

The Longest Summer

by lexiecullen17

Bella wants Edward...the only problem is, he's a counselor at her summer camp. And although Bella has always been one of Edward's favorite campers, that's all she'll ever be to him...right? When Bella returns as a counselor, can she change his mind? AH.

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http://www.fanfiction.net/s/5445804/8/The_Longest_Summer

Chapter 1 Vodka Lemonade

~ Bella ~

Here it was... the big moment. Weeks of failed attempts at seduction, drunken confessions, and confusion clouded my mind, but here I was. I stood before him, trembling slightly. He approached slowly, like he was somehow afraid that he was going to scare me off.

Silly boy, I came to you.

"Bella," he whispered my name reverently, as if it were a prayer. I gulped. No one had ever said my name like that before, and it gave me the confidence to continue. "What are you doing here?" He stood directly in front of me now, brushing the hot tears off of my cheeks with the pads of his thumbs. He looked so sad, so broken, but so desperate. In that moment, the past few weeks ceased to matter. I had him. I had this. I could do this.

Okay, pep talk over, Bella.

I lifted my head to meet his before placing a shaking hand on his cheek. He sighed and leaned into my hand. In a rare moment of determination, I moved my hand from his cheek to rest at the base of his neck, pulling his mouth towards mine. He resisted ever so slightly before groaning and crashing his lips into mine.

"Bella, Bella, Bella," he moaned, tugging off my shirt and unbuttoning my shorts. "You have no idea how long I've wanted this." The world slowed down as he began to remove his own clothing. First his shirt met mine on the floor, revealing a set of washboard abs that I knew were there... but, oh, was it different to see it now. Fuck. I was totally going to lose it. Next, he kicked off his sneakers and pulled off his pants.

"You're so beautiful," I breathed, taking in his body for the first time. Within seconds, his body was crushed against mine again, leading us back into his bed. We collapsed in a heap of groaning limbs, hands holding onto one another for dear life.

His tongue slid into my mouth, making us both whimper with pleasure. Without further ado, he moved his mouth to my neck as he reached behind me to unclasp my bra. In the distance I heard a door slam and a familiar laugh pierce through the silence of the night. My eyes widened and I froze for a millisecond before talking myself down and returning to his attention. But the damage was already fucking done.

He pushed himself off of me, sitting on the edge of the bed with his eyes downcast, surely avoiding the tears that I could now feel streaming down my cheeks. Boys were not made to do well with crying virgins in their bed. "We shouldn't be doing this, Bella," he sighed running a hand through his tussled hair. "It's... this is wrong, I... I'm sorry," he stuttered, throwing my clothes back at me before fleeing his own bunk as I looked for something to cover my naked chest.

It's wrong, I repeated in my mind.

He was right, of course. This was wrong. *Everything* was wrong. I sat there clutching his pillow to my chest, finally allowing my heaving sobs to overtake me. *It's wrong. It's so wrong.*

DAY 1

"LB!" I cringed at Emmett's pet name for me as he barreled through the small airport.

"Em! Put me down!" I squealed, gasping for air in his huge clutches. Finally on my feet, he leaned over to pick up my bags, slinging the large duffel over his shoulder.

"Aw, LB, I've missed you!" I almost growled as I felt his hand ruffle my hair.

LB stood for "Little Bella." And even though Emmett had dubbed me with the nickname at the age of 8, it had yet to disappear... no matter how many times I had begged for him to call me *just* Bella. Not only that, but the nickname spread like wildfire, and as soon as I stepped onto Long Lake Camp grounds... I was LB. *Fucking Emmett and his gossiping.* This summer, though, I was determined to be rid of the initials permanently. Finally. *Hopefully.*

"Her name is Bella, Emmett, remember?" Alice laughed, peering from behind her duffel. It was as large as she was. *Why does Alice never get called little? Hmph.*

"Alice fucking Brandon, as I live and breathe!" Emmett's smile was contagious, and soon we were all laughing. "Hey, you cut your hair," he added wrapping an arm around her midsection, pulling her flush against him...bags and all.

Alice gasped loudly as he tugged at her newly shorn dark locks, while simultaneously thrashing her legs against the hulking body that kept her in place.

I smiled at the sight of them playing. My pseudo-family was being reunited piece by piece, and it

was starting to feel like summer.

"Emmett McCarty," I scolded, "you put my best friend down right now!" Emmett's head snapped around to meet mine as trademark grin spread across his face, showing off his killer dimples. Never breaking his grin, Emmett placed Alice down on the ground before strolling up to me, wrapping an arm around my shoulder.

"This is unreal. I can't believe you guys are here for pre-camp! I didn't believe it when they told me my two favorite campers were coming out here as counselors. You guys 18 yet, or what?" he laughed, squeezing my shoulders.

"Really, Emmett? You wouldn't fuck us if we were under 18? You know, the age of consent in the state of Maine is 16 years old."

I rolled my eyes at Emmett's face of mock shock. That was just how we were. Emmett may have been ten years my senior, but he had worked at the camp since my first year there. 18 and straight out of college, Emmett needed some easy cash during the summer and apparently teaching girls how to play basketball in 90 degree, sweltering weather sounded appealing. *To each their own, right?* I wasn't not complaining, though. Emmett was more my family than my actual family. In fact, my Long Lake pseudo-family meant more to me than my blood relatives could ever understand.

Emmett was present to witness almost all of my firsts... most of them ridiculously embarrassing, of course.

He had been a chaperone at the dance with the all-boys' camp across the lake where I had my first kiss. He was the one who caught Alice and me sharing our first cigarette, sneaking it from one of the members of the kitchen staff. Emmett was there when I got drunk for the first time. Emmett was the one who found me crying at the docks when I received an emergency phone call that my father had been shot in the line of duty. And even though Charlie had made it through, I assumed that one day it would most likely be Emmett walking me down the aisle.

"I'm not going to dignify that question with a response, LB. And let's also not talk about how you know what the age of consent is... moving on..." He easily tossed our large duffels into the trunk of his car. As Alice and I moved to get in, he paused and spoke up again. "Hold up, children, I'm supposed to be picking up someone else now, too."

"Can we wait in the car, Em?" He looked distracted.

"What? Uh, yeah. Go for it. I'll be right back, hopefully with another counselor in tow." He laughed and headed back into the tiny airport as Alice and I slid into the backseat.

I breathed in deeply, enjoying the familiar pine scent, attempting to calm myself before the madness began. This summer everything was going to change. This trip SHOULD have been familiar... comforting even, but I couldn't get my heart to stop racing. I was pretty fucking sure I knew why, but I wasn't quite ready to admit that to myself... not yet, at least. I would at least be able to hold onto my denial for the 25-minute drive from the airport.

"Bella," Alice scolded, placing a calming hand on my twitching knee. *I hadn't even realized I'd been doing that. Huh.* "Why the hell are you freaking out right now? We're about to spend three months in our favorite place in the entire world with our best friends. Calm the fuck down."

"I hate you."

Alice smirked. "This non-meltdown wouldn't have anything to do with a certain video counselor we all know and love..." she trailed off.

There go my denial tactics. Thanks, Alice.

I stiffened ever so slightly, my heart racing into overdrive before relaxing and turning back to my waiting friend, controlling the impending panic attack. "Please, Alice," I scoffed dismissively. "I haven't even talked to him in two years. I don't even know if he's still working here. And even if he is, he's never given me any indication that I was more than a little sister to him," I grumbled under my breath, hoping Alice wouldn't read too much into it.

Too late. "Ha!" Alice smiled, waving her arm widely, "I KNEW it had to do with him," she laughed. "You're so ridiculous, Bella. Everyone knows that your relationship with him when you were a camper was borderline inappropriate, and in the past two years you became legal, so you really shouldn't be so panicked."

"Borderline inappropriate?" I choked. "What's that supposed to mean? And everyone?"

Alice tipped her head back and laughed loudly, clutching her stomach. "Are you serious, Bella? Long hours in the video shack... just you and him 'working' on your projects. Puhleeze. Like anyone believed that!"

"We were!" I insisted, getting a little annoyed that I had been in the center of the camp rumor mill without my knowledge. "He has a degree in film from RISD, and I want to be a director... he was just helping me out, Alice, you're being ridiculous."

"Bella, I hate to break it to you, but I think *you're* being the ridiculous one. Why are you so freaked out? You're both counselors now! You should be pumped. You don't have to lust from afar anymore... you can actually step up and DO something about it," she giggled.

"Lusted? That's so fucking creepy, Alice. He's like my brother—"

"Yeah," Alice scoffed, nudging my shoulder, "if you want to suck your brother's cock, then sure." I was about to respond when I heard the door being wrenched open.

"Whoa, what's this I hear about cock sucking, LB?" Emmett slid into the driver's seat, a beautiful blonde next to him, riding shotgun.

"Nothing," I grumbled crossing my arms angrily.

"Aww, did Tweedledumb and Tweedledumber already get into a fight? It really IS summer." I huffed in annoyance, not wanting to talk about *him* yet. "Anyway, ladies, behave. This here is

Miss Rosalie Hale, and she's new this summer, too, so be nice, please."

Rosalie turned around allowing me to take her in for the first time. She was gorgeous. Her blonde hair was perfectly straightened around her tanned shoulders, but her smile was so friendly that I couldn't help but be drawn in.

"Hey." She held out her hand for me. "I'm Rosalie. It's nice to meet y'all."

Oh, the accent. I could see Emmett's hands twitching to touch her already. He always *did* have a thing for Southern girls.

"I'm Bella, and this is Alice."

"I know, I heard. This one's got quite the mouth on him, doesn't he?" she said pointing in Emmett's direction. "He tells me you guys are ex-campers? What's that like? What made y'all come back to work here?"

"Whoa, slow your roll, Rose," Emmett laughed.

"Uhh, I don't think so, sir," she snipped at Emmett before turning back to us. "Now, tell me everything."

She was loud and excited and bossy and I think I loved her. I said as much.

"Wow, Rosalie. I think I love you." Emmett's mouth dropped to feign shock before slipping into a sly smile and winking at me through the rearview mirror.

"I think I love you, too, Bella. Now, let's start with the important stuff... like whose cock you want to suck?"

Both Emmett and Alice snorted loudly. I fidgeted in my seat trying to think of any other image than my lips surrounding his cock, but it was impossible. I'm a very visual person.

Seeing my obvious discomfort, Rosalie started up again with her line of questions. "Okay, we'll get back to that one. How about you tell me a little bit about the camp? All I know is that I needed some quick cash before heading to LSU in the fall, and this was the only job listing that returned my call."

Alice did her best to fill Rosalie in on the camp while I tried in vain to calm myself down.

"All girls camp for two months? Every summer for eight years? Hell, no. I couldn't do it—sounds like torture. Why the hell would you come back voluntarily?" Rosalie laughed wryly.

It was true. To any average teenage girl, it would have been the epitome of torture. Three months with no boys? I mean, please, only the daughter of a cop would somehow get coerced into THOSE summer plans. But, I loved it. And I loved Alice. And even though I lived in a small town in Washington and she was from a small town in Connecticut, for those eight summers, we would enjoy our boy-less, heavily scheduled, ridiculous activities together. The way it should be.

"It's because of me," Emmett smirked. "They just can't get enough of me. Ten years later, and they're still coming back for more. So, Rosalie, do you have a boyfriend?"

Subtle. You're only 10 years older than her... perv.

Uhhh, yeah, like you can talk?

Shhh.

Rosalie took out her phone and flipped it open, letting us see the gorgeous brunette set as her background.

"Yup, this is Royce," she smiled. "We've been together for four years. And Emmett, I wouldn't go bragging that this is your tenth year working as a counselor. Aren't 30 year olds supposed to have real jobs?"

"28 is NOT 30, first of all. And, yeah, I have a job. I work as an assistant basketball coach for a high school in Chicago. And what about you? I thought Southern girls were supposed to be demure and well behaved..."

"I don't conform to stereotypes," she quipped back.

Man, my neck was getting a workout trying to keep up with these two. Their bickering was like the US Open of flirting. I gave Rosalie two weeks until she broke up with the boy back home.

"Bella, let's bring this back to you. I'd say we're sufficiently warmed up. Let's get more personal. Virgin?" she asked point blank.

"No," Alice said pointing to herself. "Yes." She hugged my shoulders, squeezing my cheek towards her in an uncomfortable death grip.

Thanks, Alice. That's what friends are for.

"Aw, LB. You're still LB," Emmett smiled widely. He'd never admit it, but somewhere I think he was relieved to hear about my virginity still being in tact. No matter how old I was, I'd always be "Little Bella" with the pigtail braids and cut up knees and braces.

"Interesting. *Now* can you tell me about the cock you want to suck?" Rosalie prodded.

Really? Were we really going back to that?

The entire car started laughing maniacally, Alice slapping Rosalie's hand five. It was clear that she was already a full-fledged, initiated member of the group. "I'm not going to suck ANYONE'S cock!" I exploded, my temper finally flaring out of control.

Suddenly, I felt a cool breeze on my shoulder, and I realized that in my fury, we'd arrived at camp... and everyone in the parking lot was staring at me.

Please kill me now.

"Well that's disappointing, LB," a very familiar voice called from behind me. I peered out of the car nervously, knowing that this was only more ammunition for the boys to tease me with.

"Hey, Jake," I smiled as the tall, tanned, and gorgeous man walked up to me. I wrapped my arms around his waist... barely. The guy was HUGE. I was lucky that Jake lived nowhere near my hometown. Having him around would scare off the boys at school more than my Chief of Police father. I knew he was a softie, though. All gooey marshmallow on the inside.

I trailed behind Jake and Emmett, who lugged all of our bags to our cabin. Rosalie, Alice, and I decided to room together until the campers arrived. Upon reaching the bunk, Rosalie insisted that she needed a shower, and Alice wanted to start burning her playlists for her dance classes. I, on the other hand, had absolutely nowhere I needed to be.

Grabbing one of each of Jake and Emmett's hands, we walked back to the head of campus and sat in the roomy Adirondack chairs that overlooked the lake.

"LB, you've been crap at staying in touch these past few months."

"Senior year," I sighed. "It took its toll. It's done, and now I'm here. Thank God."

Jake wrapped an arm around my shoulders and I leaned in, happy to be home. "Tell me about your life. Emmett tells me that you're going USC film school?"

I nodded happily. That was something I was actually excited to tell... "Hey, where's..." My voice trailed off as I looked around for the man who was usually attached to Jake's other side. Thank God, he was nowhere in sight.

"Already down in the video shack," Jake answered, not needing me to finish my sentence. "He said he needed to organize his shit now that they're giving him an assistant."

"A, uh... what?"

"Oh, yeah. I forgot to tell you since you've been so MIA," Jake laughed. "My baby cousin, Seth, just graduated from NYU film school and needed to make some cash. I feel a little bad. I didn't know they were going to put him as an assistant. He's the one who's going to have to put up with our favorite pansy ass every day. Pretty boy's already been complaining about how he has a 'system' and he doesn't want someone 'invading his space' all the time..." Jake rolled his eyes using air quotes to make fun of his best friend's anal retentiveness perfectly.

The little green monster inside me sprang to life. How could they give him an assistant... who wasn't me?

At least it's a male assistant.

Ooo... fair point.

We caught up for a few more hours, watching the sun set over the lake until Jake decided that he was starving and we should all go out for dinner and drinks.

"Make sure you bring your new friend, LB!" Emmett shouted as he walked down towards the male staff quarters. I realized that I had yet to go and see the infamous "Bunk 7," and I flushed at the possibility of seeing it later tonight.

Back at our cabin, Alice and Rosalie were already dressed and shower and obviously in the midst of some heavy gossiping.

"Where have you been?" Alice raised her eyes suggestively.

"Dinner with the Bunk 7 boys in an hour. Be ready." I ignored her question, simply grabbing my shower stuff and headed to the tiny stalls with not enough hot water to commence my beautifying for the evening.

I turned the water as hot as it could go, and stepped into the stall. As I lathered my hair, I finally felt all of the nervous energy springing up inside of me. He was here. I could walk the three minutes down to the shack and see him. Touching myself in the shower where my campers would be in less than a week felt kind of dirty, but I needed a way to dispel some of my sexual frustration. And to be honest, the first time I ever touched myself was at camp at the age of 13; it was the day I first laid eyes on him. As my hand snaked down my body, I imagined my body pressed against his, leaning into his hardness as his lips savored my neck. Bracing myself against the wall, I came quickly and silently.

Luckily, I managed to get all of the soap off my body before the shower ran cool. I decided that I was too hot already to blow dry my hair and put in some curling product before heading back to the bunk, where I was sure Alice had already laid out an outfit for me.

"You know, you could cut down on your shower time by masturbating before hand." Rosalie threw on a jean skirt and tank top as I stopped in the doorway, turning ten kinds of red. "Oh my God, Bella, I was *totally* kidding," she laughed adding a long necklace to her outfit, making her look like she just stepped out of the pages of a fashion magazine.

"Here." Alice thrust clothes into my waiting hands, as I knew she would. I looked down at the pair of black shorts in my hands skeptically. "They're going to make your ass look amazing. Plus, I'm letting you wear your favorite t-shirt, and your knee high chucks."

I bought the chucks on a whim the fall after my final summer of camp two years ago. He had made a throwaway comment about how hot girls who wore the zip up, knee high sneakers were, and I couldn't help myself but to buy them. I blamed my impulse control on the purchase, but Alice knew better. Alice *always* knew better.

A low whistle greeted us as we approached the parking lot, where a clean and spiffy looking Emmett and Jake waited for us... along with another guy who I'd never seen before.

"LB, looking HOT!" Jake whistled as he wrapped an arm around the third guy, pushing him

towards me with a shove. "LB, Seth... Seth, LB." His eyes darted between us. "You're both film kids, so I'm sure you'll have *tons* to talk about."

My mouth dropped. Jake was trying to hook me up with his baby cousin? Who was the assistant film counselor? This couldn't end well.

"It's Bella, actually." I narrowed my eyes at Jake as Emmett, Alice, and Rosalie tried to mask their laughter with muffled coughing. *Assholes*.

"Great! Let's get going! I'm starved..." Jake climbed into the passenger seat, completely oblivious.

Ugh. It was definitely going to be a long summer.

As we were sliding into the backseat, someone grabbed my hand. "Alice told me," Rosalie whispered into my ear. "We'll talk later, okay?" I nodded, but I wondered what Alice had actually told her. What was there to tell? Not much.

I lusted (yes, lusted) and pined for four years, but when I stopped being his camper, he dropped me like a hot potato. I only knew that he'd been working as a videographer in Providence and working at the Brown bookstore because Emmett knew I'd want updates. I'd never ask, but Emmett would always say something. But to me? Not a word for two years. I wasn't even sure if he knew I was back at camp this summer.

"Bella, are you okay?" Alice nudged me in the stomach hard.

"Ow, what the hell, Alice?"

"You're going to have to sit on Seth's lap," Jake smirked. "I forgot there isn't a front seat in Em's truck."

"Sure," I rolled my eyes and slid onto Seth's lap. He chuckled uncomfortably, and I was sure he felt just as weird about Jake pushing us together as I did.

Luckily, we were out of the car and being escorted into a booth at Emmett's favorite lobster pound in less than fifteen minutes. Alice was giddy.

"I can't believe we're actually here! I've heard all the counselors talk about MJ's Lobster Pound for so long... and, look! We're here! Bella, don't you feel like a counselor?"

"Well, since we actually *are* counselors now... um... yeah?" But, I, too, was ecstatic to be there. MJ's was legendary among campers. It turned into a bar after hours, and every time a counselor said they were getting dressed up to go to Wal Mart, we knew it was code for getting wasted at MJ's.

"Not gonna lie, LB, it's a little weird seeing you here." Emmett slid in next to me making Jake scowl.

Thank you, Emmett.

Dinner went by at a snail's pace. I kept glancing towards the door any time anyone would walk in, and I was getting steadily more and more disappointed. I half-heartedly listened as Seth explained his senior film project, a documentary about mob ties to the New York fish market, and picked at my soggy fish and chips. My stomach was doing back flips, and I had lost any inclination to eat any sort of real food. When Emmett's phone vibrated on the table, I nearly jumped out of my skin.

Emmett put a hand on my thigh and narrowed his eyes. "I wish I had some pot to calm you down. You *really* need to mellow out."

"I wish you had some pot for me, too..." I grumbled, my eyes flicking to the door only to be disappointed again. Emmett sighed and wrapped a large arm around my shoulders as he opened his phone.

My breath caught in my throat as I read the text along with Emmett.

Em, our new roomie just got here. I'll help him unpack. Finish up without me. Be there in a bit.

I'm sure he could feel my pulse pick up under his hand, but Emmett just smiled evilly at me before texting back.

No prob. I'll enjoy getting LB and A wasted w/o u. Maybe if I get her drunk enough, LB will give up her 'no cock sucking' rule for the summer.

"Emmett!" I gasped, slapping his arm as hard as I could, attempting to steal back his phone.

"I was kidding! I was kidding! I'm deleting it!" Emmett struggled to grab his phone out of our tangled grasp. My face paled as I felt my thumb accidentally brush over the 'send' button. Emmett's face dropped as he got the phone back into his hand. "Shit. I really wasn't going to send that... fuck. Uh..."

Within seconds, his phone was chirping again. "I really don't want to read what it says..." I groaned. Alice and Rosalie's eyes were wide with curiosity, but I was entertaining thoughts of suicide right about now.

"Yes, you do," Emmett laughed, holding up the phone for both Rosalie and me to read over his brawny shoulders.

One can only hope. But seriously, if your dick goes anywhere near either of them, I will castrate you.

I released the breath I'd been holding in soft woosh like a slowly deflating balloon. He took it as a joke, obviously. It came from Emmett. Emmett didn't do anything but joke.

The rest of our meal went off without incident, but I still couldn't bring myself to eat anything. If anything, my nerves were now gaining speed knowing that he was on his way. Soon, the

restaurant dimmed its lights and a DJ appeared out of nowhere.

"Bathroom break!" Alice interrupted my thoughts, pulling Rosalie and me out of the booth.

Out of nowhere, I was suddenly being accosted by the little thing. I sat with my feet dangling off the edge of the sink like a small child while Alice applied darker eye shadow, eyeliner, and mascara to my face.

As Alice continued her work, I heard Rosalie's phone ring out with "Sugar Pie Honeybunch." She picked it up, flushing slightly. "Hi, hun... yes, I've met some really nice girls already... uh huh... it's gorgeous up here... I know, I can't wait 'til you come visit, either. Yeah, we just wrapped up dinner... can I call you later? Great—love you, too..."

My mouth dropped in response to the demure Southern girl who had just answered the phone. She was *not* the witty vixen from the before, that was for sure. She looked flustered, straightening out her skirt before dragging us both to the bar... where Emmett was already located, of course.

"I'm buying shots!" Alice squealed. "What do you want, Em?"

"Tequila all around," Emmett whooped, clearly already a little bit intoxicated. I wondered for the first time that night who the hell was going to be driving home. Jake and Seth were already pounding back beers at the end of the bar. "I can't believe I'm taking shots with you girls—I knew you when you were eight!"

We toasted to being underage before knocking back the harsh shots, causing Emmett to choke slightly mid-shot.

"Fake ID, bitch!" Alice cheered, knocking back another shot easily. For a tiny little thing, she could hold her liquor with the best of them. Apparently that's the only good thing Connecticut prep schools were good for... building alcohol tolerance. I knew I'd have to slow down if I wanted to remain functional tonight, though.

I took a small step back away from the bar and saw a flash of bronze in my peripheral vision. And then I panicked.

"Alice—I need you to get me a vodka lemonade," I shouted over the loud music. She didn't respond, only followed my gaze before heading back to the bar. I'd pay her back tomorrow. Right now, I needed a bit of liquid encouragement. The sweet liquid felt good in my stomach as I sucked up sip after sip through the long, pink straw.

"That better not be what I think it is," a soft velvet voice warned in my ear. I spun around quickly, only to be met with the gorgeous green eyes that had invaded my dreams for the past five years. He looked even better than I remembered, all artistic and brooding with his intense emerald eyes and disheveled bronze hair.

"Lemonade?" I smiled cheekily, glad that I already had a shot and a half a drink under my belt before his arrival. He rolled his eyes, making a disapproving *cluck* with his tongue before

grabbing the drink out of my hand. I stood there, mesmerized, as I watched his lips latch onto the straw and take a long pull of the drink before handing it back to me.

"I know we haven't spoken in a few years, but I *know* you're not old enough to be drinking that."

"And I know we haven't spoken in a few years, but I *know* you're not old enough to be acting like my father, Edward." His name rolled off my tongue easily, surprising us both. Feeling brazen and confident, I ran my hand along his shoulder as I walked away from him.

Suddenly, I felt a pull on my wrist, slowing me down. "Where are you going?" His eyes were laughing.

"To get another drink. Some geezer just stole half of mine." His lips curled into a half smile as he shrugged and released my wrist. I walked back towards the bar feeling on top of the world. I had no idea who this girl was, but I think I liked her.

At the bar, Emmett passed me another drink, smiling widely. I looked around, but Rosalie was nowhere to be seen... and Alice was chatting rather animatedly with a tall, blonde guy I'd never seen before.

The rest of the night became a blur as Emmett and I decided to go shot for shot. Definitely a poor choice on my part.

The next thing I knew, my head was throbbing, and I was begging for death. My mouth felt like sandpaper, and the ground swayed below my horizontal body. I opened my eyes cautiously, having no idea where I was or how I got home. All I knew was that the air around me smelled delicious.

"LB," I heard the velvet voice calling me, coaxing me from my slumber. "LB, wake up..." A tingling path ran from my shoulder, down my arm. I tensed, the pieces of the evening clicking into place.

"Edward?"

Chapter 2 Old Friends

~Edward~

"Jake, get the fuck off me," I groaned, trying to push my sorry excuse for a best friend off of my bed. He fell to the floor with a loud moan and a thud, putting a smile on my face.

"You jack ass, Edward! What the fuck?" Jake scrambled back onto the bed, attempting to climb on top of me again as I thrashed my legs in protest.

"Wow, you guys are gay," Emmett snickered, ruffling my hair, not helping me push Jake off at all.

"I just missed my best friend," Jake cooed batting his lashes over-exaggeratedly making kiss faces in my direction.

Emmett just rolled his eyes and picked up his car keys. "Gay," he muttered as Jake gave me a hand to pull me out of bed. "Okay, boys, I'm off to the airport. Try and be fully clothed when I return, please."

I stretched my sore limbs, which were pretty angry with me for traveling on a cramped Grey Hound bus for eight hours the night before. Come to think of it, I really needed to shower in the near future. Grime covered my body, making me shudder in disgust at myself. I was surprised that Jake could stand to lay on top of me with how gross I currently felt. But I had arrived at camp at 4 AM... and couldn't bring myself to hop into the shower before passing out in the familiar twin sized bed in the small, Star Wars poster covered room.

"Airport?" I asked sleepily, not completely awake yet... despite the fact that it was already three in the afternoon.

"Yeah, I'm on new counselor pick up duty, remember? And guess who's on my list today?" Suddenly, Jake looked like he was having a seizure, jumping all over the room, holding hands and dancing around Emmett looking all kinds of ridiculous.

"What?"

"LB and Alice get here today!" Jake squealed like a little girl.

Wait, what? "Bella?" I asked incredulously. This was the first I was hearing of this. Why wouldn't my best friends tell me that my favorite camper was coming back to work here? I suddenly felt like I was on the outside of a clique.

"Oh, someone brought out the 'B' word," Emmett laughed, throwing an arm around my shoulder.

I couldn't believe that she was old enough to be *working* with me. Bella as a co-worker? I wasn't sure how I felt about that quite yet. She was definitely my most promising camper. Not really an athlete, Bella spent most of her free time holed up in the video shack working on making short films, soaking up any experience and information I had to share with her. At the age of 15, Bella held more promise for her career as a director than I did at age 22, just graduated from RISD with a degree in Film and Animation. And, fuck if I wasn't the slightest bit jealous of that girl. She had vision and an uncanny ability for finding the most intriguing and original way of telling a story. I truly admired her, and I made sure she knew how much I respected her. I knew she looked up to me as somewhat of a role model, so I tried my hardest to fulfill the expectations she had for me. It was hard to live up to, especially when I knew her talent surpassed mine by light years.

Speaking of which...

"Hey, is LB my assistant?" I instantly perked up. Spending an entire summer with Bella as my assistant wouldn't be too bad. At least I knew she was talented, plus... she already knew the way I operated and my teaching styles.

"She wishes," Emmett winked before heading out of the bunk. "Later, bitches!" As the door slammed shut, Jake's face lit up with excitement again. If I didn't know about all the girls we were screwing, Jake and I would be seriously gay together.

"Nah," Jake laughed. "It's actually my cousin, Seth—remember, I was telling you about him?" I racked my brain, trying to place the name, but for the life of me I couldn't. "Just graduated from NYU film school? Come on, Edward... do you listen to *anything* I say?"

"Only when it has to do with who you're banging. Speaking of which, who's on your short list this summer?"

Jake sighed before grinning goofily. Such a slut.

"I think I'm going to wait until after tomorrow to solidify the list... you know, really check out the new goods. What about you? Emily again?"

I shook my head. Emily was easy, yes. We both wanted nothing out of our relationship except for a friend and someone to fool around with. But this would be year number three of our "relationship," and I was in the mood to mix it up a bit. I was sure Emily wouldn't care.

"Really? Good, cause as much as I love seeing a nerd like yourself get laid, the girl looks like she could be a camper," he scoffed. I elbowed Jake in the stomach, not even bothering with a verbal retort, before rifling through my still packed duffel for a clean shirt and a pair of shorts to throw on.

"Where are you running off to?"

"Shack." Jake rolled his eyes at me, obviously annoyed by my typical response. "If they're giving me a pain in the ass assistant to train, I should probably organize everything. Ugh, this is going to be pure torture. Don't they realize that I need my space? I have a fine tuned system..."

"Can you stop geeking out over your 'system,' asshole? I don't know why you're complaining," Jake lay back onto my empty bed, flicking on the 42" plasma TV we'd rented for the summer. We were ballers. What can I say?

"I'm complaining because I don't feel like having a shadow—just let me be." I balled up a t-shirt and threw it at his face. "Also, your bed is right there," I laughed, pointing at the twin bed mere feet away from the one he was currently stretched out on. "I know you've missed my scent, but... seriously..."

"Maybe if you hadn't told the directors that this was going to be your last summer, they wouldn't have given you an assistant. Did you ever think of that, genius?" Suddenly, *Secretary* popped up onto the screen, Maggie Gyllenhaal's fishnet clad legs distracting me momentarily.

"Fuck you. Some of us need to get real jobs and stop hiding out up here. And get the fuck out of my bed, asshole. If you jizz on my sheets, I will actually murder you."

As I trailed out of the bunk, I heard Jake's loud over-exaggerated moaning making me chuckle under my breath. *Such an ass.*

I trudged over the familiar green hills to the video shack, opening the combination lock without any hesitation. The door swung open, the familiar scent of stale air conditioner filling my nose. I almost laughed when I looked around. I had left the shack in complete disarray. DVDs spilled from the shelves, falling onto drawings, storyboards, and mini DV tapes. Man, I had really left my life up here at the end of last summer. Knowing that pre-camp was starting tomorrow, I decided to start cleaning everything up. God knows I didn't want some fucking assistant touching all of my stuff.

Ugh, assistant. Fucking Jake. That asshole was right. I probably wouldn't have to put up with an assistant if I hadn't informed my superiors that after six summers of being the only video counselor, I wouldn't be returning for a seventh. But, I really did need to get a real job. I loved working at Long Lake—it was my second home, and these boys were the only family I cared about. But I couldn't help but feel like I needed to give the real world a chance. I was twenty-five years old and had nothing to show for myself. When I graduated three years ago, I felt like I was on top of the world; I was going to be the next Martin Scorsese, the next Bob Iger, the next JJ Abrams...

Needless to say, my life hadn't worked out according to plan yet. And although working at the Brown bookstore and working weddings, bar mitzvahs, and sweet sixteens was enough to pay the bills... it wasn't what I signed up for. I decided that after this summer, I was finally going to move out of Providence, away from RISD (yeah, you know you're a sad, creepy fucker when you're 25 and still living in your college town). It was time to move on. Move forward. On to bigger and better things... after this summer, though.

I flicked through the DVDs I had stashed there and decided to put in *Waking Life* for some background noise to my cleaning. Nothing like some existential, pretentious animation to get you in the cleaning mood.

Time passed as I cleaned up every inch of the small room until my cell phone interrupted me. I flipped it open quickly, looking to see who needed me. A text from Emmett awaited me, naturally.

MJ's for dinner and drinks w/ some new counselors. We leave in 30.

I checked my watch and knew that I *really* needed a shower before I could head off of campus. Not only did I have the grime from hours trapped on the Greyhound, but I was now covered in dust from head to toe. Cleaning + Edward? Not the best combination. But I definitely wanted to meet the new counselors. Maybe my next hook up would be among them. There was no way I was wasting the opportunity to get to know them before everyone else. I texted back quickly as I locked the shack back up behind me.

Need shower. Meet you there in an hour or so?

As I was walking back towards my bunk, I heard the unmistakably familiar sound of giggling. I cocked my head to the side a little bit, trying to listen into the conversation, but it was still pretty muffled. I paused momentarily, turning my head towards the source of the noise when we made eye contact. Her piercing blue eyes widened in shock before a huge grin spread across her face.

"Edward!" she squealed, running at me at full force. Within seconds, she was in my arms, her tiny frame perched on my hip.

"Alice... can't... breathe!" I gasped, placing the tiny girl back on the ground.

"Sorry." Her smile told me otherwise though, as it only got wider with each second we stood together staring at one another.

"So—"

"Alice, what the—" An unfamiliar blonde stepped out of the cabin, looking completely confused. Alice looked over her shoulder at the girl, whose expression of confusion suddenly changed to excitement and then suspicion. She waved tentatively before heading back into the cabin out of my eyesight. *Weird*. Hot... but definitely weird.

Alice whipped her head around to mine again, still smiling like a crazy person. I'll admit; it was contagious. I found myself smiling right back at her.

"So, where's your other half?" I asked, finally able to finish my sentence.

"Bella's in the shower. You coming out with us tonight?"

"Oh, wow. *You're* the new counselors Emmett was talking about?" I laughed. It just seemed too ridiculous. Guess I wasn't going to be finding my potential hookup tonight. Alice simply rolled her eyes and turned away from me, heading back towards her cabin.

"Don't keep her waiting too long," Alice called out, slamming the door behind her leaving a trail of high-pitched giggling in her wake.

I had no idea what she meant with that last statement, but I was too tired to really think about it quite yet. I arrived back at my empty bunk and threw off my clothes, hopping into the shower immediately. The cool water felt like heaven against my dirty skin, and I relished in the clean feeling and the smell of my camp shampoo. As soon as I stepped out of the shower, I realized that (like an idiot) I had forgotten to unpack my towel. Figuring there wasn't anyone in the bunk, I stepped out of the bathroom ready to head to my room when I ran into someone.

A young looking, blonde kid sat on the edge of Emmett's bed with the most shocked expression on his face. Which was when I realized that I was naked. *Awesome*.

"Oh, shit. Aw, hell. I'm sorry," he stuttered, throwing his arm up to cover his face.

"It's okay," I laughed, my modesty nowhere to be found, "Just give me a second."

With that, I threw on the things at the top of my suitcase, a pair of black jeans and my Arcade Fire band t-shirt. Not wanting to prolong the awkwardness, I headed back out of my room to introduce myself.

"Sorry about that—I'm Edward." I held out my hand, and he took it nervously, running his other hand through his shaggy hair.

"Jasper. And I'm sorry, too. I should have like... coughed or something... let you know I was here." He took in my ensemble. "You going somewhere?"

"Oh, yeah. I'm actually off to the local bar to meet up with the rest of our roommates and some new counselors. Want to come?" He seemed nice enough.

"Were you leaving right now? Or do you mind if I shower, too? I just spent the last three days driving all the way from Tennessee, and I could *really* use a shower."

"Not a problem. Just remember to bring in clothes with you... uh, or a towel," I laughed. He smiled in return, his bright blue eyes lighting up just like Alice's.

"Please—like I'd show you the goods for free." I clapped a hand on his shoulder as he walked by me. I already liked this kid. I could tell.

Lying back on my bed, I turned the TV back on, seeing that Jake had only gotten about 30 minutes into the movie. I jotted off a quick text to Emmett letting him know that I'd be late before turning my attention back to the screen to watch James Spader muzzle Maggie Gyllenhaal. I was completely lost in my D/s fantasies when my phone vibrated on my stomach. I almost choked reading the message.

No prob. I'll enjoy getting LB and A wasted w/o u. Maybe if I get her drunk enough, LB will give up her 'no cock sucking' rule for the summer.

What the fuck? I assumed that Alice and Bella would probably be drinking, but putting LB and 'cock sucking' in the same sentence was enough to grab my attention. If Emmett thought he could take advantage of my girls like that, then he had another thing coming. And then I realized that he was Emmett... and it was probably all a fucking joke to him.

One can only hope. I texted. *But just to make sure...* I added, ***But seriously, if your dick goes anywhere near either of them, I will castrate you.***

Emmett didn't respond again, so I just chocked up his text as a joke before returning to my movie. I was in the midst of watching an incredibly intense spanking scene when I heard a knock at the door. Jasper stood there awkwardly, clean and showered, peering over my shoulder in shock. I figured he probably hadn't seen *Secretary* almost 100 times, and I'm sure he now thought I was some sort of perverted sex freak.

"Ready to go?" I turned the television off suddenly, breaking Jasper out of his D/s induced trance.

"Uh... yeah..."

I led Jasper up to Jake's truck; he had left me his keys like a good best friend. Jasper faltered a few steps behind me before hopping into the cab. He looked too amused for my liking.

"What?"

"Nothing," he shook his head, chuckling under his breath. I looked at him expectantly before his face lit up with laughter again. "It's just that *this* is what you drive? Some pimped out pick up truck with silver flames running down the sides? No way this is your ride. You look like you should drive a dilapidated black Saab, not *this*. Whose car are we stealing?"

I frowned. Not only did he think I was a perverted sex freak... my new roommate thought I was an emo, pansy-ass sex freak. I was a bit pissed. "Well, it's not actually my ride, if that makes you feel any better. It's my best friend's. Unfortunately, my car had to stay down in Providence for the summer getting some parts replaced... and what makes you think I should drive a dilapidated, black Saab?"

Jasper burst out laughing at my expression. "Oh my God... you *do* drive a busted up Saab, don't you?" he wheezed in between large guffaws of laughter. I turned on the radio, trying to drown out his laughter only to have the laughter increase with the music choice. At least this time, I joined in the laughter, too. Only Jake. Blasting from the speakers came the loud refrain of The Four Seasons' "Oh What A Night." I groaned loudly before putting in my own CD stored in the glove compartment. I let the soft strains of "Astral Weeks" by Van Morrison fill the car, getting me prepared for the night of mayhem that would surely ensue, when Jasper finally spoke up again.

"I love this song," he sighed dreamily, closing his eyes.

"It's a favorite of mine. My other friends here aren't really music people, so they don't get it."

"That's too bad. How can someone not be a 'music person'? That's like saying... I'm not a 'food person' or a 'sleep person.' We need it."

I stared at my new roommate for a second as he continued to enjoy the music. That fucker was right. "So, don't take this the wrong way, Jasper, but... I think I love you." He raised his eyebrow, cracking an eye open. I nodded my head toward the speakers, showing him my gratitude for his appreciation of my music choice. He gave a big smile before settling back down and listening to the music.

Driving through the familiar streets, Jasper told me all about his life story. He had just graduated with a degree in Fine Arts from the University of Tennessee and now had no idea what he was going to do. He always assumed that he'd move back to Vancouver (where the rest of his family resided) and get a job as a high school art teacher, but now he was having second thoughts. Working as the fine arts counselor this summer was somewhat of a trial run... just to see if he

actually wanted to teach. He spoke with such a calm enthusiasm—I was captivated by every detail he was telling me. I also found out that we had the exact same tastes in movies and music.

"So *you're* the Star Wars fan?" Jasper laughed loudly in reference to the Queen Amidala posters that had been placed around the walls over the past five summers.

"It's my favorite movie of all time. George Lucas was revolutionary in his vision—planning the last half of the story before the first half? Genius. And the special effects were decades ahead of their time. He changed the way people watched movies and thought about science fiction. Plus Natalie Portman is like the hottest thing to ever walk this planet... or any other planet..." *Wow, you really geeked out on that justification.*

Jasper looked contemplative for a second before shaking his head. "Nope. Megan Fox."

I scoffed in disbelief. We may have shared similar tastes in movies and music, but at least we didn't have to worry about competing for the same girls. "What? No way. She's trashtastic... and way too obvious. Sure, she's got a hot body, but how much of it is real and how much is plastic?" I argued.

"It's the black hair, blue eyes. It gets me every time..."

"Really? Well, then. I definitely have someone for you to meet tonight." I felt weird even thinking it, but if Jasper wanted himself some dark hair and blue eyes... I knew the *perfect* girl. And I had a feeling that his casual charm would be just enough to mellow Alice out.

"Yeah," I laughed. "She's actually an ex-camper of mine. Her name is Alice. Remind me to introduce you, although, I have a feeling that you'll know her when you see her."

"Ex-camper?" I nodded. "She's 18, though, right?" I thought about it. I couldn't believe that I was seriously pimping Alice out... to my roommate. But, Jasper seemed like a cool enough guy, and he was only 22, so it wasn't that bad, right?

"Yeah, she's 18."

"So what about you?" Jasper asked curiously turning down the volume on the radio.

"I usually wait until after pre-camp to hook up with anyone. And honestly, I'm really lazy, so I usually just wait for someone to tell me that they're interested in me... and it's worked so far."

It was true. I was a lazy son of a bitch when it came to relationships. I didn't really have them, per se. I had three month long relationships that lasted for the summer, and then... in the real world, they faded away. I was kind of a loser when it came to girls, but I was good looking enough to get ass—and most of them found my geeky tendencies and foul language habit charming—so I wasn't complaining.

"So you're just going to let people scope you out tonight?" Jasper laughed. "Is that the plan?"

"Sure... I guess." We finally got to MJ's, and it was already hopping. As I parked the truck, I could see the throngs of drunk counselors mingling with the local Mainers. *Ahh, yes. Now it feels like summer.*

I ushered Jasper in first but was accosted by Jake not even two steps into the bar.
"Edwarrrrddd!" he yelled.

"Jake, how are you already drunk? I'm only like an hour behind you!" As he hugged me, wrapping me in his massive embrace, I noticed another guy standing awkwardly off to the side.

"This is Seth!" He grabbed the awkward guy and shoved him towards me. "He's your assistant—and this is Edward." He turned back to the kid, who seemed to be trying to process everything all at once.

"Hey," I introduced myself, seeing as Jake was already incapacitated. "I'm Edward."

"Oh, man! You're Edward? I'm going to be working with you this summer... I'm Jake's cousin, Seth," he smiled widely like an overeager puppy. I wasn't sure how I felt about him yet.

"And this is Jasper, our other roommate." I pointed next to me at Jasper whose eyes had already started wandering around the bar. I could tell when he found Alice because his eyes widened and he looked like he wanted to fly across the room, all while standing there calmly. Our eyes made contact, and I just smiled and rolled my eyes. With that, he was off.

When I turned my attention back to Jake, he was blabbering on about something or other. I only started to pay attention at the tail end when I heard him say, "... and Seth is all about LB, so we've gotta help him out, okay, Edward? Cause, that girl grew up into a smoking hot piece of ass, if I do say so myself." Seth smirked as Jake slapped a hand on his shoulder before taking a long pull of the beer in his hand.

Um, I'm sorry... what? That kid with Bella? I do not think so, Jake.

"Yeah, sure," I muttered as I made my way towards Emmett at the bar. It was on my walk towards Emmett when I spotted her. And fuck if Jake hadn't sugar coated it. She looked practically sinful. I had the irrational desire to throw a coat over her exposed skin. How could she walk around a bar like that? With those sneakers! With drunk guys ogling her? And where the fuck was Emmett?

My eyes scanned the bar once more. Emmett was chatting up the blonde who was with Alice before, and Bella just stood there sucking down sip after sip of what I'm positive was an incredibly alcoholic drink. The big brother in me decided to intervene. I crept behind her before leaning in her ear.

"That better not be what I think it is," I whispered in her ear. She instantly tensed, recognizing my voice before spinning around.

Our eyes met, and I was completely taken aback. The last time I had spent time with Bella, she was beautiful—yes, she'd always been beautiful—but she'd truly grown into herself. She was

going to be such a heart-breaker. Her dark brown eyes sparkled as she challenged me.

"Lemonade?" I couldn't take it anymore. I grabbed the drink from her hand and downed about half of it in one sip. And then, suddenly, we were us again. Our witty banter returned, putting me at ease for the first time since I'd stepped into the bar. Then, just as suddenly, she was walking away from me. I clasped my hand around her wrist asking her where she was going.

"To get another drink. Some geezer just stole half of mine." I couldn't help but smile and let her go. Confidence oozed from her every step as she returned to the bar next to Emmett, so I decided to let them have their fun for a while and explore in the meantime. We could catch up later.

Out of the corner of my eye, I could see Alice and Jasper talking with one another, matching smiles gracing their faces. Not wanting to interrupt, I decided to head outside for some fresh air. The smoky air of the bar was feeling a little claustrophobic, and I could use a breather.

I sat down on the stone ledge, which led out to the dock, overlooking the other side of the lake from camp.

"No, darlin'... I don't see why you're making a big deal about this. We talked about it before I left," I frustrated voice floated through the air. Through the darkness, I could make out a crop of blonde hair sitting on the edge of the dock. "Seriously, you need to let this go and trust me... yeah, okay. I love you, too. Bye." I heard the click of a phone being shut and a distinct shuddering sigh, laced with the beginning of tears. The girl pushed herself into a standing position, and soon I was face to face with the unfamiliar blonde who had been hanging out with Alice before.

"Hey," I waved awkwardly. I felt like I was intruding on her phone call. Not that I meant to, but still. "Sorry, I just needed some air..."

"It's fine," she smiled, her face completely hiding any trace of sadness. "You're Edward, right?"

"I am. Although, I have *no* idea who you are." I ran a hand through my hair before holding it out for her to shake.

"Oh, God! I'm sorry—how rude of me. I'm Rosalie. I'll be working at swim. I'm new... obviously, but your friends have been incredibly accommodating. Except for Jake. That man is just too much," she laughed playing with the bottom of her long necklace.

"Sorry about listening into your phone call before, but... are you okay?"

"Yeah—just an overbearing boyfriend back home, you know? It'll work itself out, I'm sure."

"Well, how about I buy you a drink to make up for it?" I suggested. It was the least I could do. Poor thing looked like she was miserable out here anyway.

"Thanks, Edward. That's super sweet of you." I stood up and offered her my hand, which she took graciously as we walked back into the bar. What our eyes were met with... I was not

prepared for.

On the bar stood a local townie, who had taken his dick out of his pants and was now swinging it around like a windmill... literally, in front of everyone. My eyes quickly found Emmett and Bella who were laughing so hard that they were nearly falling off of their bar stools.

"Oh God!" I cried, running up to Bella and covering her eyes. She didn't need to see some local guy's dick. In fact, in my mind... Bella had never seen a penis. Ever. And I wanted to keep it that way. Rosalie stood beside me in horror, so I decided to put a hand over her eyes, too, pulling her close to my side, until the guy was pulled from the bar by security and kicked out.

"Oh my God, did you see that?" Bella laughed, clutching at her stomach. "That was the smallest dick I've ever seen! Smaller than that kid you caught me giving a hand job to at senior social," she squealed to Emmett.

So much for my 'Bella's never seen peen' theory.

"Oh, man—I forgot about that! I dubbed him Teeny Peen... what was his real name? I can't remember..." Emmett laughed boisterously, his eyes looking glazed over with drunkenness. At that moment, the music changed, getting Bella excited all over again.

"I *love* this song! I'm going to dance... Rosalie, come on!" she yelled, pulling Rosalie onto the dance floor with her. The song was some heinous rap song about "getting down" and "hitting the floor," but Bella and Rosalie seemed to be enjoying themselves, moving closer to one another slowly.

Rosalie's hands gripped Bella's hips, pulling them into hers as they moved their hips to the bass heavy beat.

"That is the hottest thing I've ever seen." Emmett's eyes widened, staring at the place where Rosalie and Bella were joined. Their faces were mere inches apart, and I swear they were moments away from kissing when Emmett bound out of his seat to attach himself to the other side of Bella, swaying in rhythm behind her. I watched in awe, shock, and horror as Emmett's hands slid down Bella's thighs, trailing up and down the bare skin between the edge of her shorts and the tops of the knee high sneakers. With each stroke, his hands moved more freely, ghosting over the insides of her thighs, making Bella relax back into his chest.

I couldn't believe what I was watching. Emmett was coming onto Bella. Emmett who had claimed that she was like a little sister to him was now groping and heavily petting the little girl in front of me. Plus, he had gotten her wasted first. I never thought that Emmett would stoop so low. Just when I thought he had reached the ultimate low, his lips moved down and grazed the side of her neck. A small smile played on Bella's lips as she dipped down and ground her rear into Emmett rising back up to meet him. I could see his eyes rolling back into his head from here. Her head moved backwards, twisting to meet Emmett... and the world started slowing down. I could *not* let this happen. I just couldn't.

Feeling emboldened, I pulled Bella out of Emmett's grasp before their lips could meet and pulled her into my own body.

"Aw, you aren't hard like Emmett," she pouted as she ran her hand over my jean-covered crotch. I almost threw up in my own mouth. Emmett had let her feel his erection? No, wait... better question: Emmett had an erection because of Bella? I felt sick. I looked for the pervert who had started all of this, but Emmett was currently being held up by Rosalie—his hands just as wandering on her body as they had been on Bella's.

"Bella, you've had a lot to drink tonight. Are you ready to go home?" I pulled her chin up to make eye contact with me, but she was too drunk to focus on anything. *Fucking Emmett. I will kill him... tomorrow. Now, get her home.*

"I love when you call me Bella," she giggled. "No one here does..."

"Uh huh..." I appeased Bella with an answer as I rounded up Jake, Seth, and Jasper to help me with getting Emmett into the truck. I loaded everyone into the bed of the truck, resigning myself to return for Emmett's car tomorrow. Apparently, I was the only sober one. Bella's hand consistently wandered towards my crotch for the entire ride home, and I finally just let her keep it there, unable to stave her off while driving any longer.

I drove quickly, getting us back to camp in less than 10 minutes. Alice was the first one to hop out, stumbling slightly as she meandered back towards her cabin. Rosalie offered to help carry Bella, but Bella was adamant that she wasn't tired and that she and Emmett were going to stay up to talk. I hoped by "talk" she didn't mean "touch his dick" because I was going to take serious issue with that.

Luckily, Bella passed out in my arms not even half way to my bunk. I put her down lightly on my bed, not quite sure what to do now. I couldn't very well get into bed with her. Especially not when she was in groping mode. That would most likely end up badly. Instead, I trekked back to the shack and put in a movie. It had been an exhausting two days, though, and half way through *The Royal Tennenbaums*, I was out like a light.

I awoke the next morning with a pain in my neck, most likely from sleeping hunched over the computer desk. I checked my phone. 8:15...

Good. At least breakfast is still going on.

I made my way to the cafeteria, only to find a mostly dead Emmett chugging black coffee. I usually would have laughed, but I was too pissed off at him to really function yet.

"Hey, man... sorry about last night," he croaked. "I was just so excited to have my girls back, and you know how I get..."

"Where's LB anyway?"

"Still in bed. I let her sleep through breakfast, although she's probably going to need something to eat. Girl can't mix her booze very well," Emmett chuckled.

I was not amused. "You're an ass, Em. I'll bring her some food. I should go get changed anyway."

"Pre-camp starts at 9, Edward. Make sure she's not late..." I heard him call as I made my way back down to the bunk, grabbing a muffin as I went. I was pissed at Emmett... and my neck hurt like a bitch, but he was right—Bella would need something to eat before a long day of sexual harassment and discipline lectures.

Tentatively, I pushed open my bedroom door. Bella was sprawled out on her stomach, her face planted into my pillow, snoring lightly. I felt bad waking her, but... it had to be done.

"LB," I called, shaking her shoulder lightly. "LB wake up..." I rubbed my hand down her arm, hoping to pull her from her drunken slumber slowly. She cracked open her eye suddenly, still looking into my pillow.

"Edward?" Her voice was cracked and dry, and I immediately regretted not bringing her some juice as well. I did have a bottle of water in my backpack from yesterday, though. That would have to suffice.

"Emmett wanted to me to tell you that you slept through breakfast, and pre-camp starts in about 30 minutes," I let her know.

At that statement, her eyes flew open. Her breathing changed, becoming more labored... and I realized that she had never been in my bunk before, much less my room.

"Where am I?" She sat up slowly, swinging her feet around to meet the floor.

"My bed."

"Oh. I'm sorry. Where did you sleep last night?" I held out the bottle of water and muffin, which she began to pick at nervously.

"Not here," I answered tersely, remembering my aching muscles.

She cringed. "Oh... okay." A sudden flicker of recognition flashed through her eyes, panic evident in whatever she was remembering. "Oh my God..." Bella laid her head in her hands, shaking them slightly. "I'm so sorry about last night, Edward. I—"

I wasn't quite ready to go into it again with her quite yet, so I held up my hand to gesture for her to stop. "Let's just head up to pre-camp, okay? Finish your water... I'm going to put on some clean clothes. Do you need anything?" She looked at me, confused as she gulped down her water. "It'd be silly for you to go all the way back to your bunk and then come back up here for orientation... do you want to borrow something to wear?" I explained further.

"Sure," she answered quickly, throwing the empty bottle of water into the trashcan. "You don't mind?"

I shook my head, finally smiling at her Bella-like insecurities shining through. "Nope. What do you want?"

"I could really use a sweatshirt," she flushed looking down at her revealing ensemble. "And I know it's a stretch, but... if you had any girl sized shoes... that'd be awesome..."

"Actually, I do," I realized. "Emily left a pair here last summer, and I think I still have them in my closet." I opened the door to reveal a small pair of brown, leather flip-flops and threw them and my red hoodie over to Bella.

"Who's Emily?"

"Uhh... just a girl I was seeing last summer. She works at field hockey and lacrosse."

"Works?" Bella looked shocked. *Oh, yeah. Shit. We've never talked about girls. This is probably weird. Although, after last night... I think all bets are off.*

"Yeah... this will be her fourth summer here, actually... you probably remember her."

"Not really. Land sports aren't my thing..." she muttered putting on the rest of the clothing.

"Ready?" I offered her my arm like a gentleman. It was the least I could do. She was probably feeling like death warmed over. She nodded grimly before we headed up towards the auditorium. On the way, I tried to deduce how much she actually remembered from the previous night. "So, Bella... about Emmett..." I looked over at her nervously, not knowing what I would find in her facial expression.

What I found was sheer and utter terror. Her eyes widened, and as her face paled, I could see her gag reflex go into action. She scrambled to get to the nearest trashcan before heaving the entire bottle of water back up into it. I grabbed her hair, pulling it away from her face as she continued to empty the contents of her stomach.

"LB, are you okay?" I asked, trying not to laugh as she continued spitting, ridding her mouth of any of the recently regurgitated water.

"Go ahead and laugh, Edward. I nearly hooked up with Emmett and then just vommed into a trashcan just thinking about it. I think that warrants a laugh," she groaned, her arm coming around my waist as she leaned into my shoulder. "Thanks for saving me, by the way."

I laughed lightly, helping her walk towards the auditorium, hoping that the first day of pre-camp wouldn't be too stressful for her clearly hung-over body. "LB, you are something else."

Chapter 3 Lesson Plans

~Bella~

Sitting through the morning's pre-camp lectures was absolutely horrific. We had three lectures,

each lasting an hour long. The only thing that kept me awake through each presentation was Edward's presence. I could tell he was pissed at Emmett; they sat at opposite ends of the uncomfortable bleachers, putting Rosalie, Jake, and me in between them. And their glaring did not go unnoticed, which was fine by me—as it was, I could barely look at Emmett. I was so appalled by the brief flashes of memories I'd had, it was a wonder that Edward could even bear to look at me.

Oh God. Earlier this morning definitely ranked up there with the most embarrassing moments of my life. I knew I shouldn't have asked where Edward had slept the night before. Even as I'd been asking it, I knew that the answer would probably crush me. But when I asked and he'd responded, "Not here," the look of disdain on his face had been enough to make my hangover multiply tenfold. I couldn't help but wonder where he had been, who he had been with...

And then on top of it, I had almost hooked up with Emmett. *Emmett*. I was pretty sure the throwing up had been a delayed reaction to the utter disgust I'd felt at remembering Emmett's boner pressed against my back.

And here comes the gag reflex again...

But Edward was being a saint. Not only had he offered me clothing (to ensure that I wouldn't have some kind of awkward walk of shame), but he'd kept his arm around me for the entire morning, allowing me to rest my head on his knee during our downtime in between lectures. He had been a small slice of heaven in a morning of hell.

By lunchtime, though, my hangover was slowly dissipating, and I was ravenous. I realized that I hadn't eaten anything since lunch the day before. I'd been too nervous to eat dinner... and then unable to keep down breakfast.

"LB, rough night!" Emmett bellowed in my ear as he slapped a large hand onto my shoulder and pushed the large red hood up around my hair, allowing it to fall over my forehead. I fluttered my eyes shut and leaned my head down onto the cool table, breathing in the soft scent of Edward's laundry detergent and hoping that the noise around me would disappear. I raised my head again to six pairs of waiting eyes.

"Don't talk to me, Emmett," I grumbled, picking up my grilled cheese sandwich and taking a large bite. "I hate you."

"No you don't." Emmett winked, making it hard to swallow the thick bread and cheese in my mouth.

"Emmett," Edward warned with a growl before smiling softly in my direction. Smiling back in appreciation, I dug back into my sandwich.

"So, what's the deal now?" Rosalie asked the more experienced counselors at the table. "Are we done with the sexual harassment lecture?" Dear lord, I hoped so. If I had to watch another demonstration of what constituted "safe touch" and "unsafe touch," I was liable to shoot myself in the head.

"Yup, now we get to actually hang out at our activities and come up with lesson plans! Woo!" Jake punched his fist into the air, cheering loudly. The people sitting at several other tables around us looked to stare at him, but I just rolled my eyes, ignoring him. Jake loved nothing more than being the center of attention.

"Where are you even working this summer?" I asked. He had the tendency to get bored teaching the same thing every summer and was constantly switching around. I thought Jake taught archery his first summer, before switching to work with Emmett at basketball... before going through a multitude of other land sports.

"Canoe." He smirked.

"Canoe?" Edward laughed from the other side of the table, raising his eyebrow in question. "You finally exploring your Native American roots?" His green eyes sparkled with mirth. Apparently, Jake was one-thirty second Cherokee or Sioux or Apache—one of those; I didn't really remember. All I *did* remember was that he had put it on his college application and talked about how his great, great, great grandfather was the Chief way back in the day, which subsequently got him accepted into Princeton. When he got there, he found out they had put him in the Native American dorm, encouraging him to make friends with his fellow minority students. And he wasn't even *really* Native American at all. Edward thought it was hilarious and never missed an opportunity to mock him for it.

"Fuck you! My ancestors invented the canoe. Right, Seth?" Seth looked baffled, having just approached the table and being completely unaware of what we were talking about. He looked around the table nervously before shrugging and sitting next to Jake. He caught my eye and smiled. I smiled weakly in response. My energy levels were still too low to really try yet. The banter continued as I spaced out, focusing instead on discreetly breathing in Edward's scent from the hoodie he had so graciously loaned me as I scarfed down the remainder of my lunch.

I was super close to dozing off right there at the table when I felt a distinct pinch on the side of my thigh. "Ow, what the fuck?" I jolted upwards in my seat, glaring at Alice, the culprit of my latest injury.

"We're talking later," she mouthed, getting up from the table. Was lunch over already? How had that happened? Where had Alice been all morning? *Too many questions.*

I didn't have time to wonder, though, only enough to run down to the art shops to meet my co-counselor, who I had yet to meet. I approached the dingy art room filled with crusty paints, brushes, pencil shavings, and glitter. Oh, the glitter. I had a feeling I was going to be covered in it every day for the next three months. Teenage girls *loved* their glitter. I pushed open the door, seeing the mess that last year's Fine Arts counselors had left for me. *Oh goody. A day of cleaning.*

I figured I would get a head start on the cleaning before my partner showed up. Looking around the room, I didn't even know where to start. It was an absolute pigsty. Holed up in the back corner of the room, I saw a dusty old radio. Some music was definitely needed if I was actually going to get anything done. I quickly made my way over to the old thing (seriously, it had a dial and an antenna. When was it made, 1982?) and attempted to find some music. I hummed with

happiness as I found the local classic rock station and sang along as I began to clean.

*"I work hard every day of my life, I work 'til I ache in my bones
At the end of the day I take home my hard earned pay on my own
I get down on my knees, and I start to pray 'til the tears run down from my eyes
Lord, somebody—oo, somebody! Can anybody find me somebody to love..."*

My voice carried on with the last phrase, sending it soaring into the little room. It felt so good to just belt and let go—sing my stress away, if you will. After that particular verse, my vocal chords were pretty tapped out, so I brought my voice down to a low hum as I raised the heavy, darkened windows to let some fresh air in.

I choked and stuttered slightly as my eyes met Edward's. He was standing right outside the shack, which was, of course, right behind the Fine Arts room, maybe twelve feet away. How could I have forgotten that? His dark, soulful eyes widened as he walked quickly towards my window.

"LB?" He sounded completely shocked. I sighed heavily before lifting the window all the way up, revealing my face.

"Hey." I smiled shyly, my nerves settling somewhere deep in my stomach. I never let anyone hear me sing. Well, Alice a few times, but other than that—no one.

"Was that you singing to Queen?" His hand tugged at his hair as I nodded and bit my lip, trying to force the nerves out of my body. "Wow. I had no idea you could sing like that." He smiled crookedly, charm oozing out of his every pore.

"Sing like what?" I laughed.

"Like... that!" He flailed his arm up in my direction. I rolled my eyes at his overzealous enthusiasm. Sometimes he looked at me like I was his child, and this was one of those moments. It was incredibly unsettling for my stomach, which just wanted him to look at me as something other than a kid for once in my life.

"You're being ridiculous, Edward." I shook my head.

"Hey, Bella!" I heard Seth call out from the front steps of the shack as he waved to us wildly. Edward's whole body slumped, and I couldn't help but let out a short laugh.

"Hi, Seth!" I called out in sing-song, causing Edward to narrow his eyes and glare at me. "Go," I laughed, shooing him away with my hand. "You have an assistant to train." He groaned loudly, obviously unhappy about the predicament, which selfishly made me feel a whole lot better about the situation.

"Fine. But know that I'm not done talking about this with you, LB. You're going to audition for the counselor musical with me whether you want to or not, and I'm telling Maria to give you a big part."

"No—" I tried to interrupt him, but he covered his ears as he jogged back to the shack to unlock it for Seth. I smirked at the fact that I still knew the code. In fact, I was the only camper to ever know the code, just in case I needed to work on a project without Edward there. And for Alice and me to sneak in late at night to watch DVDs, but that was our little secret. Well, kind of.

FLASHBACK

I shifted again, completely uncomfortable in the cramped video shack as Alice turned on my latest discovery from Edward's DVD collection, Two Moon Junction.

"I can't believe Edward gave you the combination to the shack," Alice laughed, her bright blue eyes sparkling as she started to read through the back of the DVD case. "A young, Southern debutante temporarily abandons her posh lifestyle and upcoming semi-arranged marriage to have a lustful and erotic fling with a rugged drifter who works at a local carnival? Bella, are we watching Edward's porn stash?" Alice's eyes widened with each suggestive word as they fell off her tongue.

"It's not real porn... only kind of." I blushed.

"How do you have 'kind of' porn? That seems like it's not a real statement to me. It's either hard-core porn, soft-core porn, or not porn at all." Alice tapped her toe at me impatiently. I just rolled my eyes.

"Okay, so... it's soft-core porn, and I was curious." I stuck out my tongue as Alice started giggling uncontrollably, clutching at her stomach as she fell back onto the hard wooden bench with me.

"Oh, that's rich. We're watching Edward's porn? What if he finds us?"

"He's on a date tonight," I grumbled. I had heard from Emmett that Edward was taking Jess, the dance counselor, out tonight. Edward never told me about any of his female conquests, but it was common knowledge amongst counselors and campers alike that he had a different girlfriend each summer. Thanks to Emmett, I got the inside scoop on a weekly basis.

"Fine, let's do it." Alice leaned her head on my knee, curling up on the bench to settle in and watch the movie. After about forty-five minutes, Alice and I had become, um, rather heated and needed to switch positions, but there really wasn't much of a place for us to go.

"How about we move the bench so it's on a diagonal towards the screen?" Alice suggested. "We could lean up against the side walls, then." I agreed as we both got up to start moving the bench. We didn't get very far. Suddenly, we were completely trapped and unable to move the bench into the position we wanted it to go.

"Well, that's a bust," I sighed, my disappointed tone only interspersed with the breathy moaning on the screen behind us.

"No, it's not! Bella, get on the bench, one leg on either side." I followed Alice's instructions. She quickly climbed on my lap, her legs straddling me and her arms wrapped around my neck.

"What the fuck, Alice?" I gaped.

"Okay, now rock the bench towards the left." I complied, despite the fact that my best friend was now incredibly close to my turned-on crotch. It didn't matter, though, because Alice's plan was working. The bench was moving quickly into the position we wanted it to be with very little trouble.

Suddenly, the door was wrenched open, and I heard the telltale gasp of my favorite male counselor. I looked over my shoulder to see the very shocked face of Edward, whose eyes were darting between our intertwined bodies on the bench and the intertwined bodies on the TV screen behind us.

"I, uh... didn't think, uh... in here..." he stuttered.

"I thought you were on a date tonight," I began quickly, realizing the compromising position Alice and I looked like we were in.

"I was, but then she..." Edward shook his head, his eyes still wide.

"Sorry, Edward," Alice said as she pushed herself off my lap, unwinding her legs from my waist and settling on the bench. "We didn't think that you'd come here, and we just wanted to get out of the bunk and not deal with other people's drama for a little bit."

"Uh, do you do this often?"

"Come to the shack when you're not here?" He nodded. "This is only like our third time at night, but—" He cut me off, placing a finger over my lips.

"I didn't hear that," he whispered seriously, shaking his head from side to side.

"But we—" Edward shook his head more forcefully before placing his hands over his ears.

"Don't forget to lock up when you're done," he said, a sly smile finally overtaking his face. It was his trademark move. If he didn't want to hear something or acknowledge it, he put his hands over his ears and yelled, which was fairly immature if I really thought about it. But it often got me what I wanted, too, so I rarely complained.

"I can't hear you," he shouted loudly, his hands still cupped over his ears. "Get back to work, Swan."

*"I'm not doing it, Cullen!" I stuck out my tongue, letting instinct take over, despite the fact that he wasn't looking at me anymore. This was *not* me getting what I wanted.*

The counselor musical was a *huge* deal at Long Lake Camp. It was one of the few secrets kept all summer. Truthfully, it was probably the *only* secret kept all summer. Rehearsals were always after Taps, so campers were already in bed and couldn't overhear them, and it was always on the last Friday of camp—the big reveal, if you will. As a camper, there was nothing better than

seeing your favorite counselors make complete fools out of themselves, but they didn't really care because they were doing it only for your entertainment. In fact, the moment I'd known I was in love with Edward was after watching him play Captain Von Trapp in *The Sound of Music*. And then again as the Scarecrow in *The Wizard of Oz* and Rooster in *Annie*. Sigh. He couldn't really sing all that well, but he had such an undeniable stage presence about him that it didn't really matter.

I knew I should probably give up the fight. Edward would most likely get his way and I would audition for the stupid musical, whatever it was this summer, but I refused to get a main part. I would leave that to someone who actually wanted it.

Lost in thought, I didn't even hear the footsteps until they were right behind me.

"So, what's the deal with you and Edward?" I jumped and spun around to face a sly-looking blond cutie, the origin of the slight southern voice that had interrupted me.

Although he wasn't really my type, I couldn't help but admire how adorable he was. He had this almost honey-colored wavy hair, which could be described as shaggy at best. He looked like that frat boy that always thought he was too cool to join in the first place—the one who sat in a corner smoking and laughing while drunken sorority girls made asses of themselves around him. Not to mention that his lean, lanky build and ridiculous height only added to reinforce that. Then, I remembered that he had asked me a question, but I couldn't for the life of me remember what it was. I stood there, gaping at him, hoping that he would repeat himself. God knew I looked like enough of an ass already.

"Uh, sorry," he backtracked. "I didn't mean to offend you. It's just that he took awful good care of you last night, even put you in his bed, while he most likely got a crick in his neck from sleeping in the shack, so I was curious..."

I'm sorry, come again?

"I... did you just say that he slept in the shack?" The blond nodded, sticking his hands in his jean pockets uncomfortably hard. The knot in my stomach uncurled, leaving me breathing easier already. He hadn't been with anyone else. He just hadn't been able to sleep in his own bed... because he'd given it up for me. Tucking away that piece of information for later, I looked back into the curious blue eyes in front of me. "Wow."

We stood there awkwardly for another second before my best friend came to the rescue. Alice skipped into the Fine Arts room, iPod and connector in hand, heading straight towards the ancient stereo.

"Oh, yay! You guys have already met. I'm so excited that my new best friend is working all summer with my old one," she rambled as she fidgeted with her iPod.

"Uh, actually, we haven't... sorry." He blushed. *Oh. A boy who blushes. That's just too precious for words.* "I'm Jasper Whitlock." He stuck out his hand for me to shake before finally breaking into a gorgeous smile. "The only reason I know who you are is because Alice won't shut the hell up about you. Which brings me back to my original question... you and Edward?" He trailed off,

taking a seat behind where Alice stood, still engrossed with her iPod.

"I... um... Alice? Don't you have your own lessons to plan?" I was so confused. When had Alice met this kid, and how were they already best friends? Is this who she had been with all morning?

"Of course I do," she said as she held up the iPod. *Right*. Alice's idea of planning classes just entailed picking songs for warming up and going across the floor. "But we need to seriously catch up. And now that you're finally alive, I figured that I could crash your lesson planning. Jasper already gave me the go ahead. Now, LB, you *go ahead*." She giggled at her own play on words.

I sighed. I was going to tell Alice everything anyway, so it wasn't like putting it off was going to accomplish anything except make her more anxious and probably more annoying. "Fine," I gave in, sitting across the table from the two of them, looking as eager as kids in a candy store, their matching blue eyes waiting with anticipation. "But you have to keep your voices down because the shack is right behind this room. I totally forgot—"

"By the way," Jasper interrupted, "I'm Edward's roommate. I feel like I should tell you that up front."

"Oh, okay," I laughed. "Good to know. Hopefully we'll be seeing lots of each other this summer." I didn't know what to think of that admission, but I was sure it'd come in handy later on. "Okay, Alice... what do you want to know?"

"Everything!" she gushed. "You guys looked so cute when I handed off your drink, and then I heard this morning that you hooked up with *Emmett*?"

"What?" I screamed. "I did *not* hook up with Emmett! Who told you that?"

Jasper's eyes went back and forth across the table, watching our catch-up session. Alice and I were definitely gossip queens, and anyone who knew us quickly became accustomed to our way of interrupting one another—for clarification purposes, of course.

"Whoa, okay, um, I just assumed, I guess. This morning Edward was all pissy, glaring daggers at Emmett. Plus, he gave you his clothing to wear today. I just thought that it was like his inadvertent way of reclaiming you as his." Alice paused thoughtfully for a second. "Oh, yes... this is definitely the right tempo for *dégagés*," she mumbled, writing frantically on the piece of loose leaf in front of her.

I had to pause and think for a second to process everything Alice had just said. Edward had woken up this morning and been pissed at Emmett. Then, Edward had gone to wake me up and put me in his clothing. And somewhere between those two actions, Alice had deduced that Emmett and I had hooked up? That seemed ludicrous to me. What the hell was I not getting?

"Well, we didn't. I mean, we almost did. Emmett and I kind of went shot for shot, playing 'See You At The Bottom' with beer for 'breaks' in between. That was one of our less brilliant ideas. Anyway, we were dancing, and I was just staring at Edward all night and he looked so good..."

and...ugh! Gross. I would never hook up with Emmett. Never! Especially not in front of Edward!" I whisper-yelled, Jasper's smile growing with each one of my words.

"Then why do you look like it's the end of the world?"

"I just hate this. This whole situation blows. I wanted Edward to see me for the first time in two years as an adult—a real friend—not just a student or camper. But I totally fucked everything up because I got too drunk, so Edward had to put me to bed. I can't remember that much, but what I do remember is him talking to me like I was a child. Seriously. More than a child. Like... his *own* child. Like he was disappointed in me. It totally sucked. This morning, I was just waiting for a lecture about drinking responsibly, you know? That's the kind of attitude he had. And now I just feel like an idiot. And he just overheard me singing, and he's going to make me try out for the counselor musical, and I'm going to shoot myself. Oh, and on top of it, Jake wants me to get it on with his cousin. Awesome, right?" Man, it felt fucking fantastic to get that all out there. It looked like Jasper and I weren't going to be having many secrets from one another this summer. Hopefully he was okay with that. Nervously, I looked to see his reaction.

Jasper's mouth dropped open. He cocked his head to the side and narrowed his eyes, looking like was trying to figure me out. "Huh," was all he said. I looked to Alice, whose lips were turned up into a devilish smile.

"Huh? That's all you guys have for me? Huh?" I could feel my voice getting louder with each word, anger bubbling up and spilling forth. I had just bared my soul to them, and all I got in response was a smile and a "huh?" *I don't think so.*

"Can I ask what LB means? I noticed that you introduce yourself as Bella, but everyone else calls you LB. I was just curious."

"It stands for 'Little Bella.' Emmett came up with it the first day he met me, and it's never really left, but I'd really appreciate it if you'd call me Bella. Please."

Jasper's fingers twitched on the table, like he wanted to reach out and do something, but he restrained himself. "Bella," he emphasized the name I requested he use—"I think I'm going to be seeing *lots* of you." He laughed.

"And why do you say that?" I was honestly curious. I had never really heard an outsider's opinion on my whole love of Edward. Emmett and Alice ridiculed me for it daily with every summer, but I kept it pretty far under wraps during the school year. It had always been acknowledged as such a ridiculous, fluffy crush that I couldn't bear myself to focus on him outside our summers together. None of my friends at home had even heard me mention Edward's name for fear of bringing more mocking upon myself.

"You obviously want Edward," Jasper chuckled. I rolled my eyes and nodded.

"So astute." I smirked. "Since I was thirteen."

"How old was he when he met you?"

"Twenty, I think..." I racked my brain, trying to think of how old that made him now.

Jasper shook his head slightly, smirking. I was already not a fan of that expression, and I could tell it was one he wore often. "Okay, so, why are you confused that he treats you like a child? To him, you *are* a child."

"But Emmett doesn't treat me like a child," I argued.

"When did Emmett meet you?"

"When I was eight and he was eighteen," I answered, not letting him continue his incessant questioning. It was getting me nowhere. Jasper shrugged, laying his hands out like Vanna White, as if the answer were right in front of me. I was completely lost.

"Am I completely retarded? I don't get what that has to do with anything..."

"Emmett's known you twice as long as Edward has," Jasper said matter-of-factly, as if that explained everything.

"So?" Alice spoke up. *Thank you, best friend.* I'd been wondering when she was going to come out of her dance-class playlist trance and help me out. "I've known them for the exact same amount of time as Bella, and I get treated like a normal person. In fact, didn't you tell me last night that it was Edward who told you about me in the first place? I don't see how this is any different."

"Edward pimped you out?" I asked, completely dumbfounded. That was just completely unfair.

"I'm twenty-two, not twenty-five or twenty-eight... plus, you were never *my* camper. It's totally different. Plus, we're only friends anyway. Right, Alice?" Jasper attempted to justify Edward's actions. As if any of that really made a difference.

"I hate boys," I decided. My head hurt from trying to wrap my brain around everything Jasper had just tried to tell me. Alice agreed wholeheartedly before Jasper punched her lightly in the arm. They were already adorable together. This summer was going to be torturous if Alice already had a boyfriend the second day of camp. Didn't she know she was my backup—my rock? I needed her. "And I'm not auditioning for the musical," I added as an afterthought.

"Yes you are." She winked. I grumbled with frustration as Jasper intervened, suggesting we get to work on our lessons.

We made our way to planning lessons pretty quickly. Jasper had been a TA for an introductory Fine Arts class at the University of Tennessee, where he'd just graduated from (hence the mild accent), so he was able to come up with lessons easily. Plus, being an art teacher wasn't one of the more challenging positions on the staff. I could work indoors (aka out of the sun) and listen to music while I worked. Not too shabby.

Jasper, Alice, and I were just wrapping up when I heard a loud *thump* of something being dropped on the bench beside me. I looked over to see the knee high sneakers that I'd left in his

bunk earlier this morning just before I felt his hands press on my shoulders. I had to use every ounce of control in my body not to gasp at the feel of his touch.

I had heard of "the spark" before—that elusive, electric pulse that signaled feelings of something more. In my eighteen years of life and five years of more than platonic relations with boys, I had *never* felt the spark. Not with Edward, not with anyone. I thought it was one of those mythical things that everyone talked about but that didn't actually exist... like the G-spot or Tupac's death or universal healthcare or vampires... but now I knew. I could feel the electric pulse flowing from my shoulders where his hands were placed all the way down to my fingertips. Without my consent, my hands moved towards his.

Jasper's lips curled upwards as he noticed my hands beginning their ascent to clasp themselves with Edward's. The spark only intensified, throwing me off for a second before I leaned my head against his chest to look up into his beautiful eyes, which were already gazing down at me.

"What's up?" I managed to squeak out as he intertwined his fingers with mine.

"I—" he began, and then I spaced out. I completely failed to listen to anything he was saying as my hands fell back into my lap and he applied gentle pressure to the muscles of my shoulders. I let my head fall forward, making eye contact with Alice quickly before bringing my gaze down to my lap.

He continued to talk while I focused on the heat rushing through and enveloping my body as he continued to massage my neck, moving his hands from over the plush fabric of the hoodie to come into contact with my thin t-shirt. I had to focus all of my efforts on breathing when his chin came forward to rest on the top of my head, his lips not even centimeters away from me. I noticed somewhere in the distance that he had stopped talking and was probably waiting for a response from me. Panicked, I made eye contact with Jasper, who nodded a "yes" ever so slightly before smiling back at Alice.

"Sure." I shrugged, completely unaware of what I was agreeing to.

"Great!" Edward smiled, leaning even further onto my shoulders. It felt like heaven. "You can just give me back my hoodie then—or you could keep it." My heart fluttered. "Red looks good on you, LB." Chills ran down my body as I felt his lips press against my hair. With that he was gone.

"Wh-what did I just agree to?" I whispered to Jasper. His eyes crinkled at the corners with amusement.

"Movie night at Bunk Seven tonight. Your choice, apparently." Jasper's smile widened as my stomach dropped. Edward wanted me to pick out a movie for us to watch tonight? As a movie buff who wanted nothing more than to impress/seduce another movie buff... that was more than a little bit of pressure. My jaw dropped slightly, my lips parting with the intensity of the possibilities for that evening. "And Bella?" Jasper turned around slightly in the doorway, Alice's hand in his. I still sat on the bench, stunned. "I'm not a hundred percent convinced that he sees you as a child. Don't panic just yet. See you in a few hours." Jasper smiled as he waved goodbye, leaving me alone with only my lascivious plans for the night floating around in my head.

Chapter 4

Unusual Reactions

~Edward~

Bella could sing. And not just in that, "oh—you're a girl and all girls can sing along," kind of way, either. No, Bella could full out belt along with Freddie Mercury, "hit all the high notes," kind of sing. She had a big Broadway voice, and I'd had no idea. Four years of summer musicals, and Bella had never participated in a single one. I thought the biggest part I could remember her ever having was one of the maiden daughters in *The Pirates of Penzance* when she was fourteen. She'd never been one for the spotlight, which I guessed was why she was so great when it came to filmmaking. She could give it her all behind the scenes and never have to be fawned over for her efforts.

This summer, though, I was planning on changing that. After hearing Bella's rousing rendition of "Somebody To Love," I was making it my mission to get her to audition for the lead in this summer's musical... which I had on pretty good authority was *Footloose*. A ridiculous musical, to be sure, but if Bella got the part of Ariel, she'd be forced to be on stage for nearly the entire show. I would definitely have to talk to Maria, the camp's musical director, about that one later. She was about seventy years old, and she loved me as if I were one of her own, for some reason. Bella would have whatever part I wanted for her, if I suggested it to Maria beforehand. I chuckled at my own deviousness as I jogged back to the shack to unlock it for Seth. I wasn't looking at her, but I knew that Bella would be sticking out her tongue at me for ignoring her protests.

They're futile, my dear. Don't even try...

"She's a feisty one, isn't she?" Seth nodded his head towards the Fine Arts room as I unlocked the shack, leading us into the newly air conditioned and refurbished room. The powers that be had finally heard my pleas and had redone the room with better air conditioning to keep the equipment happier... and while they were at it, they'd gotten me two new iMacs for editing. It was glorious, and I couldn't wait to get started. But unfortunately, I had to deal with the hassle of training the puppy dog currently waiting for me.

I nodded in agreement, but I must have been making a face because Seth's expression contorted into one of disbelief before changing into confusion. "Wait, you and Bella aren't like..." He trailed off, but I knew what he was suggesting.

"No," I scoffed. Not wanting to say anything else on the topic, or have him add any additional thoughts about Bella, I dove right into our "training."

"Let's get started, okay?" I continued brusquely. Seth nodded in understanding, looking a bit nervous. *Good.*

"Edward, I know you're probably not that interested in having an assistant." *Understatement.* "But I just wanted you to know that I've only heard about how talented you are and what a great guy you are for the past four years. And trust me, I know how completely gay this sounds, but I'm actually excited to learn stuff from you. So, just tell me where to start."

I was taken aback by his attitude. Although, yes, he was still damn overeager, I could definitely use him to my advantage. It was like having an intern. I finally got the appeal of it.

I explained that the video counselors (aka us) were responsible for filming a multitude of things over the course of the summer. We had to film enough to create an end-of-summer promotional DVD for potential campers, which meant that we had to film a little bit of each activity—just a shot or two involving campers looking like they were enjoying themselves—as well as each age group's musical, the talent show, the counselor talent show, and extra events like swim meets, parents visiting day, etc. Seth, I found out, was quite the organizer. He pulled out a notebook and began charting a complex system in which we could switch off who would go out and film activities while the other looked after the campers attending video classes. It was pretty brilliant, actually, and I realized how much easier everything was going to be with someone else to help out.

Also... maybe I had prejudged Seth, just a little bit. He had just graduated from NYU but was unable to afford the New York City lifestyle, so he was thinking about moving to the suburbs of Boston to work as a part-time videographer while he worked on his own passion projects. That was exactly what I'd done (still did) after graduating from film school. It was nice to see that he had a lot of passion for the projects he worked on, too. I'd never seen anyone talk with as much enthusiasm for the New York fish market before in my entire life, but I found myself being pulled into the potential mob connections he had found and filmed through his interviewing process. It was fascinating, really.

After our charting was finished, we decided to organize my archives of videos. Five years worth of camper projects, musicals, and shows were strewn about the shelves, interspersed with my own DVD collection. Seth decided that since most of it was unlabeled, we should really just watch snippets of each video, then label and shelf them by year and age group.

Suddenly, the familiar strains of "Groove is in the Heart" by Deee-lite started playing, and I couldn't help but break into a wide smile. I hadn't thought about this project in three years, but I remembered at the time wanting to shoot myself in the head if I had to listen to that Godforsaken techno song any more.

"What's this?" Seth laughed. "Shit—this is really good. Did a camper do this?" He watched the video with interest.

"Oh, man, I completely forgot about this." I pulled out the wooden bench to watch the four-minute video with rapt attention. Even three years later, it was still amazing. I couldn't believe that two fifteen year olds had been capable of such creativity.

We sat and watched in silence until the video ended with a black screen and white lettering that read, *Property of CAB Productions*. I looked up only to be met with Seth's inquisitive gaze. "It stands for Cullen, Alice, and Bella Productions. They wanted to do CBS Productions, but..."

copyright issues, you know." I chuckled under my breath. "So... what did you think?" I asked, honestly curious if I was just ridiculously biased in my love of Bella and Alice's work.

"Honestly? It's pretty obvious why Bella got into USC film school—that was hilarious." My mouth dropped open. Bella had been accepted into USC film school? Why hadn't anyone told me about that? It was a huge accomplishment, and one that I felt a little bit responsible for. "Do you have all her films here?" Seth asked, genuinely curious.

"I do, actually..." I trailed off, reaching over Seth to pick up a binder of DVDs. Flipping through, I found the DVD I had burned of all Bella's camp projects. Holding up the disk for Seth to see, we put it into the DVD player to begin our viewing.

Seth was completely captivated by the videos on the screen. To be fair, if I hadn't watched and re-watched the videos like a proud father over and over again, I'd probably be the same. We went through an hour of films—first, the music video where Bella made Alice into all five Spice Girls, then her 2-D hand-drawn animation shorts, then her other murder mystery about the serial-killing tennis counselor (that was my absolute favorite), and her experimental claymation project. Seth and I were just about to start in on Bella's senior project, a dedication to the members of her age group by documenting their last summer together, when there was a loud knock on the door.

I leaned over to push the door open, revealing a sweaty-looking Jake. He swung the door open and shut it quickly behind him, coming to stand right next to the air conditioning unit.

"You lucky sons of bitches. I just had to clean twenty canoes and you've been holed up in the dark, watching movies? Assholes," he muttered under his breath, ruffling Seth's hair affectionately. "What are we watching?"

"Bella's video projects." Seth smiled widely, looking incredibly self-assured.

"Ah, yeah you are!" Jake poked Seth in the ribs forcefully, making Seth groan. "When are you going to get on that, Seth? Time is a-wasting."

"I'll get there. Slow and steady wins the race." Seth laughed, pounding his fist against Jake's outstretched one, making my stomach clench. I really did *not* like the idea of Seth pursuing Bella. It was a weird, unsettling feeling. Or maybe I just hadn't eaten enough lunch. I was going with that.

I was so busy trying to figure out whether I was hungry or not that I didn't hear the conversation between him and Jake. "Do you think that's a good idea, Edward?"

"Uh..." My gaze shifted back and forth between Jake and Seth, who were both looking at me expectantly. "Sure. Sounds good..." I replied, having no idea what I had just approved of.

"Great!" Jake slapped a large hand onto Seth's shoulder. "You can see if she wants to come out with us after dinner." Seth nodded enthusiastically, and then I realized (far too belatedly) what the hell I had agreed to.

"Thanks, Edward." Seth smiled goofily. "Do you mind if I head out? Or did you want me to do something else?"

"No, no—don't worry about it. I'll lock up." And with that, Seth was gone. I decided to follow him out and attempt to find Bella. I stepped out of the shack and locked up quickly.

I walked back to the bunk, formulating my evening's plans, excited about hopefully being able to catch up with Bella. I was curious to see what other video projects she'd been working on since the last time we'd seen one another. I was starting to feel bad that I hadn't really kept in touch since she'd become too old for camp, but I was bad at staying in touch with everyone—hopefully she understood that. I opened the door, only to be surprised by Rosalie and Emmett, who were sitting in rather close proximity to one another.

"Oh, hey, guys..." I began awkwardly. I felt like I was definitely intruding on something.

"Hey, Edward," Rosalie chirped back happily, her southern accent making Emmett salivate with each word. "How was your afternoon?"

"Good. Seth's going to be like a genital wart on my cock this summer, but... what are you going to do, right?" I opened my bedroom door and grabbed Bella's sneakers quickly before returning to Rosalie and Emmett, who were looking at me with the most bizarre expressions on their faces. "What?"

"You're almost as crude as Bella..." Rosalie said as she shook her head slightly.

"Bella's not crude," I scoffed. "Please..." I shook my head, dismissing Rosalie completely. She looked dumbfounded.

"Uh... I'm sorry, have you *had* a conversation with her? That girl's worse than if Russell Brand and Seth McFarlane had a love child."

Emmett nodded. "Word. I've witnessed it. You really need to update your Bella stats, man." I couldn't believe it. I'd never heard so much as a "fuck" leave her mouth. Did I really not know her? I felt like an absentee parent. This was the second time today that someone had pointed out how little I knew Bella. Good thing I had planned an evening for us to spend together. Emmett was right. Updating my Bella stats was now a high priority.

"You going to see her now?" Rosalie looked directly at the sneakers in my hand.

"Oh, yeah. I thought we could have sort of a catch-up movie night tonight?"

"Sounds good." Emmett smiled.

"Okay, well... see you guys later." I booked it out of the room. The feelings of sexual tension were so oppressive that I thought I was going to choke on them. Now Jake and I were the last ones to pair up—and it was only the second day of pre-camp. I felt behind.

Shoes in hand, I trudged back to the art shops only to be pleasantly surprised to hear voices

coming from the Fine Arts room. I hadn't even needed to go out of my way to find her.

I walked around to the entrance of the room, and Bella caught my eye immediately. It took all my effort not to laugh at the sight in front of me. Bella looked ridiculous; she was all but drowning in my red hoodie. Everything was much too big for her, but it made me smile to see it nonetheless. She looked adorable. My stifled laughter made a bizarre choking noise, which alerted Jasper and Alice to my presence.

Jasper smiled widely as I walked stealthily to Bella. She seemed completely engrossed in her lesson plan, so I took the opportunity to surprise her. I walked closer and threw the sneakers down on the bench beside her. She only jumped slightly, which wasn't quite the reaction I'd been going for. Disappointed, I decided to announce my presence by putting my hands on her shoulders. She relaxed, immediately bringing her hands up to meet mine, and smiled as our eyes met.

"What's up?"

I looked at Jasper and Alice, who were already looking pretty cozy (ah, young love) and decided that they should definitely be in on our evening plans, too. "I wanted to invite you all to a movie night at the infamous Bunk Seven tonight."

"You're inviting me to my own bunk?" Jasper laughed.

"And the lovely ladies, too," I chuckled, feeling completely at ease around Jasper already.

"That sounds perfect, Edward. What movie are we watching? Should we bring anything? What should I wear?" She rattled off question after question. Typical Alice.

"You can wear pajamas. There's no other way to enjoy a DVD, really. Just bring yourselves, and as for the movie... Bella can choose it." That'd be a good conversation starter, right? "What do you say, LB?" I asked, squeezing her shoulder to regain her attention.

"Sure." *Yes. She's not going out with Seth tonight.* Feeling some sort of sick satisfaction at that thought, I leaned in to rest my chin on the top of her head and squeezed my hands around her shoulders a little bit. *My Little Bella.*

"Great. You can just give me back my hoodie then—or you could keep it. Red looks good on you, LB." It really did, too. On instinct, I leaned down to press my lips lightly into her hair. Jasper quirked his eyebrow at me in silent question, but I couldn't figure out what he was asking. Shaking my head, I headed back to the bunk to take a shower and get ready for dinner.

I showered quickly—no one else was in the bunk, for some reason—and made it to dinner with a few minutes to spare. Jasper was the first one to walk in. I flagged him over to my empty table, seeing his distress as to where to sit. It was always fun watching the new counselors at meal time. It was like high school all over again; cliques formed in record time and only briefly intermingled. I couldn't believe that the Bunk Seven clique (we'd been together for the past five summers) had a whole bunch of newbies. We were now more newbie than old, which felt pretty strange and only served to make me feel too old and out of place.

"Hey, man," Jasper said, calming my nerves and bringing me back to the present.

"So, you and Alice looked pretty close already." I snorted. "Glad to see I didn't have to do any work. I don't actually think I even introduced you, did I?" I teased as Jasper gave me a sly smile.

"She *is* fantastic," he admitted, popping a french fry into his mouth. "But we're just friends." He paused before raising his eyebrow at me slightly and adding, "Bella, too..."

What's with all the inexplicable facial expressions today, Jasper?

I was about to ask him what the hell that look was supposed to mean, but Bella and Alice came in skipping and laughing, yelling loudly at one another. Everyone in the cafeteria had their eyes on them, but they couldn't have been more oblivious. I loved how unselfconscious they were around one another.

"I can't believe you just said that, Isabella Marie Swan!" Alice shouted, sounding completely exasperated. "That *must* be a joke!"

"It's true, Mary Allison Brandon!" Bella shook her head, smiling down at the floor, clearly hiding her expression from Alice. Bella obviously didn't mean a word she was saying. She was just getting Alice all agitated. And breaking out her full name was a sure way to get Alice fired up.

"Guys," Alice breathed, slamming her tray down on the table next to me, startling me. "Bella just tried to tell me that the new Star Wars movies are just as good as the original trilogy!" I gasped in mock shock as Bella's smile widened, taking a seat next to Jasper. "Yes, Edward... tell her! You understand what an abomination that statement is!" Alice spoke firmly. "At least she listens to you," she grumbled, crossing her arms and taking a seat.

"Bella doesn't listen to me. What younger sibling actually listens to their older brother?" I shrugged my shoulders and took a large bite of my hamburger. I looked up and smiled at Bella, but she was too busy eating her food to notice. She never listened to anything I said. And she was always too fucking stubborn to take my suggestions seriously.

Suddenly, I heard a wheezing noise coming from across the table. I watched on with curiosity as Jasper started choking on his fry, and Bella slapped him on his back, glaring at him the whole time. I looked over to Alice, wondering if she was part of this weird exchange, but she just looked amused.

"Anyway," Bella turned back to Alice, smiling wickedly "—I might have exaggerated a little, Alice. They're not actually as good as the original trilogy. I just want Hayden Christensen's saber-sized peen."

Now it was my turn to choke. I couldn't believe I was sitting at the same table with Bella and Alice talking about "peen," using Star Wars innuendos. This was like every wet dream I'd ever had at the age of fifteen. I used to refer to my cock as Chewbacca—which my first girlfriend had thought was super creepy, so I'd never mentioned it again. I noticed that Jasper had started choking again, too, which only increased with Alice's rebuttal.

"Just because you've never had a saber-sized peen in your Millenium Falcon is no reason for poor taste, Bella."

Bella's jaw dropped in complete shock before cracking a small smile and breaking into full out laughter. "You're right, Alice. I've only had *Chewbacca*-sized peen..."

My mouth started salivating at the image that appeared in my head—me as Anakin Skywalker driving into Bella dressed as Padmé. *What? Stop that!* All these Star Wars references were transporting me back to my childhood bedroom, reliving my nerdiest fantasies, and I was not okay with it. Alice was about to retort again when Emmett and Rosalie arrived at the table, diverting the conversation with their arrival. *Thank God.* I was more than freaked out by my sudden daydream. I focused my attention solely on Emmett, who had his arm wrapped around Rosalie's shoulder, and she was leaning into his side. I was definitely going to have to ask him about that one later.

Dinner went by quickly in a blur of loud joking and movie quoting, our absolute favorite activity. As we were leaving, I brushed past Bella and grabbed her hand. "Come meet us in an hour?" I asked.

"Sure thing." She smiled, her brown eyes lighting up with excitement.

With that, I headed outside. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Seth approach Bella and decided to slow down my pace. I couldn't hear the conversation, but I assumed that Seth was asking Bella to come out with him. He put his hand on her shoulder, and she flinched away a little bit and shook her head sadly. Seth looked so dejected that I almost felt bad for him. *Almost.*

"What are we looking at?" I almost flew out of my skin, jumping at the proximity of Emmett's voice to my ear.

"Fuck, Em! Don't fucking do that!" I yelled. I flicked my eyes towards Bella again, but she was already gone. Emmett just stood there expectantly. "What?"

"You were all off into la-la land, E. What were you looking at? Some new chick caught your eye?"

I paused as a new feeling bubbled up inside me. *Is that what just happened?* Had Bella "caught my eye," so to speak? *No*, I answered myself. Bella hadn't caught my eye. That bizarre daydream had really messed with my head. I knew I was just having a really hard time adjusting to her being here and being an adult. On top of it, Seth pursuing her was only adding to that discomfort. The big brother in me wanted to cover her eyes and hide her away from all the booze and sex in the world, but I knew that wasn't a realistic image of Bella anymore.

If I was being honest with myself, she wasn't that kid anymore. Yes, she was still amazingly talented, but her outfit last night had *not* gone unnoticed. By me... and the entire male population in the surrounding area. She'd grown up *good*. Really good. Unfortunately, as far as I could tell, no one here this summer was even remotely good enough for her. I guessed I'd just have to see what happened.

"Eh, not yet." I shrugged nonchalantly. "Still looking. So far... no go." Emmett just rolled his eyes at my typical response. It wasn't like me to put in any effort towards my summer relationships. I really just sat back and let them come to me. I was far too lazy and noncommittal to pursue anyone.

I headed back to the bunk and changed into some sweats and a t-shirt. I wanted to be comfortable watching my movies. Plus, last night's sleep had been rough, to say the least, and I was happy to get my bed back. *Love you, LB, but I love my bed more.*

I was just settling into my bed and flipping through my binder of DVDs when Jasper, Bella, and Alice came in.

It took every ounce of bodily control to not let my mouth drop open or allow my cock to harden. Bella had just showered; her hair was still wet, dripping onto her pajamas. Well, pajamas weren't exactly what I would call them. She was wearing a tight, white t-shirt and the tiniest pair of light blue shorts I had ever seen on a girl. In the fluorescent lighting of the room combined with the residual water dripping from her hair, I could clearly see the outline of Bella's breasts. *No fucking bra. Are you kidding me?* My eyes turned immediately to Jasper, trying in vain to prevent that image from searing itself into my brain.

My dick was screaming at me to notice and stare straight at her rack, but I doubted Bella even knew I could see them. I felt guilty for even noticing. After mentally berating myself, I pushed the DVD case forward.

"So, what are we watching tonight, LB?" I asked.

Her smile faltered for a second before she approached my bed and sat down next to me, flipping through the pages of films. Her brows furrowed and her tongue slipped over her bottom lip, sure signs of Bella's heavy focus. She was concentrating so hard. I loved it.

As Bella looked, I brought my attention back to Alice and Jasper, who were already getting comfortable on Jasper's bed.

"Okay, bitches, what are we watching?" Emmett called out, bursting through the doorway with Rosalie tucked under his arm. Her face was slightly splotchy, and she looked as if she had just been crying. My gaze slid to Emmett's. He narrowed his eyes briefly, shaking his head minutely, before carrying on in his typical Emmett way.

"LB!" he bellowed. "You'd better pick something good. And watchable. Just 'cause you're a fancy USC film school kid doesn't mean you can get elitist on us."

Bella just shook her head, frustrated, before scowling at Emmett, who had taken up shop, lying on the floor. "Stop whining, Em. Everyone knows that USC film school is all about 'the blockbuster.' You know, George Lucas graduated from USC, and Steven Spielberg has an honorary degree..." She trailed off and slid her DVD choice out of the binder and into my hand.

I grinned. "*Slackers?* Really?"

"It's hands down my favorite sex comedy. Starring that brief period when Devon Sawa got hot again, the other Pete—the one that's not Danny Tamberelli—from *Pete & Pete*, Jason Segal before anyone cared who he was, and the most brilliant comedian ever... Jason Schwartzman." She paused, her eyes peering into mine with such intensity that it took me aback for a second. "I'm impressed that you even own it, Edward."

"Well, thanks." I smiled, wrapping an arm around her shoulders. She leaned into me slightly, and I reminded myself not to look down at her boobs again. "I'm not *always* a movie snob, you know..."

Emmett snorted loudly. "Yeah, but when you're not a movie snob, you're a movie geek, so just put the damn thing in already. I'm psyched. I brought snacks!"

Smiling like a madman, Emmett magically produced two packages of double stuffed oreos and a tub of vanilla frosting from under Jasper's bed (where I assumed he had hidden them earlier). From his position on the floor, he looked up eagerly at Bella. I knew that this was their apology tradition; whenever one of them was upset, the other would bring oreos and icing. I thought it developed the summer when Bella's dad had been in the hospital, but I wasn't a hundred percent sure. Emmett was far closer with Bella than I was. Smiling widely in return, Bella shot out of her seat and was on Emmett's lap within a second, her arms flung around his neck.

"Apology accepted, Em."

Just then, the door swung open. *Doesn't anyone knock anymore?* Jake stood there in awe, gaping at Bella, who was still perched on Emmett's lap with her arms wrapped around his neck.

"Uh, I was going to see if anyone wanted to come out with Seth and me tonight, but it looks like you guys are taken care of..." Jake trailed off, his eyes completely focused on Bella's chest. *Seriously?*

Jake moved to the side, allowing Seth to get a good look at Bella and Emmett's intimate position, too. It didn't go unnoticed by me that Seth's eyes dipped down to get a good look through Bella's shirt, too, before shifting uncomfortably. *Yeah, man. We're all with you.* Bella looked up and made eye contact with him. They both flushed the same shade of red as she awkwardly extracted herself from her position and slowly walked back to me.

The door slammed shut as Jake pushed Seth out of the bunk, mumbling something as they left. I was pretty sure that I heard a "Holy shit!" from Jake and a "Thank you, God," from Seth. *Assholes.*

There was a long beat of silence before the entire room (sans Bella) broke out into hysterical laughter.

"Aw, yeah. Now everyone knows you want up on this." Emmett motioned to his crotch as Bella wrinkled her nose in disgust.

"If you guys are finished, I'm putting in the movie," Bella reprimanded us, stomping her way over to the DVD player.

Looking around, I noticed that all eyes in the room were suddenly on me with matching shit-eating grins.

"What?" I mouthed. Emmett wiggled his eyebrows suggestively, and Jasper just smirked and nodded.

What the fuck are they looking at? Emmett leered at Bella, and then I got it. *Douche.*

My gaze snapped back to Bella as she turned and leaned down to put the movie into the player. Without conscious thought, my neck strained forward, staring at the tiny shorts that were riding upwards, revealing more of her luscious backside with every inch forward she leaned.

My cock twitched in my sweatpants and blood flooded my cheeks, startling the hell out of me. This reaction wasn't okay. Bella was a beautiful girl, but I needed to stop staring at her ass. *Right now, Edward.*

Annoyed (and looking for an excuse to look away without showing Emmett my newly acquired blush), I took the opportunity to sprawl out on my bed, my sore muscles finally relaxing into the soft goodness of my mattress. After putting in the DVD, Bella turned around to survey the room.

She cocked her head to the side, scanning her possible seating options. Jasper and Alice were sitting against the wall, side by side on Jasper's bed while Emmett and Rosalie were leaning up against the two beds respectively. And I took up my entire bed.

My body went to make room for her in my bed, but my head was screaming at me.

What are you doing? Do you enjoy torturing yourself? This is a bad idea. A bad, bad, idea.

Rationally, I knew that she could sit on the floor, but I was sure that didn't seem particularly appealing. Ignoring my belligerent inner voice, I scooted towards the wall, making room for Bella to lie down beside me. I patted the bed, motioning for Bella to come over.

"You already let me have your bed yesterday," she protested.

"LB, you're tiny. It'll be fine. Just get your ass over here before I change my mind."

She sighed loudly before happily plopping onto the bed. She lay down beside me, rolling to her side to fit neatly onto the small bed. I put another pillow underneath my head, propping me up further so that I could still see the screen, and I threw my arm around Bella's waist. She was like another little pillow. It was pretty great.

Until Bella started eating the oreos. Then it wasn't so great. My inner voice snickered mean "*I told you so's*" as my temperature rose, blood rushing to all the right (or wrong—depending on how I looked at it) places. Every time she leaned down to reach a cookie, her ass would inch closer to my crotch. It was hard enough keeping my erection down thinking about how little she was wearing while lying in my bed, but with her ass moving closer and closer to me, I was starting to have a serious problem. I was flush against the wall when she brushed up against the

front of my sweatpants, causing me to panic and sit up quickly. Bella nearly tumbled onto the floor, but I was able to pull her back just before she slipped off.

"Sorry," I muttered, focusing on suppressing my newly formed erection. I knew I was apologizing to myself, too. My inner voice was right—letting the barely clothed, super hot girl into my bed had been a *terrible* idea.

She shot me a confused glare. "What the hell?"

"Uh, I got too hot."

"Oh-kay," she said, dragging out the word skeptically before shifting her body so that she was sitting beside mine, leaning against the wall.

"Shut up, you two—this is my favorite part," Rosalie chided, surprising the hell out of me. I didn't think that this would be her type of movie. I refocused my attention to the screen and saw that it *was* a really hilarious part of the movie.

Cool Ethan, played by Jason Schwartzman, was trying to sleep with the girl of his dreams, Angela, but he had done some pretty creepastic things on his way to get there. He sifted through a number of apology presents to show to Angela, until finally he got to my favorite one, pulling out a treasure troll. I decided to voice the line along with him.

"I want to make sure that you and I are best friends, 'gnome' matter what?"

"*Ethan, that's a troll,*" the voice on the television argued.

"Gnome it's not!" Bella and I exclaimed, shouting the punch line at the television simultaneously. I nudged her in the ribs, causing her to giggle and lean into my side. This was good. This was easy. And as long as Bella kept her ass about a foot away from my junk, tonight would be declared a success.

Yeah, but you still want to grab some of that, right? What'cha gonna do with all that junk? my inner voice snickered, singing the opening lyrics from "My Humps" on repeat.

Somewhere in between the hospitalized whore and the sponge bath and Cool Ethan's hair doll, I was able to tune out my nagging and guilty conscience and started to drift off. The past few days had really caught up with me, and I let my eyes droop.

What seemed like seconds later, I heard a slight disruption in the room... or maybe it was in my dream.

"... no, don't wake them..."

"... only time I've seen them relaxed..."

"... adorable..."

I lifted my head up groggily and grunted to alert the room that I was awake. I felt movement on my lap and saw that Bella had also fallen asleep; her head resting on my thigh. Everyone looked like they were going to jump back into conversation, so I put my finger up to my lips, indicating that they should let Bella sleep, and I ushered everyone into the adjacent room to give her some uninterrupted, sober sleep.

"What time is it?" My voice sounded like gravel. All I could do was barely whisper.

"Midnight," Alice whispered. "The movie just finished."

Before I could comprehend what was happening, Jake bounded drunkenly into the room with one of my favorite people. It was the first time we were seeing each other since last summer, and I couldn't help the smile that spread across my face.

"Look who I found!" Jake grinned, slamming the door noisily behind him. I cringed, knowing that Bella would soon be awake, whether she wanted to be or not.

"Edward!" the petite blond called out, before throwing herself into my arms.

"Hey, Emily," I said sleepily into her hair. I was still in the process of waking up. I set her down on the floor, took a step back and really looked at her.

She hadn't aged a day since I'd first met her. Jake hadn't been really lying when he'd said she looked like a camper; she *did* look pretty young. To be honest, she *was* pretty young—only twenty one. She still had that super cute round face and a wide smile that lit up her crystal blue eyes. It was all surrounded by her short blond bob, which still had those hairs she could never manage to stay behind her ears. And I couldn't leave out her body. Her body was *banging*—to use Emmett's vocabulary. It was undeniably true. She taught field hockey and lacrosse, so she was tight in all the right places. Not going to lie... I'd seen them all. Repeatedly.

"I miss my Rainbows," she said, interrupting my blatant ogling. "I left them in your closet." And with that, she barged into my room.

It only took me seconds to realize that that was a mistake, but I didn't get the chance to stop her. I heard Emily's loud, "What the fuck?" before she came running out to me, arms wrapped around my neck. She leaned in to whisper into my ear, but she was obviously a little tipsy, so everyone around us could hear.

"Edward! Did you know there's a girl in your bed? I thought we were going to end up in your bed. Now where will we go?" I kissed her cheek before nodding and unwrapping myself from her arms.

"Hey," a very sleepy and rumpled-looking Bella called from my door, waving awkwardly. "Your bed's vacant now. Sorry about that. I must have fallen asleep during the movie..." She looked at the ground and crossed her arms protectively across her chest, looking anywhere but at me. "You should have woken me up."

"Don't worry about it." I smiled, hoping to lessen Bella's discomfort. I could see her eyes flashing

from me to Emily and then back again. "Bella, this is Emily." I gestured. "Emily, this is LB."

Emily's eyes widened before she ran up to Bella and threw her arms around her. I'd forgotten what a friendly drunk she was.

Bella mumbled a soft, "Oh, boy..." I tried to hold back my laughter at the ridiculousness of the situation. Emmett didn't even try. His laughter came out in loud guffaws. *Yup, still a douche.*

"You're LB? Oh my God! You're famous! I've seen all your videos. Edward has a whole DVD of them in the shack! That one where—" Emily paused for a second before spinning around quickly and turning to point at Alice with excitement "—you! You play all five Spice Girls. I loved that one. So original." Emily babbled drunkenly, slurring ever so slightly.

"You have a DVD of my videos?" Bella gaped, her eyes trained on me.

"Well, yeah. I archive all of my campers projects..."

"By year," she argued. She knew my organizing system. What could I say? I had been found out. But seriously. I was proud of those videos. After all, I'd taught her almost everything she knew.

"Yours have always been my favorite, LB. And *CAB Productions* deserved some proper recognition. You'll now be remembered for generations," I joked.

"Remember when we watched it that night in the counselor lounge? Man, everyone was laughing so hard..." Emily continued on. Her drunken rambling was not ceasing anytime soon, apparently.

Bella just shook her head and leaned down, pulling the flip flops off her feet before handing them roughly to Emily. "Here are your flip flops, Emily. It's been real." I tried not to crack a smile at Bella's less-than-cordial attitude towards Emily, but it was kind of cute that she was grumpy. She walked over to Emmett, who looked amused. "I'm sleepy, Em, and I have no shoes. Let's roll."

Laughing, Emmett sat on the bed so that Bella could climb onto his back. "Your chariot awaits, m'lady." As soon as she was settled, Bella snuggled her head into Emmett's shoulder, and my stomach did that weird clenching thing again.

Stop freaking out, dude. It's Emmett. He's not going to take advantage of her.

Um, I'm sorry. Were you there last night?

Clarification: SOBER Emmett would never take advantage of her.

"Night," she called out as Emmett led the girls back towards their bunk.

"Night," I mumbled, feeling completely disoriented. "I'm exhausted," I admitted to Emily as she wrapped her arms around my waist. Why I was turning down no-strings sex when I was incredibly aroused, I had no idea. Maybe it was my subconscious just trying to be a decent guy

and not take advantage of a clearly intoxicated girl. *Probably not*. Either way, I wanted to get into bed. Alone.

"Thasssokay. I wanted to visit Sam anyway." I nodded. Sam was Emily's co-counselor and best friend from high school. They were both local to Maine, but the only time they really got to see each other was during the summer now. Sam wasn't exactly my biggest fan. I suspected he always harbored some feelings for Emily, who clearly only saw him as a friend. *That sucks*.

"Tell him I say hi," I called out as she skipped out of the bunk. I shook my head. That girl had more energy than Alice.

Tired, I climbed back into bed. It was still warm from where Bella had been sleeping. With happy thoughts of the gloriousness of the invention of white t-shirts (I was all about the touch, the feel of cotton tonight), I succumbed to the darkness around me.

Chapter 5

Midnight Conversations

~Bella~

As my arms clung around Emmett's wide shoulders, I tried my very best to purge the image of Edward's lips on *her* cheek from my mind. It made my stomach hurt just thinking about how he'd touched her before. If their greeting had been that intimate, I could only imagine what else they'd done together. I needed some brain bleach ASAP. Ugh.

Emily.

Now I remembered her. She was blonde and perky and about the size of my pinky. But she wasn't a cute, hyper midget like Alice... no. She was loud and obnoxious and had a face that made her look like she was twelve years old. And Edward was okay with fucking (yes, I had acknowledged that much already) her?

"I don't like her," Rosalie spoke up as we trekked through the darkness to our cabin. Alice and I both looked up, raising our eyes in disbelief at the blunt Southerner. "What?" she asked. "You all were thinking it. I just said it."

Emmett chuckled so softly that the only reason I heard it was because I could feel the vibrations through his back. "I'm not a huge fan, either. I'll admit it."

That was all Alice needed to hear to add her two cents, which I was sure had been brewing since she'd first laid eyes on the offending woman. "Ugh, as soon as she started talking, I remembered her. I could practically hear her screeching, 'No, Alice, hold the stick further down... really? You're tired already?' and blah, blah, blah. Seriously, I don't know if I'll be able to keep hanging out with you guys if she's always around. Will she always be around?" Alice ranted.

"God, I hope not," Rosalie mumbled.

"She also looks like she's twelve."

Emmett stopped in his tracks and tilted his head towards mine slightly before breaking into loud, earsplitting guffaws. Rosalie and Alice turned around, watching the bizarre scene in front of them and joined in on the laughter, too.

"She speaks!" Emmett wheezed through his laughter. Annoyed, I flopped my head back down onto Emmett's back and pinched his bicep firmly. "Ow! What the fuck, LB?"

"She really does look like she's twelve," Alice agreed readily.

Thanks, best friend. I can always count on you.

Finally back at our bunk, Emmett dropped me down onto my bed before sitting at the foot of it, waiting patiently. He looked like he needed to talk to me about something.

"Yes, Em?"

"I wanted to tuck you into bed." He smiled, leaping up to pull the covers around me. I rolled my eyes. That was absolutely *not* what he was waiting for, but I guessed we'd discuss it later... perhaps when so many people weren't around. "Night, ladies." He winked at Rosalie before shutting the door behind him.

"Okay." Rosalie smiled wickedly. "Let's chat, Bella."

We spent the next three hours talking about everything. I learned every minute detail of Rosalie's relationship with Royce—he wasn't comfortable being in a long distance relationship (even for three months), he was very protective of her, he'd been her first, and they'd gotten into a huge fight tonight, so she was glad that I'd picked a comedy for us to watch. In return, I told her all about Edward. And me and Edward. Mostly me wanting to do dirty, dirty things to Edward and how he obviously still thought of me as a little sister.

"If he does, then he's fooling himself," Rosalie laughed. I raised my eyebrow in question. "Hun, I know you thought you were being all sneaky with the white t-shirt and no bra, but trust me... he noticed. Hell, he's probably going to dream about your perky little boobs tonight. Which, PS... *nice!*" She winked as she gave my boobs a small love tap. I blushed at being called out so obviously. *But it's true. My boobs are awesome. Hence their vulgar display tonight. Clearly, I have no shame.* And I was happy to realize that we were already at that point in our relationship. Boob groping between girls was always welcomed in my book. It was a true sign of friendship.

Rosalie was incredible. She made me feel so relaxed and happy, even when she embarrassed the hell out of me. She was the quintessential girl next door... if the girl next door had a bad case of potty mouth. She was nearly as inappropriate as I was. Additionally, it was nice to have a new best friend—someone else to confide in, who wasn't so biased or close to the situation.

"All right, girls, it's almost four, and we have to be at assembly tomorrow by nine so this beauty needs some sleep. Sweet dreams."

We fell asleep quickly, happy to have found each other so easily.

The rest of the week followed a similar routine. We'd wake up, go through the pre-camp meetings and lesson planning, and then watch a movie at Bunk Seven and head back to our cabin to gossip for a few hours. Alice, Rosalie, and I became a unit—completely inseparable—while Edward, Jasper, Jake, and Emmett formed their own. It was two of the best weeks of my entire life.

I'd toned back my "seduction"—if that was what you could call it—ever since Rosalie had called me out on my white t-shirt move, so things were progressing slowly at best. In fact, if I were to be honest, I'd admit that things hadn't really progressed at all. Edward and I were in some sort of purgatory limbo. And he definitely hadn't invited me back into his bed since that first night. But my rack and I would be working on that in the near future... one push up bra at a time. *Thanks, Victoria. It's not really a secret.* I couldn't help but feel smug when I saw Edward's eyes linger slightly on my chest, but that was essentially the only change.

After almost two weeks of gossiping and hours of my complaining about Edward, Rosalie insisted on buying me new underwear. She said if I wanted someone to eventually be seeing it, I should wear underwear that wanted to be seen. *Positive Pussy Reinforcement*, she called it. I had yet to put the plan into action, but my hoo-hah and I had high hopes.

Luckily, Emily hadn't been around that much, so I didn't need to run much interference. She'd stop by every so often to invite the boys out, but they never took her up on her offers. She and her best friend Sam had fallen in with the latest party crowd, who would go out drinking every night. And while I enjoyed drinking occasionally, I couldn't bring myself to drink in the presence of Emmett for at least a few more weeks (if ever). A little part of me thrilled every time Edward turned her down.

Tonight, though, the routine was being broken. It was the last night before the campers arrived, which meant that our total dynamic was going to shift again. And I was a little nervous. We had each gotten our bunk assignments. I had a group of thirteen-year-olds, as did Rosalie (thank God, she was only two bunks down), but Alice was being put with the nine-year-olds, all the way across campus from us. And tonight was the first night that we hadn't watched a movie in Bunk Seven or gossiped until three AM.

Instead, I was sitting alone in my bunk, trying to clean it up for the kids, who would no doubt be making a huge mess of it tomorrow. Looking at the clock, I noticed that it was already one AM, and I still felt completely wired. I tried to get comfortable on my bed, but it felt odd being alone in the cabin. I closed my eyes and started counting back from one hundred, hoping to calm my racing mind, but all I could think about was planning my underwear choices for the next week and what Edward would have to say if he saw them.

"Bella!" My eyes snapped open and I sat up quickly, banging my head on the shelf above my bed.

"Ow..." I rubbed my forehead. *Just great.* Now I would be able to welcome my new campers

with a lump on my head. I looked in the direction of the offending voice, only to be greeted with the sight of a guilty-looking Rosalie. "Rose?"

"Sorry, Bella, I didn't mean to scare you." She climbed onto the bed next to me. "I was just lonely in my bunk."

"Samesies."

"Want to go hang out on the front porch?" I nodded readily and hopped out of bed, not even bothering to put on shoes. Rosalie held my hand as we walked through the soft grass, not saying anything. It wasn't needed. We both understood that this was the last night of the little bubble world we'd been living in for the past fourteen days. I led her to my favorite Adirondack chair, the one I'd spent the first night of camp in, gossiping with Jake and Emmett.

Naturally, our conversation moved quickly to Edward and my frustrations with our weird relationship stasis.

"You're over-thinking it, Bella," Rosalie sighed.

"Over-thinking what?"

"Okay, I'm going to be a hundred percent honest with you because I can, right?" She paused, waiting for my approval to continue. Rose was never anything *but* honest, so if she had to stop and ask... what she was about to say was probably going to hurt. I nodded nervously. "You don't actually like Edward."

"Uh, what?" That was ridiculous. Of course I liked Edward. I had liked Edward forever! "I'm fairly certain that I do, Rose."

She scowled and grabbed my hand tightly. "Honey, that's not what I meant. You like Edward, but not in the way where he's going to like you back."

"What the fuck does that even mean?" I growled, growing offended by her blatant disregard for feelings I had harbored for five years.

"Stop interrupting me!" She scowled again. "Listen, you like Edward like he's a celebrity. You don't actually *know* him. You *think* you know him, but you don't really. You've put him up on this pedestal that he can't possibly live up to. He's not the gorgeous, talented, hilarious, amazing guy you gush about every night."

"I—"

"I'm not finished, Bella." I zipped my mouth shut and pretended to throw away the key. "I've been around Edward when it's just us and Emmett, and he's this whole other person that you've never met before. And I'm not saying that you wouldn't like that person, but I just don't think you know him very well. Edward... he's socially awkward and generally uncomfortable with relationships, which he compensates for by joking constantly. He's crude and inappropriate—almost as much as you—but he's also a major nerd. His *Star Wars* obsession eclipses even your obsession with *him*. He even plays with action figures..."

"He does *what*?" I asked, completely incredulous.

"Yeah! That's what *my* reaction was! You just have to wait to see them, Bella... it's pretty hilarious. He has a Jesus action figure, called Judo Jesus, and he has him fight his Spiderman action figure. They battle to the death. Judo Jesus usually ends up getting crucified..." She giggled at her own pun.

The more Rosalie talked about Edward, the more I realized that we hadn't spent that much time together in a social setting. We really weren't that well acquainted, which bothered me a lot more than I'd admit to Rosalie in that instant... especially since she'd known him for two weeks and clearly knew more about him than I did. I didn't realize that Rosalie had been spending so much time alone with the boys without me. I wondered briefly where I'd been during those moments and why she hadn't taken me along with her.

Instead of commenting, I changed the topic to something Rosalie would want to talk about: college football. Since I was going to USC and she was going to LSU, we were now rivals, which was really fun to joke about. Rosalie and I were deep in conversation when I felt a gentle touch on my shoulder. I whipped my head around, only to see my favorite crooked grin. "Hey!" I said, surprised.

"What are you two doing up? Isn't it a bit past your bedtime?" I smiled and shook my head, but I groaned on the inside. Of course he would say something like that. The past two weeks had been sprinkled with some not-so-subtle reminders that I was incredibly young.

"It's definitely past *my* bedtime, but Bella's a little insomniac and needed some company." Rosalie laid her head on my shoulder, yawning exaggeratedly. I wanted to laugh at her theatrics.

"If you wanted to get some sleep, I could take her off your hands," Edward suggested, shoving his hands firmly into the pockets of his shorts. My stomach fluttered at the thought of being alone with Edward. With everything Rosalie and I had just discussed, it was clear that it needed to happen... I just wasn't sure if I could do it. Needless to say, I was nervous.

"Oh, would you, Edward?" Rosalie feigned her gratitude. "That would be *so* great. I'm exhausted." She yawned again, standing up to stretch. I shot my eyes to her in a quick glare before smiling back at Edward, who was now taking her place on the small love seat.

"Not a problem. LB and I haven't had a chance to really catch up anyway. Too much movie-watching and napping going on for that." He laughed and wrapped his arm around my shoulder to pull me into his side. I sighed happily. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Rosalie attempting to stifle her laughter.

"Well, goodnight, you two. Don't do anything I wouldn't do," she warned as she laughed under her breath. And with a large wave, she skipped off into the darkness, back towards her cabin. I wondered for a second if the whole thing had been a set up, but... how would she have known that Edward would be around when clearly everyone else was in bed? I shook my head to rid it of those foolish thoughts before sinking even further into Edward's side.

"So, you're an insomniac?" We both gazed forward, over the sprawling front hill and out to the lake, which was sparkling under the nearly full moon.

"Only when I can't shut my brain off."

"And why can't you shut your brain off tonight?" My mind immediately started thinking about the new slutty pairs of underwear waiting to be seen by him, but I didn't think we were quite ready to discuss those yet. Instead, I glanced upwards to answer him and was completely taken off guard by his eyes, which seemed to be piercing through the darkness and seeing through the shoddy façade of attempted indifference I'd put up.

I gulped nervously. "I have a bunch of story lines I can't stop thinking about," I lied.

"I thought you wanted to be a director?"

"And a writer," I answered, sounding oddly cold. He sighed and looked forward again, but I couldn't take my eyes off his face. I examined the sturdy line of his jaw, which was stubble free for the first time in two weeks.

"You shaved." My thumb landed on the bottom of his jaw, running over the smooth skin lightly, without conscious thought. As I saw his Adam's apple move just below my hand, I realized that I had initiated contact with Edward for the first time all summer. And it was a bit awkward. Or maybe that was just me. He remained motionless under my finger until I cleared my throat and retreated nervously, placing my hand back into my lap. I felt the vibrations of his soft laughter and looked up again.

"You haven't changed a bit, Bella."

Of course. Because that's what every person who has tried so desperately to be seen as something different wants to hear, right?

Maybe I should just take off my clothes... then maybe he'd see how I've changed. It's amazing what a wax will do for a girl's confidence.

Ah, yes—let's not forget the OTHER half of Rosalie's Positive Pussy Reinforcement plan. Fuck, that shit hurt.

"So, why USC?" he continued, completely oblivious to my inner turmoil.

I smiled and looked forward again. This I could answer without hesitation. "I knew I wanted to stay on the west coast, so NYU and RISD and Syracuse were out. I looked at UCLA first, and it blew... and not in the good way." He laughed a short bark of a laugh at that comment, clearly unprepared for my potty mouth. I continued on and pretended not to notice. "There's just something so inviting about USC. I had this odd, visceral reaction to walking around the campus, like I just knew I belonged there. I may or may not have cried during our tour of the Zemeckis center, which is their soundstage. They have a fucking sound stage. Can you believe that? My parents thought I was crazy, of course. But I applied, and I got into their production program, so I'm pretty happy."

"Did you say Zemeckis Center... as in... Robert Zemeckis?" Edward looked shocked.

"Oh, yeah. Bob's an alum. What now?" I gloated. "And on the school's board of councilors." Edward exhaled slowly. I couldn't decipher his facial expression. It was confused? Pissed? Happy? *Why am I so bad at reading people?* The silence was overwhelmingly oppressive. Finally, Edward responded.

"Wow. USC," he said, sounding pained and looking unsure.

"What?" I asked, genuinely curious about his sudden change in disposition.

"I... uh... I guess I'm a little jealous." He laughed awkwardly, his gaze fixed back on the shimmering lake.

"Jealous of me?" *No way.* "That's ridiculous..."

"You're going to be such a huge success, Bella. I'm still trying to get the hell out of Providence..." He ran a hand through his hair, tugging at the ends, trying to muster up a smile for me. "My only claim to fame is selling school books to Leelee Sobieski when she went to Brown."

"You could move to LA with me," I blurted out. *My filter must still be broken.*

"If I knew I could make a living out there, I'd be there in a second." He sighed, leading us into another bout of awkward silence.

Talking to Edward was so much harder than I'd anticipated. It had never been like this when I'd been a camper. Our conversation had been fluid and effortless, but now... I could FEEL the effort that both of us were putting in. *I mean, shit. This is painful.* And even with all of those efforts, we were still lagging.

What the hell happened?

Edward fidgeted underneath my weight and squeezed the hand that was placed in my lap.

"I should probably get to bed." He shifted again so that I could lean away from him. I missed his body heat as soon as we were separated. He stood up slowly, stretching his arms above his head. I glanced briefly at the small sliver of skin that peeked out from between the waistband of his shorts and the hem of his t-shirt.

"Yeah, me too..." I attempted to stand up, but I failed to realize that both of my feet had fallen asleep. They had been tucked underneath me for at least an hour. My ankles buckled under my weight, and I crashed straight into Edward's chest with a loud *oomph*.

Embarrassed, I put my hands on his chest, attempting to push myself away from him to stand upright. But Edward's arms were wrapped firmly around my waist, not letting me move away. I tilted my head upwards and bit my lip in confusion.

As soon as we locked eyes, my breathing picked up. I had to consciously remember to steady it, counting, "in one... two, release one... two," to prevent hyperventilation. Edward was staring at me. And it wasn't just a friendly stare. No, he was looking at me so intently, it looked like he was trying to figure me out like a difficult math problem. His green eyes glowed in the moonlight, making them appear almost iridescent. Needless to say, I was completely captivated. Wasn't green the color of lust, after all? I'd heard that somewhere before... I knew I had. And I felt like I was being pulled into a cyclone of horny by Edward's glowing green eyes.

Stunned, my jaw dropped slightly, letting my bottom lip free from my teeth. Edward's gaze flicked down to the freed lip before returning to my eyes, his brow furrowing even further. He blinked rapidly then, and glanced down at the ground before releasing his hold on my waist and helping me stand again.

"Do you have your camera here this summer?"

"Wha—?" I was still trying to document every detail of our "moment." Because that was exactly what it had been... a moment. A bizarre one. An inexplicable one. But a moment nonetheless.

"Your camera... did you bring it with you?" His question shook me out of my lusty haze.

"No, did you need one? Wait, that's a really stupid question, of course you don't..." I bit my lip again and looked down at the ground. I was rapidly becoming a total spaz in his presence. This was new and unexpected, and I wasn't quite sure what to do about it yet.

"I should give you the combination to the shack. In case you want to work on any projects during your insomniac nights. You can borrow the cameras anytime." My head snapped up towards him.

"24, 9, 14... right?" He smiled then, finally. A real, genuine, non-awkward smile, which made my breathing pick up again.

"Steel trap, I see," he laughed, putting his index fingers on either side of my head to point towards my brain. "I'll see you tomorrow, Bella."

I walked back to my cabin, not really sure of what had happened. Things with Edward were definitely changing.

I knew that the comfortable repartee we used in the company of others was nowhere to be found when it was just the two of us tonight, which had never really happened before. And I knew that Edward had discovered something about me... I just had no idea what that "something" was. Lastly, I knew without a doubt that my attraction to Edward had only increased with the layers of himself that he was willing to share with me. I felt like I was finally getting to know Edward the man... not just Edward the friend or Edward the counselor. It scared me shitless.

I realized that Rosalie had been completely right. I liked Edward like a celebrity. It was safe to be "obsessed" with him because I never had to commit to anything real. There wasn't really a chance that he could like me back. But now, the dynamic of our relationship had completely

altered. I wasn't the innocent camper, and he wasn't the cool, older counselor... we were simply Bella and Edward.

But I was now more motivated than ever to continue my plans of seduction. *Looks like I may need to make a weekly appointment with Elsa the waxer, after all.* I could only hope that the look we'd shared tonight was an indication of things to come.

~Edward~

As I sprinted back towards Bunk Seven, one thought ran through my mind on repeat. I was fucked. Totally and utterly fucked. I felt like a creepy, child-molesting pedophile, and I needed a shower stat. Preferably a freezing cold one.

As if it weren't bad enough that her white t-shirt-clad tits had been making cameos in my dreams for the past two weeks, I had now gotten a boner... in front of Bella. No, not just in front of Bella. *Because* of Bella. A Bella boner, if you will. *Oh, Jesus.*

To be honest, the boobs I could kind of excuse. I was a guy—a really nerdy art school freak who hadn't even gotten to touch one until he'd been twenty-one—so the titty dreamage didn't freak me out so much. I was never doing anything with them in my dreams... they were just kind of on display. As they had been that night.

But tonight. Fuck. Tonight had been different. There was no dismissing my erection. It had happened. And I was starting to go into panic mode.

I hadn't even planned on leaving my bunk tonight. I'd merely been forced to vacate when Emmett and Jake had decided that it'd be a great idea to start playing Rock Band IN MY ROOM at midnight. Jasper had thought it was hilarious, cheering for both of them with each round. But I'd been annoyed and feeling restless, so I'd decided to take a late-night stroll around camp.

I'd walked from our bunk down to the lake and sat on the dock for a good hour before I'd heard people up by the front porch. I had decided to investigate and potentially make friends with my fellow insomniacs. I had been shocked to find Bella and Rosalie out there.

Talking to Bella had been... harder than I'd thought it was going to be. *In more ways than one.* In the video shack, we'd always been able to talk about anything. I'd been her counselor, yes, but I'd also been her confidante and her teacher. Free speech just accompanied that. Two years ago, I could recite Bella's favorite movies and her top most-played songs on her ipod. Tonight, though, I'd realized that I didn't know why she had applied to USC or even that she wanted to write as well as direct. Absentee parent was right. Except thinking that now was just so wrong. I really had to stop with the sibling and parental references. Incest boners were *never* okay... *you hear me, John Phillips? Not cool.*

I was definitely going to have to take a step back and reassess the Bella situation. We had both changed a lot in the past two years, and I wasn't really sure where that left us.

Honestly, I couldn't help the strange attraction I had felt towards her tonight. I was physically pulled to her. When she'd crashed into me, my hands had refused to leave their place on her

waist. They'd gripped her closer to me, feeling her body heat seep through my t-shirt. And when she'd looked up at me with her big doe eyes, looking all innocent and shining under the moon... and her bottom lip was contorted by her front teeth... gah! That'd been when my cock decided to speak up. I'd been so freaked out by its sudden arrival that I'd had to take a huge step backwards and get the hell out of dodge before I did something crazy. Like kiss her. And God knew I could under NO circumstances kiss Bella.

I may have had a weirdly sexual reaction to her tonight, but I couldn't let her become one of my summer flings. I was terrible at relationships. I just didn't do them. I never had and probably never would. I needed to figure out my own shit without having to worry about being a good boyfriend. And Bella deserved a great boyfriend. She was a fantastic girl. I felt like I was having some sort of existential crisis, questioning the very fabric of my existence.

Shut up, you pansy.

Sighing and refusing to dwell on it, I trudged back into the bunk. Jake and Emmett were already snoring, but Jasper was still up reading.

"1984?"

He propped himself up on his elbow to face me. "Yeah, I have a weird thing about conspiracy theories. I know, I'm totally crazy." We both laughed.

I sighed and ran my hand through my hair again. "No, I get it. Big brother is out there. I can't even watch porn on my computer without feeling like somebody's watching me." I attempted a laugh, but mentioning porn just took my mind back to Bella's rack and my recently-squashed boner.

Oo. Titty fucking.

Oh my God. You're imagining putting your cock in between Bella's tits, you sick pervert.

I really AM a creepy child molester. I should be castrated.

"Uh, I don't mean to pry, but you look like you've just seen a ghost. Care to share?"

I shook my head vehemently. "Trust me, you don't want to know." *I don't even want to know.*

Jasper looked skeptical. "Okay. I'll let it slide this time, but just know that you can tell me stuff. I'm apparently really easy to talk to." He laughed, winking at me before returning to his book.

I groaned and slid into bed. Minutes later, Jasper turned out the light. And an hour after that, my brain was still going on overdrive. I realized what Bella had meant about not being able to turn your brain off. I flopped my body over again, trying to find a more comfortable position, but it was fruitless.

