

Catching Spiders by lambcullen

Summary:

What if that first crush of your youth followed you? Haunted you? Broke you? What if it was broken too? "Hold out your hand. Come back to me..."
B/E AH



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Story Notes:

SM Owns all things Twilight. I'm just twisted.

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1. Chapter 1: Wounded by lambcullen

2. Chapter 2: Those Nights by lambcullen

3. Chapter 3: Pain by lambcullen

4. **Chapter 4: Bother** by lambcullen
5. **Chapter 5: Broken** by lambcullen
6. **Chapter 6: The Bleeding** by lambcullen
7. **Chapter 7: Hate Me** by lambcullen
8. **Chapter 8: Do It For Me Now** by lambcullen
9. **Chapter 9: All The Same** by lambcullen
10. **Chapter 10: Leash** by lambcullen
11. **Chapter 11: And All That Could Have Been** by lambcullen
12. **Chapter 12: Your Decision** by lambcullen
13. **Chapter 13: Subconscious** by lambcullen
14. **Chapter 14: The Ghost of You** by lambcullen
15. **Chapter 15: The Wind Blows** by lambcullen
16. **Chapter 16: All Hail the Heartbreaker** by lambcullen
17. **Chapter 17: Come Alive** by lambcullen
18. **Chapter 18: Echo** by lambcullen
19. **Chapter 19: Smother Me** by lambcullen
20. **Chapter 20: Circles** by lambcullen
21. **Chapter 21: The Gift** by lambcullen
22. **Chapter 22: PS You Rock My World** by lambcullen
23. **Chapter 23: Hanging by a Moment** by lambcullen
24. **Chapter 24: Look After You** by lambcullen
25. **Chapter 25: With Me** by lambcullen
26. **Chapter 26: Pieces** by lambcullen
27. **Chapter 27: I Caught Fire (magan bagan)** by lambcullen
28. **Chapter 28: 1234** by lambcullen

Chapter 1: Wounded by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

OK...here it is.

Disclaimer: This is not another TIDES. It's very different.

It's dark, angsty and it will be a long journey.

Love to my beta, Maylin & bestie elusivekoolaid for pre reading.

SM owns all things Twilight.

Spiders ~ The Editors

*Hold out your hand
Hold out your hand
Or we'll carry you*

*Hold out your hand
Hold out your hand
Come back to me
Come back to me*

*With your back to the wall
You've got one place to fall
Sometimes its all better on your own*

BPOV

I thought love was supposed to make you happy.

I thought love was supposed heal and turn you into a better person.

What I thought was wrong.

I'd been in love with Edward Masen for most of my life, but all it gave me was heartache and a new prescription for antidepressants.

I wish I could say that I was joking, but every time Edward called; every time he got me involved in his level of shit, I was left a sobbing mess, longing for only one thing.

For him to see me.

I was always left disappointed. Always left crying fetal on my small bed and invariably rescued by my friend, Alice, and a new bottle of Citalopram. It would take me months to sort myself out, but then he'd walk back into my life and the cycle would begin again. I didn't know why I allowed this kind of abuse from him. All he did was use me when everyone else was tired of helping him, and as quickly as he'd arrived he'd leave, taking another piece of my heart with him.

In his defense I don't think he had a clue how I felt about him, nor did he understand the level of control he had over me. That knowledge didn't make me feel any better, in fact it made it worse. It meant that he really was blind to the thousands of ways I'd made his life better over the years.

He was blind to me.

I was old enough to know better, and it wasn't as though he encouraged me. There was just something inside that begged for me to help him whenever he knocked on my door, or rang my cell. I convinced myself that this time he wouldn't be blind; that this time he wanted to change, but that hadn't ever happened. There had been one incident in twenty years; one stupid moment in time when I thought he was actually going to kiss me, but we'd been interrupted and nothing even close had ever happened again. Well, apart from his apologetic pecks each time he left me shattered, as he walked out of the door.

I was the biggest kind of fool. I was the one that had convinced herself that he could change; that time would make him mature and see what a mess he was making of his life. He was oddly happy with the things he was doing, and it was me that was depressed.

Alice hadn't known about him until the day he called me on my cell. I'd been working for her in her vintage clothes store for only a couple of weeks, and we knew very little about each other, but the moment my cell rang I'd crumbled. For no reason other than I really needed someone to talk to, I spilled out everything that had happened since the day we met on our first day at Forks High School. Every encounter I'd had with him tumbled from my mouth, as if getting rid of the rotten memories would cleanse me, make me better. That was too much to ask though. After I'd explained everything I still hurt, and he was still trying to call me. She'd told me not to speak to him. That had been the first time I'd ignored her in favor of Edward, and there would be many more.

Again, I was a fool, and apparently I wasn't ready to change that. I realized that day that Edward and I weren't that different.

Neither one of us was willing to make that break and alter our lives forever. We were attached to each other in our own toxic kind of way. It scared me to think of how this was going to end, because it would have to one day. We couldn't keep this cycle up.

However, knowing all that, here I was driving downtown to the police station. I was going to bail him out. Alice was going to throw a fit when she found out, because the last time he'd turned my life upside down I'd promised her I wouldn't let it happen again. She was tired of this too, tired of picking up the shattered remains that he left behind. I didn't want to disappoint her, so when he'd called I'd simply waited until the end of my shift, and left as if going home. It was sly not to tell her, but I'd convinced myself I was only going to see what was wrong with him this time, then I would tell him I couldn't do it anymore and leave.

My heart pounded and I felt nauseous, as I entered the station and walked to the front desk. Bile rose in my throat when I spoke Edward's name to the ebony haired officer. I caught a small grimace before he lifted the counter and allowed me inside.

"There's plenty of paperwork to complete, but we'd really like you to calm him down first. Ma'am he's being very abusive, though most of that's the drink."

"I'm not..." I started to protest, but he slid the small window on the cell open and nodded towards it.

I gulped and inched closer, nervously glancing towards the hole in the metal. I could hear him punching or hitting the wall, growling in frustration and knew that, yet again, I wasn't going to walk away.

"Edward," I said softly.

The anger ceased almost instantly and those intense green eyes appeared in front of me. It had been six months since the last time I'd met his gaze. Six months since I felt that familiar stirring in my abdomen, since I felt that shred of hope in my heart.

"Beeellla," he sang. "I told them you'd come. My angel."

I winced, wishing he could say that and mean it.

"What have you done?"

"Drunk and disorderly, Ma'am, but because of his track record, and the fact that he was arrested previously for violence towards the same bar staff, he will need bailing to a specific address. It will be going to court this time. The owner of the bar is tired of him."

I sighed, muttering about him not being the only one.

"Did...Did he hurt someone?"

The officer shook his head, before stating, "He smashed the place up before he was tackled to the floor. He made a real mess."

"Why, Edward?" I moaned.

"Fucking asshole wouldn't serve me anymore. All I wanted was another fucking scotch, but no, the ass had to complain that I'd had enough. He knows jackshit, never enough, ain't that right Bella?"

He smiled maniacally at me, making me cringe.

"You can't keep doing this."

"Doing what? Angel, I was just having a little fun and it got outta hand. Lighten up."

It was futile, he wouldn't admit just how wrong he was to act this way. I groaned, mentally accepting that this cycle was about to begin, and I was going to do nothing to stop it.

"Where have you been?" I hissed, but only gained a shrug from him.

"Here and there."

"Six months, Edward!"

The police officer touched my elbow and I glanced up, seeing nothing but sympathy in his eyes.

"Ma'am, we'll need you to fill out some paper work. My colleague will sort Mr. Masen out and he'll meet you at the front desk."

I nodded, not looking back at Edward and followed the officer back out into the office.

"Look, it's not my place to say this, but you seem like a nice person," he said, concern lacing his voice. "You don't have to do this."

"And if I don't?"

"He hasn't listed anyone else, and by the look on your face there isn't, so he'd probably be incarcerated until his court date."

I gagged at the thought of him living in a cell similar to the one he was in right now and shook my head. "I can't let that happen."

"Do you understand what it means, though? He would have to remain at your home until the courts have decided. He would effectively be under house arrest. There's also the issue of his drinking; he may be required to seek assistance for that."

I slumped onto the chair across from his desk, and exhaled.

"My apartment only has one bedroom. In truth, the whole place is pretty much one room. There isn't enough room to swing a mouse, let alone a cat."

"That's really not our concern. I feel like I should ask you again; are you sure you're willing to do this? It's difficult to retract once you sign the papers, Ms. Swan."

Why me? Why did he always call me?

...because he has no one else, Bella.

Alice was going to kill me. Though she probably realized I wouldn't turn him away, sometimes it was as though she could see my thoughts. It scared me on occasion.

I took the pen from his hand, and listened as he read out all the terms. I'd heard many of them before, because this wasn't the first time I'd bailed him out, but now he had no choice but to stay with me. He couldn't leave without saying goodbye this time.

He couldn't leave.

I couldn't stop the tiny grain of hope as it turned into a sandstorm. My heart clenched. Maybe this was just what Edward needed to end the destructive path he was on. Maybe this was the force that was needed.

Swallowing the emotion, I filled out the relevant forms, signing my name at least five times and supplying four different telephone numbers. The officer asked me again if I was sure, and this

time I only nodded. It took almost an hour to process everything, and as I was gathering up my copies of the legal documents, I heard a shuffling behind me. I mustered what little strength I had and turned to face him.

He was a wreck.

His matted bronze hair looked like it hadn't been washed in weeks, and coarse stubble covered his jaw. His eyes were rimmed red, as though he hadn't slept. I ached for him. He desperately needed to change his lifestyle; nobody could live like he did indefinitely.

As he stared at me, waiting, I assessed his clothes. They too were in need of a wash, and the gray t-shirt should really be in the trash, because it had more holes than material. His only possession was a thin navy jacket he was clutching in his fist. I noticed his knuckles were cut and the blood had dried on them; he'd obviously not had them looked at, they hadn't even been cleaned.

I stood, and glared at him.

"My car's parked around the corner. We need to go and clean your cuts before they get infected."

He grinned at me, showing not a single drop of shame, before leaning down and placing a small kiss on my cheek.

"You really are my angel."

I hummed and walked out of the police station. I didn't believe that, and neither did he. I was his doormat, and I had 'step here' on my forehead. I couldn't look at him again, until we were on our way back to my place, and even then, it was only in profile. It was already starting to hurt. My guts churned, knowing this time was going to be different than before. I just didn't understand yet why that was the case.

"I appreciate this, Bella. Thanks."

Again, I hummed, not trusting myself to speak. My voice would give too much away.

"Are you still in the same place?"

I gritted my teeth and nodded. He was acting as though I'd just collected him from work, not the damn police station. But then, that was Edward: oblivious.

My cell rang as we turned onto my street. I reached out to pick it up, but he beat me to it, and grinned when he looked at the screen. He wagged it at me and stated, "Alice."

She knew. I'd known when I left the store that she would guess where I was going.

"Want me to answer it?"

"NO!" I screeched.

Edward pouted as though he was offended and passed it to me, as I shut the engine off.

"Hey, Alice."

"Please tell me you haven't," she groaned, getting straight to the point.

"Um, I haven't?"

"Bella..." she warned.

I closed my eyes, as if doing that would hide me from her wrath.

"OK, I did, but..."

"What did you say last time? What did you promise? Bella, the doctor has only just begun to lower your dose again."

"I have to help," I pleaded, turning from Edward and opening the car door.

"Why? Haven't you helped him enough? I'm worried about you, so worried, Bella."

There was no denying her concern, because it was evident in the urgency of her tone.

"Alice, please? Let me sort this out then I'll call you back. I promise."

She sighed loudly into the receiver, making it pop and crackle in my ear.

"You have two hours, and if you haven't called I'm coming to bang your door down!"

I grimaced and promised again that I'd speak to her. Slipping my cell into my purse, we ascended the stairs to my apartment. Edward stayed one step behind, even though he knew the way. He'd obviously heard my discussion and must have guessed it was about him, but in true Edward fashion, he didn't bother asking.

I slipped the key into the door, and pushed it open, expecting him to barge in and make himself at home, but he waited. I frowned at him, questioning him with my eyes.

"Age before beauty," he chuckled.

"You certainly ain't the beauty. Have you looked at yourself recently?"

He said nothing as we entered the apartment. I tossed my purse onto the couch and slammed the door shut. He jumped, startled at the noise, and shuffled his jacket between his hands. For the first time in all the years I'd known him he looked nervous and...*scared*. Confusion slammed through my system, as I tried to comprehend why he would feel scared to be here with me.

"Are you going to tell me where you've been? What the hell you did last night? And why, yet again, you called me for help?" I demanded, my voice shaking with nerves.

He sagged down onto the couch and threw his head back against the cushions. I wanted to reach out; to comb my fingers through his hair until the lines of stress diminished from around his eyes. I wanted to keep doing it until he slept peacefully in my arms.

I wanted so much, and yet asked for so little.

That made me the biggest kind of fool.

I swallowed, holding my tears at bay, and waited for him to respond.

"I'm a fucked up mess, that's what you want to hear, right?" he spat.

"I only want to hear it if you mean it. You know better than to lie to me. I may nod, but you know I never believe you, so let's get rid of that."

He turned his head so he could meet my gaze, but he never lifted it. He looked so drained, and before I could stop it I reached out and stroked his arm, as compassion swamped me.

"Oh fuck...I mean it. I'm a fucking mess, Bells. I'm thirty-two! The shit I get into is for teenagers, isn't it?"

I nodded, still not trusting what he was saying. We'd been here before.

"Where have you been for six months? I waited for you to come back that night. I thought you hated me."

He glared at me, his eyes an intense dark green. "I could never hate you. I hate myself."

"Edward..."

He shook his head, turning away from me, and looking out of the window. "Leave it."

"I can't. You have to stay here now, and I mean you have no choice! Don't you see what you've done? So I think you owe me an explanation."

He muttered something; something that my stupid love addled brain thought was, "I owe you so much more," but there was no way it could have been that. When I stroked his arm again he shrugged me off, pulling himself into a tight ball and completely zoning me out. I knew him well enough to know that was it; I would get nothing further from him tonight. So I mumbled to him about only having the couch for him to sleep on, and tossed him a blanket. He pulled it over himself without looking back at me, and closed his eyes as he rested his head on a small cushion.

Taking a deep breath, I took the envelope of legal papers and my cell into my bedroom and closed the door. The room was tiny, barely enough room for my bed and a small wooden cabinet for my clothes, but it was mine, and I'd grown very attached to my little apartment.

I flopped onto the bed, eying the packet of antidepressants on the cabinet. Alice was right, I'd only just begun to lower the dosage after the last time he appeared in my life. What was I going to let him do to me this time? It was scary to be so defeatist about this, but that was all Edward ever did; he came, turned my life upside down, then left.

I wiped a tear from my eye, and stifled a sob, before calling Alice. The last thing I needed was her turning up here and getting into it with Edward.

"Hey," I whispered when she answered.

"Come on then, what's he done this time?" she asked softly.

I shuffled through the papers and read over what the officer had already told me.

"I don't really know. He came back here and told me he was fucked up, but won't give me anything else. All I have is the police report." I sighed. "They told me he was arrested last night after attacking some bar staff down at New Moon. He was smashed, Ali, and God knows what else, because he looks terrible. He's lost a lot of weight since he was here last, and his eyes have lost their shine. I...I don't know what to do."

"I could tell you, but then I think you already know. Why is he staying with you?"

I swallowed, she wasn't going to like this one bit.

"He's bailed to my address. He has to stay with me. Here."

"How long?" she asked, the irritation evident in her tone.

I lay back on my bed, wanting nothing more than to snuggle underneath and to forget the world.

"Until he goes to court and they decide what to do with him. Alice he seems too sad this time, so...broken."

"Bella, I love you, but there's only one thing broken around here, and that's your brain. Seriously, he brought this upon himself and I hate what he continually does to you. You have to stop letting him. This isn't healthy and you know it."

"Alice..." I whined, knowing she was right.

"Can you just promise me something?"

I waited, knowing she wouldn't just drop it if I agreed, and true to form, she continued without a yes from me.

"Will you call your therapist? Tell her that he's back? For me, please?"

I took a moment. I was well aware it was the best thing to do so I promised her that I'd call first thing Monday morning. She ended the call telling me to call her if I needed her, no matter what the time. I agreed and slowly began to undress, before slipping on my pajamas.

I stood looking at the bedroom door for twenty minutes. I wanted a glass of water but didn't want to disturb him. I also didn't trust myself. I'd probably see his huge body trying to fit on the small couch, and then tell him to take my bed. What a masochist.

As a test, I opened the door and listened. I expected to hear his deep even breaths, but got something else entirely.

There was sniffing.

There was hiccoughing.

There were tears.

Edward Masen was crying.

Reacting instinctively I ran to the couch.

"Edward?" I whispered, placing my hand on his shoulder.

He hid his face in the cushion and muffled a 'go away'. Ignoring him, I sat on the edge of couch, gently inching further onto it, and closer to Edward. Hurt welled for him, and for me. Would we live forever in this cycle? I stroked his shoulder, feeling him tremble, and my composure snapped. I wrapped my arms around him and pulled his head to my chest. His tears wet my t-shirt and it began to stick to my skin, only made worse as my own tears amalgamated with his.

"Talk to me," I whispered into the dark, stroking my fingers through his hair.

There was a slight shake of his head before he said softly, "I have no right to ask, but Bella, could you just lie down with me for a while?"

I should have said no.

I should have been angry with him, but instead my heart begged for me to do as he asked. So when he slowly leaned backwards onto the couch, I went with him. We jostled and shuffled in the small space and eventually got comfortable in each others arms. Silence surrounded us, and his breathing evened out. His eyes were closed and I stared at his face, trying to distinguish his features in the dark. He was a beautiful man, but so hollow inside. He wasn't evil, he just wasn't all he should be. My eyes fluttered closed as sleep began to beckon me, and just before I welcomed it, I heard a small whimper from him.

"I missed you," he mumbled.

End Notes:
O.O
Thank you xxx

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 2: Those Nights by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Love to my awesome beta, Maylin & my amazing pre reader
elusivекoolaid.

I adore you both.

Thanks to magan bagan for her Twilighted beta work.

SM owns all things Twilight.

Italics give memories from the past.

BPOV

I was thirteen when I fell in love for the first time in my life.

It was the only time, and I'd loved him ever since.

The problem was he didn't see me. I was the girl who he'd known since I was five. The girl who lived next door. His best friend, and he didn't love me back. I was always on the periphery of his life when he was with the cool kids, but at night when he wanted to talk, or when he needed somewhere to hide because he was drunk, it was my window he threw stones at. It was my bed he snuggled into, and it was me he thanked.

I had hope then.

I thought one day he would look past my boring brown hair, and my gangly form to see the woman I was going to be. There had been one night in my bed when I thought he had. We were cuddled together and hiding from his dad, I'd felt him staring at me and turned to see his green eyes fix on mine. We locked gazes, both silent, and I gasped when he floated his knuckles across my cheek. I waited, positive he was going to kiss me, but instead he said, "You're such an angel. Thanks Bella."

I deflated like a balloon, hurt beyond anything I'd felt before, but embarrassed that I'd let myself want. I was stupid for letting myself wish for him. I was no one. I wasn't cool. I wasn't pretty, and I certainly wasn't good enough for him to introduce to his friends. I was the little secret, and more fool me for not doing anything about it then, but I was thirteen; still a child. He was older and maybe he took advantage of the hearts in my eyes. I don't know, but I continued to let him. He started climbing into my window whenever he needed to disappear. Things got worse with his dad, but he would never tell me what was wrong, or even where his mom was.

On reflection, our relationship was one of comfort. However, now only one of us was getting that. Our connection had warped over the years, and I couldn't pin point how. It only became more fractured when Kate entered his life. She was everything I wasn't, and he didn't miss the adoration floating from her baby blues. He came to my room less and didn't acknowledge me at all in school. I tried to wave, to gain his attention in the cafeteria, but he would frown, throwing down his food and dragging Kate from the room.

I caught them kissing against the wall once, and to my shame I stayed and watched them, well him really. I was amazed at the way he cupped her cheek, his thumb stroking her jaw gently. I was transfixed when he tilted his head and opened his mouth a little, because I caught a sliver of his tongue. My insides clenched in a strange kind of arousal and shame washed over me. I shouldn't have been watching them, and certainly shouldn't have found it appealing. It affected me, though. I dreamed of that kiss for weeks, only it wasn't Kate he was doing it with. It was me.

I was torturing myself with images of a life I couldn't have, but he encouraged it when he came back to me after they argued. He was sullen and forlorn that night. He let me hug him, which was usually not allowed, and we'd fallen asleep on top of my comforter, Edward's head in my lap.

It was one of my most cherished memories and one I would return to whenever I felt lonely. It was the one time I felt something back from him, other than friendship. It was also the time I realized just how much we needed each other. No matter what went on in his life, who he was friends with, or who he was dating, he needed my comfort, whereas I needed him, regardless of how I got him.

I surmised at fifteen that there was no one as masochistic as me.

Our relationship was a continuing cycle of hurt and comfort.

My mom didn't know about him, and given that most nights she was working at the bar, she had no reason to question the noise of stones on the window. She wasn't around to care. We would pull an all nighter many times, just sit in my room and talk, or watch the TV. I'm sure he learned much more about me, than I about him, but in those times we were content. Without any other outside influences we were a perfect pair, but we couldn't stay in our bubble, real life always had to encroach. The problem was neither one of us was very adept at handling the outside world. I often wondered whether, if he had been willing to acknowledge me, we would have fared any better. Would we have been able to take on the world as a whole, rather than fragments of what we could have been? His reluctance was always in the foreground, and it made me feel inadequate. I wasn't enough for him.

Edward was with Kate for thirteen months. I thought thirteen was suddenly my lucky number, because I was that age when I understood my love from him, and it was the time until he was single again. We'd continued our secret nights, even after he finished high school and began working at a local grocery store. I was still at Forks High, and he actually tried to help me with my homework. I didn't need it, but when he started to read Romeo and Juliet to me, I couldn't bring myself to stop him. His voice was soothing and had a cadence that seemed to melt my bones. I let him continue for over an hour, and was excited when I rested my head on his shoulder and he didn't wince. Hope bloomed that night, but as always, I was left disappointed and hurting after he left. I thought that was the most pain Edward Masen could cause me.

I was wrong.

// CS

I woke twice during that first night. I just watched him sleep. He was calm, and he looked so different with his guard down. There was a part of me that screamed for me to leave; to get up from the couch and lock myself in my bedroom, but I couldn't. Edward rarely allowed this kind of contact, and when he did I'd wait for him to turn it on its head and do something to upset me. So right now, when he didn't know what we were doing, I took the comfort and pretended we were happy; that we were together.

Alice would go apeshit if she knew I was even sleeping with him on the couch, let alone enjoying the moment. But this was all I had. This could be all I'd ever get with him. Even if the assault charges were dropped, or it went well for him in court, he would probably leave again, and I wouldn't know when he'd be back. I took what I could from the small moments of calm before the typhoon began. It always did.

Dawn was filtering in through my blinds, casting a strip of light across Edward's hair. It was dulled from the grime, making me wonder when the last time he'd washed it was. Where had he been? Was it the same place he always ran to? Why wouldn't he let me in? I was tying myself in knots asking myself a million questions. I wouldn't get the answers lying here, but I couldn't bring myself to move from his arms. I snuggled a little closer, feeling his breath caress my cheek as he exhaled. His nose was now a little crooked, and I was certain it hadn't been like that the last time I'd seen him. He must have broken it when he was away. It was only slightly crooked as if it hadn't set right. It was probably from fighting, some stupid brawl when he was drunk. The image flitting through my head made me wince.

He was always so alone.

Was he alone in the hospital when he did that to himself?

"What's wrong?" he croaked startling me from my reverie.

I cleared my throat, trying to buy my heart a little time to calm down, before I whispered, "How did you break your nose?"

"Huh? Oh...doesn't matter," he answered dismissively, pulling away from me.

He slid from the couch leaving me cold. I pulled my knees up to my chest, wrapping my arms around them. He had the ability to make me feel lonelier with him in the room than when he was missing. But the ache was worse when he was away. I couldn't win no matter where he was.

"It does matter because I want to know."

I kept my voice low, no more than a whisper. If I demanded an explanation he would only get annoyed and leave, but I couldn't allow it. This time he had to stay because my name was on the bail documentation.

I studied his legs as he paced the floor. My eyes were level with his knees. His jeans were filthy, and had huge rips across them. I started to randomly list things he'd need if he was going to stay here, realizing he'd brought nothing more than his jacket from the police station.

"Edward, where are your clothes? Where are your belongings?"

He shrugged. "I guess they're still at the motel on Fernhill Road."

"The Dew Drop? You've been staying there?"

He nodded, not quite meeting my gaze and alerting me to the fact that, yet again, he was keeping something from me.

"How long?" I questioned, my voice so low that he bent down to hear.

"What?" he snapped and groaned immediately afterward. "Bella, look...you gotta stop asking me these half questions. I just woke up and my brain has yet to start to function, so fucking ask me."

I shuddered at his aggression, but asked him again. "How long have you been back in Forks?"

He turned his back to me, and I could see the steel set of his shoulders beneath the gray cotton. I was about to move from the couch and walk away, letting the question hang when he turned back and knelt on the floor next to me. He touched my knee and asked, "Does it matter?"

"Yes, because you've been here, Edward, and chose to ignore me until you needed me. That makes me feel really shitty."

Something flitted across his face; some emotion that he quickly locked down, but he couldn't hide the bob of his Adam's apple. It was a tell tale sign he was nervous, as was running his hands through his hair, so when he started to do that next I had to bite my cheek to stop from smiling. I knew him so well, but he couldn't say the same for me.

"I've only been here two days, and was going to leave today, OK? I wouldn't have needed to call you and mess you up again had it not kicked off at the bar last night."

I sat up quickly, my blood slowly beginning to boil, and snarled, "So, again, you only call me when no one else will help you! Do you ever think of how that makes me feel? How *you* make me feel?"

A tick started in his jaw, another signal to me; a warning of how annoyed he was becoming.

"I don't want to be here. I'm sorry you have to put up with me. As soon as this is sorted I'll leave and I'll stay away this time. I mean it."

I stood and walked over to the kitchen area, wrapping my arms around myself and hiding my terror from him. I couldn't show him what those words did to me. Even when he disappeared he still left hope, because he always came back, eventually. For him to say he'd never return was too much.

I took a moment, hoping he wouldn't follow me. I just needed space. I berated myself for my own weakness when it came to him. Edward Masen caused me so much pain, but in all honesty, I would continue to take it as long as he kept coming back.

I loved him.

"Bella," he said softly from behind me.

He placed his hand on my shoulder, and pressed lightly until I turned around.

"I'm sorry that I got you involved yet again. I knew when I left last time that I shouldn't ever come back, but I had to come here, then before I knew it I was drunk in the cell with bloody knuckles."

"So, you don't remember what happened?"

I got a shrug. I was tired of those.

"Edward, if I'm going to help you I'm going to need the truth."

"No. No, you don't, and I'm only here now because I fucking have to be. I'll stay out of your way and clean up after myself."

"I..."

"Please, don't make this worse than it needs to be. I'll be a good boy," he interrupted.

I couldn't stop a snort slipping out, and my heart melted when he grinned at me. He reminded me of the Edward I knew years ago.

"You've not been a good boy for a long time, and you know it." I ducked under his arm and reached for my cell. "I need to call Alice, or she'll come over here. Trust me, you don't want that."

"I think she made her feelings clear last time," he mumbled, toeing the floor with his chucks. "While you do that can I take a shower? Bella, I stink."

I shook my head, smiling. "You don't. I slept over there with you remember? Though we need to collect your belongings from the Dew Drop. You have nothing clean here. I could always..."

He nodded and pointed to his jacket, mumbling about a key being in the pocket.

I resolved to call Alice while I was sorting things out for Edward, and I was pretty sure he wouldn't answer the door while I was gone for fear that she'd pop around.

I pushed my arms into my black hoodie and pulled my purse over my body. I leaned in as if to kiss him goodbye and caught myself at the last minute, blushing horrendously at my slip. My pulse didn't begin to slow until I was in the car and on my way to the motel. My cell rang as I pulled up into the parking lot.

"Hi, Alice. I'm sorry I didn't get back to you, but we... I feel asleep."

"Go on then, what shit did he spill to you this time?" she asked.

"He hasn't said anything and that's what concerns me. His nose looks like it's been broken at some point. I'm worried."

"Bella, when it comes to him you're perpetually worried, but I'm more concerned about you. He's either going to jail or he's going to leave. You do understand that, don't you?"

"Alice," I moaned, knowing she was only telling the truth.

"Don't say it like that. I love you, and in the last three years I've seen him enter your life, turn you upside down before leaving again. I won't be much of a friend if I just let this go by without saying anything and you know it."

"I don't know what to say to you. I'm trying but it's so difficult when it comes to him. I know I'm a mess, and I'm trying to work through it."

"How can you do that with him there?" she asked bluntly.

I couldn't take her questions right now. She was just being a friend, though there was too much spinning around in my head at the minute to deal with her. I felt suffocated.

"I promise to see my therapist, and I promise to keep you informed. OK?"

She was silent for a while before she said softly, "I'm here for you."

I stared out of the windshield, noticing it had started to rain. The sky was a depressing gray, reflecting my mood and making me feel worse. I wanted to help him again, but did I really have the strength this time?

I checked the room number and rushed from the car, holding my hoodie over my head to try and keep dry. The place was deserted, but then it was early morning. His room was at the very end of the corridor, and it was too early for the maids, so I was certain his belongings would still be there. I nervously opened the door and took stock of the room.

It was a mess.

Clothes, dirty towels and food cartons littered the floor. His bag was on top of the bed open and waiting for me to fill it. I randomly began picking items up from the floor and placing them into the bag, not really checking what they were. I tossed the food wrappers in the trash and slowly cleared the room of all things Edward. It smelled stale, as if he had literally hidden here. There were too many things I didn't know about him, but resolved I would find out.

I walked into the small bathroom, taking the disposable razor from the beaker on the sink, along with a small tube of toothpaste and his toothbrush. There didn't appear to be anything else of value in the room, so I returned to the bedroom and began pushing everything into the bag. Something made a small crunching sound as I did, and I moved my hand to the base. I retrieved a small piece of what I thought was paper, but when I looked at it I gasped in shock.

It was a crumpled photograph of us together. It had been taken on my seventeenth birthday and taken in my bedroom. Mom had bought me a camera and scrapbook. Edward had begun snapping random shots, making me giggle. I still had the copy of *Romeo and Juliet* he'd bought me, but wondered just how he'd gotten this picture, and why it was so important for him to carry it with him, when he clearly carried little else with him. It confused me, but then most things about Edward did.

Replacing the picture and checking around the empty room, I tried to imagine him here, alone. It made me want to help him more, regardless of the consequences. At some point he needed to face his life head on, because all he ever seemed to do was hide.

I snorted at my internal rambling, because who the hell was I to make judgments on someone's life? Mine only ever blossomed when Edward was around, but then wilted and died when he left. I swallowed my threatening tears, and walked from his room, leaving the key at the reception.

Before heading back to my apartment I called in at the store and collected some toiletries for him. I didn't think he'd mind washing with lavender body gel, but I knew what he liked, and didn't see any harm in picking it up for him. I also bought some *Oreo's* and *M and M's* knowing his love of those, and eventually, when I did leave, I was thirty dollars down and had three paper sacks of goods for him. I assured myself he needed them, and I was only helping a little.

My cell rang as I entered the car, but seeing that it was Alice, I ignored it. I didn't want to fight with her about Edward, so I played my favorite game: Avoidance. I knew I couldn't do this forever, we weren't teenagers and my apartment was a far cry from my bedroom. I needed some basic answers to my questions, and I had to be strong to get them.

I pulled the car to a stop in the parking lot and fumbled with all the food sacks and Edward's bag. My curses echoed around the walls, and I glanced around to see who could hear. It appeared empty of people and only another two cars were present. It was ominously quiet.

I was slamming the car door shut when I was grabbed from behind, and the bag pulled from my hand. It was Edward's bag and contained our photograph; our little piece of history

I screamed.

*I remember when
We used to laugh
About nothing at all
It was better than going mad
From trying to solve all the problems we're going through
Forget 'em all
Cause on those nights we would stand and never fall
Together we faced it all
Remember when we'd*

*Stay up late and we'd talk all night
In a dark room lit by the TV light
Through all the hard times in my life
Those nights kept me alive*

Skillet ~ Those Nights

End Notes:
<p>Thank you for reading.</p> <p>This is mainly Bella's story, but there will be the odd EPOV.</p> <p>xxx</p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 3: Pain by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Love to my beta Maylin, and pre reader elusivekoolaid.

Thanks to Magan Bagan for her Twi Beta skills.

I also want to thank the awesome RoseArcadia who made me a wonderful banner, blinkie and thread on Twilighted.

SM owns all things Twilight. All quotes belong to Bram Stoker....

I was slamming the car door shut when I was grabbed from behind, and the bag pulled from my hand. It was Edward's bag and contained our photograph; our little piece of history

I screamed.

BPOV

"Whoa, Bella, it's only me." Edward's deep voice soothed.

My heart was crashing against my rib cage, bile rising in my throat. I tried to calm my breathing, as he slung his bag over his shoulder and pulled a paper sack from my arms. He frowned at me, tilting his head to the right in confusion. I felt like a lab rat under his scrutiny and cringed away from his glare.

"Why so jumpy?"

"You scared me," I whispered, trying to move past him.

He stood in front of me, questioning with those green eyes that haunted my dreams and made me cry. They'd been there far too many times when I closed my eyes, and there had been no getting rid of them until I wept from the loss. He had no idea what I went through each and every time he reappeared, and even though I knew I was making this harder on myself by continuing with our twisted little relationship, I knew neither one of us would break the cycle. Something was going to have to stop this for us, because we were too attached, too entrenched in the cycle. Going to jail would only stop it for a short while, and I would visit him; that was without question. We were both lost causes.

"You look more than scared."

I shook my head, and tried again to walk away. This time he let me, standing to the side so that I could move around him. I could hear him behind me as I walked towards the stairs, and with each step I talked myself into calming down.

I'd always been anxious, but things had gotten much worse over the last few years, and I don't think the meds made it any better. As well as the antidepressants I also took anti anxiety medication, and I would always have to revisit the doctor when Edward left. The problem was I

would rather feel the pain of him breaking my heart, than the hollow ache that resided when he wasn't around. How twisted was that?

I caught myself before I groaned audibly and pushed the front door of my apartment open.

"You left this unlocked?" I questioned.

"Yeah, I saw you from the window, and came down to help you. Problem?"

I rolled my eyes. This wasn't exactly the safest part of town, and I shared the building with some very strange people. I didn't like the idea of my door being open, even if he was only coming to help me.

"Edward, it's not something I would do. Please don't do it again. You should have locked it. I had the key..."

"OK." He nodded.

"I'll get you one cut, then we won't have that problem. I don't mean to moan, but everything in the world that means anything to me is in this room. Can you at least try to remember that?"

He tossed his bag onto the floor and dropped the paper sack harshly onto the kitchen counter. His eyes bore into mine as he snapped, "You make me sound like I don't care! Christ, you have no fucking idea."

"About what?"

He began unpacking the goods I'd bought at the store, slamming the packets and jars down on the counter. He was really pissed about something, when it was me that should have been annoyed.

"What the fuck are these?" he spat holding up some disposable razors and shower gel.

"Hmm, I thought that was obvious."

"Don't sass me. It doesn't suit you."

I stared at him, perplexed by his anger towards me. All I'd done was buy him some toiletries at the store. It wasn't like I'd found any at the Dew Drop, so I thought I was helping.

"Edward, I...I was only trying to help. You didn't have any in your room when I packed up."

I shrugged as if it was nothing special, but his stare burned into mine. He was really pissed at me, and I couldn't fathom why.

"You're not my mother! Why the hell do you feel the need to buy shit like that for me? Damn, Bella, I don't need you looking after me like that."

"Really?" I bit back, raising my brows in question.

He placed his palms flat on the counter top, lowering his head and inhaling deeply. I had to fist my hands to stop from reaching out and rubbing his back. Every instinct I had was telling me to go to him and make him feel better, but last night was an anomaly. He wouldn't allow contact

right now, in fact, it would probably only incite him more. Instead, I waited. I stood still and glared at him, waiting for the anger to boil over.

The silence was oppressive, making me feel claustrophobic, and I hadn't realized I was holding my breath until it came out in a *whoosh* as he spoke.

"Did you get any Scotch while you were at the store?"

I blinked, shocked by his change of tone, and then shook my head.

"I thought you needed a shower and shave more than you needed alcohol."

"You thought wrong," he stated abruptly, before collecting his bag from the floor, along with the toiletries I'd bought and pushed past me to the bathroom.

I gaped at him, perplexed, but not really surprised. Edward had always run hot and cold, his mood swings constantly giving me whiplash. This was going to be a turbulent few months, only made worse by the fact that he was staying in my tiny apartment.

Groaning loudly, I flopped onto the couch, tossing my purse onto the seat next to me. I'd only been trying to help, but I'd known the moment I purchased them that it would bite me on the ass. He didn't take well to kindness, even though he constantly wanted it from me. We needed to set some ground rules, or at least discuss how this was going to work, because it had to. Edward would push and would want to ignore me, but for once in our odd little relationship I needed to be strong and make him have an adult conversation. The two of us drifted through life, neither one making any firm decisions. I knew why I hadn't made them, but never asked Edward. I didn't know anymore about him now than I did when we were teenagers.

"Edward! You scared the life out of me!" I gasped, as he climbed in through my bedroom window.

"Sorry," he replied sheepishly, running his fingers through his wet hair.

He took off his leather jacket and shook the raindrops off it onto the wooden floor. I was dressed in my thin strapped tank and cheeky shorts; the things I usually wore to bed. It was after ten and I was reading, hoping to drift off to sleep. The rain had been keeping me awake, but now I was thankful for it.

Edward looked agitated. He was pacing around my room, not saying anything. He'd look up at me, open his mouth then close it, before pacing again. Something had clearly happened, and I couldn't stop the excitement swirling in my stomach. Had something happened with Kate? Had they broken up? If that was true maybe I'd finally get my dream. I was wrong to wish for it, but that didn't stop it burning through me. Images of him finally kissing me flooded my brain, as I watched him pace the room.

After about fifteen minutes he came to rest at the end of my bed. He frowned, giving me a quick flash of a gash at the edge of his eyebrow. There was a small trickle of blood, and even though the light was dim, there appeared to be the start of a bruise on his cheek.

"Edward, what happened?" I asked, reaching out to try and touch him.

He instantly flinched back, turning his bruised side away from me, and muttering, "Nothing."

I didn't believe him but knew better than to push him. Mom wasn't here tonight. She was working as usual, but once Edward got started he would end up screaming and shouting, and the last thing I wanted was the police knocking on my door. Edward wouldn't want that either, given the state of his face. I'd tried to get him to open up in the past, but had only encountered his anger. I now only prodded him for facts, rather than pushed.

I would always be on the periphery of his life.

"It doesn't look like nothing. You're bleeding and bruised. You came here because you wanted a friend, or even to rant, so don't tell me nothing."

"Bella, don't," he warned.

"Don't what? I'm only being a friend, but you never accept it, do you?"

I set my book aside only to have him pick it back up. He studied the cover and chuckled.

"How many times have you read this now? You must know it by heart."

I nodded, not really answering and took it from him.

"I don't want to talk about it. Can you just...can you read to me. Just let me calm down and forget, OK?" he whispered.

I nodded and shuffled back up the bed, patting the space beside me. He crept around the room, and moved onto the mattress. We didn't touch, nor did I think we would, so I began reading.

"We are in Transylvania, and Transylvania is not England. Our ways are not your ways, and there shall be to you many strange things..."

I looked over to him as he snuggled down, turning onto his side to face me and giving me a better look at the damage that was done to him. I winced and stumbled on my words. I wanted to care for him and take the pain away, but this was as close as he'd let me get to him. He exhaled deeply before whispering for me to continue. I'd forgotten where I was so flicked through the pages, making Edward laugh.

"You've read that so many times, angel, I know you can recite it."

Angel?

My heart stopped beating at the endearment, and I looked down at him. He didn't even acknowledge it, meaning it was probably a slip of the tongue. That was probably what he called Kate, and it had just slipped out.

"Um...I do know some parts by heart."

"So say those. Put the book down and just say those lines that you can remember, whether they're in order or not. Just promise me you'll fill the silence, OK?"

I nodded, setting the book to one side and trying not to cry from the sadness in his voice.

"For life be, after all, only a waitin' for somethin' else than what we're doin', and death be all that we can rightly depend on," I said softly, doing as he asked.

I heard him hum, obviously pleased at my compliance. I tried not to think of him as I rambled on, repeating random quotes that sprang into my head. He'd always laughed at my love of Bram Stoker and he was right, I had read it many times, maybe too many.

I began my next quote, when I noticed his breathing. It was deep and even.

Edward was sleeping.

On my bed.

I stopped a smile of joy, because he was hurt and I shouldn't be happy at that fact. I carefully climbed from the bed and walked quietly to the bathroom, collecting a wash cloth and a bowl of warm water before returning. He was still sleeping, comfortably curled around my pillow and snoring lightly. I placed the bowl on the small table beside the bed and dipped the cloth into the water. Gently, so I didn't wake him, I dabbed the water across his eyebrow, trying to remove the blood and clean the wound. I just hoped it was enough. To me, it looked as though it needed stitching, but it was futile asking him. He wouldn't go.

It wasn't the first time he'd turned up looking battered and bruised, but he would never tell me. I had my suspicions. Everyone did, but Edward remained stoic, therefore I respected his silence.

When the cut was clean I placed the cloth back into the bowl. The water was now a translucent pink from his blood. It made my stomach roil, but I couldn't let myself get sick now. This wasn't about me.

I tentatively touched his cheek with the back of my fingers, stroking his rough stubble. I smoothed my hand down across his now muscled bicep, and placed it carefully on his waist. He sighed into it, opening his mouth slightly and nuzzling my pillow. Wanting to feel closer to him, I rested next to him on the mattress. My face was level with his, and I could see the tiny fluttering of his eyes underneath his lids. His lashes cast shadows onto his bruised cheek, marring his beauty. He was wrong. I wasn't the angel, he was.

I was just a girl in love with a boy that needed nothing more than a friend.

That's what I would be to him. His best friend.

That night, lying next to him on my bed, I vowed I'd do what I could to make him happy, to make my Edward smile.

I just didn't understand at that time just how long it would take for me to make that happen, or what I would need to do...

I was just finishing making coffee when Edward exited the bathroom. He was surrounded by billowing steam, but what caught my attention was his damp chest and the small green towel around his waist. He was holding it closed with his left hand and clutching a small box with his right. There was an intricate half sleeve tattoo on his right bicep. It was new. I glanced at it quickly, taking in as much as I could of the eerie looking black barren tree. He cautiously met my gaze, ignoring the fact that I was ogling him and his ink.

"I was an ass. Sorry," he stated.

I pushed his mug along the counter towards him and nodded. He lifted the box, raising his brows in question. They were my antidepressants, he clearly wanted answers.

"Bella?"

"They're nothing. Just put them back, please."

I hugged my mug with both hands and blew across the brim, trying to retreat into myself. It wouldn't really do anything, but I needed something to divert my attention. I knew he wouldn't drop it, but I didn't have to tell him my sorry story when he had his own to contend with.

"I'll put them back, but I want you to talk."

"What, like you do?" I snapped.

"Fuck!" he shouted, tossing the box onto the counter and walking closer to me. "Why do you need pills? What the fuck happened?"

You happened. I really wanted to say it. It was on the tip of my tongue but it wouldn't come out. What good would telling him do? I could only see him beating himself up more. It wouldn't help our situation. It wouldn't help *us*.

"I don't need them," I lied. "They're old."

"Bullshit! Do you think I didn't check when the prescription was filled? Last month, Bella. That isn't old. Now fucking tell me!"

I had two options: the truth or continue to lie. Both of them had pretty shitty outcomes, as far as I could see. To lie would put off the heartache, but to tell him the truth would start it right here, right now. That was, if he understood the truth.

He was glaring at me, his eyes sharp chips of jade, as he waited for me to speak.

"Um...I...Why me? Why do I have to purge my fucking soul, when all you do is rant a bit until I drop it? If, and I mean *if*, I'm going to do this, then you have to as well. I'm sick of being on the outside of your life, but at the center at the very same time. It confuses the hell out of me, and it's not fair."

His eyes went wide, but immediately softened, and he stepped back a little, dragging his hand through his wet hair. The scent of the pine shower gel I'd bought him clung to his skin and the smell seemed to fill the small kitchen. It was distracting me. Edward was everywhere, there seemed like no escape from him. Alice was right, this wasn't healthy, but I couldn't see an end. At least not one I could ever be happy with.

Edward fumbled with the towel, as he spun the mug on the counter by pushing the handle with his finger. We were both silent, watching it circle the wooden worktop, until he groaned.

"OK, let me put some clean clothes on, then we can try and hash this out. Seeing as we'll be roomies for a while."

He grinned. It was the kind of grin I'd only seen on him a few times, and it had the same impact now as it did then.

It floored me, taking every breath from my lungs, and leaving me gasping. Why couldn't it be simple between us? Just two people who met and fell in love.

I nodded and took a quick sip of my coffee. Edward left his exactly where it was and strolled back into the bathroom. The meds were still on the counter. The more I stared at them, the bigger the box seemed to get, as if *they* were the big pink elephant in the room. However, it wasn't the meds that were the problem. There were simply too many things that had been left unsaid between Edward and me. It felt like this was our crossroads. Now, while he was staying with me, was our last chance to get it right. I had the feeling if we didn't do something about this now, then we would no longer have each other.

I picked up the box and slid the silver blister pack out. I hadn't taken them today, and I knew that was stupid, but with everything that had happened since yesterday I'd forgotten. I made a note to also call my therapist, I knew without a doubt that I wouldn't get through this time without help. Detesting myself for being so weak, I took my pills and threw the pack into a drawer. I didn't want the evidence staring me in the face and mocking my weakness.

"So, erm...how're we gonna do this, angel?"

I closed my eyes, holding back the tears. He had to know what that endearment did to me. Sometimes, I wondered if he knew just how manipulative he was towards me. I just refused to believe he was doing it intentionally. He wasn't that cruel.

