



Disclaimer: SM owns Twilight, but this plot is mine

Written by CaraNo

Beta'd by HollettLA



1.

I listen to Alice; I really do.

"...and then he started talking about how much he had invested in our relationship. *I* was the one who brought good things into..."

But it's easy to tune out.

She makes it so incredibly hard for herself.

"...I got so mad, ya know? 'Cause he made me feel so fucking *cheap*..."

I sip my *Bella*. Vodka, Sprite, pear juice, and lime. Oh, yes. I have my own drink here at Click. It's our bar. Well, it's Demetri's bar, but it's our

hangout. Rose, Alice, and I meet up here a few times a week just to talk, talk, talk.

"...I mean, I'm a fucking catch, right? And then..."

I tilt my head a little, bringing back a few words...

Hmm.

The writer in me doesn't know when we're off the clock.

"...all about my assets. He's just not worth it..."

It's funny. I write about relationships for a living, but I refuse to be in one myself.

"...because I'm valuable..."

Instead, I often use Alice and Rose. They inspire me. I'm fascinated.

They're both so unlike me.

Maybe it's because I grew up without a female role model.

"...so, now I'm back on the market."

There it is again. Those words.

She's talking about what's supposed to be love.

But all I hear is "investing", "cheap", "assets", "worth", "market".

Aren't those words you find in that boring section... *what's it called?* Oh, right. Finances.

"You did a good thing, Alice," Rose says seriously, even nodding for emphasis. "Alec can rot in hell."

"I know," Alice huffs in return. "I want someone who doesn't see me as a fucking possession."

Uh-huh. But doesn't she turn herself into a possession by using words to advertise herself? She's a catch. She's on the market. She's worth a fortune. She brings assets to a relationship.

She's like an iPhone with plenty of apps.

I love my iPhone.

"Anyway..." Alice sighs, and I know she's done for this time. Now it's Rose's turn. Or mine, but I rarely have anything to contribute. While Alice is all up in the dating game, Rose is stuck in a marriage she hates – but not enough to get out of – and me... Well, I don't change. I work, I meet friends, I fuck, and I'm happy.

Seriously, I love my life.

I'll be twenty-five next week. I currently have two jobs that I love, I have good and loyal friends, I have the sexiest fuck-buddy that God ever created, I adore my apartment, and I have my own drink. What's not to love?

"I think Royce is cheating on me!" Rose blurts out.

Oy.

"Hold that thought," I say, putting up my index finger. "I just need to go to the bathroom first."

I hurry.

Once I'm there, I pull out my phone.

Do you have time tonight? I need it. ~Bella.

It never takes long for him to answer, and my pussy is always ready for him.

For you? Absolutely, baby. I'll be home after ten. Spending the night? – Edward.

Ungh.

If you don't mind. See you later ;) ~Bella.



1.

Do you have time tonight? I need it ~Bella.

Fuck, yes.

For you? Absolutely, baby. I'll be home after ten. Spending the night? – Edward.

If you get a text from the sexiest woman on the planet and she's asking you to fuck her, you say yes.

Plain and fucking simple.

If you don't mind. See you later ;) ~Bella.

I chuckle.

Definitely don't mind, beautiful. – Edward.

Ask me what her middle name is, and I won't have an answer.

Ask me how she is in bed, and I will tell you that she's fucking spectacular.

Hands down, the best sex ever.

And I've been the one fucking her for the past six months.

Bella Swan. A year younger than me... I think... or maybe two. She's a writer. She's originally from Seattle.

That's what I know. Unless we're talking about her body. I know *everything* about that body of hers.

"Lemme guess. Bella."

I look up from my phone, noticing that Emmett and Jasper are both watching me. Jasper's annoyed, and Emmett's jealous.

I smirk. "Yep," I say, answering Emmett before tipping back my beer bottle. I'm getting laid tonight. They're not. Because they don't have what I have.

Emmett's all about one-night stands – he's out every weekend. That was never for me, but it was necessary evil for a while before I found Bella. As for Jasper, he's all about dating. He goes out on two to four dates every week, spending hundreds of dollars for nothing. 'Cause you see, he's a picky fucker, and he rarely reaches date number two – much less date number three – with a woman. Which means he rarely gets laid. Unless he goes out with Emmett after a failed date just to drag home some nameless tail to get that release.

Nah, I'm glad I don't have that shit.

Instead, I have Bella. Our arrangement is pure perfection. We both have needs, we're both great in the sack, we're both fucking wild, and we're not interested in relationships. And lemme tell ya. That girl is insatiable. She's not one of those who just lays there. She's kinky, she's fierce, she's full of hunger, and she's fucking bendy.

When we met at some club back in March, I knew right away that I had to have her, and the night we spent together was un-fucking-believable. So, yeah, I was very agreeable when she woke me up the next morning, asking me if we could have some sort of arrangement. Much like me, she was sick of random hook-ups. And since then, it's just been the two of us. We've been tested, and we're exclusive, which means no more rubber. I fucking hate rubber.

To summarize: I own her body, and she owns mine.

But that's as far as it goes.

We hook up at my place a few times a week, and that's it. No questions asked, no answers given.

I don't know anything about her, and she doesn't know anything about me.

Again, unless you count what goes on in the bedroom. Or kitchen, or living room, or shower... you get it.

I think the only thing she knows about me is my name and age. And my address, of course. Wait, she knows my birthday, too, actually. Yeah, 'cause before I knew about the guys' plan to throw me a party, I made plans with Bella. So, I met her after the party. She even dressed up that night. Or rather, dressed down. Damn, I'll never forget when she showed up at my door, wearing nothing but a red thong – with "Happy Birthday" on it, mind you – underneath her tight, black trench coat.

Down, boy.

"How long have you been seein' her now? Six months or something?" Jazz asks, still scowling a little. I swear, his face would be serene if he only got some. "You know it can't last forever, don't you?"

I shrug. Of course it can't last forever. As much as I hate relationships, I do want kids some day. But I'm only twenty-six. There's no rush. As long as Bella's game, I can have her for another year or two before I start worrying about that. "Why worry about that now?" I ask. "What we have is fucking perfect," I chuckle, "Pun intended."

Emmett barks out a laugh. "I don't get it, dude. There's nothing she says no to, right?" I grin and nod affirmatively, 'cause that's right. We've even tried anal sex. She was curious about it, and I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. Not that it was something I'd spent my life dreaming about, but I'm a guy. Many guys want to try it. We were each other's first there, but it just goes to show how perfect we are for this. We're comfortable with each other, it's always exciting, and we trust each other enough to try new things. As for anal sex, though... Yeah, not really our thing. But hey, we tried it a few times, and that's that. Now we know. "Exactly," Em continues, shaking his head. "How the fuck haven't you married her yet? I mean, I'm not into relationships either, but if I had someone as awesome as you say Bella is... What gives?"

I don't miss a beat. "She's perfect because I don't know her. I've never even seen her apartment. We're always at my place, ya know?" They nod, 'cause they know this. "Well, I'm sure that if I did see it, I'd see perfection. I wouldn't see empty juice cartons in the fridge, and the toilet seat would be down. There would be fluffy pillows in happy colors on the couch, and there would be pictures of puppies and shit on the walls." I shrug. "She's a woman, after all. They're all the same."

Emmett nods, agreeing with me. "All right, I get it." He sips his beer then adds, "I gotta find me a Bella."

I laugh.

"I disagree," Jasper says, and of course he disagrees. He thinks his special someone is out there, waiting for him. "Women aren't all the same."

"Sure, when it comes to personality," I concede. "But generally speaking... I mean, take dating for instance. They put on their nicest dress, they go to a fucking spa, and they put on makeup, yeah?" He nods with a dip of his chin. "Right, but we know that they do more than that. It's not just about appearance, because every guy who has been in a relationship knows that the woman doesn't show her true colors until after a while."

Suddenly, they're whiny, clingy, and in need of constant reassurance.

When I was in college, I tried the relationship thing, and they all sucked. Can't say that I've ever been in love, but I genuinely cared about a few of the chicks. Then, a few months into each relationship, they changed. Sex was all of a sudden nothing to take for granted. A night with the guys was replaced by "date night" with the girlfriend. I needed to learn a new language. *If you don't, sleep with one eye open.* If the girlfriend says nothing's wrong, something is definitely wrong. If she puts on a really sexy and tight skirt, which you compliment, she asks if you're calling her fat.

God forbid if you leave the toilet seat up or if the girlfriend enters the bathroom after you and there's toothpaste in the sink.

"Guys are more honest," Emmett says solemnly. "No bullshit for us."

I nod. "And women become what you want until you're in a relationship. That's when they stop being your fantasy."

"And some fall for it," he chuckles, jerking his chin at Jasper.

"You're wrong," Jazz replies simply. "If all women were the same in the beginning, I wouldn't leave each and every one behind after the first date."

I ponder that for a moment while we order new beers, and then when we return to our booth, I have an answer.

"I think most women are honest about their hobbies and shit like that," I tell him. "But if a guy says – on the first date – that he enjoys a night out with the guys every week, I believe the woman only pretends to think that's okay."

"Maybe they talk themselves into believing that they can put up with it," Em muses. "Then when the day comes and you're in that relationship, she doesn't want you to go out anymore."

And *bam*, you're trapped.

"All right, all right, let's talk about sports instead," Jasper sighs.

Gladly!

We're in a sports bar, after all.

"We gotta watch the next Premier League game. It's Man. United against Arsenal," Emmett says. "We're gonna kick your ass."

No fucking way. United doesn't stand a fucking chance against Arsenal.

"How about a friendly bet, eh?" I smirk.

Our night continues. Like always, we have a good time.

Then, finally, it's close to ten.

"See ya tomorrow at work, man," Emmett says as we leave Jake's Bar.

"Gym first?" I wonder. Working at Volturi Advertising has its perks. The gym on the fourth floor is fucking golden, and Emmett and I try to meet up before work a few times a week.

"Sounds good."

Turning to Jazz, I ask, "Was it tomorrow you had that shoot?"

The fucker's a model, and I much to my chagrin, his ass is gonna be on display soon for the world to see. Right there, in Times Square... and other places. Okay, not his *bare* ass – thank *God* – but in nothing but underwear. While trying to make it as a freelance photographer, he rolls in the big bucks by being a model, too.

"Yep," he replies with a nod. Then he smirks. "Just me and four half naked chicks."

I snicker. "Well, have fun. But will we see you here tomorrow?"

Jazz and I both live here, right next to Chelsea Park. Only one building separates us, and that's the one we're standing in front of right now – where Jake's Bar is. Emmett, on the other hand, lives in Murray Hill.

"Unless I score."

Riiight.

"See you tomorrow, then," I laugh.

I hurry home, eager to fuck Bella.



2.

"...I mean, I trust him, but when I checked his phone..."

Yeah, see, right there. If she trusted him, she wouldn't look through Royce's phone in the first place.

Just my humble opinion.

Alice is appalled. "What did the text say?"

Rose is indifferent, and I seriously don't understand why she's still married to that prick. "It said, 'Thanks for last night', and it was from Tanya – his assistant."

"Divorce him," I say bluntly, giving Demetri a nod when he silently asks if we want more drinks. He winks in return before he gets busy with our drinks. Our booth is the closest one to the bar, and he sure gives us special attention. Well, mostly me. Rose is married, which is a no-no for Dem, and he knows that Alice wants the "package". As in, the whole thing. Relationship which leads to a white picket fence and babies. Demetri doesn't want this. He's harmless, though. Just a little flirting on his side.

"I can't just divorce him, Bella!" Rose hisses, and she has my attention again. "Things aren't that fucking simple."

Yeah. They are.

They don't love each other, Royce is perhaps screwing around, she's so fucking above him, and she hates the massive apartment they live in. Seems pretty fucking simple to me.

But what do I know?

"What's your excuse this time?" I ask, narrowing my eyes at her. I may come off as a bitch, but pardon me for wanting my friends to be happy. There's no way I wanna encourage something that brings her misery.

"I'm very busy right now," she replies dismissively. "I'm about to launch my next line, remember?"

Of course I remember. I work for her. In some sense.

Rosalie King is the owner of Lacy Piece. She designs lingerie, and when she got started on her winter line a few months ago, she worked her magic on me. She convinced me to be one of her models. Now, I'm not model material. Well, not really. I'm attractive for sure, but I'm too short. Like really short. 5'3". But she told me it wasn't for the catwalk or anything like that. Apparently, it's just for marketing. I will be in the catalogue, and I will be on a few billboards. It's gonna be fun, I'll admit. I love trying on new things.

"About that, when are we meeting up tomorrow?" I ask.

And Rose is thankful for the change of topic. "I was thinking we could have breakfast together before." I nod, liking the idea. "I gotta be on the set at nine to meet the new male model." Ah, that's right. The one they were originally using had to bail out for some reason. "But you can be there for me during that, right?"

"Of course."

"Great." She smiles. "So, Marco's at eight?"

Ooh, it's been a while since we were there. A wonderful place in Little Italy, two blocks from where I used to live. They serve the most delicious breakfast. But since I moved to the Upper West Side, where Alice also lives – in fact, just a block away from me – I rarely come to Little Italy. "Sounds perfect." And it really does, because Edward lives right next to Chelsea Park, which means I don't have to go that far tomorrow morning. And that reminds me. "I will meet you there," I tell her. "I'm spending the night at Edward's."

Rose and Royce live across the park from Alice and me, much to Rose's disdain. She wished she could live there, too. In my opinion, she can. She just has to divorce that idiot.

"Nice." Rose smirks. "How's it going with him, by the way?"

I take a sip from my drink, feeling a shiver run through me at the thought of my personal sex god. "He's delicious as always."

"And you still know nothing about each other?" Alice inquires.

"Nope." I shake my head. "Just the way I like it."

"But that's about to change," Rose says pointedly, and she's right. One of the reasons she asked me to model for her was because of the marketing idea. On each billboard, you will see random facts about the models in the shot. In a large print, you'll also see the question, "What do they have in common?" and it will obviously be that we're wearing Lacy Piece lingerie. In fact, the male model in the photo will be the one holding the question, so to speak. So, next to me, there will be a few lines about my profession, my age, my favorite color, etc. Same goes for the other models. We will all be very different, but we'll have Lacy Piece in common.

Edward will see this, of course. But as much as I'd rather keep myself as mysterious as possible, I'm not too bothered about it. He already knows that I'm a writer and that I come from Seattle. And judging from the lingerie I often show up in at his place, I'm pretty sure he knows I love black, dark purple, and baby pink by now.

"It's not like he's gonna find out anything of importance, though," I say with a shrug. "I don't think it will matter."

Alice sighs. "I still think you're stupid, Bella. What if he's your Prince Charming and you're missing out just because you refuse to get to know him?"

I don't know how many times Alice has delivered me that line.

Rose is currently laughing because I mouthed each word with Alice.

"There's no such thing as a Prince Charming, Alice," Rose says, always on my side when Edward comes up in conversation. "I wish I had my own Edward. Though, from what you describe, Bella... Hmm, I'd say I want a bigger guy. Tall-"

"Edward's 6'3" or something," I laugh. "Isn't that tall enough?"

"Yeah, okay," she nods, "but I want a big, bulky fucker."

I scrunch my nose a little. I love muscles, and believe me, Edward has them. But he's more subtle. He has a swimmer's body. Broad shoulders, a perfect ass, a delicious six-pack, and firm biceps. Ripped, defined, but nowhere near bulky.

My idea of male perfection.

His back is a piece of art, I tell ya.

"Good thing you're married to Royce, then," I offer sarcastically, giving her a wink for good measure. "He's all muscle, isn't he?"

She flips me off, all while smiling sweetly.

Our girls' night continue like it always does. We discuss, we gossip, we banter, we argue, we drink.

Then, when our night is over for this time, I hurry home to pack a bag.

I also "forget" to put on clothes after changing underwear.

My black trench coat will suffice just fine.

And the new pair of heels I bought yesterday.

Here I come, Edward.



2.

As soon as I get home, I take a quick shower. I'm already hard in anticipation of tonight, but I decide not to rub one out. When Bella stays the night – and I fucking love that – there's always more than one climax coming my way. With her, one isn't enough. So, I'm definitely glad that she's staying over. It's been a while since I last saw her. Four days, I think. It's my fault. We're in the middle of landing a new account at work, resulting in late meetings and exhaustion.

After stepping out of the shower, I wrap a black towel around my hips, completely forgoing clothes. They'll end up on the floor soon enough, anyway. Instead, I take a few minutes to tidy up in my bedroom and living room.

I'm a clichéd bachelor.

In the living room, you'll only find a large couch, a plush chair, a coffee table, and the entertainment center. I don't need anything else. No pictures, no curtains by the window, no blankets or decorative pillows. The walls are naked, painted in dark grey. The couch and chair are black. The entertainment center and coffee table are white. Simple. But... I do have pizza boxes, empty beer bottles, and dirty socks here and there, so I pick that shit up.

The bedroom is even barer. I have a king-sized bed, two nightstands, a walk-in closet, and a clock on the wall. There's also a picture on my nightstand – the only one I own – and it's of me, my parents, and my sister. I have baby albums and shit like that, but it's all stored away in boxes back in Chicago where my parents still live.

You should probably call Liz.

True. I haven't talked to my sister in a while. She lives in London, where she works at Random House as an editorial assistant.

I make a mental note to call her one of these days.

"That oughta do it," I sigh to myself, picking up the last items of clothes on my bedroom floor. Gotta do laundry soon. Fucking hate it.

Checking the time, I notice that it's almost ten thirty. I hope she's on her way, 'cause I have a meeting tomorrow at nine and an hour at the gym with Emmett before that.

Ding dong!

"Finally," I mutter in relief.

I smirk as I head to the door. It's been a couple months now since I told Kirk in the lobby to stop calling to alert me of Bella's arrival.

When I open the door, my cock is like one of Pavlov's dogs. The fucker knows what's next.

"Hey, beautiful," I greet, letting my eyes roam over her. She's wearing her black trench coat again... *fuck*... five-inch heels in black... "Got anything underneath that?" I ask, giving her attire a chin-nod. She smiles seductively, throwing her overnight bag just inside the door, and then her hands move to untie the...

Oh, have mercy on me, woman.

I swallow hard as my eyes take her in. A dark red push-up bra in some silky material. A matching thong. And all that skin. Creamy smooth and pale. With a slight flush across her chest. *Goddamn*. There's no way she's can't see my growing erection under the towel. It's all for her, which she knows.

"Are you gonna let me in or what?" she asks in that sultry voice of hers. It's both airy and rich. Soft, warm. Always fucking seductive. "Or perhaps you wanna go at it right out here?" She winks.

A chuckle bursts through my lips, and I know she's thinking what I'm thinking. 'Cause if the walls – or the elevator, for that matter – could talk, the tales would not be suited for children. Actually, the time we *almost* fucked in the elevator...

Ahem. Yeah, we forgot about the security cameras.

"Get in here, baby," I tell her, reaching for her hand. I wrap my fingers around her wrist and pull her close to me. Once the door is closed behind us, I push her up against it. She gasps, and I bite back a groan. "Fuck, it's been too long." That's all I say before I capture her mouth with mine in a searing kiss.

Before her, I didn't really enjoy kissing. It was just something I endured to get to where I wanted to be instead, but Bella's different. Our bodies are practically made for each other. There's not a part of her I haven't explored... and loved exploring. This includes kissing.

I moan when our tongues meet. It's like a fucking explosion of flavors in my mouth, but there's only one that stands out. One taste that is Bella-fucking-Swan. Pears. Sliding my tongue with hers, I feel my need for more waking up even more. There's urgency and scorching heat. And this is where I'm so fucking happy that Bella and I are both vocal. We say what we want.

"I want those lips wrapped around my cock, baby," I groan into her mouth. I grind my erection into her stomach, feeling it throb when she whimpers. Bella has a thing for my cock. There's no denying it. She's fucking obsessed, I swear. "Could you do that for me?" I murmur huskily, lazily dragging my lips across her cheek. The tip of my tongue darts out to taste her. "Could you be a good girl and suck me off?"

She also has a thing for dirty talk.

It's mutual, though. I'm not the only one with a wicked mouth. Bella can almost make me come with her own fucking dirty talk.

"Silly question, don't you think?" she moans softly. "You know how I love it." She's not done. While she drops openmouthed kisses on my neck, she continues. "You know how I love to taste you, how I slide my tongue along the underside of your cock." *Fuck me.* My hips buck, pressing my

erection against her harder. "Mmm, and how I suckle the tip of you." I suck on her neck. My hands move up to cup her luscious tits. "And you know how I love it when you push that big boy down my throat."

"*Fuck,*" I hiss and take a step back. "Drop to your fucking knees, Bella."

Her eyes flash with desire, and she doesn't hesitate to do as told.

No more than a couple of seconds later, my towel lands on the floor with a muted thud and she has her mouth on me. I groan and let my head fall back. One hand goes to the back of her head, and the other goes to the door for support. And true to her word, she licks her way up to the head of me. She gets me nice and wet, she licks and kisses, she fucking hums.

"Mmm, that's right, baby," I moan when she sucks me in. At first, just the tip. She suckles me free of pre-cum, and my knees buckle a little as the pleasure shoots through me. "Goddamn." She can suck cock like no other, I'm sure of it. "Fuckin' amazing, Bella," I groan, fisting her hair a little harder.

With a hum, she sucks me in completely. I know she's done with slow now. I'm free to fuck that pretty mouth of hers, and I sure fucking do it. Keeping one hand on the door and one in her hair, I start thrusting in and out of her mouth. When I reach her throat, she swallows repeatedly before I pull out, only to push in again. In long, deep strokes, I fuck her mouth. Damn, how I love this. I love how neither of us is shy. We're not afraid to take pleasure, because we both know that we're excellent givers, too.

"Hell," I grit out. Images of us, so many images, they're all I see. Closer, closer, closer. "Almost there, baby." My thighs tremble slightly. I shiver when she starts massaging my balls, and when she moans around me, I'm done for. I suck in a sharp breath, stifling a goddamn whimper at the same time, and come hard down her throat. I release in three long

streams, but Bella doesn't stop until she's drawn a little fourth from me, as well.

My eyes are only half open when my softening cock slips out of her mouth. *Damn, she's out of this world.* When I've gotten my breathing under control, I help her up on her feet. "Thank you," I breathe out. I kiss her cheek, the corner of her mouth, her pouty lips. "Divine fucking mouth," I mumble against her lips. "Mmm, my turn."

She lets out a little squeal when I throw her over my shoulder. I laugh and swat her delectable ass, and then I head straight for my bedroom. Once we're there, I lower her to the bed. Kneeling in between her parted legs, I indulge myself in some simple eye-fucking, but it's a must, I gotta say. Plus, while I do that, she has time to squirm out of her coat.

Even though she's a shortie, it seems like her legs go on for miles.

She's athletic, but still curvy. Toned, but still soft and all woman.

"Tease," she whimpers when my hands slide up her smooth thighs. I smirk at her, hoping she's not in a rush. She knows I like to take my time with her. "Fuck, Edward, I need you."

Ah, someone must've had a long day.

"What do you want from me, beautiful?" I murmur huskily, lowering myself to kiss her cleavage. "Want me to eat your pretty pussy?" Thank God for bras that open in the front. With a quick flick, I have her tits exposed to me. "I hope you do, 'cause I've fucking missed it." I suck her left nipple into my mouth, swirling my tongue around it.

I can already feel my cock stirring.

"Fuck, yes," she moans, tilting her head back against my pillow. "Please lick me, baby."

Believe me, I will.

But first I spend some time with her breasts, getting her worked up and desperate.

She whimpers and moans.

She arches into me and squirms.

Pretty sure she's desperate now.

My mind takes off in two different directions when my hand slips down her panties. She's fucking bare. Completely smooth. She's been that a few times before, but there's a difference between shaving and waxing. Bella has shaved the other times. Though, usually she's just very neatly trimmed. Which is what I prefer. I like my women looking like women. Still, I'm hard as a rock again, always loving it when I'm taken by surprise.

I kiss my way up her chest and collarbone... her shoulder and neck... "Someone waxed their kitty," I whisper softly into her ear. At the same time, I push my middle finger into her.

"Oh, fuck, Edward," she cries out. She's absolutely drenched, and I'm urgent again. I need more, and I need it now. Right now. So, I kiss her hard, pushing my tongue into her mouth. I control the kiss until we come up for air. That's when I kiss my way down her body again. I'm a man on a mission. A fucking kitty mission, if you will. But just like Bella's all but obsessed with my cock, I'd be a liar if I said that I wasn't obsessed with her pussy.

While I kiss her stomach, my hands slide under her ass. "Lift up, baby." She lifts her hips off the mattress, and I manage to push down her panties. Damn. I sit back on my heels, watching her in all her naked glory. Legs pulled up and spread for me. Chest slightly flushed and heaving.

Constricted nipples. Desire and need in her eyes. And... a bare, glistening pussy. As I said, I prefer what she usually looks like, but I can't deny that my mouth is watering at the thought of eating her out now. I can fucking see the arousal coating her smooth lips. I'm like a moth drawn to a flame. Or a horny bastard drawn to a perfect pussy, actually.

When my elbows hit the mattress, she's right there. In front of my face. I lick my lips. *Mine*. But to tease her a little bit more, I leave a trail of wet kisses on the inside of her thigh. My eyes stays fixed on the area where she wants me, and I know that she's watching me. Then I'm finally there.

She holds her breath, perhaps in anticipation, as I exhale over her pussy. This earns me a cute little whine from her. She really wants me to fucking lick her already. So, I do. In one slow motion, I lick the entire length of her sex. Now, eating pussy is an art. It has to be done right. You can't be too careful; it will leave the girl squirming because it tickles. But you can't just dive in there, either. It will be too much since her flesh is sensitive. But... each woman is different. So, I won't even lie and say that my previous experience before Bella is what made me an expert. Because that's just bullshit. Honestly, I rarely went down on women before, because I've always known that it's not an act easily mastered with a fucking one-nighter. Besides, the act is too intimate for me. On one-night stands, at least.

Bella's the reason I'm the master of her pussy.

She's vocal, and I'm a listener.

I also pay attention. I know what makes her tick. I know how and why she responds to me, and when.

For instance, when I use the tip of my tongue to circle her clit – never really adding pressure right on it – she whimpers in need and frustration. Same goes for when I swipe my tongue *softly* over her clit.

"Please, Edward!"

Just. Like. That.

To offer relief, I slowly push two fingers inside of her. That makes her moan loudly, but she's still fisting the sheets, needing more pressure on that sweet clit of hers. By keeping this up, I will slowly drive her toward a forceful orgasm, and her pussy will only get more and more aroused. Wetness coats my tongue and fingers as I continue to probe and lick. And as she gets closer, I add more pressure and speed.

The thirty to forty seconds or so before she comes, I'm fully devouring her. I finger-fuck her deeply and hard, rubbing the pad of my middle finger against her sweet spot. My lips are wrapped around her clit, all while my tongue flicks it. At the same time, I listen to her sounds. When she gasps and cries out, I pause to lick the rest of her. I swipe my tongue over the lips before sucking on her flesh. Then, when she's back to whimpering and writhing, I return to her clit.

I hum and moan when I feel a new rush of wetness coating my fingers. She's so damn close, and I redouble my efforts to get her there immediately. A third finger is inserted in a quick thrust, and I swirl my tongue around her clit with more force.

By the time she comes, I'm all but humping the goddamn bed. I'm so hard, so ready for her... And this is what licking her pussy does to me.

"Holy shit," she pants when I place a final kiss on her clit. I say nothing as I cover her body with mine. Tremors rush through her, still panting and recovering. She's a sight to behold. Beautiful and sensual.

Once I'm positioned at her slick entrance, I drop a soft kiss on the spot below her ear.

Then I drive my cock into her in one deep thrust.

My breath comes out in a harsh exhale, and I grind my cock deeper into her. These short moments while she still recovers from her orgasm are just for me. I revel in the feeling of being inside of her again. All the city noise is gone. The frantic meetings at work disappear. The cluttered idea boards are momentarily cleared, and it's just me, taking pleasure from her sensitive and hot pussy. Then I move. Slowly and deeply. I pull out 'til just the tip of me is surrounded by her, and then I push in until I'm buried completely. I grind again with a swivel of my hips. That's how Bella returns to me. She turns back into the insatiable creature she is and digs her perfectly manicured nails into my shoulder blades. Her heels into my ass follow, and I growl against her neck when I realize that she's still wearing her fuck-me heels.

With a new spark of raw hunger, I grip the headboard with both hands before slamming my cock inside of her. Bella cries out my name, which always only serves to fuel me. And then it's just the sound of our harsh breathing and skin slapping in the dimly lit bedroom. I fuck her hard, just like we both love it.

I hear the rip of the sheets when she drops her sharp heels to the mattress. That doesn't bother me one fucking bit. We've destroyed so much fabric in our six months together, it's insane. Whether it's my sheets or pillows... or her lingerie... We're goddamn unstoppable when we get going. *Fuck, fuck, fuck.* She pushes herself up, meeting my every thrust with one of her own. I look down at her gorgeous face, watching the way she bites down on her lip in concentration. Her eyes are squeezed shut, and her eyebrows are slightly knit together. She's so fucking sexy that it only drives me to fuck her harder and harder.

"Fuck!" I bark out, feeling her muscles tighten around me. "You're gonna make me lose it too fucking fast, Bella."

And I don't want that.

So, I roll us over.

"Ride me, baby," I moan as I fall back against the bed. "Ride my cock."

"Oh, God," she pants, pushing her tits out when she places her hands on my thighs. "Yesss... Oh, Edward..."

She shifts, pulling me deeper inside of her.

I moan at the feeling of her on top of me. "So fucking good," I breathe out, almost to myself. "Keep going, baby." I had no reason to say that because Bella never stops. Not until we're both thoroughly sated and spent. "*Jesus.*" She takes me so damn deep, swiveling her hips when I buried to the hilt.

My hands trace the curve of her ass, slowly and softly, contradicting everything that we do. Our breathing is harsh, our thrusts are hard and grinding, but I keep caressing her ass like she's about to break if I add pressure. She knows why I do it, too, because her eyes flash to mine. She gives me a slow, seductive smile, pausing momentarily above me. Letting out a labored breath, which sounds more like a gasp, she finally responds the way I love. Like she always does. She shivers violently, visibly, and goose bumps appear on her skin. That's why I do it, because I'm fucking addicted to the way I make her react to my touch. To see that shiver run through her makes me harder than a goddamn diamond, and it doesn't take long before I feel my body react to her reaction.

We trigger each other.

We always do.

Close. Close. Close.

"Are you close, baby?" I grit out in a strained voice.

"Almost, almost," she chants breathlessly.

I take control. "From behind, Bella." In two fluid movements, she's off me and positioned on all fours. "Ready?" I ask hoarsely as I kneel behind her. She nods furiously, looking at me over her shoulder while she's biting that lip of hers.

I slam in.

"Ah, *fuck!*" I shout.

"Edwaaard!"

Fast pace. We're both on the edge. My fingers dig into the soft flesh of her hips, and I fuck her... Oh, how I fuck her. Again, I roll my hips, grinding into her. She responds by pushing back. Again, again, again. Sweat beads on my temples, forehead, eyebrows, hell... even on my chest. And then we're coming. And coming. And coming. Her inner muscles squeeze my cock, making it feel like she's milking me of cum. My head is tipped back, my thrusts are lazy, my lips are parted, I'm not breathing. It's just motherfucking pleasure that's coursing through us.

If I died now, I'd die one lucky bastard.

Just sayin'.

"You okay?" I pant. I drag a hand over my face. "Holy..." Still panting. My chest heaves from the workout, and I say this every time, but I have never felt this sated. With a slight grimace, I pull out of her. Then I collapse right next to her, too spent to move a damn muscle.

"I'm fucked," she breathes, managing to give me a wink. I chuckle breathlessly and pull her limp body to mine. "You're a fucking god, you know that, right?"

I hum, dropping lazy kisses on her shoulder. "And you're a fucking goddess," I respond quietly. Nothing but the truth. "Shower tonight or tomorrow?"

She stretches and purrs like a satisfied kitten, which just makes me kiss her again. Bella Swan after sex is an aphrodisiac itself. Had I not just had two mind-blowing orgasms, I would've been ready for her again.

"Shower tomorrow," she yawns.

Thank fuck.

With her resting her head on my chest, I reach over to the nightstand where I have my phone. "I gotta be at work around eight. What about you?"

"Hmm... Breakfast with a friend at eight. Seven oughta do it. But set the alarm for six thirty."

I smile, knowing that we'll have sex in the shower tomorrow morning.

Gotta love my life.



3.

Edward and I work together like a well-oiled machine when we wake up the next morning. First, we shower. And he fucks me hard from behind, always making me see stars when I come.

After the shower, I leave the bathroom to get dressed. A dark blue push-up bra with a matching thong, a black pencil skirt, a marine-blue chiffon blouse without sleeves, my black heels, and my hair ends up in a high ponytail. In the meantime, Edward's in the bathroom, shaving and grooming. Then it's my turn. He compliments my outfit with a hungry look and a chaste but fiery kiss when we pass each other. He goes to the bedroom and his closet to get dressed for the day, and I apply my makeup in the bathroom.

By the time I'm done, Edward's reading the paper in his kitchen. Without looking up from whatever he's reading, he hands me a cup of coffee that I accept with a kiss on his bicep.

This is why I don't apply lipgloss or lipstick until I'm in the elevator – I have a need to put my mouth on him.

He looks good enough to eat. A black suit – sans jacket – and a moss green tie.

"Thanks for last night, baby," I murmur against his shoulder blade as I stand behind him. He keeps reading, hands on the kitchen island – on either side of the paper – but I see the smile on his perfect lips.

"Thank *you*," he returns softly. Then, with a wink over his shoulder, he adds, "Don't forget this morning, Bella."

How could I forget?

"My kitty's still purring," I reply with my own wink. He smells delicious, but even in my heels, I can't quite reach up to kiss his neck. At least not when he's standing at full height as he does now. But after my words have

left my mouth, he abandons his paper and turns around to wrap his arms around my waist. He dips down, nuzzling my neck, and I finally do the same. My lips follow, and I almost moan when his aftershave invades my senses.

"Take care of that pretty kitty for me until next time," he whispers in my ear.

He gives my ass a good squeeze for measure.

I shiver.

And I *really* have to leave before we're both late for work.

"Until next time," I breathe out.

Get it together, Swan.

Right.

"I gotta go," I sigh, taking a step back. "Are you going or staying?"

"Staying," he says, running a hand through his hair. Gah, he has to stop looking at me like that. Like he's ready to devour me. "I was supposed to hit the gym with a buddy of mine, but apparently he thought sleep was more important." He winks.

I grin. "All right. See ya soon."

"Emphasis on soon, I hope."

Ungh.

I don't think showing up at a photo shoot with wet panties is a good idea, even if I will be changing.

"Soon," I promise.

~oOo~

"You're late," Rose states when I sit down across from her. "You're also glowing."

A waitress comes by and hands me a menu before walking away again.

"Amazing sex does that for you," I reply, smiling cheekily. "And I'm two minutes late," I add.

She ignores my last response. "Pregnancies also make you glow."

I bark out a laugh, both amused and incredulous. I love that Rose is comfortable enough around me to make those jokes, because she knows very well that I'm unable to have children. I was fifteen years old when my dad – in his frantic state of worry – had to take me to the hospital for heavy bleeding. After a shitload of tests, the doctors found out that I had an infection in my uterus. There wasn't an explanation. But it left me infertile without anything that could be done. At the age of fifteen, I hardly cared about children, so it wasn't something that affected me greatly. It didn't until I got older, but after counseling and some major thinking, I realized that it wasn't the end of the world. There are so many children out there in need of a good home, and when the day comes and I want to have children, I will gladly adopt. DNA doesn't make you a mother. My own mother is proof of that.

I digress.

I'm glad that Rose is able to joke about it, because that's what I want. I don't want special treatment, 'cause I don't see any problems. Alice is the only one who is uncomfortable talking about it, but I understand.

"Wouldn't that be something, though," I muse, and then I laugh. "To tell Edward that I'm pregnant when I don't even know him."

"He'd shit his pants," she chuckles.

Indeed, he would.

"Are you ready to order?" a chirpy waitress asks then, and yeah, we're definitely ready to order.

Rose and I slip into easy conversation, today mostly about the photo shoot. But beneath the surface, I'm still thinking a little about my future. I know that I'm not ready for children quite yet, but perhaps it's time to look into it. After all, I know that it's a long process, and some information wouldn't hurt.

~oOo~

"Yes, but make sure the others know," Rose tells her assistant... about something. I'm just tagging along, letting my eyes wander. The studio isn't very big, but it's pretty, though. Kinda... rustic. The wooden floor looks old, and the dark brown walls make the place feel warm and rich. That is, until we reach our set. In the back of the studio, everything is ready for the shoot. The backdrop is white, and there are some weird silvery swirls attached to the ceiling that will be in the shot, too. Decorative, I guess. "Oh, and for fuck's sake, Jessica... Don't put Royce through when he calls. Understood?"

"Yes, Mrs. King."

What happens next is a flurry of activity. Rosalie King is a fierce business woman and to see her in action is both funny and horrifying. She's already made her assistant tear up. I'm not kidding. But Jessica bounces back when it's time for us to meet the new male model. As we approach him, I gotta say... *Dayum*. He's a good looking one. Tall, kinda lanky, but still sexy. Blond, curly hair. He's definitely no Edward, but come on, only Edward is Edward. There's no beating him.

"Jasper Whitlock, this is Rosalie King," Jessica introduces before Rose cuts her off.

"Yes, that'll be all, Jessica," she says curtly. Then she turns to the model. Jasper Whitlock. "Very nice to meet you, Mr. Whitlock, and thank you for coming on such short notice."

I briefly wonder if Whitlock's from the south, 'cause he kisses Rose's hand like a true southern gentleman.

"The pleasure's all mine," he drawls, and fuck me sideways. He's a southern boy for sure. "Please, call me Jasper, ma'am."

Rose, the sexually frustrated bitch, actually giggles. "Oh, please. It's Rose. And ma'am makes me feel old. I'm only twenty-seven."

I arch a brow, fully believing that Rose has not only forgotten her vows, but also me – her best motherfucking friend. So, I clear my throat.

"Oops," she *giggles* again. "Sorry, Bella." Facing Jasper again, she says, "This is Isabella Swan, my best friend, and also one of the models you'll be working with today."

Oh, so you remember that I'm your best friend now, eh?

Pfft.

"Nice to meet you, Mr. Whitlock," I say politely, sticking out my hand.

With a tilt of his head, he just stares at me for a little moment. But then the southern gentleman in him appears again and, oh yeah, I get a hand-kiss, too! Score one for Bella Swan. "It's Jasper, darlin'. Pleasure to meet you, too, Ms. Swan."

Rose smiles haughtily, and I'm pretty sure it's 'cause I got a "daaarrlen" out of it, she didn't.

"It's Bella," I tell him, smiling sweetly.

His own smile is more... curious?

Huh.

Anyway, no time to ponder, 'cause I'm soon ushered away for wardrobe and makeup.

That's where I meet the other three models. Lauren, Irina, and Leah. Like me, they're semi-or-maybe-a-little-less-than-semi famous here in New York. Me for instance, I have an itty bit of status if you read *Written Word*, which is the lifestyle magazine where I have my column. In other words, it's all for women and fabulous gay men.

Speaking of *Written Word*, Angela – my boss – is supposed to call me today about Kate leaving the magazine. I want her sex column, and Angela's assured me that I'm first choice.

~oOo~

Dressed in nothing but a pair of dark red ruffles and a matching bra, I follow the girls as we walk back to the set. Oh, high heels in silver, too. My makeup is minimal with the focus on long lashes and glossy lips, and my hair is styled to make me look freshly fucked. Funny, since I *am* pretty freshly fucked.

Oh, Edward.

"All right, lovelies!" Michael, the photographer, calls, clapping his hands together like the marvelous fruit he is. I'm already in love with him, I swear. "We have the red shoot first." Yep, we're all dressed in dark red lingerie. "If you could all take your positions in front of the backdrop..." He yammers on, and we obey like good little girls.

Jasper – who looks very attractive in a pair of dark red pajama bottoms in flannel – is ordered to sit on the floor. With his hands on the floor behind him and his legs out, slightly spread, he looks very casual and relaxed.

"Lauren, you squat down behind him," Michael orders, "and I want your profile, honey. Stick that tushy out, make sure we can see your bra, rest your hand on Jasper's shoulder, and for heaven's *sake*, keep your legs together. This is *not* a porno shoot, nuh-uh." More orders are thrown out, and Irina is next. She's to mimic Lauren's position, but on Jasper's other side. Leah is ordered to stand behind Jasper and look playful by threading her fingers through his hair. I'm the last one, and I'm directed to sit between Jasper's legs. *Gulp*. But I do as told. "Cross your legs, *Bellisima*," he coos to me as I sit down. "And place them over Jasper's right leg. This will give me a *sublime* shot of your lovely legs." Uh-huh. Sure.

"*Fucktabulous!* Now, *Jaspermasweetie*, if you could just place your hand on *Bellisima's* thigh."

"Oh, he's gonna kill me for this," Jasper whispers under his breath, but I still heard it.

Who's gonna kill him? Oooh, his boyfriend? Ah, I get it.

"Here's your sign, Jasper," some guy says, walking over to us. It's the sign with the question about what we all have in common on it, and Fabulous Mike tells Jasper to hold it "lazily" on the other side of me.

Then it's on.

For hours we're in and out of the wardrobe to showcase Rose's latest line. And Jasper keeps mumbling under his breath about some guy that's gonna kick his ass. I guess his boyfriend is a jealous type. Maybe he's insecure, because Jasper seems sorta straight. Eh, what do I know?

One that is *flamingly* gay, though, is the lovely photographer.

Put your arm there, look sexy, lower your leg, smile, be playful, look over your shoulder, make love to the camera, be secretive, okay, lunch!

And FYI, lunch at two is not acceptable to me, so I'm kinda cranky when I order my cheeseburger and chili fries.

My kitty's itchy to boot. I rarely, very rarely, wax... but no matter how meticulous I am about making my pussy pretty, waxing is a big must if you're gonna be displayed on billboards all over New York City.

"Cheeseburger and chili fries, eh?" Jasper inquires as the food finally arrives. We're all seated in the break room, and I can't say that I'm shocked to my core when the other ladies dig into their salads. Poor women.

"Fuck, yeah," I say, grinning. "This is why I do yoga twice a week," I add, holding a fry up. "And this is why I run in the park every Sunday." I hold up the burger.

He barks out a laugh, looking oddly surprised. The dude is kinda weird, but he seems nice.

"Soon you'll tell me you drink beer and piss standing up, too," he chuckles before digging into his sub.

I roll my eyes. Men are so fucking clueless sometimes. Not all women live on salad and water.

"So... you're a model?" he asks.

I tilt my head, wondering if he'd ask me if I was a nurse if I dressed up like one. "I dabble," I half-joke. I have done this before, but never this... provocatively, so to speak. When I was little, Dad was so fucking proud when they cast me in a Mariners' commercial. I was seven years old. "I'm a writer," I tell him. "This is just something I do for Rose." *And the*

money. What? I gotta feed my addictions. Shoes and records. Yeah, that's right. I buy records. Sure, I love my iPhone and my iPod Shuffle, but there's something about records. Preferably those you have to look for, and then when you find that record you've been searching for – in mint condition to boot – it's... orgasmic.

Sigh.

"What do you write?"

Curious little bastard, isn't he? "About relationships. I have a column in *Written Word.*"

He chokes on his sub.

Scusi?

"You okay, dude?"

He nods and pounds a fist to his chest. "Yeah," he coughs. Then he clears his throat, seemingly very interested in my life. But I don't mind. My own gay friends are curious fuckers, too. Especially Seth. "Are you in a relationship by any chance?"

Had Jasper been straight, I would've told him that I just got out of a serious relationship. That's been my standard line since I met Edward. But since Jasper's gay... "I have my personal sex god who keeps me very satisfied." I sigh dreamily, already looking forward to our next time.

"All right, lovelies! Break's over!" Mike hollers.

And it's back to work.

At the end of the day, I'm totally spent.

Rose and I hurry to leave, 'cause we're having a girls' night at my place.

When we're in the cab toward the Upper West Side, Angela calls me to tell me that Kate's column is mine. Yeah, I fucking squeal. This means I have two columns! One about relationships and one about sex.

Internal fist pump!



3.

"You're kidding," I laugh through my nose. "She actually said that?"

Emmett and I enter the bar, nodding and grinning in hello at Jake, then we proceed to walk over to our booth where Jasper's already waiting. Good boy, he already bought the first round.

"She fucking did, I swear," Em chuckles, taking his seat next to Jazz. "And right after she left, the big man walked in."

Fucking hell. "Oh, man. Did you at least have time to put on your game face?"

"What're you talkin' about?" Jazz asks, sliding a beer across the table to me.

I tip it in thanks before taking the day's first sip. *Aaahhh*. The good stuff.

I take off my jacket, I roll up the sleeves of my shirt, I loosen my tie.

Daddy's home.

"Bree on our graphics team propositioned me at work today," Emmett answers him, grinning a like a fucking fool. "She told me to think about it, and then, right after she'd left, our boss came in."

I lean back in my seat, resting my arm on the back of the booth. "So, are you gonna take her up on her offer?" Bree's fucking tiny, and Emmett's... not. Besides, she's not really attractive. But if Emmett's desperate... His choice. "Don't let Aro find out, though," I chuckle.

"Nah, for fuck's sake. I'd break the poor girl!" he guffaws.

I laugh. "Seriously, you would, too."

My laugh gets cut off when my stomach growls, and Emmett's stomach follows. Hell, we haven't eaten since lunch. That was what, six hours ago? Shit, that ain't good.

"Oi, Jake!" I bellow. He looks up from the beer tap. "Three of the usual, will ya?"

"You got it, man," he responds.

Turning back to the guys, I ask Jasper, "How was work?" I smirk. "Since you're here, I take it you didn't score."

He shoots me a quick glare, but it's soon replaced by a smug grin. "No, I didn't score, but... I met one of the hottest women I've ever seen."

I snicker. "Ah, too bad. But good for the spank bank, eh?"

"Ooh, I'm not too sure about that. I'm thinkin' you'd mind."

Huh? "Why the fuck would I mind?"

He grins lazily, relaxing in his seat. "'Cause the woman's name is Bella Swan."

Good thing I wasn't drinking when he said that! "Dude! Are you fucking *kidding* me?" I exclaim in disbelief. She told me she's a writer! "Wait. It's gotta be some other Bella." I shake my head. "She's not a model."

Though, she very well could be. Damn. She could. Maybe she's a little too short for the profession, but she sure has the face for it. But that's it, 'cause in my opinion, models are too fucking skinny. Poor girls don't eat. I don't want a girl who I'm afraid will break if I so much as breathe on her.

"She *is* a writer, but she did this for her friend or somethin'," Jazz says, and I frown. "Her friend is the owner of Lacy Piece."

Ah, shit. I've heard of that. It's almost as exclusive as La Perla.

Come to think of it, I'm pretty sure I've seen Bella wearing Lacy Piece at my place many times. Huh.

"So, it was really her?" I ask, rubbing the back of my neck.

"Oh, I'm sure."

Can't say that I'm too happy to hear this. Especially if they... "Did you... you know, talk?"

He grins. "Yeah, we did." Fuck. "I learned quite a bit about her."

"I don't wanna hear about it," I tell him firmly. Bella is perfection personified, but only because I know jack shit about her. Then again, I feel uneasy knowing that Jasper's talked to her. She's supposed to exist solely for my cock's pleasure. Does this make me a pig? Of course it does, but it's how I feel. She can have her own life, which she clearly does, but I don't want it anywhere near me, and Jasper's near me. Oh, this sucks. And no, he definitely *cannot* use Bella for spank bank material.

Grrr.

"Shit," I groan, rubbing my temples. They *worked* together, which means... "Does this mean I'm going to see her half-naked on billboards all over the city soon?"

His smirk tells me yes... yes, I will.

That's almost worse than seeing Jasper on these billboards.

The thing is, Bella is already on my mind often as it is. I don't need reminders. I don't need...

I don't need curiosity.

I want to fantasize about her body, and I do, believe me, but I don't want to find myself wondering about her fucking personality. Because that will shatter my image of her.

"I asked her if she was single," Jasper mentions casually, and I want to *kill* him.

"Why the fuck would you ask her that?" I snap, feeling a flash of anger surge through me. "Wait." Dammit! "What, uh... what did she say?"

It's already starting. Questions are forming in my head.

Did she say that she was single? Did she lie and say that she was in a relationship? I'm not sure which answer I would prefer. I only know that when women flirt with me, or even flat out ask me to dinner, I say that I'm really focusing on my work right now. I never come off as available, because I'm not interested. Hell, I don't even look at other women, 'cause what I have is perfect. I have a warm, sexy, stunning body to give me pleasure when I need it, and I have my own life. That's how I like it, dammit!

"She said that she had a personal sex god to satisfy her."

My eyes snap to Jasper's. She said... "*What?*"

He starts laughing. Even Emmett joins in. I'm just fucking stunned.

"She... she *said* that?" I choke out.

And Jasper's laughing too hard to respond verbally, but he nods.

Jesus.

Is Bella Swan blunt or *what?*

Kinda hot, actually. Refreshing. Calling me a sex god and all to strangers.

NO!

This stops now! "I don't wanna hear about this anymore," I say, furiously shaking my head. "Bella is off limits. No more talk about her."

That's when our food arrives, and Jasper takes the hint, thankfully. He can see that I really don't wanna talk more about this, so he changes the subject. Sports. Safe topic. We talk about the Cowboys beating the Patriots, much to Jasper's joy and Emmett's chagrin.



"What are you gonna write about first?" Alice asks, kneeling between my parted legs. I tilt my head so that she can apply my facemask. "Gah, I'm so excited for you, Bella. Kate was too damn boring to write about sex."

I agree. She wrote about lovemaking. I'm gonna write about steam.

"I'm excited, too." I grin. "And I was thinking you could help me on my first piece."

"I can't," Rose drawls, appearing from my kitchen with a new pitcher of margaritas. "Royce can't even make me orgasm anymore. I doubt I can be of help, hun."

Hmm. "How often do you have sex?" I ask her. I shiver when the chilled facemask is applied, but I love it. I'm going with avocado with peach seeds tonight. After spending my day under so much makeup, I need some cleansing. "And how often did you have sex before you got married?" I add, feeling an idea form in my head.

I'm not one of those who believe that marriage is a sex-killer. I think it's all about routines. If you've been in a relationship for a long time, you start taking things for granted. If you still shave your legs, maybe you don't do it for your partner. But isn't that what you do in the beginning? We make ourselves pretty for our dates and boyfriends, which they appreciate, right?

Why do we stop? Why do *some* stop?

I think this is where sex changes in a relationship.

"We have sex on Wednesdays and Sundays," Rose tells me, and isn't that the saddest thing? "That's when Royce comes home at a respectable hour. Before, it was a few times a week."

"And it's not good anymore?" Alice asks as she surveys my face. "All done," she tells me with a smile.

Then it's my turn. She takes my seat in the chair, and I kneel between her legs to apply her blueberry facemask.

"He doesn't take time to get me wet anymore," Rose sighs. Which means there's no more foreplay. Foreplay is essential for women, for fuck's sake. We're not ready to just go, unless we're very horny before we even begin, of course. "And now that I know he's fucking Tanya, there's no way I'm touching him."

Alice and I exchange a look. "Divorce him!" we tell her.

And Rose sighs. Really loudly.

But I still wanna know something... "Who do you go to the spa for?" I ask her. "Because I remember when you met Royce three years ago." I ran into Rose at Gucci. That's how we met. "Everything was about him." She was close to having a panic attack because she couldn't find the perfect dress for their date. That was all for Royce. "You do it for yourself now, right?" Her eyebrows knit together, like she's in thought, so I continue. "I think a relationship changes when you start doing things for yourself instead for your partner."

"Wait," Alice frowns, "are you saying that we shouldn't do things for ourselves?"

"Of course!" I assure. "But we should do things for our boyfriends, too. Know what I mean?" I pause to gather my thoughts. Writing a column about relationships and one about sex is going to be challenging, because sometimes they merge together. "I'm just saying that we should do both. Always. But isn't it true when I say that in the beginning of a relationship, we do so much – almost everything – with our partner in mind?"

Rose nods pensively. "There's some truth in that, yeah." She hums. "But I refuse to believe that just because I wax my pussy for myself instead for Royce, he has the right to fuck around."

I roll my eyes. "That's definitely not what I'm saying, and I sincerely hope you know that." I huff and return to Alice's facemask. "What he's doing is revolting, not to mention wrong. Unforgivable, even. And there's no blame to place on you. Even if you turned into an uber bitch, infidelity is his fault. If he needs to get his rocks off elsewhere, he should've divorced you."

After that, we're quiet for a while. I hope Rose is finally considering divorce, because she deserves better. As for Alice, I hope she's thinking about her own behavior. I know how she acts before a date. She's practically another person. But you can't pretend to be someone else forever. Somewhere down the road, the real Alice is going to shine through, and maybe that's not the person her boyfriend wants. She shouldn't settle. She should wait until she finds the guy who wants her for her.

Which makes me believe that Alice is a Rose waiting to happen.

"I've wasted so much time on Royce," Rose mutters quietly.

I get that. Even though they haven't been together for more than three years, it's still a while. "You have," I agree. "But isn't it important then that you don't waste *more* time on him?"

I've only met Royce a handful of times, but even at their wedding, I got an uneasy feeling about him. I think Rose created an image of Royce in her head, and it was the image she married. She wanted someone so desperately that she became blind to his flaws. Then, one day when she woke up, flaws were all she saw. But I believe they were there from the beginning.

Growing up without a mother, I've always been more about simplicity. There are fewer grey areas for me. I am who I am, and I won't change for anybody. I never hide. I'm sure there are people growing up *with* mothers who are like me, of course, but maybe there's something to it. I mean, my dad was straightforward, no bullshit. Granted, I missed a lot. For instance, it was my neighbor who I went to when I got my period. And when I had my first crush, I didn't have a mother to talk to. Same went for when I found my crush making out with one of the cheerleaders. I thought the world was coming to an end, and all I could do was write it down in a journal. I didn't have a mom to tell me that I would get over it, that my Prince Charming was going to come, and that the boy was a loser for not seeing how perfect I was.

There was no one to coddle me.

But today, I'm almost happy about that.

"I have a date tomorrow night," Alice mentions, breaking the silence. By now we're all sitting in my couch – well, Alice in my chair – and we're sipping Rose's famous margaritas. "So, I should be myself?"

"Definitely," I say softly. "You deserve someone who likes you for you, right?"

She purses her lips. "And if I don't give a flying fuck about some date rule about when you're allowed to have sex?"

I grin. "Then have sex with him!"

"Right, but won't he think I'm some cheap slut?"

"Not if the guy is the one for you," I reply simply. "If you wanna ride him like a bronco, then you do that."

"What Swan said," Rose laughs. Then she smiles wistfully. "I need that. Something fantastic and mind-blowing."

To no one's surprise, they both look at me.

Edward. Mind-blowing and fantastic. Check.

"How can you not fall for him?" Alice wonders.

I chuckle. "I don't even know him. Although," I smirk, "I'm very much in love with his nine-inch cock. Don't even get me started on his fingers. Or his tongue."

Ungh.

"Is he attentive?" Rose asks curiously.

I don't know how many times we've talked about Edward, but I can see that she's asking for another reason now. This is what women do. We compare men with other men. She's obviously eager to compare Edward to Royce. What one does, and what the other doesn't do.

"Very," I murmur. "He pays attention to my body's reactions." I pause, realizing what I want to write about in my new column. "Was Royce ever mind-blowing?"

She thinks about it for a while before responding. "I think I convinced myself that he was."

I hum, thinking. "Maybe that was a clue," I muse. "That you weren't perfect for each other."

I'm not saying that you can tell how your partner is as a person based solely on how he is in bed, but if you don't match the first time, what makes you think you will at a later date?

Then again, it seems wrong to discard a man just because you have sex once and it isn't perfect.

"Doesn't really matter, though, does it?" Rose smiles ruefully. "I saw what I wanted to see."

Exactly. So, it didn't matter what Royce did in the beginning of their relationship, because Rose made up her own version of him.

"That makes me curious," Alice says, turning to me. "If you and Edward are so perfect together in bed – and you're always yourselves, never hiding – isn't that an indication that you might be perfect for each other in a relationship?"

Good question.



4.

"Ugh!" I groan in frustration, slamming the door shut behind me with unnecessary force. But I can't fucking help it. This new account at work we're busy with...

Christ almighty.

Emmett and I are both working late hours with the graphics.

Now, I love my job. I really do, but for the past few days, we've been holed up in our office for so long that I've forgotten there's a real world out there.

Heading for the kitchen, I loosen my tie on the way. The scowl on my face seems like a permanent fixture right now, and I know there's only one thing that can send my foul mood to Antarctica or something.

Bella's pussy.

It's been *days*.

I texted her yesterday, wondering if she had time since I got off work at the *lovely* hour of ten PM. Unfortunately, she couldn't. She said she had a deadline, whatever that means. Well, she's a writer, so I assume she had an article or something to turn in.

Writer and model. Don't forget the last one.

Like I could forget.

Being so busy with work, I haven't really seen Jazz, so he sure hasn't brought Bella up. But that doesn't mean I haven't thought about the new... *developments*.

"Fuck," I mutter, staring at the contents... or rather, lack of contents in my fridge. I don't even know why I looked. I never have anything in my fridge, unless we're talking beer and... "What the hell?" I open a Styrofoam container, not even sure what it once was. So, beer and old take-out. Emphasis on old.

I sigh, bringing out a beer. It's the last thing I need, what with my growling stomach and all. And why didn't I just pick up some food on my way home? 'Cause I don't think that far ahead, dammit.

I actually really enjoy cooking, but it's been a while since I've had the time. And I'm too fucking lazy to anything about it now, so I take my beer with me to the living room where I plop down on my couch. *ESPN* all the way. The Giants are doing well.

After taking a sip of my beer, I pull out my phone from my inner pocket, which also reminds me that I'm still wearing my jacket. Off it goes. Good riddance. I may love my job, and I don't even mind wearing a tie, but the jacket... Fucking stiff.

I snicker. *Stiff*. How convenient that I think that word just as I scroll past Bella's number.

Hmm.

I check the clock on the flat screen.

Almost midnight. That's really pushing it.

Besides, I don't really want her to go out that late by herself.

Um. You've never had any issue with that before, man.

I smack myself in the forehead.

What's *happening* to me?

Shaking my head at myself, I mull over my thoughts for a while before I decide that I just have to get the fuck over it. Life goes on. It doesn't matter that I now know something about Bella's life that leaves me... a *little*... curious. I won't act on it. I will stop. Right now. And I will text her, 'cause I need a fucking break. Pun intended.

Need you soon, baby. When do you have time? – Edward.

I'm pretty sure she's asleep, but then I'm thinking... *how the fuck should I know?* Maybe she's a night person.

"Well, she's not asleep," I mumble as my phone vibrates.

Aw, you need me? That makes me horny. You bad boy. How about tomorrow? ~Bella.

And I want to *cry*.

'Cause we have a big meeting on Friday morning, which means a very late night tomorrow.

Damn. Working late. What about Friday? I get off at five – Edward.

Please tell me you can, Bella.

That's when I realize that I'm stroking my cock outside my pants.

Well, fuck that.

While waiting for her to reply, I unzip my pants before pushing them down my hips. Boxers, too. I'm so wound up that I don't even bother to get the lotion. If I have any, that is. With Bella in my life, I rarely jerk off, and if I do, I do it in the shower.

I nearly moan when Bella's text makes my phone vibrate. Shit, I gotta get a hold of myself.

Um, which I do. Quite literally as I open her text.

Sorry, I can't on Friday. It's my birthday, and the girls are taking me dancing. ~Bella.

"Fuck," I breathe out. It's her birthday. Another fact about her that I now know. And... dancing. Oh, the images. Yeah, I stroke myself.

I remember the night I pursued her. I rarely go to night clubs, but Emmett dragged me out, and I needed some tail. He scored quickly, leaving me behind, the fucker, but then I saw Bella, and I could barely remember my own name – much less Emmett's. Boy, did I end up with tail. Tail that I now can't get off my fucking mind. And since I danced with her that night... I know just how she moves. The seductive sway of her hips, the way she dresses, how her hands go behind us and up in my hair as I grind my cock against her ass...

My thumb swipes over my slit, spreading the pre-cum around the head of me.

I hope I get to celebrate you the way you celebrated me. Btw, I'm hard. – Edward.

She has the right to know.

Fuck, Edward. You can't say that and expect me to do nothing. Btw, I'm in bed now ;) ~Bella.

Yeah, I call her.