I sat up and turned the light back on.

"What the hell?" Jasper moaned, covering his eyes with his pillow.

"I think I want to talk," I blurted out quickly, tripping over my words.

Jasper's eyes widened, and he rolled over to face me as he still lay in bed. "Okay, Cullen. Do your worst. Why the hell are you having a panic attack at three AM?"

I didn't actually want to give Jasper specifics, so I decided to gloss over a little bit. "Let's say, hypothetically, that I became... um... aroused by someone tonight, and it made me feel kind of like a pedophile. Am I a pedophile?"

Jasper flopped back onto the bed and laughed... loudly. And he kept laughing. I was starting to get annoyed.

"Jasper!"

"I'm sorry... I'm sorry..." he choked out, settling down slightly. "Okay, okay... is that it?"

"Yes..."

"So you're freaked out because Bella gave you a boner?"

"Wh... I...ho... c... di...fu... huh?" I sputtered unintelligibly, causing Jasper to laugh again.

"You said you felt like a pedophile, and I know you didn't get a boner from Alice because you wouldn't be telling *me*. So, my deductive reasoning tells me that you got—what did you say—aroused? Because of Bella."

"Shh! Keep your voice down!" I panicked again, even though I knew that Jake and Emmett both slept like the dead.

"Edward, it's okay."

"It's not okay. I'm a complete monster who wanted to take advantage of a nice little girl tonight... and oh my God, I just called her a little girl and I was thinking about bending her over my arm and ramming into her from—" Jasper put up his hand to stop me. Thank God. I was getting a bit disgusted with myself with that train of thought.

"Let's think about this rationally. Was it an accidental boner?"

"Um, what?" I scoffed. "There's no such thing as an accidental boner, Jasper."

"Trust me, there is," Jasper argued, looking more serious now. "Haven't you ever gotten one in front of your friends' moms or at church or something unconventional like that? It happens. If it's a one-time thing—it's accidental. If it happens continually... then that's something else. Was this the first time it happened around her?" I nodded, trying to take in everything he was throwing back at me. "Well, you've been hanging out with her for the past two weeks, and it's never happened before. I vote accidental. Don't freak out, Edward. I don't think you're a

pedophile, so stop referring to yourself as that. It's creepy. And untrue. She's eighteen, for the record."

An accidental erection, hmmm. Jasper was right. It hadn't happened in the past two weeks—not even with the white t-shirt (LIAR—you totally started to! Suppressing an erection isn't the same as not getting one at all, my inner voice argued). Tonight had to have been a fluke. I wasn't sure what I'd been thinking at the time. Maybe I hadn't been thinking at all.

All I knew was that I wanted to get to know the real Bella more. As a friend. No boners involved. And if tonight was truly a one-time thing, then it shouldn't be a problem at all.

"Thanks for talking me off the ledge, Jasper." I turned the light back off as I heard a muffled, "You're welcome," from Jasper.

Temporarily appeased, I fell into a dreamless slumber.

Chapter 6

Unfounded Insults

~Bella~

I was jolted awake the next morning at seven-thirty by reveille—aka my new morning wake-up call for the next two months—with an odd sense of foreboding. I didn't know if it was because of the massive amounts of awkwardness Edward and I had been exuding merely hours previous or if I was just incredibly nervous to have a flock of campers, but I had a feeling that today wasn't going to go smoothly. Wiping the sleep from my eyes, I reached for my glasses—far too tired to put in my contacts just yet.

"Wake up, bitch!" Alice called, pushing her way into my darkened cabin. Alice *loved* the first day of camp... and she was a morning person. I wouldn't be surprised if she had been up since five. Rolling over, I looked to see that she was, in fact, already showered and made up, ready for the day.

"I'm coming..." I groaned, sitting up slowly and pushing my glasses up my nose. Not even bothering to put on a bra, I threw on Edward's red hoodie over my ensemble and made my way over to Alice, who was already huffing with impatience. "Good God, woman, breakfast doesn't start for another half an hour."

"I know, but we have to go get Rosalie, and I want to see our table assignments and..." I let Alice ramble on as she grabbed my hand and pulled me the two doors down to Rosalie's cabin.

Apparently everyone was a morning person except for me. Rosalie was just finishing straightening her hair when we arrived and was already fully dressed. I was starting to feel like a slob just looking at them. Rosalie turned and smirked at me.

"Didn't get that much sleep, Bella?" she said, raising a pointed eyebrow at me.

I didn't bother to respond. Instead, I just groaned and pulled the large red hood over my head, hoping to hide away from the two boisterous girls in front of me.

"Why wouldn't she have gotten that much sleep?" Alice asked Rose before turning to me. "Why wouldn't you have gotten that much sleep, LB?" I shook my head, not ready to relive the awkwardness that was last night. "What happened? Bel-la!" she whined, her volume steadily increasing, making my head ring uncomfortably.

"She spent all last night talking to Edward on the front porch."

"You did WHAT?" Alice screeched. "Okay, that's fine. We'll talk about that later. And I'll excuse the glasses just this once. But don't think I'll forget, LB, 'cause I won't."

"Thanks, Rose."

"No problem." She winked and then looped her arms through mine and Alice's, leading us towards the dining hall.

I slid onto the bench quickly and rested my head on the table while Alice ordered me a coffee with a box of skim milk and three packets of Splenda from the table server. *Thank God for small favors, right?*

My head continued to rest on the table, even when I heard Emmett, Jake, Edward, and Jasper approach the table, grunting a hello of sorts. I only lifted my head back up when I could smell the coffee directly in front of my face. My hand went out to grab it, as did Emmett's.

"If you value your life at all, you will stop that movement immediately," I threatened, not raising my voice at all.

Emmett startled and then broke into laughter, pushing the cup of steamy goodness back in my direction. As I made up my coffee to perfection, Emmett's laughter continued... as did everyone else's, for some reason. I looked up with curiosity before Emmett leaned back, revealing a hoodie-clad, glasses-wearing, exhausted-looking Edward. And despite how tired he looked, I couldn't help but notice how delicious Edward appeared in glasses.

"Awww, you guys match. Isn't that adorable?"

"Precious," Alice cooed directly into my ear. I twitched in her direction, my only real response, chugging down my coffee and ordering another one on the spot.

"I didn't know you wore glasses, LB," Edward commented sleepily. I immediately became self-conscious. I'd forgotten that I was wearing my glasses, too. And even though Edward looked yummier than yummy in his, that didn't mean I looked like sex reincarnate in mine. In fact, I rarely wore them at all because they made me look like a huge dork.

"LB hasn't worn her glasses in public since she was, what, ten?" Emmett laughed, wrapping a

large arm around my shoulders. "I remember the summer you got contacts. I've never seen a little girl that excited before. I thought you looked super cute with the glasses, though."

"Yeah, sure."

"I think you still look super cute with the glasses," Edward spoke up. I snapped my head towards his voice, only to see him smiling happily at me. Maybe the awkwardness from last night had been a fluke? It seemed like Edward was perfectly fine with me again. *Weird*. Assuming we were back to normal, I figured it was okay to resume our typical banter.

"You don't look so bad yourself, Clark."

"Clark?"

"Aren't you supposed to be some sort of comic book nerd? At least, that's the word out on the street."

Edward rolled his eyes before digging into his bowl of cereal, milk sloshing everywhere. "Trust me, I'm no Superman."

"Clearly. Clark Kent had far better manners than you," I scolded, eyeing the milk that had splashed onto the table.

Edward ignored my comment and continued to spoon large mouthfuls of the cereal into his mouth, until his cheeks were so big, he looked like a squirrel saving up food for the winter. I couldn't control myself anymore and finally cracked my first smile of the day, shaking my head in amusement.

"Wan some?" Edward attempted to say, his mouth still full.

"No talking with your mouth full, dear," Jake mocked, batting his eyes at Edward as he wiped his mouth with his sleeve.

"I don't eat in the morning. Only coffee." I shrugged, taking another large sip of my caffeinated beverage.

"You need proper nutrition to grow big and strong." Edward tsk'ed in my direction, replicating Jake's motherly tone. "Caffeine stunts your growth. It's why you're so tiny, LB."

"Not everywhere..." Jake wiggled his eyebrows, reaching past Alice to grab at my chest over the zipped-up hoodie.

"Jake!" Edward and I yelled simultaneously as his large hands squeezed my breasts.

"What? All I'm saying is that you've filled in, and I've noticed, LB." I shook my head in disbelief. *Did Jake really just grope me in public? Am I still dreaming?*

Emmett, Rosalie, Alice, and Jasper—who had been fairly silent for this past exchange—finally

broke out into loud whoops and hollers, making me realize that Jake had nearly gotten to second base with me with the entire table watching.

"And on that note, since I'm not eating, I think I'm going to head out and take a shower..." I blushed.

"Aww, I didn't mean anything by it, LB!" Jake attempted to apologize as I roused from my seat. Looking back, I saw him looking so dejected that I had to go over and let him know that I wasn't offended. Meanwhile, Edward was shooting his Clark Kent heat-ray lasers into the side of Jake's head.

Well, if that comment upset him... let's see what he makes of this. LB is NOT so little after all, is she?

"I know, Jakey Bear." I smiled, using my age-old nickname for the lumbering giant. "I forgive you. All I want in return is a kiss, please." I turned my head towards Edward and leaned down to Jake's sitting height. He smiled in return and puckered his lips together in a forced pout. Feeling particularly confident (and attempting to get a potentially jealous reaction out of Edward), I reached down and grabbed Jake's hands from his lap and pressed his hands back over my chest as he placed a large, wet kiss to my cheek. Edward's eyes nearly bugged out of his head as he followed the motion of my hands joined with Jake's. Still laughing, I turned away from the table and headed out of the cafeteria, feeling completely rejuvenated.

"Fuck yeah!" I heard Jake call out over Emmett's boisterous laugh. "Damn, that girl is *stacked*! And no bra—shibby!" Jake continued, followed by a loud *thwack* and an, "Ow, what the fuck, Edward?"

Maybe today was going to be a good day after all.

Or maybe not. Thirteen-year-old girls sucked. And I felt truly sorry for the world that I had ever been one.

"No, Vicky!" one of the blonde ones yelled. "You can't put your Miley Cyrus poster up! I have a Jonas Brothers poster, and I think it would be disrespectful to Nick to put her up next to him."

Vicky, a tiny red-headed thing, sighed and nodded solemnly. "You're right, Jen. I don't know what I was thinking. Nick would not approve. How about this one?" She held up a large poster for *Camp Rock*. The blonde one nodded enthusiastically, and with that, they were off, pulling centerfolds out of their Tiger Beat magazines. I couldn't believe that these were actual conversations I was witnessing.

When the girls first arrived, I was incredibly excited to meet them. My six girls—Vicky, Jen, Andie, Danielle, Rachel, and Lauren—they *weren't* as excited about meeting me, though. Instead of a hello, I got a gaggle of screaming girls, who were—without a doubt—going to be raising hell this summer. There had already been a near blowout between Danielle and Rachel, deciding who had to sleep in the bed next to mine.

I mean, really? Was I this bad when I was a camper? Note to self: apologize to Emmett.

Andie was the only remotely well-behaved one, and I was pretty sure I only thought that because she'd been out of the cabin as soon as she'd unpacked her belongings and made her bed. In fact, I had no idea of her current whereabouts. And I wasn't about to ask the other five brats. No, they were too busy fighting over which Disney show was better—*Wizards of Waverly Place* or *Suite Life on Deck*. I was definitely in for a long summer. Hopefully, my afternoon classes would have more promising campers than these ones.

When the bell rang for lunch, I practically skipped over to the dining hall, desperate for some friendly faces. Luckily, I ran into Rosalie and Emmett, who were looking over the table assignments. Suddenly, Rosalie turned around and threw herself into Emmett's arms. Looking startled, Emmett took a second to compose himself before hugging her back.

"Hey, guys..." I approached them tentatively. "What's going on?"

"Oh, hey, Bella." Rosalie smiled and stepped out of Emmett's arms, looking a bit nervous. "I just found out that I'm stationed to be the foot of Emmett's table."

"Table 16, what up?" Emmett raised his hand to high five Rosalie loudly.

I hoped to God that I was stationed at a good person's table. If I had to endure three meals a day with a heinous counselor, I wasn't sure what I was going to do. I really needed this day to turn around and fast. Emmett's eyes went back to the list, presumably to find my name... and he burst out laughing. *Never a good sign, coming from Emmett.*

"Looks like you're in luck, LB. You're the foot of Table 1," he snorted.

"Um, okay?"

"I'll give you two guesses as to who are the heads of Tables 1 and 2. Only *they* would be gay enough to request tables next to one another. Here's a hint: your table head rounded second with you this morning." He paused and looked thoughtful. "Damn, girl. By the end of this summer we're all going to have felt you up. *Ooh, she wants it, uh uh she wants it...*" he sang in the style of Justin Timberlake. Ass. I shot a death glare at Emmett, who recoiled pretty quickly for being such a large guy. "Kidding... I didn't actually touch your boobs, did I? I can't remember..."

"Stop being a jackass on purpose, you oaf," Rosalie said as she smacked his arm.

Before I could thank her for coming to my defense (I was fairly certain that Emmett hadn't touched the ladies...), I felt large, warm hands clamp onto my waist and spin me high into the air.

"Jake, put me down!" I squirmed, recognizing the devious chuckle in my ear.

"Put her down, you tool," Edward rolled his eyes as he brushed by Jake and me coolly. "Where's Alice?"

"What's up your ass?" Jake said as he put me back on the ground, punching Edward in the shoulder instead.

Edward's eyes narrowed. "Nothing," he scoffed. "Just watch your mouth, Jake. Campers are officially here."

"Okay, Mom," Jake laughed, wrapping his arms around my waist again to pull me into a warm hug. Edward's eyes narrowed again, and I wondered what the hell actually *was* up his ass. I knew that he had a reputation for being moody—Jake and Emmett would often complain about it, actually—but I'd never seen it in action before. It was slightly disconcerting, and I wasn't sure how I felt about it. Not wanting to think about it, I relaxed into Jake's embrace, leaning my back against his chest.

"*Ooh, she wants it, uh uh she wants it...*" Emmett started singing again.

"*So I'm gonna give it to her...*" Jake finished the line as his hands started rising up my torso again. Knowing where he was headed, I squealed loudly and extracted myself from his arms. I ran into Rosalie's waiting embrace seeking refuge from the hulking mass chasing after me. She laughed and wrapped herself around me, protecting me from the grabby hands of Jake and Emmett, who were tag-teaming me from either side.

"Leave me alone, you goons!"

"If you hadn't given them an open invitation, maybe this would be a non-issue," Edward stated, sounding completely disgusted. His eyes weren't even on me. I recoiled, my breath hitching and my smile disappearing immediately. Jake and Emmett's playful smiles disappeared, too; their eyes snapped to Edward, whose gaze was trained on the ground.

"What's that supposed to mean?" I refuted angrily. If Edward thought he could be a moody fucker with me, he was sorely mistaken. I wasn't in the mood for taking anyone's shit after dealing with the thirteen year olds from hell this morning.

Edward looked up, his eyes conveying disgust. "I was just saying that your behavior speaks volumes. If you don't want people to think of you like that—"

"Like what?" I interrupted, my temper starting to boil over.

"You know like what," he scoffed, crossing his arms and scowling at me. I felt my body tensing and preparing to lunge at him when Rosalie's arms tightened around my waist. No one was holding Jake back, though.

"Edward!" Jake shouted, punching him square in the back. I would have flinched at the force he'd hit him with, had I not been so utterly shocked, pissed, and humiliated. "What's *wrong* with you? You've been acting like a first-class jerk since you woke up this morning. Take it out on me—I don't care. But what the fuck did LB ever do to you?"

Before Edward could respond, though, Alice bounded up the stairs into his arms. "Edward, I'm the foot of your table! LB, can you believe it? We're going to be next to each other all summer

long! I'm so excited. I hope we have a good group of girls."

Ignoring Rosalie's firm grasp, I stepped towards Edward, wanting to confront him, but his eyes refused to meet mine. *Coward.*

"Pussy," I muttered under my breath as I grabbed Jake's hand, boring holes into the side of Edward's head with my eyes. "Uh... come on, Jake. Let's go set up the table."

I didn't know what Edward's problem was, but I was in no mood to coddle him today. If he didn't want to play nice, then I wasn't going to play nice either.

Jake and I set our table quickly and stood, waiting for our campers to arrive. Edward walked by quickly and quietly, laying out a stack of plates without looking back at me once.

"LB, what's going on?" Alice whispered, turning to me as she and Edward finished up their table.

"I don't know. Someone's got a stick up their ass for no apparent reason."

"Alice, campers are here," Edward called, still not looking at me. I was starting to become really infuriated. Unfortunately, I didn't have time to retaliate because within seconds, our entire table was filled with gossiping campers, happy to be reunited with each other after nine months.

As soon as his table filled up with campers, Edward's frown disappeared, and he became the counselor that I knew and loved. It was the most bizarre thing to watch... ever. How he could change from a scowling, angry grump into a cheerful, supportive counselor, I had no idea. I didn't even know what I had done to warrant such an attitude from him, but I was happy to know that everyone was in my corner, at least.

Alice and Edward had a table filled with the youngest age group—a bunch of adorable eight-year-olds—while Jake and I had to tend to the oldest age group—a hoarde of obnoxious fifteen-year-olds.

They all fawned over Jake; it was pretty sickening. "Ladies. I trust everyone had a fantastic school year?" They all nodded enthusiastically, flipping their hair and batting their eyes at him. Jake wasn't fazed at all. Or he was the most oblivious person to ever exist. Either one. "Has everyone here met LB?" he asked, nodding towards me. A few of them smiled, recognizing me from my time as a camper, while a few shook their heads. "LB used to be a camper, but now she's working at fine arts! She's awesome, so be nice, okay?"

Jake's enthusiasm was contagious, and I soon found myself smiling and introducing myself to everyone at the table. The girls were fairly friendly, but they had far more interest in talking to Jake than me, which I was totally fine with. I spent the entirety of lunch watching Edward interact with the eight-year-olds, anyway.

It was precious, really. He was teaching the little girls all the table cheers they would need to know for the summer. Alice was helping, naturally, since she knew them better than anyone.

"Oh my God, Vanessa, have you seen Edward?" the girl sitting on my left whispered to her friend

across the table. Vanessa shook her head and discreetly looked over her shoulder at Edward, who was now participating in the table cheers. He and Alice were laughing and singing and slapping the table enthusiastically—a complete turnaround from mere minutes earlier.

"Le sigh," Vanessa whispered back. "Why does he have to be so hot? And good with kids?"

I ground my teeth and clenched my jaw, trying my hardest to not jump into their conversation. I was screaming in my head that they could keep on dreaming because Edward would never do something as inappropriate as reciprocate a camper's feelings. And then I realized what the fuck I was telling myself. How stupid could I have been to even think that Edward liking me back was a remote possibility? This is what Jasper had been trying to tell me. Edward only knew me as a camper. No wonder he'd been acting like a douche all day; he probably didn't want to lead me on. If I was even half as obvious as these campers, I was sure he knew how I felt about him.

That didn't necessarily excuse his behavior. No. I was still incredibly pissed that he had, in no uncertain terms, called me slutty—no matter how badly I wanted to curl up into his arms and forgive him without question.

"Bell?" Alice whispered as she slid onto the bench next to me. "Are you going to tell me what happened now?"

I shook my head, finally coming to. "Hey, LB, where'd you go?" Jake laughed, finishing up putting the dirty dishes into the dish bin.

"Whoa, is lunch over already?"

Jake's smile disappeared as he slid onto the bench on the other side of me. I was now an Alice/Jake sandwich—the tiny bench we were on was definitely not large enough to accommodate the three of us.

"LB, I'm not going to excuse Edward's behavior, but I am going to apologize for it. He's had a stick up his ass all day, seriously. I don't think it has anything to do with you. And it was really messed up for him to say what he did."

I leaned into Jake's side as he wrapped an arm around my shoulders. "What'd he say?" Alice said, her eyes wide with curiosity.

"Nothing of importance." I brushed her off, but to no avail. Alice wouldn't be denied—I should have known better.

"It obviously was. Right, Jake? What'd he say? Do I need to beat him up? 'Cause I totally will!"

"Pretty boy's just jealous that LB won't let him touch her rack."

"Sure," I scoffed.

"No, really," Jake insisted. "Don't tell him I said anything, but I really think he got jealous this morning. It was weird." Jake pushed off the bench and gave me a hug before pressing another

sloppy kiss to my cheek, just as Edward walked by—of course.

He made another sound of disgust and rolled his eyes before heading out of the dining room.

Jake winked and mouthed, "See?" before waving and following Edward out.

Jealousy *had been* the intended effect, but I didn't think that this would be how Edward showed being jealous. Being an asshole didn't equal being jealous. Right?

"Hey, Bella," Jasper began enthusiastically before he took a large breath and blushed. "Hey, Alice. I didn't see you there." I tried my very hardest not to giggle as the two had a staring contest over me.

"Did you need anything, Jasper?"

"What?" He shook his head, freeing himself from his Alice trance. "Oh, yeah. We don't have any classes scheduled for this afternoon. None of the art shops do—for some reason. And I was wondering if you wanted to come to Wal-Mart with me? We need a few supplies, and I was thinking we could get an iPod adapter or possibly a new radio?"

"Sounds perfect," I breathed. Jasper raised his eyebrow in question—I obviously looked upset—but I just shook my head. "Can we leave now?"

"Yeah—I just need to grab my wallet from my bunk. Want to come?"

"No!" I snapped. "I mean, I'll just wait up here with Alice."

"Oh-kay," Jasper said slowly, emphasizing each syllable, his tone filled with skepticism. "See you in a few."

I nodded curtly as Alice dragged me to the fated Adirondack chair where last night's awkwardness had occurred. I was beginning to think of it as my chair.

"Spill, now," she ordered.

"I wanted to make him jealous, and it backfired."

"Nope. Not what I wanted to hear. What happened last night?" I'd known Alice was going to ask about this. She'd probably been waiting all day to grill me, and I only had minutes to catch her up.

"It was late. I couldn't sleep. Edward and I tried to have a normal conversation, and it didn't work."

"Details, Bella," Alice sighed with impatience. I groaned and leaned my head onto her shoulder, not wanting to look her in the eyes for my latest defeat.

"We sat right here and looked out onto the beautiful moonlit lake. It was romantic and perfect,

and we talked about *nothing*. It was a strain to keep the conversation going. It sucked. It was like we were strangers who just happened to be sitting in close proximity."

"Sometimes that can evolve into a great romance, though. Like *Before Sunrise*. They were two strangers who fell in love on a bench in one night." I loved that she appealed to my love of film while explaining things to me. It was so undeniably *ius/i*. But in this situation, she was wrong anyway. The film couldn't translate to my situation. I decided to give her a better example of our situation.

"Well, this was more like *Strangers On A Train*, if you catch my drift. And the way Edward's been behaving today, I would be the creepy guy murdering him."

"Bella," Alice said seriously—a rare thing for her. "What happened? I thought Jake was going to strangle Edward just then. I mean, they fight a lot, but this was different."

I sighed and turned my body towards her. "He said that if I didn't want guys groping me, then I shouldn't give them an open invitation to do so. Apparently, Edward thinks that I've been acting like a total slut."

"He said WHAT?" Alice screeched, hopping off the Adirondack and heading toward the boys' bunk.

"Alice, calm down! Please! Don't make this into a big deal. It was my fault anyway. The whole thing at breakfast—it was an ill-advised attempt to make him jealous. Clearly it didn't work."

"It was two hundred percent not your fault, Bella. This morning was a joke. Everyone knew that! And if Edward can't handle that, then Jake is right—he *is* jealous. He's just being a goddamn fool, too."

"Thanks, Alice. That really helps," I said sarcastically, not feeling even remotely better about Edward's newfound attitude problem.

"You haven't been acting like a slut, FYI. Not even close."

"Thanks, although I was having a shitty day before that. Edward was just the last straw."

"Campers?"

"Campers," I sighed. "Thirteen year olds aren't my forte."

"It'll be okay, Bella. You're successful in everything you do, so I have faith."

"Thanks," I said, finally cracking a smile and wrapping Alice into my arms. All of a sudden, I knew what I needed—what would make this afternoon a hundred times better.

"Al?" She perked up, her eyes tilted towards my face. "Do you know what we need?"

"What?" she asked excitedly.

"To roll down the front hill!" With that, Alice's smile widened exponentially. I grabbed both of her hands and walked closer to the edge of the hill.

Long Lake Camp was situated on a massive hill. The dining room and the girls' cabins were all at the top of the hill, while most of the activities and the boys' bunks were on the slope, which ended in a beach that led out to the lake. Alice and I had discovered our first summer here that there was no better pick-me-up than rolling down the front hill with your best friend. And it was exactly what I needed right now. I needed to roll Edward's attitude right out of my system.

We both crouched down onto the ground before shooting off, rolling down the hill with abandon. It was amazing—and exactly what I needed. I closed my eyes and relished the feeling of the cool grass whipping by my skin, acting like a soft carpet beneath my swiftly moving body. Halfway down the hill, my speed picked up. I rolled faster and faster; I felt like I was flying. I held my breath, knowing that this was the final stretch. Finally, my body rolled to a stop, sprawling out on the grass. I felt completely elated and satisfied, endorphins and adrenaline pulsing through my blood. A small smile graced my lips as I heard a giggling Alice coming to a stop just past me.

I opened my eyes slowly, not wanting to ruin the newfound feeling of happiness, and reality came crashing back down. Staring down at me were the green eyes I had tried to roll away from in the first place, although now his face was adorned with a crooked grin instead of a scowl. He reached a hand down and helped me back into a standing position.

As soon as I was standing, I snatched my hand back angrily. *Helping me up does not an apology make.*

"Shit, Bella... I—" he began.

"I don't want to hear it. I have to go. Jasper's waiting. Later, Alice." I waved as Alice skipped off to the dance studio, and I turned to Jasper.

"Actually, I kind of said that he could come..." Jasper looked apologetically at me, holding up his hands defensively. I looked between the two of them, and I knew that I was shit out of luck.

"Sorry, Bella. I didn't know. Is it okay if he comes?"

I growled loudly, completely frustrated. "Fine, but I get shotgun." Edward nodded quickly, looking a bit scared of me. *Good. As he should be. There's no excuse for being an unprovoked dickwad.*

I slid into the front seat as Edward climbed into the back, still looking unsure. Ignoring him was harder than I'd thought it was going to be; my eyes wanted to look back at him. To keep myself distracted, I brought up the one line of conversation I was sure would lead to an interesting discussion.

"So, Jasper," I began, "What's the deal with you and Alice?"

Jasper's eyes betrayed nothing as he calmly responded, "There is no deal."

Edward scoffed from the backseat, and I had to resist the urge to turn around and smack him. "Sure..." he mumbled.

"I know that no one wants to believe me, but we're friends. We have next to nothing in common—"

"Except for the fact that you both want to jump each other's bones," I laughed. Jasper lost his calm demeanor for a second, his eyes widening in shock before looking back at the road.

Edward took Jasper's hesitation as a good moment to jump in. "Why do you say that, LB? Has Alice said something?" I didn't turn around, but I could hear the smile in Edward's voice. Back to our playful banter.

"Not flat out," I teased back. "But she's been my best friend for ten years. I saw that staring match earlier. Trust me, Jasper, she's been undressing you with her eyes since she first laid eyes on you."

"She has not..."

I smiled widely, feeling in a better mood already. I moved my hand and placed it on Jasper's knee and leaned in to whisper in his ear. "She has, too, and why wouldn't she? What's stopping you?"

Apparently that was as far as I could push Jasper, because his eyes went mellow again as he nodded (mostly to himself) before he started prodding at me. "So, can we talk about what's bothering you today?"

"Yeah, can we?" I joked, my tone exemplifying my mock enthusiasm about the topic that I had clearly tried to avoid.

"Maybe we should—" Edward started in, but I didn't give him the opportunity to finish. We weren't going to hash out whatever was up his ass in front of Jasper, so I changed the topic.

"Ugh, can we talk about thirteen-year-old girls for a second? And how much I despise them? *That's* what's been bothering me today. Do either of you want to know anything about the Jonas Brothers? Because I'm now a resident expert. After listening to my cabin's conversation—just while unpacking—I found out that Nick is the real talent of the band, and he's coming out with his own solo album, but the band isn't breaking up. Oh, and did you know that he wrote their first hit, SOS, in ten minutes? And he's dated Miley Cyrus and Selena Gomez? Oh, and his nickname is Mr. President? And he has juvenile diabetes? I mean, good God! Was I this bad when I was a camper? If I was, I am truly sorry..." I rambled, going on and on, hoping that this line of conversation would be innocent enough. Plus, I really had learned enough about Nick Jonas today to write a book. Not that I would.

I looked up, only to see Edward and Jasper with their mouths hanging open. "What?" I asked, feeling exasperated. They both started laughing at my obvious frustration, finally cutting the awkward tension in the car.

"That's hilarious, Bella," Jasper wheezed through his laughter. "And I don't know about how you were when you were a camper, but we do have someone in the car who was there for that. Edward, was she that bad?"

"No way," Edward said, shaking his head. "I don't think I ever heard LB obsess about anything other than her work. She was always a bit ahead of the curve, though, so I don't know..."

I blushed at Edward's praise. I knew he was trying to make up for being an asshole before, and it was working. I felt ashamed of the fact that I was putty in his hands, but it was just a natural reaction. Jasper noticed my blush, of course, and felt like he had to further this awkward conversation. Since I had properly humiliated him, it was now my turn. *Thanks, Jasper. Another reason why you and Alice would make the perfect tag team.*

"Do you really mean to tell me you weren't obsessed with a boy when you were thirteen?" Jasper laughed. I didn't like where this line of questioning was leading, but there was nothing I could do to stop it. "Come on, Bella. I find that hard to believe."

"Yeah, Bella," Edward jumped in. "Who were you in love with when you were thirteen?"

You! I wanted to scream, but I resisted, trying to think of any other answer. "I don't know," I stuttered, my words seeming to get trapped behind my teeth.

"Liar," Jasper accused. "I see that blush, Bella Swan." At his words, my blush only intensified, causing Jasper to laugh harder. Curiosity finally got the best of him, and Edward leaned forward from his seat in the back to inspect my pink-tinged cheeks.

"Wow," Edward breathed so low that I was surprised that I could even hear it over Jasper's laughter. "You *are* blushing. It can't be that embarrassing, Bella. Who was it?"

I turned my head to look at him and was startled at his proximity to my face—only inches away. Edward's green eyes seemed to be burning into my brown ones. My mind went blank as I took in his unadulterated scent, the pheromones doing crazy things to my body—like send goosebumps down my spine and a feeling of dampness... elsewhere.

"I... uh... it was, um..." I trailed off, racking my brain for *anyone*—any other person—to say. "Jake Gyllenhaal," I answered with confidence. "Yeah, Jake Gyllenhaal. I had just seen *Donnie Darko*, and it changed my life. I remember being really jealous of Jena Malone for kissing him. And then she got to kiss Hayden Christiansen in *Life Is A House*, and I was even more jealous." The more I thought about it, the more worked up I got. "And then she got to hook up with Patrick Fugit in *Saved*. Wow, I just realized how jealous I am of Jena Malone."

"Jake Gyllenhaal?" Edward looked suspicious. "Really?"

"There seems to be a pattern there," Jasper laughed again.

"Pattern?"

"Yeah. Jake, Hayden, and Patrick? They're all tall, dark, and whiney."

"More like tall and artistic with beautiful blue eyes," I said, defending myself.

"You have a thing for blue eyes?" Jasper batted his bright blue eyes at me as he pulled into a parking spot, having finally arrived at Wal-Mart.

"No." I jumped out of the car, hoping to end this conversation before it turned against me.

"No?" Now Edward was jumping in again. *Fuck*. I was running myself in circles.

"No! I guess I like light eyes in general." At that, both Edward and Jasper's smiles widened. "Can we just leave it alone? I'm not asking you guys about either of *your* types..."

"Black hair, blue eyes," Jasper responded quickly. *Of course*.

"Brown hair, brown eyes." I turned to Edward in surprise, trying not to think about the fact that I was supposedly his type. For as long as I'd known him, I'd thought he always preferred blondes. This was news to me. He paused and rubbed his jaw. "Like Natalie Portman," he clarified. *Ah, yes. Only the most beautiful person to walk this planet.*

"Right," Jasper said with a smug smile.

"Right." Edward and Jasper shared some secret look, and I wondered what the hell that was all about. Edward was just seriously bipolar today. I would have to chock it up to that.

"Are we going to stand out here all day, or are we actually going to go inside?" I asked, pretending to be annoyed. Jasper gestured for me to go ahead, and I went in, leaving them behind. They looked as if they were discussing something serious, so I decided to head towards the clothing section while I waited for Jasper.

I automatically went to the little-boy section of clothing. They always had the best t-shirts, and if I got the largest size, they still fit. I was deciding between a *Transformers* t-shirt that read, "Autobots Roll Out," and a *Batman* t-shirt, which had Batman's mask on it made up of tiny bats—it was super cool—when I heard his voice behind me.

"Definitely the Batman one."

"I'm still mad at you," I said, without even turning around. He put his hand on my elbow, sending sparks shooting down my arm again. I wanted to cry; this wasn't right. He had an unfair advantage.

"I know," he said solemnly. I had never seen Edward serious. It was kind of weird. "I'm sorry, though. I really am. It's a sad excuse, but I woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning, so to speak."

"That's a terrible excuse." I was unimpressed by this apology so far. I began to walk away to find Jasper when Edward pulled me back again.

"Wait, Bella, please." I turned around and was met with his apologetic eyes once again. "I didn't mean what I said before." At least he had the decency to look ashamed. "I was pissed off at Jake, and you were collateral damage, which is really stupid—believe me, I know. And I'm sorry that I'm not Emmett and everything can't be fixed with a box of oreos and a tub of frosting, but maybe we could walk down the food aisles and come up with our own tradition?"

"Fine," I grumbled. He grabbed my hand, as if it were the most natural thing in the entire world, and we both looked startled. I brought my eyes up to his, and he looked pissed again. I wasn't completely sure what Jake had done this morning, but I figured that it had to have been pretty bad to get Edward this angry. And though I was letting him off *more* than easy, I knew I couldn't actually stay mad at Edward. He could probably be an ass all he wanted and I would take it—because I didn't know how to *not* like him.

We walked down the food aisles hand in hand, until Edward came to an abrupt stop, picking a tub off the shelf. "Fluff? What the fuck is this shit?"

I gasped. "You've never eaten marshmallow fluff?" I asked, appalled. Edward looked at me out of the corner of his eye and smiled bashfully, shaking his head. "That's terrible, Edward. Every person should have a fluffer-nutter sandwich."

"Fluffer what now?"

"Fluffer-nutter—peanut butter and fluff sandwich?" Edward made a face.

"I don't really like peanut butter..."

"Who doesn't like peanut butter? Freak."

"My sister used to put it on everything when I was little. And I mean *everything*. It was the most disgusting thing in the world. Peanut butter and pickles, peanut butter and meat, peanut butter and—"

"You have a sister?" I interrupted. How had I not known that?

"Um, yeah. Two, actually. I'm the baby." He blushed, looking appropriately adorable.

"What are their names?"

"Tanya and Kate. Tanya lives in Vermont, and Kate actually lives in Los Angeles."

I thought for a second. "Do you like sweet and salty?" He looked confused at the jump in the conversation, so I clarified. "Like french fries dipped in a milkshake?"

"Oh my God, yes," he moaned, forgetting his sisters immediately. His eyes rolled back into his head in pleasure, sending shock waves straight to my sad and lonely clit just at the sight of him. "I lived off A&W root beer floats and fries while I was working on my senior thesis."

Smiling, I grabbed the tub of fluff from his hand and found a box of the long, stick kind of pretzels. "Trust me," I laughed, squeezing our still-joined hands, trying to appease his skeptical face.

"You should get some for your bunk," he suggested. I turned to face him, wondering where that comment had come from. "All the older girls think the coolest counselors are the ones that bring them food—'cause it's illegal." He winked.

"That's actually a great idea," I agreed, grabbing a box of cookies from the shelf. It was definitely a way to get into their good graces. Edward was a genius. "Thanks."

"There you guys are!" Jasper was out of breath, clearly having run all over the super store before finally finding us. He already had a radio and an iPod connector in his hands, and I felt bad for having left him to his own devices. But looking back at Edward's devilishly handsome smile, I suddenly wasn't so sorry.

"Sorry, Jasper. I, um, got distracted?" He looked at my armload of food with amusement. "Clearly. So, are we ready to check out?"

"Oh, fuck. I just have to grab a hoodie, and then I'll be ready. Meet you at the checkout?" Jasper and I nodded, and with that, Edward was off.

"Want to tell me what that was all about?" Jasper asked quietly.

"Not particularly." I smiled innocently.

"So that's how you're going to play it, huh?" I kept smiling and didn't respond. "I had a very interesting conversation with Edward last night," Jasper continued, trying to pique my curiosity—which it did, obviously. I tried my best to act nonchalant.

"Oh, really? What about?"

"Wouldn't you like to know." He smirked knowingly.

"You're really not going to tell me?" I asked, feeling put out. How could he tease me like that and then not follow through?

"Let's just say that Edward needed someone to vent to at three o'clock in the morning. I was asleep, but his need was so dire that he woke me up. I wonder what could have caused such a crisis?" He laughed, goading me with his every statement.

All his cryptic statements weren't lost on me, though. Edward's freak-out hadn't started this morning—it had started last night. Last night after our moment. I tried to piece together everything that Jasper had just said, but I was definitely still missing something. If anything, though, this was a positive turn.

Edward was already at the checkout line when Jasper and I strolled up. He put his hoodie down on the counter, along with the Batman shirt I'd been looking at earlier. Without a word, he took

the food from my arms and placed it next to it next to the shirt before getting out his wallet.

"Edward, you don't—"

"It's all part of the apology, Bella. Just let me do this. Please." His eyes begged me to comply. Who was I to oppose his hospitality?

"Thanks."

He smiled, a genuine smile, but then he ran his hand through his hair—a sure sign of stress. I wasn't sure what he could be stressed about, but I had a feeling that it was somehow connected to me. Not to sound egocentric, but... it all fit. Edward Cullen was acting all crazy bipolar because of *me*. I could only hope that he was going to come to terms with whatever was bothering him soon. Otherwise, I had a feeling that I'd be in for a lot of Assward and fluff-with-pretzel apologies over the next few weeks.

Not wanting to gain fifteen pounds or deal with his bitchy comments, I silently prayed for the former option.

Chapter 7 Failed Interventions

~Edward~

"What is your deal today?" Jake yelled after me, running out of the dining hall where he'd just had his hands and lips all over Bella. "You've been acting like a whiney bitch all day, and don't even try and pretend that you haven't."

I spun on my foot, turning around and almost crashing into Jake, who was coming at me full speed. "I have no problem," I lied coolly. I had a *huge* problem.

Yeah, a huge problem in your pants, the annoying little voice in my head snickered.

"I'm calling bullshit right now," Jake continued to taunt, placing his index finger on the center of my chest. My back was still aching from where he had punched me, and I knew that he would beat my ass without question if I continued to act poorly towards Bella.

Oh, Bella—the source of my less-than-cheerful mood.

It had all started this morning. Getting out of bed, I'd felt like something was off. I hadn't been experiencing dread, per se, but a feeling close to it for sure. I'd thought that I was fine. Jasper had asked how I was feeling (after our very-late-night chat), and I'd come to the conclusion that Bella was a platonic friend—no sexual feelings involved.

I'd been wrong. So incredibly wrong. The tent in my pants was testament to that. And it was

making me feel guiltier than hell and act like quite the unprovoked douchebag.

Even at breakfast, unkempt and exhausted-looking, my cock had sprung to life. She had been wearing a pair of black plastic framed glasses, drawing me into her deep brown eyes. And only as a sudden wave of heat had rushed to my groin was I able to break out of my trance. I'd shot a look over at Jasper, who'd looked fairly amused at my turmoil. And then I'd freaked out again. *Accidental boner, my ass.* I wasn't quite sure what I was going to do, but I knew that I was definitely attracted to Bella.

And I couldn't help but feel guilty as shit. A switch had been flipped with my libido, making Bella the most desirable thing in the world. It was like last night something in me had woken up last night—some crazy, perverted monster that wanted to corrupt little girls. Because that was what Bella was... a little girl. She was only eighteen, for Christ's sake. *Fuck—the girl was nine when I was sixteen. Jesus, this is bad.* She'd probably still been watching *Rugrats* and *Spongebob Square Pants* when I'd lost my virginity.

"Edward," Jake growled, shoving my shoulder to get my attention back.

"What?" I snapped. I'd had enough. I was in no mood to deal with Jake right now. After all, he was the one who had put me in my funk to begin with when he'd reached across the table to molest my Bella.

I'm sorry... your what now?

I was so totally gone already; I couldn't even believe it. When Jake had placed his hands over Bella's chest and *squeezed*, I'd nearly lost my shit. It was completely inappropriate for Jake to be touching her like that at all—much less in front of a table full of people.

And I was jealous. *Jealous?* Yes, jealous. I couldn't stand the fact that anyone was touching Bella. What I had previously disregarded as brotherly protection was now anything but. I wanted to know how her tits had felt in his hands. Was she soft? How big was she actually? Was she wearing a bra? The inappropriate questions had kept building and building in my head, until finally I'd been ready to explode—literally—my cock standing at attention and in need of some loving.

Thank God I didn't have classes this afternoon. I wouldn't be able to focus on anything with the vast amounts of lascivious images of Bella floating through my brain. It was so new and unexpected, which is why I thought I was reacting so negatively. If my freak-out last night had been any indication, I knew that I had a lot to work out.

"Did I do something, or are you just on your period?"

"I don't want to hear it, Jake," I growled, surprising him with my open animosity. "Go be a sick fuck with someone else, or you could just wait until your activity to find a camper. Maybe you could feel one of *them* up, too!"

"A sick fuck? Are you being serious right now?" I gave no indication that I wasn't, and Jake's eyes widened in surprise. "Dude, it was a joke! And we love LB. I don't get the problem."

"You're being inappropriate."

"Yeah," he scoffed. "I am. But I'm *always* inappropriate. And you're usually right there with me! But just now—just now you were being *mean*, Edward. Don't hurt that girl's feelings just because you need an attitude adjustment! I won't hesitate to punch you again!"

I was a coward. A coward and an asshole.

Shaking my head, I stormed off, knowing that I looked like a complete drama queen. But I couldn't stand there and look at him any more. I was really, inexplicably pissed. Except, it wasn't so inexplicable. I was pissed because I wanted my hands on Bella. And he'd had his hands all over Bella. And I was pissed because I would never put my hands on Bella, despite the fact that I wanted it. She had a hot body—so what? I would never *actively* pursue her. That would be inappropriate—as I'd just told Jake. And wrong. It would definitely be wrong.

Back in my bunk, I flopped down onto my bed, frustrated as fuck. I needed something to take my mind off Bella. Bella's rack. My hands on Bella's rack. *Shit!* Remembering I needed to buy a hoodie (since my black one was definitely getting a workout since I gave my red one to Bella), I decided to find Jasper—the guy who would least like to kill me right now—and see if he wanted to take an afternoon field trip.

"Edward," I heard the slight southern accent call to me. *Perfect timing.*

"Hey, Jasper." I sat up, enthused about my prospective trip, and then I saw his face. *Uh-oh. Maybe I overestimated that whole killing-me thing...*

"You're in serious trouble, man. Now, I know we're not best friends or anything, but in all fairness, I did listen to you ramble last night at three o'clock in the morning, so you owe me this much. What the hell happened?" His eyes were cold and hard, which was a first from Jasper—he had always been the warmest and friendliest of the guys. Apparently, I had really fucked up, though.

"This is all your fault anyway!" I spewed out at him, causing his eyes to widen and a devilish smirk to appear on his face.

"Not accidental?" He laughed, his gaze softening as he sat down on his bed, facing me.

"Not accidental," I sighed, running a hand through my hair. "Jesus, Jasper. What the fuck do I do? I can't walk around with blue balls for the rest of the summer!" At that, Jasper burst out laughing. Seeing my anguished face, he sobered up quickly. "Did you ever think of... um... pursuing her?" My face must have shown my disbelief because Jasper quickly backtracked. "Clearly not."

"Definitely not. This is just really sudden, and I'm super freaked out, okay?" Jasper nodded and then trained his pointed glare at me again.

"That's fine, Edward, but you still need to be nice. Because even though that girl is a firecracker

and can take it like a champ, she can still hurt. Learn some manners."

I felt like I should say, "Yes ma'am," in response, but that would probably have only gotten me punched again, so instead I nodded and made a mental note never to get on Jasper's bad side again. He used that whole disappointed-mother tone that I'd tried so hard to get away from, and I had no desire to hear it again anytime soon. So, I resolved to apologize to Bella for my boorish behavior and start being *nice*. Despite the fact that I wanted to use her body for my pleasure over and over and over again.

"Okay, you sad sack, we're going to Wal-Mart—come with me." Jasper motioned for me to follow him out of the bunk, and I did so without question—plus, I had been planning a Wal-Mart trip anyway. As we walked, I saw Bella and Alice rolling down the front hill, their hair flying behind them. Jasper nodded his head in Bella's direction, motioning for me to go over and "be nice," as he had said. I took the opportunity and walked to where I knew she would come to a rolling halt.

I peered over her still body. A small smile graced her lips, and she had her eyes still clenched shut. She looked so fucking *happy*. This was the LB I knew. I could do this—I could distance myself without being a jackass. Just as I reached some modicum of resolution, she had to go and fuck everything up and open her eyes. I helped her up, only to have her snatch her hand back with a snap.

"Shit, Bella... I—"

"I don't want to hear it," she interrupted me coldly. "I have to go. Jasper's waiting. Later, Alice." I was feeling pretty put out, until I realized that this was all a set up. Bella wouldn't have agreed to come if she'd known I was coming, too. I turned to Jasper, who was looking incredibly "out of the loop" and apologetic. *This man is the master of brilliance and deviancy. He and Alice could take over the world together.*

"Actually, I kind of said that he could come..." Jasper flashed his eyes towards me, and I could read him through and through. He was playing innocent, and I gave him an appreciative nod. His eyes narrowed momentarily, and I could practically hear the "don't fuck this up, Edward" coming out of his eyes. "Sorry, Bella. I didn't know. Is it okay if he comes?"

Bella growled and huffed off to Jasper's car, looking like an adorably pissed-off kitten. My eyes followed her ass as she sashayed to the car, and I chastised myself once again for going there. There would be no crossing the line, so looking was pretty futile. Right?

Wrong. I spent the entirety of the car ride watching Bella tuck small wisps of hair behind her ear and bite her luscious bottom lip. The only really interesting part was when Jasper asked her who she had been in love with as a thirteen year old, and she blushed. I had never really seen Bella blush before. She was never one to get embarrassed easily, and I was automatically intrigued.

"Wow," I said, resisting the urge to run my finger down her pink-tinged cheek. "You *are* blushing. It can't be that embarrassing, Bella. Who was it?"

I suddenly found myself wanting her to say my name, despite how ridiculous that would be. She

surprised the hell out of me by saying Jake Gyllenhaal, though. I mean, how on earth was that an embarrassing crush? Even I had a crush on him. I'd take a climb on Brokeback Mountain if I were actually into dudes.

Jasper continued to mock Bella's "type," which apparently was tall and artistic, with "beautiful blue eyes." Jasper widened his eyes, which were shockingly blue, making Bella blush again. Did Bella like Jasper? Why did I care who Bella liked? I just thought she was hot. A hot friend. Like Emily. I'd always suspected that Emily secretly liked Jake, and that had never bothered me. In fact, it had made me laugh more than anything else. So why did thinking about Bella and Jake or Bella and Jasper make me want to crash my head into the car door repeatedly?

My mind was clouded with brown eyes and brown hair when Bella asked us what our types were. I responded with the obvious—the two features that had been floating around in my head all day—until Jasper crooked an eyebrow at me, making me realize that my verbal filter was broken and I'd actually said the words out loud. "Like Natalie Portman," I added, hoping that Bella wouldn't notice I'd automatically responded with her two most prominent features. From the startled look on her face, though, I may as well have said, "You, Bella." She looked about three seconds from bolting.

FML.

As we stood outside the super store, Jasper got my attention and let Bella go ahead of us, holding me back for some obviously needed advice.

"Natalie Portman?" Jasper whispered, huddling closer to me. "You are in *so* much trouble, Edward." My face must have shown my panic because Jasper put a calming hand on my shoulder and took a large breath. "Okay, you need an intervention."

"I know!" I whisper-yelled. "Help me. I just need to get her out of my head." Jasper looked about as skeptical as I felt, making me finally crack a smile. "Yeah, laugh it up, asshole. Tell me what to do."

"You need to stop stressing yourself out, boy. And you need to apologize for upsetting her earlier."

"That's it?" I asked, completely disbelieving that a simple apology would fix everything—although, it did always work for Emmett and Bella. I wondered if I could apologize with food, too. Though, she might see that as a rip-off of Emmett's apology plan. I'd have to think of *something*. "I don't really *do* girls," I tried to explain, causing Jasper to break out into laughter again.

"Really? 'Cause as far as I've heard, you *only* do girls. Is there something you need to tell me, roomie? Is it Jake?"

"Ha ha. You think you're so funny, Jasper."

"I am. And I've had about four long-term girlfriends. How many have you had?"

I blanched. "Girlfriend? No. No way. I don't want Bella to be my girlfriend."

Jasper quirked an eyebrow, looking immensely confused. "Why the fuck not, Edward?"

"She's eighteen!" I squealed like a little girl. "And I don't have girlfriends. I've never *had* a girlfriend. Bella's not going to be some fucked up trial run. And I don't really think Bella wants me to stick it to her all summer and then peace the fuck out, no strings attached. She's Bella—there are strings."

"Oh my God," Jasper muttered under his breath. "This is so much worse than I'd anticipated."

As Jasper continued to mutter to himself, I decided to seek out Bella and apologize in earnest. It was the least she deserved. Plus, I couldn't take much more of Jasper's condescending and judging eyes. *Sorry that not all of us have had multiple serious relationships, Jasper. Jeez.*

I stumbled upon Bella looking at graphic t-shirts in the little boy's section. She looked to be deep in thought, having serious trouble deciding between a Batman and a Transformers t-shirt.

"Definitely the Batman one." She tensed at the sound of my voice, and I automatically regretted not apologizing first. Jasper was right; I had hurt her with my poor behavior. And I felt like utter shit about it.

"I'm still mad at you." I put my hand on her elbow and turned her around to face me slowly. I didn't want to upset her even more, but she had to know that I was truly sorry.

"I know," I began seriously, staring into the chocolate warmth that had been flooding my mind since last night. Her eyes softened immediately, and I gained the confidence to continue. Maybe Jasper knew what he was talking about. "I'm sorry, though. I really am. It's a sad excuse, but I woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning, so to speak."

"That's a terrible excuse." She began to walk away from me, and I couldn't have that. *Fucking Jasper.*

"Wait, Bella, please. I didn't mean what I said before." At least that was true, and I hoped she knew to what I was referring because I *really* didn't want to say it out loud again. I was so embarrassed to have ever said anything derogatory to Bella. She hadn't deserved any of it. My anger was completely misplaced. I was a fucking jealous asshole—jealous of my best friend in the entire world. He could stand the heat (as could Bella), but she didn't deserve it. And Jake was right; it wasn't fair for me to pin that on her. I tried to explain it to her calmly, hoping that her expression would warm. "I was pissed off at Jake, and you were collateral damage, which is really stupid—believe me, I know. And I'm sorry that I'm not Emmett and everything can't be fixed with a box of Oreos and a tub of frosting, but maybe we could walk down the food aisles and come up with our own tradition?"

The food suggestion had come on the spur of the moment, and I hoped that it was innocent enough that it could be seen as a friendly move. I mean, just because I now knew I wanted into her pants didn't mean that I was going to do anything about it.

"Fine," she sighed, and my heart soared. On instinct, I grabbed her hand happily. It was then that I felt the weird clenching sensation in my stomach again. And this time, I knew it was directly related to Bella. Trying not to focus on it, I pulled her towards the grocery section of the store, browsing aisle after aisle for an appropriate apology food for us.

Back at the bunk, I was beginning to see the error of my ways. Bella had decided that marshmallow fluff and pretzels was going to be our apology-food of choice. And though the fluff had squicked me out originally, I had to admit that shit was delicious.

But the pretzel rods were my downfall. As we talked and sat on the floor of my room, I watched with fascination as Bella's pouty pink lips sucked the marshmallow fluff off the long pretzel rods.

Oh my God, I'm staring at her mouth and wishing it were around my cock making me cum—and then it'd be my fluff she was licking off my rod. Oh, shit.

I wondered briefly what her cum face looked like. And then I felt like shit.

How could I be thinking these things about Bella? She wasn't just some random girl. No, she was a smart, talented, and intelligent woman... with an awesome rack.

No, stop it, Edward. Bella = no!

"Top ten favorite movies from the last decade... go," I instructed, moving my thoughts far far away from the gutter it was currently lying in.

Bella looked pensive. "Ten?" I nodded. "Too many, I think. Uh, okay, well I can definitely do top five. *The Dark Knight, Almost Famous, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, Donnie Darko, and Secretary.*"

I inhaled my bite of pretzel and started choking. "I'm sorry, I must have misheard you. Did you say *Secretary*?"

"Yeah. It was the first movie I ever watched that made me feel, um..." She flushed under the scrutiny of my gaze. "I just really loved the idea of it."

I stopped chewing, my brain now so completely filled with inappropriate thoughts that it was too busy to send out the right neurons to move my jaw. It did, however, have enough room to make my cock harden again. Her brow furrowed as she sucked more fluff off the end of her pretzel, unsure of why I was reacting the way I was. She had no idea that that particular movie was my number one sexual fantasy. She couldn't have known.

"So, tell me about your latest projects?" I asked, directing my attention anywhere else but to her lips and the blood rushing to my groin.

She looked so genuinely surprised and happy that I had asked about her filmmaking, and I made a mental note to do it more often—if only to see that smile grace her face. She chewed the last bite of her pretzel and swallowed.

Swallow. Bella swallowing...

MOTHERFUCKING SHIT, STOP THAT!

Flustered, I looked up into Bella's smiling face. I prayed that she couldn't read my thoughts because otherwise I'd be in serious trouble. My eyes flicked over to Jasper, who could see right through me. He was observing my reaction to Bella's unintentional sexual actions, amusement written all over his face.

"Yeah, Bella, tell us about your latest projects."

Right. That's what I asked her.

Bella told us all about her homage to Film Noir with a short film based on T.S. Eliot's poem "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock," and I marveled at what an intellectual filmmaker she was already. She'd sent it into USC as her application essay, making parallels between being a teenaged girl in love and a middle-aged, suicidal man. Shot completely in black and white on location—it sounded incredible. I couldn't wait to see it.

"You've felt that hopelessly in love before?" I asked, surprised. Prufrock was dark—very dark. Too dark to be inside Bella's heart.

Bella looked surprised, angry, and then sad before her expression settled. Sometimes I wondered if she knew how easy her face was to read but how confused her expressions left me. "Well, yes... no, kind of."

"But it was a personal essay, right? That's a dark place to be, LB."

"It was a metaphor, Edward," she snapped. I went to apologize again when Bella just shook her head and sighed loudly. "Sorry. I didn't mean to—"

She really was a little firecracker. I had to watch myself with her, or I'd be liable to get burned. "No, I shouldn't have asked. I was just surprised that you'd felt life was that bleak before." She sighed again and tucked a loose piece of hair behind her ear, bringing my attention back to her eyes, which now held a tinge of sadness. "It's okay, you don't have to tell me." I squirmed, feeling like I'd unintentionally hit a particularly sensitive subject, but I didn't know how to backtrack. And now I was genuinely curious.

"No, it's fine. I—" She paused and took a large bite of fluff-covered pretzel. Jasper and I did the same as we waited for her to continue. "The prompt for the essay was to come up with a film that portrayed an aspect of our summer. And it was a summer that I didn't spend here. My summer was spent working as a secretary for the police department. Emmett and Jake would send me pictures of all of you, and it only made me more upset that I wasn't there. I guess I'm hopelessly in love with summers here."

Her answer took me by surprise. I'd been expecting her to talk about an ex-boyfriend or even her father, but to be in love with her summers here—with me (my ego swelled at that thought)—was such a unique perspective.

I was in awe. "That's incredible, Bella. I'm not surprised you got accepted." She smiled widely, and I made another mental note to compliment her more. She looked so beautiful when she smiled.

"I owe a lot of it to you." She blushed, a light rosy flush taking over her cheeks.

"Yeah?"

"Yeah—you're the one who got me into film in the first place, you know?" The blush intensified as she peered nervously up at me from under her lashes, sending more blood to my crotch. I squirmed for a second, trying to adjust myself discreetly (which was virtually impossible under her searching gaze).

"Wait, really?"

"You got into film because of Edward?" Jasper laughed, not holding back his amusement anymore. Bella's blush deepened as she pulled her knees up to her chest, hiding her chin behind them and nodding slightly. "Oh, man, I'm so glad I could be here to witness this conversation."

Bella slapped Jasper square in the chest before hiding even further behind her knees. "We're not having this conversation," she mumbled.

"Oh, yes we are," Jasper goaded. "Tell me, Bella—how did *Edward* get you into film?"

Bella peered at Jasper from over her knees and shook her head at him, and my mouth dropped. I tried my very hardest not to let the edges of my mouth curl up into a shit-eating grin, but I think it came off as sort of a half-grin. I was good, but I wasn't *that* good.

"Did you think he was *cute*?" Jasper laughed some more as Bella rolled her eyes, but the flush stayed on her cheeks.

"Yeah, Bella, I want to know," I added, knowing that all of this ego stroking was going to leave me with a massive hard on.

"Of course you want to know, asshole." Bella flung a pretzel stick toward my head and I ducked, avoiding it—but it had been a near miss. The blush that spread across her cheeks intensified, and I couldn't resist provoking it further.

"Wait, Bella, are you trying to tell me that you started coming to video because you thought I was *cute*?" She huffed in annoyance and stood up quickly, avoiding eye contact with me at all costs.

"Okay, Jasper, we have to go organize our new art supplies now. Let's go."

"But you didn't answer the question, Bella."

"I hate you," she growled, pulling at Jasper's arm to drag him out of the room.

Just before he was pulled out of eyesight, he turned around and mouthed a, "You're welcome," before turning back to the huffing, embarrassed Bella. I'd never seen anything cuter. And my ego thanked him immensely.

After they disappeared, I put away the remainder of our fluff and pretzels and flopped down onto my bed, staring at the Natalie Portman poster on the wall. I couldn't believe that Bella thought of me like that. All this time, I'd just assumed that she had looked up to me as a mentor of sorts, nothing more. The thoughts that were popping into my head at the notion that I'd been *wrong* were wreaking havoc with my blood flow. Knowing that Jasper would be out of the bunk for a significant amount of time, I pulled my dick out of my pants and took it into one of my hands.

"Fuck!" I groaned, seeing the copious amounts of pre-cum already leaking out of the head. This was so much worse than I'd thought. With the newly acquired thoughts of Bella finding *me* attractive residing in the back of my head, this situation was quickly spiraling out of control.

I grabbed myself tighter, swiping my palm over the head gently. As I brought my hand down around my shaft and slowly pumped myself, I brought my eyes back to the Natalie Portman poster, hoping to distract myself. Bella deserved more than me jacking myself off alone in my bunk. Hand still slowly stroking myself, I decided to recount my favorite go-to fantasy—a far cry away from my newly formed attraction to Bella.

I was working as a Production Assistant on set when Natalie, in her Queen Amidala costume, injured herself on set. George Lucas looked around frantically, wondering who could help her. Not having anything in my hands, I offered quickly, leading her back to her trailer. I was nervous; she was more beautiful up close than I could have possibly imagined. I gulped as she sat down on her bed, looking up at me with her soulful dark eyes.

I turned to leave when I heard her voice. "Please, stay." I turned around and watched her strip, first shimmying out of her tight white pants and then pulling her tiny white top over her head, revealing her luscious breasts. Painfully hard, I adjusted myself, hoping to be discrete, but she called me out. "I can help you out with that, you know..."

Suddenly, I realized I was somehow already in front of her bed. My feet had traveled without my conscious approval. Looking up at me, she unzipped my pants and pushed her hand into my boxers, wrapping her tight fist around my hardness. Her tongue peeked out, swiping at her bottom lip before biting it gently.

"I've been watching you for weeks, you know. What's your name?"

"Edward," I croaked out as she pushed aside my boxers to reveal me in my full glory. Without any provocation, she leaned forward to brush her lips against my cock, her eyes downcast.

As she looked back up into my eyes while sliding her lips over my head to suck greedily, the brown eyes and brown hair transformed into Bella. Bella sucking my cock. Sucking me hard and good.

"Shit!" I exploded all over myself, coming before I usually would. This was bad. This was *really* bad. I needed to avoid this at all costs. Bella couldn't be a fuck and chuck—she was better than that—but that was all I could think about.

Instead of dealing with it, I decided to clean myself off, turn over, and take a nap. I was still exhausted from my late-night temper tantrum anyway. And seeing as how the art shops had the afternoon off, I had nothing to do for the next four hours, at least.

I woke up hours later to a still-empty bunk. I quickly rolled out of bed, ran my hands through my hair, and walked to the front door where I was assaulted with some pretty shocking images.

"Oh fuck, I'm so close." Jake's face contorted as his hands twisted harder into the log, chestnut strands of hair draping over his thighs. His eyes opened and met with my shocked ones (and probably a little appalled and a touch sleepy). "Edward?" Jake gasped, his hands stilling the faceless girl bobbing up and down on his cock. My throat went dry as my eyes nearly bugged out of my head. As if I weren't mad enough at Jake to begin with, he had to go and pull this shit? Our bunk had a very strict "no public hook up" policy—our private lives happened behind closed doors only—and what I'd just witnessed was *definitely* breaking that rule.

"What the fuck?" I fumed. The only brown hair that I'd been thinking about over and over again *better not* have been sucking on Jake's dick—otherwise, I was really going to have a fit. The girl in question whispered a low, "Shit," and scrambled quickly, pulling herself away and putting Jake's dick back into his shorts. She stood up and turned around, head down to the ground, but I recognized her instantly.

And breathed a huge fucking sigh of relief. Not the same brown hair. *Thank fucking Christ*. I did recognize the girl, however, as the waitress, Gianna, from Jake and Bella's table. *Only Jake*. Damn, he moved fast.

"I thought you said no one was here," Gianna chided him.

"I didn't think anyone *was* here..." Jake trailed off uncomfortably, throwing his shirt back on and adjusting himself within his shorts. *Gross*.

"Clearly." There was a monumentally awkward pause, all of us just looking at one another, wondering what could possibly be said. "I was napping."

"Um—" Jake shoved his hands in his pockets, looking extremely uncomfortable. "So... yeah."

"Okay, I'm gonna go..." Gianna looked around the room awkwardly before kissing Jake's cheek and booking it out of the bunk.

Jake and I stood there, staring at one another, until finally he broke out into an annoyed smirk. "You couldn't let her finish, really?" he asked, pretending to be agitated.

"Such a fucking asshole," I muttered, my disgust magnifying with each word.

Jake scoffed and punched my shoulder. "Like you can fucking talk, Assward. You have some

serious explaining to do. What the fuck has been up your ass all day?"

I rolled my eyes. "Are we really going to do this, Jake? Are we going to talk about 'my feelings' and what's been bugging me?" I shook my head, my eyes trained on the floor, knowing that Jake would have a whole lot more to say to me if I actually let him know what I'd been thinking all day.

"Fine, fucktard. We don't have to talk about your feelings. Just answer me this, did you at least apologize to LB?"

"Yeah, I apologized to Bella," I sighed. Jake's eyes narrowed for a second before he shook his own head and grumbled loudly. "Any chance I could get a hand with this?" he said, pointing down to the tent in his pants. I stared at him in disbelief. "Just kidding, pretty boy. I can take care of it myself." And with that, he headed into the bathroom, presumably to take a shower.

"Such a queer." I laughed and headed out of the bunk.

I headed up to the dining hall, seeing as it was dinner time—man, I really had slept the entire afternoon away—when I was accosted by a fuming Rosalie.

"You prick!" she whisper-yelled, smacking my shoulder.

"What?" I whined, rubbing my throbbing shoulder. She scowled, her eyes narrowing into tiny slits before she began her rant.

"I know we haven't known one another very long, Edward, but you'll learn that I'm very protective of the things that I love. And as of two weeks ago, that includes Bella Swan. So you'd better watch your back, sir. I'm onto you. If you pull anything like that again, I will not hesitate to let Em and Jake break your pretty little face." She flipped her blonde hair and stormed off, leaving me in pain, incredibly scared, and slightly in awe.

"Dude," Emmett whispered, coming up from behind Rosalie. "What did you do to my woman?"

"Your woman?"

Emmett crossed his arms and smiled widely. "Well. Not yet."

"Yeah, what's the deal with that?" I asked, honestly curious. Rosalie had been around constantly, but as far as I could tell, there had been no action to speak of.

"She has a douchewad boyfriend back home who she's scared to break up with. I'm being a good friend."

I cocked my eyebrow. "Isn't she a little young for you, Em? I mean, cradle robber, much?"

He paused and looked me over. "So, you clearly haven't stopped being an asshat yet today."

"Yes I have, Em," I answered obediently, as if he were my mother.

"You sure?"

I shoved away his towering frame, which was quickly closing in on me. "Yeah, I'm sure. We even came up with our own apology food."

Emmett's eyebrows shot up in question. "Seriously?"

"What's that look for?"

Emmett smirked and shook his head again. "Nothing, nothing." I stared him down, willing him to continue talking. "You said 'we' – as in you and LB?" I nodded, unsure of where this line of questioning was going, but I was starting to break into a mild sweat. "Why were you mad at her in the first place?"

His question caught me completely off guard. I had no idea how to answer without telling him that I wanted to fuck his pseudo-little-sister ten ways from Sunday. "I—" I was about to give him a bullshit answer when the bell for dinner rang, announcing that I was now late and saving my sorry ass.

"We're talking later, Edward!" he yelled, jogging into the dining hall, his eyes letting me know that our discussion was not even close to finished. *Gulp.*

Late already, I rushed into the dining hall only to see Alice and Bella giggling about something at the foot of my table.

"Ladies." I brushed by Bella on my way to the head of my table, trying not to notice my raging hard on making a comeback. I averted my eyes, staring past her instead. I knew that if I looked into her eyes right now, I was sure to reach some kind of catastrophic downward spiral.

"Edward," she said quietly.

"Sorry, Alice," I apologized, seeing that she had already set our table.

"Not a problem, Edward. What was keeping you?"

"Nap." I shrugged, figuring that answer was as true as anything.

"And Jake?" Bella asked. I looked up, finally making eye contact with her, and burst into laughter. "What?" She looked mildly offended, as if I were laughing at her. I needed to clarify.

"Jake had, um, something he needed to attend to." I shook my head, remembering the unfortunate scene I'd witnessed.

"Like beating your moody ass?" Alice quipped.

"More like beating something else..."

Alice made a face as a sly smile spread across Bella's. "Oh, gross!" Alice made a fake gagging noise, which only caused my laughter to increase. Gagging, Jake, Gianna. Oh, man.

"Whatever, Alice—everyone does it," Bella added, causing my ears to perk up with interest. Everybody did it, as in... Bella did it, too?

"Seriously," Alice seethed quietly. "If Jasper doesn't make a move soon, I swear to God my index finger is going to break right off!"

"Alice!" Bella laughed, shoving her shoulder playfully.

"Like you can deny it, Swan. I know about your shower time." Alice giggled as Bella blushed for the ten thousandth time today. *Holy Jesus.*

My mind took the nosedive into dangerous territory as I imagined Bella soaping herself up in the shower, doing all sorts of naughty things with her dexterous fingers.

Christ! There are other people around! Don't do this here!

"Edward?" I was pulled out of my lusty haze by Jake's overpowering bellow. "Edward, where the fuck did you just go?" he asked, punching my arm. I realized then that I was still staring at Bella, who was now focusing intently at the table as she set out the dishes.

"N-nothing," I responded, still a bit flustered, averting my eyes quickly. Unfortunately, my eyes met Emmett's narrowed ones again. I looked to Alice in a blind panic and realized that she *knew*. Alice always knew.

For the rest of dinner, I tried to be on my best behavior, engaging with the small campers sitting around me and trying to throw Alice off the track, but I kept getting distracted by the gorgeous girl sitting at the table next to mine. It was like torture. Every time I'd manage to get her out of my head and focus on the conversation at my own table, I'd catch her flipping her hair or smiling deviously. It wasn't like me to be this distracted by a girl. It had never happened—ever. I was pretty sure I was driving myself insane.

By the end of the hour, I was ready for my *own* shower time, but I knew that I had other things to attend to.

As I was heading out, Emmett grabbed my arm. I had been expecting it, really.

"Meet me down at the lake," he said sternly. "I'm grabbing a twenty-four pack, and then we'll talk." I nodded in full acceptance. The first night of camp, the girls all had a huge assembly and then bunk bonding with their counselors, leaving the male counselors with nothing to do. Emmett, Jake, and I had formed a tradition of drinking by the lake. However, I had a feeling that tonight's conversation wasn't going to be as lighthearted as it usually was.

"Hey!" Jasper called out to me as I headed down the hill. "Wait up!"

I slowed down my pace and let Jasper walk beside me. We walked in silence all the way down to

the docks. Jake was already there, unlocking The Paddle Pad, where he kept a bunch of folding chairs for us. After all the chairs were set up, I turned around to see Emmett and Seth approaching.

"Seth!" Jake called out happily. "You tapped LB yet?" My stomach rolled at his vulgarity.

Seth shook his head, blushing slightly. *Wait, what's that blush for?* "No, but I did ask her if she wanted to go out next week." Jake slapped his back, and my heartbeat increased. I couldn't imagine Bella going out with Seth. He was nice, sure, but he wasn't remotely good enough for her. But it wasn't like I was actually going to go out with her, right? Was I really going to be that guy—the one that wouldn't be with the girl but didn't want her with anyone else either? I was ready to fully admit it: I was a prick.

"Sit the fuck down," Emmett said, pushing my ass into a seat off to the side and forcing an opened beer into my hand. I took a large swig of the beer and gulped nervously as he pulled another chair up beside me.

"What?" I croaked out, knowing that I sounded like a scared little girl.

"You know what." My eyes flicked to Jake, Jasper, and Seth, who had taken off their shirts and were playing in the lake already. I was not going to have this conversation where they could hear me. It was bad enough that Jasper already knew. If Jake knew too, my balls would most likely be chopped off. And I wasn't quite ready to part with those any time soon.

"What do you want me to say?"

Emmett leaned in closer and lowered his voice, continuing angrily. "I want you to tell me that you're not going to lead her on and break her heart."

"I... uh... who?" I played dumb.

"Don't give me that shit, Edward. I know you. You've never committed to a girl a single day in your life. *She* doesn't know that, though. So if you can't, then don't."

"Don't what?"

Emmett's voice was picking up volume now, gaining an angrier edge with each venomous word. I would have stopped him and protested, but I knew that I needed this verbal smack down. I needed Emmett to remind me why I couldn't be thinking about Bella like this.

"Don't pretend to be something that you're not going to follow through with. Bella—" my eyes widened at the use of her name—Emmett *always* called her LB. "Yeah, Bella," he scoffed. "You're not the only one who can call her by her name, you know. Bella is young, and she expects the things that she should, you know? Things like loyalty and commitment and devotion. Can you do that?"

"I—I don't know," I answered honestly. I hadn't even thought about it like that. All I really knew was that my body craved Bella's body something fierce.

"Then don't fucking go there," he growled again. "I won't let you hurt her. Are we clear?"

"Uh..." I didn't know what to say or how to respond. My mind was agreeing with everything Emmett had said, but my cock was screaming at me that Emmett was an idiot and that we could be faithful and serious. I wasn't sure, though. And Emmett was right. Until I was one hundred percent certain that I wanted more than just sex with Bella, I wouldn't do anything about it.

Chapter 8 Awkward Auditions

~Bella~

I sighed loudly as I set up my easel and stared out the back window of the Fine Arts room again.

"Bella," Jasper whined, bringing my focus away from the window. "You're driving me crazy!"

"He's been acting weird," I huffed. "Right? It's been three days, and he's been acting weird!"

"Stop staring at the shack, Swan. You're making something out of nothing."

"It's your fault. If you hadn't told him I liked him—"

Jasper cut me off. "I didn't tell him you liked him. I told him you thought he was cute."

"Same thing!" I fumed, getting worked up all over again.

"It's not. Now shut up and get ready, please. Campers will be here any second now."

I rolled my eyes before sliding them covertly over to the shack once more, jumping as Jasper slapped his hand down onto the table.

"I'm not kidding, Bella! He hasn't been acting weird. Now chill the fuck out."

I had initially thought Jasper was the cool, calm and collected guy he appeared to be. It turned out that I was fully capable of turning him into a raving lunatic. Over the past three days, Jasper and I had turned into bickering siblings.

Our activity time together was great. Jasper was fantastic at keeping the kids calm, turning on some Garbage or REM as mood music. And I finally got the chance to work on my own artwork. It was only when the children weren't present that we lost all semblance of calm and turned into a squabbling pair.

He hounded me for avoiding Edward, and I hounded him right back for not making a move on Alice. She was practically begging him for it, and he still refused. He claimed that she was "too

much of a free spirit to be tied down." I told him to stop giving me lame excuses... and he pretty much told me the same.

Our last class of the day piled in, dragging me out of my Jasper-induced agitation. I needed to focus on the kids. My campers were pretty spectacular.

"Everyone take a seat," Jasper called out as he turned around the easel I had just set up. He went on to explain to the class how they were going to be making flip books today. He divided the easel into ten squares, showing the progression of a boy holding a balloon and watching the balloon be let go and float through the air. He then ripped up the squares and stacked them in order, showing the class how the pictures moved when you flipped through them quickly. It was like Animation 101, and I missed Edward for the hundredth time that day.

The class went by quickly, with the soft strains of REM's *Automatic For The People* album keeping me focused. I created my own flip book of a boy who started off lying on his bed and then moved to play air guitar around his room before coming back to lie down again. I was pretty proud of it. I was snickering to myself at how similar the boy looked to Jasper when I heard a soft velvet chuckle over my shoulder.

I nearly jumped out of my seat at the laugh's proximity to my ear, the puffs of hot air caressing the back of my neck. "Shit!" I shrieked, causing four straggling campers to look up at me in shock. "Sorry," I mouthed to Jasper, who was trying his very hardest to contain his laughter as Edward slid onto the bench next to me.

I gulped, breathing in his heady scent. It felt like weeks since we'd spent time together, not mere days. "Long time no see," I began, trying to keep my voice steady. I felt so ridiculous. How could he make me this nervous? After all this time. I was really starting to psych myself out for no reason.

"Yeah, it's been a while, hasn't it?" He scratched the back of his neck before slumping over the table, seemingly exhausted. Now that I was taking a better look at him, he looked a wreck. What had happened to my beautiful, secure Edward?

"Hey, are you okay?" I asked softly, nervously placing my hand on his forearm. He jolted upright, going rigid under my touch. I pulled my hand back, feeling slightly burned, and turned my attention back to my flip book. If Edward wanted to talk, he was going to have to do the work. I couldn't take his moodiness again today. I'd had enough of that the first time around, and I thought we'd sorted it out fairly well.

"I'm fine. I, uh, just wanted to remind you that you're auditioning for the counselor musical with me tonight."

I scoffed and shook my head. "No way, Edward." He stared at me, no longer looking unsure, peer pressuring me with a single look. "No!" I continued adamantly. "No." He cracked a smile, knowing that he was getting to me. I couldn't let him have the upper hand. "It's not going to happen. I don't want to."

"Bella, please? You know Alice is helping choreograph it, and Jake and Emmett and Rosalie

already told me that they're auditioning tonight—and Jasper is, too. Right, Jasper?"

Jasper's head snapped up, and he look startled. Obviously he had been unaware of the covert peer pressuring genius that was Edward Cullen. "Uh..."

"See. Everyone's doing it, LB," he joked, slipping back into form. A small part of me died when he reverted back to my nickname. It was as if every step forward I thought we were making was actually hindered by two steps back.

"It's Bella," I bit back at him, standing abruptly. "And I'm not auditioning."

"Yes you are, Bella..."

I rolled my eyes and walked out of the room. It was my last class of the day, and I seriously needed to get away from him. I didn't know how to act around him anymore. And on top of it, I had barely seen Emmett, either. He always had Rosalie attached to his hip. I knew that she had been having serious problems with Royce recently—it seemed like every time I walked into the counselor lounge, she was screaming at him on the phone, and I still didn't really know why she stayed with him. It wasn't that I didn't love Rosalie, because I did, but I missed spending time alone with Emmett. He was usually my rock and my laughter when I needed it—and I needed it desperately. However, he hadn't been around.

"Bella, wait up!" I heard a voice call. I turned around to see Seth running at me.

"Hey, Seth." I smiled, happy to talk with someone who wouldn't completely infuriate me.

"Got a second to talk?" I nodded, and he grabbed my hand happily, his hand warm in mine. Warm, but no sparks. Apparently those were reserved only for Edward. He led me to the nearest stairs, which led up to the dance studio. I could hear Alice counting to the beat as she choreographed past her class time.

"What's up?" I asked, after getting comfortable on the steps.

"Not much, actually." He ran his fingers through his hair and leaned on his elbows, slumping over exaggeratedly. "I just wanted to see how you were. We haven't had much of a chance to talk recently. How's your bunk doing?"

"They're great, actually. Now that I know the names of all the Jonases, I've been inducted into the cool counselor club, according to them. They've been on their best behavior."

"That's great!" he said, enthusiastically, placing his hand on my knee. *Knee touching. I'm not sure how I feel about that.* Seth was such a sweetheart, but sometimes he reminded me of an untrained puppy with his unrestrained enthusiasm. "Are you auditioning for the musical tonight?"

I froze. "Did Edward put you up to this?" He couldn't have. He wouldn't do that... right?

"Edward? Uh... no. Why would you think that?"

I shook my head, ridding myself of those thoughts. Of course he wouldn't. Edward didn't care *that* much if I auditioned or not. "He was just asking me before, and I didn't really want to—"

"So are you?" he interrupted, his dark eyes boring holes into my own so intensely that I felt inclined to look away. My eyes grazed the open land in front of us, only to be met with Edward's angry scowl. He was standing across the field from us, staring adamantly at Seth's hand, which was still resting on my knee.

"Uh, yeah... I guess so," I replied distractedly. The only thing I could focus on was Edward.

"Bella?" Seth called as his hand slid further up my thigh. *Well, that got my attention back.* My eyes snapped back to Seth, surprised, before placing my hand atop his and sliding it back down to my knee. Seth wrapped his fingers around mine, squeezing gently before pulling his hand away to rest on his own lap.

"Yes," I stated definitively. "Yes, I'll be there." If not to audition, then to figure out what the hell that look from Edward was all about.

He smiled widely, flashing his perfectly white teeth at me. "Great! I'll see you there." He stood up and walked away, bumping into Edward, who was still gaping at the spot on my thigh where Seth's hand had been.

Edward shook his head slightly before making eye contact with me. He ran his hand through his hair and kept his hand at the back of his neck, putting pressure on the tense muscles there. My body started to awaken just imagining all the ways those fingers could massage my body. Before I could get enraptured with yet another impossible Edward fantasy, I decided to head towards the music and catch up with my best friend.

I smiled at Edward, unable to truly ignore him, before standing and trudging up the stairs to the dance studio.

Alice was flitting around the studio to the electronic bass of Footloose, repeating a sequence of movements over and over, seemingly committing them to memory. As she was spinning around, she finally caught sight of me; I was still admiring happily from the corner, afraid for my life if I got in the way of her flailing limbs.

"LB!" she shouted over the loud music. "Perfect timing!"

Uh oh. I know that face. Abort, abort! Run away!

But it was too late. Alice grabbed my hand and pulled me towards the center of the room, ready to teach me the combination she'd been working on.

"Alice," I groaned. "I don't want to do this..."

"Don't be silly, LB. You're auditioning tonight, right?" I nodded stiffly, and she broke into a huge grin. "Fabulous! This is the audition piece, so you'll be ahead of the game."

I rolled my eyes and sighed loudly. "Alice, I really don't care that much. Edward just harassed me into doing it."

That got her attention. Alice lowered the music and pulled me to sit against the mirror with her. This was one of her favorite gossip spots. She looked over at me expectantly while pinning her short black hair away from her flushed cheeks.

"Mmkay, LB. Let's chat. What's going on with you and Edward?"

"Um, nothing?"

Alice shook her head, her blue eyes twinkling with mischief. "That's not what I heard..."

"You heard something? From who?" I snapped.

"Jasper, of course," she giggled, her intensified flush suddenly having little to do with her dancing.

"Oh, yeah—what's going on with *that*?" I prodded.

"No, no, no, Bella Swan. We're not done discussing you. We'll get to Jasper later."

I slumped against the mirror in defeat. "Yeah? Well, nothing's going on, so I don't know what there is to discuss. Now, let's talk about Jasper."

"What about me?"

Alice's eyes went wide as she shuffled back into a standing position, smoothing out her tight dance clothes. She caught sight of herself in the large mirrored wall, trying to fix her outfit before refocusing on the awkward blonde boy standing in the doorway.

"I'm about to teach tonight's audition piece to Bella, but it's a partner piece. And I was just saying that we should go get you to be her partner!"

How Alice was able to lie so easily on the spot, I'd never know. But I had to give it to her; she was damn good at it.

"Oh, no." Jasper blushed as he held up a hand in protest, but Alice wasn't having any of that. Instead, she skipped over to him and grabbed his hand, pulling him towards the center of the room.

"Bella!" she called out, not even bothering to look at me. Not like she needed to—Jasper and Alice only had eyes for one another. It was pretty precious. He blushed harder as she squeezed his hand, bringing it down between them before finally turning to me. "Okay, this is going to be part of the finale when they're all at the dance..."

As Alice continued to put us into position, I tuned her out, focusing solely on the dance. By the

time we were finished, I knew I was going to need a long shower to clean up before auditions tonight. I was covered in sweat, dripping onto Jasper every time he grabbed my hand or spun me. I was exhausted; I could barely see straight. After performing it for Alice, I only knew we had done a good job due to the amounts of sheer joy written all over her face—that was how freaking exhausted I was.

Jasper looked at me and then just collapsed onto the floor, wiping out in a ridiculous sweaty mess of limbs. Laughing, I decided to collapse next to him, reveling in the feel of the cool wood beneath my back.

"Tired?" Alice chirped.

I was fairly certain I groaned something in response, but it was definitely unintelligible. Jasper concurred.

"Not too hard for an audition piece, though, right?" she asked, sounding sincerely worried.

I tried to shake my head, but my muscles wouldn't move. "No," I breathed out heavily. "S'really good, Al."

"Al?" Jasper breathed out, just as heavily. Alice just shook her head sternly. I was the only one allowed to call her Al, and she knew it. "Oh, Bella—" Jasper interrupted himself, seemingly having forgotten something incredibly important.

"Yeah?" I turned on my side to face the still-panting Jasper.

"Edward was acting weird. You were right."

At that, I sat straight up, hitting the backs of Alice's knees with my head as I went. "What?"

"Ow, Jesus, LB!" she cried out as she sat down in between us. "Why?" she asked Jasper curiously. "What did he do?"

Jasper ran a hand through his sweaty hair, pushing it back with the wetness that had accumulated on his forehead. "I don't really know how to explain it, but I ran into him on my way here, and he was just staring off into space. I asked him what was going on, but he could barely string a sentence together. And then, just as I was heading over here, he asked me to 'convince Bella that she *has* to audition.' Direct quote, no joke."

I rolled my eyes again. That wasn't acting weird. That was just Edward wanting to get his way. What a punk. Oh, well. He was getting his way. I was auditioning after all.

"Whatever. I need a shower really badly now. I'll catch up with you two later?" I stood, ready to give those two some room to be alone. They didn't even nod back to me, already immersed in conversation by the time I turned to head out.

I walked straight to my bunk, where my girls were happily playing a game of gin rummy in the middle of the floor.

"Ew," Vicky called out as she saw me traipse in. "You're all sweaty."

"Yeah, I am," I laughed, pretending to shake my sweat onto her. The girls all screamed and giggled and jumped onto their beds to avoid my path. I was starting to warm up to them.

"Oh, Bella." Andie approached me nervously as the girls continued to giggle behind her.

"What's up?" I asked cheerfully.

"Your phone started beeping when I was in here before." Andie took my phone out from under her pillow and handed it to me. My stomach dropped. I wasn't technically allowed to have my phone inside my bunk. I was supposed to keep it in my locker in the counselor lounge, but I had forgotten to return it to its proper spot earlier this morning after talking to my mom. I really didn't want to get in trouble. "I didn't tell anyone, and I put it on silent," she added quickly. Relief flowed through my body.

"Thanks, Andie. Uh... that won't happen again."

She smiled and wrapped her arms around my waist. "It's okay, Bella. You've been really great. I didn't want to get you in trouble."

I rested my chin on top of her head and welcomed the small girl's embrace. And for the first time since arriving, I actually felt like a counselor. I remembered feeling a certain camaraderie with my bunk counselors—a weird sort of familial love that was completely inexplicable and unable to be broken—and I was glad that we'd already reached that point a mere four days into the summer.

I sat down on my bed to check my phone and was surprised to see that I had three new text messages. No wonder Andie had put the phone on silent; it must have been going crazy. The first text message was from my mom, commenting on how nice it was to hear from me. I had to keep reminding myself to call her occasionally, especially now that it was actually allowed. The second and third texts were from... Edward.

Color me shocked.

I covertly opened them, sinking the phone into my lap, away from prying eyes—as if anyone was actually reading the texts over my shoulder.

Just a reminder that auditions for the musical are tonight. See you there ;) – EC

I rolled my eyes and stuck out my tongue, even though he wasn't around to see me. I was even more surprised with the second text, though.

Sorry for pushing before. If u don't want to audition, u don't have to—I just wanted to spend more time w/ u. Why haven't u used the shack at night yet, insomniac? – EC

My breath caught, and I had to reread the text a second and then a third time. Edward wanted

to spend more time with me? And I'd been avoiding him like a scared little girl. Now I felt like an asshole... and incredibly turned on. How many nights alone in the shack with Edward had I missed out on by simply being nervous? Sweat still dripping down my body, I changed out of my clothes quickly and wrapped my towel around me as I walked the short distance to the shower house.

In the shower, I decided to utilize my alone time. It had been a very long week, and with those texts from Edward, my sexual tension level was rising by the second. I shampooed my hair thoroughly, massaging my head, imagining they were Edward's long fingers scratching over my scalp. As the shampoo trailed down my body, I squirted a large dollop of soap into my hands and worked it over my skin gently. Washing the dirt and grime away, I let my hands linger longer over my aching breasts, making my breath hitch ever so slightly.

My hand ghosted small circles over my curves, applying gentle pressure to my sensitive nipples. Keeping one hand on my breast, I allowed the other one to follow the path of the water and trail down between my legs. I pushed two fingers into my wetness, trying hard not to gasp out loud with pleasure. The fingers curled inwards and rubbed against my walls. I could feel them pulse with each thrust, making me sigh with happiness. Feeling the tension build, I moved my finger to play with my clit, rubbing myself until the point of no return. I came in furious shudders, imagining Edward pulsing within me as we lay naked together on the cold floor of the video shack.

Feeling spent and finally clean, I wrapped myself back into my towel and headed to my bunk to get ready for the audition process. Rosalie was already sitting on my bed when I arrived.

"You're *just* getting out of the shower, Bella? We have to be down at auditions in fifteen minutes! I was sent to—"

"Did Edward send you?"

Rosalie cocked her head to the side, narrowing her eyes at me. "How did you—"

"Why does he want me to audition so badly?" I asked, my voice starting to gain volume. I didn't know why his insistence was annoying me, but I guessed after three days of no contact, it just seemed off for some reason.

"Just put some clothes on."

Grumbling, I picked out the first clothes I saw, a pair of grey yoga pants and a white wife beater, but not before Rosalie could hand me the scariest-looking underwear in my drawer.

I gaped at the bunch of hot pink and white lace in my hand and dropped it onto my bed as if it were on fire. "Rose! Are you serious? I can't wear that!" Rosalie scoffed and went back to my closet, leaving the heap of scary lace on the bed. She rummaged through my clothes before pulling out a navy tank top and throwing it onto the bed, too.

"You're auditioning tonight, and you're going to need to feel hot. This underwear—" she picked up the bra, displaying the pink padded satin and white lace for all to see "—is going to get you

the lead, Bella. I'm positive. Now put it on, no complaining. Be grateful that I didn't put you in a thong." She laughed deviously and held out the matching bottoms for me to put on.

Once I was fully dressed, I could see that Rosalie was right. I felt fucking hot. The low cut neckline of the tank showed off my newly pushed up boobs, giving me ample cleavage. And the tight yoga pants revealed nothing of my underwear, but just knowing what was under there myself gave me the extra burst of confidence that Rosalie obviously knew I needed.

After throwing my hair into pigtail braids and slipping on my own pair of flip flops, I was ready to go.

"Whoa, Bella," Lauren called out as I passed by her bed, where she was reading Tiger Beat magazine, "you look really pretty. Are you going on a date?"

At the word "date," the entirety of the bunk looked up and gathered around Lauren's bed to admire me. "No." I shook my head, but my blush gave something away. "Musical auditions. Wouldn't you girls like to know what it is this summer?" I goaded, unable to resist teasing.

They all nodded their heads, smiling like maniacs. I may have been a cool counselor, but I wasn't a dumbass. "Well, I'm off now. Get to sleep and be good for night duty!" I called out, leaving the giggling girls behind and dragging Rosalie with me. I couldn't believe how a simple pair of underwear could change my mood so drastically, but I couldn't help but feel on top of the world.

Having spent so much time getting ready, Rosalie and I were the last ones to arrive for auditions. Maria, the creative director for the camp, was already standing on the stage, addressing all the counselors. She'd been one of my favorite counselors while attending Long Lake. Sort of a female Elton John, Maria was always dressed in bright colors and sequins, completely unafraid of being seen as ostentatious. Plus, she lived for the theater, making her enthusiasm nearly contagious by merely sitting in her presence.

"As some of you may have heard, this summer's counselor musical will be *Footloose*! I've asked Long Lake's very own Mary Allison to choreograph," She held out a hand and pulled Alice onto the stage, who was still frowning at Maria's use of her full name. "It's going to be quite the production! First, we'll do singing auditions. Boys first, then girls. Then we'll do a dance audition in pairs. Mary Allison has worked so hard on it. And last, I will call a few of you to read lines together. Sound good?" She clapped her hands together loudly before heading over to the piano, gathering the boys around to learn a verse and a chorus of "I Can't Stand Still."

"Where have you two been?" Alice whisper-yelled at us, sliding onto the bleachers next to Rosalie and me. "I thought you were going to stand me up, Bella, and I was about to die."

"Stop being such a drama queen, Mary Allison." I laughed as Alice huffed and crossed her arms, looking towards the boys and away from me.

After clunking through practice, it was time for the boys to sing individually, coming to stand around the piano in groups of five. Naturally, my favorite group all went together. Emmett went first, his baritone voice cracking over the difficult notes of the chorus, but that didn't matter to him. Still smiling, Emmett swayed with the beat, trying to keep up with the piano.

Seth was pretty terrible, too. I couldn't even pretend. Rosalie and I just giggled, trying to stifle our loud guffaws each time his voice would break over the higher notes in the phrase.

Next was Jake. He was pretty similar to Emmett, although the volume of his voice kind of compensated for the fact that he was a bit off key. He was so into it. Maria's face was animated, eating it all up. Jake would be called back to read lines for sure.

Jasper, though, was a complete surprise. He sounded... great. I was incredibly impressed. I'd been privy to his soft singing and humming during our class time together, but I was truly impressed with his vocal talents. Maria seemed to feel similarly because after he finished, she scribbled down something in her notebook before turning to the last person to audition in the group: Edward.

He sang extremely well, even for him. His exuberance and enthusiasm were true to the nature of the lead character, Ren, and I was positive that he was going to get the starring role.

Next, the girls went to audition. I was, of course, pushed to go first. I was nervous, but I felt good. As we walked up to the piano, Jake swatted at my ass, and I couldn't help but turn around and smack him right back. His eyes went wide as my hand collided with his behind, clearly not expecting it. After a brief pause, he broke out into loud bursts of laughter, clutching onto his stomach as he doubled over, gasping for air.

"Harassment goes both ways, you know."

"I've been waiting... for you... to... retaliate," he gasped between laughs. "It's about... fuck-fucking... time, LB!"

I rolled my eyes and turned back to the piano, feeling even more confident than before. Jake was such a goof. And I didn't mind that he treated me like a little sister, because he was definitely a big brother to me, too. As I settled at the piano, Maria's eyes and smile widened simultaneously.

"LB, is that you? Look at you, all grown up." She smiled warmly and placed her hand over mine. "Long Lake is excited to have you back."

I smiled at that and accepted the sheet music she had been handing out. We went over the first verse and chorus of the song a few times before she split us up into groups and asked us to sing individually. Rosalie went first, singing along quietly as Emmett whooped loudly from his seat, creating quite the ruckus. I shot him a glare over my shoulder. His enthusiasm was only making her more nervous. Luckily, he saw and quieted down appropriately.

Next, it was my turn. I cleared my throat, ready to begin, when I felt his eyes on me. The hair on the back of my neck stood straight up as a shiver went up my spine. I was instantly glad that Rosalie had put me into a padded bra, otherwise I would have been showing *everyone* how incredibly turned on I was at that moment. Unable to relish the feeling, I was forced to jump into the song as Maria pounded out the opening chords.

*"Where have all the good men gone, and where are all the Gods?
Where's the street-wise Hercules to fight the rising odds?
Isn't there a white knight upon a fiery steed?
Late at night I toss and I turn... and I dream of what I need.
I need a hero!"*

My voice gained confidence with every line, using my untapped sexual energy to propel my performance further. Maria looked up in surprise before scribbling in her notebook. Rosalie's arm squeezed my side, and I couldn't help but smile. For the first time, I felt like being in the spotlight wasn't such a terrible thing. At least I knew I had Edward's undivided attention.

I sat back down quickly, waiting for the other girls to finish their auditions, but I felt as if I'd been sitting for merely seconds before the dancing part of the audition began. Alice grabbed Jasper and me from our seats and told us to show the routine to the rest of the counselors. Although I would have usually been mad and embarrassed by Alice's lack of concern with putting me front and center, tonight I was okay with it.

I kicked off my flip flops and went through the routine a few times, helping a bunch of the pairs as they learned the difficult steps. Alice was getting more and more frustrated as time went on.

"No, no, no," she mumbled. "Girls, it's pas de bourrée, pas de bourrée, turn, hip, hip!" she yelled, placing arms and legs into the proper position. "Bella, show everyone again, please," she begged, exasperated.

I did the moves in slow motion before doing it up-tempo with Jasper joining me. Laughing, Jasper and I finally sat down together as the dance auditions continued. At least Maria knew that we could do the dance well. We didn't need to audition.

As we sat mocking some of the other couples, Maria approached us. "Don't go anywhere, you two. I want you to read this scene for me after the dancing is finished."

My mouth dropped. Maria wanted me to stay. I was going to read scenes! I was astounded. Jasper's loud gasp brought me out of my success-induced haze, though. I turned my head towards him, but he was staring nervously at the stage.

"What?" I whispered, nudging him in the ribs. Instead of answering, he handed me the scene. I read through it and gasped as well. The scene ended with... a kiss? I had to kiss Jasper? *That's just gross.* "Seriously?" I whined. "If we get the leads, I'm dropping out."

Jasper rolled his eyes. "Would it really be so bad to kiss me?" He batted his eyes, as he had the other day in the car, leaning in towards my face with puckered lips. I squealed and pushed him away, standing up quickly. I stumbled backwards into a hulking form, and the tingles running up my spine let me know exactly who I'd crashed into.

"Whoa, there." Edward moved his arms around my waist and leaned into my ear. "Careful, Bella." I shivered again and extracted myself from his arms. I couldn't deal with this tension. I was definitely going to spontaneously combust.

"Sorry." I could feel my cheeks heat with embarrassment as I went to sit by Jasper again.

"She's just flustered 'cause she has to kiss me." Jasper winked, sending a sly smile my way.

"Really?" Edward asked, his eyes looking incredibly concerned. I groaned as Jasper nodded enthusiastically, wrapping his arm around my shoulders to bring me closer to his side. "Oh, uh... I guess me, too," Edward added, causing me to flip around in my seat.

"Wh-what?" I stuttered.

"Maria sent me over here to tell you that I'm doing the same scene as you two."

Panic took over my body, paralyzing me where I sat. Why would Maria make us audition with a kissing scene? That was just cruel and unusual punishment. My first kiss with Edward would be clumped together with a kiss from Jasper, which I didn't particularly want... with an audience watching?

"Bella and Jasper, you'll be reading first!" Maria called out, gesturing for us to move up onto the stage.

I walked stiffly to my spot, gripping the piece of paper in my hand, attempting to mentally prepare for Jasper. I went through my lines mechanically, anticipating the end of the scene with each second it came closer. Before I knew it, we'd arrived at the end of the scene. I read over the words, "*Ren kisses Ariel*," on the script in my hand at least three times before I looked back up at Jasper.

He took a step forward, keeping his arms rigid against his sides. He was getting too close; I felt like he was invading my personal bubble. He smiled weakly before taking another step towards me, and I fought the urge to step backwards. His hands came to rest at my sides in uncomfortable fists, making me flinch with discomfort. I looked into his apologetic blue eyes, and we both took a deep breath. His lips forced themselves into a pucker as his head leaned towards mine slowly. They met mine in a tentative brush, feeling rough and chapped over mine. I tried to respond, but he was gone before I could. He leaned away and took a large step backwards, and I sighed a breath of relief. *Thank God that's over.*

Jasper smiled as applause broke out from the audience, making me realize just exactly how many people had stayed to watch us read. I hadn't even noticed them there, to be honest. He nudged my ribs before hopping off the stage and running into the audience.

"Lovely, you two," Maria called from her perch on the piano. "Let's run it again with Edward, now. Okay?"

"O-oh-okay," I stuttered uncomfortably. I waited with bated breath for Edward to appear on stage. My body started humming with nerves, and I felt close to hyperventilation.

Finally, Edward stepped out onto the stage from the dark recesses of the theater. We made eye contact, and for a second, I couldn't breathe. My brain ceased to remember how to inhale and force oxygen into my lungs and then exhale again.

"What are you doing here?" I began the scene, unable to wait any longer. Every cell in my body was alert, waiting for the inevitable closing kiss.

"Watching." His jade eyes never left mine as he spoke his first line, stepping out of the shadows.

"I thought I was alone." My hands crossed protectively in front of my chest, feeling exposed under the bright stage lights.

"Not in this town," he chuckled as he continued walking towards me. "There's eyes everywhere."

"How come you don't like me?" I asked, my eyes trained back on the crinkled piece of paper gripped between my fingers. I was too afraid to look at him or out towards Maria; my nerves were causing a massive case of stage fright.

I could hear the smile in his question as he continued. "What makes you think I don't?"

"You never talk to me at school. You never look at me." With those words, my eyes trailed towards his again. He was standing much closer now, and I could almost feel the heat of his exhale escaping into the air between us.

"Maybe because if I did, your boyfriend would remove my lungs." He ran a hand through his hair before shifting awkwardly and glancing back down at his page.

"Chuck Cranston doesn't own me," I said defiantly as I allowed my arms to fall to my sides. "He likes to act like he does, but he doesn't." I gulped, my throat inexplicably closing in on itself, knowing exactly what the next line was. "Do you want to kiss me?"

His eyes snapped back up towards mine. "Someday." He smiled my favorite half-smile, making me burn with anticipation. As I looked back at him intently, his green eyes smoldered under the stage lights, and for a second, I actually believed that he wanted me.

"What is this someday business?" I laughed, starting to feel more like Bella and less like the character I was supposedly playing.

"I get the feeling you've been kissed a lot." He took another step closer, and my heart rate picked up. It was so close I could almost taste it. "I'm afraid I'd suffer in comparison."

"You don't think much of me, do you?" I asked, my voice coming out shakier and breathier than I intended. It looked like nerves *were* going to get the best of me. "You think I'm small town?"

"I think Bomont's a small town." He took the final step towards me, and I tried not to shudder when I heard the loud crinkle of the paper in his hand and felt the heat of his palms seep through the thin fabric of my shirt. My breathing picked up as one of his hands trailed up my side and made its way under my chin, pulling it upwards to meet his gaze as the other lowered to the small sliver of exposed skin just beneath the hem of my shirt. "Wanna see something?" he whispered, his voice not wavering at all, and I bit my lip in anticipation.

How could he be so calm? My heart felt like a hummingbird was trapped inside, my blood pressure rising with each second his skin was on mine.

He cocked his head slightly to the side and moved his thumb over my bottom lip, freeing it from my front teeth. My breath hitched, trying to soak up every second his finger remained on my lip. His eyes darted down to my mouth, and I realized that I still had another line left. "Sure," I whispered in return.

The air became stagnant, and the audience hushed as Edward leaned in slowly. He pressed his lips against mine softly, and my eyes fluttered closed. I felt as if I'd been shocked—that static electricity sensation you got after shuffling your feet on plush carpet—starting with my lips. Warmth flowed through my body. I tried to stay as still as possible, committing every minute detail to my memory. The way he smelled, how soft his lips were, how his index finger twitched slightly under my chin, pulling me just a smidge closer to him. It was perfect.

I sighed as I felt him pull away, knowing that the stage kiss would be far too brief for my liking. But before I could open my eyes, Edward's lips were pressed against mine again. His grip on my chin and waist increased with the pressure of his mouth, pulling me against his hard body. I vaguely felt the piece of paper in my hand float to the floor as my hand released it and trailed up Edward's biceps to his shoulders. I used his able body for balance as I kissed him back, actively participating in our kiss for the first time.

As I drew his bottom lip into my mouth, I could taste faint traces of his mint Chap Stick. I sighed softly, knowing that I couldn't release the moans and whimpers that wanted to escape into the room so badly. I nearly died on the spot when I felt Edward's soft tongue swipe over my bottom lip and slip into my mouth.

I could feel everything down to my toes, the sparks repeating their short-circuited cycle through my body over and over again as my tongue responded, brushing against his gently. My fingers gripped his biceps, willing him to stay longer, as he sucked my bottom lip into his mouth, biting gently before releasing it again, signaling the end of the best kiss in the history of the universe.

Finally, his grasp on me loosened, and he leaned back, stepping away from me. My eyes fluttered open and my jaw dropped, almost unhinged, as I tried not to pant and gasp for air.

Edward's eyes opened and met mine, looking darker than I'd ever seen them. He was breathing just as hard as I was, and a tiny sliver of hope came to life within me.

The raucous applause coming from the audience brought me back to the present, reminding me that people had just seen that.

"Well done!" Maria called from somewhere in the distance, finally allowing me to come to. Looking around, I saw that there were two pieces of paper in the spot where Edward and I had just been. *When did Edward drop his script, too?* Still feeling jittery, I reached down to pick them up. Suddenly, there was another hand there, helping me clean up.

Edward chuckled softly before handing me the papers and heading over to talk to Maria by the

piano without saying a word.

What the hell just happened?

Chapter 9 The Aftermath

~Edward~

What the hell just happened?

Resistance was futile. I could absolutely, under no circumstances stay away from Bella. She had been far too tempting, walking into the audition looking like a freshly showered goddess. I could see every curve of her body, and it had taken everything in me to focus on the auditions instead of stare at her.

I had tried to stay away, honestly. After talking with Emmett down at the lake, I'd been resolved to keep some space as long as I was unsure of the status of our friendship. For three days, I'd watched from afar as she'd become the counselor I knew she could be. And the space I'd given her only made my longing for her body intensify. Finally, I couldn't take it anymore, and I'd attempted contact, needing her to spend more time with me.

I may or may not have suggested to Maria that the scene should include kissing—just to, you know, make sure the leads would have chemistry with one another and whatnot. And, oh shit, had that been one of my more brilliant ideas.

Then, as she'd taken the stage, ready to read our lines, the attraction had come back tenfold. I'd seen the sliver of white lace from underneath her shirt and nearly lost my shit. All I'd been able to think about was grabbing her pigtail braids and using them as reins as I drove into her from behind. But as she'd begun her lines, warmth had flooded through my body, coming to life with the dulcet tones of her whispered voice. I'd frozen — completely paralyzed with fear in my realization. I was completely at her bidding. She controlled me, and she didn't even know it.

After my lips had connected with hers, I'd known it was all over.

I'd known it was inappropriate to kiss her like that in front of an audience, even at the time, but I hadn't been able to help myself. I'd needed another taste of her plush lips. And she hadn't disappointed. Bella had kissed me back.

But as I'd stepped back and opened my eyes, aching with hunger for more, Bella's eyes betrayed her. She'd looked shocked, nervous, and even a little bit scared. It was in that second that I'd realized how strong I'd actually just come on.

After days of barely speaking with Bella, I'd essentially thrown myself at her. And now I'd scared her off. *Fabulous.*

I needed a second opinion, someone to vent to — an impartial, unbiased third party. I could no longer vent to Jasper, clearly. He and Bella had become somewhat of an inseparable pair, and I knew that although he was great at listening, his advice would be stilted.

"Edward!" Maria called out, pulling me over to the piano. "That was great." She smiled warmly and motioned for Emmett and Jake to come over as well. I was expecting Emmett to look pissed, but he didn't for some reason. Jake, however, did.

"Edward, what the fuck was that?" he whispered with agitation, punching the back of my shoulder.

"Uh..." *Brilliant response, really.*

"I can't believe that you would take advantage of LB like that!" My eyes snapped open at that comment.

"Are you shitting me right now?" I asked in all seriousness. The guy constantly had his hands all over Bella, and he was talking to *me* about taking advantage? Fuck that. Jake scoffed and crossed his arms angrily, staring me down like he wanted to murder me. "You can grope her tits and ass, but I can't kiss her? When it was written out as a part of the fucking audition scene?" I fumed.

"I don't grope her," Jake continued to scoff.

Emmett rolled his eyes. "You absolutely do, Jake." He laughed and slapped Jake on the shoulder. "But she does it right back to you. I think it's kinda cute. Don't be pissed at Edward cause he stage-kissed her. It was part of the scene, jackass."

"Stage kiss? What even is that? It looked like you just molested her, Edward."

"Closed-mouthed kiss, sometimes with a finger in between. It's made to look like more of a kiss than it actually is," Maria added, obviously listening into our conversation.

"No tongue?" Jake asked skeptically. My stomach clenched, remembering the feeling of Bella's tongue caressing mine lightly.

Oh. So that's what that feeling is. Wow, I really am a moron.

I cleared my throat and shifted my gaze away from Jake. I hated lying. "Nope, no tongue." My eyes raised back up from the floor only to be met with Emmett's amused ones. Although why he was entertained, I had no idea.

"Boys," Maria called, regaining our attention. "I wanted to talk to you about something." We nodded, waiting patiently. "As you know, the counselor talent show is next week. I'd love you boys to MC together. The girls all love you, and I know that you're creative enough to keep them entertained in between acts. So, what do you say?"

"We'd love to, Maria." Jake smiled and kissed her cheek, causing her to blush slightly. I honestly thought that Jake didn't know how *not* to be a flirt. Maybe he thought that was how everyone interacted with women. Besides, the women didn't seem to have much of a problem with it.

Chuckling, I turned to follow Emmett out of the theater, ready to get a drink or watch a movie or sleep—something, *anything* — to get that kiss out of my head. Unfortunately, Emmett was headed straight for Rosalie, who happened to be sitting on the bleachers with Jasper, Alice, and — of course — Bella. Staring at her lips, our kiss started running on repeat through my mind.

She looked up into my eyes, startled, before quickly averting her gaze. I really had scared her off. Now I needed to back the fuck up and wait for her to give me some indication that my advances were, well, welcome. The more I thought about it, the more I realized that I needed an outsider's opinion. Remembering that I had a day off next week, I walked outside to make an important phone call.

Emmett shot me a look of confusion, but I just took my phone out of my pocket and held it up before heading behind the theater. He nodded in acceptance before returning his attention to the crew sitting on the bleachers.

Sighing, I picked up the phone and pressed the familiar speed dial, which I hadn't used in months. I hoped she would actually answer the phone. It only rang once before her familiar melodic voice picked up.

"Edward? Is this a prank call?" I chuckled, unable to contain myself. Of course she would think I was calling as some sort of joke. It *had* been a while since I'd called her. "Teddy!" she sang out happily. "It *is* you! I'd recognize that evil laughter anywhere. It still haunts my dreams, you know."

I rolled my eyes, fully aware that she couldn't see me. She was the only one in the entire world allowed to call me Teddy, and only because she wouldn't stop. "Yeah, yeah. It's me. I know I've been kind of a stranger for the past year—"

"Kind of? Fuck, you even missed my birthday."

"Shit, I did? Wait, no I didn't. Your birthday isn't until October."

She laughed loudly and sighed. "That was a test, and you passed. Okay, pumpkin, what did you need?"

"Did you just call me 'pumpkin?'"

"Yeah. Do you remember when you used to be fat? Such a chubby little kid." I growled in frustration. Maybe this wasn't the best idea, after all. "What do you need, Teddy?" she continued, "I'm kind of busy here."

"I have the day off next week and wanted to know if you could meet me for lunch in Portland?" I asked in one breath, just needing to get it out.

She paused for a long moment before lowering her voice. "Edward, is everything okay?"

"Yes," I replied quickly. "I just miss you. Please?" I was so close to begging. I'd sworn I'd never go there, but apparently I wasn't above it any longer.

"Of course, Teddy. I can't even remember the last time you asked me for anything. I'll be there, okay? Don't stress over whatever you're stressing about. It's never as bad as you make it out to be. You know I love you, right?"

I exhaled slowly, relieved that she wasn't pressing for details at this current moment. As it was, I was barely focused on our phone call, thinking of the feel of Bella's lips beneath mine.

"I know. I love you, too."

"Kiss please!" She giggled, laughing at our phone ritual. To be fair, it was pretty ridiculous, but we'd been doing it for as long as I could remember. I made a loud squeaking kiss noise into the phone, causing her giggles to intensify. "'Kay, love you, bye!" we both shouted at the same time before slamming the phone shut.

Laughing to myself, I turned to go back to my bunk when I crashed into a large hulking mass. Before I knew it, I was pinned up against the side of the theater.

"What the fuck?" I asked, seeing Emmett's calculating stare. I backtracked, getting scared all over again. Hadn't my poor heart been through enough tonight?

Suddenly, Emmett backed up and cracked a smile, shaking his head in disbelief before making eye contact again.

"You're such a bad liar, Edward." He laughed, shoving my shoulder playfully as I tried to play catch up. "There was *most definitely* tongue."

"I—"

"Don't bother trying to deny it. I saw. You were all like, 'Fuck you, Daniel Day Lewis... there will be *tongue*!'"

I was confused as to why he was smiling at me. "Why are you okay with this?"

"I'm resigned. And having a great day. We'll talk about it soon. Now, we have to figure out what the hell we're going to do for the talent show. I was thinking maybe Alice could teach us a dance."

"A dance? You're out of your mind. I can't dance. You can't dance. Jake definitely can't dance."

With no regard to my response, somehow, I was dragged along. The next thing I knew, I was in front of Bella again, only now she was dancing. She moved her hips, swaying seductively as she and Alice danced together in perfect unison. Fuck me, I was in for a long night.

~Bella~

"Oh my God, Bella. Bella... Bella?" Alice called my name over and over, but I could only focus on the subtle taste of mint Chap Stick adorning my lips. It was real. That had happened.

"Look at her, she can't even say anything," Rosalie quipped. "Did Edward leave you tongue-tied? Pun intended."

"Huh?" I was still too busy biting my lips, making sure that the tingling feeling was real, to listen to anyone else.

"Oh, yeah... there was tongue." Rosalie smirked, wrapping an arm around my shoulders as I tried in vain to steady my pounding heart.

"I'm sorry, were you talking to me?" I looked up and saw that I was in the dance studio, surrounded by Rosalie, Alice, and Jasper, who had just burst into laughter. "When did we get to the studio?" I asked, only causing their laughter to increase.

"Darlin'," Jasper drawled, wrapping his arm around my waist, "was it really *that* good?" I felt my face heat, recalling in perfect detail the way Edward's tongue had brushed against mine.

"Guess so." Alice skipped over and sneaked under Jasper's free arm, smiling widely. "Oh, man, Bella. I wish you could have seen your face. I thought you were going to drop dead right there."

I chuckled, thinking back to the impossibly fast beat of my heart. "Yeah, um, I was pretty close." I paused, looking around. "What am I doing here?"

"Oh, the boys were asked to host the talent show next week, and they want me to teach them a dance for the opening!" Alice squealed, running off to hook her iPod up to the stereo. She put on her favorite dance playlist and turned up the volume before skipping back to me and grabbing my hands. "Remember our Group Twelve dance, LB?"

I nodded, falling into the familiar choreography with ease. I was mid-step when I felt him come in. Feeling his eyes on me, I couldn't help but exaggerate the movement of my hips. If he wanted to watch, why shouldn't I give him a show? Alice caught on quickly and stifled her laughter, leaving her with a mischievous gleam in her eyes.

We couldn't finish the dance, bursting into a bout of spontaneous giggles instead, as often happened. I spun around into Jasper, crashing into him with a loud *smack*.

"Ungh," he wheezed as the air rushed from his chest. "Jesus, Bella. You pack a real punch, little miss thing."

I heard Edward mutter something under his breath, and I was almost a hundred percent positive he said, "Yeah she does," which caused a shit-eating grin to grace my features.

"Okay, what do you guys want to dance to?" Alice asked, distracting the boys and allowing me to unabashedly stare at Edward without being caught.

They spent the next hour trying out different songs for dances, but nothing fit. And they were all getting progressively more frustrated by the second, especially when Alice suggested Beyonce's "Single Ladies," which Jake thought was "too overdone." Who knew that Jake was so pop-culture literate?

"This is getting ridiculous," Emmett groaned as Jake rejected yet another song.

"What?" Jake scoffed. "I'm not dancing to anything that Zac Efron's has, okay?"

Edward groaned and rolled his eyes. "Why not? It's what the campers want anyway, right? If they want me to dance to a song about how I'm feeling nervous but excited, I'll fucking do it."

And then, a stroke of genius hit me. "Nervous but excited?" I giggled, remembering where Edward must have heard that quote before.

It was the first time we'd spoken since our lips detached, and he looked genuinely startled that I'd addressed him. Our eyes met, and I couldn't help but indulge in some lofty kissing fantasies.

"Uh, yeah?" He looked confused and all kinds of adorable.

Just then, Emmett understood. He poked me in the side and smiled widely. "At night, when you're singing in your bed alone... people can hear you. Everyone can hear you!" He quoted one of my favorite SNL skits, and I burst into laughter.

"Yes! Thank you, Em. You guys should do what you're good at, not this dancing bullshit."

"And that would be... what? Being awesome?" Jake smiled flirtatiously. I ignored him.

"No, you jackass. You should make a video short — like an SNL skit, only with jokes pertaining to Long Lake. You guys are funny. *Really* funny. I could film it and edit it, even, if you wanted..."

I looked up at the boys, who were all staring at me with unreadable expressions on their faces.

Edward was the first to crack a smile, rolling his eyes to himself and running a hand through his hair. It had just clicked for him, too. "Of course! *That's* where 'nervous but excited' is from..."

I laughed, glad that he finally understood. "Yup."

"Uh, not that I paid attention to when Zac Efron hosted SNL or anything though..."

Jake scowled and smacked Edward on the shoulder. "Edward, I think we need to have a serious talk about your sexuality."

Edward chuckled softly before glancing up at me, causing heat to rise in my cheeks. His gaze shot over to Jake, and his smile widened. "Yeah, I don't think that's the issue, Jake."

"Well, I think that's brilliant, Bella," Rosalie said as she wrapped her arms around my waist,

bringing her chin to rest on my shoulder. She squeezed my stomach tighter and giggled as the boys all muttered, "Fuck," before training their eyes on the ground.

I looked over my shoulder to Rosalie, who was staring down my shirt... of course. I followed her gaze, seeing that as she'd wrapped her arms around me, my boobs had nearly exploded out of my shirt.

I spun around laughing. "You're such a slut, Rose."

Her face faltered for a second before she smirked right back. "Says the girl who just made out in public!"

My mouth dropped. Had she really gone there? As I heard Edward make a mutter-choking noise from behind me, I realized that she had. Instead of replying and giving in to her teasing, I just turned around to face the boys.

"So, why don't you guys brainstorm a bunch of skit ideas, and we can reconvene to tape tomorrow or the next day?"

"Sounds good," Emmett replied happily. Suddenly, Rosalie's phone rang with "Sugar Pie Honeybunch," breaking us out of our content moment. She sighed loudly before heading outside to answer it. Emmett followed her, not even pausing to say goodbye to any of us. I was glad that he was there to support her; Emmett was an amazing friend to lean on. I should know.

We all stood there in silence before we heard her yelling begin. Alice made a panicked face, signaling as to how she felt about Rosalie and Royce's relationship. I had to say that I agreed completely. If they had been fighting this much after barely a month of separation, how would it be after two months, or three? I didn't know if Rosalie would be able to take that. *Nor should she have to.*

"So, that's still going on, huh?" Jake asked curiously. Alice nodded and reached for Jasper's hand, which he took instantly. I made eye contact with Jasper, confused at the sudden display of affection, and he looked down at his hands and blushed again.

"Yeah. Uh..." Alice smiled up at Jasper lovingly and tightened the hold on his hand. I suddenly felt like I was intruding on a very private moment. Apparently Edward and Jake felt the same way because Jake motioned with his head for us to leave, and we all departed silently.

"What was that all about?" Jake asked.

"Finally," Edward and I sighed at the same time before starting to laugh, causing our eyes to lock in a moment that made me gasp again.

Jake quirked an eyebrow at Edward, who looked to me to explain. "They had been prolonging the inevitable. Jasper wanted Alice, Alice wanted Jasper, but neither would do anything about it for some reason. I guess Jasper finally made a move." *Thank God.*

"Well, I can see why he'd hold off," Jake began, leading us towards our usual gossip spot — the

Adirondack chair.

"And that would be?"

"Well, he's significantly older than her. That's gotta be weird, right?"

As Jake said it, Edward grimaced, cringing slightly, and I felt like I'd been burned. Edward was seven years older than me. That was three years more than Jasper and Alice's age difference.

"It's not *that* big of a difference," Edward spoke up, surprising me as he sat down on the chair, making room for me next to him.

I gulped, my throat drying with anticipation, and sat in the empty spot, attempting to be as normal as humanly possible. I could feel the air crackle between us, acutely aware of the two inches of space between where my thighs ended and his began. I blinked, but I could have sworn that Edward's eyes flashed to mine before he continued admonishing Jake. It felt like he was inadvertently speaking to me, and I could feel butterflies all over.

"You can't tell me that you wouldn't hook up with someone younger than you, Jake. That'd be a lie. I mean, how old do you think Gianna is?" Edward pointed out. "I'd say twenty-two, max. And that'd be the same age difference as Alice and Jasper."

"You hooked up with our waitress, Jake? Seriously?" I scoffed. Jake rolled his eyes, but his smirk gave him away. *Such a whore*. "And, by the way, she's eighteen. Two months younger than me."

Jake gasped loudly, turning pale in the moonlight. "Are you fucking serious?" He looked between Edward and me, just to see if I was kidding. I wasn't.

"Uh, yeah. And she has a boyfriend back home." At that, Edward started laughing, tears starting to form in the corners of his eyes.

"That's not fucking funny, Edward!"

Edward gasped for air, slowing down his bouts of laughter. "Oh, man. You have no idea how fucking funny that is. And here you are... giving *me* shit... and you got her to... to fucking blow you?"

My eyes widened, shocked that they were actually discussing this in front of me.

"TMI, Edward," I groaned. I could have gone to the end of my life without knowing who'd blown Jake.

"And on that note..." Jake trailed off, hopping out of the chair and heading away from us. I chanced another glance at Edward, and I realized that if Jake were actually leaving, we'd be alone. Alone... in the dark. Without a buffer. And all I could think about were his lips pressed against mine, tasting the faint traces of mint, his tongue caressing mine, sending shock waves to my cl—

"Uh, I should probably go, too." I jumped off the seat, as if electrocuted and nodded in the direction of my bunk.

"Oh, yeah." Edward sounded disappointed? Maybe? *Hopefully*. "Uh, good night, Bella. I'll see you tomorrow for filming?"

"Definitely." I grinned, unable to contain my happiness. I felt like I needed to do a happy dance in the very near future. Is this what being with Edward would be like? If so, then I couldn't wait.

He leaned in and pressed an unmistakable kiss to the top of my head, and I tried not to shiver under his expert touch.

"Night," he called out as he disappeared into the darkness. Finally alone, I let out a contained squeal — the one that I'd been dying to let out since Edward's lips had first touched mine.

The following day went by in a huge blur. All I could focus on was seeing Edward and potentially repeating that glorious kiss. My eyes followed their familiar path, gazing out to the shack in an attempt to get a glimpse of him, but the only difference with today was that Jasper had nothing to say about it. In fact, he hadn't said much of anything at all.

Finally, I couldn't take it anymore. Jasper wasn't being his usual annoying self, and it was time to find out what had actually happened yesterday. As our final class trailed out, I turned to confront him. He was already smiling expectantly.

"Okay, let's have it," I began.

"What?"

"Don't play coy with me, Jasper Whitlock. When did that happen?" I asked, getting frustrated. I should have gone to Alice after I saw the hand holding, but asking Jasper was just more convenient.

"When did *what* happen?" he replied innocently. I growled and slammed my hand down onto the table, a trademark Jasper move, and he broke.

"Oh, don't get your lacy panties in a bunch, Bella. It was when you left to get showered." I squealed, loving the gossipy girl time Jasper and I were sharing. "Don't get too excited, m'dear. Not that much happened!"

"Yeah, but *something* happened. I saw the hand holding."

Jasper blushed and tucked his chin into his chest, tugging at his hair awkwardly. "I told her that I liked her. And, um, that I wanted to take her out tonight."

I squealed louder and threw myself into his arms, wrapping my arms tightly around his neck. "That's so great, Jasper. I'm incredibly happy for you both."

"Thanks." He hugged me back tightly before placing me back onto the floor. "I'll tell you how it

goes tomorrow?" I moved my head up and down excitedly, channeling my inner Alice. "What about you?"

"What about me?"

"Uh, I don't know if you know this, but *everyone* was present for your first kiss with Edward. And I'm not going to lie, it looked pretty hot. Is it weird that I want to know the details?"

I bit my lip reflexively and shook my head no. I had been dying to talk about the kiss with someone. Instead, last night, I'd had to return to my dark bunk filled with sleeping children. And then we'd had no breaks today except for lunch and dinner – and Edward being present at both of them kind of put a damper on my post-kiss gossiping sessions.

"What do you want to know?" I could feel my face heating as I thought about the touch of his lips against mine and recalled in perfect detail where his hands had been and how they'd made my body come to life.

Jasper smiled, looking genuinely excited. "Well, I guess I don't need to ask how it was. Your face is telling me all kinds of things right now."

"I shouldn't get too excited, though," I reprimanded myself. "After all, it was just for a scene."

"Sure, sugar." Jasper shrugged, his smile coming down to a crooked smirk. "Whatever you say."

I rolled my eyes, ready to argue with him some more when my favorite voice interrupted us. "Hey, what's going on?"

I jumped back, surprised that I hadn't felt his eyes on me. Realizing that he could have heard any part of my conversation with Jasper, I decided to change the topic. I smiled like a proud mother, gesturing to Jasper. "He has a date tonight."

Edward arched his eyebrow in question. "Oh, really? Does he now?"

Jasper bit his lip and nodded. I looked over and pinched his cheek. "My lord, you are too cute for words."

"My lord? Bella? Methinks I'm rubbing off on you." Jasper winked and then headed towards the door.

"I'd *love* for you to rub off on me, Jasper." I laughed and hip-checked him gently.

"Just don't tell Alice, Bella," Edward joked, jumping into the conversation. It seemed as if Edward had finally made the transition from calling me "LB" to "Bella," and I couldn't help but sigh in relief.

"Well, I'd stick around to chat, but I've got a date to get ready for."

I laughed and shooed Jasper off. He smirked knowingly, realizing that this would be my first time

properly alone with Edward since "the kiss."

"So," Edward interrupted nervously, "are you ready to film?"

"Are you ready to perform?" I responded flirtatiously. I was fully aware that my voice was doing all kinds of naughty things, trying to provoke wicked images, and I was dismayed to see that Edward wasn't ruffled at all.

"Psh, am I ready?" he answered confidently. "Of course I am." Then, he played along finally and lowered his voice suggestively, his green eyes sparkling. "I'm *always* ready." My breath caught as he grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the room towards the theater, where I assumed we were filming.

~Edward~

Tonight I came to a crazy revelation. Bella made me nervous. I found myself staring at her body, imagining it naked almost every second I looked at her. Deciding that that would get me into more trouble than it was currently worth, I decided to delve right into filming.

We filmed quickly, with unbelievable ease. I couldn't believe how natural of a director Bella was. We all seemed to fall in line whenever she picked up the camera, despite how poorly rehearsed we were.

As we were mid-rehearsal for our final skit of the evening – a song making fun of all the favorite counselors from past summers – I heard a knock on the doorframe. Bella sighed and turned around and, seeing Seth at the door, she smiled.

My stomach turned with jealousy, unable to see them grinning so unabashedly at one another.

"Hey, Seth!" Jake called, breaking the scene completely.

Seth waved tentatively before nodding to Bella. "Hey, can I talk to you for a second?" she looked perplexed, although I had no idea why. It was clear that Seth wanted to be more than friends with her, and I wondered how Bella could be so oblivious to his intentions.

I watched as Bella trailed over to him, hugging him softly before pulling away. I tried to hear their conversation, but they were too far away and Jake was being too annoying. I wanted to tell him to shut the fuck up so that I could eavesdrop on their conversation, but I wasn't quite ready to go down that path yet. His reaction would only lead to questions that I didn't have the answers to.

I watched on with keen interest as Bella spoke in hushed tones, twirling and un-twirling a stray strand of hair around her finger. She bit her lip and nodded, and a smile broke across Seth's face. My stomach flipped uncomfortably, watching her accept a date with another guy. Or at least, that was what I assumed was going on. I honestly had no idea. It was an unfair reaction seeing as how I hadn't actually made up my mind concerning my future actions with Bella, but I couldn't help it.

"Great!" Seth exclaimed before hugging Bella again. She looked stiff within his grasp, and I internally gloated that she always felt like she fit within my arms comfortably. She trailed back to the camera and flushed bright red when she realized that all of our eyes were on her.

"So," Jake goaded, "what was that all about?"

"Like you don't know." Bella rolled her eyes before situating herself behind the camera again. Jake stared her down and finally Bella broke. "Jake, I'm not going out with him. I'm too busy with all of this crap." She motioned towards her camera, and the knot in my stomach untwisted at the realization that Bella had turned Seth down. Not that that would do me any good right now, but still...

"And," Bella continued, "I was just informed that I have to help wrangle the girls for the swim meet tomorrow morning, so can we make this the last take and finish everything else up tomorrow?"

Emmett was out of the room before Bella could even finish her spiel, and she was left staring at Jake and me again. I stared back before realizing that she was waiting for an answer from us.

"Yeah, I should get some sleep anyway. I'm supposed to film it, and they always want me there at the ass crack of dawn for some fucking reason."

"Actually, Seth just told me that he's doing it, so...you don't need to."

I had no response. For once, I was totally at a loss of how to act around a girl. My head was growing more and more confused by the minute. "Oh, uh... well, I guess I'll see you there anyway."

Jake quirked an eyebrow at me as Bella packed up her camera and headed back to her bunk.

"What?" I asked as he continued to stare at me with a contorted look on his face.

"You're willingly going to go to the swim meet when you could sleep in? No way, I'm not fucking buying it. What's the catch?"

I hadn't anticipated this. It was true – I had never willingly gone to a swim meet when I wasn't required to film it. And now with Seth helping out, I could actually sleep in and get other shit done. But if Bella was going to be there – and in a bathing suit – I couldn't *not* go. My cock thanked me immensely for this realization, and I shrugged in defeat.

"No catch. I just, uh, told Emily I'd meet her there. We haven't had a lot of time to catch up, if you know what I mean." I winked, reverting to form, hoping that Jake wouldn't notice my blatant lies. I felt like a shmuck, but once I had figured out this attraction to Bella, I'd let him in. / *think*.

"Emily?" Jake's eyebrows shot up at her name. He must have been surprised at that admission, seeing as how she hadn't really been around recently. "Nice."

I tried not to roll my eyes at this typical Jake. Ignoring him, I walked quickly to bed before passing out to dreams of a bikini-clad Bella. I could only anticipate that the real thing would be just as good, or better.

I woke up to an empty bunk, curious as to why I felt so rested and wondering where the hell everyone had gone. Looking at my clock, I realized that it was nearly eleven AM, and there would only be another half an hour of the swim meet left. Those assholes hadn't even bothered to wake me up.

Grumbling and already in a bad mood, I threw on a t-shirt and shorts before sliding my feet into some flip flops. As I exited the bunk, I could hear the excited yells of campers coming from the lake. The summer sun was already high in the sky, feeling hot against my skin. Once down at the lake, I saw that a t-shirt and shorts clad Bella was situated on the far corner of the docks, helping the campers get into places in their lanes for races.

Rosalie, clad in a red full-piece bathing suit, looked as if she had just stepped off the set of Baywatch, blowing her whistle to commence each race. Her hair was slicked back and she was laughing with Bella, pointing the campers in the right direction. It was so nice to see them working together, obviously in their element.

Bella was a natural. She didn't even notice how the girls followed her instructions obediently, behaving for her in an exemplary fashion. I didn't think she recognized how rare that was for a new counselor. It had taken me at least three summers to gain control of most of the girls, only because they retaliated against the newbies.

Out of the corner of my eye, I caught sight of Alice and Jasper, who were glancing at one another furtively across the throngs of children as they kept them entertained. It was kind of adorable, watching them in their bizarrely slow mating ritual. But if I had learned anything from Jasper over the past few weeks, it was that he never did anything until he was one hundred percent certain it was a good idea. Apparently, Alice finally fell into that category. *It only took three weeks.*

"Hey, stranger." A voice caught my attention, and I turned just before Emily was able to throw herself into my arms without knocking me backwards. "You've been kind of MIA lately. What's the deal?"

"Emily, I—" I was about to come up with some sort of lame excuse as to why I hadn't been able to spend more time with her when I saw Seth approach Bella. He poked her ribs, making her smile and shake her head. My head went completely blank. I could not for the life of me think of a single reason why I hadn't tried to seek out Emily, because Bella had completely overtaken my senses. My brow furrowed as I watched Seth wrap an arm around Bella's waist as he continued to film the girls in the lake.

I only came to as I felt Emily poke my side with a forceful jab of her own finger. "Ow! Jesus Christ, Emily – that hurt!" Emily rolled her eyes and cocked her head to the side, smiling shyly at me. "What?"

"Nothing." She shook her head, but her tone told me that she wanted to say more.

"What?" I asked again, getting more frustrated with her antics.

"It's just..." She paused, thinking over her next statement before pulling my head down towards her so that she could whisper in my ear. "I should have known you were a lost cause when I found her in your bed that first night."

"What?" My eyes widened, looking at the petite blond girl incredulously.

"Don't give me that face, Edward Cullen."

I was truly speechless. And I clearly needed to reign myself in. How did *everyone* know that I wanted Bella within days of me realizing it myself?

"I, um... I don't—"

"Don't bother with the denial tactics." Emily smirked deviously before snuggling under my arm and pulling herself close to my side. "I think it's kind of adorable, Edward. And honestly, it's about time that you gave up random ass in favor of an actual girl."

"I didn't say I was giving up random ass."

Emily snickered. "You didn't have to! I saw it with my own eyes, you know. I was at auditions the other night, darling."

"You were?" I was shocked. I seriously hadn't seen her there. But, then again, I really hadn't seen many other people besides Bella that night. I guessed that was what Emily was alluding to. God, how could I have been this much of an idiot?

"Why am I not surprised that you didn't notice?"

I was about to respond when I was distracted by goings-on on the docks. Seth had just handed off the camera to James, a counselor I wasn't a huge fan of, before stripping his shirt off and hopping into the lake. I wasn't so much interested in *that* as I was in Bella's reaction. Her eyes went wide before honing in on Seth's chest and abs. Now, I wasn't disgusted by my body by any means, but Seth's body was ridiculous. Had someone given that boy some steroids? He was fucking ripped. And I wasn't afraid to admit it; I was intimidated – and the boy was four years younger than me. *Shit*.

Bella could never look at my body with that kind of admiration because my body just didn't look like that.

"Please, Bella! Bel-la! Bel-la!" I heard Rosalie's piercing drawl over the din of cheering campers. I could see Bella blushing from where I was standing and was curious as to what she could possibly be embarrassed about. My questions were answered as Rosalie strode over to her and started pulling off her clothing, revealing a bright red bikini.

My jaw unhinged, my mouth dropping open as I caught wind of what was about to happen.