Burying it, I gestured towards the couch; the place we'd soothed each other during the night, but I sat across from it in the chair...and waited. I felt petulant wanting him to go first, but he still hadn't really told me the reason he was staying with me. For him to admit that would be a start for us.

He cleared his throat, and smoothed down his grotty t-shirt. He'd mentioned changing into clean clothes, but there was no way that thing had been washed recently. I stopped myself from asking again. This was all about volunteering the information.

"I'm guessing you want to know how I got myself arrested."

"In truth, I want so much more than that, but it's a start. Though, remember the officer talked to me, so don't try and gloss over it. It won't work."

"OK," he stalled, leaning forward to rest his elbows on his dirty jeans. It pulled the sleeve of his t-shirt up and flashed some dark roots of the tattoo. "I went out for a drink. Kinda needed to drown, you know?"

I snorted in disgust.

"I know what it's like to drown, but I don't need alcohol to do it, Edward."

"No, you just use your happy pills," he snarled right back.

"What? You have no fucking idea!" I shouted standing up, and pointing my finger in his direction. "Do you think taking those makes me *happy*? Get real! There's a reason I take those, and for you to throw them in my face is pretty fucking ironic."

"We all have our crutch to see us through the day, Bella," he retorted smugly, but then froze as if something had just struck him. "Wait, why is it ironic?"

Damn, the one time I had the strength to speak and I mess it up. How was I going to backtrack on this now?

I turned my back to him and wrapped my arms around my waist. I could hear him moving behind me and jumped when he totally took me by surprise. His arms came over my shoulders, crossing over my chest, and pulling my back to his front. I didn't know what to do next. This wasn't what Edward did, and it was bewildering. I could feel just how fast he was breathing as our bodies pressed together, and I deduced he was still annoyed.

I knew for certain when he said into my ear, "What the fuck is going on? And don't even think about lying to me."

*Pain, without love
Pain, I can't get enough
Pain, I like it rough
'Cause I'd rather feel pain than nothing at all*

*You're sick of feeling numb
You're not the only one
I'll take you by the hand
And I'll show you a world that you can understand
This life is filled with hurt
When happiness doesn't work
Trust me and take my hand
When the lights go out you will understand*

Three Days Grace ~ Pain

End Notes:
Thank you!!

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 4: Bother by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>Hello.</p> <p>Thank you for the wonderful reviews!</p> <p>Love to my awesome beta Maylin & prereader elusivekoolaid.</p> <p>Thanks to my Twi beta Magan Bagan xx</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

BPOV

I'd lied to him.

It wasn't the first time, nor would it be the last. I told him the medication started when my mom got sick. He didn't need to know that I'd already been on the antidepressants by then. It wouldn't help this situation if he did, so I shrugged it off as if it was nothing.

It upset me just how quickly he accepted my explanation. He'd tossed the box onto the kitchen counter and told me I needed to stop taking that shit. If he only knew the truth.

Last night had been uncomfortable. I had lain in my bed, trying to get comfortable, knowing he was on the other side of the paper thin wall. I could hear his tossing and turning in bed, and wanted to go to him. He'd been calm when we'd slept together on the couch. He needed to rest, because the next few months would be difficult for him.

I groaned loudly and shook my head. I wouldn't even think about how he would cope if he ended up incarcerated. I shuddered. I tried not to imagine where he went to when he took off, it was too painful. He always came back; always looking worse than when he'd left. All I could do was try to make it better while he was here.

I groaned, throwing the pillow over my face and moaning. I just wanted to sleep. I began to wonder if I should get the sleeping pills I was prescribed from the bathroom cabinet, but I could tell from the sounds through the wall that Edward was still awake and if I left the room, then he might too. I didn't want to risk him catching me with them. He'd already had his tantrum over my other meds, so I wasn't in the mood for debating the addiction of sleeping pills. Especially when I'd only taken four in two months. Oddly enough, those times corresponded with a phone call from him.

I gazed over at my dresser, and reached out, picking up the book Edward had bought me. I tossed the pillow to one side and stared at the cover. It was dogeared and very well worn, but I would never get rid of it. I caressed the paper cover, feeling the deep creases and smiling, because I could remember how each and every one of them had occurred.

I opened it, skipping the handwritten note on the front page. Reading that would upset me, so instead I began to read a random chapter. Hoping the familiar words of Bram Stoker would soothe me to sleep. I'd always loved the book, it reminded me of Edward, and the times I'd read to him to distract him from whatever was happening back at his own house.

The more I read, the more my eye lids began to close, and my last thought was of Edward.

"Are you going to open it?" he asked excitedly.

I'd never seen Edward so giddy, and it was infectious. I took the package from him and pulled the ribbon that was holding it closed. I could see the way his fingers tapped impatiently on his thigh, and it made me anxious.

"Just rip it!" he scoffed.

I hated ripping the paper, especially when it was the only present he'd ever bought me. I wanted to keep the wrapping, but it wasn't to be, because Edward took it from me and began tearing at the corner.

"No!" I shouted, making a grab for it.

He smirked evilly and held it over his head. I stretched up, but he moved it further from my grasp.

"Edward. Please?"

He shook his head, sticking his tongue out playfully. It made me giggle, and I tried to reach for it, but he shifted again. As he did his t-shirt rose, showing a slip of skin. I gasped, but not because it was beautiful to look at.

Edward's skin was purple and blue with bruises.

Instinctively, I reached out to touch it. Edward snarled and pulled back, retreating into the corner of the bed and pushing himself against the wall.

"What...Edward?"

I was covering my mouth with my fingers, shocked at the discoloration. He'd been hurt. Why hadn't he told me this?

"Bella, it's nothing. Just open the present, OK?"

"No, you're hurt. I can't ignore that. What happened?"

He continued to shake his head, his eyes closed of any emotion. I wasn't going to let that stop me. I wanted to know what had happened. I was his friend and he should confide in me.

"Drop it. Just forget you saw anything. If you do one thing in your life for me, just one thing, it's forget you saw this and never question me again. I don't want to beg, Bella, but please."

I wanted to cry. He was adamant, I could hear the pleading in his voice. Something was very wrong. I'd known it all along really, but had refused to question it. Those times when he had entered my room late at night and wanted me to talk, or read to him, as a distraction. I should have questioned it then, but had been too absorbed by the fact that he was with me and not her. I was

swamped with teenage emotions and so happy that my crush was leaning on me for help, that I never wanted to analyze it.

So I did as he asked.

I never asked him about it.

I made a quick grab for the gift, only for Edward to pull back sharply. He lost his balance and toppled over onto his back, dragging me with him. I landed with a humph onto his chest and froze. Edward winced, as I leaned onto his bruised flesh.

"Oh. Oh, I'm sorry," I stuttered quickly, and tried to move off him.

"It's OK. It's just sore."

I sat crossed legged next to him, and again tried to reach out to him. He shook his head, using the bed to pull himself up. He said nothing further and handed me the present. I took a deep breath and tore at the paper as he wanted. He watched me intently, his green eyes focused solely on me, as he waited for my reaction.

I giggled nervously when I saw what was inside. Edward had bought me my own copy of Dracula. I stroked the cover, my gaze darting from him and then back to the book.

"I d-don't know what to say. Thank you so much."

He stood up and whispered, "You're welcome, angel. Don't open it until I've gone."

I frowned wondering why, but after he left, I understood.

Inside the front cover Edward had written his own dedication to me.

That night I cried myself to sleep; cried for dreams I couldn't possibly fulfill.

I cried for Edward.

My sadness startled me awake, or that's what I thought had done it. It was only when I felt the mattress move that I understood I wasn't alone. I wasn't scared, because I recognized his scent. It was tarnished by the toiletries I'd purchased for him, but his essence was still there. His arm tunneled underneath the blanket, and I held my breath as he placed it around my waist.

"Are you awake?" he croaked into my ear.

Emotion was making my throat close. Just being in such an intimate position with him made hope bloom again. We'd been on a bed together many times in the past, but never half dressed, under the covers and embracing.

All I could do was nod.

"I couldn't sleep," he stated, shuffling as close as he could.

"Worried?"

I turned in his arms, but at the same time tried to put some distance between us. Edward simply moved closer.

"Not really. I just don't sleep well. You know that."

"I do, but I thought the court case would weigh on your mind."

"No. Honestly, Angel, going to jail would be a fucking blessing right now."

I pushed at his chest, staring at him in stunned amazement.

"How can you say that? How can you want to be locked up?"

"There are things you don't know about me. Things I've told no one, and I'm tired of those things bringing me down."

"So tell me!" I snapped. "Tell me everything. Edward, maybe I could help."

"There wouldn't be any point," he sighed. "I'd still have the same level of shit, even after I purged it all to you. I promised myself years ago that I wouldn't tarnish you with this blackness."

"You aren't tarnishing me if I'm asking for you to tell me."

I felt his fingers tighten on my hip, and I hoped he was debating whether to tell me. This had been too long coming. For years I'd consoled him in our own special way, but didn't know why I was doing that. I'd just continued to do so and hoped one day for more.

His gaze fixed on mine, as he lifted his hand to my face. He stroked the back of his fingers down my cheek and ground out, "I would never mark my angel with my darkness."

I opened my mouth, but he placed a solitary finger across it and continued, "This is not up for debate. I will not tell you."

His features were harsh, verging on angry, so as I did often with Edward, I dropped it. We continued to look at one another; his finger still resting on my lips. I held back the urge to close my eyes and just enjoy this moment.

I don't know how long we stayed like that, but eventually my eyelids became heavy and began to droop.

"That's right, you sleep."

Moments later I did, but before I passed out completely, he pulled me close to his chest, and I was sure he whispered, "I'm sorry."

But I couldn't be sure.

// CS

I woke to tickling along my rib cage, a gentle stroke of fingers across my thin flesh. I hummed and rolled my hips, wanting contact in other areas. My mind was fuzzy, still stuck between wake and sleep, but my body recognized the touch and demanded more.

The hand moved slowly upwards until it reached the underside of my breast. I held my breath, waiting, needing and moaned a little when it cupped me.

That was when the fog cleared, allowing me to comprehend what was going on and who was doing it. I was shocked, but tried to remain still, because maybe then he would continue what he was doing.

Maybe then I would get my wish.

Edward flicked his thumb across my nipple, as he squeezed my breast tenderly. I became wet with want, and had to rub my thighs together a little to ease the dull ache. Edward's thigh rubbed against the back of mine at the same time I felt his chest connect with my back. He'd moved closer to me, the coarse stubble on his cheek resting against my shoulder. I told myself mentally that I needed to speak up and see if he was awake and aware of what he was doing right now, but I couldn't.

I wanted this with him.

I wanted Edward to give me what no one else ever had.

I'd always been his, so I was now excited that he would finally take me. His slow, steady breaths told me Edward was definitely still asleep, which left me with two choices. I could pull away and forget this ever happened, or I could take this further. I could touch him back; I could take control of this.

I cautiously moved my hand back, and stroked his thigh. Sometime during the night he must have removed his jeans, because his legs were bare. The light dusting of hair on them teased my palm, and made me bite back a tiny giggle. This was bizarre. I was touching him, and he was doing things to me I'd only dreamed about. However, the more I touched, the more confident I became, and the more Edward touched me back. His hands were roaming underneath my top, caressing everything from my stomach up to the hollow of my throat. Our hips were rocking together slowly, mimicking what we both clearly needed to do. My hand moved up to his ass, fingers digging into his soft buttocks.

And that was the moment I realized he was awake.

I froze, because I didn't have the courage to continue, and from the speed at which he was removing his hand, neither did he.

"Oh, fucking hell," he snarled, removing his warmth from mine.

He scooted so far from me he almost fell off the bed. I turned to see the terror on his face, his sad green eyes flitting across my face, waiting for a response. I didn't know what to say to him, my cheeks burned as my mouth opened and closed, but no words would come out. I didn't have a clue what to say. We'd been dry humping, touching and caressing, and to me, it had been what I'd wanted, but by the look on Edward's face right now, he didn't feel the same.

"I'm so fucking sorry," he groaned.

"What? I...um..." I stuttered, pulling the blanket up to my chin.

I needed to curl up into a ball. This was mortifying.

Edward climbed off the bed and paced the floor, running his hand through his hair. I winced when he tugged on it harshly, cursing at, what he called, his own stupidity.

"I'm sorry. I was asleep...I wouldn't have if..."

"If you were awake?" I finished for him, then muttered, "And don't I know it."

"What's that suppose to mean?"

I pulled the blanket tighter around me, and stated, "It doesn't matter."

He froze and glared at me defiantly. "Oh, it fucking does! So spit it out!"

I didn't want to argue with him. I hurt enough from his rejection without adding his anger to the mix. I should have known he wouldn't have touched me that way if he was conscious. That wasn't the kind of relationship we had.

I couldn't look at him. I didn't want to see the hate in his eyes; the hate for what we'd almost done.

"I don't have anything of any worth to say. It was clearly a mistake. Can we draw a line and move on?" My voice broke on the last word, but I swallowed and composed myself, not giving away more of my pride than I needed to.

He crawled back onto the bed, his eyes still flashing in irritation.

"You make a real shitty liar, Bella," he stated sharply, before climbing back off the bed, and leaving the bedroom.

The door was slammed closed, the sound echoing around the room. I huddled myself into a tighter ball and tried to staunch the flow of tears. I cried too much over something that wouldn't ever alter. At some point I needed to accept that. Maybe Alice was right; maybe the only way through this was to end our relationship completely and see my therapist much more often to help me. I could only see this continuing in our twisted vicious cycle, until the day one of us called time.

He was banging around in the living area, cursing and snarling. I didn't have much in terms of furniture and possessions, but I hoped he wasn't destroying them. I was as mortified as he was, but this situation showed just how differently we dealt with things. He would get angry and his first instinct was to destroy, whereas I would curl up and cry. Neither one of those options made the situation any better.

We needed to find a new way. Or we needed to stop.

I shuddered at the final thought, but knew without a doubt that it was the truth.

I turned to reach for my cell, dialing Alice while still huddled under the covers.

"Hey, Bells," Jasper answered. "She's in the shower."

"Oh, erm, well can you tell her I called?"

"Are you OK, babe?"

I muttered that I was fine, and I just needed to talk to his wife. Jasper was a sweet guy and perfect for my best friend, but I didn't want to tell someone else about what was going on, even though I was certain he already knew. Alice kept nothing from Jasper. They were the couple that everyone wanted to be.

"You know you can..."

"Jasper," I interrupted. "I'm fine. I just need to talk to Alice. Please?"

"Sure, Bells. I'll get her to call you back when she's done., but I'm here if you ever need me."

I said thank you and hung up. It was then that I realized the noise in the other room had stopped. Edward had obviously calmed down a little.

On that thought the handle on the door turned. I held my breath as Edward entered, hanging his head in shame. What had he broken? I braced myself for the news, but frowned when he didn't speak. He moved carefully back onto the bed so we were lying face to face, and surprised me by reaching up and stroking my face.

"I'm sorry. I didn't know what I was doing. I shouldn't have touched you like that. You're the only person I can rely on, and I don't want to ruin that."

I nodded, trying not to cry.

I shouldn't have touched you like that.

"I'm sorry I stormed off too. I was angry at myself, not you."

I shouldn't have touched you like that.

I bit my lip, trying to think of something other than those words, or the way his fingers were touching my cheek. To him this was, and always would be, a friendship. Edward couldn't offer me anything more, and as much as it broke my heart I knew it was better this way.

I had to finally start sorting through my emotions for this man. I had to become stronger, because I couldn't keep living my life waiting for him to turn up. I knew when he did arrive that it would restart the cycle, anyway. It had to stop.

"Edward, we c-can't keep doing this. We manage to hurt each other over and over. We can't carry on like this. It isn't fair on either of us."

He nodded in agreement, and his voice was low, but very controlled when he spoke.

"I never mean to hurt you, but you are all I have. You're the only person that gets me; the only one that understands me. I won't ever give you up, Bella. You can't ask that of me."

I solitary tear trickled down my face, and I gulped for breath as I replied.

"We have no choice! How is this right? You break my heart every time you leave. I worry where you are, and what trouble you're in this time. We're poison to each other, don't you see that?"

"No! No, I don't see it. You're the only one that helps. Please, Bella."

I focused on a strand of his hair that was red in the sunlight. I couldn't look at him. I would break.

"Let's just sort this trouble with the police out now, and then we can deal with everything else."

His hand cupped my jaw, his fingers digging into my neck a little.

"You can't say goodbye to me, and you know it," he spat fiercely.

"Edward..."

"No. I won't allow you to. I'll come back. Always. Bella, I love you..."

*Wish I was too dead to cry,
As self-affliction fades.
Stones to throw at my creator,
Masochist To which I cater.*

*You don't need to bother.
I don't need to be.
I'll keep slipping farther,
But once I hold on,
I won't let go 'till it bleeds*

Stone Sour ~ Bother

End Notes:
Thank you!

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 5: Broken by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

I've had a lot of new readers/reviewers to this in the past week. Thank you to everyone who pimps it out!

Love to my awesome beta Maylin & my amazing pre reader elusivekoolaid.

So....time for the first spider to be set free....

SM owns all things Twilight. Spiderward is all mine.

BPOV

"No. I won't allow you to. I'll come back. Always. Bella, I love you..."

My heart soared. Had he really just verbalized what I'd waited years to hear, or was I finally losing my grip on reality? I glared at him, frozen by his words. My mind screamed at me to tell him how I felt; to admit I loved him too, but as I opened my mouth the words stuck in my throat.

I couldn't tell him.

However, when he spoke his next words I was glad, because airing those would have only made matters worse.

"You're my angel. My best friend, of course I love you."

Well, didn't that just put it into context? I was his *friend* and nothing more. I wanted to hide, because he really had no clue what he did to me each and every time he turned up. Why did I even let him?

I pulled away from him and climbed off the bed. I tugged on a robe before leaving the bedroom. I needed some space. He was beginning to suffocate me. I set about making a pot of coffee and started to slice a bagel when Edward opened the door.

"What the fuck was that all about?"

There was an edge to his tone. Edward was pissed at me and, in truth, I didn't blame him. I was only doing what he did: running away.

"I wanted to make breakfast," I replied absently.

"No. You were running from the issue."

"And you would know all about that," I snapped before I even realized what I was going to say.

"Oh, and here we are! The recriminations. Is this what we've been side stepping for the last twenty-four hours?"

He gripped my bicep, spinning me to face him. The bruise on his eye looked worse than yesterday. It was now a mixture of blues and purple and the cut underneath was in need of cleaning. I could tell he was gritting his teeth, because the muscle on the side of his jaw was ticking. It would always do that when he was trying to hold his temper.

"Don't even try pulling that one on me! I've tried talking to you about what happened in that bar, but, no, you do what you always do, brush it off and change the subject. Well, I'm tired of it. I came when you called, fuck Edward, I *always* come when you call and to be honest, I think it's time I got answers!"

His nostrils flared at my tone, as his pupils dilated. I was prodding a spoon against his chest with each syllable, but stopped when I saw the anger in his stare. I would only push him further away. I knew him well enough to understand I had to back down now, so I placed the spoon down but continued to stare.

"Answers to what?"

"You're not that dense, Edward."

He roared and slammed his fist onto the worktop, shocking the shit out of me. I cringed, pulling my arms around myself and stepping back. He was breathing sharply through his nose, his head hanging between his shoulders. I hoped he was trying to calm down, because I wasn't sticking around if things were going to get any worse.

I huddled into the corner of the kitchen, wedging myself between the cabinet and door and watched. I waited in silence, as everything within me told me to get the hell out. I couldn't, because it was as if my feet were literally stuck to the floor. I concentrated on breathing in and out without weeping. I wouldn't cry in front of him now. It would serve no purpose.

"I'm sorry, I fucked up again," he said on a loud sigh.

I swallowed, as he turned to look at me.

"Fuck, angel."

He came at me, but not like before. He swamped me in his embrace, pulling me fiercely against his chest. His breathing was stuttered; his grip strong, but I remained rigid in my stance. He wasn't going to ease my insistence with a little show of affection. He couldn't always have that kind of power over me.

"I didn't mean to lash out at you. I scared you. I'm so fucking sorry." His voice was sullen as if he really meant it, but that didn't excuse his behavior.

I swallowed and thought for a moment before asking quietly, "Why that bar?"

He stiffened immediately, alerting me to the fact that I'd struck gold. There was a reason Edward continued to cause trouble in that bar every time he came back into town. New Moon was a quiet hang out for most of the locals, so I didn't understand Edward's obsession with it.

"Why not that one?" he retorted.

I shoved at his chest and walked out of the kitchen. His arrogance irritated me on a major level. It always had. Moving around the couch, I kicked his boots out of the way and flopped down on the cushions. I pulled my robe tighter around myself and eyed him cautiously, as he came to sit on the coffee table in front of me. He rested his elbows on his knees and looked right at me.

"My sister owns the bar."

My blood ran cold.

"Y-You don't have a sister, Edward. Please don't make shit up, you're in too deep for that."

"I'm not. Look...just...just listen to me, OK?"

I nodded sharply, bracing myself for a shitload of lies, but something in his expression set alarm bells ringing in my head. There was something about this that seemed like a breakthrough.

"The owner is called Rosalie McCarty. She's actually my half sister, apparently my dad liked to fuck around. I didn't have a clue until...well, that bit's irrelevant, but yeah, I do have a sister. And like the rest of the world, she fucking hates my guts."

"You hit your sister?" I gasped in complete confusion, remembering the reason he'd been arrested.

"What? No!" His eyes were wide, and he held his hands up in surrender. He was tying me in knots and making my head hurt. "I go there to talk to Rose. Always to talk, but it gets out of hand, and I end up arguing with her husband. It always goes the same fucking way. I think I pissed him off too much this time, because I started to smash the place up. That's why he called the cops."

Edward shrugged as if this whole debacle was nothing. I was missing something here; some huge part of the Edward Masen puzzle, but I knew I wouldn't find that missing piece anytime soon. I would have to dig tirelessly until I located it. I just wasn't sure I had the energy to go through this again.

"Why haven't you ever told me about her?"

Edward lowered his hand to my knee and squeezed a little.

"I refuse to push my darkness onto you."

I snorted loudly and shook my head. "You're kidding me? Do you think living with me now until you go to jail is keeping the blackness away? Do you think going AWOL for six months at a time keeps everything virginal white? Sometimes, Edward you amaze me, and not in a good way," I moaned in exasperation.

"Angel, I'm fucking trying here!"

I pushed away from him again and stomped to my bedroom. This was getting to be a habit, but I needed the space. I needed to breathe.

"No. No, you're not. You're giving me lame-assed half truths. Just leave me alone for a while. I need a break from this bullshit."

I walked into the bedroom and it took every ounce of control I had not to slam the door closed. Instead, I turned the handle, shutting it carefully. Before slumping to the floor. I wanted to bang my head repeatedly against the wood, maybe that would knock some damn sense into me. I brought my knees to my chest, hugging them close and resting my cheek on top of them. I closed my eyes and tried to remember a time when we weren't like this.

When we'd actually had fun.

"Just get in the damn car, Bella!" Edward snarled.

I was walking home from school. It was raining and I was getting soaked. Our friendship was still a secret and therefore, Edward, pulling up at the side of road, demanding I get into his car was a surprise. I stood and gawked at the open door, not really believing what I was seeing.

"Are you sure? I don't want anyone..."

"Shut up and get in!"

I grinned and did as he asked, keeping my binder on my knee as I buckled myself in. The car smelled deliciously of him, all cigarettes and spice. I inhaled deeply, filling my lungs with him, but trying not to be too conspicuous.

"Home or the bar?"

"What?" I asked, not following his train of thought. I was too preoccupied with him.

"Am I driving you home or to see your mom at the bar, get with it Bella."

I muttered about going home, but didn't know what else to say, so we drove in silence. Pearl Jam drifted from his stereo, filling the void and giving me something to focus on. His hand brushed my thigh as he shifted the stick, and I stunned myself by moving it closer. I wanted to feel his long fingers on my skin. I flushed at the thought. I shouldn't be thinking about Edward that way, not only was he seeing Kate, but he was my friend. I didn't want to ruin that. Over the past few months we had become each others strength.

"Do you want to come in?"

"I...um...your mom?" he questioned.

"Work. Come on, I could make you some dinner. I know you won't have any waiting for you at home."

We both climbed out of the car and walked into the house. I giggled when he took my binder from me. He looked uncomfortable holding my schoolwork and shuffled around in the kitchen. I pointed towards the kitchen table, gesturing for him to put it down. It wasn't as if he hadn't been in the house before, so I didn't get why he was looking so awkward. I decided to ignore it and make him something to eat.

I searched through the cabinets, checking out what we had; it wasn't much.

"Omelette? I have cheese."

"Sure," he shrugged. "But you really don't have to feed me."

"Will you have anything at home later?" He said nothing. "That's what I thought, so I'm cooking."

"Can I help?"

I smiled and handed him a block of cheese, telling him that he could grate. We worked quietly, both locked in our own thoughts as we prepared the food. I decided to chop some salad to go with it, anything to make sure Edward wasn't hungry when he left, and began slicing a tomato. He nudged my shoulder with his playfully, making me laugh, but when he knocked his hip against mine I hissed in pain.

I'd sliced my finger with the knife.

"Fuck, angel, I'm so sorry." Edward groaned, pulling a cloth from the counter and placing it underneath my hand.

He cradled my hand in his, assessing the cut carefully.

"Edward, I feel sick. I hate blood."

My voice sounded muffled, as black dots started to form in front of my eyes. He gave a low curse and my body seemed to deflate. I was vaguely aware of being carried, but it was as if my brain was swimming through gallons of water, and it just couldn't focus. That was until Edward began to speak.

"Bella? Bella, look at me. Please?"

I moaned and tried to move my head. It was just too heavy.

"Please, try. For me?" he pleaded.

My eyelids fluttered, but shot wide open the moment my finger was swamped in a warm wetness. The ringing in my ears subsided, as my eyes met his sharp green ones. I was trying to understand why he was sucking my finger. It wasn't like him to even be this close to me, let alone have his tongue swirling around my digit.

"There you are. Keep looking at me, angel. I need to check out the cut."

His voice was soft and sweet as it floated around me. I latched onto it while gazing into his eyes.

"Huh?"

"You cut yourself. Well, actually I pushed you. I'm sorry."

I tried to sit up, but my limbs were like marshmallow. Edward wouldn't let me anyway.

"Stay where you are. Just lie down while I look at the wound."

That afternoon Edward cared for me. The cut was only small, but he wouldn't let me get up from the couch until I'd eaten and the color had returned to my cheeks.

That afternoon I knew there would be no one else for me but Edward.

A light tapping on the wood at my back brought me back to the present. I whimpered a little and waited.

"I wasn't lying to you. Rosalie is my sister, and I don't go there to start a fight with her or her bear of a husband, but it always ends up that way. I need to talk to her, but she never listens; just doesn't want to know. I have no choice but to keep asking though. I don't want to keep doing this to her, or to you, but I really have no choice."

"Why," I breathed, not caring if he heard it or not.

"I don't want-"

"Don't give me that bullshit about tarnishing me, or darkening my soul. Do you think all this makes me happy?" I interrupted.

There was a loud thud on the door, making me wince. I wondered if he was headbutting it in frustration, and it was a few minutes before he spoke again.

"You're the only person I've ever trusted, but I couldn't tell you everything. It would have hurt you and I never wanted to do that."

"But you do. Every time you avoid the subject, or when you leave me it hurts. You have to know that!" I stated, raising my voice.

My hands were fists in my lap as I tried to control my anger.

"I do know that, but I can't stay. I really can't."

"So once this is sorted out with the cops and your brother-in-law you're leaving again?" I snorted and added sarcastically, "At least you're letting me know this time. You just disappeared six months ago. I should be fucking thankful."

"I hate it when you curse." I barely heard it, so deduced it wasn't really meant for me.

I didn't care, sometimes cussing was the only way to vent my anger when it came to Edward. I refused to say anything, petulant though it was, because I needed him to talk. He had to give me something, otherwise we had nothing.

The handle on the door moved, as Edward tried to open it.

"Angel, please let me in, or at least let me see you when I talk," he pleaded, making my heart throb in pain.

I shuffled away from the door, allowing him to open it, but remained cross legged on the carpet. I stared at him, waiting, hoping. All I wanted was one thing, just one small chink of hope. I watched him run his hand through his already disheveled hair. It lifted the sleeve of his t-shirt flashing his tattoo at me. The first day he'd turned up with that I'd been shocked, but now it

was an integral part of him, and the choice of the barren branches spoke volumes. I wondered if he realized that.

"Thank you," he whispered, reaching out for my hand. He took it in his and toyed with the little silver ring on my finger. "Bella, I don't even know where to start, because I have that much to tell you. I don't want to unload it all."

I exhaled loudly, and said lowly, "So let's start with your sister. Tell me about how you found out about her."

I was trying to help him. This way he could disclose a little at a time, and surprisingly he nodded.

"I found out about her a year ago. It was actually her who contacted me, and it stunned me." He shuffled a little closer, licked his lips and continued. "I didn't believe her, even though I knew what a bastard my father could be. It was only when she began to show me the evidence that I got it. He was a part of her life until she was five, and then he just disappeared."

"So Rosalie is older than you?"

He nodded. "But only by two years, it seems my father had two families on the go. Anyhow, she's married and has a little girl, Heidi. I think she's about five, dunno. Things are a little strained between us."

"Why?" I questioned, feeling his hand tighten around mine.

"The usual, inheritance, possessions."

I frowned as he brushed the reasons off. Alarms bells were ringing in my head alerting me to his evasion. However, at least he was talking, that was a step further. I wanted to ask him so much more, I just didn't know where to begin. He was telling me about his sister and her husband, but I knew Edward, and it would only be a matter of time before he closed himself off again.

"I'm going to have to talk to them and apologize."

"Do you really think that would stop this going any further?" I asked warily.

He shrugged, "Can't hurt, right?"

I tried to move away, intending on standing up, but he tugged on my arm, pulling me close to him. He hugged me tightly, cutting off my air supply. I spluttered and giggled, trying to escape.

"Thank you, angel."

"What's with all the touching? You're not usually so tactile," I pointed out and instantly regretted my words when he shrank back.

"Sorry."

I felt guilty, and decided to take a chance. I reached out and caressed his face, watching his eyes soften. "I was only pointing it out. You can't deny that this is the most we've touched in the whole time we've known each other."

"I don't do it to keep you at arms length."

He lowered his gaze, staring at his hands. I tried to lift his face back up and he begrudgingly allowed it.

"But that's what happens, Edward. I used to watch you with Kate and seethe with jealousy. You touched her with ease, and yet you couldn't even let me hug you. On those nights when you crawled in through my window that's all I wanted to do, because I saw the pain on your face. Instead, you told me to read, as if that could possibly help you."

"It did," he croaked out. "More than you could ever understand."

I stroked my thumb across his jaw, fighting the urge to hug him. "I would know if you told me."

"Kate?" he snorted, backtracking a bit. "Kate was nothing. It was easy to pretend with her. She never even came close."

"To what?"

"The way I feel about you."

"Don't." My heart was pounding. "You can't keep saying that kind of stuff to me. It's cruel."

Edward blinked rapidly and shook his head, as if confused by my outburst. He lifted his hand and tucked my hair behind my ear as he spoke.

"I know it is, but sometimes I can't hide it anymore. I'm broken, Bella, and you know it, but sometimes I want more. Sometimes I want the unobtainable."

"What the hell does that mean?"

"It means I need to go and sort this mess out."

He let go of me and stood up, the one moment of vulnerability dissipated into the room as if it had never occurred. It took me a few seconds to absorb what he'd said and move on. I fumbled for what to say, starting a sentence four times before actually saying something coherent.

"Would you like me to come with you?"

"To the bar?"

I nodded, bracing myself for his reluctance, but he surprised me when he agreed and held his hand out to me. I took it and grinned as he pulled me to standing.

"What's so amusing?" he asked, grinning back at me.

"I was just remembering that time we went to a bar. I was, what, twenty-three?"

"I don't recall."

I began removing clothes from the small set of drawers and laying them on the bed.

"Sure you do. It was the night you got me drunk on Tequila. I threw up all over your boots."

"Oh, fuck! Yes!"

Edward tossed his head back and laughed loudly. The sound made my heart sing. These little calms in the storm showed me what Edward could be like.

They gave me hope, even when everything else was telling me there was none.

*'Cause I'm broken
I know I need you now
Deep inside you're broken
You see the way I live
I know I know your heart is broken
When I turn away
I need to be broken
Take the pain away*

12 Stones - Broken

End Notes:
Thank you!!

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 6: The Bleeding by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hello.

Lots of love to my beta Maylin & prereader Elusivekoolaid.

Thanks to my Twilighted beta Magan Bagan.

Just an FYI, all the songs have been added to the playlist on my blog.

SM owns all things Twilight. I own a pretty new graphic novel & Spiderward.

BPOV

I wasn't blind.

I knew the times he'd lied to me, and I hadn't ignored them. Each time I saw that twitch on his cheek, I knew he wasn't telling me the whole story, and I would always call him on it. It would usually cause an argument and invariably Edward would leave. I would always cry, devastated by his disappearance, but I had no choice but to continue.

All I was ever left with were my memories.

"Why aren't you out with Kate tonight?" I questioned Edward as we sat in his car.

He shrugged and pushed another fry into his mouth, chewing slowly.

We'd driven to McDonald's, both of us needing to get away from the town. I hadn't expected Edward to agree to it, but I hadn't even finished speaking before we were on our way out of the house. I could tell there was something wrong with him, but I was always cautious to ask, never knowing if I was about to overstep the mark. He'd never been cruel when I'd asked in the past, but then when he didn't want to answer he wouldn't.

I bit into my burger and continued to gaze at him, hoping he would tell me something.

"Angel, don't."

"What? I'm just asking why you're here with me on a Friday night, instead of doing whatever with your girlfriend."

I tried to sound nonchalant even though I was certain I didn't really achieve it. Whenever I thought of Edward with Kate I felt ill. I knew he was only my friend and I had no claim on him, but she was all wrong for him.

"I'm not talking to you about her, OK? When will you let it drop?"

He pouted and turned his face to look out of the window. He began drumming his fingers impatiently against his leg, alerting me to his bubbling anger.

"I can't ignore it when you're pissed off. Especially when you come to me to feel something other than anger," I spat.

"You don't have a fucking clue why I come to you! Don't make judgments based on whether or not I'm in the back seat of Kate's car steaming up the goddamn windows."

"Don't be so crude, Edward."

I tossed my half eaten burger into the brown paper sack, suddenly not hungry. We were going to end up arguing again, just like we had done the night before. It had been over the same thing we were discussing now.

He snorted, but continued to avoid eye contact.

"Crude? You act like you don't know me."

"I know the real you," I whispered, gaining his attention now.

His head snapped around sharply, and even in the dark I could see his whole body tense.

"No, Bella, you don't. You only know what I let you see. Fucking hell! Do you really think I'd let someone get that close? I'm not into pain as much as you seem to think."

"I don't understand. Why would showing me the true you be painful?"

He threw the fries out of the window and started the engine. I glared at him, waiting on an answer, but he wasn't giving an inch.

"Edward?"

He continued to ignore me, and turned some music on. Stone Temple Pilots blasted out, filling the car, and effectively ending any communication. I wasn't going to let that be the end, though. Sometimes when he was in one of his moods all it would take would be a few continued prods, and eventually he'd open up. Hoping for just that, I turned the volume down and tried again.

"Answer me."

"No!" he stated adamantly.

"Why not? It was a relatively simple question, and one that you initiated."

He exhaled loudly and smacked the steering wheel. Edward had always been quick tempered, but it never scared me. For some reason I knew he wouldn't ever hurt me.

"Don't start with your twisted logic. If I don't want to open myself up to the world I won't. I really don't see an issue with that."

"I'm not the world," I said softly, upset by his aggression. "I'm asking you to confide in me. Bella. Edward look at me-"

"I'm driving. I can't," he interrupted, before I could finish.

I snapped. I couldn't take anymore of his attitude. Something was wrong, and I was going to do what I could to find out what the hell it was.

"Pull the fuck over, Edward. Do it now!"

He chuckled sarcastically, as if impressed with himself for pissing me off, but did as I'd asked. He shut the engine off and turned to me, his eyes glinting in annoyance. A solitary brow rose as he waited.

"What the hell is wrong with you? All I did was ask a question, but you go and give me some cryptic answer and expect it to end there. Well, it doesn't, so we stay right here until you explain it to me."

Edward's expression softened a little, and I heard him swallow before he answered.

"I love that about you, you know? You never put up with my bullshit for long. Everyone else just gets bored with it and gives up. Not you, not Bella Swan. You keep asking until either I give in, or you lose your cool and demand it."

I calmed immediately, reaching out to touch his hand. He snatched it away, but gave me a small smile of assurance. He was silent for a while, and I thought I was going to have to demand again. However, he did eventually give in.

"I'm sorry. I was cruel to you, and I lied." I frowned as he took a deep breath. "You're the only person that does know me and it scares the shit outta me. It means you have the ability to really stick the fucking knife in Bella, and that shit would kill me."

Now I understood, and I swallowed back tears.

"You hate the fact that I know you this way, don't you?"

"Not hate. I just...it's difficult. I don't know how to explain it to you. I...FUCK!"

He gripped the steering wheel, gritting his teeth, and to try and soothe him I touched his shoulder. He tried to shrug it off, but I placed it back and this time it remained.

"Edward, I wouldn't hurt you. The things I know about you are between us. I know it makes you feel vulnerable, but I feel like that, too. You're my best friend, and yet you know much more about me than I do about you. I get that there are things you don't want me to know, but I want you to trust me," I reasoned.

"Trust isn't an issue, Angel. You have more of me than you'll ever really know. Honestly, I couldn't give you anymore, maybe one day you'll realize that."

"I need you too..." I started.

Edward shook his head slowly. "I can't go there. I can't explain anything else to you. I just need you to know that you're the only one. You're it."

The conversation had ended there. He started the car and turned back onto the road. I didn't know what else to say to him. He'd given me more in those few minutes than he'd ever done, and yet he'd

told me nothing. I knew at some point in the future I would reflect on this night, and finally understand its significance. I just wished I understood it now.

The bastard had left the apartment without me.

He'd gone to the bar while I was getting dressed, but if he thought I was staying here, he was wrong. I wanted to know what was going on with this part of his family that I'd been blind to. I also wanted to make sure he didn't start another fight and end up back in jail. That would effectively revoke his bail, and he'd end up behind bars in the blink of an eye. I wasn't willing to let that happen, so I grabbed my bag and raced out to my car. I'd never been one to break the speed limit, but today I felt an urgency that couldn't be denied. I gunned it to the bar, desperate to get there, if not before Edward, then shortly afterward.

The universe was against me though, and I caught every red light all the way to *New Moon*. I was pondering where the hell to park when I remembered the small lot at the back. I'd only been here a couple of times; frequenting bars wasn't my thing. Alice had dragged me here once, but I'd walked home just two hours later.

I scoured the street for Edward, but it was early and there were very few people around. There was a huge guy standing outside the back door to the bar, smoking and toeing the ground with the tip of his boot. He looked irritated, and that's when I knew Edward was already here. I groaned and pulled my purse from the passenger seat, before locking the car and walking over to the man mountain.

His size was intimidating, but when he looked up at me and smiled the anxiety disappeared.

"Hey," he grinned, flicking his cigarette across the lot.

"Um, hi. This is going to sound a little strange, but is Edward here?"

The guy winced, but quickly composed himself.

"Who's asking?"

"B-Bella. I'm Bella, Edward's friend. I'm the one that bailed him out." He snorted, but I continued. "He told me he was coming here to talk to his sister."

"So you're the angel. Not what I was expecting, but surprises can be good. He's inside."

I frowned at his bluntness, waiting for him to tell me I could go in, but he didn't. He just carried on assessing me. I should have been scared, but his dimpled grin stopped it. I shuffled my feet wondering what he knew about me, because Edward had clearly said something to him. He'd called me *angel*, and only Edward did that.

"Well, um-"

"Has he been staying with you then?"

"Yeah. Look, I didn't know about you guys until a couple of hours ago. I'm sorry he's been causing trouble here, and I'll make sure he doesn't do it again."

"What?" he spluttered. "Why the hell are you sorry? Don't apologize on behalf of him. He's old enough to take care of his own issues, you feel me?"

I chewed my lip and nodded slowly. I wasn't sure why I'd apologized for him; I just always had.

"I don't want you thinking Rose and I are aren't interested in helping him, but the other night was the last straw. This place is like our kid, and when he started wrecking it I saw red. Edward has the ability to piss off everyone around him, even when they only want to be supportive." I nodded in agreement, as he turned towards the door. "So, he never mentioned us then?"

"Not until this morning. He's never been very forthcoming when it comes to discussing his family and it's not like he's been around for the last few months. To be honest, I thought he was lying. I grew up with him, you see, so I knew he didn't have a sister."

He held out his hand for me to shake. "I'm Emmett, Edward's brother-in-law. He didn't lie to you."

My hand was dwarfed by his, but his grip was gentle.

"How long has he been here?" I asked softly, as he opened the door.

"'Bout ten minutes. Rose demanded I leave them alone, and I do what she says. I know better than to cross my wife."

As we entered the bar I could hear muted voices, and breathed a huge sigh of relief because they were obviously not arguing. Emmett escorted me into the main part and pointed over to a booth in the far corner.

"I thought I told you to leave us...Oh!" A blonde woman started to shout.

"Bella." Edward groaned, irritation lacing his tone.

"You left me." I walked forward. "I was worried, and really didn't want to pay you another visit behind bars."

The blonde giggled and clapped three times, slowly.

"Well, well, look at you! You're not the mousey little doormat I assumed you were. I'm Rosalie."

"Hi."

Edward slid out of the booth and came to stand beside me. His jaw was set, and his shoulders just as rigid. He was pissed off that I'd followed him, but then what did he expect when he'd bailed on me?

"You shouldn't have come," he rumbled.

"Oh, yes she should have!" Rose interjected. "It's about time we met her."

"Rose, I'm here to sort-"

"I know what you're here for, and I think it would be better if she stays. I get the feeling she keeps you in check."

Edward grumbled and tentatively took my hand. We walked back to the booth and sat facing his sister. Emmett went to make some coffee, and I waited uncomfortably for someone to speak. Edward still held my hand underneath the table, his fingers toying with my silver ring.

"So, what were you two discussing?" I questioned, feeling Edward's hand tighten around mine.

"Edward was apologizing for being a complete asshole. He was also volunteering to work a few shifts here as security to pay for the damage."

"I don't need to work it off. I can give you the damn cash." Edward snarled.

"But, my dear brother," she said slyly. "I don't want to take your money. I want you to work."

Edward's whole body went rigid. He was about to kick off again, but I spoke, intending to cut him off.

"How many times would you want him?"

"Every Friday and Saturday for the next eight weeks."

"And then that's it? No more police? You'll drop the charges?"

Rosalie nodded, and I turned to Edward, raising my brows in question. He groaned and rolled his eyes, knowing he was stuck. Either he worked or went to jail, the choice was his, and from where I was sitting it wasn't much of one.

I glanced between the two of them, it was complete stalemate, and given that they were only half siblings, I deduced the stubbornness came from their father. Emmett came to the table and placed some mugs of coffee down, before taking a seat next to his wife.

"So, Edward, we finally get to meet your little friend. You shouldn't have hidden her from us. We're family." Emmett chuckled.

He seemed like an easy going guy, but I would hate to be on his wrong side, because he was incredibly intimidating. He appeared pretty calm now, and I turned away, blushing, when he leaned over to place a long slow kiss on the side of his wife's neck. It was very intimate, and I felt as if I was intruding.

"I wasn't hiding her," Edward hissed. "I just don't see why she needs to be mixed up in this shit."

"I'm your sister, Edward, not shit."

I hadn't even realized I'd sighed loudly until everyone turned and stared at me. I blushed in embarrassment and mumbled an apology.

"No, don't be sorry." Rosalie laughed. "Maybe you can talk some sense into him. It seems you're the only person that can stop him making the wrong choice here."

"I don't have that power over him. Trust me."

"Excuse me, I am here!" Edward grumbled.

"So make a fucking choice already!" Emmett boomed, slapping his palms onto the table.

"Why? This isn't a fucking choice, it's blackmail!"

Rose could have won an Oscar for the drama she added to her shrug. She'd managed to annoy me in a matter of minutes. It wasn't really the way she was treating Edward, because I understood that, but it was the completely blasé way she acting. It was as if she didn't care what Edward chose, because either way she would win. She was utterly cold towards him.

I leaned closer to him and lowered my voice.

"Just say yes. This has to be better than jail. It's only eight weeks. Edward, please?"

"No!" he shouted, pushing out of the booth. "This is wrong. I came here to get you to-"

"What?" Rose yelled, just as loudly. "You came for what? The answer never changes. Every time you come here, you demand the same two things, and you get the same answers. No and no."

Confusion swamped me, as I tried to ascertain what they were referring to. I looked towards Emmett, wondering if he would help me out, but he gave a short shake of his head. It left me in the dark, the place I usually resided when it came to Edward.

On that thought I stood, and without looking back, I walked back out through the bar towards my car. There was shouting and snarling from inside, but I swallowed the urge to turn back and climbed into my car. It was only when I tried to focus on what was outside the windshield that I realized I was crying. The tears were trickling down my face, as the sobs bubbled from my mouth. My forehead rested on the steering wheel as I took deep breaths, trying to soothe myself.

"Bella, open the fucking door!" Edward snarled as he rapped his knuckles against the glass.

I whimpered and looked out at him. Emmett and Rosalie where huddled together near the backdoor to the bar. There were staring, completely dumbfounded. I just wasn't sure why.

I didn't open the door; I wound down the window and wiped my face with my sleeve. I gasped when he reached inside and touched my cheek.

"Don't cry. Fuck, don't cry."

"Get off me, Edward. Just move, I'm going home. You do what the hell you want, you usually do."

He moved his hand, but not out of the car, he shifted it further down the door and opened it from the inside. I tried to close it, but he was faster than me, and in the blink of an eye I was standing in the lot staring up at him defiantly.

"Let me explain-"

"Oh yeah, because you're usually so forthcoming," I interrupted sarcastically.

"I'm sorry."

"Stop! Just stop saying that! You don't mean it, because if you did you wouldn't keep doing it."

I tried to get back into the car, but he wrapped his fingers around my bicep and held firm.

"Edward-"

"I've told her I'll do it, OK? I'll stay and do whatever she needs me to."