She picks up right away, chuckling softly. *"I had a feeling you'd call."*

Fuck. I bite back a groan when I hear her voice. "Talk to me, baby. Tell me what you're doing."

She gasps, most likely hearing the sheer need in my voice.

"Are you touching yourself right now?" she asks in a breathy voice.

I look down at the fingers that are tightly wrapped around my throbbing cock. "You can bet your sweet ass I'm touching myself," I say huskily. On the down stroke, I cup my balls. I tug a little, just like Bella usually does,

but it's not the same. "Damn," I moan quietly. "I need your pussy soon, beautiful. How's the pretty kitty doing without me?"

She whimpers. *"Fuck, baby. I'm so wet for you right now."* I clench my jaw, I close my eyes. *"These past few days have sucked. My vibrator doesn't stand a chance against your perfect cock."*

I stroke myself harder, thinking about our box that's under my bed. With all the money she spends on lingerie, I once told her that I wanted to contribute. It's as much for my pleasure, after all, and I tend to destroy a piece or two every now and then, but Bella cranked it up. She said that she paid for lingerie, but that I could buy toys if I wanted to. And I wanted to. Oh, how I wanted to.

"Dirty fucking girl," I breathe out. "Remember when I used the purple dildo on you, baby?" I sure remember. It was one of the times we tried anal sex. I fucked her in the ass, all while moving a vibrating dildo in and out of her pussy. I could fucking feel the vibrations on my cock, and though anal sex wasn't all that glorious to us, it was still *very* pleasurable.

"Mmm, I remember," she moans softly. I picture her in my bed, legs spread, head thrown back, fingers buried deep inside of her. *"Is that something you wanna try again?"*

Maybe. Someday. But... "I prefer your pussy, you know that," I grunt, tipping my head back. "But I'm starting to forget *my* pretty kitty, Bella. It's been too long." I don't care if I come off as desperate. It's her fault. It's what her body does to me. "I need to fuck you."

"Oh, fuck... It's yours, you own my pussy..."

Damn straight. "How many fingers are you using? Or are you using a toy?"

"Three fingers and it's still not enough," she moans. "I need your thick cock."

I groan, feeling my orgasm approach. "My cock would make you feel so fucking good, baby girl. How would you like me to fuck you?"

"Ungh... I'm close, Edward!" she cries out. "Oh, God... I want... I love it when I have my legs... thrown over your shoulders..." Oh, yeah. Damn, that's it. So close. I speed up. My chest heaves. *"Or from behind... when you pound in to me..."*

Fuck! "Coming, Bella," I grit out through clenched teeth. "Fuck, I'm coming..." I shudder violently as my cock throbs before releasing thick streams of cum over my hand and abs. Dammit, over my shirt. "Shit, shit, shit," I grunt. In the background I hear Bella climaxing, and it makes me shudder all over again as my cock releases the last of my orgasm.

Fuck, what this woman does to me.

I breathe heavily, listening to Bella's own labored breathing.

As fuckhot as it was, it's not enough if she's not here.

"Is it okay if I stop by after my party on Friday?" she asks breathlessly, and I exhale in relief. *"I need more of you."*

Exactly. "Friday," I confirm. "You better stay the night."

"Oh, yeah." Did Bella Swan just giggle?

I feel my mouth curl up in a lazy grin.

Friday can't come soon enough.



5.

Gah, how I love this!

I have the best friends in the world, I swear. Rose and Alice worked their magic, and now we have an entire night club just for my birthday. Friends, acquaintances, people from the magazine... everyone's here, having fun and drinking and dancing and singing and drinking some more.

Speaking of drinking, I raise my shot glass when Rose and Alice – who are standing on the little stage next to the DJ – raise theirs.

"Everyone shut up!" Alice screams, apparently not realizing that Rose has a mic. Jeesh, she could've just borrowed it. I laugh. For no reason, really.

"Here's to Bella! May her next twenty-five years on this planet bring her a fuckload of joy!" Rose shouts out in the mic.

"Woo-Hoo!" Seth booms out, and I almost fall down. You know, 'cause I'm currently sitting on his shoulders. He said it was important since everyone just *had* to see me. "To Baby Swan!"

"To Baby me!" I laugh.

"TO BELLA!" everyone shout.

I'm high on life.

We dance.

We drink.

I'm wearing a sparkly tiara on my head.

It matches my dark purple dress. It's short, it's strapless, it's sexy, it forces me to make sure that my tits don't fall out.

"I love you, Bella!" Alice squeals as we reach our booth again.

We've reached that stage of Drunk. The stage where you love everybody.

"I love you, too, Ali!" I mimic, and then I remember another thing I love. So, so much. "And I love Edward Cullen's cock!"

There's no way I'm in a hurry to leave my own birthday party, but I'm still eager to see him later tonight.

"Hey, I love that cock, too, and I've never even met the guy!" Seth laughs.

I love my Seth. And I think he's gonna get lucky tonight, 'cause I have totally seen the looks he and Mike have been sending each other. Oh, yeah. Mike is here. After the photo shoot last week, I didn't hesitate to get his number.

"So, how about a toast to good cocks, then?" Rose suggests, grinning wickedly.

And I have the *best* idea. "If I'm gonna toast to a good cock, the good cock's owner should hear it." Right? Right. So, I take out my phone from my cleavage. It doesn't take long for me to find Edward's number. "It's ringing!" I inform my friends. 'Cause I figured they'd wanna know.

After a little while, he answers. "*Bella?*"

"Gah, you saw my name on the display!" I shout over the music. My smile is so triumphant. "It's my birthday, Edward, and we're toasting to good cocks!"

Hmm, I stare at the phone, 'cause it did something weird. Like a funny noise. Choking and coughing. Hmm. It better not die, my iPhone.

"Edward? Can you hear me?" I press a finger to my left ear, trying to hear better. And I scowl at my friends, 'cause they're laughing. Maybe at me. I'm not sure.

Bitches.

"Uh, Bella? Are you drunk?"

I fist pump the air. "You can hear me, baby!"

I think he laughs. It sounds like it, anyway. *"Yeah. I can. I guess you're having fun, then?"*

"So much fun!" But the music is all kinds of loud. Some Rihanna song, I think. "And we're toasting!"

Another laugh. *"Right. To, uh... good cocks?"*

"Yes! And I thought of you!"

I know. I *know*. I'm thoughtful.

"MAYBE THE GOOD COCK SHOULD GET HERE!" Rose screams.

Um. Edward heard that. Yeah, he did, 'cause he laughs again.

"Where are you?" I ask. "Are you also out?"

I mean, it's Friday.

"I'm hanging out with two friends," he chuckles. *"At a bar."*

Hmm. "Do they have good cocks, Mr. Cullen?" I ask seriously.

I think I have cock on my brain.

I laugh. I'm cockbrained!

"Aahahahaha!" Alice guffaws. "You said cockbrained!"

Who did, what-who, me?

"I did!" I laugh, throwing my head back. "I said cockbrained!"

"Sweet Jesus, where are you, Bella?"

I don't know! "Rose, where are we?"

"CLUB SIN!" Rose screams. She's a good screamer. "UPPER WEST SIDE."

And now I take over. "Don't you worry, Edward Cullen. I drink one drink then one water then one drink then one water, okay? I'll be good and ready for you!"

Edward seems to be in a good mood, 'cause he sure laughs a lot.

Then I scream. "I LOVE THIS SONG!" I grab Seth's hand. "C'mon, Seth, let's dance! Rose, Alice, Mike, Angela, Ben... all of you!"

Phone forgotten, 'cause it's Maroon 5 with "Moves Like A Jagger".

Soon, we're all on the crowded dance floor shaking our asses to Maroon 5.



5.

"Yes, Mom, I eat very well," I say, rolling my eyes. Ironically, I'm currently packing the fridge with groceries that I bought on my way home from work. Usually, I don't eat well at all. Plenty, but not healthily. Healthily? That's a word, right? Yeah, it is. Anyway. I'm sick of never finding anything but Heineken in my fridge. *Don't forget about the once-was-food in the Styrofoam container.* Right. Old take-out, too. So, I bought food today. There's even lettuce and tomatoes. And fresh herbs. Healthy motherfucker, I am. Yip.

"*And you're careful with alcohol, I hope?*" Mom continues.

"Very careful," I assure, taking out a bottle of beer once I'm done unloading groceries. What? I gotta celebrate a job well done. "But enough about me, Mom. How are you and Dad?"

See? I'm polite, too.

Mom starts rambling about work, Chicago, friends, and vacations... the usual, and it gives me time to go through my mail. Now, I love my parents dearly, but Mom is a chatty one. She can go on and on. Which she does. But I gotta say I'm amused whenever she curses. See, Esme Cullen is a sweet lady. She's all about charitable organizations and banquets with

causes, but she can also out-curse a sailor. Not kidding. Oh, and when she thinks no one can hear, she listens to Eminem and 50 Cent.

Liz and I couldn't have ended up with better parents.

I was four and my sister was two when Esme and Carlisle adopted us. Our real parents died in a plane crash, but we already had Carlisle and Esme in our lives. They were best friends with my parents. They were also our godmother and godfather.

I do remember my biological parents, mostly my mother, and I recall missing them, but I think I was too young for it to affect me permanently.

Anyway, I'm not ashamed to say that I couldn't have ended up with better parents than Carlisle and Esme. And I know they see us as a blessing considering how they can't have children of their own.

"...so, we were thinking about moving closer, especially now that Lizzie's returning to the States..."

"That's great, Mom," I mutter absentmindedly, sorting through my mail. I take a sip of my beer. Bills. Bills. Junk. Junk. About that, I grab my own... ya know... adjusting. Bills. Bills. Postcard from Aunt Carmen and Uncle Eleazar. More junk. Sigh.

I was sorta hoping the sex toy I ordered for Bella would get here today. It's her birthday, after all, and I rush-ordered that fucker. Evidently, it wasn't rushed enough.

I have a feeling she's gonna love the vibrating little bullet. I'm sure gonna love using it on her. Ah, well. There's always next time. I will just have to give her a good fucking birthday without the bullet. Believe me, I'm up for it. Well, not literally right *now*. I'm on the phone with Mom. That would just be wrong.

"...and we've been looking at houses in upstate New York..."

I check the time, realizing that I'm late for meeting up with the boys at Jake's.

"That sounds awesome," I tell Mom, heading for my bedroom. 'Cause there's no way I'm spending my Friday night in a suit. No, I go with jeans instead. A pair of stone-washed jeans in dark blue. A black fitted pullover follows – one that I know Bella likes, especially when I pull up the sleeves to show my forearms. She likes them, apparently.

In the back of my closet, I also pull out my Lacoste sneakers in white.

Now, all I need is a shower.

Gotta take a shit, too.

If only Mom could stop talking about God knows what.

I don't understand why her weekly call has to fall on a Friday. Why not a Monday? Or any other day, really. But a Friday? *Really?*

~oOo~

"Sorry I'm late," I say, a little outta breath, as I slide into my side of the booth. "Mom knows how to talk." From the bar, Jake holds up my Friday Special with a knowing grin on his face – a Stella Artois, a bowl of nuts, and printout to show which games you can catch here at the bar this weekend. And yeah, I'm out of my seat so fast to get it from him.

"Cheers, man. Start up a tab, will ya?"

"You got it, Cullen," he chuckles.

Then I'm back in my seat, only now noticing that Emmett's and Jasper's eyes are glued to a magazine they have on the table. Seriously, the fuckers haven't even greeted me. What gives?

"Shit, that's funny," Emmett chuckles.

"Where are you?" Jazz asks, and Emmett points at... something. I look closer... Huh. An article. "Ah, yeah. That's a good one."

"*Dudes*," I say, contemplating snapping my fingers to get their attention. But I don't. I also don't get their attention. So, I let out a sharp whistle instead, and they finally look up. "Yeah, hi."

"Man, oh man!" Em exclaims, grinning. "You gotta read this." I raise a brow. "Jazz brought it. And I have to say you've found one helluva lady."

The fuck?

"It's *Written Word*," Jasper explains, snickering. "It's where Bella has her column."

"Jasper!" I groan, barely resisting banging my head against the table. "Are you *shitting* me? You know where she *works*?"

This has got to stop. The last thing I need is more information about Bella.

"Hey, she told me where she had her column," he defends, still looking too fucking amused. "I had a modeling gig this morning, and on my way there I saw the magazine in a newsstand." He shrugs. "I was curious."

I roll my eyes before taking a big swallow of my beer. *Written Word*. Figures. Can't get any more female than that. I've heard of it, of course. Some lifestyle magazine full of articles about shit that women are into. Mom reads that crap. Hell, even Liz reads it, and she lives across the goddamn ocean. Mom sends it to her in London. Columns upon columns. Recipes that will help you slim down, recommendations to see the latest chick-flicks, Pilates tips, relationship shit, styling and makeup tips, advice on where to have your Chihuahua groomed, interviews with Hollywood actors that leave the women in puddles of goo. It's sad, really, and now I

know that Bella writes for it. Jesus. I can almost feel myself growing tired of her.

Nah, kidding.

But... it does solidify that she's just like all other women. Which is why I'm oh, so content with having her for my dick's pleasure.

"Dude," Emmett says, cocking a brow. "You really wanna read this."

Jasper grins. "It's the latest issue. Just came out today."

"Is that supposed to tempt me?" I ask dryly, taking a handful of nuts before shoving them into my mouth. "Jush led id go. Sheriouslyshly."

Do they listen?

No. Emmett even slides the magazine over to my side.

I catch the headline of Bella's article, and I snort. "'Make or Break – The First Date'. Is this some joke?" Oh, man. I see her little intro at the top. She writes about *relationships*, of all things. I can't fucking believe it.

"Read!" they both order, actually making me jump in my seat a little.

Jeesh.

I sigh, adding another eye-roll for good measure, and then I decide to humor them.

...You stand in front of the mirror, eager for the hot date you have tonight. We're talking butterflies here, ladies. This man you're going out with is just so perfect, and you need to put on your best face. Concealer, foundation, powder, blush, eye shadow, eyeliner, mascara, lipstick. Throw on a pair of fake lashes, too. Remember, you need to be perfect!

You inspect the manicure and the pedicure you've gotten today.

Repeat it like a mantra. Perfection, perfection, perfection...

"All right," I grunt, putting my hands up. "What kind of shit *is* this?"

"READ!"

Grrr.

"Fine," I snap.

...Sexy lingerie, yes. But not too sexy, because you're not putting out on the first date, are you?

The dress you bought after your spa appointment is next.

You probably spent too much money on it, but that doesn't matter. Tonight has to be perfect. You have to be perfect.

By the time you've strapped on your heels, you're buzzing with anticipation and nerves. Perhaps you take a drink to calm down? After all, so much is at stake. It's wild out there, and you need to show that you're at the top of your game. You're the lioness, the predator. You tell yourself to be fierce; you tell yourself to land this extraordinary man. You are woman. Let us hear you roar...

Oh, good God. What kind of freak am I fucking?

Is this who Bella is?

Perhaps I should gag her the next time she comes over. Which is tonight.

...Then, when you're surveying, scrutinizing, and inspecting yourself, make sure you leave a few unattractive traits behind. Men don't like it when you're clingy; they don't like it when you come off as uncertain. So, shake

it off. Hide it, bury it, get rid of it! Perfection, perfection, perfection. While you're at it, strip yourself bare of demands, compromises, needs, and wishes. It's not about you. It's about this man. Everything is about the man. You need him if you want that future you're dreaming about. He will get you there. Without him, there will be no June wedding at the Plaza. Without him, you can't tell your girlfriends that you're off the market!

Now, you're ready.

You're perfect for your date. He will melt, honey. He will open doors, he will pull out the chair, he will give you everything. He's the one. You can feel it, can't you? One look at him and you know that he's the key to everything you want...

Bella Swan is horrible!

I'm in serious disbelief!

...During dinner, you talk about likes and dislikes. He tells you that he loves his mother, and you imagine meeting the woman who gave birth to this amazing man. He tells you that he listens to Testament and Anthrax, and you make a mental note to buy all their songs on iTunes, because you need to know what your future husband listens to. Hot Date also tells you that he's a Yankees fan – that's baseball, by the way – and while you're in the bathroom to make sure your makeup is still flawless, you tell yourself that you're now a Yankee. Good girl. Be perfect for him.

When it's time for dessert, you only eat a third of the delicious chocolate mousse. After all, you don't want future hubby to think you're gonna get fat. So, you tell him that you can't possibly eat another bite. Even though we know that as soon as you get home, you're gonna open your hidden jar of Nutella. But that doesn't matter, because the god you're currently on a date with won't know that...

I look up at the guys, pleading with my eyes. "Can I stop now?" I whisper, almost feeling nauseous.

I feel like mourning. The stunning, beautiful, sexy, gorgeous, cute, adorable woman I've had the immense pleasure of having sex with is the epitome of what I'm against. She's the damn reason I don't get involved with women.

"Nope, read," Jasper says.

I never really liked Jasper. Not really.

After running a hand through my hair, I chug down my Stella. I also take a deep breath, and then I dive right back in.

...You're doing so well. Give yourself a mental pat on the back. The man is putty in your hand, isn't he? He's smiling, maybe even smirking sexily, and he's thinking how perfect you are. He can be himself with you, because you accept him. That's the goal, and I bet you're already thinking about that dress you saw at Vera Wang when your best friend got married last year. Oh, how you want that dress. Don't fret, you're almost there.

Perfection, perfection, perfection...

She's fake. Bella Swan is fake.

Not only is she fake, but she encourages other women to be just as fake.

...Flirt, but don't be a slut. Oh, and shower him with compliments. Tell him how impressed you are by his job, and maybe a teasing touch on his bicep will let him know that you're pleasantly surprised by his physique. While you do this, you're internally registering for wedding gifts at Barneys, aren't you?

Okay, the end of the date is here. Make or break. Have you been perfect for your date? Why, of course you have! You're gonna make it! Your hot date is such a catch that your single girlfriends will envy you. Tag him and bag him, honey. He's yours...

I'm surprised by how incredibly disappointed I am.

Honestly, I never thought she'd be like this. Not *this* bad.

...You sleep with him after the third date.

You're still perfect, and when he says something that bothers you, you ignore it. Hell, it's even nice, endearing, and wonderful that he is himself – that he speaks his mind. It's nothing major. Definitely not as major as a Plaza wedding next June, right? Exactly!

I hope you're proud of yourself. You started out with one single date, and now you're getting married.

The only thing you sacrificed, really, was yourself. Also not major.

As long as you're perfect for your man...

I frown.

She can't be serious. Is something *wrong* with her?

She's fucking delusional.

...But what happens when you just can't keep playing that role of perfection anymore? What happens when you're sick of pretending to love the music hubby listens to? What happens when you're ready to kill your mother-in-law? What happens when you tell your dear husband that you actually don't really like baseball? What happens when the annoying traits you once convinced yourself were endearing become suffocating? Yeah...

"Wait, what?" I mumble, thoroughly confused all of a sudden.

With a frown, I look up at the guys, only to see them grinning.

"Keep reading, buddy," Emmett says, jerking his chin at the magazine.

"You won't regret it."

So, I do.

...My advice is: Be Yourself. Even on the first date. Does the extraordinary-amazing-wonderful-godlike man not approve, tell him to take a hike!

That's all I have to say this week, ladies.

~Bella Swan...

"Holy shit," I exclaim, looking up once more, now with wide eyes. "It was... I mean... She was being sarcastic!"

She didn't mean it!

She's not fake! She's the fucking opposite!

Oh, heavenly relief.

"Told ya to keep reading," Em chuckles. "By the way, read the note at the bottom."

My eyes return to the magazine, and I read...

...PS: In the next issue you'll find me on page 47, too, as I will take over for our lovely Kate Williams. She's unfortunately leaving us in order to focus fully on planning her wedding which is next year. In June. At the Plaza. We wish her the best!

I bark out a laugh at that. That shit was funny. Kinda wonder if it's true about this Kate. Guess she's not a close friend of Bella's. And if they are, they won't be after that ribbing.

"And now, check page 47," Jasper tells me, and his grin has widened.

Page 47, 47, 47... There. Page 47.

I look for Kate Williams' column, and...

"Fucking hell," I breathe out. Kate Williams. She has a column about sex.

Which Bella will now take over?

I think my cock just did his own version of a knock-knock joke.

He misses Bella's pussy. That's it. And I can't blame him. It's like all is right in the world again.

Though... one thing is different.

What I've learned about Bella has only painted an even more perfect picture of her.

And it suddenly feels like I have my own kind of "make or break" situation on my hands.

Learn more about her... and risk everything I have with her now...

What if she's different? What if she's not like all the other women?

But what if she is? Perhaps not exactly like others – what I've learned so far contradicts that fact – but she could still be what my buddies and I like to call a "fempire". Ya know. Whereas vampires suck the blood outta you, women suck the joy outta you. In the end, you're nothing but a shell of a

man, stuck with a woman who forbids you to meet the guys and so on. They're demanding, clingy, bossy, and headache-inducing.

Fempire.

Patent pending.

"Looks like Cullen's got his thinking cap on," Emmett laughs, and shake my head to get rid of all the damn thoughts. What Bella and I have now is just perfect. Right? Surely... "Can't blame you, man. She's got humor. And brains."

And the body...

Okay, enough. "Change of topic," I say firmly, and that's when my phone rings.

Thank God, I need a distraction.

But then I groan, 'cause I see Bella's name on the fucking display.

So much for a topic change.

"Just a second," I mutter, sliding out of the booth before heading outside.

I doubt she's already on her way to me, 'cause it's only nine PM.

Shit, this better not be her canceling. I haven't gotten laid in almost a week. I fucking need her!

Once I'm outside, I answer. "Bella?"

And I'm immediately assaulted by way too loud music.

Holy fuck.

"Gah, you saw my name on the display!"

I cringe at the volume of her voice, but I can't help but grin. Bella's clearly drunk.

"It's my birthday, Edward, and we're toasting to good cocks!"

I choke on... nothing, really.

Cough.

Cough.

Blunt motherfucking chick.

"Edward? Can you hear me?"

I clear my throat. "Uh, Bella? Are you drunk?"

Stupid question. I know she's drunk.

Drunk Bella is fun in the sack. She's *loud* after a night out. I've even met her out a few times when her friends had been ready to leave and she wasn't. Drunk Bella is also an especially horny Bella.

"You can hear me, baby!" she fucking squeals.

Loudly.

I both cringe and laugh at the same time.

"Yeah. I can." I chuckle, shaking my head in amusement. "I guess you're having fun, then?"

"So much fun!" she shouts over the music. *"And we're toasting!"*

I laugh through my nose, and I make sure no one's around me. "Right. To, uh... good cocks?"

Take it easy, boy. Not yet.

Damn, my cock's insatiable.

"Yes! And I thought of you!"

Jesus Christ, I wish I could record this.

"MAYBE THE GOOD COCK SHOULD GET HERE!" someone screams, and I cringe... again.

And I laugh... again.

"Where are you?" she asks, giggling. *"Are you also out?"*

Leaning back against the brick wall, I reply, unable to wipe off the damn grin. "I'm hanging out with two friends. At a bar."

"Do they have good cocks, Mr.Cullen?" she inquires in a surprisingly serious tone. And I bite the inside of my cheek to suppress a laugh. Bella, however, does not suppress *anything*. She guffaws. *"I'm cockbrained!"*

For the love of all that is *holy!*

There's laughter all around, and I gotta admit that I'm curious about that birthday party of hers. It's quite obvious that they're out. Most likely at a club, and I can hear a shitload of people in the background.

"I did! I said cockbrained!"

I snicker. "Sweet Jesus, where are you, Bella?"

"I don't know! Rose, where are we?"

Rose. The chick who owns Lacy Piece. I owe her a thanks for creating such art.

"CLUB SIN!" Ouch, another scream. From this Rose, maybe. *"UPPER WEST SIDE!"*

That's where Bella lives. I think. I'm pretty sure. Yeah, I recall hearing something about that.

Before I can ponder further, Bella cuts in again. *"Don't you worry, Edward Cullen. I drink one drink then one water then one drink then one water, okay? I'll be good and ready for you!"*

Happy to hear that, baby. Truly. 'Cause I want you screaming in pleasure tonight as I drill my cock into you.

"I LOVE THIS SONG!" Aaah, right in my ear, Bella. *"C'mon, Seth, let's dance!"* Say what now? *"Rose, Alice, Mike, Angela, Ben... all of you!"*

And the call disconnects.

Um.

"Who the fuck is Seth?" I mutter, staring at the phone.

Yeah, no, I'm not amused anymore. And I'm thinking I may even... show up there. You know, to wish her a happy birthday and all. 'Cause I suddenly have that urge.

So, when I return inside, I tell Emmett and Jazz that Bella's leaving her party, which means she's on her way to me. It's just a white little lie, really. Yep. Then I take the first cab I can flag down. And I'm officially heading toward the Upper West Side. To wish Bella a happy birthday.



6.

I don't know how Seth and I dance, or for how many songs. He twirls me around, making me squeal like a damn pig. He picks me up, he spins me, he guides us, he makes me laugh hard, we goof around, our friends join in, we dance, we dance, we have a fucking blast.

So...

I'm mighty pissed when the DJ kills the music.

"Can we get the birthday girl up here?" the DJ shouts into a mic, and I'm like... *Okay!* I'm no longer pissed, 'cause I'm too high on fun. I'm also perfectly tipsy, and life is lovely. So, still breathing heavily from dancing, I adjust my scrap of a dress and march my sexy ass up there. You know, there. Up there. The stage. Yeah, I'm on my way.

Once there, the DJ announces that it's time for cake, and I may or may not squeal at that. Rose and Alice join me on the stage, and then we watch as two men carry a big-ass cake through the minor sea of people. It's covered in chocolate frosting, and I'm gaping by now. Eyes wide, jaw dropped. Holy cannoli, that's some cake! Big enough to feed the fifty or sixty or so people who are in attendance.

The enormous cake is set down on a table next to me, and the guests "ooh" and "ahh" before Seth starts yelling for me to blow out the candles. This triggers the rest of 'em, of course.

I smile cheekily at my friends, and then I take a deep breath before failing miserably to blow out the candles in one try. Dammit! Twenty-five candles shouldn't be that hard to blow out!

"Help me, Rose!" I cry out, tugging on Rose's hand. "You too, Alice!"

Thankfully, they help me.

I also make a wish.

I hope I get to have mind-blowing sex for the rest of my life.

"Speech, speech, speech!" Seth bellows.

That queen is *loud*.

And of course, the crowd continues. "SPEECH, SPEECH, SPEECH!"

I blow Seth a kiss from the stage, followed by Rose thrusting the mic into my hands.

"Is this fucker on?" I shout, and um, yeah, the mic is on. "Whoa."

Silly people are laughing at me, making me blush. Sigh.

"Oh, shush, you," I tell them through giggles. And I try to focus, 'cause I really do wanna say a few words. "Okay," I sigh, closing my eyes for an itty bitty moment. "First of all," I open my eyes again and face my girls, "thank you, Rose and Alice for all of this. It's been an amazing party, and I love you bunches. Second of all... and lastly... thank you all for coming. I've had a fucking spectacular night, and I think it's time to continue it!"

Cheers.

Seth squeals and jumps up on stage to kidnap me. "Time to dance again, Baby Swaaaaan!"

And when I'm back on the dance floor, I hear Rose shout out to the DJ.

"Play number three now! Oh, and you two better save us some cake!"

I fist pump the air – oops – and then I pull up my dress. Damn, I almost flashed my twins.

But all is forgotten when I hear one of my favorite songs come on. Oh, yeah, Rose and Alice told me about the playlist they gave the DJ earlier. See, I love animated movies and cartoons. One of my favorite movies is *Madagascar* – actually, both of them – and the soundtracks are just as awesome. In this case it's the soundtrack from *Madagascar 2*. "Alex On The Spot" with will.i.am, which is a *fabulous* song if you want to have is with me, also loving this, while Rose is more into chick-flicks and horror. I know, a lovely combination.

"Let's dance, Alice!" I exclaim, super-super excited.

When I spin around, Alice almost crashes into me. We laugh, 'cause we're having a fucking riot. Then it's all about moving to the best beat in the world. Or something. No, but really. I love this song. And we dance. We fucking work it. After the first verse, I twirl her around before she does the same with me. Singing along, dancing, and laughing. It's life.

King of the floor, king of the swing

Play a little beat, I'll be your dancing machine

Play a little jam, I'll come alive, alive, alive

I'm sure we look like complete fools.

But it's about having fun, right?

This is my home, this is my home

King of the throne, this is my home

This is my home, this is my home

Alice and I bump our hips together, all but shouting out the lyrics while people dance around us. Grins, smirks, smiles, they're all there. Giggling, laughing, chuckling, chortling, guffawing. Oh, how we dance.

But that's when someone wraps their fingers around my wrist, and after a quick spin, I crash into a hard chest.

I shake my head, trying to get rid of the familiar scent that suddenly engulfs me. He can't possibly be here, can he?

When I look up, though, I see that I'm wrong.

He *is* here.

See, I've been traveling, been traveling forever

But now that I'm finally home, feels like I'm in heaven

Holy fuck, he's here. And he's so... damn... sexy.

His mouth is twitching a little, showing amusement. Same goes for his eyes. Yeah, he's amused, but there's something else, too. In my tipsy state, it's sorta hard to be sure. Could it be hesitation? Maybe. This is new, after all. He's here. At my birthday party. Where all my friends are gathered. Basically, he's entered my personal life.

It's been an unspoken rule for so long. No questions asked. No answers given.

I know I started this tonight. I was the one who called him, but Alice's question from last week is messing with my head. The question about if Edward and I would be perfect for each other in a relationship since we're so compatible in the bedroom.

A shiver runs through me when he dips down, all while sliding his hands from my hips to my waist.

His lips brush against my ear. "Happy birthday, beautiful."

I. Fucking. Melt.

Needing to actually steady myself, I grip his biceps, firm biceps. Christ, I'm cooked and done.

I breathe him in, accidentally touching my lips to his neck. He tightens his hold on my waist, and when he slides his nose along my jaw, I'm pretty sure I whimper. Yeah, I did, 'cause he curses and presses our bodies together. Edward has a thing for my sounds, which is good since he's causing them.

I vaguely register the song change.

I drop an openmouthed kiss on his neck.

I feel his sharp exhale against my cheek.

"You okay with me being here?" he asks huskily, lips still attached to my skin. All I can do is nod, which I do. Quite furiously. I'm more than okay with him being here. "Good." Oh, God. I feel surrounded by him. "Dance with me, Bella?"

"Yes," I moan.

"Fuck, baby," he groans, and then his mouth covers mine.

That's also when I hear the lyrics of the song. The memory of when Edward and I hooked up for the first time flashes before my closed eyes, only intensifying my desire for him. This was the song we danced to... amongst others. "FutureSex/LoveSound" with Justin Timberlake. I remember – girls remember things like that. Oh, how I remember.

You know what you want

And that makes you just like me

See, everybody says you're hot, baby

But can you make it hot for me?

My fingers get tangled in his hair as we kiss, as we fucking devour, and our bodies move in motions you could only refer as foreplay. His hands are firm on my ass, caressing sensually, at times sliding down to touch the bare skin of my thighs. He makes me moan and forget. The way he works my body, it's consuming and intense.

Don't worry, girl

'Cause I'm gonna make it so easy

So, slide a little bit closer to me, little girl

See, Daddy's on a mission to please

I'm panting and whimpering, grinding shamelessly, and he's in control. He's playing me expertly. Skilled hands, wandering. Openmouthed kisses along my neck. A hard cock pressed against my abdomen. And that scent of his... Add more than a few of drinks and you have me: horny, delirious, needy, shameless. But Edward doesn't complain.

"You're driving me insane, baby," he moans in my ear.

Goose bumps break out over my skin.

Just tell me which way you like that

All you gotta do is

Tell me which way you like that

Do you like it like this?

Do you like it like that?

Fisting his hair the way he loves, I guide his mouth to mine again. I kiss him hard, pushing my tongue into his mouth. My hips swivel in a figure eight, effectively grinding my pussy against his thigh, and I can fucking feel the growl that emanates from his chest.

You can't stop, baby

You can't stop once you've turned me on

And your enemies are your thoughts, baby

So just let 'em go

When one of my hands reaches between our bodies to palm his erection, he gives me a warning.

A low moan in my ear. "Behave."

And I know that I have a choice. Either I can keep going, which will end with Edward dragging me out and into the nearest cab to get back to his place... Or... I stop, and I will enjoy the last of my birthday party... with Edward here.

And after you let it in

We'll be skin to skin

It's just so natural

With my fingers now splayed over his sexy happy-trail – under his black shirt – I look up at him. His abs clench under my touch. His fingers flex on my ass, digging in a little. And his eyes, they're hooded, filled with lust. Jaw clenched, lips very kissed.

"Wanna sit down for a while?" I ask, still a bit breathless.

He knows what it means. He knows that if he sits down with me, he's gonna meet my friends.

So, I'm a little surprised when he gives me a slow nod.



6.

When we reach the booth that is packed with Bella's friends, I already know who three of them are. 'Cause what Bella doesn't know is that I arrived a minute or two before she was called up on stage to blow out the candles on her giant cake. So, I already know that Seth is flamingly gay. Yeah, this was the dude whose presence made me come here in a raging speed. I was jealous of a guy who is wearing a tiara that matches Bella's.

Then there's Rose and Alice. Both of whom were up on stage with Bella earlier.

"Hey, guys," Bella says, and I'm trying not to feel out of place. Or like I'm on display, 'cause they're all staring at me with wide eyes and jaws dropped. "What's up?"

Bella stands slightly in front of me, with both her hands holding mine behind her back, and I can't really see her face. But it sounds like she's trying to come off as casual, even though we both know this is far from casual. Don't ask me what it is, but... let's just say that this isn't how I expected this Friday night to play out. I expected another guys' night with

Em and Jazz, and then I expected Bella to come to my place for a fuckhot night. Yeah, that didn't quite happen. Instead, I'm here... about to officially meet Bella's friends. And I don't really know what to feel about it.

But here I am. Not going anywhere.

"Wh... what's up?" the blonde – who I know is Rose – questions. Her eyes are still wide. "After that display, do not ask me what's up, 'cause I'm pretty fucking sure I know." And then she eyes me up and down, settling for my midsection before looking back at Bella. Damn, so she's another blunt one? "And if I had a cock, I'd be up, too!"

My eyes widen for a second, and then I watch as all the people in the booth break down into laughter and guffaws.

"Yeah, yeah," Bella replies dismissively. "Now, make room for us." Two guys – Seth and another one, who is also clearly gay – slide out of the booth completely, and Seth tells us that he's going to dance. He says this while he's blatantly eye-fucking me. Lovely. "Look but don't touch," Bella warns him.

A chuckle escapes me. I can't deny that I'm surprised to find her friends so... blatant.

Again, I don't really know what I expected, but this wasn't it. I guess I just never thought about it before.

Anyway, with Seth and his... date? gone, Bella motions for me to slide into the booth, which I do, and she follows.

"So, this is Edward," she tells the girls – as if they didn't know. "And Edward?" she gives me a sweet smile, "these are my friends. The two queens who just left, that's Seth and Mike." Then she nods at Rose and Alice. "That's Rosalie, but don't call her that, call her Rose. And that's

Alice. Last but not least," she jerks her chin at the final two, "Angela and Ben. They're like one person."

Right. "Hello," I say politely, giving a two-finger wave. And yeah, it's fucking weird. This. On the verge of awkward, 'cause Rose and Alice keep staring.

Don't they fucking remember Bella's drunken phone call earlier? Why are they so damn surprised I'm here? They did, after all, scream for the, uh... ya know... good cock to get here. Well, a good motherfucking dick is here now. Okay, that sounded wrong. Never mind. Fuck, I need a beer.

"So," Ben – I think his name was – clears his throat, "how about drinks?"

"Sounds good," I tell him, relaxing a little in my seat. With beer comes casual. Resting my arm behind Bella on the back of the booth, I lean in and ask her, "What do you want to drink?"

The back of my fingers caress her arm, and I stifle a smile when I see the shiver that runs through her. I can't fucking get enough of seeing the way her body responds to my touch.

"Um, water," she croaks when I kiss the spot below her ear. This time I don't hold back. I smile against her skin, satisfied to know that I'm not the only one who's affected. "Or maybe a Red Bull. I want to be alert for later."

Fuck me running.

"Okay, I gotta get out of here before I explode!" someone cries out. Looking up, I see it's the dark-haired chick – Alice. "Rose, you and I can get the fucking drinks."

"Yeah, and I need to change panties," Rose adds. "Edward, what do you want?"

Um, Bella's panties on my bedroom floor.

"Heineken, please," I say, reaching for my wallet. I hand them a fifty. "A Red Bull for Bella. Drinks are on me."

They all but run away.

And since they didn't ask the other two what they wanted, they leave, too, after saying that they're parched.

Fine by me.

"We sure know how to clear out a booth," Bella giggles, smiling up at me. Her eyes are slightly glazed over, showing that she's had more than a couple of drinks. But I know what she can handle. Well, I actually don't, but I know how she looks when she's had too much, and this isn't the look. I've only seen it once, and it was about a month or two into our arrangement, and Bella showed up at my place shitfaced. I knew right away that we weren't gonna do anything, and as soon as I had taken her to bed – all while withholding my laughs, by the way – she fell asleep. She did, however, wake up a few hours later and gave me a good fucking ride.

"So, how does it feel to be twenty-five?" I ask her, resuming to slowly running the back of my fingers up and down her arm. "You looked like you were having a hard time blowing out the candles on the cake." I wink.

Her eyes widen. "You saw that?" she gasps before ducking her head. "Oh, damn. They were fucking relentless."

I laugh through my nose as I dip down to nuzzle her jaw. "Funny, 'cause you're usually an expert at blowing."

And Bella moans at that.

Fuck.

With a tilt of her head, she captures my mouth with hers. Our tongues meet right away, sliding together with our lips firmly attached. And with one arm already around her, I move my other toward her, as well. All that skin she's showing... What guy wouldn't find it hard to back off? I settle my hand on her thigh, drawing lazy circles with my thumb, and it doesn't take long until we lose control. She ends up sitting sideways on my lap, and I have my hand going higher and higher on her thigh.

"Jesus, your fucking dress, baby," I moan into the kiss. Hell, even her damn tiara makes her look... Actually, it makes her look cute. Can't say sexy or stunning, but seriously goddamn cute. And I hope I can fuck her while she's still wearing it later.

"Fuck, Edward," she whimpers, and I reach my free hand up toward her tits. I haven't forgotten where we are, but the darkness of the club, the music... it would be very easy *to* forget. And I can't help myself when I reach the underside of her breast. My thumb brushes over her nipple, causing her to arch into me for more. Believe me, I'd give her more. But we're in a public place, and I don't fuck in night clubs. Okay, I have in the past, but that was before Bella, and only if the woman didn't wanna go to her place. Bella's the first one I've taken to my apartment... and don't fucking start. Don't overanalyze. I was hammered, and she was – is – the sexiest woman I've ever seen.

Now, though, I can't fuck in a club. It wouldn't go well with Bella, 'cause I'm unstoppable as soon as her pussy comes to view, and we're both loud fuckers. Her sounds are only for me.

"Holy shit!"

"Good God!"

Okay, that was someone else. Two someones, actually.

Very reluctantly, I break our kiss, ready to glare at the intruders.

We're both breathing heavily. She buries her face in the crook of my neck, and I look past her to see...

"Ladies," I sigh. Rose and Alice. With drinks. "You're back."



7.

After Rose and Alice take their seats again, Ben and Angela follow. Drinks are slid across the table, and while I take a sip from my Red Bull, Edward drinks from his beer. Oh, I definitely watch him. The way he tilts his head back, the way the tip of his tongue wets his bottom lip before those soft lips come into contact with the bottle. How he swallows... how he licks his lips again after drinking...

Ungh.

"BELLA!"

"Shit," I breathe out, turning to Alice and Rose... who had both screamed my name. "Wh..." I clear my throat. "What is it?"

They just stare at me.

And I have a feeling they're gonna wanna talk to me soon.

About Edward, of course.

Speaking of Edward...

I face him again, catching his amused expression.

Dipping down, he talks huskily in my ear. I shiver. "Let me know when you're ready to leave, baby girl."

He should be against the law. Like, all of them. I mean *all* laws. Because no one stands a chance. Least of all me. I'm completely defenseless when he's around. Don't even get me started on my panties. They're ruined. Ruined, I tell ya!

"So, Edward..."

That would be Rose.

Edward shoots me a wink... before facing one of my best friends. "Yes, Rose?" he replies smoothly.

"What do you do for a living?" she asks.

In a whiplash-inducing movement, I turn to Edward again. This is what is new for us. Is this something we want? Do we want know things about each other? I'm not sure, but I'd be a liar if I said that I wasn't curious.

"We have cake!" I hear Seth sing out then, and for a moment, it's a bustle of life around the booth as we make room for him and Mike... and cake, of course. But Rose isn't one to be deterred, and when she's repeated her question, everyone waits for Edward to answer. And color me surprised, 'cause he answers right away.

"I'm a graphic designer," he tells us, tipping his Heineken back. When he's had a sip or two, he continues. "I work in advertising."

Sexy.

Um. Yeah, that's my first thought. Don't ask me why, though, but the thought of him designing ads and... uh, stuff... is hot. Oh, God, I'm glad I didn't voice that thought. I would come off as a complete imbecile.

"You know that our girl here is a writer?" Alice asks him, tilting her head a little.

Edward nods once... with a little smirk gracing his lips. Me wants lips.

I'm so fucking coherent, it hurts.

"I do know that, yeah," he chuckles.

Rose is next. "Where are you from? I can hear that you're not a New Yorker."

"Chicago," he replies, and I wonder if he's aware of what his touch is doing to me. I mean, I'm still on his lap, and he has one hand on my thigh and one hand on my lower back. Yeah, let's just say that the small circles and caresses are driving me to the brink of insanity. "I moved here for college, and," he shrugs, "I decided to stay afterward."

"Do you have family here?" Rose again.

"My parents still live in Chicago, and I have a sister who lives in London."

Huh.

A sister?

Hmm. Yes, I can see that. I can picture him being both annoying as hell and fiercely protective.

That sorta makes me grin like a schmuck, so I bury my face in the crook of his neck to hide myself, dropping a kiss or two as I breathe him in.

I'm hungry for him.

Rose and Alice huff when Edward tilts his head to kiss me, and I hope they realize that this isn't the night to get to know each other. Sorry, but I'm too damn horny for that. So, when he kisses me softly, I deepen it, swiping my tongue across his lip. That always makes him groan quietly and open up for me. Which is just what I'm looking for.

"They're hopeless!" Alice exclaims.

"And blind," Rose adds.

I'm too far gone to care what they're talking about. Instead, I focus on kissing Edward.

His hand goes to my cheek, slowly sliding it back to cup my neck. I turn in his embrace, straddling him... somewhat smoothly, I hope. Then I press myself closer and harder to him, eager to fucking devour him. And I'm glad that my friends ignore us, talking to each other instead. *Oh, fuck.* Rolling my hips over Edward's hardening cock, I coax him into letting go. Not that he's holding much back, but he's still aware of our surroundings. I am not. That's for damn sure. And I whimper into the kiss when he responds by thrusting slightly. The feeling shoots sparks of excitement and desire through me. Our kiss grows hungrier and more forceful. Hands roaming, heavy breathing... small, but unstoppable movements that bring us even closer.

"Fuck, Edward," I pant, breaking the kiss. My lungs are almost burning, craving air so desperately. But he continues, kissing my jaw and neck. "I... oh, shit..." I moan when his erection rubs against my clit. *"Edward."*

"I need to fuck you, baby," he moans in my ear. Another thrust tells me what he'd rather be doing right now. Even though he just said it. "It's time to go."

Shivers. Oh, the shivers. "Yes," I whimper.

Yes, really. Yes, yes, yes.

I'm suddenly in a hurry.

With Edward's help, I slide out of the booth. "Um..." This is where I should give my friends a long speech about how damn thankful I am for them and how amazing this party is. "Rose, Alice-

But Alice cuts me off. "Just go, Bella. You're unable to function." I frown, and she laughs. "Look at you. You're a fucking mess. Let that man of yours fuck you six ways to Sunday."

"And about Sunday," Rose says, grinning, "how about we meet up for brunch."

It wasn't a question.

So, I nod dutifully and say, "I love you, girls. See you on Sunday and thank you again for tonight."

"Have a lovely night," Alice chuckles.

Edward clears his throat, placing his hand on my lower back. "Right. Uh, nice to meet you, ladies."

Then he ushers me out.

The cab ride toward Chelsea Park is wild. Edward and I are all over each other, and the driver tells us to calm the fuck down... more than once. In more than one language. But it's hard to obey. We kiss and touch. My leg

is thrown over his, and his hand traces my thigh... farther and farther with each pass... until he palms my ass roughly. His touch ignites me further, and our kiss turns as rough as his touch. We're more like animals, and we don't stop until the driver growls out that we've reached Edward's place.

"Keep the change," Edward barks out, throwing some bills before ordering me to get the fuck out. Oh, he's horny. "Faster, baby," he orders gruffly, helping me out of the cab. "*Jesus*, that ass of yours." He steps out after me, giving me a quick swat on said ass, and then we hurry again. Or maybe we never stopped hurrying. Regardless, we hurry inside his building. Our fingers are threaded together as he walks briskly through the lobby, not even acknowledging Kirk at the front desk.

When we reach the elevators, he presses me up against the cold wall to kiss me again. Kissing is lovely while you're waiting for the elevator to arrive. Then, when it finally does arrive, he all but pushes me inside, quickly following for another up-against-the-wall make-out.

"So hot," he groans in my mouth. His hands are suddenly cupping my tits, and like the needy bitch I am, I arch into his touch, silently pleading for more. "Losing my *fuckin'* mind," he mumbles. I'm out of control, hitching my leg over his hip to grind myself shamelessly over his steel-hard cock.

"More," I pretty much whine.

"Oh, trust me, Bella, you'll have more soon." And once the words have left his mouth, we arrive on the fourteenth floor. "Fucking finally." He grabs my hand again, and we all but run toward his apartment. At the same time, he locates his keys, and by the time we reach the door, I'm panting, both from the running and from the mind-blowing make-out sessions we've had since we left the club.

I'm dizzy for so many reasons, but mainly it's the need. It's been too long since I felt him inside of me, it's been too long since he fisted my hair

while slamming into me from behind, it's been too long since I heard his moans and snarls.

"Get inside," he breathes out, pushing the door open, and I'm already moving. I don't even stop in the hallway to take off my shoes or anything. Instead, I march straight toward the bedroom and, yeah, I hear him behind me. I hear his steps, I hear his breathing.

Just as I reach his bed, he wraps his fingers around my wrist. In a quick movement, he spins me around, and I steady myself with a hand on his heaving chest. His eyes are dark, his lips are redder from the kissing, and his jaw is clenched. And those eyes of his never leave mine as he grabs my dress at the hem, swiftly pulling it over my head. When it's on the floor, he gives me a pointed look. One that tells me to get naked for him, and I'm oh, so willing to comply. Especially since he returns the gesture, immediately starting to get rid of his own clothes.

"Keep the tiara on," he adds quietly. "Time to fuck my little princess."

Mmmm.

I lick my lips, walking backward until I reach the bed. My eyes are on him as he undresses. I'm already naked. Completely. Fuck, he's... art. His muscular arms, his chest, his pecs, his abs, his waist, the defined "v" on... Oh, my... and his jeans are pushed down... boxers, too.

"So hard," I whimper. Thick, long, so ready for my pussy.

Settling in the middle of the bed, I ask him how he wants me.

He answers as he walks toward me, looking like the predator he is when I'm around.

"On all fours."

I moan in anticipation, obeying him without hesitation or pause. And when he gets on the bed behind me, I look at him over my shoulder, wriggling my ass a little for good measure. He knows what I want. He always does. So, when both of his hands go to my ass, I know what's coming.

Smack!

"*Aaahh*, Edward!" I moan.

And a second later, I feel the tip of his cock at my entrance. It's the only warning I get before he rams himself inside of me in one forceful thrust.

"Fuck!"

"God, Edward!" I cry out. Anticipating his next move – and his pace – I grip the headboard with both hands. I know I will need the support. And I'm right. He sets a fast and hard pace right away, starting his mission to fuck me into oblivion. He's done it before, after all. He knows how to work me.

"*Always*," thrust, "*so fucking*," thrust, "*perfect*, Bella!"

Straightening my arms, I push back each time he slides into me. I'm panting and moaning like a damn porn star, but at least we're both on the same page. He keeps mumbling and grunting about my pussy, my tits, my ass, my entire body, and I don't really think he's aware of what he's saying anymore.

"Oh, *fuck!*" I gasp. He swivels his hips, grinding into me, almost digging, *forcing* himself deeper, even though he's completely buried inside of me. I can picture him behind me, which isn't helping. I know what he looks like when he's lost in the moment, and it's one of the sexiest sights I've ever seen. His lips slightly parted, his head tilted back, his breathing harsh, his brows furrowed, his teeth gritting together... No, this isn't helping me unless I want to come right now. "Edward," I mewl, feeling him reach my

sweet spot. "Please... oh, please..." For some weird reason, he understands. I'm not sure *I* understand, but he does. And he delivers. Over and over, his slick cock pushes into me, rubbing his head against that spot.

"That's it, *princess*," he pants, gripping my hips harder. "Take my cock. Fucking *take* it."

Then he fists my hair.

It's my undoing.

With a tug on my hair, he slams into me, and my orgasm hits me like a wrecking ball. Without build-up, without warning, I come and come and come and come. I think I scream. I'm pretty sure my eyes are screwed shut, and I may or may not clamp down on him so hard that he's fucking stuck. Okay, maybe not, but through my intense waves of pleasure, I'm vaguely aware of how hard my muscles contract. I can't even breathe, nor do I hear his moans as he climaxes. But I know that he does, 'cause I recognize his lazy thrusts – the ones he's not in control over.

In the end, we both collapse on the bed. With my back to his chest, I can feel his labored breathing hot against my neck. Legs tangled together. I blink repeatedly, trying to clear my vision of black spots. *Holy fuck*. He snakes his arm around me, settling his hand above my heart, and he can definitely feel the rapid beating. Hell, I can feel his against my shoulder blade. *Thump, thump, thump, thump, thump*.

"For chrissakes, beautiful," he breathes out.

My eyes feel very heavy all of a sudden, and I shiver and hum, cuddling closer to his chest.

"Fuckin' fireworks," I mumble sleepily.

A silent chuckle escapes him – one that I feel instead of hear – and he kisses my neck. "Sleep, baby."

Best. Birthday. Ever.



7.

When I wake up the next morning, I'm not surprised to feel my morning wood wedged between Bella's thighs. That's just how it is when she spends the night. But after last night, I doubt she'll be happy if I wake her up for a round or two now. So, I drag my tired ass outta bed. I take a much needed piss, I wash my hands and face, and I brush my teeth. Then I fetch a glass of orange juice and a couple of Advil for Bella, knowing that she's gonna need 'em when she wakes up, and lastly I pull on a pair of grey sweats – drawn up to my calves – and a black beater before heading back to the kitchen. Once there, I grab a bottle of water. The hallway where I have my iPod in my jacket is next, and I put in the earbuds before walking toward my gym. It's just a small room, but it's needed. Gotta stay in shape, ya know. I pass my bedroom, my study, and then I reach the room where I spend most of my Saturday mornings. It's usually where Bella finds me after waking up.

After deciding on some Soulja Boy, I walk over to the treadmill. The room isn't packed with equipment, but I have a treadmill, a chin-up bar, a

boxing bag, and some handles. If I need anything else, I have the gym at work.

I roll my shoulders, slowly waking up my body as I start off with a brisk walk. It's just to warm up a little, and soon enough, I speed up to a jog. The music helps. I always listen to hiphop and R&B when I work out. I'm curious, though... After last night, I have a few more facts to file under the stuff I know about Bella. For instance, she likes the soundtrack to *Madagascar 2*. At least one of the tracks. And I wonder what else she likes. Music-wise, that is.

Is she like me, enjoying different types of music based on the activity she's engaging in? 'Cause that's what I do. When I work out, I have playlists full of Soulja Boy, Lil' Wayne, Timbaland, T.I, and Rihanna. Then when I'm on the subway, to and from work, I usually listen to rock. The Irish in me loves Dropkick Murphys and Flogging Molly. And don't get me started on the guys' nights we sometimes have at my place. Emmett's way worse than I am. Irish, Bostonian, die-hard Red Sox fan. If he's in charge of the music when he's here, my apartment could shit out Irish leprechauns afterward.

I digress.

At work, I listen to music that inspires me. When we worked on an ad campaign for Maybelline, I listened to music about suicide. Nah, kidding. I listened to sappy shit then.

Music to me is fuel. It helps me.

Last but not least, when I'm at home doing nothing in particular, I listen to southern rock, singer-songwriters, and sometimes some mainstream music.

When I cook, I usually have *VH1* on in the background.

When I clean, or when I'm doing my laundry, I listen to hardcore.

Little things that make up routines and rituals for me.

Does Bella also have that?

I suspect most people have their own rituals.

With a labored breath, I slow down on the treadmill.

I drink some water, satisfied with the five miles I put in. It'll do for today. When it comes to running, that is. 'Cause chin-ups are next. In quick succession, I do five of them before resting for a few seconds. One... two... three... four... five. Rest. Drink some water. Wipe off sweat. One... two... three... four... *five*...

"Aahh," I exhale, stretching my body.

Sit-ups. Fifty of them.

I decide to tell Bella later that I read her article.

I mean, things have changed already. There's no use in denying it. The only question is... How do we proceed? Do we get to know each other but still continue on with our arrangement? Do I ask her out? Do we become friends?

I grimace, not having a fucking clue.

Swiping a towel over my face, I wonder how quickly I will get attached to her if I find out more. Then I give myself an inner eye-roll. Get attached. Please. Like I haven't gotten attached as it is. I may not know her rituals, her favorite music, or what food she prefers, but I'd be a fucking fool if I said that I don't know more about her than I was willing to admit before. 'Cause I do know her. Well, at least more than I admitted to earlier.

The music continues in a heavy beat as I get back on the floor to do push-ups. My breathing is labored, shallow, and I can feel my muscles burning. It's a burn I love. And as I push myself up over and over, I think about all the things I've learned about the woman sleeping down the hall. Even though I haven't really spoken to her about it. Not really, anyway.

For example, I know that she usually works on Saturdays and Sundays. I recall hearing something said in passing. Like a "by the way" or for clarification. *"I usually take my laptop to a coffee house on weekends. I love people-watching when I write."* It was just a quick explanation when I asked her if she wanted to stay for lunch a Saturday. We'd had a late night, and it was way too late to call it breakfast when we woke up. And sorry, but I don't understand the concept of brunch. Unless you get breakfast and lunch, too, that is. But you can't possibly miss breakfast. I'd *die*.

Six months of little anecdotes as we get ready in the morning are still enough for me to know that she's different from the other women I've been with.

It isn't much, but still.

But I'm a dude. The thought of changing what we have now isn't very appealing. I have unbelievably good sex on a regular basis with a sexy woman who knows how to both give and take. And I don't want that part of my life to go away. I wanna keep having sex with Bella. I also love the way my life is with work and friends.

Seventy-four, seventy-five. With a grunt, I push myself off the floor.

I chug the rest of my water down, half-surprised Bella hasn't woken up yet. She usually wakes up before I'm done. Then again, she partied hard last night. *Fuck*. She'd been so hot in that dress. And I got my wish. I

fucked her with the tiara still on her head. That was a lovely fucking sight, I gotta say.

On my way to the kitchen, I smile to myself, thinking about the tiara that was still on her when I woke up earlier. So, I guess it's still there. 'Cause that's another thing I know about Bella. She barely stirs in her sleep. She goes to bed in one position, only to wake up in the same spot.

From the fridge, I grab another bottle of water. And I'm glad I have the towel around my shoulders, 'cause I'm sweating like a pig. A shower is definitely in order, but I'm stalling, remembering the showers where Bella joins me before leaving. Yeah, those showers are definitely the ones I favor.

Using one end of the towel, I wipe my forehead. Then I chug some water, contemplating what's next. With my fridge full of food for a change, I could always make breakfast.

My stomach snarls in agreement.

"That settles it," I mumble with a firm nod. Eggs, ham, garlic, cheese, and tomatoes for the omelet. "And coffee," I add in a mutter. I definitely need coffee. And maybe bread. Hmm. I tap my chin. Decisions, decisions. Yeah, oregano bread. That's the stuff.

It hits me that it's been a really long since I cooked for myself, and I gotta say that I'm a little excited. In college, I was the fucking master of turning a few ingredients into a fancy meal. You just need to know your way around spices.

However, before I can start, I can hear my phone ringing, and I take off at a run since the phone is in my bedroom. Hopefully, Bella won't wake up. No, she doesn't. I locate the phone in my jeans, and Bella doesn't even

stir. I snicker quietly, seeing the tiara stuck in her hair, but my amusement is quickly wiped away when I see "Mom" on the caller ID.

"Shit," I sigh, walking out of the bedroom again. I love that woman, but we just talked yesterday. Anyway, I answer as I make my way back to the kitchen. "Two days in a row, Mom?" I grin. "What did I do to deserve that?"

She chuckles.

"What are you talking about, honey? I told you I'd call you this morning so that we could talk about Lizzie's birthday."

I stop short, almost dropping the bag of flour on the floor.

Shit! Liz's birthday. I forgot my little sister's birthday.

Quickly remembering that yesterday was Bella's birthday, also the thirteenth of September, I count on my fingers... thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen... That gives me- No, wait. It's the fourteenth today. Not the thirteenth. So, I have...

Five days.

Five days to get her something. Five days to get her something *and* have it shipped to London.

Crap.

"I have to admit that I'm a little curious about the gift you're giving her."

"Hmm?" Oh, right, I have Mom on the phone. "Gift? What gift?"

This is where the fact that I have a dick comes back to bite me in the ass. I tend to listen with one ear, and I may or may not function on autopilot when I reply. And now I wonder what the hell I've told her.

"Well, you told me yesterday that you've ordered something for her," Mom says matter-of-factly.

Of course I did. "Oh, yeah. I ordered something online," I respond, nodding like I know what I'm talking about. "She's gonna fucking love it." And why the hell did I just up the stakes? I hate shopping, and now I have to get Liz something that she's gonna "fucking love".

"Funny, since you usually call me, needing help with her gift."

Yeah...

I shrug, starting to take out ingredients for the oregano bread. "What can I say, Ma? I know my baby sister." Please, for the love of *God*, shut up, Cullen. "In fact, she's gonna cry. That's how much she's going to adore the gift." Yep, I'm just digging myself in deeper and deeper. "Anyway," I clear my throat, "what did we have to talk about?" I shake my head, clearing it. "I mean, we'll do what we always do, right? We send the gifts." Simple as that. I have to say I miss my little sis, and we don't see each other enough, but we live on different continents. Plus, we're all so damn busy. Christmas is what we have, and we get together in Chicago then. As for my parents, they fly to New York for a few days with me in the beginning of the summer, and then at the end of the summer, they fly to London for a few days with Liz. I've only visited my sister once in England, and that was before I got my job at Volturi. I'm too busy to fly out now. Same goes for her; she's too busy to fly here.

"Are you still asleep, Edward?" Mom laughs softly as I cradle the phone between my cheek and shoulder. Then I start chopping the oregano, wondering what the hell Mom's laughing for. "*We talked about this yesterday, you know. Dinner and a show, remember?*"

Whoa. "Wh-what?" I stammer, putting down the knife. What the hell have I agreed to?

"Well, yes. Since we're all moving to New York soon, it only makes sense for us to celebrate her birthday there, of course."

Uh...

How did I miss *this*?



8.

Waking up alone is something I'm used to when I spend the night at Edward's. He's always up early.

I smile at his thoughtfulness, spotting the glass of juice and the painkillers on the nightstand. And it's much needed. My head is throbbing, and my eyes feel heavy.

After swallowing down the pills, I wrap a sheet around my body, frowning when I feel a light weight in my hair- Ah, shit. The tiara. All tangled up in my personal bird's nest.

"Ugh," I mutter in my morning voice. Shower. I so need a shower. Which reminds me... Edward's probably working out, and as soon as he's done, we can shower together. But first, I definitely need a moment in the bathroom alone. I don't even want to think about how I look after last night. Hair all over the place, makeup smeared...

Double-ugh.

With the sheet tightly wrapped around my naked body, I pad out of the room, coming to an abrupt stop when the smell of freshly baked... *something*... hits my nose. The hell? Edward doesn't cook.

I think, anyway.

'Cause I've seen the inside of his fridge. Beer and Styrofoam containers are what usually reside there. Nothing else. Nothing that smells oregano, that's for sure. Unless he's reheating old pizza, which I sincerely hope he isn't. Besides, this is something fresh.

