

Stephenie Meyer owns Twilight

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River

Prologue

BPOV

I smile as I see Jasper cooing and cuddling with our little boy. It makes me hope that maybe we can fix this. Maybe. A part of me doesn't believe it. And it's no wonder why, of course. The feelings I have bottled up are slowly but surely ripping me to pieces. But I need this. Right? This is what I want.

Yes?

"I know you're watching us," I hear Jazz say.

With another smile, I push myself off the doorframe and walk toward our bed.

"Yeah, Mommy's watching us, isn't she?" he coos to River. "Yes, she is. Yes, she is."

Wow, three smiles in less than two minutes. That has to be some kind of record.

Stop being so bitter, Bella.

But it's hard.

I feel lonely, not to mention conflicted. Having a fiancé who works so often – and across the country – it's hard not to notice things that I'm supposed to be used to. Like when he makes me smile. It happens, of course, but not often. And how can it? Since our son was born six months ago, Jazz has been home a total of eight weeks.

But that's going to change now, right?

He said so himself.

He's here for us.

Fiancé, fiancé, fiancé.

"Hey, what's with the frown, darlin'?" Jazz asks, bringing me back to now.

I shake my head to clear it. I smile again, though it feels forced now.

I guess I just wish he could bond more with his son. As for Jazz bonding with me... well... I don't know...

"Just glad to have you home for the weekend," I reply, and it's only the truth for River's sake. I know that.

He hums and turns back to the little one. "Feels good to be back. I've missed a lot."

True.

River does new things everyday.

"His eyes aren't as blue anymore," he comments, giving River an Eskimo kiss. "They almost seem... green."

Hmm?

Well, that's odd. "Probably the lighting in here," I say with a shrug.

1.

~And he's thinking... Good riddance, Chicago.

BPOV

"Whoa, who died?" I joke, entering the kitchen.

Jazz and Rose are both sitting there, looking awfully down.

"We're going through our bank statements," Jazz mutters.

Ah, whatever. I'm sorry but I'm sick of his childish behavior about our money.

Ever since he lost his job, he's been such a buzzkill. Honestly, I don't see what the big deal is. We can always get another roommate. The house is certainly big enough.

"I think we should go with Bella's suggestion," Rose sighs.

Jazz grimaces. "That means we gotta empty the game room."

Boohoo.

But wait for it...

Wait for it...

"Or we could move back home and start over."

"No," Rose and I say at the same time.

She and I have our dream jobs here in Virginia. There's no way we're giving those up just because Jazz lost a job he barely even liked. No. No way. We're not going back to Seattle. Besides, it was his idea to come here in the first place. We thought we'd end up in California with what we do, but that was thankfully not the case. Something about permits and shit. It's cheaper for Cullen Media to be here. And we love it.

I'm glad he lost his job in Richmond. This will give him the push he needs to find a better job – a job he loves.

"You're just wistful," Rose says, patting his arm. "We just spent two months back home. Give it a week and you're a Virginia-lover all over again."

Bless her.

"Fine," he grumbles. "We'll get another roommate."

Now, was that so hard, babe?

2.

~And he's thinking... There's no way I'm shacking up with Emmett.

BPOV

"We'll be in touch," Rose lies as we shut the door in Jessica Stanley's face.

Cue collective groan.

Granted, we knew it wasn't going to be easy to find a new roommate in this town. Actually, that's a lie. It's very easy to find a roommate – especially since it's August and a new semester just started at Pines University – but no one that fits us. Ah, yes. Port Pines is a college town – about half an hour from Richmond – so we knew we would get mostly college kids applying. Well, either college kids or Cullen Media employees. Rose and I are two of the almost four hundred employees, and we often joke about it being a good idea to rename the town to Port Cullen or something. And even more now that Cullen Media moved their headquarters from Chicago to here. You see, we used to have about eighty employees here, and that's because we work on the set of Stormy Days – Cullen Media's biggest hit. Yeah, it's shit. Sorry, but it is. It's a soap opera. 'Nuff said.

But Rose and I love our jobs, which is why we're staying.

Anyway, now we have gone from eighty to four hundred Cullenians – that's a word, right? – and many are still looking for a place to live.

"Okay, who's next?" Jazz asks.

He pats his knee and I take the hint, getting comfortable on his lap.

"A Lauren Mallory," Rose replies, looking down at the applications.

"Ah, come on!" Jazz groans. His forehead meets my shoulder. "Seriously. No more chicks. I need some testosterone in this house."

3.

~And he's thinking... I want to do this alone. Quit hugging me, Mom.

BPOV

"Welcome back for another exciting season!" Royce, the director shouts out. Rose and I roll our eyes at him. "I hope y'all spent your last two months sleeping, 'cause it's on now, people!" And he thinks he's a twenty-year-old instead of a fifty-year-old. "So, go get your schedules over at Maggie's and then we can start."

Soon we have our new schedules and Rose and I are comparing them, of course, because we wanna know if we'll work together often. And as luck would have it we will, because the actors we'll work with have most scenes together.

I click my tongue ring between my teeth, still reading her list.

"You have Brandon in your group," I giggle.

Alice Brandon – the show's female star. She's very nice and all, but she's not the sharpest tool in the shed, and she is a bit... dramatic. Almost as if... she's always in character.

She's twenty-three – like Rose and I – but you could mistake her for a fifteen-year-old. She also has a crush on Jasper, and the poor man cringes every time she squeals. Safe to say, he doesn't visit the set often.

"Yeah, well, you have McCarty in yours," she huffs.

And you're jealous, Rose.

I won't say that out loud, though. 'Cause I'm not suicidal. I'll just let those two dance around in their little mating game at their own pace.

It's quite ridiculous, if you ask me. Rose could do a lot worse than Emmett McCarty. But she rules him out simply because he's an actor.

He's a good guy, and I have to say I'm glad to have him as my number one for this season. Hopefully he's less demanding and bitchy than

Victoria Adams, who I was stuck with during season thirty-four. Nah, I'm definitely glad to have Emmett.

And speaking of...

"Swan! Hale! You're back!"

I grin and look over my shoulder, watching Emmett barreling over. Fucking beast, that dude.

"Hey, Em," I say. "How was Nebraska?" Trick question. He told us before the summer that he was heading home, but I'm not one those who denies loving a good tabloid. And I sure as hell have seen Emmett more than once. And more than once he was completely shitfaced. Fun times.

"Uh, Nebraska was good," he replies, nodding too much. Actor, my ass. "Anyway, you three still looking for a roommate? I spoke to Jazz on the phone this morning..." He trails off.

"Got someone in mind?" Rose asks.

"Yep, my cousin just moved here," he tells us, grinning like a fool. "And he has this thing where he doesn't want the rich parents to help him out. So, he's looking for a place."

Wait. A minute.

'Cause... we know how Emmett got cast on this show. You know, nepotism. He's related to the Cullens.

"This would be a Cullen, then?" I inquire, and he nods again. "Hmm, all right. What's his name? What does he do? How old is he? Is he a criminal? Does he put the toilet seat down?" I grin.

"Does he know that empty milk cartons belong in the garbage and not the fridge?" Rose adds.

Good one, Rose. Good one.

Em chuckles. "Edward Cullen. He's taking over for Liam. He's twenty-five. No, not a criminal. Funny, by the way. The rest is for you to find out. 'Cause fuck if I know."

Rose and I chuckle at him.

4.

~And he's thinking... Damn, she's beautiful.

BPOV

"Rose! Can you get the door?" I shout before running into Jazz and my room again.

As a makeup artist, you just gotta head straight for the shower at the end of a day. Shimmers, foundations, powders, glosses, and shadows everywhere. Doesn't matter that my priority is Emmett on the set, because I work with others, too. But also, even men wear the shimmery shit. No, not kidding. That's how it is on soap operas. Eyeliners and gloss are for men, too. Yep.

After a quick shower, I throw on a pair of denim shorts and a black tank top. My hair goes in a ponytail. I also change the barbell in my tongue, 'cause I'm in the mood for a pink one. Sorry, but it's my favorite color. I'm a girly girl. And then I head downstairs to meet this Edward. Have to say I'm curious. He's loaded and doesn't want to use the money?

Ah, well. Kudos to him... I guess.

I follow the two voices to the kitchen, all but coming to a screeching halt when I see a very male back. Very male as in, muscular and broad with a

snug t-shirt in white to cover it. Then, the ass. Stone-washed jeans.
What? I may not be single but I can look, can't I?

"Ah, here's Bella," Rose says, grinning. "You'll meet Jazz soon, too. Bella, this is Edward."

The man turns to face me, and... Damn, he's handsome.

"Nice to meet you, Edward," I say politely, offering him a smile.

We shake hands briefly, and I don't know what I had expected, but it wasn't this. He looks casual. Not... prissy or... whatever. He doesn't look like a trust-fund baby.

"You too, Bella," he replies, returning my smile.



5.

~And he's thinking... Goddamn, just my luck. She's taken.

BPOV

After we've shown him the first floor where we have the kitchen, the living room, a guest bathroom, and a laundry room, I lead the way with Edward on my tail, and then with Rose trailing after him.

"All three bedrooms are upstairs," she says as we walk up the stairs.
"There's also a bathroom up here."

"It's the room at the end we're renting out," I mention, briefly looking over my shoulder... to see him checking out my ass.

I stifle a giggle. He's a man, that's for sure. Not that there was any question before.

I clear my throat as we reach the landing, and continue as we pass the rooms. "This one's Rose's." I point. "Here's the bathroom." I open it, so he can take a quick look, and then we move on. "This is Jazz and my room." I point again. And then we reach the last room. "This one used to be a game room but now it's not, much to Jasper's chagrin." Rose and I chuckle as I open the door for Edward. We follow him inside. "So, this is it."

"Wait, so..." He frowns at me in what appears to be confusion for a second. "You share with that Jasper, then?"

"Yeah, they're together," Rose answers nonchalantly.

I nod, wondering where the guy in question is. I check the time, and... yeah, he should be home by now.

Maybe scored a meeting?

Could be.

He's been busy, to say the least, over the past few days, trying to find a new job in Richmond.

"So... What do you think?" Rose asks Edward.

A match made in roommate heaven. Edward loves the room, and we think he's the best candidate for it. Jasper agrees when he finally comes home with a smile on his face. It's a no-brainer. And the fact that the three of us will work together is just a bonus, 'cause we can totally carpool.

We tell him the room is his if he wants it, which he does, and then we go over the details before we say goodbye to Edward.

"Mind telling me what the goofy grin is about?" I ask Jazz as we get ready for bed that night. "If you were a woman, I'd suspect that you're pregnant," I tease. "You're practically glowing."

He chuckles heartily and kisses my temple. "Well, as it turns out, I have an interview next week."

See? I knew it was only a matter of time!

"Where?" I ask, now grinning as widely.

"You're not gonna believe me." He snickers. "At Cullen Media."

6.

~And he's thinking... Fuck me. Oh, yeah. Shimmy, baby.

BPOV

My morning routine. Me alone in the kitchen. Pajama shorts, tank top, hair wet from the shower. My pink iPod and pink Skullcandy earbuds. Oh, yeah. It's on.

I flip the pancakes, shaking my ass as Tina Turner and I sing together.

"They call it Nutbush... Oh, Nutbush." Yeah, I'm shaking it. "Nutmush city limits..."

I add the blueberries, smiling at what today can bring. Jasper's not going to Richmond. Nope. His interview is right here in Port Pines. With the big man himself: Carlisle Cullen. Also, Edward's dad. I know. Funny. Speaking of, Edward moved in yesterday. He and Jazz seems to get along. That's good. He even prepped Jasper for his meeting today. He's a nice guy, that Edward. We have our first carpool today, but I've already seen him a few times on the set. He's the new Production Manager. Pretty much the link between the set and the headquarters.

"You go to town on Saturday..." I add more butter into the pan. Aaaand, I'm shaking it. Yeah, shhhhaking it. "...Go to church every Sunday..."

When the blueberry pancakes are done, I move on to chocolate.

'Cause I love chocolate. So does Rose.

I check the time. Yep. She should be up soon.

Oooh, one last time, Tina. "You have to watch what you're putting down..." More chocolate blobs. Yum. "In old Nutbush... Oh, Nutbush."

A few songs later, the pancakes are ready and I'm about to shout for Rose to get her sleepy booty down here, but a sound coming from behind me makes me shut my mouth. However, when I turn around, I see nothing. Huh. I could've sworn that I...

Ah, well.

"Rose!" I shout. "It's breakfast! And wake up Jazz and Edward!"

7.

~And he's thinking... Isn't Jasper aware of what the job he's interviewing for entails?

BPOV

"Action!" Royce bellows.

"Tanya, get a grip!" Emmett shouts, throwing his hands up in frustration.

"I'm your brother for crying out loud! Tell me the truth!"

And yeah, I notice Rose giving him the dreamy eyes. She so wishes that she was his makeup artist. Alas, I am.

Tanya – err, Alice – gasps in horror. "How can you not believe me, Mike?"

I yawn.

The life on a soapy set.

And then I feel two arms snake around my waist; but before I can scream and force the two actors to reshoot, I smell Jasper's cologne.

"Jesus, you scared me," I whisper-yell, spinning around in his arms.

"What are you doing here?" Wow, my heart sure is functioning. Holy shit.

He chuckles quietly and kisses my nose. "Just thought I'd stop by before the interview," he whispers. "Ya know, a kiss for good luck."

Ah, the Whitlock Charm. It's cute. "You'll do fine, babe." I smile before kissing him soundly. "You feeling well prepared?"

He nods and grins. "Yep. It's a dream job. I really want it, and God knows I'm able."

I never doubted that.

He hasn't told me much about the position, other than it's for a PR assistant, but since he studied Marketing and Media Relations for four years in college, I can only imagine how much he wants this.

"Well, break a leg," I chuckle quietly. "But not Mr. Cullen's. That might get awkward."

"Funny you." He snickers.

After one more kiss, he's off, and I cross my fingers, hoping he'll get it.

8.

~And he's thinking... I want Jasper to get the job. For all the wrong reasons.

BPOV

"Was that Jasper I saw running out?" Edward asks as we head to the lunch area.

"Yep," I say with a smile. "He's on his way to meet with your dad now."

"Ah, that's right." He nods thoughtfully, and I think he's about to say something more but Rose joins us then, quickly followed by Emmett and a few of the other actors.

With the weather still good, we sit by the picnic tables outside, and Emmett being Emmett, doesn't waste time starting to grill Edward. Good thing I sit next to him 'cause I know he's gonna earn himself a slap soon. I'm pretty sure Rose is thinking the same, as she is seated on the other side of Emmett.

"So, how's living with Swan and Hale, cuz? High maintenance, yeah?"

Rose and I smack him in the back of his head.

"Ow!"

Edward laughs, shaking his head in amusement, and I eye him warningly. Maybe it's a good thing I'm next to him, too. 'Cause I'm ready to slap. "It's been one night, Em. I need more time to find out."

And there it is.

"Wrong answer," I huff playfully, elbowing him in the side, to which he gives us an "ow" much like Emmett. "You're supposed to say that we're a fucking treat to be around."

"What Bella said," Rose agrees.

Edward puts a straight face on then and faces Emmett. "They're a fucking treat to be around."

Excellent.

"Despite the elbowing and all," he adds under his breath, rubbing his side.

What a baby.

I stick my tongue out, effectively making me just as juvenile, and he pouts, and... then he tilts his head a little, and I realize he's noticed my tongue ring. But then he goes back to pouting.

Still a baby.

"Aw, want me to kiss it better?" I tease before taking a sip of my smoothie.

"Would you?" he jokes, grinning down at me.

"Aaanyway." Emmett interrupts, giving Edward some weird look. "How about a welcome-to-the-building party for Edward?" He eyes Rose, then me. "Or don't you want my boy here to feel welcome in Port Pines?"

The McCarty Guilt Trip. It's epic.

"For fuck's sake, Em, I don't-" Edward chuckles.

"No, no," I say, cutting him off. "We should definitely throw you a party. Right, Rose?" I turn to her. "I'm pretty sure Jazz is up for it."

"Hell, yeah." She grins.

"HELL, YEAH!" Emmett bellows.

Yeah, we all leave him there. Emmett, that is.

9.

~And he's thinking... I hate sharing a wall with those two.

BPOV

The Saturday morning routine is slightly different because that's the day Rose joins me in the ass-shaking and the singing and the pancake-flipping. Two pink iPods and two pairs of pink Skullcandy earbuds.

"Ready?" I ask her.

She nods, and Jazz snickers at us before returning to his paper.

"Okay," she says. "One... two... three... now."

We both press play at the same time.

Aaaand the shaking begins.

I hold my hand out – she hands me a ladle.

She cracks eggs – I turn on the stove.

"...And girls... they wanna have fun..." We bump our hips together. "Oh, girls just wanna have fun."

The epicness that is Cyndi Lauper goes on repeat three times, and then we have two batches with pancake mix ready, which we celebrate by pushing play for a fourth time. Oh, and we're twirling around, using ladles as microphones. It's win. We're fucking awesome.

But then Rose sorta stops and I'm like... what the fuck? Sing, bitch!

That's when I notice her looking at something behind me, so I turn around and... Oh... my... God.

Edward. Standing in the doorway. Wearing nothing but a pair of black sweats that are drawn to his calves.

Sweet baby Jesus, his nipple is pierced.

He's lived with us for about a week now, and he always comes down in work clothes – black dress pants and a white button-down shirt.

But this is far better if I may say so.

Then I notice that he's also pissed, and he crosses his arms over his muscular chest.

Shit.

I clear my throat, ignoring the heat rushing to my cheeks, as I remove my earbuds.

I think we've found someone who doesn't approve of our singing.

"Good morning, Edward," I say, blushing like a school girl. Thankfully, Rose is scarlet, too. "Sleep well?" I smile sheepishly.

"Not really," he grits out.

Jasper just chuckles at us. Traitor.

To which Edward actually turns his glare on him. "Laugh it up, Jazz, but you're the reason I couldn't sleep last night."

Now I'm just confused.

But Rose isn't for some reason and starts laughing.

"Seriously!" Edward exclaims, looking at Rose but pointing at Jazz. "He's a fucking screamer!"

Huh?

Oh.

Oh.

Yeah, so I'm looking at my feet instead.

"Don't worry, Cullen," Rose giggles. "It doesn't happen very often, and when it does, just use headphones."

If the floor could just do me a favor and... engulf me.

Unfortunately she's right, though. It doesn't happen very often nowadays, because... well, who loves repetition? I've tried a few things to spice it up but so far, no luck. Not that I'll give up, because I certainly won't. I think we're pretty normal. I mean, we've been together almost eight years. We just need to get out of this rut. And yesterday I was a bit buzzed because we found out that Jazz is in the running for the final round of interviews, so we celebrated. Then when we came home, I took advantage of the situation, 'cause my boyfriend isn't so uptight after a few drinks. Sue me. And yeah, he was a bit loud.

"Finding the floor funny, Swan?" Rose laughs.

Shut up, bitch.

I decide then that I have nothing to be embarrassed about, so I look up and try to come off as confident as I speak. "What can I say? I gave him something to scream about." I shrug.

Edward narrows his eyes at me, still standing there in all his muscular glory. Rose is laughing, of course, and Jazz is reading the paper very intently. Too intently.

And then Edward cocks an eyebrow. "Hmm. You didn't scream, Bella."

Right. Ah, shit.

"Oh burn, Jasper," Rose giggles, now wiping tears off her face, and I hate, hate, hate her. "Well, Bella? Does that mean Jazz didn't give you anything to scream about?"

Enough.

I glare at them both. "We're done talking about our sex life, all right? And for your information, Jasper is very skilled." Sometimes. When he wants to be.

Rose finally shuts up and returns to the pancakes, and when I look at Edward, he's wearing some weird expression that I can't read. I honestly don't know what he's thinking about, but for a second I see anger. No, wait. That's not it. Not anger. Something else. Oh, whatever. Dudes are too hard to read. It ain't always women.

So, I give up and join Rose in the making of another kickass breakfast.

Edward returns to bed after Rose reminds him of the party tonight.

I don't even wanna know who Emmett has invited.

10.

And he's thinking... I thought that if this happened to me, it would be a lot more pleasurable.

BPOV

"It's five PM now," Rose says pointedly. "Jazz will be back any minute with the alcohol." I nod and sigh. The house is ready for the party. But the guest of honor is still asleep. "Let's go wake him up," she decides.

Might as well...

I follow her up the stairs and first we knock.

A few times.

"Edward?" I call.

Nothing.

"Ready or not," Rose sighs before opening the door.

Not ready! Oh God, we're not ready. Not for that.

The man is fast asleep, snoring lightly, but all I see are ass dimples. Black boxers. Legs tangled in the sheets. Face buried between two pillows.

There's also a tattoo on his shoulder blade, and I recognize it as the Cullen crest. It's a part of the company logo.

"Close that mouth of yours," Rose giggles quietly, and I wonder how the fuck she can't be affected by this man. I also wonder what the hell Edward Cullen is doing in Port Pines. He should be on the runway in Milan.

Just saying.

"Wakey pakey, hands off snakey," Rose says loudly, walking toward the bed.

I arch a brow and follow. "Quoting 'My Name Is Earl'? Really?"

She shrugs before actually climbing into bed with him. "Let's see if Edward's ticklish."

"Let's not," we hear him grumble sleepily.

A giggle bursts out, and before I know it, I'm on the bed, too. Because yeah, let's see if he's ticklish.

Rose and I nod at each other, kneeling on either side of him.

Then we attack, and...

Nothing.

Seriously. He barely reacts.

"Now that you know I'm not ticklish, mind if you... you know... leave?" Oh, someone's grumpy. "I'm trying to sleep."

"There's a party with your name on it in two hours," I remind him.

"Yeah, and I need about ten minutes to shower and change."

Hmph.

"C'mon, Edward! Be happy! It's Saturday!" Rose says cheerily. "And tonight's also the night I will score with your cousin!"

Oh, really? "About time!" I tell her, grinning widely. "What changed your mind?" I ask, getting comfortable on the bed. Rose mirrors my move, and then we're both sitting Indian-style with a grumbling Edward between us.

"Alcohol," she replies simply. "I want him, he wants me, and alcohol is a good excuse to be stupid for a night."

"That's stupid," I mutter, shaking my head at her. "He wants more than that, Rose. Don't be a bitch."

Edward groans. Really loudly. "Wanna know how I know that this is reality?" He doesn't wait for us to reply. "Because I have two women in bed with me and I'm not hard."

The sound that escapes me is... awful. A strangled, nervous, awkward chuckle. Pretty sure there was a squeak, too. I'm sorry, but that wasn't an image I needed because... well, now it's there. The image, that is. The image of his... um, you know.

"It'd be so easy to get you hard, Eddie," Rose scoffs, always the confident woman.

"Oh, I have no doubt about that," he sighs, turning over onto his back before rubbing his face. Oh... the abs. And nipple ring. Shit. Fuck. "But I assure you that gossip about my cousin won't do the trick." He yawns and looks up at us. "Had this been a dream, you two would be a lot more to the south, and I wouldn't have to use words to shut you up. Alas, it's reality, and if you don't mind, I'd rather wallow in reality by myself."

"Nice try, Cullen," I coo, patting his scruffy cheek. "But you're not getting rid of us that easily. You really do need to get up."

Now he turns to whining. "Beeell-aaa! Do you know what kind of work-week I've had?"

"Sure we do," Rose says, jumping off the bed. "We all get up at the same hour every morning – well, apart from the booty-shaker over there," she nods at me with a grin that I return, "and then you get home about two to three hours after me and Bella. So, that's just a couple of more hours

than us, dude. Quit drama-queening and get up. I have to take my shower now. Toodles." She stops when she's on my side of the- err, Edward's bed. "Don't leave this room until he gets up, okay?"

Understood.

11.

And he's thinking... I'm fucked.

BPOV

I plop down on my back, merely turning my head to face him, and Jesus, his bed is comfy.

"Where did you buy this bed?" I ask, stroking the sheets reverently. "It's so soft and fluffy and dreamy and lovely and soft."

He clears his throat but still sounds sleepy when he speaks. "No idea. Mom bought it for me. And you said soft twice."

Eh, it was worth mentioning twice.

"How cute." I smile. "Are you a mama's boy?"

"No," he scoffs. Lie. What a lie. Then he's on his side, propped up on his elbow. "Are you a daddy's princess?"

I think about that for an itty bit, but hmm... "Nope, not really. I'm actually closer to my mom."

"Yeah?"

"Mmhmm," I respond, feeling a little sleepy on the dream bed. Pretty sure the sheets are Egyptian cotton. "By the way, if you can't find these sheets next time you've done your laundry, Jasper might have stolen them."

He huffs a chuckle. "Is that a fact?"

I stretch and purr like a cat and close my eyes. "Yup."

"Bella, don't even think about it," he mutters. "Now you've woken me up. There's no way I'm allowing you to sleep then."

"But it's so comfy," I mumble.

My eyes fly open, though, when I feel him tuck a piece of hair behind my ear.

I shiver, feeling... something... rush through my body.

His eyes meet mine.

I still can't read his face very well. I don't know what he's thinking when he tightens his jaw like that, or what the cause of that frown is.

Or why his hand is still on my cheek.

But it all suddenly feels very wrong and right at the same time, and I'm pretty sure I'm dancing on some proverbial line. A line that can't be crossed. That'd be unacceptable.

I exhale shakily.

And then he's gone. Literally, he jumps out of the bed, taking the sheets with him.

"I'm gonna take a shower," he mutters before escaping the room.

I'm speechless.

Completely blank.

Scared shitless for some reason.

"What the hell was that?" I whisper to myself, cupping my own cheek.

12.

And he's thinking... It's best to avoid.

BPOV

I'm a good hostess, greeting guests at the door with hugs and big smiles, and I'm definitely not thinking about what happened earlier with Edward. Nope. Not thinking about that at all.

"Hey, Bella!"

"Hi, Leah!" Hug, kiss, mwah! "Come on in!"

But it's kinda obvious that we shared some... moment, Edward and I. Right? Yes, because Edward had refused to look at me earlier when he joined the party down here.

"Hi, Swan!"

"Hey there, Seth!" Hug, kiss, mwah! "Most of the guys are in the backyard."

The problem now is that I don't know what to do. Where do we go from here? Not that I plan on blowing things out of proportion, but... I don't want things to get awkward, either. I really like Edward, and I don't want weirdness.

"Hey, Bella!"

"Hey, Bree!" Hug, kiss, mwah! "Rose is in the living room, I think."

But I'm curious. Is Edward attracted to me or something? I mean... you can't really have a "moment" without attraction, right? Only... hmm... Well,

I suppose you can since I'm not attracted to him. And wow, that sure felt like the biggest lie of the year.

"Bella! I'm finally here!"

"Yes, finally, Em! You goof." Hug, kiss, mwah! "Get in."

I think I'm just gonna see how things play out over the next few days, and then we'll see. Hopefully, my own attraction for him won't grow, because I'm very happy with my Jazzman...

Yeah... Sure. Yes.

On a totally different note, I'm definitely not thinking about Edward. At. All.

13.

And he's thinking... Alcohol. I need alcohol.

BPOV

I'm staring at Rose. She's staring at me.

But I don't think we're staring at each other for the same reason. See, I'm staring at her because we match. And not just a little, either. No, it's everything. Dark blue denim skirts, black tank-tops, black heels, and we've both opted for ponytails. On top of this, we're both sipping on vodka cranberries. I swear, had she'd been a brunette, we could've been sisters.

"Why's Edward avoiding you?" she asks, breaking our staring contest. And I guess I just found out why she's been staring at me. Or... studying me.

I sigh. "You noticed that, huh?" I reply ruefully, looking through the window where I can see Edward in the living room. He's sitting with a few guys at Jasper's poker table, playing poker.

I'm on the patio outside, and my reason for being here is because Edward was here earlier. I had joined him, thinking it was a good time to feel him out a little, but... he had pretty much hauled ass. Safe to say, things are still weird.

"A blind person would notice, Swan," she says dryly.

I don't really know how to respond to that, so I take a big sip of my pink drink instead.

Avoidance, I love you right now.

"I think he likes you," she continues quietly, and I almost choke on my drink.

Jeebus.

But... really, could that be it? Is he into me?

"Wh... What makes you think that?" I ask, chewing on my lip.

Her smile is small but soft and without judgment.

"He watches you very often," she answers softly. "Like he can't watch you enough." My cheeks feel hot all of the sudden, and Rose steps closer to me. "And I think you might have a small thing for him, too."

My eyes widen. "I would never cheat on Jazz!" I hiss quietly.

I can't believe her!

She doesn't miss a beat. "Did I say anything about cheating?" she asks, arching a brow. "I'm just saying that feelings change... people change."

I...

Yeah, this... yeah. Okay, this is too much right now. Way too much.

I need... need... alcohol.

Lots and lots of alcohol.

14.

And he's thinking... Keep your mouth shut, Cullen. It's Jasper's job to tell
Bella.

BPOV

"There you are, babe!" Jasper shouts as I walk toward the poker table.

I think he's approaching Shitfacedville.

"Here I am, yeah." I grin, placing a hand on his shoulder.

"I'm joining the guys for a game." He gestures to Edward, Emmett, Tyler and Seth. "They're just gonna finish the one they started first." And then there's the goofy grin. "Wanna sit on my lap, darlin'?"

Out of reflex, my eyes seek out Edward. And I'd say the glare he sends Jasper pretty much confirms what Rose told me, right? So... he's into me or something?

"Um, no," I chuckle awkwardly, averting my eyes. "It's okay, Jazz."

God, why do I feel like sitting on Jasper's lap is wrong? I know it's not. He's my boyfriend, for crying out loud. I definitely don't have a reason for feeling guilty.

Ah, fuck this.

I'm too buzzed to think about this shit now, so I sit my ass down on his lap, anyway.

And Jazz grins widely.

Great...

"So... who's winning?" I ask the other guys before chugging the rest of my drink.

"Well, it's usually Cullen," Emmett chuckles. "But he sucks tonight."

"Shut the fuck up, Em," Edward snaps. Then he turns to Jasper with... a smile? "Hey, Jasper? Why don't you tell us a little about the job that I know my dad is gonna offer you?"

15.

And he's thinking... This oughta be good.

BPOV

I think I squeal.

Yeah, pretty sure.

But I'm drunk, so it's cool.

Besides, I'm excited for Jazz!

"Are you sure he's gonna give the job to Jazz?" I ask Edward excitedly. "I mean, the final rounds of interviews..."

"Yeah, I'm sure." He smirks at Jasper. "Mr. Whitlock here is the new PR assistant at Cullen Media."

Holy shit!

"That's awesome!" I... yeah, I squeal, okay? "I'm so happy for you, Jazz!" I hug him hard, incredibly thrilled for him. "I knew you could do it."

"Fucking A!" Emmett bellows.

With a grin, I release Jazz and look him in the eye. And wow, he's stunned.

Understandable. This is a dream come true for him.

"Excited, honey?" I ask, turning in his lap a little to face him better.

"Jazz?"

At last, he snaps out of his haze. "Um... wow..." He shakes his head, and slowly but surely, I see a wide grin take over his face. "Christ, of course I'm excited."

Again, Edward jumps in. "Yeah, and you should tell Bella where your main office is going to be."

Jasper's grin morphs into a glare, effectively wiping off my own grin.

Something's up, right? I... think I'm missing something here.

And both Edward and Jasper seem to know what it's about.

Then I hear Rose. From behind me. "Okay, what's going on here, guys?"

That's when I notice quite the crowd.

They all look curious, like they're waiting for Jasper to answer so that they can congratulate him on his new job.

"Jazz, answer." Rose again, and this makes me turn back to the man in question. You don't disobey Rosalie Hale. Stern woman.

He sighs.

I frown.

When he answers, his eyes aren't on me.

"I'll be at Cullen Media's office in Los Angeles."

16.

And he's thinking... Fuck. I'm an ass.

BPOV

Los Angeles.

He will work from Cullen Media's office in Los Angeles.

Not Port Pines.

Los Angeles.

All the way across the country.

And yeah, it's so quiet in the living room that you can hear a pin drop.

I clear my throat.

"Did you know about LA from the beginning?" I ask him quietly. "From when you applied?"

I'm suddenly embarrassed.

This isn't for everyone to hear.

Not like this.

He sighs again. "Yes."

Right.

He knew.

Well, he's obviously decided already. He wants this.

"We'll still see each other, darlin'," he murmurs.

Uh-huh. Sure.

"How much?"

"Um, guys?" Rose. Of course. We're not alone.

What a party, eh?

I take a breath. "Jazz, let's go upstairs."

17.

And he's thinking... They'll break up, right?

BPOV

By the time Jazz and I reach our room, the music is loud again downstairs, and I send a silent thanks to Rose for keeping the party going. But my partying is definitely over for tonight.

Make no mistake, I'm a supportive girlfriend – I really am – but the fact that he didn't tell me about this...

Yeah.

One pissed off Bella Swan plops down on the bed.

"Spill," I demand.

There's a lot of sighing going on, not to mention pacing, but then he finally tells me.

"It's my dream job, Bella, and... fuck, I really want it. And..." He sighs, pulling at his hair. "Did I mess up by not telling you? Of course, I did." His eyes are pleading with me. I can see the remorse, but that means little

right now. "I should've told you from the start, and I know it was stupid of me not to, I mean... You've always been supportive... I... I just freaked out."

His shoulders slump when he's done talking.

I can see how badly he wants this, and I will never be the one who stands in the way of a dream.

We all make mistakes.

We forgive, we forget, we move on.

I take a deep breath, releasing it slowly.

"How often will you be gone?" I ask softly. "What will your hours be like?"

He can't hear anger in my voice because there is none. What he did was stupid, and I'm disappointed. A part of me is also hurt, but... the man made a mistake. What can I do?

"Everything isn't settled yet," he replies quietly, frowning. "I... um... So far, though, we're looking at four weeks in LA, then one week here, four in LA... and so on."

Oh.

Wow.

That's...

That's a lot.

18.

And he's thinking... Both Em and Rose are on to me. Lovely.

BPOV

He sighs heavily. "I know it's a lot, babe... I really do..."

Yeah.

One month away and then one week here.

I sigh, too. Not heavily, not in defeat... It just is what it is.

"What will you do in LA?" I ask him.

And I see the way his eyes light up, if only for a second or two.

"I'll be Maria Mendoza's new assistant," he tells me, and I smirk, knowing all about her. And it's not through Cullen Media that I know about her. No, it's through Jasper. He did a piece on her in the paper he wrote for in college. Apparently she's one helluva PR lady... or something, and Jasper's admired her work for years.

I chuckle quietly at his hopeful look.

It's settled.

"We'll make it work, Jazz."

19.

And he's thinking... It's a blessing to have her as a friend.

But it's a curse to be in love with her.

BPOV

When I plop down on the couch in the living room, Edward asks how I am, to which I always shrug, and today is no different.

It's been four months since Jazz started his new job, and after a quick visit to be here with us for Christmas and New Year's, he's now returned to LA.

Though... there is one thing different.

Edward.

I missed Edward during the holidays when he visited family in Chicago. He spent ten days there, Emmett very much included, and yesterday they came back. And it hits me how much he's come to mean to me. Edward, that is.

It's not weird, either. We've grown really close over the past few months. He's funny as hell, and we sure have a lot in common. We're both goofballs, both into the same music and movies, which is why Rose never wants to join us for movie nights 'cause we rule her out with fuckawesome flicks. She tells us we're too weird or some crap like that.

Whatever.

Edward's great, especially when I need a distraction from either missing Jazz, or... fighting with Jazz. Yeah. The fighting. Sweet baby Jesus. I never thought having a long-distance relationship would be this hard. But it is. It's extremely hard, and if we're on the phone after a long day, some bickering can easily become a full-blown screaming contest. It can be about insignificant bullshit, such as forgetting the time difference when we call, or it can be bigger things... like how we never see each other.

In any way.

And by that, I mean in every way possible. Emotionally, physically, intimately... you name it. Because during that one week he spends in Port Pines, he still works. It's just that he works from Cullen Media's office

here. So, during that week he's usually busy with meetings with the bigshots and whatnots, leaving him exhausted at the end of the day.

It's infuriating. I'm pissed, sad, sexually frustrated, and disappointed.

So...

I have Edward.

I'd say I have Rose but I don't. Nah, after one drunken night with Emmett, Rose is a goner. There's no more excuse for her not to be with him. So, she is. And I'm pretty sure she's madly in love with him.

I'm happy for her. For them.

And I realize – right now – that I'm very content with this, sitting here on January 2nd, after dropping off Jasper at the airport.

I'm fine. Truly.

So, after my usual shrug in answer to Edward's question, I also add... "It's good."

And I mean it.

20.

And he's thinking... When she smiles, I win.

BPOV

"No, no, no, no!" I laugh, poking him with a spatula. "Don't ever do that again!" Gah, he's a funny dude. "Go back to reading the paper."

What used to be my morning ritual is now our ritual. Or... somewhat. He reads the morning paper while I do the ass-shaking and the pancake-

flipping. But this morning he evidently decided to join in, and... Well, the man sure knows how to make me laugh.

"What?" he chuckles, grinning down at me. "Are you saying I don't have what it takes, hmm?"

Oh, you definitely have what it takes. That's why you need to stop.

Granted, he looks like a complete fool shaking his ass, but... he's still hot as hell.

Four months without sex is getting to me, and though Edward's a complete gentleman, without crossing so much as a single line, my own attraction for him has grown. It scares me. I have eight years behind me with Jasper. That's a lot, and I certainly won't do what Dad did to Mom.

I digress.

There hasn't been another "moment" between us or anything, and if Edward is, in fact, attracted to me, he hides it well. But yeah, four months without sex is a record for me since I lost my virginity to Jasper on my seventeenth birthday.

Hell, I started losing my mind two weeks ago when my rabbit decided to leave me hanging. I bought a new one, but Rose – the bitch – snatched it for herself when she saw the pretty pink package it came in. So, now I gotta get my ass to Richmond to buy another. I refuse to order one online. Growing up with a cop, I know better than to use my credit card online. Rose calls me nuts for it, since she's addicted to online shopping, but it is what it is.

So, no, I don't need an ass-shaking Edward – wearing nothing but sweats and a wife-beater – so close to me right now.

And that nipple ring taunts me. I can see it rubbing against his wife-beater.

Jesus.

"Bella!" Whoa. Yeah, back to reality. "You okay? You zoned out for a while."

Yep, losing it here.

21.

And he's thinking... It doesn't help that my parents love her.

BPOV

"You're joking!" I gasp through my laughter. Rose is on the same page as I am while Edward and Emmett are blushing like school girls. "They actually thought they could get away?"

Esme nods, also laughing.

When Carlisle and Esme come over for dinner, we always have a blast.

I'd been so nervous the first time I met the mighty Mr. Cullen. He was visiting the set, and Rose and I were close to shitting our pants. Yeah, not happening. It turned out – very quickly – that Edward's parents are incredibly down to earth.

"In our defense, Dad and Uncle C here had just told us what they did growing up," Emmett says defensively. "They were far from innocent."

"What he said," Edward huffs, nodding at Emmett.

"So... that's your excuse for stealing?" I ask him, nudging his arm.

He nudges right back. "Wasn't like we stole cars, ya know." He rolls his eyes. "We're talking candy and sodas."

He makes me giggle like a girl.

"And it was one time," Emmett adds, pouring us more wine. "And we were what? Fifteen? Yeah."

"Who knows what would've happened if I hadn't caught you?" Carlisle points out, pretending to be serious. "Maybe you would've turned into master criminals."

Esme playfully smacks her husband in the arm, and then our night continues with pizza and more stories from Edward and Emmett's summers together in either Nebraska or Illinois. Since Carlisle's brother – Emmett's dad – had moved to Nebraska after college, Edward and Emmett only had their summers together, and they were full of trouble. Very funny to hear about.

Then, at the end of the night, we say goodbye to Carlisle and Esme, quickly followed by Emmett and Rose, who usually spend the night at his house.

"It's only eleven," Edward says, putting away the last of the dishes. "Movie?"

I grin. "Sounds good."

22.

And he's thinking... This is one of my favorite things. She's amazing to hang out with.

BPOV

He reads comic books.

Cute. Funny.

He wears reading glasses sometimes, too.

Sexy.

"This song sucks," he tells me, eyes still on what he's reading.

"Does not," I huff, but it's cut off by a moan.

Because he's also a multitasker, and while his comic book is on the couch, he's also giving me an excellent foot rub, and my foot is very comfortable in his lap. He only pauses to flip pages, and it's so freaking adorable how he tries not to get lotion on the pages.

"Does too."

"Does not." I grin.

"Does too!"

"Does not!"

Okay, we almost always like the same music.

Whereas I love fuckawesome chicas like Blondie, Lily Allen, Tina Turner, and Adele, Edward likes Ozzy Osbourne, Van Halen, and Judas Priest.

Then we have our middle ground – rock and punk. And now, instead of watching the movie we agreed to watch, he's trying to get me to like Ozzy Osbourne. It's just that the only song I like... is the one he can't stand.

Okay, there are three songs I like, two of which he likes, too... but not the one we're currently listening to.

"She sounds like a whiny bitch," he says decidedly.

The song in question is "Changes," and Ozzy sings it with his daughter.

"I think she's annoying as hell on TV," I shrug, "but the chick can sing in my opinion."

Then it's my turn, and I pretend to gag as I place his foot in my lap, to which he always chuckles. 'Cause I'm totally bullshitting. His feet aren't smelly. They are big, though. Just saying. And you know what they say about men with big feet...

"Big shoes," I whisper under my breath. Nothing else, Bella. Just big shoes.

"What?" he asks, looking up from the comic book.

Those glasses...

"Nothing." I wave him off. "Put on the other song I liked."

"Which one?" he groans, reaching for the remote. "Damn, that feels good."

Four months without sex. Four months without sex. Four months without sex.

I need Jazz.

But... shit, that feels wrong. Incorrect. A lie. Bullshit.

I'm conflicted.

"Bella? What song?"

Oh. Right.

Um... "Something about... Dreamers?"

He nods. "'Dreamer' it is. Good choice."

Mm, isn't it?

23.

And he's thinking... Um... Right. Well, I should've seen that question coming.

BPOV

"Okay, I've changed my mind," I say shakily.

"No way, missy," Edward replies, grabbing my arm. "This was your idea. We drove all the way to Richmond. We're doing this."

Shit.

I gotta say... I'm a fucking idiot when I'm bored.

My suggestion for when we had nothing to do?

To get pierced.

Yeah. Me. Stupid.

"So, so stupid," I whisper to myself.

Sure, I already have my tongue pierced, but that's different. That one doesn't hurt. Hell, piercing my ears almost hurt more.

"Come on," he chuckles, and then I'm dragged into the shop.

Edward's all man, puffing his chest out and shit, and tells me that he's going for two piercings. Cocky bastard. Soon, he settles on piercing the right side of his bottom lip. And his left eyebrow.

I stifle a whimper, as well as the reason for needing to whimper.

Woman up, Swan. You can do this.

"I also want two," I declare as confidently as I can.

The inked, bald dude with too much steel in his face grins and motions for us to follow him to the back.

Gulp.

I totally grab Edward's hand.

Warmth.

He squeezes it and smiles in assurance. "We don't have to, you know," he whispers.

But I want to.

However, I chicken out about the "two" part, and settle on a nose ring. I also tell Piercer Dude that Edward's not leaving my side until the deed is done. 'Cause I'm such a girl, and I need hand-holding in order to survive.

"Have you been pierced before?" Piercer Dude asks.

"I have a tongue ring," I reply quietly.

He nods and turns to Edward. "And you?"

Nipple, nipple, nipple, nnnnipple...

I release his hand. Four months without sex. Four months without sex. Fucking mantra by now.

Edward clears his throat. "I have a nipple ring, and uh... an Apadravya."

And I die. I die.

24.

And he's thinking... Christ, how she can be sinfully sexy and adorable at the same time...

BPOV

Thankfully, Piercer Dude thinks nothing is weird about Edward having a pierced cock, so he just nods and gestures for me to take my seat in the Death Chair. Fine, I'm being overdramatic, but... whatever. I just learned that the man I'm drawn to sexually has a pierced dick. Allow me to freak out for a minute.

I can't deny it anymore. My body reacts to him. My mind, too.

Yep, my body is definitely reacting.

Holy shit.

But luck is on my side, and when Piercer Dude approaches with a needle, there's no more wetness dampening my ruffles.

"Left or right?" he asks me.

Um...

I touch my nose.

"My left," I decide, and I hold my breath while he wipes the sterilizer over the left side of my nose.

After I wave Edward with the pierced cock over, he crouches next to me and holds my hand.

When I squeeze my eyes shut, Edward chuckles.

Fuck you... and your pierced cock.

Okay, I have got to get that out of my mind!

Jasper. Jasper. Jasper. Jasper.

Right. I just miss him. That's all. That's why I'm losing my mind.

Lies, lies, lies.

Before I can squish that shit down, I have the silver stud – which I picked out earlier – in my nose.

"In six weeks you can change it," Piercer Dude chuckles when I look longingly at the actual rings.

A single tear rolls down as an automatic response to the piercing, but I definitely freaked out over nothing.

And I have some major shit to think through now.

More?

25.

And he's thinking... I hear her crying. It kills me.

Don't knock, Cullen. She clearly wants privacy.

BPOV

When we return to Port Pines, I tell Edward that I have to clean my makeup brushes and sponges for work, which is all bullshit, and then I escape to my room.

The barbell in his eyebrow.

His lip ring.

His nipple ring.

His goddamn dick.

His tattoo.

His black rimmed reading glasses.

His personality.

His laugh.

His eyes.

The way he makes me feel...

For the first time, I masturbate with Edward on my mind.

Afterward, I cry rivers. Guilt consumes me.

Then I call Jazz.

I can practically hear his eye-roll when I tell him about Edward and me driving to Richmond to get pierced. Jazz doesn't really share my opinion about ink and steel. And in the end of the phone call, I don't feel any better. Not that I expected to, but... fuck, I don't know.

So, I just cry some more.

And I wonder if Mom would shake her head at me in disappointment, and say, "You're just like your dad."

Would she?

That's the last thing I want. I don't want to be like Dad.

26.

And he's thinking... Just like that, my day goes from good to bad.

BPOV

"Jesus H, Edward," I chuckle into the phone. "Just say something."

I can picture him, in the living room at home, preparing for our movie night while trying to stay away from his latest issue of whatever-the-fuck that he bought today after work. Ya know, comic book.

"Gimme a minute, woman. This takes time. There are so many options."

I laugh and add two cartons of orange juice in the cart.

"It's just dessert."

"Watch your mouth, Swan," he replies threateningly, though I can still hear the smile in his voice. "Fine. I've made up my mind."

"And what's the verdict?" I snicker, adding milk and butter to the cart, too. "I bet it's chocolaty. You're such an addict."

"You're one to talk, Ms. Rose-and-I-ate-all-the-cupcakes," huffs.

"It was one time!" I lie. "Besides, Rose and I made them."

"The polite thing to do is share them with your roommate," he argues.

"And you didn't. You just kicked me to the curb."

I roll my eyes. "Drama queen much? You weren't even home. It's not like we ate them in front of you."

"Might as well have," he grumbles, and he's so freaking cute, it's pathetic really. "Anyway... I pick your double frosted mudcake for tonight."

Mmm... "Excellent choice, Mr. Cullen."

"Why thank you, Ms. Swan. I do my best."

I smile for no reason at all.

But then I have a call on the other line, and I see that it's Jazz.

The rock is back in the pit of my stomach.

"Gotta let you go, Edward," I say, frowning. "Jazz is on the other line."

"Oh..."

"Yeah... um, I'll see you when I get home," I mumble.

27.

And he's thinking... Traitorous motherfucking tears.

Man the fuck up, Cullen. She won't want you.

BPOV

"Hey, Jazz," I greet through the phone, walking toward the registers.

"What's up?"

I bite my lip. We need to talk about our relationship, but I've promised myself to wait until he comes home. That's not a conversation I wish to have over the phone. But we do need to talk. I need to know his plan in order to have something to focus on, because it's clear to me that what we're doing now won't work in the long run.

I hear him clearing his throat before he speaks. "Did I catch you at a bad time, babe?"

Yes. "No."

"Um... good."

Silence.

For some reason, I get an "off" feeling.

I feel it in the pit of my stomach. Nerves... Unease.

"Bella... we need to talk," he says quietly, and I stop in the middle of the cereal aisle. "Um... I'm on my way to New York for a meeting. Well, we're at LAX now."

I frown in confusion, but before I can open my mouth, he speaks again.

"It means I won't come back in two weeks."

The first thing I notice is that he says "back." Not "home."

And all of the sudden I'm numb.

"So... the next time you'll be in Virginia is when? Six weeks?" I ask flatly.

Going to New York now doesn't explain not coming home in two weeks, by the way, at least for me, but... I can't find it in me to care enough to ask.

Different emotions... moods... feelings... run through me.

Annoyance.

"Yes."

Disappointment.

"Awesome," I say dryly.

Exhaustion.

"What's that supposed to mean?" he asks, getting defensive. "I'm trying really hard here, Bella, but I can't do it all. I need this job, babe. I've worked so damn hard for it."

Anger.

"Wait, what?" I hiss into the phone. "And I'm not trying? Is that it, Jasper?" Fuck that. "You know what? I'm sick of this. Whenever we talk on the phone nowadays, we end up fighting."

He chuckles humorlessly, and for a moment I wonder if he's been drinking. "You're right. Maybe it's not working out."

Whoa.

That sure came out fast.

"What are you saying, Jazz?" I ask, placing a hand on my forehead.

I mean...

What?

Does he mean...?

"I'm saying that maybe it's best we call this whole thing off," he mutters.

This whole thing...

Our relationship?

"Are..." I release a breath, unable to wrap my head around this. "Are you breaking up with me?" I can't... believe him. "Over the phone?"