"Do you want me to clap because you finally made the right choice?"

Edward's expression was pained at the venom in my tone, but I wasn't going to be placated by a cursory apology.

"Angel, let me explain."

I placed my hands on my hips and waited. His gaze darted around as he tried to find the right words, but his hand never left my arm. In fact, he squeezed it a little when he finally started to talk.

"There are reasons I go, and very similar reasons as to why I stay. None of them are related to you."

"If you're going to continue in riddles, then I'm leaving."

"My father is in a nursing home. I have to pay for his care. I don't want to be here, because I want nothing to do with him, but there's paperwork that needs dealing with and his bills need paying. All I want is for Rose to help me. She flat out refuses, because, if possible, she hates the ass more than me."

My eyes went wide with shock. Edward had never talked about his father, and I'd actually thought he was dead. The way he'd just spat it all out now made me more than a little startled. He gazed at me, his thumb stroking my arm slowly, and I wondered if it was soothing me or him.

"W-What's wrong with him?" I breathed.

"Dementia, which is fucking ironic."

"Why?"

He shook his head, clearly only allowing me so much disclosure in one day.

"So you come here to talk to her about your father's bills?"

"Yes, and to get her to go and see him. I fucking hate going alone. He pisses me off the moment I look at him."

Hurt swirled low in my belly as I whispered the next question. "Do you only come back here because of your father and Rose?"

"Yes. I don't want to be here."

With that I pulled my arm free, shoved at his chest and got back into the car. I didn't look back as I left the parking lot, but I could hear Edward shouting my name.

*I remember when all the games began
Remember every little lie and every last goodbye
Promises you broke, words you choked on
and I never walked away,
it's still a mystery to me*

*Well I'm so empty
I'm better off without you and you're better off without me
Well you're so unclean
I'm better off without you and you're better off without me*

Five Finger Death Punch ~ The Bleeding

End Notes:
Gah- he's such a dumbass MUAH xx

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 7: Hate Me by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hello!

Super huge thanks to my beta Maylin, along with my pre reader elusivekoolaid.

Also hugs to magan bagan xx

So, here's the chapter you've all been waiting for...

SM owns all things Twilight. Spiderward is all mine.

EPOV

She was my constant.

The only fucking worthwhile thing I had in my life, and all I ever did was screw her up.

Constantly.

I tried to stay away, because I simply wasn't worthy of her, but I could only do that for so long. It would get to the stage where I needed her comfort. It was selfish of me, but she took away some of the darkness; she was my light.

I was no good for her; I could see that, and she was right, together we were poison, but staying apart wasn't an option.

But what kind of life was this?

I was getting too old to carry on like this; to exist rather than live. Most of the people I went to school with were married with kids by now. That was just something I would never have. I had never been a child myself. I'd blinked, and I was this fucked up mess of a guy. I drifted, but the only place I really wanted to be was with my angel.

I didn't belong there.

My father had given me more of his genes than I could ever need. Every time I looked in the mirror, I swear I could see his angry eyes staring right back at me, flooding me with memories I would rather forget. His fists, his rage, his screaming, and his own self loathing, echoed in my ears until I was ready to explode from it.

From the first time I'd hit back I'd hated myself for it. I really was no better than him. That memory would always confirm to me that I had his black, noxious blood running in my veins. It

wasn't something I could exorcise, but I wasn't going to let it leak into her pores possessing her as well.

If I didn't stay away from Bella, I knew I would break her, too.

It had been done to my mother, and only when she couldn't take it anymore did the true effects make themselves known.

By then it was too late.

I wouldn't do that to Bella; I *couldn't* do that to her.

Maybe I'd gone about this the wrong way from the start. If I'd told her everything then she would have run a mile in the opposite direction, and we wouldn't be here many years later, living the same cycle of distress. However, I was selfish and even then knew her purity was what I gravitated towards. When I was with her I felt cleansed, so was I really wrong for wanting that innocence in my life?

I'd thought Kate would make our separation easier: Bella would think that I didn't want her in that way and make a break for herself. I wanted her to find someone who could be what I wasn't.

But it never turned out that way.

Her kisses were pure sex. Her mouth devoured mine in the hottest of seductions. Her hands roamed my torso underneath my t-shirt, and she grazed my nipples with her nails. I should have been aroused. My teenage hormones should have been raging and demanding I take her.

But they weren't.

I was bored.

Kate had me pinned up against the outside wall of the cafeteria, the brick digging into the back of my head as she pressed close. She was currently kissing me as if her life depended on it. Her lips played aggressively over mine, as she squeezed my ass. I assumed it was meant to turn me on, but it didn't.

Again, it bored me. She bored me.

I opened my eyes, keeping my lips locked to hers. I could see the school grounds were starting to empty. Students going home for the day. I'd be doing the very same thing, had Kate not accosted me. She had insisted on saying goodbye properly, because she was going away for the weekend with her parents. Apparently, she didn't know how she was going to cope without seeing me everyday. I'd had to turn away when she'd told me that to stop her seeing my eye roll.

I was an asshole to her and I knew it.

I tried not to be a total douche to her, but at times, I was just going through the motions. It was sex, and she was a means to an end. I had nothing to give to her, I was empty inside. The parts of myself I could give away were already marked for someone else.

Bella.

Kate seemed happy, and was always bragging to her friends about what an amazing boyfriend I was. I knew the truth. I wasn't amazing. I was a lost cause.

Too damaged for anyone to fix. Not even my angel.

That's when I saw her. It was as if my consciousness had summoned her to form. She was standing beside her truck watching us. Her brows were furrowed and she was chewing her lip, analyzing what we were doing. I continued to kiss Kate, though my eyes were set on Bella.

Suddenly, I felt it.

My body began to stir with arousal. My dick twitched and my balls tightened. Kate hummed as she became aware of it, when it pressed against her thigh. This was wrong. I shouldn't be using Kate, but I couldn't sully Bella.

When a palm pressed over the button fly of my jeans Bella's eyes grew wide, but she didn't look away. My breathing began to stutter, and the palm pushed up and down on my erection. She was purring into my mouth and fumbling to open my jeans. Bella's hand went to her throat; her face complete shock.

When I gasped, our lips broke apart, a face buried into my neck. She grasped my cock fiercely, and I knew I needed to stop this. But with Bella watching me, and the most powerful lust I'd ever felt burning through my body, I just couldn't. I felt trapped by Bella's eyes and the cold hands that were slowly bringing on my orgasm.

I was mentally begging Bella to leave. She could see what I was doing with another girl, but she remained next to her truck; her eyes locked completely to mine.

Was this a test?

Or was she finally proving to herself that I wasn't the hero she so frequently painted me as.

I was a fucking jackass. The kind of guy that let his girlfriend get him off, while thinking and looking at someone else. I stood there, with Kate palming my dick, and I felt so detached. All I could think about was Bella. I tortured myself with the hurt in her eyes. I wanted her to run and never look back at me. My blackness would obscure her light and I wasn't willing to take that chance.

My angel needed to have a good life. Without me.

She needed to meet someone who was worthy of her.

I was not that man, and I never would be.

I groaned in frustration, my eyes fluttering closed for a second, but when I opened them Bella had turned her back on me. She was climbing into her truck and starting the engine, ready to leave. My cock shriveled in Kate's hands, and she pulled away sharply.

Her blue eyes were blazing as they bore into mine. I fumbled with my underwear and jeans as she began to vent.

"What the hell was that, Edward?"

"I've gotta go," I stated abruptly, trying to move past her.

She shoved at my shoulder, tilting her head to try and gain some eye contact, but I sidestepped her and began walking swiftly towards Bella's truck.

"Edward!"

I lifted my hand in a small wave to her, but didn't turn around. I couldn't stand to see the hurt and anger in her eyes as well.

"Have a great weekend. I'll see you when you get back...and I'm sorry," I shouted over my shoulder.

I rushed into the lot. I didn't know what I was going to say to Bella when I got there, but I just had to see her. Every instinct I had was yelling for me to stop her, and try to explain, but how was I going to do that? I'd only gotten hard after I set eyes on her. Kate didn't arouse me.

Bella did, but I was pretty sure right now was not the time to tell her that.

I was running my fingers nervously through my hair as I approached the driver's side. Bella turned the engine over and didn't look my way.

She was understandably pissed at me.

"Bella!" I shouted, tapping lightly on the window.

She revved the engine, staring in front of her, as her knuckles turned white from her grip on the steering wheel.

"Bella, please..." She spun around, her eyes watery with unshed tears. Knowing I had done that was like a knife twisting in my gut.

"No."

"I-I...Fucking hell! I'm an ass OK? I know that! Fuck, you know that!"

I kicked the tire, glaring at her through the glass. She shook her head slowly, and my chest clenched when a single tear dropped onto her cheek.

"Let me go. Please."

"I can't let you go." She put the truck into gear and I stepped out of the way, whispering, "I can't ever let you go..."

It didn't escape me that years later I was standing in exactly the same situation. Sure, it was a different lot, but I was still watching Bella drive away from me because I'd messed up. I was still hurting her, and I'd never been the right guy for her. That lacerated my heart.

I was forever making the wrong decision, but I'd always made them with her at the forefront of my mind. I had no backbone. I wasn't strong enough to tell her to run; to get her to leave me and start a life that wasn't based on our friendship.

She was the strong one.

She was the one I'd wanted to end this, but she never had. Bella had always assumed she could save me, or that she could make me better. Even after all this time she still thought that, and I was a bastard for relying on her. She was the purest thing in my life and I knew I was messing her up.

"FUCK!" I yelled.

"She's not what we expected."

I turned sharply to see Rose standing nervously behind me.

"What?" I spat.

"Bella. She's not what we expected. From your description we thought she was some mousey little doormat, but she certainly takes very little shit from you."

"If that was the case she would have cleared out years ago. We're fucking addicts."

"I'm not sure I know what you mean, but come back inside and we can talk."

She turned and started back inside. I spoke before I could stop myself.

"By talk you mean sort out how this blackmail is going to work?"

"Edward, this isn't blackmail. You wrecked my bar. You want to stay out of jail, you work the debt off."

"You pay your share of *his* care," I demanded quickly.

We walked back into the bar, and I watched as Emmett placed a scotch on the counter. I swallowed, reaching for the glass and downing it in one. I raised my brow at him, only to have him shake his head swiftly.

"No way, dude."

I slumped onto the stool, resting my forehead on the bar and groaning loudly.

"Edward..." Rosalie started. "How many times must we have this discussion about him? I want nothing to do with him, never did, so why would I pay for his care? The man needs to rot and die alone, and he certainly doesn't deserve your sympathy."

"I can't do this with you, Rose," I snarled out.

"Then why the hell do you keep coming back? I'm sick of this! I've told you a hundred times that I won't give you money for him, and yet you keep coming back every few months to ask. It's as if you don't understand, but Edward, I *know* you do. I know you had it bad, because I know what he did to you! So what's with the loyalty to him?"

"He's our father!"

My voice shook at the same time my hands balled. I felt Emmett lean across the bar, ready to try to rein me in. He didn't need to. I wasn't about to lose it with them.

All I wanted to do now was to go and find Bella. I needed to talk to her. The sight of her crying alone in the car made it hard to breathe.

I hated myself.

"So let me get this straight, your loyalty towards that abusive bastard is based solely on the fact that his blood runs through your veins? That's messed up, even for you."

"Back down, Rosie," Emmett interjected.

"No, I want to know why he does this." She turned back towards me and I looked up at her.

"Even when the man was lucid all he ever did was hurt you. He did one thing for you and that was keep a roof over your head. That doesn't make him father of the year, nor is it reason enough for you to work yourself to the bone to pay his bills."

"You don't get it. You never will." I stood and started to leave. "I won't bother you again about it. I can see I've been wasting my time. Call me when you want me to work. I'll do whatever you want. You win."

As I walked from the bar and onto the street I heard her shout, "It's not a case of winning, Edward. It's about surviving."

/ CS

I walked back to Bella's. I needed the time to think. I had to work out how I was going to make this better. She was all I had, but I was bringing her down. I was holding her back. I lied when I told her I only loved her as a friend. I adored her. Every tiny piece of me was owned by her, even my hollow heart. There simply wasn't room for anyone but her.

I didn't know if I could ever be more than friends with her, it scared the shit out of me to even consider it. I just wasn't what she should have for her life. I would only hurt her again and again, bringing her down with me. I didn't want children. I wouldn't poison another generation. Bella deserved a loving and happy family, with a husband who could care for her and children that would adore her.

I wasn't that person, and with sadness, I knew I never could be.

But can you imagine her loving someone else, holding another man's child?

I clenched my jaw, and tried not to picture her life without me, and my life without her.

I walked wearily up the stairs to her apartment and knocked lightly on the door. I didn't even know if she was going to let me in. So I knocked again and waited nervously.

She knew it was me, because she opened the door and immediately walked away. I stepped inside, closing the door quietly behind me.

Bella had flopped onto the couch, scrunching her legs up to her chest and covering her hands with the ends of her sleeves. She was balling herself up, taking comfort from the only thing she had.

Herself.

"Bella, I-"

"Shut up."

"No, I need to-"

"Shut up! Shut up! Shut up! I don't want to hear your bullshit. You're about to tell me that you don't want to hurt me, and that you've kept everything a secret because it was better that way. But to tell you the truth, Edward, I'm tired of hearing the shit you spout. All I've ever done is help you, so when I ask you what the hell is going on I do actually want to know, but you give me nothing. You never give me anything," she shouted, her voice taking on an almost mocking edge.

I took a deep breath before asking, "Can I sit down?"

"Do whatever you want. You usually do."

"Don't be petulant, Bella. It doesn't suit you," I sighed.

"And big words don't suit you," she shot back.

I chose to ignore it. Arguing was only going to make this worse.

"I don't want to fight with you, angel."

"Oh, that's right," she spat tossing her arms into the air. "Wheel out the *angel* endearment, because you know that will soften me up-"

"I'm not! You *are* my fucking angel, and if you calm the fuck down I'll talk to you about it!"

I walked to the couch, sitting down next to her feet. I instinctively reached out and touched her ankles, only to have her snatch them tighter to her body. I wanted to hold her. I rarely touched anyone but with Bella everything was different.

I felt different.

The silence was oppressive, and as I cleared my throat to speak, she snarled, "Go on, lie some more."

"Oh Christ, I'm not about to lie to you, and if you give me a second I'll talk. This is difficult, Bella."

She hummed, but said nothing further. I swallowed hard and started.

"Do you remember the night I brought you *Dracula*? Do you recall the shape I was in?"

She turned towards me, her face intensely serious. "Of course I do. You told me never to talk about it again. Ever."

I inhaled deeply and steeled myself for this confession, "My father hit me; he always hit me, and that night was the first time I hit back."

She gasped. Whether it was shock or disgust I simply didn't know, but any other words froze in my throat. I looked away from her, afraid to see that final condemnation in her eyes. My heart was in my mouth, and I chanced a look at her. It was shock that filled her eyes, and something else. How many times could I show her the darker side of myself until she finally accepted it? She always kept me around, and my utter selfishness kept her close.

"He hit you?" she whispered.

I frowned, my voice coming out as little more than a growl.

"Did you not hear what I said? I hit my father. Bella, my FATHER!"

She moved carefully on the couch, turning to face me. The compassion in her eyes was stabbing at my heart, screaming in my head.

Set her free.

"I heard you. To be honest, it's hard not to when you're shouting, but I also heard what you said before that. I can't condemn you when that man should have been caring for you. He didn't. I saw them. I saw those bruises, and I'm sure that night you brought my gift that you had cracked ribs at the very least. I'm not dumb, Edward. I was just being a good friend and doing as you asked," she stated weakly.

"I hit him," I repeated.

Her eyes closed for a moment, whether she was composing herself or thinking of something to say I couldn't be sure. I just knew she was the only person I could confess to.

She was my redemption.

"Can we dismantle this? Can you tell me when all this started?"

"My own mother left, because she couldn't take anymore of his abuse."

I spoke without even realizing the words had left my lips.

"So why would you take the blame for his abuse? He is the one that did this to you, Edward!"

"But I have his blood in my veins. And I just underlined it the times I hit back."

My hands were shaking; she didn't understand.

"When? What other times did you do it?" she asked anger lacing her tone.

"I was twenty-one, he had me pinned up against the bathroom door and wouldn't let me escape-"

"When next?" she shot back.

"About four years after that. He smashed my head into the coffee table. I kicked out and it landed on his jaw-"

"And?"

"There isn't one. That's it."

I hung my head, thoroughly ashamed. I couldn't seem to swallow as emotion completely closed my throat. I'd never wanted her to know this. I was frustrated with myself, I had never wanted it to come to this. I was leeching off of her goodness, she was such a sweetheart. I was unloading onto her small delicate shoulders and by the contents of her medicine cabinet, she couldn't cope.

She blinked, and then her spine straightened, "Are you telling me your utter self hate and destruction comes from three incidents, when you were trying to defend yourself? You're letting those three times shape your life? That's fucked up, even by my standards. I'm also assuming he continued to beat you in between those occasions?"

I nodded.

"So how can you turn it all inward?"

"How can you forgive me? How can you sit there and not be frightened of what I could do to you? I hurt people, angel. You should be running scared," I gulped.

She lifted her palm to my face, turning it towards hers. I expected her to be crying, but she was surprisingly composed.

"You're right about one thing: you do hurt people. You hurt those that love you the most. You won't allow anyone in. Ever. And that hurts like hell, because I'm here. Edward, I'm right in front of you and yet you never see me," she ground out.

"I see you."

"No! No you don't. I'm here. I've always been here, but all you ever do is rip me apart when you leave, and why? Because you hate yourself so much that you think you don't deserve a decent life? Grow up. Deal with it."

I snorted at her tone. She was very rarely aggressive, but she was snarling in disgust right now. It was good to know she had that kind of fight in her, and I hadn't taken it all away.

"I've told you so many times what I see when I look at you, but you don't hear what I say."

"This is fucking stupid!"

"Let me finish!" I chided. "You're my angel, and you always will be. You were there when everyone else left. It was you, Bella. It's always been you."

She gasped, and stared at me, waiting for more. I wracked my brain for the right thing to say. I didn't want to feel like I did. Her thumb traced a slow path along my jaw, soothing me even when she was annoyed at me.

I didn't deserve her.

But I wanted her.

"It's never been me. Even at school you chose Kate. I was the dirty little secret and have been ever since."

"You're wrong," I replied, shaking my head, appalled.

"No, I'm not!" Her voice broke slightly, and she severed eye contact with me, staring at a point over my shoulder.

I had done this to her.

I had caused so much self doubt.

She had been right when she'd said we should part and live our own lives. We simply weren't good together, but I couldn't pull away. Looking at her and seeing the fire in her eyes, and the affection in her words my control snapped.

I crashed my lips to hers and kissed her with every ounce of love I had left.

She undid me instantly, completely.

Hate me today

Hate me tomorrow

Hate me for all the things I didn't do for you

Hate me in ways

Yeah ways hard to swallow

Hate me so you can finally see what's good for you

Hate me ~ Blue October

End Notes:
<p>Hmm...what do you think?</p> <p>FYI for anyone who's read my one shot Dark Possession (Over on FF.net). I know you've all been waiting for me to expand, and SHOCKER I've actually started writing it!</p> <p>Thank you!</p> <p>xx</p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 8: Do It For Me Now by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>*Waves*</p> <p>Huge hugs to Maylin, my awesome beta & Elusivekoolaid my prereader.</p> <p>Thank you to Beate73 - if I could get you Kellan bb, I really would.</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

BPOV

I didn't know what to do.

This had to be a dream.

One minute I was giving him hell for being so damn shut off, the next his verbal vomit about his dad had started, and now I was positive his lips were on mine.

But they couldn't be. I must have been dreaming, because Edward didn't feel that way about me. He'd never made any move or inferred it before, so why would he now?

I hadn't initiated anything, in fact, I was still annoyed at him, so I was perplexed as to how the hell we'd gotten into this position now. The biggest shock to me was that I was questioning it. Wasn't this what I'd wanted for years? Hadn't I dreamed night after night of having his lips pressing softly against mine? I'd imagine what they could do to me and exactly how they'd make me feel; what the kiss would lead to and where we would go from that moment. I had it all planned out, and this was not the fairytale. .. but I couldn't bring myself to stop him.

What if this was all I would ever get from him?

Would doing this make things better or worse when he eventually left?

The questions circled around in my head, as his lips caressed mine slowly. My hand had fisted in his t-shirt, and I was unconsciously tugging him closer. I was being carried away by the shock of his embrace and the emotions thundering through my body. However, the second his tongue dipped into my mouth my mind went blank. It could barely cope with the one thought.

Edward was truly kissing me.

Like he had done to Kate.

Like he had done to many other women.

Edward was finally giving me the one thing I'd always wanted: himself.

I tentatively slid my tongue against his, feeling a small shudder wrack his torso. His hand skimmed down my back, taking his time as his palm ghosted my ass, before gripping my thigh.

I should have stopped at that point, because it was obvious where this was heading.

But I couldn't.

If he was going to leave after he'd paid Rosalie back, then I was finally going to be selfish. I was going to take this piece of him.

Even if it cost me my heart.

I wanted to confess so much, but opted to remain silent. I didn't want to break the spell. It all felt like a dream, and I was going to go along with it until the damn alarm woke me.

Edward whispered my name reverently against my lips, before skimming his tongue along my bottom lip. I groaned, unable to stop it spilling out. The pads of his fingers bit into my thigh, hitching it higher across his lap; wanting me closer. I skimmed my free hand up the back of his neck, pushing my fingers into his messy hair. I ended up straddling his right leg, but he wanted more, and continued to shift me so that I sat on him completely, bracketing his hips. I shifted my hands to his shoulders, staring down at him in uncertainty. His lips were slightly swollen; his cheeks tinged pink, and his green eyes were fixed on mine.

We stared; only the sound of our breathing filling the silence. His fingers flexed where they held my waist, and I could see a small tick on his jaw where he was gritting his teeth. I was about to climb off him, because he was fighting this and I didn't want that.

I wanted it to be real.

But before I could he spoke.

"Tell me to stop, angel. Tell me no."

His voice was merely a low rumble, but I understood its implications. The choice was mine to make. He just didn't know that I'd already made it.

"I can't," I croaked out, shaking my head.

My throat was closing and my eyes were stinging, as tears threatened to fall. My emotions were so mixed up when it came to him, and right now I didn't know what to do. There were so many reasons to say no, and just as many to say yes.

So I went with my heart, and lowered my lips back to his, kissing him with everything I had. My hands held his face, thumbs stroking his cheekbones, as our mouths mated gently. It wasn't alive with passion, it was comfort in its baser form. A comfort we both craved.

Edward was gentle in his touch, as he stroked my back. His hands on me in this intimate way were almost too much for me to cope with. I was on the edge of tears, so I removed my mouth from his and buried my face in his neck. I inhaled his scent, feeling every nerve in my body light up.

He hummed, running his thumb along the exposed skin at the waistband of my jeans. It made me shiver, and I could feel my nipples harden.

There would be no going back from this.

Ever.

This would change us irrevocably.

"Bella..."

"No," I stopped him. "Don't talk. Please, I want this. I want you."

He groaned, as if the inner battle within himself was lost at the verbalizing of my words, moments before he moved his hand up under my sweatshirt. He held my ribcage, his hands trembling. His touch was new, but I found myself wanting so much more. I could feel his heavy breathing; his chest pushing against mine with each controlled gasp. I'd never been this nervous, but I was also exhilarated. Was Edward thinking these things too? Was he wrestling with his emotions as much as me? From the tremor that was consuming his hands I could only assume he was.

I turned my face, kissing at his ear and making him moan. He mirrored my actions, nibbling lightly as he fumbled with the fastening on my bra. I decided to show him I was certain in what we were doing and began to tug his t-shirt up. He let go of me only long enough to rip the cotton over his head and discard it across the room. I traced the black branches of his tattoo with my finger, wanting to repeat the action with my tongue.

"I never told you this, but it's beautiful," I whispered.

He shook his head, frowning in disagreement. I didn't want to change his mood. I wanted this to be wonderful, so I moved my hands to his chest and began lightly touching the flesh and kissing my way along his collarbone. His head flopped backwards onto the cushion of the couch and allowed me access to the column of his throat. His smell intoxicated me; he filled my every sense. I closed my eyes needing to be encompassed by Edward.

My Edward.

He managed to flick the fastening of my bra open, and before I could gasp my surprise he'd cupped my breasts in his palms. My head shot up in surprise, and instead of seeing regret in those green eyes, I saw lust. As I gazed he flicked at my nipples, and a small smirk played across his lips. My hips rocked, a silent demand for more.

"Take your sweatshirt off, angel," he breathed.

I licked my lips nervously, before pulling it over my head and dropping it to the floor.

"Oh, Bella."

There was reverence to his voice, as if he truly liked what he saw. I'd seen some of the women he'd been with, and knew I was nothing special. But his tone told me something very different. His tone told me he wanted me.

I kissed him again, as his thumbs still teased my erect nipples. My body was acting on instinct, moving and grinding to ease wherever the ache was. The problem was my whole body was aching and only Edward could make it better. I cupped his face, wanting to memorize everything. If this was all I would ever have, then I wanted to burn it into my brain for all eternity. I wanted to be able to retrieve this perfect memory and replay it when things got bad.

"Hey, no frowning." he soothed. "I mean it Bella, we don't have to do this."

"Shush," I responded, placing a solitary finger across his lips.

My other hand trailed down his torso to the buttons of his jeans and slowly began to pop them open. Edward licked at my finger; it made me shiver in delight.

This was really happening.

Me and Edward.

As my hand delved into the denim I heard his audible gulp, before he whispered, "Last time, angel. I doubt I could stop if this goes any further."

"Then don't."

On those two words my world span on its axis. Edward had me flat on my back on the couch, and was pulling my jeans and panties off with force. He growled as they tangled around my ankles, and I helped him by kicking them free. Edward pushed his own down to his knees and blanketed me in his warmth.

It felt like home.

The way he surrounded me; his weight pressing deliciously against me. I could lie here with him forever and would still want more. He kissed me softly, allowing me to wrap my legs around his hips, and giving him access to me.

I wanted him and he was right: there was no going back.

His erection was nestled against me, and with the express purpose of teasing him, I pushed against him. Edward let out a huge gust of air, followed by a curse.

I was smiling, but the second our eyes met I stilled. Everything I'd ever wanted to know about how he felt about me was reflected in them. They were shining bright; a brilliant green, and I opened my mouth, about to confess all, when he thrust slowly into me.

We moaned in unison, as he filled me.

"Oh, Christ, angel. Oh...fuck!"

He dropped his forehead to mine, our heated breath mingling together, as we both panted. I rolled my hips, adjusting to his erotic invasion. This was all I'd ever wanted; for us to be together. I fleetingly wondered what tomorrow would bring, but shut it down as quickly as it arrived. I wouldn't allow the possibility of heartache to take away from what I had right now. Especially when he was kissing and caressing me with such care.

His hand skimmed my torso, cupping my ass, and pulling me closer to him. We began slow, but it soon sped up, and spiraled out of control. Our foreheads remained touching; our eyes locked, as our lower bodies thrust against each other.

We were both demanding our oblivion.

My fingers dug into his shoulder with one hand, and his buttock with the other. I was gasping, needing him closer, needing him harder, but he was determined to rock us slowly to orgasm. I could only deduce he was as intent on prolonging this as I was.

My words were leaving my lips as sobs, and for a second I felt foolish, that was until his lips met mine and he whispered into my mouth.

"The only one, angel. If only you knew..."

"I don't unders-"

"Shush..." he interrupted, kissing me sharply.

I would have questioned him further, but he began to pump himself into me faster, and I was carried away.

Completely consumed by Edward.

The love of my existence.

Edward came moments before I did; his grunting and forceful thrusts shattered me. My world splintered, leaving me with shards of my sanity and they were focused on Edward.

I'd never done anything as remotely overwhelming as this. It was all I could do to hold back the tears.

"I d-don't know what..." Edward panted.

"Then don't. We don't have to say anything."

"But this-"

"No," I denied, shaking my head. "Please don't. Can we just be like this? Just for a while? Edward, I *need* this."

I could see his inner war as it played across his face. His hands held me close to him, even if his mind was telling him to let me go. There was a part of him that wanted the same as me. I could only hope it won over. I braced myself for his rejection, but squealed when he shifted, lifted us up and carried me towards the bedroom.

"This is all I can give, angel," he said sadly.

I cupped his face in my hands, as he kicked the bedroom door open.

"Then it will have to be enough."

I knew he'd find out about Seth soon enough. I just didn't want to tell him. We were friends as far as he was concerned, but I'd always hoped for more; I'd always wanted more. So telling him I had a boyfriend was more painful for me than it would be for him.

I just couldn't bring myself to do it.

It had been three weeks since our first date and he was a really great guy, but I didn't feel that tingle when he touched me. Nor did I feel those butterflies in my stomach when I knew I was about to see him. I hoped they would come in time.

I questioned whether the sensations I felt around Edward were even real. Had my brain conjured them up because I wanted him so desperately? I really needed to talk to someone about him, but nobody knew we were friends. If I told Jessica she would assume I was lying, because what the hell would the dazzling Edward Masen want with dowdy Bella Swan?

So I remained silent, writing my inner thoughts into my journal and hoping I could answer my own anguish. I'd even tried to start a conversation with my mom. That had not gone well. The moment I mentioned a boy I got the contraceptive conversation. I'd explained that we'd barely even kissed, but she was on a roll and didn't hear a thing I said.

I never spoke to her about boys again.

Today Seth was meeting me outside the science block. He was going to give me a ride home. I knew what that would mean.

We wouldn't be going straight home.

I was anxious, but exhilarated. Necking in the car was a part of high school, right? I didn't want to be different, because I had a warped friendship with the town bad boy. I wanted to be like everyone else.

"Hey," Seth said happily, interrupting my musings.

I blushed, tilting my head and trying to hide behind my hair. I clutched my books to my chest and smiled shyly.

"Are you ready to go?"

His huge smile was infectious and I couldn't help but grin back. I nodded, my eyes going wide as he held out his hand to me. I jostled my books into the one arm and placed my hand in his. His palm was hot and a little sweaty, clearly Seth was as nervous as I was.

We remained quiet as we walked towards his truck, and to my surprise he opened the passenger side door. I giggle at his chivalry and climbed inside. It was only when I looked through the windshield that I saw him.

Edward.

He was glaring at us; his expression seethed annoyance. I knew he would be pissed off, and that was one of the reasons I'd kept it to myself. I debated getting out and walking over to him, maybe to try and explain, but Seth got behind the wheel and started the engine. I could have stopped him, but I needed this. Edward had Kate, so why couldn't I have someone, too?

"You OK? You look a little pale."

"I just thought I saw someone. Let's go."

Edward never took his eyes from mine as we left the school lot. My heart thundered in my chest, worrying about what he would think, what he would do. It was all I could think about as we drove into the forest on the far side of town. He'd looked pretty pissed off, but what I couldn't truly fathom was why.

"Hey, we can go back if you want. You don't appear up for this, Bells."

"I-I'm good. Honestly, but could you pull up soon? I don't want to go too far."

"Sure," he replied, pulling the truck to a halt just off the road on a small dirt track.

He turned to face me, reaching to remove the books from where I still held them against my chest.

"What's with the death grip?"

I took a deep breath, telling myself mentally to calm down, and released the books to him. Seth tossed them onto the back seat and shuffled closer. He cupped my chin and raised his brows, asking me with actions whether he could kiss me. I gave a minute nod, but inhaled sharply at the speed with which he crushed his mouth to mine. My hands gripped his jacket, but I wasn't sure if I was pulling him in or pushing him away.

It was new and strange, but not wholly unlikable. In fact, I was beginning to see what the big deal was. His lips were soft and pillowy over mine, though I was more than a little startled when his tongue pushed into my mouth. It was very aggressive and not as I'd dreamed it would be. Seconds later Seth began palming my breast through my long sleeved t-shirt.

I wasn't sure I was ready for this, but he shoved me further back against the door and pinched my nipples harshly. I winced and tried to push him back. My hands pressed against his chest, my knees coming up in a struggle to get him off. I turned my face away from him, gasping for air, but suddenly I was tumbling from the truck and landing on the muddy ground. A low growl came from above, but I needed to get my bearings.

What the fuck had just happened?

"Get out of that fucking truck now!"

Edward?

Edward had saved me?

Seth was stuttering, and as I gazed up I could see him exiting his door. I stood, trying to wipe my jeans, but giving up.

"Listen man, I-" Seth started.

"Shut up!"

Seth shrunk back, holding his hands up in surrender, before Edward quickly turned on me.

"Get in the car," he growled.

"Edward. I'm fine. I just-"

"GET IN THE FUCKING CAR!"

I stood my ground. This had nothing to do with him. Seth had just gotten a little excited. I could've handled it myself, not that it would've gone that far anyway.

I glared at him, determined to not back down and was surprised when his eyes began to soften. He groaned loudly, running his fingers through his hair before whispering, "Don't make me do this, angel. Don't."

"Do what? Edward, we were necking. It's normal and I know for a fact that you do it."

"Please?" he begged but I didn't understand.

Seth made a move to leave, but Edward stood between him and his truck. He shook his head slowly, menace oozing from every pore.

"Edward, this has nothing to do with you. Just leave us alone," I tried.

"Tell her!" he bellowed at Seth. "Fucking tell her!"

Seth was shaking; his eyes darting around the forest for a way out, but he remained silent.

"I don't want to do this. I never did, but this prick will never tell you." He sighed in exasperation and continued. "It was a bet. Him and his little ass hat Newton decided they'd see who could be the first to get in your panties. I'm sorry."

I couldn't find the words to express just how mortified I was. I wretched, hurt and embarrassment slamming into me. I steadied myself against the door of the truck, but I knew I was about to vomit regardless.

I vaguely heard Edward yelling at Seth, as his arms surrounded me. He carried me to his car and stayed with me, holding my hair and rubbing my back as I purged everything I had onto the muddy forest floor.

That day Edward was my angel.

I stroked his hair as he slept, trying to commit his calm sleeping form to memory. We'd made love three times before finally falling into an exhausted sleep. We'd still said very little, leaving the communication to our bodies, because they seemed to know what they wanted.

He mumbled in his slumber, nuzzling closer to my chest. I swallowed a lump of emotion as it formed in my throat and willed myself to sleep. Edward's arms banded around me and he whispered against my breast, "My angel. Always my angel."

I closed my eyes, fighting back tears as I replied.

"I love you."

*I gave and I gave and I gave and I gave you my trust
Like the time that we kissed and you gave me a lie
To add to the scene you pretended to cry
But I'm here and I'm cool, the way that it is
Just give me a chance and I'll try to forgive*

*And I don't know
And I can't guess
If it's gonna be OK
But now my last wish
Is that you do this with me
Kiss me here and hold my hand
Let me feel like I'm the only one
I know you can
Won't you do it for me now*

Angels & Airwaves ~ Do It For Me Now

End Notes:
<p>Thank you so much for reading. I wish I could reply to everyone, but with three stories on the go it's difficult.</p> <p>You could always come and see me on the Spiders thread :D</p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 9: All The Same by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>*Waves*</p> <p>Love & hugs to my beta Maylin & my prereader elusivekoolaid.</p> <p>HUGE love for Magan Bagan.</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

BPOV

"I don't like it, Bella," Alice stated as she placed a thin chiffon top onto a wooden hanger.

"I'm not asking you to like it," I pouted. "I'm just telling you what happened."

"But why now? Don't get me wrong, I'm happy for you, but I just don't get why the two of you are going at it now."

I frowned, slumping onto the stool behind the cash register. I'd told Alice as soon as I'd entered the store. I couldn't hide it really, because my happiness was written all over my face.

Edward had still been asleep when I'd had to leave for work. I'd considered calling Alice and making an excuse, but I was certain she'd have seen right through it. So instead, I begrudgingly kissed Edward's cheek and dressed before leaving for the store.

My mind was consumed with memories of the things he'd done to me; the way he'd touched my skin.

I'd felt alive.

It had been the most perfect night of my life, and I'd never wanted it to end.

The problem was the excitement didn't remove the gut wrenching anxiety I felt. It still remained. Deep down in the very pit of my stomach I knew this wasn't right. I knew nothing good was about to come of last night, no matter how beautiful it had been.

I wouldn't admit it though; not even to myself. Wasn't this everything I'd ever dreamed about? Wasn't his acceptance what I'd always wanted?

So why didn't it feel enough?

"Come on. Spill it," Alice chirped, leaning across the counter.

"I don't know. There's just something. I thought this would be it, Alice."

"And it's not?"

"There's something missing. It still hurts," I replied honestly.

She pursed her lips and little furrows appeared in her usually smooth brow, as she thought how to verbalize her opinion. I braced myself because it couldn't be good if she was actually thinking before she spoke.

"Have you ever considered that it isn't right? That no matter when you guys finally did the nasty, or how many times you did it, it still wouldn't be good? I know you love him, Bella, I think I'm the only one that truly understands that, but maybe it's never meant to be. Maybe you're destined for someone else."

"Destined? Gimme a break."

"Hey," she laughed, holding her hands up in mock surrender. "Don't get pissy with me. I call it as I see it, and Bella, I'm calling this. Edward is a leech. He wades into your life for a few weeks every year, turns it upside down and then fucks off, leaving you cold, lonely and feeling very used. I'm not wrong for trying to point that out to my friend."

"Why don't I feel happier?"

"Because you know this isn't the declaration you've waited years for? Because you know that last night was about comfort instead of love."

I gulped back tears as a customer entered the store and began to browse.

"I'm here for you. You know I am, but you should never have bailed him out this time. I really hate playing the *I-told-you-so* game, but you know it's true."

"How's the house hunting going?"

Alice rolled her bright blue eyes. "Don't change the subject."

"I'm not," I denied. "I'm just tired of talking things out and getting nowhere."

"That's because you're talking with the wrong person."

"I've tried speaking to Edward, but he's so evasive. Last night was the first time I ever really got anywhere, but then things got a little crazy."

"A little?"

She turned and strolled towards the woman at the back of the store. I watched as she pulled a dress from the rack and began to tell the customer exactly why it was perfect for her.

Alice was passionate about her store, and it shone through whenever she was selling a garment. She never let anyone leave that was unsure, or had bought something on a whim, and because of that customers would come back continually.

They adored Alice.

As did I.

I'd wished to be just like her so many times over the years. She'd met the love of her life last year, and they'd fallen for each other instantly. Jasper had been walking by the store as Alice was dressing the window. They'd stared at each other through the glass and that had been it. They'd been inseparable ever since. They lived above the store now, but were searching for a real home, somewhere larger because they wanted to start a family.

It made me incredibly jealous.

Alice seemed to have everything I'd ever wanted. The career, the perfect partner, and soon the beautiful children. I had a closet for an apartment, a job that didn't really interest me and a best friend who was oblivious to my love for him. Add to that the contents of my medicine cabinet and anyone would understand my jealousy. I knew they were all things I could change, but alteration of one would effectively change the others; like a line of toppling dominoes.

I didn't think I was ready for that.

The small voice in head questioned when I would be, but I tried my best to ignore it. I tried to recall the things I wanted when I was at school. What had mattered to me? But none of that fit who I was anymore.

Maybe it was time for something new?

"Bella? Helllloo?"

I looked up to see both Alice and the customer gawking at me.

"Huh? Sorry," I apologized.

Alice pouted and handed me a red satin dress. "Can you put this in the back and take Sara's details please? She's collecting this on Thursday."

I nodded and filled out two cards, slipping one over the hanger of the dress, and placing the other in the box under the counter. Sara waved and promised she'd return to collect the dress. Alice was glaring at me as she closed the door.

"Wake up, Bella. It's not the best impression to have my staff half asleep."

"I know, sorry. I'm fucking useless."

"Only when he's around," she pointed out. "Have you been taking your meds?"

I nodded.

"Called your shrink?"

"I have a meeting there next week anyway. I know as soon as I mention that he's returned she'll increase the appointments."

"Bells, you know you can't go on like this." It was a statement rather than a question. "I know you love him but this is wrong. Even now, after what should have been the happiest night of your life you're still questioning, still sad. And don't get pissy at me. What kind of friend would I be if I let you carry on without even showing you the reality of the situation? Please, just *look* at what's in front of you."

There was no denying she was right. The cycle of me and Edward had been going on for too long, but why was I only seeing it now? I should've been giddy with excitement given what had happened between us. I was happy about it, but the black cloud still remained, telling me more than anything else that this wasn't right.

I couldn't bring myself to regret it though.

It had been too wonderful for words, but I needed to talk to Edward and work out what the hell we were going to do now. Edward had to remain here while he repaid Rose, but that was only eight weeks.

What would happen after that?

"Do you need me to come with you? To your appointment, I mean?" Alice asked softly.

I wanted to say no, but knew without a doubt I'd be a mess after confessing everything, so nodded reluctantly.

"Tell me when, and I'll get my hot little hubby to look after this place."

I giggled. Jasper hated watching the store, but did anything for her, whatever made her smile. I could only hope for that kind of adoration.

"I want a coffee," she stated, changing the subject. "Fancy going to get us one?"

I was about to agree when the door opened, and Edward walked into the store.

Our eyes met and my heart stopped.

Nothing else existed but him at that moment. He was frowning as usual, and his fingers were absently running through his hair. He didn't seem to notice Alice was there...until she shoved angrily at his chest.

"You need to stop fucking around with my friend. And I don't just mean what you do with the bottom half of your body. She can't cope with your asshatery much more. Do you see what you're doing? Do you?"

Edward winced, as she shoved at him again. I walked around the counter, trying to put myself between them, and was shocked when she scooted around me. She was trying to protect me.

"Alice!" I warned, but Edward interrupted before I could say anything more.

"No. Let her."

Her hands fisted on her hips, as she squared off at him. It would have been amusing if the situation wasn't so intense. I glared between the two of them; the two people I loved most in the world. I was about to beg them to stop, but realized this was going to happen whether I permitted it or not.

"You're playing with her heart!" Alice yelled. "You're fucking torturing her! Don't you see that?"

I watched Edward's throat constrict as he swallowed, but he said nothing in response.

Alice prodded his chest with her finger, as he stared down at her in question.

"Will you fucking answer me?"

"I came to talk to Bella. I know you're angry with me, and to be honest, I'm annoyed with myself for letting it happen. It shouldn't have, but you need to let me speak," he replied gruffly.

I gulped, and whispered, "You regret it? Regret? Really?"

Alice stepped back a little as I tried to breathe slowly.

"Angel, I-"

"Oh, here we go again! *Angel* solves everything. You know Edward, I used to adore that endearment, but now I absolutely hate it; it makes me cringe. Tell me, which time did you regret? The first? The second, or was it the third, when every part of my body touched yours. When you kissed my lips with each thrust, or when you were repeating what I meant to you as we came? WHICH TIME? WHEN?"

Edward's eyes closed a moment as he tried to compose his response. Rage was coursing through my veins, because even though he hadn't said the word *regret*, it had certainly been inferred. All he ever did was slice my heart open, and I just kept letting him.

"I don't regret it, Bella. I could never regret what we did. Ever." He reached out for my hand, but I crossed them over my chest, denying him the comfort. "Can we go and talk? Please...*Please?*"

Alice took hold of my bicep, turning my back towards Edward and began to speak, not bothering to hush her tone.

"You don't have to, you know? I understand you want to clear some things up with the dickhead, but don't feel pressured."

"I'm gonna be OK, Ali. I have to do this. It's important."

She nodded, embracing me quickly before kissing my cheek.

"Don't you even think of taking her far. When you make her fucking cry again I want to be able to beat your ass, without running too far first. Got it?"

Edward hid a smirk by wiping the side of his mouth and nodded.

"Don't think I didn't see that!" Alice pointed at him.

I muttered to her about only being a short while and walked towards to door. I could hear Edward shuffling behind me, as Alice shouted that she'd be waiting.

We strolled along the street, my arms still wrapped around my body. We felt miles apart, when really it was millimeters.

It wasn't the first time...

I sat alone in the corner of the cafeteria. I wasn't hungry, so I settled for juice and reading my book. I could hear half the people in here whispering about me. Seth had told them all what he'd done, or at least tried to before Edward had arrived, and in good high school fashion it had been warped and twisted, leaving no semblance of truth.

I didn't respond to the rumors; it wasn't worth my time. Those people had made a decision based on what they'd heard and wouldn't change their opinion, so I kept to myself and tried to ignore the chatter.

I'd also been ignoring Edward.

I'd locked my bedroom window for the last three nights, wanting to be alone. I'd woken this morning to find a note taped to the outside. It broke my heart when I read it:

What did I do wrong?

I wanted to find him and talk, but didn't really know what to say to him. I was so embarrassed about the whole incident. I was also still angry that he knew about the bet, and yet, hadn't told me until it was almost too late. When I closed my eyes all I could picture was what could have happened if Edward hadn't followed us. I'd tried telling mom about it, but she got stuck at the first few words and proceeded to ramble on for an hour about what her first kiss was like.

I should've known better than to ask her for help.

I turned the page and caught movement in the corner of my eye.

Edward.

He was sitting at the table across from me, alone, and glaring directly at me. He was slouched in the crappy plastic chair, his eyes completely focused on me. I tried to look away, but I kept being drawn back. He quirked a brow, silently asking a question. I closed my book, picking up my backpack, as I left the cafeteria and stormed outside into the pouring rain.

"What's your problem, Bella?"

"Leave me alone," I shouted over the thunder.

"If I'd done that you'd be minus a cherry right now"

"Damn it, Edward! Do you have to be so crude?"

He grinned maniacally, flashing his white teeth, rivulets of rain ran down his cheeks. His hair was darkened and plastered flat against his forehead. I shuddered from the cold, but stood my ground.

"Look, thank you for saving me."

"I don't want your fucking gratitude!" he snarled. "I want you to stop with the cold shoulder and the locked window."

"Why?"

"Because...because, well, we were friends and I haven't the faintest fucking clue what I did to stop that. I thought I was helping."

I slumped back against the wall, holding my book to my chest.

"You did," I responded quietly.

He took a step closer, tilting his head to the side so that he could hear me.

"So why the attitude and avoidance?"

I didn't know what to say. Shame didn't seem a reasonable excuse now that I was faced with it. So instead of speaking we stood in the rain and stared at each other. I could see his breathing was rapid and shallow; his nostrils flaring in annoyance. A couple of girls walked by, giggling and pointing. Edward growled, making them run.

We were drenched, but neither one was trying to move. Anxiety was making my chest tight.