Which also means he's not in his gym.

Pity. Watching him work out is like watching porn. Porn that later fucks me hard in the shower.

So, it's with a pout I enter the bathroom, and my pout gets even more profound when I see the steam billowing out of the room. I can only assume that he's already showered. Why the hell didn't he wake me up? And if he has plans for the day, he definitely should've woken me up so that I can make myself presentable for the world before I leave. 'Cause the walk of shame with mascara smudged on my cheeks and hair tangled in a clusterfucky mess just isn't my thing. So, figuring that I don't have much time, I hurry. After flushing the toilet, I even decide to take my toothbrush with me into the shower.

~oOo~

Once I'm squeaky clean and my breath is minty fresh, I leave the bathroom with a towel wrapped around me. I know I have clean lingerie here – that I've left behind – but I doubt I have clean clothes. So, when I reach Edward's bedroom again, I open his closet. Oh yeah, he's fucked me in here, too. *Mmm, shiver.* I quickly locate a matching bra and thong in dark purple satin in his underwear drawer, and then I pick out one of his

many white button-downs. I roll up the sleeves, also leaving a few buttons unbuttoned. It'll do until I have to cram into my dress again.

"All right," I sigh to myself as I leave his bedroom. Time to track down Edward, which shouldn't be too hard since I can hear that the TV is on in the living room.

Sure enough, he's on the couch. The TV is on, but his eyes are glued to the laptop on the coffee table. And my eyes, well, they're glued to his rather naked body. Apart from the black boxers and the black rimmed reading glasses, he's deliciously naked. So, I assume he's not in a too big rush to get out of here. And that's good, but it makes me wonder why he didn't wait for me to join him in the shower. Or, hell, he could've woken me up.

"Good morning," I say softly, alerting him to my presence. His head snaps up, quickly followed by a sexy smile on his lips as he gives me a slow onceover. I walk toward him, eyeing him in the same way he eyes me. I love his glasses, but unfortunately he takes them off when I reach him.

"Sleeping Beauty's finally up, huh?" he murmurs, leaning back against the couch. He pats his thighs once, silently telling me to straddle him and, yeah, I do just that. "Damn, you're sexy, Bella." With his hands sliding up my thighs, he nuzzles my jaw, and I kiss him on the forehead as my fingers make their way to his hair. It's still damp from his shower, which reminds me...

"You showered without me this morning," I say, pouting.

He chuckles quietly and kisses my pout. "I waited for you, but you didn't wake up."

I'm completely limp on his lap all of a sudden, just feeling relaxed and... and... *something* else. My face against his neck – where he smells so

amazing – my arms around his shoulders, and legs folded on each side of him. He draws shivers from me as the pads of his fingers trace my spine under the button-down, and the soft kisses he drops on my shoulder cause my skin to break out in gooseflesh.

"Wake me up next time," I mumble – rather sleepily – and tilt my head to kiss him. We kiss slowly, lazily, and he makes me smile when he sucks my bottom lip into his mouth. It tingles when he swipes his tongue over it.

"Don't eat me," I chuckle softly, pulling away.

He responds by growling playfully and nibbling on my cheek. "But you taste so fuckin' good."

Then he fucking tickles me.

"Gah!" I gasp as he flips us over, pinning me to the couch. "Edwaaard!" With one of his hands capturing both of mine, he uses his free hand to tickle the shit out of my ribs. I squirm and kick, shriek and laugh, all to no avail. He's too damn strong! "Please, please, please!" I wail through my breathless laughs. "Gaaah, let me GO!"

"Never!" he laughs.

Argh!

In sheer desperation, I start making farting noises on his cheek. Then I lick his face, which only makes him return the fucking gesture. I squeal, still squirming as he continues his assault, but then it stops when our mouths find each other. The tickle war quickly morphs into one helluva make-out, and we kiss hungrily and greedily. He releases my hands, both of which quickly find purchase in his hair. I tug him closer, and he cups my ass, pressing our bodies together. And that's when I feel his erection. Right. Where. I. Want. It.

"Edward," I whimper, suddenly needing, needing, needing.

"I know," he pants. He kisses me one more time then raises up to lower his boxers. "I need you, too, baby," he murmurs huskily. I bite down on my lip, watching as he gives his cock a few strokes. "Look at what you do to me." A rush of wetness dampens my thong, and it reminds me to get naked. So, I do. While I watch Edward, I wriggle out of my lingerie. First my thong, and then the button-down and the bra. "See how fucking hard I am for you?"

I nod and let out a mewling sound. "Fuck me, baby." I sink down on the couch again, loving it. Seriously, his couch is to die for. It's one of those you don't want to leave, 'cause it's so soft and plush. "Put that thick cock in me, Edward."

His eyes darken. Slowly, he lowers himself, covering my body with his, and when I can feel all of him, he whispers against my temple. "I bet your pretty little kitty would love that... to have my cock pounding... filling you up."

With that said, he pushes into me in one quick movement.

The man renders me speechless.

"Look at me, Bella," he breathes out, and I didn't even know that I had closed my eyes. Opening them, I see him. His eyes are dark, his brows are slightly knitted together. Noses almost touching. He slides in and out of me. Firmly, setting an amazing pace and rhythm. "I want you to look at me when I fuck you."

I whimper.

He dips down to kiss me. It's soft, merely brushing against my lips, but he lingers there. Our breathing mingles. It's hot and almost overwhelming. It makes me want more, so much more. *Fuck, so perfect.* I wrap my legs around him, lifting up so that he can slide in deeper, which he does with

even more force. We both moan loudly, lips still touching. I lick mine, wetting his at the same time, and he chooses that moment to kiss me fully. With a groan, he devours my mouth. He kisses me hard, passionately, completely dominating it all.

When he reaches down – in between our bodies – I arch my back, and when his thumb touches my clit, I cry out and throw my head back. He plays me expertly, never ceasing his thrusts. In and out in long, deep strokes. I take all of him, using my muscles to bring him closer to his orgasm. He lets out a low moan, swiveling his hips at the same time.

"Fuck," he mutters breathlessly, squeezing his eyes shut. I close mine, too, about to get lost in the pleasure. The feeling of his fingers, his mouth, his cock...

I can feel the heat rising in me. My cheeks, my chest, my forehead.

My breaths come out in short gasps, and he continues delivering thrust after thrust. A bit faster now, a little harder. More grinding, heavier breathing. I know he's so, so close.

"I need you to come, love," he grits out. My eyes flash open, my breathing hitches, and everything inside me tightens and pulses. "Oh, fuck. Baby, I can't hold it."

What I see is Edward's orgasm taking over.

It's the last thing I see before I come, too.

A good orgasm is one that makes you feel feverish. It swallows you whole. It sweeps you off your feet, and you can't breathe as the climax rushes through you. Those are the orgasms Edward usually gives me. But this one is different. This one is more. It almost feels like I'm under water. I can hear whooshing and thumping... my pulse or heartbeat. It's like I'm on fire.

He called me "love" right before he came. I didn't mishear it, and in return, I came harder than ever before. And now I'm panting with a collapsed man on top of me.

"Am I crushing you?" he mumbles breathlessly against my neck.

I chuckle, still catching my own breath, and thread my fingers through his hair. "Yes. But I like it."

And I do.



8.

She might like it when I'm crushing her, but I don't. I'm quite partial to her being alive, so I move off her, and my softening cock slips out of her in the process.

Once I'm off the couch, I pull on my boxers again. Then I dip down and kiss her, smiling when she breaks the kiss with a yawn. "Tired?" I murmur, squatting down next to her. Her smile is sleepy, and she nods before closing her eyes. Threading my fingers through her hair, still wet from her shower, I ask her, "Wanna stick around for a while?" She only opens one eye when she asks if it's okay. She tells me she's in the mood for a lazy Saturday, and she's still a bit hung over, so she's not going to write today. That's all very fine by me. Maybe I can ask her about what chicks want, seeing as I have to find the perfect gift for my sister. "Of

course you can stay," I reply. "I don't have any plans today, so..." I trail off a little, letting my eyes roam over her naked body. Very unwelcome images pop into my mind, and I can see her spending many Saturday mornings here. Maybe we'd watch a movie, maybe we'd watch a game.

Now, now, don't worry. I know this is just an unreal fantasy. She's a woman, after all. I'm pretty fucking sure we don't share the same opinion on sports.

"Are you sure it's okay?" she asks as I cover her upper body with my button-down. I nod and kiss her again, and then I ask her if she's hungry. I've already eaten. I did that earlier when I was trying to find a gift for Liz online. "Hmm, very hungry," she says quietly, casting a glance toward the kitchen. "I can smell oregano."

I smirk. "Wow, you're good." She smacks me playfully on the arm before I stand up. "Sit tight and I'll get you some," I check the clock on the flat screen and chuckle, "lunch." Breakfast time is so over. Then I change my mind. "Or if you want, you could see if there's a movie on."

"Yeah?" she asks, smiling an odd smile as she sits up. It's almost shy, and it's... cute. Then I make the mistake of looking down. Shit, her tits are right there. The shirt pools around her waist and, well, I love those breasts of hers. It's been a while since I fucked them. "Edward?"

"Hmm?" I look her in the eye again, realizing that she's caught me. Ah, well. I have nothing to hide. "Woman, it's your fault. They're right there!" I point for good measure, and she laughs and bats my hand away... before she covers herself up with the shirt again. Such a shame, really. "You know... feel free to walk around naked," I tell her. "We can pretend it's a nudist colony or something."

She laughs again and shakes her head at me. "Go fetch me whatever it is you have that smells like oregano. I'll find a movie."

I snicker. "Yes, ma'am."

When I'm in the kitchen, I heat up an omelet from earlier. I also prepare three slices of oregano toast with goat cheese, sliced tomatoes, and chopped olives. Of course, I buy seedless olives. I finish off by drizzling some garlic-flavored olive oil on top, and what Bella won't eat, I certainly will. I mean, I doubt she'll eat three pieces of toast *and* an omelet.

"Coffee or juice, baby?" I call, opening the fridge.

"Juice, please!" she hollers back, and I grab the juice carton from the fridge.

Once it's all done, I place everything on a tray before heading back to the living room.

I chuckle when I see that she's been in the bedroom to get the comforter and a few pillows.

"Do you mind?" she asks sweetly, holding up a pillow.

"Hell no," I reply. "Lazy Saturdays... and Sundays for that matter... they require that stuff." And that's the truth. "All right, lunch. I hope you like Mediterranean food." I'm a sucker for Greek and Italian, myself, and I'm a little curious about Bella's likes and dislikes now. That's right, I'm curious, and I won't deny it. We'll just have to see where it all goes.

"Holy shit, Edward," she murmurs, eyes darting between the tray and my eyes. "This looks amazing." She licks her lips when I hand her a plate with toast, and *that* looks amazing. The sight of her licking her lips, that is. Well, the toast looks pretty fucking stellar, too, if I may say so. "You make me feel like a princess."

I wink at her. "You *do* have a tiara." My guess is that it's still in the bedroom, and there's no way she's getting it back. "Now, eat... Princess

Bella." I get comfortable on the couch – under the covers, of course – and then I take a sip from my own juice before settling the laptop on my lap. "I hope you don't mind," I mutter, reaching for my glasses, "but I need to find a birthday present for my sister, and I have less than five days to find something that will make her cry."

I am so fucked.

"You said you didn't have plans," she responds, looking troubled. I frown in confusion. "Maybe I'm in the way?"

Oh. "No, no. As long as it's okay that I'm online for a while, then please stay. It's really fine, Bella." She chews on her lip, not convinced yet, so I add, "I promise. In fact, would you mind helping me? I could really use a woman's opinion."

Her worry is quickly replaced with a huge smile. "I'll *definitely* help you shop."

Oh, she likes to shop. I can tell. She's a shopper, for sure.

I force a smile. *Shopping*. Yay...

"But now you're looking all constipated," she says, picking up her toast. "I don't have to help, you know. You were the one who said you needed help. Not me."

"I do!" I say hurriedly. "But..." I rub the back of my neck. "I mean, we're not going out, are we?" I. Fucking. Hate. Shopping. "'Cause I was thinking I'd find something online. You see, me and department stores..." I shudder violently.

She finds this amusing for some reason. "Don't worry, baby. Online it is."

And I breathe out in relief.

Thank God.

"Sorry," I say a bit sheepishly. "It's just that you looked so fucking excited, and I thought you'd wanted to hit Fifth Avenue or something, and that's just not me."

She smiles, tilting her head a little. "Wow. A man who doesn't like shopping." Her eyes widen. "Shocking."

Look who decided to be funny.

I throw her a playful glare. "Wow. A woman who loves shopping. Shocking."

And she fucking giggles. She even ducks her head, which makes her hair fall in her face, and that's just not right. So, I lean over and tuck it behind her ear again. Much better.

"Touché," she concedes with a nod. "Okay, I'm gonna help you real good, I swear. You can start by leaving the site you're currently on." She points at the screen, and I look at it. It's Tiffany's. How in the hell can that ever be wrong? "No piece of jewelry is going to make your sister cry, although I have no idea why you *want* her to cry." I look at her again, about to explain, but she sinks her teeth into the toast then... and moans. Loudly. It's not a sex-moan, but it's close enough, and my dick is all over that shit. Hell, I can't even remember my sister. Wait, I have a sister? "Good God, Edward!" she moans... again. "Did you make this?"

I clear my throat, trying not to look at her exposed shoulders. She's naked under the covers. She's naked under the covers. "Uh, yeah." Get it together, man! You just fucked her half an hour ago! "Right. Um, yes, I made it. The bread, I mean. And the..." I wave a hand at her plate. "Yeah." Wow, I'm one articulate motherfucker.

Smooth, so smooth.

"Wait. You made the bread, too?" she asks, surprised. I nod, eyes on the covers that are slowly sliding down, now exposing her chest. "Like, from scratch?"

"Uh-huh."

"Wow," she repeats. "It's amazing, Edward." Just a liiittle bit more and I'll get nipple action. "Edward?" Come on. "Oh, for the love of..." She pulls up the covers.

I sigh. "Why'd you do that for?" I complain.

She snickers, again shaking her head at me. "Such a man."

"A fact I hope you like," I mutter, turning back to the screen. "Otherwise, you might wanna visit Tanya who lives next door. She's probably fucked her way through all the lesbians in the Tri-State area by now."

The few times I've run into her, she's even had the nerve to ask if Bella's straight, 'cause apparently she's seen Bella once or twice, and Tanya liked what she saw. Bitch.

"She hot?"

I turn to Bella, cocking a brow at her. "You're fucking with me, right?" First of all, Tanya's blond. I don't like blondes. Second of all, she's too damn skinny. That whole size zero trend is not appealing to most men. I'm very much included in that bunch. I want some meat on my women. God gave them curves. Women shouldn't work to erase them. Which is why I'm glad to see that Bella has an appetite. She also has curves. Sexy and enticing ones. She's still slim and toned – it's easy to see that she works out – but there's still a softness, one that I fucking love.

"Yeah, I'm fucking with you, baby." Bella's voice brings me back, and I grin at her. "I'm on Team Cock. Don't worry."

I can't help but laugh. "Team *Edward's* Cock," I elaborate. "At least, judging by you... last night..." I trail off with a wink.

"Oh, yeah, I remember." She nods furiously. "I toasted to good cocks." She smiles fondly, biting into her toast again. "Good times."

This woman...

She's different, isn't she?

And that reminds me of her article. So, I close down the laptop, deciding that I can always continue my search later. For now, though... "Do you know a guy named Jasper Whitlock?"

Her brows knit together, and she tilts her head at me, still chewing on her toast. She swallows then answers. "Vaguely." She nods slowly. "A friend of mine – remember Rose from last night?" I nod, already knowing all of this. "She's the owner of Lacy Piece, and I'm one of the models for her winter line. Jasper's the male model."

"I know," I chuckle, angling my body to face her fully. "He's one of my buddies."

She's definitely surprised. "Really?" I nod. "Shit, that's... Huh, small world."

"To say the least." I take a sip of my juice. "Let's just say that he was one smug fucker when we met up after your shoot."

"Wait." She frowns then looks down for a moment. It looks like she's solving a math problem. I'm about to ask her what's up, but she gasps, looking up at me in shock. "He knew who I was, didn't he?"

Oh, shit.

The fact that men gossip is a secret. Women aren't supposed to know, but how would Jazz know Bella's name if I hadn't been the one to tell him?

"Uh, by name," I explain, running a hand through my hair. "No details or anything, but I guess I've mentioned you as the woman I'm seeing casually, ya know?"

There's no need to tell her that Jazz and Em already know just how adventurous Bella is, or how often we fuck, or how bendy she is, how insatiable she is, how perfect her body is, how kinky she is, and...

Now I'm hard.

Greeeeaat.

But the thing is that men like to brag, and I may or may not have bragged about the woman I'm fucking.

Sue me.

"Oh, relax." She surprises me by laughing. "Edward, I know all about 'locker room talk'. Only, it doesn't really happen in locker rooms all the time, does it?" She winks, and I scowl at her. Then she sets down her plate before disappearing under the covers. My scowl is so gone by the time she emerges on my lap. With the covers still over us, she straddles me, most definitely feeling my semi, and kisses me. That works. "Edward is a gossip, Edward is a gossip," she sings. So, I shut her up by kissing her harder.

A few moments later, we catch our breaths, foreheads connected.

"I thought he was gay, but he was talking about you, wasn't he?" she asks suddenly. And no, I don't understand anything. Luckily, she sees this and clarifies. "During the shoot, he kept mumbling about a guy that would 'kill him', and I assumed it was a boyfriend. But now I'm thinking it was you,

and he was," she shrugs, "I dunno, touching what was yours, or whatever." She waves it off. "Not that I'm yours in that sense, but you know what I mean."

And I start laughing.

Loudly. And so hard that my sides hurt.

Can't fucking wait to tell Jazz this!

She thought he was gay!

"What's so funny?" she chuckles, eyeing me like I'm sporting a second head. "It feels like I'm missing something."

I shake my head, trying to calm down but it's damn hard. "Aaahh," I gasp, wiping my eyes. "You thought he was..." And I fucking giggle. Not kidding. I'd be embarrassed if I wasn't so fucking amused.

Then Bella takes my hands and places them on her tits.

Now that's a way of shutting a man up!

"Fuck," I breathe out, dipping down to capture a nipple in my mouth.

But she pushes me away. "Nuh-uh." Wha...? "We're talking about Jasper now." I'd rather not. "You know him?" Yes, but I'm still cupping your tits, baby. Can we talk about Jasper later? Or never? "You obviously talked about me. What did you guys say?"

"He told me about your column in *Written Word*," I tell her, and then I lower my mouth again... only to be pushed away... yet again. "Why are you being so mean, baby?"

She smirks and removes my hands from her. Meanie. But she's still on display. Hello, titties. I miss you.

So round, so soft, kinda perky, perfect C-cups.

Mmm...

"Edward," she sorta groan-laughes and forces me to look her in the eye. I shrug, not sorry at all. "Can you focus on what I'm saying?"

I sigh. "Fine." I kiss her one last time, and then I pull her closer. It presses her breasts against my bare chest, which is a little distracting, but it's better than seeing them. If I see, I touch. "Yes, he told me about your column, and yesterday he even bought the new issue. Jasper and another buddy of mine were reading it when I joined them at the bar where we usually hang out."

"Oh." She looks at my shoulder for some reason, and her hands are suddenly busy, or rather, her fingers are busy... playing with her hair. I slide my nose along her jaw, urging her to look at me as I drop a kiss or two on my way to her mouth. "Did you, uh..." I smile against her cheek, knowing what she wants to ask. Yes, baby, I read it, too. "You know... by any chance... read it?"

I laugh through my nose. "Yeah, I read it." Then I sorta feel the need to add a little, 'cause it was, in fact, a good article. "You're a good writer." I won't tell her that I almost lost my shit before I realized that she was being sarcastic until the very end of the article, though. "You made some excellent points about the frenzy that comes with dating."

"Yeah?" she asks, sitting up straight. Thankfully, she covers herself with the comforter. "What do guys think on the first date?"

I grin, understanding that this is the writer in her asking. She's curious. I'm beginning to piece her together, and I gotta say that I enjoy it so far.

"Whether we're gonna get laid or not," I reply bluntly.

She laughs softly. "Figures." Hey, it's the truth. "So, it's all about sex?"

I ponder that for a moment before responding. "No, I wouldn't say that," I say pensively. "If we just wanna get laid, it's a safer bet to go to a club." I waggle my eyebrows at her. It was how we met, after all. Bella chuckles. "So, if we go on dates, I think it's pretty safe to assume that we're ready for relationships. But that doesn't mean we don't think about sex, 'cause we do. From the get-go."

She hums, and it's clear that she's deep in thought.

She's fucking beautiful.

And I think I want more.

I want to think it through, though, 'cause I'm risking a lot, and I don't even know if she wants more, or even wants to try, but I'm pretty sure that I do. Want more, that is. So, I'm gonna feel her out... and maybe show her more about me. If we're compatible, she's bound to notice things.

"My fingers are itching now," she murmurs, smiling ruefully at me.

For some weird reason, I find it funny. Sorta endearing. "You mean you wanna write?" She nods, looking sheepish. "Does that mean I've inspired you?"

"Hmm, maybe?" She taps her chin. Then she smiles sheepishly again. "Sorry."

I shake my head and kiss her cheek. "Don't apologize. I think it's great that you have a job that you love."

I'm actually the same. That's why I have a study in my apartment. If I get an idea stuck in my head, I need to work it out; I need to get it in visuals.

Hell, I can sit by my computers, playing around on InDesign or Illustrator for hours.

"How does your week look?" she murmurs, weaving her fingers through my hair. I lean back against the back of the couch, closing my eyes.

I hum and shiver. "We just finished a big one, so next week is pretty calm. A few pitch meetings with some potentials, but nothing extreme."

"Hmm, you're sexy when you talk the talk."

My eyes open, and I chuckle drowsily. "What, advertising?"

She nods. "Now that I know what you do for a living, I can picture it, you know. It's sexy."

I squeeze her ass, just 'cause. "If I'd known you'd think it was sexy, I would've told you sooner."

"Like I need more reasons." She rolls her eyes, but smiles. "I already find you incredibly sexy."

I lick my lips before capturing her mouth with mine. "You better leave before I keep you here for another few rounds," I mumble against her lips.

"I will," she mumbles back. "But not before I know when I can see you again." She pecks me once, twice, three times. Then she backs away a little. "You needed help with your sister's gift?" Oh, right. Yeah. "Plus, it's been a long time since we had sex in the kitchen."

Fuck, yeah. "We should rectify that," I say solemnly. "How about Monday?"

"Monday it is."



9.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry," I sigh heavily, slumping down in an empty seat across from Rose and Alice. "I'm late, I know. I'm so sorry."

It's Sunday. A day to rest. Well, fuck that. My morning has been insane.

After leaving Edward's place yesterday, I spent the entire day writing. This led to sleeping in this morning, and in turn, that made me late for an appointment I had all the way across Manhattan. Okay, so it wasn't so much an appointment as it was a friendly get-together with a colleague at *Written Word*, but I still call it an appointment because Charlotte and I don't know each other very well. So, there.

"That's all right," Alice chuckles, eyeing my rather big bag, which is now sitting on the seat next to me. "Are you moving, honey?" She cocks a brow.

I stick out my tongue. "You're so fucking funny, Ali." And that's when the waitress appears. She hands us three menus, takes our drink order, then scurries away. I sigh again. "Okay. I'm here. Let's brunch."

Rose grins. "Lots to cover, but we're gonna start with the bag. Spill, missy. Did you meet with that Charlotte?"

And now I'm excited. "I did!" I tell them, resisting the urge to bounce in my seat. My morning may have been insane with taking a cab back and forth, all while dealing with being late, but the morning has also been very rewarding. "She was so nice and helpful."

Like I said, I don't know Charlotte very well, but she was at the party last Friday – along with many other writers at *Written Word* – and that's how I found out that she and her husband recently adopted a little girl. She was raving about that little cutie, showing pictures and everything, and me in my drunken stupor pointed out that I hadn't seen her pregnant. I mean, even though most of us work from home, simply sending our work via email, we still see each other at meetings and such.

I digress.

Charlotte and Peter told me that they had adopted, and after that, I was a goner. I was asking question after question about the process. And in the end, Charlotte had asked if it wasn't better to talk when we weren't in a night club. Yeah, I wasn't the smoothest of operators.

Anyway, she called me yesterday, and we agreed to meet up today. Which we did. I brought breakfast, and even a stuffed animal for little Anna. And after I had apologized for my rude behavior on Friday – something Charlotte just waved off – we spent the morning talking.

"I can't believe you're gonna have a baby," Alice murmurs thickly, even sniffing. Aw, our little drama queen. "Rose, we're going to be aunties."

"Please, Alice," I chuckle, rummaging through my massive bag. "It's going to take so much time." Locating one of the folders of papers that Charlotte's given me, I place it on the table. "I'm just ready to get started, but like I said, it's going to take time."

"A bag full of information is a good start, though," Rose says, covering my hand with hers. "I'm excited for you."

So am I. Truly.

"Here are your drinks, ladies," the waitress announces, appearing with a tray. "Have you decided yet, or do you need more time?" She smiles.

Alice and Rose have already decided what to eat, so I quickly look through my menu. Since I ate breakfast not too long ago with Charlotte, I settle for small turkey wrap.

"All right, can we talk about Mr. Good Cock now?" Alice asks once the waitress has left again.

"Ah, yes." Rose nods. "We want to hear everything. Let's start with... Why the fuck aren't you two married yet?"

"What she said," Alice agrees, jerking her chin at Rose. "You two were on fire at the party, and neither of you could keep your hands off of each other."

I duck my head and clear my throat, thanking God that I'm not a blusher anymore. I was when I was little, but I grew out of that shit in college. I can still get embarrassed – obviously – and my cheeks can get a little pinkish from time to time, but it's very rare, and it passes in a second or two.

"Spill, Swan," Alice sings.

Dammit.

"I honestly don't know what to say," I admit, sighing. With an elbow on the table, I cradle my cheek in my palm, and I feel a little defeated. Especially after yesterday. "Truth be told, what you saw at Club Sin is how

it's always been between us, but something has still changed." I pause to take a sip of my water. "You should've seen him yesterday after I woke up." I shake my head, remembering... everything. The sex, the playfulness, the talking, the sharing, and God, the man can cook! Or bake, whatever. But that bread... I'm telling ya, it was to die for. Pretty much like his cock is to die for. "He called me 'love!'" I blurt out. Shit. Two jaws drops across the table, and I hurry to explain. "It didn't mean anything. Well, I sorta think it does, but not... not *love*." I lower my voice. "It was during sex, so..."

Alice looks contemplative for a second, and I knew she'd be all over this shit. She's so sure that Edward is my Prince Charming. "I think he's falling in love with you," she tells me firmly. "He just doesn't know it yet. It was like his subconscious took control during sex-"

"Actually, mid-orgasm," I confess with a wink.

"Even better!" she exclaims. "That's when men are completely out of control."

I snicker.

"Are you done, Ms. Fairytale?" Rose asks her dryly. Alice sniffs, jutting her chin, and flips her the bird. Gotta love my girls. "Anyway," she drawls, turning to me. "I think we can all agree that 'love' is a term of endearment – one who many use without actually being in love. Yes?"

I nod, definitely agreeing. "That's what I'm thinking. I sure as hell don't think he's in love with me, but maybe he's developing slightly deeper feelings than he's had before?" I shrug, 'cause I really don't know.

"Has he used that word for you before?" Rose asks before sipping her iced tea.

"No. 'Baby', 'beautiful'..." I hum, thinking back. Has he called me anything else? "In the beginning, he called me 'sexy' as a term of endearment, but that was replaced by 'beautiful' a month or two later."

"Naw, I love that," Alice says softly. "Beautiful. It suits you. I can definitely see him calling you that."

I smile, feeling warmth spreading through me. I love it, too, when he calls me that. But that's Edward. He always makes me feel so incredibly desired.

"Fuck," I mutter, running a hand through my hair. "I have it bad."

Alice looks giddy by my admission. Rose smirks, not surprised at all.

"About time you admitted it," she says simply.

I shake my head, wondering when the hell this started. It couldn't have been at the beginning, could it? No. It's gotta be more recent. "I've only just started getting to know him, though," I reply, looking out the window. Then again, there are things I know about him without asking. For instance, what he likes in bed, how he functions in the mornings, how he likes his coffee, the fact that he keeps his toothbrush in his mouth as he shaves, or how to cheer him up after a gruesome day – with a blowjob, of course... I know his ticklish spots, I know that he loves being close before we fall asleep but when he wakes up in the morning, he doesn't like to linger, I know that he prefers Heineken when it comes to beer, I know that when he's frowning, he's not in the mood to be teased. I know his expressions.

Now I also have a reason to believe that Edward Cullen is excellent in the kitchen.

He has a sister that lives in London.

He's originally from Chicago.

He's a graphic designer.

And judging from his actions in the bedroom – or elsewhere – I know that he's attentive and giving, but he also has a playful side. He can dominate one moment, only to moan loudly in approval when I take over. He's man enough not to feel threatened by a woman in charge. But I have a feeling that he thrives on being a man's man. I mean, I'm not stupid. It's easy to see that he rushes through the apartment to tidy up right before I come over. I can only imagine the dirty socks and pizza boxes littered all over the place... before I knock on the door, so to speak. And when you look at his entertainment center in his living room, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that that's where he has his video games and consoles. 'Cause I've definitely seen his Xbox. I've also noticed his flat screen, or rather, the size of it. It's gotta be 50 inches or something, and I'm willing to bet he just loves watching sports on it. Which takes us to a certain part of his closet. It's filled with game shirts, and we're not just talking about one sport or one team. No, no. We're talking soccer, baseball, football, hockey, and even basketball.

So... maybe I know more about him than I thought.

"Earth to Bella!"

Shit. I jump in my seat, facing Alice and Rose again. "Sorry," I breathe out, clutching my chest. "Damn, you scared me."

"The food is here," Alice says, pointing at the plate in front of me. Huh. I really spaced out, didn't I? "Mind telling us what you were thinking about?"

I'm all about sighing this morning. "I was thinking about Edward."

"Thank you for stating the obvious," Rose chuckles. But then she turns serious. "Do you want more with him?"

I don't know.

A part of me does, but my history with men isn't the best. Not that I've been hurt or anything. I've just had the worst luck when it comes to dating. I swear, if I go out on one more first date where the man tells me how much he earns and what car he's driving, I will kill myself. Then there's also the whole thing with me and not being able to have kids. I never know when to tell the guy that. If I tell the man on the first date, he's going to think I'm ready for marriage and children already, and if I wait... Well, I waited when I was dating Tyler. We were both in college – I had no reason to tell him – and it didn't come up in conversation until we had been going out for a year. So, when he found out that I can't have biological children, he broke up with me, stating that he felt betrayed. He didn't understand how I could keep something like that to myself. And lastly, some men only want children that are theirs by blood.

I wonder where Edward stands in this.

"I don't *know*," I whine a little. "It's so hard, guys. I mean, I've already made up my mind, you know?" I hold up the folder about one of the many alternatives you have if you're going to adopt. "And fitting a guy into all of that?" I sigh. "I just don't know."

Do I *like* Edward? Yeah, I'm pretty sure I do. But I have so much to lose.

I want more of what Edward and I already have, but I refuse to be greedy. He's only twenty-six, and from what I can tell, he loves his life the way it is now. And I'm okay with that, really, because I love my life, too. It's just that a part of me is starting to ache for someone to take care of. I want a child, a little someone who hasn't been dealt the best cards in life, someone who I can give a home to. Someone to love. I'm ready to be a

mother. If not this instant, then soon. And since I know that it's a long process, I'm ready to at least get started.

Okay, enough of this. "Can we please change the subject," I beg. "I don't want to overthink anything on this lovely Sunday." I finish off with a small chuckle.

"All right, honey," Rose says, nodding once. "I have some news, actually."

"What's that?" I ask, picking up my turkey wrap. "Finally divorcing the prick?" I joke.

"Yes," she replies bluntly, and I drop my jaw.

Alice does, too.

"I'm meeting with my lawyer tomorrow." She flips her blond hair over her shoulder. "I'm gonna ruin Royce for good."

"Oh," I breathe out.

"My," Alice chokes out.

"God," I finish.

Fucking finally!

"We have to celebrate!" Alice cheers, even clapping her hands. "Gah, I'm so proud of you, sweetie!" She throws her arms around a smiling Rose, and I squeeze her hands over the table. "Wow, this is really fucking good news."

"Hear, hear," I second, holding up my glass. I grin. "To Rose *Hale*."

"Hale!" Alice and Rose echo, laughing.

No more Rosalie King, fuck you very much.

"We should definitely celebrate, though," I say, referring to what Alice said just a few seconds ago. "We could go clubbing, or go out to dinner?"

"And shopping," Alice adds, but that's a given.

"Yeah, clubbing sounds good," Rose sighs, smiling wistfully. "I need some cock."

I snort. "So does Alice."

"Hey! I fuck just fine, thank you," she huffs.

"Oh, yeah? When was the last time you saw stars?" I counter. She shuts up. Good. "So, here's what we're gonna do... We pick a day, starting it with a spa appointment, of course. Then we go shopping, followed by dinner... then we go home to me for drinks and pimping. Lastly, we pick up Seth and Mike before we go out."

For as long as I've been with Edward, Seth has worked as my shield when we're out. 'Cause when I go out with my girls, I wanna dance and have fun. I don't want sleazy guys grinding their junk against me, hence bringing Seth.

"Next weekend?" Alice asks as we all bring out our planners. Well, I have my iPhone, but Alice and Rose have big planners. I guess they need them since they have busier lives than I do. Rose has her own company, and Alice is a fashion coordinator with I don't know how many clients to keep track of.

Anyway, we all decide that we're going to celebrate Rose next Saturday.

Then our brunch continues, and we talk a little about this and that as we eat. Oh, and I fill them in about the whole Edward-knowing-Jasper-Whitlock thing. Rose laughs, of course, since she was there at the shoot, and she thought Jasper was gay, too. I also tell them about Jasper and

Edward reading my article – something I feel odd about. When Edward told me that he had read it, I felt that I wanted his approval for some reason. I want him to like what I'm doing for a living, but don't ask me why I want that. Or why I care.

"Hey, speaking of that southern gentleman," Rose says, forking the last piece of her chicken. "He'd be a good match for Alice, I think."

I hum, and my eyes travel to Alice. I think Rose is right, actually.

"A guy you first thought was gay?" Alice snorts. "How fucking flattering."

I grin. "But he isn't. And he's very handsome."

"Most gay guys are," she replies flippantly. "Besides, the last thing I want is some Southern mama's boy who thinks hard fucking is the same as making love fast."

Rose and I crack up at that.

Hard.

I had called the girls earlier this week, and I asked them about self lovin'. I've already submitted my first article to Angela, but I'm now working on my second one, and I wanted Alice's and Rose's input. The conversation had turned into a large debate about the difference between making love and fucking. It was quite fun. And not on topic, because my second sex article will be about women and masturbating.

"I'm pretty sure he knows the difference," Rose assures Alice.

And that's when my phone rings.

"I bet it's Mr. Good Cock," Alice murmurs. "Look at her face. She's positively beaming."

"Oh, shut up," I mumble, turning away slightly to answer Mr. Good Cock's call, 'cause Alice is right. It's Edward. "Hello?"

What I hear are sounds that you only hear when you're out shopping.

At a sale.

"Bella!"

"Uh, Edward?" I press the phone closer to my ear, cringing at the sound of screaming women in the background. "Where are you?"

"A fucking warzone!" he yells. *"Can you please save me? I'm at Macy's!"*

I laugh. "I thought you only shopped online."

"Yeah, well, a buddy of mine called me a pussy for being too scared to go out and buy a goddamn present."

And men love pussy as long as they don't turn into one.

Got it.

"So, you ventured out, huh?" I'm teasing him, I know. But this is fun.

"Please save me before I kill myself!" he begs. And then he yelps. *"Shit! Vicious bitches with elbows!"* My eyes bug out then as a woman shouts in the background, definitely at Edward. *"Mine! What the hell are you gonna do with a purse!"* And Edward shouts right back. *"That's none of your fucking concern!"*

And I remember. Oh, I remember reading about the sale at Macy's. Which is today. In the paper, they named it the Sunday Super Sale, and it's to clear away before they start stocking up with all the winter merchandise coming in. Aw, poor, poor Edward. I doubt he knew this when he entered the store.

Stifling a girly giggle, I tell Edward that I'm on my way.



9.

If I don't see them, they can't see me, right?

That's the rule.

So, I squeeze my eyes shut.

I rub my temples, willing the headache away.

But all around me, I can hear the shouting. Oh, the screaming and yelling and shrieking and squealing.

So many women. Running around, elbowing, snapping, and clawing.

"Bella will be here soon, Bella will be here soon," I mumble to myself.

Soothing circles on my temples. I hate headaches. Rub, rub, rub, softly.

"That bag is mine, bitch!" someone yells.

I cringe. I can't see them, they can't see me.

"I saw it first, skank!"

I hate Emmett, by the way. When I called him last night to make plans for working out with him before work tomorrow, I felt compelled to bitch about the fact that my entire family is moving to New York. And not only are they moving here, but they are also moving here in less than four days – something I have completely missed. Okay, they're not moving here in four days, but they're coming to spend a few weeks while they look for houses and apartments. Shit like that. And I have a sinking feeling that Mom's gonna suggest that Lizzie stays with me. Which I don't want, 'cause that means weeks without seeing Bella. Oh, I could see Bella, but then I would have to face an inquisition. Mom and Liz would be all over that shit.

I digress.

I bitched and whined about this to Emmett, and I also told him about finding a birthday gift for Liz. That's when Emmett told me to grow a pair and just head out already.

I had no idea it would make me suicidal.

I swear, had Bella not been on her way, I would've called Mom.

Speaking of Bella... It's been half an hour now.

Which feels more like half a decade.

Then my phone vibrates, and I hope to God it's her saying that she's here.

Arrived. Where are you, lost boy? ~Bella.

I quickly type in a response.

There are bags and scarves and shit everywhere! – Edward.

I hope that will suffice. But she's a chick; I'm sure she knows this place like the back of her hand. Even if Macy's is as giant as a small country.

Yeah, I think she does know this *country*, 'cause it doesn't take long until I see her.

"Bella!" I almost yell, starting to walk toward her.

She sees me and smiles, floating like an angel as she walks. Because she's saving me from this purgatory. And she looks... fucking gorgeous. It's different. Casual. Usually, she's a bit more dressed up when she comes to me, but that's understandable. Those are often the nights when she's been out. Not all the time, but yeah. This, though... I like it. Black tights- Sorry! I mean *leggings*. God forbid if you don't get it right. Black leggings, an oversized flannel shirt – that ends right below her ass – and it looks more like a dress. Especially with that leather belt around her waist. Huh. A belt over her shirt? Odd. Still, it works. Really fucking well. She's even got a bit of a cleavage, what with the three top buttons unbuttoned and all. Then... *fuck me*... dark blue heels that match her shirt/dress, and... her hair is down. I fucking love her hair. It's really long, sorta wavy, and thick. When I fuck her, it's so good to just grip, ya know? Last but not least, a pair of aviators on the top of her head. Sexy.

Then I notice the behemoth that is her bag. Hot damn, it looks like one of her overnight bags that she brings to my place. I had no idea she actually uses them as purses. I mean, what's in it? Her life?

"Your savior as arrived," she says smoothly, not bothered at all by the hell going on around us. She even curtsies. Cute as fuck. "This isn't so bad," she adds, looking around. "I thought you were being attacked or something," she chuckles.

My eyes widen. "Are you shitting me, Bella?" This is beyond insane! "I've been scarred for life." I rub the place where I was elbowed earlier. My poor ribcage. "Thank you for helping me," I add, glancing around. "Or more correctly: saving me."

She surprises the shit outta me when she starts singing "Help" by The Beatles. She's doing it to tease me, no doubt, but doesn't she realize that she's also giving me more of her?

I'm a bit stunned, 'cause she has a beautiful voice. Soft but warm.

"...*Help me get my feet back on the ground,*" she sings, bumping her hip against my thigh. I can't help but grin down at her. Even in heels, she's a short one. "...*Won't you pleeeeeease, please help me...*" She laughs and loops her arm with mine. "Come on, Cullen. I'll get you out of here."

I'm a happy follower as she guides us out.

And once we do get out, she slides her sunglasses down onto her nose and smiles up at me. "So, a gift for your sister?"

She looks good in the sun. Just... sayin'.

"Only if you have time," I say, automatically draping my arm around her shoulders. Then I slide down my own sunglasses from the top of my head – my beloved Ray-Bans. "I hope I didn't tear you away from anything important."

I hadn't even thought about that.

"Brunch with my girls," she replies with a shrug. "But we were wrapping things up, so it's okay. Now..." She smirks. "Which way?" Um, I have no idea. Can't we go home? I have internet access at home. "Oooh, twenty percent off." Yeah, her eyes are glued to a shop window now. "I need a new pashmina."

"Not now, you don't," I huff, dragging her away. She pouts, but follows me. Maybe because I don't give her a choice. "How about we get some coffee? I can tell you a little about my sister. That oughta help you pick something great, right?"

"Sounds good," she responds. "But, baby? *We* are picking something. *I'm* not doing it. *We* are. She's your sister." Well, fuck. "And quit pouting. It doesn't become you."

"Hey! You just pouted when I pulled you away from the scarves," I say defensively.

But she just smiles and shrugs. Dammit. It's impossible to get mad at her, too. She's here, after all. To help me.

"They were pashminas, by the way," she adds dryly.

"Scarves – pashminas... what-the-fuck-ever," I mutter.

They're both rugs you have around your neck.

Speaking of necks, I position myself behind her on the sidewalk, and my arms snake around her waist. "Thank you," I murmur, pressing soft kisses along her neck. "For helping me." Turning around in my arms, she smiles up at me, which makes me chuckle, 'cause those aviators are big on her. "You're cute in those shades," I tell her, dipping down to kiss her.

To the people walking around us, we don't look like fuck-buddies, do we?

"You look sexy in yours," she sighs softly. The tip of her tongue swipes across my bottom lip, and I open up to her, kissing her deeply. She tastes like... Hmm, something spicy and fucking delicious. Obviously, this reminds me of the fact that I haven't had lunch.

Disaster.

"Lunch instead of coffee," I mumble, pecking her a little. "You taste good."

She chuckles and gives my biceps a little squeeze. "You can eat. I've already eaten both breakfast and brunch."

Lucky girl. "The park?" I suggest, and I grab her hand. "It's been a while since I was in Central Park." Living right next to Chelsea Park means that I run there, but now that we're close... "We could find a deli on the way."

Fuck, yeah. A pastrami sandwich with mustard. I can practically hear it calling my name.

"All right. Let's go," she says, threading our fingers together.

No, definitely not fuck-buddies.

~oOo~

"Damn, this is the life," I sigh, plopping down on the grass. I have a fuckawesome sandwich waiting to be devoured, the sun is out, it's still quite warm, and a sexy woman who... is just standing there. "Aren't you gonna sit, baby?"

"On the grass," she states flatly. "I think not. I'll ruin my clothes."

Oh. Good. God.

I snicker and roll my eyes, but I'm also a gentleman, so I remove my black hoodie and tell her to pretend it's a blanket. This earns me a sweet smile, a sweet kiss, and a sweet "thank you". Good thing it's warm enough for just a t-shirt, is all I'm saying.

"Such a girl," I admonish playfully, unwrapping my sandwich. "Watch out, the dirt could kill you."

"I'll have you know that I'm not afraid to get my hands dirty," she huffs before sipping her soda.

"No, just your too-expensive designer clothes," I retort, giving her a wink to show her that I'm kidding. Sorta. "My sister's the same." I shake my

head. "She can spend four hundred bucks on a pair of shoes, and if you so much as go near them, your head will be rolling."

And Bella doesn't look surprised to hear this.

Bugger. I bet she's the same.

"I love shoes," she tells me, and cue the Edward Cullen Eye Roll. "It's an indulgence, sue me." Then she cocks a brow at me, looking awfully threatening, to be honest. "But just because I spend money on shoes and clothes, doesn't mean I'm a prissy prude. For instance, I love hiking."

Since my mouth is full of sandwich, I can't really snort or huff – unless I want to literally inhale my food – so I settle on a dubious look for her. *Hiking, really?* I doubt it. If she's afraid of sitting down on the grass in Central Park, then I doubt she's up for hiking in the woods.

Now, don't get me wrong. I love women who are women. I don't mind laying out my hoodie for her so that she can sit – in fact, I kinda like it that way. It's chivalrous and shit like that. I also like that Bella is one to take care of her body. She works out, she goes to the spa, and she gets manicures and pedicures. She's a girl's girl, and that's what I prefer. As long as they don't smear too much makeup on, of course. I hate that, and I'm glad Bella knows where to stop.

But... don't tell me that you enjoy hiking when you're afraid to sit down on a damn lawn.

"I grew up in Washington," she tells me amusingly.

"The state?" I ask around my sandwich.

She nods. "In a tiny town four hours away from Seattle. Edward, I grew up in the middle of the Olympic Peninsula. Constant rain and trees everywhere."

Yeah, I can't see it.

But I'm curious, and I want to know more.

"So, when I go back to visit... and I want to go hiking..." She gives me a sorta lopsided smile. She has dimples. *Damn*, that's beautiful. Truly. "You know what I do then?"

I shake my head, swallowing what I've been chewing. I also take a sip from my Mountain Dew.

"I pick out clothes that haven't cost me a small fortune." She winks. Great, she's being funny. Lovely. "Really, Edward," she chuckles. "Is it so hard to imagine that I love hiking?"

"Yes," I say bluntly, but it's not like I don't believe her. She has no reason to lie. Then again, the women I've dated in the past didn't have reason to hide their true selves either, yet they did. So, why don't I have issues with believing Bella? Fuck if I know. I'm a dude. I don't read into shit.

"Tell you what. I also enjoy beer and sports every now and then."

Now she's just yanking my chain. "Oh, yeah? What's your favorite sport?"

She knows I'm testing her, and she doesn't look intimidated. Not even a little.

"Baseball and soccer," she says simply. I arch a brow, needing more than that. "I'm not an obsessive follower, but I don't switch the channel, so to speak, if the Mariners are playing. Same goes for Arsenal."

Holy shit!

Okay, first of all, the Mariners suck. Seriously. But since she's from Washington, I'll let that slide.

But Arsenal? Damn. That's... something. Something. As in, it's also the team I'm rooting for when we're talking Premier League.

"You look surprised," she laughs quietly as she takes off her shoes. Then she pulls her knees up, resting her chin on them. "I grew up with my dad. If the TV was on, it was on some sports channel."

Information overload.

With the little pieces of information she throws me, I end up with a shitload of questions. This is good, but only if it goes both ways. What I've learned so far about Bella has kept me interested – very much so – and, yeah, I want more. But only if she wants the same from me. I hope that makes sense.

"Can I ask you something?" she... asks. I smirk at her before nodding in "go ahead". "You're a guy. I bet you love technology." That goes without saying, baby. "And your flat screen sure cost a pretty penny, didn't it?"

I shrug. "Yeah, I guess." Computers, flat screens, video games, music... that's stuff you spend real dough on. If you're cheap, you end up with shit. "What's your point?" I wonder, shoving the last of my sandwich in my mouth.

"Girls are the same with clothes, shoes, makeup, and accessories," she explains. "We all have our indulgences, Edward." She grins. "And just like I would freak out if I ended up with a grass stain on my shirt or leggings, I'm sure you would lose your shit if someone spilled a drink over your TV."

I definitely would, yeah. "Are you saying that you wouldn't lose it if someone spilled on your TV, then?"

Take *that*, Bella.

She shrugs. "Not really. I have a cheap piece of shit, and I don't really care for it. At least not in the way I care about my shoes."

Huh. "What about your computer? You're a writer, after all."

Another shrug and another grin. "I have everything backed up, you know. Plus, my laptop isn't all that fancy. It's definitely replaceable. All I need is a Word document, and I'm good to go. I don't need anything special." How about that. Okay, I guess I can see her point. A little. She has girl-stuff she cares about, and I have guy-stuff. Simple as that. "So, you see, *baby*," she drawls. "If I had known that I would've ended up here today, sitting on grass, I wouldn't have picked out these clothes this morning. Just because I'm not afraid to spend hundreds of dollars on shoes doesn't mean I would say no to everything that may come with stains. I would just leave my fancy shoes at home."

I nod thoughtfully, looking down at my lap. It's easy to draw up a similar situation from my perspective. For instance, if I were to have a party at my place, I would definitely store away my most expensive gadgets.

The woman actually makes sense.

"Consider me lectured," I joke, lying down on the grass. My hands go behind my head, which makes my t-shirt ride up. "Good thing you have my hoodie," I quip.

She snickers and also ends up on her back, though she uses my stomach as a pillow. I'm very good with that. But I want to see more, so I twist my body a little to the side, resting on one elbow.

"Yeah, otherwise I'd be outta here so fast. Grass is Jimmy Choo's enemy."

Jimmy, who?

Whatever.

I smile and start playing with a strand of her hair.

This is... new. There's really no other word to describe it. But I like it.

"So... Edward Cullen, tell me about your sister." Tilting her head, she faces me with a smile. I can feel the warmth of her cheek against my abs.

"Start with name and age."



10.

"My sister," he sighs, twirling a piece of my hair between his fingers. I look at him, almost mesmerized, 'cause he's devastatingly handsome in the sun. His brown hair, which has red and bronze in it, looks so damn soft, and I know that it is. And shit, Edward Cullen in Ray-Bans... Oh, have mercy. "Hmm, what to say?" he chuckles quietly. "All right. Name and age, you said. Her name is Elizabeth, but we call her Liz or Lizzie. And she turns twenty-four on the eighteenth."

So, she's his baby sister. I bet he's protective of her. I can definitely see that.

"And you mentioned that she lives in London?" I continue softly. Turning on my side, I keep the side of my face pressed against his exposed skin, but it gives me the chance to touch him without twisting my body uncomfortably. So, my hand slides under his shirt. My touch is soft – fingers tracing his skin.

"Um, yes. But she's moving here," he murmurs. "In fact, so are my parents." And even though his eyes are hidden behind his shades, I just know that he's rolling his eyes for some reason. "They're all arriving on the seventeenth."

Wow. "That's the day after tomorrow."

He grins wryly. "Oh, I'm aware."

"Don't you want them here?" I smile curiously.

"Hmm..." He purses his lips for a moment. "Yes and no." He huffs a chuckle. "I love my parents, but who wants their parents around all the time?" And then a sigh. "I don't know. It'll be good, but it's gonna take a while to get used to." Understandable. It'd be weird to see my dad in New York, that's for sure. "Besides, my sister's fucking annoying."

"Ah. But you need a good gift for her now."

He hums. "One that makes her cry."

Uh-huh. "And how come?"

"Because I may or may not have told Mom that Liz was gonna love her gift so much that it made her weep."

I laugh, burying my face against his stomach. "And you said this... why?"

Damn, he smells good. Taking off my sunglasses, I start kissing his happy trail.

"I choose not to answer that question," he replies quietly. His abs tense when I place an openmouthed kiss right before I reach the band of his boxers. Calvin Klein boxers, I see. "Fuck, don't wake up the beast, baby."

No, that wouldn't be smart. There are people everywhere, taking advantage of the sun this wonderful Sunday. And I guess they didn't come here for a free show.

"Sorry," I say, not sorry at all. In fact, I want much more, so I sit up, only to push him a little. He ends up flat on his back, and then I straddle his stomach. Expensive leggings, be damned. I can live with a few grass stains. "Tell me more about Elizabeth."

Because I want to know.

"She loves books," he sighs contently. When he grabs my hands, I thread our fingers together, and then he pulls me down on him. Nose to nose, our hands above his head. "She loves shopping." I kiss him softly, slowly. With a quiet hum, he parts his lips for me. "You should see her collection of bags." We both sorta smile as we keep kissing, and this is bad, bad, bad, so fucking bad. The feelings I'm beginning to...

Crap.

After giving him one more kiss, I straighten up. Then I let out a giggle as he slides me down his body in order to sit up. Now straddling his hips, I can feel his semi-erection, but he doesn't seem to think about it. Instead, he keeps me close to him, arms around my waist, hands resting just above my ass, and his face buried in the crook of my neck. And I shiver because this is so new, so different, and so amazing. But this can also be a make or break moment.

I'm suddenly scared shitless that it's break rather than make.

"Edward," I whisper into his hair.

"I know," he murmurs, and I wonder if he really does. He kisses me then, hard and sensually, passionately and firmly. It's one of those kisses where

you just cave. His tongue slides against mine, and I tug on his hair, craving, wanting.

I'm in love with the moment we're sharing.

But of course, this is also the moment my phone rings.

And it's Dad's ringtone.

"Fuck," I mutter breathlessly, breaking the kiss. Edward drops his forehead to my shoulder, and I reach for my bag. "I'll be quick. It's my dad," I mumble.

"No worries," he says softly.

No worries? Sorry, but I'm worrying all over the place. 'Cause I have a feeling that my life won't be "uncomplicated" for much longer. I just don't know if it's a bad thing or a good thing.

"Hey, Dad," I greet into the phone. I run a hand through my hair before my hand finds Edward again. Cradling his cheek, I try to... I don't know... read him, maybe?

"Hey, kiddo," Dad responds, a smile in his voice. *"How's my city girl?"*

I don't know. I think I'm about to have boy trouble. Problem is, a big part of me wants to know what can come out of it. 'Cause as I look into Edward's eyes, I have a feeling Alice is going to say "I told you so" someday soon. Edward... Prince Charming?

Hmph.

Anyway, I definitely don't tell Dad this. "I'm good," I say instead, dropping my forehead to Edward's. I keep my eyes open, locked with his, and he doesn't waver. "Still loving New York, I'm afraid," I add, smiling. Edward smiles, too.

Oh, I'm fucked for sure.

With a small sigh, I lean back a little, resting my hand on Edward's chest as he places his hands behind him on the grass for support. "And you, Chief?" I ask. "Everything's good with you?"

My dad is a man of few words. We don't speak very often. Last time I spoke to him was about a month ago. Well, apart from the quick phone call on my birthday. He did, however and as always, send me a care package. But we save our talks for when I visit. That's when we go hiking or watch old games on the flat screen. He goes fishing, and I cook it afterward.

I look down at my lap, hit by a small pang of wistfulness. I miss him. Good thing a few holidays are coming up. It means it's time to return for a week or two.

"All good," he replies. "Same old, same old, really. Been thinkin' about taking a vacation, actually."

Oh? "You could visit me here," I suggest hopefully. Last time Dad was here was when I graduated college, and his exact words about Manhattan were, "At least the place looks good on a postcard". Yeah, he's really a small-town man.

"That's what I was thinkin'," Dad chuckles. "Which is why I'm calling now. I'm checking flights online, and I was wondering how you'd feel about Thanksgivin'."

Hell yes! "Sounds perfect, Dad," I assure him happily. "I'll make sure I have my schedule cleared."

"Alrighty, then. So, three or four days around Thanksgivin'?"

I frown. "A week."

"Fine. A week around Thanksgivin'," he agrees, snickering. "I'll book the flight. Take care, baby."

"Always, and you, too, Chief."

"Always."

I feel light and happy when I end the call.

Dad's coming. In a couple of months, but still.

"Chief?" Edward asks quietly.

I look up at him, smiling, but I notice that his eyes aren't on me. "He's the chief of police in my hometown," I answer, following his gaze.

He hums in acknowledgment, and I'm sorta rigid. His eyes are definitely glued to one of the folders about adopting that is sticking out of my bag. I'm finding it hard to breathe, and it's completely impossible to read Edward's expression. It's blank, neither angry nor thrilled. There's just nothing. Not even shock or surprise. Then again, while I was talking to Dad, maybe Edward had time to recover or whatever I'm supposed to call it.

Then, after what feels like a lifetime, he tilts his head in my direction. His expression is still blank, but his stance is the same as before. Casual. His hands are on the grass behind him, and he's kind of leaning back a little.

"Am I allowed to ask about this?" he asks bluntly.

I swallow hard and chew on my lip. Then I give him a small nod, hoping my heart can calm down soon and stop trying to pound its way through my damn chest.

"Are those papers for you?" he asks first.

Expression still blank. It's killing me, and it hits me hard how much it suddenly matters to me. His reaction, that is.

"Yes," I respond just above a whisper. I clear my throat. "I can't have kids." I give a small one-shouldered shrug, remembering last year when I saw a doctor to make sure. Since it had been years and all. "An infection when I was a teenager." Edward gives nothing away, but I can see that he's listening intently. "It never really bothered me. I was just fifteen when I found out. Um..." I swallow and lick my lips, finding it hard to look him in the eye, so I don't. Instead, I look next to us – at my bag. "Then, as I got older and started thinking about having children, I went to a counselor." Another shrug, because really, I'm fine with it all now. But I still feel vulnerable in front of Edward, and I don't fucking get it. "I got over it, 'cause DNA doesn't mean everything. Sometimes not *anything*." My dad was only sixteen when I was born. Mom ran away. Dad kept me, worked hard, raised me, went to college, became a police officer, climbed the proverbial ladder. "So, I quickly decided that when the day comes and I want children... I'm going to adopt." I smile. Just a small smile. At the thought of little Anna who I met this morning. "If someone told me today that something can be done so that I can have biological children, I would still go with adoption." And that's my truth. "There are so many children out there who need a good home..." I trail off.

Make or break.

With a resigned sigh, I look up at Edward again.

His expression is far from blank now, but it's still hard to read. He looks pensive. His eyebrows are slightly knitted together. His teeth are imbedded in his lower lip. His head is tilted, if only a little. And it's so fucking frustrating. But he's not pushing me off his lap. That's good, right?

"And you're ready to have kids now?" he murmurs.

I blow out a breath. I go with honesty. "I'm ready to start the process. It's going to take time, but..."

He nods slowly, looking down at my hand, which is resting on his stomach.

My own stomach clenches.

There's no way we can go back to what we used to be.

Is there?

The next words are spoken softly, and without looking up.

"Liz and I are adopted."



10.

See, here's the thing. I'm an instinctual being. Most men are. Men go with their gut, and they don't really question anything. The less we know about the universe, the better. This doesn't make us stupid. This makes us incredibly smart. Fewer reasons for worry, fewer reasons for headaches. Curiosity killed the cat? Nah, curiosity killed the man.

I'm not saying that this applies to all men – definitely not – but it does for most of us. It's just facts. We go with the flow, and don't fuck with our path of contentment. Because that's what we want – contentment. We're

simple. Sure, we can be full of shit – just like women. But again, most of us don't need much. Most of us just want uncomplicated.

Good sex. Yes, please. That's golden.

Money in the bank. Yeah, that helps to keep things uncomplicated.

A home. Uh-huh, 'cause we need a place to keep our shiny toys. Plus, there's nothing like sleeping in a good bed.

Speaking of shiny toys: gadgets, technology. Yep, that's a man's playground. We want. We like.

See where I'm going with this? It doesn't take a lot to keep a man satisfied.

Then the heart gets involved. Like now, for instance, in my case. Bella Swan. She's currently waiting for me to freak out. Not that I will, 'cause that's not in my DNA as long as my basic needs are covered. I still have a home, I still have my gadgets, I still have my job, I still have amazing sex. Well, that last part remains to be seen, but I ain't no quitter. My gut tells me now that I know all I need to know about Bella. She's fucking perfect.

Like I said, I'm not stupid. So, I know that things may get a bit tricky now for a while. But that just gives me a goal. Which is another thing about men. Many of us are competitive. We hate to lose. I'm one of these men. Now that I see something I want, I will just make sure that I get it.

That's Bella.

In a very short period of time, I've learned a lot about her. But what I see, I love. She's beautiful, fucking hot, a hellcat in bed, smart, apparently all heart... She's genuine, she's blunt, she's all woman, she's a puzzle that I want to solve, then keep. She's the one who will turn me into

a pussy-whipped man, and you know why? Because she will hold the strings. That's how it goes. I've seen my dad and how he is around Mom. She calls the shots because she's the only one who can fuck with Dad's basic needs. If she's pissed, she can throw away Dad's fancy grill. She can hide the remote control, she can withhold sex, and she can go on a shopping spree to calm herself down. A spending spree that will leave Dad a nervous mess.

This is why we fold. This is why we become pussy-whipped.

We hate conflict, 'cause it messes with the calm. We hate conflict, 'cause it has the potential to keep us away from our basic needs.