Bella was going to participate in the relay, meaning that she was going to be in her bikini - and soaking wet - in the very near future. My dick stood up, hardening in my shorts at the mere sight of her.

Bella had been outside for hours, making her skin glisten with a combination of sunscreen and sweat, slightly tanned from being out in the sun all morning. My eyes couldn't help but go straight for her cleavage, where the halter neckline of the top plunged, revealing the tantalizing swell of her breasts. After lingering on her chest for an inappropriate amount of time, I forced my gaze away, downwards to flit over her flat stomach and low-rise bottoms, showing over her curvy hips and strong legs. My eyes refused to blink or look away from the expanse of skin.

Upon seeing my expression, Emily was unable to contain her laughter anymore, letting out loud, throaty guffaws. I tried to stifle her laughter by pulling her face into my chest, hoping that Bella's attention wouldn't be drawn to me. I really didn't want her to see me blatantly checking her out, despite the fact that that was exactly what I'd been doing.

"Shut up, Em!" I warned, silencing her with my hand across her mouth. Her laughter finally died down, but I was reluctant to let her go. Emily had quite the mouth on her, and I wasn't ready for anyone to overhear what was going on.

I looked up at the docks again just in time to see Bella dive in head first. Seeing that it was safe, I removed my hand from Emily's mouth, but looked at her pointedly. She got the point, her laughter dying off quickly.

"I'll be good. I'll be good..." I let her go and she wrapped her arms around my waist again, placing her chin on my chest as she looked up at me coyly. "So, are you going try and deny anything again?" Her hand wandered lower on my stomach, and even though I knew that she was just trying to prove a point, I wasn't going to let her get that far with all these campers around.

"Fine, fine." I smiled and wrapped my hand in hers, pulling it away from the erection that we both knew was there. "You win. I want her. Badly. Now shut it."

"Yes, sir." She winked and pulled away. "Whoa, there, handsy!" she started again, pulling my gaze back to the lake where Seth was "helping" Bella out of the water – if "helping" could be described as grabbing her ass from underneath and pushing her onto the docks. Could he really be that forward with her and have her not mind, or even retaliate? Seth pulled himself onto the docks easily, his biceps bulging with the obvious exertion before standing to pull Bella into a tight embrace.

"Are you serious?" I growled, causing Emily to snicker again. "I... I can't fucking watch this."

"Don't get all emo on us, Edward. Just do something about it." She smiled and grabbed my hand, squeezing it tightly before letting it drop between us.

"I'll try."

Unable to watch the display of intertwined limbs that was currently Seth and Bella, I turned to

leave, heading back up the hill to my bunk to wallow in self-pity – or jack off to thoughts of a soaking wet Bella, clad in that delicious bikini. One or the other, definitely.

With one last look over my shoulder, I caught Bella's eyes glancing over in the spot where I'd been standing with Emily. She looked... sad, for some reason. Sad and a bit angry – or was it frustrated? Unable to figure it out, I headed away from the lake to sort through my own thoughts instead.

Chapter 10 Shack Time

~Bella~

Rage. Quiet unadulterated rage was pulsing through my body, and I had no real way to squelch it except for my mild shaking. I may have been pushed up against Seth's hard and muscular body, feeling our skin rub against one each other, but all I could see was Emily's dainty hand drifting down Edward's stomach as he grinned at her.

How could he do that to me? After kissing me, how could he just go back to her like it had meant nothing? I'd thought that he'd been maybe coming onto me yesterday, but clearly it had all been in my imagination.

"Bella, are you okay?" I heard Seth ask as his hands stroked my arms softly. My eyes snapped upwards to his, and I couldn't help but smile at his genuine concern.

"Just a little cold," I fibbed, shaking out my wet hair and ringing it out over the lake. In reality, I was pretty warm. After standing in the sun for three hours, I could feel my skin flushing and drying in the early summer heat. But I was feeling particularly exposed in Rosalie's small bikini. Apparently all of the supervising counselors had to wear red bathing suits, of which I had none, but Rosalie had plenty. She'd lied to me, claiming that she only had bikinis – while she herself showed up in a one piece. *Little harlot.*

"Oh, let me grab you a towel!" Suddenly, Seth jetted off and returned with a large green beach towel from the side. "Here you are." He smiled again and wrapped it around me, pulling me close to dry me off. I would have minded the familiarity he displayed with my body, had he not been doing me a favor and covering me up.

My mostly naked body that Edward didn't even bother to ogle because he was too distracted by Emily, my inner voice growled.

"Thanks!" I managed to call out to Seth before he was pulled away by James, the soccer counselor he'd passed his camera off to.

Then, just as quickly, I was being pulled off in the other direction by Rosalie, towards the beach. I threw my towel and myself down onto the sand as the campers all wandered off to their bunks

to shower. I should have probably taken a shower, too, but I was too emotionally exhausted to move right now.

"Bella, you look smoking today. Just thought I should tell you." Rosalie giggled and threw me a cookie from the swim staff's private stash.

I rolled my eyes and stretched my arms over my head, relishing in the sun's calming feel on my drying skin. I let out a long slow exhale, trying to expel the bad energy I'd accumulated.

"Are you okay?"

I shook my head, keeping my eyes closed and trying to think of happier thoughts, but I was stuck on the image of the loving and intimate way Edward and Emily had interacted with one another. I knew that Edward was a touchy-feely kind of guy, but he wasn't *that* touchy-feely.

"Do you want to talk about it?" Rosalie offered up. I lay there in silence, continuing to shake my head gently from side to side, hoping that she would just let me relax. "Please, Bella."

"I'm frustrated," I admitted, still keeping my eyes closed. Talking that way was easier, anyway.

"What?" Rosalie asked, sounding legitimately confused.

"I'm frustrated... and lonely." I said it again, feeling the honest way it tasted on my tongue.

"I don't understand. How can you be lonely? You're surrounded by your best friends every day."

"That's true, but it's also not true." I paused, hearing her take in a deep breath and wait for me to continue. "They had lives as counselors before I became one. I thought that it would be easy, since we were always best friends. But it hasn't been. Jake is distracted by anything with tits that isn't me." I chuckled at that admission. "Emmett is distracted." I smirked as I heard Rosalie huff quietly. "Alice found Jasper – and I'm so happy for them, but they're already living in their own little world. Did you see them after their date yesterday? They barely waved hello to me—"

"They *just* got together, Bella. Give it time, they'll be back to normal within the week, I guarantee it."

"I don't need time. I need to take my focus off Edward and make some new friends. Here I've been pining and hoping that he'll look my way all summer, but it's not going to happen – and it's preventing me from making new friends. Friends that I should be making because I'm now a counselor and I can."

"You always have me, Bella," Rosalie said sadly, and I finally opened my eyes to look at her. She was sitting at the bottom of my towel, looking wistful as she laid her hands on my shins. "I love you tons, B. You make me happy."

"Thanks, R. I'm sorry, I didn't mean for it to sound like I was belittling our friendship. God knows I love you, too. I just don't spend enough time with you. Having activities and a cabin full of girls kind of gets in the way of that. And most evenings you spend on the phone with your family or

with Royce, and I never want to interrupt you. But if you want to talk about it, I'm here."

"I know, and I really appreciate it. Dealing with Royce has been... rough. And if you want to move on past Edward, then go for it, but you don't have to. Because I know that he makes you happy, too. I know for a fact that all of your best friends love you — Alice, Jasper, Emmett, Jake, me, and even Edward."

"Edward's a lost cause. I think I'm going to go out with Seth."

Her eyebrows shot up, arching into the middle of her forehead. "Really?"

"He's already asked me out twice, and I'm running out of creative ways to turn him down."

"Twice?"

"Ugh, yeah. Once during pre-camp and then again last night. I should give him a chance, right? I mean, what's the harm in going out once? He's really sweet, and it's not like I'm planning on throwing my V-card at him."

"Why not? He's got a rockin' bod."

I sat up straight, leaning over to talk with her so that I could lower my voice. "I know, right? I didn't want to say anything before, but I'm pretty sure my eyes nearly popped out of their sockets when he stripped down. Not too bad to look at, hmm?"

Rosalie giggled, throwing her wet hair up into a messy bun. "I tried to count all of his abs — I gave up at like fourteen. And those pecs... mm, mm, delicious."

"Oh, I know. I wanted to sink my teeth into them — just gnaw a little bit. They'd probably be nutritious."

"Like lean meat?"

"Well, since you've already decided I'm giving it up for him, I do hope there's nothing *lean* about his meat," I quipped, making Rosalie's mouth drop again.

"I love you, Bella." Rosalie sat up and grabbed my body in a huge hug, kissing my cheek sloppily and pushing us both down to the ground so that she was essentially lying on top of me. "So much!" she continued in between her ridiculous kisses.

"Jesus Christ, I've died and gone to heaven!" I heard Emmett call from behind us. Not getting off me, Rosalie tilted her head up, staring straight at him. I looked up, leaning my head back to try and gauge his reaction, only to see him adjusting himself in his shorts. *Gross.*

"You wish." Rosalie kissed my cheek loudly again before rolling off me and pulling us both up to stand.

"So, LB." Emmett cleared his throat and wrapped his arm around my shoulders, pulling me flush

against his side, as Rosalie did the same on his other side. "You going to edit our opening video tonight?"

"Yup. I'm actually going to head to the shack as soon as lights go out. I feel a little bad for my campers – I'm never around after lights out." And then I thought of something, despite the fact that I might not necessarily want to know the answer. "What are the rest of you guys doing tonight?"

"Uh, I think Jake and Seth are going out with Claire, who works at softball, and a bunch of her friends. Jasper is probably playing love songs to Alice on his acoustic guitar while weeping. And Rose and I are going to be doing laundry, 'cause I have yet to do any since I got here."

I made a face, crinkling my nose in distaste. I hated doing laundry. "That blows. And not in the good way." I could feel the vibrations of Emmett's low laughter through his shirt, and I smiled widely as he ruffled my wet hair. I had really been missing my pseudo-big-brother. "What about Edward?" I asked tentatively. He was probably going out with Emily. *Le sigh.*

Emmett cocked his head and his grip on my shoulders increased, his muscles tensing before adjusting and relaxing once again. "He's not going to be in the shack with you?"

"If he is, I'm not aware of it. I just assumed he'd be out with Emily or something." My voice must have sounded pathetically sad because Emmett stopped walking and turned me to face him directly, looking into my eyes.

"Emily? Why would he be out with Emily?"

"He was all over her this morning at the swim meet, I just assumed—"

"He was all over Emily this morning?" Emmett's voice had an angry edge to it, and I couldn't figure out why. Unless Emmett had a thing for Emily, which... just... no, he didn't. "That son of a—"

"Em, what's the big deal?"

Emmett shook his head in frustration before placing me back under his arm again, continuing the walk up towards the cafeteria. "Nothing, I just need to have another conversation with him, apparently."

I was truly confused. "Shit," I said aloud, realizing the time. "I'm going to be late for lunch. I don't have dry clothes to put on for the dining hall." It was strict dress code - shirt, shorts, and shoes must always be worn inside, and the clothes in my hand were wet, leaving me in only Rosalie's tiny bikini and some flip flops.

"Bella, who do you take me for? I'm always prepared." Rosalie rummaged through her black knapsack and pulled out a full outfit for me to wear inside. I was astounded.

"Thanks, Mary Poppins."

She winked in return while zipping the bag up and wandering off towards her table, while Emmett followed me towards my own.

I turned around as I got to the foot of my table to see what the hell Emmett needed, but he was already in a heated conversation with Edward at the head of the table next to me. Suddenly, Edward's eyes flashed to mine, and I flushed at having been caught staring. His eyes narrowed in confusion before he shook his head and looked back at Emmett. I had no idea what they were talking about, but it seemed serious, and I was definitely curious.

Apparently, so was Jake. As soon as he came bounding through the door and saw their close proximity, he threw his arms around both of them. "What are we arguing about, kids?" The raucous timbre of his voice shook the table, and I laughed at his pure obliviousness and lack of tact.

Emmett stepped back and raised his eyebrows. "Nothing. Just a misunderstanding."

"Did Emmett steal your Anakin Skywalker action figure again, Edward?"

"Jake!" Edward yelled, jabbing his fist into Jake's flat stomach. Instead of Jake flinching, though, Edward yelped and yanked his hand back in pain. "Jesus, Jake! Are your abs actually made of iron? That *really* hurt!"

I couldn't help but giggle at the ridiculous display. Edward had tried to regain some cool points by punching his best friend, only to end up looking like more of a nerd. My giggles turned into full out laughter as Edward's eyes met mine with an expression of anguish, shame, and hilarity.

As soon as my laughter calmed down, Jake resumed his Edward-torture, which was a natural thing for them. I definitely loved them all the more for it. "What can I say? Seth and I have been doing an intense workout regimen in our free time. I guess it's paid off."

"Definitely," I jumped in, not even thinking about the words escaping my mouth. "I saw Seth's body this morning. Good job."

Jake raised his eyebrow at my comment, making me blush. "Does someone have something they want to tell me about my baby cousin?" I shook my head, my blush intensifying further. I could feel the heat seeping into my cheeks. "No? So maybe you want a piece of this..." Jake trailed off and began to pull up his shirt to reveal his solid abs when a throat cleared from beside him. One of the administrators had seen his little stunt and suggested he keep his clothes on.

Smiling, I continued to lay out the silverware and set the table. As Edward did the same at the table next to us, I noticed him wince slightly when he gripped a bunch of forks. "Edward, are you actually hurt?"

I jutted out my hand to grab his and rested his fist in my open palm. I ran my finger over the bruise that was already forming on his knuckles with curiosity. He must have put a lot of force into his punch to injure himself. I ran my finger over it again, and although he rolled his eyes, he winced ever so slightly.

"I'm fine," he said, his voice sounding low and husky. "I just didn't realize that I was punching The Iron Giant."

"The Iron Giant? I was told I had to see that movie before I got to film school, but I haven't had the time. Is it worth it?"

"Is it worth it?" Edward choked. "It is absolutely worth it. We'll have to make a plan to have you watch it one night with me, okay?"

My heart fluttered and my crotch tingled at the thought of a movie night with Edward – a movie night that didn't include four other people. The tingling in my crotch moved to my hand when I realized I was still clasping his.

"Sounds good." I tried to breathe normally, but I was too distracted by the pounding of my heart to really monitor it. "So, you play with *Star Wars* action figures?" I started to tease him, but he interrupted me, ignoring my question completely.

"Tonight, I figured we could work on editing the opening monologue. Tomorrow we can put in music and sound effects tomorrow because I have Thursday off, and then the show is on Friday. Does that work for you?"

I nodded, not truly comprehending everything he was saying, but instead focusing on the way his lips moved and imagining them pressed against mine in the solitude of the shack.

He dropped his hand and smiled, walking back towards the head of his table as Alice and the campers scurried into the dining hall.

I turned my head to ask Alice where she'd been when I saw the dark bruise on the side of her neck, just above the neckline of her t-shirt. Just then, Jasper walked by our tables. I noticed the way his hand lingered on her shoulder for a second too long as he admired what I was sure was his handiwork.

"Alice." Jasper tipped his head and winked at her before traipsing off to his own table. As happy as I was for them, this relationship was definitely going to take me a while to get used to. I already missed Jasper's affections. *Am I really this needy?* Yes, I decided. I was absolutely that needy.

The rest of lunch went by quickly, and I soon found myself back in classes. The weather was now at an all-time high, and the room had very quickly become sticky with humidity, making everything in the room sweat.

On top of being annoyed from the heat, I was especially disgruntled by the gossiping occurring in my classroom. I knew that campers were the worst, but I had to physically restrain myself from intervening at the conversation about how one camper had supposedly spotted Emmett and Rosalie making out while she'd been coming back from the nurse's office the other night. I shook my head at the complete fabrication of the story, ashamed that I'd once been caught up in the speculation of counselor's lives, too.

As soon as our classes were finished, Jasper bolted from the room, and it didn't take a genius to figure out where he was running off to. And my level of annoyance only increased when I realized that I was now left to clean up the art room by myself.

I sighed and turned up the volume of my favorite classic rock radio station, blaring the sexy guitar riff of "Heartbreaker" by Led Zeppelin.

Looking around, I saw that our latest class had made a mess of the mod-podge and glitter we'd let them use today. I started to clean it up with a damp rag, but it really didn't do much good. The glitter was spreading everywhere, and the amount of effort I was exerting to clean it up was only making my temperature rise more.

I searched around the room for a few minutes until I found a wiry and broken-looking fan in the back corner of the closet. I quickly plugged it in, hoping that it would work. Sweat was now starting to drip in between my boobs and onto my stomach, which wasn't the best sensation in the entire world.

The fan barely worked, only seeming to push the hot air around the room even more, leaving me disappointed and irritable. My eyes darted from side to side as a brilliant idea formed in my head. I folded the waistband of my shorts over, making them ride as low as possible on my hips. Then I took my extra hair elastic and knotted the back of my t-shirt, exposing my midriff to the steamy air. It wasn't great, but it helped. Grabbing a rag, I continued cleaning like that, until a bit of the damp cloth hit the skin of my stomach. When I leaned towards the fan, the skin cooled under the low breeze of the fan.

Victory!

I wet my stomach with the cloth before coming to stand directly in front of the fan, arms to the side, head tilted back. I closed my eyes, enjoying the cool sensation of the water drying on my flesh.

A shudder went through my body, and I couldn't help but moan with satisfaction. I hadn't even realized how fucking overheated I'd been.

Suddenly, I heard the door hit the wall, and I spun around in shock. Edward was standing in the doorway, and it looked as if he'd accidentally fallen into the door and was stumbling to stand upright again.

"Uh, hey." I waved awkwardly, one short almost-salute.

He finally gained solid footing and adjusted the door so that it wasn't smacking into the wall before running his hand through his hair, tugging on the ends harshly. "You look hot," he said so fast that I was positive I'd misheard him.

"I'm sorry, what?"

His eyes bugged out of his head a little bit when he realized what he'd said, and it was almost comical. I'd never seen Edward flustered before. It was definitely amusing.

"You're dripping wet... I mean, sweaty... I mean, it's hot in here, right?" His bumbling was pretty endearing, and I couldn't help but stand there and smile.

I went to put my hands on my hips when I figured out that I was indeed dripping wet and hot *and* half naked. *Awesome*. I went to cross my arms over my stomach, but it was still really too hot for that. I groaned.

"Yeah, it's too hot in here to even think properly."

"I was going to ask if you wanted to hang out in the shack until dinner to get some stuff done. Plus, it's air conditioned in there..."

"Air conditioning?" I walked over to him and placed my finger over his lips, effectively silencing him. I noticed the electric spark pulse through the tip of my finger as it pressed against his lips. "I'm sold. Let's go!" As I removed my finger from his lips, I smelled the faint traces of mint Chap Stick and crinkled my nose. "Now my finger is going to smell like mint." I laughed, trying not to show how thrilled I was that he hadn't flinched under my touch—or made any attempt to move, really.

He smiled and took the Chap Stick out of his pocket and reapplied it. "Yeah, sorry, I'm addicted to this stuff."

A faint blush crept across my cheeks without provocation, just thinking about how well I knew that. "Oh, I know."

Edward's eyes snapped back to mine, glimmering in the late-afternoon sunlight before he smirked. "I guess you would." He paused and lowered his eyes before raising them to meet mine again. "That wasn't awkward, was it? I know we didn't ever talk about it or anything, but—"

I cut him off, unable to hear him say the words "it was just a scene," when in my head, that kiss was the center of my world. "Don't worry about it, Edward. It wasn't awkward."

Not. At. All.

We arrived at the shack, and he motioned for me to open it. I quirked an eyebrow at him. Why wouldn't he just open the door himself?

"Just making sure you remember the code." He snickered as I fumbled with the lock in my sweaty hands. Finally I managed to get it open and shivered under the heavy flow of air conditioning in the small room. I automatically reached behind me and pulled the elastic out, returning my shirt to its normal position covering my stomach. I could have sworn I heard Edward mutter a low, "thank you," but I couldn't be sure.

We sat down in front of the computer, and he got out my camera to connect it and started importing the footage we'd recorded the night before.

"Oh, so this is a business meeting?"

Edward slouched in his chair, kicking out his legs and crossing them to get comfortable. I suddenly felt completely at ease, as if this was how it was all supposed to be.

"Multitasking, Bella." He smiled, and had I been standing, I would have absolutely swooned. It was one of those heart-stopping, panty-dropping smiles that I'd seen him unleash on unsuspecting female staff members throughout the years.

He continued dragging icons around the computer before I heard the faint strains of Led Zeppelin's "Going To California" come over the computer speakers. I sighed, feeling content. This song felt like my theme song. I closed my eyes and let the guitar soothe away the heat, the tension—everything.

We sat, not saying a word until the song finally finished. It was then that I heard the heavy base of "When The Levee Breaks," and I realized what we were listening to.

"*Led Zeppelin IV*?" Edward nodded slowly, coming out of his own musical trance. "I didn't know you were a fan of The Zep."

"I'm not, really. I noticed you listening to them in the Fine Arts room before and figured that since I was stealing you away, I might as well bribe you with music, too."

"Well, if you were really paying attention, you'd know that I was listening to 'Heartbreaker,' which is off *Led Zeppelin II* not *IV*, but I appreciate the sentiment."

Edward paused and leaned forward, bringing his forearms to rest on his knees. "Wow, so you really like Led Zeppelin."

I shook my head emphatically from side to side. "No, I *love* Led Zeppelin. British Blues is by far the best music that has ever been written. Nothing will ever compare."

"Nothing? What about Nirvana or the Red Hot Chili Peppers or Radiohead?"

I started giggling, unable to stop myself at the predictability of his response. "Of course you would name those bands... you're such an emo indie whore."

The corners of his mouth tugged upwards as he leaned further over, closer to me. "Did you just call me a whore?"

I shrugged, making a joke out of our most recent plight. "An eye for an eye, and all that..."

"Touche, Bella." He leaned further over, and I could nearly feel his breath on me. My heart stopped and stuttered, hoping beyond all hope that he would close the distance and kiss me again.

His eyes burned with an unspoken intensity, and I leaned slightly forward, unable to resist his magnetism. As we were centimeters away from bringing our faces together, the import on the computer finished, *dinging* loudly and snapping him back to a rigid position in his chair.

I could have throttled my video camera in that moment.

Unwilling to lose our momentum and let the moment fall flat and awkward, I began talking about the one thing that had been plaguing my thoughts all afternoon.

"Emmett isn't hooking up with Rosalie, is he?"

Edward didn't turn around as he answered, still fidgeting with the clips on the computer, but his answer was resolute. "No, no way."

"Oh, okay." I sighed in relief, although I wasn't sure why.

Edward heard and spun around in his chair, looking quizzical. "Why?"

"I just, I heard some campers talking about it. Apparently they saw them making out on the front porch last night. But that's impossible. They'd tell me, right?"

"Why wouldn't they?"

"I don't know... I've kind of feeling out of the loop, I guess." It was hard to admit that, but ultimately, that was exactly what it felt like. "I just couldn't believe that a camper would know that about my best friends before they'd tell me themselves, you know?"

"Don't believe camper gossip. It's usually fabricated," Edward said with a dismissive shrug. I didn't know why, but the action irked me greatly. I hated feeling like I was being blown off; it made me feel like a camper again. Although, I was infinitely grateful that he'd finally given up calling me LB.

"Oh, really? So you never hooked up with Jess in the dance studio?"

Edward's mouth dropped, and his eyes held an ounce of guilt. "You know about that?"

I laughed at his shameful expression. "Um, yeah. I know about *all* of your conquests, Edward. Jake's, too." I shook my head. "This camp is small, remember? Jess was the bunk counselor of the cabin next to mine. The cabin walls are thin, and she had a big mouth."

"I remember," Edward quipped, leaving me stunned at his choice of words. "I mean, she was loud." He blushed, realizing *again* what he'd said. "Fuck, I didn't mean it like that..."

I couldn't help but laugh. This was the second time today Flustered Edward had made an appearance, and I was enjoying him thoroughly.

"Edward, it's okay. I understood before you dug yourself into that hole."

Edward paused, composing his thoughts, and it seemed as if he were going to say something incredibly important, when chimes for dinner rang. I realized that we'd been in the shack for an hour longer than I'd anticipated. Time with Edward seemed to fly by at an unnaturally fast pace.

"Fuck, how did it get to be dinner time?" Edward asked as he stood up, stretching his arms above his head, showing off the small trail of hair that led into the waistband of his shorts. I had to put some serious effort into not drooling. "Come on, my dear."

He laughed, seeming incredibly light-hearted, before offering me his arm. I took it gratefully, enjoying the sparking sensation in my hand where our skin joined. My stomach flipped as he turned out the lights, leaving us in the darkness for a millisecond before he pushed open the door, releasing us back into the heated daylight of the summer evening.

I couldn't resist leaning my head against his shoulder as we walked. It was firm but just soft enough under my touch. This much time alone with Edward was going to fuel my fantasies for weeks. I felt like a guy, keeping track of which images and conversations I could put into my own spank bank. And I was only slightly ashamed that I knew I would use every single one of them.

As we arrived inside the dining hall, Edward lowered his arm and wrapped it around my waist, squeezing gently. He laid his chin on the top of my head, and I used all of my willpower not to blush excessively under Jake's scrutinizing gaze from the head of our table.

"That was fun, Bella. See you again tonight? We can finish editing." I nodded, not trusting my voice to betray me and expose the emotions that were coursing through my body. "Great. I'll see you after Taps, then."

I nodded again as Edward disentangled himself from me to set up his own table. As I watched him with interest, my level of anticipation rose for our time alone this evening. It felt as if it were going to be a huge turning point in our relationship, and I couldn't have been more excited.

Chapter 11 New Faces

~Edward~

The afternoon with Bella had been incredible. I finally felt like I was getting to know Bella the woman, rather than Bella the camper. She had grown up into this crazy, unique person, and I was excited to get to know her.

When I'd seen her swaying to Led Zeppelin, half naked, hair blowing in front of the shoddy fan in the art room, I'd known that I had the perfect ploy to spend more time alone with her... and possibly relive that kiss, if she wanted to.

Oh, the benefits of working in an air-conditioned climate. The ladies just can't say no...

And even though I hadn't received my kiss, I had ended up getting some valuable information. For instance, Bella was insecure in her friendships, which — for the life of me — I couldn't understand. She had to know that Emmett and Rosalie had both nearly chopped off my balls the

day I'd pissed her off. They loved her more than life itself, and I highly doubted that either one of them would risk their friendship with her by not being honest. Plus, Emmett wasn't the type to get involved with someone in a relationship, which Rosalie still was, as far as I knew.

When it came to say goodbye, I could barely let her go. I wrapped my arms around her, feeling how comfortable she felt within my grasp. And I noticed that Bella didn't try to escape either. I knew that whatever was happening with us, I needed to address it soon, otherwise one of us would end up hurt — and I wasn't sure I was willing for that person to be me.

This is why you don't do relationships, you pussy, the annoying little voice in the back of my head taunted.

After dinner I got ready quickly, not wanting to waste a single second alone with Bella. The heat of the shower felt good on my tense muscles, despite the unusually oppressing heat of the summer evening. I lathered up my skin, washing off the dirt and grime of the day from my body, spending extra time lazily stroking the hardened flesh between my thighs. Knowing that I should take care of this situation before seeing Bella, I imagined all the things I could do to her alone in the shack tonight before climaxing quickly.

I hadn't done this much jacking off since I was an adolescent. Emily had been right—I was giving up random ass for Bella. And somehow, I was okay with that.

Once outside the shower, I threw on a pair of shorts and a t-shirt; it was still too hot outside to even think about putting jeans on. Jake was out on the couch, looking relaxed and ready for a night out.

"Hey, where are you headed off to tonight?"

Jake grinned widely, looking like he'd been getting into trouble. "The Lobster Pound. It's karaoke night tonight."

I chuckled, knowing exactly how much Jake loved karaoke night at *The Pound*. I still remembered the night I'd knew Jake and I were going to be best friends—he'd had had far too much to drink and had taken the microphone up on the bar to serenade a group of hot girls with "You've Lost That Lovin' Feeling." He'd called me over, and we'd ended up hooking up with the two hottest girls of the group that night. I still couldn't believe that we'd been best friends for five years, and he was still up to the same shenanigans.

"What's your count?" I asked, referring to the number of girls he'd nailed so far in the three weeks we'd been here.

"Uhh... seven? I think..."

That caught my attention. "Seriously? Seven? Dude, that's—"

"I know," he grumbled. "I'm behind where I usually am." He looked disappointed in himself, and in that moment I realized what a fucking man-whore he was. How had I never noticed that before?

"I was going to say that's high, but whatever." I laughed, trying to hide my judgmental tone.

"Really? What's *your* number this summer?" I fidgeted, unable to tell him my number. "Oh, come on, Edward. It can't be that fucking bad. Be a man and fess up."

"Zero, okay?" I exploded, leaving Jake dumbfounded.

"You're not messing with me?" My head shook from side to side, letting him know that I wasn't lying, just changing.

"That's not technically true. I saw you kiss LB. That's one, at least."

"I didn't *screw* LB, though," I growled, anger welling up inside my chest. I had told myself that Bella wouldn't be relegated to the chuck and fucks that Jake and I had always quickly dismissed, and I was holding true to that word. She would *never* be in that category. "Whatever, Emmett has zero, too."

Jake barked out a short laugh before looking at me with confusion written all across his face.

"Wait, are you serious?"

"Uh, yeah. Why wouldn't I be serious?"

"Maybe because he and Rosalie have been fucking for the past two weeks at least," Jake scoffed, as if he thought I'd been joking.

My stomach plummeted, making me feel ill. How had I not known about this? And what was worse was I had assured Bella earlier that there was no way they were hooking up. But they hadn't told me either, and despite the fact I was only slightly hurt by being kept out of the loop by Emmett, my heart started hurting for Bella.

"No. No fucking way."

Jake looked confused. "Yes fucking way, Edward. Every time they say they're going 'to do laundry,' it's code for getting down." He paused. "I thought you knew?"

"How the fuck would I know?" I growled.

"Dude, you seriously need to chill out. This isn't a big deal. How are you even surprised?"

I was starting to panic, not for me, but for Bella. I needed to find Emmett and Rosalie and tell them to inform Bella before she found out through other means. Running out of the bunk, I realized that I'd totally blown off Jake, but I assumed that he'd harass me about it later. Right now, I had people to find.

I started off in the laundry room, assuming that if they were "doing laundry" they might be there. Unfortunately, it was just that seedy counselor James, smoking a cigarette and hanging out with some of the kitchen staff. "Hey, you haven't seen Emmett, have you?" I asked, trying to

keep the anxiety out of my voice.

"Nah, sorry." He shrugged and went back to flirting with the kitchen staff girls.

I wandered down towards the lake, seeing people by the basketball court. I jogged towards the shadowy figures, hoping that it was Emmett and Rosalie. As I approached, I could see them clearly. Emmett sat on the lowest bleacher beside the court as Rosalie straddled him, her arms wrapped around his neck, her mouth attached to his.

I would have laughed at them being caught out in the open had I not been so utterly pissed. "What the fuck?" I roared.

At the sound of my voice, Rosalie disconnected herself from Emmett and slid into the bleachers next to him. I rolled my eyes. *Right, because I'm going to pretend I didn't see you guys making out.*

"Hey, Edward," she said coolly. "What are you doing down here?"

"Emmett," I said in a clipped tone, ignoring Rosalie, "can I talk to you for a second?"

Emmett looked around nervously before nodding and heading over to meet me by the water fountain on the far side of the court. "Sup?"

I nearly growled at him. "Sup? Really? Is this why you've been in a ridiculously good mood for the past week? You've been fucking an eighteen-year old with a boyfriend under everyone's nose and getting away with it?"

Emmett's jaw dropped and his brow furrowed, leaving him looking as if I'd killed his puppy. "We're not fucking."

"That's not what Jake told me."

Emmett swore under his breath and rubbed his neck with one of his free hands. "We were about to last night when Jake came in and interrupted us... but no, we haven't actually... fucked yet."

I took a deep breath, trying to steady myself. But I was irrationally enraged by his actions. "She has a boyfriend, Emmett!"

"Why do you care?" Rosalie added, having joined our conversation, apparently. "Not that it's *any* of your business, but I just found out that Royce has been screwing my best friend for the past three years, and I'm breaking up with him. I don't want to do it over the phone, but for all intents and purposes, we're broken up. So, what's really bothering you? The fact that I'm eighteen?"

Rosalie had turned defiant quickly, yelling at me loudly, and I couldn't believe that she felt like she had the right to be pissed at me.

"No! I couldn't care less that you're eighteen. I think we *all* know that I want to fuck an eighteen year old, too!" I shouted, surprising us all and rendering us silent.

My jaw snapped shut. I couldn't believe I'd just said that out loud. Despite my intense desire to get Bella alone and naked, I hadn't actually told anyone – or even really admitted it to myself. Apparently my filter was broken.

Rosalie's mouth struggled to hold back her laughter, forming a tight line, but it finally broke through. Her jovial laughter was enough to lighten the mood and crack my abnormally pissy disposition. "Sorry... sorry," she choked out, her chuckling making her voice crack. "So, you're finally admitting that to yourself?"

I ran my hand through my hair and sighed loudly. "Yeah, I guess so."

"Good. Denial wasn't so becoming on you," she quipped. And then I remembered why I'd been so pissed in the first place.

"Yeah, it's not so good on you either. You have to come clean to Bella... like a week ago." Emmett raised his eyebrow in question, urging me to continue. "She was freaking out earlier because she was sure you two were lying to her. And if she finds out from somebody else first, she's going to be really pissed. At both of you. And probably me for knowing before her. I hope you're prepared."

Emmett nodded and groaned, understanding how their failure to tell Bella would be perceived as purposefully cruel to her. "I'll tell her first thing tomorrow." Rosalie nodded in agreement. "Wait, aren't you supposed to be with her right now?" Emmett asked. I glanced at my watch and freaked out again. I was now more than an hour late to meet Bella. Fucking Emmett and Rosalie and their distractions.

"Shit. Gotta run." And with that, I bolted, leaving Rosalie and Emmett to pick up exactly where they left off.

I approached the shack, which sat silently in the darkness. My feet picked up their pace as I got closer, needing to see Bella. I hoped she hadn't bolted. I mean, I was *really* late, and she would have had every right to not wait for me. Damn it.

As the door opened, I was relieved to see Bella still there. She was slumped over one of the computers, deeply entranced in her editing work. She looked so beautiful. The lights were off in the shack, her face aglow with the light from the monitor. I was stunned into silence, only broken by the loud clanking of the wooden door shutting behind me.

At the loud noise, Bella turned and jumped in fright at seeing me there. "Jesus, Edward!" She put her delicate hand up to her throat, attempting to calm her erratic heartbeat. "How long have you been standing there?" she asked, breathless.

"I just got here. I'm sorry... I didn't mean to scare you." The darkness of the room made it come alive with static, and I realized how badly I needed to control myself. Turning around, I flipped the lights on, shattering the unspoken electricity, dulling it with fluorescent overhead lighting.

Bella blinked rapidly, shifting in her seat to clear her vision before training her dark eyes back on me. She looked tired and worried, and I felt like a schmuck for keeping her waiting.

"I'm so sorry I'm late, Bella—"

"It's fine, Edward. Is everything okay?" She looked genuinely concerned, and my arms longed to hold her within their embrace, taking her worries away.

"Yeah, just... something came up." It was a poor excuse of an answer, but I couldn't respond with where I'd actually been. Emmett had insisted that he be the one to tell Bella about her relationship with Rosalie.

"Oh." Her head fell, looking everywhere but at me. "Something came up? Fine, Edward. Whatever." She shook her head, and I could see the hurt in her eyes. I'd hurt Bella. *This is why you're not good enough for her*, the annoying voice in the back of my head came back to taunt me. Tomorrow couldn't come soon enough. The information I'd gain from my lunch date would be invaluable. I knew this. I just wished that I could do something in the meantime to make it better.

"Right, so, did you manage to get some editing done?" I asked, trying to keep it friendly. It must not have been the right thing to say because Bella seemed to see it more as condescending than friendly, and I could see the fire build within her, making her temper lash out.

Bella just rolled her eyes and crossed her arms angrily before pulling up the file on iMovie. "Yes, Edward. I actually managed to finish it all by myself. But thanks for finally joining me tonight, anyway," she snapped before turning away and shutting the TV off. It turned out that hurt Bella gave way to angry Bella fairly quickly, and I had no way to make it stop. As far as she was concerned, I'd blown her off for the night after we'd made specific plans. I'd be pissed, too.

"Sorry."

The silence in the shack was deafening as I replayed my own words in my head. I was acting like a complete asshole, and I knew it.

"Um, I'm going to head to the counselor lounge to make some phone calls, but you can look through the cuts I made and make sure everything looks okay." She was equally as dismissive in her tone as I had been, and I fidgeted restlessly, unable to make it better.

"Sounds good," I replied, but she was already gone, the door slamming shut behind her. Sighing loudly, I pulled at my hair and flipped the lights back off. The darkness of the small room mirrored my own shitty mood. I'd had such high hopes for our night together. It would have been just her and me, alone. And although I wasn't necessarily ready to tell her what my muddled brain had confused as lust and friendship and feelings, I had wanted to get to know her better. Sadly, I slouched into the seat to look at the incredible work Bella had done by herself in my absence.

It was incredible, as I'd predicted. Her comic timing in the editing was close to genius. As I was

mid-laugh at one of our final jokes, the door swung back open, revealing a frazzled and upset-looking Bella.

She was winded, as if she'd run back to the shack at full speed, and I could see a red flush creep up onto her cheeks from her exertion. She put up one finger, signaling for me to give her a second, but I couldn't wait. What the hell had happened?

"Bella, is everything okay?" I took a step towards her, and she took a giant step backwards, pressing up against the shack door, far away from me. Her retraction stung like a razor through my stomach. "What happened?" I asked quietly, approaching slowly, not wanting to upset her even more.

"I... I... I..." She gasped for breaths, and I could see her getting progressively more worked up. "I was... I was..." Finally, I reached her and grabbed for her arm, pulling her towards the chair to sit down. Whatever had just happened had really upset her, and I wasn't sure what to do or how to comfort her without getting too physical. But as I heard her shuddering breath and saw the red rim of her eyes, I threw decency out the window. I was going to comfort her, and there was nothing anyone could do about it.

My arms wrapped around her waist, pulling her flush against my chest. Her forehead rested precariously on my shoulder as her tears leaked from her eyes and splattered onto the white cotton of my t-shirt. Heat spread throughout my groin as her small hands wrapped around my neck, bringing her to nearly sit on my lap. I willed my erection down, needing to focus on comforting Bella.

Instead of forcing her to talk, though, I waited and shushed her, merely enjoying the feel of her in my arms. We sat in silence until the computer monitor dimmed, letting the dark screensaver take over, shrouding us in shadows once again. Bella finally calmed enough to get out her words, tucking her head into my chest. "I saw Emmett and Rosalie," she mumbled.

Fuck.

"I was on my way to the counselor lounge, and I saw them... against the side of the dance studio." Her words were barely whispered, heavy with her breath. "Why—"

I couldn't stand to hear her sounding so upset. Something in my gut compelled me to protect her, to take her in and comfort her. Without provocation, my head tilted down, and my lips sought out her forehead. My arms continued to hold her in place, trailing small lines up and down her back. She let out a shaky breath, releasing her tense muscles into a state of relaxation.

She pulled back, and I couldn't help but to stare into her eyes. I let one of my hands move to her wet cheek, and I gently pushed the tear away. Blood pooled beneath my fingertips, and I smiled knowing that I had this kind of effect on her. My lips unconsciously moved towards hers, needing to feel their softness beneath mine. But I should have known that nothing about tonight was going to go as I'd planned.

~Seth~

My night had gone to shit pretty quickly. I'd planned to go out with Jake and Claire and some of the girls who worked at swim, but Jake had made it pretty clear that if I accompanied him, he wouldn't be responsible for "entertaining me," as he'd put it. *Fucker*. Not that I could blame him, though. If Bella ever agreed to go out with me anywhere, I wouldn't be paying any attention to Jake either.

Only minutely annoyed, I decided to head towards the lake. I remembered that I'd left my iPod down by the swim docks this morning, and I wasn't in the mood to wake up early and retrieve it. Plus, as I'd found out in Maine, the weather was nothing if not unpredictable and I didn't want it to get ruined should it happen to rain.

As I walked past the basketball courts, I saw Rosalie and Emmett with Edward. They sounded as if they were arguing about something, and I did my best not to eavesdrop. However, when I heard Edward's amused voice, loud and clear, "... fucking an eighteen year old with a boyfriend under everyone's nose and getting away with it..." I paused. From what I had overheard, it was clear that Rosalie and Emmett were together. Although what Edward had to say about that, I wasn't completely sure. Suddenly, images of lurid threesomes entered my brain. Was Edward into Rosalie, too? Shaking off those thoughts, I decided to pick up my pace so as not to overhear an incredibly personal conversation. That just wasn't polite.

I got to the lake and was immediately put at ease by the dark stillness. I could vaguely hear Edward, Emmett, and Rosalie's voices, but they were pretty muffled, so I didn't feel too bad. This particular evening, the air was warmer than usual, and I decided to spend a few minutes with my feet dangling into the placid water and figure out what the hell I should do with the rest of my night.

Since hanging out with Jake wasn't a viable option, and Edward, Rosalie, and Emmett were clearly up to something I shouldn't be privy to, I decided to head towards the shack. I'd stored some beer in the mini-fridge there, and I could sit and watch a movie uninterrupted, at least.

A beer and a movie... alone. What thrilling evening plans, Seth.

My inner voice was mocking me, but I couldn't help but agree with him. My evening plans had been pretty lame for the past few weeks. I'd asked out Bella, but so far we hadn't been able to coordinate our schedules. I had been serious, though, in what I'd said to Jake. *Slow and steady does win the race*, and I wanted to court Bella slowly. She was an absolute spitfire – tons of personality and attitude – but she was incredibly sweet, too. She was a mystery that I longed to figure out... if she'd only let me.

I sighed, and it cut through the silence, echoing off the lake. I guessed Rosalie, Emmett, and Edward had either made up or gone to make out somewhere else because the basketball court was now completely empty. Quickly, I wandered back to my bunk to throw my iPod onto my bed before grabbing my *Harry Potter And The Prisoner of Azkaban* DVD (if I was going to be watching it alone, I figured I should watch one I didn't want other people to know I loved, right?).

Halfway to the shack, though, I caught sight of Bella. She looked incredibly upset, as if she were about to cry. Her feet skidded down the hill as she walked quickly in the direction of the shack.

My heart clenched, hoping that she was looking for me, but I knew that was fairly unlikely. After all, as far as she knew, I had plans to go out with Jake tonight. Maybe she was going to the shack to be alone, though. She *did* know the code.

Seizing the opportunity to have alone time with her and possibly comfort her, I picked up my own pace. I opened the door to the shack merely a minute after her, and my heart dropped at what I saw. The arm that still gripped my thoroughly embarrassing DVD hung low by my side as I inhaled sharply and snapped on the overhead lighting. The loose threads and inexplicable excuses finally came together to show me the piece I'd been missing.

In two chairs, facing one another closely, were Bella and Edward. One of his arms was around her shoulders and the other one gripped precariously low on her waist. Bella looked at Edward with her red-rimmed eyes, tears spilling onto her cheeks gently. Edward's thumb stroked the side of Bella's waist, but he was looking at her so intently, I doubted if he even realized he was doing so. Their lips were millimeters away from meeting, making my heart sink into my stomach, when the shack door slammed behind me.

Bella pulled back, frightened, her eyes wild and blinking under the harsh glare of the lights. She looked relieved when she saw me and relaxed back into Edward's arm, which was still resting atop her shoulders. "S-Seth? Wh-what are you d-doing here?" she whimpered. I had no idea what had made her so upset, but I longed to take her pain away. I immediately crossed the room to kneel beside her and placed a hopefully comforting hand on her knee.

"Bella, are you okay?"

I didn't look away from Bella's glazed eyes, but I could hear Edward swear under his breath before shifting to move closer to her.

Are we going to play this game now? Really, Cullen? The girl is upset. Save it for later.

Plus, I could easily tell that there was no competition. Edward would win hands down. Sadly, I was okay with that. I just needed to make sure that Bella was fine first, then I'd leave them to their...

I couldn't think it yet, so I turned back to Bella with concerned eyes. "Bella?"

"Ro-Rosalie and E-Emmett... why w-wouldn't they t-tell me?"

I nodded in understanding.

"So, Edward told you?" I asked, doing my best to soothe her. Unfortunately, my words had the adverse reaction, and she stiffened like a board before shooting out of her seat, nearly knocking me onto my ass. "Bella, wh—"

"Bella." This time, it was Edward who shot up, reaching a hand out to her. She recoiled quickly, and I was thoroughly confused as Bella's face contorted into one of pain before she let out a heaving sob.

"You knew?"

"Bella, no-" Edward's brow furrowed as she continued to step away from him and towards me.

"You knew and you didn't say anything?" Her voice sounded shy and afraid. I'd never heard Bella sound so small before, and it unnerved me completely. Edward had no idea of the power he held over her.

"Bella, it wasn't like that," he argued. Edward had been known to have a slight temper, and I could see and hear his frustration rising every second.

I stood still, observing the lovers' quarrel. I nearly laughed, seeing as how neither had any inclination that they were lovers, but my laughter died as I felt Bella reach for my hand, intertwining her small fingers with mine. Her presence warmed my body completely.

Edward's eyes darkened as they flicked to our newly intertwined hands. "Please let me explain, Bella," he nearly growled. "It wasn't my secret to t-"

"Please leave, Edward." Bella's tone was now stoic, but I could feel her increase the pressure on my hand, a way to dispel some of her excess frustration, probably. "You can stand me up and blow me off, but please don't lie to me on top of that." She enunciated her words with fervor, each sharp consonant cutting into Edward's gut, marked by his flinching.

His eyes looked downcast and downtrodden before exhaustion wiped across his face. "I don't even know why I bother," he mumbled. "Night."

As the door rattled in his disparaged wake, Bella sank to the floor, propping herself against the wall as she finally let out her tears. I felt the need to protect her, entertain her, and make it all better. Somehow, though, I knew that I wasn't the person she wanted for that job.

"So, you and Cullen, huh?"

Her head turned so fast towards me that she looked like the little girl from the *Exorcist*, and I couldn't help but smile at the bewildered expression on her face. I slid down beside her and let my arm wrap around her shaking shoulders, which jumped with each one of her rattled breaths.

"N-no," she scoffed, regaining her semblance of calm.

"I thought we already established that it's not nice to lie, Bella." I laughed as she scowled at me, frustration taking over her features. "Okay, we don't have to joke about it yet."

I sat there, rubbing small circles onto the back of her shoulder as she evened out her breathing. She seemed conflicted, and I didn't want her to feel like she had to bare her soul to me, only that I was available as a friend. I'd always want more, I knew that on some level, but if she needed someone to vent to, I'd be more than happy to be that person, too.

Bella groaned before finally relaxing into my touch, leaning her head onto my shoulder. I noticed that in this position, there was no way I could look into her eyes. "You must think I'm such an

idiot."

"I promise I don't. Now, are you going to tell me what led to the blowout I just witnessed, or can we drink my beer stash and watch a movie?" Bella eyes widened as I pulled out my *Harry Potter* DVD. I handed it to her and pushed myself up, reaching low into the mini-fridge for two Coors.

Bella's tears were gone, replaced by a confused and almost disgusted face. "I don't drink Coors."

I laughed and placed the beers down on the counter. "That's fine. They were both for me anyway." I winked and helped her off the ground, enjoying the chance to have her in my arms. I tightened my grip on her, giving her my best soothing hug, and my heart rejoiced when I saw a beautiful smile light up her face. "There's some of Edward's girly beer in there if you want it."

She flinched at his name, and I silently cursed myself for being so stupid. Whatever had happened had *just* happened, and her wounds were too raw for me to throw his name around so haphazardly. I needed to be more courteous of her feelings.

Drawing in another shaky breath, Bella leaned over, exposing her beautiful behind to me. Flustered, I looked down at the ground until she stood up straight again and cracked open her Sparks. I shuddered. I didn't know how Edward drank that crap. It was orange beer—an alcoholic energy drink. But it would probably do Bella some good right about now.

She chugged it in three long sips before grabbing another one and slouching into the chair in front of the biggest monitor. I slid the DVD into the computer, and I smiled as she relaxed to watch the film. I was even happier that she wasn't commenting on it, seeing as how we were both film kids, and she could have mocked me mercilessly.

We watched the first thirty minutes of the film in peace. Every so often, I'd catch Bella looking like she was deep in thought and sniffing slightly, but other than that, she seemed to have calmed down greatly.

"The fourth one's my favorite," she admitted quietly in a particularly tense spot.

"It would be," I replied cheekily. I noticed that Bella responded well to snark, so I had to up my game to be considered one of her friends.

Her body shifted in her seat to face me. "Why did you say it like that?"

"You seem like you'd be a Cedric fan. It's the light, messy hair, right?"

Her entire face dropped, and for a second I thought that Bella might smack me across the face. Luckily, she simply sighed and leaned in closer to me.

"Am I that obvious? Does he know?"

Her comment sent my thoughts reeling. She was admitting this to me, and I needed to be supportive. "You're not that obvious, Bella. Honest. I think he has no clue, which may be part of the problem... how long have you liked him?"

Bella leaned even closer, and I struggled to keep my focus and not stare at her plump lips as she continued to talk. "Since I was thirteen."

"Wow. That's a really long time. And he has no clue?" She shook her head, letting the ends of her hair whip back and forth into the air.

"You have his attention, Bella. Why not just tell him you like him?"

"No!" she yelled, her eyes scared. "Please don't tell him, Seth! Please!" She was working herself up again, and I still didn't know what had upset her in the first place.

"Why not?" She didn't say anything, simply rolled her eyes in defiance. "Bella, I'm not going to say anything. I promise. I just want to help you out, that's all."

Her eyes softened, and she lowered her voice to only a shaky whisper as she questioned me. "Why?"

"I like you... a lot, Bella." She looked shocked, although I couldn't imagine that she didn't know I was interested. I mean, I had asked her to go out twice already. She had to know. She looked as if she were going to respond, so I stopped her. "I like you, yes, but I'm your friend, too. And I think friends should be there for one another. You were upset tonight, and this is me trying to be a supportive friend... Cedric Diggory and beer helps a little, but I have a feeling that venting will help the most."

The most stunning expression took over Bella's face before she burst into tears again. I had no idea what to do. I sat awkwardly patting her back until she calmed down again. Her cheeks were splotchy and she looked a huge mess, but I still thought she was beautiful.

"Th-thank you, S-seth."

"You're welcome?" I said, feeling perplexed. I hadn't said anything that monumental, but apparently Bella felt differently. "So, did you want to vent?"

"I don't think I need to anymore, actually. You're a great friend, Seth. Really. Thank you."

"Just throwing this out there, but if you wanted any help eventually telling him, I'll be there for moral support if you want. Or if you want to tease him 'til he's begging for you, I'm good with that, too." She looked surprised when I winked, and she turned back to the television to watch the rest of the movie in silence, looking pensive and quietly sipping her energy beer. I would have given anything to know the thoughts running through her brain. Had I just offered myself up as Bella's plaything to torture Edward with? I believed I had.

When the movie was over, she yawned and said something about needing to get to bed. It was then that I realized I could spend more time with Bella tomorrow. "Hey, what are your plans for tomorrow?"

"Um, work?"

"We have the day off tomorrow. All the art shops do."

She looked genuinely surprised, as if it had completely slipped her mind. Our first day off and she had no plans. How lucky was I tonight? "Oh, nothing, I guess."

"Want to go to Portland with me?" I asked. "Jake said I could take his truck."

Bella's returning smile set my body on fire. "That sounds perfect, Seth." She paused in the doorway before turning back. "You said all of the art shops have tomorrow off?" Her eyes were sparkling, and I could see where this one was going. Oh well, it was a good reminder that she didn't want to be with me, anyway. "Do you think I should invite Edward to go with us?"

I forced a weak smile and hugged her again. "Absolutely. Baby steps, right?"

She nodded excitedly and headed off, leaving me to wonder how I'd gotten myself into this situation and if I was actually okay with being relegated to Bella's "friend zone." Seeing the happy smile on her face, I decided that I was. I would be content to be her friend.

~Edward~

I had royally fucked up. And I hated Seth. At least, I was fairly sure I hated him...

Bella had been so mad, and I couldn't stop seeing her furious expression in my mind. I wish I could have at least explained that I hadn't lied to her, but she hadn't even let me get that far.

Frustrated, I continued to lie on my bed and stare at the ceiling. My iPod was firmly placed in my ears as I listened to my emo indie music, as Bella had called it earlier. My proverbial tears were coming out of my speakers through the likes of Jeff Buckley, Death Cab for Cutie, and Joseph Arthur. Yeah, I was an emo indie whore, and I was okay with it. If I couldn't cry, I could at least listen to some skinny white whiny boys, singing their depression away.

In the midst of "The Honey and the Moon," I heard a soft knock on the door. I assumed it was Emmett coming to apologize again, so I mumbled a soft, "Come in," before closing my eyes and returning to my sad, sad music.

"Edward?" Her small voice could still be heard over my speakers, causing my eyes to shoot straight open. I rolled over and scrambled to sit up, wondering what the hell she was doing in my room at God knows what time of night (not that I was going to fight it).

"Bella?" She looked at me fiercely, clearly still pissed, and I scrambled to apologize. "Bella, I'm so sorry about before. I wasn't lying to you, I promise. I ran into Em and Rose and yelled-"

"Edward, it's fine."

"No, it's not. You *should* be yelling at me." I was adamant, and she looked taken aback.

"It's really fine, I promise. I overreacted because I was angry with Emmett, not you. I should be

the one to apologize." She smiled warmly, like she *wanted* me, and I could feel my dick start to harden in my pants. It was clearly thrilled by that prospect. "I actually wanted to know what your plans for our day off were tomorrow? 'Cause I thought maybe you could come out with me."

She wanted me to go out with her, and I had to turn her down... and again, I couldn't tell her why. I didn't think she'd respond well to, "Sorry, Bella, I can't go out with you because I need advice from the wisest female I know on how to seduce you without scaring you away." *Yeah... not so much.*

"I can't, actually." Her face fell, and I felt like a douche bag all over again. What was with today, today? "I already have lunch plans," I groaned sadly, but then the often elusive genius inside me roared to life. "But I don't have anything planned for the evening, if you wanted to go out?"

I wrung my hands, nervously anticipating her answer. She'd turned me into a little school boy instead of the fairly confident and overly cocky ass I usually was. And I was starting to think that I was okay with it.

"Out?" she squeaked. "Like... just with you?"

Her face flushed, and I couldn't believe that I'd been so forward again. I'd completely scared her off.

"Hey, what's—" Emmett bound into the room but stopped when he saw Bella's menacing face. "LB, what are you—"

She whipped around towards him, her eyes narrowing into mean slits. Gone was the bashful and flirtatious Bella of yore, replaced by angry, ready-to-break-some-face Bella. "I can't be here with you right now. You need to wait your turn to speak to Edward." Her chest rose and fell with her heavy breath, keeping her volume in check as she spoke in a condescending tone to the giant beside her.

"What did I do?" Emmett could be such a fucking idiot sometimes. I tried to warn him, but his eyes were focused solely on Bella—not that I could blame him.

"What did you do?" she seethed. "What did you do? I'll give you one hint... starts with an 'R,' ends with a 'my best friend has been fucking my other best friend behind my back for weeks and is a complete asswipe!'"

Emmett's jaw unhinged, opening and closing as he struggled for the comeback that I knew he didn't have. "Bella, I'm—"

She frowned and turned back to me, and I was grateful that she hadn't decided to turn against me for longer tonight. God knew I deserved it. "Clearly this one doesn't have anything to say for himself," she scoffed. "But Edward?" My ears perked up, giving their full attention to the tiny girl in front of us. "I'd love to go out tomorrow night... if the offer still stands."

I nodded dumbly, unable to form words at the current moment, so taken aback by the way

she'd controlled the situation. Bella was incredible, indeed. I watched her sneer at Emmett as she sauntered past us, slamming the door behind her. I wanted to slam into her from behind, but... that was something completely different.

"Dude, you have a date with Bella tomorrow night? What are you going to do?" Emmett asked, drawing me out of my less-than-appropriate fantasies.

"I-" Fuck. I had inadvertently asked Bella out on a date with nothing planned. And I had no idea what to do.

Emmett just burst out laughing at my lost expression. "Oh, man, you should see your face right now."

Shit. Thank God I'd be receiving some female guidance tomorrow. If there was one person who'd be able to help me in this time of romantic tumult, it'd be her.

Chapter 12 Murky Relations

~Bella~

Last night had been one of the most emotionally draining of my entire life. First, I'd waited patiently for Edward to show up to our shack date for nearly an hour and a half. Then, when he'd finally shown up, it seemed as if he could have cared less that he'd essentially snubbed me for something that had "come up." Yes, *that* was the brilliant excuse he'd used. I could feel my temper raging under the surface, just waiting to spontaneously combust.

However, when I'd combusted, it was only because I'd found the two people I loved and trusted most betraying me. Seeing Rosalie and Emmett's bodies (and tongues) intertwined as they pressed up against the side of the dance studio had hit my stomach like a ton of bricks. I wasn't even sure *why* I was so upset. Maybe it was the fact that they'd both lied to me about it, or maybe it was the fact that I'd already been feeling ditched.

Blindly, I'd run back to the shack, seeking Edward's solace, despite the fact that I was still a little angry with him. And then, to find out that he too had been lying to me... well, it had been more than my fragile ego could take. How many times did a person have to be beaten before they broke completely?

Seth, to be frank, had been, a Godsend. He'd provided me with booze, Harry Potter, and a shoulder to cry on. I knew I should have been embarrassed that he knew I was crushing on Edward, but if he was offering to help me seduce Edward, then who was I to fault him for knowing in the first place?

Having slept in past breakfast, I was just getting ready for the day when my campers arrived back at the cabin. They all admired my non-uniform clothes, a pale blue sundress, perfect for

the mid-summer heat. I told them to be good and behave while I was gone and headed straight towards the parking lot to meet Seth at Jake's truck.

I was surprised to see Jasper, Alice, and Edward waiting by the truck as well. Jasper's arm was around Alice's shoulders, and she leaned into him at the perfect place, fitting into his side as if she were made for him. They were deep in conversation as I approached, and I couldn't help but be innately curious as to what they were discussing with such serious faces.

"Morning!" I called out from a few feet away. Edward, whose back had been facing me, spun around quickly, stumbling over his words as he hopped into the driver's side of Jake's truck.

I'd thought that Edward had other plans today, but apparently we were all going together. Seeing my confused face, Jasper jumped in, wrapping his other arm around my bare shoulders.

"We're taking *my* car to Portland, since apparently Jake's a dumbass and double-booked his truck for today," Jasper explained as Edward waved awkwardly out the window and sped out of the driveway, the thick acoustic guitar sounds of Wilco trailing in his wake.

"Is he going to be okay?" I was honestly curious. I'd never seen Edward so frenetic in his actions before. It was as if Flustered Edward had taken some amphetamines this morning, causing him to act even more spastic and awkward than usual.

Alice flicked her blue eyes to Jasper before sneaking out from under his arm to stand in front of me, hands on her hips, looking as sassy as ever. "Oh, he'll be *perfect*. You, on the other hand, might not survive today." Her tone was sharp and devious, and I wondered what the hell she was up to now. "I have plans for us today, LB, and you're going to accept them. Plus, Rosalie would kill me if I didn't take you for another bikini wax today."

I could feel Jasper flinch at her words, and he shook his head slowly. "Aw, Alice, I don't need to hear that! I don't want to know what y'all are doing with your waxing..." He trailed off and shuddered, a fierce blush pooling in his cheeks and the tips of his ears.

Alice looked visibly put out. Her eyes drooped and her lip jutted out, like an infant on the brink of crying. "You don't?" Jasper shook his head, disgust still the prevalent expression on his face. Alice smiled devilishly as she looked through her purse for a bobby pin. She pushed it open with her tooth before sliding it into place in her hair, creating a sort of poof away from her face. "That's a shame," she said, completely distracted.

The blood rushed out of Jasper's face at Alice's insinuation, and I couldn't control the fit of giggles their conversation left me in. They were both so adorkably delightful as a couple, and I thoroughly regretted harboring any ill feelings towards their inevitable union.

"I... uh... yuh... cou... wh... what now?" Although seeing Jasper flustered was a common occurrence, my laughter would not cease. My pent-up frustration ebbed and flowed through my laughter, giving me the release of emotions I definitely needed.

"What are we all laughing at?" a jovial Seth asked, jogging up to our spot in the parking lot.

"Oh, we were just discussing Jasper and Alice's sex life," I replied with a noncommittal shrug. I heard Jasper gasp and choke at the same time that I saw Alice's smile widen. Maybe by the end of this summer, Jasper would finally be accustomed to our brazen discourse. Seeing his still-pallid face, I decided that he probably wouldn't. *But I'm going to have a stellar time trying.*

Shrugging back, Seth just smiled and slid into the backseat. I slid in after him, giving Alice the front. I had high hopes that she'd be able to render Jasper tongue-tied the entire trip. Unfortunately, he was a step ahead of us and already had his music picked out for the drive. I couldn't begrudge him, either, since I spent the forty-five minute drive singing along with the classic rock tunes.

"So, where to first?" Seth asked, kicking a pebble along the street. Portland was beautiful. I'd never been, so I'd had no clue what to expect, but I immediately fell in love with the narrow European-looking cobblestone streets and quaint shops.

Before anyone could answer, Alice nearly pulled my arm out of its socket and was dragging me into the closest spa she could find.

As we sat, waiting for the Russian receptionist to call our names, Alice sat quietly. We hadn't talked in days, and I couldn't understand what she was waiting for. She should have been gushing about Jasper by now, but she was keeping quiet. *Too quiet.*

"Okay, Al. Let's have it." She looked at me, her eyes wide in shock. "Tell me all about Jasper and how fantastic the sex is?" I asked it as a question, and as I did, her eyes widened more, confusing me with her surprised expression. "Alice?"

She shook her head, shaking out whatever thoughts had surprised her so thoroughly, and leaned in to whisper, "We haven't had sex! We've barely kissed!" Now it was *my* turn to look shocked.

"Wait, what?"

Alice looked indignant as she continued, smoothing the short strands of stray black hair behind her ears. "He's a gentleman."

My face contorted as I examined the clearly visible bruise on the right side of her clavicle. "Sure he is." I poked her neck, and she winced and whimpered in pain.

"Jesus, LB! He is! This—" she moved her shirt collar to show me the rest of her dark bruise "—is from my curling iron."

"Curling iron? Your hair is barely long enough to run your fingers through it, much less curl."

If Alice could have bared her teeth and growled, she would have done it in that moment. A fire flashed through her eyes, and I was suddenly afraid of my best friend. "I know, *Bella*." She emphasized the syllables of my name, something that she only did when I was in severe trouble. "Hence, the burn."

We sat, letting the soft hum of Enya's voice lull us into silence, but I could still feel the frustration rolling off her in waves.

"It's just... is there something wrong with me?"

My eyes slid over to the small girl next to me, and I was inordinately shocked to see her looking less than confident. In fact, she looked downright insecure. "What? Al, are you serious? You're perfect. What happened?"

"It was... sweet," she said with distaste. "He took me out to dinner, where we talked about everything, and it was just great. And then we went to a movie and he held my hand, and then he drove me home and kissed me once. And now he just wants to talk." She huffed and crossed her arms angrily, and I could see the frustration in her eyes — her sexual frustration. I finally got it. *Huh. I guess Jasper isn't giving it up yet.*

"So this bikini wax is really for you, then... not for me."

"Oh, no, it's for you. It's definitely for you. Having Jasper know that I'm getting one was just an added bonus. I hope he's hard for days, thinking about my bare, swollen pu—" She started speaking as if she were narrating a steamy harlequin novel, and I forced my hand over her mouth.

"Alice!" She licked the palm of my hand, and I retracted it quickly, wiping it off on the chair next to me. "That's nasty."

"So, now that I've spilled about Jasper, can you spill about Edward? Or Seth? I mean, really, LB, what the hell has been going on? I've never seen Edward so serious about anything as this morning, it was kind of freaking me out."

"I—" I was about to launch into a full-on rant about the trials and tribulations of the past few days when the receptionist called out my name, pulling me towards the scary, paper-covered bed.

Luckily, the wax was over quickly. I gritted my teeth through it, trying not to focus on the fact that a random woman was staring up my cooch. She led me out towards the door, where Alice was already waiting for me, despite the fact that I'd been called in first.

As we were walking out of the store, I was about to ask Alice what she'd meant by her earlier comment when I saw Edward walking down the street. I'd had no idea his plans were in Portland, too. I stiffened, not prepared to see him after I could feel every inch of my bare pussy — not to mention the wetness that was definitely accumulating there. My feet stopped without conscious thought, freezing me where I stood.

"Bella?" Alice followed my gaze, and a look of shock spread across her face.

"What's he doing here? I thought..." She trailed off, looking on with curiosity as a girl appeared from around the corner and ran into his waiting arms, wrapping her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck. He hugged back with equal fervor, leaning his cheek to brush against

hers, and I suddenly didn't want to look anymore. "Whoa," Alice muttered under her breath. "She's..."

The girl was beautiful. She was one who'd probably had constant boyfriends since the age of twelve and never had to spend a Friday night at home. She was gorgeous, stunning, and a whole slew of other adjectives that I was too intimidated to think about right now. Her long strawberry blonde hair hung straight nearly halfway down her back, curling up at the ends, and I could see her emerald eyes sparkling from across the street.

As she slid down to a standing position, keeping her hands firmly clasped within his to speak with him, my eyes finally moved away from her face and trailed down her lean body. A white wife beater and black shorts were topped off by none other than a pair of knee-high black chucks. I almost vomited in my mouth, wondering if Edward's throwaway comment years ago about girls wearing them being hot was based on this inhumanly attractive girl.

They embraced once more before a megawatt smile lit up her face and she dragged his hand into a close-by Chinese restaurant.

"... Bella? Bella!" Alice's yelling finally penetrated through my downward spiral, imagining all the dirty things Edward and his mystery lady were off to do. "Bella!" She pushed my shoulder, and I snapped out of it.

"Sorry." My stomach was churning, and I couldn't remember ever feeling this jealous in my entire life, not even when I'd known exactly which girls Edward had been hooking up with. This one felt different—more intimate and familiar. PDA ahoy with those two, I was sure. Just as they disappeared into the restaurant, Seth and Jasper reappeared with smiles on their faces.

"Lunch?" Seth asked, his chin nodding towards the restaurant Edward and his "friend" had just gone into.

Jasper and Alice agreed, but I had no desire to sit a few tables away from the lovebirds and watch on in despair. "I'm kind of in the mood for pizza, actually."

Jasper cocked his head towards me, knowing that Chinese was my absolute favorite and curious as to why I would turn it down — especially because we never ate it camp. In fact, I'd been complaining for the past three weeks that I'd been missing Chinese food.

Seth and Alice agreed again without any thought, but Jasper continued to stare me down. "Later," I mouthed. He nodded in acceptance, and I was relieved. At least this way, I'd have time to think things over. Yes, I definitely needed time.

~Edward~

I got to Portland an hour before the time I needed to be there. So, instead of walking around town like a normal person, I sat in Jake's car and let my mind wander to the image of Bella from this morning. She'd looked ethereal in her light blue dress, her hair wild and whipping around her cheeks in the morning sunlight. I'd needed to get away from her as quickly as possible before I said something truly inappropriate. Plus, I still had no idea what to do about our date

tonight. My lust for Bella was turning me into quite the idiot.

I was so lost in my thoughts of seducing Bella that when my phone beeped with a new text message alert, I was genuinely shocked to see that I was now late for lunch.

Just parked. U better b ready to spill, Teddy! K luv u, bye. – T

I groaned at the text. It finally clicked that I'd need to spill my proverbial guts about this Bella situation, and my head still didn't feel screwed on straight about the whole thing.

I picked up the pace as I strolled out of the car and towards the Chinese restaurant I wanted to go to. I'd had a craving for some good kung pao chicken for weeks now. Long Lake's version of Chinese food was fried chicken with a melted peanut butter sauce — not up to my usual standards.

I caught sight of her rounding the corner and smiled, opening my arms for her. She bounded down the street and jumped into my hold, wrapping her legs around my waist, her arms around my neck, and giggling, "T-t-t-teddy!" at a ridiculously high pitch.

God, she could be so ridiculous sometimes.

I hugged her back, matching her overzealous enthusiasm with a too-tight hug and a goofy grin. She released her hold on me and gained her footing on the ground as I responded with the apt, "T-t-t-tanya!"

My response made her grin even wider, and she nearly skipped as she interlocked her hands with mine and pulled us into the Chinese restaurant. The hostess, a little black-haired girl that reminded me oddly of Alice, glanced at our intertwined hands and visibly pouted. I could have laughed at the dejected tone in her voice as she mumbled, "This way, please." I wanted to let go of Tanya's hand to give the hostess at least a little hope, but I had no interest in her anyway, so I figured it was pretty much pointless. Although I had no idea how anyone could construe the closeness of Tanya and me as romantic. That would be disgusting.

Cue incest jokes.

The hostess sighed once again, handing us our menus and claiming that our server would be right out. But before she could turn and walk away, Tanya reached out her hand to grab her wrist. She smiled, showing off her impeccably (and naturally) straight white teeth and began in a sing-song tone as her thumb moved lightly over the girl's pale wrist. "Don't frown so much, hun. You're far too pretty for that." The hostess blushed and smiled before ducking her head and scurrying away.

I let out a short, barking laugh. "Since when are you into girls, Tan?"

"Since never." She took a black rubber band from her around her wrist and twirled her long hair up into a messy bun, keeping the "restaurant smell" out of her hair, as she always did when we went out to eat. "But that poor thing looked so sad that we were on a date, and I couldn't tell if she was into me or you, so..."

I snorted at Tanya's unflappable ability to make anyone feel better about themselves. Such a giver — a giver of sexual confidence.

Right, which is why you came to see her in the first place.

"So, what's the sitch, Teddy? Don't tell me I hauled ass two hours from New Hampshire just to look at your pretty punum?" She reached over the table and squeezed my cheeks. "Not that it isn't fab to see you, 'cause it is, but—"

"But you want to know why I called you for an emergency get together?" I laughed and pushed air into my cheeks, making them blow up like a chipmunk storing acorns for winter, forcing her hands off my face.

Tanya's eyes widened, and she leaned closer, lowering her voice. "It's an emergency?"

A groan made its way through my mouth before I could suppress it. Closing my eyes, I nodded slowly and began to speak, fearing her reaction. "I want to bone one of my campers." Tanya's gasp was so loud that the entirety of the restaurant went silent. I went over my words and snapped my eyes open, realizing my blunder. "Ex-camper," I stuttered. "She's an ex-camper, I mean. Fuck."

The exertion of admitting my attraction to Bella to someone outside of Jasper, who had apparently known without a confession, caused me to break into a mild sweat and slump over the table, needing to rest my forehead on the cool wood.

"Well, that's the first problem," Tanya quipped. I raised my head and narrowed my eyes at her, but she wasn't fazed. She looked back at me expectantly, obviously wanting me to continue my story. My groan gained volume, and I sank back down to the table, hiding my face away from the one person in the entire world who could read it best. "Oh, come on, Edward. Be a big boy and tell me what's going on. It's not nice to leave a girl hanging, you know. Been there, no fun. I'm like, can't you fucking follow through, you pansy?"

"Gross, Tan. I don't need to think about my sister *hanging on*—"

"Well, I don't need to think about my doofus little brother wanting to bone a minor, but here we are." God, my sister could be snarky as fuck, and I hated it when it wasn't convenient for me. Then again, I had been the one to call her for her sexual expertise, and she was my best friend in the entire world, so it was really my own fault that I wasn't hearing what I wanted. I did feel the need to clarify, though. "She's not a minor..."

I was so lost in thought that I didn't even hear our server approach. However, when I came to, he was staring at both of us, poised to take our orders.

"Should I give you two a few more—" the server began, but Tanya quickly interjected, not even bothering to look his way. It was a shame, really, seeing the indecent way he was drooling all over her, but she was too intent on figuring out the rest of my story to be bothered with this latest cad.

"We'll have one order of veggie spring rolls, kung pao chicken, and mushu pork with extra pancakes and plum sauce. Oh, and one white rice and one brown," she added as an afterthought.

The server stood there for an extra second, in awe of Tanya, until he finally scurried away to put our order in. I couldn't blame him; she was stunning and she had no clue. I had never met anyone as oblivious to their natural charm as Tanya in my entire life. She drew people in, guys and girls alike, but she just claimed that they were friendly.

I was constantly in awe of my sister, as well. Only a year older than me, Tanya and I had spent nearly every waking and sleeping moment of our lives together. In fact, as an infant, my parents had thought it'd be super awesome to put us in the same crib together—saving money and all that good stuff. It wasn't so awesome when they realized that Tanya was a sleep kicker, causing me to wake up crying every hour, on the hour. And she'd been abusing me ever since.

That said, she was also my best friend, and I knew that she would be there for me without fail when I needed her, which was why she'd driven the two hours from Concord, New Hampshire to come listen to my sad, sad tale. I had nothing but love, admiration, and respect for her, but she definitely knew how to be a pain in my ass.

"From the beginning, Teddy. And don't leave out any gory details, please."

"Do you remember my old camper, LB?" Saying LB felt unfamiliarly childish on my tongue, and it suddenly became clear why Bella had been so adamant about getting rid of her nickname. To me, LB and Bella were two very different people.

Tanya's green eyes widened in recognition. "LB? Your pride and joy, child protégé, LB?"

"She goes by Bella now, but yes."

"You want to bone her." Conflicting and simultaneous guttural responses of an erection and nausea spread over my body as I nodded hesitantly. "Why are you making that face, Teddy? You look like I just kicked your video camera."

"She's... young," I began.

"How young is *young*?" She emphasized the word, using the same guilty tone of voice I'd just used.

"Eighteen."

Tanya looked thoughtful and sipped her glass of water. Before she could continue questioning me, though, a smile appeared on her face as our copious amounts of food were brought to the table. She made my plate for me, scooping the perfect amount of brown rice and kung pao on it. I wanted to scold her for babying me, but the truth was, she'd always taken care of me like this, and I hadn't realized how much I'd missed it.

"What does she look like? Did you bring me a picture?" I quirked my eyebrow at the ridiculousness of her statement. It absolutely didn't deserve a response. "Kidding, Teddy. Give me a description." As she began shoveling her intricately made mu shu pancake into her mouth, I launched into a description of Bella.

"She's gorgeous, Tan. But not in that obvious kind of way, you know? She's, I don't know, about five-two, really petite, but with a noticeable rack. And she knows it, too, which she doesn't hesitate to flaunt, but in a tasteful way, not a slutty way. And she's got this long brown hair and these brown eyes that make you want to melt—"

Suddenly, Tanya started coughing and choking from her side of the table, stopping my epic Bella rant. She slapped a hand hard onto the wood as she chugged her glass of water.

"Tanya, are you okay?" I noted her watering eyes as she finally started breathing normally again.

"Jesus, Teddy," she wheezed, the final pieces of rice from her self-made Chinese burrito dislodging themselves from her lungs. "You're giving me a heart attack here with how dense you are."

"What?" It was like she was speaking in riddles. She was the basilisk, but I did not speak Parseltongue.

"Are you seriously this much of a 'tard?" I looked at her blankly, and my resounding growl took me by surprise. "Teddy, you don't want to bone her." She shook her head, looking incredibly disappointed in me, which piqued my frustration.

"I'm one hundred percent positive that I do, actually." She rolled her eyes and waved me off, taking another large sip of her water.

"You're such a moron, you know that? You don't *just* want to bone her. You *like* her." She paused for dramatic effect before continuing to talk to me like the retard that I was. "You have *feelings* for her, Edward."

I let her words sink through my skull, giving them time to marinate. I had feelings for Bella? I liked her?

I knew I lusted for Bella, that wasn't a question. My cock had without a doubt clued me in to my affections for her body, but... did I have feelings for her? I wouldn't even begin to know what that meant.

"No, I don't. She's just a friend. And I'm confused because I want to sleep with her."

"Are you shitting me right now? You used the words 'eyes that make you want to melt,' and then 'tasteful' to describe her tits! Trust me, boo, you want *more* than to sleep with her. You want a relationship with her. That's why you haven't yet, obviously. Since when have you ever felt guilty about wanting to sleep with a friend? Remember that little blonde one you were telling me about? I believe you said that she was 'tight in all the right places.' God, you're such an imbecile sometimes. I want to wring your neck. This poor girl!"

As Tanya continued to berate me, my mind started flying. I liked Bella. I *liked* Bella. I wanted to be her boyfriend.

Oh God. It hit, and the panic overtook me. I wanted to be her boyfriend! I wanted to kiss and hold hands with her and hang out by the docks late at night just to sit side by side. I wanted Bella to tell me about her work and her hopes and her dreams and, *fuck*, I was *so* out of my element.

"Teddy! Come in, Teddy, come in..." Tanya threw her napkin at my head, smirking as if she'd known about my predicament the entire time. "You okay in there?" She reached over the table to knock on the side of my head, and I couldn't help but retaliate and throw the napkin back at her.

"I'm fine, I'm just—"

"Freaking out?" she snickered.

"Freaking out," I confirmed.

"No worries, Teddy. You eat your Chinese, and Tanya's going to come up with a plan to make it *all* better." Her tone was full of mockery, as was her over-exaggerated wink.

I was glad to finally have some semblance of clarity. If I had Tanya on my side now, at least I couldn't fuck up too badly. Somewhat appeased, I delved into my delicious lunch, wondering what the hell Tanya was planning, and more importantly — if it would work.

~Bella~

The rest of the afternoon was uneventful. Alice dragged us into shop after shop, filling her arms with merchandise, but my mind was trapped in a Chinese restaurant, wondering how Edward's lunch date was going.

"Should we go see a movie?" Seth suggested as we walked past a multiplex.

"Sure. I'm getting kind of tired, anyway."

Jasper looked forlornly at Alice, who was gearing up to go into another store. "Actually, I'm getting pretty tired, too. I was wondering if y'all wouldn't mind cutting your day out short to just go back to camp and hang out?"

That sounded like the absolute best idea in the entire world, and I wondered if Jasper wasn't able to read my mind. Unable to control myself, I threw my arms around his waist. "I've missed you."

Jasper blushed and tipped his head towards me. "Likewise, Bella. Are you going to tell me where your mind's been all day, or am I going to have to guess?"

"Seriously. Later," I repeated.

"I'm letting that go temporarily, but expect to be grilled when we get back, okay?"

I nodded, feeling too drained to care. How could I go out with Edward tonight after knowing that he'd already been on a date for lunch? And who went out with two girls in the same day... unless they were just friends? But, in that scenario, I too could be the "just friend," so I decided not to focus on that right now.

As soon as I thought the word "friend," Seth appeared on my other side, linking his arm with mine. "So, what happened to asking Edward to come with us today?"

"He had other plans already, but we're supposed to go out later, I think..."

A look of surprise passed along his features before melting into a kind smile. "Do you want to go home to get ready?"

Relieved that I wouldn't have to explain more than that, I used my "excitement" for later as an excuse to head home early. In reality, all I wanted to do was curl up in bed and listen to the emo indie music that reminded me of Edward and maybe eat a tub of frosting with Oreos, which subsequently reminded me that I was still mad as hell at Emmett.

Alice and Jasper continued to look on worriedly as I pretended to doze during the car ride back to Long Lake. I thanked Jasper for the ride and was headed towards my bunk for said wallowing (minus the junk food) when I crashed into a large boulder that could only have been one of the few people I'd been trying to avoid.

"LB," his booming voice called, but I kept my eyes trained on my feet. I felt two large hands wrap around my shoulders and pull me close into a comforting embrace. Emmett's hugs always felt like home, and I hated that he was thawing past my shoddy icy exterior so quickly. "This isn't the place to explain everything, but you have to know that I'm sorry I didn't tell you." His words sounded heartfelt, but I kept my eyes averted, knowing that one look into his puppy dog eyes and I'd be done for.

I sighed softly and stepped back. Shrugging off his mediocre apology, I decided that I knew what I really needed, and fortunately (or unfortunately) I would need to use Emmett for it. Finally, I brought my eyes to meet his, forcing him to see the hurt and betrayal I'd been feeling because of him.

"I'm sure you are, Em."

I could see the lightbulb go off in Emmett's head as he recalled why my presence should be a surprise. "Hey, I thought this was your day off. Why are you here in the middle of the afternoon, anyway?"

Images of that girl's body wrapped around Edward's flooded my mind, and my annoyed body became filled with untapped rage. "I need a favor."

"Anything," he answered without pause.

"I know that I'm supposed to be like super pissed at you, but can we put that on a momentary hold?" He nodded, and I could see the excitement building in his muscles. It was as if he could anticipate what I had planned. "Gather the troops, Em. I'm going to change into a bathing suit. Meet back here in twenty, sound good?"

"Aye aye, Captain!" Emmett saluted me and ran off towards the basketball courts, where I happened to know he stashed supplies for a full-scale water balloon battle. During the hottest days of summer, Emmett liked to alleviate the tension on the dry courts with some watery fun. And after the day I'd had, I seriously needed it. *Fuck Edward Cullen and his stupid whore*, my inner voice cried out like a battle call. I was going to enjoy my day off, no matter what.

Back at the bunk, I pulled on my rattiest clothing — an old white t-shirt with a storm trooper's mask covering the entire front and my oldest denim cutoffs — over my favorite blue bikini, put my hair into pigtail buns, and headed down to the courts. I passed the mirror on the way out, and I nearly gasped at how camper-like I looked. However, I wouldn't be deterred. Instead of communicating and fixing my problems, I was going to do what I always did best: avoid, avoid, avoid.

Jake, Seth, Alice, Jasper, and Emmett were already waiting for me when I arrived, anxious to get started.

"Where's Rosalie?" I asked no one in particular.

"She, uh, thought that maybe you wouldn't want her here," Emmett said with little of his usual confidence. So, Emmett had shared my discovery with Rosalie, and she'd run away, too. I guessed I wasn't the only one good at avoidance. However, I couldn't help but be slightly glad she wasn't around. It was bad enough that I had to put up with the dreamy eyes of Alice and Jasper. I didn't think I could stomach being around two couples right now. Not when Edward was off gallivanting with only God knows who.

"Plus, this way the teams are even," Jake added. "Shotty being on Team LB!" His voice raised to an ungodly pitch as he squealed and jumped over to me like an overzealous fangirl. I laughed at his enthusiasm; I loved how Jake always seemed to be able to break tension and put a smile on my face.

"Oooh, samesies!" Alice squealed, running towards us. She didn't get very far. Emmett gripped the sides of her waist, holding her back so that she was essentially running in place.

"Not so fast, shorty. We can't have both newbies on the same team. You and Jake can duke it out, but one of you has to be with me."

"I called it first—"

"She's my best friend—" they both shouted at the same time. My heart exploded with gratitude to the both of them for making me feel better.

Suddenly, Jasper walked over to Alice. He put his hands on her shoulders and cocked his head towards Jake. "Sweetheart," he drawled, using every ounce of charm in his imported-Southern repertoire, "Jake *did* call it first." Alice looked like she was about to keel over in shock with how strong Jasper was suddenly coming on. No doubt it was everything she'd ever dreamed of. "Plus, I want to be on Team Bella, too." He backed away from Alice and wrapped his arm around my shoulders.

After a few prolonged moments, Alice finally rejoined the living world. She shook her head and scowled, wagging her little finger at him wildly. "Jasper Clancy Whitlock! You can't *do* that... cheater!"

"Clancy?" I snickered as a red hue took up space on Jasper's cheeks and ears.

"I told you that in confidence, Alice," he muttered, shifting uncomfortably from one foot to the other.

Always the tension breaker, Jake was the first one to reach for a balloon and hit Alice in the head, making her stumble backwards.

She whipped around in shock, looking slightly like a drowned kitten. "Oh, you'll pay for that, Jake..."

And with that, we were off. With each balloon I threw, I felt the day's tension being relieved. Laughter poured forth from us, making me feel lighter. After a while, it didn't even matter which team was which or who was winning. It was each man for himself, and I had never had so much fun.

In the middle of our fight, though, Jake took off, running up the hill, crying out a muffled name I couldn't quite make out.

My eyes followed Jake's loping form, and I caught sight of strawberry blonde hair and knee-high chucks barreling back towards him. An irrational surge of jealousy spread through my body, and my hand reached for a water balloon before I could even think my actions through. The balloon left my hand and exploded all over the back of the girl's head. Water dripped down her hair and back, causing Jake to fumble with his grasp. Soon, they crashed to the ground, making me feel slightly vindicated.

Seeing Jake and the mystery girl collapse onto the grass, Edward jogged over quickly, looking concerned.

"Sorry," I called out, feeling anything but. "I meant to hit Jake."

Seth and Jasper both scoffed, and I couldn't resist smiling innocently at them. They knew I was jealous, I knew I was jealous... I didn't even know why I fought it anymore.

We had a date tonight, and Edward had decided to bring back a... what? An ex-girlfriend? A best female friend? I didn't even know. And the fact that Jake obviously knew who she was spoke volumes as well. Edward wasn't one to introduce his whores to his friends, so this one must

have actually meant something. *God damn, there goes that light, happy feeling I had.*

Seeing Edward scowling at Jake's proximity to the girl as he shamelessly flirted with her, I knew. My stomach knotted with his caring expression. This girl meant *more* than something to Edward — she meant *everything*.

"Look, Edward. Tanya's wet." And so the bitch had a name.

Tanya.

It sounded oddly familiar. Had Edward told me about a Tanya he'd dated? I honestly couldn't remember.

They continued their banter, making my stomach roll with how flirty and familiar they all were. I could feel the anxiety building in my stomach, and when I looked over my shoulder and saw Rosalie walking up from the docks, I decided that I needed a bit of a reprieve from the situation.

Sensing my distress, Seth nudged me in my ribs and cocked his head toward the Adirondack chairs at the top of the hill.

As we climbed, I glanced behind me. *Tanya* was being introduced to everyone, and I saw her in a large embrace with Rosalie. Traitors.

"So... do you know who that was?" Seth asked quietly. I shrugged and shook my head. Why did she have to be so pretty? I would never be able to compare to someone like her.

Suddenly, we heard yelling coming from inside the counselor lounge. Curiosity took over, and I grabbed Seth's hand to pull him along with me.

A crowd was huddled around a small piece of paper, tacked up to the bulletin board.

"Oh my God, Lara! I'm Rusty!" a counselor who worked at tennis called out.

Oh. My. God. The cast list for the musical was up. Today, of all days. Oh well, if I hadn't gotten the part I wanted, I'd still make it through. After all, *everyone* was admitted into the chorus. But after being confused by Edward's mood whiplash, I really needed something great to happen today.

Nervously, I took a meager step towards the paper. I felt a warm hand at my back, pressing me forward as I shut my eyes. I knew that Seth was just encouraging me, and finally, I opened my eyes to scan down the cast list.

I didn't have to scan far.

There, at the top of the cast list was written:

Ren McCormack Edward Cullen

Ariel Moore Bella Swan

I started squealing uncontrollably, shrieking noises bubbling out of my chest that I hadn't known I was even capable of before I spun around into Seth's waiting arms. My smile was so wide that it hurt my face, and Seth's comforting embrace was exactly what I needed.

As I stood there, leaning against the wall with a smile on my face, I was bombarded my congratulations from people I didn't even know had known my name. There had never been a more auspicious moment to feel like I belonged than that very moment. Plus, I was going to be spending every night rehearsing with Edward... as a love interest.

"Hey." A velvet voice greeted me softly as an elbow nudged my shoulder, and I jumped in surprise. It was like I'd willed him to appear, and it creeped me out slightly.

"Edward!" I gripped my chest, not prepared for the onslaught of desire that his close proximity invoked. "You scared me." *More like, set my heart and loins ablaze, but that works, too. Oh God.*

He leaned in closer, moving a stray piece of hair behind my ear as he whispered, "What's going on?" I tried my hardest not to shudder, but there were some reactions that couldn't be controlled. My nipples hardened and my skin broke out into goosebumps as I replayed the feel of his warm breath on my still-damp skin.

I refused to look at him. If I looked into those jade eyes and they were smoldering the same way his voice tinged my ears, I would be sure to do something idiotic. Instead, I crossed my arms over my puckered breasts and replied as coolly as I could. "Cast list for Footloose went up."

I could hear each one of his steady breaths as he waited for me to keep talking, but I couldn't. My voice was already on the edge of breaking, and I could feel a different kind of wetness pooling in my already-soaked bikini bottoms.

"So..."

His voice sounded like he was begging, and just as I turned around to give in and forget about the way my heart had shattered as I saw him with that gorgeous girl earlier, my dreams were destroyed again.

"Congratulations, Edward!" The girl jumped him... literally. Did she have no shame? And then, to add insult to injury, she started pressing loud, squeaky, overtly obnoxious kisses to his face. I wanted to pull that strawberry blonde hair out of her fucking head for having her lips on him, but instead I stood and calmly controlled my breathing — and my temper issues.

I snapped my head back towards the wall, unable to see the gratuitous display of public affection before I congratulated him myself.

"I can't believe my Teddy is the star of the musical!" Tanya shouted as she wrapped her arms around Edward's neck. His face turned red, and I wondered if it was from embarrassment or if she was cutting off his air supply. I secretly hoped it was from the latter. That would serve the fucker right.

My Teddy? The fucking nerve some people had. *Teddy?* How ridiculous did that sound? *How juvenile.*

Suddenly, their eyes were on me, and I realized that I'd most likely voiced my disbelief at the nickname. Though, to be fair, I was in all kinds of shock here. I drifted off, watching the hugs and congratulations being given around me, not wanting to give into dissecting the words, "My Teddy," at the current moment.

I was so lost in my distractions that I hadn't noticed that Tanya was standing in front of me, staring me down with a curious expression on her face.

"Um, hi?" I said awkwardly, unsure of what she could possibly want from me.

Her smile was instantaneous, and it lit up her entire face, only making her more beautiful. I took a second to examine her up close. She was stunning. *Too bad, Bella. Looks like you're out of the running.*

I was so caught up in my self-flagellation that I failed to hear anything she was saying to me, which was too bad because it had probably been important.

"... so rude. I'm Tanya," she explained, sticking out a hand for me to shake. I looked at it as if it were something dirty before finally taking it within my own. Keep your enemies close, and all that, right?

"Bella."

"I know," she breathed, sounding exasperated. "Teddy is such an imbecile, right?"

My brow furrowed, unsure of what she was asking me, since I'd essentially missed the first half of her introduction. I needed to pay better attention.

"Yeah," I agreed, rolling my eyes.

Tanya's smile widened again, and the glint in her eye returned. She looked as if she were up to no good, and I really hoped she wasn't thinking about the dirty things she was going to do to Edward tonight, because I might just upchuck my pizza for that.

"As soon as I saw your shirt, I knew who you were. Teddy's description of you is just uncanny."

Wait. I'm sorry, what? Edward had described me to Tanya? Why in God's name would he talk about a girl to another girl? That seemed all kinds of fucked up to me. What the hell was he playing at anyway?

Glancing down at my shirt, I flushed. The white storm trooper's mask was fading with the age of the fabric, and it was nearly see through due to the remnants of the water balloon battle. Uncomfortable, I crossed my arms and looked at the floor nervously.

When Tanya didn't continue, I was forced to look up. Her expression hadn't changed, and it seemed as if she were waiting for me to say something in particular, but I had no idea what that would be. Did she want me to confess my undying love for Edward? Was it written so plainly across my face that she needed me to admit it?

"Ted-Edward talked about me?"

That had my interest piqued. Tanya nodded enthusiastically as she leaned in closer. "Oh my God, yes. And I have a *huge* favor to ask you, if you don't mind?"

Oh my God, yes? Well, that sounded enthusiastic. And she didn't seem to hate me, so I was truly confused now. "Sure," I agreed hesitantly.

"I know that you and Teddy were supposed to go out tonight, but—"

"You do?" I gaped, not having been prepared for that admission.

"Yes, but... I was wondering if you didn't mind us all going out together and rain checking on your date? I'm only here for the day, and I would really like to see everyone before I head back."

I bit my lip in frustration. I should have been prepared for that question, but somehow it blindsided me and left me feeling lightheaded and like someone had just kicked my stomach. But it seemed that Tanya was really important to Edward, and I didn't want to take her away from him, either. *What a fucking double-edged sword.*

"Sure." Feeling slightly confident, I decided to be a little brave. "But—"

"But what?" she asked, leaning even closer.

"Never mind." I shook my head, unable to ask her what I really wanted to. I needed to protect my heart somehow.

"Bella, you can ask me anything." Her eyes were wide and sincere, and for some reason, I was completely drawn to her, hypnotized by her unwavering gaze.

Instead, I chickened out. "How long have you known 'your Teddy?'" I used the dorky air quotes and everything.

Tanya looked momentarily confused, her smile dying quickly as her eyes darted around. Then, just as quickly, they refocused on me, her grin looking lopsided, almost like a certain video counselor's.

"Um," she began, tapping the nails of her left arm against the forearm of her right, "Since I was almost one."

"Years old?" I blanched. This was so much worse than I had anticipated. Friends for life? No wonder she wanted to take him out.

Her laugh came out easily, unnerving me slightly. "Yes, Bella. Didn't you listen to me earlier? I told you I had just relocated from Vermont to New Hampshire for a photography gig? And I was pissed at Teddy for not introducing us *himself*?" I was still lost. Figuring out that I hadn't listened to anything she'd said before, she continued with a smirk plastered across her face. "I'm Tanya, Edward's older sister."

Oh. TANYA. That's where I've heard the name before!

My night brightened infinitely at her words, and the guttural pain I'd been feeling dissipated quickly. The girl was his *sister*.

"Tanya!" Jake yelled, scooping her into his arms again. "I heard you're taking us all out tonight? It's karaoke night at the pound again, and we need to sing a love duet together."

Tanya laughed and leaned into Jake's side. "By love duet, do you mean Liz Phair's 'Flower?'"

Jake took a large step backwards and faced the two of us, looking serious before breaking into song. "*Every time I see your face I think of things impure, unchaste. I want to fuck you like a dog. I'll take you home and make you like it.*"

Having never heard the song before, I was so aghast with shock that I reached for Tanya, just to make sure I wasn't imagining Jake's performance. She was laughing so hard that tears were now running down her cheeks as she gasped out her words. "I... don't know if... I should... be more worried that you... know all the lyrics... or that I think you actually mean them!"

Jake wiggled his eyebrows and slid his hand down over her rear and leaned in to whisper seductively, "T, I always speak the truth." He pinched her ass and she took off running, pushing through the entryway of the counselor lounge, leaving me dumbfounded.

Jake and Tanya?

How had I read this situation so completely wrong? Tanya and Edward weren't together; they were siblings. I should have known – those green eyes were one of a kind. But thanks my egregious error in judgment, I now knew that I needed to step up my game in terms of "seduction." We may not have our date tonight, but Jake's karaoke suggestion had given me a great idea. I was going to give the performance of a lifetime tonight. *Edward won't know what hit him.*

Chapter 13 Not Quite First Dates

~Edward~

"This is a terrible idea," I said mostly to myself as I parked Jake's truck, seeing Tanya pull into the spot next to me in her hunter green Jeep Wrangler. She'd fallen in love with the car on the lot,

claiming that it matched her eyes and she had to have it. Somehow, my parents had been too taken by her charm to argue her on it. Such was life with my sister.

As soon as I had two feet outside the truck, Tanya was on my back, her arms and legs wrapped around my torso.

"Onwards, Teddy!" She snickered, pulling at my hair as if it were reigns.

"Fucking hell, Tan," I whined. "Behave, please. This is my place of work, remember?"

I didn't have to see her face to know that she was rolling her eyes in response to my semi-serious chastisement.

"You're such a Grumpy Greta today, Teddy. Let's go find Bella and cheer you up!" she said, far too loudly for my comfort. If Tanya was going to be hanging out with me today, I needed to get some things straight. In an instant, I had her feet on the ground and my hands gripping her shoulders so that I could stare into her eyes.

"Tanya, I love you, but so help me God, you will rue the day you were born if you fuck this up for me."

She snorted and removed my hands from her shoulders before climbing back onto her perch on my back. "Edward, there's no way in hell that I could fuck this up for you any more than you already have, so let's roll." She hitched upwards, as if she were posting and I were an actual horse. *Fuck my parents for getting her all those riding lessons.*

Done prolonging the inevitable, I started walking towards my bunk, keeping Tanya firmly hitched onto my back. But as my eyes located a group of counselors in the midst of a water balloon fight in the middle of the hill, my feet stopped working.

Bella had changed out of her dress from earlier, which had tortured me so, into something that only served to torture me more. My cock was instantly alerted to the fact that she was dressed in another small bikini under a soaking wet white t-shirt with the mask of a Storm Trooper on it. It was plastered to her skin, riding up to show me the smooth expanse of her stomach. Her jean shorts were cut off so high that I could see the bottoms of the pockets sticking out in front. And then, to make my wildest and wettest dreams come true, she was wearing her dark hair in pigtail buns. I couldn't decide what I wanted to do more - be a creeper and observe in silence, or be a creeper and jump her in the middle of the field. Both options were equally appealing and poor choices.

Tanya's low, rumbling laughter finally clued me in to the fact that my entire world had stopped when I'd laid eyes on Bella. "I found her," she continued to giggle into my ear, lowering her voice to where only I could hear her. "Your description was spot on, Teddy. I'm melting from all the way over here."

Annoyed, I nudged my head into hers, signaling for her to back off. I wasn't quite ready to cease my Bella-ogling just yet, and her commentary was hindering it. When my eyes made their way back to the water balloon fight, all eyes were on me.

My esophagus constricted, forcing saliva back down my throat. I hadn't even noticed that it'd gone dry. All I noticed were Bella's eyes trained on mine and her pert breasts on display under her wet t-shirt.

"Tanya!" Jake hollered, and then they were off. Tanya scrambled off my back and flew into Jake's arms, who had been running toward her at full speed. She managed to come at him with more force than he'd been prepared for, and Jake lost his balance, spinning her around to try to regain his footing. Suddenly, out of nowhere, a balloon came flying through the air and smacked Tanya in the back of the head, causing water to drip down both her and Jake's bodies. The newly introduced water did little to help things, and when Jake's hand slipped, everything went to shit. Before he knew it, Jake was flat on his back with Tanya on top of him.

I jogged over to check out the situation, hoping that Tanya hadn't hurt herself by crashing on top of the Iron Giant.

"Jesus, are you okay, Tanya?" I helped her into a sitting position, which was essentially just her straddling Jake. *Awesome.*

"Sorry," Bella called out, looking anything but. "I meant to hit Jake." She looked next to her at Seth, in some sort of secret, silent exchange, and they both smiled. I could feel the scowl forming on my face, but I tried to rein it in. I needed to step up my game; I didn't want Seth causing a wedge between Bella and me.

"Look, Edward. Tanya's wet." Jake grinned as his hands went for Tanya's now-wet white tank top.

"Oh my God, stop!" I grabbed his wrists and moved them over his head and far away from my sister's visible bra, making my frown increase.

"If you wanted to make it a threesome, all you had to do was say so, Edward." Jake winked at me as he thrust his hips upwards, making Tanya gasp and get off her precarious position over Jake's junk. Tanya tapped his head lightly with the toe of her sneaker and frowned before wrapping her arms around my waist.

"Jake, that's disgusting," she admonished him. He just grinned at her, his back still on the ground. "Glad to see you haven't changed."

A throat cleared from behind, and I spun myself and Tanya around to face the entirety of my group of friends, except for Bella and Seth, who had wandered up towards the Adirondack chairs - far, far away from my evil sister. And far, far away from earshot. My stomach flipped at the idea of them being alone and out of my sight.

"Teddy, aren't you going to introduce me to your friends?" she cooed, sounding syrupy sweet to my ears. She was playing it coy, and I was incredibly nervous. This had been such a poor decision. I hated myself for never being able to say no to Tanya.

Always the gentleman, Jasper smiled and held out his hand. "I'm Jasper." He flashed me a dirty

look, and I almost recoiled. "Teddy's roommate. And you are..."

"I'm Tanya," she continued, cheerfully sticking out her hand to grasp Jasper's before pulling him into a tight hug. "Teddy's big sister."

Tanya nodded enthusiastically, looking sort of like a bunny on crack. Then she turned to me and pinched my cheek, making me squirm. *Leave it to Tanya to embarrass the shit out of me right out of the gate.* "The one and only. Well, not the *one* and only. Kate lives in Los Angeles. She's our oldest sister, but she's lame and doing something corporate and boring with her life. Anyway, I'm only here for the day, so what am I doing?"

"Me?" Jake asked flirtatiously.

"Jake!" I groaned.

"Well, he has a point, Edward. It's not like I'm going to be sleeping in *your* bed tonight, right?"

I poked her in the ribs before lifting her up and spinning her around, tickling her sides. "Not funny, Tan."

"No, no, you're right," she breathed out as she struggled to stop her laughing. "The funny part is that you don't know I've already hooked up with Jake!"

I searched for a retort but could find none. My mind was absolutely blank. "I—" My eyes shifted to Jake, who was now full out grinning at Tanya. She was grinning back, and I had no doubt in my mind that she wasn't fibbing or trying to get a rise out of me. Fury flashed through my body, and Jake finally had the decency to look guilty.

"Stop giving me that face, Teddy. It's not my fault that we look so much alike." Tanya winked at me and then looked at Jake, but I was totally lost.

There was a momentary pause, and then Rosalie started giggling. I had been so distracted that I hadn't even seen her approach. Then Emmett joined in, and Jasper, too.

Jake's fury was evident; there was practically steam exuding from his ears as he shouted, "I do *not* want to do Edward! I'm not gay!"

"Edward, I fucking love your sister!" Rosalie stepped up and flashed a grin at Tanya, looking her up and down before sticking out her hand. "Rosalie Hale. And I'm so glad I have the honor of meeting the person responsible for Edward's inferiority complex," she drawled sweetly.

Tanya batted away Rosalie's hand before hugging her thoroughly and stepping backwards. She feigned shock, holding her hand up to her heart and replied, mimicking and exaggerating Rosalie's accent. "Little old me? Why, I'm glad I have the honor of meeting you, Rosalie Hale. But, tell me, where's the famous Bella Swan?" Her eyes flashed around the group. All of them wore surprised smiles, and I could feel a blush creeping its way up my neck into my cheeks. "Aww," she cooed again, running her finger down my flushed cheek. "You're blushing! Teddy, I don't think I've ever seen you blush before."

I swatted her hand away, trying not to call even more attention to myself, but it was too late. I very nearly heard the wheels spinning and clicking into place before the light bulb lit up over Jake's head, causing him to gasp.

"Wait," he paused, staring straight into my eyes. There were very few moments that Jake and I didn't joke around with one another, and I was shocked to find that this was one of them. "You... and Bella?" His tone was incredulous and concerned and skeptical, all at the same time.

"No," I replied quickly. Too quickly, apparently, because soon laughter had broken out amongst the remainder of my friends.

"No?" Jake joined in the laughter. His concern disappeared all too quickly, shifting to amusement, and I was genuinely surprised to see his reaction. I'd anticipated punching and scowling and yelling, not... chuckling. His tone turned serious again as he stepped between Tanya and me, wrapping an arm around each of our waists. "So, is that why you're at zero?" he whispered.

"Zero?" Tanya asked, getting her head into our miniature huddle. "What does that mean? And, seriously, where'd Bella go?"

I was about to reply with something biting and witty when I heard a shrill squeal from the entrance to the counselor lounge. My spidey-senses were tingling, telling me not to go there, but I couldn't help my curiosity. Turning around, I took a few steps up the hill, only to see Bella thoroughly encased in Seth's grasp. Her arms and legs were twined around the front of his body, and he looked as if he'd just won the lottery, smiling back at her like a crazy person.

Jake broke away, running towards the pair of them, and they quickly disappeared, taking Bella and Seth into the lounge and out of my sight again.

"What's going on?" Tanya asked. Having no response, I decided to go check it out myself. Everyone trailed behind as we made our way inside the lounge. Everyone was huddled around a spot on the wall, and Seth and Bella were still beaming at one another.

"Hey." I stepped closer, nudging her side with my elbow. Bella gasped loudly and stumbled, clutching her throat.

"Edward! You scared me!"

"What's going on?" I leaned in and whispered in her ear. Her body broke out into goosebumps, shivering slightly. I couldn't help but wonder if I had anything to do with it, but it was most likely just the cool air of the lounge hitting her drenched clothes.

"Cast list for Footloose went up," she responded, and I could see the edges of her smile tugging upwards.

As people around us continued to cheer and hug, I could see that she wasn't going to give me anything. "So..." I prodded.

"Congratulations, Edward!" Tanya came flying at me. Her hands gripped my shoulders as she bounced on her toes and pressed embarrassingly squeaky kisses to my cheek. I hadn't even noticed that she'd followed me. Suddenly, I was bombarded by a ton of congratulations by counselors I hadn't even talked with before.

"Congrats, Ren," Bella finally continued, staring in front of her, rather than looking at me.

"I can't believe my Teddy is the star of the musical!" Tanya wrapped her arms around my neck and got a little too close to my body for comfort, especially in the people-filled, claustrophobic entryway of the lounge.

I tried to shrug her off until I heard Bella's choked and muttered, "My Teddy?"

And that was when I realized what the fuck Tanya was doing. She was trying to make Bella jealous, and I wasn't fully comfortable with that realization.

"Tanya, cut it out," I snapped, unwrapping her arms from my neck. She pouted, as was predicted, but I ignored her and moved away, going to read the cast list.

There, written in bold, were the leading roles.

Ren McCormack Edward Cullen

Ariel Moore Bella Swan

I turned around to congratulate Bella, but she was mid-conversation with Tanya. They seemed to be talking about something incredibly serious, and Bella was starting to look upset. As if he could hear a distress signal, Jake jumped in to diffuse the situation quickly. I had no idea what Tanya had said to Bella, but I wasn't okay with her pissing her off.

Soon, Jake was causing them both to laugh, and Bella looked genuinely happy... and maybe a little bit devious? She looked thoughtful as she wandered through the throng of people and out of the lounge to the Adirondack chairs.

"Bella?" I called out. I'd followed her without even realizing it.

She turned around, spinning on her heel at the sound of my voice, the sunlight bringing out the red glow of her hair. "Hmm?" she asked, sounding dazed.

My feet drew me closer to her. Now that I knew I liked her - had a crush on her, or whatever - I had no idea how to act. My hands were clammy, and my breathing changed just by looking at her. I was so utterly fucked.

"Hey," I breathed quietly, approaching her.

"Hey." She smiled back as something akin to confusion flickered through her eyes. "So, tonight should be fun, right?"

Fuck. I had completely forgotten that Bella and I were supposed to go out tonight, and Tanya hadn't come up with plans for me. Or if she had, she hadn't informed me of them yet.

"Right."

"Yeah, it's going to be the best night ever!" Jake cheered, wandering up towards us, Tanya and Rosalie on his arms.

"Wh-what?" I stuttered.

"We're all going to karaoke night at *The Pound*!" Jake's smile was devious as his eyes flitted from me to Bella and back again. I almost groaned in defeat. Why would this sound like a good plan to anyone? The Pound would be loud and filled with drunk people, making it impossible to talk to Bella, which was what I had hoped to accomplish with our evening out alone.

"But weren't you and Bella supposed to—" Rosalie started to interject, but Bella cut her off quickly with a soft smile.

"Don't worry about it, Rosalie. Tanya wants to take us all out tonight to celebrate. Isn't that sweet of her?" The malice in Bella's tone shocked me. It was like watching *Mean Girls* up close. I could see that Rosalie was dying to respond. Her vocal chords were probably itching with her quippy response, but she reined it in, letting Bella have this one. "I'll see you later, Edward," Bella said. I was entranced by her eyes, wondering what the hell was going through her mind as she smiled and waved goodbye. I nodded dumbly as she walked off, her jean-shorts-clad rear tantalizing me with the exaggerated sway of her hips.

"So, Edward, what are we going to sing tonight?" Jake asked, hopping around with far too much pent-up energy. "I was hoping we could bring back the classics tonight. A little 'Living On A Prayer?' Or maybe some 'Eye of The Tiger?' What do you think?"

"I—" I actually had no words. All I could do was stare at the space where Bella had last been. Her presence had turned my brain into mush.

"Edward!" Rosalie snapped. "Stop thinking about Bella's ass and focus on us for one second, please!"

My head spun around, confused as to how they knew what I'd been thinking. My mind scrambled for a response, but I could think of none. I shrugged sheepishly, feeling the familiar blush take up space on my cheeks, and their laughter started again.

"Oh, you are in such big trouble, Teddy," Tanya joked, poking at one of my pink cheeks.

"Stop it, Tan," I whined, shooing away her finger. "This is serious! I don't know what to do."

Tanya rolled her eyes and linked her arm with mine. "This is serious," she said in a high-pitched voice, clearly trying to mimic me. Rosalie and Jake started up their laughter again. I, on the other hand, didn't find it quite so amusing. "Just leave everything to me, okay?"

I groaned, unsure of how much I really trusted my sister. Okay, well, that wasn't entirely true. I trusted her implicitly. "You'd better know what the hell you're doing, Tanya," I warned as she pulled me towards my bunk, following Jake and Rosalie's lead.

Jake held the bunk door open as Rosalie skipped off to sit in Emmett's lap. He wound his arms around her waist, and it took me a second to not freak out in shock. *Right. 'Cause you already know about them.*

Tanya flopped down onto the couch, commanding me to get ready so that she could approve my wardrobe choice.

Such a tyrant, that one is.

I shook my head, dispelling the voice of Yoda, which often seemed to reside in there. How could Bella like someone who thought in "Yoda?" *Because yes, that is its own language. As is Ewok, which I can also speak...*

Suddenly, something was chucked at my head, making me groan in pain. "What the—?"

Tanya quirked one eyebrow at me before dropping her gaze to the floor where Jake's plush Spiderman action figure lay at my feet. "Seriously, Teddy, you've been staring at that poster for like five minutes." She moved her gaze to the Queen Amidala poster I'd jacked off to merely days before while thinking of Bella's plush lips around my cock, only now I added her outfit from today... "I needed to make sure you were still conscious." Tanya's voice invaded my brain again, pulling me from my out-of-control fantasies. "Go!"

Apparently, my brain was just non-functional today. With Tanya's stellar motivation, I was off, quickly showering and dressing before our excursion to The Pound. Tanya put me in a pair of black jeans, a white t-shirt, and my black Ray Bans because "it was going to be sunny for at least another two hours," as she claimed.

I thought I looked a bit like a greaser, but she insisted that I looked good. And I very nearly believed her when Rosalie whistled and made me spin for her. All in all, I was feeling good.

That was, until I saw her.

Bella was already waiting in the parking lot, joking around with Jasper and Alice, but my eyes were only focused on her. She was wearing tight, dark jeans, which almost looking like a second skin wrapped around her luscious ass. On top, her hair was pulled up, and it looked like she was wearing just a simple black t-shirt, but as she turned around to laugh at something Jasper had said, I saw that there was a huge part of it cut out, revealing nearly the entirety of her back. *Jesus, that's hot.*

I approached nervously, feeling like the biggest dork in the entire world as Tanya pushed the sunglasses back up my nose. They had slid down as I'd taken a minute to really examine Bella, and naturally, I'd been caught by everyone around me.

"Stop it, Jasper!" Bella squealed as he pinched her side, causing her to grab Alice and use her as

a shield.

"You can't lie to me and tell me you don't know what you're singing tonight," he prodded.

"Maybe I'm not singing anything," she teased him, sticking her tongue out, and I had the urge to grab her and suck on it. *God, it's going to be a long night.*

Instead, I draped my arm around her shoulder as coolly as possible and squeezed it gently. "Well, that would be a shame."

Her eyes looked up and grew wide at the sight of me. She kind of did the same thing Rosalie did, except without the whistle, and I was starting to trust Tanya. Clearly, she was the expert.

Bella's eyes regained their focus, and a sly smile spread across her face. "Why, *Teddy*?" She emphasized the name, making it clear that she was going to mock me with it for ages. I knew I wouldn't stop her, either. "What are you singing tonight?"

"Me? Uh... nothing, unless Jake and my sister get me completely toasted." My eyes darted around the parking lot for them. I found them quickly, already in the front seat of Tanya's jeep. "Speaking of which, shall we chaperone them? I don't really want Jake's offspring to be related to me."

Bella's mouth dropped in shock, and it was then that I realized she hadn't been around to hear about Jake and Tanya's, *ugh*, previous relations.

"Ew," she muttered, a slight shudder running through her body as my hand slipped from her shoulder to brush against her bare back, leading her to the car. I hoped her response was for the thought of Jake and Tanya together and not the feel of my hand; otherwise I was going to be screwed.

At the car, I opened the door for her to go in first, trying to be a gentleman, but it had the adverse effect. The jeep was slightly too high for her in her high heeled black boots, which I had just taken the time to notice, so I had to place my hands on either sides of her hips and hoist her into the backseat. Of course, me being me, my hands had to slip and grab her ass, causing her to gasp and tense mid-push.

"Sorry, sorry..." I muttered as I climbed in after her, willing the blush staining my cheeks to disappear immediately. Who was this fumbling, bumbling, awkward boy? I hadn't seen him since I was eighteen, and I really had no desire to revisit him ever again.

I chanced a glance at Bella. She was smiling to herself, fidgeting with her fingers in her lap. I was about to say something when Tanya turned up the radio, blasting (ironically) "Don't Stand So Close To Me," by The Police. It was slightly awkward, seeing as how I was sharing the cramped back seat with someone who I worried was much too young for me, but as Jake started to sing out, not even I could hold back my laughter.

"*This girl's an open page. Book mark it, she's so close now. This girl is half his age!*" he sang out, and soon we were all joining in. Just as the tension was finally starting to dissipate, we arrived at

The Pound.

Jasper pulled up shortly after, and I smiled, seeing how many people he'd fit into his car. Rosalie, Emmett, Seth, and Alice all climbed out.

Emmett ran ahead first, presumably to get us his favorite table, and we were all led out to the back patio immediately. One of the waitresses who worked there had a thing for Emmett, and despite the amount of people always waiting to get in, we never had to.

As we got to the table, I was perplexed by the seating arrangement. Emmett and Rosalie had already taken a spot next to Jake and Tanya on one side of the table, while Alice, Jasper, Seth, and Bella had slid into the other side, leaving no room for me. I stood awkwardly, arms crossed, confused as to what to do. They couldn't pull another chair up to the head of the table, because that would cut off the waitresses' serving path. I looked at Emmett pointedly, glaring at him for being an idiot and getting a table for eight instead of nine, when I heard a meek voice cut in.

"Um, you can sit here, Edward... if you don't mind me sitting on your lap."

My cock hardened in my pants as Bella stood up, gesturing for me to take the seat. This was not going to end well, but how could I resist? Like the dumb fool I was, I nodded and slid onto the bench, adjusting myself quickly before Bella took her perch on my knee. I admired the pale skin of the back of her neck and resolved to tell her to wear her hair up more often.

The waitress came to the table quickly, and seeing our seating predicament, her brow furrowed. "Oh, my, I'm so sorry, y'all! We have a table that's about to leave over there if you want to—"

"No worries," Bella interrupted her. "I'm actually pretty comfortable." As she said the last part, she moved her hand to pat my leg behind her, but she was already taking up so much of that space herself, her palm brushed against my inseam, causing me to jump in my seat.

I shifted so suddenly that Bella nearly slid off my knee and onto the ground. I quickly grabbed her waist and pulled her back in a more comfortable position—and where she wouldn't be able to feel my solid erection digging into any part of her body.

She chuckled nervously and looked over her shoulder back at me. I hoped my face looked calmer than I was actually feeling, otherwise we were going to have some serious issues. "Well, I was comfortable."

I groaned in defeat, letting my forehead fall forward to lean on her bare back. Unable to resist, I tried to discretely inhale Bella's scent, which was savagely interrupted by a jarring pain as she straightened her back suddenly, crashing into my nose.

"Ow!" I cried, holding my hand up to my nose, hoping it wasn't bleeding. "Jesus fucking Christ..."

Carefully, I pulled my hand away, happy to see that there was no blood involved in this injury. I lifted my eyes up and saw the entire table staring at us in silence, their mouths agape.

"You two are so fucking dysfunctional, I can't even begin to..." Jake trailed off, shaking his head

at me in disbelief. *Yeah, I feel that, too, asshole.*

"So, who needs a drink?" the waitress asked, purposefully trying to ignore the most awkward outburst in the history of seating arrangements.

"Me!"

"I do!" Bella and I called out simultaneously.

The waitress grinned, staring at Bella thoroughly with some sort of glint in her eye that I just couldn't figure out. "What can I get y'all?" Her voice was coy, mocking, almost.

"A round of Patron shots for the table!" Emmett called out. That boy sure loved his tequila, but I didn't have quite the same affinity for it.

"Well, if we're doing tequila, we may as well stick with it. We all know what happened last time you mixed liquors, Em." Bella reminded Emmett of their last experience at The Pound. I could only hope that tonight would be extremely different.

"Then let's just get margarita pitchers to share," Tanya suggested.

Dinner went by in a tequila and Bella-induced blur. All I could focus on was the feel of her shifting her weight on my lap every time she'd take a bite of her food and the nice tingling feeling I was getting as a result of my magically refilling margarita glass.

"Bella, can I talk to you?" Rosalie was standing at the head of the table, looking patiently at Bella, who was now finishing the last few sips of her margarita.

Instead of responding, Bella leaned back into my chest, sliding down in my lap and resting her head on my shoulder. I had no choice but to wrap my arms around her waist — just to make sure she didn't slide off my lap, of course.

"Nope," she giggled, and I finally took notice of the pink flush on Bella's cheeks. The girl was buzzed, at least. "I think I'm good right here."

I should have encouraged her to hash it out with Rosalie, but I was enjoying having her on my lap too much. I smiled back down at her and tightened my grasp a little bit more. "Yeah, Rose. She's good right here."

Rosalie rolled her eyes. "Thanks for all your help, Edward."

I held up one hand in a gesture of defeat. "You should go talk to her," I said, whispering into her ear.

"Fine, fine," Bella grumbled.

Although I was sure there was about to be a cataclysmic explosion between the two strong personalities, I knew it needed to happen. And sooner rather than later was probably a good

choice. Once Rosalie and Bella had disappeared around the corner, I relaxed back into my seat and took a large gulp of my magical margarita glass, which was filled again.

"So..." Tanya came around the table so that Emmett and Jake could escape, most likely to write their names down for karaoke. Fools. I would *not* be doing that tonight. Nope, I was content to drink and watch other people embarrass themselves... and keep an eye on Bella.

"So, what?" I grinned.

"You're so adorable when you're drunk, Teddy."

"I'm not drunk," I protested, but to be honest, things were getting a bit fuzzy.

"Sure, you're not." She leaned over and refilled my half-empty glass, and I finally figured out how my magical glass was keeping its supply of booze. My sister had been actively trying to get me drunk. I opened my mouth to object. "Oh, don't get your panties in a twist, Edward. I've been refilling Bella's glass all night, too." With a wink, she slid back out of the booth and ran to go find Jake, presumably.

Huh. So, my sister had not only been getting *me* drunk, but Bella, too. That didn't seem like such a fantastic plan to me. I wanted to be sober enough to remember everything about tonight. And the last time Bella had had too much to drink, it had ended in absolute mayhem.

Instead of continuing on with the margaritas, I made the executive decision to switch over to water. As I took a large sip, relishing the way the cool liquid slid down my throat, Seth leaned forward to get my attention.

"Good choice," he smirked, pointing to the water in my hand. I swallowed the sip in my mouth and raised it to my mouth again.

"I thought so." I shook my head, trying to clear it of the mass quantities of tequila and sugar my sister had stuffed it with.

"Hey, Edward?" Seth shifted in his seat to face me, and he looked a bit nervous, although I couldn't imagine why. "You really like Bella, don't you?"

"Uh..." I now knew the answer to this question, but I wasn't sure if it was the right one to give Seth, who was also interested in her. My hesitance gave me away, though, and soon Seth was smiling widely.

"Yeah, I thought so."

Jeez, did everyone know I was into Bella? Fuck. Did Bella know I was into Bella? My face must have shown my panic because Seth started talking again, calming me down immediately.

"Don't worry, Edward, she has no idea."

His words should have filled me with relief, but I couldn't help but be disappointed by them.

"Right."

I fiddled with my straw and pushed around the leftover food on my plate, trying to ignore the awkward tension that had filled my body. There was a lull in the noise of the bar and suddenly, Jake's voice was blaring over the speaker system, signaling the beginning of a very long night.

Instead of dealing with Seth right now, I decided to head over to the bar and watch Jake make a fool out of himself. The bar was pretty crowded, so I just leaned up against the end of it. Jake was halfway through "Dead Or Alive" when I saw Bella dart through the mass amounts of people and up to the bar.

Winding my way through the bodies, I finally made it to her as she was ordering her drink—a Long Island iced tea. Or, as I used to refer to them, a sure thing. It made me nervous that Bella was diving into heavier booze, especially coming back from what was sure to have been an emotional conversation, but who was I to judge? Honestly, I'd often found myself doing the same thing. As long as I kept an eye on her, I decided it would be okay. Unable to help myself, I placed my hand at the small of her back, but unlike last time, she leaned into my hand, rather than away from it. *Good start, Cullen!*

"Hey, are you okay?" I leaned down to whisper in her ear. She didn't turn towards me, instead nodding stoically. The bartender pushed her drink forwards, and as she reached for her wallet, I cut her off. "Here, let me." I handed the bartender a ten-dollar bill, letting him keep the change.

She took a long pull of the mind-numbing drink and sighed, letting her eyes close. I took a moment to shamelessly ogle her tits, seeing as how they weren't confined by a bra tonight.

You are one sick bastard.

"Do you want to talk about it?" I offered, placing my arm on her shoulder, unsure of what I should do in this kind of situation.

She took a deep breath in and exhaled slowly. I could see the tension leave her body, melting away quickly. She opened her eyes and smiled. "Nope. I'm good. And we're going to have fun tonight, okay?"

"Okay." I smiled as she took my hand and pulled me back towards our table. I intertwined our fingers, loving the way her small hand fit perfectly within mine. We were just about to reach the table when I heard the two words I'd dreaded coming tonight over the speaker system.

"Where's Edward?" *No, please let this be a joke.* A groan pushed its way through my lips as I hung my head in defeat, trying to ignore the MC who was continuing to ask for me. Whoever had signed me up to sing karaoke was going to die a very slow and painful death. I would make sure of it.

Bella giggled, sipping her drink and pushing me back towards the stage. "I didn't sign up for this, just so you know," I protested.

"Unimportant." She smiled and took a seat next to Tanya, right at the edge of the stage.

A microphone was thrust into my hands, and I realized that I had no fucking clue what I was supposed to be singing. I hoped to God it wasn't something ridiculously embarrassing.

As the words, "My Sharona," by The Knack lit up on the screen in front of me, I breathed a huge sigh of relief. Not an embarrassing song at all. In fact, I loved the song.

The music started, and I reluctantly started going along with it.

*"Ooh, my little pretty one, my pretty one
When you gonna give me some time, Sharona?
Ooh, you make my motor run, my motor run
Got it coming off of the line, Sharona..."*

The crowd in front of me cheered, and I couldn't help but laugh at Emmett and Jake, who were high fiving one another. At least I'd figured out who had signed me up in the first place.

When the next verse started up, though, I fucking remembered what the hell the song was about, and it took every ounce of restraint in my body to not run off the stage and pummel my two best friends. Instead, I tried to focus on the screen and not the gorgeous girl in front of me, despite the fact that the lyrics I was singing were so clearly aimed towards her.

*"Never gonna stop, give it up, such a dirty mind
I always get it up for the touch of the younger kind
My, my, my, aye-aye, whoa! M-m-m-my Sharona..."*

During the musical interlude, I threw down the mic super quickly and rushed towards Emmett and Jake.

"Do you guys think this is fucking funny?" I whispered through gritted teeth. They both nodded, tears of laughter running down their cheeks. Instead of getting angrier, though, I just grabbed their wrists and brought them back on stage with me.

They were pretty rowdy, which took the heat off me for a bit, and I was grateful. Their presence on stage also gave me the opportunity to stare at Bella bit more unabashedly without it being totally creepacular. She giggled and sipped her drink, occasionally making comments with Tanya.

Raucous applause broke out through the room as we wrapped up the song, but I rushed off the stage quickly, letting Emmett and Jake ham it up. Before I could turn around, Bella's arms were around my neck. "Whoa!" I stumbled backwards slightly, trying to brace myself.

"That was great, Edward," she whispered awfully close to my neck, making my hair rise. "I can't wait to sing with you all summer."

My arms suddenly became like Jello. Unable to hold her up anymore, she slid down my body to find her footing on the ground again, leaving me with a ridiculously painful hard-on.

"Yeah, m-me too."

During the next few songs, some people butchered Journey, Sir-Mix-A-Lot, and Queen, while Bella, Tanya, and I pointed and laughed at them. I ordered them both another Long Island iced tea, which they gratefully accepted, exclaiming what a nice boy I was. It felt really natural and relaxed, and I was internally grateful to my sister for loosening me up with some drinks to dispel that awful awkward boy from before. I was just getting comfortable when the MC called out Bella's name. I was surprised. I didn't even know she'd put her name down on the list.

"Wish me luck!" She winked and then was off. Booze did magical things to Bella. She was this happier, more confident person. It was as if the alcohol melted away all her insecurities, and I wished that she were like that more often. She was amazing, and more people needed to tell her that more often.

I couldn't wait to hear her sing. Bella's voice was incredible, and she didn't use it nearly enough. But as the first chords of her song came on, I wanted to die. This song wasn't going to help me get through the night acting like a proper gentleman.

Her voice was sultry and her eyes were closed as she brought the microphone up to her lips to begin.

*"I love myself. I want you to love me
When I feel down. I want you above me
I search myself. I want you to find me
I forget myself. I want you to remind me."*

Seriously? Bella had to sing a song about masturbation? It was bad enough that I'd been hard all night just watching her, but now watching her and hearing her and *imagining* her... I was ready to bust a nut. I was pretty sure the hottest thing I could imagine involved Bella touching herself. I could feel a light sheen of sweat break out on my forehead, and the temperature in the room increased significantly as Bella continued to move her hips to the seductive beat.

*"I don't want anybody else
When I think about you I touch myself
Ooh I don't want anybody else. Oh no, oh no, oh no..."*

My cock was leaking. I could pretty much feel it now. It was like it was crying, "Please, Bella! Please be singing about me... if you're not, I'll cry!"

And as Bella finished up the last verse of the song, I decided that I was pretty much going balls to the wall tonight. I was going to go for it—I couldn't *not* be with her, especially after having figured out that I wanted more.

The room went wild as Bella finished up her song, and I could literally feel the wolves about to descend. They were eyeing her like she was a piece of meat. Well, I couldn't let that happen.

"How was I?" Bella spun around, a wide smile on her face. I had never wanted to kiss someone

so badly in my entire life.

"You were fab, sweetheart," Tanya answered for me, since I was too wrapped up in my ogling.

Bella retook her seat next to me, but I was itching to spend time alone with her. For the first time in my life, I was jealous of my sister for talking to a girl. After about twenty minutes and another round of drinks, I decided I was going to have my way.

"Hey, Bella." I leaned in and let my nose graze the patch of soft skin behind her ear. "Want to go for a walk?"

"Where to?" she asked, but I noticed she was already getting up, willing to follow me. God, I wanted to be on her so badly right now. I just needed to get her alone.

"Actually," Tanya interrupted, making me want to throttle her. "We were going to head home now. Is that okay with you guys?"

No, you cockblocking son of a bitch! That is NOT okay!

"Of course," Bella replied emphatically, sounding a little drunk. "Heaven forbid you keep Jake's hard-on waiting."

"Oh, gross, Bella." That visual was really more than I could bear right now, and it tempered my raging libido momentarily.

She put up her hand to whisper, away from Tanya, but she was too drunk for volume control, so it just ended up being kind of hilarious. "She wants on his peen, Edward. She told me so. I think it's cute."

Tanya stood, hands on her hips, looking highly amused. "I love her," she mouthed, causing a wide smile to break out across my face. Out loud, she continued, "Okay, come on, drunkards, let's go."

We hopped into the car, where Jake was already waiting with the keys in the ignition. I guessed he was already ready to go. *Ugh.*

He drove fast — faster than anyone should drive through the dark and winding streets of Maine - until we were back at Long Lake.

As I was getting out of the car, Bella jumped onto my back, throwing her arms around my neck. It was like she had lost all her inhibitions, and she was acting with me like she did around Emmett. I could only hope that the sentiment was different.

"Giddy up, Edward!" She hitched herself on my back as Tanya had earlier, laughing loudly as she did. I didn't even ask her where she wanted to go. Instead, I took her straight back to my bunk... which in retrospect was a terrible idea. As soon as we entered the bunk, I could hear the muffled sounds of my sister and my best friend doing incredibly dirty things behind closed doors. They must have sprinted from the car to get naked so fucking fast.

I shuddered, let Bella down to walk through, and quickly closed my own door, where Jasper was already in bed.

"Oh, sorry..." He sat straight up in bed, ready to leave if need be. What a trooper. That was totally unnecessary. I considered my boner squashed after hearing my sister.

"Don't worry about it, we're just going to—" I looked over my shoulder to ask Bella what she wanted to do, but she was already curled up on my bed, completely passed out. I guessed she'd had a few too many Long Island iced teas to make it much longer. "Never mind."

Tonight hadn't been anything like I'd planned, but it had been fun and completely natural. It gave me hope that I could be in a functional relationship. It kind of seemed like we could. Hell, even Jake was okay with it, which said a fuck ton.

I slid off my jeans and threw on some sweats and quickly curled up behind Bella and shamelessly dug my nose into her hair, pulling her tighter to me.

"Aw," Jasper cooed, throwing a blanket over us from the foot of my bed before sauntering back to his own bed and turning off the lights.

"Shut up," I mumbled into Bella's hair. I must have mumbled a little too loudly because Bella suddenly stirred underneath my arm.

"Edward?"

"Hmm?"

Instead of replying, though, Bella simply nuzzled her head further into my pillow and sighed. I couldn't help but let a smile overtake my face. I didn't know what had happened tonight, but it was definitely good.

Chapter 14 Delicious Scents

~Jasper~

I had always been an early riser, up with the sun to greet the morning and all that. But when I was woken up to the sounds of Bella moaning "Edward," over and over at 5:30 in the morning, I thought I was going to die... or kill them, either one.

My eye cracked open, not wanting to fully open it yet, in case I needed to pretend I was still asleep. But to my utter shock and disbelief, both parties were still asleep. There was no "them" to kill—only a "she." Apparently, Bella was a sleep talker—well, sleep-moaner. Good God. I was ruining the day they actually got together because I had a gut feeling that Bella would have *no*

problem being vocal.

Shudder.

As Bella's moaning continued, I gave up all pretenses of sleep and pulled out *Catch-22*. I hoped that the complex characters and intense story would distract me from the porn-like noises coming from the other side of the room. How Edward could sleep through this, I honestly had no clue. Was he deaf? In fact, I was surprised that the entirety of Bunk Seven hadn't rushed in here to find out what was going on behind closed doors... or maybe that's why no one had come in. Privacy and all that.

"Fuuuuckkk," Bella moaned. I tried to tune her out—I really did—but the pornographic sounds were never ending. In fact, they were getting worse. Bella writhed and whimpered calling out, "Please, Edward... don't stop, Edward... harder, Edward!"

"Seriously?" I said more to myself than to anyone else as Bella's noises gained volume. I could feel my blood rushing through my body, a steady blush creeping over my cheeks, heating my ears, and a half-erection that I just couldn't will down, twitching at her every moan.

"Ung... ooohhh... yes... mmm, Edward! Ohhh, ohhh, ohhh!"

As Bella's pitch increased, I hoped we were nearing the end of the most epic sex dream I'd ever witnessed. Thankfully, it did. Relieved that Bella seemed to be happily satisfied by Dream-Edward, I threw myself back into the book.

Finally, at seven-thirty, I heard reveille, signaling the start of my day; I threw down my book to get ready for breakfast. Neither Bella nor Edward stirred as I shuffled around the room, and I figured that I could give them both until seven-fifty five to stay as they were.

To be honest, I couldn't bring myself to wake them up—not when they looked so peaceful. I had a feeling that things wouldn't go as smoothly as either of them wanted after waking up. Call it intuition, but I had a feeling that Edward wasn't quite as ready as Bella was to jump into whatever was going on between them.

Shaking the negative thoughts from my head, I made my way to the door of the bedroom, cracking it open slowly so as to make as little noise as possible. I failed miserably, though, shrieking like a little girl at the faces of Emmett, Rosalie, Jake, Tanya, and Seth, who were all waiting outside the door.

"Shit, you guys scared me."

Jake and Tanya looked the guiltiest, so I was positive they'd had their ears up against the door moments before I'd opened it. I was intrigued by their body language, though. It was as if they were magically back to friends; the sexual tension that lingered between them yesterday had dissolved into friendship. I was still astounded by their whole relationship. I couldn't imagine sleeping with someone and then just being friends with them. As it was, I'd only kissed Alice, and I was a hundred percent certain that I couldn't go back to "just friends" with her.