He inhales – I can actually hear it – shakily, holding it for a while before he releases it slowly.

It feels like forever before he answers.

And then he does, quietly. "Yes."

Yes. He said yes.

Breaking up... over the phone...

Wow.

Eight years.

Just like that.

Classy. Real classy, Jazz.

"Thought about this for long?" I ask, tapping my foot.

Fury.

"A few weeks," he sighs. "I mean... fuck... I love you, Bella. I do. I'm in love with you... But... I'm never home, and... like you said, we fight more and more..."

Uh-huh.

Whatever.

"You don't know how much this is killing me, Bella... I really do love you, you know..."

Right.

"Okay," I say numbly.

.

.

"Okay?"

I shrug tiredly. "Okay."

"Okay," he breathes out.

Silence again.

And I feel it, something, wanting to escape me. Raw emotions, anger, frustration...

I want to scream.

But I'm still standing here, in the middle of the grocery store.

And then... then I hear the click, alerting me of the fact that Jasper-motherfucking-Whitlock has hung up on me.

In disbelief, I stare at the damn phone for I don't know how long, but when I feel the urge to scream again, there's only one thing to do.

I leave the cart.

I walk toward the exit.

I call Rose.

"Hey, Bella, what's up?"

Deep breaths.

"Get off Emmett's dick, Rose," I bark out. "We're going out."

28.

JPOV

When I pocket my phone, I'm numb.

I can't believe I just...

God, I broke up with my Bella...

Over the phone.

"Are you okay, Jasper?"

No. I'm really not. I just broke up with the only girl I've ever loved.

"I'm fine, Mari- Ms. Mendoza," I sigh, resting my elbows on my knees.

Bella.

Yes, I have thought about it... about breaking up, but...

That's because she's right. We always fight nowadays, and I was sorta thinking... that maybe... Fuck, I don't even know, but isn't there a saying... If you love someone... let them go? Or some shit like that.

"Are you sure?" she asks, placing her hand on my arm. I nod and pull back slightly. "Hmm, all right. Well... we're about to board the plane."

The plane. The plane that will take us to New York, and in New York we will be able to move all the meetings, meaning that we won't have a reason for returning to Virginia any time soon. Fuck.

And then I panic.

Christ, it's Bella.

Bella. New York. Bella. New York. Bella. New York.

Oh, God...

"Ms. Mendoza, I can't do this. I have to... I have to..."

Bella, I'm coming for you.

29.

And he's thinking... I hate Emmett.

BPOV

"Are you gonna tell me what's going on?" Rose asks, looking at me intently.

"No," I reply for the umpteenth time. Not yet, Rose.

I down my shot of vodka.

We're at bar close to work. We go here sometimes, and it's the kind of place where you don't need to dress up or anything. That's just fucking perfect for me, considering that I left the grocery store to come here right away. I'm still in jeans and a hoodie. Classy.

Rose had eyed me, of course, as soon as she stepped through the door, and she knows something's up but I'm not ready to talk. I'm just ready to drink. That's what I told Edward, too.

I had texted him on my way to the bar, telling him that I had to cancel movie night because I needed to drink.

Then I had shut off my phone.

"Did you and Edward fight?" she asks, eyeing my third shot of vodka.

Edward. She asks about Edward. Not Jazz.

I take the shot before chasing it down with beer.

"No," I croak, wiping my mouth. Edward's great. Jazz, on the other hand...

"Okay, that's it." She snatches my divine liquid away. Bitch. "Talk to me. Tell me why you're acting this way and tell me what it has to do with Edward."

Didn't she hear me? "It has nothing to do with Edward." I frown.

"Then why is Emmett over at your house now to talk Edward off the proverbial ledge?"

Um, what? "What are you talking about? Edward's fine. I talked to him just before I left the grocery store."

She pulls up her phone. "Well, right before you called me, Emmett was on the phone with Edward, and apparently he was pissed. Edward, that is."

That's... weird.

"Hmm..."

"What?" I ask.

Rose doesn't answer. Her eyes are glued to her phone.

30.

And he's thinking... Emmett's hiding something.

BPOV

"Can I get you ladies anything else?" Garrett, the owner, asks.

I nod, but Rose shakes her head. "No, we're not staying. Thanks anyway, Garrett."

"We're definitely staying!" I hiss. I'm not done drowning my sorrows.

She responds by yanking me off the barstool.

"We're going to Little Stage," she tells me as she drags me toward the exit.

Little Stage? "The rundown blues joint?" I scoff.

There isn't much to do in Port Pines. We have about five bars and two night clubs, but four of these establishments are mostly for college kids, so we tend to stay away from those places. Garrett's Hut and Little Stage

are the two bars we visit sometimes, but the latter has become a magnet for the bad seeds at Pines University. So, don't ask me why she wants us to go there.

"Emmett just dragged Edward there," she tells me, nodding for me to get in her car.

I'm too tired to fight. Whatever. They have booze at Little Stage, too.

"Why?"

She revs the engine. "Because Edward's playing."

31.

And he's thinking... I might as well have been here alone.

Em's eyes are glued to the fucking phone, anyway. God, I just wanna go home and mope like a bitch.

BPOV

My jaw drops.

Edward's playing?

Playing what?

"Now, before you talk," she says, holding a hand up. "Do you remember Liam?" Um. I nod, confused. Edward has his job now as the Production Manager. "Well, his dream was apparently to own a bar. He left his position at Cullen Media because Little Stage was for sale." She shrugs. "He bought it, cleaned it up, and now it's clear from the Uni bad boys." And I'm gaping. Rose chuckles. "You've missed quite a lot in the past four and a half months, Bella." Clearly. "Anyway... whenever Jazz is in town,

Edward spends some time at Liam's place. I have seen him play a few times. He's good."

I... can't believe... any of this.

How did I miss this? And more importantly, I missed this for staying home and fighting with Jazz? Awesome. Sarcasm, by the way.

Okay, we didn't fight all the time.

He tended to fall asleep before a few fights could kick in.

Damn, I always figured they went to Garrett's bar or something.

But...

"Why hasn't Edward told me any of this?" I ask, slightly hurt. We've become so close... "And what does he play?"

All of the sudden we're here. Parked outside Little Stage.

And Rose turns in her seat to face me fully. "He plays the guitar. Sometimes with Emmett," she says softly. "Just covers, but... they're both really good." Okay, I'm more than a little hurt. "And Bella? He kept this to himself because it's private. With good reason."

'Scuse me?

32.

And he's thinking... Don't understand why we have to be here this early.

BPOV

"Don't get sassy, Isabella," she warns, and I haven't even opened my mouth. "I can see that you're annoyed or whatever, but you have no

right. We're all entitled to keep shit to ourselves, and this is Edward's thing, okay? He's very private about it."

I fold my arms over my chest. "But you and Emmett know." I point out.

"That's because we know why he keeps it private!" she snaps, and I cower in my seat. Rosalie Hale can be scary. "He picks songs about what he's feeling, meaning this is practically his version of a fucking diary."

She huffs, and I'm stunned. I've only seen Rose this protective of... well, me.

"Anyway..." She takes a deep breath, calming herself. "I'm done seeing you this way, and Emmett is done seeing Edward this way. So, we're in charge now."

I'm so confused.

And slightly drunk from the shots I took at Garrett's bar.

"It's about time you opened your fucking eyes," she mutters, opening her door. "Let's go, you blind bitch."

Gulp.

33.

And he's thinking... Fuck you, Em. Fuck you, Rose. I love you, Bella.

BPOV

Okay, things have definitely changed. Little Stage used to be dirty and seedy, but this... yeah, I like this. Simple but cool. Dark red walls, black leather booths, a couple of high tables and stools scattered in the middle where you can clearly see a dance floor. And of course, the little stage in the corner. Big enough for a small house band.

"Over there," Rose says, pointing at the left corner next to the bar. Ah. Shit. Both Emmett and Edward are sitting there... and there are also two guitar cases. Holy...

I shiver for some reason.

And as we walk across the dimly lit room, I shiver again.

He looks good. As always. When he's not dressed for work, he's in sweats or pajama bottoms and beaters, except for when we go out. Then it's holey jeans, well-worn chucks, and in tonight's case, his grey Stoli t-shirt. And let's not forget his piercings... and how he bites on the ring in his lip... or run the tip of his tongue over it... Or how he arches that pierced eyebrow...

"You're so fucking transparent," Rose sighs.

Shit.

But... fuck that. I'm apparently single now. I'm free to do what I want.

Okay, not a good thought. The last thing I'm going to do is to jump my friend.

Damn, I'm just all over the place.

"Hello, guys," she says as we reach the booth, and Emmett and Edward look up.

Emmett looks happy.

Edward looks like he's seen a ghost.

34.

And he's thinking... I can read her, and something is wrong.

BPOV

We're very quiet seated in the corner booth. First Emmett, then Rose, then me, and lastly, Edward.

It's suffocating.

I need drinks. Yes, plural.

And I'm confused.

Edward is glaring at Rose and Emmett. He refuses to look at me. I'm hurt, but I push that down. I don't exactly trust my own emotions tonight. However, I wonder if I've done something to upset him, because it's clear that he doesn't want me here.

"So..." That's Rose.

"What's up, guys?" Emmett asks, looking at me and Edward.

"I need a drink!" I blurt out.

Silence.

But luck is on my side, and a waitress evidently hears me, so she rushes over with her little notepad.

"One beer and two shots of Tequila, please," I say.

I ignore the looks.

If they think two shots are weird, they have another thing coming.

An hour later, Rose cuts me off.

Four shots and two beers are gone.

Not many words have been exchanged.

"We're up soon, dude," Emmett tells Edward.

Edward shakes his head, still nursing his first beer. "No way. Forget it."

"It's time, cuz," Em continues pointedly, "You've been going back and forth for too long now. You want her to know."

He doesn't want me to hear him play, Emmett.

Okay. Okay. Um. Like Rose said, it's his choice. I'm sure he has his reasons.

"He doesn't have to," I tell Rose and Emmett. "It's clear he doesn't want me to hear him."

Then I snatch back my beer from Rose.

"It's cool," I add with a shrug, and it's complete bullshit. I feel worse and worse with each second that passes, but I try my best to hide it. Besides, it's not just Edward. He's just the tip of the iceberg. It's Jasper. He threw away eight years over the phone. And that's the thing; I'm upset because the way he broke up with me hurts me more than the actual breakup.

"You can't lie for shit, Bella," Edward sighs quietly, eyes trained on the beer in his hand. "And it's not about the music."

I don't look at him as I ask, "Then what is it about?"

"What the music represents," he replies softly.

35.

And he's thinking... It's time.

BPOV

"I can go up there," he points across the bar where the stage is, "and play if that's what you want. I have no issues with that. It's the song I originally planned to play tonight that I'm not comfortable with you hearing."

I look over at Rose and Em and find them watching us intently. It makes me uncomfortable. Not just for me, but for Edward, too. They have no right to meddle, especially not after my lovely trip to the grocery store. What I want is... God, I just want to drink my day away. And yes, this makes me sound so very clever. Okay, it doesn't, but with the past couple of hours on my mind, I don't want to think. At all.

"Then don't," I tell him simply, looking at him now. He faces me, too, and frowns. "Don't do what you don't want to do."

Honestly, I don't see the big deal, but what do I know? Nothing. So, I keep my eyes on his, silently conveying that I mean every word I said.

I don't want him to feel pressured into anything.

Because I wouldn't like feeling that pressure myself.

Something flashes in Edward's eyes, but before I can read into it, it's gone.

But then he speaks. "I'll play. It's time."

36.

And he's thinking... Thank God I can't see her for the spotlight.

I'm nervous as it is.

BPOV

When it's Edward and Emmett's turn to play, Rose and I move closer toward the stage. Apparently, it's "Acoustic Night" at Little Stage tonight, meaning it's quiet and relaxed. So, the high tables stay put on the dance floor, and Rose and I pick one in the middle.

It's quite the turnout for a Thursday night at...

I check the time.

Whoa. Already nine PM.

Huh. I left the store around six...

Ah, well. Time flies when you're miserable, too, I guess.

I hear a chuckle coming through a microphone then, and I look up to see Edward and Emmett sitting on two stools on the stage. Two men, two, stools, two guitars, and two microphones. A spotlight is fixed on them, and Emmett's the one chuckling. Always thriving in the spotlight, that one. Edward, however... Yeah, not so much. He's focused on tuning his guitar.

After a five minute soundcheck, Emmett greets the fifty people or so, and it's clear that they've played here before. People recognize them. Well, there are also two cougars in the back, cheering for Mike Newton – Emmett's character on Stormy Days – but after Rose throws them a death glare, they shut up.

"Okay," Emmett says a little louder into the microphone. "You ready to hear some songs?"

And the little crowd cheers happily while Edward leans in and whispers something in Emmett's ear.

The song Riverward's gonna sing: [youtu . be/ aH8xU4kn9k0](https://youtu.be/aH8xU4kn9k0)

37.

And he's thinking... Here goes... everything.

BPOV

The two cousins whisper back and forth for a moment, and then Edward turns to his microphone.

"Hope you don't mind if I start us off tonight."

I shiver at the sound of his warm voice.

And he chuckles when the crowd cheers again. "All right. It's a classic. I doubt anyone in here hasn't heard it, so... you'll know what to do."

He leaves it there, and I'm a bit confused, but I assume I will find out.

Then, as Emmett starts playing, Edward leans in once more, and murmurs, "This is for Bella."

My eyes widen.

I gasp quietly.

And I recognize the song.

Holy...

Hold on, little girl

Show me what he's done to you

Stand up, little girl

A broken heart can't be that bad

I exhale shakily as the people around me start clapping to the music.

I'm stunned.

And his voice...

When it's through, it's through

Fate will twist the both of you

So, come on, baby... Come on over

Let me be the one to show you

I'm frozen in my spot.

I feel Rose's eyes on me.

And when the chorus comes, my vision blurs.

I'm the one who wants to be with you

Deep inside I hope you feel it, too

Waited on a line of greens and blues

Just to be the next to be with you

"You okay, honey?" Rose leans in to ask, and I shake my head.

I'm not okay. This is...

My heart is ready to explode.

As Emmett takes the first part of the next verse, I find myself gulping, unable to breathe properly. And my mind is spinning, providing me with images of Edward. All this time... All these months...

Then Edward sings again, in his rich, warm voice.

I've seen it all go down

Your game of love was all rained out

So, come on, baby... Come on over

Let me be the one to hold you

Oh, God...

The mornings we've shared in the kitchen... The laughing... The movie nights...

We've confided in each other, talked, and... everything.

I've been so blind.

I'm the one who wants to be with you

Deep inside I hope you feel it, too

Waited on a line of greens and blues

Just to be the next to be with you

He told me he was sick of Chicago and the shallow friends he had there. It was never for him. He wanted real, he wanted genuine... So, when his parents told him they were leaving the city for Port Pines, he didn't hesitate.

And I remember feeling all that warmth washing over me when we started getting to know each other.

It was all him, wasn't it?

Why be alone when we can be together, baby?

You can make my life worthwhile

I can make you start to smile

But he already does. He already does make me smile. Constantly.

He's been there when no one else was, and I've adored our moments together. He's... taken over.

Question is, when did he start taking up space in my heart?

Also from the beginning?

"Bella, breathe."

I can't, Rose. This is... this is so, so much.

38.

And he's thinking... Get through the set before you seek her out.

Get through the set. Just a few more songs.

BPOV

Too much. Too much.

I feel dizzy.

Emmett and Edward are still playing the last rounds of choruses on the song.

"Bella?"

I shake my head. "Rose, I-"

One step backward.

Another.

"Bella."

Another shake of my head. "Not tonight," I choke out, pleading with her.

I can't deal with this tonight. Not after the day I've had.

"Don't do this to him," she tells me, also pleading. "You'll hurt him if you leave now." And I see anger in her eyes. "You know you feel something for him, too."

That's the problem. I know now that I feel very strongly for him.

"Just... not tonight," I beg, taking another step. I'm breaking. "I can't deal with this tonight."

"Why not?" she grits out, taking a step when I do. "What's so fucking wrong with tonight?"

Everything.

"I don't want to hurt Edward," I tell her imploringly as my vision goes blurry again. "I really don't. Could you just tell him that I don't feel well tonight? Make sure he gets it. Make sure he knows I'm not pushing him away, I'm not running-" I choke up. Deep breaths. Almost at the door. "But I need to be alone right now, Rose."

She falters. "Bella?" She pauses. "Did... Did something happen between you and Jazz?"

Yes, but apparently it was coming. "Give me one night," I say instead. Tears spill over. "I need to think. Just tonight. Tell him."

Then I turn around, and I'm out the door.

39.

And he's thinking... Rose told me to wait at home. So, I'm waiting.

Worried sick, and waiting. Nervous, scared, vulnerable. And waiting.

Until I can't wait anymore.

BPOV

Three hours later, I'm gone.

Utterly fucked and gone.

My car is still at Garrett's bar, so I had nothing after I'd left Little Stage.

But ten minutes away from Little Stage is one of the nightclubs in Port Pines.

That's where I am now.

Drunk.

I sit alone in a corner. There's been giggling. Crying. Muttered curses. Oh, yeah, I'm quite fond of talking to myself when I'm wasted. Wasted and angry. Angry at myself. But when you're drunk, you can also be blessed with the loveliest epiphanies, and I wonder...

When did I fall out of love with Jasper?

And when did I start falling in love with Edward?

"Hey there, little lady."

I snort at the umpteenth college kid who has approached me tonight.

"Little lady? Really?" I mutter before chugging the last of my beer.

Little lady...

I'm twenty-three years old. Don't call me "lady."

"Can I buy you a drink?" he asks, and I look up at him for the first time.

Hell, why not? He might as well make himself useful. "Sure thing, Ponytail. I'll have another Corona."

He winks before he walks toward the bar.

I shudder in disgust.

But at least I have another beer coming my way.

40.

And he's thinking... Oh, thank God.

BPOV

As I wait for my beer to arrive, I take out my phone.

Whoa.

Seventeen texts. Twenty-two voice messages.

I only open the last received text.

Tell me where the FUCK you are, Isabella! We're worried sick! –
Rose.

Oh, shit.

"Oh, shit!" I exclaim. God, I'm just the worst person ever.

With shaky fingers, I type a quick reply.

Didn't mean to worry. At the club with Screem in the name. –
Bella.

Had I been sober, I wouldn't have jumped in surprise when the phone started ringing, but I'm not sober, so... yeah.

And it's Rose, of course.

"Hello?" I shout over the music.

"We're two minutes away!" she shouts back. "Get your ass outside!"

Uh-oh. Someone's pissed.

I giggle.

'Cause I'm in so much trouble.

"Here's your beer, sweetheart."

Right. I forgot about that.

"It's James, by the way." He winks.

"And I'm not impressed," I retort, taking the beer from him. "Thanks for the beer, though." I tip the beer in his direction before downing half of it. Yes, I'm a girl who knows how to handle my liquor. "Have a good one, Ponytail. I'm outta here."

"Nah, surely you're not leaving just yet."

41.

And she's thinking... Edward!

EPOV

I'm out of the car before Emmett kills the engine.

Of course... she's not waiting for us outside.

Thankfully, Emmett and Rose are hot on my tail, and they distract the bouncer so that I can sneak inside.

She has no idea how worried I've been. No fucking idea.

"Fuck," I curse, seeing the crowded dance floor. Is she there? Damn, it's gonna take forever to search through.

The obnoxious music is too loud. It's too dark. Flashing lights, making my head throb. People really go here voluntarily?

Ignoring the fake tits and fluttering lashes, I make my way toward the floor.

"Hi there, handsome."

Yeah, I don't think so.

"Edward!"

My head whips around. I'm not sure... Maybe I imagined it over the music, but...

"Bella!" I shout, spotting her in a corner booth.

Thank fucking God...

She's not alone, and my eyes narrow. It's quite clear that his advances aren't welcome, so I hurry over, eager to get her out of this fucking dump.

I arrive just in time to see her knee the dude in the crotch.

Ouch.

"Touch me again, and I will rip your fucking balls off before I shove them up your ass!" she shouts at him, and I don't doubt her. Bella Swan can handle her own. I made the mistake of going caveman on her one time when we were at Garrett's. I won't do it again. Unless I know she can't handle it herself, of course. But this guy...

He doubles over in pain.

"You okay?" I yell over the music as I grab her arm. She nods, and I pull her closer to me as I lead her out.

42.

And she's thinking... It's all him. Everything. I've been so stupid.

EPOV

"Just drive, Em," I mutter, putting my arm around Bella.

We're in the backseat of his Jeep, and for some reason she won't let me go. That's very fine by me.

"Bella, are you okay?" Rose asks from the passenger seat.

She doesn't answer, but I feel her nod against my chest.

Jesus. I tilt my head back for a moment. The night has been too fucking insane.

I push the pain down, though. My own damn pain. As long as she's okay.

But I know she's not. That's the problem. Something is definitely wrong, and though I know very well that something has been wrong for a long time, tonight has brought in new shit. I saw that the second she joined us at Little Stage. If only she could talk to me. It's all I want.

Well... she is all I want.

I don't know the exact moment I fell in love with her, but... yeah, I never stood a chance. It happened fast.

She became my best friend, the weird girl I fell in love with, and the confidant who listened to me. It doesn't matter if I tell her about the

shallow friends I had back in Chicago, or if I babble about the latest issue of Hellboy. She's there.

"We're home," Rose announces quietly, and I look out the window to see our house. "Want me to help you, Edward?"

I shake my head. "I've got her. I'll call if I need you."

43.

And she's thinking... Right here, right now... everything is perfect.

EPOV

"You okay?" I ask her softly, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear.

I sit on the edge of her bed, wishing I could have her in my room. But she's not mine, so she's here. In her bed. Their bed. Their room.

He doesn't deserve her.

"I am now," she sighs quietly. Her smile is soft, almost shy. "Know what I realized tonight?"

I chuckle under my breath. "No, what did you realize tonight?"

That I'm a pathetic, lovesick fool for playing you that song?

She smiles wider. Eyes glazing over slightly. "That it's all you."

I'm confused. "Wh... What?" That it's all me?

She nods against her pillow. "Yeah. You took over. All the space in my heart."

And I choke on my own saliva.

Then my chest constricts painfully. "Don't..." I shake my head, closing my eyes. "Don't drunk-talk with me, Bella." I beg you. I can't take that.

"But I'm not," she tells me, and when I open my eyes, she's sitting up. "I promise. I..." Her turn to close her eyes. And her smile is soft again. I'm not smiling, though. I'm not even breathing. "I was so blind," she whispers. "To my own feelings, to yours..."

"Bella." I clear my throat. "You're-"

She cuts me off. "Drunk. Yes. But I'm telling you the truth."

44.

And she's thinking... It's so easy to tell him the truth.

EPOV

I'm about to argue, but she renders me speechless when she fucking straddles me. Right there, on the edge of the bed. And she's only wearing panties and a t-shirt. Sweet Jesus. I may have seen her in panties and t-shirts before – we live together, after all – but this is different. Oh, so different.

"Jasper and I broke up today," she tells me. My eyes widen. I stop breathing again. "Actually, he broke up with me, but... It was time." Her tone is firm. "I needed the wake-up call."

I... don't know what to say. I have nothing.

But she does, and she continues. While cradling my face. "The fact that I let him go so easily when he got that job... It only proves that we were going downhill, even back then." She licks her lips, and it's by reflex that I do the same. "Don't you see, Edward?" I want to, but... "It's you."

Fuck.

Then she rests her forehead against mine, and I doubt she knows about the storm raging inside of me.

45.

And she's thinking... I'm consumed by my need for him.

EPOV

When she presses her lips against mine, I don't respond.

I'm in disbelief.

Frozen.

Warring with myself.

She's drunk.

But she told me she...

Doesn't matter. She's still drunk, and we have much more to talk about.

In the meantime, Bella's moving closer to my body.

Tearing down my walls.

Still urging me to kiss her back.

I want to. God, I want to.

"Want me, Edward," she whimpers, and I screw my eyes shut.

My body reacts.

The tip of her tongue brushes over my lip ring, and I feel my resolve crumbling faster and faster.

A whisper. "Please..."

It's so wrong, but it's so right.

A quiet moan escapes me when she rolls her hips over my growing erection.

I'm caving.

And before I know it, I'm kissing her back.

46.

And she's thinking... Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

EPOV

I'm too far gone as I push her back on the bed.

I'm controlled by my body, by my needs, by my fucking urge to claim her.

Her hands are on me as I hover over her. They feel so good...

"More," she begs breathlessly, and I pull off my t-shirt. "Jesus... Yes, Edward..."

I groan at the sound of my name.

Then we're back to kissing, and I hiss into her mouth as she flicks my nipple ring with her thumb. Does she know how often I've dreamed about this? Doubt it. Seriously doubt it. Weeks, months...

"I won't be some fucking rebound, Bella," I tell her. "Goddamn." She's all over me.

"Never," she gasps. Arching into me, she silently begs for even more, and I fucking know this woman. I know what she will like. "It's you, Edward..."

We need to talk. At length.

But I don't have the power to stop her, to stop us.

"Give me you," I grit out through clenched teeth.

She responds by rolling us over, and it's a flurry of activity. Clothes disappearing, hands roaming greedily, mouths tasting, teeth clashing, moans, groans, grunts, faster, pleading, rolling over, then again...

"Yours," she moans loudly. Eyes wide and fixed on my cock. "Edward, I just... I have to..."

I'm even more gone when she kneels between my legs and lowers her mouth onto my leaking cock. And another hiss escapes me when she sucks on the tip while swirling her tongue around my apadravya. Oh, fuck. She sucks me in. Hard and deep. There's no stopping her. Man, she can do this...

"Fuck, Bella," I grunt, threading my fingers through her hair. "Holy..." My eyes roll back for a second, and it's clear that she's not looking for slow and gentle. "That's it, baby," I moan. Damn, I feel her tongue ring... More swirling and flicking... "God, your mouth feels so good," I groan loudly.

She whimpers and hums around me, and that's it.

I won't finish like this, so I pull her up, and fuck me if she doesn't pout.

Cheeks flushed, eyes full of desire...

Desire for me.

Then I'm on top of her again, only this time we're naked.

Heavy breathing.

Still in disbelief.

My eyes drink her flawless body in.

And a beat of silence. Eyes locked, conversing. Conveying.

She nods, coffee brown eyes pleading...

47.

And she's thinking... Euphoria.

EPOV

Love, passion, anger, disbelief, fear, want, need, desperation, fire.

It's all there as I push my cock inside of her.

Shivers rip through my body.

Out of this world.

"Holy shit, you're... Oh, God..." Her breathing hitches.

I smirk at her shocked expression.

"Want more?" I ask breathlessly, feeling her wet pussy squeeze me.

It's been a year for me. A fucking year.

I pull out before I slam back in, and she chokes on a moan.

"Please, Edward!"

That won't ever get old. To hear her beg me for more.

Knowing that I won't last very long, I move my thumb down to her clit, and again she starts constricting. She feels too damn good. And don't get me started on how she looks, writhing under me. Her full tits, her neatly

trimmed pussy, her curves, her beautiful face... She's all woman.
Delectable and worthy of worship.

"Say it, baby," I moan in her ear. "Tell me it's me."

Because for me, it's all you.

She digs her heels into my ass. "You," she pants. "Only you, Edward."

Damn fucking straight.

The next time I push in, I don't stop. I set a fast pace.

Deep.

Hard.

Bella likes it rough.

"Soaking wet for me, baby," I moan, pounding harder and harder. "I fucking knew we were gonna be perfect together." I lean down, sucking her earlobe in to my mouth. My breathing is out of control. It's all her.
"Don't ever settle for second best again, Bella."

She claws at me.

We're wild.

All over the fucking bed, rolling around, both trying to stake a claim.

"Oh, fuck!" she gasps, and I know she can feel it. I know I have reached that spot inside of her. I know I'm rubbing against it with each thrust.

"Yes... ungh... Oh, Edward!"

Yes, that's it. My name. Not his.

When she rides me, I know she only has me on her mind as her head tilts back.

I cup and squeeze her luscious tits, making her moan louder.

And then, when I roll us over again and slam into her, I take her by surprise, only proving that she never had this before.

"Mine, baby girl," I whisper in her ear.

With that, she falls apart.

And I turn Bella Swan into a screamer.

The pleasure shoots through me as I follow.

No words can describe the intensity of my climax.

48.

And she's not thinking at all.

EPOV

I wake up in the middle of the night with a body pressed close to mine.

Legs tangled together.

Not my room.

Sheets hanging loosely on our lower bodies.

And her flowery scent hits me.

Bella.

It happened.

But before I can breathe out in relief, I hear the reason for waking up.

Quiet mumblings coming from her.

"Bella?" I whisper.

"Don't feel... so good," she mumbles sleepily, almost inaudibly.

I sigh, caressing her cheek. I have no idea how much she drank last night, but I guess it was quite a lot.

"I'll get you some water and aspirin, okay?" I murmur.

She barely nods. Eyes still closed.

With a kiss on her forehead, I reluctantly get out of the bed.

I crack a small smile when I see her pout.

And I hope... God, I hope she's mine now.

I will always love her. I know that. She's just... it for me. I will do everything for her.

Which apparently includes running out to buy painkillers in the middle of the night, because as I check the medicine cabinet downstairs, I see that we're all out. And I have a feeling she's gonna need 'em.

So, after getting dressed, I hurry my ass out to my car, glad that it's only a ten minute drive to the closest store that is open around the clock.

Maybe I can pick up ingredients for pancakes, too, 'cause I have no idea what happened to the groceries she was supposed to buy yesterday.

In the car, I text Rose.

49.

RPOV

Just wanted to let you know, Bella's fine. She might need u tomorrow, tho. Out to buy a mountain of hangover stuff now – Edward.

"Jesus Christ," I sigh to myself, getting out of Emmett's bed.

Is there anything that guy wouldn't do for Bella?

Since I haven't been able to sleep at all, I quickly decide to head back to the house now instead later. Emmett has meetings tomorrow, anyway.

Or... today, I suppose. Four thirty AM.

Luckily, it's just a short drive between Emmett's house and... what I used to call home. Now I'd say it's Bella and Edward's home. My home is with Em.

Jasper certainly doesn't live there anymore.

I swear, I love that guy. He's my childhood friend. But Bella comes first to me. She's like a sister. And I know her. I know her past. I know what her dad did. I know what makes her hesitate. Hopefully, though, she's done hesitating now. Edward's declaration sure didn't leave her questioning.

Back at the house, I pull up just as Edward does, and I chuckle when I see the bottles of ginger ale. Bella's favorite drink for a hangover. Edward knows that.

"You didn't have to come over at this ungodly hour, you know." He grins sleepily.

I shrug. "Couldn't sleep, anyway. Want some help?"

"Nah, I've got it."

50.

RPOV

It's been a few days since I was here, so while Edward puts the hangover food and ginger ale in the fridge, I check through the mail on the kitchen table. Bills. Trash. Bills. Yada, yada, yada.

"Gonna go take a shower," I sigh. He nods in acknowledgment, and I walk toward the stairs... where I stop. "What the...?"

Clothes. A trail of clothes, leading upstairs.

For a moment I wonder if they're Edward's, but...

Um, no. Those are Jasper's dress pants.

"Did you say somethi-"

And now Edward sees the clothes.

"I didn't know Jazz was home." I frown, heading up the stairs.

"He wasn't supposed to be," I hear Edward breathe out behind me.

I register his heavy breathing as we reach Bella's door.

And then we hear it.

Bella's quiet moaning.

"Oh, God..."

"Bella..."

And that's Jazz.

While my blood boils, I see the blood leave Edward's face.

"Don't give up, Edward," I plead with him quietly. "I know Bella, and you two belong-"

"Stop," he breathes out harshly, shaking his head. My heart breaks for him as I see his eyes well up. "That," he points at the door, "guts me, Rose." Oh, God... "She told me they had already brok-" He chokes up. Another shake of his head. "I'm out. I... I'm out. This is too much."

He drops a bottle of aspirin on the floor.

I'm frozen in place, just watching he runs down the stairs again.

In the back of my mind, Edward's words register.

She told me they had already brok...

She told me they had already brok...

She told me they had already brok...

Broken up?

Bella told him that?

Edward slamming the door shut downstairs brings me back to now, and soon I hear him starting his car.

In the meantime, I feel fury taking over inside of me.

How could she...?

"Fuck, I need..."

When I hear Bella's quiet moaning again, there's nothing stopping me from pushing the door open.

Tears of anger blur my vision, but when I see the bed, I freeze in the doorway.

I expected catching them, but...

"Bella!" I cry out, running over to the bed. Oh, God. Oh, God. Oh, God... She's on the floor, for fuck's sake, moaning in pain.

"Jasper!" I growl, glaring over at his sleeping form as I kneel on the floor next to Bella. His naked ass is the last thing I wanna see right now, but that bastard needs to wake the fuck up. "Bella, baby, can you hear me?" I whimper.

She's shaking, clutching her stomach, and it looks like she's ready to throw up.

"Ed-ward," she mumbles under her breath. "Don't... feel so..."

A light sheen of sweat covers her face. And I'm officially worried. Really worried.

"Bella..." I hear Jazz mumble. In his sleep. Fucktard.

"JASPER!" I shout.

Finally, he stirs. "Wh... What?"

When I look over at him, I see bloodshot eyes. Dark circles, exhaustion, and...

"Oh, my God, are you drunk?" I hiss.

What is it with people getting completely hammered these days?

51.

RPOV

I sit with Bella on the bathroom floor for hours.

She throws up. She cries. She wonders what's happened.

I wonder, too. I wonder when the hell Jazz showed up. I wonder how long Edward had been gone before he texted me. I mean, the store isn't far away. He couldn't have been gone for long before Jasper showed up.

God, it's just too much.

And as much as we both want to deny it, we smell the sex.

Which leads to more throwing up... and more crying.

Jasper's still asleep.

Emmett's here. Took me two hours to reach him, but he left his meetings when I told him how it was.

I can't reach Edward, though. That worries me.

But what worries me most is that Bella can't remember anything from last night.

Her last clear memory is of leaving Little Stage.

More crying. Crying for Edward, but I can't fucking reach him for her.

By now, I'm crying, too.

Emmett's ready to kick Jasper's ass if he doesn't wake up soon. Drunken son of a bitch.

It's obvious that they had sex, Bella and Jasper.

And when I tell Bella this, she starts wailing... before throwing up some more...

Then she confesses that Jasper broke up with her over the phone yesterday while she was in the grocery store... and the thought of sleeping with him now... Yeah, she's not happy. Neither am I. I mean... really? Over the phone? He ended eight years over the phone?

Safe to say, we need his story.

But first...

"Bella," I murmur, wiping her forehead. "I think we need to go to the hospital."

"Why?" she croaks.

"Because you have no memory of last night and... I mean, do you know if you left your drink unattended or something?"

52.

And he's thinking... After thanking Dad and Liam, I head to the airport.

BPOV

I'm numb when we leave the hospital.

In my urine, they found weak traces of GHB.

A date rape drug that leaves you in ecstasy for a few hours before you crash and burn.

I don't know how it happened. I don't remember...

I don't know where Edward is, either.

I don't know how I ended up having sex with Jasper this morning, and...

Great, now I'm crying again.

"Bella, please," Rose murmurs softly, and I hug her in the backseat as Emmett drives us home. "It will work out, honey."

"But I can't believe him," I cry. "I can't believe myself." I know that I can do stupid things when I'm drunk, but... sleeping with Jasper was the last thing I wanted.

I've tried to remember because the doctor asked me if there was any chance that I had been raped, but... God, I remember pushing Jasper off me. I remember him kissing me, apologizing, telling me he loved me. I remember ending up on the floor. I remember him crying, and I remember hearing his fucking snores.

I can't remember what happened before that, but it's quite fucking obvious that we had sex. I mean... I'm not stupid. I smelled like sex, and I could... feel it. Sperm doesn't just disappear.

"Oh, God," I cry out, covering my face with my hands. "I can't believe I had sex with him, Rose!"

"Well, here's your chance to kick his ass, 'cause we're home."

53.

And he's thinking... A one way ticket to Veracruz.

BPOV

Rose told me earlier how hurt Edward was, hearing me with Jasper.

Even though I wasn't having sex with Jazz at that time, I still had... apparently.

I just don't remember.

Regardless, it's the fact that I've hurt Edward that fuels my anger as I storm up the stairs.

Emmett and Rose follow me, and I push open the door to my room.

"Great, you're up," I grit out, seeing Jasper by his closet. He turns around, wearing nothing but a towel and a somber expression. "Mind telling what the fuck happened this morning?" I spit the words out. "Why are you even here?"

"Bella... Where have you been-" He chokes up. I couldn't care less, I swear. "Can... Can we talk alone?"

My look tells him to spill the fucking beans before I hurt him physically.

"I messed up," he croaks. "I shouldn't have broken up with you." He pulls at his hair. Rose huffs behind me. "When I arrived in New York, I took a cab, and-"

"Whoa!" I cut him off as my eyes widen. "Do not tell me you actually took a cab here! From New York!" That's a seven hour ride, for fuck's sake! But Jasper's eyes tell me that that's just what he did. "How stupid are you!"

"I..." He shrugs dejectedly, looking down. "I was desperate, and... I was drunk."

"There's no fucking way they'd let you drink that much on a plane," I shoot back, not missing a beat.

And now he looks guilty. "I went to a bar first... Um, to think things through."

My eyebrows shoot up, but before I can scream at him for being so fucked in the head, I realize that I did the same yesterday. I went to a goddamn nightclub to clear my head.

So, I move on. "And you ended up drunk off your ass, and then you took a cab... to Virginia," I state flatly. He nods once. "And then what? When did you get here?" And how the hell did I end up sleeping with you?

I shudder at the thought now.

54.

And he's thinking... Alcohol won't solve anything.

BPOV

He looks around the room helplessly, and I just know...

I know that he was too drunk earlier to remember.

Whatever, I move on again. "How the hell did we end up having sex?" And my voice cracks at the end. I still can't believe I did that. I can't believe I did that to Edward. No, we're not together or anything, but... I know now that he's the man for me. I may not be ready to jump into a new relationship right away, but I sure as fuck don't want to let him believe I'm with Jasper.

"I don't know, Bella... I don't remember," he sighs heavily, again pulling at his hair. "I'm so fucking sorry, I..." Then his eyes widen in fear. "You don't think I forced you, do you?"

"No!" I gasp. Christ. I may hate him right now, but he's not... I mean... God, I know he wouldn't do anything like that.

"But the fact remains... We had sex, Jazz, and..." I shake my head. "And we didn't use protection."

"Wait... what?" Oh, yeah. I have his attention now. "You're on the pill!"

I shake my head. "I didn't renew my prescription last time. Why would I? You were never home, and even when you were, we only fought."

His shoulders slump. "You're speaking in past tense."

I nod with a dip of my chin. "I'm not taking you back, Jasper."

55.

JPOV

I try to remember. I try to recall...

But...

Fuck, the drinking. Even in the goddamn cab ride to Port Pines.

Pretty sure I'm gonna lose my job. Once they find out that I used the company credit card to pay for the ride...

Whatever. It doesn't matter. I lost her.

"There's no chance?" I ask quietly, ignoring that Rose and Emmett are both glaring at me from the doorway.

"No."

No. She said no.

I remember the pleading... the apologizing...

I can't remember having sex with her, but... Well, it happened. Evidently.

I chuckle humorlessly. If only I could remember my last time with her.

"All right." I grimace, averting my eyes to the floor. "So... now what?" I cringe for even asking, but I'm desperate to have her in my life. If stalling gives me more, then...

"Now nothing," she says quietly. "We're done."

Right.

I've lost her. The only woman I've ever loved...

56.

And he's thinking... Tyler asks if I have plans on returning to the states.

I don't answer.

BPOV

Jasper leaves at nightfall. Two bags of clothes. Two boxes of movies, CDs, trinkets, memories... And his case of photo albums.

He's gone.

I'm empty.

Edward won't respond to my calls... or my texts...

Guilt is eating at me.

And I'm so... frustrated... about not being able to remember.

I've tried. I keep trying...

But I have nothing.

Just Edward as he performed that song for me. My last vivid memory. The rest is a blur until there's just... nothing.

I cry.

I get pity looks from Rose and Em.

So, I walk up the stairs.

I pass my room.

Outside Edward's room I pause with my hand on the doorknob.

My forehead against the door.

Eyes stinging.

And when I open the door... When his scent invades my senses...

There's no stopping the sobs.

He'll be back, right?

57.

And she's thinking... I just wanna scream.

So, I do.

EPOV

When I finally arrive in Veracruz, I'm fucking spent.

Numb, too.

Tyler notices, of course, but he doesn't question it. He and his wife just welcome me, and soon I'm shown to my room.

"We'll talk tomorrow, man," he tells me, and then I'm alone again.

He's the only one I keep in touch with from Chicago.

Much like me, he bailed. We used to be part of a group of friends – and I use that term loosely – hanging out on the weekends, but it became too much. Everything was about clubbing, getting high, getting laid... Hell, I

don't even know how Ty and I ended up in that fucking crowd. It wasn't us. We never participated. So... kinda safe to say that it was easy to leave.

He left first, after meeting a Mexican chick on vacation. Carmen. Now they own a bed and breakfast here in Veracruz.

And I left Chicago shortly after, when Mom and Dad decided to move the headquarters to Virginia. Or... when Mom decided that she wanted to leave. It had been her choice, after all. She wanted the "small town feeling". And Dad and I followed.

I sigh to myself, falling back on the bed in my room.

It didn't take long before Dad and I fell for the damn town.

Granted, Bella helped.

"Christ." I scrub at my face.

Bella.

There's no ignoring the stabbing pain now.

58.

And she's thinking... I wake up in Edward's bed. Still no word from him.

EPOV

"Are you okay, son?"

No.

Not even on a secluded beach in sunny Mexico am I okay.

"Yeah," I mutter, cradling the phone between my shoulder and cheek.

"Liar."

I chuckle wryly as I continue tuning Tyler's guitar. "It is what it is, Dad."

"And what is that, exactly? You didn't really tell me anything yesterday," he says pointedly, and I know he's right. After I had left the house yesterday, I had driven straight to Mom and Dad's. I'd woken them up, telling Dad I needed to get out. Indefinitely. That's all I had said. Then I had called Liam while I was still in Dad's study and asked him to fill in until Dad found a replacement. Liam said yes, and that was that. He won't exactly need training seeing as how it was his job before I arrived.

"I have a feeling it concerns Bella."

I sigh. Everything concerns her, for fuck's sake. 'Cause I'm a pussy like that.

"So, she's the one, eh?" Mom had said after meeting Bella the first time.

I hadn't said a word about my... Well, I guess it was an infatuation at the time.

But moms notice shit like that, and I hadn't been able to deny it.

My parents know very well how I feel about Bella, both of them.

"Doesn't matter," I tell Dad. Because it really doesn't. It's clear that Bella doesn't feel the same way. Otherwise she wouldn't fuck Jasper mere hours after being with me. Jesus, I hadn't even been gone for more than half an hour. And she was already back with him?

Yeah, you bet your ass, I'm bitter.

I don't even believe they broke up in the first place. I mean, I've come to know Jasper Whitlock. Maybe not very well, but still, and he wouldn't dump Bella over the phone. Because she said they broke up on Friday,

and he wasn't in Port Pines until yesterday morning. So... a phone call? I think not. He wouldn't throw away eight years like that.

"Edward, are you even listening to me?"

Right. "Sorry," I sigh. "I zoned out. What did you say?"

"I said that Emmett's trying to reach you."

I figured.

"Don't tell him where I am," I mumble. Even if his schedule is full, I know he'd be on the first flight down. And if Emmett knows, Rose knows. And if Rose knows...

"Will you at least tell me where you are?"

"You know I'm in Mexico," I reply, scratching my chin. "At Tyler and Carmen's place."

"Yes," he says slowly. "But you've never mentioned where in Mexico."

Huh. Well, good.

59.

And she's thinking... I've lost him. Before I even had a chance, he's gone.

EPOV

I don't really know how long I've been here.

Maybe because every day's the same.

I wake up in my room. I shower. I eat what Carmen forces me to eat. I take a morning swim in the ocean. I plant my ass on the beach. I sit there. I play on Ty's guitar, missing my own. And my mind... Fuck, it's all

her. Every goddamn minute of the day. I see her everywhere. In everything.

In little things. Yesterday for instance, when Tyler told me to stop moping. He'd thrown me a comic book – in an attempt to be funny, of course – but as soon as I saw that damn Captain America cover, I'd fucking lost it. I ended up running down to the beach just so that no one would be able to hear my rather impressive line of profanities.

All I could hear was Bella's laughing.

Even her damn snorting is endearing. I love it all. Everything about her is so damn real. Genuine.

There was always this smile on her lips whenever I read my comic books in the living room. She'd poke fun at me at first, only to end up asking what the comic was about. Then she'd quiz me about my love for comic books.

I almost smile at the memory of her when I told her that my favorites are Captain America and Hellboy.

She had rented one of the Hellboy movies the next day. "Just to see what the fuss is about," she'd said. "'Cause I'm all sorts of confuzzled, dude."

Adorable, that woman.

"Fuck," I sigh heavily. I'm all about sighing these days. Deep breaths that don't do shit to relieve the pain.

"Edward!"

Jesus.

I look over my shoulder, seeing Ty walking down the beach toward me.

Great. Another attempt to “talk it out”.

“Mind if I join you?” he asks, not waiting for my response. He just plops down in the beach chair next to mine. “You need to shave.”

Sure. I’ll get right on that.

“I’m not ready for an intervention, man,” I mutter, sliding down my Ray-Bans from my hair.

“Edward.” I tilt my head in his direction. “Enough is enough. You’ve been here for two weeks. It’s time to talk.”

60.

And she’s thinking... Fucking nausea.

EPOV

“Wait. Lemme get this straight. You slept with her, woke up in the middle of the night, went out to buy some stuff, were gone for half an hour, and when you came back, she was back with the boyfriend?”

Yeah, that pretty much sums it up.

I nod once, eyes on the ocean. “Lovely, eh?”

“Damn,” Ty sighs, leaning back in his chair. “She sounds like a keeper.”

I grimace, reacting to his sarcasm. “She’s...” My heart clenches. I don’t have it in me to defend her, but at the same time I know her. I know how fucking perfect she is. What she did... getting back with Jasper like that... it doesn’t add up with what I know about Bella. But still... it happened, and it infuriates me, because I’m too much of a pussy to be mad at her. I’m just hurt. Pissed at myself, but not at her. I may not be able to defend her, but I’m not able to think badly of her, either. It’s all so messed up.

"So... you're in love with her," he states.

I chuckle humorlessly. "That's putting it mildly. But... yeah. I love her."

In the end, I tell Tyler about everything. Not just that night. But all those months...

God, I miss her.

61.

And he's thinking... Why does the pain get worse?

BPOV

Jasper's parents hate me. Mom wants me to take Jasper back. Jasper himself is begging.

I don't listen.

But it's hard, though, not to listen to Mom. After what Dad put us through...

Fuck.

I push that away. It doesn't matter. Okay, it does, but I won't take him back. I can't, because I don't love him anymore. Not like that, anyway. Of course, I will always have him in my heart, because... eight years. That won't ever go away. But I'm not in love with him.

I'm just glad I have Rose and Emmett.

I'm also glad that Jasper's parents, Mom, and Jazz are across the country.

Yes, even Jasper. Apparently, he was allowed to keep his job if he paid back the ridiculous amount of money for that stupid cab ride from New York to Virginia. Not that he did, but his parents did.

But he's back in LA now, working for Maria Mendoza.

He calls me... but I hang up. I don't wanna hear it.

I just... God, I just want to move on.

Yeah, that's bullshit. What I want is for Edward to come back. I want to apologize for hurting him; I want to make it up to him... or try.

But he's not here, and all we know is that he's in Mexico.

Carlisle and Esme are worried sick, but he doesn't answer his phone anymore, so there's not much we can do. And he only answered for Carlisle earlier. When Rose called, nothing. When Emmett called, nothing. When I called... nothing. And now it's shut off completely.

His message is clear.

I just have to learn how to cope.

62.

And he's thinking... Another day of misery.

BPOV

"Could you sit still?" I sigh, feeling a small smile play on my lips. But I can't help it. He's too cute. "I have twenty minutes, okay?" I try to give him the bitchface. Emphasis on try.

Emmett and Rose have been everything to me, and it's impossible to be mad.

"But I gotta do this, Swan," he whines, eyes on his Blackberry.

Rose is gonna lose her shit when Emmett tells her where they're spending Valentine's Day in two weeks.

She's a lucky girl.

"Quit whining," I tell him, flicking him on the forehead. "Eew, greasy."

Now he looks up. "What?" He frowns, touching his forehead.

I shake my head and reach for my wipes. "Seriously, that Maggie chick should be fired," I mutter. "She can't do makeup for shit."

Yes, I took two weeks off work after he left. And Maggie, a new girl, covered for me, but I'm back now. Fucking disaster. Well, I was supposed to be back yesterday, but I've been sick. I was sick this morning, too, but I gotta pay the bills somehow, right? So, I called Maggie to cover the first two hours.

I won't do it again, 'cause she doesn't know how to work with Emmett.

"Glad to have you back," Em chuckles, pocketing his phone.

"You could've told her not to use the suffocating paste they have here," I tell him pointedly. "See?" I hold up a mirror. "Your skin is already pleading with me. 'Save me, Bella. Save me.'" He laughs, and I can't help but snicker. "Close your eyes," I say, still smiling a little. It feels good to smile.

After wiping off the shit they call foundation here, I reach for the one I've ordered specially for Emmett.

"Now this... is the good stuff." I wink before applying the new foundation on a moist sponge. "And why, Emmett?" Yeah, I'm totally quizzing him.

He rolls his eyes but replies dutifully. In a very female voice, though. "You use that one because it allows for my skin to breathe."

I grin. "Exactly!"