And why do we put up with it? Why do we allow for a woman to have us by the balls? Because we're not heartless. Human beings thrive in numbers. We're not made for spending our lives alone. And I like the idea of having someone to come home to. Someone who I can have for myself, someone who can provide me with the good sex. Ya know? Plus, there's the company. I also like the idea of doing other shit with Bella. Simply put, I want her to share everything with. I will be myself, which will be reflected in the dates I hope I can take her on. And dates... Yeah, I'll do all that with a fucking smile on my face, 'cause seeing the woman you're involved with happy is pretty much what we want. If the chick is happy, the guy is, too.

Then if we share hobbies and interests... Well, that's just terrific. It can't get much better than that, 'cause that means we can enjoy a whole lot more together.

Next topic is children. I can only speak for myself here, but I still have a feeling that what *I* feel also applies to many other men. And that's that I don't see kids in the near future until the topic is touched by the woman. I think we know whether we want kids or not, as in, at all. And sure, I've always seen myself with a kid or two... in the future. But there's no time

frame, you know? Until there is. The subject is now waiting to be talked about, 'cause Bella's at that place in her life. Evidently.

Now, I'm not getting ahead of myself. I know that I have my work cut out for me, but I'm up for the challenge. Because my gut instinct tells me that Bella's perfect for me, so that's what I'm going with. And the fact that she can't have biological children doesn't bother me one bit. In fact, it probably only solidifies that Bella's the woman for me. After all, like I just told Bella, my sister and I are adopted. I know very well that DNA doesn't make a good parent.

Patience does.

I kid, I kid. There's love and devotion, too.

What I'm saying is that if Liz and I didn't have Carlisle and Esme when our biological parents died, we would've been thrown into foster care. Luckily, there are people like Carlisle and Esme out there, and... people like Bella.

So, how can I possibly not want Bella for more?

She's not just beautiful on the outside, but also on the inside.

Things are about to get complicated for a while, but I have a feeling it's going to be worth it.

Leaning forward, I surprise the hell out of Bella when I kiss her. Both hands cradle her face, and I kiss her firmly. She doesn't know that I have plans to nestle myself into her life yet, but she will.

"Um... Edward?" she pants, breaking the kiss. I keep kissing her, though. Her cheeks, her jaw, her neck. "Wh... what are you doing?"

I'm kissing you. "Isn't it obvious?" I chuckle quietly, nuzzling and kissing her jaw.

"But... you just told me... and now...?"

After placing a last kiss on her cheek, I lean back on my hands on the grass again. "I told you that my sister and I are adopted, yes. We are." She looks very confused, and a bit dazed, so I continue. 'Cause it's on now. We're gonna get to know each other. "Our parents died in a plane crash when I was four. Lizzie was two." Her eyes soften. "Carlisle and Esme were our godparents. They adopted us."

"Oh," she breathes out.

I go on. "They couldn't have children, Bella," I murmur. "They were already looking into adoption when my parents died. Since then, Liz and I have been called Mom's – Esme's – blessings." I chuckle and scrub a hand over my face. "She still calls us that."

Bella smiles. "I can see that."

Of course she can. "Yeah, I'm not very good with this sappy shit, but don't you get it?" I tilt my head. "If anyone's a blessing, it's Mom. And Dad, of course. They gave us everything, without hesitation or doubt. They gave us a home."

"You're all blessings to each other, then," she replies softly.

I nod once, conceding. "So, don't worry. I'm not gonna freak out about this." I grin wryly when she ducks her head. "You thought I would."

She shrugs. "It's a big thing, and... others have freaked out in the past."

I can see that. Ignorant people. "Well..." I blow out a breath. "I'm not going anywhere."

There.

Interpret that however you like, baby.

She opens her mouth then closes it. Her brows knit together, and it's my cue to change the subject.

"Your dad is a cop?"

Not just a cop, but the chief of police where Bella grew up.

Greeeeaat.

"Um, yes." She chuckles a little. In confusion, I think. Maybe because I dropped the subject. Or, she thinks I did. "Why?"

I shrug. "Just curious." That's the man I'm going to suck up to one day, after all. "So, he carries a gun?"

Now she smirks. "You bet."

Lovely.

Can't wait to tell him how I met his daughter.

Sarcasm, by the way.

"What does your parents do?" she asks, and that's more like it. Keep going, baby. Get to know me.

"Mom used to be a NICU nurse, and that's how she met Dad. He's a surgeon," I explain. "But when they adopted me and Liz, Mom quit to be a stay-at-home mom. Now, though, she runs her own charity foundation."

"Wow," she murmurs, smiling in awe, I think. Not sure. "What's the foundation for?"

I smile. "She raises money for single parents. Parents who are struggling with work or school, all while taking care of their children." Bella averts her eyes, and I have feeling that's something she's familiar with, 'cause I

noticed earlier how she didn't mention a mother. And how the whole phone call earlier played out... Yeah, I'm pretty sure her mom's not in the picture. "The money goes to food, baby sitters, sometimes tuitions... gas money, bus fare... you name it."

All right, enough with the heavy. Well... maybe it's not heavy, but it's obviously struck a chord in Bella, and that's not what I want. Not today. We'll get there.

"Hey," I murmur, nudging her a little. "How about we get that damn gift for my sister now?" I think she's thankful for the change of topic this time, 'cause she smiles. "Sound good?" She nods and reminds me that she still needs to know more about her in order to make suggestions on gifts. So, I swallow down the rest of my soda, and then I launch.

Three hours later, I come home with two gifts for Lizzie that better make her cry.

I. Hate. Shopping.

Bella noticed this, of course, when we were out. She'd have to be deaf not to notice it, actually. But my whining worked, 'cause promised to kiss it all better when she comes here tomorrow night.



When there's too much on my mind, I pace.

So, that's what I'm doing right now. At home. In my apartment. An apartment I love. It's very me. Old wooden floors, high ceilings. And I have Central Park right outside my living room window. Same goes for my bedroom window. But that's not where I am right now, though. No, I'm in my little study. It's just a small space, crammed in between my bedroom and guest room. You can fit a king-sized bed in here, but nothing else. So, I made this my home office. A small desk, a comfortable chair, and my laptop. There are also some small shelves on the walls where I keep all my work. Every *Written Word* magazine since I started working there. I also have the articles from my college newspaper and some other papers where I've published a thing or two.

This is where I'm pacing now, anyway. In front of my little desk.

A glass of California White in my hand. *Gotta love white wine.*

I'm only wearing a simple tank-top and a pair of boy shorts.

And I'm pacing.

Thinking about today. About Edward. About... what I want.

Guzzling down some wine, I walk around my desk and settle in my chair. The laptop is waiting for me, but so is the first drawer in my desk. Yeah, that's a thing about me. A ritual, if you will. First I will pace and think, and then I will sit down in my chair, pull out the first drawer and pick out a nail polish. Because I can't write just yet. I'm not done thinking. However, I still need to do *something*... and over the years, that thing has been to paint my toenails.

I choose dark blue today.

With my knee drawn up to my chest and my heel resting on the chair, I swipe the brush over my nails, and in the meantime, my mind keeps working. I know it's going to be for my next relationship article. I also know that it's going to get a lot more personal from now on. At least, that's what it feels like. Because when I started at *Written Word*, I was just like Alice. Well, not just like her. But I was all up in the dating game. So, I wrote about my experiences and so on. Then I met Edward, and I stopped writing about myself. Or rather, I stopped getting ideas that involved myself. Instead, I used Rose and Alice. They inspired me; they were the sources.

Now, though...

I look up at the empty Word document.

It doesn't take long before my fingers fly over the keys.

No strings attached – is there such a thing?

There are many kinds of relationships out there, and depending on where you are in your life, you find one that fits you.

In this issue, I will write about one of these relationships.

Ever had a fuck-buddy?

I sit back, taking a sip of my wine.

The term "fuck-buddy" doesn't make sense, I observe. A buddy is someone you know, right? But that contradicts the whole meaning of "casual", doesn't it? Because the way I see it, you can't say that you're not ready for a relationship if Mr. Perfect knocks on your door. No one has that restraint. I think we're greedy by nature, and if we find something wonderful, we want more of it.

So, the question is...

The question is, can they last without altering? For instance, if you see a man casually, can you really keep it casual? Is there really a choice?

Because here's the thing, though you might not find out about this guy's favorite color or what TV shows he watches, you will definitely learn a lot just by being in his presence. That's inevitable. So, what do you do when you find out that your "fuck-buddy" is amazing outside of the bedroom activities?

After a few nights at his or your place, you start finding out little things about him. Things he wouldn't bring up on a first date, but things that define him, or are simply part of him. Maybe he has a morning routine that fascinates you. Maybe you think it's cute that he hums in the shower. Maybe he makes you smile when he struggles to pick out a tie.

Perhaps you find yourself wanting to help him pick out that tie.

He may not fit into your life or your current path, but is it possible to stay away?

The strings are there now.

Are you really strong enough to cut loose?

Regardless, the strings are present, proving that even the most casual relationship can get your heart involved. It's really only a matter of time.

Leaning back again, I let out a sigh as try to think back on my own "casual" relationship with Edward. I'm definitely not saying that you can't have sex without commitment. I mean, I'm no stranger to one-night stands. But that's just it, though. Maybe you can only have casual sex with those you drag home for a single night. Or maybe you need to know that the person you're fucking isn't perfect for you in a relationship before you start an "arrangement". I can see that working, I'll admit. Because if

you know that there's no appeal except for his body, then there's no temptation. No curiosity.

It makes me wonder if there was a part of me that immediately knew that Edward was different. Because as I think back, I can recognize the struggling. The struggling to keep a distance. For instance, I never invited him here to my place. It's always been his.

"Not that it helped. Fucking strings," I mutter to myself, closing the laptop. I can continue later. Now I need a spoonful or two of Nutella. I also need to do some research for my next sex article, which means I need to call a few guys. Guys that can give me input. And I'm glad I have my very own panel of men at my disposal. Angela's husband is one of them, and I grin to myself, wondering what reaction Angela will have when she finds the book I'm giving Ben.

A moment later, when I'm sitting on my kitchen island with a spoon in my mouth, I contemplate asking Edward for help. And since I'm contemplating this, it's quite obvious that I'm not strong enough to cut loose. The strings are there, and I'm not running.

Reaching for my phone, I dial his number and wait.

I've always called him from my cell phone, so I'm not surprised when he greets me differently. He doesn't have my home number, after all.

"Edward Cullen here."

So, that's how he greets strangers, I muse internally.

"Bella Swan here," I mimic in a deep voice. He chuckles, and I grin stupidly. "How are ya, handsome?"

"All good. Just watching some TV," he responds casually. *"And you, beautiful?"*

Homina, homina, homina. "Also good. I'm writing," I say, dipping a finger into the jar of Nutella. "Actually, I'm taking a chocolaty break, and I figured I could give you a call about tomorrow. When do you want me to come over?"

"A chocolaty break?" He snickers. *"I'd love to know what that entails. And I get off at five tomorrow, but I'm meeting up with a few buddies for a beer or two before I go home."*

That's just perfect. Maybe they can offer an opinion, too. "A chocolaty break entails a spoon," *a few fingers*, "and a jar of Nutella," I inform him in a serious voice. "As for tomorrow, I wonder if you could help me out with something."

"Yeah, I'm still stuck on the Nutella, baby." Such a man. Gotta love it, though. *"But I'll make an effort for you."* He clears his throat. *"Whaddya need?"*

You.

Oh, facepalm.

"Um, it's for an article I'm writing, and I need a guy's opinion," I tell him. "I already have a few guys who help me, but I thought I could ask you, too." I pause, 'cause this is the tricky part. "It involves a book, Edward."

"First of all, you have a few other guys who help you? Mind elaborating on that one, please?"

I smile and stick a Nutella-finger in my mouth. I shouldn't be giddy right now. I shouldn't swing my legs like I'm unable to sit still. I shouldn't feel like bouncing around. I shouldn't be pleased to hear the jealousy in his voice. It's definitely not something I should want to shout out all over the city. But I do all this, 'cause I'm such a girl.

There are strings for Edward Cullen, too, it seems.

"You met Ben at my party, right?" I know he did. "Angela's *husband*. He's one of the guys in my dude panel," I chuckle. "They're just there to help me when I do research." Sure, the little green-eyed monster sent a thrill of satisfaction through me, but I certainly don't want to drag it out. I'm not evil. "You can relax, baby."

Again, he clears his throat. "*Good*," he says, and this time he's only *trying* to come off as casual. But he fails, much to my girly self's pleasure.

"*Moving on. Uh, a book?*" And now I stifle my amusement, because this is what I meant earlier by "tricky". Getting a guy to read a book isn't always easy. "*You want me to read?*" See? What a fucking cutie. "*Yeah... sorry, baby, but unless it comes on a box of cereal or sports magazine, I'm unable to pitch in.*"

"It's smut," I say bluntly.

"*Suuuhwhat?*"

I shake my head, grinning. "Porn, Edward. Ya know, erotica. And I don't want you to read the entire book. Just skim a few pages." Another finger goes into the Nutella. "If you just give me the address to your work, I could drop it off in the lobby or something. Then, when I come over tomorrow night, you could tell me what you think."

"*Porn*," he states flatly.

"Uh-huh." I giggle. "Like I said, you don't have to read a lot. Just skim a little."

"*Yeah, no, I can do that. Yeah. I can definitely do that. Yeah.*"

I laugh. "Say 'yeah' one more time, sweetie."

Silence.

"Edward?"

"Uh, yeah, I'm here," he says softly. "And yeah, I will help you." He chuckles. "It will be my pleasure."



11.

When I enter the bar, I huff and roll my eyes at the sight of Emmett. That fucker called in sick today, and as I get closer to our booth, I can see that he actually *is* sick. But if he can go to a fucking bar, he could've worked today, as well. Instead, *I* had to deal with his workload. And it was that workload that kept me from running downstairs to meet Bella as she dropped off the porn. I mean the book. Of porn. Erotica.

"You look tired, man," Jake says when I pause at the bar.

"I am," I sigh, loosening my tie. "Think I need something stronger today."

He chuckles. "How about a Jack, then?"

I nod. "Sounds good. Make it a double."

A moment later, I drop my briefcase on the floor before sliding into my seat.

"Hello, Jazz," I say politely, and then I turn to Emmett. "You fucknut."

He grins... then coughs. "What did I do?"

What did he...? "You left me hanging, that's what you did," I mutter. "We had the Amun meeting today, remember?" At least he has the decency to look sheepish. "Aro really wants that account, and I had to sort through your shit in less than twenty minutes before the meeting."

"Ah, fuck. I'm sorry, dude," he sighs, dragging a hand over his face. "But I really do feel like crap."

Tell me about it. There's no suit on him today. I can't really see what kind of pants he's wearing – since he's sitting down in the booth – but I can see the bulky sweater. I can also see the scarf and the beanie. "You look like shit," I tell him before sipping my whiskey. "Got a cold or something?"

"Yeah, you can say that," he grumbles then coughs.

I shake my head. "Then what the fuck are you doing here?"

I mean, it's easy for me and Jazz to just drop by. This is our neighborhood, after all. But Emmett lives in Murray Hill, and even though there's no real distance around here – 'cause it's Manhattan – it's still a cab ride.

"I needed to pick up some food," he says with a shrug. "Figured I could use something strong, too." He holds up a glass... Ah, a whiskey for him, too, today. "Besides, I fought with my mom over the phone, and I really needed to get out."

"What did you fight about?" Jazz asks, sipping his beer.

Emmett rolls his eyes. "Mom refused to come down here from Boston to take care of me."

Another shake of my head. I sigh, too, for good measure. "That sucks, buddy."

That's why I'm glad that I never get sick. 'Cause to be alone when you're sick is like the world coming to an end. And there's no way my own mom would fly in from Chicago to take care of me. Oooh, but Bella would. Okay, maybe not yet. But she will once I've made her fall in love with yours truly.

"I'll live," he mumbles dejectedly. I sorta pity him, 'cause it's not by choice we turn into boys when we're sick. "Anyway, how did the pitch go?"

I smirk and reach down to open my briefcase. "They left some ideas, and I'm pretty sure we're gonna get it, but they're currently in business McKenna Inc., too." Which is Aro's biggest rival. He hates Charles McKenna with passion – something we all know. "So, we gotta come off stronger next time," I add, sliding a few papers across the table for Em. I also bring out Bella's book while I'm at it. "But we have two weeks to work something out."

I'm not really worried, 'cause we're awesome.

"What's that?" Jasper asks, jerking his chin at the book in my hand, and I laugh.

I can't help it, but this book... Oh, women.

Since I've been so fucking busy today, I was only able to skim a little during my lunch. A lunch that lasted fifteen minutes. Yeah. So, I've really not been able to form an opinion, but- Okay, that's a lie. I may not have read a lot, but I have formed an opinion. Three pages of this told me that I was reading shit. I'm willing to admit that the sex was fairly graphic in places, but... yeah, no, it was shit.

"Bella asked me to help her with an article she's writing," I explain. Emmett and Jazz both arch eyebrows at me. "Remember that she's taking over some column about sex?" They nod, frowning a little. I smirk. "This is for that." I hold up the book, and they see the title before their eyes widen. "Oh, yeah. It's erotica... and it sucks." I snicker, shaking my head as I flip open the book. "She dropped it off at work today."

"So, you're supposed to read it?" Em wonders.

I shrug. "She asked me to skim through a few pages. Just enough to form an opinion about the writing and shit like that."

"And you did." Jazz grins.

"I did." I nod. "And I don't know whether to laugh or cry. I sincerely hope women don't think we're like this." They both ask what I mean by that, so I stifle my amusement enough to explain. "The book is written by a chick, of course, but she's writing it from a man's point of view."

"Uh-oh," Jasper says, cringing.

"Exactly," I agree. "For instance, listen to this crap..." I quickly find the sex scene I read earlier, and I read it out loud for the guys. "...I looked into her glittering eyes as I moved in her. Her shiny hair smelled like honeysuckle, freesias, and wild berries. It was like the softest silk between my fingers. Her velvet heat drew me in with each thrust. It was heavenly. Making love to this woman completed me'... The shit goes on and on, really," I sigh, throwing the book down on the table.

Jazz cracks up and starts guffawing.

Emmett's gaping like a fucking fish. Then he grabs the book, most likely needing to see that bullshit for himself.

Yeah.

Now, when a dude falls in love – not that I know from experience, but I've seen my dad, and he's disgustingly in love with Mom – we can absolutely have our sappy moments. And yeah, I noticed that Bella looked fucking beautiful in the sun yesterday, for instance, but we don't think about glittering eyes! The word itself – glitter... that shit doesn't exist in our heads. Sure, Bella's hair is shiny and silky, but that's as far as it goes. If you ask me what she smells like, I will tell you that it's something flowery. I don't fucking know what freesias smell like. And what the hell is honeysuckle? And wild berries? How exactly do they smell?

I'm willing to bet that the only scent I can recognize when it comes to flowers... Hmm... I'd say roses. 'Cause everyone knows the smell of roses. And then we have fruit. Dudes would say that she smells like just that – fruit. Maybe berries. I suppose strawberries are easily detected. And then we have a few other smells. Like vanilla, cinnamon, apples... Okay, fruits and some spices are easier. But freesias? Fuck no. Honeysuckle? Another no. Us guys... we don't think like that. We're simple, remember? We go with fruity, flowery, sweet, fresh... whatever.

We certainly don't pause our fucking to decipher the flowers in a woman's shampoo.

And velvet heat? Please, call it what it is. A pussy is a pussy. There's nothing velvet about it. For fuck's sake, isn't that a type of fabric? Fucking fabric doesn't sound appealing to me. By the way, aren't fabrics, you know, dry? Yeah, maybe the "man" in that book needs to work on his skills, 'cause the woman's not aroused if she feels like fabric.

"Oh, man," Emmett groans. "Listen to this. 'When we both reached our peaks, it felt like our souls became one.'" He looks up at us. "What the fuck *is* this?"

Again, I shake my head. "Poetic, isn't it?" I ask dryly.

I take a sip from my Jack when Jasper grabs the book. It doesn't take many seconds until he's found something to laugh about. "For the love of fucking!" Yep. Pretty much. "Crap, this one's worse. 'In our post-coital glow, I watched her, willing my eyes to take all of her in. I wished I could capture the moment forever. In fact, this was almost as perfect as being inside of her. Her eyes were sparkling, and it took my breath away, nearly making me emotional. She was everything to me. I knew I would do everything *for* her. She had my heart in the palm of her soft hand. From this moment on, I was owned, and the scents of honeysuckle and freesias would always remind me of her.'"

I lose count of how many times I shake my head.

"What're freesias?" Em asks.

"Type of flower," I reply.

"And what do they smell like?"

I shrug. "Fuck if I know. What's honeysuckle?"

Jasper sips his beer before responding. "Another flower, I think."

"Do they smell like honey?" I wonder. 'Cause if they do, then maybe they'd be easily recognizable.

"Who the heck knows?" Jazz sighs.

"Women," Em and I say in unison.

We all clink our glasses together – or bottle in Jasper's case.

"So," Jazz grins, "what are you gonna tell Bella?"

I huff a chuckle. "The truth."

And I will. There's no way I want her to think this is how men function. During sex, we think about getting our cocks deliciously wet. We think about having an orgasm, we think about tits jiggling, we think about how fucking amazing it feels to fuck. Of course, a real man thinks about the woman's pleasure, too. And I certainly think about Bella feeling good. Hell, that's *very* important to me. But I don't think about how good her hair feels between my fingers when I'm inside of her.

"Speaking of Bella," Emmett says with a pointed look. "You're not so casual anymore, are ya?"

Yeah, I have told him about showing up at Bella's party. And I know that Em told Jazz. They also know about her helping me yesterday with the shopping.

Locker room talk, remember?

"Nope, not casual," I say simply. I don't beat around the fucking bush. "At least not for me. I'm gonna make her mine."

"Huh," Jazz grunts. "What changed?"

Many things. "Getting to know her," I sigh. "She's different."

"You asked her out or anything?" Em waggles his eyebrows. "She'll probably put out on the first date, you know."

I huff. "She better." I'm a Bella addict now, and I sure fucking hope dating her won't change what we have between the sheets, so to speak. "But no, I haven't asked her yet."

Jazz cocks a brow. "What's the hold-up?"

And here it comes... "She wants kids."

"Damn," Em mutters. And coughs a little. "Right now?"

I nod slowly, phrasing my words. But then I just spit the shit out. "She's gonna adopt. And she's ready to start the process."

This, of course, leads a lot more questions.

In the end, I've told them everything I know when it comes to Bella not being able to conceive.

I don't know much, but I do know – from watching her as she told me – that she feels good about her decision. Adopting is something she wants. Even if she had other options, as she said, she would adopt. And since yesterday, I have given it some thought. That's what men do when a topic is suddenly touched upon. We think it over, and we make our decision. Then we stick to it. Well, *good* men stick to their decisions. I know very well that some dudes make decisions, only to change their minds after a few years. Granted, we can't predict the future. Things can go wrong. But when it comes to children, you better fucking step up.

"So, do you want kids?" Jasper asks.

I sigh, thinking about it a little. But I still come up with the same answer as I did yesterday, and then again this morning when I thought shit over again. Just to be safe, ya know.

"I think it has to do with having kids with Bella," I explain thoughtfully. "I doubt I would've been ready if it wasn't her." Fuck, explaining things isn't the easiest. I just know what I feel, and it feels kinda good to think about a future with Bella. Who am I to question that? "All I know is that when she told me about this adopting thing, I..." I shrug. "It fucking clicked."

Her telling me that... Yeah, that gave me a larger image of what kind of person Bella is. And I love that image.

"Shit, buddy," Em chuckles incredulously. "Are you in love with her or some shit?"

Not yet. I think. Ah, fuck. Who knows? Maybe I am. I mean, if I'm able to think about a future with her, I think it's safe to say that I care deeply for her. And if that's love, then fine. So be it. But I'm still waiting for that thunderbolt to strike me in the fucking head... and take my balls away in the process.

See? I had a sappy moment right there.

Without velvet heat.

I snort. "I'm getting there." I know I am. "Anyway," I sigh. "Enough about me. What about you, Jazz?" I say sorta randomly. But come on, I already know all there is to know about Emmett. He doesn't have to give me a detailed story about his cold.

"I'm waiting for your sister," he replies, smirking, and I reach over the table to punch his arm. "What? I've seen the picture you have of her."

Dude. "That was from her high school graduation, you sick fuck," I tell him, reining in my anger. "You're not going anywhere near my sister."

End of.

"Fine," he laughs through his nose. "Maybe Bella has some hot friends?"

"Oh, yeah," Emmett agrees, nodding. "Hook a buddy up, will ya?"

I shake my head. "Chase your own fucking tail." There's no way I'm risking Bella's friends. That will just come back and bite me in the ass. Especially if Emmett's the one hooking up with one of her friends. As far as I know, he's a fuck-and-duck kinda dude, and the last thing I need is Bella's girlfriends crying to her about my buddies.

"Well, I already have Rose's number," Jazz drawls. "Maybe I could just give her a call."

I flip him off. "Be my guest. At least I have nothing to do with it." But then I frown, 'cause I think I remember something about Blondie. "Pretty sure Rose is married, though," I tell him. "So, I gotta ask how you ended up with her number."

He holds his hands up. "Don't worry, Cullen." He winks. "I only have it since I worked for her."

Ah, right. I remember.

Know what else I remember then?

Yeah, I laugh. Hard.

"The fuck?" Jasper frowns. "What did we miss?"

"That's what I'd like to know," Em says... before sneezing. "Shit."

"Dude, you should go home and sleep," Jazz tells him, and I nod, all while trying to quit with the laughing.

Bella thought he was gay!

But before I can get a word out, my phone vibrates.



Since I'm early, I'm not really surprised when Kirk at the front desk tells me that "Mr. Cullen" isn't home yet. So, I walk out of the building again, gym bag and yoga mat in tow. That's why I'm early. Alice called around noon, telling me that a client of hers had given her two tickets to his wife's very exclusive health club, which is in this neighborhood. It was two passes to try out their new Bikram center, and... yeah, never again. Don't get me wrong, because I love yoga, and I can even see the appeal of *Bikram* yoga. I sure as hell feel cleansed and refreshed right now, but the time we spent in that heat... It's just not worth it. It was *hell*. Alice thinks so, too. Seriously, it felt like my skin was about to get ripped off me. It prickled and stung as we sweated like pigs. And on top of it all, we had to focus on the instructor, all while mirroring his movements.

No, thanks. I'll stick to regular yoga from now on.

After digging out my phone from my very cool and very pink Nike bag, I send off a text to Edward.

I know we said 9 PM, and it's only 8 now, but I'm early. Are you almost home, or should I come back later? Don't rush on my account :) ~Bella.

Had it not been for the pure luxury we had access to after the yoga pass, I definitely would've gone home before coming here. But as it was, Alice and I got a little spoiled first with showers, then a Jacuzzi, then a steam bath, and then another shower. I feel like jelly, I swear.

So, now my yoga pants and tank-top are safely tucked away in my bag, and I'm wearing my black Juicy outfit, complete with pants and a sweatshirt. Yeah, I know, I know, the fact that it says "Juicy" on my ass isn't all that wonderful. But the soft cotton is, and there's not a chance in hell I'm gonna wear jeans or anything rough after working out. I need soft and snuggly. Sue me.

At least the outfit isn't pink. Like my yoga mat or my Nike bag...

Hmm, and my white sneakers have stripes of pink, I remember as I look down.

"Oh, finally," I murmur, feeling the phone vibrating in my hand.

Where are you? – Edward.

Outside your building. Want me to come back later? ~Bella.

His reply is instant this time.

Definitely not. Walk back the way you came. I'm in the next building. Jake's Bar, you can't miss it. I'll be right out. – Edward.

Um.

Following his directions, I walk back toward the street that goes along Chelsea Park, and when I reach the side of the building, I look both left and right. Ah, there it is. Jake's Bar. So, I wonder... does he want me to go in? I mean, he said he'd be right out, but then what? I assume he's not in there alone. And as comfortable I am in my extremely casual outfit, I'm not sure I want to run into anyone Edward knows in these clothes. Hell, I haven't even fixed my hair. It's still wet from my shower, and I just put it in a simple ponytail. *Thank God that I at least put on mascara and eyeliner.*

As he said, Edward walks out of the door where I can see the sign with "Jake's Bar" hanging above, and he looks yummy, of course. I love a man in a suit. Only, he's taken off his jacket. His light-blue tie is also loosened, and his sleeves are pushed up. Fuck, he's so sexy that he makes my head spin.

He stands casually with his hands in his pockets, smiling as I approach.

"Hey there, Yoga Girl," he murmurs, eyeing my yoga mat with a tilted head. "You been rock climbing?" he jokes as I reach him.

"Hi," I sigh softly, standing on my toes to kiss him. He dips down, humming as his lips close over mine. "Rock climbing, by the way? Pfft." I peck him twice more, loving his hands on my hips. "I've been skiing. Can't you tell?"

He chuckles, and I shiver as his thumbs rub little circles on my skin. That's right, under the shirt. He always goes under my clothes, this man. I love it. "Sorry, can't believe I got that wrong." He rolls his eyes. Then he grins down at me. "So, this is new." He gives me a once-over. "I didn't know you work out in this neighborhood."

"I usually don't," I admit. "One of Alice's clients gave her two passes to Chelsea Exclusive, so we went today."

He hums, lips pressed to the top of my head. "And now you're here." With a final kiss at the top of my head, he smiles down at me again. "You're *really* fucking short without heels, you know." I scowl at him and even stick my tongue out. "Aw, don't be like that, baby. I like it. The only time you're this short is when you're naked."

I shake my head in amusement. "I'm not *always* naked in your apartment."

"I know, and it's a damn shame." He winks. "Now, come on. I endured your friends last Friday. It's your turn to meet mine now."

He grabs my hand and takes a step toward the bar, but I'm not moving. Fat chance in hell. 'Cause I have issues now.

"What's wrong?" he asks, looking back at me.

I hold up one finger. "First of all, I can't meet your friends when I look like this."

"You've got to be kidding me," he chuckles with a shake of his head. "You look fucking gorgeous, baby."

Naw, shucks.

"I haven't fixed my hair, I'm not wearing enough makeup, and-"

Finger over my lips. Shutting me up.

"You're perfect," he whispers against my forehead, and I'm a puddle of goo. It's totally unfair. "And we're not staying long. Just lemme buy you one drink."

Mmmmmokay.

"Fine," I sigh. Again, he takes a step in the direction of the bar, but I'm still standing firm. 'Cause I'm not done. So, when he arches a brow in question, I continue. "Second of all... you 'endured' my friends last Friday? *Endured*, Edward. Really?"

He frowns, not understanding. But he will.

So, I wait.

And I cock the bitch-brow.

Then it dawns on him. He suddenly looks sheepish, and he starts rubbing the back of his neck.

"Right. Wrong choice of word."

"You think?" I drawl.

Mr. Cute Cock looks a little scared. "Shit," he mutters. "I didn't mean it. It was... nice... meeting your friends, all right? They were... um, ya know... really, really... nice."

"Pffff," I utter before I start laughing. "Such a fucking cutie." I pat his cheek, and then I pass him, entering the bar.

Great. A sports bar. I probably should've paid attention to the windows when I was outside. Yeah. Well, at least it looks... nice. No, truth be told, it does look good. Kinda dark. Dad would love it. It's not too big, but large enough to have you buzzing if there's a good game on. Four screens hang from the ceiling – in the middle of the bar – positioned like a jumbotron, which is sorta cool. Then there are booths along the walls and, lastly, chairs and tables scattered on the floor. I presume they take those away when there's a big game.

Straight ahead of me, across the floor, is the bar, and I think I need a drink right about now.

But before I can take a step, I feel Edward behind me. Hand on my stomach, mouth close to my ear. "You thought it was fun to make me squirm, didn't you?"

I grin cheekily and turn around. "Guilty as charged."

He huffs... then smirks... then throws me over his shoulder.

"Edward!" I gasp, almost losing hold of my bag.

His only response is to smack my ass, and when I look up, I can see that several men are watching, and they are highly amused. Well, fuck them.

"Edward, put me down!" I squeal, starting to attack his ass with my hands. But he just laughs when I smack, grab, and pinch.

"Oi, Jake!"

I hear a laugh. "Well, well. Does *that* belong to you, Cullen?"

"Sure fuckin' does," Edward grunts, and I huff. "Now, quit staring and make her a drink." Again, he smacks my ass. "Baby, what do you want?"

"Two feet on the ground!" I whine.

Thankfully, he obeys me this time and sets me down. I wobble a little, but he steadies me before drawing me close to his body. I definitely hate that I can't be pissed at him. He smells too good, and right now his smile is too sweet and gorgeous. Like I've said before, you don't stand a chance against Edward Cullen.

"You okay?" he asks as I blow a few pieces of hair away from my face. It makes him chuckle, and then he tucks the strands behind my ear while I try to balance out the blood flow in my face.

"I'm fine," I mumble, burying my face against his chest. See, when I'm supposed to smack him, I fucking snuggle instead. How messed up is that? "And I'll take a beer, please. A Newcastle." 'Cause I doubt they have my *Bella* here. Only Demetri can mix my drinks to perfection.

"You heard the lady, Jake. A Newcastle. And grab a Heineken, too, while you're at it."

Glancing up, I catch Edward's less than amused expression, so I ask quietly – as he dips down to listen – what the problem is. 'Cause he's frowning, and I don't like that. I even reach up to smooth out the crease between his brows, to which he grabs my hand and kisses my fingers.

Swoon... is all I'm saying.

"Just don't like it when dudes stare," he mutters, and an incredulous chuckle escapes me. "Seriously, Bella, you're too hot for your own good."

"Edward, my ass was practically in his face," I tell him imploringly. "That's your fault, by the way." I wink at him to lighten the tension.

Luckily, it works.

Once we have our beers, Edward takes my bag – how chivalrous – and steers me toward the booth closest to the bar on the right side. And I see two grins at once. Edward's buddies, no doubt. They've been watching the entire time, of course.

"Miss Bella," a certain southern gentleman greets me. He smiles and stands up, offering me his hand. And I blush like a damn fool, 'cause I thought the man was gay. "So lovely to see you again, darlin'."

I'm sorry, but that was *really* hot.

I can't wait to hook Alice up. He will ruin her in delicious ways, I can tell.

"Nice to see you again, too, Jasper," I say, ducking my head when he kisses my knuckles. Yep, he will be the death of my Ali. Lordy, lordy.

"For the love of God, Jazz," Edward snaps gruffly. Gently cupping my elbow, he ushers me into the booth before following. "All right, Bella. That idiot's Jazz." He gives the other dude – a bulky behemoth dressed for a ski trip – a chin-nod. "And that's Emmett, but don't touch him, 'cause he's sick. And... guys, this is Bella."

My eyebrows shoot up, and I look at Emmett before my eyes find Edward again.

Sick how?

"Don't worry," he chuckles, resting his arm behind me on the back of the booth. "It's just a cold."

"Pleasure to finally meet you, Bella," Emmett says with a dimpled smile. Holy mother of... Ahem. Edward has attractive friends. I have dimples, too, but I gotta say they suit Emmett more. "We've heard so much about you."

Really? I'm very amused now and, yeah, I look up at Edward with a smirk.

"Oh, shut up," he grumbles. "I don't wanna hear about it."

I hold my hands up. "I didn't say a thing."

And he shoots me a playful glare. "No, but I know what you're thinking."

What... that men are *such* gossips?

I'll let it slide this time. Instead, I pick up my beer and take a healthy sip. Healthy, as in, big. I don't drink beer very often, but when I do, I don't fuck around. Beer is supposed to be chugged. That's just how I was raised.

"So..." That would be Emmett, and I look at him... to see him holding up a certain book. The three of them suddenly look like they're ready to explode with laughter. "Our boy here," he nods at Edward, "came here with this one today. And we hear that you're to blame."

Ah, gee. Well, after hearing what Ben had to say about the book, I can only imagine what Edward and his friends think. Honestly, I've read it, and I didn't think it was that bad. Sure, it's very romanticized and fluffy, but I still think it's okay. Sorta beautiful and lovely. Not necessarily what I usually read when it comes to erotica, because I'm more into hardcore erotica, but I wouldn't discard this one just like that.

"I take it you don't like?" I guess.

One by one, they all break down into hysterics, starting with Emmett then Edward, and lastly Jasper.

I sip my beer while they get it out of their systems.

"Velvet heat!" Edward guffaws.

"Fuckin' freesias!" Emmett chortles. And coughs then chortles again.

"Post-coital glow!" Jasper giggles. Oh, you bet. *Giggles.*

Siiiiiiigh.

Okay, so maybe I don't want Edward on my dude panel.

With a petulant huff, I fold my arms over my chest and lean back in my seat.

"Aw, Bella, Bella, Bella." Now Edward's giggling, too. How very masculine of them. I roll my eyes as he wraps his arms around me. "Don't be mad, baby." Problem is, he starts kissing my neck, which is breaking my resolve to stand firm. "We can't help that the book is shit."

Roar.

"It's not shit," I argue weakly when he tilts my chin in his direction. Damn. How can his eyes be full of amusement and soft with cuteness at the same time? "It's *romantic.*"

He purses his lips, not buying my "sell-talk".

"No," he chuckles, shaking his head. "I know romance, and that's not it. The man in that book is a woman with a dick." Picking up the book, he

flips open a page. "I'm sorry, Bella, but we don't think, '...and when I pushed into her, I could hear angels singing...'"

Oh. Well, I know *that*. Like I said before, this book isn't necessarily what I would read, and I admit that I found several parts that were too corny for me, but again, I wouldn't toss it away with a snap of my fingers. I can still see the lovey-dovey appeal of it, and many women love that.

"It's romanticized," I answer with a shrug. "It's a book about making love."

Three men give me dubious looks.

"So, you're saying that men who don't think about shiny hair and glittering eyes can't make love?" Emmett asks with a grin.

Hmm. "Well, no," I answer pensively. "I'm just saying that many women love reading this because they picture the man in that book being with them... and not the female character. The man is obviously worshipping the woman, and who doesn't wanna feel that every once in a while?"

"Ah." Edward nods. "But I assure you that a man can make a woman feel worshipped without the sappy shit." He waggles his eyebrows at me, and I hide my grin. "In fact, I can demonstrate later."

Yummm.

"I'll hold you to that," I reply cheekily before facing Emmett and Jasper again. "So, what are your final thoughts? And please leave out the laughing."

"It's shit," Emmett says bluntly, still grinning.

I stick out my tongue at him, making him laugh at my maturity. I kinda like Edward's friends.

"It's unrealistic," Edward replies.

Jasper nods, agreeing. "Yeah, it paints a picture of a man who doesn't exist."

Hmm. That's pretty much what Ben and his friends said.

"So, give me a correct picture then," I challenge before tipping back my beer bottle.

"Ooh, I like this one," Emmett laughs. "She's a keeper, Cullen."

I'm a girl who suddenly feels all mushy and happy inside.

I'm a keeper, Edward. Hear that?

Fuck, I'm hopeless.

"She is pretty fucking spectacular, yeah," Edward murmurs, and the arm that was on the back of the booth, returns to my shoulders. "But I already knew that."

Rainbows, leprechauns, fairy dust, bunnies, and swirls of pastels.

It's official. I want more. I want it all.

I'm fucked.

"Right, a correct picture?" Jasper reminds us, and I nod, thankful for the change of topic. Still, my hand ends up on Edward's thigh, and he laces our fingers together. Yep, I have some major shit to think through. "Well, I have an idea that might help you understand us men." He grins and puffs out his chest.

I can't help but laugh. "Do tell."

"Here we go," he says, clapping his hands together. "Let's start with something simple. What color is Edward's tie?"

Both amused and excited, I play along and turn to look at Edward's tie.

Easy. "Light blue," I respond firmly. "And a little grayish."

Edward chuckles. "Yeah, right there. See, to us it's just blue."

Huh?

"We don't think in shades, Miss Bella," Jasper drawls, smiling lazily. "And what about my shirt?"

I chew on my lip. It's another easy one. He's wearing a fitted button-down in burgundy. And a charcoal skinny tie to go with it.

"It's burgundy," I tell him.

"It's red," he counters.

No way! "But there's brown in it!" I exclaim.

"So?" Emmett coughs before chuckling. "It's still more red than brown. Therefore, his shirt is red. And his tie?"

I slump down in my seat a little. "It's charcoal," I mumble. "Or dark grey... if that suits you better."

Edward snickers. "It's grey, beautiful."

Hmph.

"Moving on to scents," Jasper decides. "Edward, smell Bella's hair."

And Edward doesn't hesitate. He immediately closes in and takes a sniff.

Thank God I showered after yoga!

"Smells like flowers," he replies, and I smirk at the new tone in Edward's voice. 'Cause, yeah, my scents turn him on. "And vanilla, I think."

"And Bella?" Jasper asks. "What's *your* answer about your hair?"

Orange blossoms, lilacs, and vanilla.

But instead of just answering verbally, I dig through my Nike bag.

In the end, I present them with my shampoo, my conditioner, my body wash, my body butter, and my face cream.

"Have at it," I say.

"All right, let's test some shit!" Emmett booms out.

"Nah, this isn't gay at all," Edward laughs quietly.

"No, no. This is good," Jasper tells them. "We're gonna make Bella see how we function." Oh, this I gotta see. "Darlin', please remove the caps or lids, and hide whatever labels you need to."

I start with my body butter since the correct answer to which smells are in the cream is displayed on the lid. After that's done, I pass the little jar to Edward before I move on to my face cream. I skip the conditioner since it's the same as the shampoo.

"Fruity," Edward says, taking a few sniffs. Then he passes the jar to Jasper. "And again, I think vanilla's in it."

Correct, baby. Vanilla is one of my favorite scents, but *just* vanilla can easily get too strong. That's why I buy products where the flower or fruit is the main ingredient. In the case of my body butter, it's peach. Peach and vanilla.

"Fruity and sweet," Jasper says about the body butter as he gives it to Emmett. "And Edward's right. There's definitely vanilla in there."

Really? Can't they detect the scent of peaches?

"Face cream," I announce, chuckling at the situation. This is so not how I thought my Monday would end. Not that it's ended yet, but... you know.

"Sometimes you smell like pears when you come to my place," Edward murmurs, taking the tube of face cream from me. "Or rather, you taste like it."

I smirk. "That's from a drink."

He hums in acknowledgment. "Okay, this," he holds up the tube, "I have no idea. It just smells... fresh. I guess."

"Peaches!" Emmett declares proudly, making my head snap up. He's holding the damn body butter. "I fuckin' ate peaches this morning, and this is how they smell. Or wait... was it nectarines? No. Peaches, I'm sure. I think." He frowns.

I give him a gracious nod and wide smile, but internally I'm so confuzzled. So, the only reason he knows they're peaches is because he recently ate some? Jeesh.

"Peach is correct," I sigh.

And he fist-pumps the air.

Before coughing.

"See where we're goin' with this, darlin'?" Jasper asks. I sigh again... and nod. "We don't think in shades, we don't analyze scents, and we don't think about sparkling eyes during sex."

I snort at that, but I blame the testosterone. It's not easy being ladylike in this bunch.

"So, when the dude in that book mentions that the woman smells like... what was the flower?" Edward asks, and Jasper says something about freesias. "Right, freesias... Yeah, we just don't do that. Granted, fruits are easier to recognize than flowers, but still..." He shrugs. "We don't think that far. We stop at 'she smells good' or 'she feels fucking amazing'." He grins and, again... waggles his eyebrows. "And we sure as hell don't think of a pussy as 'velvet heat'."

Actually, I'm thankful for that last part.

"I get it," I chuckle, resting my head on his shoulder. "Men don't think."

"Whoa there, pretty girl!" Jasper cautions.

"Ey, oh, whoa, hey, ho!" That's Emmett, sounding like an Italian gangster with hand gestures and everything.

"Now, now, don't be mean, Ms. Swan," Edward says, pretending to be stern. "We definitely *think*. Just not about flowers and fruit."

"No," I retort. "Just, 'she feels fucking amazing'."

A slow sexy grin takes over his face, and I know that I'm in trouble.

The kind of trouble that hurts so good.

So, I'm not surprised when he leans down to whisper, 'cause I have a feeling it's gonna be dirty.

"That'll be another thing I have to demonstrate, then." His lips brush my ear. "I promise, baby... the next time I fuck you, I'm going to tell you exactly what I'm thinking."

Come, come, come to Mama.

Check, please?



12.

"I like your friends," she says softly as I usher her into the elevator. "They seem fun."

I smile and push the button, feeling thoroughly relaxed. When I had received Bella's text, I hesitated at first and contemplated cutting guys' night short. It would've been so fucking easy. But then I figured that it was time for her to meet them, and now I'm glad I stuck with that decision.

"It's mutual," I chuckle quietly, leaning back against the mirrored wall, and what I said couldn't be truer. I sure noticed the looks Jazz and Em sent me while Bella was there. Then, of course, if I'd had any doubts, the four thumbs-up I received before we left – while Bella fiddled with her phone – solidified it all. "They like you, too."

She's about to say something, but her phone chirps again. "Sorry, it's just Rose," she mumbles, eyes on the iPhone in her hand. "Hmm... Friday, Friday..."

My eyebrows rise and I can feel the corners of my mouth quirk up.

"What happens on Friday?" I ask before I can stop myself.

"Hmm?" She looks up at me. "Oh! Um, just some research with the girls."

I narrow my eyes at her, not really believing her for some reason.

She's fucking blushing.

"Are you *lying*?" I ask, rather proud of my discovery. My smile is smug as hell.

Her eyes widen. "No!" she gasps in horror, and she's lying *again*. I can tell. Hah! Good to know, good to know. "I most certainly am not lying."

"I call bullshit," I huff, still grinning. "Wow. What are you hiding, baby?"

"It's research," she insists as we reach my floor. I keep my eyes on her as we walk toward my apartment. "You and your friends inspired me, so we're gonna try something..."

I take out my keys to unlock the door, and I'm not convinced yet. "And what are you gonna try?"

Once we're inside, I drop her gym bag and my briefcase on the floor.

"It's classified, I'm afraid," she tells me, smirking. "What, are you Curious George all of a sudden?" As she says this, she unzips her hoodie. I shrug out of my jacket at the same time, and my mouth starts to feel dry when she drops the shirt on the floor. "I'm pretty sure there are far better things we can occupy our time with... than talking."

Oh, I agree.

What were we talking about, anyway?

"I believe we said the kitchen, right?" I murmur, getting rid of my tie as I watch her hungrily. She nods and starts walking backward, all while undressing slowly. I lick my lips when she shimmies out of her cotton pants. "And I believe I have two demonstrations for you." She whimpers and I follow her. "So, what do you want first?" We reach the kitchen, and I back her into the side of the kitchen island. "Do you want me to worship you?" I trail a finger from her neck, down, down, down her neck. To her collarbone. My eyes follow. "Or do you want to know my thoughts as I fuck you?"

"Fuck," she whispers under her breath, and I look her in the eye. She swallows. "I want your thoughts."

Dirty. Fucking. Girl.

"You want inside my dirty mind, yeah?" I whisper against her jaw. She shivers, and my hands cup her ass.

"Yes," she mewls when I slide down her panties. Once they're gone, I unclasp her bra and toss it to the floor. That's when she starts on my belt and pants. "I need to see you naked."

I'm more than happy to oblige, baby girl.

To make it more comfortable for her, I remove my shirt and spread it out on the cold kitchen counter. Then I pick her up and sit her down on the fabric. My hands push her legs apart with ease, and if she wants my thoughts, she'll get them. Oh, she'll get them.

"Not yet," I mutter when she tries to push down my boxers. My pants pool by my feet, and I step out of them, but my boxers stay on for now. She makes a whining noise, but I don't care. I'm in charge right now. "Put your hands behind you... on the counter," I instruct quietly. Fuck, she's... "Perfect," I murmur huskily. My hands slide up her thighs, and I allow my

thumbs to caress the sensitive skin over her pussy... "I love your pussy. It's so fucking soft and..." I chuckle darkly, quietly. "Inviting." But then I continue, much to her chagrin. Up her stomach... I cup her tits, and she lets out a low moan. My cock swells in my boxers. "I love when you're needy," I admit, dipping down to suck a nipple into my mouth.

"Oh, fuck," she gasps, and her head falls back. I hum against her flesh as I look up at her. "Feels so good..."

With my cock pressed against the counter, I fight the urge to hump the surface like a fucking dog. It's not easy, but I'll get mine soon enough. First, though, I want her to go insane. So, I tell her as much. "I want you desperate and fucking soaked," I whisper. Pushing her slightly away from me, I start kissing my way down her stomach. "Fuck, I can smell you, Bella." I inhale, feeling my mouth water. "You're wet, aren't you?"

Stupid question, I know. I can see her, dammit.

"Edward," she whimpers.

I exhale over her pussy.

I lick my lips.

"I'm the one making you this wet," I state quietly, looking up at her as I lower my mouth to her wet pussy. She bites down on her lip, and I drop a soft kiss over her clit. "Do you know how fucking good that feels?" I hum against her flesh, making her shiver and moan. "Knowing that I'm the lucky bastard getting to eat you out, to make you come..."

After suckling her clit for a few seconds, I lick her downward, not stopping until my tongue slips inside of her. She moans my name, and I tell her that she makes my cock so fucking hard whenever my name falls from her lips. Then I bring my fingers into the mix, and I murmur how fucking hot her pussy is as I start finger-fucking her slowly. Deeply. My fingers draw

more wetness from her. *Fuck*. I groan as I lap it all up, swallowing her arousal. My tongue and lips return to her clit, licking and sucking. But it's not all about her clit. I also lick and kiss her lips, not missing a damn spot.

"Can you play with your tits for me?" I moan quietly. "You know how I love it when you touch yourself."

Damn. I can already feel her clenching and fluttering around my fingers.

"Edward... Edward," she pants, chest heaving, eyes struggling to stay open. "Oh, fuck... yeees..."

Arousal drips from her pussy when I rub the pad of my middle finger against her g-spot. Up and down, persistent little strokes.

Making her do *anything* now – other than drowning in her own orgasm – is impossible.

I screw my eyes shut, only momentarily, but I need to calm myself down. Bella's not the only one breathing harshly. My cock is hard and ready for her, and I know that when I do take her... in a few seconds or so... it won't be slow or gentle.

"Let go, Bella," I groan, greedily devouring her pussy. "Come in my mouth..."

"Baby... *Aaah*, Edward, you... you... g-spot..."

She starts squirming and gasping, shuddering violently, and when I realize that I'm still rubbing against her little rough patch with my finger, I also realize that she's trying to warn me. I grin internally, feeling my cock throb as it dawns on me. She's going to ejaculate and is most likely going through that awkward little moment where she thinks she needs to pee. I, on the other hand, am just trying not to hump the goddamn air.

I've made her ejaculate before, and I fucking love when it happens.

So, I add pressure.

"Come on, love," I moan around her clit. "Give me everything."

She gasps before her breathing hitches. Her entire body starts trembling, everything tenses, her head tilts back, and her mouth pops open in a small "o". And with a silent scream, she comes.

A shudder rips through me as I drink down what she gives me. I moan and lick, closing my mouth over her drenched pussy, and the hand I've held on her thigh goes to my cock. Another moan right there. I stroke myself roughly.

In the end, she falls back against the countertop, clutching her chest as she tries to breathe.

Standing up, I drag my hand over my mouth and chin. I'm wound up; my body is coiled and tensed. Hell, I can barely form a thought. All I know is that I fucking *need* to be inside of her. Unfortunately, I know that those orgasms are physically exhausting. She's going to need time to recover.

"Edward," she mewls breathlessly, and I join her up on the island, crawling over her flushed body without hesitation. "Oh, God... you... you..."

I kiss her neck, her jaw, her cheek, her mouth. But she turns, still needing to catch her breath.

I grit my teeth, trying to get myself under control.

I've never wanted her more.

"I need to fuck you, Bella," I beg, pushing my hips against hers. I moan when my cock is met with her literally drenched pussy. "Please, baby... Fuck, let me be inside of you."

She nods, quite furiously, actually, and pulls me down for a kiss.

Not a second passes before I slide my cock inside of her.

"Shit," I grunt. I kiss her again, pushing my tongue into her mouth. My hands find her legs, and I wrap them around me. With my next thrust, I go even deeper. "So good, so good," I mumble into the kiss. "Perfect pussy, baby. Perfect mouth."

She gasps, still recovering. The sounds that escape us both are hoarse and so fucking hot. I love it when we just lose it, when we go with our instincts.

"Taste yourself," I pant, sucking her bottom lip into my mouth. "Taste that pretty kitty of yours." I knead her ass with one hand, keeping her in place as I slam into her. "Feel that? That's my cock making you moan." She cries out, she clings to me, she kisses me frantically. "That's it, just take my cock. Take everything I give you."

I groan and roll my hips, grinding into her.

"Edw... Edward," she chokes out, moaning and almost sobbing. Still clinging to me. I fucking love it when she clings to me, and I tell her as much. I tell her while I'm pounding into her. I tell her a shitload of stuff, to be honest, and I'm afraid half of it is too jumbled with my moans for her to catch it. She cries out again. "Oh, my *God!*"

The next time I grind and swivel, I make sure to put pressure on her clit.

Sweat beads on my forehead.

We're both panting, exchanging heavy breaths.

"Oh, Edward!"

We smell like sex.

Arching into each other's touch.

My abs tighten, the muscles in my back tense, my thighs throb.

Hands grabbing, pulling, twisting.

Still, as hard as I fuck her and as hungrily as I kiss her, I can't get enough.

"Baby," she whimpers, eyes squeezed shut. "I can't... Oh, fuck... more..."

"Come with me, Bella," I groan hoarsely. Panting, panting, panting. Yet, I can't fucking stop. I slide into her soaked pussy, only to pull out and push in again. So close... so, so fucking close. "Can't hold it, love." I bury my face in the crook of her neck. Shivers rip through me, the heat is making me flush, and my thrusts become jerky and erratic. "*Bella.*"

I come with a strangled groan. Everything erupts inside of me. I'm vaguely aware of Bella climaxing, too, but all I can focus on are the heat waves of pleasure shooting their way through my system. In several pulsing streams, I spill into her. I don't have any control left, and both my arms and legs strain from the excursion.

In the end, I slip out of her as I roll over next to her. We're both on our backs – on the damn kitchen island – panting like crazy.

"Holy mother of..." I gasp and blink, trying to get my bearings.

"I'm dead," she wheezes out.

I chuckle, but it turns into a cough when I choke on... well, air.

Jesus Christ.

Truth be told, the way I feel right now, I'm pretty sure I'll be spending the night right here. I can't move a goddamn muscle. Even reaching up to

wipe the sweat off my forehead is too much. With a groan, I manage to turn my head in Bella's direction, though, so... yeah. I'm so... *able*. But I just had to, 'cause her face – her *body* – after sex... *Fucking. Beautiful.* Chest flushed and heaving... Cheeks also rosy... A few strands of hair stuck to the skin along her collarbone. Her tits... oh, her tits... I lick my lips. Too bad I'm literally drained.

"Ugh," she groans, trying to sit up. She actually manages, too. I'm impressed. "Your countertop isn't all that comfortable."

Really? I'm just fine here. Well, that's what I'm pretending.

"I'm gonna sleep here tonight," I yawn.

She chuckles at me and hops off the island. She also snatches my shirt, which she puts on. Pity. No more tits, I guess. "Hey, how about a shower?"

Yeah, but I need strength to get there, so...

"In a minute." Or fifteen. "By the way, you're spending the night, right?"

She's out of sight, so I only know she's by the fridge because I hear her opening the fridge door.

"I thought your family was coming tomorrow," she replies softly. "Water?"

Um, I need sugar. "Are there any Cokes or Gatorades left? Check the bottom," I tell her. "And yeah, I'm picking my sister up at the airport, but it's not until three." I finally manage to get my ass in a sitting position. What a feat. "I even took the day off work."

Knowing my sister, she's going to wanna catch up and stuff. I probably want that too – yeah, I do – but I'm still dreading that she's gonna ask to

stay with me. Well, my dick is dreading it. With Liz staying here, I can't really bring Bella over.

She smiles, holding up both a Gatorade and a Coke. "Which one?"

"Coke, please."

For herself she takes a bottle of water and, after closing the fridge, she walks over to me again.

"Thanks," I say, taking the can. With a slight tug on her – *my* – shirt, I have her standing in between my legs. How she can stand up, I have no idea.

She tips the water bottle in my direction. "Thank *you*."

"So... staying?" I tip the can back and take a healthy swig of the sugary deliciousness.

"Staying," she confirms with a smile. Then the smile turns wicked. "Oh, and, Edward? Your thoughts during sex definitely beat the book."

Yeah, that goes without saying, but... "Why, thank you, Ms. Swan." I wink.



Waking up to wet kisses along my neck: very welcome. Especially when a hard cock is pressed against my ass.

"Well, someone's up this morning," I chuckle sleepily with a little ass wriggle.

He groans quietly, still kissing and sucking on my neck. "I want you."

Shivers.

Lifting up my leg, he quickly slides two fingers from my clit to my entrance and then back again. I whimper and heat rises, making me flush. It doesn't take him many seconds to get me wet and ready for him. Still, he's not in a rush. He takes his time, finger-fucking me deeply and slowly until I'm bucking my hips for more.

"What time is it?" I moan, hoping I don't have to hurry.

He grazes my clit, pressing down on it, stroking it, circling it..

"Only ten," he breathes out. "I've been awake since seven."

The next thing I hear is a buzzing sound, and he removes the fingers he had inside of me. I instantly know that he's taken out our little pleasure box, and I'm curious to see what he's picked out. That's what I love about us. We love trying new things.

"Oh!" I gasp. He... he... Oh, God, he slides something inside of me...

A bullet.

But this one feels... different. Not like the blue one we already have. No, this is definitely metal.

"Edward," I whimper, reaching behind me to fist his hair. He moans and kisses my jaw, pushing the bullet up farther and farther. The vibrating...
"Oh, fuck me."

"I intend to."

I moan like a fucking porn star, because, because, because that means he's going to...

"I'm taking you in the ass, baby," he whispers.

Yes. Yes, please.

"Do you like the toy?" he asks huskily. "I bought it for your birthday, but it didn't arrive until this morning."

All I can offer is a loud moan.

He's everywhere. His hands, touching and caressing. His mouth, kissing and sucking. His cock, rubbing against my ass. His words, washing over me in hot breaths.

When the heat disappears behind me, I know that he's going for the drawer in his nightstand. I know he's taking out a condom and the bottle of lube. I shiver and whimper. Anticipation, need, desire...

It's been months since we had anal sex, and it's truthfully not something we prefer. But combined with toys, or when we're in the mood for kink... I just fucking love the way he stretches me. It's oddly intimate, and it's definitely not something you do unless you completely trust the person you're with. I trust Edward, though, and I think I always have. He's always been affectionate, and when it comes to anal sex, he's always careful. He's also an expert at reading me.

"Ready, baby?" he asks, and I moan. His fingers, wet and slippery fingers, caressing, pressing, probing, preparing. "So fucking tight," he breathes out. One finger, two...

Slowly.

Deeply.

The bullet keeps vibrating inside of me, drawing wetness and whimpers from me.

"Please," I moan.

Three fingers.

Wet kisses on my neck.

Dirty fucking whispers.

Then he replaces his fingers with the tip of his thick cock.

My breathing hitches. His does, too.

"Fuck," I choke out. As slowly as he pushes into my ass, the burn is there. Stinging, stretching. I fist his hair tightly, pulling and twisting the strands between my fingers. His breath comes out in hot puffs against my neck, accompanied by strained groans. Inch by inch, achingly slow, he fills me.

"Fuckin' hell," he whimpers. All in. I shudder, reminding myself to relax. That's when the pleasure sets in again. The vibrating bullet is pressed against my g-spot, and I rub my thighs together, needing friction. My movement makes him moan loudly. And finally, at last, he starts to move. Ever so slowly, and so fucking rightly.

"Touch yourself," he grunts, gripping my hip tightly. "Let me watch you."

I do. Two fingers slide inside of me. The hand I have in his hair moves to my breasts. I pinch a nipple, moaning, and I keep fingering myself at the same pace he fucks me.

"I won't last long," he warns me breathlessly.

Neither will I.

It's intense. Everything. The burn becomes dull and barely there.

"Goddamn... *Edward*."

He picks up speed. I do the same with my fingers. Two, three dips inside of me, and then I pull out to rub my clit before pushing in three fingers.

"Do you know how fucking sexy you are?" he asks in a strained voice.

Faster.

"Sin."

"Edward!" I cry out.

I meet his thrust, overcome with the heat spreading through me.

"Baby," he pants. I can barely focus. I'm... fuck... already close. I finger myself harder. "Sweetheart, kiss me." He moans, and I whimper and tilt my head back in his direction. "Fuck, I..." He captures my mouth with his. Morning breath be damned. He doesn't seem bothered in the least. So, we kiss hungrily, devouring each other's mouths.

"I... oh, *God*." My body starts to quiver and tighten. "Edward, I can't..."
Breathless chanting. Close, close, close. "*Aaahh!*"

Explosion.