Ignoring me completely, Emmett pushed the door open all the way and shuffled past me into the room. I sighed as the rest of the group followed suit and followed him to observe the sleeping pair.

Rosalie and Tanya gave a small, "aww," but I could see Emmett's fists clench by his sides. I walked back in, ready to diffuse whatever situation was about to arise, and saw what they were all staring at.

Somewhere over the course of the past hour, Edward and Bella had shifted positions from spooning into a rather, um, intimate one.

Edward laid flat on his back, and Bella was—for all intents and purposes—on top of him. She had one leg hitched over his hip, and her torso was curled up flush against his chest, her head tucked neatly into the curve of his neck. And then I saw what Emmett had clenched his fists at and couldn't prevent the laughter that bubbled up in my chest from escaping.

Edward loved Bella's ass. I knew this. Rosalie knew this. Jake knew this. In fact, I think even *Bella* knew this—and she was pretty oblivious. In his sleep, Edward had not been afraid to claim what he loved. One of his hands rested under Bella's thigh, preventing her from rolling off him, and the other was wrapped below her waist, palming her ass.

My laughter was all it took to break the silence in the room, and soon it was filled with chatter from the gawkers huddled around the bed.

"Ten bucks says they hooked up last night," Jake whispered conspiratorially.

"No way," Tanya countered. "Look at their position. Do they look like people who have cleared the air of sexual tension?"

Rosalie nodded in agreement. "I'm tense just looking at them." Then she paused, her eyes warming and a slow smile spreading across her face. "They do look precious, though, don't they?"

"Yeah, really precious." Seth's voice was sarcastic and filled with longing.

I looked up to see him trying to look anywhere but the couple intertwined on the bed, and I couldn't help but feel bad for the guy. I'd be able to recognize that nauseous, sickly expression anywhere. Heartbreak. It was rough, and you could actually feel it stabbing into his chest—*no one tells you that, you know?* I knew he had somewhat of a crush on Bella, but I hadn't realized how deep it actually went. From the look on his face right now, I'd wager that it was a bit stronger than a crush.

Another added complication for these two. Just what they needed, of course.

Seth shuffled into the common room, grabbed something off the couch—presumably what he'd come into the bunk for in the first place—and took off like a bat out of hell.

"So, how long were you listening in?" I asked Emmett, but Jake answered with a devious smirk.

"Since the 'Oh, Edward, don't stop, Edward's!' started coming from this room."

"What?" Edward's gravelly voice spoke up, sounding a bit peeved.

"Of course *now* he hears it..." I mumbled under my breath, but it was loud enough to cause Jake to start snickering.

"Hm?" Edward was still mostly asleep, his eyes still closed and his body still laced with Bella's.

Bella sighed loudly and nuzzled her head further into Edward's neck. I watched on with interest as Edward groaned and tightened his grip around Bella, which caused Jake's low snickering to increase to full on laughter.

The laughter permeated the contented silence of the room, thrusting Edward into consciousness. I saw the exact second he realized who was in his arms because every muscle in his body tensed and froze as his eyes snapped open in surprise.

They darted around the room, searching from face to face, taking in our amused expressions. "What the..." His head rose up slightly from the pillow, making Bella's face shift and turn slightly towards me. That was when I saw the small, coy smile tugging on the edges of her mouth. *That little brat*. I wouldn't embarrass her now—no, I was more of a gentleman than that—but I was certain that Bella was awake and had probably been for some time now, and I was most definitely going to give her hell for it later.

~Bella~

I was having the best dream ever. Edward's body felt hot over mine—it was as if he was exuding heat, but I was still shivering. He knelt between my already spread thighs, hovering over my torso as he ran his hands over my stomach, teasing my flesh with the softest touch of the pads of his fingers.

"Edward," I moaned, bucking my hips in an attempt to get his fingers to travel lower. Instead of giving in, though, he just smirked, raised one of his perfect eyebrows, and moved his hands upwards. I almost groaned in frustration... until his hands ghosted over the erect peaks of my breasts. Finally, he leaned over to bring his mouth to mine. His tongue slid against mine as his hands made the descent I had wished so hopelessly for.

"Oh God, Bella... you're so wet." His finger slid into me with ease, moving gently within my folds to brush against my aching clit. I'd never wanted anything so bad in my entire life.

"Please, Edward, please..."

And then he was crushing me, pinning my wrists over my head as his fingers thrust into me again and again. His hot mouth moved from my lips to take up residence on my neck, sucking and marking me as his own in a feverish passion.

"Edward, yes! Oh God, yes!" I screamed out as I thrashed below him.

"Oh, no—you don't get to come without me," he mumbled into my neck. He removed his fingers, making me whimper with loss. But the whimper quickly turned into a full-fledged moan as he thrust his thick cock into me. Over and over he pounded, bringing us both to the brink of insanity before slowing down his pace to meet my lips in a languid kiss.

"What are you doing?" I asked breathlessly as he pulled away. I received no answer, just a satisfied smirk as Edward resettled between my legs, before going harder and faster than I could possibly imagine.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" Each one of my moans was punctuated by the sound of his forceful hips slapping against mine.

My climax was building, as was his, but he wanted to make it last. Bringing one of his hands down, Edward pulled my leg upwards to wrap around his waist, angling me so that he could fill me to the maximum capacity. His other hand reached down and pulled at my ass, making sure that we were as close as humanly possible.

A surge of pleasure washed through me, making me shiver and moan his name on repeat. My heart was beating faster than I'd ever felt it, pounding from my ears to my chest to my groin, where Edward's flesh was still moving between my thighs.

"Oh, Edward, don't stop Edward!" I cried out, but... my voice sounded far away, as if it were coming from somewhere else. And it didn't escape my notice that it sounded a tad like Jake.

In fact, it *was* Jake. My eyes fluttered open, and I realized that not everything about my dream had been, well, a dream. I took immediate notice of my position in the bed. My leg was draped precariously over Edward's hips, aligning my center with his rather prominent morning wood, which I'd obviously been rubbing myself against in my sleep.

Edward huffed and squeezed my ass and thigh, bringing us even closer, and I used all my effort not to groan audibly. No, I wanted to enjoy every second of this for as long as possible. Instead, a contented sigh escaped my lips, and I couldn't help but to lean further into the crook of his neck, noticing that I fit perfectly there.

My moment of perfection was ruined, though, by—of course—Jake, whose laughter shook the entire room, rousing Edward from sleep nearly immediately. I felt his body freeze, every muscle tensing around mine, inadvertently rubbing his erection directly on the inseam of my jeans.

Oh Jesus. Do not freak out, Bella. Absolutely do not freak out.

Knowing he was already good to go only caused him to invade more of my senses. My restraint only stayed intact hearing everyone's loud breathing behind me. Plus, I wanted Edward fully conscious for any sexual activity we might partake in.

"What the..." I heard Edward's sleep-laced voice question as he quirked his head off the pillow. My body shifted downwards slightly, but I noticed that he still kept a firm grasp on my body, not letting me roll away...or put my leg (which was still tossed over his hips) down. I suppressed the

grin that threatened to take over my face at that realization.

We lay in blissful peace for approximately 1.2 seconds before I heard Emmett's bellowing voice in my ear, "Get up, you perv!"

"Fuck you," I groaned as I attempted to get my hungover head far, far away from Emmett's booming voice. My body moved in the opposite direction, starting with my head burrowing into something soft and pliant, which I assumed was a pillow. *Wrong*. It was only when a low chuckling reverberated through my body, making me tremble with excitement and arousal, did I realize that I'd inadvertently rolled directly on top of Edward.

My eyes flew open as I scrambled to sit up, pressing my hands on his chest to brace myself. This did little to help, since it only brought my center directly on top of his erection... yet again. His eyes widened, and a strangled noise escaped from his mouth as I straddled him, effectively pushing myself down onto the (rather nicely-sized) cock I'd just been dreaming about.

"Fuck, I'm—" I began to apologize, seeing the panic in Edward's eyes, but I was interrupted.

Laughter filled the small room again, and I took a second to notice the other people in the room. Jasper, Emmett, Rosalie, Tanya, and Jake were all red-faced and clutching their stomachs as they, as far as could tell, stood and watched us. "What are you guys doing in here?"

"Apparently... watching the... beginnings... of a live... porno," Jake guffawed, his words coming out in wheezing gasps amidst his intense laughter.

Emmett turned quickly to Jake, punching him at the top of his shoulder, giving him a dead arm and silencing his obnoxious laughter.

"Oh shut up. You both know it isn't like that," Edward said, glaring at Emmett, breaking my heart and leaving it in tiny shards strewn over his sheets.

"Right." I sighed and removed myself from his bed. He had just effectively tainted the best night's sleep in my entire life, and I couldn't sit in the bed with him until he actually wanted me there. I thought maybe he'd been coming onto me last night, but apparently it had all been in my head. "Let's go to breakfast."

The room was filled with curious stares, and it took me a second to figure out that I was still wearing my clothes from the night before. And I would need to be in uniform to enter the dining hall. And then I realized something else.

"Hey, if I slept here, who the fuck is with my bunk?" My heart picked up its pace. I was going to get fired. I got drunk on my first day off and subsequently forgot about my children!

"No worries, B. I got Jen from tennis to cover for you," Rosalie explained calmly, letting my heart settle.

"Oh. Thanks," I replied awkwardly. Things with Rosalie were tenuous at best. Last night we'd begun to mend the shock and betrayal I'd felt, but it was going to take a while to gain back the trust I'd had in her.

FLASHBACK

At Edward's suggestion, I followed Rosalie back to the docks, where we could talk without the added ambience of ridiculously poorly sung rock ballads and power hits of the eighties.

"I don't understand why you're mad, Bella," she began, and the condescension in her tone hit me like a ton of bricks. "It's ridiculous for you to be mad over something that clearly doesn't involve you." My jaw unhinged slightly as his words continued to sear into my skull, giving me a pounding headache. "Are you really that insecure that you can't stand to be number two to Emmett?"

I was reeling. "You think that's why I'm mad at you?" Her eyes were fierce as she nodded sharply. "Screw you," I mumbled under my breath.

"What?" her eyes were wide with shock, and I was clearly under the influence of too much tequila, because my words spilled forth with no filter.

"I said. Screw. You." Fury ebbed and flowed through my body, warming my cheeks with a red flush. "This is so fucking unfair, you know... I'm the one who's supposed to be mad at you!" I screamed. "Emmett has kept things from me—it's part of his older brother mantra—sometimes I don't want to hear shit from him. But you? I've told you everything, Rose. Everything! There's no minute action that I don't immediately run to tell you. I guess I just assumed you would do the same. I thought Alice and I would come first. We're supposed to be best friends, and this wasn't really 'best friend,' behavior. On the day that you claimed you would always be there for me, you weren't."

"I was going to," she replied, looking distraught. "I was going to tell you yesterday after the swim meet, but you were so upset about Jasper and Alice going out already, and I thought I'd give you time to adjust to them first before springing something else on you. I thought I was being considerate..."

"Considerate to who, Rosalie? Considerate to me? By lying to me? Finding out that two of my best friends are together by finding them making out in public really isn't the best way to express that. I... I—"

"He cheated on me!" she snapped. "You want to talk about 'best friend' behavior? Yeah, okay. My best friend from home called me..." she let her eyes close and continued "to tell me that she and Royce were in love and they'd been together... for..." Her blue eyes opened, and I saw the pain behind them. "They'd been seeing each other behind my back for three years." Tears started to trickle from her eyes. "Bella. I... I'm sorry I didn't tell you, but I lost it and Emmett happened to be there. And I r-really like Emmett. He's s-sweet, and you always tell me the nicest things about him. H-he would never do that t-to me."

I sighed and wrapped my arms around her shaking body, which was still convulsing as she tried to get a grasp on her sobs. "Oh, jeez." I'd never seen Rosalie cry. Yell, yes. Hell yes. But cry... never. "I'm sorry, too, Rose." At my words, she pulled back, looking confused. "I'm sorry that you felt like you had to hide anything from me. It really sucks that you didn't tell me, especially after I

told you I was already feeling crappy. I know it's really fucking lame to say, but... you hurt my feelings. You and Emmett both."

"You don't seem all that pissed at Emmett, to be frank."

I rolled my eyes at her petulance. "Emmett is Emmett. He leaves me Oreos and a tub of frosting, and I can't help but forgive him. It's how we work, but it doesn't mean that I'm still not pissed off as fuck at both of you."

"So, are you going to be even more pissed if I ask you what's going on with you and Edward tonight?"

I cracked a small smile, but the anger and hurt were still present. "Maybe I'll talk to you about it tomorrow, but right now I kind of want to forget that you and Emmett exist."

She looked pained, but I was unyielding in my decision. I was going to drink and be merry and focus on the gorgeous man inside whose lap was still warm from my body. Resolute in my decision, I turned, leaving Rosalie on the docks.

"You're going to need something to wear, LB." Jake's ridiculing voice brought me back to the room, which was still filled with people. "And a shower," he sniffed my hair and scrunched up his nose, looking like a sad puppy, "you smell like ten hundred kinds of different booze."

"Shut up." I laughed and elbowed him in the stomach.

"Uh, here." Suddenly, clothes were pushed into my arms awkwardly, hanging over my arm in a haphazard mess. I looked around for the culprit just as a towel was flung at me from across the room. I sidestepped it, looking bewildered at a flustered Edward, who was looking over his shoulder at Jasper—aka, the culprit.

"Do you know where the shower is, Bella?" Jasper smirked, cocking his head to the side, which made me incredibly nervous.

"I think I can manage..."

"Don't be silly, Bella." Jasper stepped up, leaned down to get the towel he'd thrown, and linked arms with me, leading us out of the room and towards the shower. "I'll show you."

"That's really unnecessary, Jasper..." One look at his cocked eyebrow was more than enough to silence me, though. He pushed open the door to their bathroom, revealing a small one-person shower, letting me step in. His facial expression hadn't changed, and it was starting to drive me slightly insane.

"What?" Did I have something on my face or something? Oh man. I realized I hadn't even looked in a mirror yet this morning. I could potentially be a shit show.

"I just want you to know," he began cryptically, "that I know."

Huh?

"Know what?" I asked, but he just shook his head and began closing the door. "Wait!" I stopped the door with my hand and peeked my head out. "Jasper! What do you know?"

He shook his head again and winked before closing the door all the way, leaving me dumbfounded. Jasper could be such a freak sometimes. Instead of thinking about his puzzling comments, I stripped down quickly and turned the water on as hot as it could go.

As I stepped into the shower, I realized that it was filled with the boys' toiletries. I sidestepped Jake's AXE shampoo and body wash quickly, not wanting to smell like a male stripper all day, leaving me with three other options to choose from. I picked up all the bottles, examining their contents. The first was a lemon-scented shampoo, which I recognized as Emmett's, but I decided that I was still a little too pissed at him to use it. The second was unscented body wash and shampoo from Dove, which I had almost squeezed into my hand when I saw the label of the last bottle.

It was a girly looking bottle by Nexus, but when I opened it – oh good God – I nearly orgasmed just from pure scent alone. It was as if someone had bottled Edward and put him into a neat little package. I read the ingredients over quickly, wondering what could possibly result in such an amazingly fresh and crisp fragrance, surprised at what I found there: bamboo extract, chamomile, and orange blossom... really?

Unable to resist, I poured a huge amount into my hand and lathered it into my hair. An unstoppable moan escaped my lips as the steam became imbued with the scent, filling my lungs with each deep breath. I'd be surrounded by Edward all day.

There was a quick knock at the door, but before I could respond, I saw a flash of bronze at the door. "Fuck!" I cried out as the shampoo ran into my unblinking eyes.

"Bella?" a voice called out from the still-opened door, but it was a different head of bronze than the one I had been expecting.

"Yeah?" I managed to squeak out.

"I'm driving home now, and—" there was a pause before a muttered, "Go away, you miscreant! If Bella wanted you to see her naked..." I wasn't able to hear the response, but my skin burned under the hot water at the idea of *someone* trying to get a look at me naked... unless it was Jake or Emmett or Jasper... because that'd be disgusting. "Anyway, I didn't want to leave without saying 'bye,'" Tanya continued. "I had so much fun with you last night. Teddy has my number if you ever want to call, and hopefully I can make it up here again before the end of the summer."

I heard Jake bellow a loud, "Fuck yeah!"

"Thanks, Tanya. Drive safe!" I called out loudly, laughing as she closed the door again.

I finished the rest of my shower in record time, not even bothering to shave (because really, how did I know whose razor was whose—and what parts of their body it shaved if it was

hanging out in the shower *shudder*). But as I hopped out and began to put the clothes that had been shoved at me on, I realized two very important things—one, the clothes, without a doubt, belonged to Edward—and two, I hadn't worn a bra last night and had no clean underwear to put on. *Fuck*.

As I stood staring at the pile of clean clothes, there was another loud bang at the door. My breath caught and my body jumped as Emmett's booming voice called out, "Come on, LB! Hurry the fuck up! The water is off, so what the fuck are you doing in there? Some of us have to pee! You better not be doing anything dirty."

Frustrated, I responded, glaring at the door, "Sorry, Em, but 'dirty' is the problem. I don't have any fucking clean underwear!"

Emmett sighed loudly, dropping his forehead against the door in resignation. He knew I had a thing about not wearing underwear. It really weirded me out for some reason. And I was already wearing someone else's clothes—*Edward's* clothes. "Can Rosalie run back to my bunk and grab me some?" I asked, oddly hopeful.

"No can do, LB. She went to walk Tanya out and was going straight to breakfast." There was a pause, and I heard Emmett step away from the door. "Wait there. I have an idea!" His footsteps walked further away and my heart constricted with panic. Was he honestly going to leave me in his bunk in a towel until after breakfast?

"Fuck! Emmett!" I yanked the door open, thinking that—like Rosalie—everyone had gone up to breakfast already. "Don't leave me here!" I was in for a huge shock as three pairs of eyes focused on my wet, towel-covered body.

Jasper immediately blushed and averted his eyes to the floor, but I didn't have time to notice anyone else's reaction because soon Emmett's body hovered in front of my own, blocking my view with his hulking stature. His hand slipped down and passed a pair of black boxer briefs into my hand. As I opened them up to check the size (which was extra small), I noticed that they had the Batman symbol on the front and started giggling.

"They were given to me as a joke," Edward groaned.

"Sure they were." I laughed, relieved that I'd have underwear to put on. As I was giggling, Jasper seized his opportunity and ran into the bathroom, throwing back the clean clothing at me before shutting the door behind him.

"Jasper!" I yelled, banging on the door.

"Go change in my room. I've had to pee forever!"

I growled and stalked past Emmett into Jasper's room, causing Edward's eyes to widen exponentially as he scrambled for his own clothing and *ran* out of the room. *Nice*.

I guessed we weren't going to have that whole morning after, "oh yeah, it was totally normal that we slept in the same bed and woke up with me sleep humping you," conversation yet.

Today was going to be weird. I could feel it already.

My classes dragged by slowly. After having the day off yesterday, my brain wanted nothing more than to shut off for the rest of the day, but instead it had to put up with whining campers who only wanted to chat and ogle Jasper instead of working on their assignments.

I knew that camp was supposed to be fun, but it was really grating my nerves that I hadn't been able to accomplish a single lesson plan today. Also, I was still frazzled from this morning's events... and the fact that I knew I was wearing Edward's clothes (including his underwear) and was swimming in his scent all day. Technically, I could have gone back to my bunk to change after breakfast, but I couldn't bear to part with the soothing presence of the clean smell by choice.

Plus, Jasper had been taking all day to slowly clue me into what *he knew*. Yes, I'd been awake in bed with Edward for a little bit before I'd admitted to being awake. Sue me for wanting to enjoy that just a smidge! Apparently, Jasper thought it was hilarious and continued to mock me mercilessly throughout the day.

Only one more class to get through today, I chanted to myself. One more class, and then I could lay down and imagine that this morning had gone down a different route—maybe one where my group of friends hadn't been the biggest cock block known to man.

The campers meandered in slowly, taking their places at the low wooden tables, already looking bored. Jasper was in the midst of explaining the life of George Seurat and pointillism—the making up of an image by using only tiny dots—when a flustered-looking camper ran in.

She held up both her hands in apology and turned to me, staring at me with big brown eyes. "Bella, Edward wanted me to tell you that it's his fault that I'm late, and he's really sorry."

My face must have betrayed my shock at her statement because the girl felt it necessary to continue.

"We were working on my new project and he didn't hear chimes ring for next period. So, when he asked me what I had next, and I told him I had Fine Arts, he... um..." she blushed, looking uncomfortably at my face "... he swore, and then he told me to apologize to you specifically for making me late."

"Okay, well, thank you..." I drifted off, feeling bad that I didn't remember the girl's name.

"Maggie."

I smiled as warmly as I could and gestured for her to take a seat, which she did gratefully. Her flustered attitude and clear contempt for being in the center of attention reminded me of myself as a camper.

I found myself watching Maggie with a closer eye than I had with any of the other campers as she submerged herself into the work, focusing on creating a beautiful pointillism piece, using her own hand as the model.

"That looks great, Maggie." I leaned down to point out my favorite aspects of her shading, causing her to blush and smile shyly. She was incredibly talented, and I admired her focus, even when the people surrounding her were caught up in conversations about the latest rumors they'd heard floating around camp.

As class was wrapping up, I pulled Maggie aside before she could escape. "Am I in trouble?" she squeaked nervously.

"No, not at all. I wanted to let you know that I wasn't mad at you at all."

"Are you mad at Edward?" Her face looked incredibly worried.

"What? No, of course not."

She sighed loudly before smiling and nodding. "Good. He was so nervous that you were going to be mad at him, and I—" Maggie's blush overtook her entire face as she whispered, "—I wouldn't want to get Edward into trouble."

Aww. I loved this camper. She loved Edward, too. I couldn't help but add in my two cents to help her feel more at ease. "He *is* really cute, isn't he?" Her blush intensified as she nodded some more, trying to avert her gaze from my prying eyes. "I'll go let him know neither of you are in trouble right now, okay?"

A wide smile overtook her face and she yelled out a goodbye as she ran off toward the bunks. I decided to follow my own words and go visit Edward.

The shack was completely empty when I arrived, though. Seeing as I already knew the lock combination, I just opened it up and went inside. I could wait for Edward in the shack, right? That wouldn't be creepy at all.

The last time I'd been in the shack alone, I'd been so miserable, thinking that Edward had stood me up. But today I wanted to make new shack memories. Better shack memories. Happier shack memories.

I sat down in Edward's chair and looked around, making myself at home there. Surrounded in Edward's scent, sitting in his seat, I felt oddly close to him. There were storyboards strewn around the desk from, what I assumed was, his last class.

As I looked at the empty boxes, images of a new animated film flooded my mind about a shy flower who wished she could move from her spot in the garden. She sees all her friends and family get picked to be in bouquets week after week, and she's so sad by herself. Finally, when her wish comes true and she gets picked to be in the bouquet, she realizes that all of her friends have been picked have been denied their life source, hidden away from the sun, forced onto a shelf until they wither and die. A little depressing, yes, but it fit my state of mind.

Gathering a group of colored pencils, I started to plot out each frame until I realized I was missing something... music. I needed music when I was drawing, so I moved the mouse around

and turned the monitor to the iMac back on. I browsed through Edward's iTunes, chuckling as I went. My browsing ended when I found a playlist filled with rap. Who knew that little emo Edward listened to rap?

Immersing myself in the heavy beat, I began to draw. The images flowed naturally as I mumbled along with the lyrics.

*Tonight I want a slut, will you be mine?
I heard you was freaky from a friend of mine
Now I hope you don't get mad at me
But I told Nate you was a freak
He said he wants a slut, hope you don't mind
I told him how you like it from behind*

I was totally in my groove when I heard the sound of two bodies colliding. I was able to turn in my seat just as Edward stumbled forward, with an unsteady Seth right behind him. After regaining composure, they both stood in silence, watching me closely.

"Hey." I waved awkwardly, a small quasi-salute before turning back to my drawing. They both stared at me with unreadable expressions on their faces, and it was making me just the slightest bit uncomfortable. I was glad I had something else to focus on besides their probing stares.

"Are we interrupting something?" Seth's voice came from over my shoulder, and I could feel the heat from his body escaping thickly into the air behind me.

"No, just..." I nodded toward my paper and tried my very hardest not to shudder as Edward placed his hand on the desk next to the paper, leaning close to my head to look at the drawings in front of us.

"Is there a script for this animation yet?" he asked, curious.

"Uh, kind of..." I nodded towards the separate page with my overall storyboard.

"It looks kind of intense," Seth noted, dragging a finger along the edge of the page.

"Well, it's adult animation," I explained.

I felt Edward's hot breath on the back of my neck as he leaned in to nudge my shoulder playfully. "Adult animation? Bella, if you wanted to watch porn, there's a whole stash right here," he joked, wrapping his arm around my shoulders to reach the mouse and drag it towards his photos folder.

"Oh, shut up." I laughed and turned my head to look at him, ready to continue my berating, but my breath caught. Edward wasn't looking at the screen at all. No, he was looking at me—very nearly through me, and I could feel my heart pick up pace. I needed a second to swallow before I continued. "It's not adult *like that*," I squeaked out as I averted my eyes, turning them back to my drawing.

"Sure, sure, Bella." His chuckle was light and breathy in my ear, and I could feel every inch of my skin prickling at the sound of it.

As it died down, an odd silence came over the room just as the song switched to R. Kelly's "Ignition (remix)." The suave tones combined with the thoughts of looking at porn with Edward caused me to break out into laughter again.

"Speaking of which, seriously, Edward, what is this raunch-tastic playlist for?"

His head came next to my ear, whispering in the naughtiest tone I'd ever heard him use, "What do *you* think it's for, Bella?"

Panties drenched now. Sexy times in the shack soon, please. Kay, thanks.

Suddenly, a throat cleared behind us, and I realized that Seth was still in the room. Funny. I'd completely forgotten about his presence. "Hey, Edward, don't you have to get ready for the talent show tonight?"

Edward straightened up stiffly, leaving me missing his body heat immediately. He ran a hand through his hair and shrugged. "Yeah, I should... go. Um, hey, are you going to be filming tonight?" he asked Seth.

"Yup. Or I assumed I would be." There was another pregnant pause where they stared at one another. I almost felt like I was invading a moment or a silent conversation... or something. As they continued to be weirdos, I pushed out from the chair and got up, piling my drawings and putting them on the shelf above Edward's computer, out of the campers' way. "Unless Bella wants to help?" Seth looked hopeful, and I smiled back.

"Me? Help film?"

Seth nodded hesitantly. "Should we go set up the camera?"

"Sure."

As Seth grabbed the tripod and the rest of the equipment, I remembered why I had originally set up camp in the shack first of all. "Oh! Edward!" He turned around, quirking an eyebrow in my direction. I blushed, realizing how overly excited I sounded. "Uh... I wanted to tell you that I got your apology... from Maggie."

A look of understanding flashed across his face, spreading into a soft smile. *Oh, yes. My insides are turning into goo.* All of a sudden, his arm was being wrapped around my shoulders, pulling me into his side as we trekked out of the shack and up the hill towards the theater.

"Good," he said as he squeezed my shoulders tighter. As if I would fight him off. *Please.* "Because I would hate for you to think—" Edward cut himself off before pressing his nose into my hair suddenly, making me feel super self-conscious. "Hey, you smell like me."

My neck got hot, a steady blush creeping up over my cheeks at his ability to smell his shampoo

on me. I chanced a small glance upwards at him, but his nose was still pressed against my hair, so I couldn't see his face. "Uh, yeah..." I trailed off, looking for anything to distract him from his recent discovery. "Sorry I didn't ask or anything, I just figured..."

And then I saw it. The trip board. The perfect distraction.

The older age groups would be going on their first overnight trips next week, and I had forgotten that they were going to put up the list of chaperones tonight before the talent show to see which counselors were going to be on which trips.

"Hey! Trip advisor list is up!" I pulled away slightly, grabbing Edward's hand and dragging him up the steps of the front porch.

Usually, new counselors didn't get assigned to the overnight trips, but I hoped that I would be able to go. I knew that Emmett and Jake and Edward would all be put on the same trip—to Quebec with the oldest age group—they always were.

Naturally, my eyes went to that piece of paper first, seeking out the Quebec trip. My mouth nearly fell open in shock as I saw my name nestled between Jake and Emmett's names... shortly followed by Edward and Danielle from water ski.

Wait, what?

"Wait, what?" My filter was broken today, apparently, as my thoughts tumbled forth from my mouth. "I... um... Quebec?"

Suddenly I was spun around to face my best friend, who had been noticeably MIA all day. Seriously, that girl appeared and disappeared faster than a senior citizen's erection.

"Holy God, Bella!" Alice squealed. "You're going to Quebec? I have never been more jealous of anyone in my entire life! You get to sleep in a hotel room! And go shopping and go to restaurants and have so much fun! Do you remember *our* trip to Quebec? And the boys we met on the cruise ship?" She giggled, pulling me into a hug. But I was awkwardly tugged back seeing as my hand was still firmly encased within Edward's.

"Um, Edward?" He looked spaced out, so I held our clasped hands up in front of his face. Finally, he came out of whatever deep thoughts he'd been lost in and looked apologetically at me as he released my hand.

"Oh, right... I'm gonna... just..." he trailed off, nodding towards the theater.

As Alice continued to babble about how lucky I was and how much fun I was going to have, I realized the potential for this trip. An overnight in a hotel with Edward? Yes and please. My imagination went wild as images of us intertwined between sheets flooded my mind. But then I remembered—hadn't that been a real opportunity last night? And he hadn't taken it. Instead, he'd squelched it and told me, "it wasn't like that."

Today had done nothing to give me any hope that Edward viewed me any differently, but I

couldn't let go. And I was starting to think that I really should.

"Hey, Bella." Seth nudged my shoulder with the tip of his tri-pod **gigglesnort** bringing my focus back to my surroundings. "Should we get this set up?"

I acquiesced, seeing as Alice had already darted off to wherever she needed to be next, and followed Seth to the balcony of the theater.

After climbing up the ridiculously narrow stairs, I realized that I'd never been up here before. Sitting on the balcony was a counselor privilege, and I knew that coming up here was a favorite afterhours activity—the perfect location for any debaucherous behavior.

The space was fairly cramped, too close to the ceiling for a full-grown person to stand all the way up. I shuffled through, kicking up clouds of dust as I went—clearly there hadn't been enough debauchery up here this summer... yet. I couldn't help the slow grin that spread across my face as I watched Edward rehearse with Emmett and Jake for their hosting gig tonight.

"Earth to Bella," Seth whispered, poking me in the arm.

I scowled and went to poke him back, but he already had his hands up in surrender. "Wow, you are touchy today," he joked, pulling up two chairs for us to sit in. I spaced out again, day dreaming about the trouble Edward and I could potentially get up to in this tight crawl space, when I felt Seth poke my arm again... hard.

"What?" I snapped, shouting a little too loudly for the small theater. His face dropped, and I felt bad. It wasn't his fault that he was stepping on my Edward fantasies. If anything, it was good that he did. "Sorry," I apologized.

"No worries. I was just asking, um, what happened last night? I'm guessing good things." He nodded his head in the direction of Edward, who was staring in my direction, most likely because I'd just had a crazy spastic outburst in a confined space. I met his concerned eyes with an easy smile.

"Hm?"

"Did something happen between you and Edward?" Seth asked, flat out.

I didn't really know how to answer the question. "Um, maybe?" And then, because no one had really been asking me what happened or how I felt about anything, I verbally vomited all over Seth. "I don't know, actually. We were kind of drunk, and he's touchy-feely to begin with, but then we ended up sleeping together. Not like sex sleeping, cause, yeah, I'm still a virgin, but like slumber sleeping. Except we woke up all on top of one another and he didn't pull away, but maybe he was just tired and hungover? And oh my god, I'm so sorry, you don't want to hear any of this, do you?"

Seth's eyes had glazed over slightly, and I knew that I'd pushed the whole "let me be your friend," card a little too far. "Sorry," I continued to apologize.

"Bella, it's okay." He leaned closer, placing his hand on my knee in a comforting—as opposed to creepy—manner. "I told you I'd be here for you, didn't I?" I nodded, unsure of how cool he was with this whole thing. "And, uh..." A slight flush appeared on his cheeks, and I wondered what the hell could fluster him. "I won't tell anyone you're a virgin if you don't want me to."

"Shit." I had just told him that, hadn't I? I'd literally spewed out whatever had come into my mind, and of course that had to be throw in there somewhere. "Yeah, um... please don't."

"Don't worry." He squeezed my knee in another gesture of assurance, but all I felt was an overwhelming sense of claustrophobia and suffocation.

As the campers filed into the theater, I sat in uncomfortable silence with Seth. He'd said not to worry, but as I watched Edward gracefully take the stage, smiling widely at all the campers, I couldn't help but do just that.

Chapter 15 Quebec Overnight

~Edward~

"Please forgive me as I try to explain... a place that once found me and left me this way. Black and white visions melt to warm colors. Skies sprinkled with stardust impressed in my mind. This gently painted picture, the setting of my childhood. Cradled by breezes of happiness. In the comfort of friends whose hearts feel it, too. Eternal bonds form, souls freeze as once. Please forgive me, for I've tried to explain..."

My eyes fluttered open with the impact of the vibrations from the road on my cheek. Laughter and singing cluttered my senses, but all I could feel was *her*.

"... no, no, no, Em, that's not what happened at all..." Her impatient sigh cut through the din of the campers, rousing me from my restless slumber.

"Tell me, then!" Emmett growled.

"Tell him what?" I lifted my head from the cool glass of the bus window and pushed my glasses up my nose, bringing the rest of the large vehicle into focus.

Bella's face heated, visibly turning pink in the mere seconds I'd laid eyes on her. God, she was too fucking gorgeous for words. "N-nothing," she stammered, glaring daggers at Emmett, who was sitting in the front seat of the bus, helping the driver navigate.

I sighed and flipped open my cell phone, glancing at the time. Only 8:52AM. Only approximately three hours and eight minutes until we reached Quebec, then. I felt bad that I had dozed off on chaperone duty, but honestly, those girls were contained to a nice coach bus for six hours. I didn't foresee them getting into too much trouble. Plus, we'd left at 6AM, and I'd barely slept

eight hours since the night I'd had Bella in my bed.

Fuck. How had I fucked this up so badly? As I'd awoken in my bed, intertwined with Bella, things had looked different than they had the night before. First of all, my sober self wasn't nearly as courageous as my drunk self. So, when I'd tried to downplay how much I ached, having her rub her soft curves against the, uh, harder parts of my body and she'd agreed with me that we "weren't like that," any quasi-confidence that I'd gained the night before had completely shattered. I'd never had a girl jump so quickly out of bed with me before—not since that fateful night at RISD when I'd lost my virginity. Fuck, that girl hadn't even stayed long enough for me to get her off. Pathetic, I was. Truly pathetic.

Okay, Cullen, enough of the fucking Yoda inner monologue. It's really not helping your loser case.

Somewhere over the course of that evening, I'd convinced myself that Bella saw me like I saw her, too... as special. I'd imagined it in her playful touches and flirtatious smiles, but clearly that was all it had been—my imagination.

So, I'd done what I did best. I'd shrugged it off, smiled and made nice, pretending that I could go back to that first week of camp when Bella was still LB, with her pigtail braids and braces. That had lasted all of five fucking minutes, until she was naked in my shower, merely feet from where I was standing. And then she was in my room, covered by a towel with the scent of my soap and shampoo emanating from her every pore. And I'd fucking loved that. Marking her as mine. And that was when I'd realized how totally and utterly fucked I was.

"Get enough rest there, sleeping beauty?" Jake asked, pinching my cheeks from the seat behind me.

I grunted and slapped Jake's hands away from my face. He was the one who'd created this angsty mess of non-sleep I'd gotten myself into for the past three days anyway. Well, he'd instigated it, so I was going to throw some blame at him, 'cause I could. It was actually *Jasper's* fault, but he wasn't around for the next two days. Ass.

FLASHBACK

All throughout lunch, Jake kept throwing me sideways glances and winks. Had I not known it would hurt me more than him, I would have punched his fucking lights out for his smirking. It was bad enough that he'd now slept with my sister—twice—but to throw it in my face for an hour? Well, let's just say that I was close to my breaking point.

"Hey, what's up your butt today?" Alice giggled, scooting herself next to me on the tiny bench as the campers filed out of the dining hall.

I looked around for the culprit of my less-than-fabulous mood, only to see him wrapping his large arm around Bella's petite shoulders.

"Jake."

Alice's giggling increased as she followed my line of vision. "Yeah, you would be the bottom of

that relationship, wouldn't you?"

I was too pissed off and antsy and upset to even come back at her joke. Instead, I closed my eyes and leaned my head back against the wall, trying not to hit something.

"Whoa, no comeback?" She poked my side. "What happened last night?"

I was debating whether to spill my soul to Alice—or if that'd be a poor choice—when a slow drawl intervened. "You want to know what happened last night? Do you, sweetheart?"

My eyes went straight for Jasper, and I was surprised at the bags around his eyes. "Jesus, Jasper. You look like you've been through the wringer. Didn't you get any sleep last night?"

At my words, Jasper's eyes narrowed for a split second before he groaned and leaned his forehead against the table. "No, you asshole. And I'm a little angry that you did, seeing as it's your fault that I got approximately four hours of sleep last night."

"My fault? What did I do? I was passed out within minutes of getting into our room."

Alice's eyes widened, flipping back and forth between my curious eyes and Jasper's head, which still lay on the table, hiding his eyes from view.

"That's the problem," he groaned. Finally, he lifted his head up, revealing his tired eyes once again. "Did you know that Bella is a sleep talker?"

I racked my brain, wondering if I had heard Bella talk in her sleep last night, but I could only remember waking up and feeling the most rested I'd felt in a while... maybe ever. "No?" I asked as a question, wondering how loud Bella must have been talking if she had kept Jasper up.

"Yeah, and it wasn't only talking... there was also sleep mo—" Alice jabbed her little elbow into Jasper's ribs, cutting him off mid-sentence. The tiny girl looked downright dangerous, causing Jasper to blush and apologize immediately and leaving me wondering what the fuck the end of that sentence was.

Sleep moving? Sleep moping? Sleep mobbing? Sleep mocking?

Fuck.

Sleep moaning? It sounded like a long 'o.' If Bella had been moaning in her sleep and I'd missed it, I was really going to punch someone out.

Instead, I apologized quickly to Jasper, saying that Bella probably wouldn't be sleeping over anytime soon anyway, and I ran to the shack to hide, essentially. Unfortunately, "hiding" did me little good because as I opened the door, I came across Jake sitting in my chair, waiting for me.

I rolled my eyes at his goofy grin and turned around to leave.

"Whoa, hold up, jackass. I need to properly torture you, so come sit your ass back down, please."

My head whipped around, and I glared at him appropriately. "We are not discussing what happened with you and my sister... ever."

To my surprise, Jake rolled his eyes and pulled up a chair, instead of retorting with his usual amount of snark.

"Yeah, no shit, dude. It's why you didn't know about it in the first place. Obviously. Why the fuck would we talk about that? No way. We're going to talk about LB."

"What about Bella?"

"I have a bet riding on this, so I'm going to need the entire truth, Eddie. Are you going to tell me that you didn't try a single thing with her last night?"

"I—" My throat dried, constricting slightly as I shook my head slowly. Jake's expression morphed into one of disappointment. "I'm guessing that wasn't the answer you wanted?"

"Eh, it was only ten bucks. I'll live." A smirk appeared on his face, and my stomach tightened with nerves. "The question is, how will you live, knowing that she was asking for it and you didn't give it to her?"

"Wait, what? Bella wasn't asking for it. Don't talk about her like that, you piece of shit."

"Are you for real right now?" I had no idea what the fuck he was getting at, so I continued to stare him down, hoping he would refrain from making any more lewd comments about Bella. "Oh man! You are!" Jake laughed, slapping his knee. "So, she was loud enough in her sleep moaning to wake up the rest of the bunk, but you slept through it? I'm sorry, man, but that... that's just too good."

Fuck me. Sleep moaning? So that was what Jasper had been privy to all night, and she'd been loud enough to wake up the entire bunk. How the fuck had I slept through that?

"Didn't you wonder why we were all in your room this morning? I swear, Tanya had to restrain me from breaking down the door when I started hearing the, 'Oh, yes, Edward, please, Edward... faster, Edward!'"

"That's not funny, Jake." I shook my head, ridding myself of the lusty thoughts Jake had just placed there.

"Dude, I wish I were kidding, but you can ask Emmett. If Rosalie hadn't been there to tell us about LB's sleep talking, your pretty face would be broken right now."

With that, he patted my knee and took off, leaving me alone to regret being a heavy sleeper.

"Fuck off," I groaned, causing Jake to snicker again.

"Wow, what's got your panties in a twist?" Emmett inquired from his seat, narrowing his eyes at

me.

"Nothing," I sighed. "I just haven't been sleeping very well."

Emmett just rolled his eyes. "So, go back to sleep. We have like three more hours before we get to Quebec, and we need you to be at maximum potential by then, m'kay?"

I shrugged and put my earbuds back into my ears, choosing the wallowing playlist I had made specifically for this trip.

*"This fact not fiction for the first time in years
And all the girls in every girlie magazine can't make me feel any less alone..."*

Death Cab's lyrics couldn't have been more fitting if they'd tried. And with little persuasion, I delved back into the topic that had been torturing my mind all weekend. Knowing that Bella had been dreaming about being with me as we'd laid intertwined in my bed had given me a small amount of hope that Bella might have felt similarly about me. I'd allowed my mind to wander temporarily, imagining the late night rendezvous in the shack or in the theater balcony—oh, yes, my cock had *really* liked those ideas.

But Seth had quickly squashed those thoughts. We'd spent the afternoon getting video clips of various activities, and as we'd filmed, he'd continued to talk about Bella.

Bella's so sweet, Bella's so smart, Bella's so unique, Bella's so talented, blah, blah, blah. I'd wanted to grab his shoulders and tell him, "*I KNOW*." But I couldn't. Because, in all honesty, Seth was probably a far better match for Bella than I was. He was (I wasn't afraid to admit it) a good-looking kid. But more than that, I'd never met a more optimistic person, unlike me, who had been a perpetual Debbie Downer since Friday.

I just didn't know what to do now. On Thursday, I'd been so convinced that I was ready to make my move and tell Bella how I felt, but seeing Bella and Seth together on Friday had shaken me. She just seemed so much lighter and happier around him. Relaxed—that was the word. And I wanted that for her, always. I guessed I would give it a little time, and then I would be content to let her go. *If you love someone, set them free and all that crap.*

Letting the soothing tones of Death Cab push those less-than-appealing thoughts away, I returned to my fitful nap.

"Cannonball!" Jake screamed as he plopped down onto the king-sized bed in our fucktastically awesome hotel room. I'd say this about Long Lake Camp—they definitely let us travel in style. The Fairmont Le Chateau Frontenac had been home base for the eldest age group's overnight trip for the past nearly thirty years, and I'd been lucky enough to enjoy the accommodations for the past five.

"Ugh. Fan-fucking-tastic," Emmett groaned. "They forgot my cot."

Jake rolled onto his stomach and smiled up at Emmett, patting the comforter space next to him. "Come on, baby, there's room enough for all of us in here."

Emmett tossed a pillow from the small loveseat at Jake's head and scowled, looking like a petulant child. "I'm not getting into bed with you homos. I know you two are *comfortable* sleeping in the same bed, but I need my own fucking cot."

"And who said I'll be sleeping here tonight?" Jake laughed and turned onto his back, propping himself up on his elbows. "The girls are only two rooms down, and I'm sure they both want a piece of this." He thrust his hips into the air, and my overtired mind snapped.

"Okay, enough, Jake!"

Like someone had scratched a record, the noises in the room came to a screeching halt, leaving me listening to my own heavy breathing. Emmett quirked his head to the side, and Jake's jaw unhinged slightly.

"Shit, Edward... it was a joke."

Grumbling, I sighed and sat down on the edge of the bed and leaned down to rest my head in my hands. "I know. I'm sorry I'm being such an epically emo douche today."

"Today?" Jake snickered.

"More like all weekend. And don't think we haven't noticed you avoiding LB, either, 'cause we fo sho have."

A smile threatened to overtake my face. "Did you just use 'fo sho' in that sentence and not laugh?"

Emmett's right fist came out of nowhere and pounded my shoulder... hard. "Get your shit together or just leave it alone. Permanently. If you make her cry. I will make you cry."

And I knew Emmett was serious.

"Samesies," Jake called out as he squirmed on the bed, rolling around like a dog scratching its back. "And I punch way harder than Em. You'd be hurting for weeks."

"No way! Have you seen these guns?"

Rolling my eyes, I decide to unpack my small overnight bag into the drawers as my two best friends continued to squabble over who could best beat my ass.

After a short while, a soft knock at the door alerted us of the time. Emmett opened the door to reveal Bella and Danielle, who had both showered and cleaned up for our afternoon and evening activities.

Looking down, I noted that I was still wearing my jeans, t-shirt, hoodie and my glasses. Spectacular.

"Ladies..." Jake winked as he held out his arms for them to hold on to, and I very nearly growled.

Naturally, that had to be the moment that Bella looked over her shoulder and found me glaring. I tried to soften my expression, but she flushed and turned around before I could. *Awesome.*

We split up, quickly taking attendance of our thirty campers, and made our way to the front of the hotel, where our tour of historical Quebec would begin.

Our tour guide was an old woman named Bree, who had fiery red hair, a thick Quebecois accent, and a spitfire personality. She knew the history of every inch of Old Quebec City—including several stretches of sidewalk where battles had occurred and famous people had traveled.

I kept my eye on Bella, who was walking just behind Jake and Danielle. The two of them seemed to be deep in conversation; Jake was probably figuring out his chances... typical. Opposed to the chatty and overzealous pair, Bella looked withdrawn and almost as tired as I felt. How had I not noticed this before?

"Now, if you'd all be so kind as to look at this church..." I tuned back in as Bree launched into another ridiculously detailed explanation. I'd heard her spiel so many times that I didn't even feel that bad zoning out for a while and just admiring the view...aka Bella.

The sooner you admit this to yourself, the sooner the torture will be over!

Ignoring my inner monologue, I wandered around the cathedral, paying attention to the beautiful architecture. Notre-Dame-des-Victoires was a small historic church in the heart of Old Quebec City, and despite the fact that I was by no means a religious person, I'd always felt extremely at ease there.

I was pulled out of my musings by Bree's chuckling voice, encouraging us to move onwards to look at the part of the city that had been destroyed by fire. As we walked, I took out my camera and filmed a bit. One of the main reasons I got to go on this trip was so I could record it for the video yearbook. As soon as I did this, though, the campers started acting up for the camera.

"Hi, Edward," a group of three girls chimed simultaneously.

"Hey, guys." I smiled back. "Are you having fun so far?"

The one furthest to the right started blushing and giggling. "Of course we are, *Edward.*" She prolonged my name as if it were extremely important, batting her eyes over-exaggeratedly. *Jesus fucking Christ. This is not what I need right now.*

"Really? What are you doing?" I asked, hoping that they'd talk about the tour being given and not me.

"We're going on a fantastic tour!" the one in the middle spoke up.

"Yeah?"

"Yes," she continued dramatically. "That—" she pointed ahead of her, signaling my camera movement—"is Bree. She's *super* smart."

"Have you learned anything valuable from her today?"

The girls all made equally panicked faces, making me chuckle slightly. "Don't worry... there won't be a test. I was just asking."

Their faces changed immediately into contented smiles as they laughed and talked about everything they'd learned so far. Apparently they'd learned that Vanessa, the camper on the right, snored loudly, listened to crappy music and couldn't understand a word coming out of Bree's mouth. They were actually incredibly entertaining, and their ridiculous anecdotes from the past eight hours or so kept my mind from wandering back to Bella, which was definitely a necessity at this point in time. My mind needed a Bella break, if you will.

As soon as the camera was put away, though, the girls didn't fade back into the group as I'd thought they would. No, they continued to stay with me and chat about their days. And I couldn't help but notice how close they were getting or the forwardness of their conversation. Needless to say, it was getting a bit claustrophobic, and I wasn't really sure how to extricate myself from the situation without embarrassing them or myself.

At pre-camp, they'd told us how to deal with campers having crushes on male staff—it wasn't a foreign concept, obviously. But I'd never dealt with campers who had literally come onto me... several of them at the same time, at least. I had no idea what the fuck I was going to do.

Giggling again, Vanessa reached out her hand and brushed against my cheek. "Are you trying to grow a beard, Edward?"

"Uh... no... I just..." My eyes darted around, searching for Emmett or Jake, but both were engrossed in Bree's lesson.

"It looks good. Definitely." She smiled widely, never removing her hand from my jaw. Finally, I took her hand and moved it away, but she just took that as an opportunity to grab onto my arm and attach herself to my side. "Amanda and Becky like it, too, don't you guys?"

All three giggled, and I tried my very hardest not to groan and scream out in frustration.

"Ooo, and I love your glasses, Edward," Amanda added. "They make you look like those models from the Calvin Klein ads."

"The underwear ones?" Becky inquired devilishly. "You *would* think Edward would look like an underwear model."

"Ugh, not the underwear ones, Becky! The glasses ones." Amanda scowled at her best friend, finally giving me a slight reprieve from her unwavering attention. "But that's besides the point. What I was *trying* to say was that they make you look hot, Edward."

At that point, all three girls turned their attention back to me, their giggling and blushing

increasing to the point of absurdity as they rambled about which models and actors I looked most similar to. It was utterly ridiculous.

"... yeah, like Simon Baker, too..."

"... what about, like, Harry Potter? He's super hot now, too..."

"Really?" An angel's voice cut in, causing a massive grin to spread across my face. "I thought glasses were supposed to be super dorky on guys—like Clark Kent or Peter Parker. Don't you know? Guys who wear glasses are always too afraid and insecure to get the girl. You girls are better off looking for a glasses-less guy..." Bella paused and looked me over, a glint in her dark eyes. "Maybe one closer to your own age."

Her eyes flicked down to where Vanessa's hand was still wrapped around my forearm before raising them back up to meet the camper's embarrassed ones. Stuttering nonsensically, all three campers scurried off, finally rejoining their group and leaving me to breathe freely.

"Thanks."

"Not a problem."

"Those girls are vultures," I whispered, leaning down towards her ear. She laughed loudly, smiling at me for the first time all day.

"Yes. Yes, they are," she agreed, nodding mostly to herself. "I thought I was going to drown on my way walking over here." I looked at her inquisitively, so she continued. "You know... from all the drool?"

I let out a barking laugh, which was so loud that Bree faltered in her speech, causing the entire group to look back at us with expressions of horror plastered across their faces. As I looked around, I realized that we were paused at a large cemetery and that Bree must have been explaining the deaths of important historical figures.

"Sorry," I said regretfully, training my eyes back on the ground and away from the disbelieving faces of my fellow staff and the campers. I stood there in silence, kicking a pebble, until I finally heard Bella's soft snickering coming from beside me.

My eyes flashed to her as she flushed with the exertion of keeping her laughter down. "And I thought I was awkward."

Her statement took me by surprise, leaving me utterly dumbfounded as she skipped over to Emmett, beaming and sliding her small hand into his with ease. He lifted it between them, kissing her knuckles lightly before squeezing and dropping it between them again. My stomach clenched with envy. I wished that Bella were comfortable enough to touch me casually like that.

And my jealousy skyrocketed as I began listening in to the camper's comments.

"... so cute, right?" a small redheaded one was saying quietly, nodding towards Emmett and

Bella's clasped hands.

"I heard they've been going out for a while, and that's why Bella flipped out when she found out about Emmett and Rosalie," a tall blonde chimed in.

The girls surrounding them began to murmur in agreement. "That makes so much sense. The way Emmett looks at her... it's like he'd do anything for her. And he's, like, known her forever. I wonder how long he's loved her?"

The small redhead sighed loudly, staring wistfully at Emmett. "I don't know, but, swoon. I wish I had an Emmett."

As they continued to perpetuate these ridiculous rumors, I thought I was going to lose my cool, or at least intervene and set them straight. But then I realized—what the fuck would I tell them?

Uhh, no, girls. They're just best friends. Emmett and Bella aren't together because...

Yeah, there's no end to that sentence... yet.

Grumbling to myself, I picked up my pace and walked to the other side of Bella so that Emmett and I were flanking her on either side, hoping my mere presence would be enough to dispel any rumors.

The tour ended close to the hotel at a local restaurant where we'd be eating dinner. The girls split up amongst themselves, but Amanda, Becky, and Vanessa begged and pleaded with me to sit at their table. Luckily, Bella intervened, sitting down at the last empty chair with them and shooing me away. I smiled graciously and sat down with Emmett at a table of girls, who were teaching him the fine art of burping.

It ended quickly, and we began to walk back towards the hotel to get ready for a good night of sleep before our epically long day of activities tomorrow.

"So, what are we doing tonight?" Bella asked, looking between Emmett and me.

"Movie?" Emmett asked. "I'm sure Long Lake wants to pay for something on demand."

"Sounds great," Bella chirped. "I'll just change into my pajamas and meet you back in your room?"

They both looked at me expectantly, but I wasn't fully there yet. My head was warring with itself, and I wasn't quite sure why. I needed to clear it before putting myself into close quarters with Bella again.

"Um, you guys go ahead. I'm gonna walk around for a little bit more."

Emmett glared at me as Bella's face changed to an expression of hurt. "Oh," she said quietly. "Okay. Well, we'll see you later, then."

He wrapped his arm around her shoulders, following the campers to the elevator as I meandered through the town. It looked beautiful; the sun was setting, leaving me in a murky dusk that reminded me of the state of my own mind.

Seriously, what was wrong with me?

I had a feeling—a very strong feeling—that Bella liked me. I'd seen it in Emmett's protective stance, Jasper's incredulous stares and Alice's hopeful ones. As I continued to walk through the twilight, more pieces clicked into place. Tanya had helped me realize that I liked Bella and that I wanted a relationship with her, but no one had told me that Bella wanted the same thing. And to be honest, I was a scared little shit who had his head up his ass. I'd somehow convinced myself that I would be content to let Bella be and not interfere, but I'd never even remotely considered the fact that she might want me.

Had I really hated myself enough to delude myself into believing that Bella could never want me?

The answer was a resounding yes.

I was a pathetic loser, a twenty-five year old who still worked as a temp and camp counselor. And Bella was incredible. At the end of this summer, she was going to go to USC and start the career that I'd always dreamed of for myself but would never achieve.

I needed to stop second-guessing myself. My torture ended tonight. No more "will they/won't" they crap. I needed to make my move. And I would.

Resolute in my decision, I turned towards the hotel to find Bella and hash this out once and for all.

~Bella~

Back in my hotel room, I quickly stripped off my clothes and stepped into a pair of shorts, a wife beater, and Edward's red hoodie. If he wasn't going to join us, the least I could do was be comforted by his quasi-presence.

He was driving me insane. I wasn't sure what his motivations were, but Edward Cullen's moods were giving me whiplash. He would go from perfectly content one second to insanely crabby the next to overly flirtatious all in the span of one minute, and I was getting hella frustrated. In my heart, I would always love Edward, but I couldn't stand to put it out there if he'd just stare at it, watching it shrivel up and die. I honestly wouldn't survive.

What was the saying? Better to have loved and lost than never loved at all? Fuck that. My life would be two hundred times easier right now if I'd never loved Edward Cullen at all. And I'd feel way less guilty about the texts Seth and I had been sending back and forth to one another all day.

I'd told Seth about my nerves, being on this trip with Edward, and he was doing everything in his power to help make me smile and relax. Grabbing my phone and wallet, I trudged down the hall

to the boys' room. I knocked twice loudly before Emmett swung the door open.

"Where's Jake?" I asked, curious as to where he'd run off to.

Emmett simply rolled his eyes. "He and Danielle are doing room checks."

I rolled my eyes as well. "You know they're going to be out of their rooms within the next thirty minutes, right?"

Emmett nodded, well aware of the time-honored tradition of the girls heading down to the hotel pool to stir up some late-night mayhem. "I figure as long as they don't burn the place down, we're good to go." Smiling, he flopped down onto a large cot that had been wheeled in front of the giant king-sized bed that took up half the room.

"Nice digs."

"Yours isn't as nice?"

I scoffed. "Nope. I guess the administrators like you guys more... obviously. We have a double and the room is, like, half the size of this place."

"Lame-o."

I nodded, absentmindedly chewing on my lip and wondering when Edward would be back. Instinctively, I pulled his hoodie tighter around me, sniffing the faint traces of his scent.

"LB?" I looked up at the sound of my name. Emmett was patting the portion of the cot next to him, signaling for me to sit with him. "Talk to me, little one."

I furrowed my brow, wondering what the fuck he was getting at. "I... about what?"

"You've been upset this weekend. Actually, you've been upset for a while, and I'm the jackass best friend who's been too distracted to ask you why. But I think I've figured it out."

"Oh really, now?" I quipped sarcastically.

A broad smile broke out across Emmett's face, and I smiled back at the sight of his dimples. They always made me smile. "You need a boyfriend."

My smile fell immediately at his words. "What?"

"You need a boyfriend," he repeated, patting my knee. "Let's go through all the options."

"Um, Em? There's only one option, and he's not interested."

"Exactly!" he exclaimed, getting himself riled up. "If Edward isn't going to pull his shit together and stop this hot and cold business, you need to buck up and move on. Consider him *not* an option... who do you want?"

My head was spinning. Emmett had basically reaffirmed everything I'd been stressed out about, and he would know best, I figured. Knowing that I wouldn't really go along with anything, I let Emmett enjoy his bonding time with me and started to participate.

"Fine... go through some options," I grumbled. "I'll tell you yes or no."

Emmett looked pensive as he went through the options. "Billy Baseball?"

"Too short."

"James from ski?"

"Too skeevy."

"Tim from golf?"

"He's already using Rogaine!" I exclaimed, getting more exasperated by the second.

"Johnny from tennis?"

"Ew."

"Jake?"

I just glared. That suggestion deserved no response.

"What? I'm just saying... you could *definitely* get that."

I rolled my eyes. "I'm sure I could, Em. But I don't *want* that."

"Well, the one you want..." Emmett trailed off, and his eyes flashed over my shoulder as I heard the door click closed. "Hey, Edward."

"Hi," I squeaked, glancing over my shoulder at a very disheveled-looking Edward.

"What are you guys talking about?" he asked warily.

Please don't tell him, Emmett, please don't tell him. If I could have telepathic powers at any point in my life, I would have wanted them here above all else. But, of course, I didn't have them, and Emmett explained exactly what we were talking about.

"We're coming up with a boyfriend for LB. Wanna help?"

"Uhh... what?" Edward's face turned red, and his eyes hardened.

"Yeah," I chuckled sarcastically. "Emmett's going through the staff to try and find me a boyfriend. Apparently, that's what I need this summer."

I thought Edward would laugh with me—or participate, even—but instead, he freaked the fuck out. I swore there was steam coming from his ears as he sputtered uncontrollably.

"Wh-what? No! No... no... no way! Em, are you fucking serious? N-no!"

It was as if Emmett's suggestion to find me a boyfriend was blasphemy, and it hurt a little bit to see Edward ridiculing the idea so ferociously.

"Why not?" I asked, trying not to sound completely hurt.

"Why not?" he repeated.

"Yeah, why not?" Emmett felt it necessary to reiterate the point, stabbing at my bleeding heart.

"Because!" Edward exploded, his face turning a deeper shade of red. "No one here is remotely good enough for you." My mouth dropped, and his next statement took the wind out of my lungs. "Not even me." He shook his head and lowered his voice. "Especially not me."

There was an uncomfortable moment of silence as a blanket of tension wrapped around me, making me feel as if I were being strangled.

"I'm going to get changed..." Edward trailed off quietly, grabbing some clothes and locking himself in the bathroom.

I turned back towards Emmett, trying to get my heart back under control, but I couldn't stop shaking. I didn't know whether it was from rage or nerves or excitement... all I knew was that something major had just happened.

Apparently it hadn't phased Emmett, because he sat smiling, continuing to list off more names.

"What about Greg from sail?"

Distracted, I replied, "I heard he's into really freaky shit... like strangling and whipping—"

Emmett's face turned red as he interrupted me, grabbing both my shoulders. "Little Bella Swan! You are a virgin, and I'm going to pretend that you don't know anything about 'freaky shit,' okay?"

Blood flooded my cheeks as I heard fabric rustle behind me. *Great, and now Edward knows I'm a virgin, too. I rue the day that Rosalie and Alice felt like it was appropriate to discuss my virginity in front of the only person in the world who wasn't born with a filter.*

"What about Seth?" Emmett continued.

"What *about* Seth?"

Emmett's face lit up with excitement. "You want him, don't you? You didn't say no!"

"No!" I yelled. "No, no, no, no, no!" I stood up, embarrassed and angry with the turn in the conversation and Edward's lack of participation. His eyes were downcast as he sat on bed, focusing on the remote, which apparently was fascinating to him. "Uh, I'm going to bed."

"But... movie?" Emmett asked with his puppy-dog eyes.

"Watch it with Edward," I spat. "Clearly, I'm too good to spend time with you guys anyway."

At my statement, Edward's shocked eyes met mine, burning with an intensity I wasn't prepared for. I needed to get away. I needed to think and breathe and calm down and figure out exactly what the hell I was going to do next.

I loved Edward. I knew this. And Edward clearly cared about me, but I didn't know if that would ever be enough.

Feeling disappointed and just mentally exhausted, I walked back to my room quickly. I slid my keycard into the door and pushed it open... only to slam it shut immediately.

"Fuck!"

Today really really sucked. I was going to need bleach to erase the sight of Danielle on top of Jake in the bed that I was *supposed* to be sleeping in tonight.

I begrudgingly knocked on the boys' door again, where Edward's stunned face met my furious one.

"Bella? Is everything okay?"

"Your asshole of a roommate is fucking *my* roommate in *my* hotel room... so... I need somewhere to stay tonight. I figured I could just take the cot."

"You could have literally two seconds ago, but Emmett just popped three Ambien and passed the fuck out."

Sure enough, Emmett was sprawled out on the cot, fast asleep. I groaned loudly.

"I'm sorry. Today is not my day, clearly."

"You don't want to sleep with me?" Edward asked, finally letting me into the room and closing the door behind me. "It's a king-sized bed, Bella... and we slept together in my twin like three days ago..."

"I know... I'm just... tired." I pleaded for him to understand, but, per usual, it seemed as if there was a communication barrier between us.

"We can still watch a movie." I nodded, unable to do anything else as I curled under the covers. "What do you want?"

"Whatever you want," I mumbled, letting my eyes fall closed. They snapped back open, though, as I heard the opening lines of the movie.

"Eternal Sunshine?" I propped myself up so that I could see the screen.

"You seemed like you needed to get out of your head."

I smiled, and the bed shifted as Edward climbed in, leaving about six inches of space between us—it might as well have been a chasm a mile wide. It felt as if he were on the opposite side of the world. And as much as I knew it was wrong, I couldn't bear to be that far away from him.

As the movie continued on, I inched closer until I finally had my head resting on his shoulder. He moved his arm to wrap around my shoulders, letting me settle against his chest, and I reveled in the sound of his heartbeat against my ear, lulling me into contented rest. We watched on with interest as Clementine and Joel ran around his brain, picking through his memories. Edward was right—it was the perfect movie to watch to get out of my head.

As the last lines were spoken, I realized I was crying.

"Bella?" he whispered, brushing a tear from my cheek, scorching it with his brief touch. "Why are you crying?"

"It's just beautiful," I sniffed. "They were so in love, but... they couldn't be together."

Edward nodded and sighed, and I could feel his breath curl around my face.

"It's funny, actually. I always thought the point of the movie was that they were always together because they were together in his memories. I've always thought it was super romantic... the last lines... when Joel tells Clem, 'I can't see anything I don't like about you.'"

As soon as he said the words, something changed. The air around us crackled, and I knew that my entire world was about to be altered.

"Edward?" I whispered, placing my hand on his chest and lifting my head up to look at him.

"Hm?" His green eyes glowed in the dim fluorescence of the television, warming every inch of my body.

"I can't see anything I don't like about you."

A slow smile spread across his face. "I can't see anything I don't like about you, either."

"Okay," I sighed, resting my head back down on his chest.

"Yeah." A slow rumble of laughter could be heard. "Okay."

Chapter 16

Quebec Overnight Part II

~Edward~

My heart thundered in my chest as Bella lifted her head. I held my breath as the tension between us increased. For the first time, I could see the desire in her eyes, and I didn't doubt it or second-guess myself. I could feel her pulse race and her body flush as we continued to gaze into one another's eyes.

"Edward?"

Her voice was so quiet, I would have thought I'd imagined hearing her if I hadn't glanced down at her luscious lips.

"Hm?" I replied absentmindedly, just wanting to tell her how much I liked her, how much I wanted to be with her, why she could never be with anyone else... how glad I was that she never *had* been with anyone else.

"I can't see anything I don't like about you."

Fuck. She beat me to the punch. But Bella's always been the more advanced one out of the two of us.

Her small voice pierced through the darkness as the credits rolled on the television screen, and I couldn't control the grin that overtook my face. It felt like the broken pieces of myself were coming together, neatly clicking and locking into place.

"I can't see anything I don't like about you, either," I repeated, yearning to lean forward and capture her lips with my own. Just as I was about to lean forward, she turned her head to lay on my chest and breathed out a small, "Okay." I could feel the tension leave her body, and I couldn't help but chuckle softly as I assured her of my affection again.

"Yeah." I paused, realizing that Bella and I were acting out one of my greatest movie fantasies. Well, behind *Star Wars* and *Secretary*. "Okay."

Her cheeks heated, and I could feel it seeping through the thin fabric of my t-shirt. Instinctively, I wrapped my arms around her waist, pulling her flush against my side.

"So," Bella began sleepily, "what d—" Her sentence was interrupted by a large yawn, and I couldn't help but laugh at her complete adorableness.

Adorableness? Is that even a word? Whatever... it is now.

"Shhh, we can talk tomorrow, Bella." I silenced her with a soft kiss to her forehead, surprising the both of us. She looked like a contented kitten as she leaned into my chest again.

I stayed awake long after Bella's erratic heartbeat had evened out. And although Jake had given me somewhat of a warning, nothing could truly prepare me for the sound of my name passing through her lips.

"Mmm, Edward," she mumbled, hooking her top leg with mine.

My cock sprang to life at her words, and I had to shift my entire body over to ensure that I didn't accidentally rub against her in my sleep... or cum against her in my sleep like some horny pubescent boy. How embarrassing would that be?

And now, after having heard that she was still a virgin, I knew that I had to take things physically at a slow pace. I didn't want to push her into anything, despite my dick's protests. I'd make the first move, but I'd let her set the pace past that. Anything to make her more comfortable.

Of course, at that second, Bella shifted onto my throbbing cock again, grinding her hips against me. I tried to take deep, steady breaths to calm myself, but it only served to excite me more, as her scent surrounded me.

This was fruitless.

And so, with lewd thoughts of deflowering my innocent Bella, I closed my eyes and fell asleep.

High-pitched giggling brought me out of my incredibly restful slumber. I felt as if I'd been sleeping for days, rather than simply hours. I groaned and tried to stretch my arm out, but it was pinned underneath something soft and warm.

The corners of my mouth pulled upwards as the giggling sound continued, its source moving towards me to free my arm from underneath it.

"Wake up, Princess," a voice chuckled—not the voice I had been expecting.

I tried to figure out if I was awake or still dreaming—although I was clueless as to why I would be dreaming about Jake waking me up. Nervously, I opened my eyes and couldn't help but laugh at what I saw.

Bella was still by my side, looking up at me with a nervous smile on her face, but it was the faces behind her that really woke me up. Somehow, Emmett and Jake had scrunched themselves into bed with us, and they were both grinning gleefully.

"What's going on?" I ran my fingers through my hair with my free hand, hoping that it wasn't too crazy after a long night's sleep.

"Time to get the kids up and out for the day!" Jake bellowed.

I cringed, which brought my lips to Bella's hair again, and I couldn't resist placing a small kiss on it. "Too loud," I mumbled, not pulling away from her.

Emmett cleared his throat loudly, causing me to jerk my head up. What the fuck did he want? His eyes were calculating and set upon my hand, which happened to be resting across Bella's ribs, *just* underneath her chest on the inside of her unzipped... hey now... .

She was wearing my hoodie. To bed. Pride swelled inside my chest, but I couldn't linger on it too long. Instead, I huffed and settled back behind her, temporarily ignoring the fact that Emmett and Jake were definitely staring at us. I couldn't bring myself to care just yet.

She released a long breath underneath my palm, relaxing back into me further, and I couldn't help but stroke my thumb in a small circle across her ribs. Our confession of sorts last night gave me no more room to pussy out. I liked her, and she liked me. And I was a hundred percent okay with using my body to show it.

As my thumb stroked, though, I inadvertently grazed the underside of her breast. Her breath caught, and I could feel her temperature increasing against me as her nipples strained against her thin wife beater.

I could feel myself hardening against her back, but before I could let it get too far, I jumped out of bed in an attempt to put some space between us. I might have been okay with showing physical affection, but I kind of liked my dick and wanted to keep it. Having Emmett present for where that turn of events was headed was a guaranteed way to end up castrated. So, instead of flipping Bella over and letting my hands roam all over her body, I awkwardly blurted out, "Gotta shower," and locked myself in the bathroom.

I'd thought that telling Bella how I felt about her would have made me less awkward, but apparently it'd had the adverse effect. I now felt like some anxious high-school kid with sweaty palms and a perma-boner.

Speaking of which...

My cock needed some attention as of, like, two days ago. Sighing, I slid my pajamas off and turned the water as hot as it would go. It felt so good to have real water pressure after using the measly camp shower for the past month and a half that I actually moaned when the hot water pelted onto my back, massaging away my tension. My head dropped forward to stretch the muscles of my neck as the heat did its thing. Naturally, my eyes landed straight on my cock, which was begging for me to touch it.

Following its simple directions, I poured some soap onto my hand and gripped myself tightly, letting it slide up and down my shaft. By the time my hand had pumped about three times, I was ready to explode. I needed to start doing this more than once a day, otherwise when I slid inside Bella for the first time—

And with thoughts of me driving into Bella's tight, untouched warmth, I came all over my hand.

The rest of my shower followed languorously. I took my time, knowing that I'd be likely receiving hell from my two best friends as soon as I stepped out of the room. When I finally turned off the shower, the entire room was clouded with steam.

"All right, Edward." Emmett's loud voice reverberated through the door. "We all know what you're doing in there, so you can just finish up and come on out. We're going to be late as it is!"

Indignant, I wrapped a towel around my waist and swung the door open. "Jesus Christ, you asshole, I finished *that* up like twenty minutes a—"

Standing in front of me, mouth opened and eyes wide, was Bella.

~Bella~

The most epic shower masturbation time—thirty minutes of recollecting Edward's hands brushing against my needy breasts as I plunged two fingers inside myself—were completely for naught. As soon as I saw Edward's half-naked body, all the sexual tension I'd ridded myself of came rushing back tenfold.

"Uh..." My eyes roamed his naked torso, lingering on the droplets of water as they dripped from his hair and crashed onto his shoulders. I had to restrain myself from licking my lips as I followed their trail down to his stomach. It took me by surprise to realize that I'd never seen Edward shirtless before. I mean, he'd never participated in a swim meet, instead hanging by the sidelines with his camera in hand.

And Edward was, in a word, beautiful.

His skin was pale, having rarely—if ever—seen the sun, but it only made his eyes stand out more. And although he wasn't ripped or stacked like Jake, he was lean and the perfect size for me to wrap my arms around comfortably.

I let my gaze wander downwards over his waist and to the towel that he was gripping tightly at his hip. I wanted nothing more than to pry his fingers off it and let it flutter to the ground. Every inch of my body yearned to see all of him.

My eyes finally met his, and the nerves that I saw in them, incidentally, were what finally calmed me. Edward Cullen was *nervous* because of me.

"I can... I was... I... um..." The words tumbled out of his mouth as he shifted uncomfortably from foot to foot.

"Right. Well, we're late, so I'm—" I motioned with my head towards the door and spun around quickly. Instead of walking out the door, though, my body collided with The Iron Giant, aka Jake. "Ow, fucking hell. What the fuck?"

Jake placed his hands on either one of my shoulders and stepped back, leaving some space between us. He cocked his head to the side, examining me thoroughly before flicking his eyes over my shoulder towards Edward and then back. "What the hell was that?" he asked gruffly.

"What was what?" I kicked at the carpet with my sneaker, looking anywhere but at the three sets of eyes that were trained on me. "And don't you try and have attitude with me when you were the one who kicked me out of my own bed last night."

"LB, I keep telling you... if you want a piece, all you have to do is ask." Jake's hands snaked from my shoulders to rest on my sides, pulling me closer to him in a death grip. I squealed and tried to get away, but it was no use.

"Hey!" Edward's voice came as a warning to his best friend, and finally the fingers that were gripping my sides loosened. I pivoted my torso towards his voice, needing to thank him, but his face changed to one of curiosity as he looked at me up and down. Despite the fact that I was fully covered, I felt naked under his gaze. "Hey," he said, his tone soft, "are you still wearing my hoodie?"

"I thought it was *my* hoodie now," I replied confidently, but my blush betrayed me, sneaking up in pink splotches on my cheeks.

"It is," he replied quickly, throwing a t-shirt over his head and subsequently calming me even further. "I just haven't seen you wear it during the day, so..."

"Well, it smells like you again, so I wanted t—" I began to explain, before realizing that my filter was most definitely broken if I'd just said that out loud.

Edward's curious face turned into one of amusement as a large smile spread across his face. "You wanted to what?"

My blush roared, burning up, as I shook my head quickly from side to side. "I have to..." Side-stepping Jake, I made my way through the door and escaped to safety.

I was only a few steps away when I heard Emmett's voice booming through the narrow corridor. "You were just watching Edward and Bella, episode one. *Damn*, that was hilarious."

The rest of the morning went off without a hitch. We split the girls up into five groups, one counselor chaperoning, to explore and shop until lunchtime, so I had four hours without Edward. Well, kind of.

Every so often, our groups' paths would cross. It was torturous. And occasionally, our arms would brush against one another's for a brief second, making my stomach clench. Something in his eyes had changed since last night, and I wanted nothing more than to unlock the secrets they seemingly held.

As I held Edward's gaze, I couldn't help but wonder if my declaration last night was fully understood. To me, I'd admitted that I liked him, that I had feelings for him, and that I wanted to be with him. And as much as I knew things between us were changing, I wasn't completely convinced that the words held the same meaning for Edward. I wondered if he had thought it was an admission of platonic affection. We'd had our ups and downs throughout the summer, and it'd only been a month and a half. I worried that my words, which had taken all my courage to say, had been wasted on a misconstrued admission of friendship.

My head ached from a lack of caffeine and the crazy thoughts bouncing around in my head.

Luckily, the gossipy campers were able to prevent me from going insane with indecision with their inane rambling about the latest pop stars and celebutantes. I could have cared less about it, but it was a good distraction nonetheless.

Finally, we picked up some heinously unhealthy food (fuck yes, McDonalds) and hopped back onto the bus. I slid into the seat I'd inhabited on the long ride there and opened up my bag of deliciousness. I spread napkins out on my lap and set up a little station for my chicken nuggets and the appropriate dipping sauce—sweet and sour, obviously. My mouth watered as the greasy scent spread throughout the bus. I couldn't remember the last time I'd had such crappy food, and I couldn't have been more excited. My mom had always been somewhat of a health nut and McDonalds or any other kind of fast food was strictly forbidden in the Swan household. Thank God for summer vacation, or I'd never know the nirvana that came from partaking in chicken nuggets.

As the first drops of sweet n sour sauce hit my tongue, I closed my eyes and moaned.

So fucking good.

Distracted as I was, I didn't miss the feeling of a hand brushing past me to reach for a nugget... and I could *not* have that. My hand jutted out and gripped the wrist that was making a dive for my tasty meal.

"Back it up, Em." My eyes snapped open and landed on a guilty-looking Edward. "Oh, sorry. I thought..." As I trailed off, I noticed Edward's other hand diving for the chicken nugget and pulling it back to his mouth.

No he didn't...

He chewed it quickly and, with a satisfied smirk, slid into the seat next to me as I continued to stare at him, my mouth agape. "You made me want one," he explained, as if there was a possible justification for him being a food thief.

"I... I... I can't believe you just did that!"

"What'd he do?" Jake asked, walking up the aisle after doing a head count to make sure all our campers were back on the bus.

"He stole a chicken nugget!" I huffed indignantly.

Edward's face fell into one of remorse as Jake burst out laughing, ruffling his already-messy hair. "Oh no you di'int." Jake snapped, cocking a hip to show the proper amount of 'tude for his ridiculous chastisement. "Nuggets are more valuable than gold to LB."

"You had ten of them," Edward mumbled, opening up his own bag of food.

"And now I only have nine." I couldn't control my pout or the whine in my voice.

"Aww, sad face, LB. Don't have an aneurism. I'll give you one of mine," Emmett said, passing one

of his own chicken nuggets over the seat.

Giggling, I blew a kiss to Emmett as I swiped the nugget from his hand. "Kiss, kiss, Em. Thank you. And Edward—" I turned to him, looking as serious as I could possibly muster "—you steal my nuggets again, I'll shank you. Also, I'm going to need a few of your fries as interest for your theft."

Edward held out his container of fries as a peace offering, and I lost it, giggling like crazy as I took a few out. He rolled his eyes, seeing that I'd been joking the entire time, and shoved a few fries into his own mouth. I followed the motion of his hand as it brought the fries to his lips, and I almost dropped all my valuable nuggets onto the floor as his tongue swiped the remaining salt from his bottom lip into his mouth.

Suddenly, he leaned over and pulled some ranch sauce from his bag, which he'd laid on the floor between us. As he started to sit back up slowly, the bus started and his body shifted towards mine slightly, bringing our bodies together with his hand trapped between. As he continued to rise, his hand did, too, slowly dragging itself against my jean-covered thigh. I tried not to choke on the chicken in my mouth as I gasped and groaned at the warm feeling that spread throughout my body, concentrating itself in my crotch.

Fuck.

"What?" he asked, pulling me out of my Edward's-hand-on-my-thigh-induced euphoria. I must have looked confused because he just shook his head and continued. "I thought you said something... never mind."

"Nope." My voice sounded strained even to my own ears, and I focused all my attention on my own food, trying to ignore the seductive creature beside me.

Noting to myself that we'd just taken off, I knew that this was going to be a long ass six-hour drive.

~Edward~

Three words: Longest. Drive. Ever.

Bella and I sat for hours, feeling each slight movement as we pressed up against one another, pretending that there wasn't an oppressive amount of sexual tension hovering over us—strangling us.

I was aware of her every move. Every smile, every breath, every flick of her hair. I felt it all and could find no real way to distract myself. It didn't help that every time the bus went over a small bump, my body would shift against hers, causing just enough friction to increase my all-consuming desire for her.

When her eyes fluttered closed, I finally breathed a huge sigh of relief, knowing that I could somewhat relax when she was asleep and not equally as tense beside me. My relief was short-lived, however, as I started listening into the conversation going on behind me.

"So, do you know if anything happened last night?" Jake whispered.

"You mean besides you not being able to keep it in your pants for one goddamned night?" Emmett quipped back. I chuckled and slid my eyes to Danielle, who was engrossed in some lengthy romance novel.

"You know what I meant. With Awkward and Awkwella. Did our boy score... at all?"

Emmett chuckled softly, and I could picture him shaking his head as he affirmed what I already knew. "I took some sleeping pills last night so I wouldn't have the chance to find out."

There was a prolonged pause, and I wondered what was being conveyed. I almost turned around, just to see what their facial expressions were, dying to know what a third party had to say about us. Jake lowered his voice even further, and I had to strain to hear what he was saying.

"To be honest," he whispered softly, "I thought LB was into Seth."

"Yeah, he—" Emmett began, but at his words, blood rushed to my ears, blocking out whatever the rest of his response was.

Was Bella into Seth? That was what I had been fearing. Feelings of awkwardness and inadequacy filled my muscles, clenching my hands into tight fists that I tried hopelessly to relax.

I was so fucking high strung that when Bella's phone suddenly chirped on her lap, I nearly jumped out of my seat. My jerky movement accidentally hit Bella, waking her and making me feel like a jackass.

"Sorry. Your phone buzzed." I handed the phone to her, which had slid onto the seat in between us, but as I grabbed it, my thumb slipped over the center, showing me that she'd just received a text message from none other than my *favorite* assistant, Seth.

She stretched sleepily and opened the text, a sly smile appearing on her face as she read it. My insides burned with jealousy, wishing that I'd been the one to put that smile on her face.

As she texted back quickly, the words escaped my mouth before I could stop them. "Who's it from?"

Bella's eyes were still filled with sleep as she yawned and shifted to lean against me. I wrapped my arm around her shoulders, pulling her torso flush against my side. With a small yawn, she mumbled a low, "No one," before rubbing her cheek against my hoodie.

It drove me crazy that she wouldn't tell me that she'd received a message from Seth, and my mind started coming up with what she could possibly be hiding from me. Was he sending her lewd messages?

Did you just say lewd? Really? Because you didn't have an old-man complex before.

Or maybe he wasn't even sending her texts at all. Maybe they were sending back and forth inappropriate picture messages or badmouthing me. Or maybe she truly thought of him as no one important and therefore, not worth telling me about.

Yes, let's stick with that one. We like that one.

As I was busy appeasing myself, I felt Bella inhale a long slow breath, and I couldn't resist teasing her about her comment earlier this morning.

"Getting more of my scent?" I laughed, squeezing her shoulder tightly and smiling at her petulant scowl.

"Don't flatter yourself, Cullen. I... I just..."

"You just what?" I goaded as she stuttered.

Suddenly, her phone buzzed again, and I could have sworn I heard her mumble, "Saved by the bell," but I couldn't be sure.

She read the text quickly and then held it out for me to see. Curious, I took the phone in my hand and couldn't help the slow, satisfied smirk that overtook my face at what I read.

B-town, first play rehearsal tonight. u and ariel's boy toy are the only ones called. – J-town

I reread the text from Jasper. If I had just read that correctly, it meant that Bella and I were the only ones called for rehearsal tonight, and I could not be more excited about that. I could only hope that she felt the same way. And if she didn't, at least this time alone with her would give me time to prove my worth over Seth.

The phone buzzed in my hand again, and I automatically went to check it out, thinking that Jasper had texted again. I was wrong. It was from my nemesis.

We can talk when you get here, Bells. Why aren't you back yet? Miss you, too. – Seth

My mouth went dry. What did she need to talk to Seth about? My stomach churned as I thought of the worst possibilities. And, miss you, *too*? That meant that Bella had written that she missed him first. How could she miss him when they'd barely been apart for two days? And Bells? What kind of stupid nickname was that? I mean, please... he couldn't think of anything more creative than that? My internal tirade was short-lived, though, because I realized that I was still holding her phone... and for an inappropriately long amount of time.

"Uh, you have a new text..." I said, shoving the phone back into her hand.

I watched her carefully as she read the message, hoping to decipher some secret message through her facial expressions. However, her face was completely passive as she typed out another quick response and put her phone away.

No matter what was going on between Bella and Seth, I knew that I needed to keep my relationship with her as positive as possible. She'd obviously been unable to deduce that I was into her, so I needed to do everything in my power to ensure she knew that. I was finally going to make this happen. I couldn't lose her to Seth—not when she was so close to finally being mine.

"So, play practice is just us, hm?" I asked, resting my chin on top of her head.

"Yeah, it should be fun, right?"

"Should be." I paused, mulling over if whether my next statement would be too inappropriate to admit, but then I decided to fuck "appropriate" and go for it. "Especially if we're practicing our kissing scene again."

I could feel her cheek warm against my chest, which I hoped was a positive reaction instead of one of humiliation. My stomach clenched uncomfortably until I felt her release a shaky breath and mutter, "Uh, yeah... that'd be good."

She still felt slightly tense in my arms, so I decided to continue, letting her know that I was serious about us. "Bella?" Her wide eyes shifted upwards, seeking mine out as I pulled away slightly and allowed my nails to scrape gently up and down her arms in small, comforting strokes. "We can go as slow as you want."

Her eyes widened even further as she nodded. Without a word, she sank back against me, and I couldn't resist kissing the top of her head before settling into an easy silence.

When we finally arrived back at Long Lake, we still had a little bit of time before Bella and I had to be at rehearsal, so I suggested we head down to the shack to upload the footage from the trip onto my computer. I figured the more time alone, the better.

However, my plans never seemed to go smoothly, and this time was no exception. I should have realized that Seth would be waiting in the shack, but it still frustrated me to no end to see him there, ready to pounce just in case she came back without me. Or, that was what I told myself, anyway. Good thing he wouldn't have that opportunity. *Ha.*

His face lit up upon seeing Bella but promptly faded as I put my hand on the small of her back. "Seth." I greeted him tersely, hoping he'd get the point, but the boy played dumb, per usual.

"Edward, Bella," he said warmly. "How was your trip?"

I looked down at Bella and slid my hand from the small of her back to her side, bringing her closer to me. "*Really* good," I replied, never taking my eyes from Seth. His eyes, however, flashed quickly from my face to Bella's waist. I saw the spark of anger flare in his expression, and I wanted to scream out a big, "*Yeah, so there!*" but I refrained. Instead, I decided to further mark my territory like the alpha male I'd never been before. "Right, Bella?"

She looked up at my smiling face, surprised, and I was incredibly pleased when an intense blush heated her pale cheeks as she smiled back. "Yup. Really good."

"Yeah?" Seth's face was curious, trying to read our expressions. "I've never been to Quebec before... what was your favorite part?"

My eyes met his, trying to convey every ounce of possessiveness I was feeling at that moment as I responded. "The hotel."

"Right, Bella was telling me that you guys were staying in some sort of castle?"

"Chateau, actually," Bella corrected.

"So, it was pretty beautiful?" Seth was straining for conversation, and I knew that, without a doubt, I was winning right now.

"Mmhm. And I had the best night's sleep I've had in quite a while. Well, since Friday, at least." Bella's jaw unhinged slightly as her blush spread over her neck and to her chest, blending in with the red of my hoodie.

Hook. Line. And sinker. Later, Seth.

"Well," Seth snapped, shoving the chair out from under him and preparing to leave, "sounds like it was a great time. Can't wait to hear more about it later." He nodded quickly to both of us and was gone faster than a speeding bullet.

It took me a full ten seconds after Seth had left to realize that Bella hadn't moved or said anything. I looked down to find her still staring blankly at me, and I panicked for a second, hoping I hadn't offended her. I mean, I'd basically just insinuated that I'd slept with Bella, in front of Bella, and that couldn't have been further from the truth. *Shit*. I could be in so much trouble right now. Why didn't I know how to be a functioning person at all?

"Uhh..." I had no justification, but I thought I'd try out at least some attempt at communication.

Bella's brow furrowed as she finally removed herself from my grasp to face me properly. "What was that?" she asked quietly.

"What do you mean?" Playing dumb definitely seemed like the best option in this scenario.

"What's with all the 'tude towards Seth? He's a really nice guy, you know. I thought you liked him."

"I do."

She looked at me insistently, and I balked slightly, knowing that she could see right through me. "No, you don't. I just can't figure out why."

I almost rolled my eyes, but I resisted. Was she really that thick that she didn't know Seth wanted her ass almost as much as I did? Seeing her confused face, I received my answer. Apparently, she was.

"Don't worry about it. Let's just..." I signaled my head toward the computer, and she looked at me for a very long second before giving up and sitting in the closest chair.

I sat down next to her and hooked the camera up to the computer, letting the import start. It was going to take a fair amount of time, so I decided to turn on some music while we waited. There was nothing worse than awkward silence, and I had a feeling that Bella and I were in for a world of it.

I knew I had to proceed and talk to her, truly communicate for the first time ever, but the truth was, I had no idea how to do that without sounding like a complete tool or douche. Instead, we sat listening to my shuffle, making odd, unimportant comments about our favorite movies. Essentially, I pussied out... again.

When evening taps rang, I clasped Bella's hand within mine and led us up the hill towards the theater for rehearsal. We didn't get too far, though. Just as we stepped outside the shack, I felt a tugging on my hand and realized that Bella had stopped walking and was staring at me intently.

"What?"

She bit her lip, drawing my eyes to it immediately and making my cock fill with blood. *Right, because this is the perfect time for that...*

"Edward, are you okay?" she asked nervously.

"Um, yes?" I replied, as more of a question than a statement.

She removed her hand from mine and crossed her arms over her chest. "Are you mad at me or something?"

"What?" I asked, indignant. Why in God's name would she think I was mad at her? "No." I shook my head. "No, of course not."

"Are you sure?" Her voice lowered even further as she looked down, tucking her chin to her chest, and it became progressively shakier with each word. "Because... you've been acting, um, weird... since we got back to camp. I just—" she paused and looked back up at me, and I was shocked to see unshed tears shining in the new light of the moon "—I just don't know what I did..."

As she continued to speak, my brain stopped thinking and let my body take over. I closed the distance between us and wrapped my arms around her slender waist tightly. "I'm so sorry," I gasped, clutching her small, shaking body to mine. "I... I don't know..." Unable to finish my sentence, I placed gentle kisses into her hair, brushing lightly against her forehead.

Bella leaned back against my hands to gaze up at me, letting hers move to my chest to brace herself. It was only when I saw the few tears that had escaped and run down her cheeks that I made up my mind about my next move.

"Don't know what?" Her brown eyes were inquisitive, and I stared into them, hoping I was making the right decision.

"I don't know what I'm doing," I whispered, cupping her soft cheek in my palm. She sighed quietly, leaning into my hand as her eyes fell closed. Keeping my thumb in place to stroke against her pale skin, I let my fingers slide from her cheek to twine themselves in her long hair.

With another deep breath, Bella reopened her eyes, her tears nowhere to be found, replaced by a warmth I could feel in my toes. With her eyes locked on mine, I couldn't feel anything but an odd fluttery feeling bouncing around in my gut.

Oh hey, stomach, meet butterflies.

After what felt like the longest second in the history of the world, I took a breath and leaned towards her. Her brown eyes never left mine as I approached. I felt her delicate hands start to tense, grabbing onto the fabric of my black hoodie, and her chin lifted up ever so slightly.

We both knew what was about to happen, and I knew it was about to change everything. This wasn't mandated for a stupid audition, and it wasn't some drunken lapse in judgment or a ridiculous dare from immature friends. No, this was me, awkward, nerdy, nervous Edward Cullen, finally getting my shit together and taking a huge fucking leap. I could only hope that I'd land safely on the other side.

Without another thought, I closed my eyes and allowed my lips to meet hers. She was motionless against me for a second, making me wonder if I'd just made the biggest mistake of my life. But then, just as quickly, she was pressing back, her hands fisting my hoodie tightly as she let her lips slide against mine.

The kiss was one of the most tender and delicate moments of my entire life. Never again would I be able to replicate this very moment when I felt Bella's hot breath against my mouth.

Her lips disappeared from mine for a second, only to return with a hunger that I was more than anxious to reciprocate. My hand wove itself further in her hair as she clung to me tightly, both of us desperate not to let go. And it was only when I felt the rough texture of the wood scraping against my knuckles, still wrapped around her waist, did I realize that I'd pinned her to the side of the shack.

Unable to wait any longer, I allowed my tongue to peek between my lips and brush against hers. It was accepted almost immediately with a low groan that reverberated all the way to my aching cock. I felt like I'd been waiting my lifetime for this kiss, and I wanted to savor each second of it. With the slowest pace I could muster while still keeping remotely sane, I met her tongue, soft and warm in her own mouth.

If I could have lived forever in that one moment, I'd be perfectly content until the end of my days. She tasted like leftover salt and sweet n sour sauce, but I truly believed it was the sweetest taste. Pure, unadulterated Bella.

My body's temperature kept rising; every flick of her tongue and each one of her touches was

like the hottest inferno I could imagine.

Bella's hands, which had been gripping my hoodie, trailed from my chest to the nape of my neck. And as I felt the delicate touch of her fingers start to scratch my scalp, I lost the will to go slow.

My lips crashed to hers again, this time seeking out her tongue and pulling it into my own mouth greedily. This time, it was I who moaned loudly. Her tongue against mine was the sweetest torture, the most blissful massage, and I prolonged it for as long as I possibly could. I knew I was reaching the end of my breath, but I couldn't bring myself to release her yet. Slowing down again, I finally pulled away with one more short parting kiss to her now-swollen lips.

As my eyes opened, I found her staring at me, yet again, breathing hard and looking completely dumbfounded. She brought one of her hands to her mouth, her shocked expression never dissipating. "You..." she whispered, searching my eyes for something.

Never letting her out of my grasp, I leaned my forehead against hers and reiterated my previous statement, hoping it wouldn't be forgotten. "I don't know what I'm doing, Bella."

She chuckled breathily. "I beg to differ. That was..." She trailed off, tilting her head back up to look me in the eye.

I breathed a sigh of relief, feeling like I might have actually landed safely. I should have known that Bella would never let me fall. After all, she was obviously the stronger one of the two of us and most likely the more self-assured one, too.

"Yeah." I kissed her forehead softly, enjoying the freedom I was now being allowed. "It was."

With a sweet smile, she laced her fingers with mine, and we headed up the hill to the theater, enjoying silence in all its non-awkwardness, for once.

Inside the theater, Maria was waiting for us with a huge smile on her face.

"Oh! I could not be more excited about you two. You have such fantastic chemistry that I thought we could jump right into your main duet. How do you feel about that?"

Never letting go of my hand, Bella led us to the piano, ready to learn our duet. Her eyes pierced through me as she sang the lyrics, and it knocked the wind from my chest, feeling that she was singing the truth.

"I feared my heart would beat in secrecy.

I faced the nights alone.

Oh, how could I have known that all my life I only needed you."

I wondered how long both of us had kept this from one another. And I wondered why the hell it had taken me so long to figure it out. Were my friends really that cruel, that they would keep this from me? Did they know that we both wanted one another but had kept it a secret anyway?

*"It seems like perfect love's so hard to find.
I'd almost given up, you must've read my mind."*

That much I knew was true. I'd seen it in her eyes over the past few days and heard it in her conversation with Emmett at the hotel. She'd wanted to move on, move past me, which was probably the smarter thing to do. But, unwilling to let her go, I'd made my desperate plea to keep her close. And as I looked at her flushed cheeks and twinkling eyes, I felt certain that it had worked.

Maria placed us on the stage, working on preliminary blocking, showing how the progression of the song would have us get closer, gradually ending up in an embrace similar to the one we'd just shared against the shack.

I looked deep into Bella's eyes, seeing the same look of recollection there as I'd been feeling. My lips instinctively sought hers out until I heard a loud throat clearing beside us. I pulled back sharply just before I made contact, seeing Maria's highly amused face.

Yeah, yeah... laugh it up.

"Well," she began, "the song will end with a kiss, but I'm sure you two can practice that on your own time."

An unstoppable smirk spread across my face at the thought of "practicing," and seeing Bella smile and bite down on her lower lip, I had a feeling that her own thoughts weren't too far from that, either.

I couldn't wait.

Chapter 17 The Longest Day

~Bella~

"Great job, you two," Maria called out, turning off the overhead lights in the theater. "I'll see you tomorrow night for our next rehearsal."

"Thanks, Maria." My voice sounded foreign to my own ears—maybe because I was currently having an out-of-body experience. Somewhere along the ride home from Quebec, I must have fallen asleep or died or *something* because there was no way that in my own reality, Edward Cullen had kissed me. Like, *really* kissed me.

As soon as I'd thought the words, though, I found myself pressed against the side of the theater bleachers with Edward's plush lips against mine. The sharp edges of the sides pressed into my spine, but any pain I was experiencing dulled with the first languid stroke of Edward's tongue.

Please, please, PLEASE let this not be a dream.

I let my body press against his, the thrum of my erratic heartbeat pounding between us. My lips moved against his with ease, filling me with a sense of elation I hadn't even known existed.

Edward finally pulled away, a large grin plastered on his face. He looked like a little boy who'd just gotten away with something really naughty. And if that something was me, I was *not* going to complain. His eyes looked amused as they stared me down.

"What?" I asked, wondering why he was looking at me so intently.

His grin grew wider as he leaned towards me. "I can't believe I get to kiss you whenever I want," he whispered, placing his hands on both my cheeks and pressing a sweet kiss on my mouth. My face heated under his hands, the rest of my body heating up shortly after.

"Whenever?" I smiled and let my arms wrap around his waist. Although on the inside I was screaming like a little fan girl, I was trying like crazy to keep my cool.

He looked serious for a second before nodding. "Well, you heard Maria. We have to practice... and you know what they say about practicing."

I widened my eyes and looked up at him. God, I loved how tall he was. "What's that?"

Edward's brow furrowed as he tried to figure out how he was going to complete the sentence before giving up and pulling me into his chest again. I relished every second his lips were on mine. I was still pretty convinced I was going to wake up any second.

"How many hours a day do you think we should practice?" I asked, biting my lip.

"Not sure," he said, wrapping his arms around my shoulders. "At least two, don't you think?"

"Mmhm," I said sleepily, letting him lead me toward the girls' bunks. "At least."

We walked in silence, with Edward pressing soft kisses into my hair every so often. I was glad he was leading us because if I had been left to my own devices, I wasn't sure where I'd have ended up. As it was, I could barely think straight.

When we got to the head of campus, I saw that none other than Emily was in charge of night duty, making sure all the campers stayed in their bunks and that the female counselors got checked in. Normally, her presence would have bugged the crap out of me, but tonight, I was completely untouchable.

Tonight, I had been kissed by Edward Cullen.

"Hey, Bella," she chirped, sitting cross-legged in her large collapsible chair with a clipboard across her lap. "Edward." She nodded towards him, looking as if she were suppressing laughter or a smile or amusement of some kind, though I couldn't imagine how this situation was funny for her.

Beside me, Edward cleared his throat and smiled back. "Emily. How are you doing this fine evening?" he said, sounding oddly formal.

"Not as good as you two, clearly," she giggled, tucking a loose hair behind her ear before gripping her pen and checking my name off her long list. I hated when people talked to me without looking at me, so I tensed slightly and gave her my most solid response.

"Nope, probably not."

At my words, both her and Edward's eyes slid towards me, looking equally amused.

"Well," Emily continued, now looking straight at me, "you're the last one in tonight, so you should get to your bunk. Your campers have missed you, I'm sure."

All I wanted to do was tilt my head upwards and kiss Edward, but I had no idea if I could be that forward yet. Instead, I turned towards him to kiss his cheek and was shocked to feel his lips against mine. It wasn't a little kiss either. No, this was a toe-uriling, moan-inducing fuckawesome kiss. My hands moved to his hair, pulling him closer and reveling in every second Emily had to watch him with his tongue in my mouth. It was like the best giant "*Fuck you, so there, ha!*" I could imagine.

He pulled back slowly, kissing my lips chastely one more time before whispering, "Whenever, remember?"

I nodded and smiled at his soft, "Goodnight, Bella."

I was in such a daze on my way back to my bunk that I didn't even mind Edward hanging out with Emily at the head of campus. I told myself that he was most likely watching me walk back to my bunk and decided to put an extra swagger into my step. Fuck, if this was a dream, I wanted to take advantage of every single second.

Instead of wandering back to my bunk, though, I found myself two bunks down. I opened the door quietly and plopped onto the bed, shaking the sleeping body in front of me as gently as possible.

Her blue eyes opened, startled, and I pressed my hand against her mouth before the loud gasp and/or shriek could be released. I felt her tongue lick my palm and groaned before wiping it off on the blanket and letting her speak freely.

"Bella? What the hell?"

An unstoppable smile spread across my face, and I could feel the adrenaline rushing through my body as I recalled in perfect memory the kiss that had without a doubt changed my life.

"Oh my God!" Rosalie's eyes widened as she sat straight up in bed, pulling me into a sitting position to face her. "He kissed you!" she whisper-yelled. "Tell me everything! Oh my God. Was it in Quebec? Was it super romantic? Why didn't you call me? I mean, I know you're still peeved

at me, but I expected a phone call for something this major... or at least a text!"

"Rose, calm down." I attempted to shush her, but I was too hyped up myself to have much of an effect.

"Spill," she deadpanned. "Now."

"I don't even know what happened, Rose. One second we were walking to rehearsal and then the next, he had me against the side of the shack. I... I..." I sighed, unable to put into words what the hell was going through my mind.

What *was* going through my mind? Honestly, I had no clue. What did this mean? He'd kissed me... multiple times. But we hadn't talked about anything between us. I knew we needed to because I'd continue to overanalyze everything, but I was now confident that this was real life and not a dream, which meant that I needed to squeal loudly in the very near future.

"What did he say?"

I giggled and leaned back down to rest my head on her pillow. "That he couldn't believe he could kiss me whenever he wanted."

Rose rolled her eyes and flopped back down next to me, pulling the blankets over both of us. "He is like the least suave guy in the entire world. But I'm glad he finally stopped being a jackass. For your sake."

I had no idea what Rose was talking about, but I couldn't bring myself to care. "Thanks."

"Okay, B, I've missed you way too much, but it's late and we've got to be up early. Don't think I don't want to hear more tomorrow, though, okay?"

I nodded and headed back to my bunk quickly, falling into bed and asleep within record time.

The next morning I was woken up not by morning reveille but by three warm bodies pinning me to my mattress. I tried to roll onto my side, but I was trapped.

"What the..." My eyes opened slowly and snapped shut at the resounding squeal that echoed through the bunk.

"She's awake!"

Suddenly, another three bodies plopped down onto the bed, giggling and chattering loudly.

"Morning, girls."

"Bella, we missed you!" Andie said, snuggling closer to my side. I wrapped my arm around her and smiled. I hadn't realized how attached I'd grown to my campers over the past month and a half. And I was surprised to realize that even with everything that had happened over the past two days, I had really missed them, too.

"Missed you, too." A large yawn interrupted my sentiment, causing them to burst into another fit of giggles. "But was it really necessary to wake me up *before* reveille?"

The girls hopped off the bed, finally allowing me to prop myself up on my elbows and look around. My mouth dropped. I was shocked at the state of the room in front of me. The cabin was a disaster zone. Clothes were strewn all over the wooden floor and hanging from closet doors, towels and bedding lay in a huge heap next to the door, and there were brooms and dustpans scattered throughout. I was about to reprimand them for letting their living quarters get this bad when the bell for breakfast rang.

I shot out of bed, stressed at running late, while the girls simply looked on, amused.

"Um, yeah, you slept through reveille," Rachel explained as I rummaged through my closet for a clean uniform. I quickly threw on a pair of navy shorts and a white t-shirt, ready to head out the door. But as I was turning, a flash of red caught my eye, and I couldn't help but throw on the hoodie, too, which was now saturated with Edward's delicious scent.

"Come on, Bella!" Vicky whined, dragging me past her array of Jonas Brothers posters with a hard tug on my hand. As she pulled, my feet got stuck on some of the clothes covering the floor, causing me to stumble slightly.

"What's with the pig sty, girls? I leave you for two days and come back to this?" I leaned down to untangle my feet from whatever had tried to trap them and flung the offending piece of fabric at Vicky, who was still pulling at my arm.

The girls all simultaneously sighed and rolled their eyes, putting a huge grin on my face. "It's Super Duper Clean Up this afternoon, Bella."

My mind reeled. Super Duper Clean Up? This afternoon? That meant that tomorrow was...

"Tomorrow is Parents' Visiting Day?"

"Duh," Jen quipped, tossing her blonde ringlets over her shoulder. "I'm so excited. My mom said she's bringing me a huge batch of homemade cookies. They're delicious."

The other girls jumped in, gossiping about all the contraband their parents were giving them tomorrow, but I stopped listening as soon as we passed the threshold of the dining room and my eyes found his.

My feet crossed the room without conscious thought, leaving my gossiping girls behind, my mind filling itself with images of his lips on mine.

"LB!" Alice sprang out of nowhere, wrapping her arms around my waist tightly and stopping me before I could barrel through the table and probably onto Edward's lap. "I've missed you *way* too much. But how was Quebec? I need to hear everything like right now. Your texts weren't nearly enough to keep me satiated. Also, thanks for texting *me*, you ass. I had to get all my information through Jasper." Finally, she pulled away, pouting.

"Quebec was great." My eyes slid to Edward's without provocation, and my stomach clenched at the burning look in his narrowed eyes. Why did he always have to look so fucking good? All I could think about was pushing him into the closest locked room and pulling off his pants.

Whoa there, Bella. Calm yourself. Are you sure you're ready for that?

As I looked back at Edward's smirking face, I was shocked to realize that the answer to that question was a resounding yes. Shit. I'd been waiting six years for Edward Cullen to look at me like this, and I wasn't going to waste any more time fucking around.

Suddenly, I felt a huge pain in my shoulder, pulling my eyes back to the annoying thing in front of me. "Ow! What the hell, Alice?"

Her eyes narrowed, and she leaned in to whisper in my ear, "If you lost your virginity and didn't text me immediately after, I swear to God, LB..."

"What?" I pulled away from her quickly, needing to see her curious blue eyes. Did it really look like—I mean, was it really that obvious that *something* had happened? "N-no!"

Without another word, she slid onto the bench, grinning widely at Edward. He, in turn, looked at me, completely confused, with one eyebrow cocked in question. I automatically flushed, knowing all the dirty, dirty things I wanted to do with him at our soonest possible convenience. Seeing the glint in his eye and the smile appear across his face, I hoped his thoughts weren't far from mine.

Breakfast went by in a blur of delicious French toast and sneaking glances at Edward over and over again. About halfway through, I realized that Jake was staring at me, his dark eyes boring holes into my skull from across the table.

"What?" I mouthed at him. His glare towards Edward and then back towards me told me all I needed to know. My skin flushed under his unwavering attention, and I had never been more grateful for my forceful best friend than when she pulled me out of my seat and away from the table the second breakfast was finished.

The dance studio door slammed behind us, causing Jasper to jump up from his spot where he'd been leaning against the stereo. He looked incredibly confused as he stammered, "Uh... Alice... I know that you really love Bella, but when you said to meet you here after breakfast, I kind of assumed that you wanted to..." A soft pink tinged his ears and cheeks as he brushed a stray hair behind his ear and pulled at the hem of his shirt awkwardly.

Alice's eyes softened momentarily as they focused on the embarrassed-looking Jasper. She flitted over to him, grabbing his hand and pulling his mouth towards hers to place a soft kiss there. "I know, and, trust me, I wasn't planning on including LB in our time here." Her eyes narrowed and trained in on me again as she turned within Jasper's grasp. "That was before I absolutely without a doubt knew that something happened with Edward. So, LB, don't think you're allowed to hold back on me for one second. Sit. Now."

I loved when Alice got forceful, but I'd never been on the receiving end of it before, and it was kind of fucking scary.

A lazy smile spread across Jasper's face as he motioned for me to come sit with them against the mirrors, as we had that first week of pre-camp. "I knew it." He laughed as I blushed.

"Knew what?"

"No way, hun. You don't get to play coy." Alice pointed a tiny finger against my arm, poking me obnoxiously.

"Fine," I breathed out, ready to explode. I mean, I wanted to tell her, anyway. God, would Edward be okay with this? Were we telling people? I didn't even know what to tell. I decided to just come out and say it. "Last night, Edward kissed me." Alice's eyes grew wide, and I could practically see a squeal building in her chest as she squirmed in her seat.

"Was it the best kiss ever?" Jasper asked in a valley-girl voice.

I pushed at his chest, annoyed that he was making fun of me. I knew he wanted the gossip just as much as Alice... if not more. "Yes. It was."

"Details, LB. Come on!"

"I don't ask you two details about your kissing!" I huffed. Jasper blushed again, but Alice saw through me and rolled her eyes.

"Yeah, that's because you don't want to know. And I want to know *everything*." She stretched out the last word and wiggled her eyebrows.

"So you want to know how he had me pushed up against the side of the shack with one of his hands in my hair, tugging, and the other pushing up my hoodie to press against my skin? Or that he kissed me again after rehearsal and then kissed me *again* in front of Emily so hard that I can still feel his tongue pressing against mi—"

Jasper groaned and held up a hand. "Okay, that's more than enough, right, Alice?"

Alice nodded excitedly and finally let out the squeal I knew she'd been holding in as she tackled me to the floor in a huge hug. "I am so excited for you! So what now? Are you guys, like, boyfriend and girlfriend?"

"Um, we didn't really do much talking..." I trailed off, my face heating up for the bajillionth time that morning.

"Of course you didn't." Jasper chuckled and shook his head, but I could see genuine happiness shining from his eyes. "You know, he doesn't have any classes today. If you wanted to go back to our room, I'm sure he'd be up for more—" Jasper paused and smiled widely "—talking."

Alice grinned evilly and pushed my arm before looking back at Jasper. "Yes, and then we can do

our *own* talking."

"Gah! Gag me," I blurted out, standing up quickly. "Wait 'til I'm gone to start that shit."

As I was turning away, Alice smacked my ass with her open hand and giggled. "Go get some!"

I walked quickly to Bunk Seven, awkwardly tugging at my hair to attempt to smooth it out. I hadn't really fancied myself up before leaving this morning, and as the bunk came into view, my nerves appeared in mass force. I knocked on the door lightly, and I heard Edward's, "Yeah!" from behind his bedroom door. I walked through the common room, poised to knock on his own door when it swung open.

"Hey," I whispered, flicking my eyes down to avoid having to see what his facial expression was. Was he happy to see me? Confused? Excited? Annoyed? I didn't want to seem clingy, but God, I never wanted to let him out of arm's reach now that I knew I was allowed to touch him.

"Bella!" He sounded startled, making my nerves increase again. I had to look up. My eyes finally found his, and I was surprised to see that they looked concerned. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah," I replied, confused. "Why wouldn't it be?"

"You just looked..." He trailed off, his eyes flicking to my mouth briefly before returning to my eyes.

I took a large gulp and let my hands travel up his chest to around his neck. His body tensed, making me freeze and second-guess myself, but just as I was about to remove my arms, he wrapped his own around my waist, pulling me flush against him.

"Hey," he said back, finally putting me at ease with a crooked smile. The mid-morning sun filtered through the window behind him, making the tips of his messy hair appear strawberry blonde, and I couldn't resist letting my fingers play with it. He groaned and let his head fall forward.

Hmm, so Edward has a hair trigger. Good to know.

Before I could even process what was happening, I felt his lips press against my cloth-covered shoulder. From this angle, I could let my fingers travel over more of his scalp, scratching lightly with my dull fingernails. As I continued, Edward's kisses moved from my shoulder up to my bare neck, making me start to ache and throb in all the right places. My hands clutched his head closer to my neck, and I could feel myself getting wetter as he opened his hot mouth against the skin there.

My heart pounded faster as he moved his head and crashed his lips to mine, knocking my head back into the side of the doorframe. It probably would have hurt if I hadn't been focused solely on the feeling of Edward's tongue in my mouth and his hands starting to push the hem of my t-shirt up.

"Jesus motherfucking Christ, my eyes, LB!" I heard Emmett shout as Edward pulled away from

me, taking a large guilty step backwards.

In the common room was Emmett, who had his hand slapped over his eyes, the rest of his face scrunched up in disgust. He was accompanied by Rosalie, who was smirking with her hands on her hips.

"Don't you guys ever have to teach classes?" Emmett bellowed. An unstoppable fit of giggles overtook me as he peeked through his fingers to check if the coast was clear. Seeing that Edward was an acceptable two feet away from me, Emmett pulled his hand down to his side, looking us up and down thoroughly. "I never want to hear anything," he growled at Edward before stomping like a small child into his room. Rosalie stood there, her mouth still agape until Emmett called out to her, whining, "Rose! I need you!"

She smiled widely, hands still on her hips as she mockingly glared at Edward. "Don't you dare fuck this up, sweetheart. 'Cause you know I'll kill you in your sleep," she warned him, keeping her tone as light as possible.

Edward laughed uncomfortably, watching with wide eyes as Rosalie walked into Emmett's room, closing the door behind her. *Ugh.*

"Sorry," he said, ushering me into his room. I looked around, wondering where the best place to sit was before plopping myself onto Jasper's bed. The door closed with an ominous click, and I could feel my heart rate increasing again. "What are you—" He looked at my place in the room, cocking his head to the side like a confused puppy.

"I think we'll get more talking done if I'm over here," I admitted quietly.

"Okay," he said nervously, sitting down on his own bed to face me with worried eyes. "What did you want to talk about?" I took a deep breath, ready to bear my heart to him, when Edward started rambling nervously. "I know this is really bizarre, and I don't want you to think that I'm taking advantage of you because I heard what you said to Emmett about you not having, um, been with anyone, and I'm not that person, the one who knows how to do this and so..."

"Edward?" I asked as he trailed off, catching his attention. My heart felt like a fucking hummingbird was trying to escape or explode, but I needed to get everything on my mind out, otherwise it'd be driving me crazy. "I don't particularly care that you don't know what you're doing. But I need to know what *we're* doing, so I can keep my sanity."

His eyebrows furrowed in confusion, forcing me to continue, despite the fact that he was the boy and should have fucking figured out all of this. "Are we..." I paused to gather my thoughts. I didn't have nearly enough balls to ask him if he was my boyfriend. I mean, how stupid would that sound after a few kisses? Pretty lametastic. Instead, I asked him more formally. "Is this just physical?"

His face dropped and he stood up quickly, dropping down beside me on Jasper's bed. "No," he said resolutely. "No, it's definitely not. Trust me, I had to stop myself from touching you so many fucking times. But, I really..." He looked up at the ceiling before returning his piercing eyes to mine. "I *really* like you, Bella. And I fought against it for a fucking long time because, well, I

thought it was wrong."

"You thought it was wrong?" I asked. His words weren't doing much to calm me down.

Seeing my panic, he put his arms on both my shoulders, facing me head on. "I did, but now I know that it's not wrong. It's really fucking right. I just... I needed to get over myself."

"What?"

"I didn't want to be the one responsible for defiling you," he said with a low chuckle.

My mind went blank. I knew he had meant it as somewhat of a joke, but suddenly I couldn't see straight. Edward had thought about defiling me? Fuck and yes. "Uh..." I couldn't even put a coherent sentence together, and, like always, Edward misunderstood.

"Seriously, Bella, we can go as slow as you want. I meant it when I said that. I'm not expecting you to rush into anything."

And instead of fixing his misconception verbally, as I should have done, I kissed him, hoping my actions were loud enough to drown out whatever sexual road blocks he'd put between us. With my hands still wrapped around his neck, I moved to place my knees on either side of his lap, straddling him more efficiently.

"Fuck," he muttered against my lips before grabbing my ass and standing up, taking me with him. He walked the few short steps to his own bed before laying me down on it, never removing his lips from mine. I could feel myself heating up and starting to inadvertently roll my hips up to meet his. He froze, bolted off the bed quickly and looked around the room, leaving me wanton and panting. "Uhh... we should watch a movie, if you're going to stay."

"We can watch *The Iron Giant*, since you said I had to watch it," I suggested. He quirked his eyebrow at me before shaking his head.

"That's the kind of movie that I want you to really pay attention to."

"And I won't be paying attention to the movie?"

He groaned, chuckling to himself and running his fingers through his hair. "Okay, fine," he sighed before putting the movie in.

The television flickered on, and Edward climbed onto the bed beside me, tucking me into his chest with one arm tracing faint circles on my lower back, which quickly progressed to another make-out session. It was as if neither of us could stop touching, the most innocent of touches increasing my arousal. Two hours later, I was a needy, sopping mess, ready to combust. I knew I needed to get out of there and start helping with Super Duper Clean Up, anyway.

Edward acquiesced and walked me to the door, even, to kiss me a proper goodbye. I waved goodbye and promised to come back that night after taps... because he wanted me there. As everything was happening, I literally couldn't believe it. This was too good to be true. Had I

accidentally stumbled into an alternative universe where Edward actually wanted me?

I was so caught up in my thoughts that I didn't see anyone in front of me until I crashed into them.

"Whoa, Bella." Seth's low voice rumbled in his chest as he caught me, preventing me from crashing to the ground. He helped me regain my balance and looked me over, quirking his eyebrow as he stared me down.

"What?" I asked as Seth searched my face. For a second, I panicked, wondering if there was maybe evidence of the last two hours on my skin. I hadn't looked in the mirror before I'd headed out, and it was entirely possible that Edward had marked me without my knowledge. Instinctively, my hand moved to cup my neck. I hoped that I would somehow be able to feel if there was something there.

Seth's expression changed to one of sadness before it morphed into amusement. I didn't know what caused the abrupt change, but he suddenly started laughing and walked me into the shack.

He pulled out a chair for me and dragged the bench out to face me. He shook his head slightly before chuckling. "He didn't leave a mark, Bells." My eyes widened with surprise, but Seth continued on. "I'm guessing this is what you wanted to talk about when you were in Quebec."

I sighed and leaned my head against my hands. "Yes."

"I kind of figured after last night."

Had I always been this transparent? Seth had seen me for about ten minutes total and he could tell. And if it was that obvious, why the fuck hadn't Edward jumped onto it sooner? It was then that I remembered his mind block about defiling me. It sucked that I felt so ready to hand over my virginity to him when I knew that he was going to have a serious problem getting over it, hence, taking too much time. If I wasn't a virgin, it would just be easier.

"Bells?" I finally came to, hearing Seth call my name. He shook his head before making a face. "I don't think I want to know where you just went..."

I laughed. "I was just thinking about what Edward said earlier." I sighed, wishing I could somehow fix the issue.

He leaned forward. "About?" He dragged out the word, making me smile.

"About why he took so long to do something." I grumbled, annoyed with Edward's reasoning. Now that I was really thinking about it, it felt incredibly archaic and kind of sexist.

"Aanndd?" Seth whined, starting to sound like a child who won't stop asking, 'why?'

I rolled my eyes. "He just has this thing..." I trailed off, wondering how in God's name to word it without sounding completely ridiculous. "He didn't want to be responsible for deflowering me."

I had no idea why I was saying all these things to Seth.

I blame the hormonal adrenaline rush from two hours with Edward's tongue in and around my mouth.

I paused, mulling over how that sounded. *Yup, just as ridiculous as I anticipated.*

"Oh, I've got it! How about you do it?" I joked coyly. "That'll make things much, much easier. So, what do you say, Seth? Want to deflower this gentle petal?" I snorted at the absurdity of my suggestion, but when I looked up, Seth's face was completely blank, and he was staring at me in disbelief. "Seth?"

"Uh..." Seth shifted uncomfortably.

"It was a joke, Seth," I clarified. He shook his head before cracking a wide smile and slapping a hand on my shoulder.

"Of course it was, Bells. I knew that." He shrugged, causing us to fall into an awkward silence.

"Okay, well, I've gotta go help my bunk with clean up, but I'll see you later!"

Seeing the look on Seth's face at my bad joke, I realized that it wasn't only Edward; apparently all guys had an aversion to having sex with virgins. *Sigh.*

Instead of focusing on that, though, I spent the rest of the day helping my campers prepare for their parents' arrival and waiting for taps to ring so that I could run back to Bunk Seven.

But, of course, camper to the cock block. Just as I was gathering my cell phone and heading out, I heard a muffled cry amongst the loud, excited chattering of anxious girls. The lights had already been turned off, so I couldn't see who it was.

Sighing, I walked through the cabin, pausing when I came across the soft sobbing coming from under Andie's pillow.

I walked over quietly, trying not to alert the other campers that something was wrong before kneeling beside her pillow and placing a soft hand on her shaking shoulder. "Andie?" I whispered, concerned. Andie was always the best behaved of my campers and definitely the sweetest. It made my heart ache to hear her cry. "Andie, what's wrong, hun?"

A small sniffing face appeared from underneath her pillow, peeking out nervously.

"Don't worry," I whispered, pushing a wet strand of hair from her eyes, "no one else is listening if that's what you're worried about."

As I continued to stroke her hair, her lip trembled and tears poured silently from her eyes, rolling onto her sheets without a sound. "I m-miss h-home," she stuttered quietly.

"But you're going to see your family tomorrow," I cooed softly. "That's only hours from now."

She nodded, biting her lip, but the tears continued to come in long, steady streams.

Guess you'll have to rain check with Edward.

I quickly typed out a text telling Edward that I had a crying camper and that I'd see him the next morning. My stomach clenched at his answer, making me feel horrible and wonderful all at the same time.

You're a great counselor, you know that? Can't say I'm not disappointed though. –E

"Hey, Andie," I began with an over-exaggerated yawn, "I'm sleepy, so I'm going to get into bed, but do you want me to move your bed closer to mine so we can talk more?"

She nodded, her wide blue eyes shining with relief. I pulled her bed towards mine, leaving only a few inches in between, and hopped into bed, snuggling between the fleece blankets.

Her hands gripped at the blankets, obviously tense. "I'm scared that seeing my parents will make me miss them all over again. I... I don't want anyone else to know... it's st-stupid to be this old and h-homesick, right?"

"Not at all. I remember being homesick my last summer when I was sixteen. Sometimes you just miss it. I understand."

"You did?" she whispered, clearly not believing my words at all.

"Absolutely. But then I remembered that when I get home, all I want to do is come back to Long Lake. And that made me feel a lot better."

She nodded appreciatively, her tears finally slowing down. I looked down and noticed that somewhere over the course of her confession, she'd rested her hand in mine. I couldn't help but smile. "Thanks, Bella. I... I do that, too. I love it here." Andie sighed appreciatively and let her eyes close, keeping her hand around mine.

"Night, Andie."

I'd forgotten the mayhem that was visiting day. I wasn't sure why or how, but the invasion of parents at Long Lake was something I'd repressed. It was nearly impossible to make my way through the throng of excited campers reunited with their families. Every direction I looked in, there were more people.

And the worst thing about visiting day, I realized, was that I had to have a class every single period. I'd become accustomed to having multiple periods off during the day, but every parent wanted to see what their child had been creating, so Jasper and I were stuck in the Fine Arts room all fucking day long. I lost count of how many proud parents had thanked me for making their child's summer. Apparently Jasper and I were popular counselors, we'd just had no clue.

I'd thought I was going to have a small reprieve for lunch, but when I looked up to see a devilish-

looking Alice and Rosalie with plates of food for us, I knew I wasn't going anywhere.

"So..." Rosalie began, pulling her wet hair up into a ponytail and glaring pointedly at me.

"So, what?" I replied innocently.

"Oh, please, Bella. The last time I saw you, Edward's junk was pinning you to a door." My face heated as I remembered the feel of Edward surrounding me, forcefully, *finally* taking initiative and kissing me senseless.

Jasper snorted, and he threw his free arm around Alice as he shoveled potato salad into his mouth. Alice leaned in closer, making me realize that I wasn't the only one who had shit to divulge. I didn't particularly want to hear the nitty-gritty details, like the ones they requested of me, but a simple thumbs up or thumbs down to some peen action wouldn't be out of the question.

"Bella, Bella, Bella," Jasper sang out mockingly. "You forget that I live with the fool. He seemed pretty, uhhh, frustrated after receiving a particular text message last night. You wouldn't happen to know why, would you?" Jasper winked, his eyes wandering to both Alice and Rosalie to see their reactions.

Of course, Rose acted up first. "Jasper, can you clarify... frustrated how?"

I rolled my eyes at the scene playing out in front of me. Jasper chuckled, and his eyes tilted downward, clearly avoiding contact with all of us. "I don't think it'd be appropriate to discuss that at the table."

Rosalie burst into inappropriately loud laughter, slamming her hand down onto the table. "Fucking hell, you two are hilarious. So, clearly there's been no penetration yet."

"Rose!" I admonished her. Why did we always have to talk about *my* sex life, or lack thereof?

"Definitely no penetration," Alice echoed solemnly.

I groaned and leaned my head against the table. "No. Not yet. But for fuck's sake, can we leave it alone? I'll tell you when there's something to tell." I looked up into their waiting faces, and although Rosalie looked annoyed, Alice and Jasper nodded in acceptance. *Thank God.*

We ate the rest of our meal in relative silence, and I was grateful when the chimes for afternoon classes rang, despite the fact that I'd have to endure another five hours of dealing with overzealous parents.

When the bell sounded for our last class, I nearly squeed with glee. I realized that it had been over a day since I'd last seen Edward, and all I could think about was being in his arms again... or maybe a little bit more than that, but whatever.

Lost in fantasies of ways for me to seduce Edward, I didn't hear the mother approaching until she was directly in front of me. She was a beautiful brunette with long hair that hung straight

down her back, bouncing with her steps towards me. Who in God's name had a model for a parent? I looked around, only to see that Maggie, the camper I'd thoroughly enjoyed teaching, had her eyes on us.

"Hi, Bella," the model said warmly, sticking out her hand for me to shake. "I'm Maggie's mom, Angela."

"Nice to meet you, Angela," I replied politely, trying not look as intimidated by this woman as I felt.

"I just wanted to thank you."

"Thank me?" I asked.

"Yes." She smiled and moved closer, leaning in so that she could speak without shouting. "Maggie writes nothing else in her letter but how much fun she has with you and what an amazing artist you are. It's been about five weeks of Bella-idoling in her letters, and I just wanted to thank you. She can be incredibly reserved, but I can already tell that she's becoming more open and making more friends, and I think it's because you make her feel more comfortable. So, yes. Thank you."

As I listened to her eloquent speech, I was blown away. I hadn't realized the potential impact of my influence on my campers, but then I remembered the way I'd idolized my own counselors during my time at Long Lake; it made me feel on top of the world.

"You're welcome." I smiled. "Maggie's great. She's incredibly talented, too. Have you seen her work?"

Angela grinned like the proud mother she obviously was and nodded. "It's great, isn't it? But I saw your work, too." I blushed, forgetting that Jasper had made us put out some of our own projects for the parents to look at. "You're fantastic. Are you studying art?"

"No, film."

Her brown eyes lit up, sparkling with interest. "Wow, film? Where are you studying?"

"Well, I haven't actually started yet," I admitted. "But I will be going to the University of Southern California."

Angela gasped and held up a peace sign. "A fellow Trojan? I'm a USC alum! Fight on!" I smiled at the coincidence and the warmth of this woman who I'd thought was so intimidating merely minutes before. "So, are you from Los Angeles?"

I shook my head. "No, Washington originally, but I'm so excited to move down there... despite the fact that I won't know anyone."

"Well, now you do. We live in Brentwood, but we have season tickets at the Coliseum, so we'll definitely be around. Also—" Angela held up a finger before reaching into her purse and handing

me a card "—my husband, who is also an 'SC alum, works at Plan B Entertainment, which is Brad Pitt's production company, in case you're not hip with the industry lingo yet."

My mouth dropped open slightly as I held the card between my fingers, admiring the fancy monogram. Was this really happening? Holy fucking shit.

Angela grabbed the card out of my hand and flipped it over, writing another number on the back before handing it over again.

"That's his cell, and I'm sure if you have any free time, he'd love to have you as an intern over there." She sighed loudly and leaned even closer. *Good God, does this woman have no personal-space bubble?* "They're actually in the middle of production on a new movie, which is why he couldn't make it out here today. I know she understands," she sighed, looking over her shoulder at Maggie, who was drawing with a bunch of her friends, "but sometimes I wish that she didn't have to. Are you sure you want to go into film?"

My answer was automatic. "There's nothing else that I'd even remotely consider doing."

A wide smile broke out across her face. "Well, in that case, please don't lose that card, and call him the second you get out there. He's always looking for motivated and talented interns to get started in the industry."

"Th-thank you!" I stammered, so full of adrenaline that my words weren't even forming properly.

"You're very welcome," she said, wrapping her arms around me in a large embrace. "And I mean it, Bella. Don't be shy."

The chimes rang, signaling the end of the period—and thank Jesus, the end of the day— and Angela and Maggie departed with a small wave, leaving me completely dumbfounded.

I spun around on my heel, staring incredulously around the room until my eyes locked with Jasper's.

"What?" he asked, cocking his head to the side. Without giving him any warning, I ran and leaped into his arms, wrapping my arms around his neck tightly. "Uh, Bella... you're kind of choking me."

I slid to the ground and held up the card for him to see. I contained my squealing, but just barely, as his eyes widened and he brought me into another large hug. "Wow. Bella, this is amazing." He pulled away to look into my eyes. "Do you know what kind of contact this is? This is huge... no, bigger than huge." He paused, running a hand through his hair. "What's bigger than huge?"

"Ginormous? Gargantuan? Massive? Vast? Colossal?" I rambled. The excitement rushed through my body, making me act like a complete spaz.

"Thank you, Merriam Webster. Yes. All of those." He grinned and slung an arm around my

shoulders. "You should be very proud of yourself, B-Town. I'd be screaming that from the rooftops if I were you."

I gulped, overwhelmed by the mass onslaught of my enthusiasm. Jasper was right. I wanted to scream this news from the rooftops, but the only person I really wanted to tell right now was Edward. And I absolutely needed to find him.

"You can go find him," Jasper chuckled.

"How... ?" I turned to look up at him, wondering how the fuck he could read my mind. I knew that Jasper and I had somewhat developed into siblings, but suddenly it felt like we were twins.

"Bella," he said, exasperated. Oh, right. I'd forgotten that I was this transparent to everyone.

"But where do I even begin looking for him? He could be anywhere. Parents' visiting day is like... his busiest day," I whined. Which was true. Edward recounted every second of parents' visiting day, never turning his camera off, barely resting to eat lunch or dinner.

Jasper shrugged and rolled his eyes. "You could try the front porch, since that's where all the crying children are saying goodbye to their parents," he suggested. "Or the shack?"

"Fuck it. I'm just going to wander until I find him."

"Sounds like a plan," Jasper snickered. "Best of luck, B, and congrats again!" he shouted out as I made my way up to the front porch.

Unfortunately, everyone and their mom (literally) was on the front porch except for Edward.

"LB!" Emmett shouted, lifting me up and spinning me through the air. "How was your first parents' visiting day? Did you live through it?"

"I more than lived through it," I snickered.

"Oh God, if this has anything to do with Edward, please spare me the description." Emmett feigned gagging and bent over, pretending to puke all over me. *Such a sweetheart, that one is.*

I punched his arm, but of course, he barely felt it. "It's not. For your information, I just made a contact out in LA with a production executive." I couldn't help the shit-eating grin that spread across my face as I held up the card and danced around a little bit.

"Whoa! Way to be a baller before you even *get* to school, LB!" Suddenly Rosalie strolled up and jumped onto his back. Emmett was barely fazed, only stumbling forward slightly before regaining balance and grinning at me again. "So, you're looking for Edward, I take it?"

"Well, yeah." I blushed again. "After all, he's the one who got me into film in the first place." My blush increased at Emmett's pointed stare, so I decided to change the topic completely. I'd look for Edward as soon as Emmett was thoroughly distracted. "So, where are you two off to?"

At this, Rosalie blushed. I didn't think I'd ever seen something faze her before, and my stomach immediately jumped at the realization of what the hell they were going to do tonight.

"We're just going to go back to the bunk to—"

I held up my hand. "If you finish that sentence, I swear to God, Emmett, I will vom all over your feet."

"What?" he said dumbly. "I was going to say 'watch a movie.' Jeez, LB, get your head out of the gutter."

"I think it's there permanently," I quipped as they headed off toward Bunk Seven. "Also, if you see Edward, can you tell him I'm looking for him?"

"Sure thing, LB. Enjoy your night. I know I will be," Emmett called out as Rosalie buried her head into his shoulder. *Gross.*

Pouting, I spun around, hoping that Edward would just miraculously appear in front of me. He didn't. However, Seth did. I approached him quickly, linking my arm through his from behind, which startled him.

"Hey, where are you off to?"

"Uhh, just back to my bunk," he answered stiffly. It was unusual. Seth had never been anything but super sweet to me, but somehow, it felt like he was being cold, and it upset me more than I liked.

"So, video is done for the day?"

"Yeah, we just locked up the shack."

My ears perked up. "We?"

Seth laughed quietly before sighing. "Yeah, we. I'm sure he's already back at his bunk. He seemed anxious to just get out of there. Not that I can blame him. Today kind of sucked."

I leaned into him, knowing full well how much it sucked for him. Edward complained about it every year. I would be willing to bet that he'd need to blow off some serious steam tonight. My stomach clenched with anticipation, imagining telling Edward my news and then possibly *really* celebrating.

Positive thinking, right?

"Okay, well, I'm kind of exhausted." As he said it, a large yawn passed through his lips, validating his statement. "But I'm sure I'll see you later." He smiled then, giving me the warm smile I'd learned to depend on over the past few weeks. It was that smile that propelled me towards the counselor lounge, which was fairly deserted, actually. I guessed that everyone was thoroughly worn out from playing nice for almost twelve hours with the parents.

Apparently, Edward was in his bunk.

I took off running, heading down the hill to Bunk Seven at record speed, needing to not only share my news but to feel his arms around me. Now that I knew what that could be like, I couldn't imagine it any other way.

I stepped through the bunk door and into the common room. Both doors were closed, but I nearly ran to Edward's door, not wanting to hear any of the noises that were likely to be coming from behind Emmett's. I took a deep breath and prepared myself to knock on his door, bursting with excitement and anticipation.

Just as I raised my hand, I heard a familiar voice from behind the door, and it wasn't the velvet one I'd been waiting for. No, this voice was high-pitched and annoying as fuck.

Emily.

I heard her groan and giggle, causing bile to rise to the back of my throat. No... he wouldn't... he couldn't... he...

"Shit, baby," she moaned loudly, "fuck me harder."

I gasped and stepped away from the door as if I'd been electrocuted. My hand fell limply at my side. I needed to run as far away from the noises as humanly possible, but I couldn't bring myself to stop listening. It was like a bad car crash, a disaster that you couldn't look away from.

"Mmm, I've been waiting for your cock. All. Summer," she cried out, getting progressively louder with each word.