"You caught m-me..." I hissed, before I watched comprehension dawn.

"Fuck! It's not like I caught you without your panties, angel. There is nothing to be ashamed of; you did nothing wrong."

He reached out, touching my elbow with the tips of his fingers. It tingled, but I convinced myself it was the cold. I wanted to stay mad at him.

"You could have told me. You should have told me. I thought...well, I thought he really liked me."

Edward groaned and rolled his eyes. His hands clenched at his sides and the tick started at the side of his jaw telling me just how angry he was.

"I'm sorry. I'm really truly sorry. I don't know why I didn't tell you. I guess I thought you wouldn't go with him anyway."

"Why? Am I not allowed a boyfriend?"

"Not one like that fucking loser," he interjected.

"Then who? Who has the Edward Masen brand of approval?" I spat.

He shuffled on his feet, repeating himself. "Not that loser."

I pushed off the wall and started to walk past him.

"Bella?"

"No, Edward. Just leave me the hell alone."

I left him behind that day and didn't look back.

I reopened my bedroom window.

We both played with our coffee cups, twirling them by their handles. The coffee shop was quiet and I debated going somewhere else. I didn't want the world to know what we were arguing about.

Edward's fingers trembled as he reached for the sugar, and I frowned.

"What's wrong?" I questioned.

"Truth?" He raised a solitary brow, before I nodded cautiously. "I don't know where we go from here? I fucked up. I really fucked up, and I'm scared I'm about to lose the only person that's been there for me. The only person that means anything to me."

"I can't believe we're here. After all this time, Edward. All the shit we've been through and done to each other we land here, after having sex. What do we do?"

"I can't give you what you want, angel. I can't be who you need," he replied honestly.

"Can you really tell me you know what I need?"

"I've always known one thing. That one thing has been like a mantra to me. I'm no good for you."

I tossed the spoon onto the table, glaring at him in annoyance.

"You confuse the fuck out of me, do you know that? You talk about not wanting to taint me with your darkness, and then about not being good enough, but don't you see what you do to me? Are you really that blind?"

"Bella, I see-"

"Shut up! You don't see. If you did you wouldn't continue wafting in and out leaving destruction in your wake, and after meeting Rose and Emmett I see you do that with them too." I took a deep breath before continuing. "You know how I feel about you. You've always known, and don't try to deny it. I'm not naive, Edward, I know last night changes nothing. In fact, it makes things worse, but I can't ignore it, or regret it." My throat closed and my eyes began to burn with tears. Edward reached across the table and entwined his fingers in mine. "We have to change this. Now. For both of our sakes."

"I'll do what I need to. Angel, I can't lose you."

"Were we ever really friends? Or has it always been some sick twisted codependency?" I asked quietly.

"We've always been friends. My only true one."

"How is that possible when no one ever knew about me?"

Edward snorted, and the corner of his mouth quirked upwards in a little smirk.

"Bella, *everyone* knew about you. You were the one that stayed away from me during school. Don't you remember the time I came towards you in the corridors only to have you turn and runaway? What about the week I sat on my own at a table in the cafeteria, waiting for you to sit with me? But instead you stayed with your friends, knowing I was waiting for you."

I glared at him in confusion, but he was on a roll and wasn't about to stop.

"You've always been under the impression that you were my dirty little secret, but that couldn't be further from the truth. My father always knew where I ran to. Kate always knew she didn't

even come close, and my sister and her husband were told about you before I even talked about myself. You were never a secret, Bella."

I tried to think back, tried to remember those instances, but there were too many memories warped by time. The venom had seeped into even the good times, marring them with its dark stain forever. Our whole relationship had been marked, and with that I accepted the one thing I'd never wanted to.

"This has to end..."

*I don't mind where you come from
As long as you come to me
But I don't like illusions I cant see
Them clearly
I don't care, no I wouldn't dare
To fix the twist in you
You've shown me eventually what you'll do
I don't mind
I don't care
As long as you're here*

*Go ahead and tell me you'll leave again
You'll just come back running
Holding your scarred heart in hand
It's all the same
And I'll take you for who you are
If you take me for everything
And do it all over again
It's all the same*

All The Same ~ Sick Puppies

End Notes:
Thank you! xx

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 10: Leash by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Thanks to everyone still reading my angsty tale...

The usual super hugs to my beta Maylin & prereader elusivekoolaid.

I heart you both.

Plus super huge hugs to Magan Bagan.

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

I braced myself waiting for his response. I expected anger and denial, but Edward sighed and nodded. His fingers squeezed mine a little tighter as he croaked out, "What do we do, angel? Where the fuck are we supposed to go from here?"

Tears began to sting my eyes. I hated crying in front of him and held it in most times. This wasn't one of those times, and I wasn't really concerned with where we were either. A huge chapter of my life was about to end and I couldn't numb myself to it.

No matter how much I really wanted to.

How were we going to draw a line under so many years of friendship?

How were we going to move on from what we'd done together last night?

"I don't know, but we have to. This cycle is torturing us both."

"So you're saying we never see each other again?" he asked.

His words lanced through me, making my heart throb in pain.

"I don't think I could ever do that," I whispered honestly. "And I don't think you could really stay away."

"So where does that leave us, Bella. Besides alone."

I swallowed the lump in my throat. His words only made me feel worse.

"We're not alone. We just have to find a new way to be friends." I took a deep breath. "You need to move out. This isn't going to work with you living in my tiny apartment, and you don't need to be there anymore."

Edward nodded and removed his hand from mine. He hugged his mug of coffee close to him and stared down at the contents. I was about to ask if he had somewhere else to stay, when he answered the unspoken question.

"My father's house. Until recently it was leased to a couple, and the rent went a way to covering his care. They moved out last week, so it's empty. I could stay there."

His voice sounded as hollow as my chest. As if he was merely speaking the words but not feeling a single one. Why had we ever let it get this bad?

"Do you need to sell the house?"

"No. Look, talking about the issues with my father's home isn't getting us any further with our problem, is it?"

I held back a snort. He was shutting me out; keeping something hidden from me that he didn't want to discuss. I knew the signs, but couldn't bring myself to care about that right now. This was one of the first of many lines I would have to draw when it came to Edward Masen.

"I'll leave this afternoon," he added.

I didn't know what to say, I just stared at him. Neither one of us had touched our coffee, but we were holding onto the mugs as if our lives depended on it. I struggled for what to say next. How was I supposed to deal with the unknown? Edward had always been a large part of my life, even when he wasn't in town, but this would mean he could only play a small part. Anything more would lead us back to square one. However, how did we determine what was enough and what was too much?

A couple came and sat at the table across from us, touching and kissing. Their public display made me want to look away, but I was mesmerized by their affection. Edward was watching them too, and out of the corner of my eye I could see his grip tighten on his mug. They affected him as they did me. Their total absorption with each other was fascinating. It was something I'd never had but always wanted. The few men I'd been out with never stayed past the third date, and I didn't blame them. There had been only one other boy that had made me feel even remotely what I felt for Edward.

But he'd let me down.

"You look beautiful, Bella." Riley whispered, as he held me close.

We were entering the gym at school.

Prom night.

Riley and I had been dating for two months. He'd literally swept me off my feet. He was the sweetest boy I'd ever known.

That was why I'd let him take my virginity last night.

It had been uncomfortable and awkward, but Riley had been very gentle and caring. His car hadn't been the most romantic of places to have sex, but there hadn't been anywhere else to go. It hadn't mattered, because it was still a wonderful experience.

I'd wondered many times over the last few months what Edward would think of Riley, but I'd never told him. Edward didn't come to my room as often at night, and as he was no longer at school, we didn't see each other as much. After my horrendous date with Seth I was cautious about disclosing my feelings to him. He'd saved me, but he could've told me sooner and saved me many nights of tears.

Up until Riley had picked me up I'd still held out the small hope that Edward would have come to see me. If only to tell me to have a nice time, but as always when it came to Edward, I was disappointed.

I'd gone to Port Angeles to pick out my dress alone. I was useless when it came to fashion, but then my mother was worse. I didn't really have any other female friends, not ones that I trusted with a dress so important anyway. So I'd trawled the shops alone, and after four hours and numerous dressing rooms I finally found a simple purple satin one. I wasn't going to wear heels, though. My black chucks would be the most comfortable for a dance. Riley liked my casual style anyway.

Matchbox 20 flooded from the speakers, as kids filled the dance floor. Teachers stood uncomfortably in the corners, waiting for couples to get too close, or for the punch to be spiked. I hadn't really wanted to come, had never considered going to Prom, but when I'd met Riley I knew he was the boy that was going to take me.

I was happy.

We'd danced and laughed, as we moved our way around the gym. I could see the other kids pointing at us, but Riley would just twirl us around and turn my back to them. He was wonderfully considerate...or at least that's what I thought.

It was only when I returned from the bathroom to see him with his hand up Bree's dress, that I understood what he was really doing.

He was trying to hide me from the truth.

The truth that, yet again, I'd chosen the wrong person to trust.

The whole school must have known what he was doing with her. They'd been laughing at me. I was mortified, but I didn't approach them. I was holding in my sobs, and Bree would only laugh at my sadness. So I'd walked back into the bathroom and locked myself into a stall.

I stayed there for almost an hour, before I mustered the strength to try and walk home. I didn't get any further than the lockers though, because Edward was standing at the end of the corridor. My breath caught, as I tried to comprehend exactly what I was seeing. Edward had really come to my prom, but had he come for me?

"Angel," he stated quietly.

I stammered, confused by his appearance, and tried to wipe the tears from my cheeks. I'd hoped he would come, but never believed he actually would. I was stunned into silence, and all I could do was stare.

"You look...I...Wow!"

I nodded and walked closer, wringing my hands nervously. Edward met me half way, but didn't touch me, opting instead to run his hands through his hair. His knuckles were red and angry, making me instinctively reach out and stroke them. He hissed sharply, pulling back and glaring.

"What the fuck did you do that for?" he snarled.

"It looks sore. Edward, what have you been doing now?"

He rolled his darkened eyes, but said nothing to me.

"Ok...What're you doing here then?" I tried.

"I came to see you."

"Oh!" was the best I could manage, because it wasn't at all what I'd expected.

"And it's a good job I arrived looking at the tears in your eyes-"

"I'm not crying," I interrupted.

Again, there was nothing more than an eye roll. I decided to push the attention back on him.

"So what's up with the hand?"

"Someone needed to learn some manners when it comes to women. No biggie."

I frowned, but was certain I wouldn't get anything more from him. The music from the gym was floating through the corridor and now and then there were cheers of excitement. Edward tilted his head towards the noise.

"You're missing out on your Prom."

"Not really," I shrugged. "I was never one of those girls anyway."

"Those girls suck, Bella. You'll always be an angel, no matter what anyone does to you."

My bottom lip began to quiver from his words. I swallowed, trying to focus on anything but what he'd said.

"Let's go and clean your hand before you get kicked out. You shouldn't be here," I reluctantly pointed out.

Edward stepped closer, towering over me and making his hair fall into his eyes. It gave him an intense bad boy image; it also set my skin alight. My breathing hitched when he crooned his next words.

"Well, if I'm about to get escorted from the building I'm going to do what I came here for...I'm going to dance with you at your Prom, Bella."

I gulped, as he pulled me close. His hands gripped my hips forcefully, and he rested his chin on top of my head. I had no choice but to lean into him. His manly scent filled my lungs, making my body respond instantly. I was about to tell him the music had stopped when Green Day flooded the dark hallway.

Another turning point, a fork stuck in the road
Time grabs you by the wrist, directs you where to go
So make the best of this test, and don't ask why
It's not a question, but a lesson learned in time.

Edward began to sway slowly, giving me no option but to follow. I felt silly at first; what if someone saw us? However, after only a few moments my sole focus was on Edward and how wonderful it felt to be in his arms.

It's something unpredictable, but in the end it's right.
I hope you had the time of your life

Neither of us spoke. We just rocked gently to the music, completely enveloped in each other. His hand stroked absently up and down my back, and my hand fisted instinctively into his gray pea coat. I didn't want him to leave.

I wasn't stupid. I knew this was nothing more than a happy haven in a desert of hurt, but I was pleased to have this.

Even if it only lasted three minutes.

It would be a memory that would stay with me forever.

"Angel, did you hear me?"

I snapped back to the present, my eyes blinking furiously.

"Sorry, I was miles away," I mumbled.

"So I see. You were humming..." he added, letting the sentence hang.

I wasn't about to tell him what I was remembering, especially not right now, when I had a feeling the subject of sex was about to be raised. Instead, I asked him to repeat himself. He cleared his throat and reached for my hand again. I didn't pull away.

"I can't make myself regret what happened between us. I don't have the words to tell you what it meant to me, but I do realize we only made our fucked up friendship worse. There's only so much willpower one person has, you know?"

"No," I replied, shaking my head. "Why would you need willpower? Edward, you confuse me. Up until yesterday I knew very little about your life. You hid it all from me!"

"I thought- and still do, that you were better off not knowing. You didn't need-"

"The darkness," I interjected in a bored tone. "Edward, get over yourself. You have no right to decide what was best for me. As a friend, I deserved to know. How the hell was I supposed to help you if I never understood it all?"

"You helped. You always helped," he sighed, his hand squeezing mine a little tighter.

"How?"

I sounded harsh, even to my own ears, but there came a time when the band aid needed ripping off. This was that time. It would hurt, probably lacerate my already scarred heart, but I didn't see another way. I understood without question, that if we were to go forward and still have a relationship we needed to do something we never had before.

We needed to be honest.

"At the very worst times in my life you have been there. Every. Single. One. I could list them, and even tell you what we did at that point. You were the only one, Bella. Nobody else has even come close to you, and even though you didn't understand it all, there is no one I trust more than you."

I gulped at the complete honesty in his words. He said them with such conviction, that I couldn't question them. He meant every word.

"Are you going to tell me everything now?" I muttered.

"Do you want me to be honest?" he shot back.

I ground my teeth. Wasn't that what we were talking about? Was he going back on this already?

"Hey!" he moaned, holding his hands up in surrender. "I was only asking. We need to start again, angel. So the way I see it, is it's going to have to be a little at a time."

"Edward-"

"No, hear me out." He inhaled deeply. "How long have we been doing this? Just how many years have we played this fucked up game?"

"Too long," I groaned, trying not to focus on the way his thumb caressed my knuckles.

"Years, Bella. So we can't change this overnight. If we could, I promise you I would, and we'd be very different."

"So tell me. What do we do?"

"We go back to the start. I know that sounds stupid, but I can't lose you. So it's our only option. We have to start to talk to each other. It'll be harder for me than you, I admit that, but I'm going to do it. If this is the only way to keep you in my life then I'll do it," he responded fiercely.

"What if we were never meant to be friends?" I whispered, hating myself for even verbalizing it. "What if we just tortured ourselves for years and should've called time a long time ago? What do we do then?"

A solitary tear trickled down my cheek, and I couldn't stop the sob that bubbled from my lips. Edward instantly stood up, pushing the chair back with such force that it landed on its back with a loud bang. His arms folded around me, holding me in the cocoon of his body. He only made me sob more when he kissed my tear away.

"Shush, angel. We can do this-"

"What if we can't?" I wept. "Edward, think about it. We're so fucked up. What if it's not possible to fix? Are we just too broken?"

"I refuse to believe that. How could something that broken make something so perfect?"

"Huh?" I responded, gripping his bicep tightly.

"Last night, Bella," he croaked.

"Oh, please don't...I can't deal with that right now. This is hurting too much, Edward."

He stroked my hair, whispering nonsensical words into my ear, while I cried into his chest. I could vaguely hear a waitress asking Edward if I was OK, and was surprised when he calmly replied that his *girlfriend* was fine. I didn't have the energy to protest, so when he stood us up, and began walking towards the door I went with him willingly.

"Where's your truck, angel?"

I pointed, not protesting when he led the way, nor when he started to drive. I curled into a ball, hiding from the pain of what I knew was about to happen. We said nothing as we drove home, and once again, I let Edward lead me. I felt numb. I fumbled with my keys, so much so that Edward had to take them off me to open the front door.

After that the next thirty minutes became a blur. Edward did exactly as he'd vowed.

He packed the few items he had into his bag and left.

Only this time he'd actually said goodbye, and left his cellphone number on the coffee table. It was only hours later, when I'd stopped crying, that I remembered his lingering kiss on my lips...and his declaration that he would fix us.

I am lost, I'm no guide, but I'm by your side

I am right by your side.

Young lover I stand

It was their idea, I proved to be a man

Take my fucking hand

It was their idea, I proved to be a man

Will myself to find a home, a home within myself

We will find a way, We will find our place

Drop the leash, Drop the leash...

Leash ~ Pearl Jam

End Notes:
The prom song was Green Day~ Good Riddance (time of your life)

I'm sorry to kill you all with the angst... but these guys can't be healed by sex alone.

MUAH!

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 11: And All That Could Have Been by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Huge thanks to my beta, Maylin & pre reader Elusivekoolaid.

Sloppy kisses to Magan Bagan. The best Twi VB ever!

Oh...what's this another Epov?

SM owns all things Twilight.

EPOV

I stared at the glass and empty bottle of bourbon sitting on the floor in front of me, wondering whether it was physically possible to drink myself into oblivion.

I was certainly going to try.

I'd been sitting in this very spot for almost four hours. One leg had gone numb from where it rested turned underneath the other, and the longer I'd stayed here the further down the wall I'd slipped.

I tried to drink the memories away: the memories of Bella writhing beneath me. They were torturing me, refusing to leave and remaining on constant replay in my head.

I'd left her crying on the couch three days ago. Three days with no contact, but I'd broken down this morning and called her.

I needed to hear her voice.

She'd been civil, but cold and it had cut me more than anything that had been done to me before.

More than my mother's desertion.

More than my father's fists.

I knew exactly why.

Bella was the only person in the whole of my existence that had ever meant anything to me. So her apparent disinterest hurt. Deep down I knew she was fighting this as much as I was, but it didn't make it any easier to accept. And being here, in this house alone, was only highlighting that very point.

I had to make this right by her, because she deserved more than me. I just knew I could never let her go. She was a part of me and to never have that again would kill me. Which left me with one hell of a decision to make. Neither Bella nor I could continue this cycle; there had to be a

change, and that was why I'd been sitting here so long. I was desperately trying to work out how we could do this; how we could remain in each others lives and for it not to poison us. However, my brain was fixated on how she'd felt in my arms. The texture of her skin was imprinted on my fingertips, and the more I thought about that night the more they ached to touch her again. I was fighting a losing battle, hopelessly trying to draw a line under our old relationship and mark the start of a new one.

I clutched the only photograph I had of us in my shaking hand. It was creased and torn, but it was priceless to me. I carried it with me wherever I went, and that was never usually far. I travelled with work- mostly construction, whenever I needed the extra cash to pay for my father's care. The house would have paid for it, but it couldn't be sold because my mother still owned half.

I drained the glass and reached for the second bottle. My vision was blurry, but I didn't need my eyes to see my angel.

"Edward..."she panted.

My lips skimmed her throat, as she arched closer towards me. I kept going, placing tender pecks along the way until I reached her breast. My angel gasped in desire, transfixing me with her little moans. I watched her chest rise and fall rapidly, as I circled her nipple with my index finger. I'd never taken the time to truly explore a woman's body before. I was only ever interested in the quick fulfilment; the sharp brain numbing intensity, but I wanted to know my angel in every single way. If this was all we'd ever have together then I would make it mind blowing.

I blinked rapidly, snarling and slamming my head back against the wall. The memories wouldn't go, though. The more I drank, the more intense they became. I could see with perfect clarity the way her body had undulated against mine - Christ, I could almost feel it! I should have stopped it, but I was a selfish bastard and I'd wanted her so badly there was no going back.

I'd taken what was mine.

"Oh, angel," I breathed, as I entered her.

Her warm brown eyes were locked onto mine, conveying to me her complete trust and devotion. Her legs wrapped around my hips, pulling me closer and making me hiss.

Looking at her, filling her, I knew this was where I was meant to be. We were supposed to be complete, but too many things had been broken along the way and now it was too splintered to repair with sex.

I gripped my chest at that thought. It ached; a constant stabbing sensation that never eased. I closed my eyes, gritting my teeth and trying to get a grip. I wanted to talk to her; I *needed* to hear her voice, so I fumbled around the floor trying to find my cell. Instead I lost my balance, and in my drunken stupor fell across the floor, knocking the bourbon across the carpet.

"FUCK!" I yelled, but remained sprawled across the floor.

I watched it as it seeped into the brown fibres of the carpet, darkening it with its moisture. My limbs felt like lead as the alcohol took control of my body. I could see my cell near the door, but

the best I could manage was to flop onto my back. I tried to focus on the ceiling, but my vision was blurring.

I was a complete fuck up.

Bella should have severed all ties years ago. She deserved so much better than me.

I hoped- prayed even, that she would leave Forks when she went to college, but her Mom got sick. Bella stayed and cared for Renee, which was more than she merited. My angel deserved so much more than a job at the local grocery store, and the worry of how to pay the next bill. I'd heard she was still studying but it was via a correspondence course.

It wasn't what should have been. She was better than that.

I'd kept our contact minimal after the prom, and she seemed happy to accept that, though whenever I needed the comfort I'd play the Green Day song that we'd danced to.

It had been a night I'd never forget.

I'd randomly call her house just to hear her say hello. I was fairly certain she knew it was me, because she'd stay on the line and just breathe. It soothed me like nothing else ever could.

She was my constant.

I was fairly certain she wasn't working today, but when I entered the store she was sitting behind the cash register, staring out of the window and twisting her hair. She looked thoroughly bored.

I thought about turning around and coming back later, but I had to work myself in a couple of hours and we needed food. So with a huge sigh, I collected a cart and pushed it up the first aisle. I hurriedly tossed boxes and packets into the cart, trying not to think of Bella sitting only meters away from me.

I knew the hours she worked, and not because she'd told me. I was always looking out for her, even when she thought I'd deserted her. I owed it to her to make sure she was safe, but the one thing I couldn't make her was happy.

That was beyond my control.

I'd seen her around the town with the same guy over the last month. She smiled when she was with him, but it never quite reached her eyes. I knew what Bella's eyes really looked like when she was happy.

They'd been holding hands when they'd left the movie theatre last week, though Bella wasn't standing too close to him. I'd stood outside of the bar and just watched them. I wasn't in a rush to get home; my father wasn't in a good mood.

He was never in a good mood.

Wincing, I added milk to the shopping, and then pushed it up to Bella's register. I gave a shy smile and pushed my fingers through my hair.

"Hey," I sighed.

Bella smiled and began to scan the goods, as I loaded them onto the conveyor belt.

"Haven't seen you around for a while."

"Hmm, yeah...working," I stammered, unsure what I should say.

"Yeah, Jake told me you were working at the old Forge place."

I frowned as she ran the bread through.

"Jake?"

Her cheeks flushed pink and she averted her eyes from mine.

"Um, yeah, Jake and I have been hanging out a bit. He's nice to me, Edward," she whispered.

Those last five words tore at my heart, shredding it as I tried to absorb them. He was nice to her, whereas all I'd done was cause her problems and upset. I was too much like my father, always leaving a path of broken souls in my wake. That was why I needed to stay away from her.

That was why she was probably better off with Jake.

"Just be careful, angel," I stated before I could stop myself.

Her eyes fluttered closed for a second, as if revelling in the endearment, but she just as quickly composed herself.

"I will be. I've learned my lesson, Edward. Jake and I haven't even kissed yet, ok? You don't have to worry about me. I'm a big girl now."

"I do worry...I always will."

She muttered something that I didn't quite catch, so I tilted my head towards her, but she shook her head and wafted her hand as if it was nothing. I didn't believe her.

We stared at each other, the silence awkward, until she finished ringing up my groceries.

"That's thirty-one ninety-five, Edward."

I pulled my wallet from my jeans and handed her a bunch of notes, cringing at the price.

"How's everything for you?" she questioned sweetly, handing me my receipt.

"Same as always. Some things never change, angel."

"Look, I'm due a break in twenty minutes, do you have time for a chat? Maybe a coffee across the street?"

I shook my head, knowing it would upset her, but I was determined to let her have a life and not have me dragging her down. I was determined to stay away.

"Sorry, Bella, I have to get these to my father, and then I have work myself."

She pursed her lips, casting her gaze downward and sighing loudly.

"I understand. I just...I miss you, is that so wrong?"

"Yes!" I snapped. "It's very wrong. You don't need me. I only pull you further into my crap. Go live, baby. Go be happy."

I turned, unable to deal with the hurt that was currently playing across her face, but as I started to walk away she spoke.

"Edward? Can I just ask one thing?"

I stopped, but didn't face her and waited. When she spoke it was quiet and more of a statement than a question.

"Please don't ever stop calling me."

I wanted to scream at her. Didn't she see what I was trying to do for her? Instead I put one heavy foot in front of the other and walked from the store.

My fingers were vibrating and apparently making an odd noise. My head throbbed as I tried to open my eyes, but everything was too bright. However, whenever they were closed all I could see was Bella. Every muscle in my body ached, and protested when I rolled over. It was only at that point that I realized I'd been asleep on the floor. My face was wet from where the bourbon had spilled across the carpet, and the skin itched in places where it had begun to dry.

I turned trying to find my watch, but the incessant buzzing was annoying the shit out of me. I growled, sitting up and clenching my fist, only to find the buzzing was coming from my cell and it was now in my hand. I squinted at the screen as it continued to flash at me. Unable to take the irritating vibrations any longer, I lifted it to my ear and snarled into it.

"What?"

"Hello to you too, dear brother."

I scrubbed my face, her voice grating on my nerves.

"What, Rose?"

"We need you at the bar. Just a gentle reminder," she stated.

"Fuck! Does it have to be tonight?"

"What do you mean *tonight*? It's four-thirty, Edward. You have an hour and a half to get here, OK?"

Who the fuck did she think she was? Why couldn't everyone just leave me to wallow?

"Fuck off, Rose! I'll be there."

I tossed the phone across the room, it should have been forcefully, but instead it was more of a flop than a throw. I pulled at my hair, hoping the pain would startle me into life. Something needed to, but the only time I'd felt alive was when I'd been buried inside of her.

I cringed at the crudity of my own thoughts, because being with Bella had been indescribable. I refused to cheapen it.

Glancing around at the mess I was currently existing in, I felt nauseous, and it wasn't down to the hangover.

Bella had been right: changes needed to happen.

But where did I start?

/ CS

"Look, buddy, fuck off or we call the cops. You ain't got no I.D, then you're not coming in." Emmett shouted, pushing a skinny teenager onto the street.

I blocked the door, crossing my arms across my chest and glaring at the kid. He got the message and quickly ran off, leaving us alone outside the bar.

"You feelin' any better?" he asked, nudging my shoulder with his.

"Don't, Emmett. You're not really bothered, and you're only asking so you can tell the princess."

"Nah, man, not at all. You worry me, so I'm asking for me, not Rosie."

I sighed, straightening my *New Moon* T-shirt and staring out onto the street.

"I went to see him yesterday. He didn't have a fucking clue who I was, as usual. Drank myself into oblivion last night to try and forget. I'll be fine. Always am."

"Not the only thing you're trying to forget, right?"

I fucking hated how perceptive he was.

"I'm not talking about it. I can't," I stated abruptly.

He turned to face me, stepping away from the door as a couple exited. I stared as jealousy consumed me, the way they held each other and gave each other small kisses of affection.

"Bella? You and her..."

"Don't."

"You can't carry on holding everything in-"

I snorted loudly, interrupting him. "And I'm supposed to purge my soul to you?"

"Fuck no!" he gasped. "I mean, you could if you really wanted to, but I think your little fairy would appreciate it much more, you feel me?"

"I told you to drop it, for fucks sake! I'm only here because your wife likes blackmail. I'm certainly not here to make friends with you."

"No, you don't need friends, do ya?" he replied harshly.

"What the fuck is that supposed to mean?"

I stepped closer to him, showing I wasn't intimidated by his size. I was here as security and nothing more, so he could lay off the Dr. Phil shit.

"Back it up," he warned, his dark eyes glaring fiercely.

"I will if you drop the questions."

It was a strange kind of standoff, because even though we were both defensive there didn't seem to be that much aggression involved. We continued to glower for a heartbeat or two, before I stepped backwards.

"Look, man, I'm not getting in your face just to annoy you. I really am worried. You walk around all pissed off and looking like you're about to break at any minute. All I'm saying is Bella's there and she wants to help; from what I see always has."

"You don't know anything about her."

"At the risk of you punching me, I'm actually gonna say I don't think you know anything about her. You guys are in a real mess and to be honest, you need your heads cracking together."

"Fuck-"

"Yeah, I get it," he interrupted. "Gotta go back inside any how...and you have a visitor."

He nodded towards the end of the street, making me turn to see who it was. I gulped as my eyes took in the figure before me.

Bella.

My Angel.

She was clinging onto a blond guy and giggling loudly. That alone was enough to get my blood boiling, but when she stepped under the street light and I saw what she was wearing I couldn't be contained. I couldn't describe it as anything more than small scraps of fabric; it was totally unlike anything she usually wore.

"What the fuck is going on?" I snarled, striding forward and trying to grasp her arm.

Her eyes went wide as she snatched it away, only moving her closer to the blond guy.

"Hi, Edwar-"

"You need to get out of my sight," I warned, pointing to her friend, but never taking my eyes from Bella's. "What the hell do you think you're wearing?"

"Clothes, Edward," she pointed out petulantly.

"Do you know the kinds of things men will be thinking when they look at you?"

"That has nothing to do with you! You walked out on me. You left, and not for the first time!"

I took one step closer, close enough that she had to tilt her head upwards to meet my gaze. The blond, strangely took one step back, as if allowing us to do this. I found this a little odd, because no guy would do that for a girl he was interested in.

"You think that because I left I don't think about you? Care about you?"

My voice was gruff, her words had been like a bucket of cold water. Did she honestly think that each time I left I did it with ease, and that I was able to forget about her?

I turned to face the guy, and uttered bluntly, "Go."

"Bella, I'll be inside, OK?"

Bella nodded, as he left, leaving us out on the dark street alone.

I opened my mouth, ready to continue when she snapped.

"I don't know what to think when you leave! You go, and I have no clue where you go to or what you're doing! YOU TELL ME NOTHING!"

"It's for the best."

She rolled her eyes and started to walk away, spitting over her shoulder, "Well so's this!"

I couldn't let her leave. This was getting out of hand, snowballing into hate and only I could stop it.

I sped after her, pulling at her arm and making her face me. She hissed and punched at my chest.

"You can't keep doing this to me! Sometimes I want to hate you so bad, Edward!"

She began to sob, her punches becoming weaker.

"But no matter how hard I try, I can't. I can't hate you, even when you mess with my head and play with my heart."

Her tears were mixing with her mascara, leaving black trails down her cheeks. Just looking at her was breaking my heart in two. I didn't stop her assault on me, because I deserved every last punch and more. Bella needed to get this out of her system.

"Sometimes this hurts too much, Edward. Do you see that? I'm breaking..."

"Fuck!" I yelled, kicking at the dirt with my boot.

I tried to pull her against me, but she fought, pushing at me as hard as she could. I remained firm, not allowing her escape, and eventually she loosened and rested against my chest. She whimpered into my T-shirt, fisting the fabric in her hands.

"I try to do this without you. I try to have a life, but I...I c-can't."

Her knees buckled, and cursing I picked her up. She wrapped her arms around my neck, and cried against my throat. Guilt sat like a huge black stain in my guts.

This was all my fault.

I took her into the bar, noting the blond guy was now talking to Alice. I hadn't even seen her enter the bar. Rose frowned at me in confusion, as Emmett came closer.

"What happened? Is that...Bella?"

I nodded.

"Can we go upstairs?"

"Sure, man. I can watch the door. Just be quiet, Heidi is sleeping."

Again, I gave a short nod and carried my angel up the stairs, and into the living room. I closed the door with my foot and sat down on the leather couch, resting Bella on my lap.

I stroked her hair until the tears subsided and her breathing calmed. Each and every sob had lacerated my heart further. I was shocked my T-shirt wasn't dripping with blood instead of tears.

When she was soothed I tilted her head upwards, swiping the black makeup away with my thumbs.

"Bella, baby, I'm so sorry we got to this. I'll do anything to make this right," I croaked out. "I can't let this go on..."

"Edward...kiss me," she whispered. "Make it go away. Kiss me, please?"

*Please
Take this
And run far away
Far away from me
I am
Tainted
The two of us
Were never meant to be
All these
Pieces
And promises and left behinds
If only I could see
In my
Nothing
You meant everything
Everything to me
Gone fading everything
And all that could have been*

Nine Inch Nails ~ And All That Could Have Been

End Notes:
Oh, Bella! Muah xx

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 12: Your Decision by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Huge kisses and thanks to my beta Maylin & my pre reader Elusivekoolaid.

This chapter my surprise you...

HUGE thanks to Magan Bagan. The best Twi VB Ever, and super speed to match!

SM owns all things Twilight.

"Edward...kiss me." I whispered. "Make it go away. Kiss me, please?"

BPOV

I couldn't believe I'd begged him. I was so pathetic. I'd made the choice to come out with Jasper and Alice tonight intending to actually have some fun. I didn't know Edward would be working, and now I'd made a fool of myself. I never dressed like this, and I'd regretted it the moment his fiery gaze locked with mine. He must have thought I was teasing him, but that couldn't have been further from the truth.

"I can't kiss you, angel." Edward moaned, making sure all traces of my tears were gone.

I sat on his lap, staring into his eyes. They reflected my own hurt. Why did we continue to do this?

I gulped and nodded, thoroughly ashamed with my reactions to him.

"You know we can't go backward, and kissing you would be doing that. I want to, fuck, I want to, but we made a decision, Bella. One of us has to stop this."

I felt his body quake underneath me as he said the words. I was so tired of fighting this. I just didn't know how to sever the tie I had to him.

Did I even want to?

I fell against his chest, resting my face in the crook of his neck and inhaling his scent. My heartbeat began to slow, my pulse became less erratic and I exhaled audibly.

"I mean it, angel...I want to. That night...I...don't have the right words."

I bunched the fabric of his *New Moon* t-shirt in my hands, whether trying to push him away or pull him closer I didn't really know, but then that summed up our relationship perfectly. Neither one of us had the slightest idea where to go from here. We'd talked about how to change things and how to move forward, but did we truly mean it? Or were we meant to replay this cycle over until one of us broke forever?

"I feel so lost, Edward," I whispered.

"Then you need to find your way. I made a decision today, one that I should have made years ago, and I think you need to stop looking out for me. I can see it's hurting you."

"What decision?"

"I'm going to find my mom, Bella. I think that's what I need to do to be able to get a grip. I need some answers, and *he's* not about to give them to me. He doesn't even know who I am most of the time," he stated with conviction.

I lifted my head, taking in his expression. He looked relieved, as if just knowing what he was about to do helped him. I couldn't comprehend that kind of decision. Why would he want to search for a woman that had rejected him when he needed her most?

"Why would you want to do that?" I asked quietly.

His hand stroked my bicep tenderly, before skimming down to my wrist. He pushed his fingers into my fist and waited while I let go of his t-shirt. We linked our fingers and he spoke slowly, looking at our joined hands the whole time.

"I have to. I know it sounds masochistic, but I want to know why she abandoned me." He swallowed and took a moment before he continued. "Me and you? We're messed up, and I relied on you for so much. I've hurt you when all I wanted to do was make you smile. It's because I'm fucked up. That's why I fucked you up. It hurts to stay away, but then when I'm here I see what it does to you and that hurts just as much."

He danced his fingers against mine, as I pulled back a little from his chest. I looked up at him, startled by his declarations.

"You only see this now? I don't know what to say. I'm confused, Edward."

"I've seen it for some time. You asked where I'd been for the last six months, well it was nowhere of any importance, but that was the longest I could physically stay away from you. You're all I have in this world."

His voice broke on the last word, showing me more emotion than I'd ever seen from him before. Edward usually got angry, not emotional. I fought with myself not to kiss him, not to try to fix a broken man, but I lost. My lips met his before I could scream at myself to stop. I felt his fingers tighten around mine, as he opened his mouth to kiss me back. I shuffled in his lap, straddling his hips and nestling myself as close as I could. My hands shot to the back of his head and burrowed into his hair. He growled, sliding his tongue against mine and smoothing back the hair from my face with his free hand. I took whatever he gave and returned it in spades. I poured what I had into the kiss, wanting him to know that even if I was the only person he'd ever had that I could be enough.

I could be his.

We just needed to find a way. *Our* way.

Edward sighed when I angled my head and deepened the kiss. He gripped his hand around mine as if using it as his anchor. I tried to push him back onto the couch, but he resisted. I didn't give up though, I wanted him. I wanted to feel whole again.

"Edward, is she-*Shit!*"

He ripped his lips from mine as if they were molten, and glared at the owner of the voice. Rose stood in the doorway, hands on hips and pouting in annoyance.

"I didn't let you bring her up here so that you guys could make out! What are you? Fourteen?" she demanded.

"Rose, I-"

"It's my fault," I interjected. "I'm the one who kissed him. It just happened, Rose, I swear."

She nodded, tucking a strand of her blond hair behind her ear, and flicked her head towards the stairs.

"We need you downstairs, Edward. Are you OK now, Bella?"

"Yes. I'll be fine."

I climbed off Edward, trying to tug my skirt down without losing all my modesty. Edward snorted as he stood, wrapping his arm around my waist and pulling me against him. It felt nice.

It felt real.

It just wasn't right...and I couldn't deny it, even though I tried.

"We'll be right down. Can you just leave us alone for five minutes, please?"

Rose rolled her eyes, but turned and left, closing the door as she yelled, "Five minutes!"

I looked down, straightening my clothes and noticing my hands were shaking. Edward saw it, too. He took my hand in his and smiled at me.

"Will you stay? We can talk about it after I finish. I could walk you home," he grinned.

"Like old times?"

"Nope," he stated, shaking his head. "New times. New start, remember?"

"I remember." I led him towards the door. "I'll wait, Edward, if we can truly talk."

I moved in front of him, ready to descend the stairs, when he rested his chin on my shoulder and spoke into my ear.

"I promise, and I'm sorry for going off on you out there. I lost it. I shouldn't have."

His words floated over me, making my upset dissipate.

"I forgive you, but I want feeding on the way home, ok?" I asked playfully.

Edward chuckled as we walked into the bar. Alice and Jasper were sitting on high stools near the counter, and gawked when they saw us enter. Alice raised her brow in question, but I just shrugged and made my way over. Edward kissed my forehead, whispering that he would see me soon. I closed my eyes, enjoying the moment. He seemed to have gotten over tactility issues with me. The hugging and the kissing made me happy.

I felt wanted.

I felt loved.

"Are you coming or not?" Edward asked impatiently, holding out his hand to me.

I stood at the front door in my pajamas frowning. It was eight-thirty on a Saturday morning, and Edward was asking me to come outside with him. He'd found something he wanted to share.

It was only a week after I'd seen him at the store, but I hadn't heard a thing from him since. Well, except for the usual phone calls.

"Depends on where you're taking me," I teased.

He sighed heavily and shuffled his feet nervously.

"I've got the day off, and I...I just don't want to stay home, OK?"

I nodded and opened the door, ushering him inside, but he shook his in denial.

"I'll wait in the car."

"But there's no one else here. You can sit on the couch-"

"It's fine. I'll wait," he interrupted sternly and walked back towards his car.

I didn't have a clue where we were going, so I wasn't sure what to wear. I opted for jeans and a hoodie, based solely on Edward's attire. I quickly brushed my hair, pulling it into a messy knot at the back of my head. All the while wondering what had brought this on. Why did he need me today? The most telling aspect was that I wasn't even asking him: he needed me and I was there. I didn't even ask him as he drove me to his secret location. I trusted him, and I was hoping he'd volunteer the information.

He didn't.

I was stunned when he put our prom song on, and all I could do was stare at him, as he focused on the road ahead. We'd been on the road for fifteen minutes before he cleared his throat and spoke.

"Hmm, so you and Jake?"

"What?" I asked sharply, turning my head so fast it made me dizzy.

He'd gone from silence to asking about Jake? I opened my mouth, closing it almost immediately. What could I tell him about Jake that I hadn't already?

"He's a good friend. Like you."

Edward gave a low chuckle and shook his head a little. His mouth quirked into a small smirk.

"What?" I repeated.

"Nothing, forget I mentioned anything."

He turned off the road, onto a small gravel path. The woodland was dense, and all I could see was green.

"Where are you taking me?" I finally asked.

"Why? Don't you trust me?" he retorted, pulling over.

I rolled my eyes at him and climbed out, looking around the forest.

"Come on," he shouted, already half way down the path.

"But I don't know where you're taking me."

He turned to look at me, but continued to walk backwards.

"Just follow the bad guy, OK?"

I blinked, puzzled at the description he gave himself, but began to follow, slinging my bag over my shoulder. He walked with determination; he knew exactly where he was heading. I was still bewildered by his sudden appearance and his impatience to show me whatever he'd found.

"Edward," I moaned. "There's nothing down here! Look, its all trees."

He pushed his hand into the branches, completely ignoring me, and parted them. He ushered me through the curtain of leaves, waiting for me to see what lay before me. I gasped as my eyes took in the meadow of bright flowers. It was completely encompassed by the forest, and I could do nothing but gawk at it.

"Amazing, isn't it?"

"When did you...? How...?" I stammered.

"I needed to get out of the house yesterday, so came here to hike. I found this and just had to show you."

"It's so beautiful."

I stood in the center, spinning around slowly to take it all in. Edward was standing next to me, watching my reaction to his treasure. He lowered himself onto the grass and beckoned me down.

We sat in silence, both content in each others company. Our legs were out in front of us, our arms behind bracing our bodies, but our fingers touched.

Just a little.

I lifted my face to the sun, feeling its rays tickle my skin when I closed my eyes. When I rested back onto the grass, Edward followed me. We looked at the sky and held hands.

It was me that broke the silence; me that spoke first.

"I saw the cops at your house the other night."

"Yeah," he groaned, holding our joined hands up and turning them in the sunlight. "I hate dealing with them."

"Why did you have to?" I whispered.

"Doesn't matter, angel."

"It does. Please tell me."

He turned onto his side, never letting go of my hand. He looked so sad. I wanted to help, but he never let me in, always telling me I was doing enough by just being with him. I never believed that, but had little choice but to do as he asked. I didn't want to add to his upset. It took everything I had not to reach out and smooth the frown from his forehead.

"Things got out of hand at home, that's all. It's nothing. I'm sorry if they disturbed you."

His tone was extremely abrupt, and I knew instantly to stop. His guard was up and if I pushed he'd shut down and take me home. That wouldn't help either of us right now.

"It didn't disturb me," I exhaled. "I went out on a date with Jake last night. He kissed me."

I thought changing the subject would help, but it only seemed to irritate him more.

"Don't, angel. I can't hear that."

"Edward, what am I supposed to do. You bring me here, but don't want me to say anything to you."

He brought our joined hands up to my face, and skimmed my cheek with the back of his hand.

"Just stay here with me and enjoy the meadow."

It wasn't the only time I visited the meadow, but it was the only time I was there with Edward.

A month after that day he left, breaking my heart for the very first time.

*I watched him as he said goodbye to the last of the customers. The women were batting their eyelashes and touching him in the vain hope he'd go home with them. I couldn't stop myself from thinking *mine*. I knew it was wrong, because he wasn't, not really, but my heart wouldn't have it any other way.*

Alice and Jasper were still on their stools, drinking and randomly groping one another. It was sickeningly sweet, but still made me jealous. I wanted what they had. They were so comfortable around each other, and slotted together perfectly. They'd never had to fight for something as basic as friendship.

"Doesn't Bella look hot, Edward?" Alice shouted drunkenly.

Edward frowned, locking the door and scratching his head.

"Alice, please?" I begged, hoping it didn't all start again.

I wanted one night of normalcy.

"No, Bella! You look sexy and Edward needs to acknowledge that."

Jasper held her as she tried to get off the stool. She stumbled, but managed to wobble across the floor towards Edward. Rose watched cautiously, but Emmett seemed to understand what was about to unfold and whooped as he bounced towards the jukebox.

"What're we having, ladies?"

"Em..." Rose whined. "Heidi's in bed and I'm tired."

"One song, Rosie. Just the one, and then I'll be all over your ass."

Everyone laughed, and I swallowed as my throat constricted with emotion. Why couldn't it be like this all the time? We were all so very different and yet, right now, we were grinning and getting along just fine. Edward glanced at me, smiling and tilting his head towards the door in a silent gesture to leave.

"Oh no, you don't!" Alice slurred. "Sssshe deserves a dance."

He held his hands up in surrender, his green eyes glinting with humor.

"I don't dance," he stated abruptly.

"Neither does she."

Alice pointed behind her towards me, but lost her balance and began to fall over. Luckily Emmett caught her and helped her back towards her husband as the music started.

"Bruce Springsteen?" Jasper questioned towards Emmett, as he helped Alice back onto the stool.

She flopped across the bar, and I was in no doubt that she would be asleep within seconds. She was mumbling and grunting, but none of it made any sense. Rose had rounded the bar and had begun to dance with Emmett, as *Born to Run* filled the room. Jasper snorted and raised a single brow towards Edward, and my eyes went wide as he walked slowly towards me, holding out his hand. It took my breath away, reminding me so much of my prom. Tears stung as they threatened to spill. Tonight was what I needed, and it wasn't only the connection to Edward. It was the feeling of friendship.

"Edward, you don't have to," I sighed, as he pulled me closer.

He kept hold of my hand and shrugged.

"Come on. New memories?"

With those words I knew he was trying to make us better, and I couldn't stop the blossoming thought that this was our time. This was when we were finally going to mend the tatters of a twisted past and move forward.

I could hear Rose and Emmett laughing, but never took my eyes from Edward. His mouth began to move, soundlessly singing the words, as he started to dance to the music. I couldn't stop a loud giggle bursting from my lips. It was so unlike him. My hips moved of their own volition. I was clunky and awkward, we both were, but before I knew it we were screaming along to the music with Emmett, Rose and Jasper. Alice had long since passed out. He twirled me under his arm, making me grin foolishly at him, as he bellored the song at me.

"...We'll walk in the sun, but till then tramps like us, baby we were born to run!"

I collapsed against his chest, feeling it shudder as he chuckled and wrapped his arms around me. We swayed slowly, his arms tightening when I laid my cheek over his heart. It thumped steadily, soothing me.