But my grin is quickly wiped off when I smell coffee nearby.

My stomach rolls, and before I know it, I'm running toward the nearest trash can.

63.

And he's thinking... I know I won't regret the tattoo.

BPOV

"No, Emmett, don't come in here!" I cry out.

But it's too late. He's in, and his eyes land on the counter right away.

"Holy shit!" he exclaims.

Which just causes another set of tears for me.

"Get out, Emmett!" Rose hisses, pushing him out of the bathroom.

Doesn't matter now. He's already seen it. Or them. I bought six.

And I'm back on the floor, crying my eyes out.

"I saw them!" he says, knocking on the door that Rose just locked. "I saw them!"

I know. And they're all positive.

After a week of living in denial, Rose forced me to buy tests.

So, we did.

And I'm pregnant.

Rose sinks down on the floor again, placing her arm around me. She's done that too many times over the past few weeks.

"I'll call Esme and Carlisle," she murmurs. "We can have dinner with them another night."

I shake my head. "No," I croak. I've only spoken to Esme over the phone since he left, and I need to see them. They're my only link to him. "I wanna see them," I tell her, accepting yet another tissue. "We can order in or whatever, but dinner's still on."

64.

And he's thinking... Is he taking her out on a romantic date for Valentine's?

BPOV

"You have to call him," Em says pointedly.

I stick out my tongue before refocusing on applying his eyeliner.

"No talking during work hours, Em."

No thinking, either, please.

It's futile, though. I think about all of this all the time. The pregnancy, Jasper, Edward, Mom... Even Edward's parents.

Their reaction to the pregnancy had been guarded when I told them last week. Esme had started crying softly when we'd sat down in the living room, and I knew that was my answer. They know about Edward's feelings.

Emmett had already warned me that they most likely knew, but that night confirmed it.

They were happy, truly, but it was quite clear that they wished for me to be pregnant under different circumstances.

I can't blame them for feeling that way, because I feel the same.

To get pregnant by the man you just broke up with isn't sunshine and roses.

Don't think about this now, Bella.

Right.

I take a deep breath, reaching for a new brush. "So... Valentine's Day," I mention, needing to change the topic. "When are you and Rose leaving tonight?" To his credit, he doesn't reply until I've smudged out the sharp edges of the eyeliner. Such a good boy. I've taught him so well. "You may answer." I snicker, lowering my brush.

He smirks. "You mean, if we actually leave?"

"You're going," I huff. "Rose is just having a hard time leaving mama-bear mode." True. So true. She's been great and so supportive, but she's a worrier. "Kidnap her if it comes down to that," I add with a shrug.

"I guess that can be arranged," he chuckles. But then he's back to business. "Nice try, by the way, but I won't be sidetracked. You need to tell Jasper about the baby."

I know. I'm just not ready to face him. So, I shut Emmett up by applying his lip balm.

Mascara follows.

Oh, but then he talks again. "I was thinking..."

I arch a brow as I wipe my hands. "Did it hurt?"

"Shut up. Anyway... how can you be six weeks along when Jazz knocked you up four weeks ago?"

I ignore the pain I feel at the mentioning of his name. "Keeping track of my pregnancy, McCarty?"

He just gives me a you-better-speak look, so I grab the bottle of shimmer fix before I answer. "Close your eyes," I sigh. He does, and I talk as I spray it on his face. "They count the two weeks before you get pregnant, too. Don't ask me why, but... yeah. Something about the egg..."

"Huh."

Yeah.

"All done," I tell him. "You're soap opera worthy now."

65.

And she's thinking... He broke up with me over the phone.

I don't feel guilty when I tell Jasper about the pregnancy through a text.

EPOV

"How are the 'rents?" Ty asks.

"Dude," I say in a complaining voice, holding up my issue of Captain America. "Not cool to talk when I'm reading." After adjusting my glasses, I turn back to my comic book. "You of all people should know," I add in a mutter. Really, he should know. He shares my addiction, after all, and we sure knew how to geek it up back in the day.

"But you never talk," he huffs.

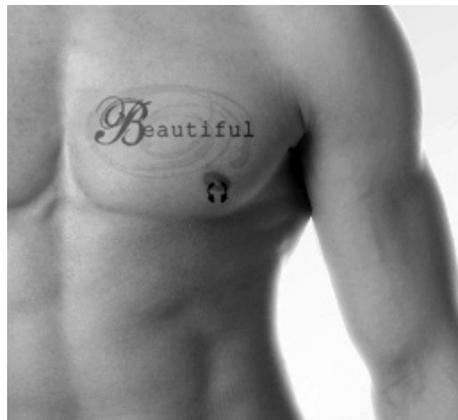
I rub my bare chest, looking out over the ocean. "You sound like a woman, Ty."

"At least I'm not a pussy," he retorts. "Still can't believe you got her name inked over your heart."

"I didn't," I reply defensively. It's not her name. "It's just a word."

He shakes his head at me, obviously seeing through my bullshit.

"Listen, Cullen," he says firmly, snatching my comic away from me, "you've been sitting here for four weeks now." I open my mouth to argue, but he continues. "Don't deny it, man. I mean, look around. You have a chair, a cooler, a blanket, my guitar, a stash of comics. You practically live on this beach. I took you out one night, and you ended up getting 'Beautiful' tattooed over your fucking heart." He sighs. "That's not moving on. That's wallowing. Now, I know that this Bella girl is one of the good ones. You've convinced me, all right? But this shit has got to stop. So... unless you tell me what your plan is, I'm calling your parents."



66.

And she's thinking... Rose sure is reluctant to leave for her romantic weekend with Emmett. So, I push her out the door, assuring her that I'm fine. She sees through me, but thankfully leaves.

EPOV

"Not cool," I mutter, shaking my head at him. "You'd call my fucking parents? We're all adults here, ya know. I'm twenty-five. Not five."

"Then act like it!" he exclaims. "You're hiding here, dude!"

I'm not... hiding.

Oh God, I'm hiding.

But... can you blame me? I've had my heart ripped out. Surely, I'm entitled to some privacy.

"I stand firm on this one, Edward. Tell me what your plan is, or I'm calling Carlisle and Esme."

Damn.

"They've been trying to contact you, haven't they?" he asks.

I sigh and lean back in my chair. "Yeah." Constantly. Every day. But I always delete the messages they leave. Then, before I shut off my phone again, I send Dad a text, telling them I'm fine, and that I need more time.

"I need time," I tell him, dragging a hand over my face. I really do need to shave. Shit. "Time before I go back."

"So, you are going back?"

Yes. But not now. Not ready for that. I'd die if I saw her now. Sure, when I pick up a comic book now, my head isn't drowning in memories of Bella, and I don't feel like someone's stomping the shit out of my heart, but... It's still too soon. Way too soon.

"In time," I reply quietly. "But I'm not ready to see her. She's with him, and... I just can't deal with that yet."

"Okay." He nods once. "At least I know now."

67.

And he's thinking... I need to get better.

BPOV

I'm not surprised to see Jasper when I wake up on Saturday morning.

When I open the door for him, he's holding up his phone.

My text.

I'm pregnant. Just thought I'd tell you – Bella.

"You're pregnant?" he asks thickly, and my eyes go back to his face. He looks tired as hell.

"Yeah," I mutter, opening the door wider.

He enters and collapses on the couch in the living room.

I sit down in a chair and pull my legs up.

I feel close to nothing.

"You didn't have to fly out," I say quietly, watching him as he loosens his tie. "I mean... not right away. No hurry."

He throws me a glare. "You're pregnant, Bella." I'm aware. "What kind of idiot would I have been if I didn't fly out?"

I smile wryly. "The kind of idiot who breaks up with someone over the phone? The kind of idiot who takes a cab from-"

"I get it," he replies angrily.

I shrug.

And then we're quiet for a while.

He's off in his world, and I'm off in mine.

Edward.

I miss him so much.

I bet he'd be angry if he knew where I spend my nights. But I can't sleep in my own bed. I just can't. Same goes for his deep blue Captain America t-shirt. I'm wearing it. It smells just like him. Okay, not just like him, but close. I use his detergent, and, um... I may spray some of his deodorant on it. Oh, God. I'm such a loser.

I rest my forehead on my knees.

"Um..." He clears his throat. I don't move. "Who knows about the, uh... pregnancy?"

That's his first question?

Not... And how are you?

Not... Where do we go from here?

"Rose, Emmett..." Looking up, I rest my chin on my knees instead.

"Edward's parents. A few coworkers."

He tilts his head as his brow furrows. "You didn't mention Edward."

68.

And he's thinking... The way her body felt against mine...

BPOV

Edward sang to me... Admitted his feelings... In front of a crowd. And I left him. Then he thought he heard me having sex with you, even though we weren't. Because... apparently... we had already had sex at that time. Do you understand? Get what I'm saying and all that?

Yeah, I won't really tell Jazz this.

So, I say, "He's in Mexico, um... visiting a friend." And it hurts. God, it hurts. "I don't know when he's coming back." Or if he's coming back. "So, he doesn't know about the pregnancy."

He scratches his forehead. "Huh... Uh, when did he leave?" he asks.

When he heard me moaning. "Shortly after that night." I give him a pointed look.

He nods and looks down.

"So..."

I raise a brow. "What?"

After a deep breath, he looks up again. "What happens now? I mean... what are your... plans?"

Plans?

"About the pregnancy," he clarifies quietly.

And my eyes bug out. "To have the baby, of course!"

"I'm sorry," he says quickly, looking slightly panicked. "I just wanted to be sure."

"Look, you don't have to do anything," I tell him, because he really doesn't. "I know a baby doesn't really fit into your life now-"

"I'm not leaving you!" He all but snaps. "I'm not gonna abandon my own child!"

I fight nausea. Everything feels so wrong.

"Shit," he breathes out, leaning forward on his knees. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you, but I'm not-" His shoulders slump. "It's just a lot to take in, and my job..." Yeah. His job. "I don't know what to do, Bella." His eyes find mine, and I see the helplessness. "You're right. This isn't the perfect time..." It's not the right person, either, Jazz. It's all wrong. I shouldn't have his child. He shouldn't be the father of mine. "But I won't be that guy. I... I just... Fuck, I mean, is there any way we can work this out?"

Um... "Work what out?" I ask dumbly.

He hesitates.

And I know. "No, Jasper," I sigh. "We're over. I can't..." Deep breaths. "I don't love you like that anymore."

He swallows hard, and I feel my heart clench. I don't love him. I don't, but we still share a history. Eight years together, not to mention the years before that, when we were close friends.

But I'm in love with someone else.

That won't change. I feel that. I feel how different my love for Edward is. It's nothing like the love I felt for Jasper. Loving Jasper was effortless, comfortable, and safe.

Loving Edward is... heavy. More. There's an excitement I've never felt before. It's consuming and wild. It makes me feel alive and so awake.

Too bad I realized that I love him when my ship had already sailed.

"All right," Jazz mutters, bringing me back to now. "So... how do we do this?"

69.

And he's thinking... To see her dancing in the kitchen.

BPOV

I don't want Jasper to miss out on the pregnancy, but I don't to take him away from his job, either. And maybe I'm selfish... yeah, most likely... but I feel good with the agreement we settle on. Because I want the space.

He'll go back to work. Four weeks in LA and one week in Port Pines. During that week, when he's here, he'll sleep in his room. Our old room.

He's the... the father.

Christ.

But we're not together.

It's a bit awkward, and I know he isn't happy with my decision, but in the end we're... friends.

Friends having a baby together.

It still feels so fucking wrong, but... it is what it is.

And this is our plan. For now. When the baby's born, we'll see what happens. I mean, it's pretty much up to Jasper. It's his job. His choice.

I just know that I will be here. As the mother of his child, and... as his friend.

And if he needs me, he can find me in Rose's room.

I'm not stupid. I know she wants to be with Emmett, and I won't let her stay just for my sake. She has to live her life.

At the end of the night, I say goodbye to Jasper again.

He'll be back in a few weeks.

I sleep in Edward's bed again.

70.

And he's thinking... My thumb hovers over her phone number.

BPOV

"Holy shit, he's really going at it," Em laughs, both hands on my stomach.

I grin, trying to focus on work, but it's hard. "Rose thinks he'll be a soccer player," I chuckle.

"Yes, I do," I hear Rose say, and I look over my shoulder to see her enter the makeup trailer. "Are you ready soon? Royce is impatient." She snickers.

Ah, the lovely director. He doesn't like that I'm pregnant. Ever since I started showing, he's been one scowling motherfucker. Not that I care.

I'm in a good place in life. Finally.

Okay, not always, but... for the most of it. I surround myself with people who support me, which includes Rose, Emmett, Edward's parents, and a few other coworkers. Yeah, Jasper, too. I suppose. Though, I gotta say I'm a bit disappointed in him. I'm not really sure what I expected, but... a little more enthusiasm, maybe? I don't know. But he's been as distant as ever. Granted, during the week he spends in Port Pines, he asks questions and so on, but that's pretty much it. He rarely calls while he's in LA.

I refuse to let it get to me. A part of me is actually relieved.

"Just finishing up," I answer, turning back to Emmett who's still feeling my little kiddo kick the shit outta me. Jesus, I had been an emotional mess

when I found out I'm having a boy. Emmett was, too. I swear I saw him wipe his cheek. Yes, he was the one taking me to the ultrasound. Rose was working, and Jazz was in LA.

"We gotta have a couple of these, Rose," he chuckles, making me grin widely.

Rose chokes on air. "One step at a time. Okay, buddy?"

I smile, knowing she's beaming on the inside.

Emmett and Rose are... solid, to say the least.

I doubt I'll ever have that.

Edward's it for me. And he's not in my life anymore.

As far as we know, he's still in Mexico.

It's been months... Obviously, he's not returning.

No, no. Happy thoughts, Bella.

Right.

71.

And he's thinking... I'm too fucking chicken to call Bella.

Maybe I could call Mom and Dad... or maybe Em.

BPOV

"Being pregnant suits you," Esme murmurs softly, grasping my hand.

I love this woman. She's been... amazing.

"I like it," I admit, leaning back on the couch. It's just us girls tonight. Me, Rose, and Esme. "And it's easy to get consumed by it," I add quietly, watching as I place my hands over my belly.

I never really saw myself as a mother, and I'm still so young. Only twenty-three, but... my priorities have changed. I can't wait to meet the little guy.

"The pregnancy?" Rose asks, tilting her head, and I nod. I call it a bonus to being pregnant; the distraction it brings. I need it. Even Esme needs it. She misses Edward so much. "But it's not enough," Rose adds. Her smile is teasing, and she's trying to lighten the tension. And in this case she manages, because it's been a fun couple of days.

"Ah, yes," Esme chuckles. "The pet."

Exactly.

Rose huffs, and I stick my tongue out at her. At least I have Emmett on my side. Carlisle, too.

Now that Rose is living with Emmett, she suggested that I get a pet since I refuse to rent out Edward's room. If I needed the money I probably would, but Carlisle and Esme are covering his rent, so...

Anyway, the subject was pets the other day, and Rose was obviously thinking about a cat... or a dog.

No, thanks.

Since Emmett and I had the day off, he helped me.

Yeah, I bought a pig. A micro pig. Or, teacup pig... or mini pig. Many names for such a cute creature. It's so fucking adorable, it's not even funny. And so tiny... with black spots all over.



"I can't wait for it to get here tomorrow," I sigh softly. "I already miss him."

"You and Emmett drove out there, to that farm or whatever, once," Rose says, arching a brow. "And you're both so damn attached already. Can't believe it. I mean... it's a pig! A pig!"

"I know," I reply excitedly.

I've shown them all pictures of my little pig, but like I said, only Carlisle and Emmett are on my side. Well, Esme is Switzerland. But Rose is against.

"Thought of a name for him?" Esme grins into her glass of wine.

I sober slightly and nod. "Yeah," I murmur. "I'm gonna call him Cap."

When they ask how I came up with that name for a pig, I just shrug and say that I've read it somewhere.

What they don't know is that Cap's full name is Captain America.

72.

And she's thinking... The house is so quiet.

EPOV

Deep breaths.

It feels wrong to call Dad. I want to talk to Bella, but... yeah, I'm a pussy.

Sitting in my chair on the beach, I sip on my Corona while I wait for Dad to pick up.

I don't really feel any better. I thought I would, but I don't.

So, it's kinda safe to say that my four months of shutting everybody out have been for nothing.

Sure, the wounds don't feel quite as deep anymore, but my feelings haven't changed. I'm still in love with her. I'm still hurt. But I'm at that point where I really miss my friend. Because she isn't just the woman I fell in love with. She also became my best friend, and now I wonder if she hates me for leaving. Then again, she wasn't exactly the best friend when she fucked me, only to sleep with Jasper a few hours later.

Yeah, go down that road again, Cullen. 'Cause you haven't done that before.

Gotta love the inner sarcastic bastard.

"Pick up, don't pick up," I mutter, fidgeting with the strings on my board shorts. "Pick up, don't pick up."

"Carlisle Cullen speaking."

I suck in a breath.

I release it slowly.

"Dad. It's me."

73.

And she's thinking... I can't sleep.

EPOV

"Well..." I hear Dad clearing his throat. "About time you called."

Yeah, I feel bad, and I can only assume how worried Mom had been, but...
Fuck, I needed this time. Alone and away.

"Sorry," I mutter, not knowing what else to say. "I haven't been ready."

"And you are now?" he asks, and I notice how guarded his voice is. "I presume you haven't listened to any of the messages we've left."

I sigh. "No, I haven't."

He sighs, too.

"You've missed a lot, son," he says softly.

And my heart clenches.

"Like what?" I force myself to ask.

The last thing I want to hear is how lovey-dovey Bella and Jasper are.

But I know my parents, and I'm pretty sure they're still close with Bella.
Shit, I hope they're not close with Jasper. That would really fucking kill me.

"It's not something I'd love to tell you over the phone," he replies. "Is there any chance you're coming home soon?"

I close my eyes.

Am I ready to face Bella? Am I ready to just be her friend?

I have to be. I can't go on like this. I will just have to suck it up.

"Soon," I say. "But can you just spit it out, Dad? I'd rather come home prepared," I chuckle humorlessly.

Then he just blurts it out. "Bella's pregnant!"

74.

And she's thinking... Still can't sleep. His pillow doesn't smell like him anymore.

EPOV

"So, you see? You have to come home, Edward..."

I tune Dad out.

Pregnant. She's fucking pregnant?

I can't believe it.

Why... I mean... shit.

How the fuck did they get to that stage in their relationship? Because I'm not clueless here. Obviously I noticed how distant Jasper was before. Christ, I wouldn't have played her that song if I knew they were completely happy together. But... ah, fuck. They're having a kid? Stab me in the fucking chest, will ya!

Had she really been that drunk when she slept with me?

Because there is no way she goes from having sex with me to... "Ooh, I wanna start a family with Jasper." Right?

"...So, with Jasper gone so much, it's really just Bella-"

"Wh... wait, what?" I cough. What did I miss now? Jasper's gone a lot?

Holy shit, I'm confused.

"What?" Dad asks, and I pinch the bridge of my nose.

"What do you mean when you say that he's gone a lot?" I grit out.

"Well," he says slowly, "he's working, of course. Like before. A month in California, and a week here in Port Pines."

No way. No fucking way. So, they find out they're having a child together – a child – and he leaves her at home? He goes back to LA? What kind of a dickhead is he? Jesus fucking Christ. Had that been my ch-

I rub my chest as it constricts painfully. I squeeze my eyes shut.

Fuck, they're starting a family together.

A family.

It won't ever be me. I won't get to have that with Bella.

"Fuck," I breathe out.

"Are... are you there, son?"

I swallow, leaning forward on my knees. "Yeah," I reply hoarsely.

"I know this is hard for you," he sighs heavily. "But you shouldn't give up, and..." He pauses then continues quietly, "She misses you. She could really use a friend."

Yeah. A friend.

I blow out a breath.

Still can't believe Jasper. Doesn't he know how fucking lucky he is?

Whatever.

I have to... I have to man up. I'll be there... as a friend.

"I'm coming home." I clear my throat. "Give me two days."

Dad is relieved, to say the least.

I'm just trying to breathe.

It's not until after we end our conversation that I realize that I have no idea how far along Bella is, but... I guess I'll find out soon enough.

75.

And he's thinking... She's still so fucking beautiful.

BPOV

"Dude! Hold onto that leash!" I exclaim.

Rose laughs.

Thankfully, Emmett tightens his hold on the damn leash. Shit, he, of all people, should know. We had spent an hour trying to catch Cap yesterday after we had brought him home. We figured he could get acquainted with the backyard. Jesus, I had no idea pigs were that fast.

And now, when we're at work... Yeah, I don't wanna chase him among all the trailers, that's for sure.

"Relax, Swan," he chuckles, crouching down to pet Cap. He's so fucking cute. Cap. Not Emmett. Well, both of them, I suppose. "He's my little buddy."

"Little" is correct. Cap is freaking tiny. Like a tiny, tiny puppy.

I shake my head at him, unable to hide my amusement. It was his idea to bring Cap to work today. No, it's not really allowed, but we're not technically on the set. We're standing outside Emmett's trailer. And if Royce or Liam comes by, Emmett assured me that he could pull his I'm-related-to-the-Big-Man card. And honestly, it would probably work, 'cause Carlisle's in love with the little thing. He had also been at the house yesterday when we brought Cap home.

He hadn't been there just for my pig, though.

"Edward's on his way home," he'd told us after dinner.

I've been a nervous wreck ever since.

He's coming back, and he could be here whenever. I wonder if he'll come here... or to the house... Or maybe he'll go to Carlisle and Esme's house.

"Nervous?" Rose asks knowingly, sitting down on the steps to the trailer.

I nod.

It's lunch time, and I've been checking my watch every ten minutes.

I don't know what to say to him. I want to apologize... hug him... kiss the shit out of him. Not that the last mentioned will happen, but... I wish.

We have a lot to talk about.

The only thing I know is that he's aware of the pregnancy.

"Um... Bella?" Emmett murmurs, standing up. His eyes are on something behind me. Maybe the set? "You might wanna turn around."

So, I do, and...

He's standing there. Leaning against the wall of the building. Ankles crossed. Army green cargo shorts, a black t-shirt, white Nikes. Ray-Bans on top of his head.

A soft smile...

You're here.

76.

And she's thinking... I love him.

EPOV

I'm too occupied watching Bella to worry about the fact that my cousin is cuddling with a pig.

I just watch her.

Christ, she's beautiful. The sun makes her hair look reddish. She looks... amazing. She's only wearing denim shorts and some hoodie that she's practically drowning in, but she still looks to die for.

And she fucking owns me.

Even more so when Emmett alerts her of my presence.

Because when she turns, I'm lost. Or maybe found. Something cheesy like that.

It will hurt, being nothing but a friend, but I will savor it.

"You're here," she says thickly.

I feel a smile tug at the right corner of my mouth, and I walk toward her, seeing nothing but her face. How I survived without this woman for four months... I don't know. But I know I wouldn't be able to survive it again.

"You're here!" she repeats, louder and in a voice full of emotion.

Then she's running.

And I catch her as she jumps into my arms.

Jesus fucking Christ.

"I missed you," she cries against my neck.

Shivers rip through me, and I pick her up, wrapping her legs around my waist.

"Missed you, too, beautiful," I whisper into her hair.

Her flowery scent washes over me, making me close my eyes. I just breathe her in.

It's not until then I feel the rather noticeable baby bump.

I swallow hard.

Time for me to be the friend. Time for me to lighten the tension. Time for me to act like everything's okay.

"Hey," I murmur, releasing her slowly. "Are you having twins, or what?"

She scowls up at me, and I throw her a wink as I resist the urge to actually touch her stomach. I want to, but I won't. Instead, I wipe her tears away with my thumbs.

"Calling me fat?" she asks, and I can see that she's torn. There's amusement, but she's still emotional. "I'm perfectly normal for being almost five months pregnant, ya know."

I open my mouth...

I close it again.

I blink.

She's how fucking pregnant?

77.

And he's thinking... Oh, my God.

BPOV

He's gaping like a fish, and before I can tell myself that this conversation is better saved for when we get home, I launch.

"This," I place my hands on my belly, "is the result of a night that I will spend forever apologizing to you for," I say, and my eyes well up instantly. "Not that I don't want my baby..." I shake my head. Fuck, my thoughts are all jumbled. "I really do, but... I treated you horribly. You played and then I just-"

"Wait-" he chokes out. "Th-That night?"

I nod, averting my eyes to the ground as shame washes over me. "I'm so sorry, Edward." I sigh heavily, covering my face with my hands. "I never should've..." slept with Jasper. Jesus, I can't even say it. "I mean... I was drugged, and-"

"Whoa, what?" He all but shouts, and I look up in shock... before I realize that I'm such an idiot. He doesn't know that I was drugged, of course... Wow, and I really just blurted that out. At work. God, I'm a fuck-up.

But, being the stupid woman that I am, I continue. "I'm really sorry," I whimper. "You have to believe me, I had no idea he was coming home, and..." Deep breaths. "Had I been sober..." Another shake of my head. "I never would've slept with him. That entire night is just... gone." By now,

tears are streaming down my cheeks, but I don't care. I just need him to know how fucking sorry I am. "The last thing I remember is you playing that song for me," I cry, wiping my cheeks. "And then..." Ugh, waking up next to Jasper. "He and I..." I shrug dejectedly.

I hate myself for it.

"I'm sorry," I breathe out, looking down again.

I won't blame him if he doesn't forgive me.

"You..." He breathes heavily. "You don't remember, do you? You were... drugged? Someone drugged you?"

I nod, eyes still on the ground.

"Oh, God..."

He won't forgive me, I can feel it. "I'm so sorry," I repeat for the umpteenth time.

78.

And she's thinking... I'm losing him.

EPOV

I can't believe it.

I can't fucking believe it.

She doesn't remember that we slept together.

She doesn't remember.

And now...

Now she's pregnant.

With what she assumes is Jasper's child.

Oh, God... it could be mine, for fuck's sake.

Holy shit.

Someone drugged her...

And she slept with us both. Though, she only remembers him. Maybe because the drugs were wearing off? Shit.

This is... This is too much. Too fucking much.

But that child...

"Oh, God," I breathe out, pinching the bridge of my nose.

That child might be mine.

My baby. Ours.

I try to remember if we used protection, but I don't think we did.

Fuck.

Did we?

Now I'm not so sure...

"I'm so sorry," I hear her whisper again.

Too much. Way too much all at once.

I need... I need to think. Jesus...

"Um..." I clear my throat. Fucking hell. "I need to absorb this."

Deep breaths, Cullen.

"Just... for a while, okay?" I add. "I'll... stop by the house later."

Her head snaps up, and it kills me to see her in so much pain, but I am in no place to fix that right now.

"You're... Are you leaving again?" she asks as her eyes well up again.

I shake my head. No fucking way. I'm not going anywhere. "Just a few hours."

79.

And she's thinking... I check the time... again and again.

EPOV

Mom cries for an hour, and I've lost count on the hugs. The smacks, too. She has a knack for smacking me in the chest. So, she can be hugging me, crying, and... then smack... followed by a "how could you just leave us?"

But eventually she stops, at least enough to be able to fill me in on the time I've missed.

First of all, Bella and Jasper aren't together anymore.

She didn't lie to me. They had broken up. And... that fucking idiot actually dumped her over the phone. Which... was followed by drunken sex upon his return, and I'm trying hard not to think about that, especially since it happened right after I had slept with her.

Second of all, she's having a boy. A baby boy. Her due date is October 8th, and I'm doing the math. It's June... She's twenty-three weeks pregnant according to Mom. So, that's... um, not really correct in my book. Because that would mean that she got pregnant a couple of weeks before I slept with her. Right before Jasper returned to LA after New Year's. Right?

Then again, Bella said it happened that night...

It's all fucking with my head.

So, I retreat to one of the guestrooms.

I fall back on the bed. I stare at the ceiling, trying to... work this out in my head.

80.

And she's thinking... It's been hours.

EPOV

I scrub my face with my hands, groaning in frustration as I go through the facts... again.

They're not together.

But they're having a baby together. A boy.

A boy that... could be mine.

A son.

I'm still not a hundred percent sure whether or not we used protection, but... I don't think we did. And then there's how far along she is...

I do the math over and over...

Fuck.

New Year's.

Around New Year's. That's when she got pregnant...

But why would she tell me that it happened that night?

"Fuck it," I say as I sit up on the bed. I bring out my iPhone.

Time to Google.

~oOo~

I don't understand half of it.

"Is this English?" I mumble to myself.

"...By using a combination of methods such as studying cervical fluid, taking your body temperature, and tracking your periods, you can calculate your time of ovulation..."

What the fuck?

"...A blood test can be used to monitor hCG levels and progesterone levels..."

Um.

"...The follicle from which the egg was released is called the corpus luteum. It will release progesterone that helps thicken and prepare the uterine lining for implantation..."

I fidget with my lip ring, feeling very outta place...

"...The blastocyst will imbed into the uterine lining and begin the embryonic stage..."

I shudder... and I don't even know why.

"The hell is..." I squint at the text. "...gesta... gestational age?"

With a sigh, I move on.

~oOo~

Forty weeks. That's how long you're pregnant... give or take a week... or something.

And Mom told me her due date was October 8th... So, yeah... she got pregnant around New Year's.

Then, why would she tell me that her baby is the result of that night?

Shit, then there's the whole thing about her not remembering...

That stings.

81.

And she's thinking... Where is he?

EPOV

"Drugged," I whisper under my breath. I still can't believe it. Someone fucking drugged her.

And I had sex with her.

Guilt washes over me...

I couldn't have known, but...

With my elbows on my knees, I sit on the edge of the bed, pulling at my hair.

She was drugged when we slept together.

Does that mean none of her words were true?

No, I can't believe that.

Christ, I could feel how much she cared for me... I know she did... do, did. Something. Fuck. But it doesn't matter now, does it? First priority is the baby. A baby. Yeah, I fall back on the bed again. A boy.

And Jasper's involved as the father.

"Goddamn," I wheeze out, rubbing my chest.

Think, Cullen... Think...

Well, the baby comes first. Of course.

And even though Bella and Jasper aren't together, I won't ever create a problem between two parents. As long as that child isn't mine, that is. But that chance is small. I will just... Fuck, I'll just have to start being there as a friend, and then if she wants more...

One step at a time.

Right.

First step: be there as a friend. I will feel her out; make sure she doesn't remember anything. God, I want her to remember...

But she doesn't. As far as I know. And... Damn, I gotta get the entire story from Jasper. I mean, what are his thoughts? Does he want this?

Of course he does. Who wouldn't want to start a family with Bella?

Then, why isn't he here? Why work in LA?

82.

And she's thinking... He came back.

EPOV

When I arrive at the house, I find Bella asleep on the couch in the living room.

I've been gone for more than just a few hours.

Close to midnight.

And it smells like home.

I hope this still is my home.

I know, Mom told me she and Dad covered my rent, but... I don't know, maybe Bella has other plans. Because I know that Jasper also lives here, though not in the same room. Thank God. But Dad was certainly right. I've missed a shitload, and apparently Rose lives with Em now.

"Bella," I whisper, squatting down next to the couch.

My brow furrows when I see the tissue box next to her, and fuck, I doubt she's needed them from watching one of her chick flicks. Like... The Notebook. I don't know how many times she's made me watch it. But as long as it's with her that I suffer through it...

Tucking a piece of hair behind her ear, I murmur her name again, and soon she stirs.

Her eyes flutter as I gently grab her hand. "Edw... Edward?"

"Hey," I whisper, giving her hand a squeeze. Her eyes widen slightly. "I'm sorry I took so long."

She shakes her head and sits up on the couch. "Don't. No apologizing... You're home now."

Home. I smile.

"Sounds good to me," I admit, and she yawns, making her eyes glisten.

"Sorry," she chuckles sleepily.

I can't help but grin. "Hey, enough apologizing, okay?"

"Does that mean...?" She chews on her lip.

I nod. "We're okay."

And she throws her arms around me, much like earlier today on the set, and I stand corrected. This is home.

83.

And he's thinking... I don't need details!

BPOV

I have no idea where we stand, but right now it doesn't matter. He's back.

"Will you let me explain everything?" I ask hesitantly, releasing him. He said that we were through with the apologizing, but I still want to explain myself. I still want him to know that I never would've slept with Jasper if I had been sober. I know, I've already told him this, but I don't know... I just don't want him to think I take this lightly.

"Um..." He shifts uncomfortably on the coffee table. "Mom already filled me in."

I grimace. A part of me is relieved because I don't really enjoy thinking about that night... or about what I remember. And Esme knows pretty much what I know; that I was drugged, and that I ended up sleeping with Jasper.

"So, you... don't remember what, um, happened the night before?" he asks, rubbing the back of his neck.

I avert my eyes, hating seeing him so uncomfortable. I hate the fact that it's my fault even more. And I can't blame him. The thought of hearing him talk about being with another woman...

Deep breaths.

"The last thing I remember from the night before..." I swallow hard, fidgeting with the frills on my blanket. "...is you playing that song." I can't look at him knowing that I've hurt him. Fuck. And the next thing I remember... waking up to Jasper kissing me, apologizing, trying to make up, and... then how I ended up on the floor as I pushed his half-sleeping ass off me... "And, um..." Tell him, Bella. Get it over with. "Then the morning after when Jasper started kiss-"

"I get it," he chokes out, and I squeeze my eyes shut.

84.

And she's thinking... He's staying, he's here, he's home.

EPOV

Fuck.

I take deep breaths.

The last thing I want is details. Knowing that they slept together is enough.

"I'm sorry," she whispers brokenly, and I'm so done with it. All of the apologizing. Technically, she hasn't done anything wrong. We weren't together or anything, and... I know now that she wouldn't have slept with Jasper if... Yeah, it all comes back to the fact that she'd been drugged.

I still have questions. Many of them, but right now I just... Christ, I'm tired and weary. I'll ask my fucking questions, but I need time. I've missed her beyond words, and even though a lot is at stake, I want some calm.

Because it's my God's honest truth when I say that I don't think I can handle more tonight.

So, I tell her to stop feeling bad.

And I squeeze her hand again... "It's been a long day, Bella," I sigh quietly. "How about we call it a night?"

I can tell that she's going to apologize again, so I add, "I'll leave if you say 'sorry' one more time, understood?"

Cheap shot, maybe, but when I see the small smile playing on her lips, I don't care.

85.

And he's thinking... Seriously. Only Bella. She bought a pig.

Too bad the little fucker's cute.

BPOV

"Um, Bella?"

I stop in the doorway to Rose's- um, my room, and look down the hall to see Edward standing outside his.

"Yeah?"

"Please don't tell me Mom was here cleaning my room," he says, waving a hand at his open door.

And I blush.

No, Edward, she didn't. I did, because I've used your room for the past four months... except for when Jasper's been in town.

"Uh, I cleaned it," I reply, trying to look nonchalant. "Figured you wanted to come home to a clean room." I add a shrug for good measure.

He tilts his head, and I can smell the questions coming, but apparently there is a God, because soft grunting interrupts us. Cap escapes my room, and I glance over at the stairs. Thank fuck. I didn't forget to close the gate. I breathe out in relief.

With a sheepish smile, I look over at Edward again.

He's staring at Cap. Eyebrows raised, hands on hips.

Cap, however, is oblivious to the stare-down and is happily sniffing Edward's feet.

"So... I bought a pig," I tell him, shifting on my feet.

His eyes meet mine, and... "Yeah, no shit," he deadpans.

But then he gives me this grin, and I'm like... internal fist-pump!

86.

And she's thinking... I can't sleep.

EPOV

"A cat or a dog wasn't good enough?" I chuckle, squatting down to pet the... pig. Jesus. A pig. A pet pig. But man, he- hmm, she? It... is cute.

Fucking tiny, too.

"Nah, I wanted something different," she replies, walking over to us. "His name is Cap. Emmett and I brought him home yesterday."

I grin at the little thing. "Cap," I murmur, trying out the name. "I like it." When I scratch him behind his ears it's clear that I've hit home, and I laugh through my nose as he grunts and comes closer. Can't fucking believe it. A pig. "He's just like a dog." I snicker.

"No way," Bella huffs playfully, punching me in the arm. "He's just like a pig."

Another chuckle escapes me when she picks him up and cuddles with him.

She's too fucking adorable.

~oOo~

A while later, when I'm in bed and staring up at the ceiling, I can't help but wonder if there's a name for the baby yet.

Have she and Jasper sat down at the kitchen table and discussed names?

I've already decided not to do anything about my "situation" until I've talked to Jasper, but I know that I won't be able to sit by and do nothing when it comes to Bella's pregnancy. I want to be there. I don't want to miss anything. But I also don't want to cause problems and heartache if it's not necessary. I mean, if it's his baby – which I fear that it actually is – then he doesn't deserve to have me ruining this experience for him.

It doesn't matter how much I personally dislike him. A child is involved now and that changes things. Besides, my dislike for him... Christ, that's mostly because he has what I want. I admit that.

Knock, knock.

"Jesus," I breathe out. I drag a hand over my face as I sit up in the darkness. "Come in."

The door opens, and it's Bella, of course. Uh, and Cap.

"Um, hi," she mumbles, standing in the doorway.

From the light out in the hallway, I can see that she's wearing a pair of cotton shorts and a tank top – her usual sleepwear. Comfortable, sexy... Beautiful. But she looks even more beautiful now with her rounded stomach, curvier hips, and um... bigger tits. Shit.

"Something wrong?" I ask, squinting a little.

"Umm... Yeah, I... I can't sleep."

87.

And he's thinking... This can't be good.

BPOV

Cap's squirming in my arms as I wait for Edward to respond.

I'd feel bad, but I don't.

I'm just a little afraid he's gonna disappear on me again. Edward, that is.

"Um, all right," he replies slowly. It's dark, and I can barely see his features, but I can, however, see him rubbing the back of his neck. "You, uh... You wanna sleep in here?"

I swallow. "If you don't mind?"

I need to be close to him.

"Sure, I mean... I don't mind," he answers quietly.

And I breathe out in relief.

After closing the door behind me, I walk toward the bed in complete darkness.

"Want me to turn on the lights?"

"No, it's okay," I say as I reach the bed.

I sit down on the edge and slip off my comfy slippers.

"Cap stays on the floor, Bella."

I pout in the darkness as I cuddle with the cutie in my arms. "Why?"

Edward chuckles. "Because you're pregnant, and I won't have him kicking you in your sleep."

Oh.

See, I thought he was gonna say something about not wanting a pig in the bed, 'cause... well, it's a pig. And they're not filthy creatures, really. Well, except for when he eats. But I can't really argue when Edward uses my pregnancy as a reason.

"Okay," I concede, feeling a smile play on my lips.

So, after making a bed for Cap with a folded blanket and a pillow, I join Edward in his bed. I'm then very aware of the fact that I didn't bring my own covers, but when I feel Edward holding his up, I decide that I'm glad I didn't.

88.

And he's dreaming about lazy Sundays with comic books and Bella.

BPOV

In that state... where I question reality...

Fingers ghosting over my hip.

"Don't ever settle for second best again, Bella..."

"Don't ever settle for second best again, Bella..."

A hot breath against my neck.

I rub my thighs together.

Closer. My back against a hard chest.

Blurry flashes of something animalistic and desperate...

Deep thrusting... I claw at him... More... I taste, we kiss...

I arch to feel more. He groans and slides in...

Harder. Deeper.

A whisper.

"Mine, baby girl..."

"Mine, baby girl..."

I bolt right out of bed, panting and clutching my chest.

In the darkness I blink over and over, still seeing a few images flash before my eyes.

"Bella?" I hear Edward mumble sleepily.

I'm still breathing heavily.

Jesus Christ...

"Are you okay?" he asks, sitting up in bed.

I don't know.

"Um, yeah..." I swallow audibly. "Weird dream."

Weird and... fucking hot.

"Holy crap," I whisper under my breath, slowly making my way back to the bed.

89.

And she's thinking... This feels... right.

EPOV

"Get..." I yawn. "...back to bed."

I hold up the covers when she returns, and soon she has her back against my chest again.

"Sleep," I order drowsily into her hair.

It's not until I feel her protruding stomach under my hand that I wake up more fully.

Bella. In my bed. Should we be this close?

Probably not, but when she turns in my embrace and buries her face in the crook of my neck, I couldn't give two shits about "should". This feels perfect.

"Night," she breathes out, wrapping her arm around my midsection.

Fuck.

Her tits have really grown.

And they're very pushed up against my chest.

Great.

90.

And she's thinking... The ink. There. On his chest. It says "Beautiful."

EPOV

When I wake up the next morning, I hear Bella goofing around with Cap.

In my bed.

Didn't I tell her it wasn't a good idea to have him here?

Women.

Still, I don't open my eyes yet.

"Hmm, maybe we should escape, Cap," she says quietly. I hear amusement in her voice, though. "'Cause I don't think Edward's gonna be thrilled when he finds out that you peed on his floor."

I groan internally. Fucking pig.

"Or what do you say, cutie? Hmm?"

I squint through my lashes. She's sitting Indian-style, and... Yep. She's tickling the pig.

Seriously.

"You are so fucking weird," I say in my morning voice, rolling over onto my back. I make sure my morning semi is under the covers. No, I won't get rock hard when I have an actual pig in my bed.

At first she looks like she's been caught doing something bad, and then she sorta beams at me.

"By the way, Bella? You're mopping my floor later."

Sheepish smile. "Um, good morning to you, too."

"Good morning," I chuckle sleepily, dragging a lazy hand over my chest.

Yawning and stretching follow.

"What," I clear my throat, "Bella?"

She's blushing like a school girl, keeping her eyes on Cap.

"What's with the blush, Swan?" I ask, sitting up. I nudge her, at which she lets her hair fall in between us like a curtain. "Dude." And then I have Cap crawling up in my lap. "Hey, little fucker," I chuckle. "Do you know why the woman's blushing?"

Bella giggles, but instead of answering me already, she leaves the bed, still refusing to face me.

"I'm gonna go make breakfast," she announces quietly.

Then she's out.

"You picked a weird owner, buddy," I tell Cap.

91.

And he's thinking... Well, the attraction's still there, that's for sure.

BPOV

I smile to myself as I flip the pancakes.

I can hear Edward shuffling around upstairs, probably getting ready for the day, and he's so talking to Cap.

So, though we may have a lot to settle, I still have faith in that we'll be okay.

He's still Edward.

And I want to know about his new ink.

Could it... I mean... is it too presumptuous to wonder if it's about... me?

I cringe and scrunch up my face. It feels too presumptuous.

But I'm really dying to know if he still has feelings for me.

Not that entering a relationship is the first thing on my list of priorities, but it couldn't hurt to know where he stands. If he does feel that way about me, I sure as hell will let him know that I have feelings for him, too. Okay, I'm ridiculously in love with him, but... one step at a time.

I chuckle as I hear Edward and Cap coming down the stairs. He's still talking to the pig that I assume he's carrying. 'Cause he's too little to handle the stairs by himself.

"Next time, take a piss in Bella's room, deal?"

Shit. I forgot to mop that up. Bad, bad Bella.

Thinking ahead, I take a plate and fill it with pancakes, and that's how Edward finds me in the kitchen. Which means he's focusing on the food. 'Cause he's a man.

"Damn, looks delicious," he groans as he sets Cap down on the floor.

Safe to say, he's not thinking about the piss on his floor anymore.

And if anything here looks delicious, it's Edward. In a pair of black board shorts and a white wife-beater, he looks downright sinful. Add a baseball cap on backward, the nipple ring visible through his beater, his Mexican tan, his lip ring, eyebrow barbell, and... yep, more muscles. Holy shit. What exactly did he do in Mexico?

Those biceps...

I'd blame my pregnancy hormones, but anyone would react this way to Edward Cullen, and don't even get me started on this morning when he was stretching in bed.

I shiver at the memory.

"Checking out the goods, Bella?"

Hmm?

92.

And she's thinking... As he's off in his own world, I stare.

Can't help it.

EPOV

Sorry, but I fucking had to call her out on it.

Besides, if anyone needs an ego boost, it's me.

"Um... wh-what?" she replies hazily.

And it feels good, I gotta say.

I wink at her when her eyes finally meet mine, and then I grab the plate of pancakes before leaving the kitchen. 'Cause it's summer. We eat outside, I hope. After four months in Mexico, I love eating outside.

It takes a while, but Bella and Cap eventually join me on the patio, and though the silence might be uncomfortable for her, I'm basking in the feeling of her getting flustered by me. I know very well that I can pleasure her, turn her on, and... well, make her scream. But she doesn't know that.

A part of me wants to tell her about our night, but a bigger part refuses. I know Bella, and she's a genuine person. She's amazing and has her heart in the right place. The last thing she needs right now is more drama. Plus, I don't think she'd react very well, knowing that we slept together. Not because it was with me, but because she'd feel bad about not remembering. Like I said, she's a good person. I know that she would feel horrible.

She already feels guilty about how things turned out that night, what with her leaving after I had played for her and everything. I won't add to that pile.

We have enough on our plates as it is.

I want to make Bella mine no matter what, but it's hardly the priority. And since Jasper's more likely to be the father, I will simply set a slower pace.

And speaking of...

"Hey, Bella?" I ask, looking up from my plate. She nods for me to continue, and I withhold a smirk when she blushes slightly again. "When's Jasper coming back?"

93.

And he's thinking... Thank fuck. Jasper doesn't know.

BPOV

"Um." I shake my head, trying to get rid of the Edward-induced haze I find myself in. "In about three weeks or so. Why?"

I'm a bit uncomfortable speaking about Jasper with Edward, so I look out over the backyard instead, watching as Cap finds the pieces of apple I

threw out earlier. It's gonna be a bitch trying to catch him again, but the little dude needs some freedom.

"Three weeks," I hear Edward repeat thoughtfully, and I glance back at him. He doesn't necessarily look uncomfortable, but I wouldn't say everything's fine, either. And my guess is that Jasper's a sore topic. Can't blame him. It's the same for me.

"Is this gonna be too weird?" I ask quietly, chewing on my lip. "I mean, us... living together."

He shrugs a little, rubbing the back of his neck as he keeps his eyes downcast. "I don't know, maybe..." He sighs. "I mean, no. Not... not too weird, but... uncomfortable?" He looks up at me again, and takes his lip ring between his teeth. "What, uh... what does he know?"

I take a sip of my juice before answering, and I hate that we're dancing around our feelings like this. Or in this case, his feelings. Feelings that I don't even know still are there. "I told him you were visiting a friend in Mexico."

I see relief in his features, if only a little, so I assume he likes the fact that Jasper doesn't know about Edward's feelings about me. Or... what he used to feel... I really don't know.

Maybe he still has feelings for me, but with my pregnancy, things change. It could be that. Perhaps he doesn't want to be involved with a mother or a mother-to-be. Then, of course, it could also be the fact that I all but rejected him last time. Shit. That kills me. I'm gonna have to make sure he knows how I feel.

Well, the way you eye-fucked him earlier couldn't exactly have made him believe you're repulsed by him...

True.

But still... I will make sure he knows. I'm not gonna jump him and make a complete fool out of myself, but I'll think of something.

94.

And he's thinking... Another morning, another shower where I rub one out.

BPOV

I hate waking up alone, but I'm used to it by now.

Ever since we shared Edward's bed that first night three weeks ago, it has become more and more common for me to wake up as Edward returns from his morning shower. Um, yeah, we still spend every night in his bed. It's like a silent agreement, I think.

Anyway, when he reenters the room, he's wearing nothing but a towel.

I pretend to still be asleep, because I don't want him to cover up, which means, yes, I've seen his naked ass now a few times as he gets dressed. It's really too bad that he never turns.

But I can't complain too much- no, wait. I can, because I'm pregnant and so... fucking... horny. Yesterday, I cried. Not kidding. It's a constant ache, and it's the hormones and those damn dreams. I wake up in the middle of the night, panting and whimpering from those images. They're blurry but... so intense. I'm blaming Edward for them. After all, the dreams began after he'd returned from Mexico, and... for some reason it feels like he's the one I'm dreaming about. Fucking hormones. Fucking Edward.

Yes, please.

God, I'm pathetic, really.

95.

And he's thinking...Jasper is coming back tomorrow.

BPOV

Fucking hormones. Fucking Edward.

Yes, please.

God, I'm pathetic, really.

Let's just say that I try to keep my ass busy during the day. Actually, we both do. Edward's busy as hell, getting back to his old routines at work, and I'm busy with the final shooting before our annual two-month break. Yes, we're wrapping up another season soon, and I can't wait.

Besides work, we're all for lazy summer nights on the patio. Dinners with Carlisle and Esme, Rose and Emmett. One of the most fun nights I've ever had was last week when we celebrated Edward's twenty-sixth birthday. We'd had this massive barbecue with our closest ones and a bunch of guys from work. We had so much fun, and no words can describe how sweet Edward was when he refused to drink. He'd taken a beer for dinner, but after that, he said that he was gonna "be pregnant with me".

A fun night for sure.

Sometimes we're alone, too, of course. It's always comfortable, and I'm incredibly relieved that we've found our way back to what we had before.

The only thing that has changed, really – apart from my pregnancy – is the sexual tension between Edward and me. Or maybe it was there before, but I was too blind to see it. However, I now wonder if Edward's too blind to see it. Or feel it. Ah, whatever. I'm a horny mess, not making any sense.

"Finally," I breathe out, hearing Edward leave the bathroom.

I'm on my side, facing his closet, pretending to sleep. My hair is conveniently splayed across my face.

Such a hussy.

Can't help it.

And here he comes.

Whistling. The dude is often whistling.

"Morning, buddy," he says quietly, bending over to greet Cap. That little thing is always following him.

But my eyes aren't on Cap. Nope. Edward's body... Broad and muscular back... His ass... His ass dimples... His ass. Worth mentioning twice.

And after a minute or two of deciding what to wear, he... he... he...

Drops the towel.

Uuungh.

I bite my lip.

For the love of all that is holy, turn around!

But he doesn't.