I didn't even notice I'd started crying until I felt the tears trickle under the collar of my shirt.

No, please, no, I begged. This can't be real.

No, my inner voice called, this is what's real. It's the rest that's not real. Obviously.

I staggered away from the door and out of the bunk, slamming the door shut behind me. I leaned against the nearest tree; I needed support of any kind. My body folded in half as it wracked itself with silent sobs.

My heart felt like it was shattering into two billion pieces, each one of them being chewed, spit out, and stomped on again and again. I could literally feel pieces of myself breaking off.

What had just happened? Had he been lying about liking me? Was it all some joke to him? Or had he just been that impatient for sex that he needed to get it from somewhere else, since he didn't want to do me. But of course he didn't want me—young, inexperienced Bella.

Maybe you should get it from somewhere else, the niggling voice in the back of my head called. Even though I'd said it as a joke, right now, I couldn't think of a better plan. If Edward wanted to

fuck someone, then so could I.

Without thought, I ran blindly through the male staff quarters, looking for the bunk where I would finally rid myself of my virginity. The word felt thick and gross, and I wanted to get rid of it more than anything else. Rational thought left my mind as I opened the door, not even bothering to knock.

Seth's shocked face turned around at the sound of his door slamming shut behind me.

"Bella?" His body turned towards me, his expression a mix of concern, frustration, and sadness. "Are you okay?"

I hadn't tried to use my vocal chords since my bout of mass hysteria, and my throat felt raw as I tried to gasp, "I... I..."

"What happened?" he asked, his genuine expression only making me feel that much more determined.

Here it was... the big moment. Weeks of failed attempts at seduction, drunken confessions, and confusion clouded my mind, but here I was. I stood before him, trembling slightly. Seth approached slowly, like he was somehow afraid that he was going to scare me off.

Silly boy, I came to you.

"Bella," he whispered my name reverently, as if it were a prayer. I gulped. No one had ever said my name like that before, and it gave me the confidence to continue. "What are you doing here?" He stood directly in front of me now, brushing the hot tears off my cheeks with the pads of his thumbs.

He looked so sad, so broken, but so desperate.

Me too, Seth. Me, too.

Desperation took over, and in that moment, the past few weeks ceased to matter. I might not have been able to keep Edward, but I had Seth. I did. I had him. I had this. I could do this.

Okay, pep talk over, Bella.

I lifted my head to meet his before placing a shaking hand on his cheek. He sighed and leaned into my hand. In a rare moment of determination, I moved my hand from his cheek to rest at the base of his neck, pulling his mouth towards mine. He resisted ever so slightly before groaning and crashing his lips onto mine.

"Bella, Bella, Bella," he moaned, tugging off my shirt and unbuttoning my shorts. "You have no idea how long I've wanted this."

The world slowed down as he began to remove his own clothing. First his shirt met mine on the floor, revealing a set of washboard abs that I knew were there... but, oh, was it different to see it

now. Fuck. I was totally going to lose it. This wasn't how it was supposed to go. I tried to keep my tears at bay, focusing on his lips moving against mine, distracting me as much as possible. Next, he kicked off his sneakers and pulled off his pants.

"You're so beautiful," I breathed, taking in his body for the first time. It might not have been the body that I wanted, but *that* body was making someone *else* moan with pleasure. I just needed to move past it. Move past him. Within seconds, Seth's body was crushed against mine again, leading us back onto his bed. We collapsed in a heap of groaning limbs, hands holding onto one another for dear life.

His tongue slid into my mouth, making us both whimper with pleasure, but it wasn't even close to comparable to Edward's kisses. Why wasn't this working the way I wanted it to? Without further ado, Seth moved his mouth to my neck as he reached behind me to unclasp my bra. In the distance, I heard a door slam and *his* laugh pierce through the silence of the night. My eyes widened, and I froze for a millisecond, wondering if he was walking Emily to the door and kissing her goodbye. My panic was short-lived, as I'd already made up my mind. I needed to focus all my attentions on Seth. He deserved that much. I took a deep breath went to continue, but the damage was already fucking done.

He pushed himself off me and sat on the edge of the bed with his eyes downcast, surely avoiding the tears that I could now feel streaming down my cheeks...again. Boys were not made to do well with crying virgins in their bed.

"We shouldn't be doing this, Bella," he sighed, running a hand through his tussled hair. "It's... this is wrong. I... I'm sorry," he stuttered, throwing my clothes back at me before fleeing his own bunk as I looked for something to cover my naked chest.

It's wrong, I repeated in my mind.

He was right, of course. This was wrong. Everything was wrong. I sat there, clutching his pillow to my chest, finally allowing my heaving sobs to overtake me. *It's wrong. It's so wrong.*

Chapter 18

The Longest Day: Part II

~Edward~

I'd forgotten how much visiting day sucked. It was as if I needed to be everywhere at once, although with Seth helping out, my load was significantly less. I had to admit, for as much as I'd hated the guy originally for liking Bella, could I really blame him? I mean, I'd be the first to admit how beautiful and talented and hilarious and... okay, maybe not first, but at least I had finally admitted it, right?

Camera in hand, I glanced down at the list of stops for the day before I could take off, wondering where the hell I had to go next. I groaned, seeing that the last activity on my list was swim.

Rosalie had been giving me shit since returning from Quebec about taking so fucking long to make a move on Bella, and it was grating on my nerves.

When I got down to the docks, Rosalie was already in the lake with her swim group. She was teaching them the proper arm movements for breaststroke. Each time she'd show the movement, though, every father's eyes would go straight to her cleavage, which became more pronounced with each stroke. Did these men have no shame?

Embarrassed by their gratuitous display of staring, I nudged through them to get to the edge of the dock, hoping that I was enough to distract them from their unwavering focus on her chest.

"Hey, Rose." I crouched down and brought my camera up. "Do you mind if I film your group for the swim section?"

She swam under the water quickly, popping up on the edge of the dock with a coy smile. "Edward, you want to film me? Should I be telling someone else about this?"

I barked out a small laugh at her words, though they did have some validity. Filming could definitely have its perks, and I was not going to rule that out for some future activities.

It had been a full day without seeing Bella, and I was beyond ready for this day to end so that I could see her. I'd promised myself, and her, that we'd go slow, but my cock definitely had other ideas... especially as it imagined being videotaped, something I'd surprisingly never done.

While I'd been lost in my thoughts, Rosalie had turned back to her campers and told them to do the exercise for me to film. After about ten minutes of filming, I was confident that I had sufficient footage and made my way back to the shack.

Seth was already there, importing footage, when I arrived.

"So," I began, clapping a hand on his shoulder before pulling up a chair next to him, "how was your visiting day?"

He turned to look at me, smiled, and shook his head. "Not too much fun. I'm not going to lie... it was pretty miserable."

"Sorry. Yeah, it really sucks. I'm fucking exhausted, too." As if on cue, a large yawn erupted from my mouth. "I don't even think I stopped to eat lunch," I realized, suddenly very aware of the gnawing feeling in my stomach.

"You haven't eaten all day?" I shook my head, feeling incredibly stupid. Who forgets to eat? Seth held out a hand and motioned for my camera. "Leave the camera with me. Go get some food, and then go back to your bunk. I'll import the footage and lock up the shack."

"Really?"

Seth rolled his eyes and grabbed the camera from my hand, placing it next to his own, which was currently hooked up to the computer. "Yes. Be gone, please. I'll see you tomorrow." He

waved me away with his hand, and I couldn't help but smile genuinely at his offer.

"Thanks, Seth. Have a great night!" I called out as I left the shack and headed straight to the kitchen.

"Edward!" Elizabeth, the head of the kitchen staff called out upon seeing me in the doorway. She was one of my favorite people at camp, and I knew she'd always had a soft spot for me. Normally, counselors weren't allowed into the kitchen at all, but I had come around for more than one late-night snack. Elizabeth had always been more than happy to oblige.

"Hey, Elizabeth, how was the food today?"

Her eyes widened in shock at my question, and she took off running, putting together a plate of food for me before I could even ask for one. "How could he not eat? Today of all days?" she muttered to herself, as she removed the food from the giant refrigerator. "You work so hard, Edward, especially on this day. You need a good girl who will take care of you and make sure you always eat."

I smiled and threw my arm around her shoulders, picking up a chunk of potato salad with my fingers before plopping it into my mouth and licking my fingers clean. "Like you?"

She rolled her eyes. "No, not like me. I have my own man to feed, thank you very much." She chuckled, moved the loaded plate in front of me, and pulled up a stool for me to sit on. My mouth watered at the feast in front of me. I was insanely grateful to finally be able to get some food into my stomach. "No," she continued, "you need a sweet girl who will look out for you but someone who'll also keep you on your toes and not let you get fat."

"Yeah, I'm working on that."

"Sure you are," she said, eyeing me warily.

"No, I really am!"

"Edward, I'll believe that when you bring her back here to meet me, but until then, I refuse to believe that."

Ignoring her rant, I took a large bite of cold fried chicken, which tasted like manna from the gods to my sad, empty stomach.

"Oh my God, Elizabeth, this is amazing," I said with my mouth half-full. "Thank you so much."

"Chew, darling," she laughed, pushing a glass of lemonade in front of me.

I took my time finishing the rest of the plate she'd made me. Every bite was just as delicious as the first, and we talked about nothing and everything, complaining about the hellish day we'd both had. As soon as I'd finished, I kissed her cheek, feeling sated, and made my way to the front porch, hoping to find Bella there.

Unfortunately, since I'd eaten my lunch/dinner/whatever the fuck that meal was, nearly everyone had gone back to their bunks, leaving the front porch abandoned and dark. I was about to head back to my bunk when I saw a flicker of light down by the Fine Arts room.

My inner teenager squealed, and I started jogging towards the light, hoping that Bella was sitting in there waiting for me.

Don't flatter yourself, Cullen. She's definitely not waiting for you...

And I was right. She was definitely not waiting for me. Jasper was the only one in the room, cleaning up the remnants of their busy day while listening to Dave Matthews Band. As I watched him sing along, I briefly wondered if Jasper was a stoner, and if he was, if he would be willing to share with me. I needed to mellow out something fierce.

"Hey," I said. My voice sounded disappointed even to my own ears.

"Oh, hey," Jasper responded, seeing me in the doorway. "Bella ran off a while ago, looking for you, actually."

My heart clenched with excitement. Bella had been looking for me, too. I sighed and ran a hand through my hair. "Did she say where she was going to look?"

Jasper shook his head. "Nah, she said she was just going to wander until she found you. But if you give me a few seconds, I'm almost done here. We can just go back to the bunk. That'll probably be her last stop, I figure."

"You and your logic, Jasper." He laughed as I wagged my finger at him.

"It comes in handy from time to time." With a last sweep of his hand, he stepped back, put his hands on his hips, and shrugged. "Eh, good enough."

With that, he flicked off the lights and locked the door behind us.

"So," he began nervously, "I have a kind of awkward question for you."

My feet slowed down so that I could look at Jasper properly. He was tugging on the hem of his uniform shirt and avoiding eye contact with me at all costs. I felt like Medusa, like he was afraid to look into my eyes for fear of being turned to stone.

Yeah, I like mythology. Get over it.

"Yeah, what's up?"

He cleared his throat and continued to stare at the grass below his feet as we trudged down the hill toward our bunk. "Hypothetically, if I needed to use the bunk and have you not be around... would you be offended if I asked you not to be there?"

"Uh, what?" I asked, confused by Jasper's rambling. He was usually the articulate and logical

one, and hearing him sound less-than was giving me a headache.

He suddenly looked up at me and blushed. In fact, he blushed so hard that I could see it clearly, even under the darkening sky. "What I'm trying to say is... ." He trailed off, trying to get his bearings, but it clearly wasn't working. Instead, he ended up looking more frustrated and tongue-tied.

"Spit it out, Jasper, come on."

"I, um... I... 'tbethere..." He paused and then quickly added, "... soon."

His words were so rushed and closely strung together that it took me a full ten seconds to comprehend what he was trying to ask me. A large smile threatened to overtake my face, but I tried to keep it serious as I responded, "Wait, so, you don't want me to film you guys?"

Jasper's jaw unhinged, and his blush deepened. "I-I...y-you... I-I—"

"Jasper." I gave my obviously wound-up roommate a sincere smile and slapped a hand on his shoulder. "Just give me the word, and I'll be out of your hair. I'm happy for you, man."

He released a long breath and smiled back, finally looking me in the eyes. "Thanks."

I was so wrapped up in Jasper's nerves that I failed to see we'd arrived back in our bunk, and by the time I'd realized what was going on, it was already too late.

My feet stopped in front of my open door, allowing me to take in the scene before me. On top of my bed, with my blankets, were Jake and Emily... completely naked. Emily bounced up and down, making the small twin bed creak with each forceful thrust, while my lazy, slutty jackass of a best friend lay there, his hands guiding Emily onto his hips harder and harder, which she was yelling at him at maximum volume. I couldn't decide whether I should yell, laugh, cry, or keep watching, to be honest.

I heard Jasper's gasp and chuckle over my shoulder as he came to a halt behind me. Soon, he wasn't able to contain his laughter any longer and had to escape to the common room. I closed our bedroom door quickly, hoping not to alert the copulating pair that they'd had two pairs of eyes on them in the act.

Without a word, I turned around and walked back out of the bunk, finally letting my laughter ring out into the silent night. I heard the door slam behind me and took notice that Jasper had followed me outside.

"I'm going to have to burn my sheets." I couldn't stop laughing, despite the grossness of the situation. "Why the fuck are they on my bed?"

Jasper snickered and responded in kind. "Well, as I was in the common room, I couldn't help but notice that Emmett was making some loud noises behind his closed door as well."

"Motherfucker," I swore under my breath. Was Jake really so desperate for a fuck that he

couldn't find somewhere else to do it but my clean bed? I mean, what was wrong with our bathroom? And the laundry room and the gym were both just a short walk away. I was disgusted, yes, but I was also fucking amused. Only Jake.

Jasper was about to respond again when we heard a huge disturbance coming from a few bunks down. A door slammed, and a loud booming voice started shouting, "Fuck! Why the *fuck* am I such a dick?"

I didn't recognize the tone, but I'd know that voice anywhere. It followed me around fourteen hours a day. Seth.

"What the hell?" Jasper asked, craning his neck to see where Seth was running to. I couldn't see a goddamned thing in the dark, so I took a few steps closer, hoping to catch the tail end of the drama.

"Dude, what the hell just happened?" Jasper asked again. I shrugged, having no idea, but I was excited to get camp gossip before it went through the filters of everyone else.

Seth had always been so even keeled. I'd never heard him raise his voice like that. Ever. I was incredibly curious as to what the fuck had gotten him so riled up. The only thing I could think of that could possibly elicit such a major reaction...

As soon as her name entered my head, I heard a woman crying behind the closed door of the bunk that Seth had just fled.

No. No fucking way...

Without conscious or rational thought, my feet dragged me toward Seth's bunk. Jasper trailed after me, asking me what the hell I was doing, but if what I thought had actually pissed off Seth that bad was right, I couldn't *not* check and see if they were her tears.

The ever-acquiescing Jasper shouted something about him checking on Seth, but I continued forward. The sobbing hadn't stopped, or even lessened, for that matter. On the contrary, it progressively got louder with each second I stood outside the door, hand poised on the handle. Finally, I couldn't take my self-imposed suspense anymore.

What I saw made my insides boil.

Bella was curled up, clutching a pillow to her chest, her hands gripping at her knees as her body convulsed with the force of her sobs. It was then that I took note of what she was wearing, or rather, what she *wasn't* wearing.

My mind started jumping around, sorting through the pieces of evidence I had—Bella was only wearing her underwear, Bella was hysterically crying, Seth had left dramatically, Seth had verbally berated himself for being an ass (a fact I would not dispute), and I was fucking furious.

I sorted through these facts, always coming back to one conclusion: he'd taken advantage of her... or tried to, at least.

I had no idea what to do. My entire body was so tense that I was sure it was vibrating, and I could feel my rage spiraling out of control. I wanted to sprint after Jasper and rearrange Seth's face, but that would have to wait until after I had dealt with the obviously traumatized girl in front of me. I yearned to take her into my arms, but I wasn't sure that was the best approach. Instead, I cleared my throat quietly, trying to gain her attention.

"Bella?"

At the sound of my voice, her head lifted up, finally allowing me to peer into her eyes. The tears continued to stream down her face as she muttered, mostly to herself, "No, no, no," while shaking her head from side to side.

Seeing that she was still a bit hysterical, I moved to comfort her, maybe wrap an arm around her shoulder or even a hand on her knee. Just... something. I couldn't stand this. But as soon as I placed my hand on the soft skin of her arm, her entire body went rigid.

"Bella?" I asked again, a little louder this time. When she still gave no indication that she'd even heard me, I squeezed her arm a little.

That was enough to set her off again, and soon she was inching away from me, pressing herself up against the wall while screams ripped themselves from her lungs. "Don't touch me! Don't you fucking touch me!"

I immediately dropped my hand and took a step backwards, as if I'd been burned. I had no idea how to handle this kind of situation. I needed Jasper, or someone, or something.

"Okay, okay, I won't touch you." I tried to speak calmly, as if I were trying to tame a spooked horse, but it wasn't working. Bella's cries only got louder and angrier. I understood that it was probably normal to lash out on people, but I hadn't been prepared for something like this tonight.

"You don't ever get to fucking touch me again!" Her eyes closed again as she continued to shake her head, crying, "It's wrong... it's so wrong."

"Bella, please calm down," I begged, but she was having none of it. Her tears came in mass torrents, covering her red cheeks as she continued to yell at me nonsensically.

During her hysterical outburst, she'd let the pillow drop to the floor, revealing her naked breasts, but I couldn't focus on them right now. No, I needed to focus on helping her, re-clothing her. My eyes scanned the floor; her shorts and t-shirt lay in a heap in the middle of the room.

I knew she was going to fight me, and I couldn't help her alone anymore. I needed to find someone. And that someone had to prevent me from running off and killing Seth, ripping his body apart, limb from limb.

Picking her shirt up first, I turned it right side out and put it over her head. Under my fingers, her body went limp, and I managed to get the shirt on quickly.

Her eyes flashed towards me, and I was left nearly incapacitated by the sadness I saw in them.

"It'll be okay, Bella," I whispered, holding out her shorts for her to step into.

"No, Edward, it won't," she whispered before breaking into gut-wrenching sobs again.

Murder. Seth was going to be the victim of murder at my hand. It was going to happen later, I swore to myself. But first, I needed to tend to Bella. Ignoring the way her sobs increased, I picked her up and cradled her against my chest. Her fists slammed against my chest, wailing for me to let her down and let her go, but I maintained my hold on her and began walking toward my bunk.

I didn't particularly give a shit about what was going on in either one of the rooms. Bella needed us, and they were going to stop mid-thrust to come to her aid if that was what was necessary for her to calm down.

Just before reaching the bunk, Jasper crossed our path again. His eyes widened considerably at the sight of Bella in my arms, and he looked as if he were grasping for words, unable to figure out the right ones to say. I felt the exact same way, so I just said, "I know," with a solemn nod. "Did you deal with Seth?" I all but growled. His name tasted like acid on my tongue.

"Yeah, Edward, but you should kn—"

"Ohhhhh, yes!" Emily's high-pitched wailing interrupted us. "Fuck me like a dog, *please!*"

There was a loud, harsh growl, and then Jake's voice continued, "Yeah... ung... you like it on your knees, don't you, bitch?"

I couldn't help but crack a smile at the ridiculously cheesetastic porno lines coming from behind my bedroom door.

"Fuck me harder, you big, big boy!" A series of panting and slapping noises (I didn't even want to know) were followed by a lengthy moan, and I hoped to God that the hideous performance was over. I'd be sleeping on the couch in the common room tonight, no matter what, though.

A chuckle escaped through my lips, breaking the silence.

Wait, silence?

I looked down at the girl in my arms, whose eyes were now wide with surprise. Her crying had stopped completely, and she shifted in my arms just enough to make me realize that she wanted to get down.

Bella's body wriggled against mine until her feet were firmly planted on the floor. Her large brown eyes were filled with questions as they flicked from my face to my now-silent room and then back again.

"But... but I... but how... ?" Her voice was thick with the remnants of her tears, which had dried her throat and clogged her nose. Suddenly, she came hurdling at me, tucking her head into my chest and wrapping her arms around my waist as her tears returned. "Edward, I'm s-sorry... s-so s-sorry!"

I was appalled by her words. How could she apologize to me at a time like this? "Bella, you have no reason to be sorry. What happened was *not* your fault," I said sternly.

Bella pulled away suddenly, her eyes searching my face for something. After only a few seconds, she seemed to have found it. She took a deep breath and swayed on her feet before muttering, "I really need to sit down..."

"Of course." I stepped close to her and led her to the couch. She sat as far away from me as possible, but I couldn't stand the distance between us anymore and scooted close to place her hands in mine. "Bella, can you tell me what happened?"

She looked down at our joined hands and bit her lip, tugging at it with her front teeth. "I'm so sorry," she whispered solemnly.

I reached out and tilted her chin in my direction, needing to reassure her. She sounded so broken, and for the first time in my life, I felt a responsibility towards someone. I needed to make her better. Her big brown eyes were filled with tears as they fixed themselves on me. "You need to stop apologizing. Please," I begged. "Please tell me what happened."

She blinked, and tears spilled over and rolled down her cheeks. "You're going to hate me," she whispered, cringing.

"There is no way that's possible. The only person I could *possibly* hate in this entire fucking scenario is the one who made you cry. I swear to God, if I see Seth—"

"No!" she exclaimed, her body stiffening again. "Please don't be mad at Seth. It's my fault, not his."

My mind was reeling. I couldn't keep up at all. I'd heard of people who were abused and then blamed themselves, but to actually see it come to fruition with someone who I cared so deeply about was thoroughly disturbing.

"Bella, you may think that, but it's not true. Seth..." I shook my head, unable to finish my thought.

"Seth was only doing what I asked him to."

"What?" My heart stuttered. She couldn't possibly mean what I thought she meant.

"I... I wanted to see you, and I came here because I really wanted to share something with you, and then I heard..." She motioned in the direction of my still occupied bedroom. "... Fuck, Edward, I'm so sorry. I really thought that... that..."

And then it clicked. I suddenly felt as though I'd been stabbed in the chest and the back simultaneously. "You thought that I was in there." I didn't ask it as a question; the return of Bella's tears was all the confirmation I needed. "Fuck."

I had no other words. My mind had gone from thinking that Seth had potentially tried to rape Bella to now realizing that Bella had gone to him—no, fled to him—because she'd thought that... well, I didn't really know *what* she'd thought.

I pulled at my hair, groaning at the whole situation. And the worst part was that I couldn't even really be mad at anyone but myself. And I wasn't really mad. No, I was more sad. It kind of sucked. After all, I had been the one who hadn't been secure enough to tell her how I felt—how I wanted her to be mine and me hers. It hurt like a motherfucker, though, realizing that she didn't think I would be faithful. Or *could* be faithful.

Bella's tears continued to pour out, and I realized that I hadn't really done much to assuage her fears. She most likely took my silence as a rejection.

"Bella, I'm not mad." I wrapped one arm around her shoulders and pulled her against my side so that I could wipe the tears from her cheeks more easily.

She looked at me with her beautiful and confused eyes, and I just wanted to kiss it all away, but I knew that was what had got us into this whole mess to begin with. The kissing would have to be postponed until later.

"You really thought that I was with Emily?" Her lip quivered as she nodded. "Then I can't really be mad at you. You thought I was with someone else... I'm sure if the situation had been reversed, I'd have done far worse." I paused to reign in my thoughts. I felt like a total girl, but the ache in my stomach was telling me that I absolutely had to ask. "But... how could you think that I would be with someone else after what happened with us the other night?"

"Honestly?" she asked quietly, tucking her head into my chest. My hand that had been wrapped around her shoulders slid down to make small comforting circles on her lower back, helping her even out her breathing.

"Please."

She sighed, and I could feel the shaky vibrations, the remnants of her outburst. "Because it doesn't make sense."

"What doesn't make sense?"

"You... wanting to be with me. It was like I'd been living in a dream for two days and then gotten my wakeup call."

Wow. Did she really think that? Because I had been on cloud nine for the past two days under her influence alone.

I gripped her shoulders with my hands and pushed her back to make sure she could see my face

as I spoke firmly. "Bella, I can't let you think that. You are *so* much better than me, it's fucking ridiculous. Do you need me to tell you all the ways in which you've already surpassed me? Because I will." She opened her mouth to obviously protest, so I barreled on, riding the coattails of whatever wave of confidence I was experiencing. "You're a beautiful, hilariously inappropriate, talented, ambitious, caring person. The only thing here that doesn't make sense is why *you* can't see how amazing you are."

Her cheeks flushed at my words, and I was happy to note that this time, the redness wasn't from her tears.

"Thank you," she said, tucking her chin into her chest bashfully. "So..."

"So..." I cleared my throat and pushed her hair behind her ears, needing to occupy my hands with some way to dispel my nervous energy. "Next time you hear those kinds of noises coming from my room, I'm hoping it'll be because you're in there with me." Bella's jaw dropped a little bit, so I hurried to add, "But that won't be for a while... cause... um..."

"Because I'm clearly not ready." She nodded, mostly to herself, but I understood the sentiment. It was true. No matter how much Bella had tried to convince herself that she was ready, there was still the fact that this epic communication breakdown had led her to act rashly.

"And we'll talk about it?" I asked, unsure of what the proper protocol for a situation like this was.

"We'll definitely talk about it. I'm sorry I just assumed—"

"Bella, if you don't stop apologizing, I'm going to actually get mad," I threatened. "And, uh, Bella?" Her attention was fixed on me, and I knew that I had to just do it and make the final step. Had I done this two days ago, I had a feeling that this shit would have never happened at all. "Just for clarification purposes, do you want to be my girlfriend, like, officially?"

She sat there staring at me for what felt like hours, and I began to wonder if I had made the wrong presumption. I was about to backtrack and take it all back and let her dictate everything from then on when she pounced on me. Her arms were thrown around my neck so tightly that she was dangerously close to cutting off my air supply, but I could have cared less.

"I'm hoping that's a yes?"

"Of course it's a fucking yes, you ass." She moved her head and pressed her lips against mine, smiling so hard that it was less of a kiss and more just breathing into my mouth. Naturally, I was okay with it if it meant that Bella would stay perched in my lap like she was.

"Nice," I mumbled back. "I ask you to be my girlfriend and you call me an ass. You're the one who hooked up with someone else tonight."

Bella pulled back quickly. "I know, and I'm so sorry."

"And I still don't want to hear your apologies. I'm serious. Now, please come back here so I can

kiss my girlfriend again."

"So demanding," she said sternly, but the smile on her face gave her away. Her lips met mine, softly at first, and I groaned as she slid her hands from my neck to scratch over my scalp. I could feel my cock hardening in my shorts, but I knew that we needed to take things at a snail's pace... slower than that, even.

What's slower than a snail?

She pulled away and smiled shyly.

"So obedient."

She slapped my chest lightly before leaning her head against my chest. I had to shift my position slightly, moving so that my head could be propped against the armrest and my body could extend the length of the couch with Bella on top of me. I hadn't heard a peep from either my room or Emmett's, so I assumed the couples were done with their fucking and getting their sleep on.

Sighing, Bella looked up at me and began talking again. "Edward, I know you don't want me to apologize—" I started to reply that, no, I didn't want her to apologize, but she barreled on. "—but I really have to."

She propped herself up on her elbows and looked me in the eyes. "Edward, I'm sorry. I know you said that if you had thought what I thought, then you would've done the same thing, but... that's the thing, isn't it?" She laughed, but she didn't sound particularly amused. "You wouldn't have ever thought what I thought."

I couldn't protest that fact. It was true. I'd thought after the other night, we both expressed how we felt about one another. I couldn't really imagine being in her position, hearing what she heard, but I couldn't imagine not questioning it, either.

I strained my neck forward and pressed a kiss to her forehead. "You're right. Thank you."

She nodded in acceptance, and relief flooded her features, allowing her to relax back into my chest. We lay there in silence, just taking solace in one another's presence, finally. My fingers tugged through her tangled hair, smoothing it out along the length of her back. I loved feeling our breaths even out together; our heartbeats slowed to the same rhythm. It was the kind of peace that we both desperately needed after our heinous day. Our peace was interrupted far too soon, though.

"Ugh, get a fucking room," was called out to us amongst low chuckling, and I sprung up so fast that I nearly knocked Bella off the couch and onto the floor.

"You!" I growled, pointing an accusatory finger at my whore of a best friend. "You motherfucking cocksucking idiot!"

Jake shrugged and held up my laundry basket, which had my sheets and blankets on top. "I was

going to wash them..."

"Are you serious right now? Don't wash them... burn them!" I raged. "And flip the mattress over, too. Gah! I'm going to have to make a Walmart run tomorrow, and you're paying."

Although he at least had the decency to look somewhat ashamed, Jake simply wrapped an arm around Emily's shoulders and whispered theatrically, "Good God, he's such a drama queen. How did you *ever* put up with him?"

Emily caught my eye and I shook my head, hopefully somewhat discreetly, signaling that now wasn't particularly the best moment to revisit our previous relations. Her eyes flashed to Bella, who was still perched on my lap, only sideways now, so that she could properly admonish Jake.

She crinkled her nose at him, as if he smelled foul, which he probably did. "Disgusting."

His jaw dropped, and it seemed as if he was going to refute her for a second, but then he just nodded and sighed. "I'm aware."

Satisfied, Bella leaned back and snuggled into my chest, allowing me the privilege of just holding her in my arms. "Good. Just as long as you know." A large yawn contorted her face as she finished her sentence, and I knew she must be exhausted. Today had been a long enough day without the added emotional trauma we'd both just been subjected to.

"Time for bed, little one," I said as I kissed the top of her head, earning me an angry scowl.

"No jokes about me being little, please?"

I rolled my eyes and pulled us both off the couch. "Let me walk you back to campus. Emily, do you want to come?" Emily looked from Jake to me to Bella and nodded in acceptance.

"I can walk you," Jake butted in.

"Actually, you can't. You have to do my laundry, fucker."

With that, I left the jackass to clean up his mess. Nasty pervert.

The walk back to campus was fairly quiet. I loved the feel of Bella's hand laced with mine, and I loved it even more that I got to kiss her goodnight.

As Emily walked back to her bunk, I grabbed Bella's hand again before she could follow. "Goodnight, girlfriend."

I smirked and couldn't help but steal another kiss from her pouty mouth. At this point, I was really only making myself harder, but I figured I could hop into the shower and have some alone time before bed.

She hummed against my lips but gave me a sad smile as she pulled away.

"Night, Edward."

I watched as she walked across the large campus towards her bunk, trying in vain not to focus on the sway of her hips, but that was like asking Superman to hang out in a room filled with kryptonite; it wasn't going to happen. So, instead, I gave in and followed her sweet ass with my gaze until her bunk door closed, hiding it from my sight.

As I walked down the hill back toward my bunk, I noticed that there was a light on in the shack. My stomach clenched, and I knew exactly what I had to do. It would be weird and probably difficult as fuck, but I needed to talk to Seth.

Just before I opened the door to the shack, I heard Winona Ryder's voice come through.

"I was really going to be somebody by the time I was twenty-three."

Oh no. Is he watching...

"Honey, all you have to be by the time you're twenty-three is yourself," Ethan Hawke's voice replied. My stomach twisted, knowing exactly how fucked up he must be feeling to be watching *Reality Bites*.

"I don't know who that is anymore." I stood outside, knowing that I should go in, but I couldn't bring myself to interrupt the most pivotal scene in the movie.

"I do," Ethan's sincere voice rang out. "And we all love her. I love her. She breaks my heart again and again, but I love her."

I heard a distinct whine and growl, followed by a thump. Nervously, I cracked the door open, peering into the shack. Seth's head was resting on his folded arms, and he was staring directly at the floor.

The door shutting behind me clicked loud enough for Seth to hear it over the dialogue of the most depressing film in unrequited love history, and he shot up like a rod, tensing as he saw me.

His eyes were bloodshot, and his hair was a mess. I'd never seen him look so out of sorts before. Then again, I'd never heard him lose his shit before tonight, either.

"Hey," I began nervously.

All of a sudden, Seth got this panicked look in his eyes. "Shit, Edward, if you're pissed at me, could we do this tomorrow? I... I just can't do it right now."

I pulled up a chair, sat down facing him, and spoke as clearly as I could. "I actually came to thank you."

"Thank me?" he asked, completely disbelieving. "What the hell for? If this is some reverse psychology bullshit—"

"No, Seth. I mean it. Thank you." I gulped, trying to calm my nerves. I hoped I wasn't exacerbating the problem or probing at his wound. That was not the intention. "What you did earlier tonight..."

Seth visibly cringed and purposefully averted his eyes, but I soldiered on.

"It was really, well, considerate. I don't know if you know what happened—"

"I don't," he interjected, "but I don't really need to know. That wasn't important."

"And that's why I'm here," I stated, noting his confusion. "Yeah, I don't mean to get all emotional on you, but what you did showed exactly how much you care about her." I didn't use Bella's name, for fear of making him cringe again. When he didn't, I continued my explanation. "And so I have to thank you for stopping what could have been a really..." I paused, letting him digest my words. I could see him processing them, accepting them for what they were.

"Huge fucking mistake?" he filled in.

I nodded and continued cautiously, knowing that the next words out of my mouth were probably the most sensitive. "I know how hard it is to deny yourself something you really want. No matter how hard I tried, actually, I couldn't actually stop. But you did. Your behavior tonight, Seth, it was... commendable. You're mature way beyond your years, and I wish that I could tell you it'll all be okay or whatever, but I can't. But I do know that what goes around comes around and all that other mumbo jumbo bullshit has its place."

He stared at me again, keeping his eyes trained on my face. He smiled sadly and shook his head. "Winona Ryder will always love Ethan Hawke. It doesn't matter how nice Ben Stiller is or how many things they share in common or even how much fun they have together. Even when Ethan's not number one, he's still number one. It just took some time for me to remember that."

I couldn't help but smile at his movie analogy. We really were quite the pair of film nerds, and I genuinely felt bad for the guy that I couldn't do anything to make it better because I'd be damned before I let Bella run into his arms again.

After a less-than-enthusiastic goodbye, I left Seth to his wallowing. It felt justified.

Back in the bunk, Jasper was sitting on the common room couch, waiting for my arrival. He'd never admit it, but he was a gossipy little fucker—just like his little sprite of a girlfriend.

Upon seeing me, he shot off the couch and started rambling, "Edward, I chased after Seth, and—"

I held up my hand and slumped down to rest on the couch. "Yeah, I know what happened."

He raised an eyebrow in my direction, looking skeptical. "You do?"

"Once Bella calmed down enough to realize I hadn't been the one screwing Emily, we talked. Like, finally really talked."

"And?" Jasper said, leaning closer.

"And we're great. No, we're better than great."

He sighed and slouched back into the couch next to me. "I'm so happy to hear that." Jasper sounded genuinely relieved. "And how *great* was Bella's news?"

I cocked my head at Jasper, having no fucking clue what he was talking about.

"The contact she made?" At my non-response, he continued. "In LA? With the film executive?"

"What?" I shouted, probably waking up half the guys in the surrounding bunks.

"I thought you said you and Bella talked about everything!" he whined, clearly exasperated by my lack of knowledge on the topic.

"I... we talked about *us*. She failed to mention that news," I said grimly. After talking about communicating more, how could Bella forget to mention that extremely important piece of information? I could already picture her walking around set, knowing exactly what she wanted. The image was enough to revitalize my hard-on, and I figured that a shower wank was definitely in order. God knew I deserved it after the day I'd been subjected to.

Longest. Day. Ever.

The kind soul that he was, Jasper tossed me one of his blankets to use on the couch while I started the shower, turning it as hot as it would go.

My nerves were frayed, and I stood underneath the pelting water for a while, just to calm me down. As soon as I was reasonably calm, I took a deep breath and imagined Bella in the shower with me. I knew it wouldn't happen for a while, but just the prospect was enough to cause my dick to rise. She was my girlfriend. I'd used the word and she'd confirmed it. There was no backing out now—not that I had any desire to do so.

I recalled her reaction to me calling her little and wondered what kind of nickname I could conjure up for her. Obviously, LB was out of the question, but what about SB for sexy Bella? Or VB for vixen Bella? Or GB for grown-up Bella? Actually, I supposed that would be GUB, which was a little weird. Eh, I had time to work on it. For now, I had some frustration to dispel.

As the steam swirled around me, I pumped my cock with my hand slowly, releasing the tension from my day. I had so much pent-up sexual energy, though, and I knew I was going to be using my hand for a while... but that didn't mean I couldn't imagine my hand was Bella's hot mouth. I ran my hand over the sensitive head, imagining her tongue flicking out and sucking it. As I continued my thrusting, I wondered if Bella would be open to my two favorite numbers: six and nine. I couldn't imagine many things better than feeling Bella's mouth on me while I sucked her clit into my mouth, between my teeth, hearing and feeling her moan around me...

Shit.

That was too fucking quick. I was going to have to get better control of myself in the very near future.

I got comfortable (well, as comfortable as I could) on the couch as soon as I'd finished my shower. Tomorrow, I would ream Jake out for not only causing unnecessary drama but for fornicating in my living quarters without my permission. I mean, who the fuck did that anyway?

With thoughts of beating down my best friend and getting rewarded by my incredibly sexy girlfriend (SGB?), I finally fell asleep, hoping that the remainder of our days wouldn't feel this long or tedious ever again.

Chapter 19

Explosive Beginnings

~Bella~

I awoke the next morning with a start. My dreams had been emotional and intense, and when I came to, I was gasping for air and clutching at my covers.

As soon as I became conscious of the room around me, the haunting visions of my dreams disappeared, leaving me confused and drained—my state of mind for the past twelve hours.

The room was oddly quiet for the morning; each one of the girls was still tucked neatly beneath their comforters. My eyes flicked to the huge clock hanging on the wall, and I groaned with the sad realization that I had an hour until Reveille was even called. I closed my eyes and willed myself to fall back asleep, but my mind was too agitated, still sorting through last night's events, to allow that to happen.

Instead, I decided to get out of bed and take a long, hot shower. My hair was in a mess of tangles, and my eyes were red and dry from the remnants of my tears. Stripping down to just my towel, I made my way across the campus to the showers, ready to scrub myself down. I was about to hop into the closest shower when the curtain was pushed open suddenly from the inside, making my heart jump into my throat. Surprised blue eyes met mine, and confusion marred her usually perfect-looking features.

"B?"

"Jesus Christ, R." I gasped as my hand came up to the top of my towel to clutch at my heart. "Give me a heart attack first thing in the morning, why don't you?"

Her eyes narrowed as she took me in. "What in God's name happened? You look a hot mess, hun." She must have been tired, because her southern twang pervaded her words for the first time in a while, and I couldn't help but giggle at its reappearance. "What?" she asked, panicked. "B, you're scaring me a little bit."

"I'm fine, really," I assured her. "There was a, um, misunderstanding last night—"

"I will castrate him," she said menacingly, and for the first time, I was genuinely concerned for Edward's dick, especially since I planned on familiarizing myself with it in the *very* near future.

"No!" I quickly jumped in to defend him. "He *really* didn't do anything. In fact..." I trailed off, realizing that I was going to have to tell Rosalie the entire story, despite how idiotic I felt over the whole thing. "Fuck, can we talk about this later?"

Her expression transformed into one of surprise before she leaned back and shook her head. "Uh, yeah, I don't think so. Get in the shower. I'll do my hair while you talk."

I wanted to argue with her, but surprisingly, I wanted to talk it out with someone. As the water cascaded down my body, I let the entire tale of the previous evening spill forth, starting with me getting the card from Maggie's mom and ending with Edward asking me to be his girlfriend.

The more I talked, the guiltier I felt. Why hadn't Edward completely lost his shit? Why didn't he hate me? / would have hated me, had the situation been reversed.

Rosalie wasn't one to hold back, and not surprisingly, she felt similarly. "Wait, so he didn't get mad?" I shook my head. "At all?" I shook my head harder as I got more frustrated with her reaction, despite the fact that I'd been prepared for it. "Hm."

I wrapped my towel around my body tighter and walked across the campus back towards our bunks as she continued to express her disbelief. "I bet he's secretly pissed," she said adamantly.

"You think?"

She shrugged and nodded slightly. "I don't know. Maybe his self-esteem is so low that he didn't care that you ran to Seth just as long as you ran back to him in the end?"

My mouth dropped in horror. "Edward doesn't have low self-esteem."

Rosalie started giggling uncontrollably, so hard that I feared her towel would slip off her body and reveal her naked form to the entire campus, who was now waking up and heading towards breakfast. At my lack of response, Rosalie's laughter slowed. "Oh, you were serious..."

"Yeah. Why wouldn't I be? Edward is the most self-assured person I know. Plus, he's like ridiculously gorgeous." I paused, letting the butterflies in my stomach reappear as I thought of the way his hands had tangled in my hair as he kissed me. "And... my boyfriend."

A warm smile spread across her face as she took me into her arms, holding me in a firm embrace. "You two are going to be great together. Just remember that Seth will most likely be a touchy issue from now on."

She kissed my cheek loudly before pushing me towards my bunk, and she scurried off to get ready in hers.

I entered my bunk and went straight to my closet to find my best pair of underwear. I knew it was stupid, knowing that Edward most likely wasn't going to be seeing them anytime soon, but the dark pink lace gave me confidence and made me feel sexy. Well, Edward did that, too. And imagining him seeing me in the underwear was enough to make me blush from my ears down to my chest.

After I was ready, instead of waiting for my campers as I usually would, I headed into the dining hall early, anxious to set up my table before Edward got there.

Unfortunately, that plan came to a screeching halt when I saw Edward already sitting at his own table.

Way to foil my plans... boyfriend.

The blush that I'd finally gotten to dissipate rekindled at the thought of the word "boyfriend," which didn't go unnoticed. Edward caught my eye nearly as soon as my blush started up again, causing it to deepen. I felt as if my skin were on fire from the way his eyes darkened and his crooked smile widened.

"Hi," I said quietly as I slid onto the small wooden bench at the table next to his.

"Hey." His response was lacking in enthusiasm, and Rosalie's words about his potential anger flooded my mind.

My eyes flashed to his, but I couldn't see any anger. If anything, all I saw was disappointment. Was he disappointed in me? Did he feel like he was settling for me? Panic bubbled inside my stomach, sloshing around like the time I'd tried to eat an entire box of Tagalongs in one sitting. *Don't try that... it's not fun.* Without thinking over the consequences, I jumped up and slid my ass next to his on the tiny seat.

His eyes lit up again, and I leaned into his side as his arm came around my shoulders. "So, a little bird told me that you had some pretty big news to share with me last night."

"Oh my God!" I smacked my hand to my head, feeling like a complete moron. With everything that had happened last night, I'd completely forgotten that the catalyst for it all was actually something worth sharing. "I'm so sorry I forgot—"

"Bella, it's not a problem. Tell me now." His thumb rubbed up and down my shoulder, and it took all my concentration to focus on telling him the story of Maggie's parents and the valuable contact I'd made rather than purr in delight at the warm sensation it was creating within me. After I'd told him my great news, I felt his lips press into the top of my head and heard a small groan as his nose pressed into my hair. "That's fantastic, Bella."

I pulled back and angled my head upwards to stare him down. "Did you just sniff me?"

"No," he said quickly, conveniently looking around the room at anyone but me.

I snuggled further into his side to hide my smile and gripped the side of his t-shirt. "I'm pretty sure you did."

"I—" He was about to deny it again when he finally caught sight of the wide smile plastered to my face. "Oh, you think you're *so* funny, don't you?"

His long fingers dug into my side, right below my rib, making me squeal with loud peals of laughter that rang loudly throughout the dining hall. I squirmed and begged him for mercy as he continued to tickle me, but he was relentless in his torture.

As Alice approached, I pleaded with her to save me as I gasped for air, but she just shook her head and smirked at us, saying that she thought I "didn't really want any help."

Traitor.

Edward's tickling ceased suddenly, and I shifted in my seat to wonder what he had stopped for. In the doorway was the saddest-looking Seth I'd ever seen. His hair was a mess and there were dark circles under his eyes... his eyes, which were boring holes into my chest. He made me feel as if I were naked in the middle of the dining hall. Making sure that wasn't the case, I glanced down, and I realized that as I had moved to look at Seth, Edward's hand had somehow shifted to take up residence on one of my tits. I gasped quietly and tried to relish the feeling of Edward's warm hand over my chest, but as soon as I realized what was going on, so did Edward. And just like that, he snatched his hand back and put into his lap.

I wanted to protest as Seth sulked away and tell him that it wasn't what it looked like, but it really *was* what it looked like. And as guilty as I felt for being somewhat responsible for upsetting Seth, my overwhelming happiness at finally having the boy beside me be mine was enough to compensate for that. It made me feel like a bitch, but I wouldn't have changed anything if it meant not being with Edward. *Sad but true.*

"Sorry," Edward sputtered, his hands fiddling nervously in his lap. "That wasn't, um, intentional. I wouldn't want to—"

"Edward." My hands covered his in an attempt to quell their awkward fidgeting. "It's fine. Don't worry about it." I pressed down on them in what was meant to be a comforting action, but as Edward shifted suddenly in his seat, I felt movement *underneath* his hands. My entire body warmed at the realization that my action of comfort had had a completely unintended reaction.

Oh. My. God.

My hands "pulled an Edward" as I snatched them out of his lap and placed them back into mine. Obviously, I knew what a guy's hard-on felt like. I might have been a virgin, but I wasn't completely inexperienced with the opposite sex. Thankfully, camp socials with the boys' camps across the lake had somewhat prepared me—somewhat meaning I'd given two awkward hand jobs and an even more awkward blow job, where Emmett had so kindly found us and interrupted, saving me from deciding whether it was socially acceptable to spit or swallow.

"Motherfucking hell," Edward muttered as he tried to angle his lower body away from me.

I couldn't stop the nervous laughter that spilled from my lips at his reaction. We were both so fucking awkward around one another. At this rate, we wouldn't ever be getting past second base!

"Uh oh," Jake's booming voice cut in. Edward stiffened and shook his head, looking like he had a mild twitch. "If this was her reaction to you asking her out on a date, I lose ten bucks to Emmett."

"Wh-huh?" I turned to look at Jake, who had finally figured out that Edward was trying to tell him something. "You're asking me out?" I flipped back to Edward, who was running a hand through his already-mussed hair.

A loud sigh escaped his mouth as he slumped forward. "Well, yeah, I was going to," he said, narrowing his eyes at his best friend. "We hadn't really worked up to that yet. Goddamn cocksucker ruins everything."

My heart leaped into my throat, causing it to narrow and making my voice inexplicably high-pitched. "He didn't ruin anything. I want to go out with you... obviously."

Edward's eyes shifted nervously, seemingly checking me over to see if I was telling the truth. Satisfied, he nodded stiffly and started rambling. "I figured you wouldn't want to do anything too crazy after last night, so I thought maybe we could just hang out in the shack and watch a movie? I would suggest my room, but Jake hasn't gotten around to buying me new bedding yet, and I know you don't want to lie on that mattress without sheets, even though we did already flip it over and—"

Not wanting to prolong the monologue of epic proportions that Edward was spouting, I simply placed a finger to his lips, effectively shushing him. "That sounds goo-ood." The last word was broken up as Edward placed his hand around my wrist and kissed my finger lightly before intertwining our hands between us.

"Perfect." He smiled, and I tried my very hardest not to swoon and melt into the bench next to him. I got up as campers started swarming the tables, and I grinned when I saw that Jake had already taken the liberty of setting up our table for me. Yes, that boy had some serious groveling to do. Not to me, of course. But I was collateral damage, and if he wanted to include me in his apology to Edward, then I wasn't going to fight it.

I sneaked another peek at Edward before focusing on my campers completely. I knew today was going to feel long, but I could not wait until tonight.

~Seth~

I had always been a good kid. I'd never received a speeding ticket or gotten so drunk that I'd blacked out. I'd done well in school and treated my parents with respect.

But I was *this* close to punching Edward Cullen's lights out today.

Over the past six weeks, I'd learned a multitude of things about him.

Edward was pretty moody. He had a sour attitude about most things in life and never hesitated to share those feelings.

Edward was highly opinionated. He had a viewpoint on everything, film especially, and he could be the most critical bastard ever.

Edward was focused. He took his job more seriously than most, and it showed in how he handled his classes and the campers.

Edward was incredibly self-conscious and in no way self-assured. He, for some reason, hated nearly everything about himself. I'd never heard him tout his own talent, of which there was a multitude.

Edward was kind of a dick. He wasn't mean, per se, but I was pretty sure that having Jake as a best friend for so many years solidified his place in the dick kingdom.

Today, however, Edward was none of those things. Nope, Edward was unrecognizable. At first, I'd thought that maybe he'd smoked a bowl this morning, but I knew he couldn't have been *that* unprofessional. But, still... this Edward was a stranger to me.

Instead of being moody, he seemed to have a perma-grin etched across his face. He even laughed and confessed to having a copy on DVD when one of our campers answered that *The Godfather: Part III* was her favorite sequel. This was absurd in itself because I knew for a fact that Edward had written one of his college term papers on why the film was the most offensive piece of cinema to ever grace the silver screen, and he'd compared the series to his *own* favorite "Part III" – *Star Wars: Return of the Jedi*.

He was acting like sunshine and daisies and rainbows and unicorns, and I wasn't going to lie, seeing him like that put me in a funk because I knew what—or rather, who—the source of his excellent mood was. And that really sucked for me.

By the time afternoon rest hour came along, I was ready to off myself, or at least hang out in the shack by myself and watch another depressing movie about a love triangle where the nice guy finished last. I scanned the shelf of the shack, filled with Edward's movies, and I grabbed *X-3* without a second thought.

As Edward pushed out his chair, he eyed my movie choice warily.

What? You're the one who owns it in the first place...

"You're not going to go back to your bunk?" he asked.

I shook my head, shuddering at the thought of returning to my room—or my bed—and I put the DVD into the player. "I can't go back there yet..." I trailed off, unsure of why I felt I had to justify myself to him anyway.

Edward's eyes widened in what seemed like understanding before he clasped a large hand to my shoulder. "Dude, did you sleep here last night?"

"I, uh, yeah."

He looked at me with pitying eyes, and I could feel anger bubbling inside my chest. I was exhausted and sore and I just wanted him to leave so that I could watch Jean Gray leave Cyclops for Wolverine in peace. But instead, he gave me a sad smile. I could feel another apology coming on, and I really didn't think I could stomach it, so I was infinitely grateful when my lug of a cousin came barreling through the shack door.

"Hey, bitches! It's Wal Mart time!"

Edward growled slightly and shoved Jake's arm hard. "You bet your ass it is. If you think for one second I'm going to let you give me chlamydia, you are sorely mistaken."

Jake snickered, wiggled his eyebrows, and threw a huge arm around his best friend's shoulders before pulling him close to his side and whispering, "Yeah, you and who else?"

Edward playfully jabbed Jake in the ribs with his elbow, causing Jake to stumble back, clutching his side in mock-pain. I couldn't help but cringe as well. If Jake was making jokes about it, it was 100% official now. Edward and Bella... Bella and Edward. I knew it was going to happen, but nothing could have prepared me for the sinking feeling in my stomach at thinking of them together in Edward's bed.

"Are you guys going to stop fucking around here, or should I turn the volume up?" I snapped.

The two best friends froze as soon as the words were said, leaving them with their mouths open and gaping. "What the fuck is up *your* ass? Did Edward pass his emo to you? Is it contagious like STDs? Maybe we can all have the clap! No t that I have the clap—"

"Jake!" I was going to lose it. I needed to be left alone to my wallowing, not verbally stabbed over and over. "Please, just leave me alone."

"Uh, okay, man. So you *don't* want to join us on our Wal Mart run, then?" Jake asked nervously.

"No, not particularly." I sighed and, of course, looked back to the TV screen just as Jean confessed that she loved Wolverine.

"Okay, well, I guess we'll see you later." Jake looked between Edward and me a few times before Edward forcibly pulled Jake from the shack, finally leaving me to my misery.

~Edward~

Today was a great day. I knew that I'd probably pissed off Seth something fierce with my devil-may-care, laid-back attitude. His pissy attitude hadn't gone unnoticed, but I couldn't help myself. I had a date with Bella tonight.

And before then, I got to force my best friend to spend a shitload of money on me. This was a win/win situation.

As soon as we walked through the doors, I dragged Jake straight to the mattress aisle. He looked at me in disbelief.

"Oh, you've got to be fucking kidding me. I can't afford this shit, Edward! I work as a part-time coach and a *camp counselor*!"

I smirked and hopped onto one of the beds to test out the softness. I rolled to the side and picked up the price tag. "This one's only three hundred twenty-nine dollars, Jake. And I think I like it the best." I lay back with my arms crossed behind my head and sighed. This was the best present ever.

Jake's face turned all kinds of red, and I swore that steam was about to start coming out of his ears. "Edward, I'm not going to spend a grand replacing your bed stuff."

Pushing myself up onto my elbows, I stared Jake down. I wanted him to see just exactly how serious I was about this. "Well, maybe you should have thought about the repercussions of your actions before fucking my ex-girlfriend in my bed, you self-centered piece of—"

He held up his hand to stop me before flopping down onto the bed next to me. "Okay, I get it. But, honestly, I think this punishment is a little bit harsh. I mean, I'm all for owning up to the consequences of my actions, but we just fucked... I don't see what kinds of repercussions there are to that besides needing to wash your sheets."

All the anger that I'd repressed for Bella's sake last night came flooding forward, and I fucking lost it. "Are you serious? You really don't think there were any consequences besides dirtying up my sheets? Fuck, I *wish* that was all that had happened. But, no, you didn't stop to think that *maybe* Bella would stop by the bunk to see me and *maybe* overhear *someone* having incredibly loud sex with my ex!"

"Oh, shit," Jake hissed.

"Yeah," I continued. "Oh, shit." I didn't pause to think. I knew I needed to let this all go, and Jake had to know what he had caused. "You want to know why your cousin caught my emo? I'll tell you why." I barreled on, not waiting for a response. "Because Bella *did* happen to hear you and Emily, only she didn't hear you, so she thought it was *me*, you dumbass. And do you know what she did in response?" Jake grimaced. He knew what was coming next. "She threw herself at Seth to make herself forget or to get back at me or some bullshit like that."

"Fuck, Edward. I didn't even think—"

"You're right. You *didn't* think."

"So, did they..." Jake didn't want to finish the end of his sentence, and I couldn't blame him. It still felt like someone was trying to cut through my stomach with a dulled knife at the thought of it.

I sighed, threw my arms down, and stared at the ceiling. "Seth stopped her. I don't know how he found it in him to stop, but he did. He's actually a really good kid. And he's still really fucking upset because you let your cock do the thinking, and he ended up getting hurt in the process. So, yeah, I'd say there were a few more ramifications to your actions than just some dirty sheets."

Jake pushed himself into a sitting position and scratched the back of his neck, finally looking appropriately admonished. He toyed with the price tag in his fingers for a few seconds before turning to me and nodding. "Three hundred twenty-nine dollars?"

"Yeah, three hundred twenty-nine dollars."

"Okay, then." He stood up and stretched his arms over his head before holding out a hand to help me off the mattress. "Let's go find you some sheets and bedding."

It was a shitty apology, but it was the best I was going to get from Jake right now.

A loud chuckle from behind made me jump slightly as I fluffed my comforter, completing my newly made bed. After dinner was over, I'd made Jake haul my old mattress out and bring the new one, plus my brand-new bed stuff, into my room. I had barely an hour until Taps played. And I was only slightly nervous...

"Oh, man," Jasper snickered. "Only you would buy *Transformers* bedding."

I stood back and admired it. Yeah, it was dorky as fuck, but I only really needed it for the next six weeks. It wasn't like I was going to take home my new Optimus Prime comforter to snuggle with.

"And a Bumble Bee blanket?" Jasper held up the yellow and black fleece, but I snatched it back and placed it at the foot of the bed.

"For when it's too hot at night for the comforter."

Jasper nodded and raised his eyebrows, clearly mocking me. "Of course, of course. So, does this—" he pointed to my new set up "—mean I should make myself sparse tonight?"

"Uhm..." I hadn't really wanted to bring Bella back to my room after everything that had happened last night, but it seemed like the shack was going to be occupied by Seth for at least a few more days. I didn't want to risk running into him. I mean, I had mad respect for the kid, and it didn't seem particularly nice to flaunt our first date in his face.

Jasper broke out into his usual mega-watt smile and held up his hands. "No worries, my friend. No worries at all. I'm sure Alice and I can find somewhere else to hang out tonight."

I let out a whoosh of air that I hadn't even realized I was holding in. "Thanks, man."

As Jasper got ready for his own evening, I sent a quick text to Bella to let her know that she

could come to the bunk as soon as Taps played. And then my nerves skyrocketed.

This was Bella. I shouldn't have been this nervous, but I couldn't calm myself down for the life of me. She was the first person who I'd ever had, well, feelings for—as trite as that sounded. I didn't have time to call Tanya for advice, so instead, I hopped into the shower, which I'd needed to do anyway.

I was halfway through rinsing the shampoo out of my hair when my phone buzzed on the sink counter. Pushing back the curtain, I wiped my hand dry before flipping it open to see who had texted me. The words on the screen did nothing to quell my worries.

first date in your room? ... how convenient... see you soon. xo, bella

My cock sprang to life, hardening and making its presence known. I couldn't let her show up to my room with this kind of problem, so to prepare for Bella's impending arrival, I jerked off... twice. I let my hand glide over my soap-covered cock, needing to reign in my sexual desire. Really, I didn't need to pounce on Bella. I wanted tonight to be sweet. It was our first real date.

Towelng off, I headed back into my now-empty room to throw on some clothes. Just as I finished slipping on a pair of clean shorts, there was a soft knock at the door. I peeked my head out the door where Bella was waiting patiently outside and contemplated running back into the bathroom and jerking off again.

Fuck.

She was wearing the same black shorts she had worn that first night out at The Pound, the ones that showed off more of her legs than was mentally healthy for me, and the Batman t-shirt I'd bought her weeks before. It was as if she was marking herself as mine, and my dick *really* enjoyed that thought.

Our eyes locked, and in that second I realized how ridiculous I must have looked just staring at her instead of opening the door like a normal person.

"Sorry, uh, you don't have to knock." I pulled open the door and reveled in the easy way her arm slid around my waist in greeting.

She let out a small laugh and looked up at me, her eyes glimmering with a multitude of emotions that I was too overwhelmed to sort through. "Actually, I think I do. I learned my lesson last night."

My chin fell to my chest, where my head hung in defeat. She had a legitimate point. I almost growled until I felt a small hand brush against the side of my cheek and another rest against my chest. "Edward, I was kind of kidding."

"Sorry."

She moved my chin so that I couldn't hide from her anymore, forcing me to look back into her worried eyes. "What are you apologizing for?"

"Nothing, I've just been with Seth all day, and he..." At Seth's name, Bella tensed, and I shook my head, trying to clear it of the nonsense. It had been less than a minute into our date, and I'd already made everything more than awkward. *Typical*. "Never mind. Uh, maybe we should not hang out in the hallway and go into my room?"

She bit her lip to suppress a smile, and tightened her grip on me. "Don't I even get a kiss hello?"

"I, uh..."

Was I brain dead? Words failed to form into sentences as my gaze flickered over her mouth and then back to her eyes.

"Yes?"

I nodded, unable to stop the gravitational pull between my lips and hers. Knowing I needed to keep it short, for fear of jumping her in the middle of the hallway, I counted to five as I kissed her.

1... my lips caressed hers, joining softly as they found the perfect rhythm... 2... her tongue pressed against my lips, and who was I to deny her what she wanted?... 3... I met her tongue with mine, tasting remnants of mint gum mixed with Chapstick, which caused every inch of my body to lose its inhibitions, lost under her spell... 4... my hands gripped her waist tighter, not wanting to let go, but also remembering that in this state of excitement, it wasn't a good idea to have her body pressed against mine... 5... I pulled back and finished with one parting kiss.

Breathing heavily, I rested my forehead against hers, happy to hear that she was just as winded after five seconds as I was.

"Hi." She smiled warmly.

"Hi." I took a deep breath and slid my arms down her waist, letting one fall further to grab her hand.

"Better now?" she asked, and I could hear the laughter in her voice. She had no idea of the effect she had on me.

"Much." I tucked her into my side and led her into my room, where she immediately burst into a fit of giggles upon seeing my new bed. I should have been prepared for that...

"Oh my God, Edward," she gasped through her laughter. "You had the choice to buy any bedding, and this is what you got?"

I shifted awkwardly on my feet and stuffed my hands in my pockets. "Uhh, yeah, I guess... I don't know."

Suddenly, she gasped and reached for the fleece before turning to me with excited eyes. "I *love* Bumble Bee!" And just like that, any awkwardness I'd been feeling magically disappeared. I

didn't know what it was about her, but somehow, Bella always managed to make me feel ten times the person I actually was. "So, what are we watching?"

I ran a hand through my hair and tried not to focus on the way Bella's shorts rode up higher as she crossed her legs and scooted back on my bed. As soon as I caught sight of dark pink underwear, I almost had a seizure, and I jumped across the room to my binder of DVDs.

Flicking through, I noticed that all my "quality" movies were in the shack, and my stupid movies, mostly sex comedies, were all I had here. *Of course.*

Warm hands wrapped around my waist, and I felt her slip underneath my arm to get a peek at the movies. "Oo!" Bella gasped, pointing to the one movie I was praying to God she wouldn't see was there—*Zack and Miri Make A Porno*. "What about that one? I didn't see it in theaters, and Kevin Smith is kind of my idol."

"You love Kevin Smith?" I was genuinely surprised, although I didn't really know why.

"Um, yeah. Film geek with a potty mouth right here." She pointed to herself and slid the DVD from the binder. "I'm so excited!" She jumped up a little bit as she walked over to the DVD player, and I couldn't help but smile at her enthusiasm. This was like getting to know Bella all over again, and I was thoroughly enjoying myself.

She quickly pressed play and flipped her hair over her shoulder as she walked back to the bed. With her sitting cross-legged, I could see straight up her shorts. I felt like a dirty, horny old man and tried to avert my eyes again, but they had a mind of their own and continued to stare.

Bella started giggling and scooted back further, getting into position on my bed. She propped herself up against the wall, leaving room for me to slide in next to her, but apparently Bella didn't want that from me. As I took up the space next to her, she looked at me and pouted, her eyes becoming wide and sad.

"What?" I said with a chuckle in my voice. I was thoroughly enjoying Playful Bella.

"Can I lean against you?"

A wide smile broke across my face, and I couldn't resist leaning in and kissing her temple. "Of course."

As soon as she began to move, though, I realized what she meant... and a second too late. *Fuck.* Bella moved my legs apart and sat herself between them so that she could lean against my chest. Her scent surrounded me, and my arms naturally slipped around her waist. I felt, more than heard, her hum in approval as she placed her hands over mine. Had we been standing up, we'd have looked like a cheesy high school prom photo, but I could have cared less.

Well, for a while.

The first thirty minutes of the movie went really well. I felt Bella relax against my chest, letting her head be completely propped up by my shoulder. I was even impressed at how well we fit

together, how natural everything felt.

And then the movie *really* started. Suddenly, girls were taking off their clothes. My thumbs began to stroke the skin between the hem of Bella's shirt and the top of her shorts slowly, enjoying the feel of her soft skin beneath mine. I heard her small sigh/groan and almost lost it. And to make things worse, it happened to be the point in the movie where they filmed their own porno, *Star Whores*. Now, I really liked brunettes, but there was nothing bad about seeing Elizabeth Banks in a porno-styled Princess Leia costume. My cock definitely felt similarly, but I tried to shift away so as not to alert Bella of its presence.

Unfortunately, my motion had the adverse reaction I needed it to. And instead of moving away, Bella moved closer, pressing her ass directly against my very erect cock. I knew I should fight it, but I couldn't bring myself to. So, when Bella shifted her head to look at me, I couldn't resist leaning down and capturing her lips with my own.

It started off slowly enough where I felt in control. I could do this; I could restrain myself. I let my fingers tangle in her hair, angling her head back so that I could kiss her better.

And then, everything changed.

Bella moaned against my tongue, and my control snapped. I wasn't sure if it was all our pent-up sexual frustration or the porno moaning coming from the television, but I needed her badly.

My hands gripped her waist and helped her turn around to face me. Bella broke away suddenly, panting and on her knees. I had never seen anything sexier... and then I caught a glimpse down her shirt. Her tits were pushed up perfectly and encased by dark pink lace, which matched her underwear.

"Fuck, Bella," I groaned.

She bit on her lip, looking every part the sex kitten with her mussed hair, flushed cheeks, and swollen lips. "What?"

"I thought we were going to go slow." I clenched my eyes shut, trying to get a hold of myself. I wasn't some horny teenager. I could control this.

With my eyes closed, the little devil, formerly known as Bella, took advantage of the situation and climbed into my lap, effectively straddling me and pinning me against the wall. "All our clothes are on, Edward," she whispered into my ear, the hot skin of her cheek brushing against mine far too briefly before retracting again. "We're just kissing. That's okay, right?"

Something in the tone of her voice made me open my eyes, and before she could lock it away, I saw the flash of insecurity there. The girl was fucking straddling me with my boner nearly pressing into her, and she was worried about being rejected again... because I was obviously the biggest fuck-up of a boyfriend ever.

"Yeah, of course it's okay, Bella." Her eyes still held an ounce of doubt, so I did the fucking stupidest thing ever and grabbed her hips, pulling them as close to mine as possible. "It's *more*

than okay."

With that, I grabbed her neck and pulled her into a searing kiss. She whimpered and readjusted herself on my lap, getting more comfortable, all the while never separating herself from my mouth. This was amazing and terrible all at the same time, though. Her adjustment brought my cock right against her crotch, and I could feel the heat seeping through the fabric of her shorts through my jeans.

Oh God, she's so fucking hot. Please, focus on anything but her warm, wet... GAH!

Her fingers ran through my hair, causing my hips to buck up slightly and a loud groan to escape my mouth. My arms roamed her back as she moved her lips against mine. Her tongue slid into my mouth as she grabbed and pulled at my hair. I was impressed that she had already figured out how to elicit deep, reverberating moans from my chest, so my competitive self decided to find out how to reciprocate.

As my hands drifted down to Bella's lower back, her kisses became more passionate, deeper—if that was even possible. I reveled in the sensation of her thighs widening as she ground down onto my burgeoning erection. Taking my chances, knowing I was playing with fire, I let my hands slide over her ass, which I had so thoroughly admired for the past few weeks. At the first ounce of pressure against her gloriousness, the moan I'd been waiting for pushed its way from her chest and against my lips.

Hearing her noises only spurred me on, but knowing that I couldn't take this much further was making my cock start to cry. Literally. It was then that Bella ground her hips into mine, and I lost all semblance of rational thought.

As we continued to kiss, Bella began to rock against me. I was fairly certain, knowing that she was a virgin, that it was unintentional. But it felt so good to get some friction against my sobbing dick that I let it be, and I just gave in and enjoyed it.

Unable to resist, my hands squeezed her ass again, and I moved my own mouth to suck at the skin on her neck, just so that I could be privy to the noise she let out into the room. Accompanied with the overzealous moaning of the fake porno behind us, it sounded like we were doing far more inappropriate things in the room than we actually were. And somehow, my cock wasn't able to distinguish between fiction and reality. In fact, it had a vivid imagination.

As I continued to lick and suck and bite Bella's pale skin, her rocking got harder. It felt so fucking good that even though I knew I should have pumped the brakes, I honestly couldn't bring myself to.

"Edward." My name sounded so fucking hot coming off her tongue. "Feels... so... good," she panted, grinding into me harder. As she continued to pant and mumble incoherently, she took one of my hands from her ass and placed it over her chest. Without any warning whatsoever, I erupted, moaning and letting a massive shudder take over my body.

Realizing what had just happened, I froze completely, along with the movement on top of me. I could feel blood rushing to pool in my cheeks, and it suddenly felt all kinds of hot in my tiny,

cramped room. I chanced a glance at Bella, who was still perched on top of me, her mouth forming a tiny 'o' —and, yes, I didn't fail to see the irony in that.

"Did you just—"

"That doesn't usually—"

We both began at the same time, recognizing the moment for what it was.

"Y-you go," she said, incredulous. Yeah, I was pretty disbelieving, too. If I couldn't even keep it together while it was legitimately in my pants, how the hell was I ever going to last when we got past that? I couldn't even think about that right now. Nope, right now I had to explain to my girlfriend that having her writhe on top of me had caused me to blow my load in my pants like some high school kid. I wanted to hit my head against the wall repeatedly. Anything to take away this embarrassment. "Edward?" she questioned nervously.

"Uhm, yeah... that hasn't happened to me since high school... I promise."

Then, the last thing I ever wanted to happen happened—Bella started laughing, and not small chuckles, either, but loud gut-wrenching guffaws. I was in some serious shock. At this rate, my dick was going to shrink and crawl back into itself, running away in shame.

I wasn't sure what my face looked like, but it must have been easy to read because suddenly Bella was smiling. "No, Edward, I'm not laughing at you. Seriously. It's just... that was incredible."

"Incredible?" I scoffed, feeling anything but.

"Mmhm." She nodded and placed a chaste kiss against my lips. "I'd never really seen someone, um, and you..." Her fingers slid around my neck and scratched at the base of my scalp, automatically making me feel better. I loved the way she just instinctively knew what to do to make that happen. "Was I, um, was it... good?"

I couldn't help but laugh. "Bella, you just made me seem like the world's douchiest boyfriend. It was so, what word did you say, good? It was so good that I couldn't even keep it together long enough for you to..."

I trailed off, watching a soft blush color Bella's cheeks as she realized what I was implying.

"Oh, I don't, I mean you don't need to...um..." She tucked her chin into her chest, and I couldn't help but laugh at the notion that the vixen Bella I'd been dealing with moments before had all of a sudden turned into this demure, innocent girl.

"What if I wanted to?" I countered, pulling her chin up.

"Umm..." She looked hesitant, so I did her thinking for her. Grabbing her hands, I placed them on the wall on either side of my head. Seeing the position I'd put her in, her elbows bent slightly, moving her lips to mine again. They met softly, and I had just begun trailing my hand up her silken thigh when the door swung open.

"Whoaaa, shit." Bella leaned back, revealing Jasper, who was swaying on his feet. "Sorriry, Ed. I thought y'all would have wrapped it up by now. My B, B." He snickered at his own joke.

I couldn't believe this was happening. Bella shifted slightly above me, making my jizz move around in my pants—not the best feeling in the entire world, especially with Jasper now included in the mix.

Then suddenly, out of nowhere, my entire room was filled with people. Emmett, Rosalie, Alice, and Jake sauntered in, pretty trashed.

"Heyyy, what's going on in here?" Emmett slurred, pointing at Bella's and my position, which looked fairly compromising.

Bella chuckled lightly and hopped off my lap, moving my jizz around one last time before coming to sit on the edge of the bed next to me.

"Come on, LB!" Alice squealed as she tried to grab my girlfriend and pull her away from me. I put a quick stop to that and wrapped my arms around her waist, keeping her next to me.

"No, stop." I buried my nose into the crook of Bella's neck. "I'm not done with her yet."

Bella twisted around and kissed me loudly on my cheek with a loud squeak before leaning in to whisper in my ear. "You can make that up to me tomorrow... with interest."

"With interest?" I smirked as she pulled away.

"Mhm. Good night, Edward."

"Goodnight, VB." I tested it out, and she turned to me, her eyes filled with curiosity. "Vixen Bella?" She shook her head, but I saw her blush reappear. "What? I'm testing things out."

She waved from the door and with one last wink was dragged out by her two drunken best friends, giggling and gossiping the entire way back to their bunk, I was sure.

"What kind of douchey boyfriend are you?" Emmett asked, pushing my shoulder into the wall. "You don't even get up to walk your girlfriend to the door?"

I grimaced and shifted again, trying to ignore the cooling, drying sensation going on in my boxers. "Uh, she understood that I couldn't really, um..." I couldn't take it anymore, and I moved to get out of bed and clean up. As soon as I tried to adjust my pants, Emmett, Jake, and Jasper all broke out into hysterical laughter.

"Oh my fucking God, has the sky fallen? Edward Cullen came in his pants!"

They all continued mocking me as I got up from my bed, walking carefully to the bathroom. And though it was embarrassing as fuck and I'd probably never hear the end of it, I'd say it was a pretty awesome first date. And I definitely couldn't wait for our second one.

Chapter 20

Tennis Court Tanglings

~Bella~

"Bella!" someone screamed out to me as I was shoved across the room. Staggering backwards, I clutched at my shoulder-now in serious pain.

"Oh my God, what?" I snapped, whipping my head around to see who the hell had decided to assault me during post-class clean up time. As I should have predicted, Rosalie and Alice stood just inside the doorway to the Fine Arts room, smirking at me like no one's business.

"Oh, so you *do* have some of your senses today. Good to know," Jasper chuckled as he scooped up some papers and threw them into the recycling bin.

"Hm?" I asked distracted. I needed to get back to putting away the blocks of charcoal that were now messing up the tables with black dust, but apparently my friends weren't having any of that.

"You've been in a different world today, darling," he said, his eyes laughing even though his mouth had ceased.

"I wonder why?" Alice mocked. She tilted her head toward Jasper, and he kissed the top of it, as if it were the most natural thing in the entire world. How were they not awkward? I envied them times a billion.

I bit my lip and thought back to exactly why I'd been the most unfocused person in the entire world today. Flashes of Edward's lips on mine, his hands caressing my skin, and then him shuddering and groaning beneath me kept running through my mind on a loop. I was so fucking proud of myself that I couldn't think of anything else for the past twenty four hours.

"There she goes again," Jasper muttered under his breath, and Alice and Rosalie burst into a fit of giggles before linking their hands around each of my elbows and dragging me towards one of the tables. I knew they wanted me to spill. I'd been far too giddy last night and they'd been highly intoxicated, so I'd been saving my gossip for today. It looked as if now was gossip time.

I looked up, wondering if Jasper was going to join us too; I knew he loved girl talk almost as much as we did. But, it looked as if today he was going to play the "man card" and leave us to our girlishness. I briefly wondered if Edward had filled him in on what had happened last night. Judging by the tinge of red that appeared on Jasper's ears as Rosalie asked me to "spill all," I guessed that he was probably in the know.

"Later guys," he called out and shut the door behind him, leaving me with two wild-eyed hyenas, salivating for information.

"It must have been good if Jasper had to leave," Alice commented. She must have put together the pieces the same time that I had.

My face heated as my mind conjured the low rumble of Edward's moans and the tingling feeling that had been building as I'd rocked my hips against his. Seeing him come undone beneath me, with such little effort on my part, well, it was something that was sure to fuel my fantasies for a good, long while.

"Oh my God, look at your face! What did you do?" Rose prodded. "Did you see peen? Were his fingers involved? He looks like he has good hands... I think all artists have good hands. Did he know how to use them?"

"No," I shook my head and bit my lip as I sagged onto the bench, unable to hold myself up—or really concentrate at all—while remembering my night's activities.

"No fingers? Or he didn't know how to use them?" Rosalie sounded so sad.

"No, no fingers... well, I mean, obviously he has them, but they weren't involved."

"Not at all? So what'd be use then?" Alice gasped as she got closer to me, her eyes wide with excitement. "Tongue? I remember once watching him eat an ice cream cone and thinking dirty things about the length of his tongue. Obviously, I never mentioned it because I didn't want to get punched—"

At which time my left arm, without conscious thought, pushed forward and made contact with Alice's side.

Oops.

"Jeez, Bella!" she wailed, clutching her side. After sticking her tongue out at me, she staggered over to the other side of the table next to Rosalie, who was staring at me like the world's hardest math problem.

"Okay, so if there were no fingers and no tongue... how did he get you off?"

"Um... I didn't..."

"What?" Rosalie asked, clearly disbelieving. "But when we walked in there last night, you guys were all post-coital adorable and touchy." It looked as if she had gotten to the end of her math problem, only to realize that she'd written down the equation incorrectly, causing the answer to be way off track.

"Yeah, um..." I fidgeted awkwardly, unsure if this was okay to be talking about. I mean, I knew that I wanted to gloat, but it wasn't the nicest thing to do to Edward, all things considered. But, seeing the excited looks on both my best friends' faces, I decided to just go for it. This was the first time that I really *had* anything to talk about, and I was going to just fucking go for it. "... see, I wasn't the one that was post-coital."

"Way to go, LB!" Alice cheered. "Was he big?"

My entire body flushed with my recollection of the feel of Edward, hard and beneath me. "Uh, I don't really know." They both looked confused, so I elaborated. "I didn't actually see it..."

The confused expression stayed on their faces until finally Rosalie got it. Her face morphed into one of disbelieving amusement. "Wait just a second there, B." She held up one of her hands for emphasis's sake. "Are you trying to tell us that you got Edward off through his clothing?"

Hells yes, I had. And I was damn proud of it. Unable to contain my excitement anymore, I let out the girliest giggle-squeal I could manage and began nodding enthusiastically.

"He came in his pants?"

There was no response, really. They knew exactly what had happened, and I didn't need to reiterate my point further with a verbal response. Instead, I could do nothing but nod and giggle. My behavior was contagious, apparently, and soon Alice and Rosalie joined in, our unstoppable laughter getting so out of hand that it started to hinder our breathing. Too far gone, we were panting and gasping for air before we were able to simmer down.

"Oh, that's just priceless, B."

"Nicely done, LB. Nicely done," Alice commented. To be honest, she looked kind of like a proud mama bear. And I realized that she'd been waiting for this moment almost as long as I had. Alice had put up with summer after summer of pining and whining and brooding and heartache, but now, she finally had the opportunity to join in the gossiping about fun slutty times. Because those times existed now. Fuck yeah, they did.

And let's not forget about what's going to happen tonight.

"What's happening tonight?" Alice asked. I hadn't even realized I'd spoken out loud. *Oops.*

"I'm going to get mine... with interest." The fact that I could say that without a hint of irony caused my body to blush uncontrollably and my mind to wander to what was inevitably going to happen when I hung out with Edward later tonight. He'd stopped by class earlier, asking if I would be okay with watching another movie in the shack after lights out, and he'd also made it very clear that he hadn't forgotten about making up for our friends' interruptions last night.

Speaking of which...

I glanced at the clock on the wall and noticed that it was approaching the time that I'd promised to meet him up at the Adirondack chairs. Without even thinking about it, my feet pushed out from my seat, and I headed towards the door.

"What the fuck, B, where are you going?" Rosalie jumped off the bench and pulled me backwards by the elbow.

In my lust-clouded haste, I'd completely forgotten they were still there. "It's time." I gave them an exaggerated wink, and before I could even process what was going on, I was wrapped into a tight group hug.

"Bella sandwich!" Rosalie cheered as Alice made a loud "smoosh" sound.

God damn, I loved these girls. And I was more than fucking grateful to have them in my life. Feeling the love, I slid my hands into one of each of theirs and led them up the hill. We babbled nonsensically until we reached the Adirondack chairs where Emmett, Jake, Jasper, and Edward were lounging, looking like a ridiculous Judd Apatow movie. As soon as I thought it, my laughter started up again, only this time, no one else was privy to the ridiculousness running through my head.

Emmett as Seth Rogen—the vulgar teddy bear, Jasper as Jay Baruchel—the adorkable conspiracy theorist, Jake as James Franco—the ever-loveable man whore, and then... I couldn't exactly pin who Edward was. Maybe he was actually James Franco? Or Paul Rudd? Or Jason Segal?

Completely lost in my musings, I forgot that I was supposed to be interacting with the people around me. I let out a small gasp as large warm hands encircled my waist and pulled me onto their owner's lap. "What's so funny, LB?"

My head whipped around, ready to castrate the fuck out of Edward for calling me LB, when I realized that Emmett was the one who'd captured me.

"Nothing," I lied. Of course, my stellar lying capabilities had everyone fooled... except not really. Before I could squirm out of his grasp, Emmett started harassing me, tickling my ribs until I cracked. "Okay, it's just... add some weed, and this could be something out of *Freaks and Geeks* or *Knocked Up*."

"Shotty being James Franco," Jake shouted loudly, raising his hand into the air.

Edward looked indignant, completely appalled by that notion. "Hell no, you're not. Clearly, *I'm* James Franco."

"What?" Jake countered, raising his voice and flailing an arm around in frustration. "No you're not... there's no way you're cool enough to be James Franco. And you definitely don't get enough tail."

Unable to filter anything, I blurted out, "That was my debate!"

Everyone burst into another fit of laughter as Edward's mouth dropped, hanging agape with disbelief. Seeing his mock-distress, I squirmed out of Emmett's loose grasp and sat down in the small space of chair between him and Jake.

I leaned into his side, happy to finally be reunited with him after nearly an entire day apart. I really hated this whole 'no seeing each other during classes' thing, especially since I'd been wanting to talk to Seth alone, but I didn't want to risk going to the shack and finding them both

there. Talk about awkward and a half. Yikes.

"You don't think I'm cool enough to be James Franco?" His lower lip jutted out into the most adorable pout, and it took all my self-control not to bite it, seeing as there were some older campers still milling about the front porch.

They told me the male ego was fragile, but I didn't think that Edward's would be. He had always seemed so perfect and self-assured to me but beneath the over exaggerated hurt, I could see the doubt creep into his normally bright jade eyes.

"No, Jake's definitely James Franco," I admitted, trying to remedy this situation by appealing to Edward's weak spot: movies. "He's way too much of a man whore to be you. Plus, you don't want to be him anyway... *Spiderman 3* sucked. And wouldn't you rather be someone who can actually crack a joke, like Paul Rudd?"

His frown disappeared quickly, replaced by the stunning lopsided grin that made every inch of my body wake up and gravitate towards him. My head leaned forward just a bit and waited, anticipating the soft brush of his lips against mine. He licked his lips quickly, but my eyes were trained to even his slightest movement. And when his lips finally met mine, it was far too brief.

"Thanks," he whispered, allowing the magical smile to appear again, which made me want to straddle him on the chair in front of everyone. Instead, I settled for throwing my legs over his knees and snuggling my torso into his side. I sighed as I felt his lips press into my hair, and I couldn't help the contented smile from spreading across my face. One of his arms found its way around my shoulders, pulling me even closer, while his other arm slid halfway up my outer thigh. Sparks traveled up my leg, my body burning as his thumb sweeping back and forth over my bare, but thankfully smooth, skin in short, comforting strokes.

A few seats away, I could hear both Alice and Rosalie 'aww' as Jake made a gagging sound from beside us. I swung my arm out and jabbed Jake's side causing him to jump off the chair and clutch his side dramatically.

"What the hell, LB?"

I lifted my head in his direction and narrowed my eyes. "Be nice, Jake. I just made you James Franco."

"As fascinating as this argument has been, I, the obvious Jason Segal of the group, would like to ask something," Emmett announced loudly.

"Oh, does that make me Linda Cardellini or Mila Kunis?" Rosalie asked, clapping her hands together in excitement.

Emmett slumped down in his seat and shook his head. "Why am I friends with such pop culture obsessed movie dorks? And you're obviously Mila Kunis," he added as an afterthought.

"Anyway, I wanted to know what everyone was doing tonight?"

"I have rehearsal," Jake grumbled. Alice and Jasper mumbled an agreement that those were

their evening plans, too.

"Ugh, I have night duty." Rosalie's nose crinkled up in obvious distaste. I'd been lucky enough to not have night duty yet, which was remarkable, seeing as we were already halfway through the summer. But I knew enough about it to recognize that being outside in the dark and cold, guarding some campers' bunks until counselor curfew at two am, was absolutely no fun.

Emmett's eyes swept the group and landed on my and Edward's interlocked position with hope and pleading.

"No." Edward shook his head vehemently, grabbing me tighter in the process. "We're watching a movie in the shack and you're not invited."

His eyes scanned the surrounding area super quickly before holding a hand in front of our faces and kissing me again. I couldn't help but smile against his lips and grab his shielding hand, bringing it to my favorite place around my waist. Edward had to shift his body to face me slightly, allowing my thighs to skim over the hardening lump in his shorts.

Forgetting that our friends were sitting there, I allowed my tongue to slip from between my lips. Just as Edward parted his lips, there was a loud cough and a throat cleared. I assumed it was one of our friends trying to tell us that they'd had enough of our PDA, which, to be honest, I hadn't even realized I was okay with until this very second.

Alas, it was not.

And as I heard the words, "Oh hey, Seth," I all of a sudden became *very* opposed to it.

I pulled away from Edward as quickly as I could, but his hands remained like a steel cage around my waist and legs, not letting me scoot away. Seth was looking almost as uncomfortable as I felt, his hands shoved into his shorts pockets and his eyes trained on the grass, which was far more interesting than any of us sitting around... obviously.

"Hey."

"What's up?" Jasper asked. I guessed he was the most amicable of our group, or at least the least intimidating.

Seth's eyes finally flicked upwards and landed on me for a split second before focusing completely on Jasper. "Heading to the shack."

Blood rushed to my ears and my stomach clenched—and not in the good way, either. I felt guilty as fuck. I'd known that Seth was upset, but I hadn't really seen it.

"Oh, really?" Edward's voice was nervous and strained as his fingers dug into my thigh and waist. It took everything in me not to cringe. Not that I didn't appreciate the sentiment, but he was actually starting to hurt me a tiny bit.

Seth, clearly not wanting to be rude, looked up at Edward, but I noticed his eyes were glued to

his face, not wandering down to where Edward's hands were still gripping me.

"Yeah... I thought I'd get some work in." One of his hands moved to clasp the back of his neck and squeezed, most likely trying to get his muscles to relax. "I've had this crazy idea for an animation set to 'The Wind' by Cat Stevens. Kind of how The Beatles used to make movies about their songs, only it'd be kind of psychedelic animation instead of live action..." He trailed off, realizing that he had started to ramble, and cleared his throat, finally tearing his eyes away from Edward's face.

"Well have fun," Jake interjected, getting his cousin's attention. "I'll be shackled up in the theater with these two—" He nodded his head in the direction of Jasper and Alice, who were snuggled up on a single chair so small that Alice barely fit comfortably between Jasper's legs. "—until God knows when. Why did I want a big part in the musical again?"

Instead of responding, Seth gave a curt wave and started his trek down the hill to the shack.

There was a minute of silence as we watched him walk off, and a large part of my stomach sank. That was so much more awkward than I had anticipated. I knew I needed to say something to make it better, but I didn't know what to say.

"I'm happy to see this won't be awkward at all," Jake said loudly, effectively breaking the loud hum of tension caused by Seth's appearance. Everyone else relaxed, sighing and chuckling softly. Except for Edward. No, his stance hadn't relaxed at all, and I wondered what the hell was running through his head. Even as everyone parted, heading off to the theater and campus respectively, his posture remained. When we were finally left alone, I turned to him.

"Okay, Hulk, you can let me go now."

That seemed to shake Edward out of whatever trance he was in, his body finally moving and twitched in my direction. "Huh?"

"Your hands," I explained. "They're starting to hurt. Do you think you could—" I placed my hands over his and he retracted them immediately, his eyes filled with worry.

"Oh, fuck, I'm sorry."

"It's okay." My voice was timid, even to my own ears as I continued. I really didn't want to upset Edward, and I had a feeling my next words would do just that. "I just really need to talk to Seth."

"Now?" Edward choked out, his grip tightening again.

"Um, yes. Please?" I whispered, eyes wide. "I know we have plans, but I'll be back super soon. I just don't feel right not apologizing to Seth. He deserves that much." My face heated, this time in embarrassment. I couldn't believe how badly I'd fucked everything up. But, to be fair, I had put myself in this situation. I wasn't a complete idiot. The reason I ran to Seth in the first place was that I knew he liked me. Ugh. And now I was dealing with the repercussions of my own actions.

"Bella," Edward sighed as he ran one of his fingers down my warm cheek to pause at my chin and tilt my face towards him. I shivered at the tingling feeling that accompanied his touch combined with the intensity of his gaze.

"Please?" I asked again.

"I guess I can hang out here and watch the sunset by myself."

I pressed a soft kiss to his lips and smiled. "Thanks. I—" *I love you*, I thought to myself, but I knew he'd probably run far, far away if he knew that was how I was planning to end my sentence, so I reevaluated. "—I'll be quick."

An odd expression passed over his face, but I didn't take the time to analyze it now. No, now I had a friend, who I'd treated *really* poorly, to apologize to.

I walked down to the shack in record time. I just wanted to make this better... now. The door was open. I pushed it open, letting the light guitar notes trickle over my skin and warm my insides. I must have sighed too loudly because Seth turned around in his seat suddenly and looked at me in shock.

"Um, hi." Now it was my turn to feel awkward. Shit, how was I going to do this? I could barely form a sentence.

"Do you need something, Bells?" he asked, and the formality in his tone nearly made me stagger backwards.

I paused before deciding to dive right in. No sense in holding back, especially when I had Edward waiting on me. "What I did to you was wrong. I feel sick about it, Seth. I wanted to use you, and I knew it was wrong at the time, but I did it anyway. And you've been nothing but an amazing friend to me, and I'm just so sor—"

Seth cut me off, jumping up from his seat, and he started to pace in small circles as he spoke. "Stop, just... stop. Please. Please," he repeated again.

"But—"

"No." I heard the finality in his tone as he stopped and brought his eyes to meet mine. "I don't know what happened that night, and to be perfectly honest, I'm not sure I ever want to."

"But—" I needed to get a word in edgewise. I needed to tell him how I thought I'd been betrayed and how he was the first person I thought of to comfort me. How he'd been the only one to get me through the first month and a half of the summer, and how I needed his friendship.

"I can't stand here and pretend like your apology will make things better, Bells."

Well, that shut me up.

"I really like you... a lot. But please be fair to me and give me some time without you to process everything." Seth crossed his arms across his chest and lowered his eyes to the ground again.

"So, what... we're not friends anymore?"

"I want to be your friend, Bells, I do." He fidgeted, as if he wanted to say more, so I helped him out.

"But..."

"But I can't be that for you right now," he finished.

"Do you know when that might change?"

He gave me a small smile and shook his head. "No, but I promise you'll be the first one to know, okay?"

"Okay," I whispered. My feet took a step towards the door, but I couldn't resist turning over my shoulder and reiterating my original point. "I really am sorry, Seth."

"I know."

That was going to have to be good enough for me right now, and with a sad smile, I made my way back up to the chairs to Edward.

I couldn't help but smile as I saw him. He looked majestic, regal almost, under the pinks and purples of the nearly disappeared sun, spread out and reclining in the large chair with his eyes closed. Seeing that no one else was around, I took advantage of his position and climbed onto his lap, placing one knee on either side of his thighs.

His hands grabbed my ass, and he brought me closer, not even bothering to open his eyes. I couldn't help but notice the beginnings of his crooked smile begin to form.

"Hey, beautiful, how'd it go?"

"Not so well," I sighed and kissed the tip of his nose lightly.

Edward's eyes opened slowly, and I could see the remnants of light reflected in them, taking me aback momentarily as I flashed to the last night of pre-camp. It had been just us two under the moon on the Adirondack chairs that night, too. It felt like a different lifetime; a lifetime where I wasn't allowed to kiss Edward. No matter what happened from here on out, I knew that I could absolutely not return to that time.

"What happened?" he asked sleepily, and I wondered if he'd actually napped in the short time I'd been gone.

"Let's just say that I'll be avoiding the shack for at least the next week."

"Sad times for me. So, what do you want to do? Should we hang out in my room since the shack is now occupado?"

"Do you mind if we go for a walk?" I asked nervously. "I don't particularly feel like watching a movie anyway."

"My Bella doesn't want to watch a movie?" he gasped, looking around nervously. "Is the sky going to fall? Has hell frozen over? I don't understand..." Edward kept rambling away, but the only thing I could focus on were the first two words that had come out of his mouth and the warmth that surged through my body at the sound of them.

"My Bella?"

"Uhhh, I didn't mean it like that. Not like in a possessive or anti-feminist way. You're obviously not an object, and I don't think of you that way. It's just a phrase. I'm sorry."

I giggled—yes, giggled—and swooped down to shut him up with a forceful kiss. Hands tangled in one another's hair, tugging with a renewed vigor.

"Don't be," I panted as I pulled away. "I kind of love it..."

"MB?" He grinned, and my stomach fluttered, knowing what the initials stood for.

"Mhm." I kissed him in approval again. Damn, a girl could really get used to this. "MB."

"So, where are we walking to?" His hands slid from my ass to grasp my sides and help me into a standing position. "The lake?"

I nodded and put my hands out to pull Edward up from his lounging position. He groaned and his hand went to his lower back. "Ah, motherfucker. This chair is fucking hard as..." He trailed off, and it didn't take me long to figure out what he had been planning on saying. Instead, he diverted. "I think my ass fell asleep from how long I've been sitting there."

Without a word, I slipped my hand into his; intertwining our fingers immediately and began to walk down the path towards the lake. It was the perfect remedy to the stress and awkwardness I'd felt over Seth.

The moon was nearly full, casting a peaceful glowing blanket over the hills of the camp. The air was warm and stagnant, although I supposed it was the middle of July, and I shouldn't have been that surprised by it. Somehow, Edward knew that I didn't need to talk right now. He kept silent, allowing the soft sound of crickets and cicadas to relax us, and just rubbed his thumb over my knuckles and the back of my hand every so often.

As we reached bottom of the hill where it finally leveled out, leading to the lake, Edward groaned again and pinched his lower back with his free hand, making the most hilarious sound I could possibly imagine that broke our undisturbed silence.

"Jesus Christ, my back still hurts from that fucking chair," he complained.

"Okay, Old Man," I snickered. He looked so ridiculous, hobbling along and trying to fix his back simultaneously.

His feet halted, turning towards me instead. "Did you just call me, 'Old Man'?"

"Well, you are almost an entire decade older than me," I goaded, knowing that it was working him up. And fuck me hard if there wasn't anything hotter than a worked up Edward. "Do you know how long that is? How many things can happen in that many years?"

His eyes lit up, magically on fire, and I could see his chest start to rise and fall with each rapid breath.

"I'll tell you... between the time you were born and the time I was born, a shitload happened, Old Man. Personal computers, cell phones, and the Internet were invented. The last all male Ivy, Columbia, started accepting women, Madonna changed her identity at least three times, Michael Jackson went from black to white..."

His face dropped at that one, but I could still see the ferocity building. It took everything in me to maintain a straight face, but I soldiered on.

"There was the Gulf War, three different presidents, um, the end of 80s metal, and the start of grunge. So, yeah, I think 'Old Man' works just fine." I topped off my monologue with a wink, and he lost it.

"I'll show you Old Man..." he growled before lunging at me and picking me up and pushing me against the closest surface, which happened to be the chain link fence surrounding the tennis courts. My arms and legs wrapped around his waist, pulling him as close to me as possible as his lips assaulted mine.

The cool metal from the fence dug into my spine awkwardly, but as Edward's lips crushed against mine, I kind of decided not to give a fuck. Within seconds I was breathless, panting and gasping for air. Aggressive Edward was fucking amazing. He trumped Awkward Edward any day of the week.

As Edward's lips moved away from mine and started their descent down my neck, I lost all capabilities of rational thought. My fingers clenched at the nape of his neck, urging his lips to stay on their current path. Warm lips attacked the right side of my neck, starting just behind my ear and moving down towards the far too high neckline of my uniform t-shirt. After he repeated the same circuit on the left side of my neck, he groaned loudly and pulled away, much to my dismay. I was so fucking turned on and wasn't ready for this to be over. But as his eyes locked on mine with a burning intensity, I saw that he was nowhere near done.

"Everything you said might be true, MB," he smirked, testing out my new nickname. "A decade is a long time, but none of that's important. Don't you want to hear about the important things that have happened in the five years since I've met you?"

I nodded dumbly as he adjusted the grip he had on my ass, causing his hips to hit me in all the

right places. The material of my uniform shorts was way thinner than the jeans I'd been wearing last night, and I could feel the heat from his hips send warm waves of pleasure to my groin.

"Some of the hottest sex scenes to ever be put on film have happened," he began before bringing his lips back to my throat. "Underworld Evolution... The Notebook... Thank You For Smoking..." Between each movie, his soft tongue pressed gently and quickly against my skin before he closed his mouth, pretending as if he were placing a chaste kiss there. Yet each time, the kiss would be prolonged a little bit longer. My temperature was rising so fast that it didn't even occur to me to make fun of him for having seen *The Notebook*. "Watchmen..." he continued with an even longer kiss, making me squirm slightly in his arms. "Brokeback Mountain..." I gulped, my throat constricting uncomfortably. I'd never really told anyone, but I had an affinity for gay men. "Mr. and Mrs. Smith..."

He pulled back, smirking, preparing to dive in again, and I totally lost it. I clutched at the collar of his shirt, balancing myself with my other arm on his shoulder and brought his mouth to mine. The boy knew how to seduce me; he wasn't an idiot. And I had every intention of thanking him.

Our teeth clanked together awkwardly as his hips pushed me further into the fence. His belt buckle pushed hard into my crotch, and I momentarily panicked that when he pulled away, my shorts would be soaked through there. I was living my own dream, and it was nearly impossible to believe sometimes.

Soft lips moved down the column of my throat again, and my body searched in vain for the optimum angle for the best friction, my hips rising and falling slightly with each ragged breath.

"There was also the invention of Nintendo Wii," he mumbled against my skin, his voice becoming more labored with each word. "the iPhone, Jude Law fucked his nanny, Tom Cruise lost any appeal whatsoever..."

At that, I had to giggle. "When did he ever have appeal?" He chuckled against my neck, his lips never leaving my skin, and I instinctively knotted my fingers in his hair even harder, keeping him close as his hot breath fanned over my shoulder through the thin fabric of my t-shirt.

"There was the rise of Uggs," he continued, and I moaned in agreement as his kisses slowed, savoring my now surely bruised skin. "... and oversized sunglasses and... tennis racquets!"

Wait, what?

"Tennis racquets?"

Suddenly, I found my feet back on the ground as Edward leapt away. My knees almost gave out, and I had to grip the fence to keep upright. My eyes followed him, and I saw that Edward had found two tennis racquets and a few balls that had been left out on the court. And for some reason, he seemed super intrigued by them, much to my dismay and confusion.

"Edward?" I asked, getting slightly angry. I mean, the boy had me all worked up and then decided to fucking bail? *I don't think so.*

He picked up a ball and bounced it, his eyes never straying from the neon yellow.

I wasn't as amused, however.

"Edward, seriously. You'd rather play with balls than play with me?"

Finally, his head snapped up, and I tried my hardest not to show the immense insecurity that was now flowing through every inch of my body as our eyes met. It was hard not to, though. He looked me up and down before stalking in my direction slowly.

"Just because we're playing with balls doesn't mean I'm not playing with you," he said as he shoved a ball and racquet into my hand. Again, leaving me dumbfounded as he crossed the court to pick up his own equipment.

"Are you good at tennis, Bella?" he asked, awkwardly gripping a ball between his fingers as they attempted to run through his hair. I shook my head from side to side. I wasn't exactly the most athletic person ever. In fact, I had originally taken up video in the first place to get me out of sports. "Well," he continued as he started to pace slightly. "If you want to be a good player and score, um... I mean, win... you need to know exactly how to handle the ball."

He paused and looked up. I hadn't moved, still resting against the fence and completely confused by his actions and impromptu tennis instruction.

"Do you know what I mean?" he asked, clearly trying to get *some* point across.

"Mhm," I lied. In fact, I had *no* clue what he was going on about.

He cleared his throat and tugged at the hem of his t-shirt, still bouncing the ball occasionally. "To score, uh... a point... you need to handle the ball with care. When you serve, you need to use enough force to get it—" he made a weird hand gesture, his arm waving in a semi circular motion in the air "—over the net, but gentle enough to not go out of bounds. If it goes out, you've messed it all up... and that's... bad."

Edward paused, seeking reassurance from me, but I legitimately had no idea what the fuck he was talking about.

"Edward, I lost you at 'tennis.' What the hell are you talking about?"

He grimaced and groaned loudly, bringing his hand up to pinch the bridge of his nose. "I... um... never mind. Do you want to play for a little bit?"

"Um, sure."

I grabbed the ball and tossed it over my head, trying to serve, but my hand-eye coordination was such that I missed it completely, and the ball fell to the ground in front of me with a thud. Edward contained a small chuckle, but my super sonic ears caught it.

"I told you I didn't play sports!"

As he continued to chuckle, he mimicked my actions, only his ball flew so far out of bounds, it cleared the fence and rolled onto the soccer fields behind it. I ducked out of the way and burst into a fit of giggles, seeing how far out of bounds it had actually gone.

"Okay, it's not that funny," he pouted.

I bit my lip, but the giggles wouldn't die down.

"Come on, Bella," he whined. "Stop laughing at me. It's bad enough that—" He shook his head and stopped himself. I had no idea what was going on with him tonight. He was being incredibly confusing.

"I'm not," I breathed out, my laughter dying down as Edward approached me, dropping the racquet in his hand to wrap his arms around my waist. I let my head lean back against his chest, inhaling his scent, a mixture of fresh and clean and mint with a hint of sunscreen. He smelled like summer.

"What are you smiling at?" he whispered, bringing his chin down to my shoulder.

"I love... this."

Holy shit, Bella, are you serious? I stopped the words on my tongue before they could be released into the quiet night and ruin everything. Edward and I had technically become a couple three days ago. Even with the fast pace of our lives while we were at camp, there was no way saying 'I love you' three days in was even remotely appropriate. Thank God I had a fucking grip on my filter today. Somehow.

"I do, too." His breath fanned over my ear just before his lips brushed across it, and my temperature started rising again. Yes, this is what I had expected from tonight. "And if I remember correctly, I owe you something." His lips captured the tip of my earlobe between them, causing a huge shudder to wrack through my body. I had never actually been... seduced before. I guessed that was a good enough word as any.

And as much as I wanted this—and believe me, I really *really* wanted this—I had no idea what the fuck I was doing. As Edward's hands started roaming, one heading underneath my shirt and the other underneath my shorts, I froze.

"Wh-what are you doing?"

His lips released my earlobe, but his head stayed in place as he chuckled, "If you don't know what I'm doing then I'm doing a piss poor job of it."

He was so close, and the small circles of his fingers felt so good, that it was impossible to think to straight... or to think at all, really. So, instead of telling him what I was thinking—what if I'm not good at this, are we really going to do this on the tennis courts, what if someone catches us, what if *Emmett* catches us, what if he realizes exactly how inexperienced I am?—I groaned loudly and spun around in his arms, melting into him as he led us to the rubbery asphalt of the

hard court.

His hand guided me backwards, stretching me out beneath him. The sight of him above me, the crescent moon shining behind him, nearly sent me into a panic attack. Edward was beautiful, and to be honest, kind of slutty. I knew that he'd had a slew of summer flings, and I knew those girls probably had no problem taking their clothes off. But those girls weren't me.

I momentarily lost all capability of speech as Edward's lips captured mine in a slow kiss. It was slow, yes, but not gentle. I felt this kiss in every inch of my body, causing my toes to curl and my knees to rise to make more room for his torso between my legs. It was as if my body knew what to do best when my mind wasn't running interference. So, I decided to just go with it.

His hips leaned into mine as the kiss continued, and I felt a sizeable lump in his shorts. My hand went to reach for it, because, um, that was what you were supposed to do, right? But Edward stopped my hand before it even got halfway there, moving it to the back of his neck.

"No," he said firmly as he moved his hips back an inch.

"No?" I asked, wondering what I had done wrong.

"This is about you." His eyes looked deadly serious despite the small smirk adorning his lips.

"Okay..." I conceded, but as Edward's fingers started pushing my shirt up my stomach, I made my own request. "Wait."

His hands froze, and he pulled back suddenly, his eyes filled with concern. "What? Is something wrong?"

"Um..." My face heated, and I felt kind of ridiculous in my panic, but I knew that I would feel much better if my clothes stayed on. I didn't want to worry about him seeing me topless on top of everything else. "I think I should keep on all my clothes—" he looked like he was going to interrupt with an objection or justification, and I didn't want to allow Edward to make me forget what I needed to say, so I just barreled on. "—just in case anyone sees us."

His confusion morphed into understanding. "That's fine, Bella. If I do something to make you, um, uncomfortable?" he said it as more of a question. "Tell me."

"I don't know what I'm doing," I blurt out, unable to stop the words before they escape my mouth.

Edward's face flushed, and he bit down on his lip before he whispered, "Bella, you made me... you make me... I..." he sputtered, "You may not think you know what you're doing, but you definitely do. Now, can you relax so I can return the favor?"

I nodded dumbly, unable to do anything else as one of Edward's hands snaked underneath the waistband of my shorts. Now, I wasn't a stranger to touching myself, obviously, but nothing I'd done had ever felt as good as what Edward's hand was currently doing.

His fingers took their time, creeping over the soft material of my cotton underwear, and for the billionth time I was grateful that I decided to keep my clothes on. I was pretty sure I'd be embarrassed if the first undies he saw me in were my faded pink cotton bikini-style bottoms from Target.

Note to self: clean out underwear drawer... soon.

"Is this okay?" he asked quietly, his hand trailing over the top of my pubic bone. I could do nothing but nod. Okay wasn't even close to describing how I felt, but I'd let it slide for now. As I thought it, my hips shifted, unintentionally moving his fingers right over the crotch of my underwear.

Both our breaths caught simultaneously, but mine quickly turned into a soft sigh as his finger moved up and down with not nearly enough pressure. If it was his goal to make me die a slow, torturous death, he was definitely succeeding.

"Oh God," he groaned, bringing his mouth back to my neck. I should have been worried about looking like a Dalmatian or a leper tomorrow, but that was of no concern as Edward's tongue and fingers moved in sync with one another. They both swept up and down before pushing into my skin with more force.

My knees fell open to rest on the asphalt, no longer able to utilize the muscles needed for keeping them upright. "Bella, I, um... I'm going to..." he said, moving the wet cotton aside, and pushing in one of his fingers.

"Oh."

My voice was surprised, but I had no idea what else to say. He was the first person, besides me, to touch me there, and I hadn't really known what to expect. But it was good. I mean, it was really fucking good. As his finger slid in and out of me, I noticed the way I clenched down on him, wanting him to push harder and faster. My hips moved in time with his finger; nothing had ever felt like this before.

But then, without any warning, the good feelings stopped and were replaced by a terrible ripping, stinging overly-full feeling. I let him keep going for a few more seconds, until finally I decided the pain wasn't diminishing.

"Ow," I whimpered, and not in the good way.

"What?" Edward moved his mouth away from my shoulder to get a better look at my face. "Did you just say 'ow'?" he asked, keeping his finger—or as I'd now figured out—fingers *plural* still.

"Mhm." I cringed, unsure of why I couldn't just keep my mouth shut.

"It hurts?"

"Mhm."

"Wow, um, okay."

Edward was looking down at where, had I been naked, he would have been able to see his fingers inside me, and I tried to steady my breathing.

"You're *really* a virgin."

My mouth dropped, and I could feel tears prickling the corner of my eyes. Had he doubted me? Did he think I was doing it to be coy but was actually some ridiculous slut? Seeing my face, he continued on.

"No, I didn't mean it like... I just meant... has anyone ever done, um, this for you before?"

I shook my head, my cheeks flaming with embarrassment. "Only myself," I whispered, barely audible.

"And you never used anything to, uhh... help?"

"No, oh my God, Edward, your fingers are still fucking inside me, can we not have this conversation right now?" I asked, panic welling in my chest all over again. "And please don't stop, please... I'm sorry," I begged, feeling his fingers start to slide out of me.

"Don't apologize for..." he trailed off. "I just..." Unsure, Edward removed his fingers, and I thought I was going to cry. He couldn't stop now, he just couldn't.

"What are you do—"

His two fingers moved from within me and stroked lightly over my clit, causing my back to arch up from the ground slightly. "Just, let me make it feel good again."

I would have responded, honestly, had his magical fingertip not started rubbing small circles on my clit. If he wanted to make it feel good again, then he was off to a damn good start. I'd heard complaints from a lot of my high school friends that their boyfriends were completely incapable of finding the elusive clit, but Edward seemed to know exactly what he was doing... obviously.

"How is that?" he asked, bringing his lips down to brush over my jaw and trail up to my ear with feathery kisses.

I hope he didn't expect me to actually respond, so I just sighed contentedly, praying that he wouldn't stop. Groaning, his tongue ran along the edge of my ear, and the noise alone was enough to make me hot enough to spontaneously combust.

"I can't believe you're actually mine, MB." His words vibrated against my ear lobe, causing me to shiver. "I love seeing you underneath me." The pressure on my clit increased, and I rocked my hips upwards, signaling my readiness for him. "You're so beautiful when you're this turned on." I mean, with words like those, who was he trying to kid? I was surprised there wasn't the whole fucking Kennebec River leaking out of my shorts.

"More?" Edward mumbled. Hearing my pant of agreement, he pushed the tip of his finger inside me, never ceasing the movement of his other finger on my clit. Rosalie was right; the boy knew exactly how to use his fingers. Keeping his eyes on me, he pushed his finger in further. As the pressure of his finger increased, he checked in with me, which I thoroughly appreciated, considering everything. "One is okay?"

"One is good," I moaned. "One is better than good."

"Okay," he whispered, continuing. His finger started its slow and steady rhythm inside me, and I felt the tingling start to build up again. In and out, his pace increased steadily, causing me to whimper and moan again.

"Still good?" he asked as his lips pressed against my neck softly.

"Shit, fuck yes." My Tourette's returned in full force as my hips bucked against his hand. He'd rendered me incapable of controlling any bodily reactions whatsoever, apparently. I was approaching and getting incredibly close to something great, something life-altering. "So... close..." I panted.

As Edward's finger curled inside me, it hit a particularly sensitive spot, and I was overtaken by warmth and white light. I was pretty sure I even saw God.

Crying out his name, I relaxed back into the asphalt, completely unable to move.

"Thank you," I sighed as he brought his lips to mine, pressing a gentle kiss there.

Edward rolled off me and pulled his hand out of my shorts, wiping it on the asphalt beside him.

"Ew, oh my god, that's disgusting."

He simply chuckled, shrugged and pulled me into his side to stare up into the clear sky, filled with bright stars.

Nothing else was said as our eyes roamed the darkness, despite the fact that we had a shitload to talk about.

I knew that things were going to be complicated with Edward, but I hadn't really allowed room for my awkwardness on top of that. Not wanting to ruin my contented buzz, I allowed the warm night air and Edward's scent to envelop me completely, putting off our real conversation for a time when I'd regained use of my brain cells.

Chapter 21

Maddening Meltdowns

~Edward~

I was in a dark forest, running as fast as I could away from a large group of vicious... tennis racquets? Yes, tennis racquets. They were holding out their hands, each one grasping large knives dripping with some sort of gelatinous substance, and yelling about cutting off my fingers. My speed increased, knowing that I wanted to keep my fingers on my hands. Through the trees, I saw a clearing up ahead. When I finally reached the opening, though, I realized it was a body of water—a dead end.

Just as the lead tennis racquet (chief of the tennis racquets?) grabbed my hand and raised his knife into the air, ready to attack, there was a loud clap of thunder, thrusting me into consciousness.

Whoa, what a weird-ass dream.

My eyes opened to a room still shrouded in mostly darkness, and the light tinny rumblings coming from my bedroom ceiling informed me that it was a rainy day. God, I fucking hated rainy days at camp. It was bad enough that the kids were upset they didn't get to do activities, but to force them to watch stupid movies and play board games all day was just cruel and unusual punishment for us all.

"Morning," I croaked, my voice sounding like sandpaper.

"Dude, I hate to be a buzz kill, but you look like hell. Out too late last night with your lady love?"

"Lady love?" I snickered, "Who the fuck are you? Who even says that?"

"Whoa there, angry face." Jasper's hands rose between us in a defensive stance. "You'd think getting some would put you into a better mood."

An unstoppable groan left my mouth as I remembered what would now be referred to as the 'Finger Banging Fiasco of Summer 2K9.' I'd wanted to make it completely about her, since I felt like utter shit about the night before. Talk about awkward. And embarrassing. So, as Bella cringed and told me to stop, I'd never felt like more of a failure. But, she was so tight...

"Uh oh. That noise doesn't inspire much confidence, Cullen. Talk to me, what happened?"

I rolled from my back to my side so I could face Jasper without getting up. My body really didn't want to do that yet. He waited patiently, perched on the edge of his bed, like a small child waiting for story time.

"I'm never getting laid. Ever again."

I closed my eyes and breathed out through my nose, willing the terrifying images of tennis racquets away. I knew my metaphor had been pretty ridiculous last night—I mean, cum as a tennis ball and pussy as the court... who the fuck was I? But, I had almost been about to lose it in my pants again, and so when I saw the sports equipment out of the corner of my eye, I knew I needed to divert. No one should ever come in their pants two days in a row... especially if said person is above the age of fifteen.

"What?" Jasper sounded confused, and I couldn't blame him. "Did she tell you she doesn't want to—"

I waved a hand, stopping him in his tracks. "No, nothing like that. It's just..." I opened my eyes again, unsure of whether or not Bella would appreciate me talking about this with anyone. I'd wager she probably wouldn't, but if any one of my friends could be trusted, Jasper was definitely it.

"Edward, I'm not the gossiping fiend everyone thinks I am. Seriously, you can tell me, and I promise I'll be a vault or a steel trap."

Everything I'd been trying to shove aside last night came rushing back in full force, and I just let it spill.

"I'm scared, no wait, *terrified* to sleep with Bella." I sighed, realizing the truth of the situation. "Last night was great. But, trying to redeem some sort of 'good boyfriend' points, I decided to make it all about her. I needed it to be all about her. And dude, I just... I just..."

I rolled onto my back and clutched at my hair. I needed to stare at the ceiling and not at Jasper for what I was about to confess.

"Two fingers were too much for her. It hurt her. / hurt her. I'm almost ninety eight percent certain that her cherry was actually popped last night... on a fucking tennis court! How low am I? But I didn't realize how fucking tight she actually was until it was too late. And if *that* hurt her, how can I possibly selfish enough to even imagine putting my cock inside her? I'll fucking rip her in two! Not that I'm ridiculously huge or anything, but I'd say I'm reasonably large and—"

"Okay, let's *not* talk about the size of your manhood first thing in the morning, okay?"

"Why are we talking about Edward's donkey-sized cock?" Jake asked, peeping his head through the door.

"Queers!" Emmett called from the living room, causing both Jake and Jasper to snicker.

"You just wish I wanted you," Jake taunted, winking.

Seeing that our opportunity for a real conversation was over, Jasper shrugged and got up from his bed. I supposed I'd have to do the same in the near future. Catching his eye, I silently asked for permission to finish our conversation later, and was elated when he nodded slightly.

Distracted, I didn't see him coming until it was nearly too late. Luckily, I managed to leap out from under my covers just before Jake threw himself on top of my new bed.

"Off, whore," I commanded, smacking the back of his head with my open palm.

"I'm not a dog," Jake grumbled into my mattress.

"Really?" I asked, amused. "You sure fooled me." I grabbed the pillow from the top of his head and whacked him with it. Pleased with Jake's disgruntled yelp, I headed toward the bathroom to get ready for my day.

X-X-X

"... groups eleven, twelve, and thirteen will be in the gym with the land sports staff, and lastly, groups fourteen and fifteen will be with the arts staff in the theater. Have a great day, and try to stay dry!" the portly director of the camp trilled.

I usually enjoyed morning announcements, but hearing that I'd be spending all day with a group of sullen fourteen and fifteen year olds wasn't exactly what I needed. At least I'd have Bella there, since I was with the entire arts staff. And, hopefully, I'd be able to finish my conversation with Jasper.

Yeah, you really need to have that conversation...

I'd barely been able to look at Bella throughout breakfast. I just felt bad. I wondered briefly if she was still sore or if she'd bled. Oh, God, no. Instead, I'd moped shamefully into my bowl of Lucky Charms, hoping that the miniature clovers I'd been ingesting would somehow give me the luck I needed and magically open up Bella's pussy.

Somehow, I'm thinking that's a long shot.

Needless to say, I was feeling a bit skittish. As I arrived at the theater, I immediately sought out Jasper. He was sitting on the edge of the stage, one hand wrapped around Bella's shoulders and the other brushing water droplets from the top of her head. As if sensing my eyes on her, she moved her chin in my direction, a small smile on her face. I couldn't help but smile back, and I loved the way her cheeks flushed and her front teeth chewed at her bottom lip, making her previously innocent smile seem delightfully devious.

Delightfully devious?

It was like my conscience had an unstoppable commentary this morning. And I seriously needed to finish that conversation; otherwise, I had a feeling the commentary would never end. Apparently, I was pretty obvious about my need, too. Because as Ashley—the head pottery counselor—slipped the first movie of the day into the DVD player, Jasper crossed the room, his blue eyes growing more serious with every step towards me.

"Want to..." he whispered, nodding his head towards the back of the theater.

I nodded and led the way to the loading dock, which was full of sawdust and left over remnants of sets from past summers.

Sighing, I pulled out a wooden box to sit on and rested my elbows on my knees, slumping over half-heartedly.

"Edward, you look like someone just told you *Star Wars* doesn't exist and it was all a figment of

your imagination."

A small smile played on my lips at that thought. If it had never existed, then my imagination rocked, and I could become a multi-millionaire creating that whole franchise in place of George Lucas.

"There we go," he chuckled. "A smile. Now, technical, um, difficulties aside... what else is wrong? Because there's a clear-cut answer to *that* problem, but I need to see if there's anything else I have to help you with first."

Say what, now? My back straightened up as I listened to him. A clear-cut answer? I'd like that now please.

"Really?" My voice came out far too high, and I took a moment to concentrate on lowering my excitement level before continuing. "And what would that be?"

"For someone so bright, you are often a dumbass." Jasper looked at me thoughtfully, and I couldn't help but finally release the tension in my shoulders and laugh.

"Gee, thanks. You're such a pal."

He shrugged and ran a hand through his hair. "It's the truth. Now, do you want my help or not?"

Groaning, I agreed.

"Awesome." He paused, and I leaned forward on the box towards him, anxious for his next words. "Have you ever heard the phrase, 'practice makes perfect?'"

"Uh, yes? Hasn't everyone?"

I had no idea what the fuck Jasper was on, but all of a sudden his eyes got really wide, and he just stared at me like I was the world's biggest moron.

And then it clicked.

Man, you really are the world's biggest moron.

"You're saying..."

"That you guys should practice? And often? Yeah. That's what I'm saying. The more you do it, the easier it becomes. You're actually helping her," Jasper said confidently. "But, if you get chastised by Em or Jake for pawing at Bella all the time, I'll deny everything."

Huh. That actually made sense. And as I thought it through, my mind started conjuring images of me 'helping' Bella in various locations all over campus—my bed, the shack, the fine arts room, the theater... oh, yes, the theater. I had options aplenty, and I couldn't wait to start checking them off my newly acquired list.

"... about you."

I looked up just as Jasper finished, what I was sure had been a diatribe and a half, but I hadn't heard a single thing. Staring at him blankly, I began to wonder how I could respond without giving myself up. Unfortunately, Jasper was too quick for me.

"I said," he began sternly, his eyes narrowing to make sure he had my undivided attention, "But, it's also important that you let her help. It can't always be about her... sometimes, it has to be about you."

"That's important?" I asked, genuinely curious. Jasper seemed like a relationship savvy kind of guy, and I felt like he was imparting extremely valuable wisdom.

"I'm going to ask you a stupid question that I don't actually want the answer to." He paused, and his face contorted with semi-disgust before continuing. "Didn't you like making Bella, um... uh... um."

Jasper's face turned a dark crimson as he grappled with the right word. Having a little bit of a heart, I decided to cut him off. Obviously, I knew what he was asking. And it didn't take a genius to know the answer.

"Of course! Which is why I still can't even fucking believe that I hurt her!" I whisper-yelled.

"Well, don't you think she'd feel the same way? Hmm?" I had no response. I'd never thought of it that way. "Exactly. So, let the girl have her turn. You'll make her feel better, and maybe it'll make you stop worrying about losing it too quickly."

My jaw dropped in disbelief, but I managed to close it quickly with a loud snap.

"Right, well, my work is done here. And let's not bring this up again, okay? You can handle the rest, right?" Still speechless, I nodded, not saying a word. "Great. Because I love Bella and all, but I really don't need to know about your sexual exploits with her."

With another nod, Jasper left me sitting dumbfounded, feeling like an idiot.

Still grappling with the mass overload of advice Jasper had just thrown on me, I made my way back out to the theater. The girls looked bored, and I couldn't blame them. The "age appropriate" movie they were watching was some ridiculous film about a teenage mermaid, and I wanted to gouge my eyes out just watching some of the terrible dialogue that was happening.

"*Do you love me?*" the Disney blonde bimbo-looking mermaid asked some supposedly dreamy lifeguard.

To which he responded, "*No, but I think you're hot.*"

I couldn't keep in my snide laughter as I continued to watch, disbelieving that a movie this shitty could actually be made and distributed. *Why couldn't I get so much as an agent to look at my films when there's crap like this floating around?* Hollywood must be a sad, sad place. Trying to

relax, I leaned against the doorframe and closed my eyes, not wanting to subject myself to the travesty on the television screen. I needed to think positively. I knew I'd never get anywhere in the industry if I was constantly doubting myself.

Suddenly, I felt small hands pressing against my chest and the heat from her body mere inches away from mine, causing a really unfortunate and inappropriate stirring in my shorts for our current location. "Hey," Bella whispered, and I finally reopened my eyes.

"Hey." Not wanting to draw any attention to us, I clasped my hands over hers and removed them from my chest. It wouldn't be a good idea to be "public" in front of campers, especially when there was a supposed non-fraternization policy amongst the counselors. I pushed myself off the doorframe, causing Bella to take a small step back. Her eyes met mine with confusion, so I signaled—as best as I could without talking—that I didn't think close contact between us was a good idea with other people around. Her head quirked to the side, taking in what I was trying to say. Then, she shrugged and leaned against the other side of the door.

I wanted nothing more than to scoop her up and take her somewhere to start our *practicing*, but I exercised all my self-control and walked toward the front of the theater where I noticed the movie had just ended.

I contemplated putting another movie into the player, but I saw that we only had about forty minutes until lunch. And really, did I want to become invested in... *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* only to have to turn it off? Ha, yeah. I decided to just let them play games and read and gossip, which was what most of them had been doing anyway.

As I surveyed the room, I saw that Bella had moved on to play some cards with a group of girls. She was so fucking gorgeous, even in her uniform t-shirt and shorts and her hair in a messy ponytail. Her face was so serious, her brow furrowed as she looked at her cards, and I wondered what game they were playing. Was Bella into poker? Or Gin Rummy? Or BS? Or maybe my own personal favorite, Egyptian Ratscrew? I wanted to know everything about her.

Shoving my hands into my pockets, I stood and watched her play until the lunch bell rang. Even then, I strayed toward the back, observing her from a distance. Yes, I knew it was fairly creepy to stare down my girlfriend from afar, but to be honest, I couldn't get enough of her. I loved the way she bit her bottom lip when she was concentrating; it made me want to pry it from her front teeth with my tongue. Or how her head would lean slightly to the left, as if tilting it would somehow give her the answer. I loved how her entire face lit up when she smiled, showing off her perfect teeth and bright eyes.

Ugh. I really should have taken her out for a real date the other night, I concluded as I watched her. Yes, I was definitely going to have to plan an early evening off for us both in the near future. Bella deserved so much better than anything I could give her, but I was going to try my very hardest not to fuck it up too badly.

Sighing, I turned off the lights to the theater and made my way to the dining hall.

Lunch was delicious and exactly what I needed to regroup—grilled cheese and tomato soup. Yeah, I creepily watched Bella eat hers, too. So what? The way her tongue would experimentally

taste the spoonful of red liquid before wrapping her lips around the spoon... fuck, I was in agony. Jasper was right; I needed practice, too. Otherwise, I was going to be coming in my pants for the rest of the summer, which was really only another month. Four weeks. Twenty-eight days.

Shit. There goes my appetite.

How could the summer only be another month? Four weeks was not enough time with Bella. And then she'd be heading to Los Angeles all the way on the other side of the fucking country from me.

Thoroughly depressed, I pushed around the rest of my soup, unable to stomach another bite.

"Dude." Jake smacked my shoulder, sending a ripple of pain down my right arm. "Is everything okay?"

For once, my best friend actually looked serious, but I couldn't really tell him what was wrong in front of all these people, so I just shrugged him off and gave him a noncommittal nod.

Thankfully, he left it alone, and I was the first one out of the dining hall after we were excused, not wanting to give him the opportunity to question me about my mood further. The campers were told to go back to their bunks and meet at their designated "rain spot" in an hour.

And an hour in the shack was exactly what I needed.

x-x-x

I was so busy with the systematical cutting and pasting of film clips that I was almost late getting back to the theater. Everyone had already arrived and *The Lizzie McGuire Movie* was just starting.

"Hey," Jasper accosted me as soon as I walked through the door. "Have you seen Bella?"

"What?" My head spun around quickly. Jasper's eyes looked legitimately concerned, and I felt my stomach drop even further. "Not since lunch, why?"

Jasper tugged at his hair and groaned quietly before typing something quickly into his cell phone. "No one knows where she is."

What?

"What do you mean no one knows where she is?" I whispered, my stomach knotting with nerves.

"Alice went to meet her at her bunk for rest hour, but she never came back." I gulped, not knowing how to deal with the overwhelming sense of panic that was coursing through my body. "You don't know where she could have gone? She wasn't in the Fine Arts room... maybe she went to the shack?"

I shook my head. "No, I was in the shack for the entire hour. She wasn't there. Wh-why wouldn't she go back to her bunk? I mean, it's fucking disgusting out there."

Jasper shrugged. "The rain's let up a lot, but yeah, it's still kind of gross out there." Something buzzed in his pocket and his eyes flicked over the screen before turning back to me. "Alice said something about how Bella liked to hang out at 'The Point' when they were campers?" He said it as a question, using air quotes.

The Point was a secluded spot, about a mile off campus. There was a long winding trail that started at the bunks and led through the woods. A lot of campers used the route as a short jog during their rest hours, but I had a feeling that wasn't where Bella was. What most campers didn't know, unless they were super sneaky or had insider counselor info, was that if you stepped about five yards off the end of the path, the trees gave way to a beautiful clearing.

"Do you mind if I—"

"Go, go," Jasper interrupted. "There are more than enough counselors here to keep these guys under control."

I squeezed his shoulder and was off.

Jasper was right; the rain had nearly completely diminished, just a light mist, which soaked through my hoodie as I trudged along the path. Luckily, I'd made this trip a few hundred times, because otherwise, I would have been shit out of luck. The rain may have been gone, but the fog was rolling in, clouding the air in front of me.

Step after step felt longer and longer, and I was beginning to wonder if maybe I'd gone the wrong way when I heard it. And it sounded like... crying.

Crying?

My pace increased as I bolted through the trees, hoping that she was okay.

Please be okay, please be okay.

Finally, I made it through, only to see a blob of red in the distance. As I approached, I saw that Bella had wrapped herself in my hoodie with knees drawn up to her chest, her back shuddering with each sob. And I had no fucking clue what to do. Or even what was wrong.

"Bella?" my voice cracked, unsure of how to handle this situation.

At the sound of my voice, she froze, her body going completely still and her tears ceasing. Slowly, she turned around peeking from underneath the large hood to look me in the eyes.

"What are you doing here?"

I shoved my hands into my hoodie pockets and walked closer. "Looking for you, actually."

"Oh." She looked genuinely shocked, although I had no idea why.

"What are *you* doing here?"

"Umm, hiding?" she asked more as a question, her voice barely a whisper as she turned her chin back to rest on her knees.

"From what?" I asked, sitting on the cold and wet ground next to her. My ass was going to be soaked, but I didn't really give a shit at this point in time. Bella was first and foremost my priority.

"You."

She said it so quietly, I almost asked her to repeat herself, but then it clicked. She was hiding from me? *Oh shit.*

"Oh." My heart was racing and my hands were damp—whether that was from the mist or my nerves, I couldn't tell. I cleared my throat, trying not to let it crack again under the heavy cloak of my anxiety. And then we sat there for a few moments in silence. I expected Bella to say something—anything, really—but all that could be heard in the small clearing was the sound of our breathing, which I couldn't help but be extremely aware of now.

I knew someone needed to give, and I had a feeling that it wasn't going to be Bella, so I just dove in.

"So, are you going to tell me why you're hiding from me, or do I have to guess?" I joked, hoping to break some of the tension.

Unfortunately, it had the adverse affect. Bella's posture stiffened, tilting her chin further away from my prying eyes. I tried again.

"Bella, I can't fix it if I don't know what's wrong."

"I don't even know why you'd want to fix it anyway," she mumbled.

"What?" I leaned forward, hoping that I'd heard her wrong. "What are you talking about?"

"I said..." her eyes slid back to mine, and I saw the anger boiling within them "I don't even know why you'd want to fix it anyway, Edward."

"Why would you say that?" I asked, my voice getting higher, even though I was trying to remain calm. "Of course I want to fix it. We just figured this out, Bella, why would you think I don't care?"

At my words, she sprung up from the ground and took a large step backwards. "How can you say you care when you won't even come near me!"

I had no idea what she was talking about. I wouldn't come near her? I was literally on top of her not even twenty-four hours ago.

My hands palmed the grass, pushing myself into a standing position, careful not to slip on the mist-covered ground. I didn't think I'd look so strong and assured if I bit it in front of my girlfriend during our first fight.

Ugh. Our first fight.

I realized it for what it was the second I saw a tear splash across her face... and then another one... and... oh motherfucking shit cock balls.

Of all the times it had to start raining again, it had to be now, right?

What I'd thought were tears was actually rain. The skies opened up, the slow, fat raindrops splattering our clothing. Maybe this was God's way of telling me he was crying for me, too... that this was the end of me and Bella. But, of course, there was no way in hell that was happening.

"It's fine, just... walk away, Edward. Don't feel obligated or whatever."

"What are you talking about?" I finally raised my voice and took a step closer, unable to really see her through the steadily increasing rain falling between us. "I'm not walking away when I don't even know what's wrong! And I'm not going to fucking leave you outside, alone, in the rain!"

"Why not? You had no problem leaving me alone this morning!" she screamed back, taking another step towards me, letting her hood fall back and the water to cascade down her nose and cheeks.

My head was spinning, trying to come to terms with what she was trying to tell me, but I couldn't put the pieces together. I had no idea what conclusion she'd somehow come to without me, and I couldn't stand it.

"I have *no idea* what you're talking about, Bella!" I flung an arm into the air, noticing that my hoodie was now completely drenched, saturated by the never-ending torrents surrounding us. "You can't talk in some crazy girl code and expect me to understand!"

"I know you don't want to touch me, so just leave me alone, Edward." She crossed her arms in front of her chest as a chill ran up her spine, her small body shaking in the rain.

I couldn't take it anymore. Closing the distance between us, I put my hands on her shoulders, forcing her to look into my eyes. "I'm not leaving you here," I said slowly. "And how can you think I don't want to touch you?" My voice was still raised, trying to shout over the loud pitter-pattering of raindrops on the trees surrounding us. "God, Bella, every second I'm not touching you is like torture."

"But... this morning... and you pushed me away... and you wouldn't even talk... you went to Jasper... and I..." she mumbled, water running over her lips and obscuring her words. "I thought

you didn't... want me..."

"You are *infuriating*," I seethed. My hands pushed her matted hair from her cheeks and let my thumbs stroke over her cold and wet skin. I needed to show her with my gentle gestures that she had to listen to the words I was saying and not the tone in which they were coming out; that was apparently uncontrollable.

"The only thing I'm guilty of is wanting you too much. Of course I pushed you away."

The anger in my tone was building again, but I couldn't stop it. I was feeling too much, and it was fucking freaking me out. She was ready to end things? I couldn't let her do that. Absolutely not. Not when we had so little time to begin with.

"Bella, I want to spend every second with you, but I can't. Instead, I have to watch you from across the room, counting down the seconds until I can get my hands on you again. And even then, I have to hold myself back. I may have no clue what I'm doing, but I *do* know I want you! How could you just run away from that?"

I'd been so angry, I didn't even notice that my hands had slipped from her cheeks and had knotted themselves in the wet strands of her long hair. Her eyes darted back and forth, droplets of water dripping from her lashes, as she searched my face for something.

"I... I thought it was over..." she confessed, her eyes finally stilling and locking on mine.

"It. Is. Not. Over." My voice lowered into a growl, and I crashed my lips to hers.

The kiss was forceful, a mess of wet lips and teeth. Bella remained passive in my arms for a second, her body motionless, until a low rumble of thunder in the far off distance spurred her into action. Soon, her hands were fisted in the front of my hoodie, pulling me closer as our feet tried to keep traction on the thick grass of the flooding meadow.

It was almost violent, the force with which we attacked one another. Hands groped and clutched for dear life as our tongues met frantically, pushing past the useless barrier of lips and teeth.

The rain continued to pelt down on us, and the sky grew darker with the impending storm clouds, but it only seemed to further ignite my lust. With a forceful tug, I pulled her hair back, revealing her neck—my mouth's new favorite spot. Gasping for air, I hovered just over the pale flesh just below her ear, loving the way her hair stood on end as my breath passed over it. My eyes glanced up to take in Bella's expression. Her eyes were closed with her face tilted upwards, letting the rain wash over her face, removing any traces of previous tears.

