are you so fucking excited to visit a fucking corpse?"

For some reason this made him laugh, and he slung an arm around my shoulders in a friendly manner. We didn't talk as we neared Jasper's room at the end of the hall - the sound of laughter and voices got louder the closer we got. When we stopped right outside the room, I realized the sound was coming from inside. I looked at Emmett in confusion and he just grinned at me.

"Jasper told me to come find you," he said.

I gaped at him. "H-he's awake?" I asked, dumbly.

"You bet your sweet ass he is," he said, grinning even wider.

Emmett threw open the door and marched in, I followed him slowly into the room.

"Look who I found," Emmett said, nodding toward me.

I looked at the bed, seeing the head-part propped up so Jasper could sit.

I didn't meet his gaze.

I just couldn't.

Jasper's arms were wrapped around his tiny girlfriend. Her cheek rested against his chest, her eyes were closed and a big smile graced her lips. Rosalie was there too, as were their parents. Emmett stepped up to Rose, wrapping his arms around her from behind and she rested her head back against him. I glanced nervously at their parents, seeing their dad have his arms wrapped around his wife in a similar fashion.

Three couples. One single. I was the odd man out.

I wondered if I would ever get to wrap my arms around my Sparrow again.

I took a deep breath, slowly turning my gaze up to meet Jasper's. He half-smiled at me, and I could almost hear his thoughts. We were going to talk about it later - when we didn't have an audience.

"I think your mom and I will go talk to the doctors," Mr. Whitlock said. "Take it easy now, son, alright?"

He looked at Jasper, but I could tell he was pointing his words at me. A silent warning for me to not upset his son while he was in this condition. Like I would ever hurt Jasper more than I already had.

"How... how long?" I asked, frowning.

"Early this morning," Jasper replied, knowing what I was asking. "The doctors didn't want me to have visitors until they had run some tests." I saw Alice tighten her grip on Jasper, and he winced ever so slightly at the pressure. "We tried calling your cell, but you didn't pick up, so I asked Emmett to go find you."

"You okay?" I asked in concern.

"What can I say? Getting shot in the stomach isn't something I would wish upon even my worst enemy," he replied honestly. "It hurts like a motherfucker. It's like they made my entire insides explode." I opened my mouth to apologize, but he narrowed his eyes at me. "Dude, if you apologize, I'm going to crack your skull. And I'm going to enjoy it too."

I chuckled awkwardly and sat down on one of the empty chairs.

"Any news on Bella?" Jasper asked then and I shrugged.

"They have a plan, and if all goes according to it I will have my girl back by midnight. But... you know... I'm not expecting any miracles," I said with a quiet voice.

"Who the fuck are you?" Rosalie snapped suddenly.

We all turned our heads to her and she glared at me openly.

"What?" I asked confused.

"I said, who the fuck are you?" she said again, but didn't wait for me to answer before she continued. "How the fuck dare you act like you've lost all hope already? How dare you act like *all* is already lost? That girl is somewhere out there, fighting for her life, if what I've heard is true... and you have already given up? My brother got *shot* for her sake, and you act like he got shot for nothing? Well, fuck that, Edward. Fuck you to the darkest corners of hell!"

I had no words for her, but that didn't matter, because apparently she had a crapload more for me.

"Despite your behavior in the past, nothing comes even close to the way you're behaving right now. It's like you wouldn't even mind if Bella turned up in a damn body bag and taken directly to the morgue," she said angrily, basically spitting every damn word in my direction. As if every single word was poisonous and she needed to get them out.

"Rose, c'mon," Emmett said, stroking her arms soothingly. "Don't you think the guy has been through enough?"

"No, because all that shithead is concerned about is himself. He wouldn't even have given a shit if he had gotten my brother killed. All he cares about is how it would have affected him!" Rosalie continued, seemingly no end in sight of her rant. I sighed and got up from my seat. I didn't even bother to argue with her, I knew that she was right, to a certain extent. I walked past them toward the door, and I could feel their eyes on me.

"Where you going?" Emmett asked.

"I'm not wanted here," I said, trying to ignore the lump in my throat as I turned around to look at them.

"Damn right, you aren't," Rosalie continued to spit. "You can act like a fucking martyr all you want, but no one feels sorry for you. You put this on yourself, you heartless son of a bitch. You're never welcome here ever again. I wish the bullet had pierced your brain instead of my brother's insides!"

"ROSALIE!" We all turned to the door, seeing Mr. Whitlock and Mrs. Whitlock-Hale stand in the doorway. They both looked mortified at what they just heard their daughter say.

"It's okay," I muttered. "It's not like she's not right." I pushed past them into the hallway, keeping my eyes on the floor as I made my way down the hall, and toward the stairs.

I needed fresh air, and I needed it now.

When I finally got outside, the air hit me like a cold, brick wall, but I welcomed it. I walked over to a snow-covered bench, sitting down without even bothering to wipe the layer of snow away. The feeling in my gut couldn't be described as anything but dread. The picture of Bella turning up in a body bag plagued my mind now, thanks to Rosalie.

I shuddered - but it had nothing to do with the cold.

The raw pain in Rosalie's eyes as she spat her accusations at me would haunt me forever. I couldn't even begin to imagine how it must be like for her. Jasper may have been my friend - but he was *her* brother. What if the roles had been reversed? What if something Rosalie did ended up getting Emmett shot? Wouldn't I have reacted the same way?

I couldn't blame her at all, especially since I knew it was my fault.

If I had only kept my big mouth shut, nothing of this would have ever happened.

Hell, if I hadn't taken a leak, nothing of this would have ever happened.

No matter how you turned it around, it all came back to me and my mistakes.

"Edward?"

I turned my head, spotting Dad walking toward me.

"What are you doing out here?" he asked. "Jasper has woken up."

"Yeah, I know. But I wasn't welcome there," I replied with a half-shrug. "Not that I blame them."

He frowned as he stopped a few feet away from the bench.

"How are you holding up?" he asked.

"Ask me that question tomorrow, because right now I really have no fucking clue," I replied.

He sighed and looked away, his hands in his pockets of his coat. He was the picture perfect doctor. *Such a fucking joke* .

"There is something you're not telling me, and I don't fucking like it," I blurted venomously.

He looked at me with a frown.

"What do you mean?" he asked, cautiously.

"I mean that there are a crapload of fucking holes in what you told me, and I don't fucking get it. I'm not saying that you're lying, all I'm saying is that there's something you and Leah didn't tell me, and I want to know what it is."

"By this time tomorrow, this town will be a very different place," he said cryptically, looking out over the parking lot at nothing in particular.

"And what the fuck is that supposed to mean?" I snapped.

"It means that there have been things going on in this town that will have to be dealt with."

"Stop speaking in fucking riddles and just tell me what the fuck is going on!" I yelled.

"Edward, there is so much going on that I wouldn't even know in which end to begin. Things are still being investigated," he replied with a deep sigh. "I don't know much about how far they've gotten into the investigation yet, since I'm not a cop or authorized to know what's going on any more than you are."

"You need to tell me *something* ," I argued.

"I've been in contact with the Mayor, and he has in turn contacted the FBI. The Forks Police Department will be investigated for criminal activity and corruption over the past year," he explained. "There, that's all I know."

"What? Corruption? And what do you mean criminal activity?" I asked, confused.

"The men in charge, Hank Amun and Charlie Swan, have been hiding and destroying evidence of illegal activities in Forks, all related to La Push and the Quileute people, for the past year."

I looked at him dumbly, trying to make sense of what he was telling me, but I was coming up short.

"When Bella was kidnapped, and I went in and talked to Amun, that was when I grew suspicious. He told me that he had already been in contact with the Mayor about the situation in La Push, and that

everything was taken care of. There was something about the way he brushed me off that made me suspicious, so I decided to contact the Mayor myself. Good thing I did too, since he told me that they had no record of ever having anything reported about La Push. The issue at hand barely existed on his map at all. He had just found out about the kidnapping, but he didn't know about the reasons behind it or that the people of La Push was related to it," he explained further, scratching his neck and shaking his head as if he couldn't believe it himself.

"So the Forks police aren't going to be there tonight, are they? Like you said they would. Why did you lie to me about your plan?" I asked, my voice empty. "Is this your fucked up way of telling me that I'm not going to see Bella again?"

He shook his head. "Quite the opposite," he said. "You'll get Bella back." He stepped over to the bench, dusting the snow away before sitting down next to me. "I wasn't lying to you the other day, Edward, I was just... *tweaking* the details. You would be surprised at how cooperative the people of La Push are, especially now when they've reacted to the news of Bella."

I turned my head to him. "What do you mean?"

"They aren't sadistic people by nature," he began, "and all participants in their rituals are supposed to be there by free will. Nobody is supposed to be forced into anything they don't want. Their beliefs are no different than any other religion's. They seek what all people want, love and happiness. Their legends provide them with that. But obviously, things have gone terribly wrong with this one. Bella has made clear that she doesn't want to be a part of any of this, which immediately goes against everything they believe in."

"And they're finding this out... *now* ?" I spat in frustration.

"From what I could tell from Leah, most people didn't even know that Bella was so reluctant until it was known that they had to kidnap her and force her into participating," he explained. "Also, it turns out,

when Leah read one of their books a little more closely; it was told that the legends only speak of true people of the Quileute, and Bella has not an ounce of Indian blood in her."

I sighed, slumping in my seat.

"The loophole," I mumbled.

"Excuse me?" he said.

"Bella and I tried to find a loophole to the legend, something that said it wasn't speaking of her, but we couldn't find anything. I guess the answer was staring us in the face... she's not a Quileute, so there is no reason why the legends should even know about her. It makes total sense." I sighed and leaned back on the bench, dragging my hands through my hair. "The legend said that the daughter of the wise one will wear feathers that are not her own, and the closest we figured was that it meant that Bella wasn't Chief Swan's daughter, and that meant that she wasn't a true Swan... making her wear feathers which are not her own. The only loophole would be if she was in fact Chief Swan's daughter, because it would mean that she was indeed a true Swan." I shook my head. "It's all fucking insane."

He looked at me with furrowed brows.

"Yes, that's what I've learnt too," he admitted. "They believe that Phil Dwyer is her biological father. I'm impressed you came to that conclusion on your own."

"Don't patronize me," I muttered.

"I'm not, but I also don't think it's true. We will obviously perform a paternity test once she gets back. There shouldn't be any doubt about who her parents are. She needs to know who fathered her. For her own peace of mind," he said.

"You have known more than you've let on," I said. "Why the fuck didn't you tell us this shit sooner? We could have prevented all of this

from happening... and why the fuck do we need to wait for them to cut her? Why not just grab her? Last time I checked, they've already done something illegal... they fucking kidnapped her and then they shot Jasper... what more do you need?"

He sighed. "The best evidence that we can get our hands on," he said. "And that's footage."

"Please, tell me you're not saying what I think you're saying... people will actually be there, watching and *filming* the fucking thing before they do anything? That's fucking sick!" I exclaimed.

"You know what else is sick? Letting these people slip through the legal cracks, and get back on the streets. You really want to risk it? It all comes down to evidence, Edward. It always does. It doesn't matter how solid the case might be, the most hideous of criminals can still get off without any repercussions because the evidence might be lacking in places. We need these people behind bars, not out on the streets," he explained seriously.

"It's still a fucked up way to go about it," I muttered. "What if she gets hurt?"

"It won't come to that," he reassured me.

"How can you be so sure?" I asked.

"Because the people of La Push don't want an innocent child to get hurt any more than you do. Bella will be just fine; you just need to have a little faith."

I narrowed my eyes at him. "How can you tell me that after all the shit that has happened to her? How the hell can you ask me to have *faith*?" I practically spat the word at him.

He smiled sadly at me. "Because what else can I tell you, Edward? To lose all hope and prepare yourself for the worst?"

"You should have told us what was going on from the get-go. None of this would have happened. It's all your fault."

He sighed and stood up, dusting the snow from his coat. "I hope you'll see it differently in the morning."

"Don't hold your breath."

He didn't respond to that, instead he just walked away. I glared at his back, wishing I could read his mind. There was so much shit that he was still keeping from me, and I didn't understand why. What the fuck did he have to lose if he told me shit to ease my mind? What was the worst that could happen if he was honest with me? Everything he said was contradictions to stuff he had already said, and I wondered what he was hiding. What was really going on here? What was the truth?

If this was the calm before yet another shit-storm, I swear to God I would get Sparrow to agree on a murder/suicide deal. If shit kept piling up on us like this, then what the hell was the use in trying to overcome it? If there was no light at the end of the tunnel, what the fuck were we even fighting for?

Maybe I was wrong, and maybe Sparrow had it right all along.

Maybe death really was the answer.

Or maybe I could just grab her. We could take the Volvo and just drive until fate struck us with another curveball.

I snorted at myself. Yes, that plan was perfect, except from the small little detail of me not being able to drive without freaking out like a little bitch. I could barely sit in a car without it happening. And in the Volvo? Forget about it. I had ruined the Volvo, just like I had ruined my piano.

I groaned to myself, hating that I was even thinking it. I wasn't a damn quitter, and neither was Sparrow. She might not admit it, but

she was a fighter. If she wasn't, she wouldn't still be here. She was a fighter and so was I. We could get past this shit together.

I just needed her back, and then nothing else would matter anymore.

So I guess I still had to fight a little while longer on my own.

Twelve hours to go.

"Tick-tock, motherfucker, tick-tock," I muttered.

Knowing the time when I could expect Sparrow to be back was almost worse than not knowing. This way I kept counting down the hours and the minutes - at one point I actually started counting the seconds too. I spent most of my time wandering around aimlessly in the park outside the hospital, just waiting for any news. I didn't feel like spending time with Jasper or the others. I just couldn't stand being in the same room as any of them right now. I could understand why Rosalie was pissed, and I really didn't blame her, but that didn't make it any easier for me to accept. Was this the final nail in my friendship coffin? Had they cut me out completely now?

Hitting Sparrow with my car, and acting like a jerk afterward, was me climbing into the coffin - getting Jasper shot, and almost killed, was me putting the final nails in it. I wondered what other fucked up thing I would do, in order to metaphorically putting my coffin in the ground and leaving me six feet under.

In the end, it didn't matter. I didn't need friends as long as I had Sparrow.

I wanted to slap myself silly.

Who knew you could grow a pussy in just a few weeks? I didn't even need surgery to make that happen.

It was almost eleven in the evening when I entered the hospital again. People around town had already started firing fireworks, and I didn't feel like watching them. I didn't see the point in watching if I couldn't share the sky with Sparrow. She would have liked it. I would have had my arms around her, hugging her back to me, resting my cheek against her hair as we both watched the sky light up.

It would have been fucking perfect.

But God forbid that we ever had that. We weren't allowed to have "perfect."

We weren't even allowed to have "good."

I wasn't going to watch the sparkly shit in the sky, because I couldn't enjoy them anyway. I wondered if Sparrow could see them wherever she was. Was she thinking the same thing that I was?

Despite not wanting to go there - I somehow ended up outside of Jasper's room anyway. The door was ajar, and all I could hear was the low murmur from the TV. There were no other voices or anything. I pushed the door open. I was surprised to find Jasper alone. He was flipping through the channels, and it didn't look like he was paying any attention to what he was seeing.

"I was wondering when you would drag your sorry ass back here," he commented, without looking at me.

"I'm an ass, I know," I muttered, walking around the bed to plop down in one of the empty chairs. "Where are the others?"

"I told Emmett and Rosalie to take a hike. She was being overly emotional and I seriously couldn't stand it anymore. I get that she's upset, but...yeah, too much is too much. I'm the one with the bullet wound. Alice is at home, because her parents didn't want her to be here at night... especially since it's not even visiting hours, even though the doctors said it was okay," he said, sounding tired. "And of course, my parents are at home because I told them to take a hike

too. I went with the 'I need some rest' speech, and Mom disappeared like a bat out of hell."

"So how are you... you know... feeling?" I asked with an awkward shrug.

"Like piss," he replied honestly, and I appreciated that he knew that sugarcoating it would lead us nowhere. "Why the fuck didn't you just shut your stupid mouth? He was a loose cannon, anybody could see that, yet you kept antagonizing him. It was as if you wanted him to pull the trigger." I stared at him, and he eventually shut the TV off and turned his head to me. "I almost fucking died, Ed. You realize how fucked up that is, right?"

I nodded. "But you don't want me to apologize," I said, and he snorted.

"Of course I don't. An apology won't get you anywhere," he said. "We both know that an apology means shit right now."

"So... is this it? We're not friends anymore?" I asked.

His eyes practically shot fire when he glared at me.

"Stop being such a fucking martyr," he snapped. "Of course this doesn't mean we're not friends. You know I would jump in front of a bullet for your sorry ass, but that doesn't mean I'm okay with what happened. You are my brother, Ed, just like Emmett. The only difference is that you guys share blood, and we don't. But you're still my brother, so of course this doesn't change things." He snorted to himself. "But don't think for a moment that I will let this one slide... this was a major fuck up on your part. It's one thing to jump in front of a bullet for you, it's another to take one when you're antagonizing the shooter."

"I wasn't thinking straight," I said, even though we both knew that didn't even begin to cover it.

"I better hope for your sake that she'll come back in one piece," he said, his voice softer now. "I don't think I've ever seen you like that. I could feel the pain rolling off you... and between you and me, man, I don't think you would survive losing her."

"Tell me about it," I mumbled. "She's my fucking life. How is it even possible to feel this... *intensely* about a person?"

He chuckled humorlessly. "I don't know, all I know is that it is. The way I feel about Alice, sometimes it doesn't even feel human. Loving someone that much is almost painful, even when everything is good."

"I wouldn't know anything about that, since there has always been a big black cloud hanging over me and Sparrow. Nothing was ever completely good, there was always something we needed to worry about," I mumbled almost to myself. "Even when we were happy, forgetting about the shit that made her life hell, we knew deep down it wasn't perfect. We could pretend all we wanted, but in the end we should have known that we had to pay... and we did, by her getting kidnapped."

"You really think dwelling on it makes things better?" he asked.

"What else can I do, Jazz?" I snapped in frustration. "I can't go get her myself, because I have no fucking clue where she's at. And I can't go to La Push, because that probably means I will get someone else hurt... because that's what I fucking do, I get people hurt. So excuse me for dwelling on my extraordinaire ability to get people hurt no matter what I do. I'm a fucking screw up. Period."

He didn't argue with that.

I couldn't tell if that was a good thing or not.

I didn't even realize I had fallen asleep until I was awoken by someone grabbing my shoulder. I jumped in surprise, looking around

confused.

"Wh-what?" I asked, groggily. Dad was crouching next to me and I stared him with wide-eyes. "What time is it?" I asked.

"A little after two," he replied quietly.

I glanced at Jasper, who was sleeping soundly.

"Is she... is she... is she here?" I asked, looking back at my dad. I was afraid to ask, I didn't like the face he was making. He looked too calm. "She fucking *died* , didn't she?" I said, my voice nothing but a cracked whisper.

He shook his head quickly, a small smile gracing his lips. "No, she's... well, I wouldn't say she's fine. But she's alive, and that's what matters right now, and yes, she's here."

I slumped in my seat as relief washed over me like a fucking tsunami.

"She was brought in a little over an hour ago, and I'm not going to lie to you, Edward, she was in bad condition," he said, seriously. "But we got her in time, and we've done what we could. All we can do now is waiting, and let her sleep."

"Can I see her?" I asked, my voice still cracked and weird.

"Yes, that's why I came to get you," he said, smiling softly. "She's been murmuring your name ever since they got her out."

My throat closed up on me as I choked on air and a nonexistent lump in my throat. I tried to breathe slowly through it, and when I finally regained control over my breathing, I looked my dad straight in the eyes.

"Did they caught the bitch?" I asked.

He nodded. "They caught them all. They won't be a problem anymore. It's over now. Isabella is safe."

He stood up and I took a deep, calming breath before standing up as well. I followed him out of the room, and down the hall. He stopped by a door just a few rooms down from Jasper's.

"Is this it?" I asked and he nodded.

"I'll let you go in alone, I have a feeling you need to do this by yourself," he said, patting my back. "Be careful with her, she's been through a lot this week."

I put my hand on the door handle, not able to push open the door. I turned to him.

"How bad is it?" I asked.

"She's malnourished, she suffered from hypothermia and she lost some blood. Although, the amount of blood lost wasn't dangerous in itself, the combination of all things made it worse. We've done what we can do for her for now," he explained.

"Will she be alright?"

He nodded. "We expect her to make a full physical recovery... as for the psychological effects of what she's been through, well, that will have to be dealt with when she's ready as well," he said.

"Dr. Cullen?" We both turned our heads, seeing a serious-looking man in a suit stand down the hall. "A word?"

"Yes, of course," Dad replied, before looking at me. "I'll talk to you tomorrow," he said to me, before walking to the waiting man and I watched them disappear around the corner.