And soon he's dressed for another day at work.

I growl internally.

96.

And she's thinking... Frustration, frustration, frustration.

EPOV

I'm losing my fucking mind.

Her dreams... I mean... Whatever it is that she's dreaming about... Yeah. Edward Anthony Cullen, losing his damn mind, right here. Or... right there, since I share the goddamn bed with her. I hear her... every night. Almost every night. Moaning, whimpering... gasping, squirming, clenching her thighs together...

It's driving me insane.

And I jack off at least twice a day.

Then there's the girl's flirting, too. I'm not stupid, I know she's attracted to me. She's shown that. Not very blatantly, but enough. And... God, I want her, too. But I'm trying to do the responsible thing here. I need to see Jasper first. I need to see him here, at home, interacting with Bella. I also need to see how he acts about the baby. Because from what I've heard, he's still in love with Bella and wants her back. Now, I would never back away. I won't give someone up for another dude, especially not when I believe I'm better for that someone. But there's still something called timing. She's most likely carrying his child and, as much as that kills me, it's true. Which means he comes first. Well, the baby comes first.

So... no drama. I refuse to add drama to a child's life. A child that hasn't even been born yet.

Anyway, I'll just have to keep going.

Jasper will be here tomorrow for a week. Hopefully, that will give me some fucking clarity, 'cause my balls are blue.

"Edward!"

97.

And she's thinking... Another day, another shirt smelling just like him.

EPOV

"Edward!"

I grind my teeth together, focusing on my milk and cereal. "What is it?" I yell back, hearing her running around upstairs. Why she doesn't get up earlier, I have no idea. But nowadays, she's always running a little late in the mornings.

"Where's your red Hellboy shirt!"

Uh-huh. Another thing. She has a thing for wearing my t-shirts for work.

This is usually my reason for jacking off in my office after lunch, 'cause seeing her in my clothes... Yeah, that does the trick.

"Laundry!" I answer.

Her response is a shitload of cursing, which is pretty fucking hot, and some major stomping around. Hormones.

Ten minutes later, she comes down, wearing a pair of black denim shorts and my fucking Stoli shirt. First of all, those shorts... they're sinfully short. We're talking half of her delectable ass on display here, but she's pregnant and it's summer. She says it's "so hot I could die". Second of all, the Stoli shirt. Mine. It's off limits. But the fact that I don't say shit only proves how much of a pussy I am around this woman.

Holy shit, she's... hot. Too hot. I almost wish the makeup artists worked under a dress code.

"Can I borrow this shirt?" she asks sweetly as she rubs her belly. Sexy fucking body... "Purdy please?"

And I look up at the ceiling, asking God... What did I do to deserve this?

"Sure," I sigh, getting ready to leave. "You gonna eat on the way?"

Pancakes are now saved for the weekends. So, I only see her shaking her ass two days out of the week, but right now I'm grateful. I hardly need more to add to the pile of I'm-fucked-but-not-in-a-good-way.

"Yeah, do we have time to stop by the deli shop?"

I check the time. "If we leave now."

"Great!" She beams at me. "And thank you," she adds, waving a hand at the Stoli shirt. It looks so sexy on her.

"Don't mention it," I reply in yet another sigh. "Ready to go?"

"Yes, I'm just gonna grab Cap. Emmett said he wanted him on the set today."

I nod and excuse myself to bang my head against a wall. But to her I just say that I need to get my briefcase.

98.

And he's thinking... Time to jack off before heading home.

BPOV

"What the hell am I supposed to do, Rose?" I hiss quietly. Unfortunately, I take my frustration out on Rose and Emmett. The latter one is trying to hold in his laughter. "Shut the fuck up, Em," I say with a glare.

Rose – who is currently working on Lauren, one of the other actors – is also trying to stifle her amusement.

And failing at it.

Today I hate the makeup trailer. It's hot, and I'm horny.

Yeah, that doesn't really sound right, but... whatever.

"Maybe you can have some fun at the party on Saturday," Rose tells me, giving me a wink in the mirror.

I flip her off before applying foundation on Emmett's face.

Ugh. The party. Fourth of July and all that. Emmett's annual party at his house. It's more of a see-ya-next-season kind of party, 'cause we wrap this week. Tomorrow, in fact. And most actors head for their holiday homes and whatnots.

"I think you oughta rename this 'The Gossip Trailer'," Em says casually with closed eyes. I refrain from poking him with the concealer brush I have stuck in my ponytail. "Or whaddya say, Mallory?"

I scowl at the bitch as she giggles.

"Fucking cougar," I whisper under my breath, focusing on Emmett's face again. But seriously, she's what, thirty-five? And all over Edward... who is twenty-six.

Plus, she's invited on Saturday. Almost the entire cast is.

"Back to the issue," Rose sighs, and I hand her the tray of glosses. "You're losing your mind, yes?"

I nod and reach for Emmett's powder.

"And..." She gives me a pointed look in the mirror, silently asking... what about Edward?

I shrug a little. "Nothing so far."

We leave it at that for now.

"When's Jazz coming in tomorrow?" Em asks.

Not what I want to talk about. "His flight arrives at six PM."

"And he still doesn't know that Edward's back?"

I shake my head. "No," I mutter.

"Why?"

Because I'm good at avoiding.

99.

And she's thinking... His opinion matters.

EPOV

"Heaven," I mumble, flipping a page.

Shivers run through me as she massages my scalp. I love these moments. She does, too. Well, I didn't really love it when I rubbed her feet earlier, 'cause the woman was all about moaning. But this is the reward. I have my head in her lap, a comic book in my hands, and her fingers in my hair. Fucking magic.

Bella has some chick flick running in the background.

Cap is on the floor, snoring like a pig.

Yeah.

Then I chuckle. "He's kicking." I feel it on the side of my face that's touching her belly. "Rose is definitely right, by the way."

"About him becoming a soccer player?" she laughs softly.

I grin up at her. "Yeah," I'm gonna teach him. The words almost spill from my mouth.

Reality check.

I close my mouth again and return to my comic book.

But I don't read it.

"Hey, what time is it?" she asks.

I check my watch, and my stomach drops a little. "Almost seven."

Which means Jasper will be here any minute now.

"All right, can I run something by you before Jazz gets here?"

I look up at her, resisting the urge to close my eyes in pleasure. Seriously, her fingers are magical. "Hmm?" I hum.

She smiles down at me. "I've been thinking about names for the baby."

100.

And she's thinking... I love him so much that it hurts.

EPOV

"Hit me with it," I tell her. 'Cause I'm curious.

"Name my favorite movie." She smirks.

I huff and adjust my glasses, returning my gaze to my comic book. "Too easy, Swan." Really, it is. "Stand by Me." Good flick, I admit.

And it hits me. Perfect.

Hmm...

I run through the cast of the movie in my head, deciding to tease her. "You wanna name the little one after Richard Dreyfuss? Can't say I approve, dude," I say in disinterest, flipping another page of my comic.

"Funny, Cullen," she replies with a playful glare.

I pretend to ponder.

"Ah." I nod. "Wil Wheaton? Really?" I grimace, and she shakes her head at me. "No? Corey Feldman?" Another shake, and I decide enough is enough. So, I smile. "River's perfect, Bella."

"Yeah?" she responds, smiling rather shyly.

"Absolutely," I affirm, turning to nuzzle her belly. "Consider yourself named, little guy. River," I murmur, and... then I realize that I'm most fucking likely overstepping my boundaries.

And when I chance a look at Bella, I see the unshed tears in her eyes.

Fuck. Fix it, Cullen.

"Sorry," I sigh, sitting up. "It's not my place-"

But she cuts me off and pushes me down again. "Don't apologize. Just..." She shakes her head. "Don't. You did nothing wrong."

Staring up at her, I try to... I don't know, but... Yeah, I really just don't have a clue.

But her watery smile relaxes me.

Until I hear a car pulling up.

Jasper's here.

101.

And Jasper's thinking... How can both LA and Port Pines feel equally right?

And why didn't Bella tell me he was back?

BPOV

"Hi," I greet Jasper in the hallway. The hug is... awkward. "Good to be back?"

He smiles tiredly as I release him. "Yeah." And his eyes are on something behind me, most likely Edward, who has returned from leaving Cap in his room. But Jazz turns back to me first. "Everything okay?" he asks, placing a hand on my belly. I nod, resisting the urge to back away. I'm incredibly torn, and I hate this situation. "You've grown," he adds softly. "You're beautiful."

Okay, enough.

I smile uncomfortably, backing away slightly. "Um, you must be hungry. There's food..." I trail off.

Jasper's eyes are on Edward again, and I hear him approach from behind me.

"Hey, man," Edward says.

"Hey," Jasper replies as they shake hands. "Didn't know you were back."

Oh, I'm so looking down.

"Really. Bella didn't tell you?"

Um, no, I forgot, Edward.

Honest mistake.

Or something.

"Well, Jazz and I don't talk much when he's away," I explain, a bit dismissively. "So... are we just gonna stand out here or what?"

As I chance a quick glance at Edward, I see that he definitely doesn't buy my bullshit, and I doubt Jasper does, but... ugh. Whatever, can we just move on? I mean, it's all out on the open now, right? Yeah. So... get on with it.

"I'm gonna take a shower," Jasper sighs, nodding toward the stairs. "We can talk when I get back downstairs, yeah?"

When it's just me and Edward in the hallway, I look up when I hear his snicker.

"What?" I ask, scowling for no reason.

He starts laughing through his nose and drapes an arm around my shoulder. His own shoulders are shaking from silent laughter. "You're so full of shit, Swan." My scowl morphs into a glare. He just grins down at me and taps me on the nose. "You can't lie, beautiful," he whispers, and I huff. "So, you're telling me you forgot to tell him that I was back?" He arches a brow in challenge.

I've got nothing... so, I totally smack him in the chest.

"Ow," he... sorta groan-chuckles.

Then he pulls me in for a hug, and I drop my forehead to his chest.

And we both sigh at the same time.

It makes me all warm inside, and when I look up at him, we're both smiling.

Then the tension shifts.

102.

And Jasper's thinking... There's nothing going on between them, right?

Nah, impossible.

EPOV

I curse internally as the tension becomes thicker.

This wasn't the plan.

But I can't step away. Not when she's looking up at me like that.

Definitely not when her eyes flicker to my mouth.

Resolve... crumbling...

"Fuck," I whisper, unintentionally tightening my hold on her.

When she licks her lips, I'm gone.

I do the same as I dip down.

So close.

Noses touching.

Her eyes flutter closed. "Edward," she breathes out, and I press my lips against hers. Softly, just brushing against. We both shiver, and my thumbs run slow circles on her hips... under her tank top. Fuck. So good. Amazing. And she deepens the kiss when her lips part. Breathing becomes labored. I don't stand a fucking chance against this girl.

I can't help but moan as our tongues meet.

"Bella..." Fuck, I want you.

She whimpers softly; it triggers me. I walk her back against the wall, gently pressing her against it, and in the meantime, our kiss grows hungry. Her tongue slides with mine, mouths moving together...

Her hands travel up my arms, and mine move to her lower back.

And then we break the kiss, panting with our foreheads touching.

Jesus fucking Christ.

I should've known that I wouldn't be able to fight her.

Her eyes are wide, dark... full of desire.

I know I mirror her.

Pretty sure things are gonna change now.

But she smiles, so I know there's no regret.

I smile back and kiss her softly... once, twice...

"Fucking finally," she whispers, eyes happy.

A husky chuckle escapes me, and I agree. Fucking finally.

Our bubble bursts, though, when we hear the shower running upstairs, but I can see that she's not backing down. She doesn't make a move to leave or anything.

"We'll talk later?" she asks softly, looking up at me. I nod and kiss her again. "And you better not make me sleep in my room tonight," she mumbles against my lips.

"Jesus, Bella," I groan, breaking the kiss. "You're killing me."

And Jasper's thinking... She looks happy. Maybe I still have a chance.

BPOV

My smile is secretive as I sit down on the couch. It falters slightly when Edward sits down in a chair, but I realize then that we have a lot to talk about... now that he's finally caved... and if he's too close to me, I'm bound to jump him. Gah, I'm so happy.

He sends me a wink before picking up a comic from the coffee table, and I know that he's trying to act casual, especially since Jasper joins us then.

"Did you say there was food, Bella?" he asks, pausing in the doorway to the living room. "I haven't eaten since LA."

"In the fridge," I reply, finding it hard to look away from Edward. "Um, we ate already, so take what's left."

He nods and leaves me with Edward again.

I lick my lips, eyes closing... just briefly. But I can't help it. That kiss was... incredible, leaving me all tingly and fiery... aching for more. It feels like a high school crush, even though I know it's so much deeper. It's heavy and wild. Scorching and pulsing.

"I wanna play poker with you someday," Edward says quietly, looking very amused. I raise an eyebrow in question, and he laughs silently. "You have no poker face, Bella. I'd win so fast."

I flush, looking down at my lap instead.

And when Jasper returns to the living room, I'm still riding high on my Edward-bliss. So, when Jazz sits down on the other end of the couch, I ask him lightly how LA is and all that. There's no bitterness left, because I feel so much better knowing that I have Edward. Okay, maybe I don't

have him yet, but... hopefully soon. It's a known fact, after all. It's easier to be happier for someone when you're happy yourself. Which I am now.

Jasper fills us in about work in LA, and conversation is light, mostly between him and me. Edward seems to be stuck in between his comic book and listening to us.

"And what about you?" Jazz asks when we're done with the LA topic. He sets the plate down, finished with his dinner. "You have two months off work now, right?"

104.

And Jasper's thinking... Maybe she can visit me in LA. If she likes it there...
God, the possibilities.

Well, Maria will be pissed, but I really don't care.

EPOV

It's kinda easy to see that he still wants her. He can't take his eyes off her, and even when he's in the middle of a story about his job, his eyes are on her, never leaving. And I recognize what I see in his eyes. I recognize it because I've spent so much time feeling that myself. The yearning, the longing, the love, the desperation, the pain. It's all there, so easy to see, but for some reason I doubt Bella sees it. She didn't see it in me. Others did, but she was blind to it. Then again, Bella knows Jasper better. Maybe she does see it.

So... I now know what he wants. He wants her. Badly.

I'd be jealous... Hell, a part of me is. There's a caveman in me, screaming in the back of my head, but... then I look over at her. And she's casual. Interested in whatever Jasper's saying, but on a friendly level. The glances she gives me, however, are anything but friendly. I wasn't lying

earlier when I told her that she has no poker face. I can see the effect our kiss still has on her.

It's goddamn reassuring to know that I'm not the only one messed up after that kiss.

Because all I can think about is taking her to my room and having my way with her. Yes, I know we have to talk, and I sure have a lot to say, but fuck, it's finally my turn. I'm the one now. Not him. He doesn't deserve her.

His job is the main reason, and that's another thing. When he speaks about LA, it's pretty fucking obvious that he loves it. The way he gets swept away by his own stories... Yeah, there's no way he's leaving that when River's born.

River. The name has me smiling to myself.

River Whitlock? And my smile is gone.

This is why I really need to talk to Bella about whatever it is we're doing together. I refuse to get caught up in some temporary romance that will tear me to pieces in the end. Not that I think Bella would be with Jasper just for River's sake, but I don't know how her feelings will be once he's born. Maybe she will want to give Jasper another chance after seeing father and son together. I seriously have no idea.

Jasper's words about Bella having two months off work now brings me back to reality, and they definitely have my attention now. I know that they usually go home to Washington during that time, but it's different now. At least for him. I mean, he has LA, and... Bella has... um...

Me?

"Any plans for the summer?" Jasper adds.

I watch Bella.

105.

And Jasper's thinking... I won't give up. She's mine.

EPOV

"I'm gonna rest a lot," Bella laughs softly. "There's no way I'm doing anything in this heat."

But then she flashes me a look, and I'm fucking toast.

Because I know that look.

I know what she would see as an exception... to do... in this heat.

So, I swallow hard and return to my comic book. Definitely not paying attention to what's in it, but... shit.

Sex. Sex with Bella. That's... um, gonna have to wait. Yes. I think. Maybe. No. I mean... Fuck! No! No fucking. What I mean is... Oh, God, I'm dead. I really am. How the fuck am I gonna be able to resist her?

It's just... the thought of sleeping with her... when she's carrying another man's baby...

I'm not really comfortable with that.

Fuck, I'm torn. Because I know I won't stand a chance if she wants it, and it's three against one, really. My body and heart... and Bella... against my mind. Yeah, there's no competition. I'm fucked. Possibly in the good way soon.

I groan internally. Our situation is just so messed up!

In an attempt to clear my head, I tune into Bella and Jasper's discussion again, only to notice that they're both quiet. But before I can ask what's up, Jasper speaks, while keeping his eyes downcast.

"So... No plans for going home?"

Um. This is home.

"I am home, Jazz," Bella chuckles quietly, and I feel my entire being relax.

"You know what I mean, babe," Jasper sighs. I grit my teeth together. Eyes close tightly, only for a moment. Babe. Fuck that. "Aren't you gonna visit Renee? Or, what about my parents? They miss you."

Deep breaths.

"If they miss me, they can always come here," Bella replies flatly. Again, she makes me relax. "Same goes for Mom, and I actually spoke to her the other day. She might visit in August."

I already know this, because I'm here to know things.

He's not here.

She can't possibly want him back once River is born, can she?

Honestly, I don't think so. But I'm still insecure. After what we've been through... I just hate not being sure about things.

"Anything else?" she asks him, and Jasper shakes his head.

I furrow my brow in confusion.

Uh... correct me if I'm wrong, but... shouldn't he ask about the pregnancy?

"Wait, how's the...?" He waves a hand at her baby bump, and my eyes widen in... I don't know what, but... What the fuck is he doing? "Everything okay with that?"

I'm fucking stunned. He can't even say it?

Bella, however, doesn't seem surprised. "Yep, everything's okay... with that," she replies rather dryly. "If there's nothing else, I'm going to bed. Early day tomorrow." He looks confused. "Emmett's annual 4th of July party, remember?" Well, he remembers now. "Yeah, Edward and I are heading over early to help out. You could come if you want." She shrugs before standing up from the couch. I'm still watching them like they're a part of Stormy Days. "Anyway... Goodnight."

Then she heads up the stairs, leaving me extremely confused.

Jasper just looks like someone ran over his puppy.

106.

And Jasper's thinking... Maybe Edward can help me to win her back.

EPOV

After an awkward silence in the living room, I decide that it's not my place to say anything to Jasper. No matter how much I want to, because I do. It angers me that he doesn't seem even remotely interested in hearing about his own son.

So, I stand up and tell him goodnight before walking toward the stairs.

"Edward?"

Damn. "So close," I whisper under my breath, seeing my left foot on the first step. After an internal sigh, I respond, "Yeah?" But I don't move.

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"Um, Never mind. See ya tomorrow."

Thank God...

I walk upstairs.

And I'm not very surprised to see Bella sitting on the edge of my bed as I enter my room. Cap is sleeping in his little bed right next to her.

"Hey," I murmur, locking the door behind me. "Wanna talk about what just happened?"

She shrugs. "It is what it is."

But it shouldn't be like that. "Bella..." I run a hand through my hair, trying to find my words. It's not easy, and I don't want to overstep my boundaries.

"Don't, Edward," she says softly, shaking her head. "I don't want to talk about him."

Okay.

107.

And Jasper's thinking... I knock on her door, but there's no response.

I guess she's asleep already.

BPOV

After getting ready for bed, we both crawl under the covers. Only, this time it's different. So very different, because he captures my mouth with

his. He kisses me deeply and passionately, making sure our bodies are pressed together. He takes my breath away with the fire. Hands leaving a trail of scorching heat as they move on my body. There's no hesitation. He's hungry, and I return it all with my own hunger.

Christ, I love him...

"We should talk," he mumbles with his mouth attached to my neck. He's on top of me, and I feel it all. All of him. Hard and wanting. He feels me, too. If not the wetness, then the heat. Or in the way I arch into him. The way I silently beg for more.

"You don't know how long I've waited for you, Bella," he whispers in my ear. Shockwaves of lust surge through me as he rubs his erection against my pussy. I respond by hitching my legs around him. "Jesus, baby," he moans as I flick his nipple ring with my tongue.

I feel a rush of wetness dampen my panties at the taste of him.

His hand goes straight to my ass. He cups it, kneads it... like a fucking expert. He's not too gentle, or too rough. Grinding, rubbing... Greedy hands... Holy shit, I can feel the barbell that's pierced through the head of his cock... with each thrust... I feel it...

"Edward, please," I whimper breathlessly. "I want you... Need you..."

He curses again, and I know he's putting a stop to it.

For now.

This earns him a pout from me. Doesn't he know how utterly desperate I am for him?

With our foreheads connected, we're both panting.

I kiss him. Because I feel the need. So, I do. I kiss him. Softly. I swipe my tongue over his lip ring. He responds by deepening the kiss, only to swirl his tongue around the barbell in my tongue. And in the end we're both grinning like idiots.

The tension is still thick as hell, and we're still in need.

But if he wants to talk, then fine.

Threading my fingers through his hair, I pull him down for one last kiss, and I make sure I pour myself into that kiss. I need for him to know that I'm here. Whatever he wants, he can have.

"So fucking beautiful," he whispers tenderly, dropping a kiss at the corner of my mouth.

I swallow my emotions. He shows me in ways I've never been shown before.

It's overwhelming... his eyes...

There's no going back from something this strong. Ever.

"You wanted to talk?" I ask softly, sliding my nose along his jaw line.

I finish with a kiss behind his ear.

And he chuckles quietly and kisses my collarbone. "No. But I need it."

108.

And Jasper's thinking... After a quick reply to Maria's text, I try to fall asleep.

BPOV

Edward wasn't kidding when he said he needed to talk.

On the bed, we're both on our sides. Noses almost touching. Kisses in between. Soft touches.

And many words.

He tells me that he wants me, all of me, but that he needs to take it slow. There's no rejection in his words, and he makes sure I know that. But with a baby, everything changes. He says that he feels the need to protect himself... at least until River's born. So... he's asking for privacy. He expresses his thoughts about Jasper's feelings for me, and that though he doesn't really worry about it, he's still not sure how things might change after River's birth.

In turn, I tell him that I understand his fears and worries, because I do. Edward once put himself out there for me, and I all but rejected him. I didn't, but I made him feel like it. Edward shakes his head at me, but before he can open his mouth to protest, I tell him that it's fact. Yes, I was drugged, and I can't really help what happened... afterward. But I didn't have to run out on him at the bar. Okay, I was extremely overwhelmed that night, but at the very least... I shouldn't have gone to a damn club.

In the end I tell him that I'm more than willing to follow his pace.

If he wants us to be private and go slow, we will.

And I know that he doesn't want me to tell him that I'm all his.

He wants- No. He needs to be shown.

Believe me, I will.

He will know that I'm all his. He will feel it.

109.

And Jasper's dreaming about living with Bella across the country in LA.

EPOV

Waking up next to Bella has been... bittersweet... in the past. To be so close to her and not being able to kiss her or tell her how fucking perfect she is...

But now I can.

And waking up this morning is... Yeah, quite different, because I have Bella kissing her way down my spine.

A part of me doesn't wanna roll over.

'Cause it feels so damn good.

I can't believe how relieved I am, either. The way she reacted to my rant last night about taking it slow and shit like that. But she understood me and said that she was all in.

"You're so awake, Cullen," she chuckles quietly. I guess I'm caught. "Now, turn over. I just brushed my teeth, and I wanna kiss my secret boyfriend." And the way she giggles at "secret" just makes me grin into my pillow. It also makes my heart do weird shit. It's all warm and fluttery. Boyfriend. Christ, that feels all kinds of amazing. But I guess that's what I am now. Yep, this comic book nerd is off the market. "Dude," she actually whines. "Roll over, Edward."

Unable to hold it in, I chuckle sleepily... and obey the woman.

"Secret boyfriend, huh?" I grin lazily, rubbing the sleep outta my eyes.

And there she is, smiling down at me.

"What does that make you?" I murmur, playing with her hair a little.

"Secret girlfriend, of course," she tells me like it's obvious... as she straddles my stomach. You won't find me complaining. "Or... at least I hope so."

I hum, pretending to think about it, as I slide my hands up her thighs.

"So labeled," I muse, and I fucking love labels. "Are you asking me to go steady, Swan?" I smirk.

She leans forward, making her hair fall around us like a curtain as she hovers over me.

My hands go from her thighs to the backsides of them.

And my morning wood is very present and in need of some friction.

"Well... since you didn't ask me last night," she sighs.

Then I definitely need to rectify that.

"Be my secret girlfriend," I say, threading my fingers through her hair. I kiss her nose. "Emphasis on girlfriend." I don't like the secret part, but I need it for now. I need this until River's born. Because if things change... then I don't want the world to know how I've been pushed aside. So, this will have to do, 'cause I can't stay away completely.

"On one condition," she tells me with a wicked glint in her eye. "That you won't get mad when I rile you up in public."

Um. "What?"

She winks. "Oh, I'm gonna tease you relentlessly, baby."

I think I'm in trouble here. "Tease me how?"

And she sits down... right on my erection. "Sexually, of course."

"Of course," I groan breathlessly. "Fucking cocktease." I stifle a whimper.

"That's the plan, Cullen," she sings, climbing off the bed. "For you to fuck your cocktease."

This time I do whimper.

"Starting today at the barbecue," she adds, reaching for the door. "I hope you're up for it."

See, that's the problem, Bella. I'm perpetually up for it.

110.

And Jasper's thinking... When I woke up around noon, the house was empty.

BPOV

Emmett's backyard is full of mingling people.

The sun is out.

Cap is running around, having the time of his life.

I'm on a mission.

"Flip 'em. Flip 'em hard," I demand, standing with Emmett and Edward next to the grill. "This preggo chica is starving."

With a hearty laugh, Emmett obeys and flips the burgers and the steaks.

Good boy.

Edward, on the other hand, is doing an awful lot of adjusting.

'Cause I've teased him subtly, but very properly... ever since we showed up at Emmett's house four hours ago.

"Harder, faster," I tell Emmett. "C'mon, I'm so ready for my meat."

"For fuck's sake," Edward whines.

I giggle.

"Am I missing something here?" Emmett asks amusingly, looking between Edward and me.

"No," I say innocently, eyes on the grill. "I'm so hungry, ya know? Ooh, do you have hotdogs? 'Cause I love me a good hotdog. A big, juicy, thick-"

"Okay, Bella!" Edward barks out. "Can I see you in the kitchen for a minute?"

Of course you can, Master.

His eyes are very dark.

Holy crap, I'm really fucking horny.

111.

And Jasper's thinking... I guess I should make my way over to the party.

EPOV

Emmett yells for us to make sure that Rose brings out the salads... since we're going to the kitchen. Well, he can believe that. But I have no intention of bringing Bella to a crowded kitchen where gossipy women are chopping vegetables. Fuck that. So, with my hand on Bella's back, I usher her up the stairs instead. The hallway is clear, so thankfully no one's seen us.

"Are you in a hurry?" she asks, smiling angelically.

My cock is throbbing in my cargo shorts.

To be honest, I'm too wound up to speak. So, I don't. I just keep walking.

I don't stop until I reach the guest room I lived in for a week after leaving Chicago.

"Get in," I tell her quietly, holding the door open for her.

Her eyes widen in excitement upon seeing the bed.

Oh, we'll get to the bed, but first...

I press her up against the closed door.

"You find this funny, baby?" I ask, making sure she can feel my erection against her hip. "Let me tell you..." I slide my nose along her jaw. I reach her ear. "There's nothing funny about walking around with a rock hard cock for hours."

"Oh, God," she breathes out. She shivers. "Please, Edward..."

I'm not thinking with the head between my shoulders when I reach up to cup her luscious tits in my hands, but she's definitely not complaining. Neither am I. Jesus, I'm kneading perfection. It makes me moan against her neck. She grinds her pussy against my thigh. Shamelessly. I know there's no such thing as resisting Bella. And the way she responds to my touch...

Then she has her hand on my dick.

"Fuck," I exhale. My eyes close briefly, but when I look down at her again, all I see is hunger. I lick my lips. "What do you want, beautiful?" I murmur huskily as she strokes me through my shorts.

She answers without words as she sinks down on her knees.

And Rose is thinking... Where's Bella?

BPOV

After weeks of dreaming about Edward's cock, there's only one thing I want right now, and that's to take him in my mouth. I fucking need to see it, to feel it, to taste it. And when I push his cargo shorts down his hips, I finally do see it.

Edward goes commando.

And he's... perfect.

Hard. Thick. Long. Pierced.

The dreams actually did him justice. It's more like... sweet fucking reunion... in some weird way.

I figured out pretty quickly that my dreams were about him. They're still blurry, those damn images, but the raw intensity... the feelings surging through me...

And the fact that I've been dreaming about a pierced cock...

Yeah, of course it's him.

"Christ, Edward," I breathe out, taking him in my hand. I'm unable to look away from him. So smooth, hard... I lick my lips.

"Bella," he groans. "Are... fuck... are... you really comfortable on your knees?"

Um, yes. Perfectly fine. Now, shush.

A second later, I have the head of his cock touching the back of my throat.

"Ffffuck!" he grits out in a strained voice.

I won't apologize for my eagerness.

Instead, I focus solely on the perfect cock in my mouth. I tongue him, I use my teeth. I flick the barbell at the head, I suck on it. And I can't get enough. The taste of his desire... the feeling of his need as he instinctively thrusts deeper...

And that's when he notices that I have no gag reflex.

"Holy shit, Bella," he whimpers.

After placing his hands on the back of my head, I encourage him to fuck my mouth. No one has ever done that to me, and I've wanted it. I want wild and primal. I know Edward's the one to give it to me. Which he does. In deep strokes, he pushes his cock down my throat. He moans loudly, mumbling incoherently, and when I look up at him, I get wetter just by that sight. His hooded eyes, his lips slightly parted, his heaving chest.

"Close," he moans, squeezing his eyes shut. His head lolls back, and he keeps thrusting. "Fuck, baby... ungh... Stop before..."

I double my efforts, wanting it all. My tongue swirls, I hollow out my cheeks, I take him down, I swallow around him, I tug on his balls.

He curses again, realizing that I'm not going anywhere.

The next thing I feel is his climax. Thick streams slide down my throat, and I keep swallowing around him, making sure his orgasm lasts for as long as possible.

I feel high by the time I release him.

His eyes are wild. Cheeks slightly flushed. Breathing very labored.

113.

And Rose is thinking... Edward's gone, too.

EPOV

Words are still failing me as I carry her over to the bed. Stumbling over is more correct, because we're kissing frantically on the way there, dropping clothes, too. But I can't help it. She's driving me to the brink of insanity, and I feel like a crazed animal. My mouth is still devouring hers as I lower her onto the bed. I taste myself in the kiss, and the thought of what she just did... how she did it... Fuck, I may not be a teenager anymore, but I can already feel myself hardening.

"Incredible." I'm panting, eager, maybe too eager. I don't know and I don't care. She's on the same page, so it doesn't matter. "You're fucking incredible," I tell her as I tug on her denim shorts. There's no asking. Only getting. Taking. I know she wants it.

I can read her body so fucking well, and when she's completely naked for me, I see her desire everywhere.

My clothes are gone, too.

I stare down at her flawless form.

Kneeling between her parted legs, I have her at my mercy. My hands slide up her calves, leaving goose bumps as I go further and further. Closer and closer. She's panting for me. Eyes wild and pleading. Oh, believe me. I'm gonna give you everything, beautiful.

I lower myself on her, dropping a soft kiss on her mouth as my right hand finally cups her pussy. She arches into me. She whimpers, and I slip my middle finger between her wet folds as I deepen our kiss. So fucking wet

and hot. My finger's coated in a second, and I can't wait to feel her arousal coat something else.

I wonder when that will happen, because I know it's out of my control. I want her too much to think about "should".

"My turn to taste, beautiful," I whisper against her mouth.

With that said, I push two fingers inside of her, making her moan my name.

My mouth travels south. Her neck, her collarbone. I lick, kiss, and suck.

And when I wrap my lips around her nipple, I'm rock hard again. A low groan escapes me as I swirl my tongue around her constricted nipple. Her hands go to my hair; there's tugging and twisting, and she's like me. We're not too gentle. We both wanna lose it.

"Oh, fuck... Edward," she moans, throwing her head back. What a fucking vision. "Oh, oh..." With two fingers curling upward inside of her and my thumb rubbing her clit, I keep her panting and moaning. At the same time, I let my mouth work her tits. I suck hard on her nipples, lavishing both of them with equal attention. I don't wanna cause rivalry between them, after all.

But in the end, I can't wait any longer.

I kiss my way down her baby bump, both loving and hating how attached I am to all things Bella. This includes River, very much.

"You're teasing me, baby," she whines as I kiss the insides of her thighs. I don't see it as teasing, though. It's not my intention. I just can't get enough of her. But her thighs are somewhat forgotten when I'm settled in between her legs.

Because my mouth is needed elsewhere now.

114.

And Rose is thinking... I bet they're doing it.

EPOV

Her moans are breathy and loud as I fuck her slowly and deeply with my tongue and fingers. Her taste drives me insane with need for her, and when I see arousal slowly trickling down her wet pussy, I'm there to devour her. I lap and lick, making sure I add enough pressure to keep her on a steady path toward her orgasm.

I'm learning her body's ways. I know her very well already, but I can never know enough. When I wrap my lips around her clit, her breathing hitches, and when I suck it into my mouth and use my tongue to flick it, she shivers violently and moans louder. It makes me wonder if she would want me to pierce my tongue for her. I would do it in a heartbeat, 'cause just the memory of feeling hers on my cock...

Yeah.

"Oh, Edwaaard!" she cries out. I feel her thighs tensing, her pussy contracting around my fingers... More arousal... "Fuck, fuck, fuck... Edward, I need you," she breathes out in a rush. "Stop, stop. I need you right now." I pause. My eyes close. She's not serious, is she? She wants to...

Here?

At Emmett's house?

With a bunch of people downstairs?

"Please," she whimpers.

Okay. Of course. Fuck, yes. Why not with a bunch of people downstairs?

"Are you sure, baby?" I gotta ask. I mean, I don't want her to regret anything. "You have to be sure, Bella, 'cause once I start..." I'm not gonna be able to stop.

But her eyes are again pleading with me as I hover over her.

"Protection?" I whisper huskily. I know I'm clean, and, um... it's not like I can get her pregnant.

"I'm clean," she says, pushing her hips up as my cock touches her thigh. Very hard to focus when she does that, dammit. "And I haven't been with anyone since..."

Yeah. Since that night.

Pushing that thought away, I dip down and kiss her. She deepens it immediately, and knowing that she's tasting herself on me... Fuck.

Urgency.

I grab my cock, stroking it a few times as I drag it along the length of her sex. My apadravya rubs against her clit. Now I'm teasing her, I know. She lets me know that she knows it, too, by giving me a sexy little growl. It makes me chuckle, but I stop that shit when she digs her heels into my ass.

"I need you," she pants heatedly, and the look she gives me tells me how urgent she is, too. "Now, Edward."

Yes, now.

With the head of my dick entering her, I grab a hold of her hands. I keep them locked with mine above her head.

Then I push in.

In one deep stroke, I fill her completely.

Hips meet hips.

And then we're back to the state we were in during our first time together. She doesn't remember, but I do. We're wild and insatiable. Mouths tasting, fingers digging into soft flesh, hard thrusts, swiveling hips. She claws at my chest, making me snarl as I slam into her, and I follow her gaze to the ink on my pec. She has to know it's for her. She has to know it's about her.

I know she's seen it before. Many times. "You know it's you, baby," I tell her breathlessly. I grab her leg, silently asking as I hold it up, and she nods furiously, giving me her permission. So, I push it up and let it rest over my shoulder. It allows me to reach even deeper without getting in the way of her belly. And I find her spot. Oh, I fucking find it. She clenches down on my cock like a vise.

"It's you, beautiful," I repeat in a whisper as I lean down to kiss her.

"Edward," she cries, clinging to me.

When I see tears in her eyes, I panic, but she's already shaking her head at me. "Don't stop," she gasps. "Don't ever... fucking stop..."

I won't.

Over and over, I push my cock deep inside of her, and it's just the sounds of skin against skin... her wetness... our moans and heavy breaths filling the air.

“Oh, God, the relief,” she whimpers, and I can’t help but chuckle. Though, it morphs into a low moan when she flutters around me. “Feels so good, Edward... so fucking good...”

I can feel my own orgasm approaching fast, but before I come...

“I need you to come, baby girl,” I groan, thrusting hard.

Her eyes flash to mine in an instant, and before I know it’s even happening, she lets out a silent scream. Fuck. I screw my eyes shut as her climax courses through her. The intensity of it makes her tighter than before, and I can’t hold it. There’s no way. Everything in me tenses. God-fucking-damnit! I drop her leg from my shoulder. I bury my face in the crook of her neck, and I pound my throbbing cock into her a few more times before I come hard in several streams.

Our chests heave together. Breaths come out choppy and labored.

And as intense and powerful our first time was... it holds nothing on this.

Holy shit, I can barely breathe.

115.

And Jasper’s thinking... Rose greets me by the door.

Her greeting isn’t as warm anymore. She’s definitely Team Bella.

BPOV

“That...” I drop my chin on his chest. “...was amazing.” And it’s not until now – about ten minutes later – that I’m able to breathe properly. “My legs are like jelly,” I add, ‘cause it’s true. I can barely feel my legs tangled with his.

He chuckles quietly, tucking a piece of hair behind my ear. "You and me both, baby girl."

There it is again. Baby girl. My trigger for coming so unexpectedly hard, not to mention fast.

"I love it when you call me that," I whisper, unable to keep the lust out of my voice. Christ, I've just been fucked into oblivion by a god, and I'm already aching for the next round. Eh, it's his fault.

"What... baby girl?" The left side of his mouth curves up. Sexy.

I nod and drop a kiss over my tattoo. He told me, confirmed... The ink is for me. "Yes."

He hums, and I feel his chest rumbling just a little. God, I'm hungry for him again. "My baby girl," he murmurs, brushing his thumb over my bottom lip. Shivers rip through me.

"Yours," I whisper.

His smile is soft, sweet, and tender.

Then I remember... "Oh!" I sit up, wrapping the white sheets around my naked body. "Okay, I gotta tell you something." I smile excitedly, and he just... sorta grins at me. "I may not have done something sweet like..." And I soften as I look at his tattoo. "I haven't done anything like that," I say quietly, making a mental note to make sure he knows how much I treasure him for doing that. "Not even close. But..." Great, now I'm blushing for how silly this will sound. "Um, Cap's full name is Captain America."

I half expect him to laugh at me, or maybe think I'm insulting him for comparing a tattoo – something that will last forever – to the naming of a pet. But he doesn't laugh, and he certainly doesn't look insulted, for which

I'm thankful. No, he just looks shocked for a moment... and then he flips us over so that he's on top of me. That works, just sayin'.

"You're so fucking cute, you know that?" he murmurs, nuzzling our noses together. "And I feel honored to have made such an impact on you with my spectacular taste in comic books."

He makes me giggle like a school girl. "Funny you." I poke him in the chest.

He winks. "I know. I'm fucking hilarious." Aand the grin. "Seriously, though... We have the coolest pig... like, ever."

I crack up so hard!

Then he kisses me stupid.

116.

And Jasper's thinking... Well, there's Edward.

EPOV

After getting dressed again, I'm ready to feel bad about sneaking around once we leave this room, but Bella doesn't let me. She still understands why I need privacy and discretion. So, once we don't look too freshly fucked, she reaches up and kisses me before whispering, "We gotta be stealthy now. Ready, Agent Cullen?"

And I know that I've met my match in the goofball department.

Through guffaws that I muffle behind my hand, I manage to give her a nod.

"Tsk, tsk, I said stealthy, not," she waves a hand at me, "whatever it is that you're doing."

"All right," I whimper through chuckles as I try to calm down. "I'm ready, um... Agent Swan?"

She sighs and shakes her head at me. "Special Agent Swan, dude."

What the...? Now that's just wrong. "I didn't get Special with my Agent," I accuse. "That's not fair!"

She smirks cockily. "Didn't you just get very special with your agent in that bed over there, hmm?"

Why, that little...

"Come here, you," I chuckle, pulling her to my body. She grins up at me as she wraps her arms around my waist. "Touché, baby girl. Touché."

"Mmmmm..." Her eyes flutter closed.

Yeah, she really likes it when I call her that. Evidently.

Good to know. Good to know.

~o~

"Dude!" Emmett exclaims as I reach him on the patio. He's sitting with a few others from work, mostly actors. Alice Brandon is one of them. "We've been looking everywhere for you!"

"Apparently not since you didn't find me," I quip, taking a seat next to him. "Weren't we playing hide and seek?" I scratch my chin. "Coulda sworn you said you were gonna count to hundred."

And he looks at me like I'm insane. "What?" he asks before shoving half a hotdog down his throat.

Which reminds me of Bella shoving me down her throat.

Down, boy.

"Never mind," I chuckle, shaking my head. "Anyway, have you seen Bella? I haven't seen her in a while."

See? I'm Special Agent Cullen.

I'm an excellent liar, and I know that Bella's currently in the kitchen, talking to a few chicks from work.

"I fink Vofie if vooking fo' her," he replies with his mouth full of food.

"All right," I sigh. "I'm gonna get some food."

On my way over to the grill, I see Jasper over by the pool, talking to... a few people. Don't really know who they are, but I assume they're from the main office. Emmett invites lots of people. My parents should be here soon, too.

And then I gotta grin when I look down by my feet. "Hey, buddy." I pick up Cap. "Or, should I say Captain?" Uh-huh, how fucking cool isn't that? She actually named him after my favorite comic. "Yeah... oink, oink to you, too."

"Hello, Edward." Shit, Rose. Behind me. She's got that voice. The one saying... I know you're up to something. "Turn around before I put the pig on the grill."

I gasp in horror and cover Cap's ears.

117.

And Rose is thinking... I'll let him believe that I know nothing.

EPOV

"You mean, mean woman," I say, turning around to face Rose. I also let Cap down on the grass again. "Run, buddy. Run like the wind!"

He sits down by my feet.

"Yeah, okay. I'll protect you," I vow before facing the mean, mean woman again. "Bella will kill you dead if you say that about Cap again." I point a finger at her for good measure. "I'd kill you dead, too, but... I don't hit women, ya know?"

Rose is suddenly amused. I am not. You just don't say shit like that about our Captain.

"You're just so... you. You know that?" she asks, titling her head. I scrunch up my face in confusion, at which she giggles. "Boy, am I glad you came to your senses."

"Huh?" I scratch my chin, wondering what the hell she's on about.

"Nothing. Never mind," she chuckles, waving me off a little. "Just... do what it is you do," she adds cryptically. "Keep it up. It's finally the way it's supposed to be." And with some weird, secret smile she leaves.

Umm...

What the fuck?

"Weird woman," I mutter to myself, turning back to the grill to get some food. 'Cause I'm fucking starving.

~o~

With Emmett living so close to the beach, it's apparently tradition to watch the fireworks from there. So, at nightfall we all make our way down to the beach.

This is my first 4th of July party in Port Pines, and I hope I have many to come.

Most people are drunk, but I'm staying sober with Bella and my parents. I've had a couple of beers, but that's it. There's no reason to get shitfaced. Though, Jasper would disagree, 'cause he's completely hammered. The guys from the main office are all drunk. Well, not Dad... obviously. But the rest of them are. They sure know how to throw back a few.

"Fifty bucks say they won't feel good tomorrow," Dad chuckles.

"No bet," I reply, shaking my head. You'd be a fool to bet against that. It's so clear that those boneheads will feel lousy in the morning.

Mom and Bella just giggle.

Yeah, it's the four of us, walking toward the beach together.

Emmett passed us a few minutes with Rose thrown over his shoulder. She was squealing like... Well, like Cap.

I hope I get to do stuff like that with Bella soon.

118.

And Esme's thinking... How can they not see that they're made for each other?

EPOV

I could watch the fireworks.

But watching Bella is far more interesting. The way her eyes light up when the sky explodes...

"You're supposed to watch that," she says amusingly, pointing at the sky.

I smile down at her, draping an arm around her shoulders. "I'd rather watch you," I whisper in her ear. She shivers violently, and I know it's not from the cold.

"So cheesy," she giggles against my chest.

Right then, I feel a kick against my stomach, and I can't help but bark out a laugh. "Dude, you gotta teach River some manners."

She gasps. "You felt that, too?" And her hands are on her belly. "Wow, that was a big one."

I guess it was. Nothing more than a little nudge, but it was definitely more than I've felt before.

"May I?" I ask, motioning for her stomach. She always tells me not to ask, but...

"Of course. I've told you, Edward. You don't have to ask."

I grin, knowing she would say something like that. But my grin fades when I place my hand on her stomach.

I'm in awe.

The little nudges move as I move. Like... River's following.

"Hey," she murmurs softly. "Is it time to go home yet?"

I nod.

After saying goodbye to my folks, Emmett and Rose, we drive home.

And we're different that night. We're not fucking. It's not just sex. For either of us.

And Jasper's thinking... I have a plan.

BPOV

July is full of late summer nights, lazy days in bed, barbecues, going to the beach, and a few nights at Little Stage. Edward and Emmett playing... Jesus, nothing could describe how amazing it all feels. Especially when I have Edward's eyes on me. This is also when he starts tinkering on his guitar at home. On the patio, at night, he plays for me and River.

When it's just the two of us, everything is perfect.

Holy crap on a cracker, Edward even gets a tongue ring.

With a wicked glint in his eyes, he tells me it's very much for my enjoyment.

Moving on before I combust.

August rolls around, and it's still perfect when we're alone. Then, the week Jasper comes back we return to being sneaky and discreet. We're obviously being secretive around everyone, not just Jasper. But I'm pretty sure Rose is somewhat aware. Regardless, Emmett and Rose are more used to the odd relationship I've had with Edward. And thinking back on it now, I know that we've always been very close and affectionate. Even when we were just friends, we often hugged and... ya know... cuddled.

It makes me wonder if Jasper questions anything.

I doubt it. He rarely asks questions, regardless. For instance, when we told him about Cap. He merely gave a grunt in disapproval before heading to bed. Almost the same thing happened when I told him about River's name. Ever since the beginning when I had shot down Jasper Junior, he had taken himself out of the name game. He just stopped showing

interest, and I know it has little to do with an actual name. I know it's more Jasper himself. He's not ready to be a dad. I know this.

I can only hope it changes once River's born. For my son's sake.

When September arrives, we go back to work. It's another season, and I'm... fat. Holy shit. Eight months pregnant. Always hungry, always horny, always complaining. Actually, I'm not complaining in bed. Nothing is wrong there, but... yeah, apart from the sex, there's always something wrong.

The wrong of today is... It's my birthday. I'm officially twenty-four years old.

The right of today is... I'm waking up with Edward's morning wood poking me from behind.

I'm definitely gonna take advantage of that, 'cause I need it. Mostly because I'm horny, but also because I need to calm down. And why? Well, my mom is the reason. Yeah, she's flying out today and will be here tonight. She wasn't able to come in August, so she suggested a few days around my birthday instead.

"Bella?" I hear Edward mumble in his morning voice. "You better stop jiggling that sweet ass against my cock unless you have plans to fix it."

Ungh.

"Oh, I have every intention on fixing it, baby," I assure, and... jiggle, jiggle.

The next thing I feel is his mouth on my neck.

Hot kisses, wet kisses.

"Happy birthday, baby girl," he whispers. I shiver. "Take a shower with me before I give you your gift?"

Actually, I'd say the shower is a gift, but... fine by me!

120.

And Jasper's thinking... After talking to Renee, I feel better.

EPOV

I love teasing her.

Standing behind her in the shower, I let my hands move over her delectable body. There's soap everywhere. Hot water running. Her mewls and whimpers are the only things I hear when I move my hands away from her tits and pussy. She's so fucking responsive to me.

"Please," she pants, perching up her ass for me. "Fuck, I need you, baby." Then there's Bella growling. Cute little sounds that make me so fucking hard. Those are some of my favorites. They're right up there with her moans and screams.

I chuckle huskily against her neck, and my hands slide down her arms.

"Place those hands on the wall, baby girl," I whisper before sucking her earlobe into my mouth. She obeys. I reach down to stroke my cock, and it's more than ready to plunge into her. "Your legs..." I nudge them apart with my right knee.

"Spread."

I can barely recognize my own voice.

"Oh, God," she breathes out, spreading her legs for me.

Not a second later, I have my cock lined up with her pussy.

"How does my birthday girl want it this morning?" I ask softly. My tongue darts out to taste her neck. "Hard? Fast? Maybe both?"

She whimpers.

I tweak her nipples, making her cry out in pleasure. "Both, Edward!"

The head of me pushes in slightly, and I bend at the knees for that spectacular angle.

Looking down, I watch as my cock disappears into her.

"Fuck," I breathe out heavily.

I pull out, only to push in again. Hard. She meets my thrust, silently telling me to go even harder. Which I do. With a firm grip on her hips, I move in a steady rhythm. Hard and fast. Deep strokes and she's so fucking tight in this position.

Low moans and grunts mingle with the steam from the showers.

My hands wander on her slippery wet body. Up and down her front, I cup her breasts, I play with her clit, my fingers stroke her soaked folds. There's never enough when it comes to touching her. I'm greedy and firm.

When I slide two fingers down her pussy, capturing her clit in between, she goes insane with her sounds. Sounds that bring me closer and closer. Sounds that make me slam into her harder and faster.

"Just... like that," she cries out. "Oh, fuck... ungh..."

"Yeah?" I grunt, pushing my entire length into her in one quick thrust. "You like that, baby girl?" Rhetorical question. I know very well what makes Bella tick. I'm a good fucking student, and I pay attention to her body language. Mmm, and her sounds. I live for the noises she makes.

"So... fucking... perfect," she moans in between thrusts.

"That's 'cause," thrust, "I know," thrust, "what you want."