Pulling her body as close to mine as humanly possible, I closed the distance between my lips and her skin, allowing my tongue to sneak out and lick rivulets streaming down her neck. She gasped quietly as I continued to move up and down the column of her throat. Finally, she decided she'd had enough and moved my lips back up to hers in a hard kiss.

Her delicate fingers wound themselves in my belt loops, pressing her stomach against my hips,

and I couldn't resist moving my hands down to caress the skin there. I slowed our kiss down, softening it as my hands ventured underneath her hoodie and t-shirt. A chill ran up her spine as a light breeze whipped through the clearing, and she broke off our kiss to tuck her head into my chest. It was then that I realized the skin I was feeling underneath her layers of clothing was also wet, and we were both fucking freezing cold.

As she leaned back to kiss me again, I noticed her lips had darkened to a reddish-purple color, and the protector in me snapped.

We were soaking wet, and the temperature was dropping steadily. If I didn't get her warm soon, she would most definitely get sick.

"What?" she whispered, her voice coming out thinly through the still raging rainstorm.

I kissed her lips softly one more time before wrapping my arms around her. "You need to get inside and get warm, MB."

She nodded quickly and burrowed further into my chest—not that my body heat would do anything for her, since it too had diminished. Grabbing her hand, we walked as quickly as we could along the path and headed straight for my bunk. The only thoughts running through my mind had to do with getting her out of her wet clothes and into something warm.

As soon as we were within the confines of my bunk, I pulled her into the bathroom, started running the shower as hot as it could go, then peeled off the layers of Bella's wet clothing. By the time she was only in her bra and underwear, the bathroom had filled up with steam, but she was still shaking and her lips had turned from reddish-purple to purply-blue.

Not okay.

Utilizing every bit of camping knowledge I had, I stripped myself down to my boxer-briefs and pushed us under the stream of hot water. It wasn't until my hands were caressing pale expanse of Bella's back that I realized we were both in the shower... together... and half-naked.

And for once, my dick hadn't propelled this. I had been legitimately concerned for her safety. Nonetheless, my fingers froze halfway down her back and started to pull away once I took in our situation.

"N-no," Bella stuttered, forcing my hands back down onto her skin before wrapping her arms around my waist tightly and pressing her cold cheek against my chest. "Th-this is-s go-ood. I'm fu-fucking f-freezing."

"Okay," I chuckled and pressed a kiss to the top of her head. "Close your eyes... and pinch me if you can't breathe or something."

She nodded, still not moving her cheek away from my bare skin, so I walked us directly underneath the hot water again. Soaking up as much heat as I could, I moved my hands in a small circuit from her shoulders, down her back and up her sides, pressing light kisses into her hair as I went.

It was delightfully innocent. There was nothing lascivious about our shower, despite the fact that we had mass amounts of skin pressed against one another.

As the water went from hot to warm, I hopped out of the shower and grabbed two towels; it wouldn't do her any good to stay in the water until it ran cold.

I reached over her and turned the faucet off before wrapping her fully in the towel, rubbing her arms, generating some friction. Still, her teeth chattered and her body shook lightly beneath my hands.

"Are you still cold, MB?"

She bit her lip and tilted her head down, averting her eyes from mine. I wondered what she could possibly be embarrassed about after sharing a shower with me, but when she continued... oh, I understood.

"Y-yeah, my... um... underwear is g-getting cold..."

I gulped, my throat constricting without my permission. And for the first time ever, I was grateful that my equipment was too cold to work because that shit would have suddenly been on display for *everyone* as I asked, "Do you want to take it off?"

Her mouth dropped into a small 'o' and I refused to let her think of me as a crazy pervert, so I bent down and gathered our still sopping clothes from the bathroom floor. "I was going to put our clothes into the dryer." I gulped again, hoping that my voice wouldn't crack over my next words. "So, I can put it in if you want..."

"That's what he said," she joked as her hands slid underneath her towel to pull down her underwear.

I couldn't help it; my eyes were glued to her hands, despite the fact that everything was carefully hidden beneath the towel. She stepped out of them carefully, and I couldn't resist taking inventory on exactly what kind of underwear she was wearing. They didn't look slutty, like the undergarments of the other skanks I'd had the pleasure of seeing wore, but they were still fucking hot. They were black and white striped with a thick hot pink waistband. And as I looked up, I saw that she was pulling a matching colored pink bra from under the towel, unclasping it and letting it fall to the ground, too.

"I-I'm just going to take these to the laundry room." I reached down and gathered our heaps of wet clothing and headed out the door, forcing myself to quit ogling Bella while I was ahead of myself.

"Wait!" Bella called, causing me to spin around quickly.

"What?"

"Aren't you going to put on some clothes?" she squeaked, and I realized that I still hadn't put on

any clothes, nor had I bothered to wrap a towel around my waist.

Chuckling awkwardly, I nodded. "Right. Clothes. Um, I need those. Right."

Wow. I think we're the most awkward couple in the history of couples.

In my room, I dropped the pile of wet clothes into my laundry basket before looking behind me, only to realize that Bella had stayed in the confines of the bathroom instead of following me into my room. Not knowing how much time I had, I disrobed quickly and threw on some clean underwear, shorts and a t-shirt.

As I walked past the bathroom, I saw that Bella was still standing inside, so I popped my head in. "Hey, did you need something, MB?"

She spun around, startled, clutching at her throat. "Yeah, I was looking for a comb or a brush or something?"

I pointed to the drawer where Jasper kept his brush. I figured he wouldn't mind too much, plus, it was the only hair utensil we had in this place. I mean, Jake and Emmett's hair was too short to do anything, and my hair kind of did whatever the fuck it wanted regardless, so I never invested in brushes.

After a small smile, I headed towards the laundry rooms, which were thankfully completely empty. I shoved our pile of wet clothes in and set the dryer to 'very dry' and jogged back to the bunk. The bathroom was empty upon my arrival, so I headed back to my room. Bella was perched on the edge of my bed, her arms wrapped around herself and her long hair dripping down her back, as she watched the movie she'd put in—*Pulp Fiction*, of all things.

"Bella, what do you think you're doing?" I chastised. "You're still cold. You're going to get sick. Get under the covers."

"Yes, old man," she giggled as I reached for my Bumble Bee blanket at the foot of the bed and threw it over her. She leaned over, lying on her side to face me, and her face contorted into the most adorable pout. "Aren't you going to join me?"

That most likely was not the best idea, but I couldn't deny her anything. So, I shrugged and hopped into the bed behind her, tucking my chin into her shoulder to press a soft kiss to her neck. It *was* a good plan, except her hair was still wet and it soaked through my t-shirt, getting me cold again nearly immediately. Not knowing what else to do, I pulled the t-shirt over my head and threw it to the ground, twirling her long hair up and over the pillow, away from my bare skin.

She peeked over her shoulder, probably wondering why I was getting naked again.

"Body heat, right?"

"Sure," she snickered before tucking her head back into the pillow and inching herself closer to me.

"So..." I began, unsure of how to broach the topic of her earlier fit, though I knew it needed to be addressed. Not only had she scared the living crap out of me, but she had to be more confident in my feelings for her. If she kept running away every time she doubted me, this next month would be torturous and we'd continue on our path of awkwardness.

"Mmm?" she hummed.

"Are we going to talk about what happened before or what?" She didn't respond, so I pressed on. "Bella? I... we need to make sure this isn't going to happen again. How can we?"

Suddenly, her hand moved from under the fleece blanket to snake around my neck and grip onto my hair, bringing my cheek almost next to hers. Her hand relaxed and scratched my scalp lightly, and it took all my concentration not to thrust against her from behind.

Yeah, now is not the right time for that, Doucheward.

"Most of the time, I can't believe this is real."

She paused momentarily before rolling over to face me, clutching closely at her towel so it wouldn't unwrap during her movement. I adjusted myself on the pillow so our noses were almost touching, relishing the feel of her hot breath fanning across my face.

"Edward, I've..." Her eyes fluttered closed. "... *fantasized* about this..." Brown eyes snapped back open, locking on mine with such intensity that I couldn't help but be completely enraptured by them. "Since the first day I saw you."

I stared at her blankly, trying to understand, but my mind was failing me greatly... per usual.

She sighed and pressed her lips against mine softly, letting her other hand take over in scratching my scalp and lulling me into contentedness under her spell.

"I don't—" I tried to interject, wanting to understand where she was coming from, but she continued on.

"Edward, that day in the car on the way to Wal-Mart during pre-camp with Jasper?" I nodded, remembering the day. I'd been a maelstrom of confusion, wondering how to come to grips with my body's physical attraction to her. "When you asked who I'd been in love with as a thirteen year old?" I nodded again, my stomach clenching in anticipation. Was she actually meaning to tell me... ? "Edward, it was you. It's always only ever been you."

Bella had been in love with me as a thirteen year old? I... I had *no* fucking clue what to say or how to respond, even. I was seriously at a loss for words. Thank god, Bella felt like going on.

"So, at the slightest denial from you, I figured that you were over it. I'm not usually this insecure, I promise," she chuckled without humor. "But... when it comes to you... I've never known another way because I just figured there was never an actual chance we could ever be together. It's stupid and needy, but I think I may just need reassurance more often than not. You... you

expected me to just know what was going on in your head, but after last night, I needed to hear that you were still okay with it... with us... with me... and my inexperience." Her eyes fluttered closed again as she rambled, but I could hear the pain and apprehension in her voice and that was no good.

"Okay," I responded nervously. "But you also have to understand that we can't be all over each other in front of campers. Not that I don't want to," I barked. "Believe me, Bella. I want nothing more than to be on you all the time. But, I can't. I can without a doubt assure you, though, that I want to be your boyfriend. And your inexperience?" Her skin flushed under the dim fluorescent lighting, and I was happy to see that she could finally get some color back to her skin. "It's just one more thing I love about you."

"Really?" she asked, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Really," I assured her before moving my lips forward and moving them against hers in a sweet kiss. Feeling like 'assuring' her more, I slid my hand from her knee to her thigh, pushing the soft terry cloth of the towel up and away from her skin.

"Oh!"

I stopped, freezing my hand on her leg and breaking the kiss as I heard a loud shriek from the doorway. "Oh! Oh! Oh!" Alice stumbled backwards, covering her eyes, but peeking through her index and middle fingers.

I had to admit, our position *did* look fairly compromising. I was shirtless and Bella was wearing a towel, so the blanket only showed off our bare shoulders, which were facing one another, her arm wrapped around my neck and mine riding up her thigh. Yeah. Um...

"Oh my God, LB, I'm sorry! I was just so worried about you when you never came back to your bunk and then Jasper said you didn't come back to the theater even after Edward went after you, so we looked in the shack and the fine arts room, and O-M-G, I did *not* mean to interrupt, um..." Alice flailed her hand in front of her face with her eyes still scrunched closed, causing Bella to tuck her head into the crook of my neck and burst into laughter.

"We're not doing anything!" Bella gasped, throwing the fleece off us, revealing our chaste and quasi-clothed forms.

"Oh," Alice breathed, a swoosh of air leaving her lungs as she plopped down on the edge of the bed next to our still entwined bodies. "Well then, what the fuck, LB? Here I was worried sick, and you couldn't be bothered to tell me you were still alive?" She crinkled up her nose as she took in the scene in front of her. "And why are you wearing a towel?"

Sighing, Bella turned over, still encased within my grasp. I wasn't going to let her go yet. If she needed reassurance that I wanted her, she was definitely going to get it.

"Sorry, Al," she said, moving her hand from around my neck to Alice's jean-covered leg. "I was upset and went into hiding..."

"The Point," they both said in unison, nodding as if those two words explained everything.

"Anyway," Bella continued, "It started raining and Edward found me and it was freezing, so we hopped into the shower and threw our clothes in the dryer and—"

Alice's eyes turned devilish as she held up her hand, stopping Bella. "Oh, I'll get the dirty details later, LB. But for now, you need to put some clothes on because it's almost dinner time."

"I'll grab them," Jasper offered as he sought out my eyes, making sure everything was all right. With a cursory nod, he was off. I really needed to get that boy a present or something; he was kind of a lifesaver.

Bella sat up and inched herself next to Alice, and I hated the fact that she wasn't in my arms anymore.

"Sorry I didn't have my phone on me," she whispered as Alice hopped up from the bed, her eyes darting back and forth between Bella and me.

"It's okay, LB. I'm sorry I freaked out. You just know how protective I am of you, right?"

Just then, Jasper returned with an armful of dry clothing. Bella picked her garments out one by one and scurried off to the bathroom to redress. She walked back into the bedroom, fully clothed, and I pushed myself up into a sitting position finally.

She leaned down to wrap her arms around my shoulders in a tight embrace, whispering her thanks before kissing me and heading out of the bunk. As soon as she left, I missed her. I had no fucking clue what was happening, but I thought that I might be falling... and falling hard for Bella Swan.

Chapter 22

Legitimate First Dates

~Bella~

As soon as the door to Bunk Seven slammed behind us, Alice was all over me. Literally. Small arms were flung around my waist as my pocket-sized best friend burrowed her head into my shoulder.

"I was so worried about you, LB." She pulled her head back and scowled at me before throwing a small punch to the top of my arm. "Don't you *ever* do that again! Good God, what's wrong with you? How many times have we been lectured about going out during a storm? You didn't know if there was going to be thunder or lightning or not! What if you had been hit? What if a tree had fallen on you? You'd be crushed and dead!"

I rolled my eyes and continued walking back up the hill towards the dining hall. "Alice, you're

being ridiculous. I didn't get crushed by a tree or hit by lightning. I'm perfectly fine."

"Okay," she pressed, "but you *weren't* okay if you were hiding at The Point. So, do you want to tell me what's going on?"

I shrugged, still unsure of where my head was. I'd confessed to Edward that I'd been in love with him when I was thirteen, and he'd seemingly had a non-reaction. I wished I could jump inside his head and figure what was going on in there. Because although he hadn't had an immediate reaction, he had said the words "... *just one more thing I love about you.*" Did that mean that he loved me? I had no fucking clue. But, damn, I hoped so.

"Fine, don't tell me," Alice whined.

"I promise I'm okay now," I said emphatically. "I'm more than okay, Al. I just took a shower with Edward and laid in bed in only a towel with him. I'm great. I'm ecstatic, even."

"Yeah," she snickered, all traces of her previous annoyance gone. "I saw that. How in the hell did that one come about? Didn't you guys just get together, like, just a few days ago? And now you're jumping into bed with him? Shame on you, LB. *Shame.*" She elongated the word as she shook her index finger at me in reprehension, but the smile on her face told me otherwise.

My eyes rolled of their own volition as Alice's arm wrapped around my waist, and she leaned in and whispered, "So, does this mean you finally got a glance of the goods?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" A small smile tugged on the corner of my mouth as I waved her off and headed into the dining hall to get an early start on setting my table.

Inside, Jake had already taken care of our place settings and was flirting up a storm with Nancy, one of British secretaries from the main office. Instead of calling him out on his game and usual man-whorishness, I sat down on my small bench at the foot of the table and rested my head on my folded arms.

I hadn't even noticed my eyes had closed until I felt a small tickle on the back of my ear. It was nice and soft and warm, and for a second, I thought I might be dreaming—until I heard Edward's breathy whisper in my ear.

"I know you're awake, my Bella." His lips were so close to my ear that I realized the small tickle I'd been feeling was actually a combination of their light touch and his heated breath.

I swallowed thickly, still refusing to open my eyes.

His mouth pressed a soft kiss on the sensitive skin just behind my ear, causing a small whimpering noise to escape from me. God damn it. My boy had *skills*. Just when I thought I couldn't feel better, he raked his fingers through my hair, his short nails scratching lightly at the nape of my neck to the middle of my scalp.

"LB, I can see you smiling all the way from here," Jake called out from the head of the table, all of *maybe* six feet away. "Rise and shine, princess. We have campers to feed."

"Not yet," I mumbled, lacing my fingers with Edward's in their fantastic movement in my hair. "This is good." I sighed, relaxing my upper body into the table, my neck becoming as pliable as Play-Doh under his skilled touch.

"Oh, I see how it is," Edward chuckled. He removed my hand from his and continued his ministrations. "You just want me for my fingers."

I bit my lip, holding back a moan, as I remembered exactly what those fingers had done to me just the night before. Blood rushed to my cheeks, counteracting my repressed moan, and Jake's raucous laughter let me know that he knew *exactly* what was going on.

I was going to reply cheekily, perhaps with some quippy response about all the things his fingers could do, when I heard the pitter-patter and squeaking of wet sneakers on the dining hall floor.

"I promise you can use me and my fingers later," Edward whispered, brushing a soft kiss against my earlobe before pulling away quickly, his obvious innuendo leaving me breathless and flustered as campers filed in, completely unaware.

I didn't know who had picked the menu for the evening, but it seemed as if it had been designed solely with the purpose of taunting me. I watched in awe as Edward picked up square after square of watermelon with his long fingers and plopped them into his mouth, carefully cleaning off the excess juice from dripping down the back of his hand with swipes of his perfectly pink tongue.

Shudder.

My breathing picked up as my thighs clenched, as if trying to trap his fingers there. And my head tilted away from him, craving his mouth's attention, letting it wander down my body. I'd been so distracted with thoughts of Edward's fingers and now *tongue* that I barely touched my own food, managing to swallow only a few bites of my mac and cheese before it turned completely cold.

Needing some air, I headed out to the front porch immediately after the campers were dismissed, not wanting to wait around for Edward then possibly spontaneously combust in public.

Emmett and Rosalie were perched on the highest step, leaning into one another and whispering softly. I felt a little bad intruding on whatever moment they were having, but I plopped down in front of them anyway, leaning back in the space between Emmett's knees.

I felt his chin press onto the top of my head and his arms wrap around my shoulders, making me feel calm and safe in his arms.

"I hate rainy days," Emmett complained. "And apparently tomorrow's going to be hot as balls. Shouldn't it be the other way around? I thought storms were supposed to bring in cold fronts or some shit like that."

I craned my neck around, giggling softly as I saw my pseudo-big brother's face contort into one of disbelief and annoyance.

"Em, we're in Maine. The weather never does what it's supposed to."

At that, Rosalie smacked my shoulder. "Are you serious right now? I feel like I haven't seen you in four hundred years, and you're going to sit here talking about the weather?"

"Um, yes?" Emmett and I answered simultaneously.

"You guys are so lame." Rosalie tried to act annoyed, but I saw her snuggle in further to Emmett's side. The bitch couldn't fool me for a second.

"Well then, Miss Popularity, what are *you* up to tonight?" he asked, moving one of his arms from around my shoulder to wrap around Rose's waist.

"Rehearsal," she grumbled back at Emmett before turning to me. "You?"

"Don't we all?" I asked, nodding my head in the direction of the theater.

How had it been merely hours since my freak out at the theater?

I still couldn't believe how had gone wrong. Apparently, I couldn't read Edward at all. It was just so fucking hard, though. I'd never felt like this—this unbearable need to touch someone and be touched by them... all the fucking time. I'd felt like I was going insane earlier when Edward had run off immediately with Jasper, rejected and thrown away. I'd wondered if I'd done something wrong or something to make me undesirable. The overwhelming doubt had crushed me and sent me running. I knew I needed to stop running away from him, but everything was so new, and I really had no idea how to do any of this. All I knew was how Edward made me feel. And I guessed for now, that would have to do.

Suddenly, someone snapped in front of my face and pulled me from my spot on the stair. "Hello, Bella? Earth to Bella? It's time for rehearsal." Rosalie stood directly in front of my face, shaking me out of whatever dark hole my mind had wandered off to. I definitely needed to thank her later.

"Sorry." I shook my head and steadied myself.

"Where'd you just go right now?" she asked quietly, clutching my hand tightly as we began our descent down the still-wet stairs.

I opened my mouth, ready to confess my insecurities to Rose, but promptly closed it as I felt Emmett's warm body slide between us, linking our arms together.

"Laaaadies," he drawled, leading the way. "Love this little threesome we've got going on. We should do this more often."

"Not gonna happen, Em," I snorted, elbowing him in the ribs playfully.

Once in the theater, Maria pulled me directly on stage, placing me in the middle of the floor as she began her spiel about what was on our agenda for the evening. First, we'd stage "The Girl Gets Around," a number with me and all the boys—minus Edward, unfortunately.

But then, they were going to work on the staging for Edward's solo number, "I Can't Stand Still," before ending with the Reverend's songs, "Heaven Help Me" and "I Confess," meaning that I would be out of rehearsal fairly early. Or, at least, I hoped.

The first number was a duet, sung by Jasper, who played the bad boy, Chuck Cranston—my character's soon to be ex-boyfriend, and me. The song was fun, and it was more than hilarious to see Jasper try and be the badass as he insulted my character.

*"Well, she'd like you to think she was born yesterday with her innocent looks and her little town ways.
When she's smiling at me she's got angels in her eyes.
But I've seen how she moves, and this girl really cooks.
She's taught me some tricks you can't learn in books, and I'm starting to think she's the devil in disguise."*

Maria helped place us on the stage, a steady progression of Jasper and I approaching each other as the insults became more heated.

*"Yeah, he likes to pretend he's a man among men, but with his hands in his pockets he can't count to ten.
Don't worry, baby, your secret's safe with me.
And he bores me to tears with his beers and his bikes, but I keep around 'cause when temptation strikes, I've got the motor, he's got the key."*

By this point, Maria had moved us as close as we could, so we were essentially singing only inches apart from one another at the climax of the song.

"Jasper, I want you to wrap your arm around LB's waist, and LB, I want you to wrap both your arms around his neck," Maria explained. "Chuck and Ariel's relationship works because of their animosity for one another. This part of the song needs to show exactly how much fire there is between them and how explosive it can be."

Jasper and I looked at each other dumbly, not particularly wanting to get any closer. Sure, I'd hugged Jasper, but that was a little different. It wasn't like he'd been hugging me with his knee between my legs. This was awkward at best. Jasper grimaced as he took a miniature step towards me, clearly no more anxious to get close to me as I was to him.

"Oh, come on, you two. This isn't the end of the world. Get closer, please." Maria placed a hand on the smalls of our backs and pushed us closer together, so our hips were touching, our bodies nearly intertwined.

Behind me, there was a loud snap and a low, "shit," followed by a near complete silence. My head swung around in the direction of the sound, only to see a very flustered Edward, trying to

reattach the bottom of the wooden railing to the side bleachers.

"S-sorry," he stuttered, seeing the dropped mouths of everyone around him. "I-I'll grab some superglue."

With that, he spun on his heel and headed straight towards the scene shop, his eyes plastered to the ground as he sped by. Jasper's hold on my waist tightened, digging into my sides, and I snapped my head back, ready to ream him out, until I saw the laughter in his eyes.

"Well," Maria interrupted, trying to regain some semblance of control again. "Since Edward is, uh... detained... why don't we move onto the Reverend's numbers next?" She looked around for Billy, our softball counselor, who had been cast as the reverend.

Before I could make it off the stage, Maria grabbed my hand and pulled me aside, telling me that I should head up to the costume room to look for a pair of red cowboy boots instead of heading out of the theater. As if I'd have gone anywhere without Edward, anyway.

I slowly trudged up the rickety stairs to the back of the theater where the costume room was. I fucking hated this room. It gave me nightmares because it looked like the rooms in horror films or investigative television shows where people were murdered and hidden amongst the clutter, not found until their stench permeated the building. I stepped into the room, the low ceiling and crowded clothes racks making me feel claustrophobic immediately, and when I felt a pair of hands slide around my waist, I nearly lost my shit.

"Shhh," Edward breathed into my ear, attempting to pin down my flailing arms at my sides.

My heartbeat pounded in my ears as I spun around in his arms and leaned into his chest, trying to catch my breath.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to scare you," he murmured into the top of my hair.

"S'okay. I think I just need to... sit..."

Edward led me to the closest, well only, thing to sit on—a small table at the back of the room where all the tape measures and safety pins were stored. Happy to take a load off my shaky legs, I scooted back towards the wall and leaned back on the palms of my hands, tilting my head towards the dim fluorescent light above us.

The tips of his fingers slid up my bare thighs to play with the hem of my shorts, doing nothing to calm my breathing. I could feel him leaning in closer, but I kept my eyes closed.

"Look at me, Bella," he all but growled, causing my eyes to fly open. He was much closer than I thought he was, his perfect lips within kissing distance if I pushed myself forward just the slightest bit.

And so I did.

I craned my neck towards him, closing the small space between us. Our lips brushed gently at

first before picking up pace immediately. My head knocked back against the wall and my legs widened, making room for him to stand between them as we continued to kiss.

His mouth trailed down my neck, and I clutched onto his hair, keeping him as close as possible. The moan I'd suppressed earlier came tearing out of my mouth as his teeth scraped lightly against my collarbone.

Edward pulled back, his eyes piercing into mine as he warned, "You're going to have to be quiet if we're going to do this."

"D-do what?"

"Do you know how hard it was for me to watch you on stage with Jasper?" he sighed, his hands tightening their grip on my thighs.

I shook my head side to side, never breaking our intense stare.

"Hard?" I squeaked.

"Very."

His hips pressed against my thigh, showing me just exactly how *hard* it was for him. My hand went to reach for him, expecting some resistance, but there was none. And once my hand was, uh, on him... I realized that I had *no* idea what I was supposed to do. I really should have thought this through more, but I was being propelled by hormones and adrenaline—which was probably not the best combination for attempting my first real hand job. Experimentally, I moved my hand across his shorts, finding the outline of his—*come on, Bella, you can say it*—cock.

A weird half groan, half whimper escaped Edward's lips as his forehead fell to my shoulder.

"Is this okay?" I whispered, not knowing if the sound was a good or a bad one...or if he was going to shut me down completely again.

"Yeah," he breathed quietly, his voice barely a whisper over the sounds of piano now echoing throughout the theater. "Just..." He looked up, his eyes apologetic as he inhaled and exhaled slowly. "Give me... a second?"

I nodded silently, not wanting to push my luck. I mean, I was touching him. Over his shorts and boxers, but still, I was touching him.

After the longest second in the history of the world, his mouth lowered to mine again, but this time, his hand started moving in small circles towards my inner thigh. Simultaneously, his other hand tentatively moved up the inside of my shirt, his thumb rubbing lightly across my skin. Slowly, torturously, his hands moved closer to their respective destinations. Not knowing exactly how to cope with the sensory overload I was currently experiencing, I slowed down our kisses, prolonging each languid stroke of my tongue against his, relishing in the faint traces of watermelon and mint still sticking to his lips.

And then, it happened. My body started tingling... everywhere. My nipples strained against my bra, reaching for his fingers which were barely out of reach as, down below, one finger and then two inched up past the hem of my shorts and over my underwear. And although Edward had just dried them, I was fairly certain they were soaked through again—only this time, not because of water.

Fuck, I was a lucky girl to call the man attached to these fingers, mine.

As his finger swept directly over the fabric covering my clit, my hand clenched around him, the muscles contracting without my consent, causing him to jerk his head back quickly and yelp like a puppy whose foot had just been stepped on.

"Oh my God, Edward, I'm sorry... I... I..." Embarrassment flooded through my body and my nerves skyrocketed. Why the hell would Edward ever want to be with me? Someone so inexperienced I couldn't even give a fucking hand job without maiming him.

"It's okay. This is what, uh, this is for." I looked up at him inquisitively, having no idea where he was going yet again. "Practice, right?" My mind reeled with the implications of that single word and continued to as he laced his fingers with my own.

"Here," he explained, flattening my hand beneath his. I gulped as he applied pressure to our hands, pressing them firmly—but not too hard—against his shorts. His cock strained against the fabric, getting harder with each firm motion of our hands.

"Like that?" I asked, needing confirmation.

Edward nodded, keeping his hand over mine, as the other continued to sweep over my clit, making the tingles return in full force.

A strangled, "Fuck," escaped my lips as he pushed aside the fabric of my underwear and slid his index finger into me. I must have been ten times wetter today than I had been last night, although I wasn't really sure how that was humanly possible, because Edward's finger moved inside me with ease. Suddenly, he moved his thumb underneath the underwear, too, to rub directly over my clit, causing my entire body to arch towards him. My legs struggled to close back up, but Edward's stance between them made that impossible. His fingers were seriously doing the craziest things to my body, but I wasn't going to try and fight it.

Instead, my free hand—the one that wasn't still being guided by him—flew up to the back of his neck, pulling his mouth to mine. I wasn't so much kissing him as breathing hard into his mouth, but it worked to effectively hush the loud moans that wanted to echo throughout the theater.

Our hands worked together over the crotch of his pants, rubbing as he thrust gently against them. The noises coming from his mouth made me feel more than accomplished. But, I was glad to have his guidance; his own fingers inside me were more of a distraction than I could really bear.

For the next few minutes, all that could be heard was our heavy breathing, the sound of rustling fabric, and Billy's tenor singing through his solo.

It wasn't perfect. I mean, I was still awkward as fuck, and we were groping one another in the costume room—not the most romantic setting by any means, cloaked in the scent of mothballs and dust—but as we both reached our precipices, freezing and then shuddering as our lips met, it felt just like that... perfect.

"Um, how mad do we think Maria would be if I cleaned up with a costume?" Edward laughed, pulling his fingers from inside me, trying his hardest not to drip on himself or anywhere else.

Gag me. Okay, I admit it. Sex is dirty and often not in a good way.

"I think I saw some paper towels up here, actually..." I trailed off, swinging my head in the direction of the tall shelves with cleaning supplies on the walls.

"Oh, shit."

My head snapped back towards Edward, and I couldn't help but break into hysterical giggles. His face was aghast with horror as a blob of sticky whiteness fell from the balled up t-shirt in his hand. Apparently, in trying to clean himself off, he'd gotten not only my but also *his*, uh, bodily fluids on his shorts.

"I can't go back down there like this," he whined, attempting to brush the grossness off his shorts, but really only succeeding in spreading it further.

"Stop, please," I giggled as I hopped off the desk and went in search of some shorts. I rummaged through the boys section and found a pair of red basketball shorts that looked like the approximate right size. "These?" I held them up for him, and he grimaced before sliding off his current pair of navy-colored ones. He balled them up quickly before eyeing me carefully.

"Uhh, can you turn around for a second?" he asked nervously as he stood there in his black boxer-briefs. "I kinda need to..." Awkwardly, he motioned towards the wet spot on his crotch, and I couldn't help but flush with pride at the thought that I'd put it there.

Happy to oblige and minimize any awkwardness that I could actually control, I turned around and went in search of the red cowboy boots that had brought me up to the room to begin with. I found them almost immediately, sitting on a box merely three feet away from the doorway. *Oops. Let's hope Maria didn't know that's where those were.*

As I picked them up in my arms, Edward came up behind me, placing a soft kiss behind my ear.

"That was better, right?"

I mumbled my agreement, unable to think of much other than the feel of Edward's body radiating heat into my back.

"Has anyone seen Edward?" Maria shouted out suddenly.

"Here!" He returned her yell and ran down the stairs, taking them two at a time.

I walked down the rickety stairs at a normal pace, not wanting to fall face first in a heap of limbs at the bottom; my legs weren't fully functional yet.

As soon as I got to the bottom of the stairs, I was met with prying eyes, who clearly knew that Edward and I had been up to no good. My stomach clenched as I glanced at Emmett. His mouth dropped as his eyes shifted back and forth between me, still at the bottom of the stairs, and Edward, who was talking animatedly with Maria by the piano.

"Wait a second!" he bellowed, making me cringe. "Wasn't Edward wearing *navy* shorts like thirty minutes ago?"

The entire room quieted down, which, thank God, was only about ten people by now. Most everyone else had cleared out, having finished their own numbers.

Edward shook his head sternly, trying to articulate that now was not the best time to address this, but Emmett had picked *now* to be infuriated, for some reason.

"She is my baby sister, dude! How could you... how could—"

Seeing Emmett's impending explosion, Rosalie put her arm on his bicep and whispered something into his ear, distracting him momentarily. Before I could escape, though, Edward was next to me again.

"Do you want to go to the main office with me?" he whispered.

"Don't you—" I began. He had rehearsal for the rest of the night. His number was the only one that hadn't been staged yet.

"Maria is letting us go early since she has the senior showcase to deal with for the next week. Come on, please hurry." He put his hand on the small of my back, leading me out the door and through the mist towards the main house where all the administration was housed. "I'll get killed by Emmett later. Now isn't the time."

Giggling, I leaned into his side and let him lead us through the counselor lounge and up the stairs to the main office. Three secretaries were still on duty, playing solitaire at the computer. As soon as one looked up and caught Edward's eye, she blushed and grinned, making me hate her automatically, despite the fact that she was a portly redhead, who was probably sixteen at the oldest.

"Grace," he crooned. "How are you doing tonight?"

"Very well," she smiled, and I could hear faint traces of an Irish accent on her tongue. *Whore*. "What can I do fer ya?"

Edward grinned, clearly turning on the charm for this poor, unsuspecting receptionist, and cleared his throat. "Well, I was hoping it's not too late to put in a request for an early evening off tomorrow?"

"No, darlin'. Not fer you, o' course." She blushed and shuffled through some papers on the clipboard beside her.

"And for my friend, Bella, here? I'd love for her to accompany me, if that's okay."

The girl blushed again and grabbed a pen, the pink hue spreading down her neck and to her ears. As she scribbled down our names on the sheet of paper in front of her, Edward's hand wrapped further around my waist, keeping me flush against his side. As if I were going to run off anywhere.

"There ya go," she said sweetly, showing us the new lines at the bottom of the 'Early Evening Off' sheet. "Now, you've got the night out. And Edward, I know you've done this before, but don't forget if you're not going ta return 'til mornin', you've gotta find someone to cover Miss Bella's bunk."

She blushed even further at the mention of staying the entire night out, and I wondered how often Edward had spent the night out with a girl if the receptionist knew about it. Feeling particularly confident, though, I pushed my insecurities aside and just enjoyed the fact that I now had an early evening off with Edward tomorrow.

"Thanks, Grace," he said, leaning down to kiss her cheek. "You're the best."

"Yer welcome, Edward," she called out, but I was too busy staring at him to really care.

The night had finally cleared up, the stars poking through the damp clouds, and I could feel the impending heat wave. All of a sudden, it sounded like a pretty good idea to head out of camp early.

"So, what are we doing tomorrow night?" I asked.

Edward gripped my waist and looked at me embarrassed. "Uhh, I thought I could actually take you out on a date. You know, dinner... a movie?"

"An official date?" I was glowing. Maybe it was because I was still post-coital, but I was pretty sure it was because Edward fucking Cullen was asking me out on a date. I retained my squeal for a time in private and simply smiled when he nodded his acquiescence.

"You didn't have anything else planned, did you? Fuck, I should have asked... I know I'm really bad at—"

My feet arched upwards, propelling myself to stand on my toes as I shut Edward up with a firm kiss.

"No, nothing else planned. And I can't wait to go out with you."

An easy smile spread across his face, and he released a soft sigh. "Well, that's good. I have no idea what's in theaters right now, but I'm sure we can find something acceptable."

"Sounds perfect." I paused, seeing that Edward had walked me all the way back to the head of campus—as far as he could take me back to my bunk.

We said our goodbyes and kissed sweetly, trying to ignore the prying eyes of the head of night duty. I walked quickly back to my bunk, thoroughly exhausted from the drama of the day. I couldn't wait until tomorrow. I had a feeling our first date would be extremely memorable. With thoughts of musky costumes, earth shattering orgasms, and first dates, I drifted off into dreamland, anxious for the next day to come.

x-x-x

"I don't think I've ever been this sweaty," Jasper complained as he stood in front of our weak ass fan with his arms spread. "And I lived in the South for four years." He groaned and ran his hands through his hair, pulling it away from his neck, and I could see that the underside was completely drenched with sweat.

I walked over to him slowly, trying not to muster up any unnecessary effort in the oppressive heat. "J-Town, you know I heart you, but your hair is seriously the grossest thing I've ever seen."

I nearly gagged as a few more beads of sweat rolled down the back of his neck.

To be fair, the day had started off in the low nineties and had now approached nearly one hundred five, plus humidity, so I'm sure I didn't look or smell like a peach either, but what was it about boys? They just sweat so fucking much.

"Don't look at me like that, Bella." He scowled at me... with his eyes closed. I didn't even know that was possible.

"You can't even see my face, douche."

He chuckled. "Oh, I know the face." Then, his eyes opened and slid towards me. "And it shouldn't be on your face when you actually have the means to get us out of this heat and into some air conditioning."

"But Seth—"

Jasper's eyes lit up, and a sly grin spread across his face, stopping me mid-sentence. "Seth is right there, heading back towards his bunk."

I followed Jasper's line of vision where Seth was, indeed, headed back towards his bunk.

"Fuck it." I needed to get out of the heat, and seeing my boyfriend wasn't the worst idea either. "Let's go."

Looking like a complete buffoon, Jasper punched his fist into the air and did a little skip-hop move. Clearly, he'd been hanging out with Alice too much.

"What are you? A fucking Newsie?"

Seeing my expression, he simply shrugged and led the way to the shack. I followed quickly, not even bothering to lock up the fine arts room behind us. We'd be back soon anyway.

Upon reaching the door, Jasper stepped aside and signaled for me to knock. The boy was his roommate and one of his best friends, yet he needed me—the new girlfriend—to knock for him?

My knuckles rapped quickly on the door, which gave way immediately, a burst of cold air surrounding my body, making my skin, still damp with sweat, prickle with goose bumps.

Needing to collapse onto something, I closed my eyes and spread across the small wooden bench, lying down long-ways with my legs straddling it. The lacquered green surface felt cool against my sweat-covered back, and it was the closest thing to me, and it was a step up from lying across the floor, which had been my first inclination.

Suddenly, plush lips were pressed against mine, their minty taste letting me know exactly to whom they belonged. As he was pulling away, though, I couldn't resist wrapping my arms around his neck and deepening our kiss. He complied and pulled back with a chuckle, forcing me to open my eyes back up. I loved to see Edward smile.

"Well, that was a warm welcome... literally," he laughed melodically, wiping his thumb across my forehead, down to my temple, pushing away a stray bead of sweat. "PS, Jasper, you stink."

Edward stole a quick kiss before sitting back down in his rollie chair in front of his computer, pulling up his iTunes, and pressing shuffle. Obviously we were people who needed a soundtrack for every conversation.

Instead of responding, Jasper flicked Edward off and groaned. "You'd smell like shit, too, if you were working in over a hundred degree weather. And our studio barely has a window. It's like we're suffocating in there, to be honest."

"Yeah, and I now feel like I'm suffocating in here, thanks to your deathly scent." Edward mock-gagged, bringing a smile to my face at their easy banter.

"Hmm," Jasper shrugged. "You know, that'd be a good solution." He nodded his head towards the computer, and Edward nodded enthusiastically.

"Oh, yeah."

"What?" I asked, feeling completely out of the loop.

"The song, MB," Edward explained, his eyes growing darker as the lyrics rang out through the tiny space.

*I forgot my shirt at the water's edge
The moon is low tonight*

Nightswimming deserves a quiet night

"*Nightswimming* by REM. It's about skinny dipping," Jasper explained, looking fairly uncomfortable discussing any kind of nudity with me. Not that I could blame him. I didn't really want to continue the conversation with him either.

"Right, I got it. The lyrics were pretty forthcoming," I spoke distractedly, although I didn't miss the pointed look between Edward and Jasper. I shrugged, not knowing how to figure them out. *Boys*. "And on that note, we should probably get back before our next class starts."

I pushed myself to my elbows and swung my leg around to help me sit up. Everything in this heat was just too hard.

Edward reached out his hands to mine and pulled me into his arms. It didn't even matter that I was gross and sticky, I loved feeling his hands clasped at the small of my back. I tilted my chin up and smiled.

"I'll see you at five?" he said, gazing down at me with a small smile.

I gnawed at my bottom lip, wondering how I was going to be able to look cute in this hellish weather. I mean, it was our first date. I didn't want to be a sweaty mess on our *first date*.

"Stop that," Edward admonished, running his finger over my bottom lip, pulling it from my tooth's grasp.

"Why?"

I chewed on my lip often. It was a bad habit, I guessed, but at least it wasn't something worse like picking my nose or LARPing.

"Because then I can't do this." His finger slid from my bottom lip to my chin, drawing it up towards his face to meet his lips in a soft kiss.

Okay, best reason to stop biting my lip ever. Boyfriend for the win.

We both pulled back, flushed and smiling.

"I am going to gag with how precious that just was. I feel like I'm at the end of a romantic comedy. Please, let's go before I puke." Jasper held out his hand, gesturing towards the door.

"Yeah, okay," I laughed. "Because you and Alice aren't like that at all, right?"

"Stop arguing with me, Bella. And please? Let's just..." Jasper sighed loudly, and Edward shook his head, rolling back towards his computer to continue whatever it was that we had interrupted in the first place.

~Edward~

I was going to melt alive. I was sure of it. Maybe it was nerves or maybe it was the one hundred degree weather, but I had just taken a cold shower and was already sweating buckets.

It was our first real date. And to me, it really meant something. Some sort of milestone or shift in our relationship was going to occur tonight, and I absolutely did not want to fuck it up in any way, shape or form.

On my way out the door, Emmett patted my shoulder and gave me a stern glare, conveying everything he needed to without a single word. Yeah, I got it—hurt Bella and my balls were gone.

I couldn't wait to get off campus, though. With everything that had happened yesterday, I felt like I needed to be as attentive as humanly possible to Bella. She had admitted her nerves to me, and while I was definitely not anxious to destroy her virtue in one fell swoop, I was more comfortable with the idea of tainting it through baby steps. Maybe.

Taint her virtue? Good lord, you are so fucked.

Waiting for Bella to arrive, I leaned against the cab of Jake's truck, hiding myself from the sun as much as I could. No need to increase unnecessary sweat production.

That thought completely went to shit as Bella emerged from the shadows and stepped into the sun. In the sunlight, her yellow dress went completely transparent, clearly showing off her braless figure. My hands longed to be reattached to her tits, and I knew they would be before we said goodnight. That was absolutely non-negotiable as far as I was concerned.

"Hey," she smiled cheerfully, looking far too pretty to just be taken out to a shitty dinner and an even shitter movie theater. But, fuck, we were in nowheresville Maine, population three—me, my trailer, and my dog. Our options were pretty fucking limited if we didn't want to travel an hour and a half out of our way.

"Hey, you look... nice." I leaned down and kissed her cheek, closer to her neck, since her hair was swept up in a high ponytail.

She rolled her eyes and started climbing into the truck. "You don't need to flatter me, Edward. You already know you're getting more than a goodnight kiss later."

My mouth hung agape at her sudden burst of confidence. This was the Bella I remembered—the mouthy, unfiltered, slightly pretentious, and faintly insolent but charming girl who had stumbled into the shack all those years ago.

She clapped her hand over her mouth, her cheeks turning pink as she began to stutter an apology.

"I—I... that sounded so much sluttier than I thought it would, oh my God... um... uh..."

"Bella," I laughed, climbing into the driver's seat and turning on the ignition. "Stop stressing. I love you and your non-existent filter. Never apologize for that."

Her brown eyes widened before blinking rapidly, and her front tooth took up space on her luscious bottom lip, which always drove me fucking crazy.

"What did I say about this?" I whispered, removing her lip from her tooth again, and pressed a chaste kiss there.

"R-right," she stuttered, all of a sudden shifting very uncomfortably in her seat.

"What?" I asked, completely taken aback by her shift in mood. She'd gone from sixty back to zero in about three point two seconds, and I had no fucking clue as to why.

She shook her head and reached for the radio. "Nothing."

"Okay," I said, skeptically. It didn't seem like nothing, but I didn't want to press her for something she obviously didn't want to tell me.

The drive to the movie theater was quick, which was good because even with air conditioning, Jake's truck was getting a bit stifling. Luckily, the air in the theater was turned on full blast, cooling us down nearly instantly.

The only movies playing at the theater were *The Hangover* or the new *Harry Potter*, so we took our chances with the D-list cast and went for the shitty comedy.

It actually turned out not to be so shitty. In fact, the movie was pretty fucking hilarious. Inappropriate to the max and filled with actors who had impeccable comic timing; I could see the movie becoming one of my favorites. It also didn't hurt that I had one arm around Bella's shoulders and the other, stretched across my lap to hold hands with hers the entire time.

Whatever had been plaguing her in the car melted away as soon as the theater lights dimmed. Her entire body melted into my side, soft and warm and perfect against me.

I didn't ever want it to end. The hour and forty minutes were up far too quickly, and we were hesitant to go back into the heat, which had diminished only by a few degrees with the sun set.

"How is it still one hundred and two degrees?" Bella whined, reading Jake's truck thermometer. "That shouldn't be possible at seven thirty pm... summer or not."

I shrugged as Bella droned on about the heat, driving us to our next location, a small waterfront restaurant on the opposite side of the lake from camp.

As we exited the car, Bella reached for my hand, intertwining her fingers with mine, bringing a smile to my face. The smile faded, however, when I saw the small cluster of elderly men leering at her over their mugs of beer.

It didn't matter how fucking hot it was, we weren't going to be sitting inside with those fuckers. I silently prayed they couldn't see through her dress in the dim light of the bar.

Keeping her close to my body, I led her out to the patio, and I noticed she breathed a sigh of relief as I passed through the doors.

"I hope this is okay," I began, unsure if the heat was still too oppressive to eat outside, but Bella's brilliant smile assured me we were fine. It was a beautiful view anyway. The sun was setting over the lake, behind the hill of Long Lake's campus.

"It's perfect."

Grinning, she opened her menu, and I followed her lead. On a day as hot as today, I wasn't particularly hungry, but I wasn't concerned with the food as much as who I was eating it with anyway.

I ordered a lobster roll and Bella ordered a bacon cheeseburger. She blushed as she ordered, saying that she was sorry she couldn't be one of those girls who didn't eat on dates. But I couldn't have cared less. I loved that Bella didn't feel like she had to eat rabbit food. It was as if slowly—very slowly—but surely, we were figuring out that we didn't have to tip toe around each other. *That* was what was making us awkward. As soon as we started being ourselves, we clicked. After all, I figured out I wanted to be with the real Bella, not some Bella-lite version. And I figured the same probably went for me, so I was going to make more of a concerted effort to stop being so goddamned polite.

Our food arrived quickly, and as we ate, the sun continued to move, backlighting Bella, so she looked as if she were glowing. Wanting to take my own advice and just 'be myself,' I started talking movies. After all, this was who I was.

"No," Bella sputtered to my latest declaration that Ben Affleck was washed up and should just throw in the towel and admit defeat to Matt Damon, the clearly superior friend. I had posed the question as to who was the most influential actor of our generation, and I thoroughly believed it was Matt Damon. Clearly, Bella felt otherwise. "Just... no!"

"Oh, come on... what was the last movie you saw Ben Affleck in that you actually liked? He's a natural born writer and director. He should have never tried to become an actor. Leave it to the pros."

"But *Good Will Hunting* is one of my favorite movies, and he's fucking fabulous in it. You can't deny that," she said, pointing a fry at me accusingly.

"Moot point," I smirked. "That movie came out in 1997. Try a movie in this decade, please. Oh, and side note, Matt Damon was the true star of that film. My point still stands."

She made an angry buzzer noise, startling our surrounding patrons and popped the fry into her mouth. "Fine, I love *Jersey Girl*, okay? That came out in 2004, so it was definitely in this decade. It was a Kevin Smith movie, and it reunited Ben and Liv for the first time since *Armageddon*. It makes me weep. Are you happy now?" She was so flustered that I couldn't help but smile unabashedly at her. "Oh, and side note to *you*, Robin Williams was the true fucking star of *Good Will Hunting*."

"Wow, MB. I think you just schooled me on movies. I didn't even know that was possible." She tipped her head towards me in a small bow, making me smile even wider. "Okay," I pressed, "so who do *you* think is the most influential actor of our generation?"

"It's a toss up," she shrugged. "Between Edward Norton..."

"Edward Norton?" I interrupted. "I can't fucking stand that guy. Have you ever listened to him try and do press? It's..." I shook my head. "I just can't do it."

She leaned forward, fire burning in her gaze. "Yes, but we're talking about influential acting alone. And with that, Ed Norton is a viable candidate. *Fight Club*? *American History X*? I mean, he made skinheads look hot."

"Did you just bring up neo-nazis on our first date?" I couldn't help but laugh. This was the strangest verbal foreplay I'd ever partaken in, but oddly enough, it really worked for us. Talking movies with Bella was making me hard as a fucking rock. "Really, Bella?"

"I *said*," she elongated the word, letting me know exactly who was in charge of this verbal sparring, "it was a toss up."

"So, who's the other choice?"

"Clearly, it's Will Ferrell," she said confidently, tucking a stray curl behind her ear. Before she could put her hand back in her lap, though, I reached for it, wrapping her small hand in my larger one.

"Bella, I love you, but have you seen *Talladega Nights*? Any movie that uses 'shake and bake' as a tag line isn't even in the same realm as Matt Damon."

She shook her head and bit her lip, her cheeks flushing as they had earlier in the car. Unable to stop myself, I let a small groan escape. The pink cheeks and the lip biting and the dark eyes with the movie talk. I was owned.

"Agree to disagree... when in Rome," she snickered, squeezing my hand as I slid my credit card from my wallet and discretely handed it to the waitress.

"Thanks, Edward. This was..."

"Amazing? Terrible? Outstanding? Horrific? Superior? Dreadful? Marvelous?"

"Will you stop interrupting me?" she chided as the bill was placed in front of me. "God, how have I never realized what a child you are?"

I signed the check and squinted my eyes at her. "You should probably lay off the sauce."

Laughing, I stood up and helped her out of her chair, wrapping my arm around her waist immediately. She looked up at me and returned my grin, and from this angle, I could see right now the front of her dress, which I did because I'm a dirty perv. My cock and I were having all

kinds of scandalous thoughts about the ending of our night; we only hoped Bella would feel similarly.

"So, what now?" she asked, sliding back into the front seat.

"Back to camp?" I suggested. There wasn't really anywhere on the town I wanted to take her. The only real place to go was *The Pound*, and I didn't really feel inclined to have other counselors around to witness the groping that was sure to go down. Plus, Seth could be there. Talk about fucking awkward.

"I'm not ready for the night to end yet," she whispered shyly.

"Neither am I, MB. I had no intentions of letting you go just yet." I winked and grabbed her hand across the console, feeling like a smooth motherfucker as she nodded her agreement.

In fact, the plans that were forming in my head for our camp activities were pretty lascivious, but I hoped—more like prayed—that she wouldn't be too offended.

Trying to be a gentleman and counteract some of the sleaze I was sure to feel in a few minutes, I ran around the truck and opened her door, happily surprised when she placed a light kiss to the underside of my jaw.

"Mmm," I mumbled, trying not to let her press against my hard cock, which was now straining against the fabric of my boxer briefs and my khaki shorts, as she hopped out onto the pavement. "How would you feel about walking down to the lake?"

"That sounds perfect," she smiled. "I think it's supposed to be cooler on the docks, right? Something about air and the water and..." As she rambled on, I tuned her out, choosing to check her out instead.

Yeah, I know. I'm an asshole of a boyfriend. Call me on it. I'm aware.

But I couldn't help it. She looked gorgeous. And something had happened over the past few hours—something good. A wall had fallen, an awkward wall, and it was becoming more natural to talk and touch and just be. Maybe we had both been over thinking it before. I didn't really know, but I couldn't help the way everything felt, like it fit.

Arriving at the dock, Bella slid off her shoes and sat down on the edge, letting her feet slide through the water. Perfect.

As I admired the view from behind, I quickly pulled off my shirt and pushed down my shorts. I briefly considered taking off my boxer-briefs, too, but I decided that a full ode to "Nightswimming" wasn't completely necessary. After all, I had to keep telling myself we were going slow and steady.

Just as Bella started turning around, presumably to see what was taking my ass so long to join her, I flew past her, scrunching myself into a tight cannonball as I hit the water.

It was the perfect remedy to the thick humidity that had stuck to my skin all day. The water was cool, but not too cold, and I couldn't resist shaking my hair out onto her as I gripped the edge of the dock.

"Edward, what are you doing?" she whisper-yelled, half concerned and half intrigued.

"Nightswimming." I grinned as she looked over her shoulder at the pile of clothes resting behind her, causing a soft blush reappear on her cheeks.

"But... but... we're not allowed to get into the water without a lifeguard present." Her stuttering was so fucking adorable, I couldn't resist pulling myself up out of the water slightly, capturing her lips in a very wet kiss.

"You're coming in, too, you know." My hands moved to cover her knees before sliding slowly up the smooth skin of her thighs under her dress.

She bit her lip, blushing even harder. Even under the moonlight I could tell she looked like a tomato.

"I don't have anything to wear," she whispered, her eyes fixated on my thumbs, which were drawing wet circles up her thighs.

"And you think I do?" I laughed, finally letting my arms relax, and fell back into the water with a soft splash.

She nodded nervously. "You've got boxers on. That's like a bathing suit for you."

"So? You can wear your underwear like a bathing suit for you," I countered.

She chuckled nervously, still staring at her lap. "I could..." she trailed off before looking up at me with a smirk. "... if I were wearing any."

Was she serious? My hands had just been inching up her dress and she hadn't been wearing anything underneath? I had known about the no-bra; I could see that clearly. But, Jesus, had I known there were no panties involved either? Fuck.

My cock hardened further, trying to bust its way out of my underwear, as my heart rate sped up. If she was going to play this game, I would play along. It was dangerous territory, but my hands went for the waistband of my boxer-briefs anyway, tugging them down my thighs, kicking them off and throwing them onto the dock next to her.

"I'm not wearing any either. What's your excuse now?"

All my thoughts went into begging her to smile and take off her dress instead of frown and run away, which, was a likely option, considering everything.

Luckily, fate was on my side. A slow smile spread across her face as she signaled with her index finger for me to turn around. I had no problem following those orders. None at all.

I waited patiently to face her until I heard a loud splash and a happy shriek, signaling her rise to the surface.

"Oh my God, I forgot how good this feels." Her face lit up under the soft moonlight, reveling in the necessary temperature change. Flailing her arms slightly, treading water, she leaned her head back, letting her tits rise above the dark expanse of the lake, peeking out and glistening with small droplets. The horny teenager in me couldn't decide whether he wanted to squeeze the shit out of them or just face-plant between them.

Unable to take it anymore, I swam to her, wrapping my arms around her waist, bringing our hips dangerously close to one another. Her head rose from the water immediately as our naked skin brushed against each other, then she reached out with both arms to crush her lips against mine.

Our limbs intertwined as our wet lips slid against one another's. Her arms wound around my neck, bringing our chests in full contact, sending a jolt down my spine. I had never felt anything quite like it before. It was magical. Sparks traveled throughout my body, igniting the low fire we'd had burning into an uncontrollable blaze. I half expected the water around us to light up and have fish dance in circles at our feet with toads and crickets chirping with glee from the long grass beside the lake. In fact, if Disney ever made a porno, I was positive it would be just like this moment.

Still attached at the mouth, we sank beneath the water, just touching and exploring the naked expanse of skin on display. And explore we did. Bella's legs locked around my waist, her ankles crossed over the small of my back, allowing me the perfect angle to run my hands up her thighs and ass. A small burning sensation in my chest clued me into the fact that if I didn't kick my legs and force us back to the surface, we were going to drown. Albeit, blissfully happy, but we'd drown nonetheless.

When we finally broke through, we were both gasping for air, but neither of us were even remotely ready to let go. Now that we knew what it felt like to be like this, no barriers, just skin against skin, I didn't know how we could ever go back.

"I think," Bella panted, "I need to hold onto something." She paused, her eyes scanning the dock for something, kicking out of my grasp when she found a small ladder at the far side. "Lest we drown," she laughed, running her fingers through her hair, pushing it out of her face as she sat down on the middle rung. "That would put a damper on our date, don't you think?"

"Probably," I said, swimming slowly through the darkness towards her. At this angle, the swim pagoda blocked out most of the moonlight, encasing us in shadow, hiding us from sight.

Licking off the lake water from my lips, I grabbed onto the ladder as well, creating a cage around Bella's body.

"Edward," she whispered, peering up through her dark lashes, which were still saturated with water. "This has been the best date ever. So, thank you."

I leaned my forehead to hers and closed my eyes, trying to calm myself down a little in an effort

not to jump her. "You are very welcome, Bella, but believe me... the pleasure was mine."

Giggling, she inched up slightly, rubbing her wet nose against mine, before stealing a kiss.

"It can be."

Then, surprising the hell out of me—mostly because my eyes were still clenched tightly—Bella's hand darted out and wrapped around my erection.

Bella's hand is on my cock. Hand. Cock... Cock. Hand. Fuuuuuck.

"Holy mother of Jesus," I groaned, gritting my teeth in an attempt to keep myself together.

"That would be Mary," she chuckled softly, caressing me up and down in slow, steady strokes.

"Fuck," I ground out in a low moan, letting my head fall to Bella's shoulder.

I could feel her pulse race under my cheek, and I heard as she inhaled a shaky breath. "Is this okay?" she asked nervously.

"This is *way* more than okay," I breathed, my voice growing hoarse with the effort I was using to hold myself back. "C-can I..."

I trailed off, letting my hand wandering up her inner thigh do the talking I wasn't capable of currently articulating.

"Please," she moaned as my finger slid inside her. She made the most incredible moaning noise before kissing me hard and whispering, "More."

I pumped my single finger twice more before pulling out and tentatively adding a second finger. It shouldn't have been tentative, though, because as soon as my fingers—plural—were inside her, she yelled out a loud, "Yes," and clenched down harder on my cock, applying the perfect amount of pressure.

Bella may have been inexperienced, but she knew exactly what the hell to do with my body. She had my cock completely bewitched, bothered, and bewildered, ready to answer her every beckoning call.

"Faster," she groaned, and I quickly complied, letting my fingers thrust faster. I didn't know who told Bella it was okay to be vocal about what she wanted, but I was ever so grateful to them. Hearing her dictate to me was one of the hottest things I'd ever experienced.

I let my thumb brush against her clit, feeling her walls clench around my fingers and hearing her cry out. Meanwhile, my cock was doing happy dances, focusing only on the slick feel of Bella's hand stroking up and down, occasionally sweeping over the head.

Had I not been so epically distracted, I may have heard the footsteps approaching the dock and seen the flashlight beam searching through the water before I heard my best friend's voice call

out, "Hey, whoever the hell is fucking in the water, you can't be here. Find somewhere else to go."

At the sound of his voice, our hands ceased their movements simultaneously, but neither of us removed them completely, her hand still clenched around my dick and her walls clenched around my fingers.

"Jake?" she mouthed, her eyes wide with fear. And I couldn't fucking blame her. I was feeling all kinds of terror at this moment in time as well. Of all the people to be on perimeter duty tonight, it had to be him?

I nodded, unsure of what to do. Maybe if we were silent, he'd just go away?

"I see your clothes out here, assholes. I'm turned around right now, but I swear I'll come back there if I don't hear bodies getting out of the water."

"Oh God, please don't come back here!" Bella cried out, panicked.

"LB?" His voice cracked, and I heard him shuffle closer to us.

"Yes, Jake! It's me! For the love of God, please don't come back here!" Her word vomit would have been amusing had I not been experiencing the same rush of dread concurrently.

"Uh..." I could hear Jake toeing at the dock with the tip of his shoe. "Edward?"

"Y-yeah?" I called out, my voice sounding gruff even to my own ears.

"Tell me you're not fucking LB right now. Because I may have to actually come back there and kill you."

I couldn't help but laugh, causing my fingers to accidentally move inside Bella again. She squeaked, quietly suppressing a moan.

"Edward!" he called out again.

"I'm not fucking anyone, Jake, you hypocritical bastard. Promise."

Jake sighed loudly and growled a little. "I can't fucking believe this is even happening... Okay," he cleared his throat to speak a little clearer, "I'm walking away now. Please get out of the water in the near future. There, I did my job. And let's never speak of this again."

"Okay!" Bella and I shouted together, stifling our laughter with small kisses.

As soon as the dock stopped shaking, signaling Jake's departure, Bella leaned in to kiss me softly.

"That was kind of amazing. I don't think anything can really top that," she giggled.

"Really?" I goaded, curling my fingers inside her, causing her giggles to morph into low, breathy

moans. "Let's see if it can."

She gasped softly and widened her legs as her hand started its slow and steady pumping again. The water splashed around us, and if Jake was still in the relative near vicinity, he'd definitely be able to hear us, but I didn't think either of us particularly cared.

Neither of us said a word as we worked one another to completion. We didn't need to. The soft lapping of water against the creaking dock kept time as crickets and toads chirped around us.

I came first, one hand on her chest and the other one working hard beneath the water, breathing her name into the curve of her pale neck. My jaw clenched, tightening as my stomach clenched, preparing to let go. My orgasm was nothing short of mind blowing, warmth coursing through my body as I tensed and released.

Bella came shortly after, tempting my cock to rise again, her walls spasming around my fingers as she cried out my name... along with some expletives thrown in there, too.

"I think we succeeded," she panted, still breathless, looking flushed and beautiful.

Grinning, I kissed her hard, running my hands through her tangled hair. "Yeah, I'd say so."

"Looks like we've got this practicing thing down!" She held up her hand for a high five before realizing it was the hand that had just been on my junk. "Oh, wait," she blushed, "do you not want to touch that? Is that weird?"

I rolled my eyes and laced my fingers with hers. We were sitting in a big cesspool of our bodily fluid anyway. Which gave me a spectacular idea...

"Since we're so good at practicing, how did you feel about more... in my shower... like, now?"

She looked up at me through her lashes, which were dark with water, looking as coy as ever. "That sounds spectacular—" I mentally fist pumped. "—except I didn't find anyone to cover my bunk tonight, so I have to go back kind of soon." My fist pump stopped short, skidding to a halt. "Rain check?" she asked, running her hands through my hair, so we were once again only centimeters apart.

"Absolutely." I licked my lips, tasting the fresh water on them. I'd never be able to taste it again without thinking of this exact moment. Leaning in, I whispered, "But if you have to go soon, we should probably make the most of our time..." I trailed off and leaned in to capture her lips, which smiled against mine.

As we continued to kiss under the sky, bright with stars, I realized that I might have been new to this whole relationship thing, but I had just planned and experienced the best fucking date ever.

Grand Gestures

~Bella~

After kissing Edward one last time, I stumbled back towards my bunk, tripping over the threshold of my cabin, dizzy with contentment. I held my breath, hoping I wouldn't wake any of the sleeping campers who were happily tucked away in their beds.

I flopped down onto my bed, smiling like a crazy person. My hair may have been tangled in knots, dampening my pillowcase with remnants of lake water, but I didn't care. Tonight, Edward had told me he loved me.

He had. He might not have known it, but he had. He really, really had.

The first time he'd said it, he stopped me cold. I almost thought I'd imagined it. Or maybe it had been some hideously unfunny joke. But when he'd said it *again*, I realized that he had no fucking idea the words were even coming out of his mouth.

"I love you and your lack of filter..."

"I love you, but..."

I couldn't decide whether I was let down by the fact that there wasn't some huge moment commemorating the words or whether it was romantic because it was completely subconscious.

But as I closed my eyes and a very specific image danced across my eyelids, I knew that when I said it back, the event would most *definitely* be commemorated. And I had a really outlandish idea of how to do it; I just wasn't sure if I was completely out of my mind or not for contemplating it.

x-x-x

Morning came too quickly, interrupting the less-than-chaste dreams swirling around my head. The rest of the day passed in the same way—too quickly. It was as if time ceased to exist. I was floating through life, not even minding the still-sticky heat, which clouded the small Fine Arts room.

As Jasper cleaned up, I sat at one of the low wooden tables and sketched. The image had branded itself into my brain, and I knew the only way to expel it was to let the muscles in my hand get it out.

"That's neat looking, B-Town," Jasper drawled, peeking over my shoulder. "What's it for?"

"Nothing." My arm swept over the drawing, blocking it from his sight. I totally wasn't ready to admit to anyone what I was doing, much less explain it Jasper. Yet.

Eyeing me skeptically, he sat down, pulling the chair out from across me and slouching over the

table to get a closer look at the shrouded paper. "Sure, nothing. That blush really tells me it's nothing."

I sighed and leaned back. It was Jasper; he was going to find out. He had some sort of innate power where he just *knew*. He and Alice both had it, especially with me.

"It's embarrassing..." I grumbled.

"What is?" Alice's all-too-curious voice asked from behind me. Groaning, I let my head fall onto the paper. "How you're going to be the third wheel on my day off with Jasper tomorrow? Yeah, I know. Totally embarrassing."

My head snapped back up to look back and forth between the couple before me, who were now cozily wrapped in each other's arms.

"Huh?"

Alice tugged on a short lock of her hair and leaned forward. "Here's the deal, LB. I miss you. This was supposed to be *our* summer together, you know? And so far... I mean, don't get me wrong, I'm thrilled that you're out doing dirty things past curfew in the lake and I've found the love of my life, but we always talked about this summer being the one where we'd get crazy piercings or dye our hair and do something rad together. And so far, the raddest thing we've done is to go bald eagle, and, well... that's not enough."

"I... but..."

My mind struggled to keep up with Alice's mouth. She was right; we had planned on doing all these crazy bonding activities together, of which we'd done very little, but first—how had she known about my lake rendezvous with Edward and second—had she just called Jasper the love of her life? From the blush spreading over his ears and neck, I was betting that was the first he was hearing of it, too.

"No buts, Miss B," she stated resolutely. "I don't want to hear it. Jasper and I are going to take you straight up to the main office and change your second day off to tomorrow. And, for the record, I'm thinking I want to get my nose pierced. What do you think? A little stud right here?"

"A stud wouldn't be too bad," Jasper said with a grin, pinching her nose as if she were a small child and tucking his thumb under to steal it from her. "You might even look a little bad ass."

"Bad ass? Oh, yeah, totally. Like X-Tina when she first got Dirrrty. But a little classier than that."

Alice continued to talk logistics of her nose piercing to Jasper as I grabbed the rough sketch, and we walked up the hill to the office together.

My name had just been placed on the list next to Alice and Jasper's names when I felt two athletic but feminine arms wrap around my waist.

"What the..."

"Why didn't anyone call me to tell me that Teddy finally came to his senses?"

My body froze, but a large smile made its way across my face. I tilted my head backwards, craning my neck to see if who I thought had just grabbed me actually had. And sure enough, staring down at me were the piercing jade eyes I'd come to love so much... only, their feminine counterpart.

"Tanya?"

She spun me in her arms, squeezing me tightly to her barely-clad body before pushing me away to look me up and down. My uniform t-shirt and shorts looked far inferior to her most likely Megan-Fox-inspired ensemble of denim cutoffs and a cropped tank top, but she didn't seem to care.

"Not going to lie, B, you are looking mighty fine. Being in love suits you. Come with me, I need to see you in better light."

Did she just say...

Not asking permission, she grabbed my hand and led me from the office to the Adirondack chairs, which seemed to be becoming the place for memorable moments this summer. Alice and Jasper trailed behind us, looking equal parts amused and shocked as Tanya continued her prattling.

"If I weren't sure it'd get my non-existent dick chopped off, I'd totally make a move for you. Way to go, Teddy. Way to finally stake your claim. But seriously—" she sighed, looking around with purpose "—I'm going to strangle that little boy for not calling me. Where the hell is he?"

I'd forgotten what a force of nature she was. With her snarky banter and quick wit, Tanya had managed to see in less than a minute what Edward still hadn't realized. I was in love with him.

"I'm, uh..." I stuttered, unsure of how to respond. Thank God, my boyfriend came in like a white knight to the rescue.

"T?"

So, obviously he hadn't known she was coming either.

"T-t-t-teddy!" she shouted, hopping up from the chair and wrapping her arms around his neck.

"T-t-t-tanya," he said less enthusiastically than she, escaping from her death grip and taking a large step back, "what the hell are you doing here?"

"I'm here to check in on you, obviously, since you don't know how to pick up a phone anymore." She glared at him and then smiled at me, making it excruciatingly obvious as to what she was checking in on.

He chuckled uncomfortably, scratching at the back of his scalp as he sat on the arm of the chair I was currently lounging in.

"You drove all these miles to see if I finally took my head out of my ass?" As he spoke, his warm hand slid over mine, automatically shifting mine to flip over and intertwine my fingers with his.

She bit her lip and flicked her eyes down towards our hands before placing her hands on her hips and tossing her hair dramatically. "Well, there's that... which, by the way, we're spending all day tomorrow hanging out so I can get all the details from you, pumpkin," she directed at him with a wink, "but there's also the promise of getting laid... really well."

"Tanya," Edward groaned, burying his face in my hair.

"Teddy, it's not my fault that your best friend knows how to use his—"

"Stop!" he cried, bringing his hand up to cover his eyes, presumably trying to wipe away the image of his sister and his best friend getting it on from his mind.

"Speak of the devil..." Jasper chuckled.

"TANYA!"

Jake barreled up the hill, taking the longest strides I'd ever seen him take before clutching Tanya around the waist and spinning her around, much like he had the first time they'd been reunited. I couldn't help but think back to my first introduction to her and how different the circumstances were now.

It had been barely a month since Tanya had last been here, but oh how the tides had changed. Instead of pining and torturing mercilessly, I was giving hand jobs in the lake at midnight and getting fingered on the tennis courts, and in the costume room, and...

"Sounds good to me," Edward agreed with a squeeze of his hand, bringing me back into the present.

"Hm?"

"Movie night in Bunk Seven tonight," Jake reiterated, keeping one arm firmly placed around Tanya's waist. I eyed them skeptically. From what I knew, this was the third time he and Tanya would be together. And I really didn't think Jake did repeat hookups. Interesting. Interesting, indeed. "And I'm coming, so you'd better pick a watchable movie."

Apparently I'd zoned out for longer than I'd thought, and there'd been a multitude of plans made in the absence of my consciousness. Oh well. If a movie was included, I wasn't going to fight the plans.

x-x-x

Shortly after climbing out of the shower and getting into my comfiest but cutest pajamas, I

decided to stop by Rosalie's bunk. I hadn't really seen her yet today, and my mind was kersploding with everything I needed to tell her.

I knocked swiftly on her bunk door, which opened quickly. She scurried around the room, dressing to coiffed perfection, simply pointing to her bed, where I sprawled out, stretching my warm muscles.

"Spill, woman," she said sternly, continuing to line her eyes with a short, dark pencil.

"Why are you putting on makeup to watch a movie?" I laughed and propped myself up on my elbows to get a better look at her.

"Emmett and I are heading out pretty soon, actually," she explained, waving the pencil in the air. "We're not staying for the movie. And we're certainly not staying for the encore."

She raised her eyebrows, making me blush and chuckle with the realization that Emmett and Rosalie were leaving for the night so that Jake and Tanya could have the room to themselves. How awkwardly sweet of them. And considerate.

"So, are you two staying out the whole night, then?" I asked, trying not to let too much curiosity seep through my tone.

At my words, Rosalie froze and slowly placed the pencil down on the small ledge under the mirror. She turned to me with a small but devilish smile and whispered conspiratorially, "B, are you asking me if Emmett and I are having sex?"

"Uh..."

"Not that I'm opposed to you asking," she continued, her smile getting wider, "but you've never taken an interest before, so I'm wondering if maybe this has something to do with your *own* life." My mind whirled, completely taken aback by Rosalie's intuition. At my lack of response, she bit her lip, suppressing a squeal, and hopped onto the bed next to me. "Okay, now... spill!"

As I ducked my head away from Rosalie's prying eyes, I could feel the blush creeping up my chest and neck, pooling in my cheeks.

"B?" She held out a comforting hand, clasping mine within her own. "You don't have to tell me anyth—"

"He told me he loved me," I blurted out. Our eyes locked in shock, both of us simultaneously surprised by my admission.

"Really? Oh my God, Bella, that's fantastic! Emmett and I haven't done that yet. The sex? Hell yes." I cringed. I *so* did not want to know about them having sex. There was I reason I hadn't asked about it before. "But love?" she continued, her voice taking on a dreamy quality. "How did he do it? Did you say it back?"

I took a large breath and gushed. Every detail from the night before came flooding forward—the

dinner overlooking the water at sunset, the movie, the heat, the lake, even getting caught by Jake in our state of undress.

Rosalie's laughter couldn't be contained when she found out Edward's admission had been completely accidental.

"What a complete d-bag! Seriously, he's a monumental idiot. But I'm so happy for you, B. So, are you going to call him out or let him say it for real?"

I shrugged, feeling a little overwhelmed by the enthusiasm and attention.

"I had this idea, but I'm—"

My confession was stopped short as Alice blew through the room, yelling at us for taking so long. Rosalie threw me a helpless look, but I waved her off. I'd tell her my plans later. For now, we had a movie night to attend.

x-x-x

Rosalie and Emmett stayed for all of about five seconds before the fighting over which movie to watch commenced. I couldn't say I blamed them. Watching Tanya and Edward fight over what movie to watch was like watching a cockfight or gladiators in the ring or something. I was completely astounded but loving every second of watching the small, infuriated boy trapped inside Edward try to take swipes at his big sister.

Curling up on his bed, I sank onto his pillow and watched the show, trying my hardest to contain my amused chuckling.

"Oh oh oh!" Tanya danced around with a DVD in her hand. "I found it. It's perfect. And you own it, so I know you love it."

Edward sighed loudly and motioned for her to show him the movie. His eyes flitted across the cover before he groaned loudly in protest. "*The Prestige*? Are you serious, T? I have a hard enough time competing against *one* Christian Bale, much less two and God knows however many Hugh Jackmans!"

Tanya shoved his shoulder, making his face turn into the most adorable pout I'd ever seen.

"Teddy, you can't seriously be that insecure. You got your girl!" She waved a flailing arm at me, causing him to slide his eyes towards me and grin. "See? There's no competition when you're in love. And it's this or *Eurotrip*, so make the call and let's watch already."

"EUROTRIP!" Jake called out loudly from his spot, stretched out on the floor. Tanya shot him a warning look, but he simply smiled in return. I was definitely beginning to wonder about those two.

Edward looked helplessly at me and then at Alice and Jasper, who were far too wrapped up in one another to even care about what was playing on the TV, before shrugging in defeat.

Tanya squealed and turned around to put the movie in, so I turned over, sitting up just enough to make room for Edward on his own bed. Instead of following my lead, though, Edward crawled over me, pulled me back down so I was lying flat, and then decided to use my ample rack as his pillow. His head buried into my chest with a soft sigh, and I couldn't resist letting my hands trail up his neck and run through his hair.

As my fingers continued scratching lightly, I felt all his muscles relax, sinking into me with every slow exhale.

"Mmm," he purred, making me giggle softly as we settled in to watch.

Tanya and Jake excused themselves about an hour into the movie, and honestly, I was impressed they'd even lasted that long. I was surprised that Edward hadn't made a fuss about it, until I leaned down and realized he'd fallen asleep on me.

His face was totally relaxed, pressed against the place where my heart was now pounding against my ribs. I knew without a doubt that I was in love with Edward, and I truly believed that he was in love with me too. And no matter what, I wanted to go through with my plan. Hopefully he wouldn't freak out or go running for the hills.

Hopefully.

At the end of the movie, I hated to wake Edward, but I knew I was going to have a long day, and Alice, Jasper, and I were all ready for bed.

I scratched his scalp lightly again, trying to rouse him from his sleep without jarring him.

Bleary-eyed, he clutched me closer as I tried to wriggle out from underneath him.

"Edward," I whispered, "I have to go."

"No..." he mumbled. "Stay... comfy..."

Alice and Jasper looked on with amusement as I tried to extract myself from his sleepy-but-somehow-steel grasp.

"Edward, you need to move just a little." I pushed his hair from his forehead, and his eyes cracked open a bit, allowing small slivers of green to peek through.

"Hey," he whispered, his voice still laced with sleep.

"Hi."

"I fell asleep. I'm sorry."

"It's okay, I just need to go back to my bunk now." I squeezed his hand, and he finally rolled to his side, sliding off just enough to let me escape.

"No," he moaned, reaching out for me in the place where I'd just been. "Come back, MB."

He looked so adorable, groping the blankets blindly, his eyes shut and well on their way back to slumber.

"I'll be back tomorrow after Portland."

"Portland?"

"Mhm, I'm going with Alice and Jasper tomorrow. But we won't be back too late, so I can hang out all night."

He nodded slowly and reached his hands up, motioning for me to come closer. Once within his reach, he slid his hands over my cheeks and pulled me into a warm kiss. I expected it to be chaste, since, you know, he was half-asleep, but before I could pull away, his lips parted and his tongue slid, wet and soft, into my mouth.

Apparently, sleepy Edward was a little slutty. And I was two hundred percent okay with that.

My hands clasped his shoulders, needing to brace myself against something as Edward's tongue moved against mine, making my legs tremble and my body heat up.

From somewhere behind me, a throat cleared, and I knew I had to leave anyway. Sad but content, I pulled away, leaving a pouting Edward behind.

"Good night, Edward," I whispered, placing one last kiss on his lips, hoping they'd tug back into a smile.

They did.

"Night, MB," he mumbled back, turning his now-smiling face into his pillow. "I luff yuh..."

The thick fabric covering his mouth muffled his words, but they were unmistakable nonetheless.

My heart stuttered and stopped before taking off in flight.

"Did he just say...?" Alice whispered.

"Oh, yeah. Yeah, he did." Jasper wrapped his arm around my waist, coming to stand next to where my feet were still frozen next to Edward's bed. "Looks like our boy loves you," he said with a pinch to my side.

I bit my lip but failed to stop the wide grin overtaking my face. Yes, Edward was in love with me. I was sure of it. And tomorrow, I'd say it back.

But tonight, I'd sketch.

X-X-X

My feet shuffled slowly along the cobblestone streets of Portland, one hand gripping Alice's and the other clutching my sketch, nearly paralyzed with fear. I couldn't believe I was going to do this. This was one of those things you looked back on and thought to yourself, *Why was I such an idiot? Why can't I go back in time and tell my younger self not to do this?* But I was ignoring that voice.

Jasper stopped in front of us, and I looked up at the huge sign that read "TATTOO" in massive glowing letters.

"B-Town, you're looking mighty pale. You don't have to do this if you don't want."

When I'd showed Jasper and Alice my sketch at lunch, telling them that I wanted the image tattooed onto my skin, branding me for eternity, I had some mixed responses. Mainly, Alice thought I was incredible and brave and poetic and a slew of other very positive adjectives, while Jasper thought I was out of my mind. Rightfully so. I mean, I knew I was a little out of my mind, but the gut feeling in my stomach was telling me that this was it—this was the right way to tell Edward I loved him. And no matter what happened, I was going to love Edward forever.

"I *want* to do this," I insisted. "I'm just not big into needles. And what if Edward hates it? Or if he hates girls with tattoos? I... I should have discussed this with him, right?"

"I'll hold your hand, LB. It'll be fine," Alice cooed, rubbing her thumb across the back of my hand in a comforting gesture. "The drawing is beautiful, and it's about something that's important to *you*. And, okay, it has a little to do with Edward, but it's not like you're getting his name tattooed on your ass or anything. I wouldn't worry about it."

Biting my lip, I nodded and crossed the threshold of the shop. It was nothing like I'd thought it would be. I had been preparing myself for some scary-looking shop, poorly lit and crowded with intimidating employees.

I should have known. This was Maine.

The tattoo shop was large and bright with Dave Matthews playing on the sound system. Four large adjustable chairs sat proudly, lined up closest to a bright red wall, which was plastered with pictures and sketches of the artists.

"Hey, can I help you?" A stocky bald guy sidled out from behind the counter, revealing a pair of jeans and a black t-shirt. Not scary at all.

"I'm looking to get my nose pierced," Alice jumped in, coming to the rescue, since my brain was acting slower than usual today. "Just something small. I saw a blue stud over there that looked like it would match my eyes perfectly," she rambled, pointing to the array of jewelry behind the glass. "And my friend wants a tattoo. She designed it and everything. She's an artist."

He came closer and held out his hand to me, but my right hand was still clutching my sketch, so I couldn't figure out how to shake his hand. "I'm Mike, and I'm the only artist in the shop today."

You are?"

"Bella," I answered, wishing my voice didn't sound so tiny.

"Tony!" he shouted over his shoulder, causing a lanky-looking red head to meander out to the front. "Can you do this girl's nose?"

He shrugged noncommittally, waving his hand in acceptance.

"And I'd love to see what you want done, Bella," Mike continued, turning back to me and gesturing at the parchment in my hand. I handed it over timidly. He appraised it thoroughly, nodding and humming. "First tattoo?" I nodded. "Where were you thinking of putting this... and is it to scale?"

This I had actually spent time thinking about and could answer confidently. "Yes, it's to scale. And I want it on my left hip with—"

"With the end wrapping around your side a little bit?" he asked, his eyes flicking back and forth between my side and the paper in front of him.

"Yeah."

He nodded again, and I wasn't sure how to read him. He just seemed very serious. I hoped that was a good thing. "All right, well, I just need to draw up a stencil, but that shouldn't take too long. And it's not too big, but the color will take a little time, so I'm thinking it'll be our hourly rate of a hundred dollars?"

I nodded, wondering if this was supposed to be this easy.

"Great. If you could fill out this paperwork while I work this up, that'd be great." He handed me a clipboard and motioned to the seats by the front window, leaving me to myself for the time being.

Jasper and Alice sat in the chairs, flanking me and rubbing my arms lightly as I filled out the standard questions, giving my consent and making sure I wasn't intoxicated.

Mike came back soon enough, not letting me give in to the butterflies squirming around in my stomach, and motioned for me to hop onto the chair. He reclined it and then motioned for me to lift up my dress.

"Oh shit," Jasper drawled. "Edward is going to murder me. Darling, you know I'm here for you, but I'm going to wait by the entrance until Al's ready for her piercing. Plausible deniability and all that."

I bit my lip and turned to Alice nervously. "I didn't really think this one through, did I?" I chuckled uncomfortably, lifting my sundress to lay across my stomach and reveal a pair of light blue cotton undies.

Alice grabbed my hand and shook her head as Mike lowered the left side of my underwear. He swiped my skin with cold alcohol, making me break out into goosebumps as he covered the newly cleaned flesh with the stencil.

"Okay, Miss Bella, go look in the mirror and see if you like that."

As I caught sight of it in the mirror, I gasped and grinned. It was perfect. Everything I'd imagined it to be.

I turned to Alice, who was grinning in return and clasping her hands excitedly. "Oh my God, LB. That's... it's just... eeee! Come sit down!"

My best friend may have been an overexcited yippy dog sometimes, but fuck, I loved her.

Nodding in approval, I lay back down on the chair and grabbed Alice's hand again. I couldn't look at the needle. *Shudder.*

"I'm going to do a few test strokes," Mike explained. "Let me know if something doesn't feel right, and I can slow down if you need."

I nodded my agreement and clutched onto Alice's hand. At the first whirring sounds of the needle, I noticeably tensed, but Mike calmed me down and asked if there was any specific music I wanted to listen to. Thank God, Alice had the sense to ask if he had any Led Zeppelin, and soon the soft strains of "Going to California" were echoing over the dull hum of the needle.

The first few strokes stung a tiny bit, and I tried my hardest not to wince. But as it continued, it became more like a low burning sensation coupled along with a really annoying pricking feeling, as if someone were poking me in the hip with a fork.

Alice did a damn good job of distracting me, and Jasper even wandered over eventually to check out how it was going.

Finally, forty-seven minutes later, Mike declared me finished. Carefully, I strode over to the mirror and took in the image now permanently branded on my hip. And I loved it even more than I'd thought I would.

Standing proudly on my hip was an old-fashioned film reel, shaded in blue. The reel was partially unrolled, giving way to light brownish purple film, which wrapped around my hip slightly up to my side. Over the film, in my large scrawling handwriting, it read: *I can't see anything I don't like about you.*

"He's going to die!" Alice squealed. "I kind of want to jump you right now, so I can only imagine what he's going to say..."

Jasper groaned and buried his face into the top of Alice's head. "I don't know, but we're certainly not going to stick around the bunk to find out."

"That's fine," Alice said with a small grin, tilting her head up. "We can find other places to go."

Isn't that right, darling?" She kissed the underside of his jaw, and Jasper's blush intensified so quickly it was as if he went from ghost to lobster in ten minus two seconds. It was pretty fucking adorable.

As Mike rubbed lotion on my skin and bandaged my side, I wondered how Edward would react. Would he want to jump me? Was I ready to have sex? *I think the answer to that is a hell fucking yes, Bella.* Better yet, was I allowed to have sex?

My ears perked back up as Mike explained the rules and regulations of my healing tattoo.

"You're going to want to remove that bandage as soon as you get home. A tattoo is a wound, so it might bleed, but it needs air to scab and heal. I want you to get some sort of non-scented moisturizer and rub it in every two hours or so. And make sure not to submerge it in water for twenty-four hours. If you need to take a shower tonight, just make sure the tattoo doesn't get in the direct line of the water. Other than that, here's my card. Just call if you need anything. I have a lifetime guarantee on my artwork," he explained with a wink.

After paying and thanking him, we walked back to the car and settled in for the hour-long ride back to camp. As I buckled in my seatbelt, I caught a glimpse of something shiny and screeched.

"Alice! You got it pierced, and I missed it? How could you do that when I wasn't even paying attention?"

She giggled and turned her head over the center console to show off her newly pierced nose. It suited her. Just a little bit of flare and drama.

"Sorry, Bella, you were too busy thinking about God knows what, so I went for it. But you'll get to enjoy it every day for the rest of the summer! Yay!"

With a small shrug, I sighed and leaned back, ready to get back to camp. Back to Edward.

As soon as we pulled back into the parking lot and hopped out of the car, Alice dragged Jasper towards the dance studio. I, on the other hand, headed straight to Bunk Seven. My body was itching to see Edward—or maybe that was just the tattoo. Either way, I was a girl on a mission.

The bunk was dark when I got there, completely abandoned. Seeing that I had already trekked the entire way there, I figured I could hang out for a while until the boys got back from wherever they were. Trying to not feel awkward, although it was a little bit, I lay down on Edward's bed and reached for the remote. I was too lazy to get up and change the DVD, so whatever was in the player would have to suffice. I just hoped someone had switched *The Prestige* out because I didn't think I really wanted to watch that again.

Lucky for me, someone had changed the movie. And, oh, was it a good one.

Whoever had last been watching had turned the television off right in the middle of my favorite scene of *Secretary*. I watched on attentively as Maggie Gyllenhaal got on all fours with a carrot in her mouth, serving James Spader, her boss and dominant, who just happened to be named Edward. The longer I watched, the more I started to squirm. I wondered if Edward had been

watching this. It made sense, since Jasper had left earlier in the morning.

I pictured Edward on his bed, in the very spot I was lying in, stroking himself and thinking of me in that position... on my knees.

Whoa, Bella, where did that come from?

Yet, the longer I let it ruminate, the more I wanted it. And I wanted him to want it. He had to want that, right? What guy didn't want their girlfriend's mouth on them? That only seemed logical.

I watched the movie, completely enraptured by the lascivious images on the screen. So consumed on my burgeoning lust, I didn't realize Edward had returned to the room until he was lying down next to me.

"Hey," he said with a grin, his green eyes twinkling with the reflection of the flickering images on the screen.

"Hey," I replied as I moved my leg to drape over his hip, needing to be as close to him as possible.

Feeling all kinds of horny and uninhibited—which I fully blamed on the film—I rolled Edward to his back, letting me straddle his hips. I leaned down to kiss him, but it was not gentle.

What was the line from the movie?

Who's to say that love needs to be soft and gentle?

So true. Every inch of my body wanted to consume him. Over twenty-four hours had passed since we'd been naked together, and in my personal opinion that was far too long.

Edward groaned into my mouth, clutching onto my ass and rubbing it against his hips in an attempt to gain more friction. When I pulled away, we were both panting and I could feel his hardness underneath me. And, yes, I still wanted to taste it. Damn Maggie Gyllenhaal for making me want to slut it up with my boyfriend.

"Fuck, where did that come from?" he panted.

The moaning and screaming from the television suddenly came into focus, and I nodded backwards toward it. Something in his eyes changed, darkening ever so slightly as a wry grin appeared on his face.

"You want to be dominated?" he croaked out, his voice betraying his face's newfound confidence.

I bit my lip, ready to nod, when all of a sudden I was on my back with Edward on top of me. His lips found mine quickly, pressing into them forcefully and parting them with his tongue. My hips bucked towards his of their own volition, but Edward wasn't ready for that yet.

His hand clutched my hip, roughly pressing it back into the mattress as he continued his assault on my lips.

The searing hot pain shooting up my side was enough to make me cry out, wincing at the feel of his palm pressed against the wound I'd so stupidly forgotten about.

In a flash, Edward pulled back onto his knees as far away from me on the bed as he could possibly get with his hands held up in the air.

"What happened? Are you okay?" His words were strung together.

I nodded, clenching my eyes shut, trying to focus on anything else but the burning sensation spreading over my hip and side.

"Bella? You're scaring me. Are you hurt? Did I hurt you?" The panic in his voice was evident, so I did the only thing I could think of. Lifting my dress slowly, I revealed the white bandage on my side.

"Shit," he swore, looking thoroughly ashamed of himself. "Bella, what happened?" He grabbed my hand and helped me sit up, but I cringed again, unable to truly sit up. "Never mind." He hurried to lay me back down, stroking my stomach softly with the pad of his thumb.

My God, this was really going to be it. There was no turning back now.

I propped myself up on my elbows and attempted a feeble smile. The confident girl I'd just been was now not so confident and trying not to show her impending freakout.

"It's actually time for the bandage to come off... if you could, um, help... me?"

Edward nodded quickly, his fingers fumbling to help remove the tape without hurting me more. His eyes flicked up as I sucked in a sharp breath.

Cool air caressed the skin, lightly caked with blood. And then it was Edward's turn to gasp.

"Did you... is this a..." Slowly but surely, more of the bandage was removed, until finally the entire image was revealed. "Holy shit, Bella, this is..."

His finger brushed over the surrounding skin, taking in the image, letting it sink in. He muttered the words softly, whispering, "I can't see anything I don't like about you," before letting his eyes snap back to mine.

I bit my lip, nervously chewing on the skin there. I couldn't gauge his reaction, and I was starting to panic. "Is it—"

"What?" he interrupted, scooting closer to me on the bed.

"Is it okay? I mean, do you like it? Or are you totally opposed to tattoos, and now I've made a

complete—"

He silenced me with a kiss, his lips moving slowly against mine, coaxing me to respond and reawaken my libido.

"It's incredible, Bella. I love it," he breathed, pulling back to look into my eyes. "I love you."

Hearing him say it consciously, knowing exactly what he was saying, was so much more than I thought it could be. My body started to tingle, and I could suddenly feel my pulse everywhere. Mindlessly, I responded to him.

"I know."

I nearly hung my head in shame. Those were *so* not the words I had intended to respond with, but they'd been on the tip of my tongue. Luckily, Edward didn't take it personally and came back with an adequate quip.

"Oh, do you now, Han Solo?"

I thought about calling him out, telling him how he'd told me on our date, but I couldn't bring myself to inadvertently spare us from our matching grins. Instead, I pulled him back to my mouth, kissing his soft lips and repeated the sentiment.

"Mmm," I hummed. "I love you, too."

"I know," he mumbled against my lips. He didn't stay there for long, though. Soon his lips dragged across my neck and collarbone, sucking at the skin there. Not wanting to be obviously bruised, I tried to angle myself so that he'd bring his lips back up to me, but he wouldn't be deterred. In fact, I was fairly certain I'd just egged him on.

Within seconds, my dress was pulled over my head, exposing my breasts to the cool air before he plunged his mouth over one. I gave a shocked yelp, but my hands automatically fisted themselves in the back of his hair. His tongue laved against the sensitive flesh there, making me release some of the corniest porn-like moans I'd ever heard.

I really didn't want him to move his mouth, but I wanted to feel his skin against mine. Trying not to squirm too much and upset my tattoo, I tugged on the collar of his shirt, hoping he'd get the idea. Luckily for me, my boyfriend was smart and didn't need to be told twice. Soon, his shirt joined my dress in a pile of our discarded clothing.

Instead of attending to my breasts as I'd hoped he would, Edward decided to explore new territory. Alice had been right. He was totally ready to jump me. My body shivered in delight at the thought and then shivered again as Edward began to move slowly down my body, kissing my stomach down to the spot on my hip where the tattoo began.

"Bella, this is... you are..." he stuttered. "Can I?" he asked, moving his fingers to the elastic band at the top of my underwear.

My temperature skyrocketed, and I was pretty sure my entire body was blushing. The burning feeling only intensified as I thought it over. Edward wanted to take off my undies? I was going to be fully naked for him? Oh. My. God.

Mistaking my hesitation for rejection, he shook his head and told me not to worry about it, that he didn't mean to pressure me, and that I could take my time. He must have been out of his fucking mind if he thought I didn't want what he wanted. I mean, yes, I was awkward as fuck and had no idea how to do this, but if Edward wanted to take charge, I wasn't planning on stopping him.

"No!" I protested as he began his ascent back towards my tits. "I mean..." Shit, I hadn't meant to oppose so fervently. Now I sounded like a massive whore. *Way to go, Bella.*

"No?" He raised his eyebrow in question.

"I mean, yes. Yes, you can... um... I want... that," I stuttered.

"Are you sure? I don't want you to do anything you're unsure about." His voice was so sincere; I just about melted into his bed. Or maybe that was the ocean flooding my panties. Who knew?

"Edward, believe me. I'm four thousand percent certain I want this." I blushed again as his cool fingers started to drag down my underwear. The panic started to surface again, so I started babbling, as I was wont to do in these kinds of situations. "It's just that I've never done this before, so I don't know what to do. Not that I have to *do* anything, right? I mean, I think I can just kind of lie in state, right? Oh my God, somebody please shut me up."

I had no idea why I felt the need to fill in the emptiness with my inane chatter, but I did. Edward didn't seem to mind, though, simply chuckling against my freshly bare skin... down there.

As my panties were tossed aside, Edward pushed my legs up, bending them at the knee. I felt so oddly exposed. We were over the blankets, so I could feel even the slightest movement against my wet flesh. As I propped myself up further, needing to see Edward's face, he made some sort of keening sound, like a horse dying or something.

"Is, um, everything okay?" I asked nervously.

"Everything is perfect," he groaned, placing a soft kiss just above my clit. I nearly jumped out of my skin. In the best way possible. Holy fuckballs. This was going to be good.

His tongue flicked out to slowly tease me, and I was already gone. My legs fell open, completely unable to stay upright during this kind of torture. He moved slowly, taking every one of my reactions into consideration. I'd never felt so adored. Or loved.

Unable to stop myself, my hands flew into his hair, urging him forward and telling him I was more than okay with what was going on. My hips fell into a rhythm with his tongue, undulating slowly and following his pace. It felt wet, but not sloppy wet. Like, just-right wet.

Guh. Stop saying wet. You're driving yourself crazy!

The heat in my body began to spread, turning my exposed skin a light shade of pink... everywhere. His fingers entered the mix, sliding into me with ease as his mouth continued its slow but effective torture. After that, I didn't last very long. The explosion came quick and hard, making me shudder and moan in delight. I could swear, my noises were so pornastic that I couldn't tell the difference between my own and Maggie Gyllenhaal's on the screen behind me.

I called out his name several times, along with some more exciting words, not knowing what else to say. My string of curse words seemed like the most appropriate response to the orgasm I'd just experienced. Edward's tongue might have even ruined Edward's fingers for me. *That* was how incredible it was.

My legs were completely still, and my body felt like lead, dead weight against the comforter. He crawled up slowly beside me with a wide grin on his face. I rolled towards him as he let his hand glide gently over the tattoo again.

"Thank you," I sighed, unable to come up with the perfect words to say. That worked as well as anything.

"No—" he leaned in and kissed my shoulder "—thank you. This..." He stroked the tattoo lightly. "... It's perfect, Bella. I can't see anything I don't like about you, either."

And despite our awkward fumbling and slower-than-anything progress, for the first time, I really believed him.

Chapter 24

Costume Conundrums

~Edward~

"Wake up, you sleepyhead!" I heard my annoying big sister call out before she flopped down on top of me. I had been quite comfortable and in the middle of a pretty fucktastic dream about Bella, so needless to say, I was a bit cranky.

"What the fuck, T? Why are you still here?" My arms and legs thrashed underneath her tiny form that was somehow managing to keep me pinned to my mattress.

She blew in my ear, a short, quick gust, before rolling off and letting me free. Stupid big sisters. I was far too old for this shit.

"I'm here because I'm about to head back home, and you're going to take me out to breakfast."

I groaned and finally opened my eyes, knowing the only way she was going to stop her incessant bouncing was if I got up and took her out.

"Come on, Teddy," she said with a glare. "I want a head start on my day and to be out of here by eight."

"Eight?" I croaked. As I tilted my head to the side, sure enough, there was Jasper sprawled out, still sleeping, and completely unaware of my crazy sister's need to wake me with the birds.

A low groan came from the other side of the room. "If y'all don't hightail it out of here right now, I'm going to go ninja on your asses."

Oops. Apparently Jasper was *not* still sleeping.

With a quick apology, I rolled out of bed and slipped my feet into some sneakers before heading out the door, still half asleep.

Tanya ruffled my hair, commenting on my breakfast attire, and led us to her jeep. Wind whipped through my hair as we drove down the narrow road away from the camp, waking me slightly.

I wasn't fully awake until I'd had a huge cup of coffee, though. And Tanya was kind enough to tell the waitress to keep refilling the cup. It wasn't too hard, seeing as the small diner's attendees consisted of a few townies and us.

"Oh-kay, Teddie," she began with an evil glint in her eye, "Let's talk Bella."

I groaned and took another large gulp of the watery coffee in front of me. I knew this conversation was coming, but I thought since I'd been able to put it off all yesterday, she might have forgotten about it. Clearly, I was wrong.

"What do you want to talk about?" I responded wearily.

Luckily, I was saved by the server, who interrupted our conversation, placing our food down on the table. My cheddar, tomato, and mushroom omelet was devoured quickly, accompanied by hash browns drenched in syrup.

"We need to talk about sex, Teddie."

Mid-swallow, I choked slightly, the potato suddenly feeling thick and rough going down my throat.

"I'm well aware of the how-to's of that, T," I choked out.

She rolled her eyes and sliced her fork through a thick piece of sausage before bringing it up to her lips and shoving it in her mouth. The imagery was enough to make me shudder.

"Oh, I don't doubt that for a second, little brother. But what we need to talk about is you and Bella and sex. It's going to happen today, so I just want you to be prepared."

"I... what?" I stuttered. "Tanya, seriously, we've only been together for a week... I think... maybe two. I don't know. Keeping track of time at camp is nearly impossible."

"Exactly!" she exclaimed, startling the elderly couple at the table behind us. I shrugged apologetically, but Tanya continued to ramble. "A week at camp is like a lifetime. Honestly, Teddie, I'm shocked. You, Emmett, and Jake became best friends within an hour of meeting each other. How long does that usually take in real life? Minimum, a month? So, if an hour of camp time equates to a month of real life time, you and Bella have already been dating for *years*. Believe me, sex is happening... and soon."

I couldn't find any flaws in her logic. And deep down, I knew she was right. We'd already exchanged, 'I love you's.' Bella's was etched into her hip for eternity, which, by the way, was one of the fucking hottest things I'd ever seen. The fact that she not only had remembered that was my favorite line but that I also thought it was the most romantic? Settling between her thighs was only a fraction of what I'd actually wanted to do. I'd say we were ready.

"Teddie!" Tanya snapped her fingers in front of my face, bringing my attention back to her. "Good lord, child, where did you just go?" I opened my mouth to speak, but she held up a hand to stop me. "Never mind, I don't actually want to know. What I want to know is if you are going to be safe."

"Jesus, Tanya, are you fucking serious?" I could feel my pulse pounding behind my ears, my frustration rising with each second my sister stared blankly at me. Finally, she cracked and started giggling.

"Edward," she sighed. "I don't know what I'm going to do with you. Look at you, having feelings and falling in love. But you always find one thing to deny. It's because you're an over-thinker. But, then again, so is Bella. Your fatal flaws. It'll kill you both, I swear. I don't know what you'd do if you didn't have me. I did some recon and learned that your girlfriend is on the pill, so... if you're clean..."

My mouth hung agape, and my cock perked up at the images of sliding into Bella. "How the hell do you find out this shit?" I whispered, looking around conspiratorially.

"Rose tells Emmett everything, and Emmett tells Jake everything. And Jake loves his pillow talk."

I barked out a laugh at that thought. "Your pillow talk with my douche of a best friend consists of what contraception options there are for me and my girlfriend?"

She shrugged and flagged down our waitress for the bill. "It came up." She paused, biting her lip and scratching the back of her head, like I always did when I was thinking about something uncomfortable. "Jake's just worried about Bella," she whispered. "He talks big game, but you know he's a marshmallow underneath that ridiculous male bravado. Bella's his little sister, practically. And you two gave him quite the scare the other night."

"The other night?"

"In the lake?" Oh, right. That. "He was flipping out, saying, 'don't those two know that condoms aren't effective under water?' and some other bullshit. Then, he tells me, 'I know Rose told Emmett she's on the pill, but that's not a hundred percent effective either!' You know, it's kind

of useful having a slutty friend, really. That boy knows far too much about birth control and STD prevention. Although, I guess in this case, it was kind of handy, no?"

Creepy as the conversation might have been, I couldn't get my newly acquired information to stop running through my head. I was on a sudden high, which may have been due to the mass quantities of caffeine running through my bloodstream, but I'd also bet it was a little bit in part because my girlfriend was on the pill. And now, all I could think about was sex. This was going to be a problem.

Still in a daze, I watched on as Tanya left money on the table and headed out to her car. I glanced at the clock on the center console, seeing it was only 7:37. Something in my gut told me it was going to be a long ass day.

X-X-X

"Counselors, please stay in the dining hall for a quick staff meeting following breakfast," the director announced loudly from the corner table.

Well, I knew what that meant. I waited patiently as the campers filed out of the room, chatting excitedly. They knew what that announcement meant as well. Oh well, at least the directors were consistent.

The director cleared his throat and began his spiel about what was to take place for the rest of the day.

Special Day.

"As most of you know, today is Special Day," he began. "This means that all your activities are canceled for the rest of the day. For those of you who are new to Long Lake and have no idea what I'm talking about, Special Day is a day reserved for the kids to let loose and have a good time. We turn the camp into a fair of sorts, led by all of you. We'll be setting up booths all along the hill and dividing you all into teams. The team with the most tickets at the end wins an ice cream social. This year's theme is movies, and I've posted a list of the team captains and their members in the counselor lounge for you all. It's up to the team captains to pick their movie and come up with costumes before the first period. Now, get to it. And have a very special day."

I glanced at the table next to me, but Jake had already bounded up from the table, most likely on his way to the counselor lounge. He had an undying love for Special Day. As did everyone, really. It was a day of too much food, sun, costumes, and cheating. So much cheating. The counselors were definitely the worst offenders of stuffing their teams' bags with extra tickets.

As a squealing Alice pulled Bella out of her seat and towards the counselor lounge, I decided to follow, knowing I'd have very little time to put together whatever costume I needed. Upon entering, Jake turned around, fuming and pointing a large hulking finger towards me.

"You!" he cried.

I stumbled backwards, bracing myself for impact, but it never came.

"I... I..." Jake fumbled his words, searching desperately but getting progressively more frustrated.

"What?" I asked, getting annoyed. "T-t-today, Junior."

"You!"

Apparently that was the only word Jake was currently capable of getting out.

"Oh," Emmett laughed, clutching his stomach. "This is priceless."

"What?" I asked, anger starting to infiltrate my tone.

"You're the team captain," Emmett chortled. "Shotty being Han Solo!" he said, raising his hand into the air.

"Wh-huh?"

My head was reeling. They made me captain? Who else was on my team? Jake had always been chosen as the captain.

Ohhhh, now this makes sense as to why he's all stuttery with the words.

"Fuck yes!" I shouted, my mind finally catching up with the matter at hand. "Okay, so who else is on the team? Because I'm definitely being Anakin."

My eyes scrolled down the list.

Captain: Edward Cullen

Jake Black

Rosalie Hale

Emmett McCarty

Bella Swan

Jasper Whitlock

Was this some kind of joke? I looked around, wondering if I was being Punk'd or something, but all I saw were the bright and shining faces of my best friends.

"What team is Alice on?" I asked, still unsure of the truth of the situation.

Jasper rolled his eyes. "She's on the team with all the theater girls. She's being little orphan Annie."

"So, does that mean I get to be Padme?" Bella smiled mischievously.

I nodded and grinned, pulling her into my arms so that I could kiss the top of her head. One of my biggest fantasies was about to happen for real, and my light saber was extended, glowing,

and ready for battle.

X-X-X

"I don't think I can do this, Edward," Bella whined from behind my closed bathroom door.

I chuckled and pulled my black robe closed, tying it off at the waist. "That was all the costume closet had, MB. If it doesn't work, you could always use that huge brown coat they had and be Queen Amidala instead..." I trailed off, knowing that she'd never take up that option considering the weather was about to reach ninety degrees in the sunshine.

"Fuck you very much, Edward. I can hear you laughing from here."

I leaned my head against the door and placed my hand around the doorknob. Everyone else was waiting on her to finish getting ready. Rosalie and Emmett looked like replicas of Leia and Han Solo, while Jasper had straightened his normally wavy hair into the perfect 1970's Mark Hamill coif to be Luke Skywalker. Jake had taken the most cajoling, finally agreeing to be Obi Wan, even though all he wanted was to be Yoda. Yes, my six-foot-seven, massive best friend wanted to be a midget muppet. Such a freak. And of course, typical me had four toy light sabers lying around my room. True Story.

"Come on, LB," he shouted, straightening his white robe. He looked more like Mr. Miagi with a light saber than Obi Wan, but I wasn't going to piss him off anymore than he already was. "Time's a-wasting. We have to be at the head of campus in ten minutes!"

Finally, the door cracked open, and I saw what all the fuss was about. My jaw loosened, unable to stay closed as she emerged from the small room. Bella had found a white top that showed off her entire stomach and white dance pants to wear as Padme. And, fuck. She looked... *unf*. My girlfriend was ridiculously hot. I could see a faint outline of her tattoo if I looked hard enough, which was enough to make my cock perk up and take notice. Her hair was tied up in a complicated mess of loops and twirls and a silver cuff on her arm was all topped off by a large black machine gun.

"Whoa!" Emmett cried, wrapping a large arm around Bella's shoulders. "Someone's looking *bad ass* today."

She groaned, her brown eyes searching out mine before she crashed her forehead into my chest. "I look stupid," she mumbled into the thick cotton of my robe.

My hands trailed lightly up and down her bare back, making sure not to dip too low in the presence of her very large and very threatening big brother figures standing behind her. "Bella," I whispered, leaning down so that only she could hear me. "You look so far from stupid right now. All I want to do is kick everyone out and pull that costume off slowly... with my teeth."

She giggled and looked up, her chin resting softly against my chest. I stared at her, wanting so badly to kiss her and ravage her, but I knew we had to go. A fierce clap to my shoulder pulled me from my stupor, shaking me away from my fantasies.

"Come on, Anakin," Rosalie said with a roll of her eyes. "You don't whisper as softly as you think you do, and I'm pretty sure you're going to be massacred before you even get the chance to grow up into Darth Vader if we don't get a move on." She smirked and smacked Bella's ass, pushing her crotch into my fully hardened cock. *Awesome.*

The rest of the morning passed by quickly, the sun growing stronger with each passing hour. For the first time in my career at Long Lake, I could do whatever I wanted during Special Day. Seth had so gallantly offered to film, so I just floated from booth to booth, helping out whenever someone needed an extra hand. Still, even with my minimal involvement, by the time lunch came around, we were all ready to pass out. Bella grabbed me a plate, and we walked through the outdoor cookout line slowly behind the campers. I may or may not have spent most the time checking out Bella's ass in her white pants. But, I mean, come on... it was right there.

After grabbing two hot dogs, corn on the cob, a bunch of chips, and three slices of watermelon, I followed Bella to a spot on the hill under a large tree where our fellow team leaders were communing in the shade.

I loved cookout days.

As Rosalie picked at her grilled chicken and speared a few pieces of lettuce, Bella dug into her own hot dog, her plump lips wrapping around the thick pink meat.

Thick pink meat? Are you serious right now?

I chewed, barely tasting my own food as I watched her with interest.

"Mm," she moaned, her eyes closing briefly in appreciation for the food she was chewing.

Swallow.

Her eyes shot open, locking onto mine, and her cheeks flushed crimson. My filter had completely broken, and I'd definitely spoken my innermost thoughts out loud. Undeterred, Bella followed my command, never breaking our gaze as she let the food slide down her throat.

"Enough with the food porn, you two!" Jake berated us. "There are campers present! And I'm gonna yak if you don't tone it down."

"Oh, please," Bella retorted, "like you don't do inappropriate things in front of campers all the time? And yak away. You did three summers ago, too. Remember... the whoopie pie eating contest?"

Jake groaned and clutched at his stomach, dramatically doubling over. "Don't remind me."

"Rematch?" Emmett laughed, holding up the large cream-filled cookie.

Rosalie and Jasper looked on quizzically, so Bella launched into a retelling of the Special Day of 2006 when Emmett had challenged Jake to a whoopie pie eating contest. Jake had claimed he could win, hands down. Needless to say, Emmett had been the victor, and Jake had spent the

rest of the night puking up the sugary treat behind Bunk Seven. To this day, he still couldn't look at one without turning a little green.

"That's disgusting," Rosalie chided, side-eyeing Emmett, who had just promptly stuffed the cookie into his mouth.

"Thorry." His words came out muffled, crumbs escaping from his lips as he grinned.

Shaking my head, I dug back into my food and picked up a watermelon slice. The sweet fruit felt cool in my mouth; it was the perfect day for watermelon. The juice ran down my fingers as I finished the last few bites, but I couldn't bear to waste any of my favorite fruit. My tongue swiped up the remaining stickiness from my fingers before I placed the rind down on my plate. I was thrown back into memories of yesterday afternoon when I'd tasted Bella for the first time. I chuckled, realizing that I hadn't wasted any of that wetness either. God, I was a sick horny fuck.

I looked up, ready to converse again, but the entire group was silent.

"What?" My hand brushed across my mouth, wondering if I'd gotten the juice all over my face, but I felt nothing there.

"Dude," Emmett croaked out, "You just molested that piece of watermelon. What did it ever do to you?"

"Huh? I did not..."

"You so did," Rosalie cackled. "What were you thinking about just then, hm?"

My face heated, a blush spreading over my ears, Jasper style. I shut my eyes tightly, willing it to subside, but it wasn't going anywhere.

"Oh my God," Bella mumbled, pulling her knees up to her chest and dropping her head into her hands.

"I didn't..." I grappled with my words, trying to figure out a way to tell them that I really just loved watermelon, but every explanation required the words "juice," "wet," "sweet," and "delicious." Somehow, I didn't see them being able to desexualize those words. Especially in the current context.

Unable to convince them otherwise, I shrugged my shoulders and picked up my second slice, moaning like a porn star with my first bite.

"Edward!" Bella whisper-yelled, scootching close enough to me to jab her elbow into my side.

"What?" I grinned, winked, and took another large bite.

"You're incorrigible, and I hate you." Sighing, she laid her cheek to the top of her knees, glancing up at me through her lashes.

"No you don't. You love me." My eyes settled on her mouth, which had upturned into a small smile, and I instinctively leaned forward, but she turned her head away, hiding her face away from me. "Bella," I whined, sounding only slightly like a petulant child. "I just want a little kiss. Please?"

Her head snapped up, and I received a dirty glare. *Oops.*

"We're in the middle of campus, Edward. I don't really want to get fired with only three weeks left."

She was right. I'd forgotten we were completely surrounded by not only our fellow counselors, but also hoards of campers, as well as the camp directors. Maybe kissing right now wasn't in our best interest. Although, now that I was thinking about it, it had been too long since I had kissed her. I wanted to remedy that immediately, but I couldn't.

My cock took notice of her outfit for the trillionth time that day and sprung to life, making me wish that I could take a flaccid pill or something. I really didn't want to be blue balling it for the next four hours until Special Day was over.

Just then, the overhead system rang with chimes, signaling the second half of Special Day starting.

Groaning, I pushed myself up to standing and grabbed my plate and hers, spotting the closest trashcan to toss them into. As I turned around, I caught Jake stripping off his robe and heading towards the dunking booth, cheering as he went. Emmett and Rosalie had gone off to start up the cotton candy machine again, but Jasper and Bella were waiting under the same tree, discussing something heatedly.

"Hey guys, what's shaking?"

Bella turned around, flustered and blushing.

"Just do it, B-Town," Jasper egged on, finishing up whatever they'd been arguing about. "I'll cover for you."

Confused, I looked to Bella, who was shifting from foot to foot, seriously contemplating something. My eyes then slid to Jasper, who had a cocky grin plastered across his face, and I wasn't sure I liked the look of it.

"Don't you have to man the face painting booth?" I pried, wondering why we were still awkwardly chillaxing under the tree.

"Jasper does," Bella began tentatively, but didn't say anymore. Widening my eyes, I urged her to continue. "He offered to take over the booth for me if we wanted to, um..." She crossed her arms in front of her bare stomach, her eyes averting mine suddenly.

"Get out of here," he jumped in. "You two seem like you may need some time alone, and tonight is bunk bonding so we can't see the girls, and I really don't want to put up with your sexually

frustrated whiney ass all night. So, please. For my sake, go."

I stared at Bella, her face getting progressively pinker under my gaze and her lip splitting under the stress of her nervous chewing. Did she seriously think I was going to say no to this?

"You're sure?" I asked, my eyes seeking out Jasper's.

"Be gone!" he said with a wave of his hand.

"Come on," I whispered, leaning down to Bella's ear. "Don't make me beg."

A slow grin spread across her face, and she nodded, letting me take the lead. "So, where are we going?"

With the whole camp distracted by the fair, there were ample places for us to wander off to. But, I decided we should still go for comfort and seclusion. No need to be pointlessly uncomfortable.

I began walking down the hill, off towards my bunk. As soon as we were out of eyesight, I grabbed her hand, interlacing her fingers with mine. The walk to the bunk felt long, considering the weather and the stealthy nature of our escape, but we spent it in comfortable silence, enjoying the feel of one another's skin brushing with each swing of our arms.

The sun beat down on us, and I finally took notice of how hot I'd been in my costume. Once there, I pushed open the door, glad to be in the cool of the bunk and discarded my black robe quickly, placing it on my bed. It left me shirtless, but I figured Bella wouldn't really care. Plus, it had been like ninety fucking degrees outside, maybe eighty-five in the shade.

Groaning, Bella laid out on the bed, stretching out and looking like a goddess on top of my super non-nerdy Transformers sheets. Equally exhausted, I kicked off my flip-flops and lay down next to her, pulling her securely to my side.

"Edward," she sighed, glancing over her shoulder, her complicated mess of braids brushing against my jaw and tickling it softly.

"Hmm," I mumbled, my eyes closed.

"Please tell me you didn't bring me back to your bunk to nap."

"But I'm so fucking tired," I groaned, burying my nose into her hair.

Suddenly, her hand slid its way under the waistband of my pants and wrapped around my cock.

"Your light saber didn't get the memo," she giggled, humming the first few bars of the *Star Wars* theme. I was in nerd heaven.

"Fuck, I love you," I said appreciatively, moving over her on the mattress, one knee on either side of her legs. Her responding grin was all I needed to lean down and finally place my lips on

top of hers. Immediately, her hands were in my hair, tugging and pulling me closer.

"I love you, too," she mumbled in between our heated kisses.

Clothes were shed quickly as we parted every few seconds to remove another item. First her pants and shoes, then my shorts, then her top.

I leaned back, appreciating her body. Every inch of her was gorgeous, from her thick hair to her dark eyes to her perfect tits. We were getting dangerously close to being completely naked together for the first time. All that needed to happen was the removal of both our underwear. And I wasn't sure if this was what she wanted or if I was the one leading and she was just following suit.

"What?" she whispered, her eyes clouding over with confusion at my hesitance.

"We don't have to—"

"Shut up, Edward," she replied emphatically, wrapping her legs around my waist, causing my cock to grind into her soaked crotch.

"Jesus, MB," I groaned as her hands fisted in my hair again, pulling my lips down to nip just under her ear.

Not needing any further encouragement, I slid my hands down her sides and hook into the waistband of her underwear. Her small hands gripped at the back of my neck as her hips lifted, allowing me to remove the last piece of clothing from her body. My eyes immediately sought out her tattoo, which—as I should have expected—still sat proudly on her hip. When it was completely healed, I was going to spend a lot of time worshipping it.

Despite being inside the cool, darkened bunk, Bella was breathing heavily, as if the air was thick. Maybe it was. I know I could feel my nerves starting to creep up on me. I'd never had performance anxiety before, but I'd also never had a girlfriend before, and I certainly had never had sex with someone I'd loved before. It was making me question everything.

But, as soon as Bella's hands slid down my back to pull my boxers off, I forgot it all. The only thing I could focus on was the feel of her gentle hands, and my cock resting against the smooth skin of her thigh.

My head lowered to kiss her lips again, but as I did so, my cock moved, too, trying to make its way inside her without either of our permission.

She gasped softly, but her legs only widened further, her invitation clear.

If this was really going to happen, which at this point was pretty inevitable, I needed a condom ASAP.

"Bella, are you sure?" I had to get some sort of reaffirmation. Silent cues weren't going to cut it today.

"Yes," she whispered.

Kissing her soundly one more time, I leaned down and reached under my bed where – yes, I'll admit it – I kept a strip of condoms. As I tore a packet off, her lips placed feathery kisses at my jaw and under my ear and her delicate fingers ran through my hair, scratching the scalp lightly with each pass. There was something so innocently perfect about it; it made my breath catch for a second.

She was so trusting and patient and incredible.

Not moving my position from over her, I tore the package open and shifted slightly to put the condom on. Once it was in place, I settled back between her legs and placed my tip at her entrance. I could feel her warmth radiating through the thin condom, and I couldn't help but groan and kiss her lips softly.

With a small nudge of her knees, Bella pushed me closer, causing my cock to part her lips. As slowly as I could, I moved within her. There was no hymen to break, but she was still tight as fuck. Her walls squeezed my cock in a vice grip, warmth and wetness strangling it as they pulsed wildly. I'd never experienced anything quite so intense, and my head dropped down to her shoulder, my breath coming in harsh pants as I tried to keep my shit together.

"Bella," I groaned out, and I could feel her fingers tighten in my hair. Blood pounded in my ears; everything felt so raw, emotions coursing through me. I moved my hips a little, readjusting and going even deeper.

And it was then that I felt it—the wince.

I propped myself further up, trying to look at Bella, but her eyes were clenched shut, her fingers still tightly wound in my hair. It wasn't the face of a girl in the throes of pleasure, that was for sure.

"Bella?" I spoke softly, moving one of my hands to stroke her cheek gently.

Her eyes fluttered open, and I could see fear in them. *No, no, no. Abort, abort!* My mind was screaming at me.

"What's wrong?"

She bit her lip and shook her head.

"N-nothing," she whispered. "Y-you can g-go more."

"No, Bella, I can't... you... You're in pain."

A long shuddering breath escaped her lips, but as she twitched, she clenched around me, inadvertently reigniting my erection, still buried inside her.

"It's not that bad." She paused and took a deep breath before pulling my neck towards hers and kissing me gently. "Please? Just slowly?"

Her eyes seemed so earnest; I couldn't refuse her. And let's be honest, my cock was pretty much having a spiritual moment, meeting its other half and all that nonsense. So, I had no choice but to listen. I didn't want to offend her by stopping, and my dick couldn't bear the thought of pulling out anyway.

Groaning, I moved forward again, sliding back and forth as slow and controlled as I could manage. But that could only last so long. As Bella's hands slid further down my back, my speed picked up a bit, needing the faster pace to finish.

"Fuck, Bella." Words spilled out of my mouth without control or hesitation. It was beyond anything I'd ever experienced. My momentum built until my climax hit me, stopping my movements completely before twitching and releasing into the condom.

I knew Bella hadn't come, but I also vaguely remembered that was normal. As I pulled out, I whispered that I loved her, knowing the words were cheesy, but I couldn't stop them from escaping, either.

"Love you, too," she said with a soft kiss to my shoulder, her hands finally releasing their sturdy grip on my dampened skin.

~Bella~

I laid on the bed, unable to move as Edward got up and discarded the used condom into the trashcan. I'd just had sex. I'd lost my virginity; it was over now. Everyone had told me that a girl's first time could hurt, but you got used to it pretty quickly and it ended up being good.

Well, those people were liars. Or had loose vaginas, whatever.

As Edward had pushed inside me, I'd felt like I was being torn apart from the inside. A fire blazed where the cuts were initiated, and the only way I could think to dispel some of the pain was to clench my eyes and my fists—anything to put the tension elsewhere. It hadn't worked. Not at all.

In fact, even with Edward removed, I was still in a whole shitload of pain. When he'd paused and asked me if I was okay, I couldn't bear to diminish the look of awe and happiness on his face, so... I lied. Sue me, okay? I lied to my boyfriend so that he'd continue to have sex with me, even when all I'd wanted to do was *beg* him to stop.

Ugh.

This wasn't how I'd imagined this to be at all.

Feeling hesitant and unsure, I asked Edward if I could use his shower. I didn't really need it. After all, he'd been the one doing all the work while I just cringed in shock. But I needed to cleanse and wipe away the pain, soothe it in any way I knew how.

"Do you want any company?" he asked, eyeing my naked form.

I placed my hands on his shoulders and kissed his smirking lips tenderly. "Not right now, if that's okay."

He nodded and waved me off to the bathroom, and I was grateful for the escape. Each step stretched and burned, tearing the cuts deeper and further with every small movement. I reached for the shower dial and turned it as high as it would go, steaming up the room quickly.

After locking in the door, I stepped in and let the water pelt down my back, the burn of the water nothing compared to the burn I still felt between my legs. Confused and in pain, I let out a choked sob, thankful that the heavy fall of water was able to cloak the sound of my tears.

My head fell forward, and my eyes trained themselves on the ground. I nearly fainted at the small river of pink swirling down the drain. Had I... Was I? Reaching a hand down, I realized that, yes, I was bleeding. I'd been stretched too far, despite being more than ready for him. I needed to get some clothes on and get out of there, preferably where I could curl into fetal position and be left to cry in peace.

I shut the shower off and grabbed a towel, drying myself off thoroughly and gently, careful not to pat too harshly between my thighs. I cringed again at the light pink coating of blood mixed with my own arousal that appeared on the light blue towel.

Carefully, I slipped on my uniform t-shirt and shorts, which were still in the bathroom from me changing into costume earlier, not bothering to go out and ask for my underwear. I had no inclination to hang out for a while. I just wanted to get clothed and get the hell out of there.

When I got back to Edward's room, he was lying back on his bed, his eyes closed and a small smile gracing his lips. I wondered if it was true what everyone said—did all guys fall asleep after sex? At least he'd put some pants on first.

Testing the theory, I made my way over to the side of the bed and leaned over to kiss him goodbye. His lips moved under mine lethargically, and his hands trailed up my back to keep me from standing upright again.

"Stay," he mumbled.

Even though I wanted to book it out of there as fast as possible, I couldn't bring myself to leave. I'd do anything for the boy in front of me.

Sighing, I climbed onto the bed, curling up beside him. His knees touched the backs of mine, and his arm draped across my stomach, pressing my back to his chest. My boy was a cuddler. Usually, I found it to be sweet, but now it felt the smallest bit oppressive, the midday heat starting to seep through the cabin walls and through the windows.

The sting between my legs dulled to a low ache with my legs pressed tightly together. And after a few minutes of slow inhales and exhales, I found myself drifting off into slumber.

A sharp shriek pulled me from my sleep, jolting me awake immediately.

"It smells like sex in here," Alice squealed, hopping from one foot to another.

Edward's arm pulled me closer, and I could feel his nose rub against the back of my head. "Ignore her and maybe she'll leave."

"Also, there's a condom wrapper on the floor," she said, completely monotone.

Edward stiffened behind me, and I groaned into the pillow. "No there's not," he said, and I could practically see his adorably confused face. "I threw that..."

Alice's wide grin stopped Edward short, and he flopped back onto the pillow behind me.

"Alice, stop tricking my boyfriend into telling you things. It's not nice."

She bit her lip and nodded solemnly, leaning back into Jasper, who'd come into the room behind her. "Of course. You'll be telling me everything as soon as we leave."

I sighed, not particularly wanting to talk about it right now, but I shrugged in acceptance anyway.

"Also," she continued matter-of-factly, "when have I ever claimed to be nice? Now, come on, you guys slept through dinner, and, LB, we need to be back on campus for bunk bonding in fifteen minutes."

Groggily, I pushed myself upright. We needed to be back in fifteen minutes? And we'd slept through dinner? That meant that we'd been napping for almost four hours. Crap.

"Say your goodbye, and let's get a move on." She clapped her hands at me, as if I were a dog, and my irritation started to grow.

Edward sensed my annoyance and ran a comforting hand up and down my back. "I'll see you at breakfast, okay?" I nodded, an uncomfortable knot appearing in my stomach.

"Love you." I leaned in for a quick kiss and blushed at his, "Love you, too."

As I got up from the bed, I couldn't help but wince again. You know when you have chapped lips and they chap so bad that they bleed? And then they heal and you're all excited, but then you go out in the cold again and they chap twice as badly, slashing your lip open all over again? Yeah, that had just happened... except with my vag.

A searing pain ripped through me with my first step, and it was so painful, I thought I would fall over.

I bit my lip, stifling any noise that would alert Edward of my discomfort, but Jasper saw. His eyebrow rose as he looked me up and down, but I simply rolled my eyes back at him.

Alice, oblivious, linked her arm through mine and led us out the door with a wave and a blown kiss. As soon as we were out the door, her interrogation started.

"How did this happen? Were you guys planning this? All of a sudden, you were just gone, and then I walked in there, and I just knew. Never have I ever seen that boy looking so content. And look at you, my LB, all grown up and welcome to the joyous world of sex!"

Alice paused and took a good look at me.

"Or not. What's up with the sad face, child? You don't look so joyous."

"I don't feel so joyous," I admitted. "I... I don't know what I'm feeling."

Alice nodded in understanding, and for once in her life, left me the fuck alone.

Back in my bunk, my girls were going crazy. Too much soda and cotton candy had revved them up far past the point of what I wanted to or could deal with at the moment. I felt like a shitty mom, but my head was spinning too fast for me to keep up with them.

As they played a rousing round of Nick, Nick, Kevin Jonas! (their fabulously creative version of duck, duck, goose), I slipped on my comfiest pair of cotton undies, pajama pants, and a wife beater.

Andie was the first to grab my hand and pull me towards them as soon as I was changed. "Come on, Bella! Come play with us."

I smiled happily and asked Rachel and Vicky to make room for me in the circle. What I hadn't prepared myself for, though, was sitting cross-legged on the hard wooden floor of the cabin. I couldn't stop the pained whimper from escaping as I took my spot, and soon all my girls hushed, looking at me with worried faces.

"Are you okay?" Rachel asked nervously.

I nodded, trying to swallow around the lump that had formed in my throat.

"You don't look okay," Danielle pushed. My group of thirteen-year-olds weren't idiots, and they knew I wasn't okay. I just needed to skirt around it as best as I could and put on a happy face.

"I'm fine. I just hurt myself a little bit during Special Day. You guys know how that happens."

The six girls nodded in agreement, but I could still see the hesitancy on their faces.

"How about we play Apples to Apples tonight?" I asked, pulling the box from under my bed.

They cheered loudly, still hyped up on sugar, but I was grateful that I'd been able to convince them to bond over a game that required sitting down. Thank God.

"You can sit on my bed if you want," Vicky suggested, and I actually took her up on it, thanking her immensely. She then plopped down between my legs and asked if I would french braid her hair. Happy for the distraction, I complied without hesitation. Also, the little thing had the most gorgeous thick red hair I'd ever seen, and I couldn't resist playing with it, either.

After a few hours, the girls began yawning, and I knew they were about to crash. As I stood up to let Vicky get into bed, the same crippling pain ran through my body, and I hissed at the pain.

"Bella," Andie whispered, tugging on my hand, "you should go to the infirmary and let them check you out."

"No, no, I'm fine," I assured her.

"Please? Just see if they can give you some medicine or something?"

It wasn't a bad idea, actually. I had no painkillers in the bunk, and the infirmary could give me some Aleve liquid gels and then send me on my way.

"Okay," I acquiesced, and a large smile spread across my campers' faces. Apparently, they'd all been worried about me.

After alerting their night duty that I was going to the infirmary, I made my way slowly to the little hut located just off the main campus drag. I knocked on the door tentatively, not wanting to wake any sleeping patients potentially in the beds there. The night nurse came to the door and opened it quickly with a large smile.

"Hey there, sweetheart, what can I do for you?"

I edged into the brightly lit room slowly and shifted uncomfortably. "Um, I was wondering if I could have some painkillers? Like Advil or Aleve or anything?"

She nodded, her grey eyes looking me up and down. "What seems to be the problem?"

How did I begin this one? I didn't think I could actually tell her that I'd very painfully lost my virginity and was experiencing what I thought could be a broken vagina. Crossing my arms, I whispered, "F-feminine problems?"

I hadn't meant it as a question, but she nodded just the same. Her pink scrubs made a comforting noise as they brushed against themselves as she bustled around, looking for pills in the cabinets behind her. She turned around quickly and put her finger up.

"On a scale of one to ten, where would you rate your pain?"

I chuckled without humor. "A fifteen?"

Her eyes went soft before she quickly turned around and poured three large blue pills into a small white paper cup. "What was the last thing you ate, sweetie?"

"Crap, um... I had a hot dog and some potato salad for lunch..." My stomach rumbled at the thought of food, and her eyes turned from soft to admonishing.

"How can you take care of your girls if you don't take care of yourself?" she asked rhetorically. "Don't you know that you should be eating low-sodium foods during your period? Salt increases water retention and worsens cramps." Shaking her head, she reached down and opened the door to a small refrigerator. She handed me a small container of applesauce, a banana, and a juice box. "This is all I have, so it'll have to do."

I thanked her, grateful for the semblance of a meal and downed all three things in record time. With a small smirk, she handed the pills and a small glass of water to me, which I also knocked back quickly.

"Darling, there's an open bed in the back if you want to use it. I know how hot and uncomfortable your cabins can be, and we're lucky enough to have air conditioning in here."

Air conditioning and a real bed sounded like absolute heaven to me, and I couldn't resist the temptation of staying overnight. I never had as a camper, but I'd kind of always wanted to. There was something a little homey and comforting about the infirmary.

"Are you sure?" I didn't want to push.

"It'll be just you and me here tonight. I'm absolutely positive. Just give me your name so I can let the head of night duty know where you are, and I'll call it in on the walkie."

I wrote down my name on a piece of paper for her, thanked her again, and headed down the hallway towards a small yellow room. The covers of the bed were cool, and the sheets calmed me down as I slipped between them, burrowing myself away from the rest of the world.

It wasn't as if my feelings for Edward had changed suddenly; they hadn't. But, I'd heard that having sex was supposed to bring people closer together, and I couldn't even bear the thought of being touched at the moment. Was I some sort of freak? I should have been ecstatic, but I just wasn't.

With a flick of the lights, I shrouded myself in darkness, curling up and letting the painkillers work their magic as I drifted off to sleep.

x-x-x

I awoke the next morning to the sound of low humming and pills being placed in a cup by my head. Assuming it was the nurse, bringing me more painkillers, I was confused when I heard the door shut and felt someone sit on the edge of my bed. I was even more confused when I felt a small prickling up and down my arm, the result of someone trailing their fingertips up and down the skin there.

"Edward?" I croaked, cracking an eye open. There, sitting on the edge of the bed with an apparent frown creasing his face, was my boyfriend. "Am I dreaming?"

"You should have told me you were sick, Bella."

Sleepily, I scooted backwards in the bed, making room for Edward to lie down facing me on the mattress.

"I'm not sick."

"You're in the infirmary. That's for sick people," he quipped.

"You're in the infirmary. Are you sick?" I replied. For having just been woken up, I was feeling pretty quick. Why *was* he in the infirmary? And was I really dreaming? I was still leaving that open as a viable option.

He held up his red and swollen finger, and I leaned forward and kissed it without any hesitation. "I got a splinter on my way out from breakfast just now. Someone fucked up the banister yesterday, and my finger took the brunt of it. Nothing a pair of tweezers and a kiss from you didn't fix completely." He paused and stared into my eyes, the intensity of it nearly making me gasp out loud. I felt naked. "Now, can you just tell me why you're here? Is it bad? Is that why you didn't want to tell me?"

"It's nothing rea—"

"Morning, sunsh—oh!" the nurse exclaimed, taking in the scene in front of her. I was under the covers and Edward was on top, but I'm sure it still looked pretty compromising. "Edward, what are you still doing here?"

"Visiting my girlfriend, Anne." Of course Edward was on a first name basis with the nurse.

"Well, that is just too sweet," she crooned, her eyes glazing over slightly as Edward unleashed a massive smile on her. "My husband was always too petrified of me to hang around when I was suffering from menstrual cramps. You're a better man than him!" She sighed and mumbled something like, "Not that I'm surprised," before clearing her throat and smiling widely. "I'll leave you two alone for a bit, but don't get too comfortable. First class starts in an hour."

The door clicked closed, and I released my nervous laughter. Edward didn't seem as amused.

"You don't actually have your period, do you?"

I bit my lip and shook my head. "No, I take the pill where I only get it four times a year so I don't have to worry about it during the summer... I..."

"So, what's wrong?" His hand brushed my hair away from my face, and his eyes looked pained as he waited for my answer.

"I'm okay, Edward." And as I said it, I finally realized the words were true. "I just wasn't prepared for—"

His face crumpled, the self-doubt and flagellation creeping up on him as I continued speaking.