I took a few moments to prepare myself before entering the room. I couldn't really grasp the fact that my girl was behind that door. All I

needed to do was to open the damn thing, and I'd be seeing her again.

It was... *surreal* .

I was fucking glad that I was going to get to have my reunion with my Sparrow in private. I didn't want someone looking over my shoulder for this. I had a feeling this could go in all kinds of directions, also I knew that either direction would end up with me crying like a bitch.

Damnit.

I took one last deep, calming breath, before opening the door and slipping inside.

The sight of my girl almost crumbled me on the spot. Slowly, and on shaky legs, I managed to reach the bed.

If it weren't for the steady up and downs of her chest, I would have thought she was dead. She was unnaturally pale, almost fucking blue. She looked so sick. I didn't even glance at the visiting chairs by the window, instead I climbed right onto the bed, lying on my side and propping my head up on my hand. I needed to be close to her.

I reached out to touch her hair, it was as silky and smooth as ever, but with a weird texture to it. Like hair-product. Her arms were wrapped in gauze again. I was glad I that I didn't know the full extent of her wounds.

The sound of the occasional firework was heard outside, as the celebration of the New Year continued - but I couldn't have been more unaware. The third world war could have broken out right outside this hospital, and I wouldn't have noticed when the ceiling came tumbling down. All because of the girl that lay beside me in this hospital bed.

I brought her knuckles to my lips, kissing them. I remembered the first time I kissed her knuckles, how innocent our relationship was. A

big confusing secret. We didn't know what we were or what the hell we were doing, and we most definitely didn't know where the hell we were headed. If I had known then, what I knew now, I wouldn't have kissed her knuckles. I would have kissed her beautiful, plump lips. I would have kissed every inch of her skin. If I had known, I would have made her mine right then and there. I hated that it took so long for us to realize that we were never meant to become friends - we were meant to be soulmates. It was fucking destiny. It all was. It was fate that brought us here.

I thought about what my dad told me - how she had said my name.

She asked for me. Even on the brink of death, she asked for me.

I pressed my lips against her cold knuckles again, keeping them there.

I couldn't find it in me to move from her side, and I couldn't remove my hand from hers. I couldn't *not* touch her. It felt like I would lose her if I ever lost skin to skin contact with her. I never wanted to let her out of my sight again.

Never.

This time I was going to do it right. I was going to keep her safe. We were never going to be separated again. If I needed to take a fucking leak - I would take her with me. I didn't care if that was a creepy thing to do - if it meant that I would keep her safe, then I guess she would have to accept that her boyfriend was a creep. A creep who took her to the bathroom when he needed to take a leak, and a creep who watched her sleep.

"I hope you'll love the creepy me too," I mumbled to her, and snorting to myself. I felt her fingers move in my grasp, and I froze. I stared at her hand for a moment, before looking up at her face. Her eyes were still closed, but I swear I felt her fingers twitch. "Sparrow? Do you hear me? You awake, baby? I'm so fucking sorry for everything, Sparrow. Please, fuck, just wake up so I can apologize... please

wake up so you can yell at me... I need you to yell at me and tell me what a fucking screw-up I am. I need you to tell me that you... that I... fuck, Sparrow, *just wake up* ."

Her fingers were still moving, and I watched her face for what felt like an eternity. She scrunched her nose, frowning as if she was in pain, and she took a shuddering breath before letting her eyes flutter open.

"Edward?" she croaked with a hoarse voice. The fact that my name was the first thing off her lips made my heart swell. God, I had missed her voice.

"Oh, I'm right here, baby," I said, adjusting my position so the hand I used to prop up my head, cupped her cheek instead. She met my gaze and I practically melted at the love that flowed through her eyes. "I'm never letting you out of my sight ever again."

Her bottom lip quivered and my own damn eyes welled up with tears. I couldn't believe I was actually holding my girl again.

My Sparrow.

"I-I love you so much," she whispered with a shaky and scratchy voice. "I-I'm sorry I almost gave up."

I didn't ask her to elaborate. I couldn't handle that right now. All I could handle was that she was safe. We could deal with the rest later.

"I almost gave up too," I whispered back. "But I knew you would have kicked my ass if I had."

She bit her quivering lip, looking at me with a silent question in her eyes.

"Would it be... be awkward if you... got under the covers with me?" she asked, biting down on her lip so hard I was sure she was going

to draw blood.

"I... do... I... you... do you want me to?" I asked awkwardly.

She nodded. "I need you as close as you can get... I need to make sure you're really here. I've been dreaming of you all week... I... I need you close."

Broken and defeated. She sounded so lost. They really did manage to break her spirit. Even before we became friends, there had been a sparkle in her eyes, a fire that kept her moving. But the fire wasn't there anymore. It was completely gone. She was dead.

I reluctantly left the bed, so I could untie my shoes and kick them off. She held up the covers so I could climb into bed with her. I wrapped my arms around her - careful not to disturb the IV in her hand - and she cuddled to my chest. We both relaxed at the same time. I held her tightly, hoping that she wasn't hurt anywhere and that I didn't cause her any pain. She didn't say anything, or show any indication that she was in pain, so I assumed it was all right.

"I missed you so much," I mumbled into her hair.

She started shaking in my arms, and a soft sob escaped her. The sound broke my heart and I tightened my grip on her even more. I wanted to tell her everything was okay, but that would have been a lie of epic proportions. There was nothing okay about the situation at all.

"I thought of you ever day," I murmured. "I tried to come get you, but I didn't know where you were and... this fucking week all but killed me... I never thought it was possible to miss someone as much as I missed you. I've been so fucking worried. I didn't know what condition you would be in once I got you back. I'm sorry I didn't find you. I'm sorry I left you. I'm fucking sorry I failed you."

She tilted her head up and I looked down so I could meet her eyes.

"I'm... Jasper... I... I'm so, so sorry," she whispered.

I frowned and stroked some hair from her face. "How did you know about Jasper?" I asked. "Did the doctors tell you? What kind of sickos are they, telling you he... no fuck... are they complete idiots?"

"N-no", she said, shaking her head. "Jacob told me. He said he... he killed him."

My face fell at her agonized voice. "He didn't die, Sparrow... he was in a coma for a few days but he woke up earlier. *He's fine* ."

She looked at me, afraid to believe me. "Really?"

"Yes, *really* . You really think you can take out Jasper with a bullet? Please, it would take a whole damn army to take out that motherfucker."

She laughed through her tears. My favorite sound in the world.

"I'm glad he's alright... but I'm sorry it happened," she said.

"Me too," I replied softly.

She clung to me, and let her eyes flicker to my lips. I licked them by mere reflex.

"Sparrow... would it be okay if I kissed you?" I asked quietly. She nodded with a sad smile.

"Please do," she said.

I cupped her cheek with my hand, tilting her face up so I could reach down and press my lips to hers. There was sadness to our kiss, it felt like we were telling each other goodbye when in reality we should have been saying hello. We were finally reunited, yet it felt like this was just the beginning of a permanent separation. I didn't like it. She was finally back in my arms, and I'd be damned if I ever let her go. I couldn't live without her.

She was my life now.

I sucked gently on her bottom lip before pulling back, resting my forehead against hers.

"Please tell me this isn't goodbye," I pleaded with a broken voice.

She shook her head. "It's never goodbye."

"Where do we go from here?" I asked.

"I don't know and I don't even care," she replied, her voice still scratchy and weak. She closed her eyes. "What happened to them?"

"Dad said they caught the motherfuckers, but he didn't elaborate on it," I said. "You want me to go and find out?"

She shook her head. "I don't want to deal with any of that right now... can we just be... *us* for tonight? Just... you and me... I don't want to think of anything that has happened in the past week... I really can't deal with that right now."

I nodded and closed my eyes, moving so I could rest my cheek against her head. We laid like that for a few minutes, just finding comfort in the fact that we were finally together and ignoring the fact that we might be separated again soon.

"Sparrow?"

"Yeah?"

"We're gonna need professional fucking help when all this is over," I said, not joking at all.

She sighed and nodded against my chest. "I know."

"Sparrow?"

"Yeah?"

"I love you."

I felt her press her lips against my chest, I could almost feel her smile too. "I know."

"Do you love me?"

She sighed deeply, turning her head up so she could look at me. "With every fiber of my broken being. I love you so much it physically hurts and it's the only thing keeping me together. You're my glue."

"We'll be okay," I promised her. "You and I will raise above all this fucking bullshit, and we will be just fine. You just wait."

"I would walk through fire, and go through hell, as long as you hold my hand through it," she said.

"You have already gone through hell," I said, smiling sadly at her. She nodded.

"And the only reason I got out alive was because I knew you were on the other side waiting for me."

"I'm so fucking proud of you," I said earnestly. "I might not know the details of what you've been through this week, but I'm pretty fucking certain that it wasn't pretty... and the fact that you pulled through, and never gave up, shows me just how fucking strong you are."

"Edward..."

"Yeah?"

"If... If I asked you to let me go... would you?" she asked with a quiet voice.

I pulled back and stared at her.

"Wh-what the fuck are you saying?" I asked. "Y-you wanna break up with me?"

"No! Not at all," she said quickly, her voice scratchy. "I just... I just want to know if you would let me go, if that was what I wanted."

I frowned as I considered her question. I wanted to give her an honest answer. The thing was, though, that I didn't need to think about it... *at all* . The answer was clear as fucking day that didn't need any extra time to think. I sighed.

"Why are you asking me this?" I asked quietly.

"Because I need to know."

"No, Sparrow. I wouldn't let you go. I'm too selfish. If we were a fucking Oreo cookie, you would be the white stuff keeping the two halves of my heart together. Without you, I would fucking fall apart," I replied honestly. "I could never let you go, even if you didn't love me anymore. I'm sorry."

She nodded as she considered my answer.

"Jacob would never have let me go either. Even when I told him there was no chance of me ever loving him the way he supposedly loved me. I told him where my heart was... and then he said that he was going to kill you if I ever uttered your name again. I didn't speak for days after that... I just couldn't. Your name was the only thing on my mind, the only word I ever wanted to say," she told me softly.

I cupped her cheek again, stroking my thumb over her delicate skin.

"That's the difference between me and Jacob," I said. "Because I would never threaten to kill someone you loved. If you told me that Jacob was the one you wanted, I would still fight for you, but I would never hurt or kill him... because I can't kill someone you love, because it would be like killing you."

She smiled at me.

"Good thing I don't want you to leave then," she said, her tone almost teasing.

"How about you though, would you fight for me?" I asked.

She sighed. "I want to believe that I would... but I honestly don't know if I could handle the rejection depending on my competition."

I frowned. "Competition?"

"Yeah, well... what if you figured that Tanya was the girl for you after all? That she could fulfill all your needs... she's pretty, she's beautiful... how could I compete with that?" she asked, sounding dead serious.

"I'm not that guy anymore, Sparrow," I said. "I wouldn't leave you just so I could get laid. Honestly, right now, I couldn't care less if I ever got laid again."

If we'd had this conversation a week ago, she would have rolled her eyes at me and told me I was an idiot. She would have said she didn't buy it because she knew I was a sexual being. But this was now, and she didn't roll her eyes at me. Instead she touched my cheek with her finger, and then traced my jaw.

"What happened to you this week, Edward?" she murmured.

"I realized that I needed to say goodbye to the old Edward... I'm not that guy anymore. I don't even recognize him," I said.

"For all it's worth, I'll love you no matter who you are, because you will always be my Edward," she said softly.

"And you'll always be my Sparrow," I said, returning the sentiment.

I pressed my lips to hers again, and there was a little more passion behind this kiss. This wasn't goodbye at all. This was a bellowing fucking "Hello, World, go fuck yourself" kind of kiss. She opened her mouth, surprising me by tracing my bottom lip with her tongue. I

didn't let her wait long before I touched hers with mine. She moaned quietly and I pulled her closer, even though she already was as close as she could get. She let her hand get lost in my hair, and she gripped my neck to keep my face close to hers.

This was what I had waited one horrible, agonizingly long week for.

This was us.

We held onto to each other as if our life depended on it. As if the other one would disappear if we didn't hold on tight enough. The desperation seeped into our kiss and it didn't take long before she was crying again. She didn't stop kissing me, but I could taste the tears as they reached her lips.

"I love you, Isabella. I'm never letting you out of my sight ever again," I told her again, against her lips.

"I wish tomorrow didn't have to come. I wish we could stay like this forever," she murmured back.

"Whatever happens tomorrow, we'll deal with it together. We'll get through this one way or another."

"Edward?"

"Yeah?"

"Thank you."

"For what?"

"Saving my life."

I frowned. "I didn't save your life...I had nothing to do with it."

She shook her head. "That's where you're wrong. You have everything to do with it. The moment you decided to pick your friends

up in Port Angeles almost two months ago that's when you also saved my life."

I smiled sadly, tracing her bottom lip with my thumb. "The night I hit you with my car." She nodded. "I think, in a fucked up way, you saved me that night too. So thank you."

"You're welcome."

Reaction, part 2

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – all errors are mine] Please note: *I've taken huuuuuge creative liberties in this chapter, especially when it came to medical stuff. I hope you can suspend disbelief long enough for see it for what it is – fiction .*

Chapter 54 - "Reaction, part 2"

Edward Cullen POV

"Give it to me."

"No."

"It's mine."

"Well, I saw it first."

"What are you, five?"

"No."

"It's my right to get it since *I'm* the one in the hospital."

"Low blow, Sparrow. Low blow."

I handed her the pudding cup with a sigh, and she smiled victoriously. She removed the plastic lid, handing it to me so I could put it on the side table. I watched as she dug the tiny, plastic spoon into the creamy liquid, and then bringing it to her mouth.

"Mmm, delicious," she moaned with a mouth full of pudding.

I stared at her lips as they closed around the spoon for another mouthful and I made a whiny noise. She brought the spoon back down to the cup, and I took my chance to crash my lips to hers. I practically forced her mouth open and shoved my tongue inside, playing washing machine as I swirled my tongue around. She was too surprised to comprehend what I was doing at first, and then I could almost feel her sigh into the kiss.

If this could even be considered a kiss.

Probably not.

I leaned back, smacking and licking my lips. She gave me an annoyed look.

"You're right, it was delicious," I agreed and she rolled her eyes.

"You're disgusting," she said, before bringing another spoonful to her mouth. "You do realize you just ate something that had been in my mouth? You actually took it from *inside* my mouth," she added with her mouth full.

"Yeah, so?" I asked, shrugging. " *You* do realize that every time we make out, shit from my mouth goes into yours and vice versa? Pudding is no different from spit, if you think about it."

"Shit from your mouth? What the hell have you been eating while I've been gone?" she asked, raising an eyebrow.

"I don't know, but you must have been eating a bucket full of attitude," I replied, smirking at her as I leaned close to her. "And I can't say that I mind *that* shit." I kissed her gently, feeling the taste of pudding on her lips. She was persistent in not letting me enter her mouth again, so I leaned back with a pout. She was seemingly unaffected by it. She just continued eating her pudding like nothing was wrong.

She kept reminding me with small things like that - as if I even needed a reminder - that she was indeed so very different from all the other girls I'd been with. Another girl would have fallen for my fake pout, and given in to my every demand just to make me happy, but not Sparrow. She wasn't as cheap as all the others were. She didn't buy shit. She saw right through my charades.

Which was exactly why I loved her so much.

That, and the fact that she was stronger than any other girl - or person - I had ever met.

It was now noon on January 2nd, she had spent the past two days in the hospital. To say that I had left her side even once would have been a lie of epic proportions. I was hit with the anxiety from hell every time I needed to go to the bathroom. I was always afraid that I would come back to an empty room – even though I used the bathroom that was connected to her hospital room.

I had felt like such a pussy when I woke up yesterday, the morning after she got back. I had needed to take a leak real fucking badly, but I just couldn't leave the bed. My arms had been wrapped around my Sparrow, who was sleeping soundly, and I couldn't let go. I remembered the last time she was with me, and I left her to take a leak. I remembered exactly what had happened then. I knew it was irrational to think it was going to happen again – in a damn hospital at that – but I still couldn't help the feeling.

Eventually, when I couldn't hold it any longer, I woke her up and asked her nicely if she could sing a song, or just talk loud enough for me to hear, while I was in the bathroom. She didn't question me about it, because I could see in her eyes that she knew exactly why I asked. I could also sense that the separation – how miniscule it may be – was going to be an issue for her too.

So for the past two days — one and a half if you were being nitpicky — that had become one of the things we did. Every time either of us needed to use the bathroom – we talked through the door.

Ridiculous? You bet. But it was a small price to pay for some peace of mind.

It was obviously one of the things we would have to deal with in therapy – which both my dad and Bella's doctor had pointed out to us. Even her caseworker, Kate, pointed it out. She was a little nicer about it though, she wasn't as straightforward as my dad was or the other doctor had been. I guess she was the only one who was smart enough to realize that we weren't fucking stupid, and we knew that the way we were dealing with shit right now wasn't healthy.

We had been told that Bella would be seeing her newly appointed therapist on Monday morning, so to say that she was nervous would be an understatement. Maybe that was where some of her attitude was coming from now. As soon as she had regained some of her strength yesterday, her attitude had changed as well. I loved that the fire in her was returning, but I also felt bad for her for getting so easily annoyed and upset. I asked Dad about it, and he said that it was to be expected, and that there was nothing wrong in the way she behaved. Her frustration was expected, and it would have been odd if she wasn't.

It's not like I blamed her though. It was clear that she didn't want to go into therapy any more than I did, but I also knew that she wasn't stupid. She knew she needed it now. There was no fucking way that she could deal with all that shit that happened on her own – not even with me helping her. How the hell would I even begin to help her anyway? This was so far beyond my abilities; it was fucking ridiculous.

My girl brought me out of my musings by holding out a spoonful of pudding.

"Forgive me?" she said, smiling.

I wrapped my lips around the spoon, enjoying the pudding.

"I love you," I replied, my voice gurgly as I hadn't swallowed the creamy mush yet.

"Low blow, Edward, low blow," she joked, as she handed me the rest of the pudding. I looked at it confused and she smiled. "How can I deny you pudding when you say stuff like that?"

I leaned in to kiss her quickly, before shoving the rest of the pudding into my mouth, so she wouldn't get any time to change her mind. She rolled her eyes in amusement and I grinned as I swallowed the rest. It was fucking delicious – especially considering it was hospital shit.

I threw the cup and spoon away in the nearby trashcan – hitting it perfectly. I almost wanted to do a fistpump for having such awesome aim, but instead I just curled closer to my Sparrow, and wrapped my arms around her. She snuggled closer to me and sighed.

"You should go home," she said suddenly.

"What?"

"You need to take a shower," she said, wrinkling her nose.

"I took a shower yesterday," I argued.

"Yeah, *here* . I'm sure you've been wearing the same clothes for days now... and frankly, sweetie, you're starting to reek," she said, smiling apologetically.

I groaned. "But... fuck... I don't want to leave you."

"I don't either," she said. "But we can't stay attached at the hip forever. Look at it as a trial run of sorts. Eventually, we'll need to be separated for more than few minutes at a time, we might as well get used to it."

"Why the hell for? I don't mind being attached to your hip... or your lips for that matter. Especially when they taste like pudding." I leaned

in to kiss her again, trying to distract her, but she put a finger to my lips pushing me away.

She gave me a pointed look. "Are you being difficult just because you can?"

"No, I'm being difficult because I don't think I reek, so I have no fucking reason to go home and change my clothes... besides, if I really stink I'm sure there is some scrubs or hospital gown I could we-" I cut myself off as I realized what the hell I was saying. This was starting to get ridiculous. I sighed deeply. "Fine, maybe you're right."

"Yes, maybe I am," she said. "So why don't you run home and take a shower, change your clothes, and run back here as fast as you can? Just because I'm right, doesn't mean I want to be apart from you any longer than I need to be."

I stroked her cheek, then tracing her lip with my thumb.

"If we get naked, we wouldn't need to worry about stinking up any clothes," I murmured.

She chuckled lightly. "You're an idiot."

"No arguments there," another voice said. We both snapped our heads to the doorway, seeing none other than my dear brother standing in the doorway with a grin so wide it should have cracked his face by now.

"What are you doing here?" I asked, a little angrier than intended. I didn't like it when people interrupted my time with her. It was as if I was trying to soak up as much Sparrow as I could. I didn't want to share her time with anybody. One week away from her was more than I could handle.

"I was just visiting Jasper, and he wanted some alone time with his girl, so I decided to bug you guys for a moment instead," he replied.

"And you don't care that you might be interrupting something?" I asked.

"I've been watching you guys for the past few minutes, and I'm pretty sure I'm not interrupting a thing," he replied simply.

"Creepier much?" I asked.

"What? It's not like you weren't completely Disney. You were totally PG rated," he said with a smirk. "I'm impressed, little bro, I must say. Who knew you had so much self-control?"