She flutters around me, alerting me that she's close.

My head falls back as I keep pounding into her.

"For instance," I moan. "I know that you like it when... I have my face... buried... in your pussy." I knew piercing my tongue was a fucking hit from the start. Bella's loud groan brings me to the next thing. So, I lean in to whisper as I gently pinch her sensitive nipples. "You also love it when I talk dirty, don't you?"

She chokes on a moan, and then the contracting...

I feel my balls tingling... Same for my abdomen...

Close. So fucking close.

"But most of all," I grunt, squeezing my eyes shut, "you love my cock."

That does it.

She falls apart with a scream, and I follow instantly. Through heavy pants and husky moans, I come hard inside of her, feeling her pussy all but sucking me in.

When we finally still, it's only the sound of our breathing under the spray of water.

"Holy fuck," she pants. I rub her hips as I lazily kiss her spine. "A happy fucking birthday to me."

Oh yeah, baby girl.

121.

And Jasper's thinking... At Renee's suggestion, I buy a plane ticket.

EPOV

"Birthday breakfast for the birthday girl," I announce, trying not to grimace as I set her bowl on the table. I'm happily sticking to pancakes, and I waste no time once I've taken my own seat across from hers. It's a sunny day, so we're sitting on the patio. "Even Cap wouldn't eat that, Bella." Okay, that's a lie, because Captain eats everything. But seriously... Ice cream with popcorn. For breakfast. Crazy, pregnant woman. And it has to be Ben & Jerry's Phish Food. She'll bite your head off if you come home with the wrong tub of ice cream. Just ask Emmett.

"I effing love it," she moans.

I chuckle. She's so fucking cute.

These past couple of months have been amazing, and I'm irrevocably in love with our little bubble, as well as her, of course. Hopefully, I can calm down soon. River's due in little less than four weeks and, so far, I doubt I have anything to worry about. Bella's shown me over and over that I'm the only one. Which means I have to tell her that we slept together... that night.

I thought I could leave it behind me, especially since the chance of me being the father is slim to none, but if we're going all out with our relationship, she deserves to know the truth. I know she's going to freak out on me. I've been lying by omission for so long, and I'm a fucking asshole for not coming clean. But I've been a damn mess. The pregnancy itself sure threw me off, and then... Well, denial is a good thing. Though, not very lasting. At all.

"Hey, what's with the frown, hombre?" she asks softly, tilting her head.

Then she shoves a spoon with ice cream and popcorn in her mouth.

Yuck.

Shaking my head, I chew on my pancake. 'Cause at least that's delicious.

"Nothing wrong, chica," I reply with a wink. Another lie, I know. But I'm coming clean. Soon. "Anyway... lemme know when you want your gift."

At which point, Bella starts bawling.

I'm used to it. It's the hormones.

So, I do what I always do. I leave my seat and squat down next to hers before comforting her.

"Don't cry, honey," I say softly. "It's just a gift."

She sobs against my shoulder. "But... you're so... wonderful!"

I bite the inside of my cheek to contain the snickers. She'd kick me in the nuts if I she saw my amusement now. That also happened to Emmett once. Couple of weeks ago. Poor man.

"Dammit!" she suddenly growls. "I gotta pee again."

Do not laugh, Cullen. Do not laugh. Think about your nuts.

122.

And Jasper's thinking... I hope she'll like my surprise.

EPOV

Bella's minor sob-fest at breakfast was only the first one.

Another followed when I took her out to the garage where Mom had helped me put together River's crib. Well, I put it together. She added the blankets, pillows, and stuffed animals.

Bella had seen the crib when we were out buying stuff for River's little corner in her room. However, she told me it was way out of her price range.

I'd driven back a couple of days later and bought it.

Along with two other things.

Which brings us to sob-fest number four.

Because, apart from the crib, I also bought the changing table that matches the crib, and a car seat.

Apparently, each of these things are worthy of more than a little sobbing.

~o~

"Feel better now?" I ask softly, caressing her hair.

I have one more gift for her, but I'm afraid she'll be hospitalized for dehydration.

"Yeah," she croaks, snuggling closer to me on the couch. Captain's asleep on my lap. His ears twitch when he's sleeping. Just... thought I'd mention it. "I can't thank you enough, Edward," she whispers, pressing a kiss on my cheek. I turn and kiss her fully, and I don't want her thanks. It was my pleasure. I'm just glad she got what she wanted, 'cause I saw how much she fell for that crib.

"Don't mention it," I murmur, pecking her softly... once, twice. "But, uh... I may have one more gift for you."

She gasps and leans away from me a little, and that shit's just wrong.

"You've given me enough, Cullen!"

I smirk. "It's just a little thing, I swear. But I wanna give it to you before you get ready for today."

The plan is for Bella and Rose to pick up Renee in Richmond. In the meantime, Emmett and I will set up for Bella's birthday barbecue here at home.

123.

And Renee's thinking... Can't wait to see Bella again. If only she lived closer.

EPOV

I was wrong.

The "little" thing I had bought for Bella was apparently also worth another round of tears.

S'just a t-shirt, really. With the words "Precious cargo. So... dude. Watch out" printed over the belly.

With a watery smile, and a sorta loud squeal, she tells me that she's so wearing it today.

And graciously, she returns my beloved Stoli shirt.

Yes, this leaves her very naked as she saunters off to change. Except for her tiny shorts, of course.

But I catch up to her.

And I put my tongue ring to good use.

I have her writhing in pleasure.

Right there, on the stairs.

I'm not satisfied until I hear her screams.

Bella, being the thankful woman that she is, reciprocates, stating that she loves feeling my apadravya in the back of her throat.

Safe to say, my girl can talk dirty, too.

She can also make me see stars.

~o~

She hugs my midsection, reaching up for a kiss.

"Be careful today, all right?" I mumble as I capture her mouth with mine. I keep one hand on her stomach to make her understand what I'm talking about. Turns out, I'm a worrier. And I don't really like that she's going all the way to Richmond without me. Sure, Rose will be there, but...

"Promise," she mumbles back, grabbing the waistband of my basketball shorts. "Gonna miss you."

I shiver. "Ditto."

She's wearing her new shirt, by the way. It looks fucking adorable on her.

Her denim skirt, though... There's nothing adorable about it. Sinful woman.

"Barbecue at eight PM." I hum, swiping my tongue across her bottom lip.

She hums, too, and parts her lips. "I want ice cream with my steak."

Okay, that's downright repulsive.

Not that I would say this. "Phish Food?" I say instead, and she nods and gives me a blinding smile.

124.

And Jasper's thinking... After another fight with Maria, I board the plane.

EPOV

I shake my head in amusement as I watch Cap give Emmett a run for his money. Around the backyard, in circles... The fucking squealing. And it's not always coming from Cap.

With a final chuckle, I tip back my beer bottle before turning to the grill again.

It's crazy how I can already miss Bella. She's only been gone for four hours.

But I stand corrected.

"Holy shit," Emmett pants, joining me by the grill. He grabs his beer from the side table where the delicious steaks are waiting. "That little fucker can run."

I shake my head again, but not in amusement. "Dude, I don't even wanna think about all the times I've tried to catch him."

Cap may have a thing for me, and he's often following me around, but he only obeys Bella. When she calls, he's there. When I call, however... Yeah, I think the little creature loves it when I chase him.

"So... How are you?"

I arch a brow at Emmett but keep my eyes on the steaks.

"What? I just wanna know how you are," he says.

"Yeah, but the tone you used... Just ask what you really wanna ask."

I had a feeling this was coming. Yeah, we see each other several times a week, but it's extremely rarely just the two of us. Bella and Rose are always there. Sometimes my parents, too.

"Fine," he huffs, rolling his eyes. Then he faces me with a serious expression. "Are you and Bella together yet?"

Yes. Sorta. "Dude. Are you a chick all of the sudden?" I snicker.

"Cut the shit, Cullen," he chuckles wryly. "Rose says you're doing it. I tend to believe my girl, ya know?"

I heave a sigh.

Rose, Rose, Rose. Ever the perceptive woman. Bella and I both suspected that she knew something.

"No, Em. We're not doing it," I reply dryly... lying through my teeth.

He harrumphs.

"Can't believe this," he mutters as I sip my beer. "I thought for sure you two were gonna hook up ages ago. Hell, I even thought you were gonna do it back on that night... Ya know, the first night when we played at Little Stage."

That one hits too close to home.

I spew out beer all over the fucking place.

125.

And Emmett's thinking... This means... This means...!

EPOV

I'm coughing and spluttering.

My eyes sting from the beer in my goddamn nose.

"Why the hell are you so surprised?" he asks incredulously, pounding me on the back... once, twice. "You could cut the sexual tension between the two of you with a fucking knife... even back then!"

And here I go, choking again.

"Enough," I cough, rubbing my chest. "Jesus... fucking..."

I can't look at him now. That's impossible. I may be a good liar, but Emmett has this weird sense when it comes to sex. If he's even remotely clued in, he'll figure out the rest.

This is why I have avoided talking to Emmett about the night that shall not be mentioned.

"Edward?"

No. I keep my eyes averted as I pretend to get over my coughing fit. The grill! I pay attention to the grill, and... Damn. The side table, the steaks. I check my watch; seven PM. It's only an hour before Bella and Rose return with Renee, and... the steaks are ruined. Weeell... Beer is actually used sometimes in cooking. Just like wine and whiskey. Though... that beer hasn't been in someone's mouth. I hope. Plus, Bella can't have alcohol.

She asked for ice cream on hers. Not, um... second-hand beer.

"Cullen!" my cousin barks out. "You fucked her, didn't you?!"

Shhhit.

"And..." Crap, he's figuring it out... Kill me. Kill me. Now. "Holy fuck, you did it! You hooked up that night!" I close my eyes. "That first night!"

Oh, I'm fucked. Not in the good way.

126.

And Renee's thinking... It's simple. Jazz, Bella, and River need to be a family.

BPOV

It feels good to see Mom again.

We hug forever, followed by gushing over my belly. She's a proud Nana-to-be, that's for sure.

But when the greetings are over, and the three of us are sitting in a coffee shop, the mom in Renee steps forward. She doesn't want me to be alone. She doesn't want me so far away. She worries, and... she doesn't want to miss out on River. So... I'm not surprised when she admits that she wants me to move back home.

Edward once asked me if I was closer to my mom or to my dad, and I remember thinking it over for a moment before answering that I was closer to my mom. The reason I needed to give it some thought is because I used to be extremely close with Dad. He was my best friend, though at that time, I used the term "bestest friend in all the world". I was still a kid. But he was my hero.

Then he went and destroyed it all, and Mom was broken in pieces.

Overnight, I had to go from Daddy's girl to Mommy's only ally.

So, yeah... I'm a lot closer to Mom, but that doesn't mean we always think alike. In fact, we're very different. First of all, she's still jaded. Dad really did a number on her. That has left her insecure and narrow-minded.

When I told her about Jasper and me breaking up, she was devastated for me... until she found out that Jasper still wanted me. She can't understand

why I broke up with such a wonderful guy. She tells me that staying together is the most important thing in the world. Walking out is not an option, and this is where I know her experience with Dad is a factor.

She can't believe that I'm willing to walk away from something that she had no option to keep.

Rose and I explain to her that I'm very happy with the way things are, but Mom won't listen. Having grown up close to Mom, Rose isn't surprised, either. It just is what it is.

So, we let Mom drone on, and we listen with half an ear.

The part of me that's listening is feeling sorry for her.

The part of me that's listening is hoping to God that she's not right.

It can't be, because no one has ever made me as happy as Edward.

127.

And Rose is thinking... If I talk, talk, talk, maybe Renee won't bother Bella.

I can already see the effect she has on her daughter.

BPOV

Eventually, Mom drops the subject... for now... and she asks about life in Port Pines.

Rose is all smiles when she tells Mom about Emmett, of course, and since Mom watches Stormy Days, she's a bit over the moon.

"Oh, Mike Newton is such a dreamy guy," Mom gushes, referring to Emmett's character on the show. "You're a lucky woman, Rose."

They keep talking.

I tune out a little, feeling... different.

It's the damn hormones. Fucking mood swings.

And... what the...?

"Shit!" I gasp, clutching my stomach.

Two sets of wide eyes are on me.

I'm just as wide eyed.

I'm also scared.

128.

And Emmett's thinking... Fuck Stormy Days. Real life is insane enough as
it is.

EPOV

"Did you use protection?" Em asks in a rush, looking more than a little
panicked.

Safe to say, my secret is out.

There's no reason to deny, 'cause he wouldn't believe me, anyway.

"I'm not sure," I sigh, sitting down in one of the chairs. I cough some
more, 'cause that beer fucking hurt to spew out. Jesus. My poor throat.

"You're not sure?" he exclaims in disbelief. "How the fuck have you and
Bella kept this a secret? I don't get it!"

Me and Bella...?

Oh, fuck.

"Um, well..." I rub the back of my neck. "Bella doesn't remember sleeping with me. She was drugged, remember? I didn't know that she was, but... yeah, we slept together, and... fuck." I scrub my hands over my face. "I went out the morning after... Jasper returned..."

Word vomit.

"Okay, hold it. Fucking hold it, Edward. Are you telling me that Bella doesn't... still doesn't know?"

I grimace... and shake my head. "Pretty much."

"Holy fuck," he breathes out. "Shit, okay. Let's put aside the fact that you are the only one aware of that night." He shakes his head. "My question is... Why haven't you told her? I mean, you could be River's dad, for fuck's sake!"

129.

And Bella's thinking... It's early. It's too early.

EPOV

"No, I can't!" I growl. It wasn't my intention to lose it, but I don't need a fucking reminder that River's not mine. "I'm not his dad-"

Deep breaths.

Leaning forward on my knees, I keep my eyes on the ground.

"How can you be so sure?" he asks impatiently. "If you both slept with her on the same night..."

I cringe at how it sounds.

"The weeks, they don't add up," I mutter, sliding my fingers up into my hair. "She got pregnant two weeks before I was with her."

I remember Bella telling me that River is the result of that night, but... It can't be. I've done the math over and over.

"Dude!" he shouts, making me jump in my seat. I look up to see his saucer-wide eyes. "They count pregnancy weeks that way, you idiot!"

I frown.

"They count from two weeks before you actually get knocked up," he clarifies. "Something about the last period or what-the-fuck-ever."

I think I stop breathing.

130.

And Jasper's thinking... Two hours 'til Richmond. Feels like forever.

EPOV

Emmett tells me.

He fills me in about... the date of conception.

And all I can think about is that... Christ... River can be my son.

If we didn't use protection, there's an equal chance that I'm his dad.

"Oh, God..." I breathe heavily as everything dawns on me.

"You can say that again-" Emmett's phone cuts him off.

I tug harshly on my hair, feeling too much rush through me. But the most easily recognizable emotion is joy. River could be mine. No matter how hard it will be to solve the mess I'm bound to cause when I confess to Bella, I may still have a son arriving in less than a month. And I will fight. Regardless, really, but... Fuck, I will fight to set everything straight.

"Edward!" My head snaps up. Emmett looks... like he's seen a ghost. "Bella just went into labor."

131.

Edward's thinking... Holy fuck, holy fuck, holy fuck.

BPOV

It's all happening too fast.

Contractions.

"I called Emmett," Rose assures me, holding my hand. "He and Edward are on their way."

Oh, thank God...

More tears spill over.

"And Jasper?" I grit out as another contraction hits me. "He should probably know."

Rose breathes with me, never letting go of my hand.

"He's also on his way," Mom tells me, and I'm in shock. "He wanted to surprise you for your birthday." She smiles. I can't return it. "He lands in an hour and a half, or something like that."

Okay. Well, he is the dad, so I guess... Yeah, he should be here.

Then... pain. "My fucking God!" I cry out.

"Breathe with me, honey," Rose murmurs.

Soon, the room fills up.

I have to say goodbye to either Mom or Rose, 'cause apparently I'm only allowed to have one with me.

I pick Rose.

Oh, God... where are you, Edward?

"I think your little boy is eager," a doctor says lightly, and can I kill her?

"You think?" I snap.

132.

And Bella's thinking... This hurts like a motherfucker!

EPOV

When Emmett and I finally arrive at the hospital, there's no thinking. Only running.

My eyes narrow in on the nurses' station.

"Where can I find Isabella Swan?" I ask, still catching my breath.

But it's a voice coming from behind me that answers.

"You must be Edward."

Turning around, I see Bella's mom. I wouldn't have guessed it if Bella didn't have a few family photos at home. Renee's skin is slightly darker... her hair is light, and her eyes are light brown. Safe to say, Bella inherited her dad's skin tone and colors.

"I am," I reply with a nod. Emmett catches up to me as I reach Renee, and I stick out my hand to greet her. "Nice to meet you, Ms. Swan. Bella's told me a lot about you."

She smiles softly, and there's the resemblance. "Renee, please." I manage to give her a quick smile, though my thoughts are all jumbled. I need to know where Bella is. "Good to meet you, too, Edward. And Bella's told me a lot about you, too." She grins. "You've been a wonderful friend."

Yeah. Friend. Sure. Well, friend, too... but...

Anyway.

"And you're Emmett McCarty," she says, and holy shit, her smile widens. Don't worry, I'm not offended. Bella's told me all about Renee's addiction to Stormy Days. "So nice to meet you in person."

"You too," he replies politely. "Mind telling me where Bella and Rose are?"

Yes. Thank you, Em.

"She's in labor," Renee replies, smiling fondly. "She's lucky, too." She nodded. "I was in labor for twenty-six hours when I had Bella." Emmett and I instinctively flinch. Hell, the pain. Poor women. "Exactly," she chuckles. "But River's eager."

River.

River.

River.

He could be mine.

"Rose is with her," she adds. "So, I suggest we get comfortable."

But... but...

Running a hand through my hair, I look at the door where I see doctors and nurses coming through. The door that leads to whatever room Bella's in.

133.

And Jasper's thinking... Twenty minutes 'til we land... Come on, come on.

EPOV

We wait.

It feels like forever, and I'm completely unable to stay still.

So, I pace. And sit. And tap my fingers against any surface that I can find. Then I return to pacing. A hand goes through my hair. I tug and twist. I look at the door. I hope...

God, I hope he's mine.

A part of me feels conflicted, because I know I will love that little boy no matter what, but...

I can't help but hope...

"Fuck, how long has it been now?" I groan in frustration. "Three hours? Four?"

An incredulous laugh escapes Emmett. Actually, Renee too.

"Dude," Em chuckle, shaking his head. "It's been twenty minutes."

Well, fuck you.

I glare at him, and I'm gonna tell him something so smart, and so... No, I've got nothing. I draw a blank. Before returning to my pacing.

"Hmm, Jasper should be here soon," Renee mentions, and my head snaps in her direction.

Did she just...?

"Jas... Jasper?" I ask dumbly. He's on his way? Here?

"He wanted to surprise Bella on her birthday." Her smile is blinding. "But I think he's gonna be the surprised one!" she laughs. "Oh, he'll be so happy."

I want to throw up.

But before I can make a run for the nearest trash can, Rose shows up.

"Edward," she says softly, smiling widely. "Bella asked to see you."

I still want to throw up.

But for other reasons.

I've never been this nervous in my entire life.

"He..." I swallow nervously. "River...?"

She nods as a few tears roll down her cheeks.

River. He's here.

134.

And Renee's thinking... I wonder if Jasper knows that Edward is in love
with Bella.

EPOV

Once we reach Bella's hospital room, Rose leaves me.

My hand shakes as I push the door open.

Then, all I see is her. On the bed. And the little blue bundle in her arms.

"Bella-" Nope, that barely worked. Holy shit. My heart's pounding. And she looks up me... Eyes welling up... and that smile. She's tired. No. Exhausted, but... Christ, she's beautiful. So incredibly beautiful.

"Hi," she whispers thickly.

I release a breath, and finally my legs start working.

Shit, my own eyes well up, too. It's... indescribable. All of this.

My eyes are drawn to the little baby, but before I allow myself to look, I dip down and kiss her on the forehead. Then her temple, her hair, her cheek. She gives me a watery smile, one I know that I'm mirroring. I end with a soft kiss on her lips.

"How's the new mommy?" I whisper, tucking a piece of hair behind her ear.

I look down, unable to do otherwise, and he's... so fucking cute. Asleep and so fucking cute.

"I'm..." She shakes her head, and I brush my thumb under her eye. "I'm... all over the place. And sore." We both chuckle quietly. "I'm happy, completely overjoyed, and... so tired."

I grin and blink back tears, dropping another kiss on her forehead. Then I return to watching River, still at a loss for words.

"Wanna hold him?" she whispers.

And my heart goes back to pounding. Fuck. Seriously. Goddamn. Hold him. Can I? I mean... what if I break him? He's so tiny. And perfect. Tiny and perfect. I've seen Bella's baby album at home; I know what she looked like as a baby, and... this is her... in a way. Her nose, her mouth. I

can't see his hair, 'cause he's wearing a little baby hat, but... God, it's easy to see that Bella's his mother.

"I don't wanna hurt him," I murmur quietly, carefully reaching out to caress his little cheek. So soft. He's all new in the world. "He's perfect, Bella."

"I agree," she breathes out. "He is perfect... and you could never hurt him."

I chuckle nervously. I want to hold him, I do, but... I'm fucking scared.

"Take a seat," she instructs softly. "There's room right here." She scoots over a little, and I swallow my nerves as I sit down next to her on her bed. "You won't hurt him, baby."

Sure. We'll see.

As I watch Bella, it feels like she was born to do this. She's more beautiful than ever, and... I'm in awe of her strength and grace. She's a natural.

And then I'm holding River.

I'm speechless, looking down at the tiny little thing in my arms. His little head resting on my arm, and even in his sleep, he grips my finger as I touch his hand. Again, there are no words.

"Edward, I want you to meet River Matthew Swan."

Swan.

Relief.

Swan's better than Whitlock. So much better. But it's also a reminder. I need to talk to her. Very soon. Very, very soon.

Tomorrow. I'll tell her everything tomorrow.

"Matthew?" I ask softly, eyes still on River. River Matthew. Perfect.

In my peripheral, I see her nod. "Remember how I named River after my favorite movie, or... favorite actor?" Yes. After River Phoenix in Stand by Me. I nod for her to go on, but I can't look away from the baby. I'm still speechless, and... the way he's gripping my finger... "Well... What's your favorite movie?" she whispers.

"Dogma," I murmur automatically, and it hits me. When I look at her, she smiles at me. "You..." I swallow hard... for the umpteenth time today. "You named him after..."

She grins. "Your favorite actor in that movie, of course." Jesus, what's the next level of "speechless"? Death? Could she be any more perfect? Not to mention considerate and... everything. "Matt Damon," she clarifies... for no reason. She knows me just like I know her.

I want to tell her that I love her.

135.

And Bella's thinking... I couldn't love Edward more.

EPOV

We sit in silence for a while, both of us watching the sleeping boy in my arms.

Even though I still need the answer, I know that I love him irrevocably.

Regardless.

How can I not?

Don't even get me started on the way he smells. I kiss him on the forehead, breathing him in as I do, and again... there's no describing it. I wish I could bottle the baby scent.

After a few minutes, River stirs in my arms.

For some reason, I hold my breath.

Maybe because I have a feeling that he's gonna scream bloody murder.

I've seen babies on TV, you know, and... don't they cry a lot?

I gotta get this little guy to like me, 'cause I prefer mutuality.

And if he wakes up screaming in the middle of the night, it'd be cool if I had some magic way to calm him down. Maybe I can... I don't know... play for him? I've played quite a lot for him already, and Bella told me that babies can hear from... the, um, inside. I know that his mommy's favorite is "Scarborough Fair".

"He's waking up," I whisper.

With a final kiss on his forehead, I'm reluctant, but prepared, to give him back to Bella, but that's when his eyes open.

A million feelings rush through me.

The love is still there. Very much so.

But now the resignation is there, too.

Because his eyes couldn't be bluer.

136.

And Jasper's thinking... I'm in shock when I've listened to Renee's voice mail.

All the way over to the hospital, I try to picture myself as a father.

BPOV

After Edward returns River to me, it feels like something has shifted, and when the nurse comes in to help me get started with the breastfeeding, Edward appears to be deep in thought. So deep that I doubt he's aware of his surroundings. He just sits in the chair next to the bed, elbows resting on his knees and eyes downcast.

With the day I've had, I leave him to his thoughts for now, but I hope we can talk soon. All I want is for us to be a couple... out in the open... officially, just like any other couple. But in the meantime, I focus on River. My son. It's... weird. To see him, to hold him, to smell him... And I know that nothing has settled yet. After the short, but intensely painful feeling of going through labor, I'm just exhausted. My body is screaming for a good rest. I'm sore and achy, sleepy and... God, I would pay a million bucks for a shower.

Every now and then, tears roll down my cheeks.

I'm completely overwhelmed.

It's amazing how this little baby is the most important thing in the world to me all of a sudden. It just happened so fast, it's hard to keep up. One minute I was waddling all over the place, thinking that I had another month to go, and now... Now he's here.

"You're the best birthday present ever," I whisper against his forehead.

137.

And Jasper's thinking... When I push open the door to Bella's room, I see them.

Kissing.

BPOV

I watch, mesmerized, as the nurse helps me with everything. I'm eager to learn, and I try to soak it all up. Together, we go through the breastfeeding, and it takes a moment or two, but eventually River latches on. It feels both weird and natural, in a way.

The nurse also tells me a few things I've read about already. Can't say that I look forward to the soreness both Mom and Esme have explained about. My poor boobs, eh?

After feeding, it's time for burping, and my mind is spinning as I listen to the nurse. Her advice matches what Esme's told me, and I'm so grateful to have had her close since my own mom lives so far away. Granted, Mom and I have talked a lot over the phone, but still...

"Hot damn," I hear Edward mutter as River lets out a burp, and I look over at him with a grin. I guess he's not deep in thought anymore. "He can compete with me and Emmett in the burping department."

True. So damn true. "No doubt about that," I agree. 'Cause you don't wanna hang around Edward and Emmett after a few beers. They're all men.

A few moments later, the nurse takes River over to his see-through crib, and she definitely sees my expression, because she rolls the crib over so that it's right next to my bed. Much better. She smiles and tells me that if there's anything I need, it's just to press the button. Then she leaves, and I'm well aware of the fact that I will soon change my very first diaper. Good thing I've practiced a few times in one of the mommy classes I took. Hell, even Edward did it. That was certainly a sight to behold.

But it only proves how perfect he is. Edward's not just here for me. He's here for River, too, and that's why I want to talk to him as soon as possible.

"You okay?" I ask softly, leaning back against my pillows. "You looked like you were thinking about something earlier."

He gives me a small smile and grabs my hand. "Nothing to worry about. How are you? Tired?"

And cue my yawn. That speaks for itself.

"Got it," he chuckles quietly before kissing my knuckles. "Let me know if you want some privacy, okay? You'll have plenty of visitors wanting to come over." He winks.

I smile and tug on his hand. "C'mere." He stands up and comes closer. Not close enough, but... "Did you talk to Esme and Carlisle?" I tug a little bit more, and finally he dips down and kisses me. He also nods, answering my question. "Good. I can't wait for them to meet him," I mumble against his lips.

"You should get some sleep, baby," he whispers.

"I know," I sigh. "But I figure I should let Mom and the others come in first."

He nods against my forehead, and I peck him a few times. Damn those soft lips for being so addictive. I can't get enough.

"Jasper will probably be here any minute, too," he says quietly.

I swallow. "Yeah..."

He kisses me softly once more before backing away. "Want me to go get Renee?"

But before I can answer, there's a sharp knock on the door.

138.

And Jasper's thinking... There's no fucking way I'm gonna let him take my Bella from me.

EPOV

Thinking that it's Renee knocking on the door, I take my seat in the chair again.

But I'm wrong.

It's Jasper.

He looks tired, but for once, he's not in a suit. Today it's jeans and a t-shirt, which is a new occurrence. Ever since he started working for Dad, he's been in a suit all the time. That's the first thing I do when I get home from work; change clothes. Maybe it's just me, but suits aren't really my thing. Small towns and simplicity, that's me now.

"Hi," Bella says softly. "Mom told me you were coming."

"Yeah," he replies quietly, looking between both Bella and me. "I wanted to surprise you," he chuckles. "Guess it's a day full of surprises, huh?"

"Congratulations," I offer, ignoring the twisting of emotions inside of me. I will just have to learn to live with it. There's no question. After seeing River's eyes, it's clear that Jasper is his dad. It stings, but... it is what it is, and there's no way I'm going to love River any less.

"Thanks, man," he mutters, and then he walks over to the other side of Bella's bed. The side where River's sleeping in his crib. "He's beautiful, Bella," he murmurs. I clench my jaw as he grabs her hand, but I have to

keep in mind that this is big for them. They're parents now, and... I'm most likely intruding on their moment. Fuck.

"Um, I'll leave you alone," I say quietly, standing up. Bella shakes her head, but I cut her off. "It's okay, Bella." It's not, but it is for Jasper. He's all smiles now. Good for him... or something. "I'll be with the others."

139.

And Jasper's thinking... Safe to say, I'm taking a vacation to stick around for a while.

BPOV

Something's wrong, I just know it.

The look Edward gave me before he stepped out of the room... I'm sure I saw pain there.

"You all right, darlin'?"

"Hmm?" I turn to Jasper. "Oh, um... yeah. Just tired."

My eyes find River instead, and it feels like he's the only one able to make me calm down now. Maybe not completely... because I can still feel that unease in the pit of my stomach. Oh, God... He's not... I mean, Edward... he's not changing his mind, right? Or is that it? Now that River is here, does that change it all for him? Has he realized that he can't be with me because of River?

"Babe, you look a little pale..."

"Don't call me that, Jazz," I snap.

Christ.

I cover my face with my hands.

"I'm sorry," I sigh, looking down at my lap. "I didn't mean to snap at you, but please don't call me that anymore."

God, I'm tired.

This is the last thing I want to deal with on the happiest day of my life.

Edward is supposed to be here, too.

"Shit," I whisper under my breath. Okay, I'm just tired. I'm overreacting, yes? That has to be it. Edward just needs to let it all settle. Yeah, that's it. This is big for him as well, and seeing Jasper here can't be easy for him. So, he just needs to let it all settle. Yeah. Okay. Now you can calm down, Bella.

"Bella, we..." I look up at Jasper. He swallows hard. "We belong together. You have to see that." Fuck. No. I shake my head. Can't believe he's doing this now. "We even have a son together!" he whisper-yells.

Anger. "Do not pull that shit on me, Jazz," I grit out, pointing a finger at him. "You didn't care about that son of yours when I carried him. Now you do all of a sudden?"

"I can't just walk away from my job," he argues quietly.

"And I never said you should. But you have no right to use River as a reason for us to get back together."

He holds his hands up in surrender. "I'm sorry. I don't wanna fight with you."

I sigh into my hands.

"Get some rest, Bella. I'll be here when you wake up."

Yeah, that's what I'm afraid of.

140.

And Bella's thinking... Before I fall asleep, I decide to focus on River.

Edward will just have to come to me when he's ready.

EPOV

"You wanted to talk?" Em says once we're outside.

I run a hand through my hair, hating all of this, but... yeah, I need to talk.

"I'm not going to tell her about that night," I tell him quietly.

As expected, his eyes widen, and I see anger. "Edward-"

"He's not my son." I look down and shove my hands into the pockets of my cargo shorts. "His eyes are as blue as Jasper's."

"Shit."

Yeah.

"But..."

I shake my head. "No buts, Em. She can't know. Especially not now." Looking up, I continue. "She just gave birth. The last thing she needs right now is me causing drama. I won't do it, and neither will you. You'll keep quiet about this. That includes not telling Rose."

He sighs heavily.

"So... now what?" he mutters.

I shrug a little. "I don't know." I really don't. Seeing Jasper and Bella together with River was almost too much. But they're his parents. "I think..." I exhale. "I think I will give them some space."

There's not much else I can say without letting Emmett know that Bella and I have been together for the past few months, and I refuse to tell him. If this is, in fact, it for the two of us, then I don't want them to know. I hate that I've become this insecure fucker, but... I can't really help it, either.

"What do you mean by space?"

"Well, I'm not taking off to Mexico," I chuckle wryly, and I think I see relief in Emmett's eyes. "I'm not going anywhere, but it's clear that the new parents need some time with their son." Might as well get used to the pain, yeah? "I'll just..." I shrug. "I'll be here when Bella needs me, and... then when Jasper's here, she'll have him."

Em gives me a skeptical look. "So, you're gonna be at Bella's beck and call, and then when Jasper's in town, you'll sit on the sidelines?"

I'm good at shrugging, so I do that again.

141.

And Bella's thinking... He's shutting me out.

EPOV

A few hours later, Bella's room is full of visitors. Mom and Dad, Renee, Emmett and Rose... and Jasper, of course.

With the introductions out of the way, it's time for everyone to have their go with River. Mom is gushing and cooing, much like Renee, and I hear Bella's mom telling her over and over how hard it's going to be to leave Port Pines. Though, she doesn't really put it that way. No, she's making it very clear that Bella belongs on the West Coast.

Thankfully, Bella stands firm. She's not going anywhere, much to my relief. Mom and Dad... Well, we're all relieved to hear that. Emmett and Rose, too.

Speaking of Emmett... Yeah, he knows Jasper's the father, too. The way his jaw tensed when he held River earlier made that very clear. One look at River's eyes and you know. Thankfully, Emmett will keep quiet for my sake. He knows that Bella and River are everything to me, and if I'm going to lose them now, I'd rather not have the world know about it.

"I guess it's time to go home," Mom sighs. I squeeze her hand, knowing how reluctant she is. "You're coming home tomorrow, honey?" she asks Bella.

"Yes," she replies softly. "And I can't wait."

Me neither.

Jasper and Renee stay.

I want to stay, too, but... "Gotta let Cap out," I tell her, giving her a kiss on the cheek. Innocent enough. "Get some sleep, Mommy." I wink.

She pouts. "Can't Emmett or Rose take Cap out?"

No. I'll do it, because it's hard for me to see Jasper with River, baby.

"You have Jazz and your mom here," I say, forcing a smile. "I'll see you tomorrow at home, okay?"

I keep the smile on my face as she watches me.

"Fine," she replies after a moment, eyes leaving me for River. "I'll see you tomorrow, Edward. Drive safe."

I sigh, knowing that things are far from "fine".

142.

JPOV

"You still haven't sent me pictures of River, son," Mom reminds me. "I'd like to see him before we visit next week."

I chuckle. "I promise I'll send them tonight."

"Good. Now, fill me in. How does it feel to be a father?"

I run a hand through my hair before plopping down at the bed.

A father. I'm a father.

"It's surreal," I reply, staring up at the ceiling. I hate that I don't share this room with Bella anymore, and... maybe I would feel more like a dad if we were together like a family. But no... instead she's sneaking around with Edward. What's so special about him, anyway?

Since we arrived back at the house last week, the days have been full of diapering, feeding, burping, screaming... Hell, the nights, too. I guess in a way, I'm a little relieved that Bella has River with her in Rose's old room. Oh, believe me, I make sure that Edward and she don't share a room. I'm pretty sure now that they've shared in the past. God, I've been blind to it. But not anymore. Fuck no. After seeing them kissing in the hospital, I've opened my goddamn eyes, and I see the way Bella watches him. Whenever Edward's in the room, she has her eyes on either him or River.

She never looked at me like that, and it pisses me off.

It also pisses me off to see Edward interact with River.

I may be in Port Pines right now, but I still work. Only, I work at the main office here, and when I come home, I often find Edward and River in the

living room. And Edward's guitar, of course. Seriously, is there something wrong with the fucking stereo? He doesn't have to play the damn guitar.

The only good thing going on right now is that Edward tends to leave the room when I'm there.

Same goes for Renee. Edward leaves when she's in the room. Problem is, she's going back to Seattle tomorrow, which leaves me alone to supervise.

"Jasper, did you hear me?"

Right.

"Sorry, Mom. You were saying?"

"I said that you need to get back to Bella," she tells me sternly. "You won't ever do better than her, and now that you have a son together, you need to be a family."

Trust me, Mom. I'm working on it.

But before I can answer her verbally, my work phone rings.

Caller ID: Home.

"I'll call you later, Mom. My boss is calling."

143.

JPOV

I answer the call with, "I gave you a key to my place for emergencies. Is my apartment on fire or something?"

I know I shouldn't give Maria attitude, but we're off the clock, and she's crossing lines. She promised that she was going to back off until I knew more, and now she's doing the opposite.

To my annoyance, Maria chuckles. "I see that Bella hasn't taken you back yet. I told you she wouldn't, Jazz."

I clench my teeth.

Deep breaths.

It was all very simple in the beginning. I told Maria that I would give her... us... an honest chance if Bella didn't take me back.

Having Maria around hasn't been the easiest, 'cause she's a sexy woman. A few years older than me and so fucking sure of herself. It's a turn-on, and the fact that she wants me is only making things harder. But... I want Bella more. Much more. We belong together. So, no... I haven't slept with Maria. Haven't even kissed her. I won't. Not until I know that I have no chance with the love of my life, and I know that I have a chance. I just have to play my cards right.

"What do you want, Maria?" I ask curtly.

She huffs. "You. But that's beside the point. I'm calling to let you know that I need you back in LA next week."

Goddammit. "You told me you had everything covered for a month," I say pointedly. "And I've only been in Port Pines for a week."

"Oh, don't give me that shit, Jasper. I know very well that you want to come back to LA. It's home to you now. You may be a dad, but you still want California and your job. You want to have it all. Well, let me enlighten you. It won't work."

I hang up.

It will work.

I will have it all.

144.

And Jasper's thinking... I need to talk to Edward.

BPOV

After saying goodbye to Mom, I lock myself in my room.

On the bed, it's just me and River.

The room is quiet, but there's a storm raging inside of me.

Mom's words, of course. She wants me to be with Jasper. She thinks it's best if we were a family. She tells me to think about what's best for River.

Her words... they hurt. I don't want to listen... because they don't feel right.

But I remember growing up, and... Fuck.

Then there's Jasper. Oh, Jasper... Will he ever give up? I don't know how many times I've told him that we're over. I don't love him in that way anymore, and I keep telling him. Not that this keeps him from continuing.

Lastly, Edward. He's hurting me. I need him, and he's pulling away.

He's there for River, but as soon as I approach... he just shuts down.

Yesterday, he told me that he has a lot to think about.

And I'm starting to really believe that he's changed his mind.

"It's a good thing I have you, baby," I murmur softly, tracing River's little nose with my finger.

145.

And Bella's thinking... As soon as Jasper has returned to LA, I will give Edward an ultimatum.

EPOV

I can't keep doing this.

I've tried, and it hasn't worked. Not even a little. I thought some distance would make things easier. At least now when Jasper's home and I have to watch Bella and him interact with their son. But nothing works. No matter what I do, the end result is still the same: I want Bella and River. I want us to be a family.

And with Jasper returning to LA in a few weeks, I know how easy it will be to slip back into the bubble Bella and I created. Problem is, if we go back to that, I will shatter if something rips it away from me. I want it permanently. Even if I will just be River's stepdad, I want to be there. Because I can't say that Bella has shown any signs of going back to Jasper now that they have River. I'd be lying to myself if I said that.

So... I have to talk to her. I have to come clean, and I have to tell her exactly what I want. Honesty. I will tell her everything.

"Edward?"

I look up from the patch of grass I've been staring at for the past hour to see Jasper taking a seat on the patio.

"What's up?" I ask, standing up. I look over my shoulder, making sure that Cap is still around, and he is, of course. Then I join Jasper.

"Something wrong with River?"

He tilts his head, watching me for a moment.

At times, I'm pretty sure he knows about my feelings for Bella, but I can't bring myself to care anymore.

"Nope, he's sleeping," he says. "For once," he adds with an eye roll.

I furrow my brows, but keep quiet.

"Anyway," he sighs. "Can we talk for a minute?"

146.

And Jasper's thinking... Don't understand what Bella sees in that loser.

EPOV

"Sure," I reply, hoping I don't come off as anxious.

But when someone says they need to talk, it's rarely a good sign.

So, when Cap nudges my leg, I pick him up, glad for the distraction.

"Turns out, I have to return to LA a bit sooner," Jasper tells me, leaning forward on his knees. "Next week, in fact." And why am I not surprised? "Which also means that I have to tell my parents to postpone their visit."

Uh-huh. So?

After what Bella's told me about the Whitlocks, they're not people I wanna meet anyway. All they want is for River to be a Whitlock. And Bella, too, of course.

"Anyway, before I leave, I wanted to tell you something," he sighs. Then he faces me fully, a look of determination on his face. "I need to get back with Bella, especially now that we have a son. We should be a family."

Churning, twisting, stabbing, fucking nausea.

I keep my eyes on Cap as I scratch him behind his ears.

Family. He wants them to be a family.

I know this, of course, but...

Rolling the barbell in my tongue over my lip ring, I try to come up with something to say, but I honestly don't know how to respond to that. I mean, it won't ever happen if it's up to me. I will be the one with Bella. But then again, Jasper is River's real dad. However... DNA doesn't mean everything. Because I will be the one who's here.

"And you're telling me this why?" I eventually reply.

He chuckles wryly, but says nothing for a while.

The sun sets behind the trees, and I turn my baseball cap so that I have it on backwards. It makes it easier to see Jasper, and yeah... he has to know. He has to know about my feelings for Bella. And he's telling me this as a warning. He wants me to back off.

"Did Bella ever tell you about Renee and Charlie?" he asks then, arching a brow at me.

I frown. "No. I mean, yes. But not the details."

He nods. "Well, allow me to fill you in, Cullen."

147.

And Bella's thinking... Am I asking for too much?

EPOV

I remember Bella telling me that her dad was unfaithful. He basically ripped their family apart, and it wasn't just the cheating. It was also the fact that Renee took him back... before Charlie repeated his "mistakes" all

over again. Three times. Three times, Renee took him back. And each time ended the same way. After that third time, Charlie found someone else that he stayed with.

I never pushed Bella for details, because I could see how it affected her.

And... as curious I am, I'm not sure it's right for Jasper to tell her story.

So, I tell him as much. "Pretty sure Bella's story is hers to tell, no?" I raise a brow.

Jasper just shrugs. "But since she hasn't, I'll step in. I want you to know this, because hopefully you'll back off once you've heard it."

Ah, so we're acknowledging the pink elephant.

He smirks. "Think I didn't know that you want her, Edward?"

"Get to your point instead," I reply dryly.

It's going to take a miracle, or... rather a disaster... for me to stay away from Bella.

"All right." He nods stiffly. "I guess you know that Bella's father destroyed their family, starting when she was seven years old."

I clench my jaw. I didn't know about her age, but yeah... "He was unfaithful. More than once. Renee took him back each time."

Another nod. "The last time it happened, Bella was fourteen." I wanna wipe off the smug look on his face. "And I was there for her, Edward. Me."

See, this isn't how I would react. I wouldn't look smug. I would feel devastated to have seen Bella broken up over this. I wouldn't brag about the fact that I was the one helping her to move on.

"How noble of you," I say flatly. "I bet it makes you feel so good."

He glares at me. "Know what? All you need to know is that Bella hated the fact that her parents weren't together. Her dad broke her heart, you know. They used to be really close, too. Which just made it sting so much more." I grit my teeth. "Charlie basically ruined her childhood. So, I gotta know, Edward... Shouldn't we get the chance to stay together as a family?"

Fuck.

"Because I want to give her everything, Edward. I would never do what Charlie did."

My anger flares. "Isn't this up to Bella?"

Leaning back in his seat, he looks way too comfortable and confident for my liking. "Of course, but it's easier for me if you're not around to fuck shit up. Plus, it's not just about Bella." I frown. "There's River, too. He's just a baby. He needs adults to make decisions for him, and... Think of it this way; River is Bella."

"What the fuck are you talking about, Jasper?" I hiss.

Jesus, I just wanna smash his head against a wall.

Then there's also the goddamn nausea.

It feels like I'm about to lose everything I'm willing to fight for.

"Think about it, Cullen." He sneers. "Knowing what Bella grew up with... Put yourself in River's shoes. Wouldn't you want your parents to stay together? And wouldn't you resent the man standing in between your parents?"

It feels like I've been punched in the gut.

148.

And Jasper's thinking... With Edward out of the way, I can finally move forward.

BPOV

During the days, I'm left to my thoughts.

Edward's at work.

Jasper, too.

Same goes for Rose and Emmett, of course. But when Edward comes home from work each day, it's my cue to leave.

He spends time with River while I shower and get ready for another dinner at Rose and Em's house.

That's the way it's been for the past week.

With Edward avoiding me, it's all I can do.

Then, late at night when Jasper comes back from Cullen Media's main office, I return to the house so that he can have a few moments with River before heading to bed.

Everything is awkward.

But it's changing tomorrow. Some way, somehow, because Jasper's returning to LA tomorrow, and I'm going to talk to Edward. Even if I have to tie the fucker down. And... I honestly don't know what his problem is, because it sure as hell isn't River. Edward adores him. It's so evident. Just one look at him and you know. So... what's his issue? Don't know, but I'll find out tomorrow.

~o~

"I'm gonna miss you," Jasper says softly.

The words were for me, not River.

Standing in the hallway, it's time to say goodbye to Jazz.

"Have a safe flight," I reply quietly, averting my eyes to the sleeping boy in my arms.

I flinch when Jasper reaches up to tuck a piece of hair behind my ear, and when I look up at him, it's not the usual hurt I see in his eyes. No, now it's annoyance.

He sighs. "Bella-"

"Don't," I hiss quietly. It's too fucking early in the morning to deal with this. "Just leave, Jazz. I'll see you in a month."

I can see how he holds back.

Lucky for him, he doesn't say anything else. He just drops a kiss on the top of River's head.

Then he walks out the door.

I exhale.

And half an hour later, I hear Edward coming down the stairs as I sit in the living room. He's getting ready to go to work, no doubt, and... there's something I want him to think about today.

"Edward?" I say, quietly, so as to not wake up River. He's asleep on the couch cushion next to me. In my periphery, I can see Edward standing in the doorway to the living room. But I don't look up at him. "We're gonna talk when you get home from work today." Not asking. Telling.

You could hear a pin drop.

He has to know that I've had enough of this tiptoeing.

"Okay," he breathes out.

149.

And Jasper's thinking... Yeah, I'm confident.

I call my parents.

EPOV

Work is out of the question.

Sitting in my office on the set, all I can think about is later... when I come home.

I don't expect her to understand.

Not even a little.

Home.

I nearly snort.

She's going to ask me to move out.

Understandable.

But... hopefully, she'll understand one day. In the future. Maybe.

Eventually.

It's for River.

I'm not saying that Bella and Jasper should be together, but I am saying that I won't stand in the way. Because as much as I hate to admit it, I would resent anyone who stood between my parents. And the last thing I want is for that boy to resent me.

I knew right away that I was gonna agree to step back after Jasper and I had talked out on the patio. I knew it; he knew it. However... since all of this was for River's sake, I made Jasper promise me something in return.

I told him that he had to make a fucking effort to be the dad River needs.

With a cocky smirk, he promised.

Lastly, I told him that I wasn't going to wait around forever if Bella was miserable.

With another cocky smirk, he assured me that he knew how to make Bella happy.

We'll just have to see.

150.

And Jasper's thinking... First step is to become her best friend again.

BPOV

It takes a while, because River's having a fit, but after feeding, burping, and changing his diaper, he falls asleep. And after grabbing the baby monitor, I walk downstairs again to where Edward's waiting in the living room.

Leaning forward on his knees, he keeps his eyes downcast.

I take my seat in a chair.

No plans to stall.

"Mind telling me why you're pushing me away, Edward?"

I smile bitterly when he doesn't even flinch. It's clear that he's been expecting this.

I'm used to see him in basketball shorts, a t-shirt, and one of his baseball caps that he usually has on backwards, but this... this is different. He didn't change after he got home. He's still in his black dress pants, white button down, and black tie. A tie that he's loosened... sleeves rolled up... Hair in a complete disarray – more so than usual. He looks... exhausted.

"I can't do this, Bella," he sighs, never looking up.

And it feels like he's kicking me.

Can't do this. He can't do this.

Right.

"You mean..." I swallow hard. "You don't want me anymore?"

Now he flinches, still not looking away from the fucking floor. "That's not..." He shakes his head. Another heavy sigh leaves him. Shoulders slump. "I'm not the one you should be with."

I clench my jaw.

And I'm fucking pissed. Furious.

"Oh, yeah? Then who should I be with, Edward?" I snap.

No answer.

He never said that he didn't want me. Only that I shouldn't be with him, and I'm sick and tired of hearing bullshit about "should". I've heard it from Mom, I've heard it from Jazz... Now Edward, too? Well, fuck that.

"I'm just..."

"You just...?" Look up, for fuck's sake. "Come on, Edward. Tell me," I spit out the words, feeling frustrated as hell. "Enlighten me, please."

Finally he looks up. "I'm just thinking about River." Oh, he didn't. "I refuse to come in between two parents, and Jasper obviously wants..." He shuts up when he notices my glare. I'm sure I'm boiling on the outside, just as I am on the inside.

"That's it?" I all but snarl out. "You're backing out because Jasper wants...?" I can't fucking believe this. "So, because Jasper wants me, you're out," I state flatly. "Wow. See, here I thought my opinion mattered, but I guess I'm wrong, huh?"

He pales.

Fucking idiot.

And I know that I'm this close to breaking down.

"Bella, I-" He pulls at his hair, looking pained, but... I'm sorry, I just can't bring myself to care right now. And how dare he say that it's about River? My son. Does that mean he knows better than I do? Does mean he's better at parenting than I am? Just because I want Edward... regardless of who River's dad is... does that make me a bad mother? Because I thought happiness counted.

Mere days ago, my plan was to tell Edward it was all or nothing.

Because the sneaking around is killing me.

Now I'm not sure I want him to have that first option.

No.

I don't.