"No, don't look like that." I placed my finger under his chin and kissed his lips. "I don't regret anything, Edward. It's just, I'm so in love with you, and I think I expected everything to be perfect and magical. But how realistic is that? We're not perfect and magical, Edward. We've been anything but that. We're uncomfortable and awkward and we pussy-foot around every issue we've ever had."

He finally cracked a smile at that. "We are pretty awkward."

I laughed, and as if on cue, my head tilted forward and smashed into his nose. He leaned back, grabbing his nose and nodded. "Point taken."

"But just because I think you broke my vagina doesn't mean I love you any less."

He scoffed. "Broke your vagina?"

"Mhm," I nodded, "with your monster cock. Obviously, my super tight snatch wasn't ready for all you had to give me."

Edward's eyes opened wide before he burst into giggles. Yes, the cutest little man giggles I'd ever heard. After he'd exhausted himself, his eyes turned serious again. "So, did I hurt you badly?"

I sighed. "Yes, I was in a lot of pain yesterday, and I haven't moved yet today so I don't really know what's going on there. But, I mean, I should have prepared myself for it. Did you realize it's only been a few days since you've been able to fit two fingers inside me comfortably?"

"God, Bella, I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize," I said sternly. "The pain doesn't matter. And just like with your fingers, we're going to get better with practice."

I didn't know where my self-assuredness was coming from, but the more I talked, the more I believed myself. And so did Edward.

"Right." A devilish smirk appeared on his face, and he leaned in to kiss me fiercely, awakening my arousal and making me whimper slightly.

I hit his chest with my fist and shook my head. "Not now..."

"Why not?" He moved his mouth to whisper just under my ear, and I shivered.

"Edward, we're in the infirmary!"

"So... ?"

Moving tentatively, I snuggled my head into Edward's chest and wrapped his arm around my shoulders. I wasn't nearly as sore this morning as I had been yesterday. Thank God those

painkillers had done their job.

"I can't believe I lost my virginity to you dressed as Anakin." I flushed and pressed my cheek into his shirt, inhaling his citric scent. I tilted my head upwards, wanting to kiss him, but his expression stopped me short. His eyes glowed with mischief, and I couldn't help but hit him again. "Please don't look at me like that."

"Why not?" He was quoting *Star Wars* to me. Dear lord, I was in nerd heaven.

"Because it makes me uncomfortable," I said defiantly.

"Sorry, my lady... my sweetest, now-deflowered Padme."

I frowned. "Heyyy, Ani definitely doesn't say that."

He nodded solemnly. "Yes, he does. I distinctly remember it."

And as we spent the next half hour debating movie quotes instead of harping on his apologies and my "injuries," I knew we were going to be okay.

Chapter 25 Messy Clean-Ups

~Bella~

Over the next three days, three important things happened.

First, Edward and I had sex again, and it was just as painful. Well okay, not *quite* as painful. But almost. We tried the following day because I had thought I was sufficiently healed. I was wrong. Edward and I agreed to meet during rest hour to continue our "practicing." After twenty minutes of making out and grinding against one another, I decided that I was ready to give it another go. Edward insisted on making me come first, and really, who was I to complain?

FLASHBACK

"Please, Edward," I whined, unabashedly reaching for his erection and placing it at my entrance. "I'm ready."

Gritting his teeth, he hissed and shook his head. "No, I'm not going to be that douche who blows his load in five minutes and leaves his girlfriend hanging."

His hand trailed down my bare stomach until his fingers were just barely pressing on my clit. I could literally feel it ache, my blood pulsing with each of my stuttering heartbeats. His hand remained hovering as his mouth descended on my neck, devouring my skin with his lavish kisses. My hips rocked upwards, trying in vain to get his hand to position itself where I wanted it most.

"Edwarddd," I groaned, and his head popped up, a devilish smile adorning his lips.

"Yes, MB?" he asked innocently.

Knowing I wasn't going to increase the pace of anything, I growled and relaxed back into his Transformers bedding.

He chuckled and finally slipped his fingers between my wet folds, sliding them into me slowly. My toes curled, and I couldn't help the small whimper that escaped my lips.

"That's right," he cooed. "You just relax and let Daddy take care of everything."

"Edward?" I squeaked out as his fingers began moving inside me.

"Hm?"

"Please don't refer to yourself as 'Daddy' ever again," I panted. "It's more than a little creepy. And my dad's a cop, and he'd have your balls in a jar for what you're doing to me right now."

"What am I doing to you right now?" His voice dropped as his fingers curled, and my body tensed, preparing itself for release. Suddenly he was gone, but when he reappeared, his mouth was on my clit, sucking gently. I climaxed immediately, my hands gripping at his hair as he continued to see me through my orgasm.

"My arms can't move," I groaned as his body moved back up mine until his face was hovering over mine again. He smiled widely, clearly proud of himself, and moved my arms to rest around his neck.

"You just rest them right there." His face turned serious. "I'll go slow, okay? And please, just say something if it hurts too much."

I nodded, and he grabbed his already condom-covered cock. How had I missed that one? It must have been rolled on during my post-coital state of oblivion. Just as he had promised, he pushed inside me slowly. But slow or not, I still felt a terrible burning sensation. I must have cringed or made a face because he paused immediately, asking if I was okay.

"It hurts a bit," I admitted.

"Do you want me to stop?" he asked, his face pained with his obvious effort of holding back.

"N-no," I stuttered. "It has to get better, right? I mean, your cock can't just be too big for me can it?" He started chuckling, but the laughter caused him to slip back and forth inside me ever so slightly, causing his chuckles to morph into groans and my chatter into pained hisses.

"Fuck, Bella, I don't want to hurt you. I'll stop."

I shook my head, biting my lip to hold in my cries.

"I should be able to have sex with my boyfriend. I want to have sex with you. Please, just... finish quickly. Are you close?"

"Of course I'm fucking close," he ground out. "My cock is currently inside the most gorgeous girl, who I'm in love with."

"Oh thank God," I breathed. "Please, come for me." Both our eyes widened, surprised by my quasi-dirty talk. And three painful pumps later, Edward finished, his eyes squeezing shut as he grunted my name.

As he called out, the pain started to dissipate, and I wondered if maybe this whole practicing thing wasn't a big sham after all. Maybe we could work up to what I'd heard all the fuss was about.

Rolling off me, he breathed out a soft, "I love you," before utilizing the remainder of rest hour to nap.

Second, I witnessed the most awkward scene of my entire existence, and I wasn't sure I'd ever be able to look at art supplies the same way ever again. I was exhausted and stressed, overthinking every second of my new physical advances, and I was a little sore, still. So, when Edward asked if I wanted to go back to his bunk with him during rest hour, I politely declined. He claimed that we could just watch a movie, but I knew that one thing would always lead to another, and distancing myself was probably the best move. So, instead of going back to the bunk, I decided I needed a relaxing hour in the Fine Arts room.

FLASHBACK

It had been a while since I'd sat down and drawn something for enjoyment, rather than teaching. And to be honest, putting on some music and losing myself in a sketchpad sounded like sheer bliss. After giving Edward a quick kiss goodbye, I headed from the front porch down the hill to the art shops.

As I approached the Fine Arts room, though, something looked amiss. The shades on the windows were closed, the lights clearly off inside the room, but the door was unlocked. It wasn't unusual for the door to be unlocked during rest hour, as all the campers were required to be in their bunks on campus, rather than roaming the campgrounds, but I was baffled as to why the thick wooden shades would be down and the lights would be off, unless Jasper had closed up the shop for the hour.

Perplexed, I reached for the handle and pushed it open. Nothing, however, could have prepared me for what came next.

In the darkness was a light. Well, several lights, actually. Glowing blobs of pink and yellow and green floated around, seemingly moving through the air in a glow in the dark dance against gravity. Curious, I turned on the lights and immediately wished I'd had the sense to turn them off again.

There, sprawled out over the table, completely naked – with the exception of a short pink tutu – was my best friend. Her arms and back were smeared in paint, flailing and silently dispersing piles of glitter. Behind her, equally naked – with the exception of cowboy boots and a hat – was my other best friend... and yes, his cock was definitely penetrating her from behind. They made no noise, other than the shudder-worthy sound of flesh slapping flesh and heavy breathing. Both their eyes were closed, as if in some meditative trance.

I stood there stunned, unable to move or speak or even comprehend what I was seeing until Alice's eyes conveniently flew open. "LB?" she asked, as if what I were witnessing was completely normal.

At Alice's words, Jasper spoke up, his eyes still firmly shut and his hips still... thrusting. "Al, we've talked about this," he said quietly. "I know you're attracted to her, but we need to have a threesome with someone who doesn't mean anything to either of us."

Alice bit her lip and flushed, ceasing eye contact with me as she let her head hang forward again. That seemed to be my breaking point. It sank in, what I was actually witnessing, and I let out a loud, "Oh my God!" before flicking the lights back off and slamming the door behind me.

Scarred for life, I ran to the shack, hoping to find Edward, but only Seth was inside. He looked at my face with wide eyes and hurriedly pulled out a chair, which I promptly collapsed onto.

"Um, Edward went back to his bunk," he began uncomfortably. "But are you okay?" I grimaced as images of paint and glitter and threesomes flittered through my head. Suddenly, a trashcan appeared at my feet. I looked up, confused. "You looked like you were going to be sick."

I groaned and let my gaze flicker between the black trashcan and Seth's concerned face. "Thanks. I don't think it'll come to that, though."

He nodded and leaned back in his chair. "You're welcome. So..." He trailed off, looking unsure. I knew he'd asked me for time and space, but Seth had become one of my closest friends and my confidante throughout this summer. And right now, I really needed him.

"I walked in on Jasper and Alice having sex!" I blurted out before clapping my hand over my mouth.

And just like that, the tension was broken. Seth's eyes narrowed for a millisecond before closing completely as he let out loud, stomach-clenching laughs. I couldn't help but join in, the sounds of our elated laughter echoing in the small shack.

"Do they have weird sex?" he asked after we'd quieted down, his hand scratching the back of his head. "They look like they'd have weird sex."

"The weirdest!"

I went on to tell Seth about everything I'd seen and heard—the glitter, the paint, the tutu, the cowboy attire, and the threesome talk. He made me pause every few seconds or so, asking me to clarify with more detail but really just asking to make me say it again. Ass. After I'd finished, I

realized how much I'd missed him, how much I'd missed our friendship. As the chimes signaling the end of rest hour rang, I became cognizant of the fact that I'd have to return to the scene of the crime and would probably have to talk it out with Jasper. Seth just shook his head and laughed as he helped me up from the chair, which I was now feeling extremely reluctant to leave.

"Hey, Bella?" he interjected softly, catching my attention.

"Yeah?"

"Despite everything—" he took a large breath and a step towards me, his arms crossing over his chest protectively "—I'm really happy for you."

Touched by the sincerity in his voice, I closed the gap between us and wrapped my arms around his waist, muttering a soft, "Thank you," into his solid chest. Tentative arms patted my back awkwardly before they softened into a warm embrace.

That brought me to today, to the last and most exciting piece of information—a new addition to the staff. But this wasn't any ordinary addition; this was something shocking. Our camp director had so kindly informed us that we had to be on our best behavior and make our new staff member feel welcomed because not only was she coming in with only three weeks left, but she was also his flesh and blood.

Since then, the counselors had been ablaze with gossip about the director's daughter's arrival. I could have cared less but... fresh meat was fresh meat, and every male was up in arms about her impending arrival, including my boyfriend and his best friends.

Their rationale was that they wanted to know if they should take her under their wing or not. I scoffed at their likely excuse. Despite my indifference to the topic, Rosalie had turned into our group spy, using her Southern charm to pry any knowledge of the new girl from our fellow staffers. I'd forgotten that the head swim counselor, Sandy, was the director's sister and therefore our new camper's aunt.

We were all gathered under the trees at my favorite spot, the Adirondack chairs. I was curled against Edward's side, my head resting against his chest, as the rest of my friends bickered and gossiped with excitement.

"So, let me get this straight," Emmett said. "She was class president and valedictorian of an all girls' Catholic prep school?"

Rosalie groaned in frustration. "Yes, Em, that's what I said. Stop being thick."

He chuckled and pulled her from the arm of the chair and into his lap. "I thought you liked that I'm thick." He winked, and the infallible Rosalie blushed. She fucking blushed.

Thank you, God. Because another image of my best friends fucking is exactly what I needed today.

"Emmett," she said in her most warning tone.

He simply chuckled again and pulled her closer. "No, I think it's more like... *Emmmmeeett*."

Hearing him moan out his own name was more than enough to have us all break into giggles. And it was enough to remind me that I maybe wanted to try having sex again with Edward today. Maybe.

"So, what I'm hearing," Jake interjected, "is that she's not our type."

"Why?" Jasper asked.

"Well, she went to some snooty prep school and was class president and bullshit. Not really someone I'd want to spend time with."

"Hey now!" Alice cried, leaping up from her seat to punch Jake in the arm. "I resent that! I went to some snooty prep school and you like me just fine." She stuck out her tongue and skipped back to her seat.

"Yeah, she could be your ideal girl, Jake." Edward's voice rumbled against my ear. "You don't know. Think about every schoolgirl movie you've ever seen—*Virgin Suicides*, *Cruel Intentions*, *Lost and Delirious*—they're always the kinkiest sexual deviants. Plus, they come with a uniform."

Jake pondered that for a moment, looking hopeful, before Rosalie spoke up again. "She's going to MIT." At that, his face fell, and we all burst into laughter again.

"What? You have to be a kinky sexual deviant to be in our group of friends?" I asked, sounding much meeker than I'd intended as my eyes flicked to Alice, who looked properly abashed.

Seeing my discomfort, Edward jumped in again. "Well, if you want to be with Jake, then, yes."

As we laughed the chimes rang, and we all began to disperse towards our classes. I linked arms with Edward, who kissed my forehead and whispered, "I miss you."

"I'm right here, Edward."

"Free period... movie in the shack?"

I smiled widely, which he returned, and broke my hold on him. I watched with wistful eyes as he headed down to the shack, leaving me to head into Fine Arts alone.

Jasper was already setting up for our class when I got there, busying himself with preparations, as he'd been doing for the past day and a half. He looked up at me quickly, giving me a half smile before looking back down at his hands and the papers he was distributing.

I didn't know what had gotten into me, but I'd had enough. "Jasper!" I snapped, causing him to stop what he was doing and gape at me instead. "This is ridiculous. Alice is pretending that nothing happened... why can't you? So, I walked in on you guys. It was an accident, and I've

totally forgotten about it already. Fine?"

His blank stare contorted into one of confusion and then of horror. "Wait, what? You walked in on me and Alice? When?" His voice was flustered, and his hands were flailing wildly, unfortunately reminding me of the scene I'd walked in on.

Uh... oops.

"You've been all weird for the past day. I just assumed that was why... because of all the weirdness and kinkery and, oh God, I'm so sorry."

"I..." Jasper paused and sat down on the closest bench, shaking his head from side to side. "I can explain?"

I shook my head quickly. "No, I really don't want to know. Honestly."

"Okay, good." His breath whooshed out of him, and I thought he was going to pass out from nerves. So, if that wasn't been the reason for his awkward/avoidy behavior, what was?

I had to know. "So, wait. Why have you been acting like a weirdo?"

"I think I peer pressured you into having sex." His words came out as one big jumble of sounds, and it took me a good ten seconds to comprehend what he had said. When the flash of awareness crossed my face, he continued. "I pushed you into something you weren't ready for, and then you got hurt. What kind of friend does that? I'm an ass."

"Wait, what?"

He sighed and rested his head in his hands, leaning forward on the table with his elbows. "I saw you. And then I heard you had to go to the infirmary. And I just feel really guilty."

I didn't know what to say. There was nothing I really *could* say. "Jasper, you didn't peer pressure me into anything. What happened was inevitable, and it was going to happen with or without your influence. Don't feel guilty... at all."

With a curt nod from Jasper, I could tell that the discussion was closed. I only hoped that he was able to see that I meant what I said. I couldn't believe he felt guilty. Who did that? I mean, *Edward* barely felt guilty, and he had to see me cringe whenever he stuck his dick in me. *Too graphic?*

The pitter-patter of little campers pulled me from my pondering, and I was able to immerse myself into teaching for the next few hours, excited for my afternoon date with Edward.

~Edward~

I smiled as the door swung open, and I let my roly chair angle towards the noise, revealing a grinning Bella. Her hair was falling out of a messy bun, dark tendrils curling around her ears, and her cheeks were flushed. Her eyes fell closed as she breathed in deeply, savoring the cool air-

conditioned breeze.

"Hey," I greeted her softly.

Her eyes fluttered back open and locked onto mine. In a sudden leap, Bella flung herself onto my lap, her thighs straddling mine and her arms perched on my shoulders. Her tongue snaked out for a millisecond, wetting her bottom lip, before retreating into her mouth and being replaced by her front tooth.

I groaned as my cock hardened beneath her. She had no idea how much that drove me crazy. Her eyes flicked down, and a satisfied smirk tried to spread across her face.

"Why, hello to you, too," she said, barely containing her giggles.

I loved seeing her this lighthearted. After the week we'd had, I needed to put more smiles on her face. No more crying, no more sighing, and no more cringing. That was the worst.

Egging her on, my fingertips crept across her waist, digging into her soft flesh and causing her giggles to erupt. My plan backfired, though, because it also caused her to squirm like a fish out of water directly on top of my new boner. Um, ouch—and more, please.

"Fuck, Bella," I groaned, the tone of my voice ceasing her movements immediately. Her head tilted back before coming closer, her lips joining with mine. "Mmm," I hummed, pleased that her lips were back on mine. This was the way we should always be.

Her mouth opened slightly, and I allowed myself the privilege of exploring her mouth with my tongue, savoring her taste. Her tongue pressed back, melding with mine in a torturously slow dance.

My hands moved from her waist to her thighs, making sure she wasn't going anywhere. She wasn't. Even when our lips parted and she pulled back, Bella kept her fingers in my hair, her nails scratching lightly on the back of my scalp.

"So, what are we going to watch?"

"Not sure. What are you in the mood for?"

I leaned to the side and pulled out another binder of DVDs I had lurking in the shack, letting her browse through her options.

"Comedy?" I asked as she passed my collection of Will Ferrell, Adam Sandler, and Ben Stiller movies.

She shook her head and continued flipping. "Superhero or epic blockbusters?" I let my hand inch up her thigh, and she paused before glaring at me and turning back. I held my hands up in defeat, letting her pick the film, before bringing them back down to trace small circles on her knees.

After what seemed like a year, she removed a DVD from the binder and pushed it into the computer. As the previews rolled, Bella got up, crossed the room, and pressed the circular lock in the middle of the doorknob.

"Something you don't want disturbed?" I prodded as she returned to hover over my still-sitting form.

"Get up, you lazy ass," she commanded, grabbing my hands and pulling me from the roly chair.

"I'm not lazy," I whined. "And you're sassy today." She snorted and moved us to the long bench that faced the screen. She positioned me just so, and soon she was sitting between my legs and leaning against my chest, reclining comfortably. My girl definitely knew her way around the shack; that was for sure.

"Really?" I snorted, trying to contain my own chuckles by pressing my lips into her hair. "This is what you wanted to watch?"

I took in the DVD main menu screen, laughing at what Bella had decided she wanted us to watch this afternoon. We obviously wouldn't be able to get through the entire thing, seeing as we only had an hour until dinner, but I still couldn't believe it.

My little movie snob wanted to watch... "Titanic?" I gasped. "Seriously?"

She looked up at me with a small frown, and I finally lost it. Raucous laughter spilled from my lips, our chests heaving at the movement of my guffaws.

"Stop laughing at me," she pouted.

"I'm sorry," I said, calming down. "It's just, we don't exactly have three hours to kill, you know?"

She snapped her head back towards the screen and grabbed the tiny remote to press play. "I know, but the first part is the only good part anyway. The boat sinks for two hours. Plus, I want to watch Leo get naked."

"But Leo *doesn't* get naked. Kate does." I pulled on her ponytail and kissed her temple lightly, emphasizing my joke.

"Stop mocking me, douche. You're the one who owns it on DVD." Her tone was serious, but her face told me everything I needed to know. Her smile could barely be contained, and I couldn't resist leaning down and capturing her lips once more, eradicating her silly smirk.

As we continued to kiss, my hands wandered, losing control. Seizing the opportunity, they ran under her shirt and pushed it up as far as it could, making it bunch around her ribs until we were kind of stuck. She broke away, breathing heavily, and lifted the shirt over her head, revealing a light blue lace bra. Yeah, that was going to come off any second now.

She looked over her shoulder at the screen, which was displaying Kate Winslet's large white hat, before looking back at me pleadingly. "But... the movie?"

I shrugged. "I own it, remember?"

Her smirk returned as she stood and shimmied out of her shorts, allowing me to take in her matching underwear. Good lord, my girlfriend was all kinds of hot. And she loved movies. And she loved me. How had I ever gotten this lucky? I really didn't know.

Don't think you have it all, a nagging voice in the back of my head taunted. *The summer is over in two and a half weeks, and then she'll be a coast away.*

I politely told my conscience to fuck off and returned to ogling Bella. She had now returned and was straddling the bench, facing me and pushing my own shirt over my head. My arms rose up, and soon the white fabric was on the floor in a pile with hers. My hands snatched her waist and pulled her as close as the small corner of the room would allow. I was about to unhook her bra and get this party really started when I saw something that stopped me.

A vague look of discomfort flickered in Bella's dark eyes, and it gave me enough reason for pause.

"Hey," I whispered, my hands rubbing small circles into the warm skin of her back, my thumbs pressing into the grooves between her vertebrae. "Are you okay?" She nodded, but she still looked worried about something. "We don't have to do—"

"How many people have you had sex with in the shack?" She cut me off with her rapid-fire question.

Wh-huh?

I hadn't been expecting that one.

"Huh?"

Pulling back, Bella crossed her arms across her chest and started to lower her chin. I had no idea what was going through her mind, but I assumed it probably wasn't good. But, seriously, what kind of question was that? Some kind of trick girl question, I assumed.

My finger reached out, tilting her head back towards mine. I needed to look into her eyes, but they were clouded with hurt. And since my dick wasn't currently penetrating her, I could only assume the hurt wasn't physical but emotional. Fuck, I was so out of my element.

"I just want to know how many other girls have been in this spot..."

"No one," I answered honestly.

"You don't have to lie to me."

"MB, I'm not lying. No other girls have ever been in the spot you're in, because I've never been in love with anyone but you. I don't think you're grasping the gravity of that. Sure, there have

been others in the shack, but do you really want to hear about the girls that meant nothing to me?"

She looked like she was about to respond, so I continued, not letting her get a word in edgewise.

"No, you don't. And as bad as it makes me sound, I don't remember them anyway. But I know I'm going to remember every second of everything we do together. Trust me, everything has already been branded into my mind. Every hug, every smile, every kiss. Fuck, Bella, please don't make me continue because I'm starting to sound like the biggest pussy known to man. Just..." I sighed and squeezed my eyes closed, my body still tense with the weight of my exasperation.

Soft lips pressed against mine tentatively, and dainty hands trailed up my stomach and across my shoulders to rest at the nape of my neck. They tugged me closer, and I relaxed into them, unable to resist. A breathy sigh escaped her lips, and I let my eyes open slightly. Her brown eyes were already wide and fixed on mine, and I couldn't help but to break away and grin.

"Do you always do that?"

A blush spread over her chest and up her neck as she grumbled a small, "Maybe?"

"It's kind of creepy," I laughed. She frowned again and punched her small fist against my chest. "Owww, " I exclaimed, dramatically clutching at her hand, not letting her escape.

"You're a dick."

I leaned in, my lips brushing over her bare shoulder, trailing soft kisses up her neck to just below her ear. "To be fair, I did warn you about that."

Her breath came out shakily, and her fingers twined themselves in my hair, keeping me close, as she reclined, lying down on the narrow bench. In this position, I could hover over her and appreciate the view, her dark hair spilling over the bright green lacquered wood, her chest rising and falling rapidly with her excitement.

"I love you." The words tumbled out of my mouth, completely unprompted, and I was rewarded with a quick kiss and a broad smile.

"I know." She bit her lip again, looking deep in thought before she commanded me to remove her underwear. Like I was going to fight her on that.

The bra unhooked easily, her tits free of their lacy confines and available for my viewing pleasure within seconds. I leaned down and kissed between them softly and moved my hands to her hips. As I began pulling the scraps of blue lace down her legs, I wondered why she had brought such seductive undergarments to camp in the first place. Did all girls wear such uncomfortable-looking undies on a day-to-day basis? It was bad to be thinking about it, but I didn't think the other girls I'd hooked up with at camp had worn more than plain and comfortable cotton ones.

"What?" she asked, bringing her hands down to help me remove the garment in question.

"Did you bring this underwear to camp with you?"

She chuckled uncomfortably and lifted her hips. "Um, no."

"No?" My ears perked up. Did that mean this underwear was for my benefit?

"Rosalie and I went shopping for them at the beginning of the summer. She said I needed some, uh, power panties." I raised my eyebrow in question. "You know, for confidence purposes?"

"For seduction purposes?" I clarified.

"No," she grumbled, raising one knee to pull her leg through the lace. I pulled it over her foot, and she kicked it to the side.

"Don't knock the power panties, MB. I mean, they worked, didn't they?" I grinned, moving my mouth from her cleavage, and kissed down her stomach, loving the way her hands automatically latched themselves into my hair. "I should really thank Rosalie." My words were mumbled, muffled by her skin, still warm and tan from being exposed during Special Day.

"I like to think it was more me than the p—"

As my tongue snaked out to lick her clit, her words cut off, morphing into the breathy moans and groans I loved so much.

"Ung, Edward..." My fingers trailed up and down her inner thighs, widening them as my tongue continued to lick and explore. Her walls clenched down, getting closer to her climax. "W-wait!" Bella cried, tugging at my hair.

"What?" I stopped and glanced up at her. She was breathing hard, her face pink and glistening with sweat.

"Take off your shorts." I must not have been responsive at all because Bella continued, pushing herself up into a sitting position, still straddling the bench. "Now, please."

Yes, ma'am.

Without further ado, I lifted my own hips and removed my shorts and boxers. I figured she hadn't specified their removal yet, but they weren't going to be on much longer anyway.

"Thank you," she whispered, her eyes darkening as she perused my naked body. I'd never been particularly confident in it; I was a skinny white boy, you know? But the way Bella looked at me, I felt as built as Hugh Jackman or as ripped as Ryan Reynolds. She made me feel invincible.

Her hand reached out and grasped the base of my hardened cock, and I groaned and let my head fall back, relishing the warmth spreading throughout my body. Suddenly, the mild heat was replaced by a blazing inferno as Bella guided me inside her, completely naked.

"W-wait!" I stuttered, my eyes flying open and my head snapping forward. "N-no condom!"

"It's fine," she groaned, continuing to lower herself onto my lap, her eyes shut tightly in either bliss or pain—I couldn't tell yet. "Pill."

The sensations were too overwhelming. I felt like I was being encased in fire, sparks traveling so fast that I could nearly feel a current running through me. After what seemed like an eternity, I felt the backs of Bella's thighs rest on the tops of mine. She opened her bright eyes and smiled, throwing her arms around my neck, pulling our chests flush against one another.

"Yessss," she hissed.

I would have laughed at the sheer ridiculousness of her excitement, had she not rocked her hips forward, effectively changing my laughter into a low, "Fuuuuck."

My hands gripped at Bella's waist as her hold around my neck tightened. Fucking finally, this felt right. Her mouth pressed against my shoulder, her hot breaths sinking into my skin. There was no way her noises could have been mistaken for anything but pleasure, and I reveled in the fact that we *could* do this. I wasn't going to say anything, but there'd been a part of me that feared that maybe Bella and I just weren't sexually compatible. I should have known that—like everything else in my life that worked right—Bella just needed to steer the way.

Her hips rocked slowly, every movement calculated; I could almost feel her thought process behind it. But, it worked.

My mouth moved to her neck, my teeth scraping against the soft curve, causing her to moan out another, "Yesss," and I let my hands roam the wide expanse of her back, coming to rest at her hair. I tugged at it, and she got the idea pretty quickly, diving in to capture my lips with hers.

As her rocking picked up its pace, our kisses morphed back into heavy breaths, almost panting into one another's mouths. It was the most connected I'd ever felt to anyone in my entire life. Had I not been completely ready to explode, I would have lived in that moment forever.

But I was wrong. Because nothing, *nothing*, compared to seeing Bella climax on top of me, my cock still hard inside her. Although she'd been vocal throughout the entire thing, as she clenched down, she was completely silent—her eyes were shut and her front tooth bit down forcefully into her bottom lip. The only noises were the ones escaping from my mouth as she shuddered and pulled at my hair. Unable to watch and feel and listen and keep going, I exploded, my own orgasm wracking through my entire body.

Spent, I sagged against the wall behind me, allowing Bella to relax on top of me.

"Wow."

"Mhm," she mumbled, bringing her hands from around my neck to wrap around my waist.

I chuckled. "Just 'mhm?'"

"Edward," she whispered, "you've rendered me completely speechless. We had sex not only so it didn't hurt me, but I actually just came all over you and probably your thighs and this bench. Let it go, okay?"

The pads of my fingers stroked at her clammy skin, pushing her hair away from her forehead. "You don't sound too speechless to me. Maybe I should work harder next time."

"Mhm." A small smile appeared on her lips. "You do that."

"So who came up with the name Titanic? You, Bruce?" The dialogue from the speakers caught my attention in the new quiet of the room. *"Yes. I wanted to convey sheer size. And size means stability, luxury, and safety..."*

Chuckling, I cut in. "Sheer size, hmm? Maybe you should start calling my dick The Titanic."

Bella looked up, pushing away from my chest, and burst into a fit of giggles. "I'm not naming your dick anything, Edward," she said with a roll of her eyes.

"Why not?"

"Because we're not Alice and Jasper, and I don't want to be wearing a tutu and throwing handfuls of glitter as you paint me."

"Fair point." I leaned in and kissed her temple. However, that wasn't enough for Bella because she moved her head, angling her lips towards mine. Just as I felt myself hardening within her again, I heard the vaguest sounds of chimes in the distance. We both froze.

"Was that...?"

"SHIT!" we cried out simultaneously. As she hopped off my lap, though, we made a mess, the remnants of our—okay, mostly mine—climaxes seeping onto the bench and onto the floor a bit.

Panicked, her eyes darted around the room, searching for something to clean up with. Luckily, I had just cleaned a few rags to wipe the computer monitors with. I stood and reached one from the top shelf and handed it to Bella, who accepted it graciously.

"I think we need to invest in an alarm or something," she commented as she finished cleaning herself up and stepped back into her underwear.

I agreed and grabbed some monitor cleaner and another rag to wipe up whatever was left on the bench and floor. At least the lacquered paint made clean-up easy enough.

Just as I began reaching for my discarded boxers and shorts, I heard a key in the lock.

FUCK. The only person who has a key to this room is...

"SETH!" Bella shouted out loudly, scrambling to clasp her bra, but her fingers were so frantic that she kept fumbling. "WAIT! If you value your life, you will not open that door right now!"

The movement in the lock stopped, and I heard Seth respond with a confused, "Okay." He continued chattering, and I wondered how many campers were actually standing outside that door with me fully naked at the moment.

"Edward!" Bella snapped, refocusing my attention on the task at hand—getting redressed.

Grinning, I stepped back into my bottoms and tossed my shirt on quickly. Bella was still having difficulties with her bra, so I decided it would be most chivalrous to help her out. I calmly moved her frantic hands away and clasped the bra for her before lifting her hair to the side and pressing a soft kiss to her neck. My grin widened as she shivered.

"Thanks," she grumbled, not bothering to turn around before pulling on her shorts and t-shirt.

"The Titanic and I are very welcome." I leaned over and turned the movie off as she finished fixing herself, tying her hair up into the same messy bun it had been in when she arrived.

"Dick."

I shook my head. "Titanic."

Scowling, she pushed by me, and I couldn't resist wrapping my arms around her waist and kissing her once more.

"Cheater," she mumbled against my lips.

"Mhm." Still holding onto her, I leaned over and unlocked the door, pushing it open for Seth and some random girl I'd never seen before. In fact, there were no campers to be seen anywhere.

Seth shifted awkwardly and shrugged apologetically. "Hey, sorry, guys. I didn't think anyone would be down here, since we don't have class next period." So that explained the lack of campers. "This is, um, Riley," I glanced at Bella, who also clearly had no idea who the girl was. "Director Biers' daughter?"

OHHHH.

This was the infamous daughter. I took a second to really size her up. She was taller than I thought she'd be. If I had to guess, I'd say around 5'9" with long legs, showcased by a short jean skirt. She was skinny, but muscular—maybe an athlete of some sort? Her long blonde hair was tied up in a high ponytail, and her light brown eyes flickered uncomfortably as she stood in the doorway.

"Right," I said. "Of course. It's really nice to meet you. I'm Edward." I was starting to stretch out my hand as she began to walk into the shack to greet her properly when Bella attached herself to my side, lacing her fingers with mine.

"And I'm Bella."

She was smiling and her tone was light and friendly, but the message was clear. *Mine*. I wanted to tell her "down, kitty cat," or something, but I couldn't bring myself to clear the air. Jealous Bella was hot.

Turns out I didn't need to. All of a sudden, Seth wrinkled his nose and looked down, red-faced. "Uh, guys? It smells like sex in here."

Horrified, Bella tucked her head into my side before glancing nervously at Seth. "No it doesn't. Does it?"

Riley smiled and tipped her head back in laughter. "It does, actually. It really does. Don't worry," she said with a shrug. "I promise we won't tell anyone."

She walked further into the room and grabbed a random film encyclopedia we had on the shelf and backtracked to the door, propping it open.

"Do you have a fan?" she asked.

Seth nodded and grabbed the small fan we had underneath the computer. She smirked, opened the one small window and placed the fan in front of it.

"We'll have this place aired out before campers come tonight," she said with a wave of her hand.

"Uhh, thanks," Bella said, nodding appreciatively.

"Not a problem. I used to have to do this in my dorm all the time, so my roommate wouldn't get all tattle tale on me."

Seth's cheeks reddened further as he sputtered, "I thought you went to an all girls' school," to which she replied coolly, "I did."

I let out a loud guffaw, and my hand was in the air before I could even stop it. Riley smiled wickedly and slapped it as I let out a low, "Niiice."

"Whoa," Seth mumbled under his breath, but Riley definitely heard and flashed him a bright smile. I could definitely see what was happening there, and I felt *very* good about it. I thought this chick might possibly be pretty awesome.

"Hey, MB, uhh..." I grabbed Bella's elbow and pulled her closer to the door. She looked at me with confusion, so I continued. "I need to show you something in the counselor lounge."

"What?"

"Uhh..." I wracked my brain for something, anything to say. "Handcuffs."

Bella did a double take. "What?"

I wanted to pound my head on the nearest flat surface. Why was that the only thing that came to mind? Riley laughed loudly and Seth scoffed, clearly embarrassed. "Yeah, I stole them from the costume room and I put them in my mailbox, and I thought we could go back to my room and—"

Suddenly, Bella's hand flew to my mouth, covering it before I could continue with my nervous rambling. Thank God I had the good sense never to try improv. I clearly sucked at it.

"I'm sorry," Bella replied. "He's obviously not feeling well."

"You must have fucked all the sense out of him," Riley quipped. "But he's obviously begging for more. Go have fun, you two." She shooed us off with a large flailing gesture. "It was nice meeting you. Bella... Edward."

I grabbed Bella's hand and made a break for it, hightailing it for the Adirondack chairs. As soon as we were out of earshot, she shoved my shoulder hard enough for me to stumble slightly up the hill.

"Are you serious?" she gaped. "Handcuffs?"

"It was the only thing I could think of! I'm sorry." Bella sighed, silently accepting my apology. So I decided to push it further. "But you have to admit it. I was right."

Bella stared at me blankly.

"About Riley? The director's daughter? Total repressed schoolgirl sex freak. I hope she and Seth are very happy together. I see the shack getting a lot of action in the next two weeks."

She finally let out a low chuckle and smiled. "You think she and Seth..."

"Why do you think I made up some random excuse for us to get out of there?"

Finally having approached the chairs, she pulled us down into one, cuddling close. The sun was just starting to set, the clouds tinted with pinks and oranges, and I felt at peace. It was silly, but I felt accomplished. Bella and I had overcome our final hurdle. Well, except for... no, I wasn't going there right now.

We sat in quiet, watching the sun move across the lake, perfectly content, until our friends finished their classes and bombarded us.

"I think," Emmett began, "these chairs are our Cheers. If they could talk, they'd definitely know our names."

Rosalie glared at him like he was crazy, and Jasper snickered. "Sorry, I just got a visual of talking chairs."

Alice paused and looked into Jasper's eyes curiously. "Are you high?"

"What?" He frowned, smacking away her hands, which were trying to pry at his eyes. "No. Don't be ridiculous. I'd share with you, I promise."

Alice nodded, satisfied, and the grin on my face expanded further. Today was a good day. This was what summers were supposed to be like.

"What are you smiling at?" Bella asked, gazing up at me through her thick lashes.

"Nothing. Just feeling like the king of the world."

"You're incorrigible," she reprimanded, trying to sound stern as she nudged my ribs.

As our friends continued to bicker, I sat back and watched, reveling in the perfection of the moment. That was what I had to do, live in the now. I couldn't think about tomorrow or two weeks from now. All I could do was enjoy what was left of the summer. And although the nagging voice in the back of my head told me that I was being unrealistic and foolish, I ignored it. If I didn't want to drive myself crazy, I'd have to.

Chapter 26 Mixed Messages

~Bella~

The next week passed quickly—too quickly. I should have anticipated it, but I ignored it, simply enjoying each day to the fullest. I woke up each morning with time to shower before breakfast, then after a full day of classes, I'd spend rest hour with Edward and each night with our group of friends or in rehearsal.

And although each night with our friends was amazing—from laser tag to double features at the drive in to drunken nights at The Pound—my favorite moments of the day were spent with Edward. Apparently Pringles had it right. Once you pop, you can't stop. And I couldn't stop. I needed Edward constantly. And by Edward, I mean his cock. I was a sex maniac, starved for peen-induced orgasms. It got to the point that if I didn't have sex with him at least once a day, I started tweaking like an addict. After that first time with me on top in the shack, we'd finally found our groove. Of course, depending on our locale, we had to use condoms again, but the convenience of a non-messy clean up was worth the saran wrap, desensitizing shield. It just allowed us have sex in less discreet places.

By the end of the week we'd christened the shack, the fine arts room, the gymnastics mats, the meadow at The Point, his shower, the girl's bathroom at The Pound, the lake, and the costume room. We were definitely making up for lost time. Stupid lost time. Time that we were running out of.

Seriously, whenever Jasper saw me, he now broke into a chorus of "The Girl Gets Around."

He claimed he was just practicing for the big show, but I couldn't help but blush into a lobster every single time.

At my thoughts of the big show, I refocused on the task at hand... the dress rehearsal. Or I tried to, at least. But it was proving extremely difficult to focus on anything but Edward.

He looked mouthwatering. I wanted to strip his pants off right there, but I knew I couldn't exactly do that. Well, at least not with other people in the theater. He was wearing a pair of skinny black jeans (his, of course), a white button-down shirt, and a skinny black tie. I got distracted nearly every time he walked on stage, which was pretty bad, considering we had the majority of our scenes together.

"Edward, Bella! That's your cue!" Maria yelled from behind the piano. She was all too amused by our inherit distraction. Oh, yeah—the same went for Edward.

As soon as he'd seen me in my jean cut offs, tight white wife beater, and red boots, boy popped a boner so hard, his brain couldn't tell right from left. It was turning out to be somewhat of a problem, seeing as the entire dress rehearsal was spent with Maria shouting, "A little bit left stage... no, your other left," at both Edward and me. Had I not been so amused, I would have been ready to kill both of us. Hopefully the rest of the cast felt similarly.

"Sorry, Maria," Edward said with a lowered head, properly abashed. "I'm trying."

Maria clucked her tongue and pulled her clipboard up to her chest. "I know you are, sweetie. And I know you haven't had very long to work on these lines or this staging, and truth of the matter is, none of the campers will care. Just, promise me when we wrap up tonight that you and Bella will run through all your lines and maybe the songs, too?"

I bit my lip, trying to hold back a moan at the thought of running through lines later. If it was this hard for us to keep our clothes on with people present, how did anyone expect us to do that alone? It was fruitless.

Edward chuckled and ran a hand through his hair before cocking an eyebrow in my direction. "I think we could set aside some time for practicing tonight. Right, Bella?"

I hummed my approval, keeping my mouth shut. I didn't trust myself to stay appropriate if I opened it. Who knows what'd be coming out? Maybe a, "Yes, Edward, I can't wait to practice coming all over your cock. Oh, and then we can run some lines, too. Sure." Not sure how the masses would take that one.

"Great." Maria clapped her hands and sighed loudly, a sure sign of exhaustion. "I know the show is tomorrow night, everyone, and we still have a chunk to get through. So, shall we take a thirty-minute break and then resume? Or do you want to keep going and just end as quickly as possible?"

"Break!" everyone shouted from around the theater.

"Oh, good." She slumped over the piano before gesturing to us both. "Edward and Bella. A word,

please?"

My stomach turned as I hopped off the edge of the stage and made my way over to the piano. It felt like I was being called into the principal's office or something.

"What's up, Maria?" Edward asked, his eyes serious.

Maria shook her head, her rhinestone glasses sparkling and nearly blinding me with each horizontal movement. Suddenly, she stopped and leaned forward. A crooked finger beckoned us to follow her lead.

"How long have you two been together?"

"Uh..." Both our mouths dropped simultaneously. It was technically against camp policy to fraternize, and here Maria was, confronting us. I wasn't sure what to think.

She cracked a warm smile and ran a hand through Edward's hair. Despite it being a motherly move, I scowled anyway, causing her smile to broaden. "I'm not going to tell on you, so don't worry about that, you fools."

"About three weeks?" Edward offered. "Since parents' visiting day."

Maria sighed and nodded. She looked as if she were coming to some conclusion, but I had no idea what on earth it could possibly be. "Okay, here is what I propose, because your sexual tension has been oozing out all night and has gotten the entire cast flustered."

"I'm so sor—"

Maria cut me off. "Don't apologize, LB. If you need to take your scripts on stage with you tomorrow night, so be it. The campers will love it regardless. I propose that we finish rehearsal for the night. You two can stay here and run lines if you so choose." That statement seemed pointed. "And please make sure that you are not so *tense* before the show tomorrow. I'm not worried about you two. You're very talented, and I know you won't let me down. Just promise me *that*, and we'll all get out of here."

I gawked. Had Maria really just insinuate what I thought she had?

"Are you saying you want us to..." Edward began. He was clearly following my line of questioning.

"Yes. Please don't make me say it out loud, Edward, but yes. Now... are we through here?"

"Yes ma'am," Edward replied with a grin.

"Great," she said with a curt nod, effectively ending that discussion.

"So—" Edward nudged me with his hip "—should we find somewhere private to start practicing? You know, so we don't bother anyone else?"

I wanted to tell him that was out of the question and that we should just wait until everyone had been dismissed from rehearsal, but my mind could only focus on the jeans and the skinny tie, and so I stupidly nodded and followed his lead.

Before I had time to think, I was pressed up against the wall of the scene shop. With Edward's body firm against mine, I couldn't see anything, but the faint scent of sawdust and primer clued me in as to where he'd taken us.

His head fell forward with his eyes shut. I'd never seen him looked so pained before, and I wondered if I looked the same. I definitely felt the way he looked—desperate.

"This costume might be the death of me," he ground out as he slipped his hands from my sides into my back pockets. I could feel his fingers squeeze my ass lightly, and I leaned further into the wall to press into them, even though I really had nowhere else to go. "Bella, I..." He trailed off, sounding unsure. Nervous, even.

"Mm?" I opened my eyes and looked up. I'd never get used to how tall Edward was and how tiny he made me feel. No, not tiny—protected, safe, treasured. His eyes sought mine out, the green darkened under the shoddy lighting of the small room.

"I love you."

I didn't think that was what he wanted to say, but I wasn't going to fight it. "I love you, too."

My hands ran up his chest and clasped behind his neck before tugging his mouth down to meet mine. Our lips met, and we both moaned in relief. Maria was right – we had been tense. For the first time in a long time, though, Edward seemed unsure. It wasn't our usual maddened frenzy; he seemed too controlled. An idea appeared in my head, and before I could talk myself out of it, I pushed Edward off me.

He held up his hands in surrender. "What? What's wrong?"

"Nothing," I cooed, pushing my very confused boyfriend onto a recently painted—but thoroughly dry—bench. "Just relax."

"What are you..." Edward's eyes opened wide, his mouth ceasing to work, as I lowered myself onto the ground between his legs. My hands went straight for his waistband, but he stopped me, covering my hands with his own. "Holy shit. You want to?"

I could feel my nose crinkle, displeased with Edward's skepticism, as my hands continued their mission: to get Edward's cock out and into my mouth.

"MB, really, you don't have to—"

I stared up at him. "Do you like getting me off with your mouth?" He was about to answer, so I kept going. "That was a rhetorical question. I know you do because you tell me all the time. So, why would you think that I wouldn't enjoy that, too?"

Edward was quick to help me remove his pants and boxers, sliding his cock from its confines and into my hands.

"Not complaining," he stuttered. "Just surprised."

As I was about to lower my mouth to his head, I looked up once more. "Um... you'll have to help me?" I asked, hoping he'd understand the subtext—I've *never done this before*.

"Of course." He smiled and placed a guiding hand on mine, wrapping it around the base of his cock. My eyes moved to our hands as I heard him exhale slowly.

Carefully, I angled his cock towards me slightly and leaned down, letting my tongue lick at the tip cautiously. It wasn't as if I didn't know the basics of a blowjob. I'd seen enough porn to know that step one was to put your mouth over it, then lean down, then pull back and repeat. But Edward had always taken his time to make sure that I enjoyed everything he did to me to the fullest, and I wanted to repay the favor.

Plus, I really didn't want to go too fast, gag and then possibly vom all over his crotch. That would most likely ruin the mood.

Slowly, I let my tongue explore further, dipping into crevices and wandering over untasted skin. With his pre-cum dripping and my tongue lapping, I felt like I was licking a popsicle, melting in the summer heat. A cocksicle.

His hands gripped the edge of the bench as I ran my tongue up the underside of his cocksicle, and his breathing increased notably. Finally back at the top, I let my mouth descend over the head. He made a hissing noise, followed by a few choice expletives, and I tried my damndest not to smile. Instead, I let my tongue swirl around, causing his hands to fly into my hair. I could actually feel his restraint as he tried not to shove the cocksicle down my throat. And I'd never felt more powerful.

As I lowered my mouth past his head, he let his arms relax, no longer feeling the need to push down. In fact, he helped me rise up, exposing his wet cocksicle to the cool air.

"I-if you can g-go faster, um," he stuttered breathily, "that'd be g-good."

"Mhm," I mumbled, causing an immediate, "Fuck!" to escape Edward's lips as he threaded his fingers through my hair.

I increased the force of my sucking along with my pace, loving the way Edward's fingers tightened in my hair, tugging just the right amount. His moans were becoming nonsensical as my bobbing continued, until I finally felt him tap my shoulder.

I raised my eyes, wondering what he wanted, but I didn't stop my movements.

"MB," he panted, "I'm getting really close. Just a warning."

I didn't understand why he would warn me. I was glad he was close. I mean, wasn't that the whole point of this oral sex thing? Instead, I hummed my acknowledgment and continued going. I wanted my cocksicle's cream center.

"Shit, you're not going to pull off? You want me to come in your mouth? I don't know if... but, oh God, I love you so much. Fuck, Bella... I... I..." he babbled, making no sense at all. Yes, I wanted him to come in my mouth. Where else would he come? Ignoring his comments, I continued sucking, rubbing my tongue up and down the thick vein of his shaft with each swipe.

"Fuck, Bella, I'm coming!" Edward climaxing was one of the most intriguing things to watch. His entire body tensed up and his eyes scrunched closed, almost as if he were in pain. But the thick fluid in my mouth told me he felt quite the opposite.

Wait, fluid... still in my mouth? Eugh.

I figured I should probably swallow what was already in my mouth, but it didn't taste very good just sitting in there, so I pulled back and looked for a place to spit. But of course, there wasn't a trashcan or paper towel in sight—odd for a scene shop. Coming to, Edward caught wind of my distress and stood up not only to tuck himself back into his pants but also to hopefully find something for me with which to dispose of the liquid in my mouth.

"Where the hell did they move all the garbage cans?" he shouted at no one in particular. Still on my knees and afraid of gagging, I reached for the closest thing to me. As discreetly as I could, I spit the milky fluid from my mouth into the open paint can sitting next to the bench. Unfortunately, the paint was brown, and it didn't exactly blend in. Even as I used the wooden mixer, I was only creating a white marble throughout the paint.

I could hear Edward laughing as he peered over my shoulder. "Oops?"

My face formed a small frown, but as I looked up at him, I couldn't help but smile. He looked so carefree, his entire body relaxed. And I had done that.

"Sorry."

He shook his head and leaned down to help me off my knees. I leaned into him as his hands wrapped around my back, pulling me close.

"Don't apologize. That was, uh, spectacular."

"Yeah?"

His grin was infectious, and soon we were both just staring and smiling at one another like crazy people.

"Oh, yeah."

Before too long, hands that had once been stagnant began roaming, lips melded and clashed, and throats groaned in appreciation and relief. I couldn't believe how impossible it was for us to

be alone without feeling this inexplicable pull to be joined together everywhere. I didn't particularly want to have sex amongst the wood shavings and partially dried set pieces, though.

"Hey," I panted, pulling back slightly. "Let's go back to your bunk and work on lines."

A sly smile appeared on Edward's face. "We did promise Maria," he said solemnly.

Hand in hand, we walked through the dark woods, the path only lit by the bright moon and smattering of stars overhead. It was perfect. With each silent step, the tension built again. How had we gone this long without one another? And how would we possibly be able to handle it again?

Sneaking a glance at Edward, I ignored the persistent voice in the back of my head and instead focused on the beautiful boy beside me. I'd never thought I could be this lucky.

As we approached his bunk, I heard raucous laughter and the heavy blare of electric guitar and synth drums.

Edward sighed loudly and ran a hand through his hair. "So, it seems like we *won't* be running lines," he said, the frustration clear in his eyes and tone.

Smirking, I leaned up and stole a small kiss. "Hate to break it to you, Edward, but it seems like we'll *actually* be running lines."

"But I wanted to practice with just you," he whined. I couldn't help but laugh. Sometimes, he was such a boy.

"We have w—days more to practice, Edward. Now, come on." I smiled, putting on a brave face. I'd almost said we had weeks to practice, but it was finally sinking in that we didn't have weeks. We had this weekend, and then next week was the last week of camp. I had tried so hard to avoid thinking about our time constraints and just live in the now, but the voice in the back of my head was getting more panicky with each passing day. I couldn't avoid it for much longer, I knew.

I made to open the bunk door, but a small tugging on my arm pulled me back into Edward's chest. "One more minute." His smirk descended onto my lips, kissing me breathless.

"Um, hey..."

Edward and I broke apart at the sound of our intruder. Emmett, of course. He scowled, his face contorting as he took in my current state of dishevel.

I tugged at my wife beater, suddenly remembering I'd forgotten to change out of my costume. I felt very naked under his scrutinizing gaze.

"Hey, Em." I didn't know why I felt so awkward, but it was as if I'd been caught making out with my boyfriend on the front step by my dad or something. In fact, that was almost exactly what had happened.

His eyes narrowed in on Edward's hands, which were still locked firmly around my lower back, dangerously close to the curve of my ass.

Wanting to diffuse the situation, I smiled and extracted myself from Edward's arms. Naturally, he pouted and was about to start up his whining again—I could tell from the face he was making—when I interrupted, cutting him off before he could get started.

"What are we still standing here for? Let's get practicing." I squeezed past Emmett and made my way into the central room of the bunk. It was a party going on in there. Everyone had spread out amongst the couches and the floor. As soon as she saw me, Riley hopped up from her spot on the arm of the middle couch and wrapped her hand around my waist. I tumbled back onto the arm with her, giggling at her enthusiasm.

"Bella, I'm so glad you're here. This practice has been absolute chaos without you. I've been trying to cover for you, but it's been pretty rough."

Seth nodded, pulling Riley from her perch next to me and onto his lap. Turns out Edward had been right about those two. Riley was just what Seth needed—a little firecracker to keep him on his toes—and he in return grounded her, reigning her in with his genuine sweetness. I hadn't speculated about their sex life; I got enough of that posturing from Edward. I assumed that was going pretty well for them, though, considering how close they had become.

"It really has. Seriously, what took you so long?" Rosalie asked, exasperated.

As if on cue, Emmett and Edward walked inside. They both looked thoroughly embarrassed, and I wondered what the hell they could have been talking about.

Riley rolled her eyes and whispered conspiratorially so that everyone in the room could hear. "Obviously, they needed to fuck before coming back to the bunk to fuck again." Then she shook her head, her long blonde ponytail swishing back and forth along her shoulders.

"You fucked in the theater?" Rosalie gaped at me, and she seemed almost a little proud.

"No!" I shouted, my face flaming. Jasper raised an eyebrow in my direction, clearly skeptical.

"Well, not today, at least," I amended.

The girls hollered at my admission, Alice louder than the others. We still hadn't had a follow-up conversation to that first "I painfully lost my virginity" one, and hopefully she was glad to know it had gotten better since then.

"Ugh, LB..." Jake cringed, and I could feel my face heat up further. "Please... just..."

"So, if you weren't fucking, what were you doing?" Rosalie asked.

I was about to tell everyone to shove it and mind their own business when the entire room burst into laughter. I looked over my shoulder to see what they were looking at, and I frowned, catching the last second of Edward's gesture before he was able to move his tongue away from the

side of his cheek.

"Edward!" I punched his stomach, or as far as I could reach. Of course, I barely tapped the front of him.

"What?" He shrugged innocently, taking his place next to me on the arm of the couch. "I didn't say anything."

"Asshole," I mumbled.

Ignoring me, Edward picked up a script sitting on the floor and smiled widely. "Okay, let's practice, guys."

~Edward~

The show went spectacularly. Every line wasn't perfect, and I missed a few steps in the choreography, but watching Bella's face as her campers swarmed her after the show made it all worth it. They loved her, and they had bragging rights over the rest of the campers for the rest of the week because *their* counselor was the lead in the musical. I was proud of her. It was like I was watching her come into her own.

Bella was brave and talented. She was everything I knew she could be and more. She outshone me in so many aspects that it was a wonder she even loved me at all. After all, she was the one with all this potential, and I was the one heading back to my college town to work at the campus bookstore and try to make some freelance videographer money on the side.

I was a loser.

"Edward!" Jasper called out to me. He took the liberty of kicking one of the legs of my bed for extra emphasis.

"Yeah?"

"What's going on?"

"Nothing." I shook my head and stretched out further, trying to avoid looking at the Padme poster next to my bed. It only reminded me of taking Bella's virginity, one of the greatest moments of my life.

Jasper sat down on the edge of my bed and leaned over me, obstructing my view quite perfectly.

"Seriously, dude. Something's going on in your head and it's not good. You were great in the show last night. But today... something's wrong today. Did you and Bella get into a fight?"

I sat up too quickly, nearly crashing into Jasper's forehead, but he managed to narrowly avoid my spastic movement. "No, why? Did Bella say we were in a fight?"

Jasper tugged at his hair, looking confused. "I'm not quite sure what this is," he said, gesturing towards me, "but you need to lighten up. We're going to a movie today. Isn't that right up your alley?"

Groaning, I flopped back onto my bedding, hoping Optimus Prime would have the answers I sought. It was another rainy day... well, a rainy weekend, more like. We were supposed to take the seniors on a beach weekend, since it was the last weekend of camp, but we'd been rained out. I would have been able to have an entire weekend of sleeping in the same bed as Bella and waking up next to her, but the fucking weather had to put a kink in my plans. And although we were going to take them to a movie, I was still a bit peeved at the change in plans.

"I hate rainy days," I said simply.

Jasper patted the bed before hopping off and donning a rain jacket. "At least you get to go somewhere cool. I'm stuck in the Fine Arts room with bored kids who'd much rather be at a movie like the seniors. Tell Bella I hate her when you see her, okay?"

I snorted and nodded, closing my eyes to descend into my self-deprecating thoughts again. I must have drifted off because the next thing I knew, Jake was shaking me awake and berating me for not being ready to go yet.

"Sorry," I groaned.

"Come on, the bus is already waiting." His goofy grin, while usually a mood lifter, only served to drive me further into my mood.

"They can wait," I grumbled, pushing myself off the bed and rummaging around my closet for my black hoodie.

Jake narrowed his eyes, and I tried to ignore his stare. When he made a humming noise, I finally snapped.

"What?"

"Whoa, can you stop being on your period?" He took a step back to give me some space. "I thought we'd finally overcome your man PMS?"

"Fuck you, Jake. I'm ready. Let's go."

The burning feeling coursed through me, and I held onto it, happy to be feeling something other than self-loathing. I flipped my hood over my head and trekked my way up towards the bus, not bothering to wait for Jake and Emmett, who were probably still standing in the hallway, stunned by my outburst.

Once upon a time this behavior would have been usual—expected, even. But now, everything was different. I hadn't been this moody since pre-camp.

My sneakers squeaked as I walked up the steps onto the bus, and I was assaulted by the shrill

sounds of excited teenage girls. My eyes scanned the bus quickly, and I was caught by surprise at the flash of red leaning against the window. I shouldn't have been shocked to see Bella in my hoodie. After all, I'd given it to her. But it made my stomach flip and the burning feeling dissipate immediately.

I tried to be stealthy in my approach, but the wet squeak of my sneakers alerted her to my presence. Her head popped up from the window, and a tired smile stretched across her face.

"Hey."

"Hey." I slid next to her, and she automatically leaned into my side. My emotions conflicted, winding against one another in a battle so lethal that I wasn't sure what I even wanted the outcome to be.

"Do you know what movie they decided on?"

"Uhh, yeah," I responded. "Something called *500 Days of Summer*."

"Oh! I wanted to see that!" Bella smiled and gazed up at me through her dark lashes, which were still wet from the rain. "It's Zooey Deschanel and Joseph Gordon Levitt and Matthew Gray Gubler. Should be great."

"Bones' sister, the guy from 3rd Rock to the Sun and Dr. Reid?" I asked, actually intrigued by the star lineup.

Bella relaxed back into my side, and I couldn't help but place my arm around her shoulders. "You watch too much television, Mr. Movie Snob."

"Maybe I should focus more on making movies and less on watching television, huh?" I joked, but the words sounded bitter coming off my tongue. She heard it, too.

"That's not what I was—"

"Hey, way to wait for us, Doucheward," Jake grumbled, sliding into the seat.

"Language," Emmett snipped before holding up a large clipboard and smiling widely. "Okay, quiet down, everyone. Time to take roll and then we can roll on out of here." His joke was met with silence, except for his soft chuckling. "Yeah, I know that was bad. Just raise your hand and say 'here' when I call your name. Arader, Michelle?"

A giggly "here!" came from the back of the bus, and I closed my eyes as Emmett prattled on. I knew Bella had taken offense to my statement, but what else could I say? *I'm sorry I'm a failure? Good thing you won't be?* I'd rather save that conversation for when we weren't surrounded by nearly thirty sixteen year olds.

As we pulled out of the long driveway and began our journey, I felt Bella shift away from me and back towards the window. It hurt, but I couldn't bring myself to open my eyes yet. Instead, I was a coward and faked sleeping, choosing to ignore and avoid for as long as possible. After about

fifteen minutes, I heard Jake speak up.

"What are you reading?" I felt Bella's arm brush against mine as she lifted it from her lap. "Ah, really? You brought Tolkien with you to camp?"

"I've never read any of them before, but they're some of my favorite movies. I mean, who doesn't love Viggo Mortensen? And Peter Jackson was truly a visionary. Did you even know his name before those movies came out? And now he's a household name."

"I hope you know I have no idea what you're talking about."

I could almost hear Bella frown. Who didn't know about *Lord of The Rings*? "Anyway," she continued, "I saw them in the library the other day, so I figured I could pick one up for some down time during rehearsals."

Jake scoffed. "Down time? You? Miss leading lady? Excellent performance, by the way."

"Thanks," she said warmly.

"Speaking of which, how's our leading man doing?"

"God only knows," she said, sadness returning to her tone.

"So he snapped at you too, huh? Good to know you're not immune. His PMS was raging this morning. Thought you'd maybe have some insight."

"Insight?" Bella asked.

"Yeah, you know... like, did you two have a fight or something?"

Thanks for prying, Jake.

"Uh, if we did, I wasn't aware..."

And thank you for placing that idea in her head, Jake.

"What'd you do after the musical last night?"

"Bunk bonding. I played charades and told stories with my girls."

"Hm," Jake hummed thoughtfully. "He hasn't been this pissy since before you guys got together. I guess I just assumed..."

"You don't think he's actually mad at me, do you?" Bella asked nervously. I could have throttled Jake.

"Nah. I'm sure it's nothing. Probably just realizing the summer is coming to a close. End of summer blues—everyone gets them. Back to reality, you know?"

"Yeah." Bella sighed loudly and quieted down. Soon only the sounds of girls chattering and rain splattering could be heard. This was going to be a long ride.

I was "awoken" some time later by Bella, who nudged my arm gently. I let my eyes flutter open, taking a few seconds to adjust to the bright glare of the clouds overhead.

As I stood up to make my way out, Jake grabbed my sleeve, pulling me back. "I know you were awake," he whispered.

"What?"

"Listen, you've been my best friend for a really long time. You're not that good an actor. I know what you look like when you're asleep, and you don't twitch every time you're mentioned in a conversation. You sleep like the fucking dead."

"Uhh..." Jake was trying to keep calm, but his rage was obviously boiling just beneath the surface. I could very nearly see it.

"I know you think you're an asshole, but you're not. *I'm* an asshole. I've owned up to that. But you... you've changed this summer. And whether you want to admit it or not, it's because of Bella and who you are when you're with her."

I laughed, trying to ease the sudden heaviness that fell over us. "Are you going to get all Hallmark on me, Jake? 'Cause I don't know how to handle that..."

He shook his head and growled. Yes, he fucking growled at me. "I'm serious, Edward! Take whatever crawled up your ass and remove it and enjoy your last week here. Unless you've changed your mind and are going to come back again next summer."

"I don't..." I grappled with what to say, knowing it was all going to make me sound like shit. "I don't know how to end this."

Jake's entire face contorted, his expression almost unreadable. "Are you serious?"

"Yes?"

He sighed loudly and crossed his arms. "I don't have time to deal with this shit right now. But we're not done talking, you got it?"

"Yeah, sure."

"And Edward?" he hissed. "Do your girlfriend a solid and be straight with her. She doesn't need your shit bringing her down."

That's what I'm afraid of.

"Is everything okay here?" Emmett asked as Jake and I made our way into the theater.

"Peachy," I snapped.

"Riiiiight. Okay, why don't you get in there and do your job as a chaperone, and I'll call the restaurant to make sure they can accommodate thirty-five people."

Looking up, I saw Bella, her nose still buried in her book. She was ignoring the campers, who were too busy enjoying their day outside camp to bother anyone. Danielle and Jake flanked them and seemed to have it under control, so I slid into the seat next to Bella. The seat creaked as I let my weight sink into it, and she finally lifted her head, a soft smile adorning her lips.

"Hey there, sleepyhead. Did you have a good nap?"

"Yeah, sorry about that. I guess I wasn't much in the way of company."

She placed her chin on my shoulder and pressed her lips to the hoodie so quickly I questioned if it had even happened or if I'd just imagined it. "Not a problem. Just wanted to make sure you were okay."

"Mhm. I think I was just knocked out by that extensive week of rehearsals and, uh, other things." A faint blush appeared on her cheeks as she ducked underneath the large hood. I let my hand move to stroke her cheek. "I love my hoodie on you."

"I thought it was my hoodie," she replied cheekily.

"It is." I smiled as she took my hand and twined it with hers. Jake was right; with Bella, I was someone else, someone better. And I needed to hold onto that feeling for as long as I could, which meant that I was just going to have to stop thinking about saying goodbye. Out of sight, out of mind.

As the lights dimmed, she leaned closer, and I draped my arm over her shoulders. I nearly jumped as our burly best friend took the seat next to me.

"We're all taken care of for lunch," he whispered. "Applebee's!" He did a fist pump of excitement. "I'm so stoked for my provolone-filled meatballs. Either of you want to do the two-for-twenty deal with me? No? No takers. Hmm... your loss."

"Mm, now I just want spinach artichoke dip," Bella said dreamily.

We finally quieted down as the previews came on, since Bella claimed they were her favorite part about going to the movies. What a weirdo. My weirdo.

The movie was cute, but it cut a little close to home. I just was having a hard time figuring out whether I was a Tom or a Summer.

At one point in the film, Tom's little sister pulled him aside and said, "Just because she likes the same bizzaro crap you do doesn't mean she's your soul mate." And for some reason, I froze. Wasn't that what I'd based my relationship on with Bella? Our love for indie films and offbeat

humor? Or was that completely debasing our relationship? I couldn't see clearly anymore. This movie was really getting into my head.

Bella said she was in love with me. No, Bella *was* in love with me... I didn't doubt that. What I doubted was her life experience. She was going off to college. I didn't want to trap her in some long-distance piece of shit relationship where I prevented her from fulfilling her potential. College was all about going out and meeting people and making connections. How could I expect her to do that without being the jealous fool that I was and wanting to tie her to her bedpost? Would I be able to handle seeing pictures on Facebook of her out at parties, drinking with ripped football players? Absolutely not. And, yes, Bella might be in love with me now, but what if keeping her to myself would prevent her from meeting the person she was actually supposed to be in love with?

Over the course of the next two hours each insecurity I'd let run and hide over the past two months came rearing its ugly head. And I turned into a pussy, a whiny little bitch.

In the conclusion of the film, Tom and Summer sat side by side. And Tom asked, "What happened? Why—why didn't they work out?" to which Summer responded, "What always happens. Life."

There, that was it. The crux of my insecurity. I could bulk up my excuses as much as I wanted, telling Bella I wanted her to go live her life and not be held down by some long-distance boyfriend who ultimately wouldn't work out, but I knew better. I didn't want life to get in the way. I didn't want to get left behind. I mean, fuck... I loved her.

x-x-x

Bella moaned as she bit into a piece of thick French bread, covered in a coating of creamy spinach artichoke dip, rousing my cock.

"Good?" I chuckled as she continued molesting the piece of bread, her eyes closed in food ecstasy.

"Perfect."

I reached over, trying to swipe a piece for myself, but she swatted my hand away. "Don't you dare, Edward Cullen. Did you not learn last time? I don't share food very well. Only child syndrome."

Rolling my eyes, I dug back into my own meal—a huge-ass chicken quesadilla. Imitating my tease of a girlfriend, I took a large bite and moaned overzealously. Her eyes snapped to me, my bedroom noise immediately catching her attention.

"Edward," she warned, her voice painfully low. "I'm not letting you fuck me in the bathroom at Applebee's, so knock that off."

Emmett choked mid-bite, sputtering in disbelief. He should have been used to Bella's crass language after this many years, but I knew he only saw her the way he wanted. Jake slammed

his hands over his ears, pretending not to hear. And Danielle simply laughed and said, "I was wondering if you two had gotten together yet. Good for you."

I smirked and replied just as low. "Why not? You already let me fuck you in the bathroom at The Pound."

Bella's mouth dropped, and her eyes widened. I couldn't tell if it was arousal or shock yet, though.

"Edward!" Jake and Emmett bellowed simultaneously.

Bella's entire chest was blushing and blending in with the color of the hoodie—that was how red she'd gotten. "I can't believe you just said that." She paused, her eyes narrowing. "You're totally getting spanked when we get home."

My head tipped back as I let out a loud guffaw. "Oh, Bella, we both know if anyone's getting spanked between the two of us, it's definitely you."

"Oh my God," Emmett mumbled, sounding pained. "This is so much more than I ever needed to hear... ever."

Bella was steaming. I wasn't sure why all my insecurity was shifting and taking form as overzealous male bravado, claiming her loudly in front of people who already knew she was mine, but I couldn't stop it.

Jake picked up my Diet Coke and sniffed it suspiciously. "Dude, are you drunk?"

"No," Bella spat, "he's just an asshole."

"You love my asshole," I quipped, but Bella cringed, finally blanching.

"Too far, Edward. Too far."

Jake grimaced and smacked the back of my head. "That can't be unheard, you twat waffle. Please tell me none of that was true."

"None of that was true," Bella and I chimed in a monotone unison.

"I'm going to choose to believe that." Jake nodded at us both sternly, and I couldn't contain the goofy smile from spreading over my face.

"So, can I ask something that's completely unrelated to whatever awesomeness just happened?" Danielle spoke up.

We all nodded, encouraging her to go on.

"What happens over the next few days? I've heard the last week of camp is jam packed, but no one's really told me anything. Hazards of being a new counselor, I guess..."

Bella responded first. It made sense. After all, she had experienced the last week more poignantly than any of us—as a camper, over and over again.

"Well, tomorrow will be a normal day, but from Monday through Thursday will be completely different. Monday, we essentially have off. The seniors do senior takeover, where they'll imitate all the counselors and get to run the overhead systems and run activities for the younger campers. Then, that night, we have our staff dinner and party... which, I have to say I'm super excited about."

Her face was glowing. "Then, Tuesday they get out of activities early and have this night of singing called Sing-Song. You don't have to go, but it's an amazing tradition to watch in action. Um, then Wednesday we'll start packing and super duper clean up. And that night is senior banquet, which is a lot of speeches and boring tributes to the girls who are graduating. Then Thursday is more packing and clean up... because Friday is departure day."

Danielle and Bella continued chatting back and forth, Danielle asking more about the specific days and events and what that meant for her. Bella was patient and explained everything in detail.

With it all laid out there like that, I realized how short my time truly was. I had five days left with Bella—only a hundred and twenty hours until we parted ways, maybe for good. Jake was right. I had no choice but to tell things to her straight. I just wasn't all that sure what that meant yet.

Chapter 27 Departure Day

~Bella~

"R?"

I popped my head into Rosalie's empty bunk. All the campers were being taken care of by the seniors. It was almost time for the staff dinner, and I had nothing to wear and no desire to get ready. Plus, I missed girl time with my favorite bitch. And since it was the final countdown, I was savoring each moment.

She looked up from her bed where she was stretched out with a book. Her eyes looked tired.

"Hey, B. What's up?"

"Uh, the staff party in about forty-five minutes?" I held up my makeup bag and hair straightener for her to see. "I thought you could help me get ready?"

She sprung up from the mattress, and her eyes were wide with panic.

"Oh, shit! That's tonight, isn't it? I totally forgot with everything else going on. Of course I'll help you, though."

"Everything else?" I asked, confused. "What's going on?"

Rosalie groaned and fell back onto the mattress, her hands covering her face. When she pulled them away, her cheeks were matted with tears. I had only seen Rosalie cry once before, and it shocked me.

"Ha! Where do I even begin?" She laughed through her tears, and I was happy to see she could at least stay lighthearted during whatever she was going through.

My feet plodded across the floor until I reached the edge of her bed. Her hands reached for mine and tugged me onto the bed with her. We sprawled out, facing one another, as Rosalie's tears continued to silently drip from her cheeks and onto the blanket.

"R, you're kind of scaring me," I whispered. A stray hair fell into her eyes, so I pushed it back, and finally the dam broke.

"I heard from Royce today. Well, kind of."

My eyes widened. I hadn't heard that name in months. I'd almost forgotten he existed at all. Obviously, Rosalie felt the same way.

"I hadn't talked to him since he told me about his *relationship* with Katherine, but she called me this weekend to discuss living arrangements. Silly me, I forgot we were supposed to be roommates this fall. She wanted to know if I'd be okay with forgoing my spot and giving it to Royce because they want to live together. Can you fucking believe that? She had the nerve to call and ask?"

"No," I whispered. How could someone be so insensitive?

"Yeah, well, I heard him in the background and sort of lost my shit at her." She frowned, her eyebrows scrunching together as she continued to vent. "I thought I was fine. I had Emmett and I had camp, but I'm not fine, B. I'm a fucking wreck. With camp ending, I'm realizing I have to go home. I have to go home and tell my mom and daddy that Royce and I are over. I have to go home and start all over, and alone. I thought I was going to be starting college with my boyfriend and my best friend, and now... I have neither."

I squeezed her hand and intertwined my fingers with hers. I could absolutely relate to everything she was saying, but one thing from her rant stood out to me.

"What do you mean, *had* Emmett?"

Rosalie was silent for a second too long, and I understood. They'd had the end-of-summer conversation already. They were over. I wasn't sure what to think.

"We talked," she admitted finally. "And we both decided that we didn't want to do the whole

long-distance relationship thing. It was just a summer thing, anyway. He'll be working in Chicago, and I'll be starting college in Baton Rouge. He's all the way north and I'm all the way south. I mean, we couldn't get any further away unless we were on opposite coasts."

She chuckled, and my stomach plummeted. I was going to be on the west coast, and Edward was going to be on the east coast. At three thousand miles away, how were we going to be able to make this relationship work? And was it "just a summer thing" for us? We hadn't talked about that at all.

Obviously, she saw my face or realized what the hell she'd said because she scrambled to correct herself. "Ah shit, but we're not like you and Edward. Em and I aren't in love. We're friends who happened to want more for a while. And we both came to the conclusion that we want to stay friends instead of staying together and ending badly."

"Right." My eyes wandered to the ceiling to count pieces of plywood instead of thinking too much about what she was saying.

Rosalie groaned and rolled on top of me, her thighs straddling me and pinning me to the bed. "B, look at me." I allowed myself to focus on her, and she stared at me, her eyes serious. "Emmett is a great friend, but I'm not in love with him. We don't look at each other the way you and Edward do, and I certainly didn't give him my precious flower."

She smirked, and I scoffed. She just *had* to go there. "I'm sure Alice and Jasper will stay together. Don't freak just yet."

I sighed loudly and mumbled an, "Okay. And also, please never call it 'my precious flower' again."

Realizing that was the best I was going to give, Rosalie hopped off the bed and pulled me up. Apparently she had a vision of what I was going to look like tonight, and it was going to be spectacular. I could only hope she was right because I wanted to knock Edward right on his ass and back into my vag.

About twenty minutes later, I was ready to go. Rosalie had somehow curled my hair into loose ringlets using my straightener, and my eyes were lined in smudgy navy eyeliner, which made my eyes look huge. She'd even let me borrow one of her dresses for the occasion—a white strapless dress that was tight around my boobs, giving me some fucktastically amazing cleavage, and that flowed loosely to just above my knees. She offered to let me borrow some of her shoes, but I turned down the pair of high-heeled pumps for a comfy pair of my own gold sandals. I felt like some sort of Grecian goddess.

"B, I mean this in the least gay way possible, but... I'd do you. You look hot, my little sex pot. Earlier in the summer you had that whole, 'I'm hot but innocent' look going on, but now..."

Rosalie's eyes scanned my newly dressed form, lingering slightly on my cleavage, and heat pooled in my cheeks.

"Thanks. You don't look too bad yourself."

"Aw, this old thing?" she said with a twang, one I hadn't heard in some time. We both giggled as she spun around, the bottom of her red skirt flaring out with a swoosh.

"Hey!" We both turned to face the sharp tone assaulting us from the doorway. "You had girl bonding without me?" Alice sounded so sad that I couldn't resist skipping over and embracing her. "No." She pouted and tried to wiggle out of my arms, but once Rosalie attacked her from the other side, she realized an escape from her plight was fruitless. We giggled and smiled until our stomachs hurt and we ran out of air. I was glad to see Rose smiling again. I really didn't like her crying. At all.

"So, what'd I miss?" Alice asked as we started making our way towards the dining hall.

"Em and I have decided to call it quits and just be friends," Rosalie said, filling Alice in on her news as if it were nothing important.

Alice's face dropped, and she reached out to squeeze Rosalie's hand. "Oh, I'm sorry."

Rosalie shrugged. "I told Bella earlier. I'm not."

"Well..." Alice dragged out the word, and as we turned towards her, a blinding smile took over her face. "I have some news."

"Al, what?" I asked pointedly.

"Jasper is going to move in with Edward and look for teaching positions in Providence! This way, we'll only be an hour drive apart while I'm at school in Boston or back home in Connecticut. He said he didn't want me to feel like I was being suffocated, but he couldn't imagine not being with me. Isn't that the sweetest thing you've ever heard? He was all blushing and stuttering, and I hadn't seen him that nervous since the first time he got naked in front of me." She squealed this high-pitched ringing noise, and I cringed—although, that could have been because of the content of our conversation. I literally couldn't believe my ears. "LB, you're *so* going to be the maid of honor at our wedding."

What?

"What?" I yelled. My filter wasn't working tonight, apparently. My heart pounded and a flush spread throughout my body. I wasn't sure if I was angry or panicked or sad or just overwhelmed, but suddenly, I really didn't want to be around anyone.

Jasper was moving across the country to move in with *Edward*? With *my* Edward? I guess I'd always had the small idea in the back of my head that Edward would come to California with me. I mean, he wanted to break into the film industry just as much as I did, and it wasn't like Providence was rolling in opportunities for that. But if Jasper was moving in with him, that definitely wasn't happening. I felt sick and in no mood to party.

Why wouldn't he even discuss this with me? Had I been fooling myself this entire time? Did he just think of me as a child, one not mature enough to handle the implications of a conversation

like that?

No, that wasn't fair. And that couldn't be true. If Emmett, Rosalie, Jasper and Alice were all adult enough to have that conversation, then we were too. Or maybe he wasn't.

My thoughts bounced around, never ceasing until we reached the steps of the dining hall where the boys were waiting for us.

Edward linked his hand through mine and pressed a soft kiss to my cheek, but I felt nothing. I felt numb.

"You look beautiful," he whispered into my hair, and I tried to muster up a smile. Alice gave me an apologetic look, but I turned my eyes away. I couldn't deal with the "Poor Bella" looks quite yet. That would only twist the knife further.

I was sure dinner was delicious. It looked delicious—perfectly cooked filet, twice baked potatoes, green beans, and cheesecake for dessert—but I barely ate any of it. I was afraid of losing it all over the table. Or Edward's lap.

After dinner, they led us to the gymnasium, which had been cleared out for dancing. There was a DJ and bright lights, and it sort of looked like a bad high school dance. Edward kissed my knuckles and asked if I wanted to dance, but I couldn't do it. I made some lame excuse about having to go to the bathroom and hightailed it out of there as fast as I could.

Outside the gym, I pressed my back against the side of the building and tried to calm my breathing. I'd never had a panic attack before, but I was pretty sure this was the beginning of one. Holy shit, how had I not worried about this before? I was in love—had been in love for five years—and it was ending.

He isn't coming with me.

Saying goodbye each summer had always been hard, but there'd always been next summer. Now, at least for him, there was definitely not next summer. And I had no idea what that meant for us.

Not wanting to cry outside the doorway and have Edward find me, I began to walk away from the gymnasium, down the long path to the docks and the lake. It was peaceful there, and at least I could cry alone.

The blaring bass began to quiet down as I walked away from the gym. I took a long shaky inhale and exhaled calmly. My arms swung at my side, and I looked down, realizing what a waste Rosalie's work had been.

So much for enjoying one night of looking and feeling good.

Lost in my thoughts, I didn't even hear anyone come towards me until both my hands were intertwined with one of each of theirs. I looked from side to side and smiled. I should have known that they had been watching me. They always watched me. We walked in silence until

we were perched on the edge of the dock, our feet dangling into the cool water.

"So," Jake began softly, "are you going to tell us why you allowed me to steal not only the rest of your steak but also your dessert tonight?"

I chuckled. Of course *that* would be my give away.

"Come on, LB," Emmett chimed in. "We just want to help. You've never *not* come to us for help before."

"This is helping." I kicked my feet, letting the water splash the ends of their rolled up pants.

"Do I need to grab the Oreos and frosting from my bunk?" Emmett asked with a small nudge to my shoulders. I shook my head.

"Do I need to grab Edward?" Jake mumbled under his breath.

That was it. I was sure I looked like some wide-eyed cartoon, but I could feel my lip tremble and my eyes water as I shook my head. I bit down on my lip, trying to prevent the noises that were soon to follow, but it didn't matter. Tears streamed down my cheeks and my shoulders heaved. As I pulled in another breath, a pained sound ripped from my chest and echoed across the surface of the lake.

"Ah fuck, LB," Emmett muttered as he wrapped his arm around my shoulders and pulled me to his side. I melted, my eyes closing and my muscles going lax as I sobbed into his shirt.

As my tears continued to pour, Emmett and Jake started to converse over my head.

"I'll fucking kill him," Jake growled.

"We don't know that he did anything," Emmett countered.

"Sure we don't," Jake scoffed. "He's just been randomly acting like a hormonal weirdo for the past two days and her crying has nothing to do with me mentioning his name."

Jake was really more astute than I gave him credit for.

"LB, whatever happened," Emmett whispered into my hair, "it'll be okay. I promise."

Sniffling, I finally opened my eyes and pulled away from Emmett's chest. "Y-you c-can't promise th-that."

"You need to tell us what's wrong. We can't help if you don't tell us." Jake's face looked pained as he practically begged to hear my problems.

"Em, I heard about you and Rose. I'm sorry." I decided changing topics was probably my best bet this point in the game.

Emmett's eyebrows crinkled, the crystal blue of his irises disappearing partially behind his lowered lids. "Don't be sorry. Rose and I had a really great time hanging out this summer. She's going to be one of my friends for a really long time. Not as good a friend as you, of course." He smiled, and seeing his deep dimples, I couldn't help but reciprocate.

"Good."

"Heyyy," Jake whined. "LB is *my* best friend. Fuck off, Em." He pulled me to his side, wrapping me in a large bear hug, and a few more tears escaped as I was locked in his embrace.

"No way!" Emmett fought and pulled me back as if they were two boys fighting over their favorite toy, which maybe I was. "LB doesn't want your herpes hands all over her."

I snorted at the ridiculous turn of the conversation. I knew they were trying to cheer me up, and god dammit it if it wasn't working.

"Boys, boys, there's enough of me to go around. No fighting necessary," I joked.

A throat cleared behind us and another voice spoke up. "Enough for me, too?"

My spine stiffened, and my breath caught. Tears that had just dried threatened to spill over again. And I hated it. A feeling of nausea ran through me, and all I could think about was getting the fuck away from him. I wasn't ready. Not even close.

"Uh..." Jake stood up and rolled his pants legs down before awkwardly shoving his hands into his pockets. "Hey, Ed, what's up?"

"I was wondering where you guys ran off to. The party wasn't so fun without my favorite people there. There's only so much Alice and Jasper I can take, you know?"

"Really?" I began, my voice stone cold. Not even Emmett's comforting squeeze was able to bring me any warmth. "I'd think you'd be ready to get used to that, seeing as Jasper is going to be your new roommate and Alice will be around all the time."

"What?" His voice was confused, and I wondered briefly if he was considering denying the whole thing. He clearly thought better of it and continued with trepidation. "Who told you Jasper was moving in?"

I didn't turn around. I couldn't yet. But I could only imagine the expression on Edward's face—confusion, hurt, anger.

"Why does that matter?"

"Bella," he growled. "Who. The fuck. Told you?"

That was it. Something in me completely snapped, unraveled, and fell apart. It may have been my heart.

I sprang up from my perch on the docks and spun around to face him. He looked exactly as I imagined. A mixture of offense and irritation spread across his face, and I stared him down with a similar look of my own.

"You don't get to raise your voice at me, Edward! I have done *nothing* to deserve being yelled at. Nothing!"

"Whoa! And I have?"

"Yes!" I screamed, my chest heaving with anger.

Emmett scrambled to his feet and glanced at Jake in a silent plea for help.

"We should get going..."

"No!" I shot him a dirty glare. "It's fine. I'm leaving anyway. I don't need to be led on and lied to. Goodnight, boys."

Not even bothering to slide my sandals back on, I grasped them in one hand and took off. I couldn't go the obvious route past the gymnasium for fear of running into anyone, so I ran through the grass and away from the lights and chatter in favor of damp grass, crickets, and seclusion.

It worked for a minute. All I could feel was the adrenaline, pushing me forward and up the hill towards campus. All I could hear was the sound of my feet sliding through the slick grass and my labored breathing. But soon, I could see nothing.

Fuck.

Usually, when walking through this part of camp, I'd have a flashlight, something to help guide my way where the lights were scarce. But now I was blindly stumbling through the hills, hoping like hell that I wouldn't come across a raccoon or, heaven forbid, a skunk. All I needed to do was make it to the shack. I could break there, steal one or three of Edward's beers, and easily make it back to campus. I just prayed I was heading in the right direction. Out of shape and out of breath, my side cramped, and I slowed down to a walk.

Tears clouded my already poor vision, and I was on the verge of another sobfest when I heard something behind me. My breath caught, and I picked up my pace again, charging through the stitch in my stomach. I couldn't look behind me. If I looked and saw some kind of animal, I'd scream and freak it out and probably cause it to attack me. They'd find me the next day, mauled by a rabid raccoon or something. Oh well, at least if I died tonight, I wouldn't have died a virgin. Wasn't that all people really cared about when dying anyway?

As soon as the shack came into view, I broke out into a sprint. I'd almost reached it when he called out to me.

"Bella, slow the fuck down!"

I should have known that there was no animal behind me. Well, actually, maybe I should consider Edward an animal.

"No!" I shouted back, not slowing down. If Edward wanted me, he'd have to catch me first.

Color me surprised when he actually did. He grabbed my arm and spun me on my heel. I nearly slipped as the dew covered grass slid beneath my skin.

"Stop running away from me!"

"Why?" I gritted.

His green eyes glowed, luminous under the faint light of the stars, flickering with heat and anger.

"I don't like it."

I rolled my eyes and pulled my arm out of his grasp. "Well, tough shit, Edward. I don't like that we're going to be three thousand miles apart in three days, but it's happening anyway!"

"And you think, what?" He laughed humorlessly. "That I like that? That I'm going to be perfectly okay here on the east coast with you going to the college that Playboy Magazine deemed has the most attractive student body? That you're going to be alone on that campus, going to parties, getting drunk, and letting pretentious film school twits impress you and then fuck you?"

His words were like venom sloshing around my stomach, making me sick. He was getting progressively louder and progressively angrier, backing me up until I was pressed flush against the side of the shack.

I couldn't process what he was saying. It didn't make rational sense. And it only served to fuel my own anger.

"You're such an asshole," I seethed. "You have such little faith in our relationship that you think I'm just going to leave here and forget about you? You're fucking delusional, Edward." I punched his shoulder, willing him to back up, but he didn't budge. He didn't even flinch. "I have been in love with you for five years. Five years! Do you know how long that is to wait for someone? But I waited. I gave you *everything*. But because I don't get to keep you, you think I'm just going to pick up with someone else? Fuck you, Edward Cullen! You don't know me at all."

We were both breathing hard, our faces so close together that our raspy exhales mingled together in a gruesome duel. His hands flew to my hips as his fingers bunched up the material of my dress around my waist, and I restrained a whimper as he undid his pants to release his cock.

"No," he snarled as he moved his hands to push aside the thin lace of my thong. "Fuck you, Bella." He entered me quickly—faster and harder than he ever had before. He'd always been too afraid of hurting me, but when my heart was already bleeding, this sort of pain was welcomed.

I groaned as he hitched my leg around his waist, driving further inside me. Flaking paint scraped

across my back, and I could feel it leaving marks as he began to move.

"I am the person who knows you best," he snapped. "I am the *only* person who knows you like this."

He emphasized each one of his sentences with a forceful thrust of his hips, and I moaned out a long, "Yes," in response, too overcome with sensations to compute what he was saying.

Deft hands moved to my breasts, pulling them from the tight confines of the dress and pinching them between his forefingers and thumbs, as he increased his pace.

"You're mine!" he growled, never taking his eyes off me. "I love you, Bella. Always!"

It was too much—the pounding, the feel of the wood planks digging into my spine and his fingers on my nipples, the warm air and his words swirling around us—I fell apart, contracting and shuddering and moaning loudly.

"Fuck!" I screamed.

Suddenly, his fist pounded against the wood next to my head. As he banged, he let his head fall to the crook of my shoulder, and he bit it... hard. I cried out again with the surge of pleasure, and he came with a loud roar. My hands clasped at his neck, keeping him close to me as we struggled to catch our breaths.

Sweat dripped down my neck, pooling at my shoulder. It wasn't until Edward pulled his face away that I realized it hadn't been sweat but his tears.

"I don't want to lose you, Bella. I promise I don't. But I'm going to." He sounded so broken that I couldn't resist pulling him close and resting his head on my shoulder. "Can't we just enjoy what time we have left together and figure it out from there?"

I ran my hands through his hair, my voice breaking as I responded with a quiet, "We'll see."

~Edward~

I had fucked up. Nothing was going the way I wanted it to go, and I knew I was to blame. When Jasper had informed me of his plans to move to the east coast, I automatically suggested he come stay with me. My one bedroom apartment in Providence had a smaller room in the back I used as a studio, but it could easily be turned into a spot for him. I didn't know what had inspired the suggestion—maybe I figured if I could hold onto some part of this summer I wouldn't lose Bella completely, but as soon as I heard the malice in her tone, I knew I'd messed up.

I just didn't know how to make it better.

Bella had essentially confessed that she didn't want to break up, that she wanted to stay together, whether it meant long distance or not, but I still didn't know how realistic that was. She had no idea what was going to change when she got to college, and I didn't want to lose her

in some jealous rage.

You wouldn't lose her if you followed her to California...

Except, maybe I would. I still didn't know what awaited her at college, and I was too much of a pussy to take that leap of faith without some sort of guarantee. I'd be miserable, and sure, she'd be miserable for a short time, too, but it'd work out better in the end.

And if we were meant to be, we'd find each other again. At least, that's what I kept telling myself... and her, which she finally let slide.

For the following two days after our, um, argument—aka the hottest sex I'd ever had up against the back wall of the shack—Bella spent most of her time with her campers. I was a little pissed off at this, to be honest, but I was so busy cleaning up the shack and boxing up my personal possessions that I couldn't be too upset.

Plus, Bella promised the last night of camp belonged solely to us.

I tried to relax as I let the faint strains of TV On The Radio drift through the shack, but it was fairly useless. I knew I'd never be fully relaxed unless Bella was with me.

I scooped up a pile of DVDs from the shelf, laughing as I caught sight of *Two Moon Junction*. That movie would always remind me of the time I thought I'd walked in on Bella and Alice making out in the shack. I figured it was an all girls camp and they probably did some experimenting. In fact, I still wondered about that...

"Hey, Edward," Seth said with a flail of his arm. "What did you want me to do with these?"

He was holding a huge stack of messy papers that had been shoved to the back recesses of the highest shelves in the shack. To be honest, I had no clue what they were.

"Uh, just leave them on the desk. I'll get to them... eventually." I shrugged and cleared the last shelf of DVDs into the large cardboard box I'd be packing into Jasper's car. That was a major positive of bringing Jasper back to Providence with me; I wouldn't have to take some shady Greyhound and ship my shit separately.

"Okay, well, it's the final cookout, and I promised Riley I'd—"

I cut him off. "Go, go, go. I'm nearly finished here."

He looked around the messy shack skeptically, but I waved him off. "Seriously, I'll be fine."

For the next hour, I packed and trashed all my junk. I cranked up the tunes from the computer and did a good old-fashioned cleaning. After five summers, I'd accumulated far too much shit, and I couldn't believe some of the things I'd found—musical scripts from summers past, Star Wars action figures, yet another light saber, a stash of condoms, and enough blank DV tapes to get me through the next year. It was interesting to see my summers chronicled by the stuff I'd held onto, and I realized how much I was going to miss this place. But Jake was right with what

he'd told me at the beginning of the summer, Long Lake had always been a safe place for me to hide away from real life, and I needed to finally grow up and stop avoiding that.

I sighed and threw another huge trash bag out the front door. There were about five of them piled out there. Seriously, I had no idea where all this shit came from.

"Ouch," I heard Bella mutter along with the distinct noise of a trash bag being kicked. "What the hell, Edward?"

"MB?" I stuck my head out the propped open doorway to see Bella struggling to get past the trash bag barrier and up the stairs with two plates of delicious looking food. A contented smile spread across my face.

Hers on the other hand didn't look so happy. A scowling Bella finally reached the doorway to the shack, thrust a plate into my hand, huffed over to the closest chair and sank onto it.

"Uh, hey..."

"I thought you might want some food, so we don't have to raid the kitchen at four in the morning," she said before taking a large bite of a ranch-covered chicken finger.

"Thanks." I slid into the chair next to her, the rolly one, and sidled up beside her to press a large kiss to her temple as she continued to chew.

"Mhm," she hummed quietly and swallowed the chicken in her mouth. "I brought yours with honey mustard since I know you don't like ranch, and I couldn't carry soda down, but I figured you had to have something left in your fridge that you'd want to use up anyway."

"You're the best." I kissed her temple lightly again before pulling away to admire my full plate of food—chicken fingers, fries, mixed salad, and a brownie. Yum. "I was about to starve to death down here. And there is Diet Dr. Pepper and/or Sparks if you want to commence drinking."

She leaned over to the recently cleaned out mini fridge and pulled out two sodas. I took mine gratefully and cracked it open to take a long swig.

Still chewing, she shuffled through the stack of papers I'd told Seth to leave for later. "Wha dis?" she asked through a mouthful of fries.

She was too fucking cute for her own good. I leaned in and kissed the salt off her lips, reminding me of the first time I kissed her and tasting the remnants of McDonalds. "Mm, I don't know."

I pulled back and took a good look at what was in her hands. "Wow, I haven't seen or thought about this in ages."

The huge pile of crumpled papers had been projects I'd worked on in RISD—several incomplete animations, story boards, even a list of future ideas. I grinned. "Aw, man. I remember these!"

Bella's eyes lit up with excitement as she browsed through. "Edward, these are great. Have you

ever thought of, um, finishing them?"

"Yeah." I shrugged. At the time, I'd promised myself I was going to see each project through. "But it's not like I have a crew and actors at my disposal, plus the equipment for lighting alone is way more than I could afford. It's one thing to do stuff like this at film school where you can utilize their resources for free, but it's a little harder after." I scratched my stubble thoughtfully and watched Bella nod in acceptance.

She opened her mouth, ready to say something, when my cell phone blared, its obnoxiously loud ringtone interrupting us. "Edward Cullen speaking," I answered to the unknown caller ID.

"Edward, this is Deborah Barry. I got your number from Marcy Klein—you taped her daughter Sarah's wedding this past spring?"

I wracked my brain and remembered the wedding she spoke of. Ah, yes. That had been a night to remember. I'd gotten sloshed with one of the bridesmaids and ended up taking her back to my place. Not one of my finer moments, and to be frank, I couldn't believe the mother of the bride would actually recommend me to someone else.

"Of course. How is Marcy?" I asked. Bella looked on with curiosity, but I just made a blabbing mouth with my hand and rolled my eyes. Clients.

"Oh, she's doing really well. A bit sad to have Sarah out of the house, but you know."

I didn't really, but I agreed anyway.

"Anyway," she continued, "I know this is a bit last minute, seeing as how it's Thursday evening, but my daughter is getting married on Saturday and our videographer just called in to say she came down with the flu! Who comes down with the flu in August, I don't know, but Marcy said you were great in a pinch, and I could pay you extra for your time. Please, Edward, I'm desperate here."

I chuckled softly and smiled into the receiver, but on the inside my heart was breaking. I'd have to go to a wedding the day after saying goodbye to Bella, possibly for good? I didn't know how I would be able to make it. "Not a problem, Deborah. Saturday, you said? What time would you need me? We can discuss compensation the day of. I'm not concerned."

I heard her breathe a huge sigh of relief, and she went on to tell me the details for the event. I'd need to be there from noon until ten pm, and it was at the Edgewood Manor—meaning I really didn't need to worry about my pay if they could afford a venue like that.

We hung up quickly after that, and I turned to face Bella, who was still looking on with curiosity. "So, who was that?"

"Client needed a last minute videographer. Edward Cullen to the rescue."

"How noble." She smiled, but it didn't reach her eyes. I decided I didn't want to waste any more time. Glancing at the computer clock, I saw it was already past eight. How the hell had that

happened?

"MB, are you all packed and ready to go?" I asked nervously.

"Pretty much," she said with a heavy sigh. "I have to shower and change into my plane clothes, but other than that, I'm finished."

"Well, I have a brilliant idea." She looked at me expectantly, her eyes skeptical. "Why don't you grab your plane clothes and meet me in Bunk Seven for some movie watching and a late night shower with me?"

Dainty arms wrapped around my neck, and her lips were soon attached to mine. I kissed back with equal fervor, not wanting to release her from my grasp.

"I don't think I've ever been one to call you 'brilliant,' since I have no intention of inflating your ego more than necessary, but... that plan does sound pretty inspired, Mr. Cullen."

With a smirk and a swagger, she disappeared from my sight. Sighing, I gathered up the remnants of the trash and took them outside. I paused for a brief moment on my RISD work before shaking my head and throwing that in, too. Pipe dreams, that was all those were. Videography and the bookstore, that was my real life.

Surprisingly, Bunk Seven was empty when I walked in. Emmett and Jake's room was completely in tact still, seeing as both were returning next summer. Each had a half packed suitcase in the middle of the floor, and I assumed they were going to finish up tomorrow once everyone else had departed campus.

I slipped off my shoes and padded over to our rented TV. Emmett would be taking it back tomorrow, so I figured we might as well get one more good use out of it. I'd just put *Cruel Intentions* into the DVD player when I felt her arms wrap around my waist.

I intertwined our hands and led us back to my bed, which Jake had already claimed for next summer since he "fucking bought that shit anyway," and relaxed into the plush comfort of my dorky bedding as the movie began, Bella happily situated between my legs.

Her nails traced light circles up and down my forearms, and I could feel myself hardening and protruding into her back. Slowly, she moved my hands to join with hers and slide beneath her shirt to caress the soft skin of her stomach. I let my eyes flutter closed and enjoyed the sensations on my fingertips.

"Bella," I groaned as her lips brushed against my neck. I didn't open my eyes. I couldn't. She'd paralyzed me with the intensity of her touch, her tenderness, her love.

"Edward," she whispered against my lips as she pushed up my shirt. I raised my arms and helped her bring the fabric over my head, casting it onto the floor with little thought. My hands reciprocated and soon all our clothes rested in a loose pile next to the bed.

She was over me then, our soft hands roaming and exploring vast expanses of naked skin.

Behind each touch was a measure of desperation and need, and I wished I could hold onto it forever.

Needing to take control, I grabbed her waist and rolled us over. If this was goodbye, I had to be staring into her eyes as I entered her. Slowly but with purpose, I did, sheathing myself in her warmth and relishing in her breathy whimper.

"Please," she moaned. I didn't know what she was pleading for, but I knew I would give her anything.

As her heels locked around my back and pressed into my spine, I began to move. Our hips rocked in a perfect unison, finally finding the perfect tempo. I cradled her shoulders in my hands and pressed her soft breasts against my chest. Slick skin slid and created the perfect amount of accompanying friction. Although the movie played behind us, all I could hear were our voices mingling in cries of pleasure.

I never wanted to stop. I wanted to live in this moment, and I would keep this memory for my dreams when I couldn't be with her.

She shifted her legs, letting them slide down to the crook of my knee, opening her further and changing the angle to one so much better I was nearly blinded with pleasure. Our fingers moved and threaded together over her head, keeping every part of us that could possibly be intertwined locked into place firmly.

"I love you, Edward," she moaned, and I returned the sentiment.

We climaxed together, eyes wide and locked, in a rare moment of unison for us. And I collapsed into her chest when we were finished. My cheek rose and fell with each one of her calming breaths, and I let the sound of her pounding heart resonate through my skull.

Her fingers ran through my hair, like I was her pet. I was only too content to act as such. Completely sated, I let my eyes drift closed. They only opened again when I heard her sniffing. I looked up as her fingers continued to weave patterns on my skull, and even though I shouldn't have been shocked, it cut me to see the tear tracks on her cheeks.

"No, Bella, please don't cry." I rolled us over, so now she could be in my arms instead of the other way around.

"I'm not ready for this summer to end," she whispered, her face tucked into my chest. "I can't say goodbye to you."

"It won't be goodbye, MB." At that she looked up.

"No?"

I smiled gently and kissed her forehead. "No. There's such thing as technology nowadays, you know? There's this thing called a computer. I hear you frequent it. And on it, there's email and instant message and facebook and skype."

She chuckled and warmth finally spread back into her eyes. "Yeah?"

"And let's not forget about my favorite—the cell phone. That has all kinds of other methods like texting and pictures and actual voice to voice contact."

"So, this isn't the end?" she asked nervously.

"Bella, I said we'd figure it out as we went along, okay? I can't give you more than that."

"Okay."

"Shower?" I asked with a sudden lightness to my voice.

"Shower," she said with a smirk.

By the time Bella and I emerged from the shower, the bunk was swarming with people again.

"Gah!" Emmett cried, putting a hand up to cover his eyes. "Put some clothes on, fools!" He flailed and turned away from Bella's and my toweled forms walking down the hall back to my room to get re-clothed.

Bella giggled into the damp skin of my shoulder. "Just imagine what he'd say if he knew what we did before and in during the shower?"

"God damn it, LB, I can hear you!" Emmett yelled again, this time singing to himself and covering his ears. What a ridiculous human being.

I pushed open my bedroom door where Jasper and Alice were cuddled up on top of his blankets.

"Oh." Jasper looked startled as Bella and I emerged through the doorway, and I could see his ears turn pink from across the room. Sucker. "Uhh, we can leave."

"No worries, J-Town. Edward—" she beseeched me with her eyes "—can you just hold up my towel while I change?"

"Sure," I said skeptically. I would have preferred if Jasper and Alice had left the room, but I could understand not wanting to kick them out.

"Aw, you're not going to let me see your hot ass?" Alice called out.

"Psh, you've already seen my hot ass a few too many times, Al." My eyes narrowed as Bella changed behind the spread towel. I really did wonder about those two, and I wasn't sure if I was jealous or not if anything had happened.

"So true. I've gotten up close and personal with that bedonkadonk, and it is *fine*, sweet cheeks."

Incredulous, I looked over my shoulder, only to see Alice mocking me, her eyes sparkling with

mirth.

"Kidding, Edward," she said with a wink.

"No she's not." Bella laughed and stepped out from behind my towel curtain and threw my, I mean, her red hoodie over a plain white t-shirt and yoga pants. Feeling lazy, I just slid on some shorts and a sweatshirt. It was already two in the morning, and I knew I was going to fall into bed as soon as Bella had left my side anyway.

Suddenly, Jake popped his head through the doorway. "We're heading up to raid the kitchen. Who's with us?"

Alice scrambled out of Jasper's arms and was on Jake's back before I could say "me!" Giggling, Bella followed suit, hopping onto my back for our trek to the dining hall.

The night sped by quickly, much quicker than I could ever remember a final night going by. Maybe it was the fact that I wasn't returning, or maybe it was the fact that I was counting down the seconds until Bella was leaving, but suddenly two turned into six.

All of us sat in our designated Adirondack chairs at the top of the hill and watched the sun emerge from the lake, breaking through the clouds and bringing the new day upon us. I wrapped Bella in my arms and kissed her as our best friends quipped and joked. The mood never fell, always light and filled with chatter.

That was, until the first busses of crying girls were starting to load.

"Shit," Bella groaned. "I have three campers leaving on this bus. I have to say goodbye." She looked at me wistfully. "Edward, I really don't want to. I'm the worst at saying goodbye."

"LB, they're your campers, and they love you," Alice reprimanded. "Now, come on, I have a few to send off, too. Let's go."

Arm in arm, Bella and Alice wandered off towards the busses to deal with the hoards of sobbing campers. I was ever so grateful the female staff dealt with that. I didn't think I was equipped for that kind of situation.

By nine o'clock, the entire camp had emptied of campers. I'd taken several catnaps, drifting in and out of slumber, as Bella came and went to help board the busses.

"Edward," she whispered, rousing me from my nap with a soft shake of my shoulder.

"Mm?" I smiled at seeing her face so close to mine. She was so beautiful.

"I'm leaving."

And just like that, my world crumbled.

"Already?" I croaked.

"Yeah... Emmett's just about ready to drive us to the airport."

"Us?" I sat up, taking note of Emmett lugging suitcases into the back of a camp van just down the driveway.

"Rose and Alice are on different flights, but we're all leaving out of Portland," she explained, her eyes starting to fill with unshed tears.

I stood up quickly—a little too quickly—and rubbed the sleep out of my eyes. "I'll come, too."

"What?"

"Is there room in the van? I want to come with you to the airport." I said it too quickly and with too much conviction for how incredibly exhausted I was, but I couldn't *not* go.

"Really?"

I looked over her shoulder and called out to Emmett. "Hey, Em! Is there room for me?"

He shrugged and nodded, so I took that as acceptance. As Bella teared up and said her goodbyes to Jasper and Jake, I pulled myself together. I wouldn't lose it. I'd stay strong for Bella. I had to.

"We ready to go?" Emmett asked, clapping Rosalie on the shoulder loudly. She scowled at him, and he laughed heartily. Only Emmett could stay this jovial on departure day.

We shuffled into the van, and I let Rosalie sit in the front so I could hold Bella's hand for the entire forty-five minute drive. No one spoke, and the eerie quiet was foreboding.

Soon enough, the girls had checked their bags and received their boarding passes. I refused to let Bella's hand go the entire time. Finally, she turned to me and smiled sadly. "I'm going to say goodbye to Em now, okay?"

I shrugged and released her hand. Blood flowed back into my fingertips. I couldn't believe how hard I'd been grasping at her, but I hadn't felt a thing.

Alice turned to me with a big smile and threw her arms around my neck. That girl was so much stronger than I gave her credit for. "I'll see you in a few weeks, right?"

"I assume so," I said dryly, causing her to punch me straight in the shoulder. "Ow, Alice, you should know I'm a weakling."

"Get used to it, buddy."

"And I hope to God I never have to hear from your whining ass again," Rosalie drawled, and I couldn't help but chuckle and pull her into a fierce hug. The girl had kept me on my toes this summer, that was for sure.

"Rose, don't kid yourself. You're going to miss me more than anyone."

She rolled her eyes and sighed, but I saw the smile threatening to escape. "Well, maybe not more than anyone, but I guess I'll miss you a little bit."

"Thanks."

Then, she approached. It was slow and timid, and it reminded me of the old Bella, the one before the confidence. It hurt. I didn't want to see her like this. I never wanted to see her like this.

"Hey." I reached out and wrapped her in my arms.

"Hey," she mumbled, but I heard a distinct sniff, signaling the beginning of the waterworks.

"I love you so much, Bella," I whispered into her hair. "Please, don't forget that."

"I could never forget that." She looked up at me with such admiration, it almost made my knees weak... you know, if boys did that kind of stuff. "I love you too, Edward. Don't forget about me. I'm going to write you emails updating you on everything, so you won't have the chance, okay?"

"Forgetting about you is a complete impossibility."

With all the tenderness I possessed, I cupped her face in my hands and brought her lips to mine. It was a small airport, and I was sure we were making some sort of scene, but I needed this kiss to last me for forever.

It was over all too soon, and Bella was being pulled out of my grasp and pushed through security. Alice and Rosalie flanked her, rubbing comforting circles onto her back, and I was glad she had them for at least another hour. Just before she rounded the corner and out of my sight, Bella turned around and blew me a kiss. I smiled, but it faded as soon as she disappeared.

Numbness consumed me as Emmett and I made our way back to the van.

"Dude," he scoffed, but he looked concerned. "You're going to break her heart aren't you?"

I shrugged, not knowing how to respond, and Emmett simply sighed and started up the van.

"I know it's no consolation," I responded, my tone empty, "but I think I just broke mine too."

As we sped away from the airport, I could feel the tattered remains of my heart spilling onto the highway, wanting to stay as close to Bella as possible. But I knew it was too late. The summer was over, and neither of us could know what awaited us.

Misguided Hearts

from Isabella Swan imswan usc . edu
to thecullenabides gmail . com
date Mon, Aug 17, 2009 at 4:23 PM
subject Finally...

Hey Edward,

I can't believe it's only been three days since we said goodbye. It feels like it's been fucking forever. I'm sorry I haven't even had the chance to call, but this weekend was completely commandeered by the chief (that's my police chief father, remember him?) and my mom. Apparently they're going to miss me this year or something. Who knew? Also, I figured you had that wedding on Saturday. How'd that go? Any hot bridesmaids? Just kidding. There better not have been. -stern face- Ugh, and I'm going to be so busy for the next few weeks. I move in on Friday, so I'm spending the rest of this week buying out all of Bed, Bath, and Beyond (seriously, I had no idea that a college freshman required so much stuff!) and packing up my truck. If you have a few minutes to spare, give me a ring. I fucking miss you so much, Edward. I've spent every moment since I got back to Washington wishing you were on top of me... I mean, with me ;) Give my love to Jasper, and I'll check in after I'm settled into USC! Love you.

xo,

Bella

from Isabella Swan imswan usc . edu
to thecullenabides gmail . com
date Fri, Aug 28, 2009 at 8:39 PM
subject it's been one week

Oh my God, I can't believe I'm finally sitting down. This week has been absolutely crazy. I knew film school was going to be intense, but I hadn't really prepared myself for the change, I guess. I'm taking five classes, which is apparently a huge fucking workload, and I'm already dying. I'm taking Intro To Film with the famous professor Drew Casper (well, famous for being a complete douchebag—he calls on the person in class who he thinks looks the most unprepared so he can scare the living shit out of them. Oh, but he already loves me because I'm the only one in my entire lecture who knew what "Rosebud" was... can you believe that? A lecture of over two hundred supposed film kids, and I was the only one who'd ever seen *Citizen Kane*... shameful, I know). Then, I'm taking Intro To TV, which is already the most boring class I've ever been enrolled in. I know you warned me that the intro classes were going to be dull, but I think this one is definitely going to take the cake. Blah, I'm sorry, I know I'm rambling and you probably don't want to hear about my lame ass classes, but I'm already having so much fun. I'm living in the best freshman dorm – New/North – and I'm on the cinema floor with the coolest kids. Most of them are in my classes, so even though I'm not the biggest fan of my roommate, Renata (she's

totally OCD, but not in a cute/endearing way like you), I'm still making lots of friends. There are two guys who live next door who have been my saving graces – Alec and Marcus. We have nearly all our classes together, and I've been schooling them in the ways of awesomeness. Neither of them had ever seen *Star Wars* before. Can you believe they let people into USC Film School who haven't watched Lucas's claim to fame? I mean, they know it's called the George Lucas School of Cinematic Arts, right? Boggles my mind. Anyway, I made them watch it last night. It made me miss you so much, though. When I got back to my room, thank God my stupid roommate was already asleep because I definitely needed some alone time, if you know what I mean, hehe. God, I'll never be able to watch it again without thinking about the first time we had sex. Okay, that was my attempt at dirty talk. I'm pretty sure I suck majorly at it, but we can work on that, right? You'll have to let me know if I'm doing okay. Some guidance is always appreciated, and I know you're really good at that. Sigh. Okay, I've got to run. Fraternity rush starts tonight, and I heard they're the best parties all year. Oh, if only the chief knew what his \$40k was going towards... just kidding. I'm sure I'll pay him back everything when I'm a famous screenwriter, right? Love you, Edward.

xo,

Bella

from Isabella Swan imswan usc . edu
to thecullenabides gmail . com
date Fri, Sep, 4, 2009 at 7:56 PM
subject USC Football?

Gah, another week gone by. How is time speeding by so quickly? And why haven't I heard from you yet? I know you're busy, but you could spend a second or two writing to your equally busy but loving girlfriend a quick response. Okay, that's all the lecturing I have in me for right now. But just know... I've got my eye on you ;) So, tomorrow is our first football game of the season. I'm a little nervous. In case you've forgotten, I'm not exactly the biggest athletic enthusiast. But I've been told there's nothing like a USC football game, and I'm inclined to believe it. The school spirit here is INTENSE. I've been told that tailgating starts in the morning (yay, day drinking!), even though kick off isn't until four PM. So, Marcus and Alec both rushed ZBT—I think they're the dorkiest fraternity, haha—and since they're pledges, they have to get up super early to wait in line so they can get the best seats in the student section (front row, fifty yard line, bitches!) for their house. I said I'd go with them because I really don't want to go with Renata, and I do really want to see the game up close and personal! Game time will be crazy! Okay, so, I don't really know that much about football, but I know that USC rocks and our quarterback is a super hot, super religious freshman named Matt Barkley. Oh, and he's #7. Plus, I can totally rock cardinal and gold... I'll post pictures on Facebook because I know you're missing my pretty face. That was also a hint that I'd like to see yours sometime in the near future. Skype date on Sunday? If I'm not too hungover, that is... Anyway, ZBT is throwing some huge pre-game celebration tonight, so I need to get ready before Marcus and Alec come pounding on my door for me to hurry up. I don't think they understand the notion of being fashionably late to a party. Whatever, I'm working on it. Hope everything's going well with you... I love you and miss you.

xo,

Bella

from Isabella Swan imswan usc . edu
to thecullenabides gmail . com
date Sun, Sep 6, 2009 at 12:04 PM
subject skype?

Hey Edward,

I just tried Skyping you, but it kept ringing and no one picked up, so I just hung up and decided to email you instead. I know you're technologically savvy, so I'm not sure what happened. I look all cute, too, because I have leftover make up on from the party last night. Morning after chic, if you will. I was pretty drunk last night – we won against San Jose State, so there were parties abound on Frat Row – it got a little crazy when some of the football players showed up. Also, girls are super skanky here, and I'm really not a fan. But when I got slightly too drunk to function (please delete that drunk voicemail from me, I have no idea what I said), Marcus and Alec helped walk me home. Such nice guys. We ended up getting chicken soft tacos from Chanos (best fucking things I've ever eaten) and watching *The Dark Knight* at two-thirty in the morning. I'm a little tired, but it was so worth it. Seriously, as soon as you come visit, we'll spend time going through the Chanos menu. You would die of Mexican food happiness. Okay, I should probably get started on my homework since I have a shitload of it, but I'll try Skyping you later or something. Love you.

xo,

Bella

from Isabella Swan imswan usc . edu
to thecullenabides gmail . com
date Thur, Sep 10, 2009 at 1:16 PM
subject Come in, come in?

Hey, so I haven't heard from you yet... I'm starting to get worried. I left you a few voicemails. Did you get them? Hopefully you didn't lose your phone or leave it at a wedding or something. Jasper told me you haven't been around much because you've been so busy with work. That's so great... I'd love to actually hear about it from you, though. I'm thinking about finally calling Maggie's dad about that internship. I'm nervous, but I think Professor Casper would be incredibly impressed for a freshman to be so involved so early on in the year. What do you think? Am I taking on too much? I just don't know. I wish you were here to help me figure out what to do. You always know how to calm me down. Please get back to me before I have to send out a search party for you, okay? Gotta run to class now. I love you.

xo,

Bella

from Isabella Swan imswan usc . edu
to thecullenabides gmail . com
date Fri, Sep 11, 2009 at 4:13 PM
subject ...

Edward, this is getting a little ridiculous. Seriously, where are you? I've tried calling, texting, Skyping, and emailing, but I haven't heard back from you once. Jasper won't give me any straight answers either. What's going on? I thought we decided we'd work on us together. I'm just feeling really confused right now. Why won't you talk to me? I love you.

xo,

Bella

from Isabella Swan imswan usc . edu
to thecullenabides gmail . com
date Sun, Sep 13, 2009 at 2:18 AM
subject Happy Birthday to me...

So, it's officially my birthday. Happy 19th to me, I guess. Just got back from a huge dinner with all my new friends at El Cholo, aka the best Mexican food you've ever eaten. I got phone calls from everyone at midnight, Edward—Emmett, Rose, Alice, Jasper, Jake, even Seth. Everyone, but you, I guess. Jasper says you're "around," so I know you're still alive, but I don't know what happened. I don't even know why I bother writing these emails anymore... it's not like you ever write back. I guess maybe that pitcher of margaritas gave me the courage to say everything I've been holding in since I got on the plane in Portland. Everything I've been holding in for the past month. Because, yes, it's officially been a month since we said goodbye. You never called, you never texted, you never Skyped—you never did anything you said you would, Edward. Why would you say we'd make it work if you weren't going to go through with it at all? I haven't forgotten about you. Sure, I'm loving USC—my classes are incredible and the whole experience is everything I thought it would be and more—but I miss you every moment of every day. Maggie's dad called me back. I start as a film development intern for Plan B Productions this Tuesday. I'll work Tuesday and Friday afternoons, and I'll get to write coverage for scripts, work with development executives and meet with writers. And fuck, Edward, the only person I wanted to share that news with was you. But I guess you didn't get that voicemail either.

I don't know what to do anymore. Is this it? Is everything I pined for five years just over now? I mean, I spend most nights wondering if you're out with other girls. Jasper never mentions that. And Alice says that the weekend she visited, you never even came home. So, what? You're back to sleeping with the cheap floozies you never cared about, while the only person you ever claimed to love is telling drunk and horny frat guys that she doesn't want to cheat on her incredible long-distance boyfriend but thanks anyway? It's not fair, Edward. It's not. If all you wanted was to take my virginity and bail, you could have prepared me better. You didn't have to

fill my head with lies of your love and devotion. And you didn't have to do it so fucking well.

I guess it's fair to assume that any love you had for me stayed within the confines of camp, and that's fine. But Edward? I love you. I loved you then, I love you now, and no matter what happens in the future – even if we never speak again – a huge part of my heart will always belong to you. Always.

Please, if you're getting these emails... please just write me back. That's my only birthday wish. I want to hear from you, how you're doing, what you're thinking... anything at all. Just, please.

xo,

Bella

from thecullenabides gmail . com
to Isabella Swan imswan usc . edu
date Sun, Sep 13, 2009 at 5:01 AM
subject re: Happy Birthday to me...

happy birthday, bella.

~Bella~

I read it over again just to make sure I hadn't hallucinated. Nope, there it was, right in my inbox, from Edward. Three simple words—and not the ones I'd been wanting to hear from him for the past month. I read the email one more time before slamming my laptop shut and letting the tears come.

What hurt the most was that I now had confirmation he'd not only been receiving but also reading my emails. He'd just been choosing not to respond. It was cold, and it felt like a dagger to my stomach.

And then, like some perfectly timed sit-com joke, my phone began ringing with the name *TANYA* flashing across the front. I contemplated not answering for a brief second, but for some reason, I had this foolish hope that Edward had lost his phone and was now calling from his sister's. I couldn't let it go to voicemail for fear that he wouldn't leave one and I'd miss my chance. Impulse grabbed at me, and I pressed the "talk" button and answered before I could change my mind.

"H-hey."

"Happy Birthday, Bella!" Tanya cheered, sounding far too chipper for my liking at the moment.

"Thanks, Tanya," I croaked. Disappointment set in. It wasn't him. And even though I knew the likelihood it would've been him was probably around .001%, I still deflated.

"Whoa, too much partying last night?"

"Something like that." I hopped up from my desk and rolled back into bed. It was my birthday, and I was going to wallow if I wanted to.

"Um, are you okay, sweetie? You're sounding a little like... um..." She trailed off uncomfortably.

"Like what?"

"Well, like Edward."

"Oh." My voice struggled to stay steady, but I refused to cry on the phone. "I wouldn't know."

The bitterness in my tone cut through and resonated through the empty space that hung between us.

Finally, Tanya broke the silence, her once-jovial voice sounding far too serious. "Bella, please tell me that's some kind of heinously bad joke."

I laughed humorlessly and allowed a few silent tears to escape. "No, no joke."

"He didn't call you for your birthday? I should fucking—"

I cut her off, needing to end the conversation as soon as possible. "He hasn't called me at all. Okay, Tanya? I don't know what his voice sounds like because the last time I heard him was when he said goodbye to me at the airport. And no, I really don't feel like talking about it."

Tanya paused for another second before coming back at me with a vengeance. I should have prepared myself, but I'd thought that giving a succinct summary of the demise of Edward's and my relationship would be the end of that convo. I should have known it wouldn't be that easy to deter her.

"WHAT?" she bellowed, and I had to lift the phone from my ear so that my eardrums didn't bleed out. "How is that fucking possible? No... just... no! Bella, I swear, I've been talking to him every week and asking how you are, and he always has answers. Always! He tells me how well you're doing in your classes and how your professors love you and the two boys from next door who are becoming your close friends and... and..."

There it was—hard evidence that he'd been reading my emails, listening to my voicemails. He'd even been relaying the information to his sister, for fuck's sake, but he couldn't be bothered to contact me back? Unable to stop it, a whimper and soft sob escaped my mouth.

"Shit, Bella, I'm sorry. If I'd known, I wouldn't have brought him up at all. But he never said anything. I just assumed... ah, fuck. You know what they say about assuming, hm? God, I'm just so sorry."

I took comfort in the fact that she didn't say she wouldn't have called, just that she wouldn't

have mentioned him. And although it frustrated me that Edward seemed to have removed himself from my life, at least no one else had.

"It's okay, Tanya. I mean, it's not okay, but it is what it is."

She sighed loudly, and I could practically see her pinching the bridge of her nose in frustration. It was one of the many mannerisms she shared with her brother, and it usually made me laugh. "It's fucking ridiculous is what it is. Does anyone else know? I am seriously in shock that his face hasn't been bashed in. Or maybe it has and that's just one more thing he's been keeping from me, that little shit."

I rolled over and clutched my pillow, wiping my wet cheek against the starched fabric. "I haven't told Rosalie or Emmett," I said softly, "and I'm not sure about Jake. But Jasper and Alice definitely know. I mean, Jasper lives with him so it's pretty hard not to know, especially with me calling all the time to see if he's alive or not." I sniffled loudly, and I could hear Tanya sigh loudly again, this time with a definite edge of aggravation to her tone. "And when Alice visits, she says he's never there, so... I don't know what to think anymore."

"You don't deserve that, Bella. You really don't." She paused for a second before perking up again. "But everything he's told me is real, right? You're loving school and doing well?"

"Yeah." I couldn't help but smile at that. "I really am."

We chatted for a while about my classes and my new friends and the start of my internship. It was nice to talk to her—even if she wasn't who I'd hoped she would be.

"Bella," she said with a sigh. "You sound wonderful. I'm so glad you've taken to college as well as you have. And I know how fucktastically cheesy that sounds, but I really mean it. And my little brother is a moron. Wait, no—" She interrupted herself. "He's worse than a moron. Whatever that is. It took him almost two months to figure out that he had feelings for you, and I don't know if you know this or not, but I had to be the one to tell him."

A short chuckle escaped at that admission.

"Oh yeah," she continued. "He's obtuse. And I have no clue what's going on with him, and believe me, I don't intend to make excuses for him, but I do know that he loves you. He's an asshole, a douchebag, an imbecile, and a billion other terrible derogatory names, but I didn't know that you two weren't together anymore—that's how he talks about you... still."

I wanted to interrupt her, but she kept going, not giving me the chance.

"So, I honestly don't know why his head is stuck so far up his ass or how the fuck it's going to get out of there, but it will. I promise it'll eventually come out, and then he'll realize how badly he's fucked up. But don't feel like you have to wait, Bella. If you want to move on and let him rot in Providence, go ahead. He deserves it."

"Yeah, he really fucking does... bastard."

I said it so confidently and angrily that both Tanya and I broke into laughter.

"Well, I've got to run, but it was really good to talk to you, B. I hope you have a great birthday, and I know you're going to have a spectacular year."

"Thanks, T."

I hung up the phone and rolled onto my back, letting my eyes focus on the white plastered ceiling. I made the decision then and there to let go and move forward. Maybe not necessarily with someone else, but I needed to focus on my schoolwork, my friends and my internship. And should I happen to meet someone along the way, so be it. I was in college to learn and have a solid foundation for my career, and just because Edward wasn't a part of that anymore didn't mean I wanted to give it up. No, I wanted him to go into a movie theater and see my name light up the screen. I wanted him to know that I could be successful without him. Tanya was right. One day, he'd look up, but it'd be too late.

In the theme of letting go, I allowed myself another hour of crying before washing my face, getting ready for my day, and swearing I'd never waste another tear on the likes of Edward Cullen.

~Edward~

I was dreaming. I knew I was, but I couldn't make sense of anything, and I couldn't seem to wake myself up either. Anakin Skywalker had just emerged as Darth Vader, only it was me inside the suit. Suddenly, my sister, Jake, and Jasper were in front of me, wielding light sabers. I tried to extend mine to fight back, but the plasma wouldn't circulate. Instead, the heat melted through the handle, burning my glove. I dropped my weapon, only to realize I was surrounded. The three circled me and talked amongst themselves, but the energy emitted to my glove must have somehow messed up my suit because I could only hear fragments of their sentences. My head thrashed back and forth as I tried to keep up and put the pieces together, but I couldn't.

"Nothing, not at all," my sister said.

"... her I wouldn't interfere. I'm sorry I..." Jasper's voice came in and out.

"It's wrong." My sister's words sounded vaguely familiar, but I supposed most things in dreams did.

"... killing each other..." Jake retorted angrily. "... going in... stop me!"

Jake came at me from behind with a force that knocked me over. My knee landed on the overheated and discarded weapon, though, which seared through my pants leg, burning my already scarred skin.

I cried out in pain and rolled over, clutching my wounded knee to my chest. It hurt like a motherfucker. I thought things weren't supposed to hurt in dreams, either. My eyes clenched closed as I tried to even out my breathing.

"Fuck!" Jake shouted loudly, far too close to my face. "Are you okay?" I couldn't respond with words, only a faint whining noise. "Edward?" he called out. "Edward? Open your eyes."

Wait... Edward? But I'm Darth Vader...

Still groaning in pain, I cracked my eye open. I'd somehow transported from the painful scene at the Death Star back to my over-crowded bedroom. Jake still hovered over me, and I still clutched at my knee, which was throbbing with pain. I tried to move it, but the sting only got worse.

"Shit!" Jake cried as he threw his hands out in a stop gesture. "Don't move, Edward. I think you might need stitches, you fucking dumbass."

"Why are you yelling at me?" I whined, my voice still scratchy with sleep. "You wake me up, tell me I'm bleeding and then call me names? And why are you here?"

Jake's eyes narrowed menacingly, and I cowered. Well, it wasn't so hard to cower. He was a fucking giant, and I was injured on the floor. It didn't take a genius to figure out he could whoop my ass in two seconds flat.

"You were having a nightmare and thrashing around in your bed," Jake explained far too calmly. "I went to wake you up, but you fell off the mattress and onto the floor, which is covered in trash, by the way. Your knee landed on a few empty Heineken bottles. One broke and sliced through your knee. You need stitches." He gulped. "And even though I'd love to sit here and watch you bleed out, you're still my best friend, so I'm taking you to the ER."

"I—"

"We'll talk more once you're finished bleeding," he said briskly.

"I ain't got time to bleed," I joked, but it fell flat. Jake must have been thoroughly pissed not to react to a *Predator* quote, one of his all-time favorite movies.

"By the way, your sister wanted me to give you something."

"Oh, yeah? I thought I heard h—"

I didn't get to finish my sentence because the next thing I knew, Jake's fist was flying at my face, and I drifted off into blackness again. Only this time, it was dreamless.

x-x-x

Noises buzzed around me encased in static, coming in and out like a hand-tuned radio. My head felt heavy, but the rest of my body felt like it was floating—a truly bizarre combination.

"... if you hadn't punched him, you moron!"

"Yeah, well... served it."

I groaned and cracked open my eye to see my sister and my best friend arguing loudly in front of me at the end of my bed, while Jasper sat in a low chair off to the side, looking apologetic. His eyes flicked from me to Jake and Tanya and down to his phone, which was practically a part of his hand nowadays.

"Stop yelling," I moaned, clutching my head, which ached at the sudden invasion of earsplitting noise.

Their heads turned in my direction, and it looked like they were about to come forward, when a pretty nurse in dark pink scrubs appeared out of nowhere and started prodding at me.

"How are you doing, Edward? Can you hear me okay?" she asked, leaning close as she shined a small flashlight into my eyes.

Um, ow. What the fuck?

"Yeah," I replied, thoroughly confused. "What am I doing here?"

Continuing to examine my face, the nurse answered, "You came in with one hell of a beating. Eight stitches to your right knee, three for your eyebrow, and a pretty nasty concussion."

She moved her finger back and forth in front of my face, but my eyes were having trouble keeping up. Finally, she leaned back and turned to my sister and Jake. "He'll be a little discombobulated from the concussion and the painkillers we administered for his knee, but other than that, he'll be just fine. Since we're not too busy at the moment, you can stay here for another hour or two. Do not let him fall asleep again, and you, Iron Giant," she said with a large flourish towards Jake. "You don't know your own strength, so try not to knock him out again any time soon, okay?"

I chuckled. I only knew one person who called Jake the Iron Giant, and fuck, I missed her. Responding to the nurse, Jake nodded with a smirk, but his eyes were cold. I knew I was in trouble.

Then the nurse turned back to me with a big smile and leaned down close again. "Edward, if you need anything, please ask for me," she whispered seductively. "Nurse Richards... Eva." Well, I was sure she thought she was being seductive, but her over-processed blonde waves and hazel eyes did absolutely nothing for me. I was too busy pushing out images of chestnut waves and dark lust-filled eyes from my mind, anyway.

"Ugh," I moaned out in pain. "Stop, I'm fine."

Nurse Richards placed her hand on my cheek, using her thumb to examine the injured skin under my eye, but I recoiled. I couldn't be touched. I couldn't bear it, knowing that it wasn't *her*.

"Stop, please," I mumbled, causing her eyes to change from concerned to alarmed to annoyed within the span of a few seconds. She straightened up her back and nodded before turning away tersely. I went to pinch the bridge of my nose, only to find it was encased in plaster. Jake had

broken my nose. Fuck. My hand slipped back down to rest on my lap, and I let out a dismal sigh.

"Dude," Jake said sadly. "You are anything but fine. I..." He shook his head and sat on the edge of the bed. Tanya mirrored him and came to sit on my other side.

"Did you punch me after you'd already knocked me out?" I asked, legitimately curious. That was the only way my nose could have been broken. He shrugged, and I was about to let him have it when Tanya butted in.

"Why didn't you say anything?" she asked, clasping my hand in hers. Her eyes shot behind Jake to my roommate, who had practically become a stranger to me over the past month. "And you? Why didn't you do anything?"

"What was I supposed to do?" Jasper said with a shake of his head. "He wouldn't talk to me. Alice would come over, and he'd lock himself in his room. You saw that place. I don't think he's taken out the trash since we got home. He's like the next hoarder or something."

"I'm right here," I croaked.

"You are in rough shape, Teddy," my sister said. "I mean, I knew it was bad, but I had no idea that..." She bit her lip and brought her voice down to a whisper. "Do you realize I called Bella on her birthday."

I could feel my jaw unhinge. "You did?"

"Um, Yeah," Jake answered. "We all did."

Tanya shook her strawberry blonde hair and twirled a long tendril around her finger before letting it slip away. "Of course I did. You love her, and that makes her family."

My head throbbed and my throat went dry at her answer. Love. Family. Fuck.

"How is she?" I asked, even though I knew the answer. She was great—taking over the world one film class at a time, just like I knew she would be.

Jake's eyes turned cold again as he spat, "You don't get to ask that question. You'd know if you'd called her." He breathed a solitary deep breath and let me have it. "I swore to myself that I'd beat your ass if you hurt her. And I thought you had pulled your head out of your ass, but when Tan called to ask how you were doing, I knew something was up. I should have known. I should have followed you down here and helped you figure out what we all know—you're not going to be able to function without Bella."

I closed my eyes and let images of her fill my head as Jake said her name.

"I can't believe you haven't contacted her, Edward," Tanya admonished.

"I have," I said petulantly, even though I knew it was practically a lie. The guilt was eating away

at me. I couldn't stomach her last email, and yes, it had been the last. I'd received no response to my less-than-cordial message. Not that I was surprised. After all, that had been the intent.

All three sets of their eyebrows shot up in surprise.

"Really?" Jasper asked, looking up from his phone with sudden interest.

"Yeah, on her birthday. I, uh, emailed her."

My statement was met with pure silence until Jake growled, "I should knock you out again for that."

"What do you want from me?" I knew I was whining, but I was depressed, injured, concussed, and medicated. I couldn't bring myself to care.

Story of my life for the past month.

Jake's nose flared as he came to life again, his arms swinging wildly. I leaned back into the pillow as far as I could, hoping he wouldn't knock me out for a fucking third time in the afternoon. That'd probably be pretty bad for my brain cells.

"You're a moron!" he yelled.

"Jake, keep it down," Tanya said with a soft touch to his shoulder. I couldn't believe my eyes when he relaxed immediately. Still so fucking weird.

"Sorry, it's just..." He growled again, and I groaned in response. Flashing eyes attacked me without words. Guilt consumed me. "Yeah, you know you're a complete asshole. Can't even fucking deny it."

"Teddy?"

"What do you want me to say? That I'm unhappy without her? I am. I'm a fucking hoarder, living off pizza, beer, and crappy movies because the good ones only remind me of her. Do you know how long the list of movies I can no longer watch without feeling sick is? Astronomical! And it's all of my favorite fucking movies. But what do you want me to do? Staying together wasn't going to change anything. It was just going to make us both miserable."