"You're an ass," I muttered.

"Whatever," he said, stepping into the room. "I heard what your girl was saying, and I was heading home anyway for a quick bite, I can give you a ride if you want."

I groaned and looked at Sparrow. She looked back with innocent eyes. Whatever she was feeling, she was hiding it pretty damn well. I didn't like it when she hid from me.

"Go," she urged. "I'll be here when you get back."

"Promise?"

"I promise. As long as you promise to come back as soon as you can."

"You won't even have time to miss me, Penguin," I replied.

"I find that hard to believe since I'm already missing you," she teased.

I leaned in to kiss her, deciding to really make it worth it. Lips sucking, tongues dancing, saliva exchanging. It was fucking perfect. We both got totally lost in the kiss, her hands gripping my hair and my hand holding her neck. We didn't get in touch with reality again until Emmett cleared his throat loudly.

"Are we going or what? If you continue with this shit we will have to fade to black if you guys intend to keep the PG rating," he pointed out.

"Fine," I sighed, kissing her chastely, before climbing out of bed. I already missed the heat from her body. "I'll see you soon."

"I will count the minutes," she said quietly. I smiled sadly at her before reluctantly following Emmett out.

We walked in silence to the elevator, and he didn't open his mouth until we were inside, and the doors had closed.

"Co-dependent," he fake-coughed.

I didn't dignify that with an answer, I just wanted to go home, change my damn clothes, and get my sorry ass back here before I had any time to develop any anxiety. It was frightening how much it hurt to leave her. I knew she was safe in the hospital - I knew she was safe from the crazy people. Period. Yet that still didn't help with the anxiety. I kept worrying that there was some aspect we were overseeing. Maybe we had forgotten about something.

Emmett tried to make small talk to me on the ride home, but I barely paid any attention. He eventually gave up on trying keeping up a conversation with me - since I clearly wasn't contributing any.

Both our parents' cars were parked out front when we got home, and I was yet again reminded that Dad hadn't told us the whole story yet. He said he wanted to wait until Sparrow was better, and for some reason I couldn't care less if I ever heard the true story or not. I had my Sparrow, the bad people were getting what was coming for them, and everything was fucking peachy.

Why dwell on the past?

We walked up the steps to the house, and Emmett made a beeline for the kitchen. I walked into the living room, from where I heard my

parents' voices. They stopped talking as I walked in. Mom smiled softly at me.

"Well, well, well, isn't it the lost son," she teased, but her voice was slightly off. "I thought we had lost you forever."

"She said I reeked, so I have to take a shower and change my damn clothes," I explained. "I will head back as soon as I can." I glanced briefly at Dad, flinching slightly at the agonized look in his eyes. "What the fuck happened now?" I asked, feeling a wave of dread preparing to wash over me.

"I just got the call," he said. "They found the body."

My stomach dropped, and the dread disappeared, being replaced by sadness and emptiness.

"When? Where?" I asked.

"His body washed up this morning on First Beach. Sam Uley found him."

"Fuck," I muttered. "Do you know what killed him?"

"There were visible signs of multiple gunshot wounds, but the rough waters had mangled his body too much for us to be certain that was what killed him," Dad replied.

"When do you plan on telling Bella?" I asked. "She already knows her father is dead, she could use the closure." I dragged my hands through my hair. "Damn it, she's practically a fucking orphan now."

"The people of La Push are currently doing everything in their power to gather as much evidence against Dwyer and Renée as possible to give to the feds, and Paul is looking specifically for evidence that Dwyer killed Chief Swan," he said, avoiding my question.

"Is there any chance that they will get away with this?" I asked. "That they will walk free?"

Dad shook his head. "There is too much evidence, and quite a few people from La Push have stated that they will testify if needed. The case against Dwyer and Renée is growing more solid by the day," Dad assured me.

"What about that fucktard Jacob?" I muttered.

Dad shared a look with Mom, both looking uncomfortable by the mention of Jacob.

"He's getting the help he needs," Dad replied vaguely.

"Fuck that, he should be in jail."

"He's just a kid, Edward," Mom interjected.

"A kid that almost got my girlfriend killed!" I snapped. They didn't argue with me, and I sighed. "What-the-fuck-ever," I said. "I'm going to go take a damn shower now so I can get back to putting my girlfriend back together. So if you'll excuse me."

I turned on my heel and stomped towards the stairs.

If Jacob came out unscathed through this mess, I would fucking kill him myself.

He deserved nothing better.

I had planned to take the quickest shower in the history of showers, but it turned out to take longer than that. Once the warm spray hit my body, I couldn't help but relax and just stand there. It was so much more comfortable showering in your own damn bathroom than in the hospital. I washed my body, massaging the shower gel over my tired muscles and I groaned at how amazing it felt. I guess I hadn't realized how stiff I really was. I spent most of my time curled up next to Sparrow in her hospital bed - which was uncomfortable to begin with - so I guess it had taken its toll on my body.

I finally got back to the hospital two and a half hours later. I had decided to bring the bird book with me, so we could look at it together. I hadn't touched it since Christmas morning. I felt almost giddy when I exited the elevator on Sparrow's floor, and walked through the hallway to her room. A smile was already forming on my lips as I pushed the door open to announce my arrival. But the smile faltered when I noticed that the bed was empty.

I immediately went to the bathroom, knocking on it.

"Sparrow? You in there?"

Nothing.

I swallowed back the bile in my throat, trying to smother the feeling of panic that was rising.

I had nothing to worry about. She was here. Somewhere. The people who wanted to hurt her were locked up and they wouldn't even get past the security in the hospital anyway. Nobody could take her.

So where the hell was she?

I walked out into the hallway - dropping the bird book on the bed on my way. A nurse excited one of their supply closets and she yelped when I grabbed her arm.

"Where's Bella Swan?" I asked.

She looked down at my hand on her arm, then at me.

"The last time I saw her, she was being escorted to her friend," she said. I gave her a weird look before I realized what she was saying.

Jasper .

"Thank you," I told her quickly before I jogged down the hall to Jasper's room. I didn't even bother to knock before I entered.

Bella was sitting in the visiting chair, hugging her good leg to her chest, while Jasper was standing by the window, looking out. They both turned their heads to me when I walked in.

"Give me a fucking heartattack why dontcha," I snapped at Sparrow. I walked over to her and she tilted her head up as I pressed my lips to her forehead.

"Sorry," she mumbled.

I sat down on the bed and looked over at Jasper.

"How's it going?" I asked.

"Good," he said, nodding. "I can finally move around. They're letting me go home in a couple days."

"Will you be able to go back to school right away?" I asked.

"They could always try and stop me. There is nothing worse than being stuck in bed all day," he said. I smirked and he narrowed his eyes at me. "Get your mind out of the gutter."

"What? I didn't say anything?" I said, holding up my hands in defense.

"No, but you were thinking it."

I snorted.

"Kate visited me while you were gone," Sparrow said, looking at me.

"Yeah?"

"Apparently there have been some issues with my fostering. The Webers doesn't want to take me in again."

"Why the fuck not?" I asked.

"Probably because I'm damaged and they don't want to have to deal with the risk of me going psychotic," she replied, shrugging as if it wasn't a big deal at all.

"What does that mean exactly?" I asked. "I mean, in terms of your living arrangements. You can't be stuck here forever."

"The doctors said that I was healing remarkably well considering all the trauma my body has been subjected to over the past few months. Basically, I can leave whenever." She smiled softly and I couldn't help but smile in return. "Which leads me to another thing... I'm finally getting the cast off tomorrow."

I gaped at her. "What? Seriously?"

"Yes, seriously. I will have to wear a supporting brace whenever I'm out and about, but other than that, I'm free from that prison."

"So your leg is...fine?" I asked.

"No, I wouldn't say it's fine, but it's fine enough. As long as I don't try to run around or do jumping jacks or stuff like that, I'll be fine."

"This is some fucking good news, Sparrow," I said, smiling widely. "I can't wait to be able to hold your hand when we walk together and shit."

Jasper made a snorting-laughing sound.

"Please remind me to tell Emmett you said that," he said. "We've been waiting for the day when we could finally give *you* shit for being such a pussy."

I flipped him the bird and turned my attention back to Sparrow.

"So... living arrangements," I said again. "Where will you end up?"

"I don't know yet," she said. "Kate is working on it, and she said I could stay with her again if I wanted to, but I'm not sure. I want to go

back to school, and going back and forth to Port Angeles every day is not something I look forward to."

"Maybe I can have my parents talk to the CPS or whoever is in charge of this shit, and have you live with us?" I suggested.

"I... I might have suggested that to Kate already," she said, sounding embarrassed. "And she may have made some valid points as to why that wouldn't be such a great idea." She nibbled on her bottom lip and rested her chin on her knee. "She also told me that my application for emancipation was declined, so I can't live alone. Apparently, I was not the strongest candidate after all."

"So what are you going to do?" I asked.

"I don't know."

I reached out my hand to her, and she took it without any hesitation.

"We'll figure shit out, we always do," I assured her.

She took a deep breath, smiling sadly.

"All I know is that tomorrow, after I've gotten my cast off, I want to talk to your dad," she said. "I also want to talk to whoever is in charge of the investigation. I want my therapist to be present too, because I want to know everything what's been going on, and what's gonna happen now, before I can even think of going into therapy. Because, how am I ever going to process what happened if I don't know *what* happened?" She inhaled deeply, seeming to relax after her rant as she breathed out.

"Do you want me there too?" I asked.

She nodded. "I need you to hold my hand. I have a feeling I won't take the story all too well. Having you there will make things easier."

"I'll talk to my dad later, and let him know so he can have it all arranged. He said he didn't want to talk to you until you had gotten

better, and I think that time has come now. He might not agree, but he can't avoid this shit any longer. I don't fucking know what he's so afraid of, what the hell is he hiding?" I asked, almost to myself.

"I don't know," she said, shaking her head. "But as of tomorrow, there won't be any more question marks. We'll know, and we can finally move on."

I kissed her knuckles as she squeezed her eyes shut, then peeking through one of them.

"He's gonna cut it off," she said seriously. "He's gonna misjudge the thickness or something and he's gonna cut off my leg all together."

I chuckled and kissed her knuckles again.

"Don't worry," I murmured, my lips against her skin. "If they cut off your leg, you can have one of mine."

"That's so cute," she said sarcastically. "Just want I want. A hairy man leg."

"I'm pretty sure your leg is going to be hairy no matter what," I pointed out. "No shaving in two months? Yeah, your leg will be a damn forest."

"Get bent, Edward," she muttered.

I laughed and held her hand to my chest as the doctor - who Sparrow had appropriately named Dr. Carrot - prepared whatever had to be prepared before he removed the cast. She squeezed her eyes shut again as Dr. Carrot turned on the small electrical saw that would help him remove the cast, and I smiled as she squeezed my hand. I watched as the saw effortlessly cut through the plaster, and in mere moments, he had made a vertical line from top to bottom. He turned off the saw, and then gently pushed apart the cast. It cracked and left a space wide enough for him to remove it from her leg. He

put it aside and I stared at her leg in astonishment. It looked so weird. So thin and small and... Fuck. Another scar.

"Has he amputated me yet?" she asked, still squeezing her eyes shut as if her life depended on it.

"Yep, it's all gone," I said with a sigh. "Hairs and all."

She peeked at me with one eye.

"You suck," she muttered, then turned her eyes to her leg where Dr. Carrot was now rubbing in some lotion of sorts.

"How does it feel?" he asked her. "Can you move your foot for me and wiggle your toes. Tell me if you sense any discomfort."

She wrinkled her nose, but did as she was told, moving and wiggling. There was no sign of distress on her face.

"It feels a little weird, but no pain," she said.

"That's good," he said, before stepping away to retrieve some weird looking thingy, with a long, flat plate and thin straps. "This is your supportive brace," he explained to her. "As you can see, it's small and it won't be noticeable under your jeans or pants. I want you to wear this for at least two days every time you're up and walking, so your leg can adjust to not being supported by the cast any more. Okay?"

She nodded, and he proceeded to show her how to put it on and how to remove it. It looked easy enough.

Once it was back on, I helped her off the examination table and she tried to put a little weight on her leg. She bit her lip, as she tentatively took a step forward. Almost as soon as she tried to put some weight on her leg, it buckled and I flew forward to catch her before she hit the ground.

"Easy there," Dr. Carrot said when he noticed. "The muscles in your leg are weak, and you'll need physical therapy to regain your strength."

She groaned, probably frustrated at the prospect of having to spend more time at the hospital because of her damn leg. Dr. Carrot helped her adjust to the new situation, and eventually she was able to take a few steps without wobbling. Yes, she had a limp, but at least she wasn't forced to use her crutches anymore.

Eventually, we were done, and we could leave. We still had two hours to kill before the meeting with my dad - he had finally agreed to go through with it. I guess he realized he couldn't hide anymore. The longer he waited, the worse it would get for him.

Sparrow and I decided to head back to her room and just hang out for a while before the meeting. I lounged on her bed, smiling as I watched her walking around. It was fascinating. With every step she took, she grew a little more confident. She quickly learned just how much pressure she could put on her leg.

I was like watching Bambi.

My smile faltered.

"How are you feeling, Sparrow?" I asked softly.

She looked at me, a sad smile gracing her lips. She shrugged as she slowly stepped over to the bed.

"I... I have my moments," she confessed. "I try not to think about it."

I sat up, swinging my legs over the edge so she could step in between them. I put my hands on her hips and pulled her closer. She wrapped her arms around my neck, and just stood there looking at me.

We hadn't talked much about what we had happened during the week she'd been gone. I was honest with her and told her that I wasn't sure I could handle hearing it, because it would only fuel the fire that was already raging inside me. The fire of guilt that told me that I could have prevented everything from happening if I hadn't left her alone like that.

We never got into details; we mostly talked about how we coped.

My heart swelled in my chest every time she said that the way she coped was thinking of me. For someone else it might be cheesy, but for us it was true. She said so herself, I saved her life when I hit her with my car. If we had never become friends, she wouldn't have had a reason to fight.

It's weird how destiny works sometimes.

"I hope you can find somewhere to live around here," I said. "I don't want you to move away... it would be a bitch to sneak out in the middle of the night to see you, and have to walk all the way to Port Angeles for it... it would take me a week."

"Not unless you learn how to drive again, then it would only take you an hour," she said, cupping my face in her hands and stroking my cheeks with her thumbs.

"Well, that would be a piece of fucking cake if I was even able to get near a car without fainting like a little girl," I replied.

"You're being too hard on yourself," she said with a sigh. "Maybe you've just haven't had the proper motivation to deal with it. Because... well, to be honest, you haven't even tried to deal with it, have you?"

"I have and we both know how that ended," I replied in annoyance.

"Maybe it would help if... well... I was there? I'm not saying I'm the solution to all your problems, I'm just saying that... erm... maybe it

can have a positive psychological effect if I'm in the car with you?" she asked.

"And that way I know you're not on the road in front of me, waiting to get run over?" I asked for clarification.

"I know, it sounds stupid... I was just thinking out loud," she said, half-shrugging.

"It's not stupid, I appreciate you worrying... I promise I'll get working on it. I'm sure Dr. Randall has some ideas for it as well. I can't wait to hear those," I replied, rolling my eyes at the last statement.

"I hope you do," she said. "Because I can't wait for you to pick me up and take me out on my first real date."

I looked curiously at her, and was almost about to argue with her when I realized what she said was true.

"I never did take you out, did I?" I murmured.

"Not unless you count Christmas Day... but that didn't feel like a date. Granted, I have no idea what a date feels like, but still... shouldn't it include a romantic dinner and a movie? Maybe some... I don't know..." she trailed off, blushing and biting her lip.

"I'll take you out on a date, Sparrow. I will rock your world," I promised her. "The day will be so fucking perfect that no other dates will ever be able to compare to it."

"We really did go about this all backwards, huh," she said, smiling sadly. "We're together, but we haven't been on a date... and we hated each other before we got together... isn't the hate reserved for when we break up?"

"Meh," I said, shrugging. "I figured we get hate hate out of the way so we wouldn't need to break up at all."

"High school relationship never lasts," she said. "I don't expect you to feel this way for me forever."

"Nothing is forever, Sparrow," I replied softly. "We only have today. Who the fuck cares what will happen next? The future doesn't exist, because it hasn't happened yet, and it never will, because all we'll ever experience is the present, and that's what we should be focusing on."

She laughed awkwardly. "I think you lost me."

"It's in the past."

I leaned in to press my lips to hers and she hummed in response.

All we have is the present - and what a mighty fine present it was.

I tried to give Sparrow a reassuring smile, but I was pretty certain it came out as a grimace. I guess I cared more about this than I thought I would. As I had fallen asleep with Sparrow in my arms that first night, I figured that I didn't care anymore about what had been going on behind our backs. I didn't fucking care what shady business my dad had been involved with, or what he was hiding from me - from us. All I cared about was that Sparrow was finally back. She was finally safe. We were together. That was all that mattered. So how come I was suddenly all nervous? Why was I afraid of what he was about to tell us? Nothing he could say could be worse than what we had already experienced, so maybe I was just blowing it completely out of proportion in my head.

Whatever it was that he had to tell us, it couldn't be bad. He just had to explain to us why he kept us in the dark. I'm sure he had his reasons, even though I might not agree with them in the end.

I raised Sparrow's hand to kiss her knuckles - I did it more for my sake than hers.

We were currently sitting in Dad's office at the hospital, and we were waiting for him to arrive. Since it was a Sunday, Sparrow's new therapist hadn't been able to make it in for the meeting, and since she didn't want to wait we decided to do it without him. So the only ones present would be Sparrow, my parents, Kate and myself.

I avoided looking at my mom at all cost. For some reason it felt like she was about to stab me in the back as well. She must have known that something was going on, and she kept it from me. That made her no better than my father.

Finally, Dad arrived. He gave us all an apologetic smile as he closed the door behind him and sat down behind his cluttered desk.

"I assume we all know why we're here today," he said, being his usual redundant self by pointing out the obvious. "I know that you two want to know what's been going on, and I will try my best to answer all your questions."

He gave us a tightlipped smile, and it was clear that he didn't want to do this.

Either that, or he was constipated.

"Kate will also help fill in the blanks where I'll be unable to do so, since she has been in contact with the feds, so she could be updated on the investigation for Isabella's sake. I am sure Isabella has questions about her parents," he said, his voice softening the slightest bit as he mentioned her parents, and I hated that he called her Isabella, since he knew that she preferred Bella. By calling her Isabella he was putting distance between them, as if he didn't want to get emotionally involved in all this. This was just another case for him.

Bella pretended as if she didn't even hear it, instead she just squeezed my hand between us and looked down at her lap.

"Before we start, I want to make sure that Bella knows that if she doesn't want to stay, or if she for some reason needs to leave the room, she can do so without anyone questioning it. Alright?" Kate said, taking Bella's other hand, since she was sitting on her other side.

"Yes, of course," Dad said, nodding. "If anything gets too uncomfortable or intense, feel free to shut us up." He chuckled awkwardly at his sad attempt to light things up.

"I might tell you to shut the fuck up just for the hell of it," I replied sourly, as it was clear that this was not a time for stupid jokes, especially when they landed flat.

"Edward," Dad warned, his jaw clenching in frustration.

"Whatever," I huffed, rolling my eyes. I was beyond being afraid of him now.

"Now that we have that cleared, let's get on with it," Mom intervened gently, trying to smooth things over.

I felt Sparrow tense next to me, and I raised her hand to hold it over my heart. I resisted the urge to just pull her into my lap and hold her.

"A few weeks ago, Bella was reported missing from her home. Her mom was hysterical and her dad was worried," Dad began, as if Sparrow and I weren't even in the room. Whom was he even addressing? Kate? She knew this shit already too. "The morning after she disappeared, Edward came to the hospital for his first meeting with his therapist, Dr. Randall, but we never got that far. Instead he told me how Bella was currently in his bedroom..."

"Yes, Dad, I was there. Why don't you tell us something we don't already know?" I asked.

"I'm getting to that," he replied calmly. "As I was saying, she was in your bedroom. Later you told me the most horrendous story of what

had happened to her. Abuse in all its forms, which she had been living in secret with for months. I've been fascinated by the culture in La Push, and I knew they were strong believers in their legends and history, but I never thought they were taking it this far. I will admit that when Bella was first admitted to the hospital following the car accident, I was curious about her scars. They didn't follow the same patterns as the ones that usually occur when a teenager is harming herself. I knew there was more to the story than Bella being a cutter." He took a deep breath. "I made a few notes in her journal, pointing out that her scars weren't those from someone who had hurt herself; they weren't made by her hand. But I never reported it further."

"Why didn't you? Why didn't you fucking do anything if you were so damn certain she wasn't doing it to herself?" I asked, irritated. "Why did you keep letting her suffer?"