"Fine," I say, and I hear how empty my voice is. "I'd say we're done, but..." I chuckle humorlessly. "We never really started, did we?" I'm

suddenly exhausted. Emotionally drained. Hurt. Angry. "I'll follow your advice, 'cause you're so all knowing."

I see the pain flash in his eyes, and since I see his, I hope he sees mine.

There's not a chance in hell I'm going to take Jasper back.

It doesn't matter what these three idiots tell me. Edward, Jasper, Mom... because to me it doesn't feel right. I want to be happy. Sue me. Staying with Jasper because we have a son together is a reason, but not the right one. At least... not for me.

"Fuck, Bella, I'm sorr-"

"Don't!" I snap angrily.

With the walls closing in on me, I need my escape.

"I'm out," I choke out, standing up. "Goodnight, Edward."

And I know that he won't be here tomorrow morning.

151.

And Edward's thinking... God, I miss them.

BPOV

Edward wasn't there when I woke up the next morning.

More than four months later, he's still not home.

It's not his home anymore.

He spent a few weeks in one of Emmett's guest rooms before he bought an apartment on Third Street – right above Little Stage. Not that I've been there, but... we're all so damn close, it's impossible not to know how he is

or what he's doing. And what I know is that he's working like crazy. He even reassigned his assistant – Eric – to keep himself busier. I know this because Rose and Esme never fail to bring up Edward when we get together.

I haven't been completely honest with Esme, because... Well, she's his mother. It's a bit uncomfortable to talk about that with her, but I've told Rose everything, at least. She knows it all, even about those months Edward and I snuck around. No, she wasn't surprised. Not one bit. The only that she couldn't understand was why Edward would just give up. We still don't understand, because as far as we know, he still wants me. At least, that's what Emmett says.

In the beginning, I didn't want to hear about it. I was just so fucking hurt, and I spent my first month crying my eyes out, only interacting with River. Which wasn't healthy, of course, but it was what it was. And then I was hit by a cold shower twice in one day. First when I received Edward's rent check. He didn't live here anymore, but he still paid. That was just insulting... in some weird way. Then, the second cold shower: Jasper's return. For the first time, it was just me, him, and River at the house.

I told him everything, of course, and when he offered to pay what I needed, I just accepted. Partly because the last thing I wanted was to find a new roommate, and partly because I was pleasantly surprised to find him comforting instead of smug. I mean, it was still that cold shower to see him, because the last thing I wanted was more drama, but... after a few awkward moments, I was able to relax. He even apologized for his previous behavior. He was honest and said that he was still in love with me, but also that he needed to respect my feelings. That felt good. Granted, I was still apprehensive, but dammit, I needed a friend.

And we spent that week taking it easy. He still worked, but when he got back to the house, it was comfortable. We ate dinner, we watched some

TV, we talked a little, mostly about River, and then we went to bed separately. He kept his distance, for which I was grateful.

In a way, he brought me out of my funk.

One month was enough of wallowing.

After that, I ventured further. Knowing that Edward wasn't at Emmett's anymore, I accepted a dinner invitation from Rose, and it was nice to get out for a change. I hadn't exactly been hiding, but... yeah, okay, I had.

Anyway, after opening up to Rose, I felt even better. That led to more, and soon I had Esme back in my life, too. Not that they were ever gone, but like I said... or reluctantly admitted... I did hide for a month or so, focusing solely on River.

My second month was... all about resignation. I came to realize that my feelings for Edward weren't going anywhere just because he had moved out. And I think this was something Esme and Rose picked up on. Subtly, they mentioned little things about him, and yeah, I soaked it all up. A part of me hated it. But then I also admitted to myself that I didn't want to get over Edward. I still don't. I love loving him... even if he's been an ass. And he's still wrong, in my opinion. Being with him is still something I want, but that doesn't mean I'm going to let it happen. At least not with a snap of my fingers. Plus, it's not an option, is it? He made things clear.

Third month. Again, it was Jasper's visit that made me feel better. Slowly but surely, I started to think that we could be genuine friends. The only thorn in my side, really, about that week, was that he seemed more interested in being my friend than being River's father. But I took what he offered, silently hoping he'd bond more with River soon enough.

I digress.

It was after Jasper's return to LA that I finally caved. Emmett had pleaded with me for weeks. He wanted me to visit the set.

Since I was in a slightly better place in my life after Jazz's visit, I did as... begged... and I visited work, knowing that Edward would be there.

And he was.

The way my breathing became shallow, the way my pulse quickened, the way my stomach fluttered... it all solidified what I thought; I'm not going to get over Edward Cullen. And I think I'm fine with that.

Though I could see how hesitant he was to approach that day, he still did, and I saw that River was the one who made him. That didn't hurt. That made me wistful. He was still... him. And I missed him like crazy... still do.

But I wasn't just missing the man I loved. I also missed my best friend, because that was he was. Apart from Rose, he's... Christ, I can't even think straight where he's concerned.

Conversation was another matter, though. It was one thing to watch him as he held River... how he smiled at him... But when he returned River to me... Yeah, that was awkward. And so very conveniently, Emmett and Rose were nowhere to be found. But we got through it with few words and meaningless topics. Still, it made me return the next day.

It progressed from there. Edward was mostly focused on River, but I found myself reveling in it, and after a few more weeks, we could at least hold a simple conversation without drowning in awkwardness.

There was also Christmas, and I thought it was going to be extremely uncomfortable, but it wasn't.

We all spent Christmas at Carlisle and Esme's house.

It was... pleasant. All thanks to Esme and Emmett, I have to say. Those two kept things relaxed and easy. We didn't steer near certain topics. We simply enjoyed a day together. Even the McCartys were there, so focus landed on Rose quite a bit since it was her first time meeting Emmett's parents.

Then... January rolled around.

I wanted Edward in my life, but I wasn't sure to what extent. With "us" being off the table, I didn't want him too close, because I'm still so incredibly in love with him. But I needed something.

When I talk to Rose about it, she doesn't say much. Mostly because she's as confused – and a bit pissed – as I am. Like me, she can't understand his view. And apparently, the "Edward-Bella situation" is a forbidden subject in the McCarty-Hale household. I definitely understand why. With Emmett being Edward's cousin and Rose being my closest girlfriend, I get why they try to keep their distance. Rose is a listener, and she shares her opinions, but there's no meddling, no planning. We're kinda standing still. There's no going somewhere with this.

Does it all hurt?

Like hell.

I'm lonely.

But I have my son to focus on.

And in February, he makes my day... week, month, year...

It's Valentines Day, and he says "Mama" for the first time.

152.

And Bella's thinking... It'll be nice to get out of town for a little while.

EPOV

There's usually only one person texting me, and that's Emmett. Always for the same reason. At least during work hours.

Bella's here with River and Cap – Em

I'm out of my office in a flash.

She comes by almost every day now, and... it's pathetic how that's all I have that's good in my life. Then again, I have myself to blame for that. I should've been honest. Most of all, I should've talked to the woman before I made any kind of decision.

So, when Bella visits the set, I soak it all up because that's what I have.

"Right on cue," Emmett chuckles when I join them outside his trailer.

I give them a small smile, but I doubt it looks very genuine. Rose is holding River, and... isn't it my turn yet?

I'm a little impatient when it comes to that little dude.

Christ, I can barely believe that he's five months old.

"All right, here he is... before you bite my head off," Rose huffs playfully, handing River over to me. Finally. "So, Bella, you were saying something about Seattle?"

With River in my arms, I squat down to greet Cap, too, but my attention is definitely divided. Seattle? What about Seattle?

"Yeah, you like Cap, don't you?" I chuckle quietly when River bounces on my thigh. Arms flailing and mouth running as we pet Captain.

"Mamamamm." That's River, of course. Everything is mamamam to him.

Unless Bella picks him up. Nowadays, it's just Mama. Sometimes Mamam. Or Mamaaa. Depends on his mood, really.

Fucking cute.

Tuning into Bella and Rose's conversation again, I hear them talking about a trip. To Seattle, no doubt. Bella's going there. Damn. To visit family.

"When are you going?" Em asks her.

"In a couple of days," Bella murmurs. "Jasper was supposed to be here this week, but he has a job interview, so we decided on next week instead. And after talking to Mom, I realized that it's been a long time since I visited."

"So, Jazz is going with you?" Rose wonders. "And wait. What job interview?"

I listen intently while peppering River's face with noisy kisses. They make him giggle like crazy, and I join in with a few quiet laughs as he grabs my face. He's strong, I gotta say.

"There's a job opening at Cullen Media's office in New York," Bella responds, and I've heard all about it. We only have a small branch there, but they're focused on marketing, and I have heard of the opening.

"Jasper's thinking about it. It would take him away from the assistant's title."

It would also bring him closer to Port Pines.

Fuck.

But that's what he promised me, right? So... I should be happy that he's making an effort.

Yeah, I should be happy.

153.

And Jasper's thinking... This is my chance.

BPOV

I smile when I see Jasper at Sea-Tac.

"There you are," he says, spotting me at the same time. "How was the flight?"

I huff and tighten my hold on River. "Flying with a little baby? Not awesome." I grin.

A part of me already wants to return to Port Pines, but I gotta admit that it feels good to get away, too. This is just what I need, and... Yeah, I think I'm gonna have two good weeks here. Two weeks of relaxing, two weeks of seeing family, two weeks of catching up with old friends.

"I can imagine," Jazz murmurs, kissing River's cheek. "Damn, he grows fast," he chuckles, and I push down my snarky remarks. As far as I know, Jasper's interview in New York went well, and if he gets the job, maybe he can finally see more of his own son. But as it is now... I have to say I'm disappointed. I mean, I knew it was going to be like this, but he rarely pays attention to River even when he's home.

"So," he grins, "how about we drop off your bags at Renee's house before we head over to my parents' for dinner?"

I nod. "Sounds good."

154.

And Emmett's thinking... The fact that I'm not allowed to tell Rose about Edward and Bella's first night is fucking killing me. 'Cause Rosie's a

woman. If I could just tell her, then maybe she could come up with some plan.

EPOV

"Stop sulking, Cullen," Rose sighs. "You're making me cranky, for fuck's sake."

I'm not sulking.

Okay, I'm sulking.

But she's been gone for a week now, and I hate it. I know I've gone a lot longer without seeing her, but this is somehow worse. Most likely because she's with Jasper in Seattle. It makes me wonder if she's giving him a chance. I know they're not together, but... will they be? Jasper sure wants it, and I can only imagine that how he's using these two weeks to get closer.

This is why I'm having dinner at Emmett and Rose's house tonight, 'cause if I spend more time in my apartment, I'm gonna lose my mind thinking about those two in Seattle.

"Sorry," I mutter, dropping the pizza crust back onto the plate. "Thanks for dinner, by the way."

Rose chuckles wryly. "No problem, Mr. Martyr."

I love my new nickname.

Sarcasm.

Unfortunately, it's fitting. So are Mr. Cullenidiot and Edfool.

Rose is quite creative.

But like I've said before, I have only myself to blame. Only an idiot walks away from the love of his life the way I did. Especially since said love of my life wanted me, too.

She wanted me, and I wanted her. Want. Not wanted. Though, I assume it's wanted in her case. God, I hate past tense. But yeah... we were both on the same page, and I pushed her away. I deluded myself into thinking that it was for River's sake and, in the process, I handed over Bella to Jasper on a silver platter.

Not that Bella is an object.

I never thought of her that way consciously, but Emmett sure made me realize that I'd treated her as an object. That was the first thing he said... or shouted... after I had told him everything. That first night, when I spent the night in one of their guestrooms, he sure let me have it. Once I had confessed everything to him – including the months Bella and I were together in secret – he made me see what a fool I'd been.

'Cause here's the thing.

I was the one who wanted us to sneak around. Not Bella. She did that for me, but she wanted us to be official.

And after River was born, I was the one who pulled away. Not Bella.

She never gave me a reason to be insecure... at least not on purpose. The pregnancy, Jasper's feelings about her, their past, and of course, that night where she ended up in bed with him after being with me... yeah, all those things fucked me up, leaving me doubting everything. But she was fucking drugged. It was never what she wanted, and she's told me this so many times. Yet, I was still unable to relax and trust.

Emmett said something smart the night I left home, or... Bella's house. "It was doomed from get-go since you didn't tell her about that first night."

He was right. Had I only been honest from the beginning...

"You're sulking again, dude."

I look up from my plate, seeing both Emmett and Rose staring at me.

I sigh.

155.

And Edward's thinking... I need a vacation. Now. Before I lose my mind.

BPOV

"Oh, shut up," I chuckle as I punch Jasper in the arm. "He wasn't that bad."

"He was!" he exclaims through laughs. I shake my head at him, returning my gaze to the yearbook in my hands. "I swear, throughout senior year, that kid was stuck to you like a Band-Aid."

"Kid?" I snort, unable to hide my amusement. "Jake's just a year younger than me, Jazz."

"Whatever," he sighs dramatically, still grinning as he drapes an arm around me. It's not what I want, but I don't want to ruin the moment, either. Our first week in Seattle has been full of catching up with old high school friends, cooking and baking with Charlotte and Mom, gushing over River, looking through photo albums, and talking about old times. It's good to have my friend back. Not that I'm fooling myself. I know that Jasper still wants more, but that's not going to happen.

The baby monitor has my attention then as I hear River waking up from his nap, so I stand up from the couch, telling Jasper that I'll be right back. Then I walk up the stairs to Jasper's old room where my little kiddo's sleeping.

"Hey, sweetie," I coo softly as I pick him up.

"Mmmamama," he responds before jumping into his usual talk-mode. I swear, I'd give a million bucks to understand his language. It's all his does while I change his diaper. Talk, talk, talk. And he's so freaking cute. Except for when he grabs my hair. I don't like that one little bit.

"I think you're ready for dinner, aren't ya?" I say, nuzzling our noses together. God, I live for his giggles. "Yeah, let's get you some food, baby."

When I reach the living room again, I notice that Jasper's not there, so I follow the voices that bring me and River to the kitchen. Mom, Charlotte, and Jazz are all there. And I quickly see that something's wrong. Mom is standing quietly by the stove, stirring in some pot, but Jazz and Charlotte are having a staring... or, rather glaring contest by the kitchen island.

"What's wrong, guys?" I ask, and three heads whip around at the sound of my voice.

I also notice how pale Jasper is.

"Bella." Jazz gulps. "Can I talk to you for a moment?"

I frown in confusion and nod.

Mom takes River from me, offering to feed him dinner, and I follow Jasper up the stairs, into his old room.

156.

And Emmett's thinking... If he's not better by the time he returns, I'm telling Rose everything.

EPOV

"What do you mean?" Emmett asks, on the verge of sounding angry.

"What the fuck is your problem, dude? You're leaving. Again."

"It's not like that," I groan in frustration as I try to locate my passport. It's here somewhere, I know it. Fuck, I hate my apartment. "I just need a few weeks, that's all. I promise." Finally! I find my passport in a kitchen drawer. Yeah. "I cleared it with Dad and Liam." I move toward my tiny bedroom and start throwing clothes in a bag. He follows. "I'll be back in three weeks, Em."

But I need this.

I need to think about the fuckery that is my life, and the secluded beach in Veracruz is calling my name. Honest, I'm not running. But I still have my cousin's words running on a damn loop in my head. The words about starting a relationship with a clean slate. Honesty is the key. So, I need to think of an approach. Not that I can see Bella ever wanting me again, but... regardless... she deserves to know the truth. Even if I can only be friends with her, it's still a relationship. I'm done making a mess. I'm done making assumptions. I will start over. I will be honest.

She will probably kick my ass, but... if that's what it takes.

She will probably also hate me.

Most likely.

Yeah, she will.

But I have to tell her.

Now I have three weeks to come up with how I will tell her.

"When Bella comes back next week, tell her I'll be back in two weeks, all right?" I say to Emmett.

His jaw is tense. "Three weeks, Edward. If you're not back in three weeks..."

He leaves it there, but I understand the warning.

So, I nod.

Then I grab my bag and my guitar, ready to leave.

157.

And Jasper's thinking... I never planned this, but damn, it couldn't have been more perfect.

BPOV

"You look like you've seen a ghost," I comment, sitting down on the edge of Jasper's bed. "And your mom looked pissed."

He smiles sheepishly, settling in the chair by his desk. "Yeah, you could say she's pissed." He clears his throat, and he's obviously uncomfortable and nervous. "Um, as you know, my parents want us to... you know..."

I barely hide my grimace as I nod. "They want us to be together, yeah."

He nods, too, and looks down. "Right. Well, while they do want that..." He trails off and stays quiet for a moment. When he looks up again, I see defeat. "I did something really fucked-up."

Slowly, my eyebrows rise up.

"Remember Nana Pearl?" he sighs heavily, and I shudder.

Pearl Whitlock. Jasper's grandmother on his father's side. Vile woman, never satisfied. She hates Charlotte – Jasper's mom. She's pissed at Peter for choosing Charlotte. Why? Because she's not fancy enough. It's all so very ridiculous, and the times I've met her, it's taken all my strength not

to throttle the bitch. She always complained about Jasper for not following his father's path to become a lawyer.

"Judging by your face, I'd say you remember," he says dryly. With a grimace, I nod. "Do you also remember her timing?" I chuckle wryly, nodding again. Pearl lives in Texas, much to the Whitlocks' pleasure, and they rarely even speak on the phone. But... she does have a tendency of showing up unannounced. And it dawns on me. I gasp. Jasper sighs again, confirming my fear with a cringe. "Yep, she's coming. She just called from Sea-Tac. Dad just left to pick her up."

I frown. "But what does this have to do with you fucking something up?"

And he turns nervous again, averting his eyes to the floor.

"Um... she called me a few weeks ago," he mutters quietly. "And, uh... she asked if you and I were back together yet." He huffs, shaking his head, and I swallow hard. He didn't, did he? "When River was born, she really... Fuck. I mean... you remember her conservative ways..." He pulls at his hair. "And I was..."

"Jazz," I grit out through clenched teeth. "Spit it out."

I have a feeling I know.

He groans. "I told her we were engaged."

All the air leaves me in a fucking whoosh.

"You did what?" I screech, making him flinch.

I thought he'd told her that we were, in fact, back together, but... engaged?

Fucking idiot!

"I'm sorry!" he exclaims before smacking himself in the forehead. "I fucked up, I know! But... shit, I was just so fucking sick of her judging and condescending..."

I start pacing by the bed.

I can't believe it.

He told her that we were engaged. Engaged!

"Holy fuck," I breathe out, coming to a stop. "And she's coming here."

Tonight. Like... so soon.

God, this is... this is...

"Gah, I can't believe you, Jasper!" I cry out.

I'm so fucking angry that I'm shaking, but... as much as I truly hate Jasper for doing this, I can see how he was driven to do something this stupid because I know Pearl. She's vicious, mean, and evil.

Hell, at Jasper's high school graduation dinner, her toast was, "You're my only grandchild, so I guess I just have to live with the fact that you're headin' off to college to study marketin'. A damn shame, but... Cheers!"

Yeah, a lovely fucking woman.

"I'm so sorry, Bella," he sighs heavily. "I'll set her straight when she comes here," he adds with both hands covering his face, and I laugh bitterly.

Unbelievable.

Insane.

"Yeah, I'm sure that'll work out well for you," I say sarcastically. I sigh, returning to my pacing again. Fuck. Ugh. "How long is she staying for?"

"A week," he mutters.

A week.

Fuck my life.

"Can't believe I'm doing this," I mumble to myself.

"Doing what?" he asks apprehensively.

I glare at him. "Get me a fucking ring, Jazz," I growl, and his eyes widen. I huff. "I know Charlotte has the one from her mother. Get. It. For. Me." A week. I can survive one week. What Jazz wouldn't survive is a face-to-face confrontation with Pearl. He knows it; I know it. "Don't look so fucking surprised that I would help you," I add angrily. He gulps. "But I have conditions."

"Anything!" he cries out.

Jerk.

"One," I count down on my fingers, "you'll confess to everything as soon as her wrinkly ass is back in Texas." He nods furiously. "Two, no displays of affection. Hand-holding, kisses on the cheek, hugging – fine, but that's it." He nods again. Good, because I don't want there to be any misunderstandings. "And three, since we have a son together and we're supposedly engaged, it's only realistic for us to share a room, and there's not enough space at Mom's house, so..." I take a deep breath. "We can both stay here, but you're sleeping on the fucking floor, Jazz."

Another nod. "I promise, Bella."

Fine.

And Jasper's thinking... River is the way to Bella's heart.

"You're an angel for doing this, sweetie," Charlotte says softly before shooting another glare at Jasper. She hands me the ring, and I swallow hard as I slide it onto my left ring finger. "And don't worry; I will make sure Jasper comes clean as soon as my dear mother-in-law has returned to Texas."

"Good," I huff, enjoying Jazz's discomfort.

I ignore Mom's smile. She wants this too much.

Instead, I pick up River. "I'll go clean him off," I chuckle, seeing the mashed potatoes he's got all over his handsome little face.

Moments later, when I'm done in the bathroom, I hear voices in the hallway.

"Looks like the wicked witch has arrived," I coo to River.

With him in my arms, I make my way to greet her... as Jasper's fiancée.

I snort to myself.

Fiancée.

There's no denying that I'm a girl's girl, and I dreamed of a big white wedding when I was little. But I was marrying a prince, not my ex. And... my prince is Edward.

"Here she is," Jazz murmurs as I reach the crowded hallway. "You okay, darlin'?"

I roll my eyes internally, but on the outside, I smile sweetly. "Yep."

"Want me to take him?" he asks softly, nodding at River. And I'm surprised. He rarely offers to take River.

I'm actually a bit dazed by his offer, so I can only nod.

It feels... good.

Really good.

And it hits me how worried I've been. But it's clear now. What I really want is for River to have his father close. Not necessarily by distance, but I want them to have a good relationship. And... if Jasper doesn't get the job in New York, I know that I'm willing to fly out to LA, if only to let River and Jazz form a better connection.

"Pleasure to see you again, Isabella," Pearl drawls, and... game on.

One week.

Here we go.

And Jasper's thinking... I always knew how to make her laugh.

I'm pretty sure my face is as red as a tomato, and I know that I'm ready to burst with laughter.

Jasper is currently telling Pearl how he "proposed" to me, and he's definitely having fun. Hell, so am I. Even our parents are finding it hard not to laugh.

"So, there we were," he says, really into his story, "inside the Oval Office. And who enters? The president! While I'm on my knee, ready to pop the question!"

I choke before hiding my laughs with coughs.

He's fucking insane, telling Pearl how we were on a private West Wing tour at the White House, and how we took a "detour" – as if that would've

been possible – so that he could propose. I mean, seriously. A proposal at the White House? Silly fucker.

“And then what?” Pearl asks, awestruck and wide-eyed.

Jasper smirks and shrugs. “I proposed with the president watching.”

Mom turns in her seat to wipe away tears from laughing so hard. Laughing silently behind her hand, of course. And she’s also tomato red in the face.

“Oh, that’s just lovely,” Pearl gushes before turning to me. “And you said yes, Isabella.”

“How could I not?” I squeak, still ready to explode. “Jazz, um... you should tell her what happened next.”

His eyes are so fucking happy as he smiles down at me, and I gotta say that it feels good to have this. In a fucked-up situation – one he will still pay dearly for – I’m glad that we still have humor. Jasper was always the one I could count on for a good laugh, and I see that it hasn’t changed. Christ, there’s only one person who I’d say beats him as a funny guy, and... well, we all know who that is. But this... yeah, this is nice.

“Ah, you mean when the horse crapped on you?” he asks, trying to hold back his amusement.

I glare playfully. “No, you know... when we were at the restaurant and Celine Dion came in with Jay Leno.”

“Oh!” Pearl gasps in excitement.

It’s finally Jasper’s turn to go tomato red.

Since he can’t talk, I take over.

Our night continues with fake stories about our fake engagement.

Many laughs are stifled, and I realize that it's been so long since I felt this content. My smiles are genuine, my heart feels better, and I'm starting to believe that I have one of my best friends back in my life.

And Jasper's thinking... I make sure to give River a lot of attention.

Four days later, I feel like a new person.

I collapse on Jasper's bed, exhausted after a day of shopping and sightseeing with Pearl. At the same time, Jasper plops down on the mattress on the floor. He's as exhausted as I am, of course. But we've had fun. So much fun, in fact. Granted, there have been many moments where Pearl has been a complete bitch, especially toward Charlotte, but we've managed anyway. More stories about made-up dates have put a smile on her face. And more than a few giggles.

"I don't think I can come up with any more stories, Bella," he chuckles tiredly, making me grin up at the ceiling. "My creativity ended with our double date with Harrison and Calista."

A laugh bursts through my lips. "That was a good one," I agree before a yawn takes over.

Jesus, I'm tired.

I'm also getting homesick.

I miss Cap.

I miss Rose and Emmett.

I miss... God, I miss Edward.

But I push that thought away. It only hurts.

It won't ever be you two, Bella.

Fuck.

"Time to get some sleep," Jazz sighs. "I'm just gonna go say goodnight to River." He chuckles. "I hope Mom and Dad don't wake up when I go into their bedroom."

Then there's that.

River's been with us each day, and Jasper has been very... attentive. And today, when Mom took River for the day, he's talked about our son a lot. He even called Mom to make sure she didn't drop off River at Charlotte and Peter's house too late, stating that he wanted River close tonight.

"I'll come with you," I murmur.

A moment later, we're both standing by River's crib in Jasper's parents' bedroom.

It's quiet, apart from Peter's snores.

Only a small lamp by the window is lit.

I want to cry when Jasper drapes an arm around me and presses his lips to my temple.

Everything about this moment screams perfection and contentment.

Everything about this moment is perfect.

Except for one thing.

It's not Edward.

It's not Edward's ring I have on my finger.

"He looks just like you," Jasper muses quietly, grinning down at the sleeping River. "It's just my eyes, really."

A smile tugs in the corners of my mouth, and it's true. He really does look like me. As for his eyes... we'll just have to see if they stay blue, or if they turn brown.

"Let's go to bed," I whisper.

That night, I cry into my pillow.

I'm tired...

And so fucking lonely.

And Jasper's thinking... Can I do this now?

"She's gonna go apeshit when you come clean," I chuckle wryly as we watch Peter drive off with Pearl. We stand on the porch steps, waving as the happy couple we've pretended to be. Then, when the car is out of sight, I turn back to Jazz. "Maybe you should tell her that I left you for the president or something." I grin.

He throws me a playful glare before capturing me in a headlock. "Don't even think about it, darlin'," he laughs softly as I push him away. "I already planned the whole thing."

Oh, this I gotta hear. "Do tell," I giggle as we head inside again.

He winks. "You're leaving me for Ellen DeGeneres."

I guffaw, unable to help myself.

And Jasper's thinking... This is it. I'm going all out.

As I pack River's bag, I watch Jasper in my periphery.

After saying goodbye to Pearl, he's been very quiet.

I'm not going home until tomorrow, but my flight leaves early, hence packing now.

Jazz is returning to LA, of course.

Maybe that's why he's quiet?

Could it be because he's going to miss River?

God, I hope so.

It's my goal. For River's sake. I want them to bond more. This week has been perfect, and I'm hopeful.

"Hey, Bella?" he says softly.

I look over my shoulder, seeing him sitting at his desk. The ring I returned to him earlier is spinning on the desk between his fingers.

"Yeah?"

After a beat of silence, he meets my gaze.

"What if it wasn't fake, our engagement?" he asks quietly.

He... um... what?

Uh...

Oh, my...

"You're not kidding, are you?" I breathe out in shock. I feel my knees buckle, so I settle down on the edge of the bed. "You're serious."

He says nothing, but he doesn't have to.

He means it.

My heart starts pounding.

My vision blurs.

My ears start ringing.

I can hear my own pulse, for fuck's sake.

And I want to scream, laugh, cry, and thrash at the same time.

No. No. No. No.

This isn't happening.

"Jazz-" I choke up, shaking my head.

In a flash, he moves over to the bed and sits down next to me.

"Bella, please just let me talk," he begs in a rush, and I can barely breathe. "I know you don't feel that way about me anymore, I do." I gulp. "And you know that I'm still so fucking in love with you, but..." God, this cannot be real. "Please. Just give me a chance. We can be a family, Bella, and I won't ever pressure you. Everything can be up to you, just... just give it a chance. For us. For River. I'll be in New York, finally able to be in Port Pines more often, and... it'll be good for River, too!" He's rambling. I'm clutching my chest. My eyes sting. I... Fuck, I already know how he feels about me, but... no. God, just... no. Then there's also... Oh, fuck! I can't think straight. He's too close, and then there's the feeling of what we've had this week. Comfort, easy, friendly. And the relief I felt when Jasper finally started caring about his own son.

"Please, Bella."

This is wrong.

"I won't ever pressure you," he repeats in a whisper.

No pressure?

Then what's this?

He cradles my face. My eyes are still wide. My chest is heaving.

"I just want the three of us together," he says thickly. "Even if we're just friends..." He swallows hard, and I blink back tears. "I miss you, Bella. So much. And... I want the house to feel like home again. Our home."

It hurts.

It's supposed to be Edward.

But Edward said it wasn't right. He said that I shouldn't be with him.

"We can be a family, Bella. Please think about it."

Family.

I wouldn't have to be alone all the time.

But... no, this is still so wrong. So wrong, so wrong.

It's not fair to Jasper, either, because I know that I will never be able to reciprocate. I will just string him along. I know that.

"Think about it," he pleads, resting his forehead against mine. "I'll take care of you, I promise. You and River."

Tears spill over.

It's too much.

I'm overwhelmed.

"I'll be back in Port Pines in two weeks," he croaks. "I beg you, darlin'. Please think about what I've said."

I sit, stunned, with silent tears streaming down my face as he slides the ring back onto my finger. He promises so much comfort, but it's not what I dream of. Accepting wouldn't be fair to either of us, would it? It would be effortless, coming home to a friend who I have a child with, but for how long could that possibly last?

"I know what I'm getting myself into," he insists softly, kissing my knuckles. "I know how you feel, but... don't you feel lonely, Bella?" Yes, I do. Otherwise, I'd be running away right now. I think. "We can be there for each other. And... Fuck, I want a chance to have it all with River. With... with my... with my son."

I suck in a breath.

"Please?" he breathes out. "I'll be home in two weeks. Please give me a chance. Think about all of this. Really, think about it."

I swallow hard.

And... "I'll think about it," I whisper hoarsely.

And Jasper's thinking... It's gonna work. She'll be mine.

When I get home the next day, I can barely stand on my legs.

The house is empty and quiet, of course.

Cap's with Rose and Emmett.

Edward's... Well, I don't know where he is.

"Home sweet home," I sigh, heading straight for the stairs.

River's already asleep in my arms, and he doesn't even stir when I put him down in his crib.

As I collapse on my bed, faces flash before my eyes. Jasper's loving smile as we said goodbye at the airport. Mom's hopeful expression as she squeezed my left hand. Peter's and Charlotte's looks of satisfaction. And I wonder... how will Rose react? Or Emmett?

Edward.

Will this bother him?

"Fiancée," I whisper, eyes on the ceiling. "Fiancée." Still feels wrong. All wrong. But... I will think about it. Because I want contentment. If I can't have happiness, then I want the next best thing.

God, this is fucked up.

"River," I sigh softly. He's my number one. Of course, he's too young to know, or to form an opinion, but I'd like to say that he'd be happy to have his parents together. However, I would also like to say that his parents' happiness come first. And what a vicious cycle, eh? 'Cause I want happiness with Edward.

So... I have to have a goal.

Contentment.

Being a good mom.

Making sure that my son is happy.

And Jasper's thinking... I call often. I ask about River. Hell, I even ask Bella to hold up the phone for him. Christ, the things I put up with.

Over the next few days, I keep to myself.

I talk to Rose over the phone. I tell her that I'm home, and no, I don't tell her about the ring on my finger. I don't tell her about the decision I have to make. I'm too scared, and... I know what she would say, so...

While I'm on the phone with her, though, I find out that Edward is in Mexico again. Apparently, he needed a vacation and won't be back for another two weeks.

I don't even know what to make of that.

Instead, I return to thinking.

I even wait to pick up Cap, driving over to Emmett and Rose's house when I know that they're at work. Because I know that Rose would notice something different about me if she saw me now. Good thing I have a spare key.

Then it's just my two boys. Cap and River.

With the weather warm enough, we spend hours in the backyard. Warm blankets, early spring in the air, sun shining, apples and grapes for Cap, a few toys for River...

And I keep thinking.

Fiancée. Jazz. Fiancée.

My goals, priorities...

To make myself and River as happy as possible.

Jasper calls often, occasionally making me smile.

Not often, but... I should make my own happiness, shouldn't I?

Is that what I'm doing?

Another few days later, I ask that question to Rose after confessing everything.

I'm sobbing at the kitchen table, telling her all about my time in Seattle. I don't miss a thing. Everything Jasper's done, and how he's become more and more attached to River... I spill my beans. Properly.

And it finally happens. I render Rosalie Hale speechless.

She sits there, holding me, and she's completely stunned to silence.

After a long, long while she sighs heavily. "I can't tell you what to do, honey. But... marrying a guy you're not in love with?"

Yeah.

I know.

It's so wrong.

But he makes me feel less lonely.

I'm aware of how selfish it makes me to even consider the engagement.

"He really said he wants it all? Including River?"

Yes, she's as surprised as I am.

But that's my main reason for thinking about Jasper's suggestion.

Although my loneliness is a part of it, it's still mainly the fact that Jasper seems more interested in River now, and... Yeah, I see how wrong that is. He should be there for River, regardless, but I'm desperate. Grasping at straws. I just want something that feels good.

Hours later, Rose leaves.

Her parting words, "I love you, Bella, and I can't tell you what to do. But you deserve so much more than convenience. Please don't settle."

She's right, of course.

But when I wake up the next morning and Jasper calls, wanting to hear River's voice, I'm once again full of doubt.

He's trying for us.

When I River's done "talking", I cradle the phone between my cheek and shoulder.

"Want me to translate what River said?" I joke, plopping down on the couch with a sigh.

River happily throws his chew toys onto the floor, and I pick them up before Cap can get too close.

"No, I understood perfectly," he chuckles. "We were discussing politics, didn't you hear?"

Yes. Please. Make me smile.

My chest feels heavy. Instead of smiling, tears spring to my eyes.

"You okay, darlin'?" he asks softly.

No. I'm not okay.

"Yeah," I respond thickly.

He doesn't buy my lie.

"I'm on the next flight, Bella," he tells me before hanging up, and I start crying.

I don't know if it's relief or the opposite.

Jasper's flying across the country for me.

Looking over at River, I think, think, think.

The words go on repeat. Fiancée. Fiancée.

Could I really give him a chance?

Could I really give him a chance, knowing that I'll never love him?

And Rose is thinking... What the hell am I gonna do?

When Jasper comes back, I decide to think it over for another few days. It hasn't been two weeks since we left Seattle yet, and I'm still too torn. Too conflicted.

But in my mind, I try to picture everything.

He comforts me.

Friend? Fiancé?

Both?

Edward. Edward. Edward.

Jasper. Jasper is the one who is here.

In my mind, I imagine him as my fiancé.

When he feeds River, when he bathes him, when we watch a movie.

My fiancé feeds our son.

I try the words.

Test them out.

"I want you both closer," he sighs softly when it's time to go to bed.

For a while, I just stare at him.

He stands outside his room – our old room – his eyes focused on River who is sleeping with his head on my shoulder.

I stand outside my room.

And then I nod.

Jasper helps me get River's crib into his room.

I follow.

With River sound asleep, I climb into bed after brushing my teeth.

How ironic, I wear one of Edward's t-shirts as Jasper joins me in bed.

As my fiancé joins me in bed.

Still wrong.

"Goodnight," he murmurs.

I'm glad he keeps his distance.

"Goodnight," I mumble.

And Rose is thinking... After finding out that Jasper's already back, I turn to Emmett for help, unable to keep quiet anymore.

Three days later, we've found a routine.

Unfortunately, we find out that Jasper didn't get the job in New York.

"We'll work it out," he promises me. My fiancé promises me. I nod numbly. "Nothing can keep me away from you. And River, of course."

He tries so hard.

I force myself to do the same.

We sleep in the same bed.

He never pressures me for more, for which I'm thankful.

I start to convince myself that it can work.

Mine becomes ours.

I push down everything that feels wrong.

Or... I try to push it down.

When I air my thoughts to Rose, she again tells me not to marry for anything but love.

And again, she couldn't have been more right.

Family. Family. Being a family.

"Christ," I sigh to myself after we've ended our call.

I find Jasper upstairs in his- No. Our room. Ours. It's ours. Nothing is his, and nothing is mine.

Ours.

And I see my reason right there.

Contentment.

My goal: to bring Jasper and River closer to each other.

I smile as I see Jasper cooing and cuddling with our little boy. It makes me hope that maybe we can fix this. Maybe. A part of me doesn't believe it. And it's no wonder why, of course. The feelings I have bottled up are slowly but surely ripping me to pieces. But I need this. Right? This is what I want.

Yes?

"I know you're watching us," I hear Jazz say.

With another smile, I push myself off the doorframe and walk toward our bed.

"Yeah, Mommy's watching us, isn't she?" he coos to River. "Yes, she is. Yes, she is."

Wow, three smiles in less than two minutes. That has to be some kind of record.

Stop being so bitter, Bella.

But it's hard.

I feel lonely, not to mention conflicted. Having a fiancé who works so often – and across the country – it's hard not to notice things that I'm supposed to be used to. Like when he makes me smile. It happens, of course, but not often. And how can it? Since our son was born six months ago, Jazz has been home a total of eight weeks.

But that's going to change now, right?

He said so himself.

He's here for us.

Fiancé, fiancé, fiancé.

"Hey, what's with the frown, darlin'?" Jazz asks, bringing me back to now.

I shake my head to clear it. I smile again, though it feels forced now.

I guess I just wish he could bond more with his son. As for Jazz bonding with me... well... I don't know...

"Just glad to have you home for the weekend," I reply, and it's only the truth for River's sake. I know that.

He hums and turns back to the little one. "Feels good to be back. I've missed a lot."

True.

River does new things everyday.

"His eyes aren't as blue anymore," he comments, giving River an Eskimo kiss. "They almost seem... green."

Hmm?

Well, that's odd. "Probably the lighting in here," I say with a shrug.

Or maybe his eyes are turning brown, who knows?

I have noticed that Jazz has been watching River closely over the past few days.

Now that he's around, I guess he's trying to catch up with everything.

"You wanna do something today?" he asks. "It's Saturday, after all, and since I came home earlier, I might have to return a little sooner. But I'll hurry back, I promise."

He looks so happy.

Like really, truly happy.

And I'm not.

It hits me like a ton of bricks.

Oh, God... this is so wrong.

No matter how many times I repeat "fiancé" in my head, it's still wrong.

Because it's Edward to me. Only him. He still owns me.

"Bella? Are you all right? You look a little..."

Wrong. So wrong. No. I can't...

This felt wrong from the beginning.

How could I ever think it would feel right? Ever.

"I can't," I whimper, shaking my head.

Jasper's out of the bed and standing in front of me a second later, and he steadies me as I try to breathe properly. Christ, how could I even consider it?

Suddenly, it feels like I'm suffocating.

"What is it, darlin'?" he asks worriedly.

Again, I shake my head. "Can't do this." Can't, can't, can't. Tears fall.

As soon as humanly possible, I slide the ring off my fingers.

"Bella!" he exclaims as I hold out the ring with a shaky hand. "No, you don't-"

"Can't," I choke out. "It's not right, Jazz."

"Yes, it is," he says forcefully.

"No." It's not. "Not to you, not to me. I can't. I don't want that with you."

As the words leave my mouth, it feels right.

I shouldn't have forced myself to even consider this.

I may be lonely as hell, but this isn't the way.

"You don't mean it," he whispers harshly.

Blinking back tears, I look up at him.

All I want is for us to be friends. Nothing more, nothing less.

"I do, Jasper. I mean it, because..." I exhale. I tell him my truth. "Because I'm in love with Edward."

The truth shall set you free, right?

158.

And Emmett's thinking... I tell Rose everything.

BPOV

"Edward?" Jazz grits out through clenched teeth. He suddenly looks lethal, and pissed beyond words. "You're in love with Edward?"

I release a breath, both anxious and relieved.

"Yes," I whisper, quietly but strongly. I'm so in love with him, and there's no way I'm settling. It's him or no one. I have to try. I have to talk to him. I never tried to talk him out of his decision to stay away from me, and I should have. I should've made Edward see how he's the one for me. Hell, maybe I even should've confessed my love for him. It wouldn't be a

romantic setting, but I don't care anymore. For all I know, he was aware that I wanted a relationship. But he didn't – and still doesn't – know just to what extent I want him.

We've both been horrible at communicating.

"What the fuck is so special about him?" Jasper seethes, and his pure rage causes me to flinch. "After everything I've done for you. All the goddamn screaming and crying." My eyes widen as he waves a hand toward River on the bed. "All the diaper changes... getting pissed on, and having food thrown at you." Holy shit. I cover my mouth with my hand. It's dawning on me, and I can't believe it. I can't believe him. "I flew across the fucking country for you, and this is how you repay me?"

That manipulative...

"You did it for me," I breathe out in horror. I've been so played. I've been so blind. "You didn't do it for River, or hell, even for yourself. You did it for me."

"Of course, I did it for you!" he snaps, glaring at me. "You know me, Bella. You know I wasn't ready to be a dad, but I did it for you!"

Fury surges through me at a raging speed, and before I know it, my hand makes impact across Jasper's cheek. A resounding smack rings out, and my hand is on fire from the force I put behind the slap. I can barely believe I just did that, but then I do believe it. Not only do I believe it, but I wanna do it again and again. He manipulated me, that fucking asshole.

"Fuck!" he growls, cupping his cheek.

Still blinded by my hurt, anger, and fury, I reach up and grasp his shoulder before I bring my knee to his groin. Hard.

He whimpers and doubles over in pain.

I'm shaking.

Still in disbelief.

His words, his actions...

They were all for the wrong reasons.

"Get the fuck out of my life, Jasper," I whisper harshly, unable to get my voice to work fully. I'm too enraged, too hurt, too humiliated. My thoughts are jumbled, my mind is spinning, nothing is working...

But one thing is clear.

Jasper is one deceitful fucker.

159.

And Rose is thinking... Men are so stupid! Eye color does not determine the child's paternity! Idiots!

EPOV

After saying goodbye to Tyler and Carmen, I make my way home a few days early.

Almost three weeks in Mexico didn't give me the courage I was hoping to get, but I'm still resolved. I'm going to tell her as soon as I get back to Port Pines, and she's going to hate me, but at least we won't have lies between us.

My fingers drum on the armrest all throughout the first flight.

Knees bouncing.

I change flights in New York.

My only hope is that she won't forbid me to see River.

I miss him.

I miss them both.

And before I know it, I give the cab driver Bella's address.

From Richmond to her house in Port Pines, it takes about twenty-five minutes. Dreadful fucking time, I gotta say.

"Fuck," I whisper under my breath.

We're here.

I pay the driver.

I grab my bag and my guitar case, and then it's just me... standing outside the house I still wish to call home.

And that's when things change.

What was just a moment ago a quiet street, morphs into a Jerry Springer episode when the door opens and a certain Jasper Whitlock comes stumbling out. Bella follows, shouting and cursing up a storm, all while throwing things... clothes and shit... in his direction.

Is that a handprint on his cheek?

Um, yes. Yes, it is.

What. The. Fuck?

160.

And Emmett's thinking... I'm losing my goddamn mind. Pick up the fucking phone, Edward!

EPOV

It doesn't take long before Jasper notices me, and his humorless laugh snaps me out of my state of shock.

"Well, this is just great!" he barks out.

"Edward!" Bella gasps at the same time.

Uh...

"How convenient of you to swoop in now, eh?" Jasper sneers, which sets Bella off again.

"Oh, shut the fuck up, you asshole!" she yells. As she starts throwing things his way again, I walk toward her, making sure I'm not in the path of destruction. "He has been nothing but sweet and genuine! You, on the other hand, you manipulative bastard, you pretended to be a good dad in order to get a fucking ring on my finger!"

What?

When I reach Bella on the porch, her chest is heaving in anger, and she's running out of things to throw, but she's not done yelling, that's for sure. But... a ring on her finger? What the fuck have I missed?

"It was all a goddamn game to you, Jasper!" she screams.

"Don't think this is over, Bella!" he yells back. "River's mine, too, and you will hear from my lawyer!"

"Hey!" I snap, unable to stay quiet any longer. I may not know what's going on, but lawyer talk won't get him anywhere. "Whatever it is that's going on here, one thing is certain: threats won't get you far. So, back the fuck off, Jasper."

Turning to Bella, I grasp her shoulders, making sure she can't throw more stuff. "Mind telling me what's going on?" I ask calmly.

Bella doesn't waste time, and she explains while glaring at Jasper. "He played me," she growls. "He knew how lonely and vulnerable I was, and he took advantage of it." My eyebrows shoot up. "Asshole!" she shouts over my shoulder. "Can't believe I almost fell for it!" she cries out in frustration. "He pretended... he lied!"

"I did it for you, Bella!" Jasper yells.

"Which is fucked up!" Bella screams. "You should've done it for River, you deceitful prick!"

Okay, that's enough.

"Jasper, leave," I warn over my shoulder. Then I usher Bella inside. "Come on, let's get this straightened out."

161.

And Emmett's thinking... Should we tell Bella?

EPOV

I sit, stunned, in a chair as Bella paces in the living room, and she tells me everything. Through whimpers and cries, she tells me all about what happened in Seattle, and how Jasper turned into the perfect dad just because there was a ring on Bella's finger.

She leaves nothing out. She voices her thoughts, fears, and doubts. How it never felt right, but that she felt lonely. In the end, it was Jasper's improving parenting skills that made her consider the whole thing. But the only thing that matters to me is that she couldn't go through with it.

Nothing happened between them, making me believe her wholeheartedly when she tells me that she hasn't loved him in a long time.

"God, I'm so fucking pissed at him!" she croaks, stomping her foot in frustration. "I'm pissed at myself for falling for it!"

"Hey, none of that," I tell her softly, leaving the couch. When I reach her, I hug her to me. "You did nothing wrong," I whisper into her hair. "He was the one who fucked up." Understatement. If it wasn't for Bella being right here, right now, I'd be hunting that fucker down. "You couldn't have known that he was doing it for the wrong reasons."

She sniffles against my chest, arms hugging my midsection, and... I realize that it's been months since we were this close. Fuck, how I've missed it. All of it. Her, River, Cap, the house. Everything. And I hate that I'm about to ruin it. But what Bella needs is people who are honest. She needs people she can trust, people she can rely on.

"You're too understanding," she mumbles thickly. I kiss her on the forehead when she tilts her head up. "Thank you for letting me vent."

I chuckle quietly... nervously... because I'm next.

"My turn to vent," I sigh. "There, uh..." I clear my throat. "There are things I have to tell you, but it's up to you if you want me to do it now... or if you wanna wait."

Smiling softly, she shakes her head. "No, I'm ready. Talk away."

Yeah. Talk away.

Awesome.

162.

And Jasper's thinking... I could threaten to take River from her, right?

EPOV

"You look nervous," Bella mentions quietly as we sit down on the couch.

"I am," I say bluntly, running a hand through my hair. "But I have to come clean."

"Um... okay?"

Shit. Okay. I can do this.

I have to.

Pulling up my leg on the couch, I face her fully.

I take a deep breath.

And I start from the beginning. "When I sang to you at Little Stage, you walked out. I didn't know at the time how much you had on your plate. I didn't know how overwhelmed you were since Jasper had just broken up with you."

She looks like she's in pain, and that's definitely not my intention. "I'm so sorry I left-"

"Don't." I cut her off softly, squeezing her hand. "Again, you have nothing to apologize for. And, you've apologized enough. I'm not saying this to make you feel bad – that's the last thing I want. I'm just retelling the events of that night. Though they don't give me an excuse, nor am I looking for one, they did give me reason for being a..." I sigh. "A coward."

With apprehension and hesitation written all over her features, she nods for me to go on.

And I do... before I lose my... courage, if you can call it that.

I clear my throat. "Anyway... after you'd left, Rose told me that you just needed some time to think. She told me you weren't running out or anything, because that's what you had told her to tell me." I pinch the bridge of my nose. "So, I went home after the set. I waited, and... despite Rose's words, I started doubting." A humorless chuckle escapes me. "I felt insecure. I didn't know at all where you stood. The only thing I suspected, and sorta knew, was that you were attracted to me. But that's it, and I..." I release a breath, feeling my shoulders slump a little. "I had pretty much professed my love for you... or, at least it felt that way-"

"Edward, I'm so, so sorry." She whimpers and throws her arms around me, catching me off guard. I still don't want her apologies; I'm just trying to leave nothing out. "I shouldn't have left," she cries against my neck.

"Bella-"

"No, Edward. This is killing me, because I should've been honest with you. I should've told you that I was falling in love with you." I almost choke on a breath as she places her hands on my cheeks. With her forehead against mine, she continues, and my heart is pounding. "That night, Edward... that was the night I realized that I was falling in love with you, and I'm still-"

"Please." I'm begging her. It's already so fucking hard to get this out, and now...

Still. She said still. She's still...?

Fuck.

She's in love with me. Still in love with me.

"When you came home that night, we slept together," I confess in a rush.

I blink back tears, knowing that I've ruined it all now.

163.

And Rose is thinking... Edward has to be the one to tell her.

EPOV

Before I know it, I'm pacing the floor in the living room.

I ramble.

I pull at my hair.

I tell her everything.

"...didn't know you'd been drugged..."

"...straddled me and told me I was the one..."

"...and you kissed me..."

"...I wanted you so badly, Bella..."

"...knew you were drunk, but..."

"...Christ, I caved..."

"...We slept together..."

"...hours later, I woke up..."

"...you weren't feeling well..."

"...went out to buy ginger ale... hangover food..."