I suck in a sharp breath. Lips pursed, eyes screwed shut.

My heart's pounding. Ears ringing.

I feel it everywhere. Swirling inside, around me, under me, over me, through me. Tightening and tingling in every part of my body. My pussy, my tits, my stomach, my chest, my neck, my legs... It's like I'm under water, but not cold water. Hot, hot, hot, like I'm bursting into flames.

The guttural groan Edward lets out sounds far away.

I recognize his lazy thrusts as he climaxes, spilling into the condom.

Good God.

I breathe heavily when I come to, and we stay still for a while, catching our breaths.

With a slight grimace, I pull out the bullet.

"Jesus, baby," he breathes out. I can only manage a tired nod. I'm ready for some serious cuddling, but as my breathing settles, there's a discomfort I need to get rid of. This is the negative side of anal sex according to me – afterward. I cringe and whimper when he pulls out of me, and even though the lube prevents messes, I still feel kinda dirty. So, a shower is definitely in order. Before that, I know I won't be able to relax.

"Shower?" he murmurs knowingly, and I nod.

A few minutes later, we're both in the hot spray in his shower.

He washes me.

Massages me.

He calls it aftercare. I call it amazing.

And another twenty minutes later, he's plating waffles and raspberry flavored whipped cream for us in the kitchen.

All of which he made from scratch!

While I was staring at him like an idiot.

He's only wearing a towel, by the way. Clinging dangerously low on his hips.

I'm back in my Juicy pants, though I'm wearing one Edward's t-shirts instead of my fitted sweatshirt.

"Don't look so surprised, Bella," he chuckles, motioning for us to head to the living room. "I'm a fucking master in the kitchen." He winks as he passes me.

"And in the bedroom," I whisper under my breath.

Yeah, I watch his ass as I follow.

"Are you in a rush, or do you wanna stick around for a while?" he asks as I take my seat next to him in the couch. I smile in thanks when he hands me my plate, and this is just so...

I can't even find the words.

"I have some writing to get done," I admit, forking a piece of waffle. "But I have an hour or two before I need to leave."

He nods at the TV. "What's your poison?"

But I can't reply just yet, 'cause I'm too busy moaning.

The waffles, people.

Holy mother of heaven.

"Fucking told you." He grins and switches on the TV, settling on *Family Guy* reruns. Fuckin A, is all I'm saying. "Is this okay?"

Oh, yes. "Definitely," I reply with my mouth full. "This is the episode with the gay gene." Alice can't stand *Family Guy*, but Rose and I love it. I swear, I would marry Stewie if... that wasn't impossible and more than a little disturbing. "Hah! When Stewie tells Peter that it's wrong to be gay," I laugh, shaking my head at the TV. "Golden."

When all I'm met with is silence, I turn to Edward, and his eyes are sorta wide.

"What?" I ask, shoveling more food into my mouth. *Mmm...*

Slowly, he smiles and shakes his head. "Nothing." His eyes are back on the flat screen. "You like *Family Guy*. My kinda girl."

I feel all warm inside.

My kinda girl. That's me, Edward.

I think I need to call the girls when I get home.

"I *love* it," I correct, watching as Peter comes home with a boyfriend, much to the family's shock.

I giggle like a little girl at that shit.

"Yeah, and I love... SHIT!" he gasps.

I stare at him, dumbfounded. He suddenly looks pale and almost sick.

"Edward?" His wide eyes meet mine, and I set my plate down on the coffee table. "Are you okay?"

He nods dumbly, eyes still huge. He swallows hard.

I frown, feeling slightly concerned. "Are you sure?"

"Uh..." A throat clearing is followed by a nervous laugh. "Yeah." He grimaces and chuckles awkwardly. "Thunderbolt moment. Fuck."

Thunder what now?

After setting his plate down, he starts to pace in front of the TV. I just stare at him, completely confused.

"Baby, you-"

"And good God, there goes my balls," he mutters, tugging on his hair. Still pacing. Back and forth, back and forth. Balls? Where, what...? "Okay. Okay, this is... Shit." He sighs and scrubs his hands over his face. "No. This is *good*. I just... oh, God. Gotta get started, yeah. A plan. I need a fucking *plan*-"

"Edward!" And he finally snaps out of his... whateverthefuckitwas. "What's *wrong*?"

He exhales loudly. "Nothing. It's all very, very..." Searching for a word, perhaps? "It *will* be perfect." He finishes with a firm nod, and then he returns to the couch, insistent on watching more *Family Guy*. In other words, he refuses to tell me about his...

Whateverthefuckitwas.



13.

"So good to see you, Edward!" Liz squeals, throwing her arms around my neck. I chuckle and hug her back, just as tightly, really happy to see my little sister again. "It's been too long."

"I agree," I reply, dropping a kiss at the top of her head. Ever the shortie, that one. We share the same hair color and eye color, but I inherited our biological father's height and lopsided fucking smile, and Lizzie got our mom's shorty-ness and dimples. "So, you're sick of London, eh?" I take the bag from her and gesture to the exit.

"Yeah," she chuckles as we walk. "I thought I'd move back to the States to bug you."

And I'm sure she'll do a fine fucking job at it. "We live in a big country, you know." I wink down at her. "Why New York of all places?"

At which she smacks me in the chest. "Wow, I can just feel the love you have for me." I drape my arm around her shoulders and laugh. "Anyway, why New York? 'Cause Random House hired me here. My old boss in London gave me *warm* recommendations." She bats her lashes at me, and I shake my head in amusement. "So, here I am."

"Here you are, yeah." Once we reach the outside, I quickly flag down a cab to take us back to Manhattan. "In you go, Ms. Cullen," I say, holding the door open for her.

Fuck, I miss driving. Having a car in New York, though... Yeah, I don't think so.

"So, give me the rundown," she tells me, getting into the car. I knew it wouldn't take her long before she pounced. "What's new with you?"

Settling next to her, I give the driver my address before I start dodging Lizzie's questions. "Where are you staying?" It's relevant. I need to know.

"With you," she replies matter-of-factly, and I want to *die*. "Didn't Mom tell you?" Maybe she did, but it may have been another thing I forgot. Selective hearing and all that. "She told me it was fine."

I'm sure she did. "How is that up to Mom?" Rhetorical question. Wait... does that mean that maybe I also agreed? If Mom asked me, that is. Shit, I gotta start paying attention! "Never mind," I sigh. "I'll be *happy* to have you rooming with me." I give her a sarcastic smile. But then I sorta add a wink to let her know I love her enough to lie about wanting her to live with me.

"Aaww, you look so conflicted," she coos, trying to withhold the giggles. I scowl. She just brings it outta me. "No, but seriously, Edward. Do you want me to stay at a hotel?"

Yes, because I want Bella to be able to come and go. Often. Especially now that I've realized I'm in love with her.

Yeah, funny story, sis. We were watching *Family Guy*, and I almost told Bella – this amazing woman I've been screwing for the past six months – that I love her. See, she was talking about loving *Family Guy*, and...it almost slipped out about me loving *her*. Fucking hit me, ya know? Just like that. And it felt natural to say it, but I managed to shut my fucking mouth before I said "you".

I wonder what Liz would've said if I'd told her all that.

Instead I say, "No. You're more than welcome to stay at my place." And now I hate our parents for raising me with manners. "But, uh..." I run a hand through my hair. "How long do you think it'll be?"

She laughs. "Don't worry, dear brother. My apartment's ready in three short weeks."

"*Three*-" I choke and cough. Three weeks! Three. Weeks!

There's nothing short about three weeks!

"Are you okay?" she asks, chuckling.

"Yeah," I lie, clearing my throat. "Three weeks. Awesome."

"I know! It's going to be so much fun!" she gushes. "And we're practically gonna be neighbors later, too!"

Clearly, I've done something wrong in my previous life.

"You're going to live near Chelsea Park?" I ask lamely. Thinking about it, I can't even remember hearing anything about an apartment. I thought they were here to *look* for apartments.

"Yep. Only a few blocks away from you."

Maybe I was a dictator before, killing a bunch of people. Or maybe I ate puppies.

"Great," I mutter, forcing a smile. "So, you hungry or something?"

She smirks. "Nice try, evading my earlier question, but not nice enough. Again I ask you: how's life?" She nudges me. "What's new and shit?"

Lie, lie, lie, lie.

I shrug. "Nothing much. It's all good. Work's good; we're getting ready for a few new accounts that will be fun. It'll be good." No Maybelline this time. "I hang out with my buddies every now and then. S'all good, ya know. And..." I blow out a breath, wondering if there's anything else I can

possibly tell her without involving Bella. I can't come up with anything else. "Yeah...it's all good."

"Five."

My brows knit together. "Five what?"

"That's the number of times you said 'good'," she replies matter-of-factly.

"Well, things are good," I shoot back. "Now, are you hungry? 'Cause I'm fucking *starving*."

Geez. Ten minutes and my sister's already making me lose it.

~oOo~

After a too-long lunch at some trendy café and a quick stop for Liz to buy magazines, we arrive at my building. The fact that she bought *Written Word* didn't escape my notice, just sayin'.

"Tired?" I ask, closing the door to the cab behind me. I think I've watched Lizzie yawn a hundred times now, which I can't quite understand. Liz is a night person and London's only five hours ahead. To her, it's close to eleven PM now, but unless she's changed since I last saw her, she's got hours 'til bedtime.

"Yeah, I didn't sleep much last night," she admits as the doorman lets us in. We both nod in thanks. "I figured it was best. That way, it won't be hard to get the hours straight. Fuckin' hate jetlag."

I chuckle. "I'm pretty sure you can't escape jetlag completely, sis."

"Eh."

Right.

When the elevator doors open, I'm more than a little confused to see a certain blonde ready to get out.

"Rose?"

Her head snaps up, and... "Edward."

"I didn't think blondes were your type," Liz whispers.

Yeah, I ignore her. She may be right but it's so not relevant.

"You live in this building?" Rose asks, looking as confused as I feel.

"Yeah." I rub the back of my neck. "You don't," I state dumbly.

And she smirks. "No, but a Tanya Denali does."

Uh... But...I mean...Tanya's *you know*, and...Rose is... Isn't Rose married?

And *straight*?

I try to think back, but that shit's difficult. I don't know if Bella has mentioned a *husband* or just that Rose is married.

Honestly, though, I thought for sure Rose was straight.

Guess I was wrong...?

"She's my neighbor," I confess, unable to hide the grimace. I'm sorry, but I can't fucking help it. Tanya's love for pussy competes with all the men in the world. Combined. I don't know how many women I've seen leaving Tanya's apartment to do the walk of shame.

I have to ask. "How do *you* know her?"

Rose chuckles again, but this time it's without humor. "I'm getting divorced and Tanya was on my shit list. Let's just say that my ex had a thing for her."

Oh.

Oh.

So, Rose is...ah, okay. I get it.

I clear my throat. "I see."

Her eyes find Lizzie then, and when they narrow, I'm quick to make sure there are no misunderstandings. 'Cause girls talk.

"Rose, this is my little *sister* – Liz," I tell her with a pointed look. "And, Liz, this is Rose, um..."

Um.

Um.

Um.

So, if I say "Bella's friend", will Liz ask who Bella is? Most likely.

"An acquaintance," Rose fills in with a sweet smile, offering her hand to my sister while I breathe out in relief. "Nice to meet you, Liz."

"You, too," Lizzie responds. Her eyes flick to mine, though, so I know she has questions.

Motherfuck.

"Well, I'm off," Rose sighs lightly. "My work here is done. See ya, Edward."

"Um, right. Bye."

Liz is oddly quiet for a while.

Up the elevator...

Into my apartment...

Through the little tour where I show her my precious gym, which will now morph into a guest room...

I'm starting to sweat, 'cause my sister is never quiet for long.

"You want a drink or something?" I ask when we reach the kitchen. During the little tour through my place, she told me that she wants to spend the evening reading magazines and eating junk food. The latter sounds fucking stellar to me, but maybe she wants to rest first? What do I know?

"Before, when I asked you what's new in your life..." She trails off, smirking at me as she hops up to sit on the kitchen island. "Did you forget to mention a girlfriend by any chance?"

Fuck my life.



"That motherfucker," I mutter, refilling my mug with tea. Alice, who's sitting on the kitchen island, just snickers and giggles at my curses. Bitch.

Honestly, I fail to see what's so funny.

When Alice came over two hours ago, I filled her in on how it was to meet Edward's friends yesterday. While I was talking, Alice noticed that I sounded off. I even sniffled. But I didn't think about it. I kept talking and talking.

Anyway, I mentioned – just in passing, sorta – that Emmett had been sick. Yeah, and Alice wondered if I'd played tonsil hockey with him since I sounded sick, too. I just scoffed and waved her off.

Now I'm not so sure.

This was just two hours ago, and I'm already feeling worse.

"He's a motherfucker," I repeat, bringing my mug to my lips. The motherfucker is Emmett, of course. 'Cause I'm really starting to believe he's given me whatever it is he's sick from.

"You're cute when you're sick," Alice laughs, the bitch. "Yeah, look at that pout."

I'm not pouting.

Am I?

"Whatever," I grumble. "Let's go back to the living room. Rose should be here soon."

Sure enough, Rose arrives ten minutes later, and then it's the three of us sitting in my living room.

"Who's gonna start?" Alice asks. We all exchange looks and I shrug. I need to talk but I don't have to go first. "Fine. I'll go first." She pauses – for dramatic effect, I'm sure. "It's *September*, ladies. What do we usually do in September?"

I frown, thinking, and- "Shit!" I gasp, which turns into a cough. Fucking Emmett! "Las Vegas," I croak, then clear my throat. "We plan our annual Vegas trip." It'll be the third year in a row we fly to Vegas, and we've always planned the trip in September before going away in early November.

"We're still going, right?" Alice wonders, daring us to say no with the fierce look on her face.

She has nothing to worry about. "Of course we are." Without a fucking doubt.

"Absolutely," Rose says with a firm nod. "I'll talk shit over with my assistant tomorrow, and then we can make arrangements, all right?" Alice and I nod. "Good. Now, is it my turn?" Two more nods. Rose grins widely. Like really fucking widely. "I punched Royce's assistant in the face today." She looks so damn proud as she says this, and it doesn't take long before Alice and I are beaming with pride, too. "After checking Royce's home office, I found the bitch's address."

"You went to her place?" I ask incredulously. Shit, my Rose doesn't joke around, does she?

"Hell, yeah. I went over there today, and..." She shivers. "It felt so fucking good, ya know? I mean, I don't give a shit about them going behind my back, 'cause let's face it...Royce was a poor choice, regardless."

Alice and I "mmhmm" at that, 'cause it's so true.

"But I still wanted to kick her ass."

"And you did," Alice chuckles.

"I sure did." Rose nods. "Wanna know another fucked-up thing about her?"

"What?" I ask.

She snickers. "Tanya's gay."

The fuck?

"Explain," Alice demands. "I'm pretty sure Royce doesn't have a vagina."

"I beg to differ," I huff. Rose high-fives me. "He's a fucking pussy."

Alice rolls her eyes but smiles, appreciating my comment. 'Cause he *is* a pussy for how he's acted toward Rose.

"How can she be gay if she's fucking Royce?" Alice prods.

And Rose grins again. "'Cause Royce paid her." My eyes bug out, as do Alice's. "Yep, he fucking paid her. According to Tanya – she actually told me this *after* I had clocked her...anyway, she wanted money, and he wanted a safe fuck at lunch every day."

I shake my head. "What...a fucking...*pig*."

"That's not the worst of this situation...or maybe it is, but it's not the *insanest* part," she continues, chuckling. Oh, my lovely Rose. Alice and I exchange a look where we internally laugh about our friend's love for making up words. "After Tanya had explained herself, she actually hit on me." She did *what* now? "Seriously, she sleeps with my husband for money, then I punch her in the face...and she hits on me."

Yeah, so, it takes a while for us to process that. By the end of it, Alice and I are laughing so hard that we cry.

"Oh, my God," I laugh, though I'm down to wheezing giggles. They're not pretty, especially not when you add a few coughs to the mix.

"Just wait, girls...there's even more!" Rose laughs.

Alice wipes a few tears off her cheeks. "What could it possibly be? Did Tanya want Royce to join you? Maybe film it?"

At that, Rose shudders. In disgust. "Way too soon to joke about, bitch!"

"Naw, I'm sorry," Alice coos, smiling sweetly.

They both flip each other the bird, followed by two air-kisses, and then Rose continues. "No, but seriously." She turns to me. "Wanna know who Tanya's neighbor is?"

My brows knit together and I nod, confused and curious.

"Edward."

I gasp. "No way!"

"Way."

Edward. Edward. Edward.

There are butterflies.

"Oh, my God," I mutter, still in disbelief. Who the hell knew the blonde living next to Edward was Royce's assistant? I mean, come on! Edward's told me about her. Apparently, she's some cheap pussy-addict, and she's hit on me, too. I sure remember.

"Yep. I actually ran into him."

My eyes can't possibly get bigger. "You're *kidding* me!"

"Nope," she laughs. "He was getting into the elevator with his sister as I was getting out."

Oh. "You met his sister?" I ask softly. "Did he introduce you? What's she like? Does she have Edward's eyes? His hair? Is she nice? How-"

"Whoa, Bella!" Alice starts guffawing.

"Yeah, pretty much," Rose agrees, nodding at Alice before facing me again. "You seem awfully interested in your 'fuck-buddy's' sister there, sweetie."

Yeah, then there's *that*.

"Oh, boy," Rose sighs. The laughing has ceased and I know it's my turn now. "It's not very casual anymore, is it?"

I sigh, too. It seems like all my thoughts are about Edward nowadays. Well, maybe not, but he's always there – in the back of my mind.

"I'm pretty sure I'm falling in love with him," I admit quietly. Reaching over to the other side of the couch, I take the soft afghan I have there and throw it around my shoulders. *Definitely getting sick.* "Whenever I'm with him, I want more and more." I look down at the empty mug in my hands. "And it's so not just about sex anymore. There are other things..." I lick my lips and shake my head, thinking about the little bits and pieces that we never did – or never cared about remembering – before. "I mean...we've always been very affectionate and perfectly matched."

"What do you mean?" Alice asks softly.

I chew on my lip as I phrase my answer. "Well..." I blow out a breath and look up at the girls again. "In the beginning, for instance, we were on the same page. There were no awkward moments, ya know? I never begged internally for him to ask me to stay, I was never curious about his life, I

worried about overstepping any boundaries..." I cough once, feeling my throat getting scratchy and sore. "Edward was the same. We were always...sweet with each other, I suppose you could say. He never asked me to leave or told me that time was up," I chuckle. "Everything just came naturally. We met up at his place, we had sex, he asked if I was spending the night or not, and then we took it from there."

"And now?" Rose asks with a knowing smile.

My own smile is both rueful and wistful, I'm sure, 'cause it's how I feel. The truth is that I don't know exactly when things started to change. I only know that I started to pick up more and more information about him as time went on. In my head, I simply began puzzling together little pieces of Edward, which created for me a more complete picture of him. A picture that has only gotten more perfect with time.

"That's the thing," I sigh. "Everything still comes naturally, but now there's also curiosity, even more desire, and...need. Yeah, there's a need. I need more of and from him." And the last piece, of course. "I find myself missing him, even though it's only been hours since I last saw him."

Right now, for example, I miss him like crazy, and it feels weird 'cause it was just this morning I woke up in his bed.

"And it's mutual?" Rose continues.

I nod, sure of it. "Absolutely. We're both talking more, just...*hanging out*." I smile at the memory of this morning. "He made breakfast for me this morning. Holy shit, girls..." I shake my head. "He's a fucking chef, I swear."

"A man that cooks?" Alice's eyebrows shoot up. "For the love of God, marry him!"

I laugh. "It's not the first time he's cooked for me. Just a few days ago, he made these delicious sandwiches...with bread he made from *scratch*."

"Again: marry him!" Alice cries out.

And I feel like such a girl. I'm all giddy and giggly.

"Good God, I *miss* him," I groan, letting my head fall back against the couch. "I'm a lost cause, aren't I?"

"Sure looks like it, babe," Rose sighs. "I don't think there's any falling. You've already done all the falling for that man."

"Okay, listen to me now, Bella," Alice says, and I loll my head to the side to face her. "How does he make you feel? When you think about him, what's going on inside of you?"

Leave it to Alice to analyze.

"Honestly?" I release a breath. "I just feel...happy. I shiver when I hear his voice...my chest tightens just as it feels like my heart grows at the same time... There are nerves. Fluttering and shit." I let out a dreamy sigh, which brings the next little ramble. "I feel so fucking girly. Just this morning after I got home, I sat down and wrote a little. And you know how I often have music on?" They nod, both smiling widely. "Yeah, there was this song...'Here Comes the Sun', only not the Beatles' original."

Alice squeals. "Colbie Caillat's version, right?" I nod furiously and yet another dreamy sigh escapes me once I've slumped back against the couch again. "That version is so beautiful. It makes me shiver every time I hear it."

"Exactly!" I exclaim. "Fuck, it almost brought tears to my eyes, and reminded me just how I feel about Edward when he does something sweet. I just wanted to cry!" God, I feel pathetic. Is this really normal? It

just feels so... "Consuming," I say, sitting up straight. "That's the word! What I feel for Edward is consuming."

Alice smiles and I *swear* that her eyes well up. "Aww, *Bella*. You're already in love with him."

"Fuck me," I fucking whimper. "Bring out the wine."

"You sure?" Rose asks, standing up from her chair.

And I shake my head as I blink back girly tears. "No, screw the wine. There's a bottle of tequila in my freezer."

She winks. "Atta girl."

Soon, we're all sitting on the floor around my coffee table. Rose pours shot after shot, and I tell them all about Edward. Ninety percent is stuff they already know, but they still listen and offer comments and advice. There's just no denying it. I've fallen head over heels. Six months – soon seven – have passed since Edward approached me at that night club... Six months of growing closer and closer, learning more and more...

"But how can it work?" I ask, sniveling. The stupid tears won't fucking quit falling. A part of me – a big part of me – is so incredibly happy, but then there's the other part. The freakishly independent part of me that is ready for children. "This wasn't the way it was supposed to be, girls." I furiously wipe at my cheeks before downing another shot. "I'm gonna be all miserable and in love, and he's gonna find another fuck-buddy."

"Aw, *Bella*," Rose sighs. "You don't know that. You've said it yourself – Edward seems to want more, too, remember?" She turns to Alice. "And at *Bella*'s birthday party, didn't Edward only have eyes for her?"

"Definitely," Alice replies solemnly...before hiccupping. I cough and pour another shot for myself. "You should talk to him, honey. I swear, he's your fucking lobster."

I let out a cry and a chuckle at the same time. *My lobster*. Oh, I wish.

"Lobster, Alice?" Rose cocks a brow. "*Really?*"

"They mate for life," Alice responds simply.

"Yeah, yeah. Back to me – the *human*," I mutter. "How would this ever work?"

"Oh, come on, Bella!" Rose groans in frustration. "Let's get a few facts straight, okay?" I nod and wave my hand in a "go ahead". "First of all, you can't have everything." I flip her off, 'cause I've never been greedy. It's not my nature. "What I mean is...you can't date Edward and expect to have kids right away."

"But I want kiddos!" I whine.

Oh, shit. Listen to me. I'm a whiny little bitch.

"I know you do," she says patiently. "But you want kids *with* Edward *more*. I mean, I know you, Bella. I fucking love you for how independent you are. The fact that you want a child even though you'd be a single mom, that's strong. *But*...don't bullshit me and say that having children with the man you're in love with isn't better."

Well, of course having kids with Edward would be better than having them alone, but... "It would take so long," I complain, still sounding like someone I'm really not. "For all I know, he may not even want kids!"

"But what if he does?" Alice shoots back. "Don't be a bitch now, sweetie. He might want everything you want. You just have to give him a chance.

Find out if you share the same plans for the future before you write him off."

"Thank God I have you two right now," I mutter into my shot glass. "I need you to talk sense into me."

"And that's what we're doing," Rose says matter-of-factly, and then she clinks her glass with Alice's. "Think about it, Bella. Wouldn't it be perfect to have Edward as your partner...get to know him...share everything...and *then...* you become parents *together*?"

"Duh," I grumble. "Of course that would be perfect, but-"

"No buts!" Alice cries out. "No fucking buts!"

"Edward can fuck my butt," I reply with drunken giggle. "He's *really* good at it."

"Grrr." Kitten Alice makes an appearance.

I blow her a kiss.

"Isabella!" I almost jump off the fucking floor at Rose's voice. Shit! Her eyes are all stern. "You will listen to me now, okay?" I gulp and nod.

"Good girl. Now, you're going to talk to Edward. You're going to feel him out. You're going to date him – 'cause that's what people do to get to know each other – and you're going to become a fucking couple. To sum shit up: you're going to make a fucking move to get more. Am I making myself clear?"

"Yes, ma'am," I whisper. I'm going to try. I'm going to give it a chance. I'm going to risk what I have, in hopes of getting all of him. "I will make it clear that I want more."

"Let's toast to that, shall we?" Alice grins.

And toast we do.

I'm really lucky to have my girls. When I'm having a weak day – a day where I bitch and whine – they're there for me, smacking sense into me.

A couple of hours later, Rose and Alice are getting ready to leave.

"By the way, honey," Rose slurs, and I giggle for nothing. "Did you get my email this m-morning?"

"About the pa-party," I cough. Stupid fucking Emmett!

"Yeah."

I nod. "I got it. Alice will be my plus one."

"Plus one, who, me?" Alice utters, tripping over air as she reaches for the door. "Oops!"

"Lacy Piece is having a party for the Christmas line next weekend," Rose explains, laughing as she helps Alice up. "You'll be Bella's plus one."

"Hey, Rose?" The best ideas pop up when you're drunk. Fucking fact. "Is Jasper gonna be there?"

Rose grins widely. "He hasn't RSVP'd yet, but I *hope* he's coming." She gives Alice a sideways glance before arching a brow at me. "And maybe Alice will *come*, too."

"Yay," Alice deadpans. "You're g'na hook me up with 'e one you thought was gay."

"Oh shush, you," Rose says. "He's *not* gay."

"But you thought he was!" Alice accuses, almost falling over again.

"All right," I laugh. "Time for you two to go. I love you, girls." I hug both of them...and we all tumble to the floor.

"Oomph!" Rose.

"Eeeek!" Alice.

And I cough.

Fuckin' Emmett.



14.

"You look exhausted," Emmett comments as we take our seats, which is pretty fucking funny if you think about it, 'cause he's still sick. He doesn't look very good, either, but he insisted on coming to work today.

I huff as I tear into my Double Whopper. Gotta love Burger King for lunch. "Exhausted doesn't even begin to cover it," I grumble. "My sister – the nasty little shit she is – woke me up at five."

"Dude. Not cool."

"Don't I fucking know it," I mutter, taking out the tomatoes from my burger. "She said it was time for breakfast since we were picking up Mom and Dad at the airport."

Which was just utter bullshit, 'cause Mom had called last night, telling us that they had to take another flight – they were supposed to arrive yesterday – but she also told us that they would take a cab into the city since they'd be landing so early. So, why the fuck did Lizzy wake me up? Easy. She wants to make my life miserable. And I know it's just 'cause I managed to dodge her yesterday about the whole girlfriend issue. It wasn't easy, but I can hold my own, thank you very much.

"By the way," Emmett says around a mouthful of fries...just as my phone vibrates. "I talked to Jazz this morning."

"Uh-huh," I utter, bringing out my phone. *Nice*. A text from Bella.

I hate your friend. That Emmett guy. I'm sick :(Hit him for me, pretty please? ~Bella.

"Yeah, we're going to a lingerie party, man!" Emmett exclaims, and I reach over the table to smack him in the forehead. "OW! The fuck, Cullen!"

"Sorry," I say with a shrug. Then I narrow my eyes at him. "Did you *have* to breathe on Bella, though?"

His glare morphs into a look of annoyance and confusion. Can't say I blame the poor guy, but Dad tells me that you should obey your woman, and I plan to do just that. Well, as often as I can. I'm not a pushover, but a happy girlfriend means a happy boyfriend, and I *like* being happy, my friends.

Makes. Shit. Easier.

"Bella's sick," I clarify, picking up my burger again.

"And she told you to smack me?" he asks incredulously, so I show him the text. "Huh...so, you're a pussy now, then?" He cocks a brow.

"Meh." I chew, chew, chew, and swallow. "I like *getting* pussy, if you know what I mean. And Bella's the only provider."

"Not the *only*-"

"The only one I *want*," I say pointedly.

Em shakes his head. "Here we go."

"The fuck is that supposed to mean?"

"You're letting the pussy control you."

"Uh..." I laugh a little but not really. "*Never*, my good friend. I'm my own boss. I just happen to love sex with Bella. Fucking sue me. I mean, do you know how fucking freaky she is in the sack?" Of-fucking-course, this is the moment my dick chooses to perk up a little. Insatiable fucker. "I'm gonna snatch up that hellcat for good, is all I'm saying."

It also helps that she's an amazing person, obviously, but the sex, people...*damn, fuck me, please*...and I'm not sure I would cross an ocean for some wallflower.

I sip my Apple Coke – ya know, Coke and Minute Maid Apple juice mixed together – and Em tsks at me. "*Dude*. She told you to hit me, which, for the record, I'm pretty fucking sure she didn't mean *literally*, you prick." He pauses to shove some fries in his mouth. "Now, with that outta the way, lemme give you some advice."

I smirk. This oughta be good. Emmett's never been in a relationship, the fucking manwhore. Okay, it's not that bad, but he loves his one-nighters.

"For instance," he begins in a serious voice, "women may be smart, but they're also easily diverted." I give him a dubious look, at which he nods solemnly. "I'm telling you, *my good friend*. It's the truth."

"How would *you* know?" I gotta ask.

He gives me a cocky smirk. "I have four sisters, Edward. All of them older than me."

Yeah, so?

"I've watched their husbands and boyfriends work their magic on all of 'em," he continues with a shrug. "And it's all about diversions."

I rub my chin, still unwilling to admit to shit.

But I'm intrigued.

"Give me your phone," he tells me, and after a few moments of hesitation on my part, I hand it over. "All right, let's see what we have here," he mutters, eyes on my phone. "What do you call her? Babe? Baby? Sweetheart?"

Um... "Baby and beautiful."

He fiddles and whatnot for a while, and then he returns it to me. "Send what I just wrote to her."

I look down at my phone.

I'm sorry you're sick, baby. But I won't hit my friend ;) I will, however, stop by your place to take care of you. If you want? – Edward.

Hmmmmmm...

"You haven't been to her place yet, have ya?" he adds as my finger hovers over the screen. I shake my head; I *haven't* been there, and I do want to. Hmm... Hmm... "Well, I just gave her a good fuckin' reason to invite you over."

Yeah, but...

"Cullen, *send it.*"

I actually close my eyes as I push send, and I'm willing to admit that I have a problem. Emmett's right. I'm a goddamn pussy. Like I fucking expected, Bella now has my balls in her possession. Shit, she doesn't even know it. Yet. She will.

"Wow, I'm impressed," Em says, clearly mocking me. "Your scruff is showing again, and your vagina is less visible. Good for you!"

"Dick," I mutter.

"Yeah, maybe you have that one left, too."

I flip him off.

And that's when my phone vibrates again.

My eyes bug out as I read the text.

Oh, my God. You would do that for me? Come over, I mean. You're a saint, baby, and so, so sweet! ~Bella.

Gaping like a fish, I show Emmett the text, and he grins widely.

"You're welcome," he laughs quietly. "I just got you laid."

So...if I'm sweet...if I take care of her...she will, er...*show her appreciation?*

This gives me some control back, right?

Maybe I only lost *one* of my balls.

I can live with that if I have Bella.

Yeah, my fingers are a bit more eager as I reply this time.

Text me your address, beautiful. I get off at five, and I have my sister's birthday dinner at seven, but I will definitely stop by. And maybe I can come over again later tonight? – Edward.

There.

I'm a man again. I think.

And maybe I'll get the chance to ask her out tonight after Lizzie's dinner.



15.

I don't have a fancy front desk in my building, or a doorman to let people enter, but we still have to buzz our visitors in, so don't ask me why Edward's currently pacing outside my door. I mean, I buzzed him in like a minute ago, and now he's just waiting out there. Actually, it looks like he's talking to himself. But why? He knows I now expect him, so what's the holdup, I wonder. And...doesn't he realize that I'm totally watching him through the peephole?

'Cause that's what I'm doing...while looking like shit. I'm dressed in black cotton shorts and a black t-shirt – a soft blanket wrapped around my shoulders – and don't get me started on my hair. It's a bird's nest. There's no makeup, no nothing. But I'm too sick to bother. Even though it's *Edward* – a man I *always* want to look attractive for. I'm just too damn sick.

Then again, if he's just gonna stay out there, I won't have to worry about him seeing me.

That also means I won't get to see what's inside the bag he's holding. Sucks, 'cause it looks like a takeout bag, and I'm hungry.

"What are you doing, you weird man?" I whisper to myself...before coughing. Loudly. Still, Edward doesn't notice. He must be in some serious thought. I hope it's nothing about regrets. Could that be it? Does he regret coming here? "Fuck it," I mumble, opening the door.

His head snaps up and he looks more than a little startled. "B-Bella," he stutters.

And there goes my eyebrows, shootin' all the way up there.

Edward Cullen. Just *stuttered*.

"Uh...hi?" Don't ask me why that came out as a question. "Are...are you okay?" He stares blankly at me for a while, so I speak again. "I buzzed you in, remember? And now you've just been...waiting...or something."

"Oh," he says dumbly, then... "Oh! *Shit*." He smiles sheepishly. "You watched me, didn't you?" He eyes the peephole in my door.

"Well, I do love watching you," I chuckle...which soon morphs into a coughing fit.

God, that hurt my poor throat.

"Fuck, come here, baby," he says, contradicting himself when he's the one coming to *me*. Opening the door wider, I let him in before closing the door. "How're you feeling?" he asks in concern as kisses me on the forehead.

"Like shit," I croak quietly. *But I'm so glad you're here.*

I think he's set down the bag he had before, 'cause then both his arms are wrapped around me, and if I still had the sense of smell, I'd probably be invaded by his cologne.

"You're here," I mumble pathetically against his chest. "You shouldn't be," I add, reaching up to throw my arms around his neck. My blanket falls to the floor, making me shiver from the cold. "I don't want you to get sick." I hug him harder, literally clinging to him. And then I'm pretty much climbing, too, not stopping until my legs are wrapped around his waist. Wow, I'm like a personal Band-Aid or leech.

Maybe a spider monkey.

"I don't care," he chuckles softly, and I press my lips against his neck. "And if I get sick, then you'll just take care of me, right?"

Yes.

"I would," I respond, quietly but seriously, as I face him. He gives me his deadly smile. Soft and lopsided. I'm so in love with him. "Thank you for coming," I mumble, burying my face in the crook of his neck again. "And I'm sorry I look like crap."

"You look like you're sick," he tells me. "But you're still beautiful, baby."

Riiight.

"Not that standing in your entryway isn't awesome..." He trails off, and I croak out a chuckle. He laughs through his nose. "Where can I carry you, m'lady?"

I smile against his skin. "The living room. Behind you."

My couch isn't as plush as the one Edward has at home, but my bed is worse.

Sue me, I've gotten used to Edward's luxurious bed.

And couch.

"Nice place," he comments quietly, walking through my apartment. Yeah, I'm still clinging to him like a child. "Very...*homey*."

That's probably the perfect word for my apartment. Edward's apartment is all about straight lines, black and white, shades of grey, not to mention a lot bigger than my place. My apartment is, like he said, homey. The building is a lot older, and with it comes...quirks. It's still a very nice neighborhood, and the rent is sky high, but whereas Edward's home is taken straight out of *Bachelor Luxury Living* – no, there's no such magazine, but if there were, Edward's place would be in it – you could find my apartment in magazines about antiques. It's rustic with old floorboards, beautifully carved wooden strips where floor meets wall, and speaking of walls...the wall facing the windows in my living room is a brick wall. That's where I have my TV, but most importantly, all my old records that I collect.

"I like it," he adds, lowering me to my couch, which I actually *did* buy in an antique store. He stands straight, taking in the sight of my living room, and I reach over to grab a new blanket. Frickin' cold. "It's very you, now that I think of it."

"Oh? How's so?" I ask, a bit amused by him. He's not being subtle at all, not that I think he's trying for subtle, but still, it's a new sight. Even for me – to see him here, in my home. Yeah, definitely new. And I like it. *Love* it.

Another thing I love is watching him in his suit. He looks dangerously handsome in it, but he never comes off as stiff. In fact, he's always casual. I watch as he removes his jacket, as he rolls up the sleeves on his

button-down, as he loosens his tie... And while I'm looking at him, he's looking at my living room...still.

"I don't know," he answers finally, the words rolling off his tongue slowly, as if he's in thought. "But it just suits you." And that's when his eyes meet mine again. He smiles. "If you fall asleep, I may or may not go through your record collection. It's quite impressive."

A laugh bursts through my lips, but the surprise of it causes another round of coughs. I cover my mouth and squeeze my eyes shut. My throat is sore and scratchy; a laugh only makes shit worse.

"Yeah, maybe I should punch Emmett for you," he mutters, and I manage to give him a weak smile before I cough again. "Dammit, I almost forgot." He heads straight for the hallway. "I brought you something to eat," he says over his shoulder. When he returns, he starts emptying the bag he brought with him. "I hope you like Thai food," he murmurs, offering me a smile that almost seems...nervous?

Hmph. "First of all," I cough and clear my throat, "I love Thai. I just doubt I'll be able to taste anything right now." With a wry grin, I sniffle for effect and Edward chuckles quietly, still setting out containers on the coffee table. "Second of all...why are you acting so weird? And *what*...was with the pacing in out in the hall earlier?"

I keep my smile intact to let him know that I'm teasing, but I can't deny that I'm insanely curious. Edward's always been confident and relaxed. This new version is...odd. And I hope his nervousness has nothing to do with him being in my apartment for the first time. That would suck, really.

Maybe he thinks we're going too far.

Yeah, I don't buy that. After the girls calmed me down a couple of days ago, I know better. This fuck-buddy arrangement Edward and I have going on couldn't be more...relationship-y.

"Uh..." He rubs the back of his neck. "Can I blame a long, hard day at work?"

I purse my lips, watching as he takes a seat next to me on the couch. "Nope, 'fraid not."

"Damn."

"*Edward*," I whine, scooting closer to him. "*Tell* me."

At that, he chuckles lazily, lolling his head to the side to face me. "Fine," he sighs, and then he reaches up to release my bottom lip from my teeth. I didn't even know I was biting it. "You're beautiful," he says softly, the pad of his thumb still on my lip. "Everything I've learned about you..." He stops and smiles ruefully, but then he's in motion, scooping me up and placing me sideways on his lap. "And..." He releases a breath, eyes meeting mine.

I swallow nervously, 'cause I have a feeling...

"And?" I press quietly.

I'm pretty sure he can see the hope in my eyes.

The right corner of his mouth quirks up. "I don't have a reason to be nervous, do I?" he almost whispers.

It feels like I've just run a marathon, my heart is pounding so furiously.

"Depends on what you want," I respond just as quietly.

He hums and leans forward, forehead to forehead. "What I want..." He lets out another nervous chuckle, this one a bit shallow. "What I want is more," he finally admits, and I'm pretty sure I could die now out of sheer happiness. "I want to take you out on a date. *For starters.*"

"Okay," I breathe out, not missing a beat. His eyes, they widen, and his eyebrows rise slowly. "I want that, too," I confess, leaning back a little. "I really, really..." I sigh heavily, but at the same time, it feels like a weight has been lifted. "Want that."

Edward looks relieved and, yeah, happy. "Thank fuck."

I'd love to tell you that Edward Cullen can't turn me into a giggler, 'cause I personally find the sound very childish, but...

I giggle. And it's a downright nasty sound once I add coughs into the mix.

Leaning away from him, I cough until my throat hurts so much that my eyes well up.

Meanwhile, Edward's rubbing my back soothingly...and cursing Emmett quietly.

"Want some water?" he asks after a while. I give him a small nod, trying to hide the few tears that escaped. He leans forward, with me still on his lap, and then he's back in his original position, water bottle in hand. "I didn't know what you wanted, so I bought water and some multivitamin smoothie."

"You're so sweet," I say hoarsely. "Thank you."

"Don't mention it," he murmurs as I move off his lap. I may not have functioning taste buds at the moment, but I'm still hungry. I'm also very curious about the food he brought and why he would bring Thai. I guess I figured most people would bring soup or something.

"So, what do you have for me?" I ask with a small grin. It seems I can't take my eyes off of him, but that's not weird. For one, he's wildly attractive. For two, he just asked me out. Like, on a real date! The only thing missing right now is me twirling hair around my fingers. Maybe some bubblegum popping, too.

"A Cullen specialty when it comes to being sick," he responds, shooting me a wink. He continues as he opens the containers. "I didn't know that your throat was sore, so one of the items is out, I'm afraid."

"And which one is that?"

"Chicken with coconut and green curry," he replies. "It's ridiculously good and will clear out nasal congestion in a minute," he grins, and I instantly know he's speaking from experience, "which means it's very strong, so I doubt your throat will like that." Agreed. I definitely don't want to add to my pain with green curry, though the dish does sound mouthwateringly appetizing. "So, I think this one's for you." He slides one container closer to me, quickly followed by one serving of rice. "Salmon stew with lemongrass, haricot verts and bamboo. It's mild, I promise."

"Wow," I mumble, feeling hungrier and hungrier. "And how is this a Cullen specialty?"

"Well," he clears his throat and looks a bit sheepish, "in truth, my mom would have my head for including her, so I guess it's just me and my dad." I give him an encouraging smile as I get comfortable on the couch with my food. "Mom would always make her special chicken soup when Liz or I got sick, but it didn't really make a difference. But when Dad got home from work, he'd bring spicy food, 'cause it clears the airways like nothing else," he laughs quietly.

I laugh, too, but it only makes me cough in the end, unsurprisingly.

"Don't make me laugh again," I croak, smacking him playfully in the arm.

"Noted," he says with a firm nod. "No laughs for Bella Swan when she's sick." At that, I kiss his cheek before returning to my food. "So..."

Looking up from my meal, I give him a nod to go on.

"Right..." He rubs the back of his neck – something I've come to notice as a nervous trait. "When can I take you out?"

Oh, my smile is so fucking wide, it's ridiculous. But I don't care. Plus, it seems to relax Edward.

"You really want more, too?" I ask softly, and maybe it's a dumb question. It probably is, but I just need to wrap it around my head.

He smiles. "I really do, baby."

Okay, confession time. 'Cause here's the thing...there are parts of the dating game that I loathe. What I want is straightforwardness and honesty. Open minds and all cards laid on the table. No tiptoeing.

"I want it, too," I admit, repeating myself, really. "But..." And, of course, a "but" is the last thing you should say in this situation, so when Edward's face falls a little, I'm quick to put down my food and crawl over to him. I don't stop until I'm straddling him. For some reason, I just *need* to be close. "I want more, *period*," I tell him. "ButwhatIalso...want..." Okay, a breath here. And hey, I made Edward smile with my word fumbling. "I want..." No, wait. It's about what I *don't* want. "I *don't* want awkwardness and questions unanswered... I don't want insecurities."

"Same here," he says quickly, his hands making their way up my thighs under the blanket. "I don't want us to revert to something we're already past, really."

"Exactly," I breathe out in relief. "I mean...six months..."

He knows, smiling gently. "We already know each other in a way."

"We just have to fill in some blanks," I add, realizing that we're moving closer to each other. That's not optimal, unless he really does want to get sick. But *God*, do I want to kiss him.

"And dates are a perfect way for us to do that," he murmurs, brushing his lips against my cheek.

"Perfect," I echo quietly. My body's reacting, heating up. It's his fault. "We won't stop, um...having sex, right?"

He groans. "God, no." But I guess he realizes that we're close to losing it, so he leans back a little. Rueful smile in place. I'm sure I mirror it. "In fact..." He actually chews on his lip for a moment, something I've never seen him doing before. "We, uh...we could always, you know...go straight for the relationship...?"

Boyfriend, girlfriend, relationship, he'd be my boyfriend, labeled, I want it, like right now, I'll be his girlfriend, just like that, we can start immediately, still date, but with labels, okay, I want it.

"I mean, I still wanna take you out," he rushes out. "I just feel that we're beyond fumbling and first date behavior, and-"

"I want it," I say, cutting him off.

He exhales. "Yeah?"

"Yes."

And then he kisses me silly.

Germs be damned.

Edward Cullen is my boyfriend!

I am *not* a giggler.

"Woman, stop giggling when I kiss you."

Cough, cough.



15.

When I reach the restaurant, my family is already seated, and I tell the hostess as much when she asks if I have a reservation.

"You're late," Liz huffs as I reach the round table. "For *my* birthday dinner."

"Chill out," I shoot back before turning my attention to my folks. "Hi, Mom, good to see ya." I kiss her cheek, we hug, she tells me it's been too long, she hugs me again, and there we go. Dad's turn. "Dad, welcome to New York." I grin as we do the man-hug thing.

"Thanks, son," he chuckles. "Too bad you couldn't go with us today," he adds, and I know that he knows that I'm not sorry at all, which is proven by the wink he sends me. Yeah, sightseeing with the family; no, thanks.

"Sorry," I lie. "Had to work."

And after work, I got myself a girlfriend.

Important stuff. Really important. In fact, so important that I check my phone just to make sure I don't forget the date. Ah, right. Liz's birthday. That would be easy enough to remember. *Should* be. And I have a feeling Bella's gonna be the reason I actually do remember this date.

"So, let's celebrate the Brit kid," I say, sitting down between Mom and Liz.

"Brit kid?" Liz drawls. I smile innocently. "I'm not bloody Br-" Right! I cock a brow at her, and she growls under her breath. "I'm not British."

"Sure you're not." I snicker and pick up my menu.

The truth is that my dear, dear sister has adopted a few British words over the years, and I think it's fucking hilarious to tease her for it. Annoying her is funny, period.

"Whatever, can I open my gifts now?" she sighs, giving Mom and Dad hopeful looks.

That's my cue to bring out the two gifts I bought her – the ones Bella helped me find.

"This is why I'm late," I tell her, holding up two small boxes. "I had to run home to get your presents."

She tilts her head. "Hmm. So, you went straight home after work? 'Cause I could've *sworn* you said you got off at five today."

I narrow my eyes at her, knowing exactly what she's playing at.

Well, little sister, it's not going to work.

"I had stuff to take care of between work and now," I respond, and my stuff's name is Bella. I cringe. Okay, that did *not* sound okay. "What-the-fuck-ever, Liz. Just open your damn gifts. Happy 24th."

"*Thank you,*" she says, smiling a smile that's sweeter than sugar. Dad buys that crap, but I sure don't. There's no way she's giving up until I've told her – not to mention my parents – all about Bella. And believe me, my friends, I have no issue telling them about my *girlfriend*, but I'll be *damned* if it's going to happen on my little sister's terms. In fact, I *want* to tell them about her, but I'd rather not do it today. We *just* got together, after all. Cut me some slack, *please*.

"Oh, I just fucking love that we're all together again." And that would be Mom. "I've missed this."

Dad and I chuckle dryly at her, and Liz huffs.

Truth be told, I adore my family. Family is family, and we're always there for each other when it matters, but...well, they're also special. Mom is both fancy and foulmouthed like hell. She has her own charity foundation, which she often hosts benefits for, but then there's the side of her that can out-curse a sailor. Then there's Dad. By day, he's an almighty surgeon, but as soon as he comes home, he's Average Joe, and...he's a bit weird. For starters, he collects stamps and bottle caps. So, let's just stop there for now.

"Oh, my God!" Lizzie's gasp brings me out of my train of thought, and I look over to see that she's opened the first of her gifts. And what do you fucking know, her eyes are welling up. Mission accomplished. "Edward, this is...I can't believe this." She looks down at the gift again, subtly wiping her cheek. "This is so sweet, big brother."

I probably should've thought about the fact that crying women give me the creeps, 'cause I never know how to act around that stuff.

"No biggie," I say, clearing my throat as I pick up my menu. "Glad you liked it."

It's really not a big thing. When Bella and I finally got around to Liz's birthday presents last weekend, I once again pleaded my case when it came to jewelry. I think it's a perfect gift, 'cause women like that shit. But Bella said that there was no thought put into jewelry, to which I replied that there certainly was. I *think* about my bank statement all the way to the jewelry store every time I buy sparkly crap for Mom and Liz. So, there.

I digress.

Bella relented and told me that jewelry was fine, but only if it was personal. So, after some serious explanation on her part about what "personal" was in the jewelry world, I fished out my wallet where I have a few photos. One of them is of me and Liz when she was about two days old, making me two *years* old. After Bella had aww'd about the damn picture, we entered the store. Hours and a few hundred bucks later, that photo was engraved in a platinum charm, which I bought a necklace for.

"Definitely a big deal," Liz says, leaning over and plants a kiss on my cheek. Jeesh. Women. "Thank you so much, Edward."

"Yeah, yeah, you're welcome," I mutter, loosening my tie a little. "Open the next gift."

It's a lot less personal, so maybe it can help us move on from this emotional fucking moment.

Actually, a part of me just wants the entire night to be over, 'cause there's not a chance in hell that I'm sleeping at home tonight. Ah, fuck no. I'm spending the night at my girlfriend's place. *Yeah*.

"Okay, Edward, I've had enough of this," Liz says, and I look up at her in confusion. "This?" She holds up the second gift I gave her – the coffee table book on New York photography. "This is *amazing*, really, but...I wanna know who picked it out." She cocks a brow, and...isn't it getting very hot in here? "I also wanna know who the purple toothbrush in your bathroom belongs to."

Oh, fuck me.

"Edward?" Yeah, that's Mom, looking awfully hopeful. "Are you seeing someone?"

Seeing, loving, fucking...

"Uh..." Words. I need words. Fuck, I hate Liz. I never really liked her. Not even a little. Ahhhh, motherfuck. "Well..." Screw it. Might as well fucking say it. I sigh. "Yeah, I'm seeing someone," I mutter, defeated.

Liz is positively glowing. "I *knew* it!"

So much for having Bella to myself for a while.

I just know that they're going to wanna meet her.

"It's very new," I rush to add, and it's only a half-lie. Sure, we've been seeing each other for almost seven months, but we declared ourselves today. "So, could we *not* talk about this?"

"Ha! Nice try, son," Dad chuckles. "You really think these two are gonna be able to keep quiet?" He snorts. I glare at him. "Yeah, *right!*"

"How new can it possibly be?" Mom asks, ignoring Dad. "She has a toothbrush at your place, and she helped you pick out gifts for your sister."

Yeah, Cullen. Answer *that*, why dontcha.

"Oh, there's more, Mom," Liz assures smugly. *Shut the fuck up, sis!*

"There's a drawer full of lingerie in his closet, and unless Edward here is a cross-dresser..."

"You went through my fucking *closet*?" I ask incredulously.

Liz just waves me off. "I was bored when you were at work." That's her excuse for going through my shit? "Okay, you gotta hear this, Mom." Kill me. Kill me! "Under his bed, there's this box, and-"

"Elizabeth!" I shout, horrified, embarrassed, pissed off. "Remember Tom in high school?"

And Liz shuts up.

I don't think she wants Mom and Dad to know about the guy she reached second base with in a janitor's closet. I also don't think she wants them to know that when I found out, I may or may not have found a new purpose for the flagpole outside of school. Let's just say that Tom's jeans were sturdy enough to hold him. Apparently, that embarrassed Liz or some shit.

No, Liz doesn't want our parents to know this.

"Thank God," I breathe out, slumping down in my seat. Sweet baby Jesus... "Now, can we please change the topic?" I plead with my mother, who is fucking giddy by now. "I promise I will introduce you to Bella-"

"Bella! What a lovely name," Mom gushes.

Grrr. "Not the point," I grit out. Deep breaths. "I promise I will introduce you, okay? But not right now. You *just* moved to New York, and Bella and I *just* made shit official."

"So, you're not a cross-dresser, then?" Dad asks amusingly.

Have I mentioned that I just *love* having all the Cullens gathered in New York?

SARCASM!



16.

"I told you earlier not to make me laugh. It hurts my poor, poor throat," I croak pathetically, burying my face against his chest. Naked chest. Actually, we're both pretty much naked, except for boxers and panties. If only I wasn't sick...

"I didn't mean to," he chuckles, pulling my fluffy covers over us more tightly. "I was just telling you about dinner."

"Yeah, 'cause hearing you telling me that your dad asked if you're a cross-dresser isn't funny at all," I mumble sarcastically. Reaching over to my nightstand, I take a sip from my tea then settle back in Edward's arms. My favorite place in the world, I swear. "So, they wanna meet me, huh?" I drop a kiss over his heart, smiling to myself.

"That's an understatement," he murmurs, playing with a strand of my hair. "Dad can probably restrain Mom for a little while, but my sister is an issue. She's sorta like an STD, though antibiotics don't work on her."

And I cough-chuckle. It's a lovely sound. I really recommend it.

"Are you speaking from experience?" I cock a brow at him, resting my chin on his chest. "The STD thing, I mean."

"No!" he chokes out, apparently horrified that I even asked. "*Jesus, Bella...*"

"Sorry," I say with an innocent smile. I'm relieved, of course, but it wouldn't be the end of the world if he'd had one. They're disgustingly common these days.

"What about you?" he asks.

I shake my head minutely. "Nope." My motto's always been "Gear up or get out".

"Good." He smiles. "Now, what were you really doing when I came here?" He eyes the laptop on my nightstand before returning his gaze to me. "And no lies, please. That's over now that we're official."

I snicker and kiss his chest again. "Why would I lie to you, baby?"

"You have before," he points out. "The night after you met Emmett and Jazz...you *totally* lied about that research-thing you've got going on with your girlfriends and, if I'm not mistaken, you have plans with them on Friday."

"Holy shit, you remember that?"

He smirks. "I have a very good memory."

But then he averts his eyes for just a quick second, and I know that he's the one lying now. Such a rookie mistake, really.

"My dad is a cop," I mention casually, though he already knows this from our Sunday in Central Park. "Don't ever avert your gaze if you're gonna lie."

He groans, frustrated. "Okay, my memory sucks! But I've been thinking about that little lie of yours for a while now, all right? So, speak."

God, he's so adorable. "What makes you think I lied?"

"Ugh, *Bella!*" he whines, and *that's* gotta be a first. "You fucking blushed, okay? Now, could you please fucking tell me what you're doing on Friday? And..." He releases a breath while I'm having difficulties containing my laughter. "*Then* I want to know what you were typing on your laptop when I came here."

Knew I shouldn't have given him my keys before. It all sounded so good earlier. Just in case I was asleep when he returned, I figured I could give him my keys... Yeah, I wasn't asleep. I was working on my next sex column, and Edward Cullen here, that pervert, was *sneaking* into my apartment, not casually entering with a nice "Honey, I'm home!" which I would've thought was cute.

Know what I mean?

"I was sneaking in case you were asleep," he'd told me when I finally noticed him.

I call bullshit.

He was totally trying to get a sneak peek.

"On Friday, my girls and I are going..." I trail off, purposely driving Edward nuts with my stalling, but this is just so fun. He's insanely curious and I think it's wonderful. Can't help it.

"Bella, I swear to *God*..."

"Okay, okay," I laugh quietly, for once not setting off a cough-fest. "We're gonna try speed dating. But, see, I wasn't really lying to you, Edward, 'cause it really is for research."

We're gonna get down to the nitty-gritty and see how men are on the first date. Well, sorta. Most of us know how men are on first dates, but I wanna know if they're different on a date that only lasts two minutes. Essentially, I'm interested in finding out what a man chooses to divulge with that little time. What's important? How much can you possibly find out in such a short period of time, and do men and women have the same priorities? Do they share the same views on what's important?

"Elaborate," Edward demands, wide-eyed. "*Seriously*, you need to tell me a *lot* more if you even want me to *begin* to consider letting my girlfriend go on a speed dating...whatever it's called."

I love him. Caveman Cullen reporting for duty. Meow.

But I'm a good girlfriend, so I do explain it all for him. I tell him how he and his friends inspired me and made me think about how men really... well, think. We're all so very different, but just that simple thing about shades and scents – how men don't analyze or subcategorize...it just made me curious. And I have no desire to actually go on dates to find out more, so Rose came up with the idea of speed dating. Thirty dates in an hour or something. *That*, I can handle. And hopefully, it will give me good input, insight...

"Humph," is Edward's response once I've told him everything. It's easy to see that he's not totally onboard, but I'm afraid he doesn't have a choice. I need to do this and, honestly, he has nothing to worry about, the handsome, handsome man of mine. It's literally two minutes with each man, and we're all gonna be sitting in a crowded hotel restaurant in New Jersey. However, that's not to say that I can't see it from Edward's point of view, because I definitely can. I'm not the jealous kind of girl, but I'm

more than willing to admit that I can be territorial. Seeing a woman flirt with Edward would make me see red. To be blunt, my claws would come out, even for just a little moment. Just enough to stake my claim. But I know Edward is the same in that department. When we've been out, though it hasn't happened many times, he's been quite possessive of me. Not to the point where it's disturbing, of course, but enough for the guy to know that I'm with Edward and nobody else. A hand on my waist, a kiss on the neck... That's the sort of things that flatter me, and I'm not even a little reluctant to admit it.

"Just two minutes per shithead?" he asks pensively, chagrined.

I smile. "Two minutes per..." A fucking giggle. "Per shithead, promise." I also tell him again that it's for research purposes. There's no way I'm actually going to go out with these men privately.

"Well, if it's just for research..." He hums, and then...his whole face lights up, I kid you not. "Then I don't see why I can't be there with my buddies. You can include me, Jazz, and Em in that little study of yours." He looks so proud of himself that I wanna pinch his cheeks and call him cutie-pie or something.

And then there's his suggestion, which is actually a good one. "That sounds like fun," I tell him honestly. "Call them tomorrow and ask."

"Really?" And now he's asking? I thought he was *telling*. "You're saying yes?"

I shake my head in amusement. "You're too fucking cute."

"Uh...thanks?"

"Uh...you're welcome?" I mimic him, at which he snickers, and I reach up to kiss his cheek. "And yeah, you can totally bring your friends. Rose and Alice want to meet them."

"Consider it done, beautiful. Now, what were you writing on your laptop?"

Damn, he can't let that go, can he?

"I'm working on my next column," I sigh, smiling indulgently. By the look on his face, he definitely wants me to tell him specifically which column I'm writing, of course. "The sex column."

"Fucking knew it! Can I see?"

This time when I laugh, I'm not lucky enough to escape the coughing, so I move away from him while I curse Emmett to the fiery pits of hell. It's just easier that way. To curse Emmett, I mean.

"You want me to refill your tea, baby?" he asks softly, rubbing my back. Sweet, sweet man.

"No, it's fine," I say hoarsely. After a moment, I fall back on the bed and say, "And no, you can't read my column. It's not done yet." He fucking pouts. "Not gonna work, honey. Sorry."

"Fine," he mutters, pulling me closer. I melt. "Not even a clue or something?"

Hmm. "You're a demanding boyfriend, aren't ya?"

"The *worst*," he says solemnly, making me wanna kiss him all over. Just because.

"I think you're pretty amazing," I whisper.

He smiles and kisses me on the forehead. "So are you. And you're not gonna be able to change the subject."

Damn. "All right," I concede, giving him a shy smile. But I can't do shit about my shyness, 'cause that's just how I am when it comes to Edward

and my work. For some reason, I want his approval. I definitely don't need it, but when he first read my article after Jasper had showed him... and Edward had *liked* it...yeah, that mattered to me.

I sigh. "It's about self-pleasure." Actually, it's a follow-up on my first article that was about self-pleasure. The first one is already in Angela's hands.

"Fuck," he whispers. He licks his lips. "You're gonna write about masturbation?"

"Yeah. That's one of the reasons I gave you that book." I chuckle when he huffs and rolls his eyes. "I bring up different things women use," I explain further. "Today's toys meet yesterday's romance novels, pretty much."

He hums. "I prefer toys, but that's just my opinion."

"I prefer the real thing," I reply, not missing a beat. He snarls playfully and kisses me sloppily on the cheek, and...I fucking giggle again.

"Especially *your...thing*."

He laughs through his nose. "Ooh, I love it when you talk dirty, sweetheart."

I love it when you call me sweetheart.

"Fine, I love your big, hard cock," I say, without a doubt failing at sounding seductive.

"Damn, keep that up and my cock *will* be hard," he promises darkly, lips pressed against my temple. "What is it with you and dirty words driving me fucking insane?"