Dad sighed and shook his head. "I don't know, son. I was convinced that it didn't lie in her best interest for me to get involved in her case, considering the accident. My judgment for anything related to Isabella would have been questionable. I didn't want to further complicate things."

"Well, then you could have just asked for a second opinion," I snapped. "You could have asked someone else to confirm what you already knew! It's your fucking fault it went this far."

Dad clenched and unclenched his jaw a few times, staring down at his clasped hands on the table. Nobody said a word for a few moments. Everybody was waiting for him to respond to my accusation.

"I don't think he meant it," Sparrow said quietly. "I can see where he's coming from."

I looked at her, meeting her gaze.

"What are you talking about?" I asked.

"Don't you see? In a crazy, screwed up way he was basically protecting you. He didn't want to get involved in my case because he didn't want it to look like he was picking sides... which you were always accusing him of already. Why fuel the fire, right?" she said, half-shrugging.

"No, that doesn't explain it at all," I said, shaking my head. "He could still have reported it, giving the case to someone else to take care of. Instead he just brushed it under the rug, hoping it would go away. Hoping that *you* would go away."

"If I may intervene," Mom said, and we all looked to her. She looked embarrassed at the sudden attention. "I just want to point out that it's no secret that this hospital is awfully understaffed. They do their job the best they can under current circumstances, but sometimes some things slip through the cracks even though they don't want to. Even at the best of hospitals, mistakes are made and people get hurt."

"That's not a fucking excuse," I snapped. "It's things like that that makes people want to sue your asses for malpractice or some shit. Hey, Kate, can Bella sue the hospital? Get some money out of her misery?"

Kate didn't look even remotely surprised at my question.

"Technically, yes, I supposed she coul-" she began, but I didn't let her finish.

"Good, make it happen. Sue the hospital for her," I told her, leaning back with a huff.

Kate sighed. "Yes, I'll get right on that," she said, placating me with sarcasm lacing her tired voice. "Can we continue now?"

"As Esme pointed out," Dad continued, "we are understaffed, but there are no excuses for my behavior in this case. I suspected that Bella's scars weren't self-inflicted, but I made the conscious decision not to report it. Even though I didn't immediately suspect abuse, I still

should have reported it. Kids and teenagers get themselves into all kinds of trouble these days. They do stupid things, and we have all seen how some kids take the term blood brother to a whole new level. Cutting themselves and blending their blood."

I wanted to yell at him and tell him that he had just been looking for an excuse, but before I got any air in my lungs - he beat me to the punch.

"I was looking for an excuse," he continued. "I knew Chief Swan, he was a kind man and his wife was always friendly. I subconsciously used that as an excuse for not suspecting abuse. If I had found bruises, it would have made sense. That type of abuse is not uncommon, but parents who cuts their own children this way? Well, that's a whole other story altogether. Which was a scenario I never even ventured into."

He looked at Sparrow, so he could address the next part to her directly.

"I made a mistake, Bella. I know I did. I let myself be blinded by what I thought I knew, instead of seeing what was right in front of me. I've been a doctor for over twenty years, I know that just because people pretend to be the perfect parents, doesn't mean they are. It's all just a mask. And just because a certain type of abuse is uncommon, doesn't mean it doesn't happen. Who would have thought that the Chief's wife would be participating in sect like rituals? I never made the connection to abuse, probably because I didn't want to, and for that, I am sorry."

Sparrow didn't answer, she kept her eyes down, not looking at anybody. I couldn't see her face, since her hair was concealing it from me. I didn't like that.

"I didn't make the connection to what was really going on until a girl was brought to the hospital from La Push," he continued. "Her arms were so severely infected after so many cuts that we almost had to

amputate her arms to keep the infection from spreading — and she immediately reminded me of you."

"Emily," Sparrow mumbled, making the connection.

"Yes, it was Emily. Her cousin Leah came to visit, and broke down in the hallway. I took her to my office where she told me everything. That was when I realized this was bigger than some kids playing brotherhood. This was bigger than your average abuse as well. Thanks to Leah, I got the information I needed to put everything together."

He continued to tell her what he had already told me - how he had been investigating Dwyer's work for the past couple of months, how he had discovered that he snuck out drugs. How Leah had told him that Dwyer had worked on many of the girls from the reservation, when their cuts got infected.

"Sadly, there are no journals or trace of him ever treating the girls. Leah's word is all we got on that point," Dad said.

"Why did it take so long for people to get involved?" Sparrow asked, almost too quietly for even me to hear - and I was sitting next to her. "If you put two and two together weeks ago... why did... why did..."

She couldn't finish her sentence and I pulled her chair closer to mine so I could put an arm around her. My other hand was still clasping hers to my heart.

"The night I was rescued... the man carrying me said that you had broken the law, that you might lose your license... even end up in jail... why?" she asked, saying every word slowly, as if she wasn't really sure where she was going with it. I frowned down at her, before looking up at my dad. What she had just said was news to me. She hadn't mentioned any of this to me.

Dad smiled sadly. "When I suspected abuse, I didn't report it. I didn't even report the cuts as not self-inflicted. When a doctor suspects

abuse, he has to report it. It's against the law not to."

"But is that enough to get thrown into jail?" I asked dubiously.

"It's considered gross misdemeanor," Kate chimed in. "In the state of Washington, that's enough for him to be sentenced to pay a hefty fine, and worst case scenario end up in jail for up to a year."

"Fuck, I knew it," I said, chuckling humorlessly. "Not only can she sue the hospital - she can sue your ass too," I told my dad.

"Edward, can you please stop being so crass?" Sparrow asked, finally looking up at me. Her eyes were glossy with unshed tears, and I realized she was closer to breaking apart than I thought.

And we hadn't even gotten to the hard stuff yet.

"Sorry," I mumbled.

"Do you have any further questions regarding that particular subject?" Dad asked, making it clear that he didn't really want to talk about it.

"No, but I would want to know what will happen to the people of La Push," I said, figuring that Sparrow probably would like an answer for that as well. "Please tell me they will all be thrown into the deepest pit of hell."

Kate turned to us in her seat, making a point to address us and not my parents.

"From what I've been told, which frankly isn't much since the subject is still under investigation, they have applied for a court issued warrant to investigate on the reservation, for suspicion of further cases of child abuse amongst other things. The people directly involved in the incident on New Year's Eve were all taken into custody. The people they have currently in custody include Renée Swan, Phillip Dwyer, Susanne Clearwater and Hank Amun. Thanks

to the video footage they got from that night, they have a very solid case against them, along with the fact that the crime took place on Forks territory, and not in La Push as they thought."

"And my dad?" Sparrow asked quietly.

"His body washed up on the shore of First Beach yesterday morning. Sam Uley reported it," Dad replied bluntly, and I cringed. Kate had come by the hospital last night and told Bella this, so she already knew.

"Oh," she said, her shoulders slumping. This wasn't news to her, but I guess she had subconsciously wished that Kate got it wrong, and that it was just another lie the fuckers had told her to keep her cooperative. She was wrong.

"Which leads us to another thing," Dad said. "We got the results back this morning on the DNA test we took when you were brought in here. We can say with absolute certainty that Phil Dwyer is not your father."

Sparrow's shoulders shook as she snorted. "I could have told you that already," she muttered. "Charlie was my father. He might have been blind as a bat when it came to his daughter, because he loved his wife more, but he was still my father."

I leaned over and pressed my lips to her hair, wanting to comfort her the only way I knew how.

Dad sighed and scratched his neck. It wasn't often you found him so lost.

"I tried to make things better, trying to help by getting involved with the aid of Leah. She didn't like what was going on any more than I did, but she also didn't want her people to get in trouble since this was a part of their legacy after al-

"Please, stop," Sparrow said, her voice shaky. "I don't want to hear about La Push. I don't ever want to hear another thing about those people. I don't care if they were brainwashed. I don't care if they consider this their religion. I don't care if they found the cure for cancer. I simply. Do. Not. Care!"

"Fair enough," Dad said. "Is there anything you *do* want to know?"

"I want to know who got shot," she replied almost instantly. "When I was rescued, I heard two gunshots. I want to know who got shot."

"Phil tried to run, so they tried to shoot him. They didn't hit him, but it was enough to scare him. He tripped and they caught up to him," Kate explained.

Sparrow furrowed her brows, nibbling her lip as she pondered something.

"What is it?" I asked her, when she had been quiet for too long.

"I'm trying to understand what I heard..." she replied, not sounding too sure now as she turned her head to my father. "I'm... my mind might have been fussy, but I'm certain I heard whoever was carrying me say you broke a law or two... they made it sound like you were in serious trouble for what you had done... but I don't understand. Was that all about not reporting what happened?"

Dad sighed. "I purposely withheld information that Leah provided me with, keeping it from the proper authorities. I could go on and on about all the things I've done wrong, all the miniscule laws I've broken in order to keep people safe. I wanted to save people, and that included the innocent people who got hurt in La Push. I got in over my head, thinking I could help more than I actually could, and now I'm paying for it."

"What did you do?" I asked him, narrowing my eyes.

"I might have repeated Dr. Dwyer's mistake, but sneaking out drugs in order to help a girl to fight off a serious infection."

"This is un-fucking-belivable," I said, shaking my head. "What happens now?"

"I'm currently on probation for the remainder of the investigation," he replied. "I'm stuck with doing paperwork for the time being."

I leaned back in my chair.

"I guess you're not the perfect doctor after all," I noted.

"Far from it," he replied, looking me straight in the eyes.

"So this is what you get when you get too close, huh?" I continued. "Do you regret it?"

He glanced at Sparrow, then at me.

"Do you?"

I smirked at him, knowing what he was referring to. Did I regret getting too close?

"Not even for a second," I replied, squeezing Sparrow's hand and holding it closer to my heart.

He smiled softly. "Neither do I."

The meeting winded down after that, Sparrow asked a few questions about what was going to happen to her mom. She asked what the odds were that they were going to get out of it, without any repercussions. Kate reassured her to the best of her abilities that both Phil and her mom would get what was coming for them. There were several things they were being charged for - murder being one on Phil's list. There was no way they would get out of this one, not

even the best lawyer in the world could help them now - especially not with all the evidence piling up against them.

Sparrow was free and safe, and I think she was beginning to realize that when we went back to her room.

"I'm safe," she said, walking to the window to look out. "It's different this time. I feel... lighter. There isn't an ominous grey cloud hovering over me anymore. It's weird... different."

I stepped behind and wrapped my arms around her. She leaned back against my chest.

"Tell me more," I murmured in her ear. "Tell me how safe you feel."

She relaxed in my arms.

"Mom is locked up in a place where she's being watched by armed guards twenty-four-seven. As is Phil. They wouldn't even be able to begin to try to escape from there. Soon, they will be sentenced for all the things they've done, and they will be locked up with even more guards and security to hold them. No judge in the world would grant them their freedom. They have footage, they have proof, they have witnesses. Mom and Phil are... completely done for."

"Do you believe that?" I asked, my lips still by her ear.

She took a shuddering breath. "I have to."

"No, you don't have to do a fucking thing," I corrected her. "If you don't believe it, you don't need to pretend like you do. You are free to feel and think whatever the fuck you want, nobody is going to punish you for it. We're not those people, we won't hurt you."

"I love you," she whispered.

I chuckled. "Nobody is going to punish you for that either, loving me in the first place is punishment enough," I joked.

"You're an idiot," she said with a content sigh.

"I won't argue with that," I replied with a smile. "But I do love you too."

"Which makes you an even bigger idiot. Our love doesn't make any sense."

"Love rarely does... or so I've heard," I replied.

She turned her head to the side, tilting it up so she could meet my gaze.

"You know what I want to do?" she asked.

"No, what?" I asked. "Anything you want, and we'll do it."

"I want you to make me as dirty and impure as you can."

I gaped at her in surprise - I thought she was going to say that she wanted another snowball fight or some shit, maybe finally take a walk sans crutches. But instead she wanted me to... *what* ?

"Eh... come again?" I asked, my mouth going dry.

"What they did to me this week, it all came down to one simple thing... sex. Phil claimed that I wasn't a virgin, and that was why they had to purify me. I mentioned this to Kate yesterday, when you were home taking a shower, and she said that he might have been judging my virginity like people did in the past. Too see if my hymen was intact."

I wrinkled my nose. "Hymen... really, Sparrow? That's probably the unsexiest word I've ever heard you say."

"Would you let me finish?" she asked, slightly annoyed. "My point is, I am a virgin. I know for a fact that I am. But Phil let the absence of an intact hymen decide it for me. They didn't even care to listen to

me. So in their eyes, I'm already a dirty whore, basically. I always will be. So I might as well act the part."

"Hymen... dirty whore... seriously, Sparrow," I said shaking my head in disapproval. "Soon you will be saying that you want it up the ass."

"I wonder if that would have been considered impure," she muttered dryly.

"Listen to me," I said, grabbing her chin and making sure that she was looking at me before continuing. "I will make love so sweet to you that you will be asking me why we haven't been doing it all this time. But I can't do that until I know you're well enough to understand and handle the consequences. I know I've been a pushy motherfucker, that I've been relentless in my quest to get inside of you but I... I just can't fucking do it unless I know that you're doing it for the right reasons. Sleeping together just because to prove a point to those fuckers is not what I consider a good enough reason. I want you to make the choice to sleep with me, and let me be your first, because you want me to be, not because they think I already am."

She smiled sadly at me, reaching out to cup my cheek with her hand. I leaned into her touch.

"I've been thinking about it a lot, Edward. Even before Christmas. I want you to be my first. I can't think of anyone better suited for the job than someone I love. I want to... I want to try to be normal for you, and for me. Having sex might complicate things, and I'm not denying that I will have issues after it's all said and done... but I think that's a low price to pay for giving you the only thing I can only give once. I want to sleep with you."

I leaned forward, to rest my forehead against hers.

"We've been through this before, Sparrow." I mumbled. "You have no fucking idea how long I've waited for you to say those words and really mean them, but I... I fucking can't. I still believe you're doing it

for the wrong reasons. You're still doing it to prove a point, and I don't want that shit hanging over our first time."

"You're being such a girl, Cullen," she murmured teasingly.

"I know I am, that's because you've stolen my balls and kept them to yourself." I sighed. "Okay, how about this... let's... ease up to it? We don't have to have sex, there are other things we could do... I mean... I can't say that I was opposed to what you did on Christmas Day... nice gift by the way. You blew me away."

"Pun intended?" she asked.

"Definitely... besides, do you remember what happened last time I even came close to your underwear? You thought you were ready, but you weren't, so you freaked out. I don't want to be subjected to that again unless I can prevent it. I think easing into things might be the way to go here."

"You sound like Kate," she sighed.

"And you sound like me. You want to get better with immediate results. You don't want to fucking wait, even though it's the obvious choice of path here. We need to wait, I'm not going to risk to traumatize you further."

"I just want to be normal."

I laughed dryly. "Normal is overrated. I like my birds freaky."

"In bed?"

I smirked. "You're going to be the freakiest, I can tell already. When we finally get to it, feathers will fly and we'll both be bruised all over."

"I can't wait."

I pressed my lips gingerly against hers, then smirking again.

"Neither can I."

Open, part 1

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – *all errors are mine*]

Chapter 55, "Open, part 1"

Isabella Swan POV

Adjusting . That was the best word to describe my new way of life. I was adjusting - to everything. Nothing was as it once was, and not only did I have to *adjust* to how things were now, but I also had to *accept* it. Some things I simply could not change.

My shrink said it was normal for me to dwell on things, and blame myself for the series of events that brought me to this point. I didn't care that it was normal - why would that make me feel better? I knew I wasn't normal in the bigger scheme of things, so was I supposed to be happy that I was having a "normal" reaction to what had happened to me?

I thought not.

It had been two weeks since I left the hospital; half of January had already passed. School had started up again, but I had yet to go back. There had been too much going on so I hadn't really felt up for it yet. They said I was allowed to change schools if I wanted to - especially considering my new living arrangements, but I said no. I was not about to change my life even more. Forks High was the only thing constant in my life - thanks to a certain boy who went there as well.

Both Edward and I went to therapy twice a week now - not together though - and even though my shrink was good, I found myself opening up more to someone else in my life.

The one who took me in when the Webers decided that they didn't want me as a burden to their family again.

Kate .

Kate had been quick to offer me a permanent place to live - with her - when it was clear that the Webers didn't want me. I didn't need to think twice before accepting her offer. I didn't want to end up at some other random home; I didn't want to subject myself to the risk of having to be thrown between homes. Kate wanted to take me in permanently, and who was I to argue with that? She had done nothing but help me ever since I'd known her, and I trusted her almost as much as I did Edward. She had that aura about her that made you trust her. You just knew she was a good person.

I was lucky that the people in charge listened to me when I said that I wanted to live with her, and that they took my wishes into consideration when they made the final decision. It didn't take long for the appropriate papers to be signed, and for all intents and purposes Kate was now my guardian. They couldn't take me away now... well, I guess they could, somehow, but that was not the point.

The point was that I finally had a real home. With Kate. In Port Angeles.

Kate and I had discussed the option of me transferring to a school in Port Angeles, but I had refused. I didn't want that to become another change. If I didn't go to school in Forks, I wouldn't be able to see Edward as much as I'd liked - especially since he still had issues with cars. He couldn't just take a spontaneous drive over here, so I didn't mind having to drive myself two hours every day - to and from school - to see him.

Another adjustment I never thought would be so major was walking without my cast. I had grown so accustomed to my cast that it was a well in-grained reflex to reach for my crutches, every time I needed to walk anywhere longer than a few feet. I always felt stupid when I realized I didn't need them anymore. Every time I did this, Edward noticed. He always chuckled and shook his head, as if he found it funny. I resisted the urge to slap that smirk off his face every time.

I was just about to put some laundry away - when my phone vibrated in my pocket, signaling that I had received a text. I plopped down on my bed, pulling the phone out to read the message.

"Did you know that the mute swan is the heaviest flying bird?"

I snickered silently to myself at his text. He shouldn't be texting me since I knew for a fact that he was in class right now.

Also, this had become a daily thing he did. Every day he would quote me some random fact from the bird book I gave him for Christmas. I was both happy and surprised that he actually read the book - and not only saw it as a symbol for our relationship. I was just waiting for the day when Edward would take up bird-watching as a hobby. He was becoming quite the expert on birds.

"Are you calling me fat?" I texted back.

I laughed when I got his reply not ten seconds later.

"Don't even go there."

"That's not a no."

"Why did the chicken cross the road?"

I rolled my eyes and smiled in amusement at his ridiculous attempt to change the subject by making a stupid joke.

"I dunno? Because it was bored?"

"No, because it wanted to hang out with his Sparrow on the other side."

"So now you're a chicken?"

"According to Emmett, I'm a pussy. But that's beside the point."

"I guess that settles it then."

"Settles what?"

"I'm wearing the pants."

It took a few minutes before I received another reply.

"I miss you."

I sighed, my heart clenching. *"I miss you too. "*

I turned my head, smiling sadly to myself as I spotted the stuffed whatever-it-was, where it laid next to my pillow. It was a gift from Jasper. I didn't know what it was, but I assumed it was an animal of some sort even though it didn't have any eyes. Jasper said it was an eel, but I wasn't so sure. When Edward had seen it, he immediately shot his eyes to Jasper and then asked him if he thought he was being funny. Jasper had just nodded and smirked, saying that he was. They didn't explain to me what that was about, but I guessed that I was missing out on an inside joke.

I was missing out on a lot of things.

I hadn't seen Edward in three days, and it was seriously starting to mess with my heart. I was kidnapped and tortured for a week - yet, three days without him now seemed like an eternity. I put a hand to the top of my chest, finding the crystal sparrow that lay there. I clasped it in my hand, trying to find some strength.

God only knew I needed it.

Monday morning. A start of yet another week. I tried to stifle a yawn long enough for me to take a sip of my scolding coffee from my travel mug. Kate threw me an amused glance.

"Tired?" she asked.

"You have no idea. I guess I didn't realize I would have to start getting up at the crack of dawn just to get to school on time," I muttered as I yawned again.

Kate was driving me to school. It was my first day back, and I couldn't be dreading it more. The only upside was that I was finally going to see Edward again. Now it had been five days since I last saw him, and it was becoming unbearable. We had planned to go see a movie in Port Angeles on Saturday, but the plans fell through when his father decided that they were going to have a family dinner. Apparently, there were some things that needed to be discussed.

Edward had called me later that night, and we had spent well over three hours on the phone. Edward had not been a happy camper, and neither was I after he told me what his father had said. Dr. Cullen wanted to relocate the entire family to Chicago - and leave the entire mess he made behind him in Forks. He wanted to ruin the lives for all of them just because he couldn't stand to be reminded of what he did - or *didn't* do, in this case.

I was worried, of course, that Dr. Cullen would get his way, but Esme wasn't having it. Edward told me that the one throwing the biggest fit during dinner was his mom. She wasn't going to move anywhere, she said, and she was most definitely not moving her children when they were so close to graduating anyway. Edward only had roughly a year left - and Emmett would be graduating in June.