"...Rose arrived when I did..."

"...and I heard it... the moaning..."

"...it fucking killed me, Bella..."

"...I left, thinking that you hadn't been honest with me..."

"...or maybe you'd taken him back..."

I don't stop there. Verbal diarrhea. I keep rambling.

"When I came back after months in Mexico, you were pregnant..."

"...I wanted to tell you everything, and I wanted River to be mine so much..."

"...I did the math, and I didn't know about those two weeks you count..."

"...and Jasper was home around New Year's, which was when I thought you got pregnant..."

"...So, I obviously thought it was his child..."

"...Fuck, I screwed up, Bella..."

"...I should've told you from the beginning, and I didn't..."

"... didn't wanna cause any more drama in your life..."

"...You already had so much on your plate with Jasper, the pregnancy, and..."

"...I kept my mouth shut. I didn't say a word..."

"...was afraid that you'd kick me out if I told you, and I wanted to be there for you, I wanted to help you..."

"...and when you said that you wanted me, Bella..."

"...I chickened out... I was so fucking scared, 'cause I knew you were gonna hate me, and I was- am so fucking in love with you..."

"...I'd already let it go on for too long, and I kept going..."

"...and when River was born, I was gonna tell you..."

"...it was also then I found out about those two weeks before you actually got pregnant. Emmett told me when we were preparing for your birthday dinner..."

"...I had no idea; you have to believe me..."

"...and I wanted to tell you, because I wanted everything with you, Bella. Not some secret affair, but everything, and I wanted us to enter a relationship without lies or secrets..."

"...and I saw his blue eyes. Jasper's eyes. River's eyes..."

"...I understood that I wasn't River's dad..."

"...I got scared again..."

"...you were so happy, and Jasper was there..."

"...I didn't wanna ruin your family moment..."

"...and I was jealous. It hurt to see Jasper with you and River..."

"...there was just too much doubt, thinking and rethinking..."

"...started pushing you away, and it hurt like a motherfucker, but..."

"...then Jasper talked to me..."

"...He told me that River's parents should be together..."

"...I made a decision that wasn't mine to make..."

"...I told him that if you weren't happy, I wouldn't hesitate to step in..."

"...he fucking promised..."

"...but like I said, I made a decision that wasn't mine to make..."

"...total disregard of your feelings..."

"...can't apologize enough. I should've been here for you..."

"...I wasn't, and I'm so fucking sorry, Bella..."

By the time I'm done, I slump down in a chair.

I'm drained, empty, anxious, scared shitless, and I can barely breathe.

And when I finally look over at Bella, she's as pale as a sheet.

164.

And Jasper's thinking... I'll call a lawyer once I get back to LA.

EPOV

She sits completely immobile, barely even blinking.

"Bella?" I whisper hoarsely.

No response.

Minutes pass, and I'm getting worried.

"Bella," I say again, a little louder.

Still nothing.

I bring out my phone, realizing that it's still shut off from the plane. After switching it on, the texts and voicemail messages start pouring in. My phone beeps over and over, but I don't have time to listen to it now. Instead, I scroll down until I see Rose's number.

Her greeting is lovely. "You better get back to the States, you dense prick! Emmett told me everything, and you've got some explaining to do!"

I sigh.

"I'm at Bella's already," I admit. "And I need your help."

She stutters for a while, obviously surprised. But soon it's the composed Rose that I know who's back. "What do you need? Asshole."

She just had to add that last part.

"I told her everything," I tell Rose nervously, glancing over at Bella. She's still frozen in place. But at least she's breathing. "And now she's not moving. She's just sitting there. On the couch." From upstairs, I hear River then. Crying. "Um, Rose? Could you come over?"

"We're on our way," she snaps before hanging up the phone.

165.

And Rose is thinking... Priceless.

EPOV

"My turn. You're hogging him," Emmett says, holding his arms out.

"I haven't seen him in weeks," I reply defensively, taking a step back.

Besides, River's totally busy playing with the hem of my shirt.

He doesn't want Emmett to interrupt that.

"And whose fault is that?" he shoots back, cocking a brow.

I flip him off and sit down in a chair.

"You two need to shut up," Rose hisses over her shoulder before turning back to Bella. Bella – another reason why I need to hold River. 'Cause if I don't have him to focus on, I'd lose my mind over Bella's reaction... or lack of one. I'm worried sick, and I've been told more than once that I confessed everything too fast. Especially after I told Rose and Emmett about the whole Jasper debacle. Rose's exact words were, "So, first she deals with Jasper's shit, and now she has to deal with yours. All in less than two hours. Great job, dipshit."

Rose doesn't love me very much right now.

It's okay. I don't love myself that much either right now.

"By the way, Edward?" Rose says. "Hand River over to Emmett."

"Why?" I all but whine.

She huffs. "Because right now you're the only one in this room who doesn't know about eye color and my guess is that you're gonna throw up when you find out."

Cryptic bitch. "What?"

"Ah, yeah. We all know, but you don't," Emmett chuckles, again holding his hands out to kidnap River from me.

"Emmett, you just found out about it yourself, so wipe off that grin," Rose says dryly.

He obeys.

Then he snatches River away from me, and I'm outta my seat to take him back.

"Give him back!" I demand quietly.

"Rose, tell him! Tell him!" he exclaims. River's having the time of his life, giggling like crazy. "Tell him now!"

"Fine," Rose sighs, standing up to face me. I glare at her, just 'cause. "As soon as Bella returns to reality, you might wanna get ready for a trip to the hospital."

"What the hell are you talking about?" I snap.

"Well, I assume after she gives you the mother of all smack-downs, you're gonna take a paternity test."

I blink.

"Most babies are born with blue eyes, Edward," she adds, and I'm like... what? "It doesn't mean that Jasper's the father." Um... "You could be his dad."

My eyes flick around. Emmett. River. Rose. River. River. Bella. Rose. Bella. River. Bella. She's not serious, is she?

"Yes, I'm serious."

Oh.

I could be River's dad?

"Yes."

Oh.

I feel all dizzy, and I can barely see. Vision's all blurry.

Room's spinning.

Ears ringing.

Someone's breathing really fucking heavily.

"Shit, he's going down, Rose."

That's the last I hear before everything goes black.

166.

And Rose is thinking... Jeesh, he didn't have shove each truth down her throat like that.

BPOV

Systems failing.

It's too much.

I process it all. Well, I try.

I don't know how much time that goes by, but I'm aware... or somewhat aware... of my surroundings. I know that Rose and Emmett are here, and I know that Edward's holding River.

The feelings rushing through me are too many and come too fast for me to get a damn grasp on... anything, really. There's anger, hurt, confusion, fury, exhaustion, fear, hope... The list goes on. But, that last one... Hope. I try to hold onto it.

I feel so incredibly betrayed by Edward, but there's still a distinct difference between Edward and Jasper.

Jasper is selfish.

Edward is the opposite.

True, he lied by omission when he didn't tell me that we... God, we slept together that night.

That's still too much for me to comprehend.

Deep breaths, Bella.

Yes, Edward lied. But... Yeah, that's it. There's a "but" that follows. I just don't know why or how yet, but it's there. It's very there. And for many reasons, I still see Edward as genuine. Partly because I know how much he adores River. Partly because he helps to help. He doesn't help to get something in return.

Last but not least. That small flicker of hope, because I remember what Jasper said.

"They almost seem green."

"They almost seem green."

"They almost seem green."

Sparks of something surge through me, and it takes a while for me to identify it, but when I do, it all makes sense. It's another thing I've been blind to, or maybe I've just denied my desire to think about it. It... being River's dad. Not that I ever questioned River's paternity, because why would I? But now... Now I can admit to myself that a part of me wished that Edward was his father... even after River was born and Jasper was holding him.

The feeling surging through me is relief.

There's a possibility that the right man is my son's father, and regardless of where I stand with Edward right now, I know that there's no better man than him to be River's dad.

It's only too bad I have this intense urge to throttle the bastard first.

I hate that he hurt me. I hate that I made him feel so insecure.

I want to kick his ass, I want to kiss him, I want to junk-punch him, I want to apologize, I want to slap him, I want to hug him.

See, that's the difference. With Jasper, I only want to do the hurting.

Christ.

It's all making me dizzy.

"Bella?" That's Rose's voice. Soft and quiet. I know she's worried. But I need to focus on breathing. "Can you hear me, honey?" she asks, sitting down next to me on the couch. She takes my hand, and I realize how cold I am. "Please squeeze my hand if you can hear me."

I want to laugh, cry, shout, scream... all at once.

But all I do is give her hand a little squeeze.

"You need to come back to us, sweetie, 'cause Edward just fainted."

167.

And Edward's thinking... Had I only told her from the beginning...

BPOV

"Oh, my God," I wheeze out, stumbling off the couch to reach Edward. He's on the fucking floor.

Fainting. Really? "Edward," I cough.

My hands are trembling.

Rose is talking. I listen on one ear.

Emmett's laughing. Idiot.

“Emmett, get some water or something,” Rose says as I start shaking Edward.

Fuck, I can still barely breathe. What a fucking day!

“Edward, wake up!” I croak.

Of course, this is the moment Cap comes over to sniff the limp asshole I’m shaking.

Yeah, that sounded so good.

When Emmett returns with water, I don’t waste time.

Don’t fucking ask me why Em dropped a shitload of ice cubes in the already cold water.

I splash some on his forehead.

That doesn’t work.

So, I drop the entire bucket on him.

What? I couldn’t help it.

At least it works. He starts coughing and spluttering, and I push him down when he tries to get up.

“Stay down,” I snap.

Christ, I’m still too torn. I want to kick his ass before I hug him.

“Fuck,” he chokes out. His eyes search frantically until they land on River.

It almost takes my breath away.

Because I see it.

Right there, in Edward's eyes... he wants this so badly.

It kinda makes the worst of my anger evaporate.

I still don't understand half of this. Well, I know what I've been told now, but it's too much. It's going to take time for it to settle, and... just the thought of not remembering that night now. It hurts me, and I can't even imagine how much it's hurt him.

"I'm okay," he whispers thickly, sitting up slowly. With his knees up, he places his head between them. Automatically, my hand goes to his back.

"Are you sure?" I ask quietly.

He doesn't answer, and when I see his shoulders shake slightly, I give Emmett and Rose a pointed look.

"I'll go check for tests online," Rose whispers, taking River from Emmett.

Then it's just me and Edward in the living room.

After forcing Edward to face me, I crawl into his lap, not caring about his soaked shirt. Instinct tells me to hug him, which I do. I hold him as hard as I can, and I exhale in relief when I feel his arms snake around my waist.

"I'm sorry," he whimpers against my shoulder.

I shake my head, eyes welling up so fast. "We'll fix this, Edward."

Pulling back, I tug on his t-shirt. He lets me take it off him, and then I reach over to the couch and grab the blanket there. In the meantime, Edward's looking away, trying to hide the fact that he's human. Christ, had he not been emotional right now, something would've been wrong.

Once I've wrapped the blanket around him, I sink into his embrace again.

"I'm sorry I hurt you," he croaks.

I sigh, dropping my forehead to his chest. "We've both fucked up royally," I say quietly, wiping away a few tears. "But we'll deal with that later. First, we need to get a paternity test."

I want to run out to the kitchen where I can hear Emmett, Rose, and River. I want to check his eyes. I want traces of green. God, how I want it.

"Bella?"

My head snaps up at the sound of Rose's voice, and I look over my shoulder to see her standing in the doorway.

"I found some info," she tells us softly. "You should call the DDC in Richmond and set up an appointment."

168.

And Rose is thinking... Whoa, what? He was only gone for twenty minutes?

EPOV

Rose and Emmett are certain.

Bella and I don't allow ourselves to form opinions.

It's about River's eye color.

They have darkened... I think...

But they're still blue to me... I think...

So, I'm a nervous mess when we go in for the test.

Thankfully, Bella pushes her anger aside, and she's there for me. She knows, apparently, how much I want this. Everything is put on hold until we get the test results back. Not that we haven't talked, because we have. Two days have gone by, and we've aired everything out. I know how betrayed she feels, but luck is on my side, because she also understands. Somewhat. She even let me stay at the house. I suppose it's temporarily, but one can always hope.

I hope she will let me help her, at least financially. There's no way she can afford to live in that house alone. Her savings are already gone, or so Rose has told me. And she still has another week before she returns to work. Mom is going to look after River, and I hope... Fuck, how I hope she will be his nana by then.

"Sit still," Rose sighs.

But I'm nervous!

Right now, Bella's with River to get the inside of his cheek swabbed.

I'm up next. Soon. And then we have to wait three days for the results.

"I think the writers from work could pick up a thing or two from Edward and Bella's lives," Emmett comments.

Douche.

"What?" he chuckles. "One night, one girl, two dudes."

"That's enough, Emmett," Rose warns before I can punch him.

"Too soon for jokes?"

"Ya think?" Rose and I snap.

At least he has the decency to look apologetic.

"For the record, it will always be too soon for those jokes, Em," I mutter, rubbing my temples. Goddamn headache. "Imagine leaving the house for twenty minutes, only to return to hear the love of your life fucking someone else."

I feel nauseous just thinking about it.

Just because Bella had been drugged didn't mean it removed my pain.

My name is called then, and it's my turn to leave a DNA sample.

169.

And Emmett's thinking... Can't we just celebrate already?

EPOV

When I return to the waiting room, Emmett is holding River while Bella's crying on Rose's shoulder. Immediately, I'm on edge, walking over to them.

"What's wrong?" I ask.

Emmett's grinning widely all of a sudden. "Wanna hold your son, dude?"

I choke on air.

"My girl's better than Sherlock fucking Holmes." He snickers.

"Language," I chide, taking River from him. Once he's safe in my arms, I turn to Rose, hoping to God she can skip the cryptic shit for the sake of my sanity. "Tell me what's going on."

I'm caught off guard when I see that Rose's eyes are full of unshed tears. "Were you really only gone for twenty minutes that morning?" she asks thickly.

I lick my lips, feeling nervous for some reason. I have no idea where she's going with this, and Emmett's grin is fucking with my head. Same goes for his words. He asked if I wanted to hold my... my...

"Yes," I respond quietly.

At this, Bella starts crying harder.

Rose smiles widely, tears now streaming down her face. "We don't think she slept with Jasper at all."

My heart is stuck in my throat.

I understand nothing.

"We heard them," I grit out.

After crying with her face hidden, Bella finally faces me. Tears streaming down her cheeks, too. "Let's go outside, Edward," she croaks. "I'll explain everything."

170.

And Jasper's thinking... Now I need to contact a lawyer.

BPOV

After leaving River with Rose and Emmett, I lead Edward outside, not stopping until we reach his Volvo.

"You're scaring me, Bella," he says anxiously.

It's frustrating how torn I still am.

Hurt. He should've told me from the beginning. I trusted him.

Anger. We all have valid reasons. There's no one to blame, which is infuriating.

Sadness. Had he been honest from the beginning... Christ, all the heartache and time lost... Then again, who knows if River would've been with us if things played out differently?

Relief. It's Edward. He's River's dad.

Bitterness. He allowed Jasper to manipulate him for a long time. He ignored my feelings.

Annoyance. Men are stupid, and Edward is too noble. I'm sick of it.

Love. Even if he lied to me, his heart was always in the right place.

It's with all of these emotions and feelings surging through me that I turn around to face Edward. Leaning back against the car, I look up at his face. He's so incredibly nervous. The part of me that's pissed wants to let him sweat for a while. But I can't, because it's...

It's him.

So, I tell him. I tell him that he never heard me have sex with Jasper. He thought he did, but he didn't. I was moaning in pain... not pleasure, which Rose knew all along... as did I, of course. But why would we tell him that? To us, it made no difference, because we still thought I'd had sex with Jasper. The room smelled like sex, so we simply assumed that we'd had sex earlier. "But if you were only gone for twenty minutes..." I sigh. I mean, it's just not possible, is it? Twenty minutes. In that short amount of time, Jasper still had to come home, undress, wake me up, somehow convince me to have sex with him, and then he had to finish, fall deeply asleep, and I had to end up on the floor, ready to puke my guts out. "And with the amount of alcohol he had consumed..." I shake my head, seriously doubting that Jasper could have even gotten it up at a time like

that. "He doesn't remember, Edward. Like me, he doesn't remember. But you weren't there to let us know that there was another reason for the room to smell like sex." And Jasper and I had both been naked. Of course, we assumed that we'd had sex since the room reeked of it.

When I'm done explaining it all, I'm afraid that Edward's gonna faint again.

"You okay?" I whisper, placing a hand on his cheek.

He swallows hard.

His eyes well up, and I feel mine do the same.

Dropping his forehead to mine, he exhales shakily.

"I'm his dad, Bella," he breathes out.

And I let out a cry and a quiet laugh at the same time. Tears of relief spill over.

I wipe his away.

He wipes mine away.

171.

And Maria's thinking... It's gone too far.

EPOV

I won't even try to describe what I'm feeling.

It's overwhelming.

Happiness and sadness are the only two feelings that are easily recognizable. Sadness for what my stupidity has cost me, sadness for

what I've missed out on. Happiness because... he's mine. And Bella didn't sleep with Jasper.

River's my son.

"I've missed that smile," Bella whispers thickly.

I chuckle in a voice filled with emotions. "Like I could do anything but smile right now, Swan."

She responds with her own blinding smile, and I feel like a damn chick when the tears just won't quit rolling down my cheeks. With our foreheads still connected, there's nothing more I want than to kiss her stupid. Well, there is one thing. I need to see River.

"You know you would've been River's dad no matter what, though, right?" she murmurs, pressing her lips against my cheek. "You were always perfect with him."

I squeeze my eyes shut, letting my lips brush over her jaw.

"Thank you," I breathe out. She hugs my waist harder, and I return the hug with my arms around her shoulders. "Thank you for not shutting me out. I know I deserve it."

She shakes her head minutely as she drops soft kisses on my cheek. It makes me shiver, it makes me want so much more, it makes me hope that I can have it one day. "I could never shut you out, Edward," she whimpers. Again, I tighten my hold on her. I just can't get close enough. "You deserve a major kick in the ass." I can feel her smile against my skin. "And you will get it." I chuckle and sniffle at the same time. Then I press my lips to her chin. "But I won't ever shut you out."

My eyes sting again, and I blink back tears.

More shivers wash over me, or through me...

"I have to kiss you, beautiful," I whisper pleadingly.

172.

And Rose is thinking... Finally, all is right in the world.

Watching them, I know they will work it out.

BPOV

"Everything is not fixed," I choke out, already tilting my head closer to his.

"I know," he breathes out.

I lick my lips.

He swallows.

I nod.

Please.

When his lips brush against mine, I'm already lost in him.

That's what he does to me.

"Edward," I whimper.

With a low moan, he kisses me fully. Softly and slowly, but still firmly. I thread my fingers through his hair, pulling him closer to me. He takes my bottom lip between his teeth, nibbling gently before swiping his tongue over it. It sets me on fire, and my own tongue darts out to meet his. It's with heavy breaths we keep kissing. He keeps it slow and passionate, almost lazy, but heavy at the same time, and I'm devastatingly in love

with our moment. It's a promise of what we'll have soon. I know it, but I refuse to assume that he does.

"We'll make it," I pant, pulling back slightly to look him in the eye. "Tell me it's not just me in this."

"I'm never running again," he murmurs in a thick voice. "It's not just River, Bella. It's you. I want it all with you."

This time, I kiss him.

But before we can get carried away – because we do have a lot to talk about – I end the kiss with a few soft, chaste ones.

I'm not ready to jump into a romantic relationship with Edward just like that. But I am ready – so ready – for him to make us a family. It's what I've wanted for so long. We need to find our balance, but before all that...

"Let's go get our son, yeah?" I smile up at him.

"Christ," he whispers softly, averting his eyes from mine. "Our son."

173.

And Maria's thinking... I call the main office and ask for Edward Cullen's number.

BPOV

This is what I have to deal with while Edward is playing with River and Cap out back.

The Whitlocks.

"...I cannot believe this, Bella! I'm just so..."

Charlotte drones on and on in my ear, and I'm seriously fighting the urge to hang up the phone.

"...You betrayed us all with that..."

It's funny. Not once has she mentioned River. She keeps ranting about me cheating on her precious son.

"...Jasper wanted to give you the world! And you..."

The chicken is almost done.

I check on the baked potatoes in the oven.

Another ten minutes, I'd say.

So, I start preparing my special garlic butter.

"...then you drop this bomb on us! How dare..."

I can't really help myself when I leave the kitchen to check on the boys in the backyard. I stand in the living room. The door is open, but I stay inside. Just watching, smiling to myself.

"...and what is Jasper going to say when he finds out? My poor, poor Jas..."

Tomorrow, it will be three days since we were at the DDC, which means the results will come. Not that we need it. We know Edward's his dad, but it will be something to show Jasper.

"...You ruined everything, Bella! And I know that you won't find happiness..."

When Edward sees me watching them, he gives me that lopsided grin before returning to River and Cap. He's all joy, that man. I remember that his personality was one of the first things I noticed about him. Or more correctly: his spirit. Edward Cullen is a happy dude. He's easygoing,

carefree, and all heart. Sweet and amazing. And no one is happier than I am to see him returning to his old self. He can be both the bad boy with his ink, foul mouth, and piercings, but he's also the comic book reading geek who I love with everything I am.

"...Can't believe this! You pressured him, you know! Nothing he did was enough for you. Don't you know that he can't work and be with you at the same time, you little..."

Over the past couple of days, I've given Edward some space to let everything settle. He was a bit emotional when I asked him to move back into the house again, but did he seriously not see that coming? No, of course he didn't. But I did ask him, and he moved his stuff back into his old room the very first day. After that, like I said, I gave him some space. He needed... still needs... to spend some quality time with River. And I love watching them as they goof around with Cap.

When the buzzer goes off, alerting me that the potatoes are done, I just go ahead and hang up on Charlotte and her rant before returning to the kitchen.

It's time for dinner.

"I'm just gonna take a quick shower before," Edward says after I've told the boys to come inside.

Ten minutes later, he returns to the kitchen.

Wearing nothing but a pair of black basketball shorts.

Nnnnnipple ring, how I've missed you.

174.

And Jasper's thinking... I pick up the phone, seeing "Mom" on the caller ID.

EPOV

"Good God, I've missed your cooking," I moan, reaching for another piece of chicken. Since I returned from Mexico, it's been take-out, 'cause we've been too tired and too preoccupied to care about cooking. But this...

Goddamn. Bella can cook like no other. The garlic butter? Fucking superb.

Good thing I spent a lot of time running and swimming in Mexico.

Gotta stay in shape, ya know?

"Glad you like it," Bella responds, and if I didn't know any better, I'd say she's annoyed.

Maybe she is. "What's wrong?" I ask, licking my fingers. "Want me to feed River so you can eat?"

"I'm fine," she snaps, shooting me a glare before focusing intently on River, who's sitting next to her. It's too bad it started raining. Otherwise, we'd be sitting on the patio.

"Liar," I say. Then I shovel more baked potato into my mouth, moaning again, 'cause it's divine.

Maybe it's something about the Whitlocks? She told me they had called her, and Bella hadn't even bothered to come up with lies. She told them the way it was. Not that they believed her, but she didn't care. At least, that's what she said.

"Damn," I whisper, and I look down at my chest. I'm a grown man, for fuck's sake, but I still manage to spill. "Not to be wasted," I mumble,

using a finger to swipe it up. Baked potato with garlic butter. Yum. That goes straight to my mouth. Oh, yeah. That's the stuff.

Anyway...

"Mom called me earlier," I tell her. More chicken, yes. Into. Mouth. Now. Man, oh man. "I was thinking we could tell them over dinner tomorrow. If that's okay," I add, feeling a bit unsure. All I want to do is shout it out so that everyone knows that River's my son, but maybe Bella wants to take it easy.

I also want Bella to be mine. Preferably yesterday, but I'm going to do it right this time. Most importantly, I won't ask her to keep us a secret. No way. I'm gonna ask her out. We've talked about it, because that's what we do now. Talking is vital. Anyway, we talked about it, and Bella told me that she wasn't ready to just jump in and pretend everything is perfect. To be honest, I'm with her on that one. We need to start over, which we both want. But as we also agreed on, we're going to get Jasper and all that out of the way before we move forward.

"Tomorrow's fine," she replies curtly, eyes on River. "We have to decide what to do with the living arrangements, too."

All right, I must've done something wrong. She refuses to look at me.

"Living arrangements?" I question.

She nods once. "I can only cover a third of all the expenses, so I guess we should look for another roommate."

"Nuh-uh," I say, shaking my head. "It's us two and River, Bella. No one else. I'll pay. It's not like I don't have the money. Now, mind telling me what's bothering you?"

Whatever it is, I wanna fix it now, 'cause Emmett and Rose are coming over soon for a few drinks. And I hate seeing Bella upset. I won't have it.

But the glare she shoots me makes me wanna hide instead of fixing anything. She could kill with that look, I swear. I think my balls just crawled back into my body.

What did I do?

175.

And Maria's thinking... Time to call Carlisle's son.

BPOV

Edward Cullen. Wearing nothing but those fucking shorts. Which means, you know, a bare chest. So sculpted. A new tan, of course. That taunting nipple ring. His tattoos. His chiseled jaw with a five o' clock shadow. Lip ring, eyebrow barbell... I've mentioned it all before, I know. Then you add dinner. Apparently. Him, moaning. Sucking on his fucking fingers. Goddamn spillage on his muscular chest that he just wipes off with one of his magic fingers.

And he has the nerve to ask what's wrong?

Fuck that. Fuck him.

Yes, please.

Oh, shut up, you hussy.

Seriously. He should get a damn room with that chicken.

Or maybe River and I should leave him alone so he can fuck that baked potato.

"Mamamamaaa!"

Right.

"Sorry, sweetie." I clear my throat and scoop up another spoonful of baby food, bringing it to River's mouth. "Such a good boy."

I guess now that I know Edward is his father, I also know where River gets his appetite.

"Sure you don't want me to feed him, Bella?" Edward asks quietly, and I know that he's still waiting for me to tell him what's wrong. But he won't get that pleasure, 'cause I'm too pissed. Read: horny.

Which pisses me off.

Ugh.

Sometimes it sucks to be a woman because we're so damn complicated.

"Want to go to Daddy?" I ask River, smirking internally. Referring to Edward as "Daddy" is a sure way to turn Mr. Cullen into one helluva sap. I may have abused his new title a lot over the past couple of days. Unfortunately for me, though, is that it's a real turn-on. Not to see Edward emotional, but to see him being a daddy to our boy.

Looking over at Edward, I see that his eyes are focused on his plate.

But there's the smile. A wide but soft one. A smile that makes me wanna doodle his name in school books, plan our fantasy wedding, and have lots and lots of babies.

I'm such a girl.

And this whole taking-things-slow sorta sucks.

Yes, a part of me is still bitter about everything, but... Damn, the man has suffered enough. Being apart from River is something that kills Edward already. That alone is punishment.

Shaking my head to clear it, I push River's plate across the table. 'Cause our son is a boy, ya know? He goes where the food goes.

"Yeah, go to Daddy," I laugh softly as River starts squirming in his seat. After picking up, I hand him over to... Fuck me, Edward's ears are pink... Wow. "Here you go, Daddy." I wink at Edward.

And he shoots me the weakest glare known to man.

Jesus, he's just the cutest.

My giddy moment is ruined when the phone rings.

"I'll get it," I sigh.

"Dada!"

I gasp.

My wide eyes snap to Edward who is equally wide-eyed.

"Oh, God," I breathe out shakily.

I'm still such a girl, 'cause my eyes well up in an instant.

"Edward, are you okay?" I whisper, unable to hide my smile.

He looks up at me, eyes brimming with tears, and nods slowly.

"Dadadadaa!"

"Holy shhh..." Nice save, Edward.

If it wouldn't make me look like a complete fool, I'd start fanning my face.

But as that trademark smile lights up Edward's face, I hurriedly grab the phone before making my way out of the kitchen. Partly to let Edward have his moment, and partly because I'm too close to breaking down like the girl I evidently am.

Jeesh.

Once I reach the living room, I answer the damn phone.

176.

And Maria's thinking... Oh, pick up the phone. I just want to get this over with.

BPOV

"Bella Swan speaking."

"Bella! What kind of bitch are you?!"

Ah, Jasper. I guess it didn't take long for Charlotte to fill her son in.

"What a lovely surprise, Jasper," I say dryly, sitting down on the couch in the living room. "Let me guess. Your mother called you."

"Of course she did!" he snaps. "Mind telling me why you're lying to her?"

I smirk. "I'm not lying, Jazz. Edward is River's dad."

Then I proceed to tell him about everything. Really, everything.

And much like his mother, he doesn't believe me. Instead, he starts yelling at me, calling me a bitch and a cheater. Oh, and apparently I'm a liar, too. Because River is Jasper's, according to him, and he's going to take River away from me.

I just let him get his shit out.

However, when he starts threatening to sue for whatever reason, I'm out of my seat in no time, heading straight for the kitchen.

"Edward," I whisper-yell, interrupting his goof-fest with River. His eyes snap to mine. "Jasper is threatening to-"

He cuts me off right away. "Give me the phone, baby."

With Jasper still screaming through the phone, I hand it over to Edward.

My heart soars as I watch how instinctively Edward slips into the role of protector. Not that I'm some damsel in distress, but I do believe he's more capable than I am when it comes to this. And it feels indescribably good to have Edward with me.

"Jasper, it's Edward," he greets flatly as I take River from him. "No, you sure as shit won't talk about this with Bella." Even as he's fighting to contain his rage, he smiles apologetically for his language. Seriously, this man. "You know what, Jasper? I think you should bring your seedy ass over to us, 'cause once you've heard what I have to say, you won't make any threats, I assure you."

And I have no idea what Edward "has to say."

But before I can find a damn Post-it to ask what he's talking about, I hear Edward's cell phone ringing in the hallway. I motion to him that I'm gonna get it, and he nods before returning to his call with Jasper. This time, without a verbal filter.

"Come on, sweetie," I murmur, distracting River with a few tickles as I carry him out of the kitchen.

177.

And Jasper's thinking... I call Renee before calling the airlines.

BPOV

"Edward Cullen's phone, this is Bella speaking," I say, cradling the phone between my shoulder and cheek. Since Edward's still talking to Jasper – rather loudly – I leave the hallway and head up the stairs instead.

"Ah, Isabella Swan. This is Maria Mendoza."

Um.

"Hello," I reply hesitantly as I reach my room. After closing the door behind me, I speak as I move toward the bed. "Edward can't come to the phone right now, but is there anything I can do?"

"Well, I suppose this concerns you, as well..." She trails off as I set River down on the bed. Thankfully, there are a few toys within my reach on floor, so I grab them for him. "It's about Jasper."

My eyebrows shoot up. "Jasper," I state dumbly. I mean, why would Maria Mendoza – Jasper's boss – call Edward to talk about Jasper?

"Yes. Jasper," she sighs. "I'm pretty sure we can all come to an understanding – without Jasper's knowledge, of course – but I'm afraid I need a Cullen in order to go through with it, and I'd rather not bother Carlisle."

I don't understand shit, and truth be told, I'm sick of it. "How about you start from the beginning, yeah?"

As if she's bored, she lets out this really long sigh before speaking. "Fine. From what I've heard, you're with Edward now, yes?"

Even though I'm confused, I answer. "Yes."

"And you no longer harbor any feelings for Jasper?"

I chuckle darkly. "Oh, I harbor feelings, I assure you. But not of the affectionate kind."

She snickers. "That's what I thought."

There's a soft knock on the door then and, after a few seconds, Edward pokes his head in, silently asking if he can come in. I nod for him, patting the spot next to me on the bed.

Fucker's still bare-chested.

"Well, I want your boyfriend's permission to use a certain job as a reason for Jasper to stop chasing you around."

Oh, swoon. My boyfriend.

Wait, what? "What do you mean?" Then I shake my head, feeling too damn confused about all of this. "You know what? Edward's here now. I'll put him on instead."

When Edward looks confused, I just shrug and hand the phone over to him.

'Cause fuck if I know what's up.

178.

And Renee's thinking... After talking to Jasper, I'm conflicted.

Surely she didn't do what he accuses her of.

EPOV

By the time I hang up the phone, I'm perfectly at ease.

Speaking to Maria Mendoza was certainly... enlightening.

"I only caught your side of the conversation," Bella tells me. "So, you might wanna fill me in, 'cause from what I've heard, you're in agreement with Jasper's boss."

I grin. "I am."

As it turns out, Maria wants Jasper. Don't ask me why, but it's quite clear that deep love is out of the question. Hell, from what she told me, it sounded more like she wants Jasper to be her bitch. So, I tell Bella this. I also tell her about the agreement. Maria wants to be able to tell Jasper that he can shove his job where the sun doesn't shine if he doesn't let Bella go. Which is essentially what I want, too. Same goes for Bella. And this is perfect because I have my own plans to make sure Jasper doesn't take any of this further. Not that I think he stands a fucking chance against a judge, but it would still be a long process to go through. One that we have no desire to waste time on.

So, for the first time in my life, I will use my name to get what I want.

Maria has my permission to use Jasper's job as a threat.

And when Jasper comes here tomorrow, I will hand out a few threats of my own.

"Wait, he's coming to Port Pines?" Bella exclaims once I've told her. "I don't want him anywhere near our house, Edward."

Our house.

I smile and kiss her cheek. "Don't worry, he's not entering. But I don't want to have our conversation over the phone."

Biting her lip, she goes into thinking mode, and I leave her to it for a while, knowing that it's a lot to settle. Instead, I focus on River, who's crawling around on the bed.

Never thought I could love someone the way I love him. It's so damn consuming, and there's no denying that he owns me - he and his mother.

Christ... earlier when he called me "Dada", I thought I was gonna lose my shit.

"Are you sure this is gonna work?" she asks after a moment or two.

And yes, I'm sure.

If Jasper takes things further, he can kiss his career goodbye. Not just with Cullen Media, either. No, fuck that. I will make sure he can't get a job anywhere else in this business.

179.

And Renee's thinking... I will give Bella the benefit of the doubt and wait for her to call me.

EPOV

"So, how's it going with you guys?" Em asks pointedly.

I snicker, knowing he wouldn't be able to last long, and tip my beer bottle back.

Emmett and Rose came over twenty minutes ago, and Rose immediately kidnapped Bella – and River for that matter – and they are currently talking woman-talk in the kitchen. Which leaves Emmett and me in the living room.

"What do you mean, dude?" I ask innocently, picking up Cap from the floor.

"Don't even try, man," he replies dryly. "You know exactly what I'm talking about."

Yeah, I do.

But I'm not giving shit away. At least, not details.

"We're taking things slow," I tell him, hating the words.

Seriously, after Bella and I had talked about the Jasper-Maria crap, she'd taken a shower and... um, you know, she came out wearing nothing but a miniscule towel. I mean, who does that? Why would she tease me like that?

"You're kidding, right?" Em asks... like he's in disbelief. I furrow my brow, feeling confused. "Fuck, Edward," he chuckles, shaking his head. "You live together, you love each other, and you have a kid together. Now is the time to slow things down? Riiight. Yeah, no, I understand."

Well, when you put it like that...

Fuck. I scrub my hands over my face.

Tomorrow, after we've gotten rid of Jasper, we're telling my folks about everything. Bella's also gonna call her mom, so...

After tomorrow's over...?

"You know what? Let's talk about you for once," I sigh. "How are you and Rose?"

180.

And Emmett's thinking... I have a ring in my pocket.

BPOV

I smile, watching Edward in silence. I'm sitting on the kitchen table, while he sits on a chair between my legs, and his eyes are glued to the DNA results we just got. We already knew, but it's official now. And I'm glad I

took Rose up on her offer. It was yesterday that she said she and Emmett could watch River today while we waited for Jasper to arrive. Edward pouted a little when Emmett came over this morning to pick up River, but he also knew it was best that our kiddo wasn't around today.

"Damn, this feels good," he sighs softly, eyes still on the paper in his hand.

I couldn't agree more. I know that we have a bunch of paperwork to go through in order to get Edward's name on River's birth certificate, and I'm sick of reading about petitions and court orders, but it will be so worth it in the end. There's no way we're postponing anything now. Plus, once we've told Edward's parents tonight, I have a feeling that postponing things won't even be an option. Edward has already warned me about how Esme will act.

See, Edward had laughed when he told me that Esme would probably start bugging us about marriage and more grandchildren.

I hadn't laughed. Well, I had, but only for Edward's sake.

'Cause I may or may not agree with Esme. Not that I'm in a hurry, but the thought of giving River siblings, or the thought of us all sharing a last name...

What girl in her right mind would laugh that off?

You're taking things slow, Bella.

Well, fuck that!

Then Edward's voice brings me back.

"Jasper's here."

181.

And Rose is thinking... God, I want children.

EPOV

"Will you please stay behind me?" I ask as we reach the hallway.

There's no way Jasper's coming in, so we're going out there.

I have a feeling it won't go very smoothly, hence hoping like hell that Bella will stay back.

"Yes," she replies, reaching for her shoes.

Liar.

Looking out the small window on the door, I see a fuming Jasper locking eyes with me from where he stands on the porch.

"For some reason, I don't believe you," I tell her, my eyes still on the fucking asshole outside.

His glare doesn't scare me even a little.

"Huh, how about that," she says innocently.

Still tying her shoes, I leave her behind and open the door.

Once I'm a few feet away from him, he raises his fist, but I already saw this coming. How stupid does he think I am? I duck his fist, and when I come back up, my elbow snaps up, connecting with his chin.

I grew up in Chicago, for fuck's sake.

Fighting is the last thing I want, but I know how it's fucking done, and there's no way he's laying a finger on me and getting away with it. Well, he didn't succeed, but...

"Fuck!" he cries out.

"Oh, my God!" Bella gasps from behind me.

Jasper leans against a post, cupping his chin while glaring at me.

"Ready to use words instead?" I ask, folding my arms over my chest.

"Fuck you!" he spits out.

From behind, I feel Bella slip her hand around my midsection, resting on my tensed stomach. She also rests her chin on my bicep, and I'm glad she's staying back. To Jasper, I may look cocky and relaxed, but I wasn't born yesterday. He might try again; therefore, I'm tensed and ready to go.

"Are you okay?" she whispers, surprising me by slipping her hand under my t-shirt.

It makes my abs tense further.

Is she doing this to goad him?

She's a spitfire, isn't she?

"I'm fine, baby," I reply, never looking away from the idiot. I keep my arms crossed over my chest and arch a brow at Jasper. "Again, are you ready to talk, or do you want to give it another go?"

He releases his chin, and I don't conceal my smirk. I fucking cracked it. Blood is seeping down from his wound.

"I want to see the fucking DNA results," he snaps.

182.

And Jasper's thinking... This is not happening!

BPOV

"Bella, can you get the results?" Edward asks.

I nod, reluctantly backing away from the sexiest man alive.

Seriously.

Oh, my God. Oh, my God.

Oh. My. God.

That image will forever be etched into my memory.

The image of Edward's elbow snapping up, making Jasper bleed.

My reaction was completely messed up, and the hand I slid over Edward's toned stomach was only proof of how I just had to touch him. I still can't believe myself, but I was so incredibly turned on! I'm sure there's something wrong with me.

"Get it together, Swan," I breathe out, grabbing the copy of River's DNA results from the kitchen table. I take a few deep breaths, needing to calm my horny ass down. Damn, I'm fucked up.

Whatever. It doesn't matter if I'm fucked up or not, because it is what it is, and nobody is having mercy on my neglected lady bits.

With an internal eye-roll at myself, I leave the kitchen, and when I return to Edward and Jasper, they're already talking.

183.

And Jasper's thinking... At least she can't demand child support from me.

EPOV

As soon as Bella's out of earshot, I speak.

"I had a chat with your boss yesterday," I tell him, smirking. "Seems like she's sick of you being obsessed with Bella." He throws me another glare, but I'm so fucking above this shit. After talking to Maria, we agreed not to say anything to Jasper, but... Fuck it. "See, here's the thing," I say, scratching my chin. "I gave her permission to use your job as leverage. It's quite simple. You stop chasing Bella around, or Maria fires you."

"What?" he seethes. "She can't do that-"

"Oh, but she can," I assure him. "Pretty sure you know my last name, Jasper, and it turns out that you can go far if you're a Cullen." I smirk. "So, yeah, she can use your job against you. Because I say so." I point a thumb at my chest for good measure. "All you need to do is get out of Bella's life."

"I can always get another job," he retorts cockily.

"Afraid you can't, Whitlock," I sigh lightly. "Because that's where I come in again." He narrows his eyes at me. "Maria's obviously not the only one sick of having you bothering Bella. I am, too... like you wouldn't believe." True fucking statement. "So, here's my deal. Back off, or you're done in the entire business." His eyes go wide, and I hope he realizes that I'm actually capable of doing this. "You know very well how big Cullen Media is in this business, so unless you want to change careers, you better back the fuck off."

That's when I feel Bella coming up from behind me. Once again, she snakes her arm around me, leaving her hand on my abs. And this time, I cover her hand with my own.

"Here are River's DNA result," she says, still standing slightly behind me. She hands the paper to Jasper, who is pretty darn red in the face. "You

can tear it to pieces all you want, but the truth won't go anywhere. And we have Edward's results inside."

I stare Jasper in silence as he reads the results.

There's no way to describe the satisfaction.

River is mine. I'm his rightful father, and there's shit Jasper can do about it.

Besides, it's very clear to me that Jasper isn't interested in my son. All he wants is Bella. River was someone who Jasper endured for her. It's so fucking wrong, and I honestly don't understand how you can avoid falling for that boy.

"I could've made you happy, Bella," Jasper mutters bitterly, dropping the piece of paper to the ground. I roll my eyes. "I still can."

"You're delusional," Bella replies flatly.

After that, Jasper leaves.

"You can both rot in hell!" he calls over his shoulder.

Whatever, buddy.

"Good riddance," Bella mumbles against my bicep.

184.

And Renee's thinking... I have faith in my daughter.

EPOV

Mom and Dad's living room is deathly silent after Bella and I have told them everything.

They're both sitting on a couch. Bella and I are sitting on another.

River's on my lap, playing with my fingers.

"Should we worry?" Bella leans in to whisper.

I shake my head, smiling at her. "They're just processing."

Then I return my focus to River.

'Cause his mom is too fucking sexy.

Earlier, after Jasper had left, Bella was... different. I kept catching her staring at me, and I'm still not sure what to make of it. A part of me wants to believe that she's ready for us to finally move on, but then there's the part that goes with "rational." I mean, I'm gonna ask her out tonight... or tomorrow, depending on what time we get home tonight.

Regardless, the looks she's sent me today forced me to jack off in the shower.

I'm sure I misinterpreted the looks, but they sure worked in the shower.

It didn't help that Bella threw herself at me after she had talked to Renee. Apparently, she had explained everything to her mom, and Renee was now a believer. Or whatever I'm supposed to call it. She's on Bella's side, anyway, and Bella is relieved. I am, too, of course. But yeah, she hugged the shit outta me after that call, and had it not been for the fact that we were already late to dinner with Mom and Dad, I would've taken a second shower.

Just sayin'.

"I think Esme's waking up, dude," Bella mentions quietly, still sitting so damn close to me. "Look at her."

So, I do.

Yep, here we go.

Mom's eyes start welling up, followed by a hand fanning her face.

"Oh, my God. Oh, my God. Oh, my God," she chants breathlessly.

Then it's Dad's turn, and Em and I have a bet going on there.

I watch in anticipation as Dad stands up from the couch. He paces for a little while, muttering stuff under his breath. I'm just like him. I also paced a shitload when I found out, ya know. So...

Come on, Dad. Come on.

"He's my grandson," Mom cries softly, and I gotta smile when she starts beaming like the fucking sun. My mom sure is a pretty woman. I love it when she smiles like that. And with the good Lord as my witness, I can relate to her happiness. "He's my grandson! Lemme hold him!"

Right, she's also a demanding little woman. So, I hand River to Bella, and she walks over to sit with Mom. I'd do it myself, but I see something else in Mom's eyes. I know she's ready to whoop my ass for everything we've caused through miscommunication. There's no way I'm going anywhere near her now.

But back to Dad.

I watch him.

He's still pacing, hands running through his hair...

More muttering...

And then...

Thud.

Like father, like son. Or the other way since I fainted before him.

Whatever.

I pull out my phone, quickly finding Em's number.

"Whaddup, cuz?" he greets.

I grin widely, leaning back against the couch. "You owe me fifty bucks, man. He just dropped."

"Dammit!"

185.

And Rose is thinking... We should all go out. We need it.

Emmett agrees after making sure it's this weekend and not the next.

BPOV

"Edward, can you help me?" I ask, not hiding my annoyance as I kneel next to Carlisle.

Don't get me started on Esme. She's still on the couch cooing at River.

"Yes, dear," Edward chuckles.

Jerk. Sexy fucking jerk.

"Carlisle, can you hear me?" I murmur, checking for his pulse.

It's strong, thank God.

"Oh, don't worry, sweetie. That's how the men in our family deal with stuff," Esme says behind me. "I'm sure Edward did the same, no?"

He sure did, yeah.

So, it's a biological thing?

Hmm, I look over at River.

Poor boy's gonna be a fainter.

"Here's water," Edward sighs, returning from the kitchen, I guess. Then he splashes water on Carlisle's face. "Yo, Dad! Wake up!"

"Edward!" I hiss quietly, smacking his arm. "Would you have liked it if I woke you up like that when you fainted?"

He narrows his eyes at me. "You threw an entire bucket of water on me, Swan."

I shrug. "I slipped."

No, he doesn't believe me – who would? – but it doesn't matter, 'cause Carlisle wakes up then.

It takes a moment or seven, but eventually he's ready to stand on his own legs. And after that, he instantly sits down again, this time next to Esme and River. Then he's pretty much lost. Both Carlisle and Esme are, actually. In the end, Edward and I feed ourselves dinner, 'cause the grandparents have evidently forgotten what food is.

"Now, listen to me, Bella," Esme says as Edward and I are getting ready to leave later on. And it's funny, 'cause her eyes aren't on me as she speaks. They're on the sleeping boy in Edward's arms. "I had no claim before, so I couldn't really demand to babysit River, but I do have claim now. So, expect my call tomorrow morning. We need to make plans for me to take him."

She's all fire. Gotta love her, eh?

Edward chuckles. "Mom, Bella returns to work on Monday. You'll be babysitting him every day, remember?"

"That's not enough," Esme replies dismissively. "We need a few weekends, too. Besides, it will difficult for you two to give me more grandchildren if you're never alone. Unless you do it at work, of course."

Aaaand there it is.

"All right!" Edward coughs. "Goodnight, Mom. Dad."

186.

And Bella's thinking... How many dates need to pass before I can molest
him?

One better be enough.

EPOV

"Don't say I didn't warn you," I tell her, putting the car in reverse. After putting some lovely distance between us and my parents' house, I feel the need to add, "Don't worry, though. Mom's harmless." I think. I hope. Maybe. "Most moms are like that, right? Itching for grandkids and... yeah."

Shut up, dude. Nervous rambling won't get you more children.

Shutting up.

'Cause I want that someday. One day. One of these days. Yesterday.

No, okay, not yesterday, but...

Yeah.

Fuck, I'm lame.

I haven't even taken Bella out on a date yet, and I'm already thinking about kiddo number two.

"Edward?"

I keep my eyes on the road. For safety reasons, ya know. "Hmm?"

"We haven't done anything in the right order," she chuckles. "So I'm just gonna say this, all right?" I give her a sideways glance, feeling fucking nervous all of a sudden. Then I manage to give her a quick nod. "We've already declared our love for each other, and we want it all together, yes?" I nod again, never hesitating about that, and grab her hand and lace our fingers together. "Well, it's only fair for me to tell you then that I want nothing more than to give River siblings. Maybe not tomorrow, but I don't wanna wait forever, either."

And my hand goes back to the steering wheel.

"Don't faint, man," I mumble to myself. "Whatever you do, do not faint."

That would be so un-cool. To faint, that is.

"Are you okay, Cullen?"

Woman is amused.

"Uh-huh."

She wants more kids.

Maybe we can start a football team.

'Cause I'm up for it. I've always wanted children. They're sorta like me. Only, they're smaller... and they piss everywhere.

Bella's phone chirps then, which allows me a few moments to calm down.

I manage. Somewhat.

"Rose sent me a text," she says. "They want us to go out with them tomorrow." Tomorrow. That's Saturday. Hmm. "You think Esme wants to babysit River?" Yes, undoubtedly. My look tells Bella how silly her question was. "Okay," she laughs softly. "So, whaddya say?"

"On one condition," I murmur, reaching for her hand again.

"And what would that be?"

"That I can take you out on Sunday."

I already know what I'm gonna do.

She'll love it.

Because I know her.

"Sounds wonderful to me."

Me too, beautiful. Me, too.

Now I have some calls to make.

187.

And Edward's thinking... !

BPOV

Last night, I was this close to knocking on Edward's door.

To join him.

But I didn't.

Because I'm a girl, and I want him to come to me. Yeah, sue me.

So, now that I'm getting ready for our club night, I'm going all out.

My denim skirt ends mid-thigh. It's dark blue and matches my thong and push-up bra in lace. Then I have a black tank top to match my five-inch heels. Oh, I'm such a slut, but I don't care. This mama's gonna get some.

It's my first night letting loose since... I don't know when.

I'm not a lipstick girl – I usually use gloss. However, that shit will just get in the way tonight – hopefully – so I apply some lip balm instead, 'cause it's less sticky. Cherry flavored. And mascara, of course. Eyeliner that I smudge out a little for that smokey effect. Last but not least, I put in the nose ring I haven't used in a few months, and then I change the barbell in my tongue to a black one.

"Bella, the car is here!" Edward calls from downstairs.

Gah, I'm excited. Rose is right. We really do need this night.