"Newsflash, you both *are* miserable," Jasper corrected, his fingers still tapping out a message on his phone. "Edward, I talk to the girl three times a week, and as much as she loves school, she loves you more. She always asks about you and how you're doing. I tried to keep my answers to her questions vague because I couldn't figure out why the hell you weren't talking to her, plus I was afraid if I told her she'd hop on a plane out here faster than a speeding bullet. But cutting her off was a mistake. A huge one. One you might not recover from."

My head was reeling. All the justifications I'd had for not talking to Bella were starting to unravel, and I couldn't remember why I'd been holding out. I'd done it for her, right? I'd done it because my life was a mess and I was a piece of shit, and I would have been holding her down

and holding her back. I knew she'd move on and move forward; it was just who she was. But then why was Jasper telling me something different?

Maybe you'd know if you'd talked to her...

I let my head hang, appalled with myself. I hadn't done this for anyone but me. I'd tried to cut her out, but it was fruitless. She was in everything, and my depression was overwhelming. I'd been teetering on the edge of breaking before I'd gone to camp this summer, and I used it—and her—as a welcome escape. I thought I could clump her into that summer magic, that euphoric feeling that accompanied my weeks there, but when all the magic faded, I found I still needed her. And then I was too much of a prideful asshole to tell myself otherwise.

"Come on," Tanya said with a sad sigh. "Let's get you home and cleaned up."

"Wait." I put up my hand to stop them, but my head got a little woozy as I moved too quickly. "What are you doing here? Both of you?"

Jake narrowed his eyes again as he helped me off the medical bed. "Intervention, buddy. And this is just the beginning."

Oh joy.

X-X-X

The next month flew by without another word from Bella. She still called Jasper, Alice, and Jake all the time, so I knew she was doing incredibly well. She'd completely blossomed at her internship, garnering the attention of high-level executives who couldn't believe she was only a freshman. They'd been impressed by her focused attitude and drive to get things accomplished while still keeping a light atmosphere. She was a professional. Not that I was remotely surprised.

This was why I'd cut off contact. She was going places, and I wasn't. I really needed to work on my own shit. Intervention was a mild term for what Jake and my sister did to me after that very low moment at the ER. My room had been completely cleaned out, frightening us all. I hadn't realized how hoarder-like I'd really gotten. TLC probably could have come in and done some fucking special on me. Leftover food, empty bottles, bags and boxes were all disposed of, and then Tanya hired a cleaning company to clean my carpet and walls. Uh, yeah... it was that bad.

Without Bella, I'd had no motivation to do anything or go anywhere, and then I realized that had been the problem all along. I needed to become a man that deserved to be with a person like Bella; it was too late and too painful to think about repairing that at the moment. So, after literally cleaning up my act, I set out to reorganize my priorities—my career, my family, my friends. Everything else would follow.

And I may have stalked her on Facebook like some deranged creeper as a part of my daily schedule. Maybe.

Checking over my shoulder, just to make sure Jake and Jasper were really out of the apartment—oh yeah, Jake had moved into my living room to enforce my intervention—I opened

my laptop and quickly pulled up her profile page.

Her picture smiled back up at me brightly, and two boys, who I assumed were Marcus and Alec, flanked her. They were all dressed in beach clothes, and behind them a big sign read ZBTahiti. I couldn't help but smile at the new profile picture. She looked incredible. I perused her wall, which was splattered with messages from some very familiar faces.

...Rosalie Hale B, what are you being for Halloween? Something super hot, riiiiight? I just decided on my costume – an angel, naturally. You must post pics! Love you, darling.

...October 28, 2009 at 8:58

...Emmett McCarty Rosalie, I saw a picture of what you're wearing for Halloween, and if LB wears anything like that and posts pics of it online, I might have an aneurism and fly out to LA to cover you up.

...October 28, 2009 at 9:10 PM

...Rosalie Hale Aneurism? That's a big word for you, Em. Good job.

...October 28, 2009 at 9:17 PM

...Bella Swan has decided that [Emmett McCarty](#) and [Rosalie Hale](#) need to take their conversation to their own walls. October 21, 2009 at 9:19 PM

...Emmett McCarty Spoil sport

...October 28, 2009 at 9:21 PM

...Alice Brandon Whoooooooooreeee! I know you're all living the high life and stuff with your internship and class, but call me. I miss your faceeee. Plus, Jasper talks to you all the time. I know he does! Love you, sweetie.

...yesterday at 1:31 PM

As I laughed at the conversation, my eyes slid over to Bella's information underneath her picture. As per every day I'd checked, her relationship status was still not there. It'd been removed from her status on her birthday and had yet to make an appearance. It was killing me slowly.

Suddenly, a chat box popped up. Fucking technology.

Jasper Whitlock: Stop stalking her. Creep.

"Fuck you, Jasper!" I called out, his returning laughter becoming clearer as he opened his bedroom door and made his way to my room. He stuck his head in and smiled widely.

"You can't deny it."

"Do I look like I'm denying it?" I inquired, pointing my hand in the direction of my screen still opened to her profile page.

"No, you don't..." Jasper shifted uncomfortably and shoved his hands into his pockets, a sure

sign that he was nervous.

"What?"

"I was just wondering what you're doing for Thanksgiving?" he asked quickly.

"Um, not sure. We usually have dinner at Tanya's, but I don't think Kate's going to be able to leave work, so I really have no clue. I figured I could hang out here. I'm not really in a celebrating mood anyway."

"Right."

I rolled my eyes. Jasper was such a woman. "Why do you ask?" He needed prompts to continue. I'd figured this out over my short time living with him.

"Well, Alice invited me to Connecticut to spend it with her family, but I didn't want to say yes if it meant leaving you alone," he admitted.

That was actually pretty damned considerate of him, but even if he did leave and Jake went back to Iowa or wherever the hell they bred him, I could spend the day by myself, watching movies or something. I was getting better at the whole taking-care-of-myself thing. Plus, I knew if worse came to worst, Emmett would let me show up in Chicago.

"Thanks, Jasper. But you should go. That's great." And I honestly felt that way.

"Okay—" He was about to continue when Led Zepellin's "Heartbreaker" blaring from his cell phone interrupted us. I knew what that meant and mentally prepared myself. He shrugged apologetically before putting the phone to his ear and smiling. "Hey, B-Town."

Like always, Jasper removed himself from my room and wandered back to his own, shutting the door behind him. It was meant to be courteous and not have me listen to their conversation, but I knew Jasper would turn around and recount it all to me anyway.

Dragging a hand through my hair, I sighed and was about to continue writing cover letters when the doorbell rang.

Weird.

We never got any visitors—not since Tanya left and Jake got his own copy of our keys.

I shuffled in my socks across the carpeted floor sluggishly as I made my way to the door. I opened it, only to reveal the mailman. What a fucking disappointment that was. Not that I expected it to be someone else, but—yeah, okay, it might have crossed my mind for a millisecond that it could be Bella. God, I was such a sad sap.

"Edward Cullen?" he asked, and I was shocked again. Who the fuck was sending me a package? I didn't remember ordering anything online. As I took a closer look, I saw it was a large envelope. Confused, I signed for it and thanked the man before shutting the door again.

Seeing that Jasper's door was still closed, I decided to head back to my own room and lie out on my bed to examine the contents of my package. I removed the clasp and opened it, shaking out the contents. I recognized it immediately, and my stomach churned. I couldn't tell if it was a good or bad churn yet, either. On top lay a folded piece of paper. I opened it with slightly trembling hands and read it over slowly.

Edward,

I debated whether or not to send this for a really long time before deciding that it should be in your possession, not mine. I contemplated stealing it, I won't lie to you. I may have some leftover animosity towards you after everything that happened this summer. But in all honesty, this needs to be with you. I couldn't believe my eyes when I saw it in the trash. I wish I'd come up with these ideas, I really do. How could you throw that all away? I don't know why you doubt yourself when you're so talented. You graduated with a BFA in film from RISD. Do you know how ridiculously qualified that makes you? You're years and bounds ahead of me in the talent department. Yeah, I'm not afraid to admit it – I may have some sort of weird man crush on you. It's cool. Don't tell anyone. Especially not Jake, please. Stop wasting time hating yourself, man. You need to focus on remembering why you loved film in the first place. No one goes to RISD for film without having a very specific vision of what they want to do with their life. So why the fuck would you give that up so easily? The papers are a little crumpled, but they should all be there. And Edward, I really hope I see your name on the big screen soon. Don't fuck up again. Life doesn't give third chances. Not even to pretty boys like you.

Now get off your ass and make me these fucking movies.

Take care, Seth

I read the note three times before finally smiling. That little shit. I couldn't believe he'd taken my RISD work out of the trash, salvaged it, and then sent it back to me. I was still laughing to myself when Jasper walked in.

"What's that?" he asked.

"How's Bella?" I retorted, my chest feeling lighter than it had in months.

"Uhhh, good. Dude, is everything okay? You're looking a little manic with the laughing and the head-shaking."

"I'm good." I smiled. I actually was.

Chapter 29 Loose Ends

~Bella~

"Ugh!" I growled as my truck sputtered and coughed in its space in our dorm parking lot. This was not the right time for this.

Seeing as how it was the week of Thanksgiving, I was the only intern at Plan B this afternoon, and I was already running late because of a god damned film discussion. Seriously, some film school twits were way too pretentious for their own good. But I'd never been late to work before, and I didn't want to start today. My parents had never been big into celebrating Thanksgiving—my mom couldn't cook for shit, so we usually ended up with microwaved and instant food anyway—and I agreed that it'd be a waste of time and money to drive or fly back up to Washington for only four days. Plus, this way I looked like an awesome intern because I hadn't asked for any time off. And I'd continue to look like an awesome intern if my car would just fucking turn on.

I turned the ignition again just as my phone started buzzing in my lap. The truck roared to life, and I breathed a sigh of relief before answering the phone and quickly pulling out of the parking lot.

"Hello?"

"B-Town!" Jasper shouted loudly across the line as Alice giggled in the background.

I snickered. "Jasper, are you drunk?" I glanced at the clock, seeing it was only 1:15 my time. "It's not even five where you are."

"Bella, you don't understand. Alice's family is crazy!" They both giggled, and I could practically picture him blushing as Alice did or said something inappropriate. "I've been drinking glasses of scotch with Michael Brandon since before noon. Yeah, did you know Alice's dad has two names as his name? Michael Brandon. Never trust a guy with two first names..." he rambled, bringing a smile to my face.

As Jasper went on, I drove down the freeway at record speed—well, for my truck anyway—and laughed and yes'ed and no'd in all the right places. They sounded so happy, and although I loved them both, there was still a knot in my stomach that made me want to punch them both out for rubbing it in my face.

"Okay, guys..." I interrupted their diatribe, knowing I'd most likely lose service as soon as I entered the underground parking of the building. "I'm at work, so I have to run. But I love you

both, and drink some water with dinner, J-Town! And have fun fucking Alice in her childhood bed."

"What?" he asked distractedly.

"Nothing, nothing. Have a Happy Thanksgiving. Love you."

Their excited chatter was cut off as I drove to my assigned parking spot on the left side of the lot. I glanced at the clock one last time and noticed that I'd arrived with ten minutes to spare. Grinning, I shoved my phone into my purse and made my way upstairs.

I pushed my way through the glass doors and smiled upon my very flamboyant welcome.

"Bella!" the receptionist, Chris, called out. "You look divine today. Give me a twirl."

I gave him a spin, showing off my latest trendy outfit—dark skinny jeans, a low-cut black sweater, a bright blue scarf, and a pair of knee-high boots. I'd learned pretty quickly that everyone in LA had a look, and I needed to find my own. Thank God flat boots were in style at the moment, so I could look cute and not kill my feet from walking around in heels all day. I honestly didn't know how some of the girls here did it.

"Thanks, Chris." I smiled and leaned over the desk to grab Jeremy's mail before tucking it under my arm and making my way back to the executives' offices.

Jeremy was on the phone when I arrived, as per usual, so I just left his mail in a pile at the corner of the desk. I was about to turn to leave when he put his hand up to stop me.

"Mhm... okay, yes... I do. No, sweetie, I promise I'll be home on time... okay... love you, too." He sighed and looked up at me with a tired smile. "Thanks, Bella. Are you the only one here today?"

I nodded nervously. Jeremy was the big honcho—he was one of the partners and the only one who was actually ever in the office.

"You're probably going to kill me seeing as you just drove all the way from 'SC in traffic, but I only have one errand for you and then you can head back home."

"Oh," I said, somewhat disappointed. I'd been looking forward to having something to occupy the rest of my day while all my friends headed back home for the holiday. "That's fine. What do you need?" I asked with a smile.

Jeremy shook his head and chuckled softly. "So eager, Bella. It's a pretty stupid errand, actually. I promised Maggie I'd buy her passes to a new Zac Efron movie premiering at The Grove tonight, but I'm not going to be able to make it down there if I want to be home in time. I guess that's what I get for living in Pacific Palisades, huh?"

"Not stupid at all. *Me and Orson Welles*, right? It actually looks like a great movie, but I'm a little biased because I really love Claire Danes, and come to think of it, Orson Welles, too. And maybe teaching thirteen-year-olds this summer has given me a new appreciation for Zac Efron, but

please don't tell that to anyone else. I have a film school rep to maintain."

He let out a hearty laugh, and I bit my lip. I rambled when I was nervous.

"This is why I keep you around, Bella." He stood up suddenly and removed his wallet from his back pocket before sliding out a very shiny silver card and handing it to me. "The customer service people know you're coming. Just give them the card to hold onto tonight and tell them there should be three passes."

"Of course." I smiled and put the company credit card into an empty slot in my own wallet. *Don't fuck this up, Bella.*

"So, I guess we'll see you next week then," he said as he sat back down in his comfy-looking leather chair behind his desk. "Do you have any fun Thanksgiving plans?"

"Not really," I said, hoping I didn't sound too pathetic. "Just planning on hanging out in the dorms, maybe exploring LA a little bit, since I won't have any homework or anything."

"You're not going home for the holiday?" I shook my head, and his brow furrowed. "Angela would kill me if I didn't invite you over to celebrate with us."

"Oh no—" I began to protest, but he interrupted me.

"Bella, it's no problem. We have a huge Thanksgiving with a ton of industry people who I hate, and I know Maggie would love to see you. You know she's started coming into the office just to see you, right?" I smiled but couldn't find any words. It actually sounded nice.

"Wow, thank you. That sounds, um, fantastic. Do you need me to bring anything?"

Jeremy shook his head and waved me off with his hand. "No, no. We have the whole thing catered. In fact, if you wanted to bring someone you're more than welcome. A boyfriend, maybe?"

The fluttery feeling swirled around my stomach as I responded. "No, no boyfriend. But I do love spending time with Maggie." I paused. "Are you really sure? I'd hate to impose."

"Bella," he said with a long sigh. "Go run my errand like a good intern, and I'll see you at my house at four-thirty on Thursday, okay? No objections. I'll email you the address right now."

"Okay."

"Great."

An awkward silence filled the room, but it evaporated quickly as his phone rang. Seeing it was a business call, I headed out with a small wave. The office was practically empty, and I couldn't resist putting a little extra bounce into my step. It seemed as if my break was taking a very positive turn, and I couldn't have been more excited.

Back in my truck, I cranked the radio up and blasted some Bon Jovi. I rolled the windows down, enjoying the beautiful weather, and sang along loudly as I drove down Wilshire Boulevard.

The Grove came into view quickly, since I'd been somehow blessed by the traffic gods with zero traffic and barely any red lights. I was feeling seriously good and even hummed as I made my way down the three flights of escalators. It was bizarre how empty the whole place was. I guess it was partly because it was a random weekday afternoon, but I'd never seen The Grove so devoid of people.

I made my way straight towards the movie theater and handed over Jeremy's credit card to the concierge. He was incredibly helpful, and it didn't take long to finish the errand. Looking at the time, I noticed it was nearly four PM, and I really didn't feel inclined to sit in rush hour traffic back towards USC, so I decided to peruse the stores.

Upon moving to Los Angeles, I'd discovered that I loved The Grove. It wasn't that I particularly loved shopping, but I loved the atmosphere. Walking amongst the throngs of people and stores was almost like walking through a movie set. A huge fountain was the centerpiece of the large circle of shops, and it lit up as it played to old school Frank Sinatra songs, dancing along with the music. I called it Disneyland for adults—even though Disneyland was totally for adults too—just because of the happy and clean atmosphere.

After almost forty-five minutes of browsing, I decided I was hungry. I walked to The Farm, a small café located right next to the theater, to grab a hot chocolate and a giant brownie.

I'd just paid the cashier and taken my first sip of hot chocolate when I heard it. My eyes flitted around as I looked for the culprit of the shocking noise. I saw nothing and sighed in relief. I was completely crazy, obviously.

Feeling on edge, I decided to swing by the movie theater concierge one last time before leaving, just to make sure everything was really in order. He looked confused as he nodded, showing me the passes along with the credit card. Of course he'd taken care of it. I was representing a very high-profile client. I breathed and let the tension drain from my shoulders. Everything was fine. And I heard it again. This time, it was like a knife through my stomach, and it took all my effort not to make a scene.

Blood throbbed in my ears and my heart pounded, stuttering and stopping and restarting so much I clutched at my chest.

"But I don't want to, Kate," he whined. I would recognize that whine anywhere. Anywhere. "I refuse to sink to your pretentious level of cinema where just because something is disturbing makes it a worthwhile film. It doesn't. Just because she's molested by both her parents and it'll probably win a bunch of Oscars doesn't make it great film-making. I'd rather see..." His voice drifted off as he looked through the movie times overhead, and I finally let my eyes focus and find him.

He was across the room, standing in front of the movie kiosks with some supermodel-looking blonde, who looked equally annoyed with him as he did with her. He looked, in a word, spectacular. His bronze hair was cut shorter, and my fingers ached to run through it. He was

wearing his standard black jeans, band t-shirt, hoodie and sneakers, making my heart race.

"Edward," the blonde complained. "I'm not going to see some stupid vampire movie or anything with Sandra Bullock. Sorry."

"What about *Pirate Radio*?" a third voice spoke up, and I knew exactly who it was. And I knew I needed to get the hell out of there before I fucking lost my shit. "It's the new Richard Curtis film, Kate—he did tons of movies you love... *Notting Hill*, *Love Actually*, *Bridget Jones*. Plus, it's got that super hot young British celebrity, who's supposedly the next big thing."

He laughed, twisting the knife further into my gut. "Oh, middle child. Thank you for settling that dispute. Let's do it. Kate, you in?"

He looked towards her, and for a second, I froze, thinking that he'd spotted me. He didn't, though, and turned back to the kiosk as his sister nodded in agreement. This was my opening. I needed to escape before they started walking towards the theaters and past the concierge.

"Um, miss?" the man behind the counter asked far too loudly. "Is everything all right?"

"Huh?" I turned back to the concierge and realized I most definitely looked like a crazy person. "Yeah, I'm fine, thanks." Keeping my head down, I made my way towards the door, but it was fruitless. The fucking concierge had drawn attention to me, and halfway out the door I heard Tanya's voice calling out my name.

I sped up my pace and my breathing. I tried to calm myself. Hyperventilating wouldn't do me any good right now. But then I heard *him* calling my name, and it was too much. Tears clouded my vision as I reached the escalators. I couldn't wait and began to run up them, ignoring everyone else. My mission was just to get to my car and get the fuck out of there. What was he doing here? On my turf? And why wouldn't he tell me he was going to be out here, so I could at least have been prepared? Why hadn't *anyone* said anything? I'd talked to Alice and Jasper merely hours ago, and neither of them had thought it pertinent to tell me he was here?

I was so lost in myself that I didn't even notice he'd caught up to me until sparks flew up my arm at his smallest touch.

"MB!" he said as he finally wrapped his hand around my wrist, stopping me in my tracks.

I snatched back my wrist and caressed it with my other hand, tending to it as if he'd burned it. "You don't get to call me that," I responded angrily.

How dare he? It'd be one thing to show up like this and call me by my name, but to call me by *his* name was just unacceptable. The sadness morphed into rage, and I wanted to let him have it.

"Excuse me." Both of us turned in the direction of the voice, a young man awkwardly trying to get around us and off the escalator, which we'd been blocking.

We both muttered our apologies, and I was ready to take off when he grabbed at me again.

"Bella, please don't go!"

I seethed, and tears streamed down my cheeks as I broke free from his grasp again. "Why shouldn't I?" I snapped. "You already let me go once."

He tugged at his hair, and I could watch his frustration build, although it only served to annoy me further. What right did he have to be upset with me? Absolutely none.

"Bella, I know it must seem like that's what happened, but I—I just..." His words stumbled around aimlessly. He had no justification for his actions.

"You just what, Edward? You forgot how to use the phone and the computer? Oh wait, no you didn't. You just forgot how to use it with me, and I can't for the life of me figure out why. But I stopped wondering that *two months* ago, Edward. I let go, just like you did, and I moved on. And I was doing just fine until you decided to show up." I talked until I ran out of breath, my anger making it come in short hard pants.

"I'm sorry," he whispered as he took a step closer to me. Instinctively, I took a step back. I couldn't have him touch me again. I had resolve, and I wanted to keep it. I knew his comforting touch would make me crumble faster than I'd ever respect myself for.

"No you're not," I countered, and he looked as if I'd slapped him across the face. Good. He should be hurting, too.

"I am, Bella. God, you have no idea how hard—"

Oh, this was rich. "I have no idea? Really? I beg to differ."

"Yes!" he fumed. "You have no idea what it was like to get that first email about how happy you were to be going to college. Look at you!" He paced back and forth with one hand running through his hair and the other perched precariously on the bridge of his nose. "Bella, you're beautiful and smart and talented and taking over the fucking film industry. I wanted to write back. I really did. But what the fuck was I supposed to say? Uh, not much to report—same old weddings and editing and falling asleep watching *Robot Chicken*? My life was pathetic, and I wanted you to keep that image of me you had of me as being successful because it's so far from where I am. And I guess I was embarrassed. The camp me is nowhere close to the real life me, and I freaked out, okay?"

"Okay?" I paused before coming back louder and taking a large step towards him, adrenaline pushing me forward. Our eyes locked, and I flew at him, pushing against his chest with each statement. "Okay? Your life *was* pathetic? Think again, you egotistical bastard! You *are* pathetic. Fuck you!"

"Bella, stop!" he yelped, attempting to grab at my hands, but I refused.

"Get away from me!"

My hand met the skin of his cheek in a large smack, turning his head with the force of it. My

fingers tingled where they'd come into contact with him, and as I looked back I could see a bright red welt where my hand had been and a small trail of blood trickling out of his nose. I almost couldn't believe I'd just done it until Tanya and Kate came running up the escalator and onto the garage level with us.

"Oh Teddy, shit," Kate said as she grabbed his face between both her hands to examine him closer. "Didn't this just heal?"

He shrugged and slid his eyes towards me.

"I..." I glanced at the scene before me and felt sick. There was so much I hadn't dealt with, but I'd never wanted to hurt Edward. "I have to go."

I heard Tanya calling after me again, but this time no one pulled me back before I reached my truck. The door creaked open and slammed shut behind me, shrouding me in a thick silence. I struggled not to cry, but I remembered the promise I'd made to myself on my birthday. I would not cry over Edward Cullen anymore. I just wouldn't. If he didn't want me as a part of his life, he didn't have to have me. I had my internship, my classes, my friends.

But you still want him.

Trying to center myself, I leaned my forehead against the steering wheel and closed my eyes. That was a mistake if I'd ever made one. As soon as I did, all I could hear, smell, and feel was him. I felt completely off kilter, and I hated him for his ability to get me this messed up.

A soft tapping against my window startled me, causing me to bolt upright in a bundle of nerves. I sighed, seeing the cause of the noise, and leaned over to open the door. Tanya slid in beside me and wrapped her arms around my shoulders.

"Hey."

"H-hi." My voice cracked with the effort it took not to cry.

"I'm not so sure you're safe to drive yourself home." She smiled, and I laid my head on her shoulder, finally giving into the oppressive sadness that had been pushed to the edges by my anger. One tear turned into two, which turned into a snuffle, which subsequently led to body-wracking sobs within the course of about fifteen seconds.

As I cried it out, Tanya somehow managed to finagle the keys from my hand and switch our bodies so she was in the driver's seat. The truck started with a low rumble, and she began to pull out of the parking lot.

"W-wait," I stuttered, still finishing off my tears. "H-how are you gonna g-get back to wherever y-you're staying?"

Please don't say Edward will come pick you up because I cannot handle that right now.

"Kate has a great apartment downtown, since she's all corporate now. It's fine. I can just take

the DASH."

I was legitimately surprised by her answer. I mean, I'd figured they were staying with Kate, but she seemed pretty LA savvy for being new to town. I quirked my eyebrow in her direction. "You know how to use the DASH?"

Tanya giggled awkwardly and nodded as she pulled onto the freeway.

"How do you know how to use the DASH?" I asked, honestly curious.

She snorted and smirked in my direction. "Certainly not because Edward forced us to take a trip down to USC yesterday."

My jaw dropped. "You're serious?"

She smiled and nodded. "He's pulled his head out of his ass, Bella. I swear." Then in a concerned tone she added, "Is it too late?"

"I don't know," I said with a sigh. And I really didn't.

I knew that I was furious with Edward for being such a self-centered asshole, but I did miss him. And did I always hold out hope that he'd figure out he wanted to be with me? Yeah, of course. I guess I just needed some extra reassurance that he wouldn't flake out on me like that again. I didn't know if my heart could handle it twice. Plus, just because he was here now and he happened to see me didn't really mean anything, right? I mean, had we not accidentally run into each other, would I have even known he was in Los Angeles? That thought cut me deep, and I hated myself as tears started to form again.

We drove in a comfortable silence the rest of the way home until Tanya asked where she needed to park. I directed her to the appropriate lot and breathed a little easier, happy to be back on more familiar ground.

My head was still reeling as I led Tanya through the complex corridors of my dorm. I felt like I needed a really good nap. Or pizza. At the thought, my stomach growled loudly, clearly agreeing with me.

"Are you hungry?" I asked as I unlocked my door and pushed it open.

"I could eat," Tanya responded, pushing her way through and examining my rather sparse room. As she continued to explore the pictures and posters I had on display, I called in pizza, cheesy bread, and Dr. Pepper from Papa John's. Yes, I had them in my cell phone, and yes, it was definitely that kind of night.

"Hey, can I borrow a sweatshirt?" she asked as she perused my closet. "It's actually getting kind of cold. I thought LA was always supposed to be warm. What the hell?"

I nodded and hung up the phone. "Sure. Pizza should be here in about a half hour."

"Great," she said slowly as she began to remove the only sweatshirt in the entire closet I didn't want her to touch.

"Wait! Not that one!" I jogged the few short steps to the closet and pushed the thick red hoodie to the back where it had been hanging.

Her head whipped in my direction as the rest of her body froze. "I..." She began to say something, but she stopped when she realized there were no words.

Pink colored my cheeks as I muttered, "It still smells like him."

Understanding washed over Tanya's features, and she wrapped me in her arms in a vice grip. I sighed into her shoulder as her hands rubbed small, comforting circles on my back.

"Why don't you go take a shower while I wait for the pizza?"

I nodded. That sounded like a brilliant idea. A hot shower was just what I needed to calm myself down from the whirlwind of emotions I was currently experiencing.

Grabbing my robe and shower bucket, I made my way to the communal showers down the hall. It was creepy how empty the dorm was, but it was also kind of nice. The silence was welcomed. At least there was nothing to compete with the cacophony swirling in my head.

I stripped down and stepped in, letting the hot water pelt down and nearly burn my skin. It was a welcome distraction. I knew I needed to deal with my feelings for Edward, but it wasn't like I had to do that right now. After all, he was here visiting his sister, not me. I showered languorously, methodically washing and rinsing every inch of my body thoroughly.

Once I finally felt clean enough, I turned off the water and used my robe to towel off slightly before heading back to my room. The door was cracked open, and I distractedly pushed it open, placing my wet shower bucket by the entry.

"Pizza here yet?"

"Um, no," a familiar voice responded. "But Tanya just went out to get it."

I looked up, witnessing my fantasy come to life. There, sitting on the edge of my bed, playing with the edge of my blanket, was a nervous-looking Edward.

Guess I wasn't going to be able to put off thinking about him. It looked like that was happening now.

Fuck my life.

~Edward~

"Fuck!" I cried out. "Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck!"

Kate flicked her eyes in my direction and turned up the stereo system on her BMW. "This temper tantrum isn't making you seem all that attractive, Teddy."

"You're a cunt," I muttered, causing her to glare at me with a piercing stare.

"I'm going to let that one go because you're hurting and obviously were completely unprepared for everything that just went down, but try calling me a cunt again, and I'll rip your balls off."

"Sorry." She was right. My tantrum wasn't appealing in the least, but I couldn't help it. I'd arrived in Los Angeles yesterday and foolishly assumed that Bella would have gone home for Thanksgiving. Clearly I should have checked that out with Jasper before leaving. Or maybe he knew and had just been keeping it from me.

And honestly, how likely was it that I would run into her in a city that covers nearly five hundred square miles and contains fifteen million people? Not very. Well, I'd assumed it wouldn't be likely, anyway. Obviously I'd been mistaken.

As soon as I saw her, I moved forward to follow her without any conscious thought. I was just drawn to her. I couldn't fucking help it. But she was so upset and hurt, and fuck, of course she was! But she hadn't given me a second to explain myself. And there was a shitload to explain. Especially now.

"Stop panicking, Teddy," Kate said with a comforting squeeze to my shoulder. "It'll be okay. P.S., nice work. She's a cutie. Tan was right about that one. She's feisty."

I snorted. That was the understatement of the year. My face still prickled from where she'd slapped me, but thank God my nose hadn't shifted too much, just enough to have it bleed a tiny bit. No big deal. Hah, the bigger deal was that she had enough animosity to slap me in the first place. I was seriously going to have to think of a way to get her to listen to me. I'd planned on approaching her when I was ready and the time was right, but now that I'd seen her, I knew I needed to see her again. Tonight.

"Um, Kate?" I asked nervously. I hated asking my big sister for favors. Lord knew she had enough to hold over my head already.

"Yes, Teddy?"

"Can I borrow your car? You know, to go pick up Tanya?"

She laughed softly and rolled her eyes. "Yes, Teddy. You can borrow the car to go stalk your ex-girlfriend. Just be careful, okay? And don't come back too late because some of us still have to go to work tomorrow, even though it's the day before Thanksgiving, and I never get to see my family ever," she rambled as she pulled into the driveway of her fancy apartment. The valet was about to come over when Kate shooed him away with a flick of her hand and turned back to me. "Don't scratch it. Seriously, this thing is my baby." With that, she swung her door open and hopped out, leaving the keys in the ignition for me. "Good luck."

"Thanks, Kate. I owe you... again."

She laughed and flipped her hair over her shoulder as she waved goodbye. "Believe me, I'm keeping track."

I hopped into the driver's seat and took off, straight down until I reached the USC gate. I knew it was sketchy as fuck, but I couldn't help it. I needed to see her, and why should my sister be able to see her when I couldn't? That wasn't fair at all.

Unlike yesterday when Tanya and I had explored the campus ourselves, the school was now devoid of any life whatsoever. Green and brick and fountains lay still, and I took it in as I parked the car and hopped out. What the hell was I supposed to do now? I didn't know which one was her dorm. I knew it was called New North, but as I headed toward the closest building to the drive, I couldn't see any sign denoting the name of the buildings. Fuck.

Frustrated, I pulled my phone from my hoodie pocket and dialed the only person who would have some semblance of advice for me right now.

"She's fine," Tanya answered with no precedent. "A little shaken up, but she's sorting through everything in her own overly analytical way, which I'm sure you're in the process of doing, too."

"Um..." I trailed off, unsure of what I needed to ask her. "Can you maybe sort of—"

Suddenly, Tanya's voice was calling out to me from two places. "Teddy!" I flipped my phone closed as I saw her head pop out of a doorway across the street from where I was standing.

"How did you know I was here?" I asked and shoved my hands into my hoodie pockets.

Tanya rolled her eyes and opened the door further to let me inside. "I know you, you shithead."

"Thanks." My feet stumbled over the carpet as she began to drag me through the hallway and up a long stairwell.

"Wait! Wait! T, what are you doing? We can't just walk in there together!"

"She's in the shower, Teddy. It's fine."

I breathed calmly until I let her words sink in. Bella was in the shower? Naked and wet, and I would be waiting in her room for her? Fuck, this was such a bad plan. Before I had time to oppose, Tanya opened her door and led me inside.

It was very Bella, and I couldn't resist smiling as I looked around. Her side wasn't messy, but it looked lived in. Little things were slightly askew, giving it a homey feeling that her roommate's side lacked. The shelf above her desk was completely filled with DVDs, and a black and white James Dean poster hung at the foot of her bed. A huge corkboard lined the wall next to her bed, and it was completely filled with pictures. It didn't escape my notice that my face was missing from the mix, though. Sighing, I sat on the edge of her bed and calmed myself down. Well, for a millisecond, at least, until Bella's phone rang and Tanya answered it, saying their pizza had arrived. Without so much as a goodbye, she sprinted out of the room, leaving me to wait by

myself. This was such a bad idea.

Trying to stay calm, I slowly breathed in and out. In what seemed to be a matter of seconds, the door was swinging open and revealing Bella—naked and wet, just as I had feared.

"Pizza here yet?" she asked distractedly as she dropped her shower stuff by the door.

"Um, no," I began, nervously playing with the end of her blanket. "But Tanya just went out to get it."

Her eyes sprang up in my direction, and I watched as her entire chest blushed beneath her loosely tied robe. She looked stunning. Water droplets from her long hair soaked the shoulders of the fluffy fabric, and I could almost predict the exact second she twirled it away from her neck and put it into a messy bun. Fuck, I'd missed her.

Awkward silence enveloped us, and I realized how rude it was of me to be staring at her half-naked form.

"I-I need to get dressed," she stuttered.

"Right! I'll just..."

I spun around and faced the window away from the opened closet so that she could change without my obvious ogling. I'd been in front of her for approximately thirty seconds, and I was already completely fucking this up. Figuring this was my only chance to have her listen to me, despite her distraction, I jumped in and just went for it.

"I moved to Los Angeles." My statement was met with silence; not even the slightest rustle of fabric could be heard. I barreled forward, knowing this was most likely the only chance I was going to get. "I want a job in the film industry," I said to the wall. "I was a mess when I got home, Bella. I know that doesn't excuse anything, but I'd given up. And you sounded so happy here, and it was so clear that I was never going to be a part of the life you were going to have, so I freaked and pussied out. But I got a huge fucking wake up call when I realized that I was only selling myself short. Okay, well, I didn't realize that. Seth made me realize that. So, I asked Kate if I could move in with her until I found a job, and she agreed because she's pretty much the best fucking sister ever. Don't tell Tanya." I chuckled, but I still heard nothing in response. "I'm sorry I fucked up so badly. And I'm even more sorry that I hurt you because I love you, but I'm just an idiot. And I told you I didn't know what I was doing. Not that that's any excuse..."

I trailed off, cutting my diatribe short since I hadn't heard so much as a peep from Bella since I'd begun my word vomit. Tentatively, I turned back towards her. She was standing in the doorway, dressed in a simple tank top, yoga pants, and USC hoodie, with her arms crossed and tears in her eyes. I just couldn't tell if that was a good or a bad thing yet.

"You moved to Los Angeles?" she whispered with gritted teeth. *Bad thing it is. Nicely done, buddy. Fucking up one step at a time.*

I gulped, willing my mouth to start creating saliva again, but it seemed to be failing majorly in

that duty at the moment.

"Um, yeah." I stood up and took a step forward, but her step backwards stopped me in my tracks again.

"When?"

"Huh?"

"When did you get here, Edward?" she croaked as she discretely tried to wipe away a stray tear from her cheek.

"Um, about ten minutes ago..."

She chuckled humorlessly and thumbed away another tear. "Not to my room, douchebag. I mean to Los Angeles. When did you get *here*?"

I could feel my brow furrow in confusion. "I flew in yesterday, and Jasper is shipping the rest of my stuff when he gets back from Alice's on Saturday." Why the hell would that matter to her?

"Oh." She nodded curtly, and the tension returned with a vengeance as both our mouths closed, leaving us in silence.

All I wanted to do was wrap her in my arms and spoon. Okay, maybe I wanted to do more than that, but at the moment, that was what I was really aching for. Just comfort.

Luckily, Tanya swung the door open, her hands filled with a large box and several plastic bags, interrupting whatever madness had just transpired between Bella and me.

She assessed the situation and quickly came to my save, except not because I clearly didn't deserve saving. "I swear I didn't call him, B. He just showed up, and the pizza got here before I could kick him out."

I growled slightly, annoyed that my sister wouldn't even stick up for me. But then I saw her wink. At first I thought it was some random eye twitch, but as I took a step towards the door, Bella sighed and hung her head, mumbling, "It's fine. He can stay."

Tanya smiled brightly and sat down cross-legged on the floor. I couldn't believe it. She really was the master manipulator. I had no idea how she knew how to do these things. But I really needed to learn how to stop questioning her, that was for sure.

"I got half plain, half sausage and mushroom. Hope that's okay." She leaned against her bed and opened the boxes of food, filling the room with that glorious cheap pizza smell. My stomach growled loudly, and I noticed that Bella finally cracked a smile in my direction.

"It's great," I answered. I let both girls take a slice before I took one of my own. I was already fucking up left and right, so I figured the least I could do was try and be a gentleman.

Bella dipped her slice into a container of ranch dressing, dousing it in the condiment so thoroughly that I was surprised she could taste anything else. I chuckled to myself at the ridiculousness of it, catching her attention. Her eyes flashed up at me angrily.

"Watch it, asshat. I have no qualms with pouring the rest of this on your slice." Her words were bitter, but her tone had a lightness to it that was more mocking than anything else. It gave me hope.

"Go for it," I countered. "I'd like to see you waste a single drop of your precious ranch. I remember how you feel about condiments."

"Oh, you do?" Her eyes burned into me, and I could see her teetering off the edge of playful and back into angry.

I gulped and nodded. "Mhm."

"That's surprising. I wouldn't think you'd remember anything about me, since I was clearly so easily forgotten." She took a large bite of her pizza, her teeth ripping through the cheese and dough. It scared me slightly.

"Bella, I remember everything."

She simply scoffed and continued eating. My eyes sought out Tanya's in a plea for help, but she looked a bit at a loss of what to say.

"So, I'm not feeling particularly well," Tanya said warily as she hopped up to her feet. "I forgot I'm lactose intolerant. I'm going to go."

Both Bella and I looked up at her in a panic, shouting in unison, "What? No!"

I scrambled after her and tugged on her arm. What did she think she was playing at? She could under no circumstances leave me alone. That was not part of the plan. "Tanya, you aren't lactose intolerant, and you cannot leave right now."

"Edward, you can do this. And you don't want me here. I know this," she whispered solemnly as she stepped out into the empty hallway. "Sorry, love you both!" she called out and slammed the door behind her.

"Um, did you want me to go, too?" I asked, still pressed up against the door.

Please say no, please say no.

She shook her head and shrugged. "I can't eat all this food by myself."

"Are you sure?" I asked hesitantly.

"Mhm."

I slowly made my way back to the floor. This time, I sat down across from her, propped against her roommate's bed. I thought it'd be easier to be further away from her, but I was wrong. From across the floor, I could really get a good look at her. I tried not to let my eyes wander to her cleavage, but she kept leaning over and dipping her food into the container of ranch. And for God's sake, I wasn't not going to look. I was a man, and I still wanted her body. I made no apologies.

Except I so do. I'm sorry.

We ate in silence, and I willed my cock to stay put. Luckily, the tension was so thick that it actually listened for the first time in history, and I was insanely grateful. A boner would have only complicated this already-messy situation.

After finishing, Bella put all the trash into the bags and gestured for me to follow her with a simple shake of her head. She led me down the hall and downstairs, outside to a gross-smelling dumpster. I was about to turn to go back inside when Bella started heading in the opposite direction, across the quad.

"Um, where are you going?"

"Try to keep up, Edward," she said with a roll of her eyes.

I didn't have to be told twice. My large strides caught up with hers easily, and soon we were walking together across the dark campus. Even at night, it was still beautiful. It looked like an east coast school, and then I remembered it'd been used as an Ivy League school in a few hundred movies. It definitely worked.

After crossing the quad, she led me down a wide road, which I assumed was the main drag. Out of the corner of my eye, I spotted something shiny and partially covered in bubble wrap and duck tape. I must have given it a weird look because Bella finally broke our silent spell and began to speak.

"That's Tommy Trojan. He's our mascot. He's usually not all wrapped up like that, but the UCLA game is coming up, and the students there have tried to vandalize him too many times, so he gets wrapped up." She smiled as she explained, and her eyes lit up as we walked down the wide path.

"This is University or Trousdale, and it's flanked by Bovard Auditorium and Doheney Library. Doheney has the best stacks ever, and one of my college goals is to do something naughty in them." She smirked and brushed a stray piece of hair behind her ear as she led me further along the street. "Bovard is covered in Ivy and has been used on screen from *The Graduate* to *Legally Blonde* to *Forrest Gump* to *Ghostbusters*. And I saw Steven Spielberg speak there about two weeks ago for a lecture on the Shoah Institute, which is housed at the film school here."

"Really?" I chuckled. "*The Graduate*?"

"They didn't want to film on location at Berkeley." She shrugged and turned, now walking us away from the main road and bright lights to a smaller winding path that led to a small

courtyard with a circular fountain at the center of it.

"Wow."

"This is where I live," she explained, pointing to a large building, which had "NORRIS THEATER" gilded across the top. "Practically."

"Class?" I asked softly, unsure of why this impromptu tour was taking place.

"Four out of my five are in here. I think the first thing I do when I get rich and famous is to rebuild Norris with stadium seating and a better screen. Too many hours of my life are passed in there for it to not be comfortable."

Bella was confusing the fuck out of me. Her mood had changed so suddenly, and I wondered if it was some sort of odd trap or something, but I doubted Bella was one of *those* kinds of girls.

"So, not that I'm opposed by any means," I started nervously, "but why are you showing me all of this?"

"I'm showing you what an asshole you are," she said as she lowered herself to sit on the edge of the fountain. I quirked an eyebrow at her, begging her to continue, and she didn't disappoint. "You said you wouldn't be able to fit into my life? I'm showing you my life, Edward. You would have fit in fine, but you sabotaged it yourself. Why?"

Her eyes were fraught with worry, and she chewed on her lip as she waited for me to explain myself. But I really didn't have much I could say.

"I'm three years out of school, Bella, and jobless."

"Well, that's your own fucking fault," she snapped.

"I'm well aware," I said stoically.

"Why now?" she asked. "What changed your mind?"

I took a deep breath and ran a hand through my hair, tugging on it gently. "Well, first Jake beat the ever-living shit out of me."

"He did?" she chirped, suddenly excited.

"Don't look so gleeful."

"Shut up, Edward. What'd he do?"

"Concussion, broken nose, two black eyes, and stitches to my eyebrow. Luckily, I just look even more distinguished with a crooked nose." I smirked, and she returned it hesitantly, although I knew part of her joy was imagining me injured.

"You deserved worse."

"I know." I breathed heavily and tentatively reached out a hand to rest atop hers. She eyed it warily but didn't move her hand away. "Bella." My voice was thick with desire. I knew it was wrong. It was too soon, and she was nowhere near forgiving me, but I fucking wanted her. Shadows of the trees fluttered across her face in the moonlight, giving her an ethereal glow. A light breeze wafted through the courtyard, chilling me, but the heat from her hand kept me warm. "I'm sorry," I whispered.

It was so soft I wondered if she'd heard me for a second. But when her eyes met mine, I knew she had. They were a concoction of emotions—pain, elation, hesitation, fury, desire, love—and I could feel myself drowning in them.

"I know," she whispered back, squeezing my fingers lightly. Her tongue peeked out and swiped her bottom lip, and I couldn't stop myself. I needed her. It had been three fucking months without her. Three miserable months.

I leaned forward slowly, giving her ample time to pull away, but she didn't. Her eyes closed, and her breathing increased. I could feel her exhale, warm against my skin, and breathed it in, needing her scent. Her fingers twitched beneath my hand, and I finally closed the gap between us.

My lips pressed against hers gently, barely moving, simply lingering. I ached to run my fingers through her hair, but I knew I needed to take it as slow as possible. Little by little, I began to move. Her lips parted, and it took all my willpower not to slide my tongue into her mouth. I wanted it so fucking bad, but I knew I had no right to take it. I went to deepen the kiss ever so slightly when Bella pushed on my shoulders, breaking us apart quickly.

"I can't."

She jumped up from the fountain ledge and covered her mouth with her hand. I wondered if her lips tingled the way mine did. Following her lead, I stood and went to place my hands on her shoulders. She recoiled, cringing from my touch. My hands automatically lifted in surrender. I'd fucking screwed up again. My talent for that was unmatched.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have done that," I apologized again.

"I thought I could, but I can't. We can be friends, Edward, but I just c-can't." Her voice broke as she took a large step away from me, and I let her go. "Come on, let's go back to the dorm. It's cold out here." She spoke mostly to herself, unable to look me in the eye, and I trailed slightly behind her as she led us back towards the brightly lit quad and even-brighter dorm.

The fluorescent lights burned my eyes, so different from the low moonlight they'd gotten accustomed to, but it was nothing compared to the pain surging through my chest.

Friends.

It was such a dirty word. I didn't like it at all, but who was I to complain? This was my fault,

anyway. Glancing at the clock, I realized the late hour and how utterly exhausted I was. Before she could open the door to the stairwell, I stopped her.

"Hey, Bella, I should probably get going. It's pretty late."

"Okay," she said in a daze. "Drive safe." She made no move towards me, so I turned and went to push the door back open. "Wait, Edward?" she interrupted. I spun to face her, intrigued by her flushed cheeks. "My boss invited me over for Thanksgiving."

"Uh, that's great." Was she bragging? I wasn't following her line of thought.

"Would you maybe want to come with me?" My face must have shown complete and utter shock, because she rushed to clarify. "As my friend, of course. It's just, I know he's in the process of looking for a new assistant, and I know that's not exactly what you want, but it's a great starting point, and I know he'd love you."

"Uh..."

I was speechless. That was a big fucking deal. And her mixed signals were killing me. Was this some sort of trap or something? Better question, did I even have anything to wear to something like that? I'd assumed we were going to Kate's boyfriend's place. Garret. He was a fuckawesome, low-key musician, and I knew I could wear jeans and a t-shirt there. But at a movie executive's Thanksgiving, I'd need something a little nicer.

"Never mind," she chastised herself. "That was stupid of me to ask. You're obviously having dinner with your family."

"No!" I shouted way too excitedly. *Come on, Edward, reel it in. Don't scare her off again.* "Uh, I mean, I just don't know if I have anything to wear, but I'm sure Kate's boyfriend has something I could borrow. We're almost the same size, I think."

"Yeah?" Her eyes looked so hopeful that I couldn't fucking say no now, even if Kate hated me forever for missing our first Thanksgiving together.

"Yeah, just pick me up whenever. I'll text you Kate's address."

She raised her eyebrow skeptically, and I realized what the fuck I'd just said. I was an asshole. This was going to take a whole lot longer to repair than I'd anticipated.

"Fuck, Bella, I really will text you. I'll do it right now if you want." I took my phone from my pocket and typed out Kate's address quickly and sent it to Bella's phone. It buzzed, muffled from the fabric of her sweatshirt. She took it out to read the text quickly before returning it to the pocket, seemingly satisfied that I hadn't lied this time.

"Okay," she said with a relieved sigh. "Good night."

With a heavy heart and churning stomach, I waved goodbye and made my way back to the car. I wasn't sure where this was going. I knew what I wanted, but I just didn't know how possible that

was going to be. But fuck if I wasn't going to spend the rest of time trying.

~Bella~

I was an idiot. I knew that. When I'd let him stay for food, I'd known it. When I'd taken him through campus, I'd known it. When I'd let him kiss me, I'd known it. And when I'd invited him to Thanksgiving I'd *really* known it.

I called the one person I knew who would help me sort through everything as soon as I heard his car roar to life and pull out of the drive. After telling her everything, Rosalie yelled at me. Hardcore. She chastised me, making it known that I was completely out of my mind for letting him in so quickly. She said I was stronger and that she was disappointed in me. That one really hurt, but mostly because I was disappointed in myself.

However, it didn't change the fact that I still wanted him in my life and to forgive him for his blatant display of stupidity. I'd known as soon as Edward started talking and apologizing that everything Tanya had told me was true—he loved me. He really did. I could see it in his covert glances, hear it in his rich voice, feel it in his touch. Everything about him still called out to me, and despite my anger and sadness, I wanted him close. He may have been an idiot, but I was obviously an idiot, too. I was so fucking angry with him, but it was clear he knew he'd been wrong and we did belong together, despite his foolish attempts otherwise.

Rosalie made me promise to make him work for it, and I agreed. There was no way I was trusting him any time soon, but the selfish part of me wanted him close while he tried. I could only hope that he wouldn't give up.

Sighing sadly, I applied another coat of mascara before pulling out the hot rollers from my hair. I tugged my fingers through the bouncy curls, turning them into long, loose waves. I took a step back and examined myself in the full-length mirror on the inside of my door. I looked good. I wasn't ashamed to admit it—Lord knew I'd prepped hard enough. I spun around, checking out every angle. Luckily, my go-to little black dress worked perfectly for the occasion, and paired with red pumps to match my red lips, I looked festive, too.

After grabbing directions to Jeremy's house, I made my way to my truck and started heading north on Figueroa to pick up Edward.

This is a mistake, my head yelled at me, but my heart just gave it the finger and flipped her hair, entirely ignoring its protests.

Nerves settled in my stomach as I pulled into the beautiful apartment driveway and texted Edward that I was there. They swirled around as my phone buzzed with an immediate response, and seconds later, he appeared in the doorway. My breath caught.

Edward was wearing a suit. I'd never seen him in a real suit before. He looked... *unf*. All clean cut and dressed up and perfect.

It was wrong to think that way, but I couldn't help it. Why did he have to look so good? He opened the door and slid in, his scent filling the small cab. Why did he have to *smell* so good,

too? God fucking damnit, this was going to be a long night.

"Hey," he said nervously. "You look beautiful."

"Thanks. You don't look too bad, either."

He gulped, and I could see his Adam's apple bobbing out of the corner of my eye.

"Music?" he asked.

"I only have a tape deck."

He reached into a bag I didn't notice he'd brought with him and pulled out a cassette converter and his iPod. Chuckling softly, he held it up in offering. "Um, I made you a mix?"

I almost swerved off the road at his words, but I had to keep my cool. "Sure," I said with an appropriate amount of indifference—or at least I hoped.

He leaned forward and pushed the cassette into the dashboard, but as he pulled back, his arm brushed over mine slightly. Goosebumps covered my entire body, and I tried not to make a noise. I was saved by the first song coming on and drowning me out, but my composure was completely derailed when I realized what it was.

My heart literally ached in my chest, and a few tears rolled onto my cheeks.

*Well, you've suffered enough and warred with yourself. It's time that you won.
Take this sinking boat and point it north. We still have time.
Falling slowly, sing your melody. I'll sing along.*

He was groveling. Two hundred percent. The song was from the movie *Once*, written about a guy who was miserable because he let the love of his life go. Edward was groveling not just through songs but movies, too? Staying strong was going to be harder than I'd originally anticipated.

We'd gotten through "*Against All Odds*", "*Don't Wanna Miss A Thing*", "*Your Song*", "*Moon River*", "*Can't Take My Eyes Off Of You*" and "*In Your Eyes*" when we pulled up to Jeremy's Pacific Palisades mansion. The driveway was overflowing with cars, and my nerves made a raring comeback.

I got out of the car silently, unable to confront him just yet, and made my way to the door. I could feel him just behind me.

"Bella—" Edward began just as I pressed the doorbell, cutting him off unintentionally.

I was about to ask him what he needed when the door swung open, revealing a bouncing Maggie.

"Hi, Bella!" she squealed and wrapped me in a tight hug.

"Hey Maggie." I smiled. Seeing her was always a bright spot in my week. It was like having a little piece of Long Lake with me out in Los Angeles, making it feel like I wasn't too far from home.

Suddenly, Maggie's face went completely pink, and her eyes went wide as she took in the man standing next to me. Oops. I'd forgotten she had the same affinity for Edward as me.

"A-and Edward!" she stuttered.

Chuckling softly, Edward leaned forward and wrapped his arms around her. "Hey, Maggie. How are you doing?"

Maggie pulled back, her face a dark shade of red as her eyes bounced back and forth between me and Edward.

"Good..."

"Bella!" Jeremy greeted us, strolling up behind his daughter, who was still flushed and jumpy. Following his daughter's eyes, he smirked while side-eyeing me and held out his hand to Edward. "I thought you said you didn't have a boyfriend."

"I don't," I said, much too quickly. "This is Edward. He's my friend. He just moved to Los Angeles from the East Coast. He was also a counselor at Long Lake." I sounded like a pamphlet—awkward and jumpy and slightly educational. What was wrong with me?

"Oh?" Jeremy's eyebrows lifted, and I could visibly see his grip on Edward's hand tighten. "And what did you teach, Edward?"

"Video," he said gruffly.

"Jeremy, who's—oh hi, Bella!" Angela came at me with a kiss and pulled me inside the doorway, letting Edward follow nervously behind. He handed Jeremy a bottle of wine, and I couldn't help but smile in relief that he'd brought something. I'd wanted to, but I had no way to cook in the dorms, and it wasn't like I could go out and buy booze from the local liquor store. "And who's this?" she asked with a knowing smile.

"Edward Cullen," he said, holding out his hand for her to shake as well. Angela simply shook her head and hugged him, ignoring his outstretched hand. "Thank you for having me."

"Please, the more the merrier."

Angela led us through their house to the living room, which was buzzing with people. It was slightly intimidating with all these gorgeous people milling about and talking shop, and I instinctively reached out for Edward's hand. He took it without hesitation, and I couldn't help but relax at the warmth and comfort it brought me.

He nudged my shoulder softly as he leaned down to whisper, "Are you okay?"

I bit back a large sigh and simply nodded and smiled. "Thank you for coming with me."

A crooked smile appeared on his face, and I allowed myself to soak in his calming and supportive presence for a moment. He squeezed my hand and inched me closer as a few waiters with large silver platters walked by us.

However, our moment of calm was interrupted by Angela. She returned to us with two glasses of white wine, the same shrewd smile gracing her face as her eyes flickered to our intertwined hands. "I hope white is fine."

We both accepted the glasses gratefully and began to sip, neither of us letting go of the other's hand. She led us through the maze of people and bustling servers to a small circle of chairs in the far corner of the room. I almost fell over as I saw who was sitting there—fucking Brad Pitt reclined in his chair chatting with Edward Norton and my boss.

As if I hadn't been nervous enough before, I now had to deal with making conversation with one of my film idols and the founder of the production company I interned at. *Oh, yeah, he's also Brad Pitt.*

"Bella, I'd love you to meet your boss's boss," Angela cheered. "This is Brad and his date for the evening—" she chuckled—"Ed. Bella is a freshman at USC and Plan B's absolute best intern."

"Nice to meet you, Bella," Brad said standing up from his seat to shake my hand. Oh my God. Brad Pitt had just shaken my hand. Holy fuckballs. I was sure I was bright red, and I couldn't even form a proper response. Luckily, Angela kept going.

"And this is *her* date, Edward."

I glanced at Edward, expecting him to be just as much of a mess as me, but he looked like a little boy on Christmas morning, the brightest smile lighting up his entire face.

"Wow, who do I even introduce myself to first? I don't know which of you to talk to, or are you really the same person?" he rambled excitedly.

I couldn't believe he'd just cracked a *Fight Club* joke in front of them. Surprisingly, Edward Norton—I had to call him his full name, unable to call him Ed as Angela had introduced him—looked up and laughed loudly.

"Edward, right?" he said, shaking my Edward's hand and gesturing for him to take the empty seat next to him. *My Edward, Bella? Really?* My Edward nodded gleefully and tugged on our still-intertwined hands, so that I was resting of the wide arm of the comfortable chair. "You've got to be a good kid with a name like that."

My Edward smirked and leaned forward, as if he were telling some top secret. "I'm kind of a dick, actually."

I was completely appalled at Edward's brash and rude behavior, but Edward Norton burst into laughter again. "Oh, man. You're going to fit in perfectly here, then. How old are you, kid?"

"Uh, twenty-five. Why, how old are you?"

From there, the night sped along in a whirl. I was having a complete out-of-body experience. Or maybe it was all the wine that kept being shoved into my hand, but I couldn't believe what was happening. The two Edwards, as Jeremy and Brad were now referring to them, got along perfectly. They shared anecdotes of their families, their times at school, movie ideas, even a story of how I'd claimed Edward Norton was the best actor of our generation. I blushed furiously at that one, but Edward handled it perfectly. He was schmoozing better than I could have possibly imagined. Even when dinner was ready, we simply went through the buffet and came back to our little secluded corner. It was unreal. But the most amazing part of the evening was listening to Edward talk about *me*. I knew it was most likely part of his groveling, but it made my stomach flutter hearing him talk about how driven I was and how he knew I was going to be successful just by seeing and nurturing my creativity at age fourteen. It may have been the fact that I was sitting with two of my movie idols, but I couldn't stop smiling the entire night. My resolve had nearly disappeared.

By the time the evening was coming to a close, I realized that I may have had a little too much to drink. I was flushed and fuzzy and sleepy from tryptophan.

We said our goodbyes, and I received hugs from both Ed and Brad before Edward and I headed back out to the car. The cool breeze whipped through my hair, and I couldn't contain the giggles that spilled forward.

"Hey, are you okay?" Edward asked, far too cautiously.

"I'm great," I replied, giddy. "You were great. Oh my God, Edward, you were *great*!"

"Okay." He laughed and pulled the keys from my hand. "I think maybe I should drive home."

The drive was quiet. We drove with no soundtrack and the windows cracked open, letting the sea breeze drift into the car. It was peaceful and calm, and for the first time in three months, I was happy.

Next thing I knew, Edward was shaking me awake. We'd arrived back at my dorm.

"Hey." I smiled. I loved seeing him first thing when I woke up.

"Hey, can you get up to your room alright, or do you want me to help you?"

It was so wrong, but I was going to play it up, despite being mostly sober. With my most innocent pout, I lifted my arms and asked for help. Laughing, and assuming I was drunk, Edward carried me from the truck and up into my dorm room. When we got there, he dumped me on my bed, chuckling. "Jeez, Bella, I think I'm a whole lot weaker than I was this summer because that was really fucking hard."

"What's hard?" I asked coyly as I "accidentally" brushed against his crotch.

He jumped back, nearly halfway across the room, and screeched out a strangled, "Bella!" before I burst into a fit of giggles.

"You're different," I said sleepily. "But you're also the same."

"And on that note, I think it's time to say goodnight." He shook his head and leaned down to kiss my forehead before turning to go. My stomach jolted when I realized he was going to leave, and I grabbed for his hand before he could get too far.

"Don't go, please?" I asked quietly.

"Of course," he whispered.

"I should change," I said suddenly, and I hopped off the bed to scrounge through my closet. My dress came off quickly and was replaced with a wife beater and sweats. I turned around to see Edward staring at the floor awkwardly, his cheeks and ears tinted pink with embarrassment. "Do you have anything?"

He looked up, surprised. "Uh, I have a t-shirt and boxers underneath. Is that, um, okay?" He fidgeted uncomfortably, and I smiled and nodded, loving the power I was currently holding. He was being cautious, but not in the way he used to be. No, he was sure of what he wanted, but he was waiting for me to give the word.

I watched him strip down, removing his jacket, tie and shoes first before losing his dress shirt and pants. He walked towards Renata's bed, and I asked him what the hell he thought he was doing.

"I just assumed that..." He trailed off uncomfortably. "I didn't think that friends slept in the same bed together."

"We did during pre-camp."

Sufficiently pleased, Edward climbed into the bed behind me, his back pressed against the wall. I rolled into him, forcing him onto his back, and placed my cheek on top of his heart. It beat loudly in my ear, and I sighed. This was where I belonged.

"Bella?" he asked with trepidation.

"What made you change your mind, Edward? You were so confident tonight, so self-assured. You're different."

"Seth," he replied. That shocked me to the core. I glanced up, and he was smirking down at me. "Yeah, Seth. He sent me a letter that kicked my ass harder than Jake had. He's actually a pretty nice guy."

"I could have told you that," I grumbled. Edward soothed me by running his fingers down my back, tracing patterns along my thin shirt.

"You did, actually. And I didn't listen because I'm a fucking moron, Bella. You're so smart, and even though I heard you, I never *really* listened."

I rolled over more, propping myself up on his chest so I could look into Edward's eyes as he rambled.

"I still think you deserve so much more than me, Bella. I don't even have any grand fucking gesture for you. You'd think I'd have learned since it's in like every romantic comedy that ever existed. And believe me, I've seen my fair share of them, especially with two older sisters. I know I'm supposed to win you back by sneaking into the theater here and playing *Say Anything* or sell your script to an agent and have you wake up with millions in your bank account." I rolled my eyes, but my heart was warming at his words. "Even me moving out to Los Angeles can't count as a grand gesture because I did it for me. Because I want to be in the film industry, and I want to be a successful filmmaker. And, yeah, having you here is a huge fucking perk because I don't want to have a life where I can't be with you, but—"

I'd heard all I needed. I held my finger to his lips, shushing him. "Edward," I whispered. His eyes widened, flicking rapidly between my finger and my eyes, making him look like a crazy person. "Shut up."

With a small smile, I leaned forward and kissed him. It was slow and careful, but it was us. *We* were slow and careful—to a fault, most of the time. It was time to deviate from our pattern. We both needed to jump in head first and stop living in our heads. I let my tongue snake out and Edward welcomed it, deepening the kiss immediately. He gripped my waist tightly, pushing me back into the mattress so that he could hover above me. Our bodies fit together perfectly, starting with our lips and ending with our feet, which were happily intertwined.

My body wanted more, but we both kept things very PG-13. His hands never strayed below my waist, and his mouth never left mine. It was the perfect reunion scene to our film. I could practically see the camera circling above us and zooming out in a carefully crafted crane shot. The thought made me giggle, causing Edward to break away with a questioning look.

I crinkled my nose and smiled cheekily. He didn't need to know that I was imagining being filmed. That would only give him ideas that I wasn't quite ready to delve into... yet.

With a sigh, Edward collapsed next to me and pulled me to my spot on his chest.

"I love you, Bella," he murmured reverently.

"I know." I believed him.

"I missed you." His voice was sad, and tears unexpectedly pricked at my eyes.

"It took you a really long time to figure that out, Edward," I whispered, still reeling from the pain he'd caused me.

"Next time I won't take as long, I promise."

"Next time?" I sat up in a sudden fit, raising my voice. "Next time? There won't be a next time, Edward. You got it?"

"There won't." He laughed, and I realized that he'd been making a really bad joke. In true Edward fashion. "There won't," he repeated solemnly.

"Good." I sighed and sank back onto his chest. There was a pregnant pause before Edward spoke up again.

"Are you going to say it back?"

"Not yet." I'd decided that on the spot. It didn't feel right. I'd make him wait it out. I needed to protect my heart because as much as I wanted to believe him, I needed his actions to prove he wouldn't break me again. "You're going to have to work for it," I said, quoting Rosalie.

"It's going to be a long winter for me, isn't it?" He chuckled and kissed the top of my head, warming me completely. I couldn't resist the silly smile that spread across my face.

"Not as long as the past five summers were for me, I'm sure," I scoffed.

"Fair enough," he said with a yawn, spurring mine on as well.

"But I can try."

Smiling, we both fell asleep, together as we were meant to be, with thoughts of an equally long winter swirling in our heads.

Epilogue

~Bella~

"... because your love, your love, your love is my drug..."

I groaned. It was far too early to be waking up, but I accepted what the annoying bars of Ke\$ha were there to do nonetheless.

"No," Edward complained, burying his face into my shoulder. The repetitive song continued as he relaxed his arms around me again, which unfortunately meant that it was up to me to wake him up. Edward wasn't exactly Sally Sunshine in the morning.

First things first, though. I threw my arm over my head where the stupid clock radio was blaring 102.7 KIIS FM. Apparently Ryan Seacrest was the only thing capable of getting Edward out of bed most mornings, so I'd had to invest in one when our sleepovers became more frequent. I enjoyed the silence for a millisecond as I grabbed his heavy, sleep-laden arm and placed it directly on my chest. He squeezed me and nuzzled my neck, directly behind my ear, and I couldn't resist smiling, despite the fact that he couldn't see my face.

His morning wood was placed precariously at the curve of my ass and the back of my thigh, and it attempted to nestle between my legs as he rolled his hips ever so slightly. I knew what that meant.

Soft lips placed light kisses against my neck, and agile fingers swept away any stray hairs that had escaped my loose ponytail throughout the night.

"Mm, morning," he whispered, his voice still hoarse with sleep.

"Morning," I replied with a groggy smile. I rolled over to face him, my eyes still closed, and was rewarded with slow and sleepy kisses. His lips parted, welcoming my tongue, and within seconds, I was pressed on my back. Edward knew I had a thing about him being on top.

Only covered in boxer-briefs, the only thing Edward would ever wear to bed, I could feel every inch as he rubbed his hips against mine. His head dipped down and out of sight to nip at my bare shoulder, and I attempted to stay strong.

"Edward." I'd meant to say his name as a warning, but it ended coming out as more of a plea. Or that was how he interpreted it, at least. "Edward," I said again in the hopes it would pack a little more punch, but of course it didn't.

I looked overhead at the clock as Edward continued mauling my skin. The harsh red glow of the numbers made it easy to read the 8:04 in the darkened room, even upside down.

"Edward," I repeated sternly, "we don't have time for this."

He paused for a second, lifting his head up to read the time before he rolled his eyes and smirked at me.

"I don't have to be at work until ten. There's definitely enough time for this and a shower, too." He winked and lowered his head, reuniting his lips with mine.

"What about Renata?" I mumbled against his lips. He pulled away, his brow furrowed, and read the sheet of paper that was tacked overhead. After an embarrassing afternoon encounter earlier in the spring, Renata had graciously written out her weekly schedule for us, including class and work hours.

"It's Wednesday?" he asked, and I nodded in return. "She's in bio lab until noon." He frowned but let his hand slip from my waist down my thigh. "I'll be long gone by then. And seriously, who chooses that kind of torture?"

"Edward," I whined, but it turned into more of a whimper as his hand moved up and inwards, tracing small circles at the hem of my undies. "I don't have to be in class until eleven, and we were up way too late last night."

My body betrayed my words, though, my legs widening and my hips angling upwards in a weak attempt to push his hand where I wanted it.

"Oh, okay," he said sadly. What a fucking actor. Edward should have been in front of the camera, not behind it. His face was drawn and disappointed, but his fingers trailed from my thigh over my fabric-covered center and then back again. "Well, if you're too tired..."

He began to push off the bed, but if he thought I was actually letting him go, he was out of his fucking mind. I grabbed his neck and pulled him back down to my mouth in a warm kiss. Simultaneously, I lifted my hips to help Edward as he shimmed my undies down my thighs, throwing them to the floor quickly. His followed within seconds.

"You're such a dick," I moaned as the tip of his cock rubbed against my clit.

"You love me." His eyes shone and his grin expanded as my legs widened to make room for him.

"God only knows why."

I smiled back, knowing how long it had taken us to get back to this moment. I'd been so broken by his lack of communication; I was on my guard for months. Edward was incredible, though. He'd been there for every drunk dial, every paper, every assignment, and every crisis that followed. I could count on him, and he'd never even tried anything below the belt because he'd known we would get there when I was ready to trust him. It wasn't until February, Valentine's Day, that I'd realized he wasn't going anywhere, and I'd finally been ready to take that step.

FLASHBACK

"Hm," Renata noted disapprovingly as she took in my casual attire. "Your boyfriend doesn't have anything planned for Valentine's Day?"

I rolled my eyes at her snide tone and pushed up the sleeves on my comfy sweater. Edward had asked if I wanted to do anything special for Valentine's Day, and I'd told him all I wanted was to be with him. And it was true. We could be doing anything, and as long as we were together, I'd be more than a hundred percent content. Keeping it low key, he decided we'd have a movie marathon with some of our favorite classic romances—how very us. I fully approved, especially since it meant I could go on a date wearing a sweater, yoga pants, and flip-flops. Absolute perfection.

"We're going to hang out and watch movies at his place," I explained, although I didn't really need to.

She scoffed again, and my anger flared. I knew she was pissed because she'd walked in on Edward and me "desecrating" the floor—aka making out while watching a movie—but there was no need to be this snippy. "Don't you guys do that, like, every night? And didn't you tell me he lives with his sister? How romantic." I didn't appreciate her sarcasm one bit.

"His sister is going to be spending the night at her boyfriend's," I snapped, "and it's not like they share a room or anything—"

I was about to go off on her further when my cell phone lit up with Edward's name, saving the

day.

"Hi," I said exasperatedly.

"Hey. Uh, is everything all right there?"

"Mhm, just grabbing my bag," I said as I slung the tote over my arm. "You are here, aren't you?"

"Yes, ma'am. Your chariot awaits."

Without a look back, I headed out the door and down to the street where Edward was parked and waiting for me. He was leaning against the passenger door of his brand new (well, used) Volvo with his arms folded across his chest, looking like some sort of James Dean wannabe. But damn, he looked good.

He smiled widely and opened his arms as I crashed into his body. He pressed a soft kiss to my forehead, and I sighed in relief. This night was already getting better, and it had just begun. Still holding onto me, he opened the car door, but as I stepped aside to hop in, he shook his head.

"What?" I asked, perplexed.

"Drop your bag in there, but we're not leaving yet," he said as he grabbed a large paper bag from the floor of the backseat.

"What are we doing?" I pushed. He was literally leading me away from his car and through campus. Why the fuck would we be staying on campus? Needless to say, I was confused. After a short walk, he paused and motioned for me to sit down.

I looked around and smiled. He'd brought me to the fountain in front of Norris Theater, the exact spot 'dI realized I could never be without Edward in my life, no matter how hard I tried to ignore him or how much of a douche he was.

"Bella, I know this probably isn't what you anticipated doing with your Valentine's Day, but I kind of called in a favor through work and, um..."

"What?" I asked yet again. I was starting to sound like a broken record.

"Well, this is where you made me realize that I could be a part of your life in Los Angeles, where you gave me a second chance, and this is my way of thanking you and promising you that I will never take that for granted. Ever. I love you, Bella."

As I always did, I smiled and kissed him instead of replying with the words he was probably dying to hear. I didn't know what was holding me back. I knew I loved Edward. This moment alone was enough to show me how much he loved me. But still, I kept waiting.

"So, what favor did you call in?"

Grinning, Edward laced his fingers with mine. He paused in front of the theater, looked both

ways, and typed in four numbers to the keypad on the door handle. With a pop, the doors unlocked, pushing open.

"You..."

As I looked around the theater, I was speechless. I'd never truly been at a loss for words before like this. Edward had taken out the first two rows of removable seats from the theater and replaced them with a large blanket and some pillows, and our only lights were small, flickering candles.

"Is this okay?" he asked nervously, although I had no idea why. This was the "grand gesture" I'd been waiting for, and he had no reason to be shy.

"This is amazing!" I squealed, my voice echoing in the large, empty theater.

I skipped over to the blanket and plopped down, arranging the pillows so that I was propped up comfortably.

Giving me a big smirk, he opened up the bag in his hand and started placing white Styrofoam boxes on the blanket. The smell assaulted my senses immediately, and I couldn't help but squeak in excitement again. I felt like I was turning into some ridiculous teenybopper at a Jonas Brothers concert with all the high-pitched noises coming out of my mouth, but I didn't particularly care.

"Chanos?" I laughed at the casual nature of our date, but it worked. "Gah, I am starving. This is perfect."

"Yeah, that was the favor I had to call in." He chuckled. "We're technically not supposed to have food in here, so just be careful with it, okay?"

I nodded eagerly as I opened the boxes and started salivating. "Steak nachos and carne asada burritos? Oh my God, Edward, I love you!"

His laughter died as soon as the words came out. After all, he'd been waiting since November to hear them again. I hadn't even meant to say them, but I was just so happy. And, well, I did. I loved him.

"Y-you do?" His voice cracked as he lowered himself to kneel on the blanket next to me.

I bit my lip and swallowed hard. "Of course I do," I whispered. "I never stopped."

His hands cradled my face, his thumbs slowly sweeping over my heated cheeks. He pulled me in for a tender kiss, and I could feel sparks circulate throughout my body. The blaring score of John Williams' main theme interrupted our kiss, and I couldn't help but break into giggles. Of course the romantic movies Edward had picked for us wouldn't actually be romances. No, they'd be Star Wars.

"What?"

I shrugged and leaned against his chest, settling between his legs comfortably. "Nothing. I just love you, is all."

"Good." He pulled me closer, keeping me tighter, as if there were any other place I'd rather be than in his arms. "Because I really love you too."

I craned my neck to look up at him and couldn't resist kissing the underside of his jaw. "Best date ever, Edward. Now, are you going to sit there all night or start feeding me some steak nachos?"

Suddenly serious, Edward pushed himself inside me, letting me accommodate him for a few seconds. We'd gotten considerably better at this, with all the practicing we'd been doing since February.

He lifted my knee and wrapped my leg around his back—my favorite lazy position. I appreciated his consideration since it was a ridiculously early hour and all. But as soon as he started to move inside me, I knew that it was just a matter of time before I took control. His hips started rocking slowly, a steady, fluid motion. Mm, so it's that kind of morning. I didn't think sex with Edward could ever be bad. There was something about the way we moved together that was always exciting and never the same. I angled my hips up, trying to get him to move faster or deeper, but he resisted.

"Bella," he whispered as he dragged his hands under my shirt, which for some reason had yet to be removed, teasing the underside of my breasts with his thumbs. "Patience."

Scowling, I pushed his shoulder and thrust my hips simultaneously, effectively rolling him onto his back. With him pinned beneath me, I took control of the pace. I had him exactly where I wanted him.

"Ung," I groaned, stripping away my wife beater before bracing myself against Edward's chest. "It's... early... I'm... cranky..." I rocked faster, clenching down on Edward's cock and making sure my clit rubbed against his pelvis with each word. "No... fucking... teasing!"

"Fuck!" he cried out, his eyes closing in gratification. He'd been teasing himself as well, and I almost threw out an "I told you so," as he came loudly.

His noises and obvious enjoyment brought me to my own peak. Pleasure coursed through me as I climaxed, my shuddering prolonged as I rode out my orgasm for as long as possible.

After I was spent, I collapsed onto his chest, feeling like a big pile of goo. It may have been eight in the morning, but that had definitely been a damned good way to wake up.

His fingertips tickled my clammy back as he pressed a soft kiss into my hair. Needing a little air, I rolled onto my back. But Edward didn't let me go too far. He clutched my hip and rubbed his thumb over my tattoo, as he almost always did after we made love. I felt cherished. Giving my body to Edward was a gift. And although we joked about it incessantly, I knew it wasn't one he took for granted. After all, I'd waited to be in love to give myself to him not once, but twice. He wasn't willing to fuck up again, and it made me smile.

Exhausted, I let my eyes droop closed. Only in the back of my head did I register that Edward had climbed out from underneath me with a soft "I love you," leaving me to my dreams. I couldn't wait to finish my final exams and spend an entire month in bed with Edward. This summer couldn't come fast enough.

~Edward~

I knew it was wrong of me to complain because I was damned lucky to be employed, but I was ready to be done with today. Bella was leaving tomorrow for the entire summer, and I was totally unprepared. The last time we'd been apart, things hadn't exactly gone according to plan, and although that was without a doubt my fault, I couldn't stop the queasy feeling from rising up to my throat every time I thought about another three months without her.

After her final exams, I'd convinced her to move in with me for a little bit instead of heading back to Washington. Well, I hadn't so much as convinced as pleaded, but she didn't put up much of a fight, saying that she wanted to work as long as possible at Plan B, anyway.

I'd managed to finally move out from Kate's fancy apartment downtown to a shoddy-looking one-bedroom apartment in Santa Monica. It wasn't much—no dishwasher, no air conditioning, and street parking—but it was all I could afford, and it was close to work. And having Bella to myself in a queen-sized bed was pure heaven.

Speaking of which...

Glancing at the computer screen in front of me, I noticed that it was already 9:47 PM. Longest. Day. Ever. And a Friday on top of all that. I had anticipated taking Bella out to dinner tonight after work, but since fall television production started next week, I hadn't been able to get out of the office at my normal departure time of seven. I'd asked earlier in the week if I could leave on time because of a date with Bella, and my boss, Lucy, had approved it. But as the phones kept ringing and emails bombarded my inbox, I had a feeling that request had all but been forgotten.

"Hey, Edward," Lucy said with a tired smile. She was the VP of Development and Original Programming for Comedy Central, and I was her ever-devoted assistant. She was incredibly sweet, but she knew her way around the business, that was for sure, and she wasn't afraid to crack the whip with me.

"Hey," I replied, equally as exhausted.

She passed me a piece of paper and leaned her elbows on the top of my sad little cubicle. I scanned the paper quickly. It had call times for the actors and their contact information, so I assumed I was going to be in the office for a bit longer. *Unfortunately*. It must have shown on my face because she clapped her hand to my shoulder and gave it a comforting squeeze.

"If you could just make those calls, we'll get you out of here. Sorry it's been such a busy day."

I shrugged and smiled. Like I said, I was really fucking lucky to have been hired at all, much less by a successful television network. So I tried to keep my complaining to a bare minimum.

"Of course, Lucy."

I glanced at the clock again. 9:52. My minutes with Bella were decreasing rapidly, so I picked up the phone, ready to begin my dialing.

"Oh, shit!" Lucy gasped, startling me. "You were supposed to get out of here early tonight, weren't you? Some surprise thing for your girlfriend? Fuck, Edward! Why didn't you remind me?"

"It's not a big deal," I said, lifting up the phone that was still in my hand. "I'll get this done quickly, and then I'll be out of here for the weekend."

She shook her head and pushed my hand down. "Nope. You're getting out of here now. You know those call times will change at least three more times before they're finalized, anyway," she said with a big roll of her eyes. "I'll see you bright and early on Monday, Edward."

I opened my mouth to protest, but she cut me off by turning away and heading back into her office without another word. Sometimes having an awesome boss was, well, awesome.

I quickly gathered my things and jotted off a text to Bella, letting her know I'd be back in the near future before I headed down to the garage. The lack of traffic allowed me to get home in merely ten minutes, and Bella was already at the door waiting when I arrived.

"Hey, stranger," she said as she leaned out over the balcony. I smiled at my warm welcome. My muscles ached and stretched with each step I took, tired and cramped from being sedentary for too long. "I'd almost forgotten what you looked like."

She giggled as I barreled into her arms, pushing us through the doorway and onto the couch placed to its left so that I was sprawled on top of her. I groaned and buried my face in the crook of her neck. She smelled like sunscreen and mothballs... an interesting combination.

"Long day?" she asked with a laugh, and I grunted my affirmation. "My poor baby." She pushed my hair out of my face and placed little kisses everywhere she could reach. "Now, get up."

"I don't think I can move," I whined.

"Not even for mac and cheese?" My stomach growled, making its desires known. With an over-exaggerated sigh, I pushed myself off her and into a seated position. She wriggled her feet out from under my thighs and headed to the kitchen—aka the other corner of the room—where she scooped some food into a bowl and placed it in the microwave.

"So, what did you want to do tonight?" she asked.

"It's *your* last night, MB. I thought I'd let you decide."

Her eyes fell at my words. I knew she was just as unexcited to be apart for the summer as I was, but I'd just gotten my shit together. I couldn't risk losing any of the progress I'd made. Plus, it

wasn't like she wasn't coming back to USC in the fall. We'd be together again in no time, or so I kept reminding myself.

The microwave's high-pitched ding distracted her momentarily from her fall into sadness, and she brought my dinner over to the couch with a smile on her face. I practically inhaled the pasta. I couldn't even remember the last thing I'd eaten today—maybe some Baja Fresh around two? Either way, the food was gone within minutes.

I leaned over and kissed her hard, loving the way she melted back into me. "I love you."

She snorted and grabbed the bowl before heading back to the kitchen, where she placed it into the sink with a loud rattle. "You just love that I can make mac and cheese that doesn't come out of a blue box."

"True," I said seriously, causing her temper to flare and her to fly across the room and back into my arms.

"I know it's early," she whispered as I cradled her in my lap, "but do you think we could just get into bed and watch some crappy TV? I heard there's a new Nick Swardson special on Comedy Central."

"Hey!" I retorted. "I worked on that special. Are you calling my work crappy?"

Instead of responding, she kissed my lips softly and dragged us both off the couch and into our room. With the lights off and our lips attached, we were playing a dangerous game. And instead of making it to the bed, Bella tripped over something and fell back with a loud *oomph*.

"Shit!" I cried, turning to flip on the lights. "Are you okay?" I shouldn't have worried, though. Bella had simply fallen onto her massive camp duffel, which was supporting her quite nicely.

"I'm fine," she said with a laugh. "But I guess we should move my duffels out of the bedroom."

It took both of us to drag her duffels into the living room. I'd forgotten how much *stuff* camp required. I usually kept everything there instead of bringing it back and forth each summer, but the girls couldn't do that, since they had no idea which bunks they'd have.

Finally, after dealing with her luggage, we stripped down to our nightclothes and hopped into bed. Perfect.

"Are you nervous about going back?" I asked, muting the too-loud commercials playing in the background.

"Yes, but I'm way less nervous than last year," she admitted. I gave her a pointed look, willing her to explain. "I couldn't sit still the entire flight last year, and Alice knew exactly why the entire time." She paused and stared at me, as if the answer was evident, but I wasn't keeping up. "You, Edward! God, you're such a moron sometimes." She laughed and snuggled further into my chest.

"Seriously?"

"No, I made it up," she said sarcastically. Her snarktasticness was growing daily. And although it was often a pain to keep up with, I loved seeing her so confident and self-assured. It was such a change from the Bella I'd witnessed only a year ago, and it made me glow with pride.

"You're not going to get drunk and hook up with Emmett or Jake at pre-camp, are you?" I asked as a quasi-joke.

"That's not even funny, Edward. That's gag-worthy."

"Good," I said with a kiss to the top of her head.

"You're not going to meet some floozy actress and have a secret on-set hook up, are you?" she asked back. I knew this joking banter was heading into dangerous territory, but maybe the conversation needed to be had.

"MB, I'm not hooking up with anyone but you, and also, I'm not really into blondes." I tugged at a piece of her hair, and she looked up at me with a scowl.

"Really? Well, Emily would beg to differ."

"Bella, that was—"

She put her finger to my lips, silencing me. "It was only a year ago, Edward. And a lot can change in a year... obviously."

I pulled her closer, locking my legs with hers before squashing any doubts she might have still harbored. "First of all, it was two years ago. And Emily has never held a candle to you. Even she knew the first time I saw you last summer that whatever we'd had between us was over. And yes, a lot can happen in a year. But it can be good—amazing, even."

"Edward," she whispered. "I can't wait to go, but I'm also dreading it. What if things really *do* change?"

"They won't," I said adamantly. "Bella, people like us, we don't give our hearts very easily. But when we do, we give all of it, and we expect people to reciprocate. I've given you my heart, Bella. And as far as I can tell, you've given me yours, right?"

She nodded slowly, her dark eyes never leaving mine.

"Then things can only change for the better."

I leaned down and pressed my lips to hers. The kiss started off slow but became progressively more heated as our need seeped through. Tongues slid together and hands roamed naked skin, making it prickle with goosebumps. We were content just to kiss, a simple reaffirmation of everything we'd been feeling. It was exactly what we both needed.

~Bella~

After our epic make-out session, Edward and I spent the rest of the night talking, our limbs intertwined. I wasn't ready to be apart from him yet, and neither of us was willing to fall asleep. Dawn approached far too quickly, and I cringed as the alarm on my phone let us know it was time to head to the airport, despite being awake before the sun.

The mood in the car was somber. Only the low murmur of the radio and the sound of our breathing were present. Our hands were intertwined over the center console. We were both unwilling to part completely. It was bad enough to let go when he had to briefly switch from reverse into drive. My hand automatically reunited with his in a tight grasp.

LAX came into view far too quickly, and I could feel tears well up in my eyes. I wasn't ready to cry yet, so I tried to stifle my sniffing, but Edward wasn't oblivious. Why was saying goodbye such complete and utter shit? Luckily for me, though, we weren't quite there yet. It went unspoken that Edward was going to park the car and walk me in, despite the fact that he could have easily dropped me off at the terminal. And I was insanely grateful.

With the car finally in park, I gulped and let go of Edward's hand to unfasten my seatbelt. Logically, I knew that we were only saying goodbye temporarily, but something about this situation felt too familiar, and it was far too unsettling. It was making me feel ill.

He grabbed a luggage cart for my duffels, but I refused to be apart from him for even that long. Instead, I slid under his arm and attached myself to his side as we pushed the bags in together.

The terminal was fairly busy for the ridiculously early hour, but we used those stupid electronic ticketing machines to get my tickets, which made the process a whole lot easier. My bags required several attendants to help maneuver them onto the belt because of how heavy they were. People stared as the attendants grunted and groaned about people who exceeded the weight limit. But really, who were they to complain if I were willing to pay the extra baggage fees? I was only slightly embarrassed to have caused such a ruckus, but when I looked up apologetically at Edward, he hadn't even noticed. In fact, he was looking in the complete opposite direction. We really should have stopped for coffee or something because his eyes kept drifting closed. I felt like a horrible, selfish girlfriend. I shouldn't have made him stay up all night with me, but I'd just been so freaked out about saying goodbye; I wanted to keep my memories as fresh as possible.

I bit my lip and lifted my head in his direction. I would not cry in front of him. I refused to let him feel bad about needing to remain in Los Angeles for his job. I understood. I really did. But that didn't mean I had to like it.

"Hey," he whispered softly as he took my hand again. "Don't worry. Remember?"

"I'm not worrying." He shook his head and let his thumb slide across my bottom lip, releasing it from my front tooth's grasp.

"Better." He smiled and kissed me briefly before leading the way up the escalator towards the gates.

I dragged my feet slowly towards security. I was dreading getting there because that was as far as American Airlines would let Edward go. And I was really not ready to say goodbye yet. *Stupid airport security and their stupid rules.*

I stopped a few feet short, refusing to cross that line yet. Edward chuckled and leaned down to kiss my shoulder.

"Bella, you have to keep going. You can't just stop here."

"But..." I sighed, seeing that there were people starting to form a line behind us. We were blocking the way.

I tried to pull us to the side, but Edward smirked and took us in the opposite direction.

"ID and boarding pass," the airport security worker droned.

My heart nearly started beating out of its chest when, instead of pushing me forward as I had anticipated, Edward pulled out his wallet and a fucking boarding pass to show the lady.

"Edward?" I croaked, my throat surprisingly tight.

"What?" he asked, his eyes wide with innocence.

"Miss?" The security lady attempted to garner my attention, but I was in too much shock.

"Huh?" I spun around again to face her, completely disoriented. What the hell had just happened?

The security lady must have thought I was completely insane because she spoke slowly to me. "ID. And. Boarding. Pass."

Overwhelmed and in a trance, I showed her both items before following Edward through the security line. Because he had nothing with him, Edward got through far quicker than I did, but it at least gave me time to get my thoughts together.

"What the hell?" I yelled, most likely waking up half the sleepy airport-goers. I punched at his chest in an attempt to exert some of the adrenaline now coursing through my body.

He snickered and pulled me into a big hug. His warmth surrounded me, and I couldn't help but melt as he whispered in my ear. "Did you really think I was going to let you leave by yourself? Someone needed to oversee your transition. Being the video counselor at Long Lake requires a certain finesse."

I wasn't sure if it was the amount of relief that swelled up inside me or the fact that I hadn't slept in over thirty hours, but I lost it. Tears poured from my eyes, and heavy sobs wracked my body.

"Fuck, MB, don't cry." He ran his hands up and down my back, trying to settle me down, but it was too late; the floodgates had opened. I lifted my chin and wrapped my arms around his neck, tears still dripping down my cheeks to my chin. He leaned down and rubbed his nose against my red one before kissing me soundly.

"I thought you'd be happy," he mumbled against my wet lips.

I pulled back with wide eyes. "I *am* happy. God, Edward, I don't think..." I trailed off, not knowing how to complete my thought. I was too overwhelmed with joy. "Thank you!"

He grinned and led us toward our gate, wrapping his arm around my shoulders. "I'm flying back tomorrow night, but I couldn't just let you go alone. I needed to go with you."

"You did." I nodded solemnly.

We sat in a contented silence, waiting to board the plane, and finally relaxed, we both let our exhaustion overtake us and drifted to sleep almost as soon as we'd been seated. I had no idea how he'd finagled a ticket on the flight, much less the seat next to mine, but I wasn't going to complain. With Edward's scent surrounding me, I fell into a deep slumber.

x-x-x

"We are now descending into Portland International Airport. We hope you enjoy your time here, and thank you for flying American Airlines."

I cracked my eyes open, startled by the crackling overhead speakers. Edward was already awake, his eyes appraising my form.

"Were you watching me sleep, you creeper?"

"No..." Edward ran a hand through his hair as his cheeks filled with blood, giving them the pinkish hue I always teased Jasper for.

I giggled and kissed the underside of his jaw. His scruff scraping against my lips was the most delicious feeling after just waking up. Well, besides his scruff scraping against my thighs. *Yum.*

"That's okay. You're *my* creeper."

"That I am, MB." He kissed me again, and I couldn't resist slipping him a little tongue. I mean, we hadn't even had sex the night before because I'd wanted to utilize our time for talking. But now I was beginning to wish we had taken advantage of our comfy queen-sized bed when we'd had the chance.

"Aw," the flight attendant a few rows ahead of us cooed. I was sure she hadn't intended for us to hear it because she blushed furiously as we passed her by, hand-in-hand and grinning blissfully.

As soon as we stepped off the plane, I heard it.

"LB!" Emmett cried out as he barreled through the small airport. I was in his arms and gasping for air before I could even respond. "I have missed you, little one," he said with so much feeling that it nearly brought tears to my eyes.

He turned slightly and looked Edward up and down, never releasing me from his grasp. "And what do we have here? Hm?" Edward shrugged, but I could see the edges of his smile aching to break through. "Why'd you bring the fun-killer with you? Oh!" Emmett hopped up and down, looking absolutely ridiculous. "Is it so I can break your nose, too? Then we'll all have done it, and we won't have to worry about me getting you back at, like, your guys' wedding or something. I know you'll want his face pretty for photos."

"Em!" I squirmed away from him, shooting daggers with my eyes in his direction. First, no one was breaking my boy's face in again. Jake had definitely taken care of that well enough, and I'd done a pretty good follow up. Plus, it was way too pretty to bash. I wanted to enjoy the last hours I had with it. Second of all, marriage? "Wedding? You're out of your mind. I'm nineteen!"

"And Edward's twenty..." Emmett trailed off. His eyes lit up, and I could practically see the cartoon light bulb above his head. "Fuck, man. You're twenty-six tomorrow! You old man, you."

"Says the twenty-nine year old," Edward muttered unhappily.

I froze. "Wait, what?" I whipped my head around in Edward's direction. It was stupid of me, but I'd forgotten his birthday was approaching, and it wasn't like he wanted me to remember because he hadn't mentioned it once.

"Let it go," he begged. "I hate my birthday."

Emmett clapped his hand around his shoulder and led us both towards baggage claim. "He just hates being the center of attention. I don't know why though 'cause he's just so gosh darned cute!"

"Doucheward's here?" Jake's bellow cut across the room as he loped closer. "Dude! Best kept secret ever! Tell me you're here for the summer."

Edward eyed him warily before cracking a small smile and embracing his best friend. They were so bromantic; it was pretty adorable. "Just here for the night, guys. Sorry. Couldn't get away from work."

"Couldn't get away from work," Jake mocked in a high-pitched voice. I knew he was ridiculously proud of Edward for finally getting his shit together. "Please. He only made the trip to make sure he got his birthday blow job," he added with a small nudge to Edward's ribs, causing him to give me a sly smirk.

My jaw unhinged, and I could feel the blood rush to my cheeks.

"Oh God..." Jake stopped himself with a gagging noise and shook his head rapidly. "I just realized that... no, no, no. That's not what's happening at all. In fact, LB will be sleeping in my bed

tonight."

"Ew! No I will not!" "Ew! No she will not!" Edward and I yelled in unison.

"Aw, you guys do the same thing at the same time thing already. That's precious." Emmett chuckled, spotted my bags, and threw them over his shoulders with ease.

With Emmett leading the way, we all headed out to the van. I paused for a second and breathed in the crisp scent of pine, so different from the oppressive smog I'd been dealing with for the past year. My lungs embraced the clean air. I willed it to stay as long as possible before releasing it again.

"Good to be back?" Edward whispered as he wrapped his arms around me.

"Always is, but it's going to be weird without you here."

"No!" a screech came from the back seat of the van, and a flash of black assaulted me before I could get my bearings. "She's mine for the summer!" Alice slapped Edward's hands away and clutched me to her petite frame. "You can't have her!"

Edward raised his hands in surrender and took a big step away, crashing into Jasper, who'd snuck up behind him. They hugged, warming my heart, but I didn't have time to pause very long. Alice shoved me into the van, squeezing me between her and Jake in the middle row as Jasper and Edward caught up in the back seat.

"So..." Alice trailed off, the insinuation clear in her voice. "How's it going?"

I nudged her shoulder with mine before taking a good look at her. She looked amazing. Her hair had grown out to just below her shoulders, and she'd changed the small stud in her nose to a black one, bringing more attention to it.

"Really well." I smiled genuinely and received a grin in return.

"I can tell," she said with a nudge to my ribs. "You both look..." She paused to think of the word she was searching for. "Relieved?"

I nodded. "Yes. Relieved is a good word."

"Hey," Emmett called out. "Why didn't anyone want to sit up front with me? You all know that Rose couldn't get out of summer school, right?"

"Yes, but it's so much more fun when you're our chauffeur, Em," I teased him, wanting to lighten the mood at his obvious disappointment at Rosalie's absence.

"Homeward, Jeeves!" Edward shouted from the back. He tugged on my ponytail and pulled me back so that he could kiss my cheek, and I couldn't resist turning my head to align our lips instead.

Surprised, he grinned into the kiss and reciprocated enthusiastically. So enthusiastically, in fact, that sounds of displeasure filled the van as Jake, Jasper, and Emmett all groaned.

Edward pulled back with a scowl and poked the side of Jake's head. "Fuck you. You're *still* sleeping with my sister."

"No, I'm..." Jake started to deny before slapping a goofy grin across his face. "Okay, so maybe I am, but damn, she's a good lay."

"Ach!" Edward sank back into his seat, covering his ears to protect them from his best friend's torture. Jake looked so smug that I couldn't resist teasing back.

"I'm a good lay, right, Edward?" I asked all too innocently.

"The best, MB. Especially when you do that thing with your—"

Jake threw out his arm to cover Edward's mouth, reaching over the back seat. "Fucking hell, man! I get it, I get it. I'll shut up about your sister now."

"Now?" Edward said, cocking his eyebrow in Jake's direction. "Because if we go to The Pound to celebrate my birthday tonight, there's no telling what I'll divulge in a drunken stupor..."

"Forever!" Jake laughed and wrapped his arm around my shoulders. "Seriously, I never want to know."

The conversation continued as we made our way back to the camp. As we turned onto the road, though, Alice and I both squealed and began to sing our welcome-back-to-camp song.

Thunder. Thunderation. We're the best camp in the nation.

When we fight with determination, we create a great sensation.

Thunder.

It was dorky, but we couldn't resist. Neither of us had sung it last summer because we'd been trying to be the cool counselors, fitting in. We didn't want to be seen as campers; at least, I know I absolutely didn't. I'd wanted to be accepted by the counselors I'd admired so much and accepted into their group of friends. But I realized now, as I looked around the van, chatting with the most important people in my life, I *did* fit in. I always had.

THE END

Outtake 1

~Edward~

My phone buzzed in my pocket, and I grinned as I saw my incoming text.

Meet you at the house in 30? Need to unload ASAP. My backseat looks like a bar. –MB

Chuckling, I sent her back a quick reply.

Already here, slowpoke. Hurry up.

My phone was buzzing again before I could put it down. Of course my Bella always had to have the last word.

Fucking cheater. It's YOUR house. Putting my phone down to drive now. xo.

Sighing, I lay back onto the soft recliner overlooking the sun setting over the Pacific and tried to be calm. It had been too long since Bella and I had spent any time alone like this, and I was only slightly nervous.

Okay, that was a huge fucking lie. I was terrified. I was practically salivating at the chance to have her in my arms again, and I wasn't sure what was going to happen this weekend.

As if he could hear the direction of my inner monologue, my phone vibrated again.

"Hey, Em!" I said, trying to sound as chipper as humanly possible. But of course, he knew better.

"How are you holding up?"

I paused and truly thought it over. Apparently that was telling enough because soon Emmett was babbling on, reiterating everything I already knew.

"It'll be fine, Edward," he began. "You guys are friends still, right? I mean, you see each other occasionally for dinner and movies and stuff and the apocalypse still hasn't come. I know it's only been a year since you guys broke up, but she's just trying to enjoy her twenties, man. She graduated less than a year ago, and she's just settling into a low level assistant position. Those days have come and gone for you, Mr. Big Shot Producer. And I get in tomorrow morning first, so I'll help break up the tension that's bound to be around you two. And it's going to be really fucking awesome. Even Rose is flying in for the weekend."

"I know!" I yelled back, exasperated, causing the disgruntled seagull on my patio to look over his shoulder at me with disdain. My fingers clutched at my hair as I sank further back into the chair. "You don't have to tell me this, Em. Really. I'm aware of the situation."

"So, you're not freaking out about the prospect of being in close quarters with her for seventy two hours, then?" My silence spoke loud and clear. "That's what I thought, Doucheward."

I groaned in acceptance. It was true, and he knew it. The longest Bella and I had been alone like this hadn't been since we'd broken up last year during her spring break. I'd known it was coming and had even been prepared for it, but it didn't take away the sting any more. But, she'd gotten her job working for William Morris Endeavor and I'd gotten promoted to the VP of Programming

for FX, and we were clearly in two very different places in our lives. She wanted to go out to clubs and bars and concerts, and I was lucky if I made it out of the office by ten PM—after which I'd promptly head home and pass the fuck out. Yes, we'd stayed friends, but it was only for a movie here and there, a sporadic text, and an even more rare phone call. I couldn't even take off work to go see her graduate last May, and we'd both passed over my thirtieth birthday without any celebration. And fuck, I missed her.

This weekend, though, every one of our friends was coming in for CCR—our annual Camp Counselor Reunion—an epic weekend filled with drunken debauchery and ridiculousness. I'd finally have her again. Except I wasn't going to have her at all, really. Then again, she was helping me host since we were both still in Los Angeles, but everyone knew we'd broken up so I wasn't sure how this was going to play out. All in all, I was driving myself insane thinking of the possibilities.

"Edward... Edward?"

"Huh, what, yeah?" I shook my head and focused back on Emmett's voice. He'd clearly been droning on as I'd spaced out.

"I was just saying, if you'd fucking listen to me for a second, that you're going to be okay. It's all on your turf. You'll be at your house for the entire weekend. You've got the home advantage."

I was still pondering that when the doorbell rang, echoing throughout the first floor. My breath caught, and I felt like a little teenage girl, nerves and adrenaline coursing through my body.

"She's here," I whispered, although I was sure Emmett didn't need a play by play.

"Are you going to sit there and make her wait, or are you going to move your ass and be the gentleman I know you're not?"

"No!" I got to my feet quickly, stubbing my toe in the process and yelping out a rather loud expletive before hobbling from my patio back into the house.

Emmett laughed, presumably hearing the sound of my feet scampering across the bare wooden floor to the front door.

With a gulp, I turned the doorknob and pulled it towards me.

"Hey," she said with a soft smile. Her arms wrapped around my waist, and I went to reciprocate, only to realize I was still on the phone.

"What the..."

"Hey, LB!" Emmett shouted over the line. "I miss your fucking face and can't wait to do really inappropriate things to it!"

"Emmett!" I growled into the receiver. How dare he...

Bella reached up and grabbed the phone from my loose grasp and started jabbering away, her body still pressed closely against mine. "I'm sorry, Em, did you say you missed fucking my face?"

I nearly wheezed in shock until I saw the mischievous glint in her eye. You'd think after four years of being with her, I'd be used to her foul mouth, but it still took me by surprise every fucking time. Emmett's sputtering could be heard over Bella's infectious giggles, and I couldn't

help but smile back. Maybe Emmett was right. This weekend was going to be fine.

"Yeah, yeah," Bella said with a roll of her eyes. "Yup, we'll see you there, Em. Love you, too." She ended the call before pressing her cheek against my chest and squeezing her arms around me tighter. "Hi."

"Hi." I exhaled slowly and brought my lips to the top of her head. We stood in silence for a prolonged moment, and I enjoyed the feel of her warm body against mine. Finally, I let my arms drop, and she pulled away with what I thought—more like hoped—was a sad smile.

"Help me unload the car?" she asked, and I nodded with a big grin. My feet faltered as I took in the sleek navy Audi taking up space in my driveway. I'd been expecting her hulking piece of shit truck.

"Whoa," I said, running my hand over the hood. "Where did this come from?"

"Graduation present from the chief and my mom. Audi A5 Cabriolet in navy. It's a three year lease, so I don't own it or anything, but... *unf*."

Her moan went straight to my cock, and I ran to open the back door to cover it up and calm myself down. This really wasn't the time or place for this. But, come on—hot girl, hot car. The present state of my cock really couldn't be helped.

"It's, uh, nice," I said, my throat suddenly dry and squeaking like a pubescent boy.

She raised her brow at me, and I felt as if she could see right through me in that second—that she could see how lost I'd been, how I'd let my job take over my life because staying on set until all hours was better than coming home to an empty house and a cold bed.

Her second groan caught my—and my cock's—attention, but I immediately regretted looking in her direction. Bella had bent over, sticking her jean-clad ass into the air, to lean down and pick up a case of beer. Her wife beater slid up slightly as she grasped the large box, exposing a small sliver of her back, just enough for me to see the two small dimples at the base. Jesus Christ. Her little noises were getting me so hot and bothered that as soon as she was turned around, I immediately grabbed the case from her hands and booked in back into the house.

Calm the fuck down, Cullen. Acting like a lunatic isn't going to make things less awkward, okay?

"Where do you want these?" Bella asked as she held up handles of Jose Cuervo and Absolute. Wow, this weekend was going to be a complete shit show.

"Uh, freezer?" I nodded my head in the direction of my massive stainless steel appliance.

"Wow. I don't think I've ever been inside your house before... it's... wow."

I cleared my throat, trying to dislodge the uncomfortable knot that'd formed there, and turned to face her. "Yeah, well, Kate found it for me through one of her realtor friends after, um..."

She flushed, a light pink tinge spreading over her ears and cheeks as she filled in the blanks. Bella and I had been talking about finding a place together. After all, she'd be graduating and wanting to move towards Hollywood as opposed to the slum that surrounded USC, and it was a little embarrassing for a twenty-nine year old man to still be living in the same hovel of an apartment he'd had since he first moved to LA. Also, when she broke things off, the last thing I

wanted to do was continue to live in the same apartment we'd been sharing for the past two summers and most weekends for the past four years. Plus, I definitely had the money.

"My only requirements were that I could move in right away and overlooking the ocean. And I won't lie, Malibu living isn't too shabby. Plus, Santa Monica is right around the corner."

Bella smiled and meandered through the room. "Well, it's beautiful," she said, looking over her shoulder.

"It is," I said with a wink. Her blush deepened, and her front tooth came down on her bottom lip, chewing nervously.

I still made her nervous, and that made me smile.

"So, what else do we need to set up?" she asked.

A few hours later, we were sitting on my living room floor, eating chips and guacamole and drinking mass amounts of Coronas with lime. It was perfect. The night hadn't been awkward at all. We'd made a grocery run, cleaned up the house, and planned several activities for the weekend, all without too much forced conversation or discomfort—well, with the exception of her catching a peek of my bedroom and noticing that my king-sized bed was the same one I'd had for the past four years, the one we'd slept in and lounged in and fucked in and...

Anyway, that was pretty uncomfortable, especially when her chest had started rising and falling more rapidly and her eyes kept darting down the hall in the direction of my room.

"So, who comes in at what time tomorrow?" Bella said as she munched on her tortilla chip. "We should write out all the flight numbers and times on one paper, so we don't miss anyone like fucking Emmett did last year." She shook her head with a laugh, remembering how at last year's CCR in Chicago, Emmett had forgotten a very pissed off Alice at the airport for over an hour because he'd forgotten she'd changed her flight because of classes. Oops.

Chuckling, I shuffled through the itineraries everyone had sent me and handed them to Bella. As she began to write, her eyes pensive and her cheeks flushed, my cock sprang to life... again. This was ridiculous. How many boners was I going to have to squash this weekend? Also, I was starting to get a little warm and tipsy. I tried to count the number of empty bottles on the floor, but there were far too many. How many Coronas had I really had?

"Okay, so, Em gets in first at eleven, then Jake, Jasper, Alice, and Rose at quarter after twelve. Then, Seth and his two roommates, Billy and Paul, at two, so we'll have time for lunch at In N Out between those pick ups. And then, Emily and Riley don't come until six, which will be major suckage for traffic. And that's it for this year. Sadface. Small reunion," Bella rambled as she finished off her bottle of Corona, putting it aside with the plethora of empty bottles scattered on the floor.

"That's okay," I interrupted. "LA is far, an expensive flight. And it'll be more... intimate." My voice lowered, and I couldn't believe how cheesy I sounded. I must have been significantly drunker than I previously thought. "So, you're not bringing anyone this weekend? No roommate, or um, boyfriend?"

Suddenly, Bella was on her feet. "I think it's getting warm in here. Can we open a window or something?"

My stomach sank. That was the least subtle diversion tactic I'd ever seen. Apparently Bella had a boyfriend. Fuck. And I'd been the sad sap who'd been celibate for nearly the past year because I couldn't handle going back to random hookups—especially not with actresses or anything. Not after what we'd had. Plus, I was a little on the old side to be picking up girls in bars.

"Sure." I pushed myself to standing and walked over to the patio door, pushing it wide open to let the cold sea breeze into the apartment.

Behind me, I could hear her cracking open another beer, and I wondered if she thought she was driving home any time tonight. Or maybe she'd just have her boyfriend pick her up. Maybe they were living together. The knot in my stomach tightened further.

"What's his name?" I asked, still staring past my patio and into the vast blackness.

"Huh?"

"Your boyfriend?"

There was a long pause, and when I heard her voice again, she was standing next to me. "Are you seriously fishing right now?" she asked, and the corners of my mouth turned upward in a small smile.

"Maybe." I heard her take a slow sip of her drink, and I suddenly wished I had some more too.

"Edward, do you really think I'd be here with you if there was someone else?" My smile widened, and I didn't even have to look at her to know she was smiling too. "What about you, got a new girlfriend for me to be insanely jealous of?"

"You?" I scoffed. "Jealous? No way!" Sarcasm dripped in my tone, and I knew I was being a bit of a douche bag, but I couldn't help it.

"No? You're not secretly having an affair with Kate Bosworth or Neil Patrick Harris? I bet he'd get you to play for his team. He seems pretty convincing. I know they're starring in your newest show..."

"First, that's ridiculous. You know brunettes are my type. Also... been keeping tabs on me, have you?" I asked with a smirk, finally allowing my eyes to drop and gaze at her.

Her eyes flicked towards mine, fire burning in them as she frowned. "I work for the agent who represents you, Edward! It's my job to keep tabs on you."

Well, that certainly caught my attention. "You're Julie's assistant?"

She nodded and crossed her arms and took a swig from her beer, pushing her cleavage towards her face and distracting me momentarily.

"Then why haven't you ever taken a call from me, and why have I never seen you at the office?"

My mind was reeling.

"I just got promoted, like, two weeks ago from the mailroom to man her desk. I would have told you, but I wasn't sure if you'd think it was me being a creeper or not. It's not like I asked to get put on her desk, and I don't know, it just felt awkward or something. Imagine that, hm? Us? Awkward?"

"Bella!" I gasped and hugged her tightly. "That's amazing. Most people don't get promoted from the mailroom for a year, and you've only been there, what... six months?"

She looked up at me and smiled. "Yeah."

With her cheeks flushed and her eyes bright and her smile just for me, I couldn't fight my instincts any more. The next thing I knew, my lips were on hers. It felt like coming home. After nearly a year of not just being physical with her, but physical *at all*, my body was greedy for contact.

My hands trailed from the small of her back to grip her ass, finally getting her to respond. Her arms went to wrap around my neck, but I suppose we'd both forgot she was holding a new bottle of Corona in her hand. The bitter liquid spilled down the back of my shirt and onto the hard wooden floor. We were like two high schoolers getting caught making out on the basement couch with the way we jumped away from one another.

"Fuck, Edward!" she said. "I didn't mean to—" She flailed her hands, seemingly flustered at the small pool of beer on the floor, but I was too busy staring at her flushed skin and overflowing cleavage. "I'll get a towel and clean it up."

She began to walk towards the kitchen, but I didn't want her lips out of my sight. Feeling resourceful, I pulled my sticky t-shirt off and balled it up on the floor. I pressed my shoe on top of it, wiping it up successfully. Ah, the life of a bachelor. Done and done.

I spun around and pointed towards the newly cleaned spot as Bella returned to the room with paper towel in her hands.

"See?" I shrugged. "Not a problem."

"Uh, I beg to differ," she said, slowly placing the paper towel down on my coffee table. Her eyes were wide and almost looked, dare I say, frightened? Really, spilling beer wasn't an issue on hard wood floors. I had no idea what she was going on about. "It's a huge fucking problem."

"What is?"

"Edward!" she groaned. "I mean... fuck!"

I cocked my head to the side and narrowed my eyes, as if my new angle would help me decipher the ways of Bella's mind. I really had no idea what she was so upset about.

With little preparation, Bella flew at me, her arms and legs wrapped around my body and her lips back against mine. I stumbled backwards but was able to maintain my footing and put my hands back where they belonged—on her ass. Heaven.

"Your pants..." *kiss* "... why..." *kiss* "... are they..." *kiss* "... still on?"

Oh! Ohhhh. Well, you may be thirty, Edward, but you've still got it. Score.

"I could ask you the same thing," I mumbled against her lips.

Bella pulled back suddenly, her lips already swollen from the force of our kissing. "Less talking, more walking, Edward," she groaned, digging her heels into my ass, not really leaving any room for interpretation. My erection woke the hell up and ground back into her warmth, and I could feel my heart beating, pulsing through every inch of my body.

She was a little drunk, and I was definitely drunk, so I wasn't all that sure of how great an idea this was, but I wasn't going to stop it either. As Bella's tongue made its way down the column of my throat and across my jaw, I walked as quickly as humanly fucking possible to my bedroom. The only light was from the moon, filtering through my blinds, but I couldn't be bothered to remove my hands from Bella for even the millisecond it took to flip on the lights.

I dumped her onto the fluffy comforter and she bounced slightly, giggling happily. I could listen to that sound all night.

When I looked down next, she'd taken off her jeans and was starting to work on mine. Clearly, this wasn't going to be slow. It was going to be sloppy and drunk and quick and aggressive, and I was a hundred percent okay with that.

My jeans pooled at my feet, and I kicked them off quickly, incredibly glad that I hadn't done laundry in enough weeks to run out of underwear. Bella seemed pretty enthusiastic about that, too, in fact.

"Oh, Edward," she moaned as she took my cock into her warm hand. "I have missed you."

I laughed. "I'd believe that more if you were looking at my fucking face when you said it."

"Shhh," she said, holding up a finger towards my face. "I'm not talking to you right now."

"Is that so?" I pushed up the sides of her wife beater and forced it over her head, tossing it on the ground with everything else.

"Mhm," she agreed, licking her lips as her eyes traveled my completely naked form. I did the same. My eyes slowly perused her body, taking in each curve and committing it to memory, just in case this was some drunken accident on her part. Which I hoped to God it wasn't.

"God, you're beautiful," I whispered, almost unable to believe she was really naked and in my bed again.

"So are you."

As her eyes lifted towards mine, she smiled a slow smile and bit her lip, and I cracked. I lifted her and dragged her back towards the towers of pillows propped up against the headboard before crawling on top of her.

With her pinned beneath me, everything fell back into place. It was as if my world aligned in that moment, and I was having some out of body experience. I let my mouth fall to the crook of her shoulder and relished in the way her hands tugged at my hair, keeping me close, as I knew she would. My hands trailed down her sides, one stopping to spend time massaging the soft curve of her breast and the other finding the slick warmth between her thighs.

She whimpered loudly and widened her legs as her own hand reached out for my cock. Rational thought left the building, and I entered her quickly.

"Fuck," we moaned in unison, and it would have been comical had it not been the most amazing feeling of my life—well, at least the past ten months. I was hard as a rock and throbbing for some friction.

I flexed my hips, thrusting hard and fast, and she responded in earnest. It was as if we were both

in some kind of race for release. Mid-thrust, she lifted her leg to rest on my shoulder, letting me slide in deeper. We both panted in thanks.

As we continued, it was clear our bodies knew *exactly* what to do. Being with Bella was like riding a bicycle. A really hot—way more flexible than I remembered—bicycle.

Her nails dug into my shoulders, and I could feel her clenching down on me, a clear sign she was almost there. I'd pretty much been ready to go since my first thrust, so this made me exceedingly happy. Plus, the sounds she was making weren't exactly hurting my ego either. Not by a long shot.

"Yes!" she screamed. "Almost... there, Edward... so... close."

Needing to help her along because I was way too close to losing it, I let my thumb rub across her clit. Her moans skyrocketed, getting progressively louder, and I could see every muscle in her body tense and shake as she came. Finally, I let myself finish, climaxing hard as I stared into Bella's eyes.

Exhausted, I collapsed onto her chest, which was damp with the efforts of our quick but intense fuck. I couldn't resist sticking my tongue out to lick it and enjoy the taste of her salty sweat.

Her fingers ran through my hair and scratched at my scalp as I listened to her heartbeat slow from racing to normal. It had always been our post-coital routine, centering us, and it felt good to slip back into it.

The next thing I knew, I was being woken up by the annoying buzz and ringtone of my phone. I reached out to shut it off, but was only met with soft skin.

Holy fuck. Last night really happened, didn't it?

I cracked my eye open and immediately shut it. Sun streamed through my blinds and straight into my eye. Not exactly how I wanted to wake up.

"Hey," I heard her say, and suddenly my view on waking up was changing rapidly. Bella sighed and tangled her legs with mine as she inched closer somewhat tentatively. And, well, I just couldn't have that.

"Hey," I replied before leaning in to kiss her softly. What was meant to be soft and slow morning kisses turned rapidly into our passionate ones from the night before. Her fingers tugged at my hair, making me groan into her mouth, ignoring the fact that we'd both been drinking and had intensely bad hangover breath.

My already hard cock was starting its descent between her thighs when my phone started fucking ringing. Again.

"Dude," Bella said exasperatedly as she pulled back to search for the cause of our interruption. "Where is it?"

"Ignore it." I tried to capture her lips again, but she wasn't having any of it. Instead, she hopped out of bed and followed the annoying ringtone to the floor by the end of the bed where it was burrowed within my crumpled pile of jeans.

She picked up the phone and tossed it to me before putting her clothes back on, making me a

sad, sad boy.

"This is Edward Cullen," I stated into the phone. It was a workday, and I was nothing if not professional.

"Jesus Padme-fucking Christ, Edward! Where the fuck have you been?" Emmett's voice rang clearly through my bedroom, causing both Bella's and my eyes to widen in shock.

"What?" I asked, rolling out of bed and starting to put on my own clothes. If Emmett was already calling me and here... that meant... oh, shit.

"You were supposed to be here an hour ago, man! I mean, fuck! Where's my welcome wagon?"

"An hour ago?" I glanced at the clock next to my bed, and sure enough, it was already noon. "Ah, fuck, Em. I got a little drunk last night and forgot to set an alarm."

That was *almost* the truth.

"Oh," Emmett sounded apologetic. "Things were that bad that you had to drink yourself to sleep? I'm sorry."

He sounded so genuine that I felt like I should tell him what actually happened, but I kind of wanted to have that conversation with Bella first—and there really just wasn't enough time for that anyway.

"Yeah, so am I. I'll be there in fifteen minutes, Em."

"Yeah, yeah." I could practically see him waving me off. "You'll get here when you get here. I'll be the one enjoying the beautiful seventy degree weather in January and standing in the sun somewhere."

"Later."

I clicked the phone off and headed out of the bedroom and towards the garage, knowing Bella would just follow.

"Whoa," I heard her breathe softly behind me as I hopped into the car we'd be taking to the airport. "An Escalade, Edward? Aren't you gangsta."

"Shut it, Swan. Or I'll bust a cap in your ass."

She rolled her eyes, but she couldn't suppress her smile. As soon as her door clicked shut, we were off. I sped as fast as I could without being in danger of getting pulled over. That would really just be the cherry on top of this clusterfuck sundae of a morning.

We probably should have talked on the ride to the airport. I still had no clue whether what happened last night was a one-time drunk thing for her or if it meant something more. Were we getting back together? Or could we do that whole friends with benefits thing? And holy shit, I hadn't used a condom. Was she still on the pill? Had she slept with other guys without condoms? Could I have contracted an STD? And what the fuck was wrong with me that I couldn't find the words to ask her? Why did I always regress into my seventeen year old awkward self around Bella fucking Swan?

By the time we arrived at the airport, I'd worked myself up, and I was pretty sure Bella could tell.

After all, she could read me better than anyone else. Looking at the time, we decided to park in the parking structure because Jake, Rose, Jasper, and Alice were all landing in the next few minutes and would probably need assistance with bags and crap. Plus, LAX traffic cops were absolute fucking Nazis when it came to standing cars in the pickup lane.

"Em!" Bella yelled as soon as she spotted him, flinging herself into his arms much the way she had to me last night. Although I really hoped her intentions were different with him.

"LB!" His voice was muffled from her neck and hair covering his mouth. When he placed her down, a sly smile appeared on his face, and he gave me a cursory nod. "Edward."

"Missed you, Em," Bella said, snuggling into his side.

Emmett snorted and pinched her side. "Sure you did. But not as much as you missed having sex with Edward, apparently."

Silence. Drop dead silence.

Well, not really, since LAX was pretty fucking loud, but it was all white noise to me.

"I... what?" Bella sputtered as she removed herself from Emmett's grasp and stepped closer to me.

"First, it's really fucking obvious. You're both wearing morning after clothes, your hair is a mess," he said, pointing to Bella's hair, which she promptly pulled up into a messy bun. "And you didn't bother to set an alarm to pick up your best friend from the airport, even though you haven't seen him in over a year, so I'm assuming something *else* was taking up your time. Also, you reek of sex, LB. You couldn't be bothered to shower, really?"

My laughter couldn't be controlled and slipped from my lips loudly as Bella's cheeks pooled with blood.

"I do not," she mumbled, discretely sniffing her bare shoulder.

Emmett grinned as his eyes darted back and forth between Bella's and my faces. "So, what does this mean?" he asked curiously. "Are you two back together again?" Silence. "Or was this a random occurrence?" More silence. "Have you two not talked about it yet, and I'm making it really awkward?"

Thankfully, the rest of our pack interrupted us before we could head any further down that road. And by God was I happy about that. This wasn't a conversation I wanted to have with an audience. Not at all.

"Good lord, I hate flying," Rosalie whined from behind a giant pair of sunglasses. "The things I do for y'all. I must really love you or something."

"Or something," Bella joked as Alice and Jasper sandwiched her in a giant hug.

Jake sauntered up behind me and went to jump on me when he shouted out, "Honestly, Edward, you couldn't have showered after fucking whatever floozy of the week you're on? You smell rank."

I rolled my eyes and tried to ignore the flash of concern I saw in Bella's eyes. "As do you, dickwad."

"Yeah," he retorted. "But that's part of my charm."

"Okay, dudes, I'm starved!" Emmett spoke up, and we all headed back to the car.

Two hours and an amazing double double with cheese, animal fries, and a chocolate milkshake later, we'd acquired the next three guests. And that's when I realized that Bella and I were supposed to have done two separate pickups, because technically the Escalade could only hold eight people. And we were now up to ten. Motherfucking shit.

"It's fine," Rosalie assured us. "Jake can sit up front with Edward, and they can hold hands and rekindle their bromance. Alice can sit on Jasper's lap, which I'm assuming they'd do anyway, and B can sit on Seth's."

"Aw," Jake cooed, sliding into the passenger seat. "How bromantic!" I sighed and hopped in myself. No use fighting. I just really could not get pulled over. Everyone got situated quickly, and I repressed the urge to kill something when Bella sat on Seth, tilting her head back with raucous laughter as he whispered into her ear.

After taking everyone back to the house and dropping off bags, we decided to show the quintessential Los Angeles to our guests and headed to Hollywood Boulevard. We wanted to check out the stars at Mann's Chinese theater and walk around the Kodak center where the Oscars were held.

All I really wanted to do was get Bella alone for a few minutes. Thoughts of our night together were weighing on me heavily, so much that I couldn't concentrate on anything. I'd be mid-conversation and suddenly see a flash of her hair spread out on my pillow, eyes clenched shut, and mouth in a small 'o.' But I couldn't get her alone for the life of me. We'd had to take separate cars to Hollywood, plus, we were surrounded by our best friends and *hosting* their stay. It wasn't as if we could just let them roam by themselves. God only knows the trouble they'd find in Hollywood without a chaperone.

By the time nighttime came around and the rest of our party had arrived, I was seriously itching to talk to her, like a junkie looking for his next fix. Alice had made several pitchers of margaritas and pizza had been delivered, so Bella got up to tell everyone about our evening activities.

"I'd like to welcome everyone to CCR: LA," Bella began, raising her glass in a toast. "CCR—Camp Counselor Reunion, for those amongst us who are a little slow—is a long standing tradition where we counselors can commune and debauch without the peril of being caught by campers or administrators—sorry, Riley." We all laughed, seeing as how Riley was now being groomed to take over the camp for her parents. But, she'd still party with us. Hard, too. "For those of you who haven't been to a CCR before, we welcome you. Tonight's activity is a getting to know you game, naturally. Because we're so mature, we're going to play truth or dare."

I shook my head as Bella took her seat on the couch next to Alice. "I can't believe I'm thirty and playing truth or dare."

Bella's mouth dropped. "Oh my God, I can't believe you're thirty!" she cried and then slapped her hand over her mouth.

"Thanks, MB. I really appreciate that."

"Aw, it's okay, Edward. I think I have a cane that I used as a prop in my dance show this year if

you need it," Alice offered.

"And if you're thirty, how old is Em?" Bella giggled, the effects of the tequila starting to show. "Like fifty?"

"And on that note," Emmett said, narrowing his eyes at her. "LB, truth or dare?"

"Truth."

"Pussy," Emmett mumbled under his breath. Which, in turn, made me think of Bella's pussy and how fucking wet and tight and hot it was last night, and how it was perfect and how badly I wanted to taste it.

And now you're hard in a crowded room. Good job, Edward.

"Who in this room have you ever thought about having sex with?"

Bella scrunched up her nose as her eyes scanned the room slowly before coming back to rest on Emmett. "Thought about how? Like, a passing – oh, that'd be fun?"

Emmett shook his head. "No, I mean full on day dream, imagined sex. Or sexual act, I guess."

"Um..." She bit her lip and slow scanned the room again, but I thought her eyes paused on me for a second longer. Or maybe that was wishful thinking. "Edward, Seth, Alice, and Jasper," she answered quickly before downing the rest of her margarita quickly.

"My turn," she started again, but the rest of us were not having any of that.

I mean, I'd figured me and Seth, even Alice a little bit. But Jasper? No. No fucking way.

"Me?" Jasper squeaked, his entire face the same shade as the strawberry margarita in Alice's delicate hand. "I... I..."

"What?" Bella tried to blow it off as if it were nothing, but she must have seen my face because she suddenly felt the need to defend herself. "I walked in on you and Alice having sex that first summer at Long Lake and overheard you talking about having a threesome with me. Is it so weird that I'd imagine it?"

"If you orgasmed from it... yes!" Jasper shouted.

Alice winked at Bella and squeezed Jasper's thigh in an attempt to calm him down but it really only made him squeak louder, and everyone finally burst into laughter.

"Okay, Jasper," Bella said with a pointed stare. "Truth or dare?"

"Truth," he answered nervously. Yes, I'd be nervous, too.

"Why Alice?"

Jasper relaxed and smiled, as if that were the easiest question in the world. To be fair, to him it probably was.

"She's my other half. She's beautiful, in that dark haired brunette Megan Fox kind of way. Although she's classier than that, but thankfully just as kinky." That got him an elbow to his ribs, but he wasn't deterred. It was actually really refreshing to see him still love her as much as he

did from that first summer five years ago. "She's talented and everyone she meets can't help but fall in love with her a little bit, as you know," he said with a wink. "I'm a better person when I'm around her. My weird found her weird and we call it love. I can't imagine my life without her."

"Aw, baby," Alice cooed, leaning in to kiss Jasper quickly.

Bella nodded at his satisfactory answer, and I think I even saw her push away a stray tear.

"Alice," Jasper continued.

"Dare," she said happily, her eyes sparkling. That was the spitfire we all knew and loved. No more pussyfooting around with this truth business.

"Will you marry me?"

Didn't see that one coming.

"What?" she asked as her margarita slipped from her hand, splashing onto the floor. "Right now?"

Jasper smiled and reached into his pocket before pulling out a small box. Holy. Fucking. Shit.

My eyes flicked to Bella, and she was beaming like a proud mama. She'd obviously been in on the plan and told Jasper about our activity for the evening.

"Shit!" Jake bellowed. He never did learn the art of subtlety.

Jasper popped the box open and grabbed the ring from inside, slowly pushing it onto Alice's finger. She wasn't moving. In fact, I didn't think I'd ever seen her this still or this silent. Ever. In all ten years I'd known her.

"Will you?" Jasper asked again.

Bella leaned over and pinched Alice's side and whispered something into her ear, and *finally* Alice took action.

"Jasper Clancy Whitlock, you little shit!" she cried, springing up from the couch. However, she did it too fast and forgot that she'd spilled her drink on the floor and ended up slipping back into Jasper's lap.

"That's a yes, right?" He laughed, pushing her dark hair out of her face, tucking it behind her ear.

"Of course," she half-laughed, half-cried before latching her arms around his neck and pulling him into a way too vigorous kiss for public.

"All the guest bedrooms are upstairs," I told them as I made my way to the kitchen to grab some paper towel. Thank God for hard wood floors. They were taking a beating this weekend. "Or the bathroom's down the hall if you can't make it that far."

I laughed as Alice hopped off Jasper's lap, grabbed his hand, and sprinted upstairs.

"We should probably vacate the premises," Riley said with a chuckle as we heard a door slam.

"That is an excellent idea," Emily agreed. "Edward? Does your house lead out to the beach?"

I nodded and bent down to wipe up the sticky red liquid. "Yup. As long as you don't start a fire, you guys can even drink out there if you want."

"Perfect!" Rosalie cheered, grabbing the abandoned pitcher of margs before leading the troops outside, the patio door sliding shut behind them. I shook my head and laughed to myself as I continued to clean up. That was not exactly how I saw that game going. But I was happy for Alice and Jasper. They really deserved to be happy. And boy oh boy was that wedding going to be a shit show. I could not wait.

Standing up, I realized I was not alone in the living room. Bella stood before me, chewing on her lip yet again.

"Hey, um, can we talk?"

"Of course," I said as I walked to the kitchen to dump the soaked paper towels into the trash.

I returned to the living room and motioned for Bella to sit on the couch. We both took our seats and turned towards each other. Everything felt awkward, and I didn't like it at all.

"So, about last night..." she began. "It was... um..."

I couldn't bear to hear her use the words "a mistake" in conjunction to what happened with us, so I blurted out, "We didn't use a condom," instead.

"What?" she asked, surprised by my turn in conversation.

"Yeah, uh, I realized it earlier today that I didn't use... and I don't know if you've been with... and... uh..."

She blushed again and her eyes widened. She knew what I was asking, and she didn't want to tell me. Fuck.

"I have," Bella explained, and it cut my stomach, even though I knew it was coming. Of course she had. Wasn't that the point of us breaking up? She wanted to shop around, and I knew she was it. I wanted to know everything about the guy or potentially guys she'd slept with. And then I wanted to kill them. "But none without a condom. Ever. And have you... ?"

She trailed off, her face telling me she was feeling just as uneasy about this conversation as I was.

"There's been no one else," I said softly.

"Really?"

"Why do you sound so surprised?" I was almost hurt. Did she expect me to go back to who I was before I'd been with her? She had to know that wasn't who I was anymore. At all.

"I don't know... with what Jake was saying before about the floozies, I thought for sure someone would have scooped you up." Her fingers pulled at a loose tendril of her hair, wrapping and unwrapping it like a nervous tick.

"MB," I sighed. "I'm scooped." I laughed at the ridiculousness of my statement. "I've been scooped."

"Really?" she asked with a brilliant smile.

"Stop fishing," I said, returning the sentiment she'd told me last night.

"I'm not," she said, shaking her head. "I just... well... I miss you."

"You could call more often, you know," I chastised her, only quasi-joking.

"It's not just that, Edward, and you know it. I miss everything. I miss your crappy jokes and puns and having movie marathons until we pass out and Saturday brunches at The Rose Café and running into Al Pacino and doing that God awful *Scarface* impression."

My stomach tightened with each thing she listed. Last night wasn't a fluke. Last night was real. It had to be.

"I miss having you as my roommate. Living alone sucks. Guys in Los Angeles talk to my boobs, not my face, and none of them know enough about *Star Wars*. I miss our long showers and you shampooing my hair for me. And backrubs. And sex with you. Like, I really miss it."

"Really?" I said with a wink.

"Now who's fishing?" She laughed and inched closer to me, closing the distance on the couch so our knees were resting against each other's. "Seriously, Edward. When J-Town was telling me all about the ring he got Alice and how excited he was to propose—" she paused "—don't freak out, but I was so fucking jealous."

I grinned. I couldn't fucking help it. "So, last night was...?" I paused and laughed. "And I'm fully aware I'm fishing, Bella."

She rolled her eyes before settling them on mine. "I don't want to be with anyone else, Edward. I have loved you for ten years. No one else can possibly compare. Now, can we go shower or what? Because I'm starting to feel a little gross, and also, I want you naked and wet right now."

Without another word, I lifted her from the couch and walked down the hall to the bathroom. I turned on the water with one hand and finally placed her down. We removed our clothes in silence as steam filled the room, both of us grinning.

A year apart hadn't killed us. We didn't fall apart or stop our lives. We could manage. But with each other, everything was so much better. It was just right.

Once in the shower, I placed my hands on both her cheeks and tilted her head up. "I love you," she whispered, sending my heart and cock soaring.

"I know," I whispered back.

Slowly, I leaned in and kissed her. Our lips slid against one another, wet and warm from the shower. Tongues met and melded lethargically. Her soft body pressed against mine, and I let my hands skim down her back. She leaned past me and reached for some shampoo, squirting a large dollop in her hands.

"Down, please."

With a smile, I knelt in front of her and let her work the shampoo into my hair. I couldn't help but groan and place small kisses on the silky skin of her abdomen. It felt so goddamned good.

After she was finished, she tilted my head back under the stream of water and rinsed it away. Usually, I would stand and reciprocate immediately, but her glorious cunt was legitimately in front of my nose, and I couldn't resist sliding my tongue out to taste her.

"Edward!" she cried out, surprised.

I would have responded, but I was too busy licking and sucking at her flesh to be bothered. I savored every second—her hands clenching in my hair, her moans echoing off the tile, and the steady thrum of water pelting against us.

By the time we'd exhausted ourselves, taking turns at bringing the other to the heights of pleasure, the water was starting to cool.

"I love you, too," I murmured against her lips before wrapping her in my towel.

As Bella went to grab clothes from her weekend bag, which was still in the living room, I went and pulled on pajama bottoms and my "Hello My Name Is Inigo Montoya" t-shirt. Old habits die hard, obviously.

When I returned to the living room, I was shocked to see that it was still only Bella, sprawled out on the couch. I loved seeing her on my couch, and I wanted to see her underneath me again... immediately.

So, I jumped her.

"What are you doing?" she said, giggling loudly.

"I want to make out with you on my couch."

"Yeah, okay," she agreed seriously.

I was rounding second base when I heard the patio door slide back open and drunken chatter begin to fill the house again. Bella sat up quickly, nearly knocking heads with me, looking abashed.

Emily smiled wickedly before holding out her hand. "Everybody pay up!"

"God damn it!" Jake yelled, pointing an accusing finger at both of us. "You couldn't keep it in your pants for one more night?"

"I..."

"Or the entire weekend? Come on!" Rosalie said, somewhat disappointed.

"Actually," Bella said, sighing loudly. "We got together last night. For good."

I had no words. Or maybe that was just because all the blood that was supposed to travel to my brain was currently flowing to my cock, but whatever.

"Ha, bitches!" Emmett cried out. "I fucking told you so."

Grumbling, everyone pulled out money and started handing it to Emmett.

"Gotta love CCR," Seth explained to his buddies. "It always starts out with a bang."

"Yeah it does," I said, holding out my fist for anyone to bump. Bella groaned and leaned into my shoulder, hiding her face away as both Seth and Emily hit fists with mine.

Got to love CCR in-fucking-deed.