I guess this was just another thing for me to pile on the things I needed to worry about.

"I noticed that you still haven't opened the letter," Kate said, interrupting my thoughts.

"I noticed you still haven't thrown it out," I replied dryly.

"I'm pretty sure it's illegal to throw other people's mail out."

"Well, it didn't come in the mail, now did it? And why would I want to read it anyway?"

"Why *wouldn't* you want to read it?"

I snorted. I didn't have a better response than that.

Two weeks ago, when I was finally leaving the hospital, Kate gave me a letter. The envelope only said "Bella", but I knew that handwriting, so I knew whom it was from.

Jacob .

I hadn't asked what happened to him, mostly because I didn't want to know, but Kate told me anyway. Obviously, she couldn't go into details since he was a minor and she wasn't assigned to his case or whatever. It's not like I wanted details anyway. Kate told me he had been taken to a facility in Seattle, dealing specifically with teens suffering from mental issues and delusions, as well as kids with a past of abuse. He was brought there for an extensive evaluation of his psyche. I guess he needed it.

He had written me a letter, and somehow gotten it to Kate who was asked to deliver it to me. I didn't want to read it. I didn't want anything to do with him, but I had yet to throw the letter out. It was as if I wanted to torture myself with it. As long as it existed, his words would too.

Maybe I just wasn't ready to hear or *read* - as the case may be - what the hell he had to say. Maybe, on some level, I *did* care, and maybe I was scared. I didn't want to read it just to find out that he wouldn't forget about me, and that he would hunt Edward down when he got out or something.

As Forks High came into view, I glanced at Kate, catching her glancing at me as well.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"Nothing... just stuff... Edward... I don't know... it's complicated."

She smiled and reached out to pat my knee - but not in a condescending way. Nothing Kate ever did was done in anything other than out love and concern.

"High school relationships always are, trust me. I had dozens."

"Are you trying to tell me you were a floozy?" I asked.

"Not even a little bit," she replied with a chuckle as she pulled up the schools parking lot. "But the guys didn't know that until it was too late."

"Poor guys," I noted.

"Indeed. Have a great day, Bella. I'll pick you up later, but if you have a change of plans and want to meet with... well, *friends* after school, just call me so I know."

"Will do, thanks," I said, nodding. "Bye."

I got out of the car and she drove off. I tried to put my brave face on, but it was hard. People were looking at me, whispering like always. I bet the rumor mill was going crazy with the talk about what had happened. I knew that The Forks News had been all over it. This was the most interesting thing that had happened to this town in years.

I spotted the owner of the familiar head of bronze-colored hair, and any anxiety I had felt earlier washed away immediately. He was standing together with Jasper and Rosalie. I was glad to see that Jasper was there too, it must mean that he was getting better. Although, I knew that the doctors had recommended him to take it

easy for another week. I guess he wasn't one to listen to recommendations anymore than I was. Or maybe school didn't count.

Jasper spotted me first and he smiled as he nodded at me. The gesture caught Edward's attention and he turned his head, meeting my gaze without even having to search for me.

He was moving toward me before I even had any time to register the look on his face.

"He's gonna kill her," I heard someone say.

When Edward reached me, he put his hands on either side of my face before leaning his head down and pressing his lips to mine so fast I barely had time to take a breath. He moved his lips with mine, and I became putty in his hands.

My hands, on the other hand, found their way up his chest, to his neck and toward his mess of hair. I gripped it at the back of his head, holding him in place as I opened my mouth. His tongue snuck out and touched mine and I moaned quietly at the sensation.

If being away from him for a few days meant this kind of reunion, maybe it was worth it.

I snorted inwardly. No. Nothing was worth having to spend any time at all away from him. I wanted to spend every waken second with him. I wanted to spend every second *sleeping* with him too - no, that was not an innuendo.

He let go of my face and wrapped his arms around me instead; practically molding us together.

"Hey, bro, get a room!" Emmett's voice filtered through into our bubble, and I chuckled into the kiss as I opened my eyes. I pecked Edwards lips a few times, before pulling away just enough for me to meet his gaze.

"Wanna get a room?" I asked teasingly.

"Mmm, don't tempt me, Sparrow," Edward replied huskily, leaning his forehead against mine "I hate that you make me all human and shit. It's unnerving, and its cramping my style," he muttered, rolling his eyes at himself as he stepped away. He took my hand in his as we walked up to the school. I was still adjusting to my new, fairly noticeable limp.

" *I'm cramping your style? You're the one holding my hand,*" I pointed out to him.

"I can stop if you'd like," he said, dropping my hand immediately.

I snorted, before hugging his arm and clasping his hand in mine. He looked down at me and smirked as he pulled the door open for us.

"I so own your ass, Sparrow," he said, sounding smug and playful.

"You do," I agreed, his playfulness contagioud. "But luckily for me, I don't need it, since I own yours."

Then I did something that surprised even me. I reached around and pinched his butt.

He jumped in surprise and then stared at me as if I had completely lost my mind.

I was pretty sure I had.

Being playful with words was one thing - pinching his butt in a crowded hallway was another.

"Did you just pinch my ass?" he asked so loudly I was sure the entire school heard him. Maybe I was just imagining it, but I was sure his words echoed in the hall, making me hear them over and over. I felt my face flush with a million shades of red. God, what the hell did I even get up in the morning for? Please, Earth, swallow me whole.

"I...I... I'm sorry?" I stuttered.

He looked even more incredulous at that, before shaking his head.

"Feel free to pinch my ass any time, Sparrow. Like you said, it's fucking yours. Do with it as you please. Pinch it, snuggle it, kiss it..." He trailed off suggestively as he licked his lips, and I swallowed nervously as he leaned closer. "As long as I'm allowed to do the same to yours."

"I... I... sure?" I replied shakily, and yelped when he returned the favor by pinching my butt. I slapped his arm. "That's not funny!" I complained.

"I'm just returning the favor," he said, smirking like the bastard he was.

"I hate you," I muttered.

"No, you don't. You love me," he said, still smirking as he put his arm around my shoulders, pulling me to his side as we continued walking down the hall. People were staring even more now; I was sure they had heard every single word.

How humiliating.

Suddenly I felt his lips against my temple and when I looked up, he was smiling softly at me.

"You know I'm just kidding around, right?" he asked quietly. I sighed and nodded.

"Yes, I know... I just... I don't know what I was thinking. I didn't know if that was alright," I replied just as quietly.

"If you haven't noticed, Sparrow, were not hiding anymore. Were not hiding our relationship. So feel free to do with me whatever the hell you want. I couldn't give a rat's ass, as long as you're happy." He kissed my temple again. "And if pinching my ass in a hallway full of

people is what you want to do, and makes you happy, then go ahead and do it. It turns me on."

I tilted my head up, and he got the message as he leaned down to press his lips gently to mine.

"I love you," I murmured.

"It's mutual," he replied.

I hated my schedule, because I wasn't going to see Edward until lunch. My class right before lunch was cancelled, so I had nothing better to do than catch up on some schoolwork in the library. Luckily for me, the work wasn't all that hard, although it gave me quite some time to think and dwell about other stuff. So maybe I wasn't *all* that lucky.

"Playing hooky?"

I looked up from the books, smiling at Jasper.

"No, are you?" I asked.

"Substitute teacher," he said, and I nodded in understanding. He didn't need to elaborate. The substitute teachers we got here were jokes. I wondered if they even know what classes they were supposed to teach, instead of letting the students do what they wanted, like roaming the school. Jasper wouldn't even be busted for it.

He pulled out a chair and sat down next to me. He cringed when he saw the pile of homework in front of me.

"I guess being busy getting run over, kidnapped and stuff makes the homework pile up," I said with a shrug.

"Want help?"

"Nah, I got it. It's not as bad as it looks."

"So did Edward tell you about our master plan yet?" he asked.

"You have a master plan?"

"Yeah, we were thinking of going to Port Angeles and eat out tonight."

"And who are we? I'm sensing it's not just going to be you, me and Edward."

He laughed. "No, actually, I guess it would be a... triple date?"

"You really think that's a good idea?" I asked. "That's a disaster waiting to happen. From what I understand, Edward and Rose are still not on speaking terms, and personally, I can't say I'm all too comfortable in her or Alice's... or even Emmett's presence. Not after everything."

"Please, don't ever tell Alice that. She'd be devastated."

"I doubt that very much."

He frowned. "Don't underestimate her. She's a good person, and she really does want to become your friend, but I guess the current situation isn't really ideal for that to happen." He dragged his hand through his blond locks, and leaned back in his chair. "As for Emmett... well, he'll become your friend sooner or later, whether you like it or not. He just doesn't take no for an answer. He already considers you a friend. I guess that comes with the territory of being your boyfriend's brother." I smiled without thinking, and Jasper gave me a curious look when he noticed. "What are you smiling about now, Missy?" he asked.

"Nothing," I mumbled, embarrassed.

He smirked. " *Boyfriend* ," he said slowly.

"Stop it," I mumbled, even more embarrassed now.

He chuckled. "Well, he is. Get used to it."

"He's so much more than that to me, and it feels weird defining him like that... or us for that matter... it's just weird," I said, shaking my head at myself. "I'm not making much sense, am I?"

"Honestly, I think you make complete sense. Nothing about your relationship is normal, so I totally get that it's hard to define it as something as normal as boyfriend and girlfriend," he agreed.

"So you don't think we're normal either?" I said, quirking an eyebrow.

"No," he said without any hesitation while shaking his head. "I don't think either of you are normal. Not in the world's definition of the word anyway. And I say that with love. You guys wouldn't be you if you were normal. It's your abnormalness that makes the two of you awesome."

I snorted. "Good save," I muttered.

"I try," he said, shrugging. "So are you guys eating lunch with us, or are you going to hook up somewhere?"

Jasper kept amazing me with the way he could get right to the point without it being awkward. He was so straight forward about everything. I think that was what I liked the most about him.

"I don't know," I said. "I'll let Edward decide. I don't care as long as I get to spend some time with him."

"Urgh, you sound just like him," he said, wrinkling his nose in mock-disgust. "Who knew Edward had it in him to be so sickly sweet?"

"You and Emmett must have rubbed off on him," I replied coolly.

"Oh, burn," he said, just as the bell rang. "Finally!" he exclaimed, pushing his chair back. "Let's get some food."

We collected my stuff, and we stopped by my locker to drop it all off, before going to the cafeteria. We bought our food, and I snickered when he offered to take my tray - before he realized I didn't need the help anymore. I guess I wasn't the only one who had gotten used to the crutches.

We were the first ones at our table, but Alice soon joined up. She was being nice and told me it was great seeing me again, and she was looking forward to tonight. I just smiled timidly and nodded. She was really trying to be nice - without being pushy - but I was still not warming up to her as quickly as she (and Jasper) was hoping.

We were soon joined by Rosalie and Emmett. Emmett sat down next to me and started talking animatedly about how Edward had been driving him up the wall for the past few days. I smiled and nodded at the right places, not really listening to what he was saying.

When the empty chair next to me was pulled out, I immediately turned my head to see Edward plop down on it. He moved it closer to mine before meeting my gaze, and smiling as he leaned in to kiss me - I welcomed it.

"Hey, dude, we're eating," Emmett said, with his mouth full of food since he had just taken a big bite of his pizza.

"Yeah? Well, so am I," Edward replied, making a point by nibbling my bottom lip before leaning back in his seat. He rested his hand on the back of my chair.

"You disgust me," Emmett muttered.

"Look on the bright side," Rosalie said, her voice neutral. "It must mean your brother finally saw the Wizard, granting him a heart."

I looked at her confused, not really knowing whether or not she was joking or being mean. Her voice was too neutral and even to tell.

"Would you look at that," Jasper said, in mock-amazement. "Who knew my sister the Ice Queen would ever apologize to Edward the Douche bag?"

I frowned as I looked at him. "That was an apology?" I blurted.

They all turned their heads to me. Edward was smirking, while Alice stifled a giggle. Jasper looked amused, Emmett confused and Rosalie surprised. I smiled awkwardly.

"Sorry," I mumbled.

"Here's the thing, Sparrow," Edward said, leaning closer to me. "Ice Queen over there doesn't use the word sorry. Because she rarely thinks she's wrong, and if she is, she sure as fuck doesn't admit it. So she has developed her own language when it comes to apologies, and that right there was probably the closest fucking thing we will ever come to her apologizing to me... or anyone for that matter."

Rosalie crossed her arms over her chest, leaning back in her seat and not looking very pleased.

"Are you done?" she asked him, quirking an eyebrow.

"Why yes, Ice Queen, I am," Edward said, nodding once.

The conversation turned lighter after that; there was no awkwardness between Rosalie and Edward, or anyone else. I watched and listened to how they all interacted with each other, and it was fascinating to see how Edward behaved around his friends. He was so foul-mouthed and almost mean. One would think he was being rude in order to hurt, when in reality it was just his way of being funny. His friends got him.

Every now and again, he would stroke my neck with his finger, and give me a secret smile. I blushed every time. If I had known earlier

that this was how it felt like to be in love, maybe I would have been more interested in pursuing boys.

Then again, no boy would ever have measured up to this. Edward was *it* .

We were young, but that didn't mean we couldn't last. As long as the feeling lasted, we would too. Feelings this strong don't just go away - I would hate my mother forever, so why couldn't I love Edward forever too?

"... two cars," Emmett said. I only caught the ending of the sentence as I was brought out of my musings.

"Sure, we can take mine and yours," Jasper said.

"What are we talking about?" I asked Edward.

"How we're going to get to Port Angeles," he replied. "Since there are six of us we need to take two cars."

"I don't see why," Rosalie chimed in. "Emmett's car is big enough to fit us all, besides, Alice is so small we can shove her in the glove compartment."

"Very funny, Rose," Alice said, narrowing her eyes. "Why don't you sit in the back like the little bitch you are?"

Rosalie also narrowed her eyes as they stared at each other for a minute, before they both stuck their tongues out at the same time, and then laughed.

I was a little surprised at their banter, and also kind of... jealous. I wondered what it was like to be able to joke so freely about anything with your friends. I wasn't even completely comfortable yet to make tasteless jokes to Edward. Then again, it wasn't like I was that kind of person anyway. I wasn't carrying around a bunch of untold, rude and tasteless jokes, just waiting to get out.

I was still jealous though.

Eventually, it was decided that we were going to take Emmett's jeep to Port Angeles. Since they weren't going to drive me back anyway, there would be more room on the way back for them.

We left the cafeteria, and I told Edward I would meet him in biology - I needed to go to the bathroom first. I did my business, and I was just washing my hands when another stall opened and none other than Tanya stepped out. She stopped, staring at me through the mirror. I wasn't afraid to meet her gaze. Tanya didn't scare me anymore. She was nothing compared to what I had been subjected to over the holidays.

She narrowed her eyes slightly as she moved towards the sinks, choosing the one next to mine to wash her hands.

"Have you slept with him yet?" she asked, her tone nonchalant as if she really didn't care - even though it was obvious that she did.

"I fail to see how that's any of your business," I replied coolly, as I grabbed a paper towel to dry my hands.

"That's a no," she said, snorting quietly. "Well, I'll give you a piece of advice... once Edward gets into your pants, he won't be interested anymore. Trust me, I know."

I gave her an incredulous look. "Excuse me?" I asked, gripping the sink to keep from slapping her face instead.

"I'm not saying it to be mean," she said, turning to me. "I'm saying it to be nice. You've had a rough month, no? With your family and all, and I would bet that the last thing you need right now is a guy breaking your heart."

"Excuse me, but you don't know anything about what I've been through, and you know nothing about my family," I snapped.

"That might be true. But I *do* know Edward, and I know how he operates. You're obviously not his type, so I'm sorry, but I don't see why he's even bothering with you. Maybe he's doing it as a challenge of some sorts. I don't know. But guys like Edward don't go for girls like you."

The entire speech was said with such a nice, comforting tone that I just couldn't believe I was hearing her right. Was she seriously telling the girl who was kidnapped over Christmas that her boyfriend was only with her because it was a challenge? Was she serious?

She took my amazed silence as a sign to continue.

"I'm seriously not telling you this to be mean," she said, as if she really meant it.

"What would you know about Edward's type?" I asked, when I finally found my voice again.

"Well, I have slept with him on more than one occasion," she said, rolling her eyes.

"So? Edward is a teenage boy, he would sleep with a mountain goat if he got desperate enough," I replied.

"Are you calling me a mountain goat?" she asked, her voice rising slightly as her nostrils flared.

"You? Not at all. You are as far from a mountain goat as you could get," I replied, smirking to myself as I realized she would never understand the double meaning of those words. That was an even bigger insult to her than calling her any kind of animal name ever would be. Too bad she would never get it. "Besides, have you ever kissed him?"

She opened her mouth, but it was as if her answer stuck in her throat. "Wh-what has that to do with anything?" she asked, flipping her hair over her shoulders. "Of course I have."

"Really? So what lip is his favorite? What technique does he use? What does he do with his tongue?" I asked, giving her a challenging look as I crossed my arms over my chest. I was not going to back down from this fight. I was going to win this - even though there was no honor in defeating Tanya. Tanya was nothing.

"He likes the top lip," she replied, and it was clear that she was making it up. "Other than that, I don't really kiss and tell... pardon the pun."

"Kissing someone is more intimate than sex, and it's pretty clear that you have never kissed Edward. Or else you would know that he prefers the bottom lip," I said confidently. "And yeah, you're right. Being with me is a challenge for Edward, just like being with him is a challenge for me... but not for the reasons you think. I love him, and he loves me. It's as simple as that."

She snorted, and there was a crack in her fake, polite mask.

"Edward doesn't love anyone but himself and his dick," she said through clenched teeth.

"If believing that makes you sleep better at night, then good for you," I said. "I need to go now."

I gave her a wide, fake smile before walking past her to the door. I walked out and smiled when I spotted Edward waiting for me by my locker down the hall. He met my gaze, and my heart skipped a beat at his smile. Then his smile froze as he spotted something over my shoulder.

I gave him a curious look before looking over my shoulder as well. Tanya had exited the bathroom and was now walking toward me. I sighed and stopped.

"What?" I asked, now pretty damn annoyed. "Can't you just leave me alone already?"

Tanya looked at me, then over my shoulder. I turned my head to see Edward coming toward us in angry strides.

"Is the bitch messing with you again, Sparrow?" he asked when he reached us, his voice tight.

"Nah, she's just killing time before the next class. Nothing I can't handle," I replied, holding out my hand to him. I smiled when I saw Tanya's eyes widened slightly as she watched Edward take it. He raised my hand to his lips and kissed my knuckles before holding it to his heart. This made her eyes go even wider. "So, Tanya, you were saying?"

She glanced between us a few times before letting her eyes settle on me. Then she smirked.

"This," she said, gesturing to us, "is fucking unnatural. It's fucking disgusting."

"Nobody is forcing you to watch," I replied.

She narrowed her eyes at me, and then pointed at me with her fancy-looking, manicured finger.

"The only reason you're so cocky right now is because nobody dares to touch you because of what happened," she hissed. "Nobody dares to even look at you because your mom is a crazy bitch. I can see why she would be trying to kill you. Who the fuck wants a kid like you? Fucking disgusting."

I thought I was prepared for whatever she had to throw at me - boy, was I wrong. I was not prepared for her to stoop to that level. How could someone be so cruel? I hadn't read the newspapers, so I didn't know what exactly had been reported, but apparently she knew that my mom had indeed tried to kill me - depending on how you looked at it, I suppose. So how could she bully a girl who had been through that? How could she be so cold?

"I... I... I... I can't even process what you said," I stuttered, and then I just shook my head. I turned around and started walking away. Edward was still holding my hand, but he let it go and put his arm around my shoulders instead, walking with me and letting me steer the way.

We walked around the corner, and it wasn't until I was sure that we were out of sight from her that I stopped. I looked up at Edward, and that was all I took for me to burst into tears.

Edward looked terrified for a split second before crushing me to his chest. I clung to him like a lifeline.

I hadn't cried over my mother; I hadn't cried over what happened. So why was I crying now?

"I love you so much, Sparrow," Edward murmured as he kissed the top of my head. "I love you. I love you. I love you." I sob-laughed into his shirt, gripping it tighter in my fists.

"A-a-m I your mountain goat?" I asked, my voice muffled by his shirt and my sobs.

"Yes," he said, laughing quietly, kissing my head again. "You're my fucking mountain goat."

I sniffled and he murmured reassuring words.

"Do you think she hated me?" I asked subdued, my voice dull and empty.

Edward was quiet for a moment. He knew I wasn't talking about Tanya.

"No," he answered eventually. "I don't think she hated you... she just loved herself more."

"Edward?"

"Mmm?"

I pulled back a little so I could meet his gaze.