This morning after Esme had picked up River and Cap, Rose and I talked on the phone, and we quickly decided that Richmond was the way to go tonight. Port Pines is just too tiny. So, the guys ordered a car for us. Cullens and McCartys can do shit like that.

"Coming!" I yell back.

A final look in the mirror.

I clean up good.

Tonight, we have the entire house to ourselves.

I mess up my hair a little before I wrap it up in a ponytail. A few tendrils fall down my shoulders, resting on my collarbones.

Deep breaths.

He already loves you, you lucky, lucky bitch. Seducing him shouldn't be too hard.

A few moments later, I reach the last step on the stairs.

Edward's waiting for me in the hallway.

Uuungh. He looks good. Dark blue stone-washed jeans. That ass. A black button-down shirt with sleeves rolled up to his elbows. That muscular and broad back. His sexy hair all disheveled like always. And then he turns to face me. Hello, handsome. A white wife-beater hiding beneath the partially buttoned shirt. Lastly, his black All Stars.

"Hi," I say, smiling innocently.

He doesn't answer, but his eyes sure do the talking.

188.

And Rose is thinking... They're so gonna do it tonight.

EPOV

So, I was thinking... I'm gonna be a complete gentleman.

Yeah, that's not happening.

I have limits, and my earlier plan to make my fucking move after a couple of dates has now changed. I think. No. Yes. Fuck! Not yet!

You should romance the shit outta her, Cullen. She wanted nice and slow.

Then why the hell does she look like that!

"Dude," Em whispers. "You're staring at her again."

Can't. Fucking. Help. It.

"It's her fault," I mutter, averting my eyes. Instead, I look out the car window. Like that's fun. "And you're no better, by the way."

He keeps staring at Rose, and he's probably getting laid.

I am not.

But it's funny to see my cousin looking all nervous, though. Whenever he looks at Rose, there's now nervousness in his eyes. 'Cause in one week he's gonna pop the question.

A lot has happened in the year they've been together. At least, I think it's a year. They hooked up at the party that was supposed to be my Welcome-to-Port-Pines party or whatever. And that was... hmm... Yeah, okay, more than a year then. A little over a year and a half, even.

"We're here!"

Rose and Bella are excited.

I'm thinking Bella needs punishment for looking too sexy.

Right?

~o~

Two hours later, we all have a good buzz going on. We're in a corner booth. The music is... not really what I enjoy listening to... Really, the club scene isn't my style, but it's all so very, very worth it when you have a tipsy Bella sitting next to you. I may or may not have looked down her cleavage a few times, but I can't fucking help it. I'm a breast man, and hers are right there.

"One more drink then some dancing?" Rose suggests.

I adjust myself in my seat as Bella nods furiously.

189. Written to She Will by Lil' Wayne.

And Bella's thinking... Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.

EPOV

After Bella and Rose have fended off a few guys too many, Emmett and I can't sit still anymore. So, we both throw back our shots before leaving the booth.

We pause when we're halfway across the dance floor and the song changes; maybe they're gonna take a break now? But no. A new song comes on, and the girls keep dancing. That's fine by me... even if the music sucks. But even though I don't like this music, I can still appreciate the beat, and this song is definitely... suggestive... so to speak.

The song is sex.

I can definitely live with that.

When I reach Bella, she has her back to me as she dances with Rose, so when I grab her wrist, I'm pretty sure she expects someone else, 'cause the glare she gives me before she realizes it's me...

Hi there, baby girl.

She smiles. Rather seductively.

I raise my eyebrow in question. She follows the movement, and I sorta know she has a thing for my piercings. So, I swipe the tip of my tongue over my lip ring for good measure. She bites down on her own lip, and I know that I have her. With my hands now splayed over her hips, I pull her closer to me. I tilt my head down, sliding my nose along her jaw. Fuck, she's intoxicating.

"Thought you'd never come," she murmurs in my ear.

I chuckle huskily and brush my lips over the spot below her ear. She shivers and moves her hands up my biceps. "Like I could stay away."

My hands wander as we start moving to the lazy beat. It's both slow and heavy, perfect for... foreplay. The lyrics don't really make things easier. Down her perfect ass, I slide both hands. Until I meet bare skin. Fuck. She swivels her hips over my thigh, effectively grinding her pussy against me. Her breath is hot and labored in the crook of my neck, and I bite back a moan when she whimpers as I give the backside of her thighs a squeeze. She can feel my erection, of course. It's pressed firmly against her abdomen, but she only moves closer and closer. The friction is far from enough. It's only riling me up.

"Fucking cocktease," I groan in her ear.

I drop my mouth to her shoulder, parting my lips to taste her.

She fists my hair. "You're not so innocent yourself, baby," she replies breathily. Then she tilts my face closer to hers. I kiss my way there, knowing there's no such thing as going slow for us anymore. "Please, Edward. Enough is enough."

I finally reach her mouth. I kiss her hard, covering her mouth with mine. Her lips part; I'm there with my tongue. The music is pounding, the tension is thick, it's dark, bodies everywhere. We kiss passionately, still grinding slowly. I can fucking feel her heat on my thigh.

"Edward," she pants, and I start kissing her neck. "I... I... Oh, God..." I cup her ass, kneading it roughly. I suck on her neck, intent on marking her. "Take me home."

Fuck, yes.

Cradling her face, I give her one last kiss. Then I grab her hand and start leading her through the crowd of bodies. We reach Emmett and Rose on

the way, and I lean in to tell my cousin that we're leaving. Thankfully, he understands and laughs about how he knew that he and Rose were gonna end up taking a cab home. After that, Bella and I leave.

Our driver arrives with the hired car, and I usher Bella inside before I follow.

I push the button to get that damn divider up, and then I have a sexy woman straddling me.

JA Mash, I'm all caught up. I want more now. Like... so much more.

If you're not reading Within Reason, you're missing out! Fanfiction . net /s/ 7501630/1

190.

And Edward's thinking... I'm about to blow my fucking load.

BPOV

"Oh, fuck," I moan, rolling my hips over his erection. At the same time, he thrusts upward. "Damn, are we home yet?"

For a quick moment, we look out the car window.

We're almost back in Port Pines.

"A few more minutes. Now kiss me," he pants.

I do. I fist his hair and kiss him hard.

His hands slide up my thighs, not stopping until he reaches my ass. Under the skirt.

"Fucking thong," he moans.

A very soaked thong, I might add.

It's all him.

"Oh, my God," I cry out, feeling his fingers, his fingers, his magic fingers.

My head falls back. I keep grinding shamelessly, all while he teases my pussy.

"Never letting you go," he breathes out, trailing kisses along my collarbone. "You're mine now, baby girl. All mine."

I gasp.

I squeeze my eyes shut as he cups my breast.

Flashes... pounding...

Thrusting...

"Mine, baby girl."

"Mine, baby girl."

All those images.

I moan.

His body... moving with mine... long, deep strokes... filling me completely.

He's forceful, yet gentle. Commanding, but loving. He knows my body. He knows where to touch. He knows where to bite. Harder. Deeper. He makes me scream. Fucking euphoria.

Not dreams.

"Say it, baby," he moans in my ear. "Tell me it's me."

"Say it, baby," he moans in my ear. "Tell me it's me."

I whimper.

It was never my imagination.

The dreams I've had...

Memories. Flashbacks.

"I remember," I gasp, burying my face in the crook of his neck. Sensory overload. I'm suddenly close. "Edward... oh, God..."

I feel completely out of control.

He lets out a low moan and pushes two fingers inside of me. "Come, baby girl."

I feel like I'm on fire.

He controls it all.

I'm shaking.

Every thrust...

Through his jeans, I feel the head of his cock rubbing against my clit.

"Don't ever settle for second best again, Bella."

"Don't ever settle for second best again, Bella."

I scream as I climax.

191.

And Bella's thinking... I love him, I love him, I love him.

EPOV

Shortly after Bella's orgasm, we're home. I'm desperate to be inside of her. Now. Now. Not later, not soon. Now. I fucking need it.

"Memories," she pants as we stumble out of the car. "The dreams I've had, Edward..."

I find my keys.

"They're memories," she tells me.

I pause.

I look down at her.

Her dreams. I remember those. I used to wake up in the middle of night to the sound of her moans.

"They're flashbacks, Edward."

Well, thank fuck.

That's all I can think, 'cause it's a damn shame that she couldn't remember how fucking spectacular we are in bed. Even that first night, we just clicked. So, that's what she's been dreaming? About that night?

"I love you," I say, 'cause I had to.

She smiles up at me. "I love you, too."

Don't worry, I won't faint. I'm too damn horny to black out.

So, I give her a quick kiss, and then I unlock the door.

That's when she attacks.

As soon as we're inside, she throws herself at me. I barely manage to close the door behind us.

I love how fucking wild she is.

"No more waiting," she pleads, peppering my face with kisses.

Agreed. No more waiting.

I bunch up her sinfully short skirt, and she hitches a leg over my hip. I understand that we won't make it past the hallway now. Hell, she's soaked. Even more than before in the car. I finger her slowly and deeply, not even bothering to take off her thong. It's just pushed aside. In the meantime, she pushes down my jeans and boxers.

"Yes, just like that," I breathe out. She strokes my cock, swiping her thumb over my piercing. She's nothing if not thorough. After giving the head some attention, she moves down to massage my balls. I keep fingering her, spreading her wetness around. "So wet, Bella," I mumble against her neck. "I need to be inside of you."

"Yesss," she hisses when I add pressure on her clit.

With that said, I wrap her other leg around me, too. Then I'm right there.

I slam into her just as her back hits the wall. We both groan at the feelings surging through us, and it's damn clear that we're not looking for slow right now. This wasn't the plan, but fuck it. It's what we need.

"I've missed you," she moans, tilting her head back. "God, I've missed this."

I murmur my agreement, still breathless from our car ride home. I'm too keyed up for gentle and sweet. It's her fucking fault. But she loves it, so it's all good. Her heels dig into my ass. I slide out then push in again,

rolling my hips when I reach that spot of hers. It makes her moan loudly, which in turn makes me fuck her harder. In between thrusts, we kiss and claw at each other. Items of clothing get pushed off, too. My jacket ends up on a hall table. Fuck. I grunt and push off my jeans completely, kicking them aside before I focus on Bella's pussy wrapped around my cock again.

"More... more..." She starts panting.

I hiss when her fucking heels dig in further.

"Get that top off," I pant. "I need to see your tits, baby girl."

With a grunt, I back off the wall, supporting her fully under my hands. Hands that are rough and firm on her ass. She makes quick work of her top and bra, but I don't wait for her. I keep thrusting, literally impaling her on my cock as I push her down on me. Right there, in the middle of the hallway.

That's when it hits me. I don't think she's on the pill.

"Fuck!" I curse, pressing her up against the wall again. "Protection, baby."

This is where I should pull out of her.

But I can't. Not until she gives me the word.

"Fuck protection," she whimpers.

That makes me still, though.

"Bella," I breathe out. My eyes search hers.

I shiver violently.

"We know what we want," she says in between gasps. "We're fucking meant to be, Cullen."

Truer words have never been spoken.

And I've never been happier.

Or hornier.

"I love you," she mewls. "But I swear to God, you need to move again."

Yeah, but...

Not here.

So, I back us off the wall again. My cock pulses when she squirms in my arms. She kisses me all over, and I walk us somewhat blindly toward the stairs.

"You want it hard?" I moan.

Sweat beads on my forehead. It's damn hard to focus, 'cause she keeps going, using her legs to move on my cock. In the meantime, I try not to fall over as I walk up the stairs. One step at a time.

"Yes, oh God, yes!"

Fuck. I pause in the middle of the stairway. I push her up against the wall, needing to just... thrust a little. But I can't fucking hold it, and the next thing I know, I'm sitting down on a step. And Bella starts riding me like her life depends on it. Holy fuck. I moan loudly, reaching forward to get reunited with her tits. I suck a nipple into my mouth, using both teeth and tongue.

"Glorious fucking cock, baby," she mumbles, almost incoherently, but yeah, I caught the words. "Christ, how I've missed it."

Consider my ego stroked, love.

"We're not gonna make it up the stairs," I groan, thrusting up when she pushes down. "Fuck! Just like that, Bella... Oh, God..." She rolls her hips, and I feel the exact moment my apadravya rubs against her sweet spot. Her muscles tense around me, making her tighter and tighter. We're both gonna lose it.

"Close, close, close," she cries out.

I curse again, feeling my orgasm take over. My thrusts become irregular and frantic, but I manage to focus on her, too. My thumb rubs her clit persistently, and we finally fall apart together. With all the pent-up sexual frustration and longing, I come hard and fast. Her own climax seems as powerful as mine, 'cause she screams against my neck. Hell, I'm pretty sure I shout out some incoherent shit, too.

"Holy shit," she pants.

I shudder, glad that I'm sitting down, 'cause I'd fall over otherwise.

"Damn." I breathe heavily. She shivers when I kiss her shoulder. "I think you killed me, woman."

"Hmm, but what a way to go," she chuckles breathlessly.

Uh-huh, but don't laugh, please. 'Cause I can fucking feel it. More correctly: my cock can feel it.

"I love you," she whispers, and we tilt our heads together. Soft and slow kisses, such a contrast to what we just did. "You make me so happy, you know that?"

See, she's gonna have to stop that shit. 'Cause I'm not one of those guys who refuses to cry, and unless she wants to ruin our moment...

Yeah, that's right. I can both faint and cry. Fucking embrace it, people.

"Very mutual, Bella," I manage to say. "Now, let's go upstairs."

"To our bed," she says softly.

I know which one she refers to. My bed was sorta always ours.

Song – Lonely Island feat. Rihanna - Shy Ronnie 2: Ronnie & Clyde

192.

And Edward's thinking... I'm gonna marry that woman.

BPOV

That night, I lose count on how many times we fuck, make love, have sex, screw... you name it.

The only thing I know is that we collapse around four AM.

The next morning, I wake up all deliciously achy and sore.

And there's only one thing I want.

So, I kiss my sleeping Edward before climbing off our bed.

Dressed in a pair of his boxers and his dark blue Captain America shirt, I make my way downstairs to the kitchen.

But when I pass the mirror in the hallway, I make a detour to the bathroom, 'cause holy crap. I mean, I'm a makeup artist, all right? That shit I just saw is un-fucking-acceptable. So, I wash my face good and proper. My hair goes into a messy ponytail, too. Then I'm done.

iPod ready. Earbuds ready. Ingredients for pancakes ready.

I'm fucking giddy as I scroll down my playlists.

Edward & Bella's Goof-list.

Oh, yeah. That's the perfect one.

Soon, I have Lonely Island gracing my ears with their spectacular music as I prepare breakfast this lovely Sunday morning. Gah, I'm going out on a date with Edward today.

"I'm a lucky bitch," I sigh to myself.

Then it's time to shhhake it.

My ass, that is. "...Everybody now, hands in the air, it's a stick-up, stick-up..." I turn on the oven. Blueberries are the way to go this morning. "...And at your funeral, your mama gonna cry..."

Hmm, maybe chocolate, too. 'Cause Edward sure loves chocolate.

I mix all the ingredients together, all while shaking my booty to Rihanna and Shy Ronnie.

Oooh, here we go. "...If you don't wanna end up dead, you do everything Shy Ronnie says... Tell 'em, Ronnie..."

Eight pancakes with chocolate.

"...Move your ass... We gettin' money, tell 'em, Shy Ronnie..."

Eight pancakes with blueberries.

"...Please... Please use your words..."

I'm shhhhaking it!

And twirling around, using the spatula as a mic.

"...Just imagine that everyone's naked..."

I'm a freak, I know.

"...Uh-oh... Boner-alert... He really picture them naked..."

The song goes on repeat, 'cause that's how I roll.

Looking out the window, I see that it's sunny out. Hopefully, it's warm enough to eat on the patio.

Once the pancakes are done, I decide to go out and check the temperature, but when I turn around, I see that I'm, um, not really alone in the kitchen.

Edward's standing in the doorway, looking awfully amused.

He's also looking awfully sexy in nothing but a pair of basketball shorts and his piercings.

Mmm, and the ink. Don't forget the ink.

"Good morning," I say, smiling sheepishly as I remove the earbuds. "Did I wake you?"

I have a very nice voice, mind you – many can confirm this – but maybe it's not the way you wanna wake up, who knows, really?

"Maybe," he chuckles. "And I'm kinda pissed, Swan."

He's not, don't worry. 'Cause he's all smiles.

But I play along. "Oh?"

"Mmhmm." He pushes himself off the doorframe. "We always do Ronnie and Clyde together. I'm Shy Ronnie, remember?" He walks toward me slowly. My lady bits cheer. Such a hussy I am. "And this morning I wake up to you singing without me. What gives, dude?"

Oops.

"Maybe you should punish me," I say, nodding solemnly.

That's when he reaches me, trapping me between the counter and his yummy arms. Yummy muscular.

"How do you suggest I do that?" he murmurs, dipping down to nuzzle my jaw. "Any idea?"

Oh, I have a few. "Perhaps a spanking?"

"Fuck me." He's suddenly wide-eyed. "Did you just say spanking?"

"Yes." Want me to bend over?

He groans.

Then he kisses me real hard.

193.

And Bella's thinking... Ungh! Yes! Oh! Aaahhh!

EPOV

By the time I break our kiss, we're both panting for air. I have a lot to do today in preparations for our date, but now she's gone and messed up my plans with talk of spankings. And I'm a man, yeah? Exactly. There's no way I'm missing out on this.

"Turn around," I tell her, taking a step back to watch her. I palm my cock through my shorts, needing to relieve some of the tightness. "Hands on the counter." Stroking myself through my shorts is not enough, dammit, so I push them down. That's the last thing Bella sees before she obeys my demands.

"Oh, God," she breathes out.

Fuck, she's really something.

"Shimmy out of my boxers," I murmur huskily, watching her delectable backside. "Remove the shirt, too. I want you naked."

I bite back a moan when she hurries to comply. I guess she's not too sore after last night. Good. Holy fuck, then she's naked. Completely naked. Right here. In the kitchen.

I take a step forward again. My hands caress her flawless skin, kneading gently, getting her worked up. Even more than she already is. "Spread your legs," I mutter. "And push this ass out for me."

Her breathing hitches.

"You want a spanking, baby girl?" I ask softly in her ear. She shivers violently, so visibly. And nods. Fuck. Dirty girl. Well, I can definitely channel the kinky fucker in me. We're very in tune already as it is. Bella knows this, and she's the same, I realize. Lucky me. "I need your words," I whisper before sucking her earlobe into my mouth.

She whimpers. "Yes. I want you to spank me."

I hum and back away again. "Beg me." I fist my cock, stroking it slowly with my right hand. My left traces her ass, down, down, down, until I can feel her pussy. With a single finger trailing her slit, I can feel how affected she is already.

Her knees buckle slightly to confirm my thoughts.

"Fuck," she mewls. "Please, baby. Spank me."

I groan. "Again. Say please."

Damn, she's wet. I push one finger inside of her, barely able to restrain myself. I want that to be my cock. All in good time. Right. 'Cause I will definitely fuck her like this before we're done here.

"Please, Edward," she fucking begs.

I think I've died and gone to heaven.

"Dirty girl," I chuckle through my nose, removing my hand from her slowly. So, so slowly, I pull out my finger. I want her to feel it all. And she will. Images of kinky games and experimenting flash before my eyes, and I think Bella's on board. I know she is. Damn, the things we can do. Maybe I can tie her up. Have her at my mercy. Then we can do it the other way around. Fuck. I stroke myself harder. The thought of a bossy Bella taking charge... So fucking hot. There's no end to the possibilities, really.

With that thought, my hand makes impact on her left ass cheek.

"Fuck!" she chokes out.

"Too hard?" I coo, caressing the spot I swatted. I know it was surprise more than pain that elicited her reaction. "Is it too much for you to handle, baby girl?"

Her knees buckle again, and she has to hold herself up. I smirk when I see her hands on the counter, fingers trying to dig into the surface.

"Please, Edward!" she cries out, and just as my name leaves her mouth, I spank again. A little harder. "Fuck!" And again. Then again, this time in the middle, and the pads of my fingers hit her slit. That makes her moan loudly. So, I do it again, focusing more on her pussy. With a quick flick of my wrist, I spank the wet lips of her pussy. Three times. Need her, need, her, need her now. Two swats on her ass follow, and then I can't hold

back anymore. With a tight grip on my cock, I position myself at her opening before I slide inside of her in one hard thrust.

"Fffuck," I snarl under my breath.

"Aaahhh!" she cries out.

My fingers flex on her hips, digging into her soft flesh. I pause for a moment, feeling her flutter around me. The pleasure is out of this fucking world. To feel her, wet and tight. To see her, stretched and so willing. The curve of her spine, the arch of her neck. Her legs spread... My jaw clenches when my eyes land on her hair. That ponytail.

"This will be hard, Bella," I warn quietly, and then I reach for her hair, wrapping the ponytail around my fist. I tug. She fucking moans again. So, I tug again, making her head fall back. Fuck. I pull out and push in again, fucking her slowly but deeply at first. She's perfectly arched for me. Ass out, hands still on the counter, and her head tilted back to give me access to her neck and throat.

Then we're done with gentle.

"Want more, baby?" I breathe out in her ear.

With my lips brushing over her exposed neck, I can easily see when she swallows hard. So fucking erotic. It makes my erection throb once inside of her.

"Please," she whimpers. "Please fuck me." The last words come out in a labored breath.

"My pleasure," I groan. My cock slides out slowly, only to slam in hard and fast. "Goddammit!" Too late to stop now. We both moan loudly as I move in her. The pressure builds up fast. I have to close my eyes. Watching would make me come too fucking fast. Instead, I focus on feeling. With

one hand fisting her hair, I control her position. My other hand travels over her hip and abdomen, down to her wet pussy. I keep her close to me by pressing my palm down on her pubic bone, all while my fingers play with her clit. "You feel so fucking amazing, Bella," I moan against her neck.

"Oh, fuck... Oh, God... ungh..."

I speed up. Then I release her hair. I also stop touching her pussy. Instead, I pull her away from the counter, only a little, but enough to let me go deeper as I bend at the knees. "Touch your pussy for me, baby girl," I pant. With both hands on her hips, I thrust harder than before. When I push in, I pull her with me. Slightly upward, and... yeah, I find that spot. I swivel my hips, grinding into her, and she cries out loudly as I rub against her spot persistently. Out slowly, in fast.

"Ah... ungh, I'm close, Edward!"

"Dammit, Bella!" I growl. The tips of her fingers slide along the base of my cock with each thrust, and I realize that she has her palm rubbing her clit. The friction is almost too much. My balls tighten, my fucking thighs throb, my abs tense, my chest heaves. I roll my hips again, needing her to fucking explode already. "Let go, baby. Come on my cock." She starts to spasm around me; her breathing hitches until I know she's holding it completely. "That's it, baby. You're so fucking close." I drop my forehead to her shoulder, tilting it slightly to kiss the spot where shoulder meets neck. "I'm gonna come so hard in you," I breathe out.

That does it.

Sound or no sound, Bella is a sexy fucking screamer. Whether it's a silent one or a loud one, the climax is out of this world. For the both of us. She lets go completely, and I hold her up, letting her peak before I can't hold back anymore. And with a guttural moan, I feel my orgasm shoot through

me. My head tilts back as I deliver my last thrust; I can't even breathe as I release my load in pulsing streams inside of her.

For several moments we're quiet, still catching our breaths. I keep holding onto her since I can feel the tremble in her legs. But as my thighs start to burn a little, I withdraw my softening cock from her before I pull up my shorts again. Then I do the same for her, still quietly while she leans against the counter. Once she's in my boxers again, I roll them up a little, preventing them from falling down. It makes me think of all the times she wore my clothes while she was pregnant. Maybe soon my boxers won't be too large for her around the waist. One can only hope, right?

It's not like we're going to keep track on her ovulating... stuff. But we won't protect ourselves from anything, either.

"What are you thinking about?" she asks softly, looking at me over her shoulder.

I smile sheepishly and hand her back my shirt. "Not about turning you into a baby maker, that's for sure." I wink.

She lets out a surprised laugh and turn around, facing me fully. That's just distracting, 'cause her tits are right there now. But then they're not, 'cause she puts on the shirt. Bummer.

"Baby maker, huh?" She's very amused. "How many exactly are we talking here, Cullen?"

Honestly?

I shrug and place my hands on either side of her, resting them on the counter. "I dunno. I'm not the one carrying them, remember? It's sorta up to you." I kiss her on the nose. "But I always wanted a big family."

I want four kids. I may even have a couple of names picked out.

She chews on her lip, now looking a little scared. Shit. "How big?"

Um. "I don't know?" Fuck, just be honest. "Uh, two or, um... three more?"

Then she fucking laughs.

I don't see what's so funny!

"Good God, Edward." She's in the middle of a giggle fit. "I was worried that you were thinking six or seven!"

Oh.

Oh.

"I'm not," I promise, shaking my head for good measure. Does this mean that three more is okay? She's smiling, so I think it's okay. "Two or definitely three more."

See how smooth I am?

"Two or definitely three," she echoes, laughing. "Sounds very... doable."

Oh, that was terrible. "Swan. Doable? Tsk, tsk." But I'm a Bella-whipped man, and her smile turns me into a sap. "I love you." That's all I can say.

She hums. "I love you, too. And I think it's time for breakfast now, yeah?"

Considering how my stomach growls, I'd say yeah.

Pancakes!

194.

And Edward's thinking... River, River, River.

BPOV

After breakfast... and a very long and satisfying shower... Edward tells me to leave the house. I'm banned, apparently. He informs me that Esme and Carlisle are expecting me for lunch, and I'm all sorts of girly when I realize that Edward has planned it this way. He knows that we'll be away from River and Cap today, too, and thought that lunch with his folks would help. It definitely will, 'cause I miss our boy a little. Edward does, too, but says he has too much to get done.

So, before noon I'm all but pushed out the door.

"I will pick you up at Mom and Dad's place around four. That will give me a moment with River, too," he tells me. "Love you, love you, love you, now leave." And after another kiss, he shuts the door.

Hmph.

~o~

"He loves you so much, you know," Esme says softly, interrupting me as I stare at the clock above their flat screen. Only twenty minutes 'til Edward arrives. I smile at Esme, feeling the same way. "I'm glad you're finally together."

"Me, too," I respond, quietly but strongly.

I'm soon left to myself again, 'cause Esme's all about River.

Carlisle's out in their backyard, putting together some turtle shaped sandbox.

Had I not been so focused on Edward, who's picking me up in eighteen minutes, I would've worried about Carlisle and Esme's white couches. Seriously, she's feeding River ice cream. He's sitting on the couch – the very white couch – while she feeds him with a teaspoon. It's strawberry

ice cream, by the way. Which means it's pink. White couch, white couch, silly woman.

Sixteen minutes left.

Fifteen minutes.

Esme grins over at me before River does something she thinks is worth cooing over.

Fourteen minutes.

Then, finally, like hours later... or thirteen minutes, I hear the front door open.

"Mom, your favorite's here!" Edward bellows. Goof.

Esme doesn't miss a beat. "I know, honey. I just gave him ice cream."

There are two light pink spots on the couch.

Esme just flipped the cushion over after River was done.

I love her.

The cushions at home are not spotless if you turn them over, is all I'm saying.

"Yeah, okay, I can't fault you there," Edward chuckles, entering the living room. "Hello, ladies." He looks good enough to eat in his army-green cargo shorts and a snug t-shirt in black. Dark blue chucks on his feet, car key in his hand. I smile like the lovesick fool I am, feeling butterflies in my stomach and all. He dips down and kisses me chastely but firmly, and... God, he smells good... but he's missing his son. So, when he turns to Esme and River, I have a lovely fucking view. "How's my boy?" he asks, squatting down in front of River.

River reaches out to Edward, all while bouncing where he sits on a cushion. "Dadadaa!"

This is where I let out this really girly sigh.

Life doesn't get much better than this.

"Damn, I missed you, kiddo," he sighs softly, peppering River's face with kisses. Esme and I exchange aww-looks, 'cause we're women. And River's talking in his own language, to which Edward nods like he understands. "I know, dude. That's what I've been saying." Babble, babble, coo, coo, babble. "You're so right. I would do that, too."

Oh, I'm smiling so damn widely.

"Is River spending the night?" Esme asks.

Edward and I both shake our heads. One night away is enough. "No, we'll come by around ten tonight," he murmurs, Eskimoing River into a fit of giggles. "Yeah, I'll be back to save you tonight, baby." Esme huffs. "But Daddy's got big plans before then. Wish me luck?"

Oh, for the love of...

I swallow hard, not really in the mood for crying right now. But it would be so easy. Watching them together... No words can describe the warmth I feel.

"Then maybe you two should leave now," Esme says with a nod. "River and I have plans."

Pushy Cullens, eh?

"Yep, time for me to woo the shhh... out of your mommy, River," Edward chuckles.

Swoon. But it's not like he needs it. He has nothing to prove.

"Nice save," Esme quips.

195.

And Edward's thinking... I wanted it back then. Now I finally have it.

BPOV

The car ride doesn't take long, and when Edward pulls over, we're at the beach.

He doesn't make a move to get out of the car, though. Instead, he sits quietly. Arms resting on the wheel. A small, contented smile playing on his lips. And he tilts his face a little in my direction. Seatbelt still on.

"I don't know the exact moment I fell in love with you," he says softly, breaking the silence. For some reason, my heart is pounding. Anticipation, nerves. But I'm still calm in some way. It feels odd, though very, very wonderful. "But I do know why I fell in love." He makes me blush. "I won't ever lie and say that it was the way your hair looks in the sun, or how your eyes sparkle when you're excited." He winks at me, and I can't help but grin. "The first thing I noticed about you was your body."

A laugh bursts through my lips, and I feel giddy.

I also appreciate the honesty, truly. His body was the first thing I noticed, too, after all. Edward can definitely be cheesy, and I sorta adore that about him, but he's never cheesy at the wrong moments. Hard to explain, but... yeah.

"The next thing was your smile," he tells me, reaching over to brush his thumb over my bottom lip. "Your voice was next." I swallow hard, and he caresses my cheek for just a second or two. Then he offers me another

smile before moving his hand down to unbuckle our belts. He clears his throat. "I haven't really planned anything special today-"

"I don't need that," I say, needing to get that out. He's perfect. All I want is him.

Simplicity is what I want, especially after the start we've had. But regardless, grand gestures aren't for me. Not that I don't appreciate romance or surprises, because I do. I'm a girl's girl. But I don't need extravagance.

"I know," he replies, simply and softly. "Because I know you."

That he does.

Without another word, he leaves the car. When he reaches my side, he opens the door for me and offers me his hand. Chivalrous. That's him.

"We're at the beach," I state dumbly.

He laughs through his nose. "Perceptive."

Mm, aren't I?

"We're having a picnic," he says, draping an arm around me. Picnic. Simple, but so perfect. He ushers me to the back of the car and opens the trunk. "Can you take the blanket?" I nod and take it from him. "And this," he grunts. Um. A picnic basket. From his grunt, I'd say it's heavy. What happened to chivalry? He wants me to carry it? And the blanket?

"Dude," I say.

He rolls his eyes. "What do you take me for, woman?"

He's right.

"Gimme," I tell him, and he obeys. Yeah. Basket. Heavy!

While I hold the basket and the blanket, he closes the trunk before locking up the car. Then, with a mischievous grin, he steps toward me.

"Remember Emmett's 4th of July party last year?" he asks, wrapping his arms around my waist. Confused, I only nod in answer. "There's something I remember from that night. Something I wished I could do."

"Oh?" I reply, slightly breathless. Did he pack bricks in this fucking basket?

"Yes. So, hold on tight." That's all he says before he picks me up and throws me over his shoulder. I squeal, nearly dropping the basket. Holy shit! "You okay back there?" he laughs.

"Um." Well, I have the best view ever. Edward Cullen's ass. "Very."

But I'm still confuzzled, ya know.

He snickers. "Hand me the basket, baby girl." I do, wondering why the hell he couldn't just pick it off the ground. Why would I need to carry it first? "I can't bend over," he says, answering my question. So, now he's a mind reader? "No, but you're thinking out loud."

Oh...

Yeah, I knew that.

Pfft.

But... "Why can't you bend over?" I ask his ass... as he starts walking.

"You'll see soon."

Hmph.

"Anyway," he continues quietly. "The party last year." Oh, right. "I saw Emmett carrying Rose like this. I wanted to do that with you. I wanted us

to have what they had. Official and carefree." He pauses, and the moment is somewhere in between funny and sad. We were both stupid back then, and there's nothing we can do about it. The only thing, really, is that we can promise ourselves never to repeat those mistakes. I fully believe we're in this now. There's no doubt about it. And then... well, it's kinda hard to be too somber... 'cause I'm still facing his ass.

"But I have you now, Bella, and I'm never letting you go."

Then he takes off in a run.

I sound like Cap.

196.

And Bella's thinking... I'm speechless.

EPOV

When we reach the water... Well, the sand... I set Bella down on the ground again. Or, um, on the sand. Yeah. I'm nervous. Hence, internal ramblings that don't make sense.

And why am I nervous?

I have no idea.

It's not like I'm proposing.

No, I'm saving that for... I don't know... way, way down the road. Like, in a couple of weeks or so. Maybe I'll even wait a whole month. Yeah.

Still, I'm nervous. Maybe it's because this is our first time just... being. Spending time together like partners, parents, lovers. She's my best friend, she's the woman I'm absurdly in love with, she's my son's mother.

Chillax, dude. Sure, she's all of that. But she's also Bella.

I look at her as she places the blanket on the ground. Inner voice is right, of course. It's Bella. I'm not cocky or conceited when I say that no one knows her better than I do. It's just facts. Like she knows me better than anyone else, I know her. Hell, she said it herself. We're fucking meant to be.

"Hungry?" I ask her, kicking off my shoes before I sit down. I've had four hours today all to myself. I used them well. I went to Richmond for obvious reasons, but Bella doesn't know yet. That was why I needed to make a few calls – the errand in Richmond.

"I could definitely eat," she replies, eyeing the basket.

Here we go.

With the basket on my left side, I tug on Bella's hand, silently motioning her to come closer. When she's sitting right across from me, Indian-style, I bring out the first dish. "You may love blueberry pancakes in the morning," I flip open the lid of the box, and she gasps before giving me a blinding smile, "but I remember the day you told me that if they didn't take so long to make, you would eat jalapeño poppers every day."

"You remember," she chuckles softly, a tender smile on her lips.

"Of course I do," I murmur.

We slip into a comfortable silence for a while. Eyes on each other or around us.

For a while, I watch the ocean. It obviously reminds me of how I spent my time in Mexico. All the months I spent on that beach, just staring out.

"Our breakfast routine became the first thing I fell for," I admit. Watching her is always... gratifying, of course. She's a stunning woman, and to see her shimmy her ass... Yeah. But there's more than that. "It's one of your

elements." I smile down at the blanket, remembering the first time I saw her in the kitchen. She had no idea I was watching her. "So carefree and fun."

Glancing up at Bella again, I see that she's watching me with a stunned expression. I was expecting it, truth be told. There's no way she could've known just how much my life revolved around her back then. But after the shallow and vain so-called friends I had in Chicago – apart from Tyler, of course – Bella quickly became my way back to all things genuine. Not that I ever strayed from who I am, but I wasn't surrounded by people like me, either. Far from it. I had Tyler, that's it. We were, are... the same. Meeting Bella gave me more.

"Next dish," I sigh, giving her a quick grin. "Mini pizzas with pineapple – sliced, not crushed. This is what you want to eat on Fridays. Preferably with *The Notebook* or some other chick flick running." I wink at her. "The only exception is when you're sick. You can't eat pineapple then."

Personally, I don't like fruits mixed with... um, food. Ham, cheese, and pineapple... that's a no-no. But Bella's a weird chick like that. And it has to be sliced pineapple.

"You..." She shakes her head, averting her eyes for a moment. "You're amazing, you know that?"

I shake my head. "I just know you, Bella."

She disagrees. "You're amazing." Leaning forward, she kisses me softly before sitting back down again. "No one's ever done this for me. No one's ever gotten to know me like you have."

Which is wrong.

See, to me, this is something I love that Bella appreciates, but I also think it's okay for her to take it for granted. This isn't me doing some big

gesture. This is just me showing who I am. Taking time to really get to know someone is obvious to me, and you don't need dates, you don't need to play Twenty Questions. You just need to pay attention.

I know. I'm contradicting myself since I ran away from her, even though she showed what she wanted – and it was me. I know this. But those were my insecurities. I made a big mistake.

"Damn, these are delicious," she moans, bringing me back to now. I flash her a grin before taking out my own mini pizza. No pineapple, thank you very much. I hand her a Coke Zero, too, 'cause that's what she prefers with pizza. And she looks like she's stunned again. I hope she gets over that soon. "You just know, don't you?"

I shrug. No biggie.

While we eat, I decide that it's time to show her what I did in Richmond.

"So," I clear my throat, "earlier, I told you that I couldn't bend over to take the picnic basket, yeah?" She nods before sipping her Coke. "That's because I did something on my ribcage."

Placing the pizza between my teeth, I pull up my t-shirt. Then I peel off the gauze to show her my new tattoo.

I already have "Beautiful" for Bella above my heart. It was about time I got something done for our son. It's simple but what I wanted. His name and date of birth.

River Matthew Cullen ~ 09-13-10

It's not official yet, but Bella told me she didn't want it to be Swan.

You better believe I shed a manly tear or two at that.

Didn't faint, though.

"Edward," she breathes out, making me look up at her. I smile softly and pull back the gauze. When my t-shirt's back in place, too, Bella crawls over to me, putting her hands on my shoulders. "I'll let you know when I can describe how I feel, okay?" I chuckle and slide my hands up her legs as she kneels between my legs. "It may take a while, though."

"Kiss me," I murmur, looking up at her. She does. Slowly and passionately. My hands caress the backside of her thighs. "I love you," I mumble against her lips.

"I love you, too," she whispers. Our kiss quickly deepens, and with some moving around, I soon have her straddling me. She slides her tongue against mine; we both chuckle quietly when our piercings make clicking noises.

Pretty sure our first date is a success so far.

197.

And Bella's thinking... Then I know exactly what to say.

EPOV

After slowing down our kiss, we continue eating the food I've brought. She stays in my lap, though. Very, very fine by me. Each dish comes with a story or anecdote. It's my way of showing, I guess. Luckily, Bella loves it. And it's not just food. I've also brought my iPod. Songs that reminds me of her, songs that are ours, songs that make us discuss the awesomeness of said songs. We also spend time in comfortable silence, which brings me to the next thing I brought. We might be on a date but the weather is nice, and we have time. So, I bring out the latest issue of her favorite makeup magazine. 'Cause that's what it's about, right? It's just us being us. No pretenses. And we like to read together. She has one earbud, and I have the other. With her back against my chest, she reads a few articles,

studies techniques or whatever. And I locate my glasses before reading some Captain America.

"I love this song," she comments quietly, flipping a page of her magazine.

I hum, agreeing with her. It's one of Bella's playlists, and even though I'm more into rock... or Lonely Island... I admit that this song is good. "Who is it again?" I ask, reaching for my soda.

"Jem," she responds. "The song is Amazed. That's what I am, you know?"

I drop at the top of her head. "Ditto, Swan."

Damn, Captain America fucking rocks.

Just saying.

"Hey, you want dessert?" I ask, remembering the cake I bought.

"Hmm, depends on what it is, Cullen," she mutters. "Is it chocolaty goodness?"

Silly question. "Gimme some cred. Would I buy something that wasn't chocolate?"

Right?

Right?

Right.

"How chocolaty are we talking?"

I laugh quietly. "Two layered mudcake with frosting and-"

"You had me at mudcake," she says, sitting up straight. "Ooh, you're wearing your glasses."

I smirk. "Nothing wrong with your eyes, is there?"

"Nope. Which is good, 'cause you're a sight to behold."

Oh, baby girl. "That was cheesy, honey."

"I learned from the best," she sings. "Now." Ah, serious look. "Cake."

Yep, that's serious business.

Cake is served with two forks. We don't eat cake with spoons, for fuck's sake. You gotta fork it up real good. Can't fork up with a spoon.

"So... do I get an A for our first date?" I ask, giving her my best smile.

She pretends to think about as she takes another forkful of cake.

So fucking cute.

Then something shifts in her. Amusement is gone, and... something... replaces it. My brows knit together an itty bitty bit as I see seriousness. And... something tender. Um. Hmm. She puts down her fork then, before making her way over to me again, straddling me once more. Had we not been on the beach, I may have thought I was about to get lucky. There are only a few people around, but a few people is still an audience. Yeah.

"You get a question," she replies quietly.

A question? I'd really rather take that A, actually. Maybe even an A+.

"Shoot," I murmur.

She cradles my face, leaning in closely. Forehead against forehead. She's so damn beautiful. Her eyes are almost... vulnerable? But loving. Soft, coffee brown, and deep.

"Edward Anthony Cullen..." She releases a breath. "Will you marry me?"

198.

And Bella's thinking... A new level of happiness. Bliss. He's marrying me!

EPOV

I blink.

I blink again.

Did she just, um...

'Cause I could've sworn I heard...

She did.

So, I feel a little dizzy, ya know?

"Edward?"

Yes, in a minute, dear.

"Are you okay?" she asks, feeling my forehead. Funny.

I clear my throat. "You..." Keep going. "You pro..." Yes, she's a pro. You are not. "Proposed?"

I just need clarification.

"I did," she chuckles nervously. Oh, don't be nervous, baby. "Or... I am proposing." Holy shit. Don't faint, dude. Un-cool. "I don't have a diamond for your pretty finger, but I promise you can pick out anything you want." Now she's being funny. But still nervous. She has no reason to be nervous. She owns me. "All you need to do is say yes." She smiles carefully.

All I need to do is say yes.

I nod. It's a start. I also breathe, which is vital. And I start kissing her. All over her face. "Yes." And there it is! Well done, buddy. "Hell to the fucking yes, baby girl," I tell her. "And you're getting a ring on that finger." More kisses. Her eyes are brimming with tears, but they're the good kind. So, I just keep kissing her.

That works.

199.

And Edward's thinking... Mmm, my future Mrs. Cullen.

BPOV

That night, we come home as a family.

While I take Cap for a quick walk, Edward puts River to bed.

At least, that's what I think.

But when I arrive back at the house, I find both Edward and River on the couch in the living room.

Our son is asleep on Edward's chest. Edward's asleep, too.

I take a picture of it, having never seen something so incredibly wonderful.

Actually, I have. Many times, even, but things are different now.

The bad is all gone.

All doubt... Every question...

We've worked through it all. We'll keep working. No more miscommunication. Only openness and honesty.

"Edward," I say softly, squatting down next to him. I caress River's cheek. My two boys. I couldn't love them more. "Edward, can you wake up for me?"

He stirs slightly. I smile when I see how aware he is of River, even half asleep. His hand covers River's back. Eyelids fluttering until they open. So sleepy and sexy.

"Mmm, my future Mrs. Cullen," he mumbles sleepily.

I grin. "Yeah, she wants to take you to bed."

That sure makes him wake up fully. "Oh, yeah, I wanna sex you up." He grins lazily. Can't wait to marry this goof. "Let's get the little one to bed, shall we?"

Sounds like a plan.

I'm gonna spend the rest of my life with this man.

I won't ever take him for granted.

~ 200 ~

Epilogue

Riverward

I've always been a happy guy. I'm easygoing, and I cherish the good stuff in life.

Vain and shallow has never been for me.

I'm all about genuine and sweet, even though I gotta love the wicked sometimes.

I digress.

I've always been happy, but this... Nothing can beat this. I'm sure of it. I have everything I've ever dreamed of and more. Then again, I thought the same a couple of years ago. Well, I've actually thought that I couldn't be happier many times.

It's the middle of the night, and everything is quiet as I go out for some fresh air. Bella's asleep in her hospital bed, and she's sorta sick of me. Maybe it's 'cause I keep waking her up when I caress her face or kiss her hand or... yeah. It's hard to keep my hands to myself, so to speak. Normally she loves it. But tonight? Not so much. So, I figured some air would do me good. Or do her good since she needs her sleep.

When I get outside, I find a bench, a little surprised that it isn't empty. Some dude is sitting there, but I sit down anyway.

He looks up when I take my seat, and I recognize him from earlier. He arrived with his girlfriend or wife – whatever – when Bella and I arrived. For the same reason, to boot.

"Hello," he says politely. Then he goes back to watching the ground.

"Hey," I say back with a nod, leaning back against the bench.

It's a lovely night, I gotta say.

It's in the middle of the summer.

"I saw you earlier, right?" the dude asks. "Your partner was in labor, yeah?"

I smile, unable to do anything else, really, and nod. "Yep, my wife just had our fourth."

This is where I wanna take out my wallet to show a complete stranger the photos I keep there. Bella, my wife and best friend. River, my almost six-year-old goofball. Dakota, my four-year-old rock chick. Savannah, my two-year-old princess. And then I wanna whip out my phone, 'cause I don't have real photos of my little newborn Cruz. Oh, yeah. He was definitely conceived in Veracruz.

I wouldn't surprise myself if I showed photos of our new house or the pets, either. I'm crazy about it all. Sometimes I miss our old house, but it was way too small for our crazy family. I may be over thirty now but the kid in me will never die, and said kid needs space. Same goes for the real kiddos. Not to mention Cap and the other two pigs. Ya know, Hellboy and Catwoman.

But I won't do that. Show pictures, that is.

'Cause he's a stranger.

"Is this your first child?" I ask instead. I'm a – what I like to call – spectacular regular at the hospital now, and I think I recognize a new daddy when I see one. I mean, between my own fantastic four, and then Emmett and Rose's three, I should have my own parking spot here.

The man surprises me with a bitter chuckle. "I wouldn't really know."

Um. "Sorry?"

He grins, but there's nothing humorous about it. Actually, he looks rather devastated. "I thought everything was perfect, ya know?" No, I really don't know. "But now..." He shakes his head. "I mean, I don't see how it's possible, 'cause we both have brown eyes, and Sarah was born with blue."

Oh.

Oh!

"Oh, man," I chuckle, giving his shoulder a squeeze. "Lemme tell you a story, dude. It will save you some trouble."

And Cap's thinking...Completion

River Outtake/Futuretake

And Big Guy's thinking... Oh, yeah. Right there, baby. Mmm. Fuck.

Cap's POV

The coast is clear. Big Guy and Hot Mama are gettin' down and dirty in the bedroom.

They always do.

Especially now when she's all fat and shit.

I swear, Big Guy's a fuckin' weirdo. Like a while ago, for instance, when Hot Mama was dressed like a ghost for a day. She had this white dress and white shit covering her hair and face... Big Guy was all up in that. Fucker even fell flat on his face. Out there, in the wild. There was sand and water. We had to go on a fuckin' giant ass bird to go there. And my so-called family – who is supposed to love me – put me in a goddamn cage and shit. That was nasty, and it took me a while to forgive them for that. Whateverthefuck. He fell asleep for a lil' while, there in the sand, and Hot Mama got all worried and started fanning his face.

Feelin' me?

I digress.

Big Guy's weird.

Hot Mama's fat.

Good thing I have Wee Kid. He's cool. He gives me grub when Big Guy and Hot Mama aren't lookin'.

Like a graceful kitty, I slide in to the kitchen. Dammit, Hot Mama's been vacuuming the floor. No fuckin' crumbs. What gives, dudes?

So, I make my way toward the living room instead.

Big Guy's always hiding goodies under the couch. I think he's afraid that Fat Mama... Fuckin' gee, I'm sorry. Hot Mama. Yeah, I think he's afraid Hot Mama's gonna take his candy away. But don't worry, buddy. She won't touch your shit.

'Cause I will.

Oh, yeah. Fuckin' A. I find the motherload of sweet stuff under there.

Y'all bitches can thank me later when Wee Kid doesn't find this and choke.

Or that Hot Mama gets fatter.

I'm like the die hard fucker in, uh... well, Die Hard. Savin' lives and whatnot by eating candy that Wee Kid can otherwise find.

Know what I mean?

Big Guy and Hot Mama keep makin' noises upstairs. Sometimes I think they're mocking yours fuckin' truly. Especially Big Guy, 'cause the sounds he makes...

Fucker sounds like me, ya know?

All right, not really. Whateverthefuck.

Once the stash of goodies is gone with the wind, I breeze through the living room, now eager to search the floor in the hallway. Crumbs, c'mon. Appear, why dontcha?

Ooh, here's somethin'. Uh, nope. That's dirt. Fuck, Hot Mama should clean that mess up! Bitch tryin' to kill me or what?

Unfortunately, my search is over when I hear the door opening upstairs. Hot Mama's gigglin' and Big Guy's chucklin'.

As per fuckin' usual, they check on Wee Kid, making sure he's still snoozing, and after that I can hear them comin' down the stairs.

I'm waiting. Yeah, here I am.

'Sup, homies?

Big Guy's grabbing at Hot Mama's fat ass and belly, all while doing some weird groaning sound.

I mentioned he's weird, yeah?

Splendid.

And puh-lease, put some friggin' clothes on, people. Hot Mama's just in a white sheet. Hey, maybe she's gonna dress up like a ghost again. But bitch, make sure Big Guy doesn't flatline again. He tends to do that sometimes.

"Hey there, buddy," Big Guy says, leaning down to scratch me behind the ears.

Don't mess up my do, you assmunch. I fuckin' love you and shit, but enough is enough. I only cuddle and snuggle when I'm full, and can't you hear my stomach?

Gimme some grub before I die.

"Time for some food, Captain?"

Seriously. Is he expecting an answer?

Whateverthefuck.

Thankfully, they enter the kitchen, and I follow, making sure Big Guy gives me enough food in that bowl.

Oh, don't be cheap. A liiiil' bit more. Yeah, okay. I guess that's enough.

Cheers, man.

"We have a doctor's appointment tomorrow," Hot Mama says, but I tune the byrd out. I mean, I love her... I really do, but... ya know...

Instead, I eat.

Life is good.