"Ok, guys! My Rosie wants me, and I promised one song, so get the fuck out!" Emmett yelled.

"Do you want to share a cab with me and Alice?"

"I'm walking her home." Edward stated to Jasper.

He wasn't abrupt but there was no room for negotiation. Jasper accepted it with a nod and dialed the number on his cell. Edward steered me towards the door, waving his hand in goodbye. I went with him, letting him walk me home in the solace of his arms. He protected me from the harsh wind as we strolled down the dark street.

"When are you going to start?" I asked into his now cool t-shirt.

"Sorry?"

"Your mom? When are you going to start looking for her? *Where* are you going start?"

I felt him shrug and the low rumble of his response. It thundered through me, making me hypersensitive to every part of us that connected.

"I have a few ideas. There were boxes in the loft of the house. A few letters gave me a place to start, and to be honest, I'm going to start as soon as I can."

"C-could I help?" I asked cautiously.

Edward gave me a quick squeeze and hummed.

"I think I'd like that, but we need to be careful, angel."

"I just want to be your friend."

He reached down and raised my chin with a solitary finger.

"I know, and I promised to fix us, but we have to do it differently this time."

He was right, so I nodded gently in acceptance and let the subject lie. We remained silent as we rounded the corner towards my apartment. I began to feel increasingly anxious when we stood outside, his hands holding mine.

"The night turned out a little differently than you expected, huh?"

I grinned.

"You could say that, though this was better."

"Really?" he responded in surprise.

"Yes. You should be going, especially if you have a job to do tomorrow."

Edward seemed to hesitate, before leaning down and kissing my forehead. It wasn't quick; his lips lingered on my skin for longer than they should have, and all I could do was close my eyes and revel in our one precious moment.

These small pieces of time were all I had now.

And they would have to be enough.

*No one plans to take the path that brings you lower
And here you stand before us all and say it's over
It's over*

...

*It might seem an afterthought
Yes it hurts to know you're bought*

...

*It's your decision
It's your decision*

Your Decision - Alice in Chains

End Notes:
See it's not all angst :D AND NO CLIFFIE! Aren't I nice? Muah!

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 13: Subconscious by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hello.

HUGE thanks to my beta Maylin & pre reader Elusivekoolaid... I adore you both more than words (there's a song there somewhere.)

Sloppy kisses to the best Twi VB ever, Magan Bagan.

Tissue warning...js

SM owns all things Twilight. The rest is mine.

BPOV

Could you change your life in four short weeks?

I would never have believed it, and yet here we were, having lunch together and talking as if the last twelve years had never happened. Our hands stretched across the table; our fingers interlinked.

There had been a shift within Edward. It was as if the decision to find his mom had been what he needed, and now it was out in the open the poison was set free. However, I knew him, so I saw the darkness under neath his eyes. I saw each time he rubbed his chest when we laughed, and the way he tried to keep the conversation light. It confused me, but I didn't want to tip the scales, unbalancing this new friendship we had. I'd been to the bar on a couple of occasions while he worked, but didn't want to be there all the time. We tried to keep our meeting to lunch dates, and in a public place.

There could be no temptation.

I'd noticed his relationship with Emmett was growing, and when I watched the two of them together I couldn't help but smile. He'd always appear so carefree, opening his mouth to laugh and tossing his head back when Emmett said something amusing. I'd rarely seen him like that, and it hurt. I thought back to times when he'd laughed like that with me, and had come up with only a handful of occasions. I knew I should be pleased that he was finally feeling something other than guilt, but I selfishly wanted him to be like that with me.

"I have to go back to work in ten, Edward," I sighed, squeezing his hand a little.

He nodded, running the fingers of his free hand through his hair.

"You've barely eaten anything, angel."

"I'm not hungry. I've been so busy at the store this morning I don't think my body has adjusted to me slowing down."

"Where's Alice?"

I rolled my eyes playfully.

"House hunting. She and Jasper have decided the apartment above the store isn't big enough. They're talking about babies."

Edward winced as if in pain, and pushed his chair back as he stood.

"Not my idea of a happy ending," he muttered.

I let go of his hand briefly, only long enough to collect my purse and hoodie though.

"Aw, does the thought of a little Edward not warm your heart?"

I pushed my shoulder playfully against his, as he wrapped his arm around my waist.

"Not a good idea, angel. My genes aren't the reproducing kind. It'd be cruel to give this to another generation. I'm not that selfish."

I nodded, understanding what he was trying to say. The experience he'd had with his parents would certainly darken those choices. It had never been something I'd considered, maybe because I was too mixed up to deal with my own problems, let alone dealing with a child.

He led us from the coffee shop, still keeping me tucked into his side.

"Thanks for lunch," I said, looking up at him.

"My pleasure." He kissed my nose, making my heart pound. "I can't meet with you tomorrow though. I'm sorry."

I stopped walking, raising my brows at him in a silent question.

"I have an appointment. Hmm, it's about my mom," he said softly.

I flung my arms around his neck, and I smiled as he leaned down to allow the contact. I spoke against the lobe of his ear.

"Edward, that's wonderful. Where is it? *Who* is it? Do you think they know where she is?"

"Questions, questions, questions," he chuckled. "I have no idea until I get there. I'm going to see a woman who was a friend of my mom's. I kinda hope she'll know more. She certainly seemed happy I called."

His hands rested on my hips, pulling me closer, as he breathed into my hair, making it tickle my neck.

"I hope she can help, Edward."

"Hmm, so do I. Would you come to the bar tomorrow instead?" His fingers tightened. "I could walk you home."

We were in the middle of the street, with people walking by, and all I could think about was pushing my fingers underneath his hoodie and feeling the muscles flex. I could remember with perfect clarity how it had felt that night. I tried to forget, but it haunted my dreams. Sometimes it became too difficult to hold myself back.

This was one of those times.

I moved my head, bringing my mouth to his and kissed him. It wasn't deep, nor was it thorough, but I still felt the current when our lips met. Edward groaned, and backed me into the wall of, what I assumed was, the coffee shop. I'd expected him to pull away, to tell me to stop, but he tentatively dipped his tongue into my mouth and stroked it against mine. At the same time his hands tightened on my hips, and mine came into contact with warm skin. There was a collective sigh that escaped from both of us. It mingled together, sweeping around our mouths with the movement of our tongues.

I was utterly lost.

The voice in my head steadily began to get louder. It was telling me to wake up - to stop this now, but I couldn't. I knew how it felt when we spiraled out of control, and I couldn't deny myself that. Alice would've been hitting me over the head if she was here now. Especially after she saw what a wreck I'd been after my visit to the therapist.

But I couldn't bring myself to care right now.

When I was in his arms, with his lips moving gently over mine, I could forget everything and pretend we were normal. I could close my eyes and act like any other couple, but when he began to pull away, pushing at my hips I knew the moment was over. I didn't want to look at him. I just didn't want to see the regret in his eyes, so I rested my forehead on his sternum and waited.

"You know we can't keep doing that?" he rumbled.

"My head agrees with you, but my heart is shouting something else, Edward."

His fingers took hold of my chin, moving my face so I had to make eye contact.

"I know that, angel, but we've been over this. Being together now would make this fucked up thing we have even worse. We have to do it a new way."

His Adam's apple bobbed as he gulped, and then continued. "Maybe then we can find a new us."

"Do you mean that?"

He kissed my forehead, before moving his lips to the tip of my nose.

"Yes, I do. I don't want to hurt you anymore."

"Even if I'm asking you for this now?" I tested.

He gave a short nod, skimming his hand down my neck, across my shoulder and along my arm. He took my hand in his and tugged me into a walk.

"Come on, people are staring. Let's get you back to the store."

We walked hand in hand down the street, as he took me back to the store. I would have happily spent the afternoon with him, making out and just being together. However, I knew he was right.

Even though this time he'd returned it was different.

Very different.

Four weeks.

Four weeks since Edward had taken me to the meadow, and four weeks since I'd last seen him.

The morning after he'd brought me here I'd sensed something was different, but didn't really understand until a week later, and the mail had begun to pile up on the porch. I'd tried to find the meadow that day, knowing he'd left me, knowing that he'd only brought me here to say goodbye, but I hadn't managed it that time.

It had taken me until today to find it, and now I sat in the middle of the field that had once been beautiful. It wasn't any more.

It was barren.

Just like me.

I brought my knees to my chest, wrapping my arms around my legs and rocked, as I sobbed. I cried myself hoarse. There would be no way he could see what he meant to me now. He'd never know I loved him, because he'd left without a real goodbye.

I hated him.

I needed him.

I loved him.

I'd kept my hurt a secret from everyone. My mom had begun to worry about my despondency, but how could I tell her I was obsessed with a man who could never love me? My mother wasn't one to be tied down, so for me to admit this kind of need would be incredulous to her. It hurt with every breath I took, and I was consumed with thoughts of where Edward was. Was he in as much pain as I was? Did he pine for something that was unobtainable? Or had he left without a single thought about me?

I knew I couldn't carry on like this, but I didn't know who to go to for help. I felt foolish for feeling this way. We'd never even kissed, and yet it was as if he'd taken a piece of my heart - my soul, with him.

Weeping, I pulled my backpack closer and fumbled inside. I'd been to the doctors today, not really knowing what I'd expected him to do. I wanted him to ease the tension in my chest, but he'd been certain there was nothing wrong. Dr. Cullen thought I was depressed, and I needed meds to help me through. I'd been disgusted. Was I really that pathetic that I couldn't get by without medication?

I pulled the prescription from my backpack and turned the box over in my hands. I tried to focus on the writing, but tears were marring my vision.

Would these really help?

Little white pills of solace?

Dr. Cullen had told me to return in four weeks, by then the pills would have taken affect. He'd also mentioned the name of another doctor, one I could talk to about what was worrying me. I'd only sobbed more when I realized he was referring to a shrink.

I wasn't mentally disturbed.

I was in love.

Anger gnawed at my insides, as it tried to claw a way to the surface. I ripped at the cardboard, not wanting my annoyance to get a grip. I wouldn't get mad at Edward for moving away from whatever haunted him in that house. I would take the meds, and hope they filled the void until he returned.

If he ever did.

Alice had insisted on coming to *New Moon* with me. She'd promised to leave me alone once Jasper arrived, and because I couldn't think of a quick enough excuse, I had to agree. I hadn't told her about where Edward had been. It wasn't my news to tell, and Edward didn't really know Alice, so he wouldn't appreciate it.

She'd tried to talk me into wearing a very tiny dress, no more than a few scraps of fabric actually, but after the last incident I decided against it. We had a precarious balance in this relationship as it was, so I didn't need to tip it any further.

We walked to the bar, giggling and teasing each other. It felt as if so many things were slowly beginning to slot into place. I was beginning to feel happy, and my heart only swelled more when we turned the corner and I saw Edward standing outside. My face lit up; I could feel it, and Edward's mirrored mine.

I held myself back, wanting to run to him, and fling my arms around his neck. Instead, I walked up to him, placing my hand in his and squeezing gently. He leaned down and kissed my lips slowly, but didn't linger. It was all over too quickly.

"Hello, Edward." Alice muttered.

Edward didn't take his eyes from mine, as he replied.

"Alice."

"Play nice, you two."

I gestured for Alice to go inside, telling her I'd follow shortly. She pouted but strutted inside, making Edward chuckle.

"How did it go?" I questioned immediately.

"Wow! I missed you to," he teased.

"Did you?"

"Huh?"

"Did you miss me?"

I knew I was opening myself up for torment by asking this, but he had been the first one to mention it. Even if it was in jest.

He frowned, as if debating how to verbalize his next comment. I wasn't sure I wanted to know the answer now.

"I *always* miss you, angel. More than I can ever tell you, but that doesn't solve this mess, does it?"

I nodded, my throat constricting at the gruffness to his tone. It would always come back to the fucking mess we'd created. There was no do over, every time we would come full circle, forever repeating a cycle.

"OK," I replied, taking a deep breath. "I'm sorry. How was your meeting?"

He winced, but I wasn't sure if it was because of the memory, or because I'd changed the subject again.

"It was good. I remembered her, and she certainly knew about me. In fact, she even had a photo of me when I was a baby."

"Oh my God, really? Can I see it?"

His fingers flexed around mine, as he explained it was back at the house.

"She passed on the number of someone who might be able to help. Apparently, my mom stayed with them shortly after she left me."

I wrapped my arms around his waist, speaking into his chest.

"She didn't leave you, Edward. She left your father."

I felt a small shrug before his voice reverberated across his chest.

"Same difference. She went. I didn't."

He couldn't hide the hurt that laced his words. I wanted to soothe him. Sometimes I wondered which one of us was more broken.

I reached up, cupping his face in my hands and trying to get him to look at me.

"Edward, she left a home that was full of hate and fear-"

"She still left me!" he shouted, making me cringe. "She left me to fill the spot as his personal punchbag, and she never called. Never came back. I was forgotten. Don't defend her!"

I gulped, and was about to calm him when Alice came out of the bar.

"What the fuck do you think you're doing?" she snapped.

Edward spun, pushing my hands out of the way.

"What business is it of yours?" he snarled, taking a step towards her.

I tried to grip his biceps from behind, but he shook me off, still determined to get to Alice.

"She's my friend, and while you just pop in and out whenever the mood suits you, I'm here permanently. I don't cause her to cry at night, or cower when I shout."

Her tone was strong, not a single quiver to give her nerves away, but I could tell she felt it. I knew her too well. My stomach churned, as they stared at each other. Edward's hands were fisted so tight that his knuckles were white, and all I could think was *'Please not now.'*

"I'm not making her stay with me, nor am I shouting *at* her."

"You were, so don't deny that! You seriously need to get a grip. All she's ever done is love you, but you already know that, and you use it to your advantage. It's callous."

Edward growled, as he tried to calm himself, but I could see it wasn't working. The more Alice pushed, the closer Edward stepped. I was going to run inside and get Emmett, but didn't want to leave them as they were. So I continued to try to reason with them both.

"Please, can we leave this alone? Alice, I'm OK, and Edward wouldn't hurt me. I've told you I can deal with this."

"Really?" Alice snarled. "Do you think this is dealing with it? Letting him hurt you again? Only this time it's gone further than ever before, so he's gonna leave much more devastation this time."

"He's not leaving!" I snapped, as Edward towered over her.

"Bella's right. I'm going nowhere, we've discussed what we need to do, so just stay out of this."

Alice took a deep breath, as nausea began to clench at my stomach. A sense of dread settled over me. This was not going to end well. She looked at me, sympathy in her blue eyes, as she mouthed *'I'm sorry'* and launched into Edward.

"You've discussed it all, have you? Somehow, I doubt that."

She placed her hands on her hips, waiting for him to respond. I shook my head, knowing what she was about to do, and tried again to tug Edward away.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Edward questioned, ripping his arm from my hands.

"It means you've never known it all, and it's about time you did."

I winced, silently begging for Alice to shut up.

"And you know everything, do you? You need to fuck off and get your own life, because you're way too consumed with Bella's."

I retched as she opened her mouth, feeling utterly powerless to stop this.

"OK, you want full disclosure, then here it is. You need to ask her about the doctor, about the antidepressants and about your complete and utter fuckery."

She reached for me, squeezing my arm, before she whispered, "I'm sorry, Bella, but it was time."

I trembled, feeling the heat of his glare.

"Bella?"

Alice went into the bar, whispering another apology.

"I...Hm, I..."

"Spit it out!" he yelled.

I took a step back, wrapping my arms around my clenching stomach. I didn't know how to verbalize this. He was going to leave once he knew the truth. The self hatred would be too much.

My silence only annoyed him further.

"Tell me!"

"I don't know how to," I whispered.

Silence choked us, and I saw the exact moment comprehension dawned.

"Me? Have I done this?"

I whimpered, unable to speak.

"I'll make it easy. Are those meds because of me? Have I broken you so much that you cannot cope without help?"

My body wouldn't move; my mouth wouldn't open. I was completely frozen in fear of uttering the truth.

"What the fuck, angel? I fucking *broke* you? Fuck, fuck, FUCK!"

He kicked at the stones on the floor, making dust rise around us. I retched again, trying to gain some control of my actions, but I was shaking so hard that nothing else would function. I willed myself to stop this, to tell him it would be all right, but I couldn't.

I knew it wasn't.

It had never been.

"I don't need you to answer, Bella. Your silence is all I need, and I won't do this to you any longer. I *can't*. I love you, but this so very wrong."

He leaned forward, bringing his lips to my forehead in a soft, lingering kiss. He spoke against the skin. "I have to remove myself from this before you're too shattered to piece back together."

I whimpered and tried to cling to him, but he pulled away, and when he spoke next his tone was cold. He'd made up his mind.

"It'll be as if I never existed."

I dropped to the floor, tears flowing down my face and my chest heaving with sobs. I screamed for him to come back; my voice breaking from the force, but he never did. Arms surrounded me, as I started to vomit.

"Bella, come on. Alice is calling Dr. Cullen. Let me take you inside, Rosie is making the couch up for you."

"Gone...never coming...back," I whimpered.

"Shush, Bella. It'll all be OK. We'll sort this out." Emmett reasoned.

But I knew he couldn't do anything.

Edward was gone.

I was fractured and broken more than ever before. I didn't see a way back from this. It was too much. I cried all night. Dr. Cullen had been worried about my mental state, but Alice, Emmett and Rose had assured him I would be fine after some rest.

They were wrong.

The next day, Alice confirmed what my shattered heart already knew. Stuck to the front of his house was a note with two words written on it.

I'm sorry.

*It's so subconscious
The way that I feel
Too bad my subconscious life
Is the more real*

*And I ain't in the best shape
That I've ever been in
But I know where I'm going
It ain't where I've been
I know where I'm going
And it ain't where I've been*

*Some kind of anxiety
Has gotten hold of my heart
And I just wanna run home
When I feel it start*

Subconscious ~ Ani DiFranco

End Notes:

hides

Sorry, but you all knew it had to come...it HAD to...

I won't drag out the New Moon Phase...I promise to make it as easy as possible on y'all.

Thank you!

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 14: The Ghost of You by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

HUGE thanks to Maylin, my beta, and Elusivekoolaid, my prereader.

I love, love, love Magan Bagan for her super awesome Twi VB skills.

SUPER TISSUE WARNING!

SM owns all things Twilight. Spiderward is MINE!

BPOV

I should have seen it coming.

I should have listened when people warned me, but I thought I knew better. I suppose in some respects I did. He didn't leave because he hated me. He left because he'd understood just how much he'd broken me.

I was a shadow; a ghost of what I used to be, and I didn't have the strength to fight back. For the last week I'd hidden. I'd curled up on my couch and slipped into a strange state of unconsciousness. I was aware of Alice; she seemed to have moved in, but her voice was muffled and her image blurry. I was too entrenched in my hurt. It scorched through my blood, singeing my organs and making me cry out in pain. Every part of me ached, my face burned from the constant tears, and my chest was hollow. It was as if someone had reached inside and removed what was broken: my heart.

However, that didn't fix the problem. It only made the pain worse. Alice was trying to bring me around, offering me food and water, holding me as I showered and forcing me to swallow the increased medication. Every now and again I'd hear a different voice. I'd recognized Jasper's and Emmett's, but it had taken a while to work out Rosalie's. I'd tried to speak, tried to ask her where *he* was, but my throat was so sore I did nothing more than croak. She'd left almost immediately afterward, and I hadn't bothered to try since.

I don't know how much time had gone by, nor did I care.

He was gone.

"Bells, you have to take these. Dr. Cullen will be here soon, and I don't think he's going to like what he sees. This is really important." Alice whispered.

She tried to get me to sit up, but my world started to spin, my stomach spasmed, and before I knew what the hell was happening, I vomited across the floor. Alice cursed, running to collect something to clean up the mess. I tried to apologize, but I could feel it bubbling up again. I stumbled to the bathroom, my legs like jelly due to lack of use, and I thought I'd never make it. I shoved open the door, falling to my knees and purging myself. My chest heaved and my throat constricted. I could feel Alice behind me, stroking my back and trying to calm me.

It wasn't working.

It was as if my body wanted rid of the poison, and it was doing everything it could to expel it.

"You can't go on like this." Alice sighed. "I've warned you about what Dr. Cullen said. I don't think he'll wait any longer if he sees you like this. Please, Bella."

I inhaled slowly, trying to regulate my breathing and stop my stomach clenching. I knew she was right, Dr. Cullen would admit me if I continued on this path. It was just so difficult.

I leaned back against the tile wall, accepting the wet cloth she passed to me.

"How long?" I panted, wiping my mouth.

She frowned, her blue eyes darkening with confusion.

"How long since he left me, Alice?"

"Four days. You've been like this for four days."

I nodded solemnly, trying to kick my brain into some kind of working order. Everything was clouded, as if my vision was blanketed in a dark shroud. I was weak, every joint in my body aching fiercely, as my stomach continued to protest.

"Bella, I'm serious. *This* is serious. You need to drag your way out of it. The hospital is not a good place for you to be, because I know you'll do better with your friends around you. We're trying to help, but you're making it so difficult."

I nodded slowly.

"He's only done it this time to stop the pain."

"Yeah, I can see how that worked out." Alice eye rolled.

She rinsed the cloth and placed it on my forehead.

"You've eaten nothing, so the pills aren't working. You can't do this to yourself, and to be honest, I refuse to let you. This stops today. I've never been more serious."

"It's more than that," I muttered. "I feel really sick."

She patted my shoulder, trying to placate me, but I knew she didn't believe me.

"Can you shower?"

I winced, and her tone hardened.

"You will. Bella this is your last chance. Dr. Cullen isn't going to keep coming each day to see no improvement. You need to show him that you're getting stronger."

I opened my mouth to protest, but she read my mind.

"Even if you're not. Pretend. I'm trying to save you here! Damn it, Bella, you can't let him do this! You said he left to stop the hurt, so at least make his leaving worthwhile."

I closed my eyes, shutting her out. I knew she was right, but how was I meant to move forward? Every time he'd left I'd known in a small recess of my mind that he would return.

That was no longer there; the door had closed.

I had to forge a new path, one that would never include Edward. I retched again. Was it even possible for me to do that? I whimpered as fear stabbed at my chest.

"Oh, Alice, this hurts so bad. I feel so alone."

Her tiny arms came around my shoulders and hugged me tightly.

"Baby, I know, but it wasn't right. You two were killing each other and there had to be an end. You were getting better, but then he turned up and everything went to shit again. You're my best friend, and it wouldn't be right for me to sit back and do nothing. I tried, damn I really tried, but his total blindness pissed me off."

I stood on wobbly legs and stepped carefully towards the shower stall.

"I don't blame you. Maybe I should, but I can't bring myself to feel anything right now. I'm hollow."

She cringed, helping me out of the oversized sweatshirt.

"Shower, and then you can talk to Dr. Cullen. He was worried that you're still sick. I'm going to make you some toast, because you need to keep something down, or the pills are useless."

I stripped, avoiding my appearance in the bathroom mirror and stepped under the spray. I wept when the water tapped at my skin. It felt like my flesh was bruising under the torrent. I could hear Alice talking in the other room, but it was muffled so I had no idea who it was.

It would never be the person who I wanted it to be.

He'd gone.

/ CS

The needle pierced my skin, as I looked towards Alice in a silent plea. She shrugged, but her expression was pained. Dr. Cullen had been harsh, and had insisted I go to the hospital. I was dehydrated due to lack of fluid and my constant vomiting. He'd promised it was my choice and I would be free to go home whenever I pleased.

It'd felt like a test.

That was why I was here, letting him push a drip into my hand and trying to be calm. If I did as he asked I could go home soon, and that was all that mattered. Alice had brought me a sandwich, along with a fruit cup and pudding. My stomach protested as I chewed and swallowed, clenching violently as the sustenance hit it. I willed myself to keep it down, not wanting to remain here any longer than necessary. But it was a bizarre war of wills, my head verses my stomach.

"Bella, I need to take some blood. I want to run a couple of tests. Your skin is very sallow, and I'm wondering if you're anemic."

I nodded in compliance, but turned my head away from yet another needle. Alice held my hand, squeezing it softly.

"I'm sorry," I mumbled.

"It'll be OK, Bells."

Dr. Cullen nodded, snapped off his gloves and left the room with his vials of my blood.

"I'm so weak. Why do I feel like this?"

She moved to lie beside me on the bed, placing her arm around my waist and her head on my shoulder.

"You'll get through this. It's going to be difficult, think about it, he's been a part of your life for more years than he hasn't. I want to shout at you to pull yourself together, but I do kinda understand. I just want you to be happy. I love you."

A tear trickled down my cheek, as I placed it on top of her head.

"I love you, too. Thank you, and I'm sorry-"

"Shush," she interrupted. "Try to sleep while it's quiet."

I hummed in agreement, but I couldn't. I stared at the ceiling while she napped, and tried to think my way out of my depression. I would have to be much stronger than I was, either that, or bury this so deep that it would never rear its head again. I couldn't remain this hollow, because that would negate the whole point of Edward leaving. I knew he loved me, and on reflection, I think I'd always known it, that was why I knew he'd always return.

That's why I was certain this time was very different.

Alice snored lightly, as there was a light tapping at the door. My tired gaze met Jasper's concerned one. He pushed the door open and gave a short smile, as he stepped inside.

"Hey," he sighed.

"I'm sorry, Jasper. I never meant for this to get so out of hand. I promise to try-"

He took hold of my hand and held up a finger, stopping my rambling.

"I know you didn't mean it, but can I be somewhat harsh and mention something?"

I nodded but with trepidation.

"Look at her, Bella."

He tilted his head towards his wife, love oozing from his every pore.

"She's been with you every second since he left. Every damn moment. She's lived the pain with you, and now she's exhausted. You gotta take the step, baby. You gotta try."

The cry spilled from my chest in a violent gust. Alice jerked upright, her arms, once again coming around me. I couldn't stop the sobs this time, they roared out, clawing angrily at my throat. Alice clung to me, as Jasper cupped my face in his hands, making me slowly breathe along with him.

"It...it hurts, Jasper," I hiccuped.

"I know, baby, but Alice and I are going to help you. You can do this. You can!"

I gulped, but continued to take deep breaths. Alice's arms didn't lessen, not until Dr. Cullen walked into my room. We all stared sharply at him, startled by his entrance. He hissed when he saw my hand, because the drip had come loose with my thrashing about. We were silent, as he slowly began to wipe the blood from the skin, and affix it correctly. I knew something was wrong when he inhaled deeply, and asked Alice and Jasper if they'd leave us alone.

"I want them to stay," I said panicking. "They need to stay."

He held a hand up, his dark eyes darting between my friends. This wasn't good. I could feel my skin start to tingle with nerves, and I grasped Alice's hand for support.

He was going to admit me, I could feel it.

"Well, the blood test we did confirmed the anemia." I sighed audibly. "But that's not all...I'm not sure how to say this...hmm, Bella, you're pregnant."

I froze.

Alice gasped.

Jasper groaned.

"That would explain the sickness, along with the dehydration and anemia. Though we are going to have to discuss your antidepressants and sleeping meds. This pregnancy obviously changes things."

All I could do was stare. The words seemed to hang in the air, but I couldn't comprehend what they said. Was he serious?

"Bella? Bella, breathe." Alice demanded.

"I..I..I mean, how?" I stuttered.

The men in the room chuckled lowly, before Jasper added, "I think you know that already."

"If not, I certainly have diagrams." The doctor added.

"This isn't a joke." Alice snapped, silencing the room.

I was trembling, my stomach twisting as the reality began to finally register in my brain.

"Oh God..."

"Do you know when your last period was?"

"I...Erm... I"

Dr. Cullen smiled and started writing on my chart.

"It's OK. We can do a scan, though from your hormone levels you're still very early on. It would have to be a little more invasive."

"What do you mean?" Alice asked.

"We may not be able to pick up the heartbeat on the type of scan you are familiar with, but we will try first. If we can't then it will have to be internally."

Alice and Jasper began to have a conversation with the doctor, but I didn't hear a word.

I was pregnant.

I was having a child.

Edward's child.

"I don't know where he is..." I uttered.

Everyone stopped speaking and looked at me.

"Pardon?" Dr. Cullen asked.

"Edward. I can't tell him because I don't know where he is. He's canceled his cell, and Rose says she doesn't know either. I...just don't know."

"Bella, we'll help you, won't we, Jasper? We'll help you through it, and if you need help finding him, then we'll do that too. Whatever you need."

She sounded almost excited by the news, but I was still replaying the word in my head, hoping it would actually mean something to me soon. It only seemed to underline just how much I needed Edward. There was a child growing inside of me that had his genes, that was a piece of him, and yet I was supposed to deal with this alone. He'd told me before he left that his genes weren't made for replication, so even if he did know this now, would his rejection still stand? Would he hate me more for not taking precautions that day?

I closed my eyes, remembering the feel of him moving above me. That night we'd been perfect. We'd set something in motion that neither one of us had considered, because the walls had crumbled and all we'd needed was each other.

But that was all gone now.

All except me and the growing baby within me.

"I can't do this. I'm a mess. What the fuck do I have to offer anyone? I can't..."

I turned and buried myself in the sheets on the small bed. If I hid this would go away. It had to, because it simply couldn't be real. Alice only made it worse by informing the doctor of the exact date Edward and I'd had sex.

"I'm going to give you a little time to absorb it, but I'll be back in an hour or so."

Jasper walked out with him, and I knew he was going to talk about me. How the hell could this be happening?

"Bella, look at me."

I turned my face further into the pillow in complete defiance.

"Isabella Marie Swan! You will sit up and you will look at me!" she shouted.

I jumped in surprise, taking in the determination written all over her face.

"You can't hide from this. This is your life now - your reality. From this moment on you can't hide at all. You have too many decisions to make."

"I don't want to-"

"You know what?" she interrupted. "I don't care what you want, because quite honestly I already know that. You want Edward, but Bella...you can't have him. He's gone, and it hurts me, because it hurts you, but you have to take stock. I know this is cliched but it's not about you anymore. There's a baby growing inside you that needs food, warmth, love and a happy Mom. Right now you're giving it none of those." She took a moment before continuing. "If you don't want to provide those things then you have only one feasible choice, but if you actually want to try, if you want to start living a real life then, for God's sake, fight! I know it's going to be hard, even without a baby, but it will be new, interesting, and I bet, utterly rewarding when you see your baby smile back at you. We meant what we said, we will help you, but this is decision time."

I trembled, tears welling, ready to escape with a blink. I was so scared, so completely and utterly terrified of both options.

"I have nothing to offer," I wept.

"You do. Yourself, and as for anything else, well you'll gain the strength for more."

She hugged me, stroking my back, as I wet her shoulder with tears.

"I feel so isolated. Why did he have to go before I knew?"

"Oh, baby, I can't answer that. I don't like to say this but you have to make the choice for yourself now. You can't consume yourself with choices Edward would've made, because he isn't here. It's you and the baby."

As she said the word I realized where my hand was.

I was massaging my stomach, trying to soothe my child. Subconsciously the decision was made and maybe it always had been. I just had no idea where to go from here.

"How am I going to do this? I don't know how to raise a child. My mom was shit, and she even admits that herself. I have no money, no room in my apartment and no way of changing that. All I have is a job," I breathed in defeat.

Alice pulled away, placing her hand above mine and smiled.

"Can I give you a real simple solution?"

I pouted at her, but felt a small sliver of hope.

"I think we should just take it a day at a time. Let Dr. Cullen do the scan and talk to you about your meds, then we'll know where we stand."

"We?"

"Yes, Bella. *We*. I haven't let you deal with this alone, and I'm not about to start now. You can do this. I have complete faith in you."

"I'm glad someone does," I laughed before sobering abruptly. "What about Edward? I can't not tell him. It wouldn't be right."

"We'll find him, though I'm reluctant to. It would be torture to bring a child into the middle of your toxicity."

"This changes everything, doesn't it?"

"Only if you think it should."

I nodded, knowing it had to. There was no way back.

This changed everything.

*At the end of the world
Or the last thing I see
You are never coming home
Never coming home
Could I?
Should I?
And all the things that you never ever told me
And all the smiles that are ever gonna haunt me*

*Never coming home
Never coming home
Could I?
Should I?
And all the wounds that are ever gonna scar me
For all the ghosts that are never gonna catch me*

The Ghost of You ~ My Chemical Romance

End Notes:

Sooooo, few things before you all kill me!

This was the harshest of all the chapters, so things will kinda begin to get better.

The story is only half way through, so there is NO WAY this baby will turn it all fluffy and HEA-y.

This fic was plotted right through from the start, so its not something added on a whim either.

Trust me...

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 15: The Wind Blows by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Huge thanks to my beta, Maylin & pre reader Elusivekoolaid.

Hugs to the best Twi VB ever, Magan Bagan.

Please bear in mind we're around half way through, so there is work still to be done with these two.

Thank you all so much for the feedback last chapter. I didn't alienate as many as I thought I would with Baby Masen.

That makes me happy.

SM owns all things Twilight. I own a HUGE smile after seeing Eclipse!

BPOV

Edward had been gone for four months.

It was four months unlike any other. During the day I focused on our baby. I gave everything I had into smiling and putting one foot in front of the other. The ache was always in my chest, but I would divert my attention towards my baby. Each morning when I woke I was still startled by the turn of events this time. It would take a few minutes for me to remember.

For me to accept I was pregnant and alone.

The startling realization would only be further underlined when I looked in the mirror. My belly was swollen, as Edwards little girl grew there. I'd cried when I'd had the sonogram, and cried even more when she'd told me it was a girl. Alice had been there, holding my hand tightly and sobbing right along with me.

She was my support.

Alice, and sometimes Jasper, had been with me for every doctors appointment. They'd never faltered from the day I'd left the hospital, after Dr. Cullen had given me the news. The first month had been unbelievably difficult. I'd been slowly taken off my antidepressants and each time the dosage was lowered the incline I was walking felt steeper. Dr. Cullen had told me I could still take antidepressants, but they would need to be exchanged for a different kind. However, I'd done my own research and was adamant that I wouldn't take them while my little girl was blossoming in my belly. I wouldn't let my deficiency affect her.

Dr. Cullen had reluctantly agreed, and over the period of six weeks we reduced the medication, but along with that he increased my sessions with a therapist. I had a new one now - one that was more suitable given my current state. Esme was charming. The minute I'd entered her office I felt relaxed, and I'd shocked myself when I'd been completely honest with her.

I'd purge my soul to Esme.

It didn't make me feel any better, in fact, it was excruciating, but it would ease the burden that Alice carried. Alice was the only other person that knew everything, and this way I would have two people that would give me the help I needed to get this right. I was determined to do it this time.

This time it wasn't really about me.

I'd made the choice to have our baby, and I wasn't going to give her the token parent that Edward and I had both been given. I was going to give her what we'd always wanted.

It still hurt that I couldn't find him. I desperately wanted him to know. I didn't know if that would drive him away again, or make him stay, but he deserved that knowledge. Even though his words about his genes still played in my head on a continuous loop.

My genes aren't the reproducing kind.

Rose and Emmett had tried to find him, but had come up with only one telephone number.

It rang, but no one ever answered.

I could only hope it really was his number and he was getting the messages.

Rose and Emmett had amazed me. I'd told them about the baby so that they would understand my urgency to find Edward. I'd expected denial, disgust or even laughter, but they'd both been a great strength. Rose had even insisted Alice and I go shopping with her for baby items. I didn't have any savings, and it went without saying that raising the baby was going to be difficult. But that day I hadn't been able to purchase a single item. Alice and Rose had gone crazy, especially when I'd finally told Rose I was having a girl.

I'd walked away with an awful lot of pink and lilac.

I was still working in Alice's store, and I'd promised to return once the baby was born. I just needed to work out the dynamics of that. Any money I saved was only going to go so far. Alice had told me to call my aunt, but I failed to see how that was going to help me. She'd never been a part of my life, and from what I heard she only ever did what my mom had.

Slept all day and worked the bars at night.

It wasn't the kind of exposure I wanted for my child.

My child; those words still shocked me to my core. I was actually doing this; I was going to raise our daughter alone. Well, at least until I could find Edward. I knew I would continue to search no matter how long it took. I couldn't live with the idea that he wouldn't know.

I'd gotten a second set of sonogram pictures, and a special scrapbook. It was for him. I would place everything important in there, so that he knew I wasn't hiding her, and so she would know all about her dad.

I would search for as long as I needed to.

The phone rang, stirring me from my sleep. I groaned, turning onto my side and placing a pillow over my head. I'd had very little sleep after one hell of an argument with my mom, so this wake up call was not appreciated. When it stopped I breathed a loud sigh of relief, only for it to start back up again. My heart pounded, because that only happened when someone needed you urgently.

I shot up, tossing the pillow to the foot of the bed and snatching up the phone.

"Yes?" I asked with urgency.

The line was silent, so I tried again.

"Hello?"

There was still nothing, though I could hear some sort of traffic in the background. That was the only thing that alerted me to who it could be. He did this often, though never this late at night. Again, I worried that this was terribly important.

"Edward, is that you?"

There was a muffled curse, but he still didn't speak directly to me. I exhaled and sat up, resting my back against the headboard and pulling the tie from my hair. I shivered as it fell down my back and across my shoulders.

"Is there something wrong? Are you hurt?" I questioned anxiously.

Nothing.

"Edward, please. Just say something. My name, anything..."

"I can't do that," he said so quietly that I barely heard it.

"Why not?"

"Saying your name hur...It doesn't matter."

I brought my knees up to my chest, and just listened to his breathing. Neither one of us said anything further, and for the next ten minutes I took solace in silence. This was all I had of him now, and I took it whenever he offered it.

Even if it was ten minutes of silence.

I would always feel better after he called. I knew he wasn't hurt and he was somewhere thinking of me.

"Are you OK? You're not hurt?"

I didn't think he was going to answer, and gritted my teeth to stop my annoyance seeping through. If I got angry with him now he'd hang up, and maybe stop calling altogether.

"I'm not hurt. Not physically anyway. I just wanted...I wanted more," he replied sadly.

"What does that mean?"

"It means you shouldn't be answering the phone to me this late at night."

He was always so damn cryptic.

"Have you been drinking?"

He gave a throaty chuckle, followed by another short exhale. It appeared he was smoking along with the liquor he was drinking. Why did he have to muster the courage to speak to me?

"Easier to forget when I can't remember my name, you know?"

I closed my eyes, but couldn't stop the anger from bubbling up.

"No, Edward, I don't know. It would be great for you to share every once in a while. Maybe then you wouldn't need to drink," I spat harshly.

"And sharing would do what?" he snarled.

"Ease whatever pain you're feeling. Give you someone to confide in. I don't really know, but we all need someone to talk to."

"That's why I call you," he interjected, his tone patronizing.

"But you never tell me anything, so why call me? Why the hell do you bother?"

A police car must have passed him, because the sirens obscured his voice. I pressed the receiver closer, hoping that would help, but all I got was, "Because...just hearing...helps."

I shook my head, perplexed as ever by his ramblings. It didn't help that I was still trying to come around after being woken up.

"What do you need from me, Edward?" I mumbled.

"I just wanted...FUCK!..."

I bit my lip to stop myself from speaking. I needed something from him, even if it was a groan.

"I just wanted to hear your voice and let you know I'm still here," he eventually grumbled.

"Where's here?"

"I meant metaphorically, angel. Here. Alive. Yes?"

He was getting sarcastic now. I knew the pace of these calls; a couple more sentences and he'd hang up because he was angry. Sometimes I wished he wouldn't bother, because sometimes the aggression was worse than not knowing.

Only sometimes.

I scowled into the phone when he let rip a series of expletives. My chest hurt; my heart aching for him, but if he wouldn't let me help then what else could I do, apart from answering his late night calls?

"Edward, I-"

"Angel, I gotta go. I'll call you tomorrow."

I knew he wouldn't. It would be weeks, maybe months before I heard from him again, and that call would go the very same way this had done.

That was our cycle now.

I realized I was still holding the phone to my ear as I heard the front door open. I placed it back into its cradle and snuggled back into the comforter.

"Hey, are you OK? What're you still doing awake?"

"I'm fine, Jake. I just went to the bathroom."

He smiled and began unbuttoning his shirt. I swallowed the lump that had suddenly formed in my throat and closed my eyes.

Sleep was not easy to come by for the rest of that night. Not even with a warm body and a steady heartbeat to soothe me.

"Did you hear a word I said, Bella?" Alice pouted, hands on hips.

I blinked; I was a million miles away, or rather a few years. I was sitting on a small chair behind the cash register, and I was supposed to be hanging some of the new items. I caressed my stomach, feeling the baby wriggle towards my touch. It always made me smile when she did that.

"Sorry, Alice."

"Are you feeling OK? No more dizziness?"

"I'm fine. I was just thinking," I answered absently.

She raised her brows at me, waiting.

"And...?"

"I was thinking about Edward."

I whispered the words, knowing Alice would suddenly get annoyed, but I didn't want to keep anything from her. Plus, she'd asked. However, instead of shouting at me, and yelling for me to forget him, she came closer and took hold of my free hand.

"You're doing so well, Bells. Just keep going and pretty soon you'll have the sweetest reward. Someone who will love you back."

"He does love me back."

I watched as she stopped her eyes mid roll. She was trying to be as supportive as she could, but she hated what Edward had done to me. I couldn't blame her; she was just being a good friend.

"Can we drop it? I really dislike having this conversation with you."

I nodded, exhaling loudly.

"What were you saying to me?"

Her face lit up; her blue eyes sparkling in excitement, and I couldn't help but smile back.

"Jasper and I got the house! We're moving-"

"That's wonderful!" I interrupted, moving to stand up and hug her, but she stopped me.

"That's not the best bit. Jasper and I want you to move in upstairs."

I stared at her, startled.

"It has an extra room for Button, and so much more space than you already have. You don't even need to redecorate, because we only just did it. And it means we won't have to try and find someone trustworthy. It's the perfect solution."

"Oh, I c-couldn't do that," I stammered.

"Why not? I know you want to get out of that place before Button's born-"

"Stop calling her that," I smiled, not really meaning it.

I found it cute really.

She waved the comment away and continued.

"You can't raise her in that place, Bella, you admitted as much yourself. This way we'd still have someone above the store without the hassle of looking for a tenant. And I'm going to be selfish and say I can come and see Button whenever I want to."

I chewed my bottom lip, knowing that it really was a great solution, but she'd given me so much already. I couldn't keep taking from her; it wasn't right. She was watching me as I debated it, and she seemed to read my train of thought.

"You're not taking. I'm offering. I'd still want rent, but this way we know you're both safe."

The thought of my baby having a room of her own and space to play as she grew was too much. I nodded and leaned forward, hugging her as tight as I could with my bump in between us.

"You're the best, Ali. Thank you," I whispered into her ear.

"I know," she giggled. "Just make sure you remember that when I demand first cuddle from this one."

She prodded my stomach playfully, before cupping my face in her hands.

"You're doing good."

I gave a watery smile and nodded. Each day was getting easier. A piece of my heart was still gone and it wouldn't ever be repaired.

Not unless he returned.

I knew I shouldn't hope for that, but it was there and I wasn't going to deny it. Edward had been in my life for so long it was difficult to imagine never seeing him again. Never feeling his touch. Never tasting his kiss, and worst of all, never feeling his love. A small piece of me would remain hollow, but I would carry on. I would forge a life for me and our daughter. She deserved it.

I deserved it.

"Do you see Esme tomorrow?"

"Nope. Not until Friday. She's really pleased with my progress and wanted to put more time between sessions now."

My voice broke at the end, making Alice turn abruptly. A single tear slipped down my cheek, before I had the chance to swipe it away.

"Hey, what's wrong? I thought we made a pact: no tears. Button will be born dehydrated."

I spluttered, laughing at her and swallowing back any remaining tears.

"I'm OK. It just creeps up on me sometimes, and I realize just how far I've come. Trouble is, then I feel guilty. This is something he should be a part of. I don't feel whole without him, no matter how hard I try."

She winced and took a moment. I knew she was working out how to phrase what she was thinking, but no matter what she said, it wouldn't fill the void.

"I'm not going to ignore what you're feeling, because that would be wrong, but over the last four months you've really taken the reins. You've changed and made so many huge decisions, and they haven't just been made for the baby. You saw what was happening and you made those changes. You need to have more faith in yourself, because *you* did this, not Edward. You," she stated with complete conviction.

I nodded, knowing she was right, but my accomplishments paled into insignificance when I focused on my loss.

"What if we never find him?" I whispered.

"Then he'll have missed out on the lives of two amazing people, and you'll know that we all did what we could to locate him." She exhaled, and smoothed the material of her dress. "We won't give up, Bella. We all know you need it, and we all know it's right for the baby."

"Do you think she'll hate me for what I've done?"

My voice was barely audible, and I couldn't believe I was choosing now to talk to her about this. Her eyes were wide, both shocked and confused by my question.

"Who? Button? Why the hell would she hate you?"

She gripped my hands in hers, clasping them fiercely. I felt another tear fall, as my little bundle kicked against our hands.

"I drove him away. He thought it was all on him; that he was the only reason for the meds. I never got to explain, but then I shouldn't have kept them from him. I should have told him about them from day one."

"When are you going to stop this?" Alice sighed. "You can't spend the rest of your life beating yourself over the head for circumstances that were beyond your control."

I opened my mouth, but she continued on with her opinion.

"He knew what kind of mother you had. He knew you always picked the wrong boys, but he chose not to see it. So if he wants to take the blame for those pills, then that's his deal. You have something much larger to cope with. Set him aside, sweetie. We'll keep looking, but focus on you and this little bump."

As if on cue, the baby booted our joined hands again, demanding more attention.

"See! Even Button agrees."

I gave a small laugh and rubbed my stomach, whether I was soothing my baby or myself I wasn't sure.

"Come on." Alice stated, tilting her head towards the stairs behind me. "Let's shut the store for ten minutes and go up stairs to arrange your new home."

"You haven't moved out yet!" I protested.

"Correct, but you know I'm decorating the nursery before we leave, don't you?"

She hauled me off the seat, pulling my arm towards the back of the store.

"You can't do that!"

"I can, and I will. Now shut up and let me help you up those stairs."

I was still half way up, and because I needed a rest. I turned and looked down at her.

"I'm going to be a Mom, Alice," I said softly, as if it was only really dawning now.

Her smile was huge, as she stroked my arm.

"Yes, Bella, you are, and you're going to be the best. Though not as awesome as Aunt Ali."

I shook my head in exasperation and walked up the steps towards my new home.

My new life.

Without Edward.