"When we have kids, please remind me to tell them I love them every day. Never let them doubt that," I said, almost pleadingly. He wiped my tears away, smiling sadly as he nodded.

"I will," he promised. "I will also remind you to tell your husband. He needs to hear that shit too."

"I love you," I whispered.

"I love you too, Mrs. Mother-of-my-future-babies-Cullen."

I rolled my teary eyes as I stood up on my tiptoes to kiss him.

We would last. These feelings would never go away.

This was constant .

The day only got better from there. Even class was fun - mostly because Edward kept poking me. I tried to pay attention in class, since I had gotten behind, but apparently, Edward didn't care much about that. He kept poking and nudging me to get my attention, sending me a dazzling smile every time I turned my head to glare at him.

He had me eating out of his hand like a bird.

I guess that metaphor fitted a little better than it should have.

When school let out, we decided to first hang out at Edward and Emmett's house for a while, before going to Port Angeles for dinner. I called Kate to let her know she didn't need to pick me up, and that I was going to eat dinner with my friends.

And yes, I said *friends* .

When we got to their house, Edward and I wanted to hide out in his room for a bit. We needed the alone time, but the others wasn't having it. They were adamant of having us included in whatever it was they were going to do. Emmett was especially persistent; he said something about needing to re-bond with his brother. I suppose he had a point. There were a lot of relationships here that needed re-bonding after the rocky past couple of months.

I didn't mind too much because it gave me a reason to get to know the others a little better. When Emmett, Jasper and Edward played their video game, I sat with the girls, listening to them talk and occasionally answering questions that were thrown my way.

"I see you're still wearing that Sparrow necklace," Rosalie noted, when she caught me playing with it. "I say it's safe to assume Edward was the one giving it to you."

I glanced at Edward, smiling softly as he cursed at Jasper for something he did on screen. He was totally engrossed in the video game; he didn't even notice me watching him.

"Yeah, he did," I replied, looking back at Rosalie.

"Two hundred dollars... I can't believe Edward bought a girl a two-hundred dollar necklace," she said, shaking her head in amazement; it reminded me of my earlier encounter with Tanya.

"Why?" I asked, quietly. "Because I'm the goose?"

Her eyes widened and she shook her head.

"No, not at all. You have nothing to do with it. I'm amazed because he bought a girl — *any* girl — a two-hundred necklace. I just didn't think Edward had it in him," she said. "He isn't the gift-giving type. So, let me ask you this... were you guys together when you got it?"

I shrugged.

"What does that mean?" Alice asked, looking confused. "Were you or were you not together? It's a simple question."

"Well... I don't know? It took a while before we even realized what we were doing... I don't know when it became official... not really," I said. "It's easier to say when we became friends, because that's clear... but not a couple. It's such a grey zone."

"Who made the first move?" Alice asked, leaning forward as to not miss a single word.

I laughed at her eagerness. "You do know who you're talking to, right?" I asked.

Alice frowned then shared a look with Rosalie. Rosalie nodded.

"Edward," they said in unison.

"What?" Edward asked, tearing his eyes from the screen for a moment to look at us. "What the fuck did I do now?"

"I don't know," Rosalie said smugly. "You tell me."

"What?" Now he looked confused. Emmett paused the game and Edward shot me a look that clearly said 'Explain!'

I sighed. "They want to know what you did to make the first move."

Emmett shot his eyes to Edward. "Dude, I want to know that too!"

Edward groaned and dragged a hand through his hair in frustration.

"Fuck, I don't know? I might have... I... fuck... what the fuck did I do, Sparrow?" he asked, looking at me.

"I don't know, what *did* you do?" I teased.

He narrowed his eyes at me. "I might have kissed you."

"Yes, you might have done that," I said, smiling.

"Awww, isn't that the cutest little thing you ever did hear?" Emmett said, slapping an arm around Edward's shoulders and ruffling his hair. "I knew my baby-brother had a heart. I just didn't know he had a matching vagina to go with it."

"Fuck you," Edward muttered, turning back to the game. "Let's get this shit over with so we can go eat."

The drive to Port Angeles was very pleasant. I was sitting sideways in Edward's lap in the backseat. Emmett was driving, with Rosalie in the passenger seat. Alice was sitting in Jasper's lap in the backset as well, so the middle seat was where we had our feet. Edward rested his head against my shoulder, his eyes closed. I dragged my hand through his unruly hair, smiling softly every time his frown would even out. He was tense - but not as tense as I had expected him to be. This wasn't as hard on him as it used to be. I was so proud of him.

His grip on me would tighten every now and again, and every time I would kiss his forehead. It made him relax instantly.

It would never cease to amaze me what an affect I had on that boy.

No one said anything about Edward or me on the drive over there. They didn't tease us about the way I kissed him, or soothed him. I guess they realized that this was not something either of us would appreciate to made fun of. Edward was hurting, and there were no jokes in the world that would make that okay.

We had dinner at a romantic restaurant called Bella Italia, and I silently wondered if Edward had picked the place. The dinner was delicious, and it was all paid for by the guys. This really was a date.

My *first* real date.

For some reason I was kind of disappointed that my first real date hadn't been alone with Edward, but at the same time I couldn't find it in me to care too much. I was having a date with Edward - wasn't that enough? Did it really matter if it was a triple-date with his... I mean, *our* friends?

A couple of hours later, we left the restaurant and walked back towards the car. Edward and I walked a few paces behind the others, while holding hands like a real couple.

Real couple. Real date.

I smiled to myself. I was normal.

"I don't want to leave you yet," he said, sighing. "We haven't had any fucking time alone all day."

"I know, but there is always tomorrow," I replied with a shrug.

Edward stopped and turned to me.

"Do you think Kate would be okay with me maybe, you know... sleeping on the couch or some shit tonight?" he asked, looking uncharacteristically unsure.

"I don't think so, I could ask?" I said, making it a question.

"I could always take the late bus home later... I think the last bus to Forks leaves at one a.m. or something, that gives us at least another five hours," he said.

I smiled. "Five hours is better than nothing," I replied.

He leaned down and pressed his lips to my forehead, before we started walking again to the car. The others were waiting by its side.

"I think I'm going to stay and take the bus home later," he told the others.

Emmett chuckled, giving Edward an amused look. "You kids behave now, alright?" he said, before looking at me. "Especially you, I don't want any funny business."

"I promise," I said, rolling my eyes.

We said our goodbyes to the others, before walking to the apartment - which was only a ten-minute walk away. When we got there, the place was dark and quiet. I turned on the lights, calling out hello, but there was no answer. I noticed a Post-It note stuck to the mirror in the hallway.

"Dinner with a friend, will be back around eleven. Call me if you need me - K'," I read out loud.

"Eleven, huh," Edward said, wrapping his arms around my waist from behind. "That leaves us three glorious hours to do with as we wish..."

"Mmm," I hummed in response, turning in his embrace so I could meet his lips.

We were both smiling as we kissed - which made for some awkward teeth knocking, but we didn't care. Edward backed me through the hallway toward my room, and I giggled when I almost tripped on the doorstep.

As soon as we had entered my room, it was as if the atmosphere shifted and changed. It became heavier. Almost electric. The giggles stopped, the smiles faded, and we were just looking at each other as if it was for the first time.

I nibbled on my lip as I gazed at him. Why was I feeling so shy and uncertain all of a sudden?

Edward slowly let his hands grip my hips, pulling me a little closer to him. I was momentarily dazzled by the intensity of his green eyes. How could he hide so much emotion there? All it took was a slight

furrowing of his brows, and he suddenly looked so insecure. So naked.

He was naked. This was the Edward only I was allowed to see.

I stood on my tiptoes and pressed my lips to his.

There were no sounds coming from us; there was no sound at all other than the quiet smacking of our lips as they moved together. No moans. No groans. Just lips and tongues moving together, like a well-rehearsed dance. How I managed to go seventeen years without the taste of his lips, I would never know.

I gripped his hair tightly in my fists, and I was worried that I might hurt him. It felt as if he would disappear if I didn't hold on tightly enough. He was my lifeline. My oxygen. Without him, I would drown.

I wasn't even aware that we were moving again, until my legs backed up against the bed and I fell backwards before I was able to catch myself. With my tight grip on Edwards's hair, he had no choice but to follow me. He fell on top of me as we bounced down on the bed. My grip on his hair loosened as I started to giggle.

"Sorry," I said.

He propped himself up by leaning his arms on either side of my shoulders.

I had never felt safer.

He stroked some hair from my face with his slender fingers and I gazed into his eyes.

My giggles and smile faded at the sight of his serious expression.

I reached up to touch his face; not understanding why he was looking at me like that. He was looking at me as if I was the most precious thing in the entire world.

"I love you," I murmured, hoping it would help him to get from where he was to where his mind was supposed to be. With me. Right now, he was somewhere too far for me to find. I needed him to come back.

The corner of his mouth lifted into a sad smile.

"I love you too," he replied softly. The emotion in his voice was eerie and I felt myself choke up. I placed my hand on his chest, over his heart. I wondered how it was possible to feel this intensely about someone at this age.

What did we know about love? What did we know about life?

What did we know about *anything* ?

Maybe we didn't need to know anything about anything. Maybe all we needed to know was what we felt and what we felt was this intense need of needing to be together in any way possible.

"Kiss me," I whispered.

He nodded once before leaning down, and I removed my hand from his chest as he became flush with mine. As our kissing intensified, as did the way my hands moved over his back. I started to cling to him in ways that should have had me embarrassed. But I knew I had no reason to be embarrassed with him. He understood, because he felt the same way.

My hands found their way underneath his shirt, and I clawed at his skin.

He made a grunting noise, but didn't interrupt our kissing. He shifted his position so he was only lying partly over me, that way he could use his hand to roam my body. He began caressing and stroking my side, until his hand found its way underneath my top.

I moaned. I couldn't help it. His hand on my naked skin felt fantastic. There was no use in trying to deny it. I wanted his hand to be there. There was no hesitation in the way we moved; there were no silent questions or pleas for permission.

I didn't need to think or second-guess my actions as I started tugging at his shirt. He pulled back from me, before grabbing the shirt in his hands, pulling it over his head and throwing it on the floor. I put a hand to his chest, marveling at how good his naked chest looked.

My broken boy was beautiful.

I looked at my hand as I splayed my fingers over his skin, right over his heart. I could feel it pump violently in his chest. I slowly let my eyes meet his and he smiled softly, before leaning back down and meeting my lips. His body was hot in more ways than one as it pressed against mine. The thin fabric of my top did nothing to keep the heat of his body from mine.

His hand found its way back to where it belonged: on my skin underneath my top.

I was starting to get hot. As if someone had turned the heat up in the room.

I was already panting when Edward palmed my breast over my bra, and I moaned when he slowly rubbed my nipple through the fabric.

It felt so good.

I tugged awkwardly at the hem of my top and he pulled his hand back, smiling against my lips when he realized what I wanted to do.

"Hands up," he said softly, as he pulled back. I did as he said, and he pulled the top off me and threw it on the floor as well. He looked down at my body and I smiled when I noticed him licking his lips. I guess I wasn't the only one enjoying the view.

He moved to straddle me and I laid there, with my arms splayed on the pillow over my head, as he continued to look at me. He put his hands on my stomach, just touching me, before moving them to cover my breasts again. I closed my eyes, just enjoying the feeling of his hands on me.

A small gasp escaped me as he let his hands move under the fabric.

I opened my eyes again. He wasn't watching my chest anymore - he was watching *me* .

I smiled and he nodded towards my chest.

I bit my lip as I reached under my back, unclasping the bra. I moved to remove it, but his hands were faster. He slid the straps of my shoulders, and slowly removed the bra entirely from my body.

A quiet whimper left him as I laid half-naked beneath him.

I was not by any means perfect. My body had flaws.

But from the way he was currently looking at me, you'd think differently.

He was just staring at me. His hands resting uselessly on his knees.

I kept my eyes on his as I reached for his hands, slowly moving them to cover my breasts. It felt better now when the bra was completely off my body. There was nothing there to disturb the sensation.

He mumbled something that I couldn't make out.

He finally leaned down to meet my lips once again, and soon we were kissing with such need you'd think we were both starving from it.

Our hands roamed.

Clawing. Squeezing. Stroking. Touching. Feeling.

Eventually, both of us felt that this wasn't enough.

I needed more - but I didn't know what *more* was.

Apparently, my hands did. As they found their way to unzip his jeans.

His hands were already playing around the same area of mine.

He unbuttoned and unzipped my jeans in one fluent motion, before slowly letting his hand inside.

I didn't freeze. I didn't still. I didn't react at all like last time. Maybe because this was so much more different from last time. Nobody was forcing anyone to do anything. Nobody was pushing or pressing an issue that wasn't meant to be pressed. I wasn't afraid. There were no evil voices in my head telling me to stop.

This was natural. Instinctual. It was meant to happen this way.

We needed to be together, and together we would be. I wasn't afraid because Edward would never hurt me. I would be all right because he would never have it any other way.

He touched me through my underwear, which in turn made me squeak in surprise. He chuckled softly as he started kissing my neck.

He was murmuring something against my skin, and I still couldn't make out his words.

He continued to move his hand over my underwear, and I started to move my hips in synch to his movements. I didn't think because this was also instinctual.

Maybe that would become the key to my happiness: never think, just feel.

After a few moments of this, he moved again. This time to finish the job I had started, but given up on when he started touching me *there*. He unbuttoned his jeans and stood up from the bed. As he pulled

off his, I shimmied awkwardly out of mine. He laughed and rolled his eyes as he watched me, before lending me a hand by just pulling them off me himself.

"Don't laugh at me," I said in mock-offense.

"Oh, I wouldn't dare," he teased with a smirk.

I rolled my eyes before reaching for him. He willingly laid next to me, pressing his naked body to mine. Our lips found each other's and my hands gripped his hair.

I didn't know how it happened, or when, but eventually both our remaining underwear had somehow been added to the pile of clothes on the floor.

Edward could no longer hide the fact that he was reacting very strongly to the situation - his erection was becoming more and more of a distraction.

I reached down and wrapped my hand around him, and he jerked in response. I felt the sudden urge to giggle again. He hadn't expected that. He started kissing down my neck, as I started stroking him.

Eventually, his kissing ceased and he was just panting against my skin.

He mumbled something to himself, and this time I needed to know what he was thinking. But before I had time to open my mouth to ask, he reached down and removed my hand from him. He braided our fingers together as he reached up and rested our clasped hands next to my head on the pillow.

"What are you thinking?" I whispered.

He looked up at me, smiling crookedly.

"That I'm so fucking lucky," he whispered back.

I bit my lip and he squeezed my hand tighter. I reached up to stroke his cheek with my free hand.

"Will it hurt?" I asked quietly.

"I'm not a girl, so I can't say... but yeah, from what I hear it hurts, but only for a moment," he replied, just as quietly.

"Take it slow?"

He nodded. "I'll be careful... just say the word and I'll stop."

"Okay."

While he moved for a better position, I took the moment to prepare myself mentally by taking a deep, calming breath. I could almost see the bubble that surrounded us now. There was no one else in this world but us.

He settled between my legs and I didn't even bother to worry about a condom. Maybe it was silly, but I didn't want anything separating us. Not this time. I didn't want a barrier, no matter how thin — and important — it was.

Besides, I had a feeling we wouldn't be able to get a hold on a condom right now anyway. Edward wasn't carrying that stuff around anymore. He didn't expect casual sex like he had in the past.

He was my Edward now, and my Edward didn't do casual sex with random people.

He didn't have sex anymore. He made love. *With me* .

When I felt him ease into me, I automatically tensed. The feeling of him filling me was nothing like anything I'd felt before. I was too busy thinking and focusing on that feeling alone, that the slight pain that followed was easily ignored.

It wasn't as bad as I thought it would be.

Did it hurt? I guess, but it was manageable. The foreign feeling of him being inside of me was something else entirely, and more worthy of my focus than the slight pain.

I couldn't decide if I liked it or not. It was... different.

Soon, he started moving his hips back and forth, and with every thrust, a weird noise escaped me. I tried to stifle the moan-like noises, but it was impossible. I made them whether I liked it or not.

I wasn't the only one making weird noises, Edward was too.

For some reason I found his noises to be... hot. I couldn't describe them, really. They were just noises — but noises of pure need and pleasure. He was making these noises because of *me* . Just like I was making these noises because of *him* .

I closed my eyes, letting all feelings and sensation just wash over me. I just wanted to feel everything he was doing to me. The feeling of him filling me was still unnerving and different, but I think I liked it. Didn't I?

It was too foreign — too new — for me to be sure.

Edward started moving faster, and I found myself trying to meet his thrusts by moving my hips. He started panting faster and faster, as he put more force behind each thrust.

Soon a strangled moan escaped him, along with a bunch of strangled profanities and a plea for God. His movements slowed down, until he wasn't moving at all. Then he had to prop his body up on his elbows, on either side of me, to keep from crushing me.

He was panting heavily as he met my gaze through heavy lids.

Adoration .

That was the only word that came to mind when I tried to describe the look in his eyes.

"Thank you," he said, huskily and breathless.

I smiled at him in amusement

"You're welcome," I replied quietly.

He inhaled deeply, chuckling as he exhaled.

He kissed me softly and I all but purred in contentment.

He moved to lie down next to me, propping his head up on his hand. He slowly stroked my stomach while looking at me.

"Did it hurt?" he asked softly.

I shook my head. "No, it wasn't as bad as I'd expected. It was... fine."

"I didn't rock your world, did I?" he asked, sounding both amused and somewhat bothered.

"What do you mean?"

He rolled his eyes with a smile. "I didn't make you *come* ," he clarified.

Of all the things we had done, *this* was the thing to make me blush. I covered my face in my hands to hide it, and he laughed quietly as he pulled my hands away.

"Sparrow, c'mon," he said gently. I refused to meet his gaze, as my face was still on fire. "Let me do this for you," he continued, letting his hand move slowly over my breasts, down my stomach and to my...

"God," I gasped as he touched me.

He let his fingers slid up and down my slit a few times, before he palmed me there. When he inserted two of his fingers in me, moving

them in and out, I couldn't decide which I had enjoyed more. His fingers or his... *penis* . While the latter had felt foreign, his fingers felt nice from the beginning.

His thumb moved over a more sensitive spot and I shuddered at the sensation that followed. I closed my eyes, letting him take over completely. If this was what he wanted to do, then who was I to deny him?

As his hand continued its ministrations, I found myself rocking with the motions. It felt like my body was seeking for something but it had no idea what it was. Edward nibbled on my neck as he moved his fingers faster.

My breathing became labored, and there was a weird feeling building up inside of me.

What the hell was it? I had never felt anything like it.

Was this... was this... was this...?

"E-Edward..." I managed to moan out before I was thrown off the cliff.

Explosions. Fireworks. A freaking earthquake.

Suddenly I understood what all those people were talking about. This was intense. So very intense. Every fiber of my being was tense for a second, completely overtaken by the sensation before every atom relaxed at the same time, and I became nothing but putty.

I had no bones left in my body. I was completely limp.

I hadn't even noticed I had squeezed my eyes shut.

I took a moment to get my breathing under control, and once I did, I opened my eyes again. I couldn't help but smile, and I had to bit my lip to keep the smile from breaking my face.

I was happy. *I was so freaking happy .*

"The pleasure *is* for the girl," I murmured in conclusion, a surprised giggle to my voice.

"No, Sparrow," Edward said, kissing my neck again before looking up at me with so much love in his eyes. "Pleasure is for *you* ."

Close, part 2

Disclaimer: I don't own these characters, I just play with them. This story is rated M, and is not suitable for younger readers. Story contains violence, coarse language and sexual "situations". Please do not read if any of these things offends you.

Note: [Unbeta'ed! – *all errors are mine*]

Chapter 56, "Close, part 2"

Isabella Swan POV

It had been a week since I lost my virginity to Edward, and I still hadn't freaked out about it. I smiled sadly to myself. *Lost* . It was such a weird way of putting it. It didn't fit with how I felt. I didn't *lose* my virginity – I *gave* it to him. I had lost many things during these past few months, but my virginity was not one of them.

I remembered the morning after so well, how carefree he had been. So relaxed and playful, like there was nothing that could ever bring him down. Maybe it was because we were still trapped in our wonderful bubble. The outside world didn't exist yet.

I had woken up by the feeling of Edward breathing deeply in my ear. I had yawned and snuggled him closer. He already had his arms around me, and his grip tightened around my waist. I had been amazed that I could be this close to him – without clothes – without freaking out. Why did it feel like the most natural thing in the world?

I saw how Edward smiled in his sleep, before he made a clucking noise with his tongue, indicating that he was indeed awake.

"Did I dream last night... or are you asking for seconds?" he asked, his voice hoarse from sleep, and his eyes still closed. He had never looked or sounded more smug.

"Shush you," I mumbled, burying my face in his naked chest, and it vibrated as he chuckled.