Just like that, a light bulb flicks on in my head. Angela emailed me earlier, telling me about some new things happening at *Written Word*. Some

additions, if you will, and each columnist will soon have their own "today's tip" or whatever I'm supposed to call it. You'll be able to get these tips through text messages that you subscribe to. Since I have two columns, I will have to come up with two different pieces of mini-advice every day. Each month, I have to email thirty – sixty combined – of them to Angela so that she can add them to the service. According to my scatterbrained boss, who was supposed to send this email out weeks ago, this is going to be a huge hit. We'll just have to see. The only thing I'm concerned about is getting started, 'cause the first month's submissions are due before this weekend.

I digress.

Edward's comment about dirty talk made me think of one thing I can tell people.

But more on that later.

"I doubt you're the only man who loves that," I tell him.

He chuckles. "I believe you."

I yawn, and I know that I really need to get some sleep. Edward does, too, 'cause he has work in the morning. But first, I gotta tell him about the lingerie party. After Edward left for his sister's birthday dinner tonight, I called Rose, asking her if she could put Alice as her plus one instead. Yeah, 'cause I totally wanna bring my boyfriend.

"Hey, Edward?"

He's back to playing with a strand of my hair. "Hmm?"

"Next weekend..." I lift my head to face him better. "Any plans?"

He purses his lips for a moment. "Not that I can think of. Why? Are *you* asking *me* out?" He waggles his eyebrows.

I smirk. "Actually, in a way I guess I am." The best date a man could ever attend, I'm sure. "Remember the photo shoot I worked on with Jasper?"

He grimaces. Okay, not the best approach, Bella. "Oh, I remember."

"Rose is hosting a launch party for her Christmas line – that's the one I'm in – and I wonder if you wanna go with me."

Wow, Edward likes that idea. His smile is...*huge*. "Lingerie party? Are you fucking with me?"

"I take that as a yes," I drawl.

"Goddamn." He looks a little dreamy. "Are you...*you know*...gonna wear lingerie at the party?"

I'd love to roll my eyes and complain about his mind heading straight for the gutter, but I can't, 'cause the answer to that question is yes. All the models are going to wear the pieces from the latest line.

"Yes," I admit, nibbling on my lip. "There's even a red carpet."

I'm definitely not a celebrity, but there will be a few who are. Celebrities who wear Rose's lingerie. I'm so damn proud of her.

"Holy fuck, really? And I'm gonna be the one standing next to you? *Christ*..." He diverts his eyes to the ceiling. "I'm gonna have to buy a fucking jockstrap."

I think it's okay to assume that Edward will be my date that night.

With another yawn, I decide to ask my last question before I close my damn eyes.

"Edward, are you just thinking about lingerie now, or can I talk?"

"Huh? Oh, yeah, you...you can talk, baby," he says, nodding slowly. Eh, he may not be here fully yet, but close enough. "What's up?"

Judging by the semi-hardness against my hip, I'd say his cock.

"You mentioned earlier that your week is busy," I murmur. "I just wanted to know if you have time to stop by or...yeah."

Cupping my cheek, he kisses my temple before responding. "Yeah, my week is booked, thanks to my family." He rolls his eyes at that one, and I chuckle, thinking about when he told me that his sister had found our special box under his bed. "But I guess I was sorta hoping I could come over to spend the night...sss...yeah, nights. Definitely plural." He's made it perfectly clear that he doesn't like shacking up with Liz. Which is totally my gain. "Is that okay?" I nod and am about to speak, but he adds, "It won't be until late at night, 'cause my parents have a crapload of stuff planned for me and Lizzie, and then there's helping my sister finding furniture and shit for her apartment..." He sighs. "But we can at least have the nights."

"That's more than fine," I assure softly. "I will just spend my days sleeping and writing, anyway..." 'Cause I doubt I'm gonna get better in only a day. And I wanna be able to go on that speed dating thing on Friday, so, yeah...lots of resting for me until then. "But a few sleepovers sound wonderful," I sigh contentedly before yawning again.

"I agree," he whispers. "Get some sleep, beautiful."

That's the first night Edward Cullen spends the night in my apartment.

I love it.



16.

The two days following Liz's birthday drag on at a painfully slow pace. For me, it's all about work and spending time with my family, leaving way too little time for Bella. I guess the only positive thing is that she has spent these two days resting a lot. Thankfully, she feels much better by Thursday night, which means that we're good to go on Friday.

Fuckin' speed dating, is all I'm saying.

But there's no way I'm gonna be cool with my girlfriend doing that shit on her own. Doesn't matter that it's for research purposes, dammit.

So, that's how I find myself in New Jersey on Friday night at six PM, Jazz and Emmett in tow. They're very eager to meet Bella's friends.

"Who the fuck names a neighborhood Hackensack?" Jasper drawls. "I thought Hoboken was bad, but Hackensack? Really?"

Emmett smirks and leans back against the brick wall of the hotel where we're meeting the girls. "Well, that's New York for ya." I arch a brow at him, 'cause this is Jersey. Not New York. "We don't have those lame names in Boston."

"No, calling yourself a Southie is so much cooler," I chuckle. "Especially since Boston is so up *north*."

"Ey, watch it, man," he warns. "It's south *Boston*, you dickwad."

"Whatever," Jasper interrupts, which is a good thing. Emmett and I sometimes tend to get into heated debates about Boston and New York. It's mostly about sports, of course, but anything works when we just wanna rile each other up a little. "Shouldn't Bella and her friends be here now?"

Yeah, but they're girls. The plan was for us to go to Jersey together, but Bella had a meeting with her boss right before, so she said that she'd be a few minutes late. And Rose had some meeting with her lawyer, I think...

"They'll be here soon," I reply, taking off my suit jacket. It's a surprisingly warm night for late September. When my phone chirps, I mumble, "Maybe that's her." But it isn't. It's my damn sister, who I have been avoiding since Tuesday.

You can't stay away forever, Edward! I know you're meeting Bella tonight, and I wanna meet her, too! – Liz.

I snort. There's no way I'm obeying that nasty little shit. After her little stunt at her birthday dinner, I've completely ignored her. She had no fucking right to out my personal stuff like that, and...I know, I know, I was a pain-in-the-ass brother to her when we were younger. This is her revenge.

"Holy..."

"Fuck me."

I furrow my brows, looking up from my phone to see Jazz and Em, and... their jaws are pretty much on the ground.

"What's wrong?" I ask, following their gaze. Ah. The girls are here, currently stepping out of a cab. Yeah, maybe I shoulda warned my

buddies about Rose and Alice. Well, Jazz has already met Rose, so I suppose his dropped jaw is in courtesy of Alice. You'd be blind not to see that those three are unbelievably hot, all in their own ways. Rosalie is Barbie, but with curves. She's also tall. Alice is petite and cute, an inch or two shorter than Bella, but still with a sexy body. Though, they don't hold a candle to Bella. Now, for instance, it's kinda hard to think gentlemanly thoughts...which is why I don't. Nah, I'm definitely thinking about ripping that little black strapless dress right off her. And those heels...*fuck me*.

She's dressed for a date, I realize.

"Hello, handsome," Bella says, walking up to me. I smile and wrap my arms around her waist, glad that her voice is back to normal. Her nose isn't red, and her cough is thankfully gone. Seeing her in pain hasn't been a nice experience, that's for sure. "I missed you today."

I'm so fucking glad that we can say that to each other without being apprehensive. There's no doubt, no hesitation. We're in this, and that's final. Granted, I'm not gonna profess my love for her just like that, 'cause I wanna wait 'til I'm sure that she reciprocates, but I know it won't be long. In fact, I'm pretty sure we're on the same page already. The last couple of days have proved that. We're simply compatible.

"I missed you, too," I murmur truthfully, dipping down to kiss her. In the background, I hear our friends taking care of introductions without us, and that's very fine by me. "You look beautiful," I whisper into the kiss. "And you smell amazing."

"So do you," she sighs softly. "Mmm, and I love a man in a suit."

I chuckle quietly. "Good thing I wear them often then, eh?"

"All right, are you two done?" Emmett asks, totally interrupting.

With a rueful smile, I give Bella one more kiss before facing the others. "I guess we are." Being the polite fucker that I am, I greet Rose and Alice and, of course, include a warning. "Those two," I point at Emmett and Jasper, "are up to no good. Consider yourselves warned, ladies." And then I look down at Bella. "Now you can't get mad at me if something happens and goes wrong, all right?"

Bella is very amused for some reason. "Don't worry, baby. I won't be mad."

Good. That's outta the way. My back is clear.

"Cool. Let's get this shit over with," I say, tugging on Bella's hand. I have thirty dates to survive, only one of which I'm actually looking forward to.

As we all head inside the hotel, I hear Alice and Jasper already making conversation behind me. "Well, I'm *very* glad to know that you're not really gay," Alice says, and I swear we all come to a screeching halt.

Shit.

Bella and I spin around fast enough to see Jasper choking on air.

"Alice," Bella hisses.

I purse my lips together, struggling so fucking hard to contain my laughter.

"What?" Alice asks innocently.

And whaddya know, Bella's blushing like a school girl.

"Wh-why would I be...*g-gay*?" Jazz splutters.

I can't keep it in any longer. I start guffawing like a mad man.

"Dude!" Emmett complains. He hates being kept in the dark, and he obviously knows this is funny. "What the hell am I missing?"

"Bella, she-" I can't continue; the laughter just pours out of me. "She thought..."

Rose, who is only snickering a little, speaks up. "Bella and I thought you were gay at the photo shoot."

"But, but, but..." Jasper has a way with words, doesn't he? "But WHY?" he finally cries out.

"You kept talking about a man who'd kill you!" Bella defends. "Tell him, Edward," she begs me. "Tell him that I didn't mean to upset him."

"Aw, come on, baby," I wheeze out through laughs. "He's not upset."

I've quickly come to understand that Bella is a real sweetheart. She may be sexy and...don't even get me started on the freak she is between the sheets, but...when it comes to friends and acquaintances, she's extremely nice and sweet. People love her, and she loves them in return.

"You thought I was talking about a boyfriend?" Jasper asks incredulously. I know that he's not angry or anything. His ego is a bit wounded, mostly because Alice, who he's obviously attracted to, was the one to point the whole thing out. And then to find out that all three girls thought he was gay...

Ah, here comes another round of guffaws. Emmett's with me now.

"Of course!" Bella exclaims. "You were mumbling under your breath the entire time about a man who'd kill you for putting your hands on my thighs, and-"

"WHOA!" I cough-choke-shout.

He had his filthy paws on my girlfriend's *thighs*?

"Well, we don't need an ice breaker," Rose says wryly.

I ignore her. "How fucking intimate was that goddamn photo shoot?" I ask, pulling Bella impossibly closer to me as I glare at Jazz, the ass. Hey, that rhymed. Not the time, Cullen. Right. "You *touched* her?"

"DUDE!" Jazz groans, exasperated. "Pick your fucking battle, Cullen. It was a photo shoot! *Work*! It's not like I groped her!"

I huff. "Might as well have," I grumble.

Emmett's laughing. Hard. "This...this...aaaahhhahaa...priceless!"

"Don't pout, sweetie," Bella says softly, placing a hand on my chest. "Like he said, it was just work."

Yeah, and now I'm gonna have to see those photos on billboards all over Manhattan.

Yay me.

"How old are you, Edward?" Jasper huffs and rolls his eyes. "At least no one mistook you for being gay."

Thanks, Jasper. You made me smile again. "That's fucking hilarious," I chuckle, looking over Bella's shoulder where he's all but stomping his foot in petulance. "And hey, it could happen to anyone, really. I mean, I thought Rose was gay."

Yeah, that wasn't supposed to come out.

"You thought *what*?" Rose screeches.

It's around this time I notice that we are far from alone in the hotel lobby.

"Oh, dear," Alice mutters.

"You thought she was gay?" Bella laughs, looking up at me. I shrug sheepishly and tell her about the time I ran into Rose in my building. Not my fucking fault. Rose only mentioned an ex, not an *ex-husband*, and... she was in my building for Tanya – a proud pussy eater. Hell, it wasn't until last night I learned the truth about Rosalie King, soon to be Rosalie Hale. Bella told me all about it, literally gossiping, and I played the part of a good fucking boyfriend and listened to that soap opera story. 'Cause... damn, Rose's marriage is full of drama.

"Well, this was fun." Emmett grins widely. "And I'm sure it's not over, but..." He nods at the hotel restaurant. "We're running late now, so shall we?"

Awesome. Thirty dates, here I come.

Fucking research.



17.

On my right side, I have Rose. Alice is on the other, and we remain seated, which means that it's the men who take care of the rotating. Two minutes each. It's pathetic.

"Hey, I'm Nick. I go first, okay? I work in real estate, I drive a BMW, I love the Knicks..."

"Sup? I'm Paulie. Thirty-four years old and...I know, I know...I look like I'm twenty..."

"Hi, short stuff. You're looking so fine..."

"Hello, my name is Brian Wallace. I need a woman who doesn't nag..."

I take a sip from my wine as the men switch, and to my left, I see that Emmett's the next one with Alice. Jasper will come after, and then Edward. I manage to hold in the sneer at the bitch who is currently eye-fucking my man. This was my idea, after all.

"Hi," says the man sitting down across from me. "I'm Scott."

"Bella." I smile politely. "Nice to meet you."

"You, too," he responds, eyes on my cleavage. "Want me to go first?"

I stifle a yawn and an eye-roll. "Sure."

Scott launches. He talks about his car, his money, his mother, and his daughter, who is in need of a new mommy. All while he's talking, he stares at my tits, so I sorta zone out a little and start thinking about how I'm going to seduce Edward tonight. He's been such a gentleman while I've been sick, not to mention sweet and helpful, so I definitely wanna show my gratitude.

"Time's up!" the lady in charge shouts out after the allotted two minutes are up. I haven't said a word so far. Well, not more than my name and a polite greeting.

"Good luck," Alice mutters into her glass, only for me to hear. "Your next one takes the prize."

And so the man who just spent two minutes with Alice moves over to me.

Oy. Ever heard of *Jersey Shore*? Yeah, 'nuff said.

"Hi there, honey." He winks. "I'm Vinnie. Thirty years old, no debt, owner of Vin's Hair Gel – I'm sure you've heard of it," another wink, "I drive a Mercedes, and I can give you a great discount on hair products..."

I tune out.

It's official. Women aren't the only ones getting desperate for someone to come home to, and it appears that speed-dating is the last stop before you allow your mother to set you up with a second cousin or something.

My idea to come here was *stupid*.

"Time's up!"

"Oh, thank God," I whisper under my breath. Turning to my right, I lean in to warn Rose. "Here comes hair gel for ya."

She grimaces into her wine before chugging down what's left in the glass.

I, on the other hand, feel a smile tug in the corner of my lips as Emmett slides in across from me.

The little smile is soon a wide one.

"Emmett McCarty," he says, grinning widely as he sticks out his hand for me to shake.

Oh, I play along for sure. "Bella Swan," I chuckle. "Very nice to meet you."

"Fuckin' ditto, girl. Now, tell me about yourself."

I shake my head in amusement, but then it hits me. This is where we all go wrong. It doesn't matter what kind of dating technique we use – we still try to sell ourselves. Only, we talk about our strengths. We bury the bad and hope it won't come up, though it obviously will at some point. Especially if we move further with the new partner. For instance, Edward will find out about my addictions – my love for buying vintage records and expensive shoes. He will learn that I go apeshit on anyone who eats from the Nutella jar in my fridge. He will also learn that I can't stand toothpaste in the sink or having to look for my remote control between the couch cushions – the remote belongs on the coffee table, people, or else...

Edward will know this and more soon.

So, why hide it?

Maybe we're not supposed to stand on a rooftop and shout out the bad traits and dislikes, but we definitely shouldn't hide them, either. That's bad advertising. Which reminds me... "Hey, you work with Edward, right? In advertising?"

He frowns momentarily, confused, but nods. "That's right. We're both graphic designers at Volturi Advertising."

I hum, thinking. "And when you're going to create an ad for a product, how important is the truth?"

Leaning forward, resting his forearms on the table, he asks, "Are you looking for a new career, missy?" He chuckles.

I laugh softly and take a sip from my wine before answering. "No, I'm drawing parallels between dating and advertising. It's all about getting the product out there, right?"

He smirks. "Ah, I see. Well, that depends on what we're selling."

"Does it?" I tilt my head, curious.

"Absolutely." He nods firmly. "We can only decide so much, after all. The decision lies in the client's hand." Of course. "The difference comes with said client. If their product is cheap, it's more than likely that there's more to hide or not mention, so to speak, in the ad. And then it's also about what people value. For example, the consumer doesn't *really* care if we use the catch phrase 'you'll see stars' when we're talking about cereal. If we're selling a car, however, people take the words much more seriously."

Hmm. "That could be said about relationships, too. Like, if we're only after a one-nighter, it doesn't really matter what we say, because it'll all be over by tomorrow morning-"

"Unless you're Edward and Bella." He winks.

I fucking giggle. "Touché."

"Nah, but I see what you mean." He smiles. "And then when it's about a serious relationship, we want to know more about the...*product* – the other person."

Exactly! "Only, we don't sell ourselves with truths," I note. "We still go with the catch phrases – lines – that will land us a quickie. We go with looks, money, success. But you need much more than that in a serious relationship. You need to know the quirks, the bad habits..." I trail off, having already made my point.

"Because it's the bad habits that usually end a relationship?" he guesses.

"Well..." I ponder. "Maybe not *end* relationships, but they cause fights and beginnings of drifts, perhaps. Just a theory."

"Time's up!"

Well, damn.

Emmett grins. "We sure covered a lot on our date, Ms. Swan."

"We did. Thank you for a nice time."

"Thank *you*," he says, standing up. "Let's talk more advertising later."

I chuckle, and he sends me a final grin before sliding over to Rose, which means I get Jasper now.

While Jasper moves from Alice to me, Edward and I exchange smiles as he scoots over to Alice. He's my next one, and I'm damn giddy about it. God, how I love that man.

"Hello, Miss Bella," Jasper says in his southern accent. Lazy smirk in place.

I guess his embarrassment from before is gone. I swear, I'm gonna kill Alice for blurting out that she's glad Jasper's not gay.

"Mr. Jasper," I drawl, mimicking him. He chuckles and sips on his beer. I grin cheekily. "Did you have a nice date with Alice?"

He glares at me playfully. "Damn, darlin'. You thought I was *gay*?" he hisses quietly. "Not only that, but you went and told your friends about it, too!"

"I'm sorry!" I whimper-whisper-plead. "But in my defense, you were talking about a guy, and, and, and it's just one friend! *Alice*," I remind him. "I only told Alice. Rose was at the shoot, too, remember?"

"And you both thought I was gay," he grumbles.

"But you're not." I wink slyly. "Which Alice is happy about."

He huffs, but I can totally see him loosening up.

"Oooh, Alice and Jasper, sitting in a tree," I sing teasingly.

"How old are you, darlin'?" he chuckles incredulously.

"Five," I deadpan.

He smirks. "So, Edward's a perv, then."

"He sure is," I say seriously, and Jasper cracks up.

"Ah," he sighs lightly. "I can't be mad at you, Miss Bella. You've got some spunk."

I decide to fuck with him. "Well, I do when Edward-"

"I get it!" he chokes out, and it's my turn to crack up. "Jesus," he coughs before leaning over to where Edward sits with Alice. "Hey, man. Your girl is a freak."

I grin proudly when Edward looks over at us. He returns my grin with a grin of his own before responding to his buddy. "She sure is," he says seriously.

Jasper groans and chugs more beer.

I blow Edward a kiss, and he shoots me a wink, not looking like Vinnie Hair Gel at all. Neither did Emmett before. Some can just pull off winking, and some cannot.

"Time's up!"

I smile sweetly at Jasper. "Thank you for the date, Mr. Whitlock."

And he shakes his head at me, but he can't hide the smile trying to break free. "Oh, Bella, Bella, Bella. You're one of a kind, aren't ya?"

"I try."

He moves over to Rose, and...

My Edward takes the spot Jasper just vacated.

I know just what to say.



17.

If I hadn't been in love with Ms. Isabella Swan, I would kill her for this. Okay, okay, it was my suggestion to join her and her friends, but shit. This is purgatory. No, wait. This is the pit of desperation. I swear, the women I've been *blessed* to converse with here in lovely Jersey...*Jesus*. Many are divorced, many have children, and they are willing to go home with just about anybody at this point. And the thing is that they're not looking for a quick fuck. No, they're devastatingly desperate for a companion. It's fucking sad.

It's hard to feel bad for them when they tell me they don't have a gag reflex, though, 'cause first of all, neither does my beautiful girlfriend, and...*deep breath*...second of all, it's pretty pathetic to sell yourself this way.

One woman promised that her kids would never be in the way. Another told me that she was willing to take care of my bills if I just gave her a chance. Then, of course, there were those women who just sat there, having given up completely already.

Fun times.

"Time's up!" the lady shouts.

I give the woman across from me a polite nod, and then I slide over to the seat Jasper just vacated. It so happens that my next date is Alice and, for some reason, I breathe out in relief. Bella's next, and then Rose, and then just a few more...before I'm so outta Jersey! No offense.

"Having a lovely time?" Alice asks with a grin.

I chug some beer before responding. "Absolutely, I'm having a fucking blast, but perhaps I should tell you that I'm a pathological liar, so don't believe a word I say."

She laughs and leans over the table a little. "You're not the only one. The men here..." She shakes her head. "What is it about you guys feeling the need to let us know what car you drive?"

I chuckle. "*I* don't have that need, so I can't really answer."

"Hmm." She leans back in her seat again. "What *would* you talk about on a first date, then?"

I ponder that for a moment, and I need the time because I haven't dated in so long. When I was in college, dating didn't come with pressure. There was no rush, no hurry. You talked about classes, music, hobbies...maybe what you wanted to do with your life. So, the dating was harmless. It was the relationship that made me swear off women who wanted more than casual. I had a few one-nighters over the next several years, and a couple flings that lasted a month or so, and then...and then I met Bella.

"I can't really answer," I repeat pensively. "I only dated a little in college, and I sure as hell didn't talk about what car I was driving."

She tilts her head. "Are you gonna take my girl out?"

Ooh, and out comes the proverbial claws. Alice wants to know that I have the best intentions with her best friend.

"You have nothing to worry about, Alice." I give her a small smirk. "I plan on sticking around, you know, and that entails dating." *And more.*

Alice narrows her eyes at me. "Could you be more specific?"

"I could," I chuckle. "But I won't. Don't you think Bella should be the first to know how serious I am about her?"

"Hmph."

I smile.

And that's when Jasper leans over. "Jesus," he coughs. "Hey, man. Your girl is a *freak*."

I arch a brow and look over at Bella, who is smiling so proudly, meaning she's been a bad fucking girl. Of course, I approve of her being a bad girl, so I can only grin.

"She sure is," I reply seriously.

Jasper groans and returns to his "date" – my Bella.

When my eyes find Alice again, I see that she's watching Jasper in the same way Bella looked at me before deeper feelings got involved, so I decide that *payback* is in order.

"And what are *your* intentions, Ms. Brandon?" I ask amusingly, grinning cheekily. "Got your eye on my buddy, *dooo ya*?"

She ducks her head, flushing, and I can't help but laugh.

"Oh, screw you, Cullen."

I laugh harder.

"Time's up!"

Finally. "Thank you for a lovely time, Alice." I smile crookedly.

She sighs heavily, but there's a smile playing on her lips, so I doubt she's really mad. In fact, I think she approves of me for Bella.

Taking my beer with me, I slide on over to the seat across from my girlfriend.

"Hey, beautiful."

She smiles and reaches over to grab my hand on the table. "Hi. Ready for our first date?"

"Give me your worst." I grin and squeeze her hand. I also notice that we're leaning toward each other in a way that no one else has.

"That's actually what I intend to do," she replies, keeping her voice low. "I want you to know the bad stuff."

I chuckle. "Trying to scare me away, baby?"

It won't work.

She shakes her head, offering a small smile. "The opposite." She takes a breath, and I swallow hard. The tension has shifted, and things don't feel light and easy anymore. With anyone else, I'd be running by now. Not with Bella, though. "I can't stand toothpaste in the sink," she starts by saying, and my eyebrows shoot up. "I actually don't care about the toilet seat, but toothpaste..." She shudders. "Oh, and don't touch my Nutella. It's mine." I see what she's doing now, and I can feel the corners of my

mouth curling up. "I'm not a morning person, I love buying expensive shoes... I collect vintage records, but don't ask to listen to them, 'cause I don't play them. They remain sealed in their original plastic covers, and this is non-negotiable." I smile softly and squeeze her hand again. "I can't cook *extremely* well, but I can, however, make mean desserts. I hate vacuuming, but I don't mind doing laundry or the dishes." She pauses and takes a sip of her wine. Then she looks at me again, smiling. "And, Edward? I know that you rush through your apartment before I come over. I know that you make an effort to hide your usual...*bachelor ways*... so to speak, before I get there." She grins. "I also know that you have a gazillion video games stashed inside your entertainment unit. And I've seen all the game shirts in your closet. Last but not least, I know that you're lazy when it comes to cleaning. Out of sight, out of mind, right?" I snicker and shake my head in amusement. She's so right. "I bet you sweep shit under the rug at times."

I laugh through my nose. "I don't have a rug."

"You know what I mean."

I do. "Yeah. And you're pretty spot-on."

She nods once. "Anything you wanna add?"

Yes, there is. "I can deal with vacuuming, but doing the laundry makes me wanna hurl."

She knows what I mean, and her tender smile is proof of it. "I'll take care of the laundry."

"I won't go near your Nutella," I promise, leaning closer to her. "And you won't take Heineken from me. Or Cheetos."

"I promise."

Meeting in the middle, I capture her mouth with mine.

We're on the same page.

And I guess I need to start checking the sink after I've brushed my teeth.

"The remote only belongs on the coffee table," she mumbles against my lips.

I smile into the kiss. "Definitely. And I'll give you a key to my place."

It won't be long until we're ready for the next step, but until the day we move in together, I want her coming and going as she pleases.

"I'll give you one to mine." With a few soft pecks, we break away. Damn, we're both wearing cheesy grins. "But I still need girls' night."

Internal fist-pump! "And I need guys' night, baby."

"Time's up!"

I bring her hand to my mouth and brush my lips over her knuckles. "I want the words as soon as this is over," I tell her quietly, imploringly, softly, hopefully.

She blushes, but the gorgeous smile is still there. "You'll have them."

Sweet baby Jesus, there's some seriously sappy shit going on inside of me.

"So will you," I return.

This time, her smile is rather shy, but I'll take it. It just means that we're serious about each other without taking anything for granted.

Since there's a fuckwit waiting for a date with Bella, I reluctantly let her go and scoot over to Rose's table.

"You look like you just got laid," she says with a wry smile.

I smirk, debating whether to say "I got something better than that" or "Not yet", but in the end, I just say, "Hello to you, too, Rose."

She laughs quietly. "All right, I can take a hint. Bella will tell me everything later, anyway."

"I'm shocked," I deadpan. "Are you saying that women *gossip*? Oh, the horror."

She grins. "You're funny."

"I know, right?"

"But not smart. Seriously, you thought I was a lesbian?"

Oh, fuck me. "Uh..." I rub the back of my neck, trying to come up with something clever, but Rose surprises me by laughing. "What's so funny?"

"You!" Yeah, we covered that, but... "Aw, look at you. All squirmy and nervous."

I scowl. "I'm not *nervous*." Pre-fucking-posterous. "You're weird."

"Yeah, yeah," she chuckles, waving me off. "I have shit to say, so let's get serious." Well, I handled Alice just fine, so go ahead. "Bella told me that you'll be her plus-one next Saturday?"

I grin. "Oh, yes." Lingerie party. Wouldn't miss it for the *world*. "I will definitely be there."

She smirks. "Stupid question. Anyway..." She sighs. "This morning, I received the RSVP from a certain celebrity, and I'm gonna need you to make sure Bella doesn't see him."

Say *what*?

I frown. "That's the serious business? And wait, what fucking celebrity?"

"I can't say his name," she whispers behind her hand. "*She* will hear it." She jerks her chin in Bella's direction, and my brows knit together. "I swear that she has some built-in radar when it comes to that guy."

Weird. I suddenly have this strong urge to piss on Bella's leg.

"Tell me later," I grit out quietly. And yeah, I will keep her away from this douchefuck who is trying to steal my girlfriend. How *dare* he?

Christ, chill out, Cullen.

Working on it.

Come on. How serious can a celebrity crush be?

True.

"We'll talk later," Rose promises with a firm nod.

"Time's up!"

I sigh.

Three more dates...

What. A fucking. Drag.

~oOo~

"Never again!" Emmett cries out as we leave the hotel.

A few women from the "event" pass us at the same time, shooting glares at my buddy.

I snicker. "Wow, you sure made them feel wanted." He shrugs and starts flagging down a cab, and I pull Bella to the side for some privacy. Her smile tells me that she knows what I want. "I've waited long enough, baby," I murmur, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear. "Give me the words."

She chuckles softly, looking up at me. "Ladies first, huh?"

"I can go first," I offer quickly, brushing my lips against her cheek. "I have no problem with that."

"It's okay," she whispers. I tilt my head, resting my forehead against hers. She smiles, and this is easy. I thought it was gonna be hard and uncomfortable. "I love you."

But it's *not* hard and uncomfortable.

It just fucking fits. *We* fit.

I breathe out, letting her words sink in.

I kinda wish I was better with words, because I believe she deserves the best. Though, I doubt Bella minds when I finally reply. 'Cause it's not about poems and mushy crap like that.

You just gotta say it, mean it, show it.

"I love you, too, beautiful."

Her breathing hitches.

I love her so much that I don't mind going through speed-dating in New Jersey for her.

That's something.

"Say it again?"

I smile and ghost my lips over hers. "I love you. I love you so much, Bella."

"*God*, that feels so good." I couldn't agree more. She has me by the fucking balls, and I'm not even complaining. Shit. "Your place or mine?"

"Yours. My sister's still at my place."

She giggles at that, and I kiss her nose for some reason. "Fuck, Cullen, you've turned me into a giggler."

"I'd say I'm sorry, but I'm not." I smile down at her, brushing my thumb across her bottom lip. "Now, let's say goodbye to the others before we go."



18.

Hands on the wall. "More to the left," I pant.

"*Jesus*, baby." He grabs my hips, slamming in harder from behind, and I cry out loudly as he hits *that* spot. "There?"

"Yes!"

"So...fucking...hot," he groans, emphasizing each word with a thrust. The hot water cascades down, and steam billows around us. It's our first time in my shower. "Shit, gimme the words again, Bella."

I smile and drop my chin to my chest. "I love you." He moans and grinds his cock deeper, making me clench down on him. "Fuck!" I gasp. "Edward, I...I..."

"Yes," he snarls in my ear. "Again, sweetheart."

I moan and throw my head back. "I love you...*God*, I love you, Edward."

"Dammit," he breathes out. Snaking one arm around me, he reaches up to cup one of my tits in his hand. He kneads and plays like the expert he is, never ceasing his deep thrusts into my pussy. "I love you, too," he whispers shallowly. I shiver and whimper. "Touch yourself for me. Touch that clit of yours."

"Oh, God." I obey, keeping one hand on the wall as I start rubbing my clit with the other. My thighs start trembling. My body flushes. The water washes away any perspiration from our fucking. "Baby," I mewl, pushing against him. "More, *fuck*..."

Panting into the crook of my neck, he speeds up and fucks me faster and harder. More grinding, greedier touching. He pinches my nipple, causing a drawn-out moan to leave me. He curses and latches onto my neck, sucking hard on my skin.

I feel the heat spreading through me.

My breathing stutters.

His hand slides down my body, not stopping until it joins my own hand.

I moan loudly as he takes over, and in turn, I reach down and cup his balls.

"Motherfuck," he grits out, and I give him a little tug. "Ahhh, close, close, close."

My knees nearly buckle as he takes my clit between two fingers and rubs me harder, and when he swivels his hips, I stop breathing. I clamp down on him so hard. He moans. I cry out. He pounds into me and groans. I meet every thrust with a push of my own and feel how his hard, wet cock slides in and out. Then we're coming and coming. Pleasure courses through me, and I go rigid. Shivers upon shivers rip through us both. Pulsing, still coming, not breathing, fingers digging into skin and flesh.

"Fuck," I choke out, grabbing a hold of the towel bar next to me.

Panting.

Panting.

Panting.

"God, Bella," he breathes out. "Are you okay?"

No. I need to lie down, 'cause I'm not sure my legs will work much longer.

"I think I'm done showering," I manage to say through my harsh breaths. He chuckles breathlessly and pulls out from me. Softly, he rubs my hips and kisses my shoulder. He whispers that he loves me, and if I died now, I would go with a smile on my face. "I love you, too," I return quietly as he spins me around. Cupping my cheeks, he kisses me tenderly, making me all mushy inside. "Don't fucking make me cry, Cullen," I warn weakly.

"Woman, I'm having a sappy moment here. Fucking let me," he huffs, stilling pecking me softly and sweetly. I squeeze my eyes shut, 'cause I

was serious about the damn crying. He's just too sweet. "Fuck, you're cute, love."

My eyes flash open – I watch him through a blurry vision – and I'm so ridiculously in love with this man, it's insane.

"You've called me that before," I admit softly, thickly. He frowns in what looks like both concern and confusion. "A few times. During sex. I doubt you've been aware." I smile and wipe away some soaked hair from his forehead, and then I reach over to shut off the water. It's really time to get out, 'cause my legs are still trembling.

"Uh, no. Can't say that I've been aware of that," he chuckles nervously. I tilt my head, curious about his reaction. "Has that, um, upset you?"

"Jesus, no!" I give him an incredulous look. "Why would that ever upset me, sweetie?"

His eyes soften. "I don't know. Maybe it was too soon at the time?" He shrugs. "Doesn't matter. But as long as we're on the subject, you've called me sweetie before, too."

Shit. "I have?" I croak, and then clear my throat. "When?"

"When you called me and asked if I could read that ridiculous romance novel." The left corner of his mouth turns up. "You called me sweetie then."

"Oh," I breathe out.

He nods slowly and pulls me closer. "I liked it back then, just as I do now. Love it, even," he whispers against my temple. I shudder, and I can feel his lips curving into a smile. "But..." Backing away to face me better, he gives me some weird mixture between a sheepish smile and a smirk. "I'm already at risk of losing my man-card – what with you having me by the

balls and all – so I would love it if you didn't call me sweetie in front of my buddies."

I blink.

"Cause the name is sorta sweet and cute, ya know?" he explains in a rush. "The opposite of butch and manly. But like I said, I love it. Only, not when Emmett and Jazz are around?"

Um.

Yeah, I laugh.

I can't help it, but this man is just too fucking cute for words!

"Why are you *laughing*?" he asks, pulling away the shower curtain.

"Oh, my God!" I wheeze out. He hands me a towel before grabbing one for himself, and I still can't stop laughing! Seriously, what is it with men always needing to be "butch and manly" in front of other men? I don't get it! "Aahahaa, *Edward*," I whimper and giggle. "You're so adorable!"

Cue the scowl.

"*Adorable*?" He makes a sound of disgust. "Didn't we *just* cover this?" And at the same time, he wraps a towel around his hips, covering his cock. Pity. "Handsome, hot as fuck, sexy, attractive...but not *adorable*!"

I crack up even harder.

He shakes his head at me. "I'm so disappointed in you, *love*. Now, I'm gonna forget about this little *episode* of yours, and when you've calmed down, you can find me in your bed." He snorts and opens the door.

"Adorable, my ass," he mutters as he goes. "Women just don't fucking get it."

Good God!

~oOo~

It takes me about twenty minutes to calm down before I walk out of the bathroom. Teeth are brushed, face is washed, and once I reach my closet, which is located between my tiny office and bedroom, I pull on a pair of ruffled panties and a white beater. *Deep breaths. Do not laugh at the poor man.* With cautious steps, I pad into my bedroom, half expecting to find him asleep, but he's not. He's sitting up, leaning against the headboard, and reading one of the *Written Word* issues I keep on my nightstand.

Thing is, he's totally immersed in whatever he's reading, too, and if that isn't adorable, I don't know what is.

He's frowning, though, but after studying him a bit closer, I realize that he probably misses his reading glasses.

Walking over to the bed, I speak with seduction in my tone. "Hey there, Attractive Butch." He let out a little yelp in surprise. "Enjoying the lifestyle magazine for *women*?"

Like the magazine is on fire, he tosses it on the floor before looking up at me with wide eyes.

Oh, try to hold in the laughs now. I fucking dare you.

"I...I was just checkin'," he says innocently.

Unable to rein anything in, I collapse on the bed in a fit of giggles and laughs.



18.

"Half an hour sounds good," I say, opening the door to my apartment. I kinda hope Liz isn't here. "I'm just gonna grab a shower and something to eat."

I'm also going to pack a small bag of essentials that I can bring over to Bella's place later.

"Or we could eat at Jake's," Emmett suggests. "I've spent all morning and afternoon with my four sisters, who are all down visiting for the weekend. Mostly to bug the shit outta me, I think. By the way, finger food at some fancy fucking café can't possibly count as a meal, can it?"

I chuckle and cradle my phone between my shoulder and cheek as I loosen my tie and step out of my shoes. "No fucking way, man. That's like an appetizer or something. So...yeah, we can eat at Jake's."

"All right. You talked to Jazz?"

"Yeah, and my dad's coming, too."

Mom and Liz are going to some art exhibit, so I offered Dad an out, which he praised the Lord for. Actually, I think his exact words were, "Oh, thank fucking *God*."

Mom's vocabulary is totally rubbing off on Dad.

"No Bella tonight?" he asks as I start walking through my apartment. So far, no sign of Lizzie.

"She's going out with the girls to celebrate Rose's divorce," I tell him, shuddering a little at what I was subjected to before I left Bella's apartment. Rose and Alice had already showed up, and they didn't waste time before bringing out face masks and shit for manicures and pedicures. So much...*gook*. According to Bella, they were gonna go to a spa, but the place they usually went to was fully booked. I just nodded and pretended to care while ogling Bella in a satin robe. Tiny little thing, that one. The robe. Well, Bella, too. Anyway. I clear my throat. "I'm spending the night there, though," I add, flicking on the light in my bedroom. "I'm staying there until Lizzie's ready to move into her own place."

Which should be in about two weeks.

Emmett snickers. *"Dude, you have it so easy, and you don't even know it. You complain about one – that's singular, buddy – one little sister, and I'm stuck with four, all of them older and sure that they know what's best for me."*

I sigh and step into my closet. "So, who did you kill in your previous life? 'Cause to be forced to share a last name with Elizabeth Cullen means I were a dictator once. I may even have been Hitler, man."

"Shit, I think I was the rest of 'em."

I laugh. "You were all the dictators? You know, some of them lived at the same time."

"I pulled it off. I was that evil."

"Hello, dear brother."

"Fuck!" I jump ten feet into the air. Fine, maybe not, but shit! Looking out from my closet, I see my evil little sister standing in the doorway to my bedroom. *Jesus*. "God, you fucking scared me, witch." I sneer at her and address Emmett again. "Dude, the Antichrist just blessed me with her presence. See ya at Jake's, yeah?"

He just laughs and hangs up.

Liz is smiling like that sweet girl she isn't, all while drying her hair with a towel. I almost wanna yell at her for wearing one of my t-shirts, but I remember offering it to her, so keep my mouth shut. "Telling your friends how much you love me?"

I give her a bored stare and walk back into my closet. "Or something," I mutter. "By the way, I hope you're done in the bathroom." 'Cause I need a shower and I don't wanna trip all over her shit.

"You're such a fucking douche, Edward," she snaps, appearing next to me as I try to pick out a shirt. "Is this what New York's turned you into?"

I give her an incredulous look. "You're fucking with me, right? You go through my stuff and I'm the douche?" I snort and shake my head before grabbing a black Henley. "That's rich, sis."

After picking out a pair of jeans, boxers, socks, and a leather belt, I head out to my bedroom again.

Liz stomps after. Go figure. "First of all, I apologized. Second of all, since we're talking about what's rich and not, weren't you the master of invading my privacy when we were kids?"

She's pulling that card? Oh, that's mature. "Emphasis on *when we were kids*, Elizabeth."

"You read my fucking diary and showed it to Mom and Dad!"

Heh. Yeah, I may have done that once or twice. "I was just being the protective brother that I am."

She gives me a sarcastic smile. "You mean you did it out of love?"

I grin. "That's right. You *do* get it. Well done."

"Fuck you, you hypocrite."

I sigh again and head for the shower.

There's no way I'm admitting to overreacting.

But after my shower, and after I've shaved and gotten dressed, I do feel a little bad.

She's my sister, for chrissakes. We're supposed to annoy each other, and we're not supposed to hold grudges. So, once I'm all ready to go to Jake's – overnight bag packed, too – I walk into the living room where Liz is abusing my poor remote control with her violent zapping.

"Hey," I say quietly, sitting down next to her. She gives me a quick glare, pulling her – *my* – t-shirt over her knees, before returning to the screen. I see what she's doing, and I hate that it's working. By curling into a ball like that, with her chin resting on her knees, she looks tiny and fragile. A brother reacts to that *crap*. "Fuck, I'm sorry, okay?" I nudge her arm with my elbow. "Don't be mad at me, sis."

"Whatever," she mutters.

"Don't 'whatever' me," I argue softly, draping an arm around her. She's reluctant, but I manage to pull her closer. "You're right; you did apologize after your birthday dinner, and I overreacted and dragged it out. I'm sorry."

She sighs.

I nudge her again.

She huffs.

I kiss her temple.

That does it. A small smile appears, and I praise my own skills.

Edward Cullen for the win!

And the crowd goes insane.

Edward! Edward! Edward! You go, Edward!

"Edward, Edward, Edward," I whisper under my breath, cheering with the crowd. 'Til I notice that Liz is looking at me as if I have three heads. I clear my throat. "Are we cool?" I ask.

She rolls her eyes. "Yeah, we're cool," she mumbles. "But, you know..." Uh-oh. "You *could* make it up to me. By avoiding me and hating me and being mad at me, you hurt my feelings." She gives me the puppy-dog eyes.

"That's really laying it on thick, Lizzie."

And then her bottom lip starts trembling.

"Elizabeth," I whine. Her eyes well up, and I'm fucking done for. "Fine! What do you *want*?"

She beams brighter than the sun. "I want to meet your girlfriend."

I groan into my hands, pretty sure that I just got played. I fucking hate that a few certain women – read: Bella, Mom, Liz – have this power over me. Maybe I should check to see if my dick has been replaced by a huge vagina. Damn, that would suck. Bella would be so pissed.

"Why are you acting this way, Edward?" she asks seriously. "I just want to meet the woman you love. Is that so bad?"

My head snaps up. "How the fuck did you know that I *love* her?"

"Oh, please." She smiles. "It's written all over you." I huff, and she tilts her head. "And correct me if I'm wrong, but she loves you, too, doesn't she?"

I stare at her, saying nothing. One, I don't do gossip. Two, I'm not gonna correct her when she's right.

"Ooh, my brother's in love!" she gushes, and that's my cue to leave.

"I'll talk to Bella about introducing you two," I say gruffly as I stand up. "But I know she's busy next week." Something about writing pieces of advice for some text message subscription they're launching at *Written Word*. I don't really know, but it's going to keep Bella busy as hell next week. "*Maybe* next Sunday. No promises."

Liz squeals.

I grab my wallet and the bag I packed, and then I tell my annoying sister that I'm spending the night at Bella's place.

Liz squeals again.

I'm out the door.

Time for a beer with the guys...and Dad.



19.

After an afternoon of exfoliating, cleansing, and polishing, the girls and I leave my place and head down to Click – our usual hangout. We'll start with some of Demetri's drinks before moving onto a club, where Seth and Mike will meet us.

"What can I get ya, lovely ladies?" Dem asks once we're all seated in our booth.

"For starters, you can stop eye-fucking Bella," Rose drawls, which makes me laugh. "She's not single anymore, Demetri."

"She's not, huh?" Dem smirks slyly in my direction.

I grin cheekily. "Nope, she's not."

"Pity. So...drinks?"

"I'll have a *Bella*, please."

"I'll have a *Sex on the Beach*, please," Alice says. "I'm getting bored with my *Alice*."

I snicker.

"And I'll have a *Rose*." Rose smiles sweetly.

With a final smirk, Demetri nods and returns to the bar. I have a feeling he's gonna send one of his waitresses to our table in the future.

"So," Alice says, and all eyes are on me. "At your place, we covered my situation." We sure did. Jasper asked Alice out yesterday during their two-minute date, and they're gonna have dinner together next Sunday, which she's very excited about. "And since it's Rose's night, I figured we could save her for last, 'cause, let's face it, we're gonna party hard in your honor soon, honey." She winks at Rose, who just chuckles.

It's true, though. Alice and I are so happy that Rose is finally getting rid of Royce, and that definitely means we're gonna party.

"So, this leaves you now, sweetie," Alice finishes.

My smile is so fucking wide that it almost hurts. "We've said the words. He loves me."

"Finally!" Alice cries out.

"We already knew you two were in love, but I'm so happy that you've said it." Rose's smile is tender and beautiful. "He's perfect for you, hun."

I sigh all dreamily and stuff. "I know. He's both sweet and fierce, ya know?" Then I can't help but laugh, remembering how he pouted when I caught him with my *Written Word* magazine...or how he scowled about me calling him "sweetie". "But I gotta come up with a new pet name for him."

"What do you mean?" Rose asks as a waitress stops by with our drinks. I snicker, 'cause I fucking knew Dem wouldn't come over himself.

"Edward says that 'sweetie' is too girly, pretty much," I chuckle. "If I read him right, and I believe I did, he likes the term of endearment, but he asked if I could refrain from calling him that in front of Emmett and Jazz."

Alice sighs. "Oh, men."

"Just wait 'til he starts with the bragging." Rose snorts. "Though, I expect the bragging takes place with his buddies, not you."

True.

I take a sip from my drink, pondering. Tyler – my college boyfriend – was also very...manly, so to speak. There were things men just didn't do, at least not with other men around. Though, behind closed doors – or rather, when only I was there – was totally different. Before Tyler became the asshole who dumped me for my inability to bear children, he was really sweet. He doted upon me and showed his romantic side very often, but he was extremely different around his friends. Not that he ever was ashamed or anything...I think...but it was like an unspoken rule. Men just don't do "girly" stuff with other men. They brag, spit, grab their junk...and feel good about all that. *Weird boys*. And Edward's definitely the same, though he's already accepted the fact that I can't have biological children. He's sweet, loving, and tender. I'm his "beautiful". He's very affectionate. No one can beat him, in my opinion. Still, I remember when I met Emmett and Jazz for the first time. I can't say that Edward was *very* different from when it's just the two of us, but there was still something in his ways. He was a bit more teasing and playful. He acted like a typical guy. There was eyebrow-wagging, and when it was time to smell body lotions and face creams, he just *had* to make a sarcastic comment about how "gay" that was.

In the end, though, I realize that I kinda like it. Maybe that's weird of me, but I sorta like that there's a sweet side of Edward that only I'm privy to. As long as he isn't ashamed of being with me, which I know he definitely isn't, he can play one game with the boys and one game with me for all I care. I mean, it's not like he's hiding his true self or anything dramatic like that.

"Eh, I think it's how it's supposed to be," I finally decide. "But enough about me. It's Rose's night, and I wanna know how your date with Emmett was."

I remember the night she told me she wanted a bulky fucker. Sounds to me like Emmett fits the bill.

Right?

"Hmm, I don't know." Rose gives us a pensive look. "He's hot, but I'm not sure we'd be good together."

"Why not?" Alice asks.

Exactly. *Why not?* As far as I know – cold-spreading aside – Emmett's a good guy. He's funny, very attractive, and carefree. He's also one of Edward's best friends, and that says a lot to me, 'cause my man wouldn't spend time with a douche.

"I don't know, I just..." Rose gives a one-shouldered shrug, looking oddly vulnerable. That's so not a look I'm used to on her.

"Hey, what's wrong?" I ask softly.

She sighs heavily. "Does he have to have dimples? *Really?*"

Oh. I can't believe I forgot!

"That's your kryptonite!" Alice gasps.

"That means you really, really, really want him, doesn't it?" I tease.

Rose flips us both off, but it doesn't matter. Her face says it all.

She wants Emmett McCarty.

"As soon as the ink dries on the divorce papers, you're going after him," I say confidently, pulling out my phone. It's time for my second round of texting with Edward for the night. The first one was about Edward actually *asking* me if he could hang out with the guys tomorrow for the Giants game. Such a cutie.

Got a question for you. What did Emmett think of Rose? ~Bella.

"What are you doing, Bella?" Rose asks.

"Nothing," I reply innocently.

Alice, who's sitting next to me, sees my phone and diverts Rose's attention. I love Alice. "Hey, Rose, I've been meaning to ask... What's the plan next Saturday? Are we meeting up before the lingerie party?"

My phone buzzes as Rose responds. "I don't think that's possible. I will be there all day, and Bella will spend the hours before with the models getting ready. Plenty to do."

Please tell me you don't actually want me to ask him. You can ask him if you want. Want his number? – Edward.

Ugh. Men.

We don't do gossip, Bella. We're men. Blah, blah, blah, blaaaah.

Yeah, *right*.

"All right, so we'll just meet there," Alice says. "Bella, have you talked to Edward about it?"

I shake my head and subtly fire off the latest text before looking up.

Yes, please. Gimme :) ~Bella.

"We haven't gone over the details yet." I take a sip from my drink. "But he knows that I'm gonna be there early."

"And that includes Jasper?"

I grin at her. "Well, he *is* a model, so yeah."

"Good. You gotta ask him about me," she says both hurriedly and pleadingly. "I need to know what he likes and stuff."

I'm already shaking my head. "Don't start, Alice." I give her a stern look. "We've already talked about this. You need to be yourself on your date. If he doesn't like you for who you are, then fuck him. And I don't mean that literally."

She huffs but says nothing.

And our night continues.

It feels pretty darn good, this feeling I have, that Edward will be in my apartment already when I get there.

He has a key.

He will be there.

It almost makes me wonder...*when are we moving in together?*



19.

"Finally," Emmett sighs, rubbing his hands together as one Jake's waitresses serves our food.

Jazz's stomach growls.

"Sweet," I mutter, going for the barbecue sauce. Damn, Jake's burgers and fries are to die for. "Shit, I forgot." I look up at the waitress. "Can we have the weekend's game schedule?"

Three big games tomorrow. Even if it's early in the season.

"Sure thing," she chirps before walking away.

I check my watch, wondering where the hell Dad is.

"Jake's showing two of the games tomorrow," Jasper tells me, apparently able to read my fucking mind. I give him a look asking him to explain further, and he does. "The Patriots game," Emmett cheers at that, and I roll my eyes at him, "and the Giants game." Now *that's* what I'm talking about. The Giants are totally gonna beat the Eagles. And I fucking hope the Bills are gonna kick the Patriots' ass, 'cause that will piss off Emmett's Bostonian ass. I guess Jasper will catch the Cowboys game later, though.

"We're gonna meet up here tomorrow, right?" Em asks, taking a bite from his burger.

Jazz nods.

I hesitate.

What's the protocol? Do I ask Bella first? Shit. No, that can't be right. Can it?

"Ooh, Cullen, don't forget to ask the missus!" Emmett guffaws.

"Fuck you," I tell him, pulling out my cell phone. I might as well check in with her, you know? Just to make sure and all.

Any plans tomorrow? The Giants are playing, and we try to meet up at Jake's for big games. – Edward.

Thankfully, her response is instant.

No plans. And I already know they're playing. You have fun with the boys ;) Love you! ~Bella.

Huh. Well, that was easy. This woman is just so fucking mine.

First, how did you know they're playing? Second, love you, too. – Edward.

"I wonder if this is the end of guy's night," Em mutters, and I can't help but laugh at him.

"Why? Are you going somewhere?" I ask, smirking. My phone vibrates again, and I check Bella's reply.

I know sports are important to you, so I've pretty much marked off Sundays until the season's over ;) ~Bella.

She just *gets* me. But I'm afraid to tell her that it's not just football I'm following. There's soccer, too, especially Premier League and Champions League. As for hockey and baseball, I just keep track on the stats, and Emmett and Jazz are the same.

Then again, if Bella's seen my game shirts, she already knows what I like and don't like.

Fuck, I'm a lucky bastard.

Behind me, I hear Dad calling my name, so I wave him over before firing off a quick text to Bella.

Amazing woman. See you tonight, and please be safe. – Edward.

"Hey, Dad," I say as I pocket my phone. "Glad you could make it. Grab a beer and then we'll deal with introductions."

He chuckles and heads for the bar, and I dive into my burger, feeling fucking good about everything. Seriously, my life is damn perfect. With Bella, I can have it all. The girl, the future with kids and stuff, *and* my buddies.

"You look like you've won the lottery," Jasper draws.

That's because I fucking have. "Life is good." I shrug. "And, Emmett? Don't worry. Bella's nights with her girls are important to her. Once you get to know her properly, you'll find out that she's not one of the clingy ones." I smirk. "Guy's night ain't going nowhere, man."

"Oh, I definitely noticed that she's different," he responds with a chuckle. "I went on a date with her, remember?"

I laugh. "That's right. How did that go, anyway?" I look at them both, a bit curious about their reactions to Bella *and* her friends. "You asked Alice out, didn't you, Jazz?"

Bella may have told me.

"I did. We're going out on Sunday," he replies with a firm nod. "She's hot. We'll see where it goes." And he's done.

Emmett's next. "Alice was inquisitive. Bella was in research-mode and drawing parallels between dating and advertising." I chuckle at that,

unable to help myself. It's just so Bella. "And Rose was pretty quiet. Sexy as fuck, but quiet."

That's when Dad appears, so I refrain from asking Emmett if he's sure about Rose being quiet – something I find incomprehensible. Then again, I don't know her very well.

"Dad, these are my friends – Emmett and Jasper," I introduce as he slides in next to me. "And Emmett, Jazz – my dad, Carlisle."

"Nice to meet you, guys," Dad says, shaking hands with them over the table. "Hope you don't mind me crashing tonight."

"No way, man," Emmett replies, grinning. "We need all the support we can get now that your son is lovesick."

"*Dude.*" I shake my head at him. "Didn't you listen to what I just said? Things aren't going to change, all right?"

"I don't know about that," Jasper says thoughtfully, and I furrow my brows at him in question. "I'm just saying that relationships do have *some* effect on everything on the outside."

He's gotta be wrong. "Dad," I tilt my head to the right, "you've been with Mom since the wheel was invented-"

"You crack me up, son," he deadpans.

I grin. "I know. Anyway, you've been with her forever, but you still have your buddies, right?"

"Well, I don't *anymore*," he says with a pointed look. "We're moving here, remember?" How could I forget... "But I get your point, and you're both right and wrong." He pauses to chug down some beer, and I find it funny

that Emmett, Jazz, and I are paying attention to him as if this is the Superbowl. "Things *will* change. That's just how it is."

"Ha!" Emmett points a greasy finger at my face. "*Told* you."

I glare at him. "You don't know *shit*. Bella told me that girls' night and guys' night are still fucking vital. Just because we're together doesn't mean she's giving up her independence or whatever."

"Sounds like a good girl," Dad comments with a smile. I feel a little proud, but don't ask me why. It's not like *I* raised Bella. "And if that's how she feels, then I'm sure you two are a very good match. Still, though, things will change."

"*How?*" I ask, letting out a frustrated breath. I don't *want* things to change. I mean, I get that things will change when we get married and have kids...*later on*...but now? I don't want anything to change *now*.

Or for a very long while. Aside from Bella and me moving in together, that is. *That* will just be awesome, 'cause that means we'll see each other every day.

In fact, if we live together, wouldn't that make things easier? Since we'd see each other more often, we wouldn't need to plan that many dates to meet, so to speak, because if we live together, we'd end up in the same bed at the end of the day. There would be no commuting, no talks about where to spend the night, and no question about where to eat dinner after work. The answer would be simple: at the damn kitchen table.

Right?

After almost seven months of slowly getting to know Bella, I'm pretty damn sure she's it for me. So, why waste time? I just want things to be done. So I can relax. Kick back with a beer, maybe. Ya know?

"Boys, let me tell you something about women," Dad says, clearing his throat. I cock a brow at his infamous words, but I can't deny that I'm all ears. Judging by the looks on Emmett and Jasper, I'd say they're all ears, too. "First of all, women are skilled manipulators. It's in their DNA." He says this so matter-of-factly that I have to laugh. I mean, my old man is a fucking *doctor*. "Over time, you will notice that they can make you see logic in something you'd scoff at before."

Jasper gives him a skeptical look. "A woman can't change me, Mr. C."

Dad smirks. "No, but they *will* be able to fool you. And don't get me started on the guilt card. They can play that like no other."

"Oh, I can vouch for that," Emmett says, nodding seriously. "Sometimes my sisters' husbands call me just to complain. Like when Mary, my oldest sister, wanted to take the kids to Disney World, and Brent – her husband – wanted them to go to Mexico. She made the poor man feel like shit for not prioritizing the kids' love for Disney or some crap."

I snicker.

"That's nothing," Dad responds, grinning wryly. "Just last week, Esme made me sound like the worst husband ever because I was tired after dinner."

I find that hard to believe. "How did she do *that*?" I ask around my burger.

He chuckles. "Quite easily. I came home after a long shift at the hospital, and Esme had prepared a romantic dinner for us. Her intentions were pretty clear, if you know what I mean." I do, and I cringe while the other two laugh. "Anyway, I was all but dead on my feet, and I just wanted to take it easy in front of the TV."

"Mom went apeshit," I guess.

"To say the least." He nods. "And this is what I mean. Whereas I just told her that I'd had a very long day at the hospital, she countered with *each and every* thing *she* had done that day. 'And you don't think *I've* had a long day?' she asked me." Oh, I can see *that* happening. "She had dusted, cleaned, done laundry, talked to the woman who will take over for her at the foundation in Chicago, looked at houses online, bought groceries, cooked dinner, sorted my 'filthy fucking socks'," the guys and I laugh at his grimace, "*and* she had taken the time to make me my favorite dessert."

I suck in a breath and give Dad a sympathy-look. "Ah, man. I bet you felt horrible."

Still, you can't help it if you're tired.

"You can say that," he says dryly. "But *should* I have felt that bad? *That's* the question."

I frown, about to ask what he means by that, but Emmett beats me to it.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, what if I had told her each and every thing *I* had done?" Dad asks casually. "What if I had told her that I lost a patient that day, or that I was beeped nine times during my lunch hour, or that there was a huge accident which brought in twenty-seven kids with broken arms, legs, and concussions? What if I told her that two kids threw up all over me, and that the kids' parents screamed at me for not making their children better with a snap of my damn fingers?"

Hunh.

Shit.

Yeah, silence.

For a while.

Jasper's first to open his mouth. "Why *didn't* you tell her all that? Maybe your wife wouldn't go off on you if you did."

"Should I have to?" Dad shrugs. "It's not a competition of who does most, is it?" That's true. "Besides, if I did tell her that, she would just say something in the line of, 'Oh, so you're saying that what you do is more important?'" Also true. I know my mom. She's badass. "Women can turn anything into their favor, I'm telling you." He finishes by chugging down the rest of his beer before saying, "I need another beer." Then he's gone.

Emmett, Jazz, and I just stare at each other.

Bella wouldn't do that to me, would she?

Thankfully, I'm not a doctor, and I usually get off work at five, but there are still days when I have to work late, especially if it's a big account and the clients are on our asses for results. Holy fuck, is she gonna yell at me? I will die. I'm sure of it. I will get pissed, and then my cock will harden 'cause, let's face it, an angry Bella is a hot Bella, and then she will get even madder. She may even hit me. Oh, God. She will hit me, and I will be the abused graphic designer who fell for his fuck-buddy. Then she will laugh about it to her friends. They will all laugh. They will all laugh and hit me.

I will cry.

"See, this is why I don't do relationships," I hear Emmett mutter.

Jasper shakes his head. "I feel a little sick."

"At least you're both single," I counter, rubbing the back of my neck. "You can still run and hide. I'm already a lost cause. I fucking love that woman, and she will hit me and laugh with her friends."

They both give me strange looks. "What are you *talking* about?" Em asks.

"If I'm late," I say, frustrated. I mean, fuck, don't they *get* it? "They will all *hit* me."

"Um..."

"Uh..."

"Okay, I'm back." That would be Dad. "What're we talking about now?"

That Bella's going to hit me and laugh if I'm late for dinner.

Then, when it's time to have kids, she'll be all sweet at the adoption agency, and the people there will love her. They will give us fourteen kids just because they think Bella's gonna be the best mother ever. They will say, "No receipt, no returns!" at the agency. We will go home, and then Bella will still hit me. And laugh.

She's gonna make me do the *laundry*.

Oh, God.

When one of our fourteen kids leaves toothpaste in the sink, Bella's gonna blame it on me.

Damn you, kiddo. It wasn't me.

Another kid will take Nutella from her, and I will *die* for it.