*I've got to breathe
You can't take that from me*

*Cause it's all that you left that's mine
You had to leave
And that's all I can see
But you told me your love was blind*

*There are times
You're so impossible that I should sign a waiver
And you will find
Someone worth walking on when you ask me to go*

*I'll leave when the wind blows
Take a breath and there it goes
I'll be outside of your window
I'll pass by but I'll go slow
I'll leave when the wind blows*

The Wind Blows ~ All American Rejects

End Notes:
<p>Ick...Bella seems to actually have started dealing.</p> <p>EPOV will be next... so buckle up!</p> <p>Thank you all for your awesome reviews!</p> <p>xxx</p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 16: All Hail the Heartbreaker by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>HUGE amounts of love to my beta Maylin & prereader Elusivekoolaid.</p> <p>Major love to my super awesome Twi VB Magan Bagan</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

EPOV

Loneliness.

A complete gut wrenching loneliness that never went away. It gnawed at my insides every second I was away from her. My whole body pined to have her back, to have her in my arms and resting against my chest, but all I ever did was hurt her.

I'd broken her.

I was the reason she took the medication, not her mother, and I didn't know how to live with that truth. I couldn't even look myself in the mirror most days. My reflection would only throw more accusations my way, and they were ones I wasn't ready to acknowledge.

I'd always tried so hard to stay away from her. I didn't want to make her life any more difficult than it already was, but I'd really gone and done it this time. I'd taken it further than ever before. I'd made love to her, and allowed my feelings to bubble up to the surface. Those few days of being together, letting her touch me whenever she pleased and permitting myself to do the same, were unlike any I'd ever had.

At night, when I was alone in the motel room, I would close my eyes and remember the feel of her body in my arms. I'd recall her scent, the texture of her hair and the way she'd cling to me even in sleep. The memories were my own private torture, payback for the pain I'd caused her, so I continued to think of her, continued to hate myself.

That was why the reality was so difficult to deal with. I'd hurt the only person I'd ever loved and I'd done it without warning. I'd used her as my comfort blanket and left her alone when I could no longer cope. Every time I'd left Forks I thought I was doing the right thing. I could see the change in her. The longer I stayed the more attached she became, and the worse I felt because I couldn't offer what she needed.

I'd never been able to, not even back in high school.

But the reality of just how much damage I'd caused was beyond my comprehension, until it was thrust in my face in the form of those little pills Bella took to get her through the day. I'd left because what I'd been faced with made me want to vomit. I was thoroughly disgusted with my actions.

There was no way back for me.

Was there?

I'd sat on the outskirts of town that night for six hours. Six hours trying to talk myself into walking back to her, but reality had won. This whole situation needed to stop. I wasn't right, and being around Bella only made my sadness seep into her. The more I stayed, the more hope I gave her, because she only ever saw the good in me. I was forever baffled where she fucking found it, but she invariably saw something. Something that made her continue to want me and continue to wait for me. I was selfish, because I wanted her to wait for me. The thought of her with anyone else made my insides boil with rage, but I knew she deserved better. My brain just wouldn't accept that she was meant for anyone else.

Each time I'd left I'd been determined that it would be the last, that she'd never see me again, but this time that resolution wasn't there.

I was adamant I was going to return to her.

I just needed to make myself worthy of her love.

I was taking a risk, because during the time I was away she might finally forget me and move on with her life. It was a risk I was willing to take; I was doing it for myself as much as my angel.

It had been six months now since I'd seen her face, or heard her voice, and just like any addict, I was desperate for a fix. I'd tried calling her apartment, but the number just rang out. I knew I wouldn't say anything to her even if she had answered. I was only doing it to make myself feel better and that was wrong. I hadn't bothered calling Rose. She'd dropped the charges, and even though I'd been three weeks away from fulfilling our deal, I was sure she wouldn't do anything about it. She'd proven her point.

I'd traveled to three different towns within the last six months, hoping to locate my mother. The days were consumed with searches, talking to one person and then moving onto the next, learning a little more each time about my mom's actions over the years. Not that there was much to learn. She appeared to be a loner, and no one knew that much about her as a person. Even people who said they'd been her friend.

It was the nights that I found the hardest.

I wanted my angel next to me. I'd never slept as soundly as I had those nights at Bella's apartment. I remembered feeling the same way those nights I'd sought solace from my father's fists. Her bedroom, along with her presence had been my haven.

To forget and combat the isolation I'd drink, holding the only photograph I had of us, and staring at it until I slipped into oblivion. Only to start the cycle of searching all over again as soon as the light began to wake me from sleep.

I'd spoken to old friends and neighbors of hers, never revealing who I was. I didn't really need to, people were open and willing to tell me anything they knew about her, and I'd been startled at the number of places she'd actually lived. Maybe I was more like her than I cared to admit. Every single house was no better than where Bella was residing now, so life hadn't gotten any easier for her even though she'd left us. The journey was beginning to wear me down when I finally found her.

At the cemetery.

Elizabeth Masen had died four years ago in a horrific car accident. I'd been stunned - still was, because after all this time I wouldn't get any answers. The void would never be filled. I'd forever be in the dark about why she left me, and why she'd never tried to locate me.

I was alone.

The local library had the old newspapers for me to read through, hoping to understand what had happened. It hadn't told of any family, or other children. In fact, there had been no reference to anyone other than the other person injured in the accident. It had, however, given me the name of the place the funeral had been held. At that point more than any other I'd needed to talk to my angel, and I'd tried to call her once more. When nobody answered I decided to find the number for Alice's store and try her there. My hand had trembled as I gripped the receiver, waiting for her to answer. However, it hadn't been Bella, or even Alice, it was a male voice and one I assumed belonged to Jasper.

I hadn't asked for Bella; I'd asked for Miss Swan, worried that he'd recognize my voice. Luckily, he seemed completely preoccupied with telling someone where to put a bassinet, and he'd just mumbled about a doctor's appointment. Alice had been chatting near the phone, telling him that the baby would be the death of her, oblivious to the fact that I was listening. Bella had told me they were trying for a baby, and I guess while I'd been gone it had happened for them. Jasper had then grunted a 'bye' before hanging up, clearly having nothing else to say to me.

I'd rested my forehead against the cool glass of the phone booth and inhaled slowly, trying to calm myself. She was at the doctor's again, and I couldn't shift the knowledge that it was because of me. I tried not to focus on her stability now that I'd gone. However, at that point I had no choice but to accept that I'd hurt her more than ever before.

I slumped dejectedly to the floor of the booth, resting my forehead on my arm and trying everything I could to stop myself from crying. I rarely cried because it got me nowhere, but I was so lost. My mom was dead, questions would remain unanswered, and I'd managed to break the love of my life. The fact that she was seeing a doctor months after I'd gone only underlined the point.

I was a fucking asshole.

I didn't even think I could redeem myself, but I was going to try. I needed her more than she could ever understand, because I'd never told her. I needed to set the past aside and focus on what I wanted from my life. I knew without question *who* I wanted in it. I just hoped she could forgive me and at least consider a future. She'd shown me what I could have and how amazingly we fit together. I couldn't ignore that anymore.

Wiping my face, I stood and lifted the receiver again. I dialed my father's care home, knowing the number without the need to check it, and waited for someone to answer. I only needed to check on him. I'd called every week I was away - I always did. It made me briefly wonder if Rose ever bothered. I doubted it.

When the receptionist answered I gave my name and was greeted with an anxious silence.

"Something wrong?" I snapped impatiently.

"Um...Mr. Masen, haven't you received our messages?"

"Clearly not, because I no longer have a cell. So what's the ass done now? And more to the point, how much is it gonna cost me?" I demanded, my hands clenching in anger.

"Mr. Masen...I don't know quite how to tell you this. We've been trying to get hold of you for the last five days. Um...your father passed away. I'm sorry."

I rolled over in the dirty motel bed, my head throbbing from self inflicted pain. I'd drunk far too fucking much last night, but it was the only way to forget. I'd phoned her and listened to her breathe for fifteen minutes. She'd known it was me, and had started to read Dracula to me. Her voice floated down the phone line, making me light headed. I'd tried to speak but no words would come out, and there were only three that I wanted to verbalize anyway.

I love you.

I couldn't be that selfish, though. She longed for me to say them, so if I did she'd assume everything was going to be perfect. It could never be that, and that's why I'd left again. This time I could see that she'd be alright. She had a boyfriend and he seemed smitten. Just looking at them together made me want to rip his head off. He was everything she should have in a boyfriend, and I could tell he hung on her every word.

I should've been happy for her.

I wasn't.

I'd never been so jealous. It oozed through every fucking cell in my body. I hated him, and for no other reason than the fact he was able to provide Bella with the things I couldn't. When she was with him there was no sadness in her eyes; not like when she was around me. So I knew I shouldn't dislike him. However, I was male and internally I was roaring "Mine!" It was unreasonable, because she couldn't ever be that. It didn't stop me, though. The need for her was bone deep and I didn't see it going away anytime soon.

I sat up, noticing for the first time that I wasn't alone. Flashes of last night in the bar with a scrawny blond shot through my head, making me groan. I'd fucked her. I couldn't remember, but she was naked and there were hickies forming across her shoulder.

I needed to shower. I needed to remove the guilt, so turning my back on my guest I walked into the bathroom and locked the door. I didn't bother checking myself out in the mirror, because I felt bad enough, so it stood to reason I'd look worse. I received my confirmation when the water hit my back. I hissed as my skin stung, and placed my hand across the area inspecting it. I didn't know who the woman was but she'd left her mark. Welts marred my back from where her nails had dug harshly in.

What the fuck had I done last night?

Wincing in pain, I scrubbed my skin raw, hoping it would cleanse me, but as always I was left with the aching black hole in my chest. I wondered if that's what Bella felt like. Did she also feel as if a piece of her was missing? Or had she forgotten about me and tried to move on with Jake?

I shoved my head under the spray, hoping it would pummel the memories from inside of it, but the shower was a shitty motel one, and was barely more than a trickle. I turned the temperature down,

wondering if it was cold enough whether it would freeze each image and I'd only need to thaw them out when I could deal with them.

When that didn't work I shut the water off completely and stepped out of the stall. I wrapped a thin towel around my waist and walked into the main room at the same time the blond woke up.

"Hey, darlin'," she said.

I think it was supposed to be a purr, but it ended up sounding as if she had something lodged in her throat instead. I cringed.

"I was just wonderin' whether to come and join ya in there."

I turned away, trying desperately not to look at her; she was making me feel ill. I must've been really drunk last night to bring her back with me.

"Good job you didn't," I muttered.

"What, sugar?"

The bed creaked, alerting me to the fact that she was either sitting up or getting out of it. I braced myself, gritting my teeth and hoping like crazy that she was going to get dressed and go. I had no such luck, and I moaned when she placed her hand on my bare shoulder.

"We'll just have to play in here then."

I spun around, snapping at her.

"Not. A. Fucking. Chance."

Her eyes went wide. At least I think they did, because I couldn't really distinguish that much from all the mascara gunk that was smudged around them.

"Go," I continued sharply.

"But you...I..."

"Get out! Get out! Get out!" I bellowed.

She didn't wait for more of my wrath. She picked up her clothes and put them on with her back to me. I saw how much her hands were shaking and felt guilt begin to churn in my guts.

I really was an asshole.

I couldn't stand to have her here. It felt as if I'd cheated on Bella. I was lower than a louse, and there was no redemption for what I'd done. The woman left without looking back, her heels dangling from her hand. I retched, dry heaving all the way to the bathroom, before slumping onto the floor next to the toilet. The cool tile soothed my lacerated back, but did nothing for my nausea. I doubted anything would. This was my karma, my payback for what I'd done to my angel. I deserved everything that was being thrown my way.

I vomited into the bowl, my whole body in spasm from the retching.

I'd cheated on my angel...and I didn't even know the woman's name.

I stared at the headstone of my mother's grave utterly stunned by the events of the day.

My parents were dead.

My mother in front of me in her casket in the ground. My father in the town morgue waiting for me to come and claim him. Neither one had cared about me, and yet I was still weeping. For the most part I was relieved. I would no longer have to deal with a man that abused his child; a man that could barely remember his own name. I wouldn't need to argue with Rose over the cost of his care, and I would no longer need to take menial jobs to top up those payments. The house would now be mine, to do with as I pleased, as would the rest of my father's belongings.

The cold slab of concrete that rested above my mother's body showed no signs of a child, or of a marriage. It merely stated her name and 'Rest in Peace.'

It was one huge disappointment.

I slumped onto the grass, glaring at the stone, and finally let go.

"Why the fuck did you leave me with him? Why?" I raged, knowing I wouldn't get a reply, but feeling better for the expulsion. "I bet he hurt you too! So then why leave me? I hate you so bad for doing that, and for never looking back."

My voice caught, and I took a deep breath. I was going to have my say and then leave. She would have to remain here, while I buried my father. Only then would I be able to move on with my life.

"I'm so fucked up because of what you two did to me. I only made things worse for myself as time went on, but you were the foundation of that, and the foundation was fucked! I've ruined the life of the only person that has ever really meant a thing to me. I'm to blame - I know that, but the rot started with you. I despise you both."

I stood, touching the top of the stone lightly.

"I won't be back, Mom. I can't."

I kissed my fingers, bringing them back down the headstone for a fleeting moment. I swallowed the lump that formed in my throat, thinking now would be the best time to get completely drunk. I had a half bottle of scotch at my motel room and drowning my sorrows had never been more appealing, but I had to go back to Forks. I had to tell my sister, bury our monster of a father, and try to find a way to get Bella to love me again.

There had to be a path for us. I refused to believe what I felt for her was disposable because I couldn't get a grip. I wasn't stupid, though. I'd abandoned her, leaving her alone with her pain, when I should've been the one to help heal those wounds.

I'd caused most of them.

Maybe this was futile. Maybe she would never forgive me, but I had to try. I had to show her that she was the only person who could make me whole. I didn't feel anything unless I was with

her, and then I felt far too much. I was a hollow shell without her, and I was going to do everything I could to show her I meant it.

I entered my motel room and began packing immediately, tossing the half full bottle of scotch into the trash. I wouldn't be needing the solace of alcohol anymore. I had to show my angel I was going to change.

I tossed my bag over my shoulder, picking up the crumpled photograph of us that rested on the night stand and went home.

To Forks.

To my Bella.

*So tonight I'll sit and pick apart your pictures
And over analyze your words
But the truth is that I've never fallen so hard
It's taking everything in me
Just to forget your sweater so far*

*I can honestly say
That I never, ever, ever felt this way
Your lips, your eyelashes, your skin
These are the parts of your body
That cause my comatose to begin*

*I will sleep another day
I don't really need to anyway
What's the point when my dreams are infected
With words you used to say
I will breathe in a moment
As long as I keep my distance
I wouldn't want to go messing anything up*

All Hail the Heartbreaker ~ The Spill Canvas

End Notes:
Eeek... he's on his way back to her! Thank you!xx

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 17: Come Alive by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>Hello!</p> <p>Major hugs and kisses to my beta Maylin & prereader Elusivekoolaid.</p> <p>These two are the best in the fandom. For Real. Along with my awesome Twi VB Magan Bagan.</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

BPOV

"Alice, I can't do this! I can't!" I bellowed.

She placed her hands on her hips and pouted.

"What's your alternative? It's not like Button can stay there forever. She wants out, Bella. Push!"

"It hurts," I whined.

"I know that. The whole hospital knows that, but yelling and complaining isn't going to help your baby into the world now, is it? Come on, Bells, you can do this."

I gritted my teeth and squeezed her hand as tight as I could, disappointed when she didn't wince, and mustered the strength to bear down. I'd been given an epidural but it had begun to wear off as I was fully dilated, so the doctor felt there was no need to top it up.

I hated them.

In fact, right now I hated everyone. Sure, I'd been told it would be painful, but that wasn't even close to what I was feeling now. I didn't feel prepared. I just wasn't ready to be a mom, and it had all happened too fast. I needed him here with me. I couldn't do this alone. It just wasn't fair.

"Bella? The baby's right there, so you need to pant when I tell you. Do not push. Do you understand?"

I nodded at the doctor, as my stomach tightened and a wave of pain hit me like a wrecking ball. I screamed and fought to do as he requested. In my head, and with each steady pant I repeated my mantra.

Edward, Edward, Edward.

I didn't know why, but just saying his name made me stronger. I was still devastated that we hadn't located him, and I would never accept the possibility that he was gone for good. He had to come back. He had to see our daughter.

Edward, Edward, Edward.

"OK, Bella, give one big push and the baby's head will crown."

"You can do it!" Alice cheered in my ear, gripping my hand fiercely. "Just a bit longer and you'll see her. You'll be able to hold her."

Edward, Edward, Edward.

The thought of seeing her, of holding her in my arms made me muster the remaining strength I had and pushed. Alice squealed, and the doctor smiled as I groaned.

"Oh, my God, Bella. It's time! It's time, it's time, it's time! Button's here!"

I smiled through the pain, holding onto her as if she was all I had, and at that very moment she was. I continued to chant, continued to do as the doctor told me, focusing completely on my little girl.

"OK, Bella, this is the last one, just one more steady push and she'll be here. When you feel it, push."

I nodded, took a deep breath and did what I needed to do to meet my baby. The relief I felt as she was born consumed me, turning into tears as the doctor placed her onto my chest. I could barely see her through the tears, but I felt her. She was slippery and warm in my arms, wriggling as she tried to understand what the hell had just happened.

"You're not the only one, baby. That was an experience I never want to repeat," I whispered to her.

"Oh, Bella! She is just darling." Alice giggled, studying me intently.

I smiled, not taking my eyes from the amazing beauty that was my child. The doctor was saying something to me, but I wasn't listening. My daughter had all of my attention. I was utterly captivated.

I stiffened when the nurse came to take her from me, but she smiled pleasantly and stated softly that she was just cleaning her up.

"She'll come straight back?" I asked panicking.

"Of course! We just need to bathe her a little and then check all those fingers and toes are there, OK? Just relax while the doctor finishes up with you. I'll be very careful with her."

I released my hold and let her take my baby, gripping Alice even tighter than before.

"Edward, Edward, Edward."

Alice stroked my damp hair, shushing me in comfort.

"We'll find him. I promised you."

I was confused at first, but then comprehension dawned, and I understood I must have chanted it out loud. I should've been embarrassed but she was firing nothing at me, just trying to help.

"Can I shout Jasper?"

The doctor told her to wait. I hadn't quite finished, and he wanted to clean me up a little before visitors. All I wanted was my baby back. For all of my adult life I'd loved only one person, and didn't think it would ever be possible to love anyone else.

I was very wrong.

Every cell in my body swelled with love for her. All thoughts of just how painful it was were forgotten because she was worth it. I knew life was going to be difficult, but I had to sort myself out for her. She was innocent and shouldn't be sullied with the shit Edward and I had created.

"Here she is, back with Momma." The nurse sang, placing her back into my arms.

She was wrapped up tightly in a pink blanket, and had a cute little hat in the matching shade on too. Alice cooed, and stroked a finger across her petal pink cheek.

"Do you have a name for her?"

I blinked at the nurse, before saying, "Lily. She's called Lily."

"That's beautiful, dear. Lily Swan-"

"No!" I all but shouted, stopping her writing it down. "She's Masen. Lily Masen."

She nodded and scribbled onto her clipboard, before replying, "All done. The doctor is going to want to check her over, and she needs her tags on, but you can have a few minutes alone with your daughter, Bella."

She turned, walking towards the back of the suite and started to tidy up.

"Lily is perfect." Alice sighed.

"Isn't she just. I'm amazed, Alice. I'm just...stunned."

We both watched her wrinkling her button nose and squirming slightly in her blanket. We were both transfixed by the pink little bundle. I kissed the top of her head, inhaling her new scent, before resting my head back on Alice's shoulder.

"She looks like Edward," she breathed quietly.

I didn't reply. I could see that for myself, but hadn't wanted to verbalize it. Though her hair was dark underneath her pink hat, she had a lot of it. I was certain it would be difficult to tame - just like Edward's. Her little fist gripped my finger, showing me just how long her fingers were - just like Edward's. My heart ached, but I shut it down, locking the door to that kind of depression. I couldn't fall back into that hole.

I had Lily.

She was my new start.

I felt ill.

I stared at myself in the mirror and my stomach churned. I was fairly certain what tonight was about, and just as certain what I was going to have to do. As soon as Jake had asked me to dinner, telling me dress up, I'd known.

I should have stopped it then, but I didn't know how to. I let the farce of a relationship continue, and remained in the apartment with a man who thought I loved him. Maybe on some level I did, but not in the way I should. My feelings for Jake weren't soul deep; they were ones of friendship. He was caring, and the kind of boyfriend any woman would want.

Just not me.

I reapplied my lip gloss with a shaky hand and walked back out into the restaurant. Jake stood as I approached the table, a grin lighting up his face.

"Have I mentioned how stunning you look tonight?"

I blushed, lowering my face and took a seat.

"Once or twice."

"Well, you do. Are you feeling all right? You look a little pale."

I picked up my glass of wine, draining it completely in seconds, before reaching for the bottle to top my glass back up.

"Bells?"

"What?" I snapped.

"Are you OK?"

I nodded sharply, knowing exactly how much of a bitch I was being to him. I couldn't stop myself. I wanted this over with desperately. I was a fool, and I was about to break the heart of someone who didn't deserve it. I could've stopped it, though it would hurt just as much. I still couldn't give him what he wanted; be who he wanted. I was made for one person, and he'd been gone for almost five months now. I didn't function in the same way when Edward wasn't here. I was a shell, waiting for his presence to fill that void. I'd tried with Jake, hoping my love for him would grow in time, but I felt nothing except a deep friendship. I'd hoped in time I could pull myself away from the twisted relationship Edward and I had, and develop something that everyone else had. Something without pain, something pure.

But all I ever wanted was Edward.

Jake was nothing more than a friend. I couldn't base a life with him on that foundation.

It was wrong.

I picked up my fork, toying with my salad and not wanting to meet his gaze. I could feel his eyes burning a hole into my forehead. I was confusing him, but I needed to muster the strength and

work out how I was going to do this tactfully. A small voice in my head told me I'd left it too long to be tactful. No matter how I did it now I was going stomp all over his heart. I was being cruel by prolonging it, and I was about to stomp all over his heart.

"Bells, can we talk?" he asked softly.

"I...um..."

"I brought you here to ask you something. Maybe you've guessed, but I want to do it right."

"Jake, I-"

"No, let me finish. Please?"

I groaned.

"I don't think I can let you finish. It wouldn't be right."

"Bella Swan," he started, ignoring my earlier plea. "I love you. I want it all with you. I want marriage, the house, and of course, the kids. I want it only with you. You make me smile, even at the sound of your name. I know it's cliched, but you really do complete me."

"Jake, please, not here," I begged.

"Bella, will you marry me?"

I whimpered as he held out a little box to me. I should have stopped this weeks ago. I swallowed the guilt that was closing my throat, and met his gaze. Tears were prickling my eyes, but I had no right to cry. I was the one that had caused this, Jake was oblivious to my true feelings. He appeared so pleased with himself, and I knew without question that my next words would shatter that euphoria.

"I can't," I croaked.

His jaw hung open, but he didn't pull the jewelry box away. His arm remained outstretched across the table, still silently asking the question.

"I know this is quick. Most men wouldn't ask within the first six months, but I feel it, baby. I love you and want you as my wife."

"It has nothing to do with the time. I'm sorry. I can't marry you."

I stood, intent on leaving, but he grabbed my bicep, his eyes flaring in anger.

"Why?"

I gulped, knowing there was no subtle way to convey this. So I went straight in, cutting out his heart with my words.

"I don't love you and to marry you- to keep this going, wouldn't be fair."

"You could grow to love me, right? I know you could."

People in the restaurant had begun to stare at us, and not wanting to be the nights entertainment, I walked towards the exit. Jake followed, trying to stop me but I kept going.

The blast of cool air made me inhale sharply, bringing me to a halt.

"Bella, wait! You can't drop that bomb and then just run."

"Why not? I'm just telling you the truth!" I shouted back, turning to face him. "I can't make myself feel something for you, and you shouldn't ever have to accept second best. You're a good man Jacob Black, but I'm not the girl you should be proposing to. I'm all wrong for you."

He frowned, pressing his lips together, before speaking so quietly I could barely hear him.

"This is about him, isn't it?"

I wasn't going to answer that. This was cruel enough to him as it was, giving him the exact reason why I could never love him would be highlighting that cruelty. So I walked, and I kept walking until I got back to my apartment. I felt his loss as soon as I entered the living room, but buried it and went straight for the bedroom. Grabbing a bag, I began to pack his belongings. There wasn't much, because he'd only just begun to leave things here and only days before had gotten a key. I was surprised he didn't follow me, but then I assumed it had actually hit him and he wanted to be alone. I'd broken his heart and vowed there and then that I would never have another relationship.

Not when I belonged to someone else.

My heart was reserved a long time ago, and only Edward Masen held the key to my happiness.

"Are you sure you want us to leave you both alone?" Alice asked as she placed my bag onto the floor.

I was bringing Lily home. Alice and Jasper had driven to collect me from the hospital, and brought me back here to my new home above her store. I cradled Lily in my arms, yawning as I perched on the edge of the couch.

"You'll only be downstairs if I need any help. You should open the store, because I really hate how many times you've had to close it for me."

"Could've been more times," she shrugged. "Button came early."

"Stop calling her that," I smiled.

"But-"

"We'll be fine, Ali. To be honest, I think I'm going to get into bed and nap. I'm so tired. She wouldn't settle last night, and I'm hoping she'll like it here a little better."

Alice nodded, patting me on the shoulder and kissing Lily on the top of her head.

"Promise me you'll shout me, OK?"

"Go!" I demanded, raising my voice and making the baby jump.

I rocked her gently and glared at my friend. She grinned as she walked backwards towards the door.

"You're doing so well, Bella. I'm so proud."

I returned her smile. I knew I was projecting my facade well, but only Lily knew the pain that gnawed at my heart during the nights. Being so tired didn't help, because when I was exhausted I cried more. I tried not to, but when I looked at our daughter I couldn't stop the emotions welling. I felt as though I'd failed her even before she'd had a chance. She'd been conceived on the best night of my life, but what had happened afterward made it difficult to cling to the beauty of that. I constantly wondered if I'd been selfish in keeping her. Would she have had a better start with someone else? I had very little to offer her, and right now, I was relying on her to keep me sane. That was a lot of a pressure to put on a two day old baby.

The thing was, though, we were managing. During the day she slept, and fussed very little. It was the nights that were harder, but then I was up anyway. I rarely slept when I should, and that was why I napped with Lily during the day.

I adjusted her in my arms, sitting back properly on the couch and gazing down at her. She whimpered a little, making me wonder what a baby dreamed of. I stroked her cheek with the back of my fingers, utterly transfixed by her beauty. I may not have much, but I wouldn't fail her. I refused to continue the cycle.

"I love you, little girl. I promise we'll find your Daddy."

She gave a little sigh and nuzzled closer. My heart may have been lacerated beyond recognition, but the little pink bundle in front of me was slowly sewing me back up. She didn't know it, but she really was my salvation.

I checked the time, knowing I had about two hours before she'd want more milk. I'd been trying to breastfeed, but she wouldn't latch on and the hospital had advised me to keep trying, but when necessary top up her feeds with formula. I had a bottle in my bag, but I wanted to keep trying.

I stood and walked over to my bedroom. Shifting her from one arm to the next, I managed to get us both onto the mattress, only wincing slightly when the exertion pulled at my still sore inner thighs. I hummed as my head hit the pillow, shuffling a little closer to my pink bundle. I closed my eyes, hoping sleep would consume me soon, but all I saw was Edward. I'd focused so much on finding him, and tried not to consider what his reaction would be once he learned he had a child. He was certain his genes were faulty, but our daughter was proof that he was wrong.

She was perfect.

She was living proof that we could be good together.

One day he would see that, and love her as much as I did. He had to.

I kissed her one last time and then relaxed into slumber...but it didn't last long. Lily woke me, what felt like moments later, screaming at the top of her lungs. I grimaced as her cries attacked my eardrums, and I glanced at the clock. I'd been napping for only an hour. I tried to gain my

bearings while shushing her. She was obviously hungry, so in a still sleepy haze I lowered the strap of my tank and bra, offering my breast to her.

Lily continued to bawl.

I didn't know what to do when she was like this. The nurse in the hospital helped me out when she'd been like that in there, but now I was alone. I knew there was the bottle of milk still in the hospital bag, but it felt as though I was giving in by using that. I swiped my nipple across her lower lip but she wouldn't stop crying long enough to see what I was offering. So on wobbly legs I scooted off the bed and picked her up. I rocked her gently, as we went to retrieve her dinner.

I had to place her in the car seat so that I could dig around in the bag for the bottle. All the while she continued to bawl. My hands shook. I didn't know how to soothe her, and I hoped that all she needed was milk.

I fished the bottle out and lifted her into my arms, trying to get her to drink. She'd worked herself up so much that she now wouldn't take it. My hands shook with anxiety as I ran the teat across her lips.

"Shh, come on, Lily. Please, baby? Mommy doesn't know what to do. Please?"

She continued to cry, and it seemingly became louder and louder. I began to pace the floor, thinking that maybe the movement would calm her down, but after almost ten minutes she was still going. I'd begun to beg and plead with her, even though she had absolutely no idea what I was asking. I'd checked her diaper and tried to burp her, but Lily did not want to be consoled. When she'd been like this in the hospital yesterday there had been only one person that had calmed her.

Jasper.

The nurse had told me that Lily could smell my milk, and would get frustrated because she couldn't drink any. Whereas Jasper wasn't effectively teasing her like that. It seemed a little strange that Lily could process that information, but I trusted her. So on a whim, I took Lily, along with her bottle, out of the apartment and down the stairs to the store, hoping he was there with Alice. I was trembling, Lily still wailing as I hit the bottom of the stairs and pushed open the door.

"Alice, is Jasper around? Lily won't stop crying, and I have no idea what to do with her. I'm so tired. Please help me," I sobbed.

Alice spun around, her eyes wide with shock. I frowned in confusion, but my head was scrambled from Lily's constant cries. It was only when I heard his voice that I understood her reaction.

"Bella," was all he said, and it was a statement rather than a question.

I almost dropped the baby. My whole body went limp, as I stared at him. Lily's wails were the only sound that filled the store.

"Edward?" I gasped.

*Nothing more to give
I can finally come alive
Your life into me
I can finally breathe
Come alive*

*I lay there in the dark
Open my eyes
You saved me the day that you came alive*

Come Alive, Come Alive

Come Alive ~ Foo Fighters

End Notes:
Thank you for reading!

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 18: Echo by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

WOW! Thank you all so much for your wonderful reviews with the last chapter!

Huge thanks to the best beta ever, Maylin & my wonderful prereader Elusivekoolaid.

Magan Bagan id the best Twi VB ever!

Sigh...here we go with EPOV and the meeting with Lily...

SM owns all things Twilight. Spiderward is mine :)

EPOV

I stared.

Her name slipped from my lips before I could hold it in. My heart literally stopped beating at the sight of her. She looked different. Well? Happy? I was aware of Alice's gaze darting between us, her mouth hanging open in stunned silence.

Well, apart from the tiny baby screaming for attention in Bella's arms. The little thing was bawling and wriggling, her cries dominating the whole store. I couldn't think straight; didn't have any idea what to say to her, and the baby's cries just made it difficult to form a decent sentence.

I opened my mouth, Bella's mirroring mine. She rocked the baby slightly, and I wondered why Alice hadn't taken her child from Bella's arms when Jasper walked in.

"Is something wrong with her? I can try...Oh!"

We all turned towards him. The same startled look forming on his face as it had on Alice's. I knew I'd been gone for months, but did it really warrant such a reaction? I cleared my throat, as Jasper stepped towards Bella. She didn't take her eyes from me, as she handed the baby towards him, mumbling about feeding and passed him a small bottle of milk. As soon as he placed the teat against the baby's lips she stopped wailing and began sucking. My heart swelled at the beautiful sight before me: a father and daughter sharing a moment.

"Can you just...?" Bella whispered to Alice.

She received a short nod and a quick pat on her arm. I hiked my bag higher on my shoulder, wishing I'd gone to the house first and showered. I should've at least made myself presentable. Even now when I was determined to make things better with Bella I was still fucking it up.

"Do you want to come upstairs?"

I frowned, but she didn't give me a chance to respond, because she'd already turned her back to me and began to walk up the stairs. I wasn't certain I wanted to discuss this in Alice and Jasper's home, but it looked like she didn't want to be alone with me and this was the best place.

I could understand it.

I'd hurt her.

I'd resolved on the way here that I was going to do whatever I needed to to make her see just what she meant to me. I would wait for however long it took. I would do it; I had to, because she was all I'd ever wanted. I'd fucked up and messed with her so much, but I'd drawn a line and taken stock. I couldn't go the rest of my life without her, fuck, I hadn't gone the last ten years without her, and even if all she could provide was friendship then that's what I was going to take.

I followed her silently up the stairs, my palms tingling to touch her. I needed a connection - something, but I was fairly certain she'd push me away if I even tried. I had to remind myself that she had no idea what I'd resolved, and she was probably wary of my motives for returning.

"Come and sit down," she whispered.

I placed my bag gently on the floor, sitting down and scanning the room. My nostrils flared from the smell of fresh paint, and I could see various bits of baby paraphernalia scattered around the room. I coughed, resting my elbows on my knees and waited for Bella to take a seat too.

"You look tired."

I blinked, unsure how I should answer that. I'd traveled for two days without sleep to get here - to get to her, but I was sure if I told her that she'd assume I was blaming her, so I nodded.

"You look well, angel. How have you been?"

My throat seemed to constrict, and I found it difficult to get the words out. My chest tightened as she gave a small forced smile. She curled her feet around herself on the chair across from me, and began toying with a pink bib.

"I've actually been better than I thought I would. Alice and Jasper have been amazing."

"I thought you'd hate Alice for telling me," I interrupted without really thinking. "Never expected you guys to still be friends."

She winced, teasing the thin cord of the bib around her finger. She was staring at it intensely, her brows furrowing as if she was working something out, but I couldn't figure out what.

"Alice did what I should have done the day you asked me about them, in fact before you asked. I know now I would've never had the strength to tell you. I was in a real bad place, Edward, and I'm not going to sit here and say it wasn't your fault, because some of it was. It's took me a long time, and a lot of help to realize I can be whole without you."

I gulped. Had she found someone else? Was Jake back on the scene?

"I'm not on the meds anymore, before you ask. But I do see a therapist more than before."

"I...Shit, I didn't know, angel. I swear to you I didn't know what I was doing to you."

"Would you have stopped if you did?"

She looked right at me, her expression serious and her whole body pressing forward, eager for an answer. I knew it instantly, but was I really that cold? Had I known subconsciously what I was doing to her all along?

"Truth, Edward," she demanded, her voice stronger than I'd ever heard it. "If we're going to get anywhere with this fuck up of a friendship then we can't hide anymore."

I exhaled loudly and nodded.

"I would have probably continued, but not if I'd have known just how bad you were. I'm not completely heartless, Bella, but you're all I have and the only person who has ever known the real me. That's why I kept returning. That's why it will only ever be you," I said, desperation lacing my tone.

"I'm not ready to hear that right now. It means very little, and to be honest we have a hell of a lot more important things to discuss than your feelings for me."

I raised an eyebrow at her, questioning her statement.

"Things have happened. So many things I have no fucking clue where to start-"

"Please don't cuss. You know I hate it when you do that."

She shrugged, pouting at me and making my heart throb with love. I'd missed her more than I ever thought possible. I could never be away from her again. It had helped her a little, but I could tell by her trembling hands, and the way her eyes kept darting towards the stairs that my return had affected her.

We both fidgeted in our seats, neither one sure of what to say, but someone had to break the silence.

"I tried calling you," I blurted out. "The number rang out. I didn't really want to call here in case Alice wouldn't let me talk to you. I worried every day about what I'd left behind and how you were coping. I mean it, angel. You were with me every step of the way."

"Where?"

"Huh?"

"Where did you go? What took you seven months?" she demanded to know.

"Finding my mom," I uttered, looking down at my hands.

Bella shot off her seat, cringing a little when she knelt down in front of me and took my hands in hers. Something had hurt her, and it wasn't emotional pain. It appeared physical.

"Tell me," she pleaded. "How? What's she like?"

I took a moment, trying to work out how to repeat what I'd discovered. Her hands were clenching mine tightly, her dark eyes fixed on mine. She was stunning and I screwed her up with my stupidity.

I didn't deserve her. Never had.

And wasn't that the crux of it all? Neither one of us had thought themselves worthy of the other. So we'd tried to be normal, while each holding a part of ourselves back, because then when it fell apart we'd still have something. No matter how small.

I refused to repeat that process, so intent on breaking the cycle I purged. I told her everything that had happened to me from the moment I'd left Forks. I could see every emotion she felt at my words as they played across her face, but once I started I couldn't stop. It felt so good to confess everything to her. I'd missed her so fucking much.

"You're killing me, Edward. Where is she?" she smiled slightly.

"Angel," I rumbled. "My mom died four years ago."

She gasped, blinking frantically as she tried to digest it.

"Um...that's not all. My dad died last week."

"Oh, no! Oh, Edward, I'm so sorry!"

Bella locked her arms around me, bringing my chin down on her shoulder so I could smell her scent. Only it wasn't like I remembered it. There was something else mixed in. It was as if her smell had been diluted, and was now masked with another, much more dominant one. I shoved it aside and focused on the feeling of her finally back in my arms. My world righted on its axis, and it was as if I could finally breathe again.

"You don't need to be sorry. This could be the best option all around."

"But you never really knew her." Bella tried to console me. "You'll never understand why she left without you."

"I know," I sighed, as she let go and moved to sit next to me on the couch. "But I've made a choice and I'm determined to stick with it. It doesn't matter. She abandoned me and never looked back, even her headstone had no mention of me. I'm too old to pine for things I never really had. I want to start living, angel."

Bella froze, shuffling across the couch and putting space between us. I felt her loss immediately, and was anxious to know why she needed the space from me. I didn't want to ask, but I couldn't stop myself. I wanted her to rip away the band-aid and reveal the scared flesh, because only when we could see it all could we begin to work on it and heal.

"Things have happened here, too." She took a huge breath. "I want you to know that I tried so hard to find you, and so did Alice and Rose, but we ended up with nothing but a cell phone number that you never answered. I left you messages and prayed that you'd ring me back. Oh, Edward, please understand I tried."

I frowned at her ramble, but wanted to wait. I wanted her to tell me whatever was going on without me requesting it.

"I don't have a cell. I tossed mine, knowing that I'd given you the number. I wanted to make a clean break."

There was a tiny whimper from her lips, but she didn't buckle. This was new.

"Look, can we go to your place? I really hate knowing Alice or Jasper could interrupt at any moment."

She shook her head, worrying her hands in her lap.

"Edward. I live here now. Alice and Jasper have a house of their own."

I looked around the room again, trying to take everything in. There was something huge going on here, but my brain was reluctant to connect the dots, and seemed to be stuck like a broken record. It continued to replay the fact that she lived here now. What was I missing?

"I just don't know how to tell you this," she continued. "No matter how I try to word it, no matter how I go about it..."

"Tell me, angel. Just spit it out."

She opened her mouth as the sound of the baby crying floated up the stairs. We both turned to see Jasper standing in the doorway. He winced, clearly not wanting to interrupt, so why had he? Bella stood and took the baby from his arms, letting the little bundle snuggle against her chest. She waved Jasper away and slowly walked back towards me. My heart pounded, and I swallowed back the anxiety that began to rise in my throat.

"We were toxic. We were wrong for each other, so very wrong and that has to change. There was a reason I *had* to call you; a reason I couldn't let you go, and that's the reason we have to start anew."

She held out the little girl, offering her to me and stopping my heart completely.

"Edward, she's the reason. This is Lily. Lily Masen. I want you to meet your daughter."

My head span, blood pulsing heavily through my veins. Her words rolled around my brain but it refused to process what she'd disclosed. However, even in the fog that surrounded me, I found myself holding my arms out and taking the baby from her. She was so tiny, and weighed almost nothing at all. I looked from Bella to the baby, my mouth hanging open in utter shock. I knew I should be asking questions, but I was too stunned to do anything but stare. Her tiny hands were fisted, her knees drawn up towards her tummy, but she became blurry as I looked at her. I blinked, making a drop of water land on her forehead.

I was crying.

My body was wracked with tremors, and my breathing became a series of gasps. Bella tried to take the baby from me, but I shook my head, holding her close to my chest and feeling instantly calmed by her.

"How old?" I panted.

Bella smoothed Lily's wild hair down, before replying.

"She's only three days old, Edward. We came home from the hospital this morning."

"Oh, Christ..."

"I found out a few days after you left. I tried. We all did everything we could to find you. I'm so sorry, but you have to understand I didn't do this on purpose. I didn't hide it; I was desperate to tell you, because I needed you. I needed you so badly. I still do; *we* do."

This was not what I thought I was returning to. I would never have placed this in our messed up equation. It would be too cruel when we had so much work to do before we could be healthy together, but how could I regret her? How could I push the sins of my father onto my daughter?

My daughter.

She was my daughter.

Reality hit like a freight train. The baby in my arms was mine. I was forever tied to my angel by this child in my arms; a child that was made on the most amazing night of my life. Gulps and spasms flooded my chest, as the tears fell freely. Bella wrapped her arms around my shoulder, whispering that she was sorry in my ear, but the more she apologized the more I wanted to cry. This wasn't her fault, but then I'd needed to leave to see the truth of just how twisted we were together. Without that we'd be continuing with the same vicious cycle. There had to be a line drawn somewhere...and this little girl was it.

"Lily?" I spluttered, as if digesting her earlier words.

"Yes. I...we'd never talked about...I didn't know what you'd want..."

She thought it was an accusation, and I couldn't really blame her. In the past it would've been, but right now I couldn't feel anything but pride for her and what she'd achieved. I'd left her desolate and broken, and yet, through all of that she'd managed to keep our baby healthy. How could I hate her for that?

"You named her Masen," I stated rather than questioned.

"She's yours - *ours*, I never considered anything else."

We both stared down at Lily, Bella's arm still around my shoulder, and the tears slowly drying on my cheeks. What the hell was I supposed to do now? How was I supposed to make this up to her and be a good father? Could I even do that?

Lily gave a short cry, making my pulse kick into overdrive.

"What did I do wrong? What's wrong with her?" I asked panicking.

Bella gave a quick giggle.

"She's fine, Edward. I think she needs burping. Can I take her, or would you like to try?"

I pushed Lily towards her.

"I have no fucking clue what to do with her. You do it."

It came out harsher than I intended, but she'd scared the hell out of me. Holding her was one thing, but actually being relied upon to do everything for her was another. The cold shower of that reality washed over me, making me shiver. Bella stood up, keeping Lily close to her chest, and making my heart swell with so much love I could almost burst.

I shot off the couch, unable to think clearly, and picked up my bag. Bella glared at me.

"I...I...Oh, Christ, angel. I need to think. Please don't hate me. Please. I need some space. I need to digest this."

I saw no revulsion in her eyes, in fact I was taken aback by the compassion that was there.

"Have you been home?"

I shook my head, walking towards the door, my legs felt like jelly and I could barely stay upright.

"Then go home, shower, eat but come back. Don't run again."

I groaned, feeling lower than I'd ever felt my entire life. I understood her reticence, so I was going to work my ass off and prove to her that I was worth the heartache. I wasn't ever going to run again, not from her or our daughter. I just needed a moment.

I needed the world to stop spinning.

"Before you go..." Bella said, as I reached the top of the stairs. "Take this, it's yours."

She passed me a scrapbook with *Lily* stenciled on the front.

"My number's inside the front page. Call me when you've looked at it and when you're ready to see Lily again."

I cupped her face in my free hand, waiting for her to meet my gaze before I spoke.

"I'll be back in the morning. I promise, angel." I kissed her nose, forcing myself to stay away from her lips. "I'll be ringing your doorbell first thing."

I moved my lips to Lily's forehead, letting them linger and absorbing her smell. Holding her once had been all it took to lose my heart to her. I was locked to these two forever, my life tied irrevocably to theirs.

I bit back the urge to stay, and held the book to my chest as I walked slowly down the stairs. Jasper nodded in my direction as Alice blocked my exit.

"I'm warning you, don't hurt her again. You'd destroy two people this time, Edward, and you know it."

I inhaled deeply, bending over and kissing her forehead.

"Thank you for taking care of them. I'll never forget it, and I'll never be able to thank you enough."

I didn't wait for her reply. I walked from the store towards home, already feeling the loss of Bella and Lily.

My family.

***There's something about the look in your eyes
Something I noticed when the light was just right
It reminded me twice that I was alive
And it reminded me that you're so worth the fight***

***My biggest fear will be the rescue of me
Strange how it turns out that way, yeah***

***Could you show me dear... Something I've not seen?
Something infinitely interesting
Could you show me dear... Something I've not seen?
Something infinitely interesting***

Echo ~ Incubus

End Notes:
<p>*Gulps*... hope it was OK.</p> <p>I've been asked a few times how many chapters I think this will be. I'm hitting for 30, but could be slightly more or less.</p> <p>Thank you all so much for your reviews!</p> <p>xxx</p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 19: Smother Me by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

I just want to thank you all for the amazing reviews you sent me last chapter!

They were simply wonderful!

Huge thanks to my beta, Maylin, and my prereader Elusivекoolaid. Both kick my ass on a regular basis. And huge amounts of love to the best Twi VB ever, Magan Bagan.

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

I really didn't believe he'd return the next day.

I'd seen the utter shock in his eyes, and I'd expected him to run. So when he'd swiftly handed Lily back and gone home, I wasn't disappointed.

My heart had still swelled at the sight of him; my arms aching to hold him, but I couldn't. I had to remain somewhat detached, and the only time I actually gave in to my feelings was when he'd spoken about his Mom and Dad. I couldn't stop myself at that point. The need to comfort him was bone deep, and it was something I was slowly learning to accept. With Esme's help.

When I'd taken his hand in mine the usual sparks had raced up my arm, and zinged through my body until they all converged in my heart. I would love him forever, and there was no getting around that fact. I just had to accept that we would never work without change.

I was getting there, but would Edward?

I stunned him with the revelation of Lily, but I knew that anger came next. Even though we'd all tried to locate him, I knew he'd still be pissed, because guilt would gnaw at him. I knew him too well.