"You know what this means, right?" he asked then. I frowned and looked up at him.

"No, what?"

"I have to break up with you." He said it so seriously that if I hadn't known him as well as I did, I would have thought he was being sincere. I decided to play along.

"Yes, of course. You can't be with the same girl twice, that's unheard of."

He nodded. "Exactly. So while last night was fun, I think this is as far as we'll go."

"Yeah, you're totally right. I mean, you finally got the goose to give it up, so why else would you stay with her?"

He opened his mouth, and I was prepared for another joke, but instead there was none. He frowned deeply.

"I have *fucking* asked you to stop calling yourself that," he said, sounding annoyed and – dare I say it? – a little wounded. I sighed, kissing his naked chest.

"Sorry, it just slipped out," I mumbled. "Old habits die hard, you know?"

"Yes, I know," he replied, grabbing my chin to tilt my head up. "But since we're obviously trying out new habits... wanna revisit last night?" I bit my lip, shaking my head. "Why?" he asked. "Was it... you know... not... eh... I thought you said it was... eh... you know... satisfactory?" he rambled. I smiled at his obvious discomfort, kissing him softly to ease his worries.

"It was more than satisfactory, thank you," I replied softly. "But I don't think I'm ready to do it again so soon. Give a girl a chance to get used to the idea that she's no longer..."

"A virgin?" he asked, ending my sentence.

"I was going to say pure, but yeah, your word works too," I replied somberly. He frowned again.

"You're not going to freak out on me, will you?" he asked. "You won't obsess over the fact that you're no longer pure, and start to think you're dirty or something... because you're not. You're not dirty, and there is nothing wrong with what we did."

I put a hand to his chest, smiling as I shook my head. "Don't worry, Edward. I won't freak out. I just need some time to adjust to the idea is all. I don't regret what we did at all, I promise. I'll be fine."

"Good, or else I would have to kick your ass."

I laughed. "Maybe you can kiss it instead?" I joked.

"Don't mind if I do," he replied, before quickly getting under the covers. I hadn't meant it literally, and I laughed loudly as I felt his lips on my naked butt cheek. At first, he was attacking my skin with quick kisses, but after a while, they started turning softer and slower. I hummed in response as I practically melted into the mattress.

I should have known better than to relax though, because at that moment there was a quick knock on the door before it opened.

"Bella, are you ok-" Kate trailed off when she took in the scene. Her eyes growing wide as saucers. Mine did as well. I felt like a deer caught in the headlight – why did this feel so familiar? Kate let her eyes sweep over the room – noticing the clothes thrown on the floor – before looking back at me, with Edward still under the covers. He was completely still now, probably too afraid to come up for air.

I bit my lip and pulled at the covers a little bit, even though I was covered already. At least I wasn't showing her any nakedness – *that* would have been embarrassing.

"Eh... good morning?" I said, trying to break the tension.

Edward snorted against my skin, but he was still in hiding.

Kate narrowed her eyes at his form, then at me.

"Bella, what *are* you doing?" she asked, her voice soft and a little exasperated.

"I'm... we're... eh... we fell asleep."

"Yeah, I can see that," she replied. "Good thing you managed to get *all* your clothes off before you did." She kicked his underwear to make her point and I giggled in embarrassment.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled.

She looked at me, quirking an eyebrow. " *Are* you?" she asked.

Another giggle escaped me, as Edward bit the inside of my thigh. "No," I replied honestly.

"Didn't think so," Kate replied with a sigh. "Very well then, I guess you and I will be having a talk about this later. There is breakfast in the kitchen when you're done here." And with that, she left. As soon as the door closed, Edward came back up.

"You suck!" I complained to him. "Why didn't you save me? That was mortifying!"

"If she saw me she might have told my parents, and my mom would have kicked my ass," he replied.

I looked at him incredulously. "Are you saying she didn't already know you were the guy in my bed? How many guys do you think she

has caught me with? Seriously, what am I?"

"A grilled chicken sandwich," he'd replied, attacking my face with kisses.

I bit my lip to keep from smiling at the memory. Edward had been wonderful. Anyone would have assumed he would have nailed and bailed, but he didn't. He stayed with me. He even had breakfast with me, and let Kate drive us to school – we didn't even care that we ended up being two hours late.

I tried to shake my head free from the memories, and focus on the task at hand.

"Are you finding anything?" Kate asked, stepping up to me. "This one is nice, isn't it?" she said, pointing on the picture on the display. I shook my head.

"I don't think I can do this... it's wrong. I'm not the one to pick this out," I replied.

Kate sighed. "You know you don't have to do this. We could go with the standard color and scheme. I just thought it would be a good way for you to gain some closure."

I didn't reply. I knew what she meant. She wasn't the only one thinking this would help me to end this chapter in my life; my shrink did too.

I walked around the room, looking at the various coffins in various colors. There was even one in marine blue. I suppose that was a fitting choice for a sailor or something. But my dad hadn't been a sailor, and even though he had gone fishing a lot, I didn't think a marine colored coffin would be fitting. I didn't even know *what* would be fitting. My mom would have known. She should be the one picking out the coffin, the flowers and arrange the funeral. She was the reason he ended up in one of these wooden boxes in the first place.

While I understood why my shrink and Kate thought this process would be beneficial for me, I still couldn't find it in me to care. I just didn't care about the color or material of the coffin. I didn't care about the flowers. I didn't care about the church or who would be making speeches. I simply did not care, because I didn't care that my father was dead.

Which was an issue all on its own.

"I don't care," I whispered. "Just go with the standard. I just don't care."

I left the funeral parlor before Kate had a time to respond, and quickly made my way over to the parking lot. I leaned back against the car door, rubbing my eyes with the heels of my hands.

"Bella!"

I looked up, and found Alice and Rosalie walking toward me. Alice's hands were full with various bags from different shops, while Rosalie only had one.

"Hi, guys," I replied weakly.

"What are you doing here? I thought Edward was supposed to be back today?" Alice said.

Edward had been in Seattle for two days, he and his mom had gone to a special clinic to talk to someone about his fear of driving. They weren't expecting any miracles, but it couldn't hurt to go. So they went, and I was waiting anxiously for him to get back. I hated the timing of it all. Why did he have to leave for Seattle when I was expected to plan a funeral?

"Yeah, I think he's coming in this evening," I replied.

"Wanna hang out with us until then? We're just finishing up some shopping, and then we're heading back to Forks," Alice said.

"I don't know, I'm kinda busy," I mumbled.

Rosalie sighed loudly. "Geez, Swan. If you don't want to hang out with us just say so, there's no need to be dodgy," she said, getting straight to the point as usual.

I turned to glare at her. No wonder she got on Edward's nerves.

"Excuse me, but I'm *busy* , meaning I'm supposed to plan my dad's funeral today. So jump off your damn high horse and stop being such a bitch, not everything is about you," I snapped. I squeezed my eyes shut, pinching the bridge of my nose to calm down – a habit I had inadvertently caught from Edward.

"Oh, well... okay," she said, a little stunned. Then after a moment, the words I never thought I would hear from her were spoken. "I'm sorry."

I looked up at her in surprise, and even Alice looked a little baffled.

"Thanks," I said, a little confused.

She smiled awkwardly. "I mean, it could have been me too, you know? Having to help my parents pick out stuff for... Jasper's funeral."

I swallowed thickly, not wanting to be reminded of the fact that I was the reason Jasper almost lost his life too. Even though I knew that I was the only one who felt that way. Nobody blamed me for what happened to him, it wasn't my fault that Jacob pulled a gun on him. If anything, it was Edward's fault for not keeping his mouth shut. Or so I'd been told.

In the end, playing the blame game would benefit no one. How could you win when your opponents were crazy? This was all my mother's, Jacob's and Phil's fault. Nobody else's.

"It's okay," I said weakly.

"Well, we were thinking of having a girls' night tomorrow at my house. You know manis and pedis, buckets of ice cream, makeovers and the whole nine yards. Wanna come?" Alice asked, changing to a lighter topic.

"Yeah, sure, why not," I replied, shrugging.

"Great! It's going to be so much fun," she said, bouncing a little where she stood. I smiled at her – at least she was *trying* not to bounce all over the place like a five year old on crack. Also, she was trying not to be pushy with me, which I knew was an effort for her. Jasper had told me repeatedly that Alice really wanted to make our new group work, and making me just as big a part of it like everyone else. Apparently, it took a lot of effort on her part not to drag me off and give me a makeover right away, and trying to justify it as a reason to getting to know each other.

Alice was one of a kind; that was for sure.

I had also come to realize that I didn't mind it much either. Of course, I would always hold a small grudge against all of them for not supporting Edward back when he had no one, but I also knew that the past didn't matter. We all made mistakes. The fact that they were all trying hard to make it up to Edward spoke volumes about how much they really cared about him. The fact that they all genuinely wanted me to be a part of the group made it difficult to hold a grudge. They were really trying, and I wasn't doing anyone any favors by turning them down. I wanted them as my friends. I wanted to be a part of Edward's world.

They were alright.

Even Rosalie.

In fact, I think I liked Rosalie more than Alice, for the sole reason that she spoke her mind and didn't beat around the bush – and not in a mean way. It was refreshing. It was easy to be honest with her, because you knew she would be honest in return. Alice was still too

afraid to speak freely around me, in fear that she would hurt my feelings. But eventually, I was sure that even that would pass.

"Anyway, we should go. I need to hit a few more shops before we leave. Talk to you later, B," Alice said, blowing me an air-kiss. I laughed and gave her a weak finger wave, before they turned around and left.

I was oddly enough looking forward to tomorrow.

Isabella Swan attending a "girls' night" with Rosalie Hale-Whitlock and Alice Brandon of all people. Yeah, now I had lived to see everything.

"... and this was taken when we visited family in Chicago when Edward was five. Look at that butt! He was obsessed with his penis even then," Emmett explained, in a story-telling voice, as he showed me old baby-pictures of Edward. I laughed and smiled at the naked five-year-old Edward.

Kate had let me borrow her car, so I could drive to Forks to see Edward when he got home. Unfortunately, Edward and his mom had gotten stuck in traffic on the way out of Seattle, because of roadwork, so they hadn't arrived yet. This left me killing some time with Emmett until they arrived.

I didn't mind, because Emmett was hilarious – almost as hilarious as pictures of a naked five-year-old Edward, grabbing his small penis.

"I hope it grew out alright," Emmett mused, still with that ridiculous voice. He glanced at me. "I mean, I doubt *that* little wiener could do much to satisfy a woman." He wiggled his eyebrows and I giggled.

"It grew out just fine," I replied – before slapping my hand to my mouth as I realized what I just said. Emmett looked at me in surprise.

"No!" he said, his eyes wide and his mouth forming a perfect O.

"What's on the next page?" I asked, trying to steer the conversation back to the pictures. He slapped my hand away as I tried to turn the page.

"Nuh-uh, girlfriend. Spill it. Did you sleep with my baby bro?" he asked.

"I fail to see how that is any of your business," I replied awkwardly as I avoided his gaze at all cost.

"You did! Oh my God!" he exclaimed. He slapped the photo album closed and put it on the coffee table in front of us. He then clasped both of my hands in his. "Tell me *everything* !" he said excitedly. I looked at him for a moment before I burst into a fit of laughter.

"You sound like such a girl," I managed to croak.

Emmett frowned, pouting a little.

"Was he good?" he asked. I sighed, smiling at how childlike he was sometimes.

"Yes."

"And he wasn't an ass about it, was he?"

"No."

"Promise?"

"Yes. Edward was the perfect gentleman. It was perfect."

"And you're still together?"

"Yes."

"Wow... my baby bro really *has* changed," he concluded in awe.

"This is news to you?" I asked.

"No, but it's nice getting proof every now and again, you know?" Emmett replied, with a light shrug.

"I suppose you're right," I replied.

The sound of a car driving on gravel caught my attention, and Emmett sighed.

"I guess my time with you is up," he said in a way that made you think he just lost his puppy.

I patted his leg as I got up. "Don't worry, Brother Bear, there's always tomorrow."

He grinned at the nickname and I couldn't help but smile in response. The Brother Bear thing was a thing we shared now; it felt nice.

I walked to the front door, just as Edward walked in. He looked at me in surprise before stepping over to me, pulling me into a hug.

"God, I missed you," I murmured as he snuggled his face into my hair, and kissing my neck.

"I missed you too," I replied, wrapping my arms around his neck.

We stood like that for a few moments, finally feeling at peace. I hated being away from him.

"How was Seattle?" I asked when I pulled away.

"It was... fine," he replied reluctantly.

"Did it help at all?" I asked. "Did you learn anything new?"

He smiled crookedly, raising his hand to tuck my hair behind my ear.

"I don't know yet," he replied. "How did the funeral planning go today?"

I wrinkled my nose, shaking my head. "Craptastic. I went to the funeral parlor with Kate, but I knew from the moment I stepped my foot inside the place that I didn't want to be involved. I don't want to pick anything out, so I told her to go with the standard schemes. I really don't care."

"Are you bailing on the funeral too?" he asked.

I shook my head. "No, I need to say goodbye. Even though I don't care now, I would regret not going."

"I think that's good. Picking out the coffin won't matter in the long run, but not saying goodbye will hunt you forever," he said.

"Alice and Rosalie want me to have a girls' night with them tomorrow," I said, changing the subject. Edward laughed.

"Now, *that* will hunt you for a life time."

"Watch your mouth, or else I'll borrow your mom's nail polish and then practice my skills on *you* ."

"You wouldn't."

I chuckled darkly, giving him a challenging look.

"Oh yes, Mr. Cullen, I would."

I hugged my knees as Alice worked on my toes, painting them a brilliant shade of red. Rosalie was drinking wine and flipping through a magazine. Alice's parents were gone for the weekend and it was just us girls in the house.

Some random chick flick was playing on the TV – but it was muted so we could hear the music that was playing on the fancy stereo.

Conversation was not as awkward and stilted as I thought it would be. It was actually quite comfortable. I didn't feel weird in their

presence, and when they asked me stuff, they did it because they wanted to know, and not because they had to.

They were my friends now... sort of.

"So I overheard Tanya talking to Lauren in the girls' bathroom today," Rosalie said.

"Yeah? Did they compare botched nose jobs?" Alice quipped.

"Actually, no. They were discussing Bella," she replied, putting down the magazine and turning to us.

"What about me?" I asked.

"Well, Tanya is trying to spread some rumors that you are paying Edward to date you, or something like that. Apparently, there's money involved anyway, because according to Tanya you inherited some money when your dad died, and you're using that money to keep Edward in your life."

"That's crazy!" Alice exclaimed in annoyance, staining my skin red as she missed the nail. She gave me an apologetic smile and grabbed a Q-tip from the table, putting some nail polish remover on it.

"Yeah, that's what I told her when I left the stall. I asked her how much Bella was paying him, and how much she was paying us, because why would Edward be the only one getting paid since we're all hanging out with her and giving her some damn worth in that school?"

"You didn't! What did she say?" Alice asked.

"She had no answer for that, so I asked her why she was being such a jealous and petty bitch. I asked what Bella ever did to her, and why they can't just give her a damn break," Rosalie said, shaking her head. "Seriously, sometimes I wonder if all those chemicals used to bleach her hair have damaged her brain."

"I wish I had my crutches... so I could hit her again," I mumbled without thinking.

Rosalie laughed, nodding in appreciation. "I do too, Swan. I do too. But luckily, I also have nails. Long, sharp nails that would create a disaster if they ever connected to that bitch's face. Just give me the word, and I'll do it. Nobody messes with my friends."

I smiled at her. "Friends, huh?" I said.

She smiled wryly, nodding. "Yes, *friends* ."

"Yay!" Alice exclaimed, ruining another toe when she bounced in her seat. "We can triple date *all the time* now! This is going to be so awesome. No fifth wheel. Everyone has someone."

"Actually, Ali," Rosalie began. "I was thinking of replacing you. Bella is not as... exuberant as you are, and I need someone quiet to hang out with. You're too much. Where do you get your energy anyway? Do you grind up hyperactive children, and drink them as smoothies?"

"Hardy har har, Ice Queen," Alice muttered. "What about Jasper? Are you replacing him too?"

"If you do, I'm out," I interjected. "I like Jasper. He keeps Edward level."

Soon, we were thrown into a discussion of whom we couldn't cut out and why, which led us to a discussion about which people in school we wanted to cut out and why. We laughed, we cried and then we laughed some more. I hadn't laughed so much in a very long time – if ever. Rosalie had a wicked sense of humor, when given the opportunity to show it. She was also the perfect girl for Emmett. She was a real Mama Bear. She was fiercely protective of her friends – which now included me. I knew that I would never have to worry about petty girls like Tanya again.

There was no doubt in my mind that Rosalie would make good on her promise to rip her face off if given the chance. Tanya might be popular, but she didn't hold a candle to Rosalie.

Around two in the morning, when Alice had passed out on the couch, Rosalie and I were still awake.

"Thank you, Rosalie," I said.

"For what?"

"For accepting me, and for not making a big deal out of it."

"I have a feeling my brother and my boyfriend would have made life really hard for me if I didn't. I figured it would happen eventually anyway, so why not cut the crap and get on with it."

"Why would Jasper and Emmett make your life hard?"

"Because my dear brother already loves you like a sister. He absolutely adores you for what you did for Edward. None of us thought we would see the day where the guy actually grew a big enough heart to love someone apart from himself. You changed him for the better, and we're all very grateful... yes, I won't lie to you. When I found you and Edward making out on the couch in our basement, I thought you were both smoking crack... or maybe I was the one smoking crack, because in what reality did that sight make sense?" She laughed at herself, shaking her head at the memory. I smiled too as I remembered how horrified I had been when she caught us. "Still, back then it didn't make sense... but now, it does. It makes perfect sense."

"You think?"

"Yeah, I do. Edward has never looked at someone the way he looks at you, and the way he keeps stealing touches when he thinks nobody notices. I mean, c'mon. Emmett doesn't even do that, and I swear to God he never looks at me with the same intensity as

Edward looks at you. And the necklace he got you? I mean, if I had known Edward had it in him, I might have gone after him instead of Emmett," she joked.

"Edward is perfect with all his imperfections."

"I'm sure he is, but to me he will always be the Douchebag. That will never change."

"And you will always be the Ice Queen to him, so I guess it evens it out."

She nodded.

"We all have your backs now," she said, her tone softer now.
"Emmett, Jasper, Alice, and myself. We take care of each other, and that includes you now. So if anyone ever gives you crap, let us now and we'll deal with it."

"Who says I can't deal with it on my own?" I asked, quirking an eyebrow. "The fact that Tanya thinks she needs to spread rumors about me to win, proves how desperate she is. She must see how serious Edward and I are, why else would she be so relentless about it? If she really believed all the crap she's spreading, then she wouldn't have to do anything but wait it out."

Rosalie smirked. "Touché."

"Still, if she takes it too far, feel free to claw her face for me. I don't think I have the nails for it."

Rosalie laughed and drank the last of her wine.

"Consider it a done deal, Swan."

I took a hesitant step forward, putting my hand down on the smooth surface. The coffin was so generic. It was impossible to tell who was

lying in it. There were no signs that suggested that it was *my* father who lied in it.

There were flowers on and around it. All were standard choices for a funeral. Many of them had cards that said, "We'll miss you, Chief." I guess the people at the station still hadn't realized what a failure of a man my dad had been. They still thought he was a hero.

"Are you okay?"

I turned my gaze up, spotting Edward standing halfway down the aisle. I smiled weakly.

"I've been better," I replied honestly.

He frowned, clasping his hands in front of him. He looked so dapper in his suit. I had never seen him dressed up before. It wasn't a fancy suit by any means, but it was still appropriate for the occasion. I was surprised that he made the decision to dress up. I had nothing to do with it.

I was dressed in a simple black button up shirt, and black dress-pants that I had borrowed from Esme. I had added a blue brooch to my shirt, to add some color. It was a gift from Esme and Carlisle – yes, I was calling him *Carlisle* now.

The brooch brought reminded me that not all was black – especially since I had wanted to wear white to the funeral. But I didn't, obviously, since I knew it would have been inappropriate. People didn't know the whole story; people didn't know how much my father had hurt me. They didn't need to know that I didn't mourn his death in the way they were expecting me to.

In a way, I wasn't mourning him at all. I just needed closure.

"Do you think he's in heaven or hell?" I asked, glancing at Edward.

He tilted his head a little to the side, pondering my question for a moment.

"I think he's in limbo. I think his soul has a crap-ton of baggage to deal with before he can enter either place," he replied. "Heaven doesn't want him for what he did to you, but Hell doesn't want him either because he tried to make it right in the end... despite the fact that he failed miserably."

I nodded softly, looking back at the coffin. Edward was right. My dad was in limbo. Only he could save himself now from eternal damnation.