Why did I have to fall in love with Bella Swan?

"I think your boy here is freaking out," Jasper giggles like a fucking girl, pointing his beer bottle in my direction. "You might wanna calm him down."

Fuck you, Jasper Whitlock. You're just terrible. Terrible!

Hopefully, Alice will hit him and laugh. If they make it past the first date, that is.

"Oh, he hasn't had his freak-out yet?" Dad asks them. They shake their heads, shrugging a little. My hands are all clammy. "Huh. How about that. Well," he turns to me, and I'm two seconds away from hyperventilating, "you have nothing to worry about, son." Yeah, right! He's not the one with an abusive girlfriend and future-mother-of-fourteen! "Remember earlier when you asked how things were going to change in the future?" I should nod, because I do remember. I think I nod. Did I just nod? "Excellent. And now that we've covered the bad, maybe I should tell you about the good parts."

There are good parts?

"Bella's not the only one who will change," he says calmly. "You will change, too, and..." He faces my buddies – my buddies who are still single with their balls intact. You, lucky bastards, you. "Do you two have significant others?"

Emmett scoffs. "Hell no!"

"Umm...not at the moment and maybe never," Jasper says nervously, squirming in his seat.

Dad chuckles quietly. "All right, so perhaps you won't believe me right now, but *you* will, Edward." He faces me again. And smirks. Fucker. "Or perhaps you won't just yet, but you will." We'll see. "As I said, you will change, too. Priorities will change. You may need two or three nights with your friends every week as it is now, but you won't feel that way in a couple of years." I wanna snort at that shit, but I'm busy breathing. Or gulping, whatever. "Whether you like it or not, and despite needs for independence and freedom, people will one day see you and Bella as one person. You will ask each other before making plans, and you will make

every decision together." He pauses, smiling fondly. "And you know what, son? It's not bad." Sure... "It's pretty damn amazing to come home to someone every night. Even if she happens to be mad every now and then." He chuckles at the end. "Couples fight. There's no escaping that, and when the good outweighs the bad, you don't *want* to escape."

"Well, no," I mumble. "I'd imagine escaping is pretty hard when the woman has you by the short and curlies."

Vise. Fucking. Grip.

Tugging is okay between the sheets, but tugging to the point of stretching...

I cringe and cup my boys.

"I can't wait to meet this girl of yours," Dad laughs softly. "Much like your mother owns me, Bella seems to own you, too."

I sigh heavily, slumping back in my seat a bit. It's true. I can talk about balls all day – ignore the way that sounded, by the way – but the fact is that Bella has my fucking heart, too.

"She's amazing," I admit, reaching for my beer. Now that I can breathe again, oxygen makes my brain function. That's good, and I'm pretty sure Bella won't hit me. And laugh. We'll work shit out together. The good and the bad.

I guess this is me realizing that I will go through anything with Bella.



20.

The key should go...*in*...right there.

I narrow my eyes, and...are there two keyholes in my door?

Absurdities!

"Definitely absur-rdi...tittie," I mumble, and I think the tip of my tongue pokes out...

Poking. Edward can poke me somewhere, fucking anywhere.

"This is a fuckin' conspiracy," I mutter, blowing a piece of hair away, away, away from my face. The key just won't get in, and I swear I can hear the door chuckling at me.

It sounds...sorta like my boyfriend.

"Open, you stupid door!" I shout. I'm, like, so damn pissed right now.

Maybe I drank too much tonight.

But we were celebrating Rose's divorce.

That's worth two keyholes.

"Sesame, open!" Isn't that how it goes? Those are the magic words, I'm pretty sure.

The door laughs at me again.

So not cool.

"Well," I huff. I huff again. "As Kelly Clarkson would say, 'What doesn't kill you makes you stronger!'" I sway my hips to the beat and start singing in earnest. "Stand a little taller! Footsteps even lighter!"

"Okay, Bella!"

WHOA!

I open my eyes. I, like, turn around.

"Edward!" I cry out, jumping into his laughing arms. Um, I mean...well, his arms are shaking, 'cause he's laughing. "The door wouldn't let me in!"

"God, baby, how drunk are you?" he whimpers through laughs as I cling to him. He closes the stupid door behind us, and then we're inside.

Still clinging, here. Arms around, and legs around. His waist and neck, I mean.

Wait. What?

I shake my head.

"I'm super sober," I slur. "Scout's promise."

He shakes his head at me, eyes shining with amusement, and then he does the cutest thing. He kisses me on the nose. Right there, soft lips on the tip of my nose.

"It's scout's *honor*, sweetheart," he chuckles.

"That's what I said," I retort, and he starts carrying me through my apartment, which reminds me... "We're at my place. How was it staying here when I wasn't here, me wants to know." I tilt my head an itty bit. Mmm, scruff. On. His. Jaw. "Can I lick?" He gives me an odd look and lowers me on my bed. "Your jaw, I mean. Can I lick it?"

Again, the man is so amused. Sitting back on his heels, down there, on the floor, between my legs, he starts unstrapping my four-inch black stilettos. "I hope you remember this tomorrow," he says. "And if you don't, you have a boyfriend who will remind you." He winks up at me.

I giggle and start humming Kelly Clarkson again.

At the last club we went to tonight, they played Kelly Clarkson's "Stronger", and it's *such* a woman song. A song for women. Gotta love it.

"Thank you for the stuff you left me, by the way," he mentions, smiling as he slips off the last shoe. "I expected to open your fridge and find water or something, so I was pretty stoked when I saw the six pack of Heineken."

"Did you see the note?" I ask. "And the Cheetos? And the DVDs on the coffee table?"

My Edward doesn't like chick flicks – from what he's told me – so I made sure to dig out my guy-friendly movies before I met up with the girls. That included *Blade*, *Braveheart*, *The Godfather* trilogy, *Gone in 60 Seconds*, and the third *Die Hard* movie.

"I did, baby," he says softly, caressing my cheek. I hum, 'cause he's just so lovely. But then I realize that my eyes are closed and it's pretty hard to open them again. In fact, it's impossible. "Time to get some sleep?"

"Mmm...yes, please," I mumble, swaying a little where I sit.

He chuckles again, 'cause apparently something's funny.

The next thing I know, Edward's naked body is next to mine. Okay, almost naked. Just boxers for him and a thong for me. And I'm in his arms, still humming the Kelly Clarkson song, I think. It sounds like it, anyway. Oh, and this shit is just so cuddly. Covers, soft pillows, perfect man, and *moi*.

"Love you," I yawn and snuggle closer. "Le's 'ave sexy time t'morrow 'stead."

I feel him drop a kiss on my forehead. "I love you, Bella," he says real quiet.

The last thing I hear, though there has to be something seriously wrong with my hearing, is something in the line of...*Balls and heart. I'll take the blame if the kid steals your Nutella.*

That just doesn't sound right.

~oOo~

When I wake up next morning, it's to the smell of something delicious... and to something stomping on my head. Or inside of it, maybe. Regardless, I groan at both the pain and the amazing smell. And, for the record, the amazing smell has nothing whatsoever to do with me. Fuck, did someone dump old food and milk in my mouth? Not kosher.

I grimace as I sluggishly make my way outta bed, only pausing to swallow down the two painkillers Edward's left me on my nightstand. Mmm, and orange juice, ice cold. Then, still with my eyes partly closed, I pad my way to the bathroom. A shower is in order, and then I'm totally gonna shove a tube of toothpaste down my throat, 'cause this shit is foul.

I bring my toothbrush with me in the shower.

Brusha', brusha', bruuusha'...

Reference: *Grease*.

I feel happy. Tired, but so happy. It makes me hum that song, the song I'm in love with. And for some reason, I feel the need to say, "No, it's not a Kelly Clarkson song..." I don't know why I felt that need, but...eh. Whatever, it's *that* song. The song that makes me think of Edward and our relationship. "Here Comes the Sun". Not with The Beatles, but with Colbie Caillat. Yes. That one.

Shampoo. Scent of apples and vanilla. Lather, lather, lather. I spit out some toothpaste, and then I take more of it. Then body wash.

"Here comes the sun..." I smile to myself and set the toothbrush aside. More body wash. 'Cause I wanna smell delicious. "Little darling, it's been a long, cold lonely winter..."

Hot, hot water.

And some conditioner.

Face wash. Makeup, be gone.

"Little darling, it seems like years since it's been here..." More smiling, and *God*, I'm such a lovesick fool. "Here comes the sun, du-du-du-du..."

Done.

I shut off the water, quickly wrapping a large towel around my body before the chill reaches me. As soon as the shower curtain's been pushed aside, I still shiver, but it's survivable.

Before leaving the bathroom, I swish some mouthwash while I brush out my hair, and then I walk out, heading straight for my closet. The gazillionth smile plays on my lips when I hear sounds coming from the kitchen. It's a wonderful feeling.

A pair of black cotton shorts and a simple white t-shirt, a bit on the snug side. No underwear today. My hair goes in a messy ponytail, and then I'm ready to see Edward.

When I reach the kitchen, I see him standing by the stove, wearing nothing but a pair of light blue sleep pants.

Ass dimples. Broad shoulders. His usual messy hair. Those muscles...

The dreamy, super girly sigh that escapes me is hardly on the quiet side, so I'm not all that surprised when Edward looks over his shoulder.

"Well, good morning, sleepyhead." Hmm, there's definitely amusement in his tone.

It makes me wonder if I've done something embarrassing.

I duck my head, walking over to him. "Good morning," I mumble, wrapping my arms around his waist. Damn, he smells good. All man.

"Mmm, what time is it?"

"Almost noon," he murmurs as I tilt my head up. He grins and drops a soft kiss on my lips. "You didn't come home until three in the morning, so I figured you needed some extra sleep."

What's with the mischief in his eyes?

"So...hungry?" he asks. "I made waffles."

I nod furiously, remembering just how awesome his waffles are.

"Definitely hungry."

"Okay," he chuckles. "Is it all right if we eat in the living room?"

"Of course." I don't have a kitchen table, anyway. I usually eat in front of the TV. The stools I have around the rather small kitchen island aren't all that comfortable. "That's where I usually eat."

So, a few moments later, we find ourselves on the living room couch. Two plates of waffles, whipped cream, raspberry jam, and coffee... Safe to say, I'm never letting this man go.

"How was guys' night yesterday?" I ask, moaning a little. He could be a chef, for God's sake. "Your dad was there, too, right?"

"Yeah." He nods, forking a piece of waffle. "It was good. Just good."

I smile teasingly. "An entire night of sports and being men, huh?"

"Yep." He looks down at his plate. "Just sports. Nothing else. We only talked about sports. Sports. Definitely. Yeah..."

Wow, is Edward Cullen a sucky liar, or *what*?

Setting down my plate on the table, I lean toward him. "Baby?"

"Mmhmm?"

I nuzzle his neck. "Are you hiding something from me?"

He scoffs. "No."

"Liar, liar...pants...on," the tip of my tongue flicks his earlobe, "fire."

I bet they gossiped. Men say they don't do gossip, but that's just bullshit.

"I'm trying to eat here, love."

I laugh against his skin and push him back a little. "What happened last night?"

No response.

With a huff, I take the plate from him, set it on the table, and then I push him back again and straddle his thighs. My grin is so wide, and he's refusing to look me in the eye.

"Edward?" I sing, kissing his jaw. He groans quietly, still trying to resist. "I want to know...what...happened."

"Nnnngh...nothing... Only sports talk..."

I giggle when he places his hands on my hips. "Did you gossip about women?"

"No!"

Pulling back, I catch his horrified expression, but...well, my dad is a cop. I can smell lies miles away.

I make sure to keep a smile on my face – I don't want him to think I'm serious – and I cock the bitch-brow. That has some weird effect on men. It always makes them squirm a little.

"Dad only shared some friendly advice!" he blurts out. "Now, quit looking at me like you're an interrogator."

I burst out laughing.

~oOo~

After breakfast, Edward puts in a movie while I get drinks and snacks.

A lazy afternoon is just what we want, especially since next week will be so busy. However, I know we only have a couple of hours, since he's meeting the guys again later for the Giants game. But that's okay. I can work a little, and then I'll see him tonight.

"Hey, did you ever text Emmett?" he asks as I set down Cokes and popcorn on the table. "I texted you his number."

I plop down next to him, smiling as he pulls the covers over us. "Yeah, but he didn't respond. Did he tell you?"

He shakes his head and reaches for the DVD remote. "No, I think you texted him after I left. We didn't stay out very late."

"Hmm, well, I asked him what he thought of Rose, so we'll see if he replies."

"I have a feeling he will," he says under his breath – which I hear – but I refrain from pushing for answers. He clears his throat and pushes play on the movie. "By the way, do you have any plans next Sunday?"

I look up at him curiously. "Not that I can think of. This week will be busy as hell, but I'm pretty free after that. Why?"

He takes a breath. "Um, my sister wants to meet you."

Oh, that can definitely be arranged. "Sounds fun. Do you wanna invite her over here, or should we be at your place?"

"Not here," he says quickly. "I don't want her to know about this place yet. She'll probably come over just to piss me off. Nasty little shit that she is."

Can't you just feel the love?

"Okay," I laugh quietly. "Your place it is. Dinner or drinks?"

He shrugs, looking a bit uncertain. "Is dinner okay?"

"Of course."

I make a mental note to pick up the ingredients to my special blueberry cake with lemon parfait.

~oOo~

As we already knew, next week is a blur. It's a good thing Edward and I spend our nights together, otherwise we wouldn't have time to see each other at all. I'm either at home writing or out doing research. And when Edward's not working, he's helping his family settle in. He tells me that his parents have finally found a house, which they're all happy about. No matter how luxurious it can get, living in a hotel doesn't beat having your own home. So, in a couple of weeks, Carlisle and Esme are moving to Brookhaven. They also have plans to buy a small apartment in the city since Carlisle will probably find work around here, but nothing's set in stone.

Edward also tells me that his parents want to meet me, so we agree to find a weekend as soon as they've moved into their new home. And speaking of parents, I tell my dad about Edward, and we decide that introductions are in order when Dad visits before Thanksgiving.

Before we know it, we're waking up on Saturday morning.

"What time do you have to leave?" he asks when we take our now regular seats on the couch in the living room. I hand him a cup of coffee, and he hands me a plate of scrambled eggs and bacon. What has also become a routine is him putting on the news.

"I have to be at the hotel in two hours," I answer, using my fingers to untangle my bed hair. There's no use in showering, 'cause Rose told me that we're going to a spa after we've gone through the schedule for the day. All the models are going. And yeah, it's gonna be fun to see Jasper and the other male models in a spa.

"We can share a cab, right?" I ask. The lingerie party is being held at Eventi Hotel in Chelsea, so it's close to where Edward lives. Both the rooftop veranda and the Ventana Ballroom have been booked for tonight's festivities.

"Yeah," he nods, "I gotta get ready soon, anyway. Liz and I are having lunch, and then I gotta go to that damn store and pick up the shirt for tonight."

Ungh. Edward's gonna be so hot tonight. Rose even convinced him to wear boxers from Lacy Piece's men's line. Aside from that, he'll wear a pair of stone-washed jeans – that I went out and bought for him on Wednesday – a grey button-down, which I found him online, and a skinny tie in black. He'll be delicious.

"I ordered it in your name, so there shouldn't be a problem," I say, bringing a forkful of eggs to my mouth. Chew, chew, chew, swallow. "Oh, and there's a small bag with accessories waiting for you, as well."

He gives me that look. The what-the-fuck-have-you-done look. Yeah, that one.

I give him a dismissive wave. "It's just a leather cuff, a belt, and pair of aviators, baby. And don't forget to roll up the sleeves on your shirt." 'Cause that's so sexy. "Last but not least, at some point tonight, I will make sure the photographers see the waistband of your boxers." It's all about Rose's lingerie tonight.

"What the hell have I gotten myself into?" he mutters.

I give him a cheeky smile. "You get to see me in sexy underwear. All better?"

He grins goofily. "Oh, yeah."

Such a man.

~oOo~

A little over two hours later, the cab stops outside of Edward's building to drop him off before I continue to Eventi.

"Six o'clock?" he murmurs, kissing me softly.

Yes. At six, a car will be here to pick up Edward, and then they'll pick me up a few blocks away from the hotel. That way, we will arrive together.

"Six o'clock," I confirm. "I love you."

He smiles and pecks me twice more. "Love you, too."



20.

I've showered, shaved, and put on some cologne. Boxers from Lacy Piece's men's line. Dark red waistband on 'em. New jeans: on.

"Mind your own business, Elizabeth!" I bark out.

I'd like to say that all the action I get in my bedroom is fucking amazing, but that would be a lie. 'Cause right now, I have Liz standing in the doorway to my bedroom, telling me that I'm a prick because I haven't

taken Bella on a proper date yet. At the same time, I'm getting dressed in my closet. I'm also talking to both Jazz and Rose through texts.

I'm in heaven! Half naked chicks everywhere! – Jazz.

I curse under my breath as I button my grey shirt.

Is Bella one of those half-naked chicks?

She better not be!

"Girls *hate* being taken for granted, Edward!" Liz shouts from the bedroom, and it's hard to tune her out. Even as I type a reply to Jasper. "I am just trying to help you!"

You're lying. I bet you think the spa earlier was heaven! – Edward.

I snicker and start rolling up the sleeves on my shirt, as per Bella's request.

"I don't need help, sis!" I yell back, sorta like an afterthought. It's true, though. I *don't* need help. I'm gonna date my girlfriend, don't fucking worry, but it's been a busy week.

My phone buzzes again, and this time it's from Rose.

Yes, a lot of action going on, yet none of it is pleasurable.

Z's limo is scheduled to arrive at six forty-seven. That's thirteen minutes after you and Bella. ~Rose.

Dammit.

Z.

Okay, at first I had laughed when Rose texted me the truth about Bella's celebrity crush.

I mean...*seriously*. Zac Efron. A *kid*. Which, for the fucking record, I told Rose. That he's a kid, that is, and she went all, "Actually, he's only a year younger than Bella or something." But *still*. Zac Efron? Is my girl *delusional*?

I sigh and reach for the goddamn accessories. Leather fuckin' cuff for my wrist. Belt. Sunglasses...even though we'll be indoors. I know. I *know*. It doesn't make sense to me either, but Bella told me that it was for the red carpet. Once we get inside, I've been ordered to keep them in my chest pocket.

"Okay," I sigh to myself. I check my watch, noticing that it's five forty-five. That means I have fifteen minutes to get my ass downstairs.

On my way out of the closet and the bedroom, I ignore my little sister.

Completely.

I grab my wallet, my phone, my keys, and the light blue box from Tiffany's.

Like I said, I don't need Lizzie's help. After our lunch today, she went to her new place to talk to the landlord about...something...and I went to Tiffany's to buy Bella a gift. No reason.

Dad advised me that gifts are usually extremely well received when there's no special occasion. He also admitted that later in life, when you've been with your partner for many, many years, impromptu gifts can have the opposite effect. For instance, when Dad gave Mom a pair of earrings a few months ago, she asked him what he'd done wrong. He hadn't done anything wrong, of course, but yeah...

Anyway, I bought Bella a bracelet in white gold. I plan on buying charms for it in the future.

I'm thinking it will get me laid a lot. Not that we don't have sex often as it is, but...I dunno...call it an insurance policy, if you will. Plus, I may enjoy making my girl smile.

"Are you spending the night at Bella's?" Liz asks as I put on my shoes.

Black boots. Doc Martens. They're Bella-approved. She wants me to go for a bad-boy look. Or whatever.

"No, I'll be here tonight," I tell her, reaching for my leather jacket. "I was thinking you and I could stay up all night and talk about our feelings and eat ice cream."

Her eyes light up. "*Really?*" she asks excitedly.

I laugh a little. "No, not really. I'm fucking with you. I'll be at Bella's."

I'm out of the apartment before a shoe – at least I guess that's what it is – hits the door.



21.

"Sweet Jesus, Mike!" I exclaim, backing away from him. "Stop touching my tits!"

Mike just smiles innocently, looking so out of place in this suite. There are scantily dressed models everywhere and Mike just looks weird in here.

Maybe it's because he looks like the new spokesperson for *Jelly Belly*. And by that, I don't mean that he's delicious. No, it's that he's wearing a rainbow. Damn dude is off the rocker. His pants are neon pink, his shirt is light blue with green polka dots, his shoes are orange, and his fedora is dark purple.

I thought a good fashion sense came with gayness.

Gotta love him, though.

"I can't help it!" he cries out defensively. "Seth doesn't have tatas, and those two," he points at my breasts, "are like yummy pillows. I just wanna squish them and fall asleep."

I huff, trying to hold in my amusement, and finish the job myself. Which is adjusting my emerald green push-up bra in satin. It's super sexy with straps made of black lace that also frame the cups. The boy shorts I'm wearing obviously match.

"Go bother one of the other models," I say with a dismissive wave. Like I said, there are models everywhere. Even in the hallway outside. "Hey, the male models are in the suite next to us," I add pointedly. "I'm sure someone in there needs help adjusting their boxers or something."

Then there's a makeup artist in my face.

Again.

And Mike holds up his camera, reminding me that he has a job to do in here. Perhaps he's reminding himself, too, since his hands were full of tits a few seconds ago and not his camera.

Rose hired him and two other photographers today to take behind-the-scenes shots – something she does at every event.

"I tried earlier," Mike says, clicking off shot after shot. "Jaspermasweetie didn't appreciate it."

I can't help but laugh, much to the makeup artist's chagrin.

"Sorry," I tell her, smiling sheepishly.

My lashes are, like, a mile long. Dark green eye shadow mixed with black and charcoal...you know, to get that smoky look.

A man with a clipboard and a headset walks in. "Group Green: hair! NOW!"

Shit, that's me.

The makeup artist steps away, and I put on my black satin robe before leaving the suite. All the models who are wearing green lingerie head to another suite, and the group of models wearing red walks into the suite we just vacated. It's now their turn to go through their routines again, as well as having makeup artists making sure everything is perfect.

Jasper and I smile as we pass each other in the hallway. He's also in Group Green, but he's a male model, meaning he won't get to watch us undress.

"Isabella Swan!" someone calls.

A stylist.

I walk over to him and he gestures at the chair, in which I take a seat.

While he starts creating that perfectly styled bed-hair look, a woman joins in and starts painting my nails glossy black.

"Listen up, everyone!" In the mirror, I can see another man holding a clipboard. They're all shouting. "As soon as you're done in here, please go

down the hall to get your shoes and trench coat!" With that said, he walks out again.

I just go with it.

~oOo~

The limo just picked me up. There's another dude in the car, too. His name is Sam. Love, who is he? – Edward.

I smile and keep walking.

There are several other models walking with me, and we all have dates that we need to meet up with a few blocks away. Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to arrive at Eventi together. We even had to leave through the garage, or the photographers outside the hotel would've seen us.

Edward and I have been teamed up with Leah – one of the models I worked with several weeks ago – and her date. Husband, actually. And that's Sam, which I explain to Edward in a text, and the four of us will go together...for about four blocks.

My phone buzzes again, and I chuckle as I read Jasper's text.

Are you far ahead? Just left the hotel to meet my date. – Jazz.

His plus one is Emmett, and since Rose and I mistakenly thought Jasper was gay, he's now scared shitless that others will think the same once he steps out of the limo with a dude.

Almost there. But Edward and I are arriving before you, so I'll just see you inside later. Don't forget to smile for the cameras! ;)

~Bella.

Then another text, this one from Rose.

**Alice and I are finally on our way. The limo line is freakishly long!
XO ~Rose.**

I can only imagine. Hell, almost everyone is arriving by limo, and this includes all the models. The red carpet is Rose's way of creating a runway for us, which is a pretty cool advertising trick. There will be a small runway in the ballroom as well, but that's saved for the surprise Rose has for the press later, and I'm a bit nervous about it.

"Here we are," Leah says as I type out a quick response to Rose.

**We're waiting for our limo right now. They're everywhere haha!
See you soon. XO ~Bella.**

It's true. There are limos circling the blocks everywhere.

"Which number did our car have?"

"Thirty," I answer, shivering a little from the cold. It's not *very* cold, but if you're only wearing lingerie and a trench coat...yeah. And it's gonna get worse once we arrive back at the hotel, 'cause when Edward and I reach the red carpet, I need to untie the already-thin coat. The photographers are meant to see the lingerie, after all.

"Over there!" Leah points ahead, and I follow her gaze until I see the car with our number on a piece of paper attached to the window. We say a quick "See ya later" to the others, all of whom are looking for their designated cars, and then we walk down the street toward our limo.

When we get to the car, the driver steps out and says, "Ms. Swan and Mrs. Uley?"

"That's us," I reply, and the driver walks around the car, removing the numbered sign as he goes, and then opens the door for us. "Thank you."

The man, who I assume is Sam, is sitting in the seat closest to the door, and we exchange polite smiles before I tilt my head to the right, and...

There he is.

Hot damn, he looks to die for.

Judging by his expression, he approves of me, too, and I haven't even removed my trench coat yet. That bodes well for me.

"Fuck me," he whispers under his breath, though I certainly caught every word. Pretty sure Sam and Leah did, too. "Jesus, you're hot, baby." I smile and take the hand he extends. With a gentle tug, he pulls me closer and I sit down next to him. "What're you wearing underneath?" he asks quietly, eyes on my knee-length black coat.

"Hi to you, too," I chuckle, leaning closer. "And I'm sure you can guess what I have underneath."

"Mother of..." He sighs and shakes his head a little. "It's going to be hard keeping my hands to myself, Bella."

I smile and kiss him on the cheek before whispering in his ear. "I could always help you relieve some tension."

I'm sure we can find a bathroom once we get inside the hotel.

We just gotta survive the red carpet first.

"I love you," he tells me. "I just had to say it."

Naw, my sweetie.

~oOo~

At six thirty-six – two minutes behind schedule, according the driver – we finally stop outside of Eventi after circling around for a bit. Sam and Leah exit first, and I can hear the hired announcer informing the photographers that Leah Uley has arrived. He goes on about who she is and what she's wearing, and I know that she's currently untying her trench coat...which I will do very soon, too.

"We're up," I say, shaking my nerves.

Edward smiles uncertainly and steps out of the car before me, only to offer me his hand so that I can follow.

Just as I step out, the announcer continues. I can't see the man, but he's loud and clear over the speakers, that's for sure. "And next we have Bella Swan, a writer for the popular lifestyle magazine *Written Word*." Holy shit, there are really photographers here! Time to put on a brave face. Not that I'm shy, but this is something else. "She is twenty-five years old and this is her first time as an LP model."

As decided, I untie my trench coat to expose the emerald green satin I'm wearing, and I ignore Edward's sharp intake of air.

Yes, baby. C-cups. Nothing you haven't seen before.

Behind me, I can hear the limo taking off, and another will soon take its place, so it's time to get a move on. With my coat hanging loosely on my shoulders – effectively exposing my entire front – Edward places his hand on the small of my back before we start walking slowly toward the entrance. Meanwhile, the man over the speakers tells the photographers what I'm wearing.

"This is fucking insane, Bella," Edward murmurs in my ear. "Are you like some celebrity?"

Hardly. In New York, there are plenty of women who'd know me if they heard my name, but that's only because they read *Written Word*. That's all.

"No, and... Smile for the cameras, baby," I say as I smile up at him.

Closer to the entrance to the hotel, I can see both Rose and Alice talking to reporters. I knew she'd still be here by the time Edward and I arrived, but that's not weird. This is her night, and the buzz is loud. Everyone wants to see the Christmas line, which hasn't been showcased yet. It's just a small part of the entire winter line, but Rose is well-known for her Christmas designs.

"I'm smiling, *honey*," Edward responds, and yes, he's smiling, though it's looking quite forced. "But they're all taking pictures of you. They don't do that unless you're famous."

A reporter is waving for us to come over, so I reply to Edward as I we start walking toward her. "It's because what I'm wearing. I'm an LP model for tonight. There's nothing more to it." He's about to argue, so I add, "All the models for the winter line have jobs that put them somewhat in the public eye. I'm a writer, for instance, and Leah's a TV chef."

But enough about that. I wanna get this over with so I can go inside and see if there are any fun celebrities.



21.

This is...*crazy*.

But I'm smiling. For the cameras. Oh, there are cameras, lemme tell ya.

I swear...I'm dating a frickin' *model*.

Which means, you know, that I'm the *luckiest* son of a bitch on earth.

While I certainly have a possessive streak when it comes to my hot-as-fuck girlfriend, especially when we're out, this is something else. This is all about showing off, and *trust* me, my friends, I'm *all* for it. 'Cause I'm the one taking her home later. Her, as in the sinfully sexy woman a reporter is now asking questions.

And I'm smiling for the cameras. It's a little bit forced, I admit. My cheeks are beginning to hurt.

"You're friends with Rosalie King, yes?" the reporter inquires.

Bella smiles. "Oh, yeah. She's one of my closest friends, and..." She leans in a little, looking conspiratorial. "...I can tell you that it's soon-to-be Rosalie *Hale*."

The reporter looks positively giddy. "You don't say." And Bella nods, still smiling sweetly. "That's certainly news!" They laugh, and then the reporter turns to *me*. Well, fuck. "And you're Bella's date."

Obviously.

"This is my boyfriend, Edward Cullen," Bella introduces, a hand on my chest. "He's a graphic designer for Volturi Advertising."

I'm smiling.

"And how does it feel to have such a successful girlfriend?" she asks me.

Lame. So lame. I hate that she has a job, that she's hot, that she's perfect, that she lets me watch my games, and that she's kind-hearted. I just hate it. And she makes my life so difficult with all the sex.

That was sarcasm...if you didn't get it.

"Uh..." I clear my throat. "It feels...great, of course. I'm proud of her."

Good, eh?

"Does this mean you get a first peek at Bella's writing?" she continues with a wink. "After all, she's got women all over New York reading her advice."

I chuckle. "She's quite secretive about her writing." I grin down at Bella, who shoots me a playful scowl. "But she's often in research-mode, so I guess you can say that I have a front row seat for it."

"Ah," the reporter nods, facing Bella, "this handsome man is a source of inspiration, I take it?"

Hell to the yeah.

"He's definitely one of them," Bella agrees. "Especially now that I've taken over for Kate Williams."

Oh, yeah. The sex column. Fucking love it.

"Your first article certainly had women agreeing with you!" the reporter laughs, and I dunno. I haven't read Bella's first article yet, 'cause like I said, my girl's all secretive about it...and modest. I should probably check when that magazine comes out. "So, Bella, before I let you go, anything you can tell me about the future for you? Any other project you're working on?"

"Well, we have the new subscription app at *WW*," she says, at which the reporter smiles widely.

"I just got the first texts today! I have to say, your tip on teasing breakfasts was to die for."

Tip on what now? Man, I need to get on my A-game.

Anyway, the reporter thanks us for our time, and then we move along, slowly but surely making our way to the entrance. Several journalists stop Bella on the way, and some focus on her writing, some focus on what she's wearing. It's during one of the interviews where Lacy Piece is in focus that Bella smiles and pulls up the hem of my shirt, revealing the waistband of my new LP boxers. I swear I fucking blush at being on display, but don't worry, I make sure to tense my abs, too.

By the time we reach the entrance, we've caught up with Rose and Alice, both of whom are exhausted after countless interviews—well, mostly Rose, of course—but Bella coaxes a huge smile out of Rose when she admits that she told a reporter that Rose will soon be Hale again. Rose, in turn, calls Bella a bad, bad girl, but with the huge smile she's sporting, I doubt she's serious. But more on that later, 'cause mentioned bad, bad girl promised me a bathroom blowjob, and I fucking need it to unwind.

"Get some drinks," I suggest to Rose and Alice. "Bella and I will catch up later."

"Sure," Rose says, "but wait, Bella." Bella turns to her...while I tug a little on her hand, 'cause...come on. "I've ordered Mike to follow you two around tonight."

"Why?" Bella asks curiously, and...blowjob, blowjob, blowjob.

Rose leans in and speaks in a low voice. "I have this idea, and I'm not sure it's going to work, but I wanna try. There are four models with dates

who are also wearing LP underwear, so I've ordered one photographer for each couple."

Blowjob, blowjob, blowjob.

"For publishing?" Bella wonders.

Rose smiles mischievously. "Maybe? I mean, I wouldn't publish without approval from all of you, but can we just see how it turns out?"

Bloooooowjob.

"Of course!" Well, Bella obviously approves of whatever they're talking about, so can we just...*go*? "So, we'll just act normal?"

"Yes. Dance, mingle, drink, have fun."

"Got it."

And with that, I tug Bella away from the cockblocking Rose.

Bella's all giggles as I make my way toward the bathrooms.

"In a rush, baby?"

"You can say that," I respond seriously.

About a year later, we reach the bathrooms, and I gotta grin when Bella doesn't bat an eyelash when we enter the ladies'. She doesn't care if we're blatant—if we're not hiding what we're about to do. Which is a fucking turn-on for me.

Ignoring the women's knowing looks around us, we walk into the stall farthest in.

"I recognized that woman," one whispers as I close the door.

"Bella Swan," another whispers.

I snicker at Bella.

"Well, that guy didn't waste time scoring some tail tonight."

The fuck?

"He's my fucking boyfriend!" Bella shouts. "Don't be bitches, ladies."

*Holy shit...*is pretty much what my look says...to Bella, that is.

"What?" she whispers with an innocent smile. I shake my head, amused, turned on, in love, and close the distance between us before I dip down and kiss her hard. In the back of my head, I register the clicking of heels and the opening of a door...followed by silence.

"I love you," I say while kissing her. My hands are just all over, cupping her face, on her hips, one on her ass and one holding her hand, both on her thighs, palming her ass, cupping her tits. And that's where I stick around for a while as we kiss frantically. "So fucking sexy," I groan. Through the green satin, I feel her nipples contracting. "I want you," I admit breathlessly and grind my hardening cock against her abdomen.

"Fuck me," she whimpers.

"May I?" I joke. Okay, it's not so much a joke, but whatever. I really wanna fuck her, but we still have that problem where we can't be quiet when we get going, and...if I listen intently, I'm pretty damn sure I can hear someone close by.

"Please, Edward," she breathes out, and I realize that she's serious.

Jesus.

"Okay," I murmur with another kiss. I slow it down a little, 'cause I don't wanna embarrass myself. The woman really is sinfully sexy, and I don't want her to think I'm a teenager by coming too soon. "Take off that coat for me, beautiful," I whisper, kissing my way down her chest. It's heated and slightly flushed, evidence of her aroused state. Fuck, how I love her.

"Here, let me," she says quietly and sits down on the toilet lid. I watch dumbly, letting my eyes drink her in. The coat is gone, and...Christ, she's hot. "So hard," she whispers, and yeah, no kidding. Of course I'm hard, baby. You're currently unzipping my pants. How can I not be hard? Especially after that make-out session.

"Fuck," I mutter as she pushes down my jeans...and boxers. With one hand on my hip and the other holding my dick, she leans forward and plants an open-mouthed kiss on the tip. I moan quietly and thread my fingers through her hair. "Baby...suck me."

She shivers violently.

And then she sucks me in.

My head falls back.

She gets me nice and wet, swirling her tongue around me, and I thrust slowly, wanting to prolong the feeling. Jesus, what a feeling it is. When I do it slowly enough, it's so much more than if I'd just go rough. Now...I can feel how I slip past her soft lips, how she licks the underside of my cock, how she lets her teeth graze gently when I pull out, how she suckles me before taking me in again...

Enough.

"I need you now unless you want it to be over," I pant.

She nods quickly and stands up, moving around me to place her hands on the door, but not before I managed to get in one more kiss. Her lips are wet and swollen, sensitive, and I fucking love them. Standing behind her, I keep kissing her as I push down her panties. The tip of my tongue swipes over her bottom lip just as I slide two fingers along the slit of her pussy. She's on edge, turned on, but not wet enough for my taste. You gotta make sure women are ready. They can't just jump into it unless they've been turned on for quite a while before the sex.

"I've missed this kitty, beautiful," I whisper against her lips, simultaneously tapping her clit softly with my fingers. Once, twice. And she moans. "Even though I tasted it just two days ago... Can't fucking get enough."

"Edward," she mewls and pushes her ass against me. *Not yet, baby.* I finger her slowly but persistently, bringing wetness from her opening to her clit...then circling, pushing, rubbing...sliding in...two fingers. "Please."

There we go.

"I'm gonna cover that mouth of yours," I whisper in her ear. At the same time, I grip my cock and guide it to her pussy. She's slick and hot as I tease her with my erection.

Pushing in just the head, I move one hand to her mouth, something I know she loves, and then I slam in all the way.

"Fuck," I grit out, dropping my forehead to her shoulder. Her own "fuck" is muffled. I set a fast pace, sliding in and out of her over and over without faltering. I'd fist her hair if it didn't mean she'd get loud. "Goddamn," I groan before biting down on her shoulder. 'Cause Bella's not the only loud fucker. Pun intended. We're damn crazy when we get going.

The door outside opens and closes, but we don't stop.

With my free hand, I start circling her clit. In response, she whimpers against my other hand, and I sure as fuck feel how her pussy tightens around me. I pound into her, swiveling my hips when I'm flush against her sweet ass. We're both moaning, sounds coming out muffled, but what I love more than the moans are definitely her harsh pants. When I have Bella breathing quickly and shallowly, I know that I'm fucking her properly. Now I just need make her come before I fucking lose it.

"Come on, baby," I breathe out against her neck. I suck and nibble on her skin. "I wanna feel you squeeze my cock the way only you can." Yeah, that makes her cry out, and again the sound is muffled by my hand, but I still believe people outside could hear it easily enough if they weren't talking. And that just turns me on more. *Jesus*. As I slide in again, I continue with my dirty talk, knowing that Bella goes crazy over that. "They're gonna know," I whisper, out of breath. "As soon as we get out, the women out there are gonna know that I've fucked that pretty pussy of yours."

"*Aaahhh*, Edward," she moans breathily and starts fluttering around me.

"That's it." I groan, I push down on her clit, I hiss in pleasure, I slam in harder. "You're gonna make me come, love."

I exhale hotly against her skin as my orgasm takes over. I feel it everywhere, how it starts in the back of my head, that tingling sensation traveling down my spine, my muscles contracting, my balls tightening, my thighs trembling... And when Bella sucks in a sharp breath and clamps down on my cock, I know that she's coming, too. I thrust lazily, unable to breathe, as I pulse inside of her. Three streams release from my dick, ending with a smaller one, just a few drops, and I'm so fucking consumed by her. Everything registers. The slickness and heat of her arousal mixed with my come inside of her, coating my still-hard cock, feels goddamn glorious. Especially when I have my girl squeezing the shit out of me.

"Oh, my God," she pants. "Oh, my God."

I breathe into the crook of her neck, a smile playing on my lips. "You okay, beautiful?"

"Understatement," she exhales as I remove my hand from her mouth. She drops her forehead to the door, and I kiss her neck before pulling out of her. "Fuck, that was so good, baby."

I grin to myself, quickly tucking my cock back inside my boxers and zip up my pants. Then I grab some paper to clean up the mess I doubt Bella wants in her new lingerie. Well, not here...at the party...where she's supposed to showcase said lingerie. "We're always good," I chuckle in her ear and wipe away the residue of my release. "We always will be," I add with a kiss on her jaw.

At that, she turns around and kisses me properly. "I love you."

I wink at her then toss away the paper. "Ditto, honey."

About ten minutes later, we enter the ballroom—hand in hand—with cheesy smiles on our faces. There were three women in the bathroom when we stepped out of our stall, and since I was buckling my belt and Bella was fixing her hair, it didn't take a genius to figure out what we'd done. So, that's why I'm grinning like a fool, 'cause, let's face it, that's just hot. And Bella's grinning 'cause...well, I dunno. Maybe the same reason?

"Emmett and Jasper are over there," I say, pointing over at the bar.

"Perhaps Alice and Rose are there, too."

But I don't get a response from Bella.

I try to follow her gaze—she's pretty much frozen in place, by the way—but it's hard to see, 'cause the dimly lit ballroom is packed with people.

Then, for the first time in my life, I hear Bella squeal. Actually *squeal*.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeek!"

That's sorta what it sounded like.

And I realize that there's most likely one person in here that can cause that reaction in her.

Zac fuckin' Efron.

I wonder if he spells "dick" without the "k", too.

And maybe, just maybe, his last name has been censored. Ya know, the way some people sometimes say "effing" instead of "fucking." So...Zac Fuckron? S'that it? Makes sense to me.

"All right, where is he?" I ask Bella.

Dammit. I wasn't supposed to let her see him.

"Over there," she breathes out, eyes wide, and points toward a crowd of people. "OhmyGod, I can't *believe* this!" Then she turns to me, fisting the lapels of my leather jacket. I almost roll my eyes at the sight of her, but I can't help but chuckle, 'cause it's amusing as hell. "Zac Efron, Edward. Zac Efron is here. Eeeeeeeeeek!" I cringe. "I just wanna squeeze his butt cheeks!"

Yeah, there will be no...butt cheek...squeezing.

"How about a fuckin' autograph?" I ask gruffly. "That's what normal people ask for."

She huffs and releases my jacket. "Are you jealous, baby?"

Honestly? No. A little. "Pshhh. Now, that's crazy talk." I roll my eyes for good measure.

"Aww, sweetie," she says softly, and I am *not* amused anymore. "You have no reason to be jealous. First of all, he's the cutest man to walk this earth." I cock a brow at her, 'cause...*hello?* "Listen to what I say. Cutest. Not sexiest, not the most handsome... He's *not* the man who can fuck me six ways to Sunday." Oh. Well. I can do *that*. "He's just so...*cute*." She almost squeals again but manages to rein it in. Thank fuck. "And, for the record, you'd go fangirl if one of the players from the Giants walked in here."

"That, my dear, is fucking horseshit," I tell her. "Plus, they don't have vaginas."

She smirks lazily. "They do when they lose."

And I gasp in horror. "You did *not*...just say that."

Good Lord in heaven, I can barely look at my own girlfriend right now.

The *Giants*, people...*Jesus*.

"What if Heidi Klum walked in here, then?" she says, changing tactics.

"Can you honestly tell me that you wouldn't be salivating?"

Damn straight. "If Heidi Klum walked in here, I wouldn't see her," I tell her, which is the truth. "'Cause Emmett would be all over her. Aside from that, I still wouldn't salivate, as you put it, 'cause I don't find her very attractive."

"Bullshit," she fake-coughs.

"It's not." I shake my head. "I don't do blondes." Bella, of all people, should know that.

I also don't like stick-people. Poor women don't seem to know how to eat.

"All right, what about...um...Rachel Bilson or-"

"*She* is hot," I agree, nodding. "She's hot as hell, but I still wouldn't lose my damn mind over her."

That's when Bella goes woman on me. Hands on hips: check. Bitch-brow cocked: check. "Are you saying that I've lost my mind?"

"Oh, don't you," I make a growling noise and point a finger at her, "don't you turn this around, woman."

She juts her chin.

Fuck.

I huff, run a hand through my hair, and wave a hand in Fuckron's direction. "Just go squeeze Zac's ass."

At which Bella laughs for some reason. "Edward!" she giggles and literally throws herself at me. Good thing I manage to catch her. "I'm not going to squeeze his fucking ass." I try to glare at her, but it's pretty damn hard when my hands are full of Bella's ass. 'Cause her legs are wrapped around me and all...you know. "You're so fucking sweet, baby," she says and plants kisses all over my face. Fuck. "And I love you. So much."

I narrow my eyes at her. "I love you, too. If you apologize for your comment about the Giants."

She makes me smile when she puts on a solemn look. She even places her hand over her heart. "I'm sorry for basically calling the Giants pussies when they're clearly the rulers of this planet." Good, good, keep going. "I shouldn't have said something so stupid, 'cause we all know they're gonna win the Superbowl."

If only Emmett and Jasper could hear this.

"Apology accepted." I grin and kiss her. "So, are you gonna ask for the kid's autograph or what?"

And now she looks nervous. "I dunno. And he's not a kid."

"Whatever," I chuckle and release her. "What's with the lip-biting, baby? Nervous?"

"No." She scoffs, the liar. "I can totally ask him. Maybe I just don't want to."

"I call bullshit." I grab her hand, and then we're walking. "You want the douchefuck's signature; you're gonna get it. But no pinching or squeezing."

"Edward," she hisses, trying to pull back. She's strong, I give her that, but she's not stronger than I am. "He's a celebrity! You can't just go up there!"

I snort. "Yeah, 'cause people never approach celebrities. Imagine the *horror*."

"Are you mocking me?" she asks as we pass one of the many groupings of people.

"Oh, I wouldn't dare," I assure.

Then we reach ZacDic Fuckron's little posse.

"Oh, my God," Bella whimpers behind me.

Whatever.

Standing there, in a black suit, is "the cutest man to walk this earth", so I tap the kid on his shoulder. And, FYI, I'm several inches taller. Just wanted that to be known.

"Yeah?" he responds, turning around.

"Hi, my girlfriend here would like your autograph," I drawl.

"It's for my sister!" Bella blurts out, and *man*, is she a liar or *what*?

"Sure thing," Efron replies...while eye-fucking my girlfriend. Not cool, kiddo. Not cool. Not when she's dressed for a vacation on Greenland, and definitely not when she's exposing her front at a fucking lingerie party.

"What's her name?"

Bella blushes and hands Mr. Dic a napkin. The pen comes from the kid himself.

"Her name is Bella," Bella says. Bright. Red. In. The. Face. "And she thinks you're totally cute."

Totally.

"Well," Dic chuckles as he writes, "tell your *sister* that she's very cute herself."

"Yeah, I think that's enough, *cutie*," I tell him with a glare.

"Sorry, man," he responds and returns the napkin to Bella. "Didn't mean no disrespect."

Go back to school and learn proper grammar.

"Thank you for the autograph; my, uh, sister will be so happy," Bella says, stumbling a little over her words. "Come on, baby. Let's go to the bar."

As we leave Efron behind, I relax and can't stop myself from laughing at Bella. Not loudly, but she sure hears it.

"What?" she asks, annoyed.

I snicker and put my arm around her. "You just made a fool outta yourself, love. Your sister? *Really?*"

"Shut *up*." She smacks me in the chest. "I couldn't help it! I got so damn nervous."

"My little fangirl," I chuckle and kiss her temple. "You're so cute right now. Not the cutest to walk the earth...but cute enough."

'Cause the cutest ever is *totally* Zac Efron.

Or whatever.

"You're funny, Cullen," she deadpans.

"I know."

Then we reach the bar, along with Emmett, Jasper, Rose, and Alice.

Oh yeah, they witnessed it all.



There's only so much I can take of public humiliation, so when my friends have spent approximately ten minutes laughing at my little moment with Zac Efron, I chug down the rest of my drink then leave their mean asses behind.

Only, Edward follows. Good. 'Cause that's the thing with women. Sometimes, they leave, but they still want to be followed. *Pursued*.

"We're just teasing you, sweetheart," he chuckles and throws his arm around me. "You gotta admit that it was fun."

I gotta do no such thing, mistah'.

Unfortunately, Edward Cullen has a smile that makes you melt—well, you've all seen it—so it doesn't take long before I'm putty in his hands. We also happen to be on the crowded dance floor, and my smile is just the cheesiest as he starts swaying us, and...*insert swoon here*...that tender look in his eyes? I'm a goner. It only gets sweeter when the music changes into a faster beat and Edward doesn't follow. He keeps it slow, making me all girly and mushy inside.

"It's not fair, you know," I sigh, looking up at him. "That smile of yours. Deadly."

He grins and shakes his head in amusement, but his eyes stay soft and tender. "It's mutual."

I hum in contentment and rest my forehead on his collarbone. It feels so good, 'cause he's all warm, and my still-exposed front is a bit chilled.

"Hey, I've been meaning to ask," he murmurs in my ear. "That subscription app you talked about earlier—with the reporter?" I nod. "Is that something I can sign up for, too?"

I smile widely and meet his eyes again. "Of course you can, but..." I chew on my lip. "I didn't think you'd want that. I mean, it's pretty girly."

He shrugs and tightens his hold on my waist. "I wanna be in the loop. I also wanna know about that breakfast teasing...whatever it was."

"It was the first relationship advice," I chuckle. "It went out this morning."

"So, what did it say? The text. And there's one for the sex column, too?"

I nod. "The first one—for relationships—was: 'Dress down instead of up, ladies. When you say goodbye in the morning, only wear his button-down. And while you're at it, enjoy a banana. He'll think of you all day!'"

"Jesus, that's cruel, baby," he laughs, but then it dies and he gets this faraway look in his eyes. I'm thinking he's thinking about bananas and my mouth. Kidding. No bananas. Obviously, his cock. Then he shakes his head and clears his throat. "Right, um...what was the other? For the sex column."

I grin. "You really wanna know?" He nods furiously, making me giggle like a little girl. Not cool. "Um, it was: 'Dating a sports nut? Find out your partner's favorite team and then go buy a cheerleader outfit. Sex guaranteed.'"

In my opinion, it's not the best advice, and it doesn't apply to all women out there. But it was just the first of many. After all, there will be a new text every day.

"Holy shit," Edward whispers with a wistful expression.

No reason to be wistful. I've already ordered a cheerleader outfit, and it's all about the New York Giants. And I had to special order that fucker, 'cause apparently the Giants don't have cheerleaders.

"Do, uh..." He clears his throat. Again. "Will you, you know...listen to your own advice? Maybe?"

"Ha!" I laugh. "Oh, sweetie. What do you think?"

I'm totally beginning to feel something hard against my stomach.

We can't do anything about that now, though, 'cause just as I'm about to tease him with something dirty, Rose approaches us.

Bummer.

"Time to change," she tells me quietly.

I nod in understanding. "The suite?"

"Yeah, I've just told the others."

I nod again, and she leaves.

"What's up?" Edward asks me.

I smile. "Rose is gonna show the Christmas line now, so I gotta go change into that."

"Wait, what?" His brows furrow. "Isn't this the Christmas line?" He traces a finger along the black lace that frames my bra.

"No, it's the winter line," I explain. "The Christmas pieces are just a small part, and they've been a secret until now. Tonight is the first time the public will see them." Tilting my head to the side, I see the makeshift runway across the room. "Look behind you. They're preparing things right now."

He looks over his shoulder then back at me. "You're gonna shimmy that ass on a runway?"

"Uh...yeah?"

His whole face lights up. "Right. I need to find a camera or some shit." He even starts looking around us, as if he's in a hurry.

I can only be amused. "Baby, relax. There will be plenty of photos of this."

"Oh. Good." He nods. "Very good. I want copies. Like...I don't know..." He makes a bubble face. "Two hundred?"

I laugh and swat his chest playfully. "You're so sweet, Edward."

He doesn't laugh, though. His stare is blank. "Yeah, I'm serious, Isabella."

Oh, my goodness. He doesn't call me by my full name often, but when he does...

Wetness, you know?

"Right." I snicker. "I'll see what I can do. I gotta go now."

He dips down and kisses me silly. "Can't wait to see you. Christ, what an evening this is. By the way..." He exhales. "Those billboards, when are they going up?"

My smile is coy. "Tomorrow."

"Shit. This is almost too much. Lingerie all over the fucking place."

"Want me to stop?" I grin.

"Hell no!" He smacks my ass. "Go change. I'm gonna track down Emmett and Jazz and brag about my model girlfriend."

"You won't find Jasper," I remind him. "He's going to change, too."

"Oh..."

Yeah. "See ya, baby." Then I'm gone.

~oOo~

About an hour later, I'm standing backstage, wearing the new lingerie. It's both slutty and classy, if that makes sense. And had it not been for the Swarovski crystal snowflakes, you wouldn't have thought it belonged to a Christmas line. The piece—garters, bra, ruffled panties, and thigh-high stockings included—is black lace, almost completely see-through. Yeah, not a Christmas color. But there are tiny snowflakes attached in several places. There are three between the cups of my bra—they're dangling down on a satin string—there are a couple attached to the front of my panties, and a few attached to the straps of my bra. Last but not least, a few glued onto the stockings.

My heels are six inches and a shiny silver color. They match the crystals and the rhinestones on my skin. And lemme tell ya, I'm wearing loads of rhinestones. The makeup artists have been busy. They're on my face, my chest, my arms, my stomach... They're even in my hair. And my hair? It's big. It has that freshly-fucked look.

"Holy fuck, Bella."

I turn around and chuckle when I see Jasper. He looks sexy, too, wearing a pair of black boxers in satin, again with those crystal snowflakes attached to the fabric. He's also wearing black slippers and, on top of his head, he has a sleep mask. It's all matching.

"Lookin' good, Jasper." I smile.

"Yeah. Um. You, too." He scratches his nose. "Man, I wish I could see Cullen's expression when he sees you."

"And I wish I could see Alice when she sees you," I counter, waggling my brows.

Damn, I've been hanging out with Edward too much.

Kidding.

"Oh, yeah?" He smirks lazily. "I made an impression, huh?"

"You could say that. Bet it's mutual, too."

He chuckles. "I'm not a gossip, darlin'."

Dammit. "Worth a try."

"Group one, you're up!" someone shouts.

That's me. "See ya out there, Jasper."

"Me too, but I'm going out last. Break a leg." He winks.

I hope not. I sincerely hope I don't.

I have nothing against heels—I really don't—but six inches are a liiiittle too much.

"Okay," I breathe out to myself and head over to the rest of group one. The only one I recognize is Leah, and I find out that I'm walking with her. That's good, 'cause she's a nice girl. She's wearing the same line, but instead of a bra and garters, she's wearing a lacy camisole that ends mid-ass. Her panties match mine, as does her heels.

"Ready?" She grins.

I grin, too. "Hell, yeah."

"Isabella Swan, Leah Uley!" the same woman from before shouts out. We quickly walk over to her. "You're going out third." We nod in understanding then take our spots in the little line forming.

Music comes on.

I recognize it, 'cause it's the only Christmas song my dad will listen to.
"Mistress for Christmas" by AC/DC.

I'm buzzing with nerves, listening as the announcers takes the stage.

"...proud to present this year's Christmas line from Lacy Piece..."

I squeal internally, so proud of Rose. I can't wait for her to go out after the show and soak in the praise.

"Here is Black Noël!"

Leah and I exchange matching smiles when the crowd erupts in cheers.

I tell myself that I'm imagining the booming voices of Emmett and Edward.

"Sarah and Chloe," the woman says, and the first couple goes out. Then we wait about thirty seconds before she says, "Natalia and Anna." And Leah and I take another step forward. We're next. Another thirty seconds or so, and Sarah and Chloe return. "Isabella and Leah."

That's us.

Deep breaths.



22.

"Outta my fucking way!" I bellow, making my way to the front.

'Cause I gotta be right there when Bella comes out on the runway.

"Move it, people!" Emmett shouts.

We have Alice with us, too, and she looks like a midget between Emmett and me.

When we finally reach the front, we take our seats—seats that belong to the press. I sit my ass down on a chair that is reserved for some chick at... some magazine. Whatever. I'm more important than she is.

"For Christ's sake," Alice mutters, staring at a chair. "I don't get why a Bob Green from *Dog Style Living* is at a lingerie party." Then she plops down on the seat.

"Doggy style," Emmett and I giggle and bump fists.

We're men.

But then it's time to shush, 'cause the music comes on and the emcee takes the stage.

Emmett and I are fucking buzzing with anticipation.

The dude says something about *Black Noël*, and shortly afterward, two women walk out.

"That's what I'm talkin' about!" Emmett howls.

I laugh.

Too bad they're blondes. Hot bodies, though.

"Blah, blah, blah," Alice says.

I tilt my head in her direction as the second set of ladies walks out.

"What?" I ask.

"I said, you two must love life right now," she repeats.

Right.

"Hell, yeah," I chuckle, and then I watch the runway again. The two chicks do their twirling thing and then head back, only to stop and spin again. Then they're out, and...

Fuck.

Me.

Bella and the woman from the limo—Leah?—they walk out, and my God...

I drop my jaw as I watch her shimmy that ass. She looks to die for in some...sexy...I can't even...I don't know what all that is called. Oh, wait, I do know. It's called Edward Cullen's death. *Holy shit*. The South is rising. Pants getting tight. And her smile, Jesus Christ. She knows what she's doing. They both do.

"Dude," Emmett says.

I'm nodding. "Word."

Her legs are fucking killer—miles long. And those tits, that ass, the waist, those curves, her hair, her *face*.

Some guy behind me lets out a whistle, and I sorta wanna break his face.

Mine.

"Down, dog," Alice says, eyeing me. I cock a brow at her. "You were growling." She huffs and sits back again. "Maybe that's why Bob Green is here...somewhere."

"Whatever," is my witty comeback before I, once again, face the runway. By now, Bella has reached the end of it, meaning she's so close, so right there, so in my face, and hopefully, so on my cock...soon, I mean. Not now. That'd be weird. With all these people around. "I'm gonna fucking marry that woman," I declare with a firm nod.

The audience or crowd—whatever you wanna call it—go nuts when Bella and Leah jut their hips out and smile cheekily. Hell, I'm one of them—the ones going nuts. And I press my knuckles to my mouth when Bella actually spots me.

She blows me a kiss, and I slump back in my seat and clutch my heart.

"You're killing me, baby," I groan, knowing very well that she can't hear me.

Alice giggles and goes, "Blah, blah, blah."

I nod. "Yeah, no kidding."

To which she gives me an odd look.

I'd ask her to repeat whatever she said, but Bella turns around then—Leah, too—which means I'm very busy at the moment. 'Cause damn, my girlfriend's ass...it's a bubble ass. I just wanna bite it, kiss it, fuck it.

After that, we watch as more women and men walk out and show off Rose's lingerie line.

Emmett's like a fat kid in a candy store.

So am I—I mean, I can appreciate a hot body—but I'm itching to see Bella again. Only seeing her once isn't enough. Hmm. Maybe she can model for me in our bedroom? Shit. I mean *my* bedroom. Or *hers*. I'm not picky.

But...

I scratch my chin and give Alice a fleeting glance.

Approaching her might not be the smartest idea, 'cause we all know she's gonna spill the beans to Bella, but...maybe I want that? Oh, God. Thinking clearly is evidently a real challenge at a lingerie party.

"Hey, Alice?" I lean close. "I..." *don't know what to say now.*

"What?" she asks, giving me a sideways look.

I release a breath. "I wanna ask Bella to move in with me," I admit over the music.

Her eyes go all wide and stuff, but then it's the other way around—they narrow into thin slits.

"I think you're either pussy drunk or lingerie drunk," she says decidedly.

"No!" I shake my head. I've thought about this before, after all. "I kid you not. I really do want that shit. But is it too soon to ask her?"

Here's how I see it: now that I know I want Bella for the long haul, I hate wasting time. I just wanna get it all over with, so that I'm set. This waiting game ain't my thing. There are signs, and you gotta read your woman...shit like that, and I don't do that very well. Why not just move in together and be done with it?

Alice smirks. "Ask her."

I frown. "Well, you're just no help at all. You know that?"

She shrugs and turns to the stage...runway...and ignores me.

Bad midget.

Okay, that was mean.

But she started it!

Ugh.

I sigh and mope internally for a little bit...until Bella comes out again. This time she's not just with Leah, and she's wearing the same thing. She, Leah, Jasper—whom I must've missed before—along with several others, walk out with Rose in the lead.

We applaud, because, let's face it, she deserves a Nobel Prize for doing what she does.

The Nobel Lingerie Prize. There should be one.

Oh, fuck it. She could have the Peace Prize. I'm sure her lingerie would create peace in the Middle East. Then again, she'd start a war with so many Souths rising.

Whatta dilemma.

"You go, Rose!" Alice cheers, clapping and bouncing. "I'm so proud of you!"

Right. That, too.

~oOo~

Yeah, so the last thing I expected or wanted to happen was for the six of us to end up at some diner after midnight. There's apple pie and coffee,

and Bella isn't wearing lingerie anymore. Well, she is, but under her clothes.

I gave her the bracelet earlier, the one I bought for her, and I figured it would make her go insane and drag me home for a night of ravishing. Turned out, it didn't. She just kissed the shit out of me and *promised* some good times...soon.

But what about *now*? I want it *now*.

"Let me know when you're ready to go, baby," I whisper in her ear.

That's code for, "*I'm still hard from watching you on the runway, so let's go fuck.*"

She gives me a coy smile and sips her coffee. "Oh, *sweetie*-"

I'm quick to check to see if Emmett or Jasper heard that.

Phew. They didn't. They're busy with pie.

I give Bella a look.

She just laughs it off. "Whatever," she giggles. "And I'm sorry, but I'm not spending the night at your place tonight."

"Whoa." I'm taken aback. "It felt like you just kicked my balls blue."

Bella giggles harder and slaps my chest. Nice. "You're so funny."

I know, but what does that have to do with anything? I was serious with the ball shit. Okay, that sounded wrong, but whatever.