Sleep hadn't come easy last night, and not because Lily was awake. In fact, last night she'd slept for five hours before needing a feed. My insomnia was all my own making. I was too consumed with the reconnection with Edward. I could still feel his hand in mine, and when I turned onto my side and closed my eyes I remembered all too clearly how he used to spoon me. I wondered what he was doing, and whether he'd looked at the scrapbook I'd made about Lily. Was he really interested in her? Or was he going to hate me once the reality had been digested?

The thoughts continued to roll around my head for the rest of the night, making *me* roll around the bed. I felt small on the large mattress, and no amount of movement could make me comfortable. I'd ended up sitting on the floor by Lily's crib and resting my head against it, as I stared at her for the rest of the night.

She deserved better than the mess that we'd been, and I was steadfast in my resolve to give it to her.

She was my life.

I studied her face, my chest aching as I analyzed just how much she favored Edward. Her bottom lip bobbed as she sucked it in her slumber, and she gave a low mewl before snuggling into a tighter ball. She had no idea of what she was in the middle of, and I would do whatever was needed to make sure she never did.

His appearance was more painful than I'd prepared myself for. I was determined to be stronger – to hold myself together, but it had taken everything I had. I supposed it would be this way for some time. We needed to find a way to make this work, but right now, I didn't have a clue what he was thinking.

So I went about my new morning routine, bathing Lily, preparing a bottle – just in case, and getting us both dressed. We had nowhere to go, and if I was honest, I still felt weak from the blood loss of labor. Maybe a short walk to the coffee shop would be what I needed? I would get to use the pushchair for the first time, and show Lily off to the patrons. The thought of that filled me with pride. She may look like Edward, but she was mine too, and I wanted to enjoy that. I wasn't going to go far, so if Edward did show up he wouldn't have to wait very long.

I couldn't remain inside hoping for him to return.

I'd changed.

Lily squealed as I picked her up, cradling her to my chest and placing a small kiss on top of her head. It still felt alien to me, and I was very nervous about exactly how to handle her, and what her cries meant. All the books told me I would just *know* what they meant, and I worried that something was wrong because I honestly didn't. I would try everything until she stopped crying. I felt inadequate, but having listened to some of Rose's stories about the early days with Heidi, I wasn't too worried. At least not yet. She always seemed to settle in Jasper's arms anyway, so at least that was something.

I was utterly exhausted, and everything around me had a foggy glow. I was moving at normal speed, and yet I was slow to react. I needed sleep. If I felt this way after only a few days, then I was concerned as to what it was going to feel like after a couple of months. It didn't bear thinking about. My mantra started in my head, only it had morphed from his name into something else entirely.

I can do this. I can do this. I can do this.

Those four words over and over kept me going. They didn't ease the pain, nor the anxiety, really, but they kept me moving forward, and that was all that mattered.

Lily whimpered, and rooted towards my breast. She'd never done that before, so I was rather shocked. I stared down at her as she nuzzled my breast, opening her little mouth and trying to gain some purchase.

I grinned at her, stroking her downy hair gently. The trip out was obviously postponed.

/ CS

Lily had ended up feeding for half an hour. We'd rested on the bed, and had both drifted off to sleep. I only started to rouse when a steady, soft tapping filtered through the layers of sleep. I took a moment to right my equilibrium, before pushing my hand through my hair and climbing carefully off the bed. I padded towards the door, checking my watch to see that we'd been asleep for almost three hours.

I wasn't really clear headed when I opened the door, and was still blinking the blur of sleep from my eyes. His voice stopped me short, and I know when I finally looked up at him my expression conveyed nothing but shock.

"Hey," he breathed.

"I...wha...?"

He gave a small frown, before combing his fingers through his hair impatiently.

"I told you I was coming, angel. I was worried about arriving to early. You know, with ...erm...the baby and all."

I sighed, stepping away from the door and allowing him to enter.

"Her name's Lily," I added as he swept past me.

"I know. I've been awake all night learning about her."

My eyes went wide, staring at him as he sat on the couch. I opened my mouth but couldn't get anything to exit.

"I've been reading the scrapbook you gave me. I didn't realize there was so much information on someone before they were even born."

"I saved every little thing," I blurted out, gaining a low chuckle from him.

"I saw. You did a pregnancy test just for me. You didn't need to. You didn't need to date it all either." He inhaled and met my eyes before he continued. "I'd never deny her. I *know* she's mine, Bella."

I gulped. I'd never verbalized it, but it had always been there, at the back of my mind, that he could doubt her paternity. Plenty of men would.

"I didn't date the items for that reason. Well, not *only* because of that. I did it so that I had you with me every step of the way. That book was essentially you, if that makes any sense at all?"

He nodded, just as Lily started to cry. Edward winced, starting the roll of anxiety in my stomach, but I had to remind myself that he wasn't used to being around babies. He wouldn't be here if he wasn't interested. Would he?

I walked into the bedroom, trying not to think of the reasons for his reaction, and went to pick the baby up.

"Can...Can I hold her?"

His deep timbre made my skin tingle and my pulse quicken. That would never go away, and it would always alert me to my feelings. It was futile trying to deny them.

I removed my hands from underneath her and turned towards him. She cooed lightly, still making sure I hadn't forgotten her.

"If you want to. Can I ask you something?"

He stepped into the bedroom and nodded.

"You said you came straight to me when you came back to Forks. Does that mean you haven't buried your father yet? Does Rose even know?"

He cleared his throat, scrubbing his face with his hands.

"No, Rose doesn't know, but then I don't think she gave a shit about the old man anyway. As for the funeral, well the care home has started the process and I have to go there later today to sort it out."

"I'm so sorry," I said for lack of anything else to say.

Edward shook his head, not wanting my sympathy, so I sharply changed the subject.

"Edward, I never kept Lily so that I'd always have you."

He blinked furiously, as if that's exactly what he'd just accused me of. I knew he would never verbalize it, even if he did think it, but I needed to clear it up.

"I never-"

"Let me just say this, OK?" I asked firmly.

When he didn't respond I took it as confirmation to continue, so took a huge inhalation and started.

"I found out I was pregnant shortly after you left. I was a mess. I'm sure Alice will tell you exactly just how bad. The days blurred into each other and it became serious. I wasn't aware of what was happening, and only Alice saved me from some serious hospital time."

He cursed lowly, but this had to be said. He had to know.

Lily began to cry a little louder, so I picked her up, shocked when she stopped immediately. I carried her into the living room, sitting on the couch so that Edward could join us.

"I had no idea. It hadn't even entered my head that I could be pregnant, and when the doctor told me I was totally floored. It took me only minutes to realize that this fucked up mess had to stop. I never once considered not having her, because she was half yours and half mine. Not because I thought it would get you back. But the reason I kept a record of everything *was* for you. I was determined to make sure you knew about her, even if you never wanted anything to do with her."

"I do," he whispered.

My heart thundered in my chest at his words, but I remained impassive, waiting for more from him. He stared back at me, his green eyes darkening.

"What does that mean?" I questioned.

"I don't honestly know, angel, but then neither did you when you accepted that you were having her. Did you?"

I moaned, because he had a point.

"I still don't. This scares the hell out of me, and I have no idea what she wants half the time," I admitted.

A small smile played across his lips, as he reached out and stroked Lily's head. Tears welled. I mentally blamed the hormones but knew it was so much more. I was admitting my inadequacies to him, knowing he could use them against me. I was trying to show him we could still be friends and do this for our daughter.

"I don't have the first clue what to do with a baby, but you seem to be doing OK. I'm sorry you had to do it alone, Bella," he said sincerely.

"Are you tempted to run? I expected anger, Edward."

I saw his shock at the abrupt turn of my tone, along with the subject, but I needed to know. I would rather he go now if that was the case. Better that Lily never get used to him than that he torture her like we'd done to each other. I had to bite back a snort of laughter at that thought. Alice would be terribly proud of my *Mamma Bear* role. She said my claws would come out if my child was threatened, clearly she wasn't wrong.

"I'm gonna be honest with you, because keeping secrets is what started this mess. I was angry last night, even punched a wall at my place, but the second I felt the pain it was like a switch had been flicked. I knew being angry wouldn't alter what I'd left behind, nor what I'd found when I returned. Yeah, I thought about running the moment you put her in my arms yesterday. I told you my genes shouldn't be replicated, and I truly believed that, but then I looked at her."

He swallowed as if his throat was constricting, and took a moment before speaking. When he began again, he lowered his hand and gently took Lily from me. He cradled her uncomfortably in his arms and gazed into my eyes.

"How could I think those things when the proof is here? I don't know what the fuck I'm doing, where I'm going, or what the hell *we* are, but I know I won't fail her like my father failed me and Rose. I won't, angel."

He gazed down at his daughter, missing the tear that fell from my eye. I swiped it away. I didn't want to show him just how vulnerable I felt right now. He needed to see my resolve, and know without question that I was doing this whether he wanted to be a part of it or not.

"Do you hate me for making the decision without you?"

"I could never hate you. *Ever*. I left because I thought it was for the best, and maybe it was. If I hadn't found out about my Mom, then I don't know if I'd have been able to move on. I can't even imagine the decisions you've had to make alone. For that I am so very sorry, but if I'd have stayed I don't think we would have had the same outcome."

I fought the urge to rest my head on his shoulder. Months ago I would've done that without a second thought, but there now had to be an invisible wall – something that would stop us getting hurt, or hurting Lily. Instead, I stroked a finger down my daughter's arm. Her comfort was more than enough.

"Do you think we'd have torn each other apart?" I asked quietly.

"We still could," he stated, reading my mind.

Neither of us knew what to say after that, so remained close on the couch, both gazing at the little girl in Edward's arms. I didn't know where to go with this conversation next. Everything was too confusing, and I'd never even expected him to turn up.

I'd expected him to run.

He still hadn't told me everything I wanted to know, but he was here because he wanted to be, not because he felt like he had to.

"Umm, would you like to feed her?" I asked when Lily started fussing again.

The fear on his face was comical, and I considered teasing him more, but when I tried to remove Lily from his arms he pulled her gently back.

"It's OK. I'll try. Can I just..." he drifted off.

I waited a moment, before asking, "What?"

"Can I just have some time with her? I don't want to encroach, but I just want..."

I smiled. My first real smile in days. My chest expanded, allowing my heart to swell with love, for both Lily and Edward. That would never go away. He'd been my only one since day one, and I knew he always would be, no matter what occurred between us.

"You don't need to explain, Edward. I'll go and get a bottle and you can try. Would that be alright?"

He nodded, still mesmerized by his daughter. The phone rang as I entered the kitchen, and I knew immediately that it was Alice.

"Hey," I answered, resting the receiver in the crook of my neck.

"What's going on? You haven't called me."

"Alice," I warned. "I didn't call because there was nothing to say."

I began preparing a small bottle for Lily, as Alice questioned me about Edward's reappearance.

"I don't know. I wish I did, but things are really up in the air at the moment. We're just working out where to go from here. He's mixed up and needs time to sort through everything. He found out some things while he was away, things that have changed him."

"What did he say about Button?"

"He's transfixed by her!" I said excitedly. "I thought he was going to hate me and run, Ali, but that's so far from his reaction. He wants to stay. He wants us to do this."

"Together?" she shot, her tone sharp.

"No. I told you what would happen if we found him, and I'm sticking to that. Please don't be like this. You promised me."

A sigh popped down the line as Alice exhaled. I began shaking the bottle, mixing the formula up while I waited for her reply.

"I'm sorry. I'm trying. I'm just used to wading in and defending you."

"Not required. I can do this. Please let me."

"OK. I'm backing off, but can I please come up and see Button later?"

I agreed and we chatted for a few more minutes about her new house and Lily, before ending the call. She was just downstairs if I needed her, and feeling comforted by that I walked out of the kitchen and into the living room. I was greeted with a sight I would never forget.

Edward was sitting back in the couch, Lily curled on his chest, with his cheek resting on top of her tiny head. They were both asleep. He was clearly exhausted, and it looked like Lily knew who her Daddy was. I stepped closer, placing the bottle on the coffee table and perching on the edge of the couch. They looked perfect together, so much so, that I reached for my cell and took a few photos of them together. I felt left out, wanting to be a part of them. Would he know if I leaned against him for a moment, and just enjoyed the time together.

A family.

Taking the chance, I slipped back and curled my legs around me. I placed my head on his shoulder, looking down at Lily. My hand rested on his arm, just above his dark, intricate tattoo – the tattoo that reflected his view of himself.

My world seemed to right itself, everything slotting into place for one perfect moment in time. If this was the only moment we'd have together like this, then I was taking it and holding it close. It was precious.

"Angel?" Edward rumbled.

I froze, but he lifted his head, placing a small kiss on my forehead, stopping me from bolting.

"Thank you," he continued. "Thank you for never really giving up on me. Thank you for waiting, and thank you for giving me hope. That's what she is, you know? My hope."

"Mine, too," I admitted.

"*Our* hope."

I placed my arm around Lily, resting my palm on Edward's chest. I could feel the steady beat of his heart, and the slow rise and fall of his chest. I'd missed this comfort. We'd had far too little of it when he'd been here before.

"Can I ask you something?"

I nodded, never moving my head from his shoulder, but I was utterly startled by his next words.

"Do you think there's any hope for us, angel?"

*Let me be the one who calls you baby
All the time
Surely you can take some comfort
Knowing that you're mine
Just hold me tight, lay by my side
and let me be the one who calls you
Baby all the time*

*I found my place in the world
Could stare at your face for the rest of
my days
Now I can breathe, turn my insides out
and Smother me
Warm and alive I'm all over you
would you smother me?*

*Let me be the one who never leaves
You all alone
I hold my breath and lose the feeling
That I'm on my own
Hold me too tight stay by my side
and let me be the one who calls you
Baby all the time*

Smother Me ~ The Used

End Notes:

Ooo, what's she gonna do?

THANK YOU!

xx

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 20: Circles by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p style="text-align: center;">*Waves*</p> <p>Huge amounts of love to my beta, Maylin & prereader Elusivekoolaid.</p> <p>Huge thanks to Magan Bagan, my awesome Twi VB!</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

BPOV

"Do you think there's any hope for us, angel?"

I closed my eyes, feeling the sting of tears at his words. Wasn't this what I'd always wanted from him? Hadn't I waited years for him to admit just how much he wanted me? He was asking me, wanting to know that we could actually be together, so why was I questioning it now? Why wasn't I bouncing around the room in happiness?

I'd changed.

And because of that we needed to change this – change *us*.

I moved away from him, instantly feeling hollow. I needed for him to see our relationship had to change, otherwise there could be no *us*.

We gazed at each other, Lily snuggled in his arms. How could I make him see this wasn't a rejection?

"I'm sorry," he rumbled. "That wasn't fair for me to blurt out. I'm an asshole. You already knew that."

I placed my hand on his bicep, feeling it tense underneath my touch.

"Don't apologize for that, but that's something we need to talk about. We can't-"

"...carry on the way we were," he finished for me. "I see that, and before I knew about Lily I was coming back to you to work this through. Angel, I want you. I-"

Lily started wailing, interrupting the conversation. I gave him a sympathetic smile, and held out the bottle.

"Are you sure you want to try this?"

He winced, before smiling.

"I have no idea. This is all messing with my head, Bella. I want to feed her – I feel like I should, but I'm so fucking scared I'm gonna screw this up."

"I've spent nine months thinking that," I replied honestly. "I still don't know what I'm doing. I need help, and feel far too inadequate."

He took the bottle from my hand, his fingers touching mine lightly, and yet still making sparks zip through me. I removed the cap and showed him how to hold Lily so that she could feed correctly.

"You'll have to slide the teat along her lower lip. She isn't taking the milk very well, that's why I'm not breast feeding. I have tried, but she..."

He shook his head, doing as I'd instructed with the bottle.

"Don't. Don't justify yourself to me. I can't take that."

"I just thought I'd explain why..." I breathed, letting it drift off, because he was no longer looking at me.

He was transfixed by his daughter, and she had her eyes wide, taking him in. A lump formed in my throat, and my breasts began to ache. I hated that he'd missed so much, and even though we'd tried to find him I couldn't help but blame myself. I knew something was wrong when I began to feel faint, and didn't want to eat. If I'd have addressed that sooner, then I'd have known I was pregnant before he'd left.

"I'm sorry," I blurted out.

Edward's brow furrowed in confusion, as Lily finally took the teat into her mouth.

"I'm reluctant to ask what you're apologizing for. Maybe we still see things differently, but I don't know what you have to say sorry for."

"You had no part of this, and I'm sorry you missed out."

His arm tensed under my palm again.

"How is that your fault? Shit! We really need to have this out, but I don't know what the fuck is going on."

I gulped.

"I obviously never expected to find a child here, so my head is desperately trying to grapple with that, and yet I know we need to talk. We have so much garbage to wade through. Angel," he softened, finally looking up at me. "Where do we start? What do we do?"

The teat slipped from Lily's mouth, making him curse.

"I can't even get this right. I'm a fucking failure at so much..."

I took the baby from him, as his voice cracked. I adjusted her in my arms, noting the damp patch on my top. I wanted to try breastfeeding her again, but wasn't exactly comfortable with doing it with someone watching. Of course that was unreasonable – Edward had seen me naked, but it just seemed wrong. So I placed the teat on her lower lip with a shaking hand, and tried to get her to feed.

"You're not a failure, Edward. We've both screwed up terribly, and neither of us tried to stop it. I see that now, now Esme has helped me to see it."

"What do we do?" he whispered, holding his head in his hands.

I was desperate to touch him, to ease his pain, but my little girl needed me more, and this was how it was going to be from now on.

Lily was what was important.

"We keep trying. Do you know the one thing that made me understand *us*? Esme mentioned it and I haven't been able to lose it since."

He hummed, but still remained cradling his head.

"The evasion was always there with us, right from the start. We were both hurting in our own way, both crying out for each other, but because we needed each other so much we wouldn't open up. We were both scared of hurting the other with our own pain. How messed up is that?"

Lily gurgled, as he lifted his head. His eyes were watery with unshed tears, but he swiftly blinked them away.

"She's very insightful. Is she...?"

"It's OK, you can say it. She's my therapist, yes."

He nodded, but added nothing further. Lily finished her feed and I was about to lift her, needing to burp her, when he spoke quietly.

"Can I do that?"

"Hmm, sure. You have to be careful though. Have you done this before?"

"Never," he snorted, taking her from me, and placing her high up near his shoulder. "I have, however, seen it on TV. That's gotta help, right?"

I giggled, because that was pretty much what I'd said to the doctor when he'd asked me. Edward smiled back, making the tightness in my chest lessen. He couldn't stop staring at Lily, and it gave me hope. He didn't hate me for having her, didn't seem to hold any resentment at

all, and I knew he could see the difference within me. There were still so many questions – too many answers, but this was a good start.

I watched him, as he fumbled awkwardly.

"You like holding her."

It was a statement rather than a question. To which Edward nodded carefully, still smiling.

"I don't know how to explain it. From the instant you handed her to me, and told me she was mine it was there. *Something. A feeling.* It's like...I..."

"Grounded," I interrupted. "She makes me feel grounded. She reminds me that no matter how bad I feel, how tired I am, that she's what's important. And that's only after a few days, imagine what she's going to do in a few years."

Edward groaned, rolling his eyes.

"This is it, isn't it?"

"Huh?"

"Tied together, no matter what." I nodded. "We sure did it this time, Angel."

"We did, but I...I just-" I tried to explain, but the words wouldn't form.

After years of keeping secrets it was difficult to alter that now.

"Tell me," he sighed.

"I can't regret her. I can't regret what we did that night. Ever."

He reached out, taking my hand in his and squeezing tenderly.

"I didn't regret that night before Lily. I don't regret it now."

Our eyes were locked, confessing what we were not confident enough to verbalize yet. His thumb was stroking my knuckles, flooding me with the kind of warmth only Edward could. I'd tried this kind of relationship with others but had never felt a thing. It only ever came back to him, and now we were irrevocably tied together.

I opened my mouth...just as Lily burped loudly. Edward's eyes went wide with shock.

"That came from...? She did...?" he stammered.

I laughed nodding in confirmation.

"Amazing isn't it?"

Lily whimpered, but nuzzled further into Edward's neck. I remembered that place, and I remembered his tangy smell, so I couldn't stop the pang of jealousy that gripped me. Would I always feel this bone deep need to be with him, or would we be able to raise Lily as friends? Was that possible given we each knew how the other person felt?

I pulled away, yawning, and trying to hide my slightly damp top. I blushed when I realized Edward had seen it, and tried to cross my arms across my chest.

"Don't," he stated softly. "I won't have you ashamed of something so perfect."

I didn't know what to say, or even how to say it. This whole situation was not going as I'd planned it out in my head. Edward had changed, just like I had done, and I'd never considered he'd be this receptive to Lily. He wouldn't let her go.

"Can I ask you about your Dad?" I asked, trying to change the subject.

He winced, rubbing Lily's back as if comforting himself just as much as her. He thought he didn't know what to do with her, and yet watching them he really was so natural in his movements, so gentle with his care. It was as if he *knew* instinctively what to do with her. It made me a little jealous.

"His funeral is on Wednesday," he all but shrugged. "Gotta go and sign a few forms about the house and stuff on Thursday."

"Do you want me to come with you?" I asked quietly.

Edward groaned audibly and shook his head just once.

"You can't."

"Why not?"

"Bella, I've always used you for comfort – my solace, but to move on I have to stop. The cycle has been broken by this little one, so I refuse to start it up again," he stated adamantly.

"But I'm offering. You can't be using me if I'm offering it to you."

"You *always* offer, and I *always* take. By doing that I *am* using you. I have to do this alone. I have to put this one in a box."

I blinked, unsure what he was referring to, but he chuckled.

"I just have this analogy. Like all the bad shit that's happened needs to be put away, or buried in a box before I can move on."

"You can't bury the hurt. I tried that for years, and I ended up so raw on the inside that just looking at you made me bleed," I stated honestly.

He cringed and turned his head from me. Telling him was like pushing him in the gut, but if there was ever going to be an *us*, he needed to know. I couldn't live with myself if I kept secrets now. I reached out, trying to touch him, soothe him, but he stood, carrying Lily as if he'd done it a million times before, and stalked across the room.

I could see their reflection in the mirror, and it made my heart blossom with love. This was my family, and I was going to have to fight to make it work.

"Angel, I fucked you up bad. I really did break you. I was blind to what I was doing, because all I cared about was making myself feel better and you were the one that did that. You were all I had..."

He gulped the last word; his expression pained in the mirror. I could see how much it affected him to admit this, but we still had a long road ahead. This was just the start. There were years of hurt between us.

"Edward," I started, standing up and walking to him. "We're both to blame, but we have to stop it now. Quits. Lily deserves more."

I clenched my hands into fists, forcing myself not to wrap my arms around his waist. My body hummed, demanding that kind of connection from him, but I had to deny myself. There was no other option.

He turned back to face me, and I wanted to sigh at the sight before me. It was a perfect image: Father and Daughter.

"We'll take this slow then. We'll get it right," he confirmed.

I nodded, crossing my arms back across my chest. I needed to shower and change, but felt awkward asking him to care for Lily for a little while. After all he'd only met her yesterday.

"Can I ask a few questions?"

"Sure," I replied warily.

I fidgeted, trying to cover the stains on my T-shirt, along with my reaction to Edward. This was embarrassing. Edward seemed to sense my unease, and frowning at me he skimmed a finger down my cheek. The skin tingled and I battled to keep my eyes open.

"Do you need to clean up? The questions can wait. I can be trusted with our daughter, Bella."

I whimpered, my knees trembling. I had to back up into the couch and sit down. Those two words. Just two words coming from his mouth almost undid me.

Our daughter.

"Are you OK, angel?"

He looked around the room, holding Lily and trying to find a safe place to set her down. He wanted to console me, pulled between his need to be touching his daughter and his desire to be with me. I thoroughly understood that.

I swallowed, wiping at my eyes and trying to get a grip on my emotions. It was difficult, they seemed to be all over the place. All Edward had to do was look at me and I wanted to burst into tears.

"I just...when you said...Oh God, Edward, I'm so sorry you weren't here. I'm sorry you've been denied so much. So sorry."

"Stop. Please stop. You're killing me. It's taking everything I've got not to breakdown right now, and you're tipping me over the edge. I don't want you to be sorry, because it wasn't you fault!"

He knelt down at my feet, still cuddling Lily to his chest. His free hand rested on my knee, and I stared at it, while trying to calm down. I hiccuped, trying to regulate my breathing, before reaching out to touch my baby. She snuggled closer to Edward, completely happy in the arms of her daddy.

"Look," he started. "I have to go to the care home later, so please go and clean up while I'm here to care for Lily. Let me help you."

I didn't want to leave them, but I was a mess and the idea of a warm shower was more than a little appealing. My breasts were aching, and I was hoping the heat would soothe them. So I reluctantly stood, kissing Lily on the forehead and lingering next to Edward's face. Our eyes met, both of us knowing exactly what we wanted, but sanity prevailed and I pulled away. I forced myself towards the shower, and made certain I didn't look back.

I didn't want my will to crumble.

/ CS

I'd spent longer in the shower than I intended too, but the warm water on my skin felt too good to stop. I'd forgotten to take clean clothes into the bathroom, so opted for my worn pink robe. I tightened the belt around my waist and lifted a towel to my hair. I caught my reflection in the vanity mirror; it instantly made me moan.

I looked exhausted.

My skin was sallow and purple bruises marred the skin under my eyes. My body still felt sore and weak, but it was getting easier. I was bouncing back, and the most incredible aspect of that was that I was doing it without meds. I was doing this on my own.

I walked towards the door, already hearing murmurings from within the living room. I wondered if Edward was on the phone, so I opened the door quietly. I popped my head around the wooden frame, and instantly felt like I was intruding on a moment. Edward hadn't heard me, as he was clearly entranced by his daughter.

He was holding her in front of him, resting her on his forearms and cradling her head in his palms. I couldn't tell if she was awake, but it didn't seem to matter to him, because he was talking to her anyway.

"...never meant to hurt her, in fact everything I kept from her was so that she didn't get tarnished by my mess. I didn't see that I was hurting her anyway. Maybe if she'd known from the start what my problems were we wouldn't be here, and if that's the case then I can't regret what's past.

"I thought I didn't want kids; thought my genes were black and rotten, but they're not, are they, cherub? You're proof of that. You have perfect written all over you."

He lifted her and kissed her forehead, lingering and kissing her again.

"I never thought I'd love anyone but your Momma. Looks like I was wrong, because you have stolen my heart. You make me want to sort my selfish ass out and give you what I never had. I'll make it right. I'll do whatever I need to to make up for everything I've done. I'll make you and your momma happy. I promise."

I stepped from the room, my whole body shaking with emotion. Edward looked up, his green eyes shimmering with tears and...love. I opened my mouth, the words struggling to escape.

"Not much of a conversationalist is she?" I finally uttered.

Edward cleared his throat and sat back on the couch.

"Good listener though."

"I think she needs to rest properly, Edward. You'll spoil her by carrying her everywhere."

I reached out to take Lily from him.

"Says who?" he shot at me, letting me lift her.

"All the books and magazines."

I placed her into the pram, tucking a blanket around her and turned back to Edward.

"Thank you for letting me do that. I feel better now."

I picked up a packet of pain meds, popping two tablets from the blister pack and was about to swallow them when Edward shot off the couch and gripped my wrist tightly.

"Did you lie to me? You told me you weren't on meds, Bella. Are we starting with the secrecy already?"

"Edward-"

"No!" he raged, his grip becoming tighter. "We'd come to an understanding and yet within minutes you go back on it. Why? Why would you do that?"

I wrenched my arm away, stumbling back and glaring at him. I inhaled deeply, trying to get a hold on my temper, because Lily was in the room and I refused to wake her. Especially when the reason was Edward's ignorance.

"Labor? It fucking hurts. I mean *really* fucking hurts. It doesn't stop when the baby is through. Hell no! That would be way too easy. It goes on for days afterward. Your uterus spasms until it shrinks back to its normal size. So, *Edward*, I don't intend to torture myself needlessly and I take the meds to help with the pain."

He winced, realizing what he'd done instantly, but I wasn't letting this go. I wasn't going to allow this.

"Fuck! I'm sorry-"

"Save it. Fucking save it! You've been here for one day. One day! And yet you assume I'm the one that has lied and messed up. You need to go away and really think about what I've had to

deal with for the last eight months. She wouldn't be here if I'd fucked up, and you know it. So don't you dare accuse me of lying about my medication. I haven't taken a single antidepressant or sleeping pill in months. I did this on my own. MY OWN! You fucked off and never bothered to contact me. If you had, you would have known about her from the start. You would have been there, Edward!"

I began to cry, great sobs tearing from my chest. He stepped closer, trying to wrap his arms around me, but I moved back, hissing at him until he stepped away. He was holding his hands up in surrender, but I was in no mood now. He'd opened the dam, and I sure as hell wasn't about to stop the flow now. If he saw how truly broken he had left me, then maybe he would stop acting like this.

"Get out!"

"Angel, I'm so-"

"Get. The. Fuck. Out. I refuse to raise my voice at you. *Our* daughter is asleep. This is my home, and you have pissed me off so bad. You need to go home and work out what you just did. Maybe then you'll see why I'm kicking you out," I spat, opening the door and waiting.

He tried to speak again, but I looked at the floor and listened to him as he shuffled around the room. He came to a stop in front of me, and placed a quick kiss on top of my head.

"I'm sorry. I messed up again. I just want you to know I'm only leaving so that we don't upset Lily. I'll be at the house and my cell will be on. Kiss Lily for me."

I didn't look up. I knew my will would waiver if I did. I simply closed the door and went over to check on my baby.

I would not let him do that to me.

I was stronger than that.

*Take my hand let's go,
Somewhere we can rest our souls.
We'll sit where it's warm,
You say look we're here alone.*

*I was running in circles,
I hurt myself,
Just to find my purpose.*

*Everything was so worthless,
I didn't deserve this,
But to me you were perfect.*

*I'm scattered through this life.
If this is life I'll say good bye.*

*She's gone like an angel,
With wings let me burn tonight.*

Circles ~ Hollywood Undead

End Notes:
I told you this wasn't going to be easy! Thank you xx

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 21: The Gift by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p style="text-align: center;">Hello!</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Huge thanks to my beta Maylin, and prereader Elusivekoolaid.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

EPOV

Prick.

Asshat.

Moron.

Dickhead.

Every single one of those fucking words applied to me.

I'd shattered our precarious understanding by not trusting her; by accusing Bella of lying to me. I'd certainly fucked it up with style again.

What the hell was wrong with me?

We'd spent so long trying to get to this point, and now I'd made a real mess of it. I'd returned back here kicking myself for my own stupidity. We'd taken two huge steps towards something wonderful and I was the one to bring us right back. I would now have to work twice as hard to prove to her that I was serious about this relationship.

Serious about our family.

I'd felt so lonely, my arms empty, last night as I tried to sleep in the house alone. I'd ended up in the garden at five this morning and had been there ever since. It was pushing on for lunchtime now, and the sun was beating down on me, but I was engrossed.

I picked up the saw, and placed the serrated edge on my small pencil marking, pulling it back against the wood to make a slight indent. When I'd been away from Bella, taking manual jobs to help top up my father's care, making small items in wood was the only thing that kept my mind from brooding.

From fixating on the pain I was causing her.

My neighbors would probably be pissed off at the noise I was making, but no one had been around. Not that I could hear the doorbell from out there anyway.

"You'll burn if you stay out here much longer without a t-shirt or lotion."

I jumped, not expecting anyone to come around back, and certainly not her. I wasn't sure what to expect, but when I looked up, taking in her smiling face, I knew she wasn't here to berate or accuse.

"Alice," I stated, for lack of anything else to say.

She stepped forward, moving her sunglasses to the top of her head, as I picked up a bottle of water. I could feel sweat trickling down my spine as I stood up straight, meeting her gaze.

"I think we need to talk, Edward."

"Look, Alice, I appreciate what you did for Bella, looking after her and everything, but if you're here to have a go about what's happened since, then I'm gonna have to ask you to leave. It's got nothing to do with you. This is my family, and I will make it right."

"I'm not here to argue with you, Edward. I'm actually here because I think you need a friend."

"Yeah, right," I huffed.

"I mean it. You seem to think I hate you, and I guess I did kinda come off that way, but all I've ever done is try to look after my friend. She means far too much for me to just ignore what was happening between you two. I admit, I should never have told you about her meds the way I did, and I really am sorry for that. But this thing between you two, the toxicity, it would have just carried on. You needed to know."

I took a deep gulp of water, still not convinced she meant what she was saying.

"Can I sit down?" She asked cautiously, pointing to a small stool I'd made months earlier. I grimaced, but nodded.

She flopped down, dropping her bag on the grass at her feet, and worried her hands in her lap. She was staring at my arm, at my tattoo, so I twisted away slightly obscuring it from her view and waited.

"Bella's worked hard to get to where she is today. She's done everything she could to make sure she was stable enough for when Button- sorry, Lily arrived. We all tried to find you; she never wanted to do this alone." She swallowed audibly. "Jasper and I have had to watch her at her lowest, when she didn't eat, sleep or wash... You can't let her do that again. You have to accept that even though she has always loved you, *will* always love you, she's stronger now. There's another focus to her life now."

"Our daughter," I added.

Alice nodded.

"Isn't she perfect?"

I slumped onto the grass, and reached for a towel. I began wiping the sweat from my chest, thinking of exactly how Lily made me feel.

"Last night," I croaked out. "I felt lost without her, without *them*. How stupid is that? I barely know her, and yet I feel the ache here."

I rubbed at my sternum, right over my heart, embarrassed when I felt the prickle of tears in my eyes.

"Did she tell you what I did?"

Alice nodded, but had nothing to add.

"I don't know what came over me. I saw her taking some pills and just assumed she was lying to me. I was so angry. I don't blame her for kicking me out. I deserved it."

"Damn, right you did. But now you can't keep fucking it up. It can't be like before."

"I know," I sighed.

"I'm not sure you do."

She held her hands up in surrender, when I opened my mouth to protest.

"Just let me finish, please? You've only had a couple of days to get used to the idea of a baby. Bella had almost six months. Six months for her to see exactly where you guys needed to change and exactly what should never happen again. You haven't had that, and I can see you're still reeling. I'm not expecting you to talk to me, but I think you need someone. Jasper, Rose, Emmett, someone..."

"I want my angel," I breathed.

"I know you do, and if I thought differently I wouldn't be here, but there's a lot for you to actually deal with. Talking will help you. It has for Bella."

"A shrink?" I questioned, raising a brow at her.

She shrugged.

"Maybe, but I think you're a little different. I think you can do this with your friends, but you have to let them help. Let *us* help. Can I confess something?"

"Sure."

She was going to say it anyway.

"I know you guys are meant to be together. I know you can all be very happy. A perfect family, but you're gonna have to fight for it, and fight like hell for Bella. She's not who she was. There's a huge wall around her heart now, and locked inside are her and Lily. You're going to have to work damn hard before she lets you in."

I took another swig of water, trying to dislodge the lump in my throat.

"Why are you helping me?"

"Because I love my friend, and I know just how much she loves you. You guys were family to each other, and even amongst all the hurt I know there were good times."

I snorted, recalling so many times when we'd been unable to catch our breath because we'd been laughing so hard.

"I guess I forgot those,,," I whispered absently.

Alice raised her brows, whether she was underlining my point or questioning my ramble I wasn't sure, but she'd sure struck a nerve. Whenever I came back I'd needed Bella to help me heal; to make me feel better after being apart from her, but there hadn't been a whole lot of fun. For years we'd been stuck in a cycle of hurt, and it was surprising she was still around.

Even more startling that she'd stayed around long enough to get pregnant and have my daughter.

The voice in my head mocked my surprise, reminding me that I knew exactly how Bella felt about me. I'd always known and I had used it to my advantage on more than one occasion. I couldn't help but wonder if everything would have worked out differently if she'd known how I felt.

That she really was my angel.

I groaned, shoving my fingers into my hair aggressively, and not stopping until I felt the biting pain in my scalp.

"I've hurt her every single step of the way. I couldn't live with myself if I did it again, and that's before I even think about Lily. Fuck! Alice, what do I do?" I growled.

"Fight."

"I don't think she'd appreciate the caveman approach."

She grinned.

"You're correct in that assessment, but she wouldn't be able to shut down if it was an all out cuteathon, would she?"

"Huh? *Cuteathon*?"

"Well, I was thinking if roles were reversed and Jasper and I were having *issues*, what would make my heart melt and get me to remember the reason I loved him? I think all you-"

"We're a little different than you and Jasper," I interrupted, pushing up to standing and staring down at her.

"I know that, silly, and the conclusion I came to was simple really," she shrugged, squinting up at me.

"And that is?"

"Just be a dad. Be there for Lily, and be everything that baby needs," she grinned in excitement.

I rolled my eyes, walking back to my workbench and picking up the wood and mallet.

"I intend to do that anyway." I glowered at her. "There is no fucking way I'm walking away from my little girl."

I was pointing the mallet at her, snarling, when I saw her begin to clap. My whole body was vibrating with anger, but the smile on Alice's face, and the fact that she seemed happy with my annoyance made me stop.

I dropped the mallet, and glared at her for some clarification.

"That's what you need to show her. Fight, Edward. Just fight, but this time make it for something worthwhile. Anger won't keep you warm at night, or snuggle into your chest and make you feel so much love. Anger leaves you lonely, you already have proof of that."

I turned my back on her, pretending to measure another leg for the small table I was working on. She was right, but I wasn't going to admit that to her.

"I just came to say I was here if you need me. We all are."

Her hand pressed flat on my back as she tried to hug me. I let her lean in, but didn't return the comfort. I wasn't ready for that.

"Bella never told me about this," she said, changing the subject and reaching out for a small tray I'd completed this morning.

She ran her fingers across the inlaid colored glass, and I hoped the resin had set, otherwise she could cut herself.

"I'm not sure Bella knows. I mean, the glass thing? We used to do that as kids. Whenever shit got bad we'd hide out in the woods, collecting stones and glass then make pictures from the different tones and textures. The woodwork I kinda picked up along the way. When I'm beginning to drown I do something like this. It helps me to forget."

"Do you have any other finished pieces like this tray?" she inquired tilting her head inquisitively.

I took her back, towards the old shed, pointing towards a pile of trays, picture frames and stools. All had glass and resin inlaid into areas of the wood.

I didn't stay and watch her pick through them. I wasn't in the mood, and to be honest, I'd thought of something more important that I would rather be doing.

"Alice, I'm going out. Can you lock up the shed when you're done? Just post the keys through my letterbox, OK?"

She waved her hand absently, ushering me to leave.

"Thanks for coming over. I hate to admit it, but it helped."

"Good, now go and sort your shit out!"

I left her searching the shed, and went to shower. I couldn't exactly go and see my little girl dirty and sweaty, now, could I?

/ CS

BPOV

"Alice, you said you'd take care of her," I complained into the telephone receiver.

"I did, and I want to, but Button has someone else that needs her right now. I promised not to get involved, and I won't."

"So I'm supposed to ask him to have his daughter while I go and see my therapist? Really, Alice?"

She huffed.

"Yes, really, Bella. He's Lily's father, and the perfect person to care for her. It's only an hour. He can take her to the park, some father daughter bonding."

"When did you become his cheerleader? What am I missing?" I asked impatiently.

"Nothing. I just think Lily needs her dad, and you both need each other. You've just got to sort yourselves out and meet in the middle. Your appointment is the perfect opportunity, wouldn't you say?"

I could hear her smile as it came down the call. She was so smug at times. Why had I never noticed that before?

"I'm just supposed to call him and ask him? After what he said to me yesterday?" I screeched.

"Yup, that's exactly what you do. Share the load, Bella... Oh, how pretty! Oops, sorry, yes, call him."

"What're you doing?"

"Just looking at some new gifts to sell in the store. Nothing important. So are you gonna ask him for help?"

I groaned and disconnected the call. I hated it when she was right.

I tossed the phone onto the couch, and lay back down on the floor with Lily. She was asleep on a large blanket spread across the floor, her arms raised above her head, her mouth wide open.

I watched her.

I was exhausted and knew I should really get some sleep while she was, but I couldn't stop staring at her. The more I looked, the more I saw Edward. She was like a perfect replica of her dad, and I should be annoyed, or even upset, but all I ever felt was love.

Wasn't that the problem?

I'd forgiven Edward for so much, and each time the only reason I'd had was love. The line had to be drawn somewhere, and his inability to trust my word had given me the will to do it.

I sighed, rubbing Lily on her stomach and taking a deep breath, inhaling her baby scent. I was already relying on my little girl too much. Her moods affected mine, her sleep pattern deciding my own, and her scent was the only thing that could calm me.

Was this normal?

Was I repeating the past?

Just the thought made me tear up, and within seconds I was bawling, great chest wracking sobs. I tried to stay quiet, not wanting to wake Lily, but my emotions were just running away with themselves. I took deep breaths, trying to staunch the flow, and only cried more when Lily woke and began to scream twice as loudly.

I picked her up, cuddling her to my chest, as I rested back against the couch. We both sat there crying, and I wasn't sure either one of us knew why. We just needed the release.

There was a knock on the front door around the time my sobbing turned to sniveling. I didn't have the strength to stand up and answer it. I stayed on the floor, whimpering to myself, and absently rocking us.

The knock came again, and unable to think clearly I whined, "Come in."

Edward filled the doorway, staring at me, and taking a moment to absorb exactly what it was that he was seeing.

"Angel, what's wrong? Did something happen? Are you OK? Is Lily OK?" he asked, panicking as he tossed his paper bag aside and knelt down next to me.

I hiccupped, trying to gain control of my breathing, and hoping that would allow me to speak. He reached out trying to take hold of Lily, but a whimper bubbled from my lips.

"Hey, it's OK, angel. She's sleeping now, let me put her in her stroller, and then I can help you. Let me help you, baby."

I eyed him, tears rolling down my face. I felt stupid. I didn't even know why I was crying. Edward was staring at me, his face a series of puzzled expressions, but I couldn't make that go away. I was just as confused.

"Let me take her," he tried again.

His hands slipped between Lily and my chest, taking her from me. Instead of placing her in the stroller, he rested her on the couch, our backs stopping any possibility of falling. He rested back on the couch, his shoulder touching mine, and placed his hand on my knee.

"Bella, talk to me," he croaked.

"I-I-I..." I wiped my nose on the sleeve of my t-shirt. "I don't know what's wrong with me. I was looking at Lily, thinking of just how much she looks like you, and the floodgates opened. Now I can't stop."

He stroked my knee, waiting for me to elaborate, but I couldn't.

My emotions were all over the place.

He cleared his throat, and took a deep breath.

"Angel, is this something you need to see the doctor about?"

"What?" I asked, utterly surprised.

"Are you feeling low? Is this getting too much?"

His voice was no more than a whisper, because he clearly felt wrong asking me about this.

"It's the baby blues, Edward. The doctor warned me to expect tears, but if it makes you feel better, I'm at my therapists tomorrow."

I felt him nod, but couldn't bring myself to look at him. This was my cue; the point where I could ask him, but the question was sticking in my throat. I had to mentally berate myself, and make myself spit the question out.

"Hm, could you...? I mean, did you want to...?"

He raised a brow at me, waiting, and I knew I had no choice but to just come out and ask.

"Could you please care for Lily for an hour tomorrow, while I'm with my therapist?"

His smile lit the room, his eyes shining in complete joy, and he quickly crawled across the floor to retrieve his paper bag.

"She could make her debut in this," he grinned, happily.

Edward pulled a tiny pink cord jacket from the bag. The hood had tiny bunny ears sewn on it, and when he twirled it around, I could see a fluff tail at the back.

"Cute," I stated, wiping my eyes.

"Kinda went shopping, bought her a few other items too. Wanna see?"

I shook my head, feeling rather cruel, but ignoring previous encounters was what had gotten us here, so I refused to repeat the past.

"We need to talk about yesterday. I won't have you accusing me of lying ever again, Edward. Ever."

I watched his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed, and when he spoke his voice was gravely.

"I was out of line, and I fucked up. I'm trying with everything I have here, angel, but I'm not perfect. I'm gonna mess up. I'm gonna take the wrong turn, but you and Lily are at the top of my list of priorities, and I'll do whatever I can to get you to trust me again."

"Trusting you was never an issue before yesterday. You're the one that messed that up," I replied rather petulantly.

"I know. I really do, but gimme a break here, Bella! I'm doing what I can, more even. I'm bound to fuck something up. I'm damn sure you have!"

My jaw stiffened, as I tried to get a grip on my anger. I wanted to scream at him, but was startled when my annoyance began to dissipate so quickly.

He had a point.

I nodded, feeling a small tear slip down my face. I was trying to calm myself when he changed the whole track of the conversation, maybe hoping it would lighten the mood.

"I bought you something too."

I pouted at him, watching as he pulled a book from the bag and passed it to me.

Dracula.

"What's this?" I asked, knowing it was a stupid question.

"Years ago I bought you this book, and I know you still have it. I know how much you love and cherish it, but this is a new start, so I want you to have a new book."

The tears came again almost immediately, and once again there was no stopping the stream of emotion. Edward patted his shoulder, his hand covering mine, as he whispered.

"It's time you used my shoulder to cry on, angel. I'm here and I'm offering you what you need. Take it."

I did as he asked. I rested my head on his shoulder and I sobbed, as he rubbed my back, comforting me like he'd never done before. And I knew in that moment that nobody else could ever replace Edward in my heart.

No matter how much I fought it.

He was all I'd ever wanted.

All I'd ever need.

We just needed to find a path. A path that would give us hope.

A path that would give us our future.

*Hold me now I need to feel relief
Like I never wanted anything
I suppose I'll let this go and find a reason I'll hold on to
I'm so ashamed of defeat
And I'm out of reason to believe in me
I'm out of trying to get by*

*I'm so afraid of the gift you give me
I don't belong here and I'm not well
I'm so ashamed of the lie I'm living
right on the wrong side of it all*

*I can't face myself when I wake up
And look inside a mirror
I'm so ashamed of that thing
I suppose I'll let it go
till I have something more to say for me
I'm so afraid of defeat
And I'm out of reason to believe in me
I'm out of trying to defy*

The Gift ~ Seether

End Notes:
<p>Big thanks to JacnDaniel for the song!</p> <p>MUAH!</p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 22: PS You Rock My World by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Thank you to all my reviewers. I adore each and every single one I get.

Huge thanks to my beta Maylin, and my prereader elusivekoolaid.

SM owns all things Twilight.