"You *fucked* up, Dad," I told the coffin quietly. "You fucked up real bad. I will never forgive you for what you did... or didn't do. But that's okay. I don't need to forgive you. My forgiveness means nothing to you now. My forgiveness never meant anything. The only person I have to forgive is myself. I need to forgive myself for not fighting harder, for not talking sooner and for not getting help. I need to forgive myself for what I did to myself after what happened. That's all I need to do, and I'm doing it. I'm forgiving myself."

I sighed deeply, looking back at Edward. He was smiling softly at me, hearing every word I said. I turned back to the coffin.

"I'm opening up to someone who loves me unconditionally. Someone who puts me first and beyond everyone and everything else. I love him, and it's thanks to him that I got this far. Without him, I would be the one in this coffin," I said quietly. "Being with him, I can understand why you put Mom first. Why she was your priority. But... but despite the love I feel for Edward, I will never understand how you could turn your back on me like that. How could I not be more important to you? How could you toss me aside so easily?" I shook my head. "You know what? It doesn't matter. You were who you were, you made the decisions that led you here. Now you have to pay for it. I don't have to learn from your mistakes, because I know I would never make them in the first place."

I took a step back, my hand leaving the smooth surface. I took a deep breath, holding it for a moment before breathing out.

"I'm forgiving myself," I said again, with more conviction.

I stepped down to where Edward was waiting for me, and he held out a hand for me to take. He squeezed my hand as he pressed his lips against my hair.

"I love you," he murmured.

"I love you too," I replied.

"I will never make you chose between your kids and me. Remember, the kid will always come first in every damn situation, okay? Our daughter will never ever have to doubt our fucking love for her, you got that?" he said, almost as if he had to convince me of the fact.

I put my free hand on his stomach, smiling up at him.

"Edward... are you pregnant?" I asked.

He rolled his eyes.

"No, but if I have my way, one of these days you'll be. I will knock you up so hard you will need a wheelchair," he replied.

"I'm not sure I even want kids... not anytime soon anyway. I don't think I have it in me to be a mother."

"I'm not saying we'll have kids today, or tomorrow... fuck, my mom would kill me if I had a kid before I finished college and all that crap," he said, rolling his eyes. I snorted at the irony. His mother would kill him if he had a *kid* before an education – my mother literally almost killed me because she thought I'd had sex before marriage. It's funny how that works.

"Well, I'm sure we need a lot of practice anyhow, right?" I said, biting my lip as I blushed.

Edward smirked.

"Wow, Sparrow, are you telling me you want me to rock your world again?" he asked.

"You already are," I replied, meeting his lips with mine.

It was a surprising amount of people who attended the funeral. It felt like almost everyone from Forks was there – as well as the better part of Port Angeles. I never knew my dad had made so many friends through his job – I didn't recognize any of these people as friends of his.

I wasn't ready to enter the church just yet, so I stood with Edward by the empty grave that soon would be my dad's final resting place. Edward had his arm around my waist, holding me to him. I braided our fingers together, where he held his hand on my stomach.

"What happens now, you think?" I asked.

"Life," he replied without a moment's hesitation. "Fucking life happens now. This is just the end of a chapter... no, this is the end of the damn story. We're entering an entirely new story now."

"Who knew you could be so deep?" I mused, leaning back against him.

He took a step so he could wrap both his arms around me from behind, and resting his cheek against the side of my head.

"Will we be okay?" I asked, turning my head to look up at him.

"We'll be fucking perfect, Sparrow. Nothing can touch us now."

I nodded. I was confident in the fact that I would be okay. If I had Edward – I had everything. I would be okay.

Edward stiffened in my arms as he looked at something in the distance. I followed his gaze and I froze too. A few people from La Push were standing by the gate to the graveyard, looking at us. They looked a little uncomfortable, probably wondering if they should approach me or not. When I studied them, I realized they weren't very old – actually, they all seemed to be in their twenties.

Eventually, one of the guys stepped forward and walked over to us. Edward's grip on me tightened, and I didn't object.

"I am so sorry for your loss," the guy said when he reached us, and I vaguely recognized his voice. I noticed that the others were slowly making their way toward us as well.

"I'm not," I replied, frowning a little.

The guy held out his hand.

"I'm Paul," he said.

For some reason, his name made me relax. I knew who this guy was. He was there the night of the ceremony. He was one of the guys who saved me.

"Hi, Paul," I said, nodding with a small smile.

"My friends and I are just here to give our condolences. Your father was a good man, and he was well respected on the rez. We're sorry for everything that has happened, and what you were put through because of the Blacks. You were never meant to be a part of it," he explained, sounding regretful.

"Well, she was," Edward cut in. "And what the fuck for?"

He held me even tighter against his chest.

Paul looked up to meet Edward's gaze. "The legend spoke of the daughter of the Wise One, a girl who was supposed to be coming from the family of the Swan, wearing feathers which were not her

own. The Uleys and the Blacks were convinced the legend was speaking of Bella, mostly because Dwyer put that idea in their head. When Renée was told, that was when everything went to hell. Even if the legend had been speaking of Bella, it wouldn't have mattered. If the girl – or the guy for that matter – doesn't *want* to fulfill the prophecy and the legend that's the first sign that it's not supposed to be. Free will is the most important thing."

A girl – no, a *woman* – stepped up next to him, hugging his arm; she looked a little older than Paul, maybe she was in her late twenties, and she had a friendly face.

"The rest of the tribe was being kept in the dark; we were under the impression that Bella wanted this just as much as Jacob did. We supported him, of course. We want nothing but happiness for our tribe, but not at the expense of someone else. When it became known that the Black's were planning to put Bella through a cleansing ritual to make her pure, as well as kidnapping her, it became clear this was not mutual. That was also when Leah showed everyone the research she had done, making it clear that the legends never speak of anyone outside the tribe. Bella couldn't be the daughter of the Wise One, because she's not a Quileute," she explained.

"So, what happens now?" I asked. "Will you still pretend like your legends are real?"

The woman smiled. "They *are* real, sweetie," she said. "The legends are what brought me and Paul together. We had our firstborn daughter on the same night as the prophecy said. The legend told us that we would have our child the day after the sky had exploded, and we had our daughter on New Year's Day. See, they *are* real, as long as the right people are involved."

"Some people in our tribe will always take them more seriously than others, of course," Paul said. "But that doesn't mean we're going to hurt innocent people. We will never force anyone into something they don't want. We don't want a repeat of this."

"Good to know," Edward replied with a snort.

Paul turned his eyes back to me. "Bella, I apologize for everything we have put you through. Even though we didn't know how the situation was progressing, we still should have questioned it. The fact that you were never on the reservation after that first ritual went wrong at your house, should have been enough of a warning for us. We should have stepped in, and we are deeply sorry that we didn't."

I just nodded. I had nothing else to say.

"I guess we'll be leaving you now, we just wanted to pay our respects," Paul added.

"You can stay for the ceremony if you want to," I offered quietly.

"Thank you," he said, nodding. He turned around, walking back to the church with the rest of his crew, with the woman still hugging his arm.

"Hey, Paul?" I called, remembering something.

He stopped and turned around. "Yeah?" he replied.

"Whatever happened to Billy?" I asked. "From what I hear, the feds never got to him."

Paul smirked in a dark, but somewhat amused, way.

"We dealt with it," he replied after a moment.

"Which means?" I prodded.

"That we dealt with it. You have nothing to worry about," he replied.

"Do you think they killed him?" I asked Edward, when they were out of earshot.

"They are sick bastards," he replied. "I wouldn't be surprised if 'dealt with' means cutting him into pieces and making bread out of him or some shit. Either way, I'm sure he got what he deserved. Even if the guy is still out and about, what the fuck can he do? He's in a wheelchair for crying out loud. What's he going to do with you anyway? His son is gone, his accomplices are behind bars... he has nothing left. That bastard will suffer and die alone, if he's not dead already."

I sighed and smiled wistfully to myself. Edward was so angry about the whole thing, while I was just... over it. I didn't care much about being reminded of what happened. I just wanted to move forward.

"I think I'm ready to say goodbye now," I said, looking down at the grave. "I'm ready to close this chapter of my life."

He kissed the top of my head, before letting me go. He stepped up beside me and took my hand as we walked toward the church where everyone was waiting.

"Do you remember what you told me that night, when I asked you what you would choose, if you could choose anything in this fucked up world to have, what it would be?" he asked me.

I looked up at him, shaking my head.

"No, I don't remember," I replied.

He smiled down at me. "You said all you ever wanted was to be loved."

"Oh , *that* ," I said, blushing.

"Yes, *that* . So now that you finally have that, what will you do?"

I stopped, making him turn to me. I then smiled.

"I will do anything. I will go to college, get a degree, I will bungee-jump, I will swim with the dolphins, I will sleep under the stars, I will

travel to Europe, I will learn Japanese."

Edward smiled.

"Sounds like a plan, Sparrow. Am I allowed to join?" he asked.

"Yes, I can't imagine doing any of those things without you. You know what else?"

"No, what?"

"I will always love you."

"Sounds like an even better plan, since I'll always love you too."

He leaned in to kiss me, and just as his lips were about to touch mine there was a voice interrupting us.

"Hey, guys, the ceremony is about to start, and seriously, bro, did you lose your balls before or after she told you she loved you?" Emmett asked. Edward and I both turned our heads toward him, where he was waiting by the gate – also looking dapper in his suit. I smiled at Emmett.

"He didn't lose his balls, they are thoroughly attached to his body, thank you very much," I told him.

"You would know, now, wouldn't you, Sparrow?" Edward teased. I felt my face flush a brilliant shade of red, and Emmett's booming laugh echoed through the graveyard.

"You really shouldn't have said that," I warned Edward.

He smirked. "What are you going to do about it?"

"You'll see."

He quirked an eyebrow at me, expecting me to elaborate, but I just laughed and continued my way toward Emmett.

I put my hand in my pocket, fingering the corner of the envelope. I had been carrying around Jacob's letter for a few days, trying to decide what to do with it. I didn't want to read it. Since I didn't want to talk to him – why would I want to read his damn letter? What difference would it make? Jacob was a closed chapter in my life, and reading this letter would not benefit me in the slightest.

I guess that was why I took it with me today. I was going to bury the letter with my father. That way, I would be burying Jacob. It made more sense that way than just throwing the letter out.

I had been right.

This was not the end – this wasn't even the beginning.

It didn't matter what it was.

All I had was now.

Edward was biting furiously on his thumbnail – or what was left of it. I sat on the steps, watching him as he watched his car. He walked around it, kicked one of the tires, while munching away on his thumbnail. This had been going on for almost forty-five minutes now. He had yet to utter a word.

It had taken him ten minutes to even enter the garage in the first place. I had leaned against the wall, while Edward had clenched and unclenched his fists at his sides. He had stared at the door as if it was silently insulting him. I suppose I could understand why he would feel that way, since we both knew what was hiding behind said door.

But eventually, he got the courage and walked in. I had followed suit and sat down on the steps, waiting for him to do his thing. In therapy, they were focusing a lot on Edward's fear of driving. I didn't know if it was because Edward wanted it, or because the shrink thought it was a good place to start. As I watched Edward now, however, it was

clear that he was very intent on getting over this. He didn't even want to go out on another date with me until he had gotten over it.

Apparently, he wanted to do it the right way. He didn't want his girl to pick him up. It was all backwards, according to him. I didn't mind. I didn't need any dates, as long as I got to hang out with him. Dates were overrated – what could a date offer that I couldn't get with him at home anyway?

I crossed my arms over my chest, to keep myself from trying to reach out and touch him.

"We don't have to do this," I said eventually with a sigh.

He turned his head to me, furrowing his brows.

"Yes, we do," he replied, still nibbling on his thumbnail. It was starting to look disgusting.

"We have time. We don't need to rush it. Maybe today isn't the day."

He groaned and lifted his hands, dragging them a couple of times through his hair, before gripping tightly.

"I *can* fucking do this," he said, as if trying to convince himself.

I sighed. I wanted to reassure him, and tell him he could do it, but at the same time, I knew that this wasn't the day. This wasn't the day when all his issues would go away. This was an issue that needed time; this was too deeply rooted to be gone in one simple afternoon.

How did we even end up in the garage today? Well, after a very nice make out session in his room, he had become overly optimistic. He talked about how everything was finally starting to work out for us, and that was when he decided that he was going to take me out for a spin. He said he felt good, and that he thought that taking me out with his Volvo would be a non-issue. He was over it now, he said, since my cast was gone and could no longer remind him of it.

I guess my boy was wrong.

As soon as we had reached to the door that leads to the garage, he had stopped. Then, he just stared at it, while fighting an inner battle that I could not help him with.

"What's the worst thing that can happen?" I blurted, feeling frustrated with the entire situation. I was frustrated with his stubbornness and I was frustrated that I couldn't help him. Edward was just standing there – watching the car. I didn't know what he was thinking, so I didn't know where his mind was. I didn't know what we were supposed to do; all I knew was that staring at the car would get us nowhere.

He glanced at me briefly before staring at the car again. His hands were gripping his hair. I studied his face for a moment, wondering if I was maybe onto something...

"Tell me," I said. "Tell me what you think will happen if you were to actually get in behind the wheel of that car."

"Nothing will fucking happen," he muttered. "It's just a damn car."

"Exactly. So why aren't you opening the door... maybe sit down for a while?" I asked.

He didn't answer me – he didn't even acknowledge that he heard me. I sighed and stood up. I stepped over to him with confident steps. Although, my limp was kind of ruining the illusion.

I walked around the car, glancing back at Edward, before really giving the Volvo an onceover. I hadn't watched the car at all since we got in here – I had been too busy watching Edward.

The Volvo was spotless. There were no traces of the damage he had done to it after his freak out. I knew it had been bad, even though I had only heard about it and never seen the damage for myself. Whatever he had done – there were no traces of it. It was as if it

never happened. I vaguely realized that this car had been through quite a lot since the accident – especially considering Edward hadn't even driven it since.

It had been three months now. Three months since I had hit that windshield.

So much had happened since then.

Wow.

Three short months .

I stepped around the car, standing in front of it as I looked at the windshield again.

"Can you please step away from the car?" Edward asked quietly, with a sense of desperation to his voice. I looked up to find him standing by the driver's door, gazing at me with a vulnerable expression in his eyes.

"Why?" I asked him, not moving.

He made a weird twitchy motion with his head as he stepped toward me. He reached for my hand, and I took it, letting him pull me away. I thought he was just going to take me away from the car – but instead he wrapped his arms around me, crushing me to his chest.

He pressed his lips against the top of my head, and we stood there in silence for a moment before he spoke.

"Do you have flashes from that night?" he asked.

I shook my head. "No, I don't really think about it that much," I replied honestly. "Not about the accident itself anyway... I mostly think about what happened because of it." I pulled back so I could look up at him. "Why do you ask?"

"Because I do," he said with a sigh. "I have flashes. Mostly when I'm trying to sleep or something just reminds me of it... like right now, when you were standing in front of the car. I could literally see you get hit and smash into that fucking windshield..."

"Maybe this wasn't such a good idea," I mumbled.

"No, it wasn't," he agreed. "Let's go watch some fucking TV or something."

I nodded, waiting for him to turn toward the door, but he was still frozen in place. I looked up at him. He was staring longingly at the car; the pain was evident in his eyes. I couldn't even imagine how much he wanted to be able to drive again. This was hurting him so much.

"If I sit in the passenger seat, do you think that would help?" I asked quietly. "You don't seem to have that strong of a reaction when I'm *in* the car... you seem calmer. But then again, I don't know how you are when I'm not in the car, but still. I've noticed you seem to relax if I touch you..."

"You wanna touch me, Sparrow? We can go up to my room for that," he said, smiling crookedly as he tried to make the situation into a joke.

"Edward," I warned him.

"Fine," he sighed. "Let's get this shit over with."

I stepped away from him and to the passenger side, shooting him a glance before getting in. Edward looked at me through the windshield, and I tried to give him a reassuring smile.

"You know what happened last time I tried to do this... the last time I tried to just sit in the damn thing," he said.

I nodded. "I know, but you were alone then. You aren't now. If you freak out, I'll be able to calm you."

"How can you be so sure? What if I hit you or something?" he asked. "I smashed the damn car. How can you be so sure I won't smash you?"

"I can't be sure, but I trust you and that is all I have. So please, try. For me."

I wanted to kick myself for pushing him like this, but at the same time, I was only doing this for him. He needed a push, and he knew that just as well as I did. That was the only reason he didn't fight with me on this, because he knew I was just trying to help.

I reached over the center console to open the door for him, and he clenched his jaw as he stepped over to the door. He took a deep breath before getting in. It didn't escape my notice that he kept the door open. I decided to let that detail slide. *Baby-steps* .

As soon as he was behind the wheel, his entire posture changed drastically. I had never seen him so distraught before – even though I had seen him pretty damn upset before. His eyes were wide with panic and his breathing was shallow.

All this, because he was sitting in his car.

I did this to him. I didn't get out of the way, even though I had time, and because of that, Edward was now afraid of his own car. A car he used to cherish over all else in this world. This car was his baby, and because of me, he could barely look at it now.

I took his hand, holding it between us with both of mine. I was completely turned to him in the seat.

"I'm so, so sorry," I whispered, with tears only moments away from falling.

Edward relaxed infinitesimally at my touch, and he turned his head to me.

"What were you thinking when you saw the car coming toward you? What were you thinking?" he asked; it was clear that he struggled hard to keep his voice even.

"I thought that I was finally going to get the relief I'd been waiting for. I was finally going to get rid of the pain. I would finally get some peace," I replied.

"What was the last thing you remember thinking?"

" *Finally* ," I replied, with a sad smile. "I remember thinking 'Finally'."

"When I got out of the car, and found you seemingly dead on the road... all I could think about was how this was going to affect *me*. I didn't fucking care that you were dead, all I could think was that people would think that I was a murderer. I cared more about the rumors, than the fact that I had actually killed you. How messed up is that?" he asked.

"Not any more messed up than not getting out of the way even though you had time," I replied with a shrug. "We were both different people back then. We were both in dark places in our lives... different kind of darkness, maybe, but darkness just the same."

He took a shuddering breath, chuckling awkwardly.

"Are you saying I made you see the light? That's some good shit," he said.

"There was a light at the end of the tunnel, I just walked toward it. How was I supposed to know you were waiting for me at the other side?"

"Do you think we're dead?" he asked.

"Yeah, I think we are. I think we both died that night, and were reborn with the people we were supposed to be." I smiled and leaned my head back against the headrest. "Do you know why they call it soul mates?" He shook his head. "Because our souls recognize each other. They travel together from life to life, always searching for one another. Maybe that night was when our souls decided that enough was enough, and they wanted to get back together again. Our souls were trapped in the bodies of two people who couldn't be more wrong for each other, so destiny intervened and brought them together, by killing the people who hated each other, so they could be reborn in the same life into people who loved each other."

Edward smiled crookedly to himself, as he looked out the windshield.

"Soul mates," he echoed.

"You think it was too cheesy?" I asked, wrinkling my nose and smiling in amusement.

He shook his head and turned his gaze to me.

"No, I think that made perfect sense. We did die, only difference from normal death is that we didn't need a coffin."

"Do you think we will last? Do you think we'll last all through college?"

He nodded. "I do. Of all the fucking things, that's the one thing I am sure of. I love you. I can't imagine this feeling ever going away. I fucking fall in love with you more and more for each passing day. That shit will never stop."

We were quiet for a moment. Both taking in what's been said.

We were both still broken, and we would remain broken for a while. I wasn't going to get over the issues I had any easier than Edward was. Edward had a long way to go before he would be able to drive a car again, but it was okay. We had all the time in the world. He

didn't need to get over it tomorrow – or even next week. As long as he worked on it, he would be okay eventually. He was going to get all the time he needed. There was no rush.

As for me, I still had quite a few things to come to terms with, but I found it easier and easier to deal with each passing day. The fact that my mom wasn't going to come back for me was a huge help.

I didn't need to worry about looking over my shoulder, I didn't need to worry about being pure or clean, or whatever the hell my mother had expected of me. All I needed to be was me, because that was good enough.

I was good enough.

"I guess things are going to be kind of boring now, aren't they?" Edward asked eventually. "I mean, no batshit fucking crazy mothers running around, no threats of relocating my family to Chicago... It's just us now, and deal with whatever shit we have to deal with. So what do you want to do, Sparrow? What's next?"

I looked at him, smiling.

"I've chosen my life – now I want to start living it."

THE END

Outtakes

Outtakes

This is just an announcement about outtakes, feel free to ignore :)

I have started posting some outtakes from Hit By Destiny, and they are posted as a separate story, conveniently called "Hit By Destiny Outtakes," and you can find the link in my profile.

I currently have two outtakes posted, and I'm sure I'll be adding more when I get the time.

Direct link (remove spaces): **fanfiction . net / s / 6850378 / 1 / Hit_By_Destiny_outtakes**

Thank you for reading,

- *ocdmess*