"I'm meeting your sister tomorrow," she says slowly, and I'm like...*yeah, so?* "And she lives with you right now. So, I don't want to meet her first

thing in the morning. I wanna make a good impression." She adds a firm nod.

"What about your place, then?" I ask.

She forks a piece of pie and eats it slowly, 'cause she wants to kill me.

"Can you keep a secret?" she whispers.

I scrunch my nose. "Um, yeah."

"Alice is nervous about her date tomorrow with Jasper," she admits, leaning close. Even if she's wearing a nice button-down right now, I can still feel her tits brushing against my arm. Highly distracting. "She asked if us girls could spend some more time tonight. So, we're gonna go to my place after this."

Bad midget. Taking my girlfriend like that. So rude.

"Rose and Alice are spending the night?" I ask, keeping my voice low.

She nods. "We're also going to start planning our annual Vegas trip. We usually go after Halloween."

I compose my face, while internally, my mind is spinning.

They go to Vegas, huh? Just like that—three women...

Hmm.

I dunno about that...

"Plus, I wanna bring something over to your place tomorrow. I'm gonna bake." She beams at me.

I smile and touch her cheek, making a mental note to bring up this Vegas shit later. "You don't have to do that, you know."

She shrugs. "I want to...my little *pumpkin*." She pinches my cheek, which earns her a glare from me.

My smile is so gone.

'Cause Emmett totally heard that. The pumpkin part, that is.

"Pumpkin!" he guffaws. "Bella calls you PUMPKIN?"

I'm horrified. "No! No, she doesn't!" I look down at Bella. "Tell them you don't!"

By now, the whole table is laughing.

"Edward and I have the cutest nicknames for each other," Bella says, smiling so wide. I stare down at her, still horrified and mortified. I fucking told her we'd save the sappy stuff for when no one's around, and now she goes and calls me pumpkin? PUMPKIN! Which, for the record, she's never called me before! EVER! "I'm his munchkin," she adds proudly.

My jaw drops and my eyes bug out. Terrible woman! Now she's just lying!

"The munchkin and the pumpkin!" Jazz giggles. Yeah, he's a giggler.

I only giggle at doggy style.

Uh, never mind.

"She's lying!" I point a finger at Bella.

"No, I'm not," Bella argues, chuckling. "Ooh, wait! Sometimes I call him sugar plum, too. He loves that—gets all cuddly and adorable."

"Sug—sugar," Emmett wheezes out through laughs.

I groan and palm my face.

My ears feel hot.

"What's up, sugar plum?" I hear Rose ask. "Are you *blushing*? Wow."

"Aww, don't be mad," Bella coos as she tries to pry my hands away from my face. "I love you, my sweet snuggles."

"Grrr!" I growl at her.

She's not intimidated in the least.



23.

Even though Edward and I didn't have plans to spend the night together, sharing a bed with him is what I would've wanted to do tonight. But instead I'm standing in my own kitchen, listening to Alice go on and on about the different personalities she can use tomorrow for her date with Jasper.

That's right. Personalities.

"*I can be spunky!*"

"*Or should I be honest and tell him right away I'm looking for something serious?*"

"*Hmm, Bella, you told me he likes Southern rock. Should I buy cowboy boots?*"

Rose and I guzzle down wine.

I'm also making lemon parfait for tomorrow's dinner with Edward and his sister. Well, it's for the dessert.

I'll bake the blueberry cake tomorrow.

"Oh, my God!" Rose cries out, frustrated. "Alice! How many times are we gonna have to tell you? Be yourself!"

I'm nodding with Rose.

Alice averts her eyes, looking so insecure. It's not really who she is, but when it comes to dating, she's nuts. Plus, she really likes Jasper—the little she's seen so far—and I know she wants to make a good impression. Actually, that's not really correct. She's already made a good impression on Jazz, and now she wants more.

After hundreds of dates, she's been left a little jaded.

"What if that's not enough?" she whispers.

I sigh. "Sweetie...if Jasper doesn't want you for who you are, then he's not the one."

"Exactly." Rose nods. "You're you. Mary Alice Brandon, who throws away her socks instead of washing them, who listens to metal when she cleans her apartment and boy bands when she goes grocery shopping, who cries when Nemo's mother and little fish siblings die, who eats like a horse but never gains a fucking pound, and who loves to read both *Cosmo* and thrillers."

Another nod from me. "What Rose said," I say softly and squeeze Alice's hand. "That's the Alice you should be with Jasper. If that's not the one he likes..." I shrug. "Then there's someone else out there for you. *But,*" I stress, "I think he's going to love the real Alice."

"Definitely," Rose agrees, pouring Alice more wine. "He couldn't stop looking at you tonight at the diner. That's something. *And...he* was the one who asked *you* out. Remember that."

Alice slumps her shoulders and accepts the wine. "All right. I'll..." She sighs. "I'll be myself."

"Good!" Rose and I say.

She waves us off. "Change of topic. Let's talk Vegas."

And this is where I go first, because I've been doing some thinking. Now that Edward and I are in a serious relationship, I don't feel it's right to go on just like I've done before—when I was single. Sure, I still want my girls' nights, and I'm still an independent woman, but...there are limits. I want to spend my life with Edward, and that means including him. Which is not just what I feel is right, it's what I want.

"First of all," I say as I start peeling a lemon. "If this is a trip for just the three of us—like it's been in the past—I want to run everything by Edward first. It doesn't feel good taking all that for granted." I release a breath. "I'm pretty sure he'll have nothing against us going, of course, and it's not like we started talking about going to Vegas just now. It's something we're done plenty of times now, but..."

"I get it, hun," Rose chuckles with a smile. "You're a couple now, and a trip is a bit bigger than just going to a spa or whatever. Of course you should talk to him."

I relax, glad they understand.

"But there was a 'second of all', too, right?" Alice smirks.

I grin. "How about asking them to come with us?"

"Oh, great." Rose rolls her eyes. "It'll be two couples and me and Dimples."

Alice frowns. "Two couples?"

And I playfully nudge her arm. "You and Jasper, Edward and me."

She looks away, but I still see her beaming smile that is directed at my floor.

So cute.

"And, Rose?" I cock a brow at her. "You *want* Dimples."

Maybe I was wrapped up in Edward all night, but I still didn't miss the cat-and-mouse game Rose and Emmett played. She pretended not to be interested, yet as soon as Emmett paid attention to someone else, she was gawking at him. And Emmett knew it, too.

"He'll be your own pumpkin one day," Alice sings.

I laugh at that, remembering how I teased Edward at the diner with all the fake pet names. That was fun. It was also my payback. For ten excruciating minutes I was made fun of after my run-in with Zac Efron. Edward laughed, just like the others did, and like I said, there's only so much I can take of public humiliation. So...what happened at the diner was my sweet revenge. It was all in good fun, though, and my sexy boyfriend is aware.

"Whatever," Rose says, blushing, which Alice and I don't miss. But we don't call her on it. "All right...so the six of us. Las Vegas. Yay."

I chuckle. "You're secretly happy, and you know it."

Her blush intensifies. "No, I'm not."

Alice and I exchange a look.

She so is.

"Another topic change," Alice decides, her eyes still on me. "Did you and Edward really fuck in the bathroom tonight at the party?"

Oh, sweet Jesus.

I clear my throat and focus on the lemons.

"I think that's a yes," Rose laughs.

Yes. Yes, it is, Rose. A definite yes. Christ.

"I can't help myself around him." I shrug. "God..." It's one of those dreamy sighs that slips through my lips. Edward Anthony Cullen has the tendency to draw them from me. "I'm so in love with that man," I gush, unable to help myself...again.

Alice looks pensive all of a sudden. "Does that mean he's the one? You want everything with him?"

"Duh," I giggle and grab for my wine.

"Hmm. Maybe you should ask him to move in together."

I give her a look. "I said I want everything with him, not to scare him away."

While Edward and I are serious about each other, men are usually afraid of commitment. I doubt he'd freak out if I asked him, but I'm not quite sure he's ready for *that* step yet.

"Oh, I assure you," Alice replies imploringly, "you won't scare him away."

"What?" I frown. "Do you know something?" I point at her face. "That look. What's up with that?"

She shrugs and smiles innocently. "I may have heard a thing or two, but that's all I'm gonna say."

"You may have..." Rose trails off, narrowing her eyes at Alice. I do the same. "Hey, if you've heard something, spill it!"

"Nope!" she laughs. "I think it's called the bro code?"

"You're not a bro, Alice," I point out.

"I know, but this is more fun." She looks giddy. "Ask him, Bella."

~oOo~

On my way to Edward's the next day, I find myself shrinking farther and farther into my seat in the cab as we go.

I'd totally forgotten that the billboards were going up today, and now I'm seeing myself everywhere. On buses, on buildings...God, I'm glad I haven't seen Times Square yet, nor am I sure I ever will.

I hope Edward hasn't been out today.

I look good, mind you, but...I'm everywhere!

Jasper's everywhere, too. And Leah, and Lauren, and Irina.

"We're here, miss," the cab driver says gruffly.

Right. Looking out, I see that we're parked outside of Edward's building. So, after paying the fare, I take my Tupperware containers with blueberry cake and lemon parfait and enter the building quickly. Seriously, I hope

Edward hasn't been out today. And maybe he doesn't *want* to go out. 'Til, say, after Christmas?

Works for me.

In the elevator, I check my hair and makeup. I don't get why I'm this nervous, but it is what it is. I want Elizabeth to like me, to approve of me.

I mean, it's not like I'm dressed to meet the queen of England—whole other Elizabeth—but I'm hardly dressed for a yoga class, either. I've kept my makeup light, 'cause I don't wanna overdo it, but my dress is sorta fancy. Fancy and modest. It's a black cotton dress, sleeves ending at my elbows, a little cleavage, and my stilettos match.

Shit. It's too much, isn't it?

With another glance in the mirror, I decide that yes, it's too much. Especially with my hair up. And what was I thinking with the diamond earrings? Oh, God. Placing the Tupperware boxes on the floor, I hurry to take off the earrings and let my hair down. I ruffle it a little, too. For good measure. And then the elevator dings.

Holy shit.

I take a deep breath when I reach Edward's door, and then I knock twice.

Inside, I can hear Coldplay's "Viva La Vida" playing, and I smile, guessing that Edward's chosen the Kitchen List on his iPod.

"*Come on in, baby!*" he shouts from inside.

Okay. Another deep breath. Here we go. I open the door, and I'm immediately assaulted by something delicious in the air. That Edward can cook, I already know, but this...shit, this is heaven. Definitely steak. And something garlic-y.

"Bella, is that you?" he calls from the kitchen.

I chuckle as I remove my coat. "Do you call lots of people 'baby'?"

He laughs. "I figured it was you, but Liz is out, so..." And then he appears in the hallway, wiping his hands on a hand towel. And I die. 'Cause he looks to die for. Yeah. Um. He's wearing dark blue jeans and a black button-down, sleeves pushed up to his elbows. "You look gorgeous." His smile is wide as he walks toward me. "Hi." He dips down and kisses me softly, which finally makes me come alive again.

"Hi," I sigh contentedly. It feels like I'm home. "God, you look good, Cullen. It's not fair."

He snickers and drops a kiss on my forehead. "I could say the same about you, love." He winks then takes a step back. "Liz is just out getting more wine. Apparently, one bottle wasn't enough for her." He rolls his eyes.

I stifle my giggle, 'cause giggling is just not cool.

"Okay," I say, holding up my Tupperware. Mainly, the parfait. "Um, this goes in the freezer; got room?"

"Freezer, huh? What is it?"

I smile. "You'll see."

"All right," he chuckles. "Come on." He grabs the containers and leads the way to the kitchen, where my boyfriend is evidently preparing a feast. Damn, he's going all out. I see the steaks on the stove, and when I bend down, I see potato wedges in the oven, then vegetables for a salad on the counter. I also see that the bread maker is switched on.

"Anything I can help you with?" I offer as he places the parfait in the freezer. He holds up the other container, as if asking if that needs to go

into the freezer, too, and I shake my head. "Just put it on the counter or something."

"Okay." He nods. "And no, there's nothing you can do to help. Just sit down and relax." He smiles at me. "Wine?"

Christ, when can I marry this man?

Just wondering.

Coldplay's "Paradise" comes on next, and it's like I'm ready to explode. The song itself is swoon-worthy, and with what I'm already feeling...*oh, sigh...*I snap, okay? So, I attack him with kisses.

"Oomph." That was him.

You know...upon impact.



23.

Is this a yes on the wine?

"Jesus, beautiful," I groan into her mouth. It's like she's possessed or something, and when a woman gets like that...it doesn't take long before the man follows. "What's with you?" My breathing is already labored, and when she wraps her legs around me, I know that it's going to take a minute or thirteen to recover...once we actually stop.

"I just..." She moans as I squeeze her ass. By now, I have her pressed up against the fridge, but she doesn't seem to mind or even notice the cold.
"I just love you."

I smile and nip at her bottom lip. "I love you, too."

"I missed you last night," she admits, panting as I kiss her neck. I hum against her skin, having missed her, too. Spending my nights alone isn't nice anymore.

Lifting my head from her neck, I stare down at her.

"*Ask her.*"

"*Ask her.*"

"*Ask her.*"

Great. Now I have a midget in my head.

I'm going to assume—which means that I *hope*—that Midget Alice said, "Ask her", three times, and not that...it echoes in my head. That'd be a bad sign. 'Cause my brain is packed with IQ points. That's how it goes, right? Yeah. I'm packed—*packing*.

I digress.

Should I ask her to move in with me, then?

"Honey, I'm home!"

Ugh. Guess not.

I give Bella a tight-lipped smile and release her. "And that's Liz."

She chuckles breathlessly and straightens her dress. "I should hope so."

Right. "In the kitchen!" I holler to Liz, and then go ahead and pour Bella a glass of wine.

Just as she thanks me for the glass, I hear click, click, click, click, when Liz approaches. She's just like my girlfriend with the expensive shoes. You know, the ones that can provide food for a country in Africa for a whole month.

Yeah. Those ones.

Suddenly, there's a high-pitched scream filling the kitchen, and I'm pretty sure my eardrums explode.

"Christ!" I shout, checking to see if Liz shattered anything made of glass.

"Eeeeeeeeeeeek!" Liz again.

"Stop it!" I exclaim, giving her an incredulous look. Then I look over at Bella, remembering something. "She sounds just like your sister when she met Zac Efron." I wink at her.

She throws me a playful glare. "I'm not sure I know what you're talking about, *pumpkin*."

Damn. "Well played, Ms. Swan. Well played," I admit, placing my arm around her shoulders. With a kiss to her forehead, I once again turn back to Liz, who's standing there with wide eyes and a dropped jaw. "Dude. You look weird," I tell her matter-of-factly. "What's wrong?"

That seems to wake her up. "Oh, my God—*Edward!*" She slaps my chest.

"Hey! What's with the violence?" I frown.

She gives me a look. "You told me you were dating a woman named Bella. You didn't tell me it was Bella *Swan!*"

"Um..." That frown of mine deepens. "Is this where I apologize so we can move on?"

She ignores me and turns to Bella instead. "Hi, I'm Liz Cullen—Carrot Top's sister. So nice to meet you." She shakes Bella's hand, and I shoot the sister a glare because. Just because. "I'm a huge fan."

And my eyebrows go all the way up there. "Of *what?*"

"Your girlfriend," she replies, barely missing the "duh" at the end. "She's an amazing writer."

Oh.

Oh.

Oooooooh. Yeah, I nod. 'Cause I remember now that Liz reads *Written Word*. So does my mom.

About that. "Hey, I got my first two texts this morning," I tell Bella, pretty excited, actually. The sex advice was: *Stop using headaches as an excuse to not have sex. Most men today know that a good orgasm works better than a painkiller.* And ain't that the truth? We do know that shit. Oh, and the relationship advice was: *Don't be mad if hubby doesn't notice the new drapes or your new haircut. That's simply not what they think about. Be straightforward instead. But if he says, "Looks the same to me," all bets are off. ;)*

My girlfriend is smart.

And I know better than to say, "Looks the same to me." I'm not suicidal. A safe choice is always a compliment.

"I got them, too!" Liz says. "Well, I received two yesterday, as well. They're so good."

"Um, thank you," Bella chuckles, smiling modestly. "And it's nice to meet you, too."

Right. And now dinner's ready. "Why don't you two sit down," I suggest, kind of wanting them out of the immediate kitchen area. What can I say? I cook alone. "I'll bring the food over to the table."

"Where were those manners before?" Liz teases and she pours herself some wine. I raise an eyebrow at her. "I'm just saying—I've been living here now for a couple of weeks, and you haven't cooked for me."

"Have you cooked for me?" I ask casually.

She says nothing.

I nod. "Case closed."

Bella winks at me.

"Okay, let's sit down, Bella," Liz says, ushering Bella over to the table. "I wanna hear all about Lacy Piece! 'Cause...I saw the billboards, and you look gorgeous!"

That makes me look up from the lettuce I'm chopping.

Billboards?

Billboards! They're up now!

Holy shit, I need to get out. Later tonight. Or maybe tomorrow. We'll see.

~oOo~

To be honest, I thought my sister was going to embarrass the shit out of me tonight, but I'm glad to be wrong. In fact, dinner is really nice. Well, as nice as it can be with two chicks, one of whom is a family member.

It's not like we're talking sports, but at least they're nice enough not to talk about...I don't know...nail polish?

That would've sucked.

"This was delicious, baby," Bella compliments with a bright smile. I smile back and give her thigh a squeeze. 'Cause my mother taught me not to talk with food in my mouth.

"So, Edward..." Liz smirks at me. "When are you gonna bring Bella to see Mom and Dad?"

I shrug and fork up a piece of meat. "We talked about going out to Brookhaven once they're settled into the new house."

I know this is my sister's way of testing me. She wants to know just how serious I am with Bella, and by mentioning the folks, she gets her answer. Had I not been all-in with Bella, I certainly wouldn't have planned on introducing her to my parents.

After dinner, Bella serves the dessert she brought, and...damn, it's good shit. Some blueberry cake with lemon ice cream. Or parf-something-French.

We talk casually about everything and nothing: work, hobbies, music, movies... And Bella and Liz seem to get along just perfectly.

All in all, I'm calling it a success, and when Liz tells me that she's going to spend the night at her new apartment, I refrain from jumping for joy. Her place isn't ready just quite yet, but she can sleep without fancy wallpaper on her walls for one night.

"It was so nice meeting you, Bella," Liz says, putting on her coat in the hallway. "My brother's a lucky man."

I smile.

"I'm the lucky one," Bella replies, and I kiss her temple. "And it was very nice meeting you, too. You have my number, right?"

Right. They exchanged numbers. Not sure if that's a good or bad thing yet.

Time will tell.

"Yes! We'll go shopping soon." Liz beams excitedly. I can't help but chuckle at her. "Okay, I'm gonna go." She steps forward and hugs me, and I kiss the top of her head. Then she hugs Bella, again saying it was good to meet her. "Take care, guys."

"Be safe," I tell her. "And text me when you get home."

Her new place is only a block or two away, so she won't take a cab.

"I will." And then she's gone.

It's just the two of us now.

Bella's smile is sexy, bright, and beautiful. Her eyes are slightly darker...as if she's thinking the same thing- Wait. She can't be thinking the same thing, 'cause this is one of those rare occasions I'm not thinking about devouring her in my bedroom. I'm actually thinking about going out. And not to a damn club. No. I wanna go to Times Square.

I want to see the billboard of Bella.

"Put your coat on," I say, dipping down to kiss her cheek. "We're going to Times Square."

"But, but..."

I shake my head, the corners of my mouth turning up. "I want to see it, sweetheart. You gonna deny me?"

Her shoulders slump. "Fine. Let's go."

~oOo~

I stare up, then down at the woman next to me, then up, then down, then up, then down.

"I'm really dating a frickin' model," I mumble, scrubbing my hand over my jaw. I look down at Bella, then up at Bella. Up at Bella, down at Bella.

"Do you like it?" she asks nervously.

Yes. No. Parts of it. Fuck yes, I like it! No. I don't. I love it. But I hate Jazz. God.

It's tasteful and very professional, the massive billboard, thank goodness. But she's still sitting between Jasper's legs. On some floor. With two other chicks next to, and slightly behind, Jasper. However, when I look past that fact, it's damn good. She's sinfully exquisite. Granted, she shows a lot of skin to the good people of New York, but I'm the only one allowed to touch her, kiss her, hold her...*fuck her*...and make love to her, shit like that.

"You're hot as hell," I say bluntly.

Bella laughs softly, a little shakily, maybe, and positions herself in front of me. I take the hint and wrap my arms around her.

"I wanna nut punch Jazz, though," I mutter, resting my chin on the top of her head. "I hope he didn't get handsy."

"Oh, please. He was too worried about you. Remember? He kept mumbling about some guy?"

"Ah, yeah. That's right." I snicker. "And you thought he was talking about a boyfriend."

We're quiet for a while, just enjoying the peace. Okay, this is Times Square and there's no such thing as peace here, but it sorta feels like it. Darkness has fallen, and we don't pay attention to the city life surrounding us.

"You cold, baby?" I murmur in her hair, noticing that she's shivering. I tighten my arms around her and pull her closer. "Maybe we should go back home."

She shakes her head and turns around in my arms, looking up at me with a soft smile. "I love you."

I grin and kiss her nose. "Right back at'cha." Dipping down further, I kiss her lips, too. I want to ask her to move in with me, but I'm still not sure about her reaction. Hell, we haven't even been on a proper date yet, which I promised her. It's something I want to do, anyway. So... "Go out with me," I mumble into the kiss.

She hums and nibbles on my bottom lip. "You don't have to do that, you know. I'm already yours."

"What do you mean?" I push my tongue into her mouth and groan. She still tastes like dessert. "I want to take you out on a date."

She shivers again. "Well, if you *want* it... Just don't feel pressured. You're already perfect in my book."

"Good to know," I chuckle, pecking her softly. "But I want."

"Oh, you're killing me," she whines. "Okay, that's it. Take me home."

Home...?



24.

"Son of a bitch," I hiss quietly, unable to find the shoes I'm looking for.

"*You cursing at me, kid?*" Dad asks a little incredulously.

I roll my eyes and cradle the phone between my shoulder and cheek. Then I keep looking for my fucking shoes, hurrying. 'Cause the thing is, Edward will be here any minute to pick me up for our date.

"Dad, I really gotta go," I complain. "Edward's picking me up."

And to prove my point, there's a knock on my door.

I guess someone left the building as he arrived, seeing as I haven't buzzed him in.

"*He treatin' you good, baby girl?*" Dad mutters.

"He treats me very *well*," I assure him as I head to the door. "You'll meet him at Thanksgiving, remember?"

Before I reach the door, I check the mirror I have in the hallway. Makeup is good, hair is good, dress is good. You can't really go wrong with the little black number every woman should have in their closet. Whenever I can't choose a dress, I go with the black one. It's satin, it's sexy, it's classy, it's strapless.

"I'm just worried about ya, that's all," Dad defends just as I open the door. *"This is New York we're talking about. You never know what's gonna happen there..."* God, he's so handsome. Edward, that is. Not Dad. Well, I guess Dad, too. When he wants to be. But the man standing before me right now, wearing a black suit, a light blue tie, a white button-down, and holding a single white rose? Sigh. He's a dream come true.

"Dad," I mouth, pointing at the phone as I roll my eyes.

Edward gives me a small smirk and steps forward. "You look beautiful," he whispers.

My cheeks heat up as I accept the rose. "Thank you. And you look..." I sigh. "Like a god?"

He chuckles quietly, eyes full of mirth.

"Bella! Did you hear what I just said?"

I wince, having forgotten he was there. "Shit. Sorry, Dad, but Edward just got here. "

"Oh... Well, you be safe. Maybe I should talk to him."

"Yeah, maybe you shouldn't," I respond dryly. With a wave of my hand, I motion for Edward to come in, and then I walk to my kitchen to find a vase for my rose, which is so pretty. "I'll talk to you soon, okay?"

"Fine. Love you, kiddo."

I smile. "Love you, too, Dad."

As soon as I've hung up the phone, I turn around to see Edward casually leaning against doorframe, looking so fucking sexy.

With a girly squeal, I run to him and jump into his arms, which I've wanted to do since he arrived.

Ever since he asked me out last Sunday, we've spent our nights together, yet I've still missed him. If he's slept here, I've missed him when he went to work in the mornings, and if we spent the night at his place, I've missed him the second I went home to write. It sucks.

"Hey, beautiful," he chuckles as I kiss his face. His hands are full of my ass, so I'm thinking that's partly the reason for the wide smile on his gorgeous face.

"I missed you today," I admit between kisses. "I always miss you." I haven't applied lip gloss yet, so his face is safe for now. "Mmm, and you smell so good."

He laughs through his nose. "Christ, you're so fucking adorable." He pecks my nose. "And I missed you, too." Another kiss to my nose. "But my sister is finally gone."

Ah yes, Edward took the day off work today, just so that he could help Liz move. He's such a good brother. I offered to help, too, but Edward told me no. Apparently, since Liz and I get along so well, he assumed moving would take longer if I were there, 'cause Liz and I wouldn't focus on packing. We'd focus on shopping. Some bullshit story like that. Which is totally false. Liz and I went to get our nails done together a couple of days ago, and Edward feared we'd talk about that all night long. He's out of his mind.

"So, I guess we're spending the night at your place?" I ask, wishing I could call his apartment "home". I really love it there. I wish it had more color, but seriously, the apartment is so nice.

"Oh yeah," he murmurs huskily, "and you can be as loud as you want."

Ungh. Edward releases me, and I clench my thighs together. So uncool of him to ruin my new panties already.

~oOo~

Instead of taking me to a swanky restaurant in Manhattan, Edward takes me to a quaint place in Brooklyn. It's an Italian restaurant, and it suddenly feels like we've gone back a few decades in time. It's the décor, the feeling, the atmosphere. It's cozy and romantic, a perfect choice for our first real date.

After placing our orders, Edward and I scoot closer together in our little corner booth. The lights are dimmed, and on the table there's a candle burning in a glass bottle.

"This is so amazing, Edward," I say quietly, not wanting to disturb the atmosphere. He drops a soft kiss on my bare shoulder and threads our fingers together. "Have you been here before?"

"Not for dinner, but lunch once." He smiles. "Before we got the big accounts at Volturi, we did advertising for smaller places." I look at him curiously. "I designed this place's website and logos. The front sign? I designed that, too."

"Wow." My eyes take in the place again. "But isn't this an old restaurant?"

It has that feel. Like generations upon generations have tended this place, all from the same family or something. I guess I can't see it having a website. Don't know why.

"It's actually only four years old," he answers. "The owner wanted a rustic place, one that reminded of the old days."

"Huh." I look up at him and smile again. "Well, you've done a fantastic job." I wink.

He laughs through his nose. "Thanks. It was about three years ago when the owner came to Volturi, so a few things have changed since then, but..." He shrugs.

Our wine and appetizers arrive, and we talk as if it really is our first date. Okay, it is, but our relationship isn't that new. But we cover the most basic topics, the ones you usually cover in a brand new relationship. High school years, college years, interning, finally landing real jobs... We also talk about family, and I'm a little surprised to find out that my family is bigger than his. Aside from his parents and sister, he has an aunt and uncle on Carlisle's side, and an aunt and two cousins on Esme's side. All of whom live far away.

"Carmen—that's Dad's sister—and Eleazar, they live in Alaska," he tells me, cutting into his main course. "And Mom's sister and two children live in San Francisco."

I hum and take a sip from my wine. "I don't even know how many cousins I have."

While I'm an only child and Dad loves living alone in secluded places, we come from a big family. Dad has two brothers and three sisters, and all of them have children in all ages.

"Dad's the second oldest in their family, and we're only really close to his older brother and his family—they live in Seattle. The rest we see on a few major holidays, but they're sorta spread around the globe," I chuckle, thinking about how very rarely actually do see them. Edward grins. "So, if you ever wanna go to Singapore, for instance, I can hook you up. One of my uncles lives there with his family." I frown. "I hope we don't actually have to live on the oil rig, though," I joke.

He laughs then asks, "Have you traveled a lot?"

We've reached the topic of vacations, and I decide to finally jump on the opportunity to ask him about Vegas.

"I did some traveling after high school," I reply pensively as I gather some spaghetti carbonara on my fork. "I went to Europe—cliché backpacking experience—but it was hilarious. And Dad took me to Singapore once when I was nine, then once to Finland where I have an aunt—that was when I was twelve." I smile. "What about you?"

He smirks. "Same 'clichéd backpacking experience' in Europe." We chuckle. "Only, I went over the summer after my first year in college. Other than that...I visited Liz once when she moved to London, and when Mom and Dad celebrated twenty years together, we all went to Hawaii."

"Damn, that sounds amazing," I say dreamily. "I've always wanted to go to Hawaii. Oh! And Australia." I nod. "One day." And I hope it will be with Edward, which I want him to know. "You ever wanna go to Australia?"

He gets what I'm saying. The soft smile on his lips tells me as much. "Yes."

Insert internal squeal right here.

After a beat of silence and some more moaning about the delicious food, I find the balls to ask.

"Ever been to Vegas?" I tilt my head.

His mouth twitches a little at the corners, but he takes his time answering, and not before he's eaten a forkful of chicken.

"Twice," he says, eyes locked with mine. "During college. Why?"

I chew on my lip, nervous. "Um, the girls and I go every year, and..." I start fiddling with my napkin. "Well, this year, I...I sorta asked them if I

could ask *you* to...come along." I gulp. "You, Jasper, and Emmett, I mean." I glance up at him.

He looks both amused and, to be honest, relieved. "You want me to go with you?"

"Yeah." I nod quickly, feeling my cheeks heat up. "I was, uh, thinking now that we're...you know, serious..." I blow out a frustrated breath, not used to being so flustered and unable to speak properly. "I guess what I'm saying is that going away on trips without talking things through with your boyfriend or girlfriend, um...is not okay?" Edward's lips are pursed as he just stares at me. "Holy shit," I mutter, placing a hand on my chest. I take a breath. "Could you please take pity on me and save me here?"

And he lets out a loud laugh.

Lovely.

"Stop it," I mumble with a scowl and smack his chest.

"Fuck, I'm sorry," he giggles like the man he is. His arm goes around my shoulders. "No. No, I'm not. That was really funny." He kisses my cheek noisily. "You're cute, love."

"You're sweet," I deadpan.

"Hence 'sweetie', right?" He winks. "In all seriousness, though..." He tucks a piece of hair behind my ear then kisses my nose. "I'd love to go to Vegas with you. I'm sure Em and Jazz would be thrilled, too. When are you leaving?"

"We haven't set a date yet, but we usually go after Halloween."

He turns pensive at that, if not a little disappointed.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

He frowns and sighs. "I just remembered we have a lot to do at work both before and after that weekend." His frown deepens as he stares at his plate. "Which means Emmett's busy, too. Halloween is our deadline for three accounts that have Christmas campaigns beginning mid-November."

"Oh..." My brows furrow, mind spinning. "But what about Thanksgiving, then?" His head snaps up. I nod, liking my idea more and more. "You think you could take a few days off right before Thanksgiving?"

He smirks. "I wouldn't mind a few days of drinking right before I meet your father, now that I think of it."

I don't know how many times I've told him he has nothing to worry about, but since my dad is a police officer, Edward thinks Dad is going to interrogate my boyfriend's sexy ass.

"Thanksgiving sounds cool, though." He nods slowly, thinking. "How many days?"

"We settled on four this year."

He nods again. "Shouldn't be a problem."

Insert another internal squeal here.

"Eeeeeeeek!" I quickly cover my mouth with my hand.

Shit. Okay, so it wasn't very internal, that squeal.

"Excited?" he laughs.

I bob my head up and down furiously. "We're going to Vegas, baby!"

Instead of bouncing around like a patient who has escaped an asylum—sort of like a certain Bella Swan—Edward gets this tender look in his eyes...before he kisses me stupid.

That shuts me up.

That turns me on.

"I love you," he groans quietly into my mouth.

I fist his hair and pull him impossibly closer. "I love you, too."

"Dessert to go instead?"

"Oh, yes," I breathe out. "Take me home."

He pecks me softly, but there's nothing soft about his gaze. He looks predatory, hungry, and determined.

"Home," he finishes quietly.

I shiver.



24.

"Bella, baby," I groan, pushing the back of my head further into the pillow. "Don't fucking tease me." I'm ready to beg the woman.

Flattening her tongue, she licks the underside of my cock, and she's taking her sweet-ass time. It's clear that she's in charge tonight, and that's more than fine with me. I love a woman who knows what she wants. However, my girl seems to be in the mood to drive me insane.

"Where do you want me?" she asks seductively. I grunt and arch into her as she sucks on my balls. Jesus Christ. "Tell me."

"*Fuck.*" I drag a hand over my face then prop myself up on my elbows. 'Cause I gotta see this. "I want you to suck my cock, sweetheart. That's what I fucking want."

She whimpers and bites her lip, eyes first on my face then on my erection.

Then she sucks me in.

Deep.

And I fall back against the pillow again.

With my fingers threaded through her hair, I set the pace, feeling greedy. I want to come first because I need an all-fucking-nighter with my Bella. It means it's her turn after this, and by the time she comes, I'll be hard again and ready to fuck her. After that, since it's still pretty early in the night, we'll probably shower, and I sure as hell wouldn't mind giving her another orgasm in there. Then we'll get a snack, maybe the dessert we brought home from the restaurant, and then more sex before we pass out.

"Jesus," I grunt, squeezing my eyes shut. Her mouth is hot and wet, eager, and her pouty lips are wrapped tightly around me. At the same time, she massages my balls with one hand. "Oh fuck, yeah." She swallows around me, causing my abs to tighten in response. I swear, every time the head of my dick rubs against her throat, I'm ready to give her the world.

"Mmmmm," she hums.

I curse and thrust into her mouth, also tightening my hold on her hair.

"Close, love," I moan. A tingling sensation travels down my neck and spine. I tense up, thrusting deeper, down her throat, and Bella only hums in approval and sucks harder. "That's it—fuck!" Holding her head in place, I come hard in three thick streams. "Ohhhh, *God*," I groan breathlessly.

While I catch my breath, Bella kisses her way up my body.

Shivers rip through me, one setting off another.

"Come here," I pant, scooting down on the mattress. "Sit on my face."

She does, and I eat her out. I'm addicted to the taste of her pussy. With my tongue and fingers, I fuck her 'til she screams.

I barely let her recover before I flip her over and shove my cock deep inside her soaked pussy.

"Fuck!" she cries out.

I grip the headboard and keep pounding into her. Noses touching, breaths exchanging, moans and groans, skin slapping, hips meeting, her nails clawing at my back, my cock drilling into her. We act like animals tonight, a stark contrast from a romantic evening. But this is how we are. Sometimes we go rough, sometimes we go slow.

"Edward," she whimpers, pulling me down. "Baby...*please!*"

I exhale harshly, feeling a few beads of sweat trickling down my chest.

"What?" I swallow. "Tell me what you want, honey."

She arches into me, eyes screwed shut. "More...oh, *God, more!*"

So, I roll us over. "Ride me," I tell her, and then I push her luscious tits together. I suck on her nipples, letting my teeth graze her flesh. And she rides me. She rides me hard, clenching her muscles tightly around my hard cock. "Fucking sexy," I groan. "Kiss me, baby. Kiss me." Which she

does. Twisting and pulling at my hair, she kisses me hungrily and pushes her tongue into my mouth.

My hands slide down, one ending up on her ass and the other on her pussy. Fuck, I can already feel a second orgasm approaching, and I need her to come first.

"I love you," she mewls and takes my bottom lip between her teeth. "I love you...fuck, so much."

"I love—I love you, too," I grit out. We're a panting mess. "And you belong here," I admit as I start sucking on her neck. "With me—always me, baby."

Her pussy constricts around me and she tenses fiercely, crying out my name. But more importantly, she also cries out a yes. Not that it's enough—it's still too vague.

With my thumb, I rub circles on her clit. It makes her gasp and tilt her head back, which in turn pushes her tits out.

"Goddamn," I grunt when she slams down on me.

"With you," she breathes out shallowly in my ear. "Here."

I shudder, wondering if she really understood where I was going.

"Move in with—with me," I clarify, panting.

My thighs throb.

She lifts her hips and sinks down, and then she crashes her mouth to mine again, this time almost forcefully.

Close.

"Fuck, too close," I groan, out of breath.

"Yes," she gasps as I add pressure on her clit. "I'll move in with you... Oh, yes...Edward."

Then we're pretty much both gone.

Bella stiffens and sucks in a sharp breath just as my cock begins to pulse inside of her. The pleasure shoots through me, and it's impossible to focus on anything else. It's like an eruption inside my body; it leaves me rigid. I vaguely register Bella's breathless gasps in the crook of my neck, and I can feel her heart pounding against my skin.

Slowly, I tilt my head toward her and drop soft kisses on her shoulder and neck. My lips don't even leave her skin; they linger, and I taste her when the tip of my tongue darts out. She tastes like sex and her body lotion—so both a little salty and sweet. I love it.

"Beautiful," I murmur, reaching her jaw. I nip at it gently and smile when she turns her head to kiss me. "You'll move in with me?" I mumble against her soft lips.

"Here," she whispers. "I prefer your place—it's perfect."

I grin and chuckle, still not fully recovered from our, uh, workout. "Your place is homier, though," I point out quietly. To be honest, I love my place and it's also bigger than Bella's, but I want her to know that I don't really have a preference. It's hardly a deal breaker. And I didn't lie; her place is homier. I live in a classic bachelor pad.

It'd be easier if we took my place, though, 'cause I own my apartment. Bella rents.

When my biological parents died, they left us quite a fortune. Not enough to be set for life or anything, but it made it possible for Liz and me to buy

our own apartments and pay for college. And seriously, to buy a place in Manhattan, you actually need a fucking fortune. Just saying.

"Oh, you'd be surprised what a little color can do," she laughs under her breath.

I laugh, too, and shake my head in amusement. "Planning already?" I kinda like it. I may not ever understand decorative pillows and paintings of babies and fruit bowls, but whatever. I want this place to look like Bella lives here.

She offers a bashful smile, and for some reason I bite her nose.

Don't ask me why, seriously.

"Ugh, boy cooties," she teases, rubbing her nose.

I snort. "Says the woman I'm still inside of."

"Oh, yeah. Forgot about that."

I give her a horrified look. So, maybe I'm very soft at the moment, but come the fuck *on*. "Not exactly what a man likes to hear, Bella."

She forgot the cock?

Something is wrong in this universe.

"Please!" She scoffs and slaps my chest. "Like you don't already know how big your cock is."

Okay, so now I smile a little smugly.

Fucking sue me.

"Wipe that smile off your face, Cullen," she giggles, "and join me in the shower."

Done and done.

~oOo~

After a satisfying shower where I give Bella another orgasm and she gives me a thorough backrub, we split up for a little moment. I go to the kitchen to slice the chocolate cake we brought home from Brooklyn, and Bella goes to *our* bedroom and to get pillows and the covers. So, now we're on the couch in the living room, sitting at opposite ends, under the covers, with our legs tangled in the middle.

Unfortunately, we're not naked.

I'm in boxers and a t-shirt, and Bella's wearing, uh, actually the same—a pair of my boxers and an old t-shirt from my college days.

It says Cullen on the back of it.

Just saying.

"When can I move in?" she asks with a cheeky smile.

I fork up a piece of cake, unable to wipe off the grin on my face.

"Yesterday."

"Done!" she chuckles. "No, but seriously."

I nod. "I *am* serious, baby."

Delicious fucking cake, by the way.

Bella chose it for us, and it's like three layers of chocolate cake, chocolate frosting, and chocolate flakes.

"Edward..." Her smile is now soft and tender and sweet, which is not good for my masculinity. If her eyes well up, my balls will shrink. "You really want me to move in? Now?"

"Yeah. Yesterday." I take a breath and set down my plate. "I'm serious, baby. I want all your woman shit, too. I know there will be changes, and I'm ready. You wanna paint the walls?—Fine by me. You wanna rearrange the closets?—Be my guest." I shrug. "I mean...it's been what—seven-eight months now since we met?" She nods. "Right. Well..." I shrug again, 'cause I'm good with shrugs. Words? Not so much. "Just...move in."

Averting her eyes for a moment, she seems to think about...something. I don't know, but then she looks back at me, and...fuck me, there are tears in her eyes.

"I love you," she whispers thickly.

"I love you, too." I smile, a little nervous. "But don't cry. For real. I don't do well with tears."

She sniffles and laughs at the same time. "Happy tears."

"Still." Can't she just stop? 'Cause I get this uncomfortable feeling in my gut when I see her cry. That's just how it is in the life of a pussy-whipped man. Sucks. "Smile instead," I tell her with a wink.

And she smiles.

For a moment, we sit in silence and eat our cake, but I can tell that there's a lot on her mind.

That's women. They gotta over-think everything. Nothing can be easy.

But I'm ready for it.

"I have a month-to-month lease on my place," she mentions quietly, almost shyly.

I smile at her. "Perfect. Talk to your landlord."

And she's relieved. Maybe that's also a woman thing—they gotta be reassured a few times? I don't know, but I'm ready for that, too.

"Hey," I say, just remembering something. "My dad is looking for a place here in the city." Since he'll be working here and living in Brookhaven, he has one helluva commute to look forward to, but both he and Mom mentioned that a small place in Manhattan would be perfect. "Just a place he can sleep when he's on call or whatever he said."

Bella agrees right away, and we wear cheesy fucking smiles while we finish the cake.

Despite this being one of the best days of my life, though, I end up having a nightmare that night.

I dream that my dick is too small.



25.

"You're distracting me," I complain, not meaning it at all. I try to focus on the box with kitchen stuff I'm unpacking in *my* new kitchen, but that's not

very easy when I have Edward standing behind me, kissing my neck. Those hands of his are wandering, too.

"Can't help it, love," he murmurs in my ear before returning to his kissing...licking...nibbling...sucking. Jesus. "Fuck—you've just made me so happy. We're officially living together."

And I die.

But I won't cry.

Ignore how that rhymed.

Speaking of ignoring, I ignore the cheese grater and turn around in my live-in boyfriend's arms. My hands slide up his muscular arms, and he dips down just as I reach up. He kisses me passionately, making me forget the fact that our friends are close by. He also makes me forget that his parents are on their way over.

Over the past few weeks, Edward and I have been busy, to say the least. Aside from work, we've talked about changes we wanna make in *our* apartment, we've planned the Vegas trip, we've packed up my old place, we've talked about the future, and we've bought some new stuff for our home.

There's not a lot I wanted to change, but a few things...

For instance, we currently have Emmett and Jasper painting the white walls in the living room into a warm, moss green color. And Edward's black super comfy couch has gotten a new dark brown slipcover to match the new living room. We've also bought a new entertainment center—in solid wood, as opposed to the glossy, plastic thing Edward had before. Our new coffee table matches, too, and the wall behind the couch will soon house all my old records.

White linen drapes. A thick beige rug. Matching photo frames for our pictures to go on the walls.

At first I thought Edward would mainly shrug and say, "Whatever you say", but he hasn't. He's been involved in picking colors and such, though he told me bluntly that he didn't give a fuck about decorative pillows, plants, or drapes.

I don't hold it against him. A man has his limits.

He was, however, *very* picky when he bought his own tool belt.

"How's it coming along in there?" I ask, pecking his lips softly. Edward's jeans are stained with moss green paint. As is his black t-shirt. Mine is stained with dark red, which is the new color for our bedroom. Actually it's just one wall, but it's made a huge difference. Even Edward said it was perfect.

"Good," he mutters and gives my ass a squeeze. "Just came out here to molest my girlfriend and get more beer."

I chuckle. "Feel free to molest me at any time."

"Planned to," he growls playfully, nuzzling my cheek. "By the way, Rose and Alice are done in the study."

"Great!" I grin. We'd talked a little about what to do with Edward's study, whether or not we wanted to keep it or change it into something else, but then we agreed that we could both benefit from it, so we kept it. We just made room for my desk and my research materials and stuff. "I guess it's time to call for pizza, then?"

He nods and kisses me on the forehead. "Sounds good. My folks should be here in twenty, so it'll be perfect timing for lunch."

Yeah...just perfect timing...

Thing is, we've tried to come up with a date for us to meet, but Edward's father recently started working at Beth Israel, making it difficult for us to agree on an occasion where he wasn't either working or just coming off a long shift. But when Edward called his parents last week and said that he and I had picked this weekend to move in together, Esme was quick to tell Carlisle to take a "sick day or whatever-the-fuck". That was a direct Esme Cullen quote, apparently. 'Cause there was no way Esme could stand not having met her son's girlfriend until we actually shared an address.

So, Carlisle is "sick" today.

"Don't be nervous," he tells me, kissing my nose. "You're already a godsend in my mother's book, so relax." Then he grimaces. "I'm just weirded out that she subscribes to my girlfriend's daily sex advice."

That certainly lightens the tension.

When Lizzie told me that she'd spilled the beans to Esme about who I am and what I do for a living, Edward had received a phone call with a squeal as a greeting. I should know, since I was sitting next to him on the couch when he picked up the phone. So, Esme knows I'm the Bella Swan from *Written Word*, and she definitely seems to approve, much to my relief.

Still, meeting your boyfriend's parents for the first time is nerve-racking.

"Cullen!" I hear Jasper below from the living room. "Now, this is just cheesy! Do you serenade Bella with this?"

I tilt my head at Edward, curious about what Jazz means, at which Edward just laughs.

"The iPod," he explains, chuckling. I listen to the song that just began, and then I can't help but laugh, too. It's Van Morrison's "Brown Eyed Girl",

and I'm willing to bet Edward's buddies think he's the sappiest dude on the planet right now. But while my sexy man is very capable of being romantic, he does it without the cheese. And he doesn't have this song on his iPod for, uh, wooing reasons.

See, a few weeks ago, at Halloween, I was invited at *Written Word's* Halloween party, and I obviously brought Edward with me. But we'd been so busy with work and stuff that we hadn't had time to prepare costumes, so we took the easy way out. I put on some 60's inspired outfit and became Brown Eyed Girl, and Edward donned a regular tux and held a martini glass—*voilà*, he was James Bond.

I downloaded this song as we got ready that night, and when we got back from the party, we realized this song was the worst song ever to have sex to.

But that's neither here nor there.

James Bond still fucked me good and proper.

"Dirty girl," Edward says quietly, narrowing his eyes accusingly. "You're still thinking about me in that tux, aren't you?"

I flip my hair over my shoulder and reach for the phone. 'Cause it's time to call for pizza.

Stupid question, by the way. "Obviously, Double-Oh-Cullen. *Obviously.*"

He chuckles. "It *was* a good night, wasn't it?" And he gets this faraway look in his eyes. "And if I remember correctly," he smiles smugly and leans in to whisper in my ear, "I gave you double O's that night."

Oh, he sure did.

"Mr. Cheese!" Ugh. Emmett this time. "What happened to our beers!"

"Mr. Fucking Cheese, my ass," Edward mutters and steps back. "I'm not cheesy, am I?"

"No. You have nothing to worry about," I giggle. "Besides, I picked out this song."

"Hmm. You want cheese, baby?" He grins mischievously. "I'll give you cheese."

Without another word, he pulls me to him then twirls me around before drawing me close again. And we're suddenly dancing.

"Edward!" I laugh.

Love-struck, dumb-struck, um, swoon-struck? That's me.

His grin widens as he spins me again. "Better?"

"Oh, sweetie," I giggle again. "I'm so keeping you forever."

He pulls me close, swaying us playfully to the song. "Forever sounds good," he murmurs in my ear, and then he dips me. I let out a squeal, afraid he's going to drop me. But he doesn't. "Just don't count on the cheese." He snickers.

I look into his eyes, grinning widely. "You're such a goof. *My* goof."

"*That*, I am," he agrees, chuckling, and pulls me up. "And now I'm your starving goof."

I'm starving, too, but before I can tell him that I'll call for pizza, I hear a muffled squeal *very* close by.

It's not Rose. It's not Alice. It's certainly not Emmett or Jazz.

Holy shit.

I bury my face in Edward's chest.

'Cause his parents are standing by the kitchen island that separates the cooking area from the dining area.

"Crap," Edward mumbles in my hair. He clears his throat. "Yeah, Mom? When I gave you spare keys, it didn't mean you could actually use them."

She lets out another squeal that's muffled by her hands, and then I hear the clicking of her heels as she walks over, which means my hiding is over.

"You two just look..." She trails off for a moment with a dreamy look on her face. "You look *so* sweet and in love." Then she gives Edward the bitch brow. "And we knocked on the door, just so you know. But the music was too loud for you to hear." And she faces me again, smiling widely. "It's so nice to finally meet you, Bella."

"You too, Mrs. Cullen," I say politely with a smile.

She waves that off and grabs my right hand in both hers. "It's Esme." She squeezes my hand gently.

"And this is my dad," Edward adds as Carlisle steps forward.

"Pleasure to meet you, Bella," he says with a warm smile. "Edward's told us a lot about you." He winks. "All good things."

I chuckle, both nervous and...um, nervous. Worth mentioning twice. "Glad to hear that. And nice to meet you, too, Dr. Cullen."

He grins. "It's Carlisle." Then he looks to his son. "Your sister told me you'd picked a girl way out of your league. I'm thinking she's right."

Esme snorts. "So did you, Carlisle honey. So did you."

I find myself relaxing.

"I knew she way out of my league from the get-go," Edward chuckles and kisses my temple.

Swoon.

"Awww." Esme.

"That was a little cheesy, baby," I tease, looking up at him with a grin.

He clutches his heart. "Damn. That means I gotta go do something manly now." He laughs through his nose and kisses mine. "It's your fault, love. You've turned me into a sap."

"That's what they do," Carlisle says solemnly. "Once you fall in love, there's no hope left."

Smack!

"What was that for?" Carlisle whines as he rubs the back of his neck.

Esme huffs, and Edward and I watch in amusement. "If you don't know why, then I can't help you." She sniffs and juts out her chin.

"Well, I don't know!"

She shrugs. "Then I can't help you."

"All right," Edward chuckles. "Sweetheart, you call for pizza. Mom, Dad, I'll introduce you to our friends."

~oOo~

Half an hour later, we're all sitting in the living room, devouring pizza, all nervousness long gone. Esme and Carlisle are easygoing and funny, and both Jasper and Emmett crack jokes with Carlisle about Edward handing

over his balls to me. Jasper gets all thoughtful and wonders if that's why they call it the old ball and chain. 'Cause the wife is in possession of the man's balls after marriage. Then Edward turns the tables and points out that Jasper may as well hand over his masculinity, too, seeing as Jazz and Alice are official now. Jasper shuts up at that. And then, in the end, we have Carlisle, Edward, and Jasper teasing Emmett, the "last man standing".

Meanwhile, Rose, Alice, Esme, and I...we just watch. It's all like a big pissing contest.

"I'd love to tell you that it gets better with time," Esme mutters, reaching for another slice of pizza. "But I'd be a liar."

"They're all so macho now," Alice agrees, nodding. The men don't listen. They're too busy talking about football right now. Edward gets so passionate when they talk about the Giants. And Jasper when they talk about the Cowboys? *Jesus*. Or Emmett with...some other team. Um, the team that's from Boston. No, wait. New England? The Patriots! That's it. Ugh. Never mind. I tune into what Alice is saying again. "...we're over at my place or his—doesn't matter—but when we're alone, Jasper's so sweet and tentative. Then when he's with Edward or Emmett? Holy fuck!"

I nod. "I feel like I'm waiting for them to pull out a ruler or something."

Just last week, Edward invited Emmett and Jazz over for a poker night in the living room, and Liz and I were in the kitchen, drinking wine and just talking. It was crazy once the guys got going!

"NO WAY!" Edward suddenly bellows, mouth full of pizza. He's glaring at Emmett. "The Giants will take home the fucking title, you ass! I'm telling you, this is their season. Just you wait for the Superbowl."

The girls and I exchange knowing looks.

Emmett glares right back at Edward. "It'll be the Patriots against the Giants, and you will walk home the fucking loser!"

"Edward," I caution, placing a hand on his bicep.

"Not now, love. I'm busy here." He gives me a quick—not to mention greasy—kiss then returns his attention to Emmett and starts talking football stats.

I sigh and turn back to Esme, Alice, and Rose.

"Welcome to my life," Esme says, patting my hand.

I have a feeling it's a life I'm going to love. But I think it's a good thing that I grew up around sports. Dad's as crazy as Edward is, and I know when to back off. I also know not to get between a man and his flat screen when there's a game on.

"So, when are you off to Vegas?" Esme asks next, and we forget about the boys.

"Next week." I grin, so excited. "Then we'll be back two days before Thanksgiving."

"It's gonna be so fun!" Alice exclaims. "We definitely need a vacation."

"Amen, sister." Rose nods. "Four days of drinking, gambling, shopping, and sleeping late."

"And seducing Emmett?" I tease in a whisper.

She flushes and ducks her head.

I swear, the sexual tension between Rose and her Dimples is too much sometimes. It's only a matter of time before they give in. Or rather, before Rose caves, 'cause Emmett's made it clear that he wants Rose.

"Well, I hope you'll have fun," Esme says, smiling. "Just don't get married there. I'd like to see my son when he says 'I do' to you."

I get all warm at the thought of marrying Edward.

And while I sincerely doubt I'll get hitched in Vegas, I won't promise Esme anything.

'Cause here's the thing. If Edward Cullen proposes to you?

YOU SAY YES!

I mean...I saw this vampire movie once, right? And that girl...her hot boyfriend popped the question over and over, and I was like...if that chick doesn't get over herself soon and says yes, I'ma bust a cap in her ass.

Gangsta' style.

Ya know?

In all honesty, I want my dad to walk me down the aisle the day I get married, but...

Yeah, there's that little "but" that keeps me from saying a word to Esme.

So, I just smile at her and fill my mouth with pizza.

When I look up again, I find Edward watching me with a soft smile, but his eyes are questioning.

"What?" I whisper, afraid he can see through me. After all, I'm in no rush. I'm only twenty-five, and Edward's only a year older. We have plenty of time to get married and think about the future. Plus, we *just* moved in together. I don't want Edward to think I'm not content to wait. A little.

He purses his lips and opens his mouth but then closes it again.

"Nothing," he finally says. He kisses me quickly. "Love you."

I breathe out in relief and grin. "Love you, too."



25.

"My ass is so fat," Bella complains in the crook of my neck...as I squeeze said ass. Her ass isn't fat. It's juicy and round and bubbly and fucking perfect. No pun intended. "Stop groping, Cullen." I will do no such thing. The truth is that we've both put on a few pounds in the past couple of weeks; moving in together does that. But, and I will stress this to no end, I don't want Bella to lose those few pounds. She's still slim, but now she's just a little bit softer. And her *ass*, people...*Christ*.

"I love your ass," I mutter, nipping at her shoulder. In response, she squirms on top of me, realization dawning on her when she feels my erection through my black board shorts. "Yeah, you see, honey?" All her fault. "Don't move—we wouldn't wanna scare the good people of Las Vegas."

'Cause that's where we are.

We're staying at the Hard Rock Hotel & Casino—in the Paradise Tower—and our room has a view of the pool. We're currently lounging by mentioned pool. She's literally on top of me, as I lie in one of the many

chairs, and she's wearing this white itty bitty bikini. No fucking wonder I'm hard.

We got lucky, 'cause it's usually not *this* hot here this time of year, but it's about 78 degrees right now, and it's fucking amazing. The sun is shining, the drinks are flowing, the beer is cold, the girl on my lap is sinfully hot, the food is great, the nights are steamy, the...I can go on and on, really.

We have two more days before going home, and we refuse to waste it by staying inside. We can gamble at night.

"Guys, I'm gonna go up and take a nap before dinner," Rose says, getting up from her lounger. I look at her through my Ray-Bans, knowing very well that she's full of shit. Bella knows, too, which is why she's giggling against my shoulder.

"Be safe," Alice says on the other side of me, and how she manages to remain serious, I don't know. All I know is that I'm hiding my amusement by burying my face in Bella's hair. And Jazz, who's lying next to Alice, is shaking with silent laughter.

From the other side of Rose's chair, I hear Emmett yawning loudly, as if on cue.

They're not subtle.

"Yeah, I think I'm gonna get some z's before dinner, too," he says, stretching his arms out. "Catch'a later."

As soon as they're out of earshot, we all break down in laughter.

Actually, Bella's not laughing. She's just giggling sleepily while stretching and purring and using me as a mattress. Which is how she's been for the past two days whenever we've been by the pool. I've been her teddy bear or something.

I don't mind. Especially not when her bikini shifts or rides up...places.

"Tired, sweetheart?" I murmur in her hair. She shakes her head no and lifts her chin to face me. Her lazy smile tells me how much she's enjoying our vacation. "You should put some more sunscreen on your shoulders," I say, reaching for my beer. "They're a little red." She's mostly gorgeously tanned, something that doesn't happen to me and my lily white ass—and definitely not after just two days—but we've been down here since breakfast, so... Woman needs to be careful, dammit.

"After a swim," she replies, smiling. "Wanna join me?"

I take a sip from my Heineken then nod. "You bet."

"I think we should get Rose and Emmett so hammered that they wake up married tomorrow," Alice giggles.

I snort-laugh at her, but it *would* be fun, I admit.

"Only in the movies, Alice," Bella chuckles and gets up from the chair. I watch as she straightens her tiny bikini, which is unfortunately double layered. Otherwise, I would've gotten some nipple action. Then again, I don't want anyone else seeing her nipples.

"What do you mean?" Alice asks.

Bella grins. "I mean that you can't really get drunk and wake up married. That only happens in the movies. First," she holds up a finger, "you gotta go down to the Marriage License Bureau downtown." Another finger comes up. "Then you wait in line to stand before a clerk to get that license, and," she chuckles, "they won't issue you one if you're drunk. And third, though it might be legal, only the seedier people will marry a couple that is drunk. So, sure, you can get married drunk, I guess, but you can't obtain your marriage license unless you're sober."

I smirk at her, placing my shades on the table, and get up from the lounge. "That was a fairly detailed description, Ms. Swan." I smack her on the ass and lead her toward the pool. "Done your research, have ya?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," she says flippantly. Then, with a cheeky wink, she dives in. Once she resurfaces, she's all smiles. "Joining me today or tomorrow?"

I tilt my head, just watching her.

Truth is, I have a ring.

I bought it last week. Liz helped me.

I saw no reason to wait. Bella and I are solid, on the same page, in it for life.

But getting married in Vegas?

I don't know.

While I'd love to just get it over with and make Bella a Cullen, I only plan on getting married once, and Mom would *kill* me if she missed out on it. It wouldn't be fair on anyone, really. Besides, I haven't even met Charlie yet. Now, I can only speak for myself, but if I had a daughter and she came home married one day without my knowing it, I'd be pretty hurt. My guess is that it's a big deal to walk your daughter down the aisle. I'm also willing to bet that it's a big deal for the daughter, too. Bella in this case.

There is one thing I suddenly wanna do here in Vegas, though.

"Edward? Is something wrong?"

I shake my head no, I smile, I dive in.

Swimming underwater, I make sure not to resurface until I'm right in front of her. Then I slide my hands up the back of her thighs as I break through the surface, hoisting her up and wrapping her legs around my chest. That makes her laugh and smile down at me.

Slowly, she slides down my body until we're face to face and her legs are settled around my hips instead.

"God, you're so fucking beautiful," I murmur as she brushes drops of water from my cheeks. Her eyes soften and I kiss her chastely. "I love you."

"I love you, too," she whispers. "But right now you need to stop looking at me like that."

"Like what?"

She kisses me on the nose. "Like I'm your world. You said you don't do well with tears, and that look, the look you have right now, is beckoning me to become emotional."

I let out a breathy laugh, knowing that I'm gonna have a weepy Bella in my arms soon enough.

"We won't do it in Vegas," I say quietly, softly kissing her cheek. Her jaw. "We'll do it in New York." Her nose gets a kiss, too. "I will watch you as Charlie leads you to me." Her breathing hitches once. "And I will always look at you like you're my world, because that's what you are." I kiss the spot behind her ear. "I have your ring at home already." With one more kiss, I look her in the eye. "Marry me, Bella."

I'm usually not very good at words, but I thought that was pretty stellar, if I may say so myself.

Judging by the look on Bella's face, I'd say she thinks the same.

"Be my wife," I whisper and kiss her softly on the lips. "Please."

I feel the shaky breath that leaves her, and I find myself swallowing hard, not having expected my own emotions.

"Yes," she breathes out tearfully. "*God*, yes." She throws her arms around me. "Yes, Edward." She sniffles a little and hugs me so tightly. "You're my world, too."

I smile and kiss her hard.

Maybe we started out as fuck-buddies, but we grew at the perfect pace—perfect pace for *us*—and now there's no holding back. No drama, no fuss, no denial, no running away. We just happened to fall in love, we just happened to be perfect for each other, and we just happened to want each other for life.

To be continued...