EPOV

I stared down at the wooden box. The casket contained my father, and I felt nothing but hatred.

I hadn't really wanted to come; didn't see the point, but it was the only completion I'd get. The only time I could vent and not have him hit me, or stare at me blankly because he had no idea who I was.

I hadn't told Bella, though I sorely needed her support right now. I just kept thinking of my little cherub, and that in a few short hours I would be able to hold her. She would make whatever hurt I was feeling go away. She made me feel like a better man.

And I knew I really could be for her. For them both.

I'd spent the whole of last night trying to figure out how I was going to make Bella trust me again. I'd fucked up over her pain meds, and wanted to show her I was serious.

I was here to stay.

I thought over the conversation I'd had with Alice, and I'd even considered picking up the phone and calling Alice. But when I picked up my cell and realized the time, I knew it was too late to disturb her. I also worried she'd tell Bella where I would be this morning.

There had been four people at the service. The others were people who cared for him at the home. Rose never arrived. She'd refused, and I really didn't blame her. I was only here to bury the past; to gain a new start. I was going to leave the shame and regret here in the ground with the man that had caused so much of it.

I had much to take responsibility for, and I was going to have to shoulder that forever.

That was my burden to bear, not Bella's, and certainly not Lily's.

"Goodbye, old man," I stated, kicking some dirt into the hole.

It splattered across the wooden casket, obscuring the little plaque that bore his name. Obscuring him from my view.

"I won't be back. You really are on your own in this."

I turned, refusing to look back. I wrapped my long black coat around myself, fighting a bone deep chill that had nothing to do with the temperature, and walked away from the grave.

My head held high for the first time in as long as I could remember.

/ CS

I'd rushed home, showered and changed as quickly as I could.

I wanted to get to my family.

I wanted to feel complete again.

Bella had worried me when I'd found her sobbing on the floor, and I wondered if the whole experience had been too much for her. However, the more we talked the more I actually saw how strong she was.

I'd always known the burden I placed on her shoulders was great, and she'd carried it with very little complaint. Because of that I'd systematically taken advantage, sometimes without even giving it a second thought. So I knew getting this right now was going to be the hardest thing I'd ever done, but I was determined to do it.

I checked my appearance before knocking on Bella's door, and shuffled my feet as I waited for her to answer. I could hear Lily crying, and Bella's light footsteps before the door flew open.

"I'm going to be late," she gasped, stepping aside so that I could enter. "She won't stop crying, Edward. What am I supposed to do? I try, and I try but nothing ever works."

I moved closer to her, seeing the alarm in her eyes. I slipped my hands between Lily and Bella's chest, pulling her little body towards me. Bella let go of her willingly, sighing loudly and pushing her fingers into the front of her hair in exasperation.

"Go and get ready for your appointment. I'm here now, and I'll take care of it."

"I think she needs her diaper changed, and she'll need burping right after. Will you be OK with that?"

I sat down on the couch, trying to hide my grimace at the thought of changing Lily's diaper. I realized I hadn't actually done that before, but how hard could it be?

I nodded, asking her where everything was, before she went into her bedroom. I took Lily into her little nursery, grinning at the large orange giraffe that was painted on the far wall. There seemed to be a couple of smaller ones, along with brightly colored butterflies scattered across the room. It was very cute.

I took her towards the changing station, placing her on the mat, watching her wriggle and mewl. Her knees lifted, scrunching them up to her stomach, as her tiny hands fisted.

"We can do this, Cherub. We totally can," I muttered, more to myself than to her.

I looked around the room, picking up the smallest diaper I'd ever seen, along with some wipes and a small pot of cream. I placed them next to the mat, and began removing her cotton panties, which matched her dress, along with the dirty diaper.

My hands were shaking as I fumbled with the wipes, trying to keep her ass elevated so that the mat remained clean. It soon became clear I was holding her legs with the wrong hand, and I would have to cross my arms just to clean her up.

I was making something simple into something very difficult, and it only became worse when I tried to slip the diaper on. I ripped the tiny tab off one, and had to get another, but then I'd ended up covering it in cream.

"What the fuck?" I snapped, tossing another useless diaper into the trash.

Bella giggled from the doorway, and I turned, looking at her sheepishly.

"You've never done that before, have you?"

I shook my head, moving aside so that she could finish what I couldn't. I watched her nimble fingers as they quickly popped a diaper onto Lily, along with the panties and minutes later she was back in my arms, nuzzling my chest.

"I guess I should show you properly," she stated, looking at her watch.

"You'll be late. I'll manage. You need to go."

"Are you planning on staying in here?"

I frowned, unsure because I hadn't given it much thought.

"Am I OK to take her out?" I questioned.

Bella nodded, pointing to the pink rabbit coat I'd bought her. It was hanging on the side of her crib, waiting to be worn.

"I'll call you when I'm done. Please don't go far, and Edward? Be careful with her."

I was about to protest, to ask her what the hell she thought I was going to do with a week old baby, when she leaned closer and kissed Lily on the forehead.

"Love you, baby. Take care of your Daddy, he's pretty clueless at the minute."

"Hey!" I groaned, but it was cut short when she placed her palm on my cheek.

Our eyes met, locking together for a brief moment in time, before she let go and walked away. We'd shared moments exactly like that in the past, but this one felt more. Something shifted, and gave me a sense of hope.

I continued to stare in her direction, even after she disappeared and closed the door. It was only Lily's tiny sigh that brought me back to the present.

"Well, little Miss, what are we to do now?"

I eye rolled at myself. I was talking to a baby, and she had absolutely no idea what I was saying. However, the sound of my voice made her sigh and snuggle closer to me. My heart seemed to swell, as it always did around her. She astounded me. In the midst of all that hurt, all that heartache, this perfect human was created. She was the only proof I needed to show me just how good we could be.

I gazed down at her, stroking her wispy hair, when she opened her eyes and looked at me. I'd never seen her with them open before, and I gasped in surprise. She seemed to assess me, her eyes darting around my face.

"Hey, Lily," I whispered, watching as her mouth formed a little 'o'. "You have me to pander to your every whim for a while today. Be nice to me, please."

I lifted her, kissing her forehead, and then her nose. Her powdery scent filled my lungs, and made me smile.

"Shall we go and get some air? We could meet your Momma in the park when she's finished."

I picked up her bunny coat, and walked into the living room. I had to lie the coat on the couch and then place Lily on top, because I couldn't get it on any other way. She couldn't sit up.

Strapping her into her stroller was easier than I'd anticipated, but then there was the issue of getting the stroller out onto the street. The apartment had stairs leading to it, whether I left via the back or through the store. How was Bella going to manage this as Lily got older and heavier?

It worried me.

I struggled, but eventually got the stroller down the stairs, one step at a time. I checked her diaper bag again, paranoid that I'd forgotten something, before pushing her proudly along the road towards the park. It felt strange to be doing this – pushing *my* daughter in stroller, but I couldn't stop the huge burst of pride I was feeling. I wanted to lift her high and scream that she was mine. I was even tempted to stop the people I walked by and show her off.

"Well, I never thought I'd see the day." An excited voice came from behind me.

I turned, knowing exactly who it was.

Rose.

"Hi," I muttered.

She peeked into the stroller, tucking her blond hair behind her ear to get a better look.

"She's stunning, Edward. Heidi, come and look at the baby."

I nodded, smiling at Heidi when she skipped over. Rose cooed with her about how tiny she was, and how cute the bunny ears looked on the coat.

"Bella?" Rose inquired.

"She's good. She has an appointment, so I get to look after Lily."

"And how's that going for you?"

"Um...interesting," I replied cautiously.

She frowned, walking to sit on a bench next to the play park. She waved at Heidi, before turning back to me.

"I'm not trying to catch you out. I know how difficult these early days can be. I just want to make sure you're doing all right."

I snorted, and before I could stop myself I said, "I buried our father this morning. Do you really think I'm all right?"

"I would've thought you'd be dancing happy that the bastard is six feet under. You get the house, right?"

"Is that all it means to you?" I snapped.

"It means nothing to me," she shrugged. "I never understood why he meant anything to you."

In truth, nor did I, but I wasn't going to admit it to her.

I chose to say nothing, watching Lily while Rose laughed and waved at Heidi.

"You're really happy," I stated rather than questioned.

"I am because I chose to be, Edward. I wasn't going to let him claim every part of me..."

"Like I have, you mean."

"Not my place to say what you have or haven't done, but just see it for what it is now. The man is dead, and you have the possibility of something beautiful. Are you going to let this slip through your fingers?"

I shook my head forcefully.

"Never."

"Then remember today as the day you took your daughter out for the first time. Not the day you buried someone who doesn't matter. Now lemme have a cuddle before Bella gets back. I'm not willing to fight for attention."

She smiled, stroking my arm in silent comfort, before picking Lily up from the stroller. She held her to her chest, cooing over her softly.

"Can I ask you something?"

It was said absently, but there was an undertone that held my attention.

"Would you have stayed around if you'd have known about the pregnancy?"

I toed the ground, knowing the answer instantly, and by the look on Rose's face she did too.

"Make it right with her, Edward. You both love each other. Everyone can see that. Fight your way through the bullshit."

I huffed.

"Someone else told me the same thing recently."

"Then they were right. Heidi, not too high!"

She passed Lily back to me, and raced off to stop her daughter. I chuckled, rubbing my nose gently across hers in an Eskimo kiss. She squirmed, her face scrunching as she gave a short whimper.

"Sorry, Cherub," I smiled. "Daddy can't seem to leave you alone."

I shook my head in amazement. Months ago I remembered telling Bella that my genes weren't meant for replication, and yet here I was loving every second I spent being a father.

I watched Rose interact with Heidi, and laughed loudly when she climbed the steps to the slide, before slipping down with her daughter. She giggled, as she raced back to me.

"Damn, it's no wonder Emm sends me here with her. She doesn't stop."

"Things are so different now, aren't they?" I asked, sobering.

Rose shrugged.

"Only for you. I think you finally see people for what they've always been. Before, you only saw what you wanted to." She knocked her shoulder against mine playfully. "There's hope for you yet, Edward."

"Could you tell Bella that?" I muttered.

Her blue eyes went wide, as a small smirk played on the corner of her lips.

"She's knows that. She's always known that. It's you that needs the acceptance. I meant what I said; I'm here if you need to talk."

Heidi shouted, interrupting our conversation, and Rose rushed off to play with her daughter, leaving me with Lily. She began fussing for what I assumed was milk, so after retrieving a small bottle from her diaper bag I fed her in the park, while watching Rose and Heidi play. Heidi had wanted to push Lily on the swing, and it'd taken some serious skills from Rose to explain that really wasn't possible. She'd still strutted off, pouting and reminding me of her Mom.

I checked my watch at the exact moment my cell buzzed, and a grin stretched across my face when I saw who the text was from.

"Is she on her way then?" Rose said softly.

"Huh?"

"Bella. I can tell by the look on your face who that's from."

She touched my shoulder, and leaned forward to kiss my cheek. I blinked at her, shocked by the touch.

"Heidi and I are going to get some dinner. Have Bella come and meet you here. Talk. Be a couple..."

"We're not a couple, Rose."

"Yeah, I've heard that from you guys before, but lookie what it produced!" She sassed, pointing to Lily. She stood, and continued, "The job at the bar, Edward? It's still open, you know?"

I nodded, but said nothing further as she walked towards Heidi and took her to dinner.

I finished feeding Lily, and was just about to burp her when Bella arrived. She smiled at us, chewing her lower lip nervously.

"Hey there," she whispered, sitting next to me and kissing Lily's head.

"How'd it go?" I croaked out, my throat feeling tight.

"Actually, it was good. I didn't cry, which is always a plus. How's she been?"

"Great. I met up with Rose and Heidi. She...um...she offered me that job back. Kinda."

"Cool. Can I...Can I just hold her a second?"

I handed Lily to her without question, and noted the slight quiver to her hand. The appointment had obviously shaken her, and now she needed Lily to calm that. I understood, maybe more than she knew.

She placed Lily in the crook of her neck, closed her eyes and inhaled deeply. I left her to have her moment, but she halted my movement by placing a hand on my knee. She'd joined us all, linked us together for one small intimate second.

It was beautiful.

"Are you going to take it?" Bella finally whispered.

"Pardon?"

"The job. Are you going to take it?"

I thought for a moment, and nodded before I'd even mentally accepted it.

"Good. I think you should, but..." She sighed loudly and turned to face me over Lily. "Is it selfish if I say I don't want that to mess up the time we have together. As a family."

My heart gave a double beat, and I swallowed the brimming emotion, before uttering, "I understand. I don't know whether it would be the same days as before, but taking it will prove to you..."

I let it hang, only realizing she had no idea what I meant when she glared at me, raising her brows.

"That I'm staying."

"I see, but that doesn't really prove it to me, does it? Time does that, Edward. I'm not asking for anything more. *I'm* the one that chose to have Lily, and I'm putting nothing on you that you're not comfortable with. I don't expect *anything* from you."

"I know," I groaned. "Look, can we go for a walk? I want to keep talking, but I feel a bit of a fraud sitting here with a week old baby."

Bella laughed, making Lily jump and wail. She shushed her, rocking her gently and stood up.

"You're so funny. It's a damn bench. Anyone can sit here."

I smiled back at her, and began to push the empty stroller. We walked along the path, Bella trying to stop Lily's tears, while I was trying to figure out how to say everything I desperately wanted to. I wanted to beg her to forgive me, to tell her that I'd do whatever I needed to, but I knew that would be futile. Showing her would be the only way she'd believe it.

I knew Bella too well, and maybe that only added to our problems. I would know her reactions even before she did them. Just like she did mine. This really was going to take work.

"Would you like to come to the house for dinner this week? With Lily, of course," I blurted out.

"Erm, sure, but it can't be too late. I need to get Lily into a routine."

I thought for a moment, as we skirted the duck pond.

"Maybe I could bring dinner to you? I'd cook it, and leave when you'd had enough. Promise."

"Dare I? I've tasted your cooking, Edward, and if I remember correctly I was sick for two days afterward. Maybe we should order in?"

"You want to?" I asked, slightly dazed, because I'd never expected her to agree to it.

"Sure, why not? We need to really talk, and I think Lily would like her Daddy to bathe her before bed."

I snorted, making Bella stop in her tracks and look at me in confusion. I shook my head, before confessing, "I still can't get used to this *Daddy* stuff. I don't know how I'll cope when she actually says that."

"Oh, my God, don't! I don't even want to think of her at the walking, talking stage. I'm barely coping day to day." Bella gasped.

"She looked at me today," I stated proudly. "Opened her eyes and looked right at me. Not sure whether she liked what she saw, though."

"I don't think that's a problem."

She stopped herself, and did something she hadn't done since we were teenagers.

Bella blushed.

That small tinge of pink gave me more hope than anything else, and I reached out before I could stop myself. I skimmed my knuckles down her cheek, feeling the heat warm my skin. Her eyes fluttered closed, and I saw her throat constrict as she swallowed. My chest tightened more when she actually leaned into my touch.

"I miss you, Angel. I miss you so fucking much," I whispered, my eyes stinging with tears.

"I...I...Oh, Edward. I don't know how to deal with this. I don't know how to move forward feeling what I feel for you, but still keeping that wall around myself. It's so difficult."

"I love you. That has *never* changed. It *never* will. It just became stronger when you had our daughter."

She whimpered, clutching Lily tightly to her chest. I placed my arm around her shoulder, pulling her towards me and hugging them both fiercely. I kissed her forehead, and gulped down the need for more, before moving to Lily and kissing her head too.

"We'll do this, Angel. We'll get there."

"Promise me," she demanded. "Promise me that we're not just stalling for time before the inevitable."

I cupped her face with my free hand and tilted her head so her eyes met mine. I wanted her to see the utter conviction I felt.

"I promise. I fucking promise," I all but snarled. "I refuse to let the only person that I've ever loved slip through my fingers, because I was too fucked up to change. I know we have so much work to do, but Bella, if you're willing to wait then it will be worth it. I'm going to do everything I can."

A tear trickled from her eyes, falling to my fingers as they cupped her face.

"Don't hurt me, Edward. I'm giving you the last of what I have. You fuck this up, and there is no more. I have to stop for Lily. For *me*."

I leaned down, kissing her nose and breathed, "Mine," gently.

*I was at a funeral the day i realized
I wanted to spend my life with you
Sitting down on the steps at the old post office
The flag was flying at half mast
And i was thinking 'bout how
Everyone is dying
And maybe it is time to live*

*I don't know where we're going
I don't know what we'll do*

P.S You Rock My World ~ Eels

End Notes:
<p><i>Thank you!</i></p> <p><i>xx</i></p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 23: Hanging by a Moment by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Huge thanks to every single one of you reading this! I adore you all.

My beta, Maylin, is the best ever! And my prereader, Elusivekoolaid rocks my socks daily.

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

Mine.

Edward had whispered that we were his, and I couldn't deny the truth of that. It had played on a constant loop during the day, and even though I tried to just focus on general activities it kept coming back. That, and the fact that I wouldn't admit I was excited about dinner.

I'd spent a few hours downstairs in the store, talking to Alice this morning. Or rather I'd *tried* to talk to her, but Lily stole the show. Alice had swept her from my arms and had proceeded to show her around the racks of dresses and sweaters, pointing out what was in this season, and what wasn't. She had me giggling within five minutes.

It was exactly what I'd needed.

"So how did it go yesterday?" she asked, twirling around while clutching Lily.

"No tears and I actually felt lighter when I left there. I met Edward and Lily in the park afterward..."

Alice raised a brow, waiting for me to carry on.

"He took her out for some air, and said he met up with Rose and Heidi. It was nice. We had a little talk, and discussed a few things. One step at a time, right?"

"Never thought I'd say it, but yes. You guys need to do that. Slow and steady wins the race."

"I'm not a tortoise, Alice."

"And this isn't a story, but the sentiment's the same," she stated, waving my comment away.

"Look, I know you don't like..."

"Who? Edward? Oh, Bella, I don't dislike *him*. I dislike his actions, you know that. You can't defend them."

"No, I can't but we're going to work on it for Lily," I protested.

"Just for her?"

I stared at the floor. She'd be annoyed if I told her what I was really hoping for. What I really wanted. But the changed me didn't want to hide it from my friend. However, when I tried to speak Alice had already begun.

"You don't have to tell me everything. I understand why you wouldn't want to, because I haven't exactly been his biggest fan, but you know what?"

"What?" I muttered warily.

"I see it. I know why you guys are like this. You're magnets, and once you're together it's so difficult to prise you apart. All you've done is repel each other up until now, and I get the feeling that it's all about to change. Maybe the good is just around the corner."

She shrugged and started to rearrange some small gift items on a shelf, still holding my daughter. The light hit them, and reflected faceted streams across the store.

"They're pretty. Where did you get those?"

"New artist," she replied absently.

"Edward and I used to do that with glass when we were kids. Cool idea to set it in resin."

"Hmm, I just know they'll be a good seller, and as for you and Edward doing this, I don't really see him as the artsy type."

I snorted. She had no idea. The pictures we made were always more him than me. I usually just found the right shapes or colors.

"If I told you Edward was coming over for dinner tonight, would you get pissy with me?"

"Why would I do that?" Alice snapped. "I told you I'd back off. I have, but I also just admitted to seeing something new about the two of you. Don't I get a little bit of credit?"

I grinned at her pouting face. It was a novelty to see Alice unsure of herself, so I took my time with my response, enjoying her nerves more than I should.

"Yes, you get some. A little." I held my arms out. "Now gimme my baby. I need to get her ready for her daddy."

"Button always looks beautiful, and I think it's you that wants to get ready for him."

She passed the baby back to me, laughing at her own statement. I rolled my eyes, taking Lily's hand and wiggling it in a fake wave.

"Bye, bye, Aunt Ali."

Alice moved forward, and gave Lily a tiny Eskimo kiss. It made her scrunch into a ball and whine a little, so I took that as my cue and left.

Lily was still fussing as I walked up to our apartment. I decided to feed her now, and then get showered and change my clothes afterward. Maybe she would sleep while I showered?

I went straight to the couch, sitting down, propping her against my body and tried to get her to breastfeed. I was rather surprised when she seemed to latch on immediately. I rested my head against the back of the couch, closing my eyes, and just enjoyed the moment with my daughter.

I was only just becoming accustomed to her, and getting to know her little mannerisms. I didn't think it was possible for someone so small to know what they wanted, but she really did.

I yawned, acknowledging just how tired I was, and hoping she'd sleep for more than two hours straight tonight. She sighed, placing her fist on top of my breast. My heart expanded with love every time I looked at her, and even though I was exhausted she was worth it.

All of it.

There hadn't been a single moment that I'd regretted my decision, and I hoped Edward wouldn't either. She seemed to have wrapped him around her little finger already, though, so I wasn't too concerned. In fact, his reaction to Lily had been very different from what I'd envisioned. It was his reaction to me that continued to confuse me.

I could feel the pull between us, but then that was always there, and he'd said that he wanted to try for more. I just wasn't sure how we were going to do that.

My mind flowed from one question to the next, never really answering the previous one before it shifted. Before I knew it an hour had passed, and I'd resolved nothing. Lily had fallen asleep while feeding, but at least she'd had some breast milk.

The problem was, now I only had fifteen minutes to get ready before Edward was due to arrive.

How could someone so small sap so much time?

/ CS

I stood in the doorway to the bathroom and watched them. Edward was trying to hold Lily still while she squirmed and squealed, because she hated baths. I felt a little cruel for not informing him of that fact earlier, but he'd been so excited at the thought I didn't want to shatter it.

He'd brought pizza, but he'd been early, so I hadn't showered or changed my clothes. Edward didn't seem to notice. He'd entered the apartment, kissed my forehead and went in search of his *cherub*. From that moment on I hadn't so much as touched her. Edward was absorbed in his daughter.

It was utterly adorable to watch, especially when he tried eating his dinner one handed because he refused to set her down. I'd tried to protest, but he'd laughed, and I hadn't forced the issue. They looked so cute together. When he was holding her he seemed happy, calm, and I knew exactly how that felt, so I let him.

I let Lily soothe him, just like she'd done for me on so many occasions. I couldn't imagine my life without her now.

"What do I do now? I can't clean her hair because she's crying so much!" He asked, pulling me from my thoughts and bringing me back to the present.

His cheeks were flushed, as he stared at me, his eyes pleading for help. Lily was squirming in the small bath, wailing for someone to get her out of the water.

I smiled, moving to stand by his side and picking up the sponge.

"Keep hold of her, because she hates having her hair washed."

"Don't blame her." Edward huffed.

I smirked, and between us we managed to get Lily washed and dressed in her onesie without too much more fussing from her. I noticed Edward's hands no longer trembled when he held her, and wondered if yesterday had helped him as well as me. His confidence around her had increased, and he even changed her diaper without the need for my help. I'd cleaned up the dinner plates while he gently rocked her to sleep.

It all seemed so perfect.

It was all so right, and I couldn't help the anxiety that began to build as I waited for our little piece of calm to be shattered.

I sat down on the floor, leaning against the couch, as I listened to Edward talking quietly to our daughter. I closed my eyes, fighting the tears that threatened to spill. This was a happy moment, and I'd promised myself I wouldn't cry during those. I'd spent far too long crying, and now I was just going to enjoy the times we spent together.

When I looked across at Lily's room, I saw him close the door and walk towards the kitchen. I watched the way his muscles moved against the material of his t-shirt, and when he reached up to retrieve a couple of wine glasses I caught a glimpse of skin near his navel.

I sighed, remembering what his skin felt like under my touch. I tried to force my gaze away, but when I did I met his stare and blushed. He raised his brows, alerting me to the fact that he knew exactly what I was staring at.

"You OK?" Edward asked, smirking.

"Uh huh," I nodded. "Just tired, I guess."

"I should go..."

"No!" I interrupted, my voice louder than I'd intended. "I mean, I'm fine. Come and sit down."

His answer was a quick smile, before he proceeded to open a bottle of white wine. The dark tattoo bulging on his arm, as he uncorked the wine and poured it into our glasses. I had to grit my teeth to stop another sigh of approval slipping out.

I couldn't keep letting my hormones run away with me when I was around him. I needed to be stronger, or at least bury it deeper.

Edward handed me a glass of wine and sat on the floor next to me. I felt the electricity as it flowed between us, and fought to ignore it. He rested his back against the couch and gave me a little smile.

"I shouldn't be having this. I'm breastfeeding, or at least trying," I sighed.

"Still having problems?"

"Not as many, but I do have to top her up with formula. She's so fussy."

His face lit up with a large grin.

"I realized that yesterday when I took her for a walk, and then with the bath. She certainly has your temperament."

I shoved his shoulder with mine, and it made his wine slosh over the top of his glass. He quickly reached for a discarded bib and dabbed at the moisture on the floor.

"I should've made you clean that up," he teased.

"No way. You were the one that inferred her stubbornness came from me. You deserved it."

He huffed and moved back next to me, his shoulder now touching mine. There was a strange silence, not wholly uncomfortable, but I still felt the need to fill it.

I just couldn't get my brain to focus on anything other than his body next to mine.

Edward cleared his throat and opened his mouth to speak, but shut it almost immediately afterward.

"What?" I questioned.

"I want to ask you...what..." He exhaled loudly. "What was it like? When Lily was inside of you?"

I blinked, taken aback by his question.

"You want to know what it *felt* like? Or how I felt doing it on my own?"

"Both. All," he replied.

I sighed, taking a moment to think it through. I knew at some point we'd have to have this conversation. From the moment he'd returned it had been like we'd skirted the issue and just dealt with the situation. Edward had stated from the start that he didn't hate me for the decisions I'd made, but that didn't mean he actually understood. This was him asking for that clarification, and it would be completely unfair for me to deny him.

"I don't know where to start," I uttered honestly.

"The beginning?"

I laughed, not intending for it to come out sounding so maniacal.

"You want to go back to the start? The very first day?"

"No, though we're gonna have to talk about that, but one step at a time. I'd like to know about my daughter," he said thickly.

I swallowed, licking my lips and bracing myself. I'd verbalized this to Esme, and obviously Jasper and Alice had had front row seats to it, but telling Edward was going to be difficult.

I also couldn't shift the thought that it would actually be cleansing too.

I shuffled uncomfortably before taking a deep breath and starting.

"I fell to pieces when you left. Totally crumbled, and I missed all the signs. The doctor was only days away from committing me because I'd sunk that low. I did nothing, just stared into space or cried. It was Jasper of all people that made me see what was going on. Alice had moved in to care for me and she wasn't sleeping." I gulped. "Anyway, you wanted to know about Lily. I never considered anything other than having her, you know? She's a part of you, of us, and I couldn't even get my head to focus on anything else. None of it felt real until I began to see my stomach swell, and then there was the first time I felt her move..."

"What was that like?"

"Odd, to be honest, but now I kinda miss it."

I placed my hand on my stomach and remembered the sensation of her wriggling inside.

"What about the sonogram?" he asked, leaning forward.

"I cried, and so did Alice. I thought of you that day. Ha! Who am I kidding? I thought of you every day. All the time."

"Me too," he offered.

"I'm going to be honest and say that's of little comfort, Edward. You left me, and even though you had no idea I was pregnant, I still find it hard to forgive you for that. Every single day was a struggle. Every time she kicked, every appointment at the doctors and each time I bought her something I thought about whether you'd like it, and what you were doing. That's why I started the scrapbook when I found out. I needed you with me, and that book became you."

"You were always the strong one, Angel. I relied on you for far too much, and I never accepted what it was doing to you."

"I let you," I pointed out, intending to move away, when he stopped me.

He placed his hand on top of mine and squeezed it lightly. I looked down at them, remembering when, not so long ago, he'd never allow that kind of touch, let alone initiate it.

That's when it struck me.

We had changed, or at least started to. The touches, the kisses, the way we were comfortably intimate with each other before he'd left all proved that, but we'd both expected too much. We'd wanted a complete, immediate alteration and when we both showed signs of the past we'd

balked. Why was I seeing this now? Why not before? Would knowing that have saved us from all the heartache?

I took a deep breath.

It didn't matter, because we were here now, with all of that behind us. The only way now was forward.

"Did you really think of me everyday?" I muttered, knowing I should just let the conversation drop.

"Yes, and then when I realized exactly what I'd done, and why I should never have left, I came straight back to you."

"And was met with a rather large shock, huh?" I snorted.

"I think I took it well." Edward grinned, making my stomach tighten.

His smile always did that to me. I'd always referred to it as dazzling, because he dazed anyone that he directed it towards. It was just never usually in my direction.

I took a deep gulp of wine, and set my glass back down when he rested his head on my shoulder. The bronze strands tickled at my neck, and I giggled, wriggling slightly.

"I'm proud of you, Bella. More than I can ever really explain, more than you'll ever understand, but I want to help now. I want to be a father, Angel, and I never thought those words would leave my lips. Ever."

"We're really going to have to work at this, Edward. We've agreed to be honest, and as far as I can see it's got to be total disclosure. Both ways."

Edward nodded against my shoulder.

"I'm going to admit that love has never been an issue, but that won't solve all of our problems, will it?"

His hand squeezed mine tightly, as he stated with conviction, "We're gonna do this, and we're going to be great."

"One step at a time."

"One conversation at a time," he amended. "Um, I kinda have an idea."

He lifted his head and locked eyes with mine.

"How about I come over every night and bathe Lily before bed? After that we can sit for a while and talk. And I don't mean about Lily."

I began to worry my lip with my teeth, when he cupped my face in his hands.

"Us. We need to find a way for us, because I refuse to believe that there can never be one."

"I can't make that kind of promise, and neither can you," I said firmly. "I want you, always wanted you, but maybe we're not meant to be like that. Maybe we're only meant to be good friends and great parents."

"No," he denied, his voice fierce. "We have something that I could never feel for anyone else. We just fucked it up along the way."

I could see he meant it, and every cell in my body was crying out for me to lean closer and press my lips against his, but my brain told me to wait.

"I love you, Angel. I love Lily, and I want you both. I'll do whatever I need to. Just tell me you want me. Tell me you really meant what you said in the park."

I nodded, swallowing the wave of emotion that threatened to choke me. My will was melting under his gaze. It was like being on the edge of a cliff, and deciding if you were ready to dive. The nervous exhilaration swirling in your stomach, threatening to make you vomit, but I couldn't look away. He leaned closer, testing, waiting to see if I would refuse his advance, but I wouldn't, and I sighed when his lips pressed delicately to mine. His hands still held my face, and he tilted it slightly, deepening the kiss as his lips caressed mine. I closed my eyes, and went along with it, my lips tingling when his tongue swept across them. The sinking in my stomach dispersed almost instantly, and I bit back the urge to beg for more when he pulled away.

"Go lie on the couch, and we can watch some TV before I leave."

Edward placed another quick kiss to my lips, before standing up, adjusting his jeans and walking over to the door that led to Lily's room. He peeked his head in, obviously checking she was sleeping and smiled as he walked back towards me. He held out his hand, pulling me up and helping me onto the couch.

"Why do I need to lie down, Edward?"

"Because I said so," he replied with a sly little smirk. "You're tired, and I really don't want to leave yet. I'll stick around until Lily's next feed then I'll go, OK? You need to rest."

He cupped my face again, stroking my cheek gently with his thumb. We'd had this kind of connection for such a short time before Lily, but I'd missed it.

Terribly.

I turned my face into his hand, kissing his palm and closed my eyes as I rested my head on a cushion. I heard the TV switch on, and him shuffle down beside me, but what felt like moments later I was being jostled around. I blinked, trying to work out where I was and what was happening, when I heard Edward whisper into my ear.

"Shush, sleep, my Bella."

I hummed, knowing I should say something but my brain wouldn't function correctly. So instead, I closed my eyes again and let sleep claim me.

*Forgetting all I'm lacking
Completely incomplete*

*I'll take your invitation
You take all of me now...*

*I'm falling even more in love with you
Letting go of all I've held onto
I'm standing here until you make me move
I'm hanging by a moment here with you
I'm living for the only thing I know
I'm running and not quite sure where to go
And I don't know what I'm diving into
Just hanging by a moment here with you*

*There's nothing else to lose
There's nothing else to find
There's nothing in the world
That can change my mind
There is nothing else*

Hanging by a Moment ~ Lifehouse

End Notes:
<p>Aww...bless.</p> <p>I've started a new fic over on FF.net. It's cute, fluffy and full of fun. It's called Whispered Words and False Promises. There's already a thread here on the Twilighted Forums.</p> <p>MUAH.</p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 24: Look After You by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Huge thanks to my beta, Maylin & prereader Elusivekoolaid.

Thank you to Magan Bagan, my Twi VB.

I adore you both.

SM owns all things Twilight.

BPOV

I rolled over, stretching and feeling thoroughly rested. I hadn't felt this good in a very long time, and I snuggled further into the comforter, reveling in it.

My brain took a while to wake up, but the moment it did it was on red alert.

Lily.

I hadn't heard her wake during the night, and the last thing I remembered was Edward carrying me to bed.

I threw the comforter from my body, noting that I was still wearing the clothes from last night and rushed from the room. My whole body was shaking with panic.

What if something had happened to her?

How could I have slept the whole night without hearing her?

I was already fucking up and I'd only been a parent for a week.

I whimpered, as I pulled the bedroom door open, but it caught in my throat as I saw what greeted me.

Edward was lying across the floor, a blanket underneath him. His arm stretched out, as he rested his head on his bicep, and cuddled Lily close to his chest. He didn't move as I entered, so I assumed he was sleeping.

He'd been here all night.

He'd let me rest and took care of our daughter.

My heart melted. I tried to be strong around him. I wanted him to see what he'd done to me, to *us*, but when he did things like this it only reminded me just how much I loved him.

Because I did, and that would never change.

Edward was the only man I was ever really meant to be with. My heart knew that, and so did my head.

I stepped a little closer, wondering why my heart hadn't stopped the frantic beat now that I knew Lily was safe. In fact, it was thumping so hard now I was certain it would leave bruises. I placed my hand over it, as if trying to muffle the sound, and took another step.

"I'm awake," he whispered.

I smiled, as I lay down on the blanket next to Lily.

"You stayed," I breathed, pointing out the obvious.

He gave a small nod, gently rubbing our daughter's stomach. He hadn't met my gaze, and I knew why.

He was waiting for me to vent my anger. He thought I'd be annoyed that he'd slept here, so hoping to ease his anxiety, I reached out, cupping his stubbled cheek.

"Edward?" I waited until his green eyes finally met mine. "Thank you."

He exhaled loudly as relief coursed through his body.

"You were so tired, and I was just about to leave when she woke up again. I really hated to disturb you. You were sleeping so soundly, it felt mean to disturb you."

"I really appreciate the rest, and I mean it when I say thank you. It's just what I needed."

He rubbed his face against my palm, closing his eyes briefly.

"I can see why you were so exhausted. I think I've had about three hours sleep. She's a fussy little one, isn't she?"

"Yeah, she likes things done her way, that's for sure. Are you OK?"

Our voices were barely a whisper, and I didn't think it was because of Lily sleeping between us.

This moment felt so intimate.

"I'm fine, Angel. Just tired, but nothing a coffee won't fix."

I moved to get up, but he stopped me, holding onto my wrist gently.

"Don't go. Being like this with the two of you...it feels right. It feels like we're a family."

I swallowed, and took a chance.

"We *are* a family, Edward. We just have more to work on than most."

"And you think we can?" he prompted.

"I think we owe it to her to try."

My thumb stroked his cheek, feeling the coarse hair, as his eyes darkened with sadness. I understood why, and quickly added, "We also owe it to ourselves. We have been stupidly avoiding this for years. Both scared to cross a line, but that was crossed the night Lily was conceived. It's always comes back to us, and it's only this time around that we're actually being truthful and making progress. I think this is the best chance we'll ever have."

He was silent for a moment, but his eyes were fixed to mine. His thumb started to caress my inner wrist, and I wondered if he felt my pulse increase.

"Do you think we can do it?" he questioned, his voice gravelly.

I nodded.

"If we try hard enough, and want it badly enough..."

"I want it, Angel. I want you both."

With that declaration he tugged on my wrist, bringing me closer to Lily. He placed his arm around my waist, encompassing our daughter and smiled warmly at me.

"You look happy," I stated, the words spilling out before they'd even registered in my head. "I mean, I've never seen you like this. Ever."

"Everything's changed," he breathed and kissed the baby's head.

"I know, but I never thought you'd..."

I gulped, not sure I wanted to verbalize what came next, but Edward prompted and we'd agreed to total honesty.

"I thought you'd leave again when you found out about her. Your reaction is more than I dared wish for."

"I know we can't start again. I know I fucked up; we both did, but what we're doing now is working. My feelings for you are unchanged, and I doubt they ever will."

He moved his hand to cup my face.

"It's always been you, Angel, and you know it has. You need to remember those times we were together, because it was always there. Everything got clouded and mixed up, but I feel the same as I did then, in fact it's stronger now."

Lily gave a little whimper, and before I could even try to soothe her, Edward moved his hand from my face, and placed it back on her torso. At the same time, his lips moved to her ear and he hummed softly.

I blinked, as she began to settle again.

"How did you...? I..."

He flashed a quick smug smile, which elicited a giggle from me.

"Figured that out at about three this morning."

"And you look very proud of that fact."

"I am," he admitted. "It's nice to know something about my daughter that no one else does."

I didn't know how to respond to that. From the moment I was told I was pregnant I saw Lily as *ours*, but Edward was now only just seeing that.

"Shall I make some breakfast?" I asked, trying to change the subject.

Edward winced a little, and carefully sat up. I mirrored his action, crossing my legs and gazing down at Lily.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing," he replied, shaking his head.

"Liar. Tell me."

He moved to stand up, but I stopped him, resting my hand on his thigh and staring at him until he gave in.

"We were talking, Bella. We were getting somewhere, and you shut me down. I don't get it."

I crawled across the floor, so that I could sit next to him. He frowned, waiting for my reply. I wasn't sure what to say. I didn't even realize I'd done that to him.

"I'm sorry. I didn't..." I sighed. "Sorry."

He opened his mouth to speak, but Lily was the one with a response. She began to wail, her hands fisting, and her knees rising towards her stomach.

"Guess we were destined to be interrupted anyway. Go and do breakfast. I'll see to Lily."

I stood, looking back to see him whispering softly into her ear.

We were definitely on the road to a new start, but I was still cautious of every move I made.

/ CS

Over the next few weeks we fell into a pattern. Edward did as he'd promised. He came over to the apartment every evening, gave Lily a bath and tucked her into bed. It allowed me time to myself, and also gave him time to be a daddy. He even came over the nights that he worked at Rose's bar, but those nights we couldn't sit and talk. He'd also started to care for her when I had my meetings with Esme, and stayed over a couple of nights so that I could get some rest.

He slept on the couch.

Today had been the first day he'd had her alone for more than a couple of hours, because I'd worked in the store, and then gone on to my therapy appointment. I was a little worried as I walked back to my apartment, but I knew I was being silly. Edward was coping just fine with her, and more importantly, we were working well as a family.

Albeit, a strange one.

We hadn't kissed again, but we'd shared the odd touch, or peck on the cheek. It was enough for now. I was actually very proud of my restraint, because every single time I saw him with our baby I melted into a puddle of drool. He'd never looked more attractive than when he was cradling Lily against his chest.

I'd told Esme how I felt, and she'd nodded knowingly. I'd never kept my feelings for Edward a secret, and she'd explained it was only natural for them to grow stronger the closer we became. But she did advise caution. She'd also asked about the help Edward was getting.

I'd stared at her, aghast.

I didn't know, and I'd never asked him.

I felt ashamed. Esme knew how important this was to me, and yet I hadn't bothered asking about a major part of it. I thought about it constantly as I walked home. Edward had changed, but who was helping him to deal with the things his father had done? What about his mothers' abandonment? I resolved to raise it with him after Lily had gone to bed.

I grinned as I climbed the steps to my apartment. I could hear Edward talking to Lily, because he'd left the door open, leaving the screen in place. Wanting to listen a little longer, I stood to the side of the door where I wouldn't be seen and waited.

"Mommy will be here in a little while, and then you get snuggles, which makes me extremely jealous. I miss her snuggles, Cherub. Maybe one day we'll all be able to do that and no one will be left out."

I sighed, as he added wistfully, "Maybe."

I knew what he wanted, it was no surprise, because I wanted it too, but hearing him verbalize it to our daughter made it real.

"And you certainly drank that fast. I think we need to talk to your Mommy about giving you more."

I took that as my cue, and opened the screen door. Edward was sitting on the couch, Lily in his arms as he slowly rubbed her back, trying to burp her. He was wearing a white wife beater, so with every stroke to her back his tattoo undulated on his arm. My mouth became suddenly dry. His smile sent tingles skittering across my body, as he noticed me in the doorway.

"And here she is Lily. You gonna say hi to Mommy?"

I stepped inside at the exact moment Lily gave a huge burp. Edward laughed loudly, catching himself when Lily cried out.

"That's some welcome!"

"She was clearly saving that for your arrival."

I dropped my purse to the floor and walked across the room towards the couch. Normally I would have held my arms out, seeking comfort from my daughter after my therapy session, but today I didn't. I sat down next to Edward, rested my head on his shoulder and gazed into her eyes.

They were starting to change color, the blue deepening into something else. Green? Doctor Carlisle had explained that if they were going to change it would be within the first three months, and it looked like they were going to. I'd also read in a book that in a few weeks she should start to smile.

I couldn't wait.

Every day with her was exciting. She was like a flower just coming into bloom; with each petal that opened you saw something new.

"Everything go OK?" Edward asked softly.

"Yeah, but could we talk about it after I put her to bed. Please?"

"Sure," he shrugged, patting her back and eliciting another loud belch.

There was a silence that followed, but one that felt comfortable. I kicked my shoes off, curling my legs around me, and snuggling closer to Edward. He gave a soft sigh, before resting his head on top of mine.

"It's her birthday tomorrow." Edward rumbled.

"What?" I asked confused, but laughed when my brain finally caught up. "One month."

"Yes. What shall we do to celebrate?"

"Do most people celebrate one month?"

He moved Lily into his other arm, cradling her gently, before wrapping his now free arm around my shoulders. I went along with it, giving him what he'd told Lily he wanted and rested my head on his chest. I could hear the thundering of his heart underneath my ear; it mirrored my own, and when he spoke it sent shivers across my whole body.

"Doesn't matter what other people do. She's our child, and I want to celebrate it. Angel, I've missed out on a lot, so I just want to make up for it. Humor me?"

"We talked about this, Edward. You don't need to make up for anything. She's here and we're going to move forward. Our messed up past has nothing to do with her."

"Do you mind if I put her in her crib? I'd really like to just cuddle and talk tonight."

I nodded, pulling away so that he could carry Lily to bed. I debated ways in which to bring up the subject of help with him as I waited, but all of them seemed forced. I was dreading his reaction to my question, but I knew I had to ask.

I remained on the couch, waiting, as I heard him cooing to Lily. She was already asleep, so I wondered if he was merely comforting himself. He'd mentioned wanting to talk, but hadn't explained if it was something specific.

Perhaps it was.

"You look scared. What's wrong?" he asked, pulling Lily's bedroom door closed. He held the little white monitor in his hand, and I could see the lights flash as it detected my daughter's little breaths.

"I'm just wondering what you want to talk about," I answered honestly.

"You've no need to feel worried, Angel. What I have to say is about me, and to be honest, I think you'll like it."

I nodded cautiously and waited for him to sit back down. He placed the monitor on the small table next to the couch, and took the seat next to me. When I made no indication of sliding closer to him, he exhaled loudly and pulled me next to him. My body instantly molded into his, fitting together as we had done before. His scent, along with his heat enveloped me, and any panic I was feeling dispersed.

"Do you want to tell me about your time with Esme?"

"Erm, sure. I guess it's good news. No appointment next week. She wants me to try having them every other week."

"And how do you feel about that?"

"Good. I know I'm stronger."

Edward nodded, squeezing me tightly. I closed my eyes and inhaled his scent deep into my lungs.

"You really are. I'm so proud of you."

I swallowed, before deciding to spit it out.

"Esme asked about you, and any help that you were getting. I've never asked you."

He gave a low chuckle, and I tipped my head up to see what on earth was so amusing.

"What?"

"That's actually what I wanted to talk to you about. Seems we're on the same page."

"And what is it that you have to tell me?" I probed cautiously.

His hand lifted towards my face, and he traced a solitary finger along my jaw before cupping it in his palm.

I shivered from the connection, and continued to gaze into his deep green eyes.

"I went to see someone yesterday. Rose talked me into it, and came with me."

"Rose?"

"I've been talking to her a lot over the last few weeks. In fact, since that first day I cared for Lily alone." He took a moment before continuing. "I call her everyday, and I talk to her about whatever I need to. I never thought I'd ever have a decent relationship with her, but she's actually helping me more than I can really express."

"You talk to Rose? Everyday?"

I knew I was sounding a little dumb, but his confession had really startled me.

"Yes, Angel."

His thumb stroked my cheekbone, it sent sparks skittering across my skin, and I realized it was becoming harder to deny my desire for him.

"So who...I...Who did you see?" I stammered.

"It was a doctor Rose saw herself a while back."

"And how did it go?"

"Odd," he grimaced. "Not as bad as I'd thought, though not exactly painless."

"Are you going again?"

He gave a short nod, followed by a snort of derision. I raised my brows in question, his thumb still sweeping softly across my skin.

"I just feel sorry for Lily. Both parents in need of therapy. None of this is her fault."

"I understand, but Edward, we're doing this so that we don't fuck her up. We're doing this to make everything better. Don't feel ashamed of this. Don't make *me* feel that way."

"I don't mean to," he replied gruffly, before holding me as close as he could and burying his face in my neck.

I twisted to get comfortable, kneeling at the side of his lap and feeling my stomach clench with need.

I knew what was coming when I felt him still, and I did nothing to stop it.

I wanted it as much as he did.

Edward lifted his head, holding mine in his hands. His eyes were glistening, boring into mine in a silent question. His Adams apple bobbed as he swallowed. I watched him close his eyes for an instant and inhale deeply. I knew what he was thinking right at that moment.

So before he mustered the courage to ask I nodded.

My whole body burned the instant his mouth touched mine. I lost myself so completely in the kiss; it felt far too long since we'd done this. I could taste his delicious tang as he moved his lips seductively over mine. It was intoxicating.

He took it slow, savoring our time like this. His left hand moved down to cup my neck, as his thumb began to stroke the skin gently. A small whimper slipped from my mouth into his, as he tilted his head a little deepening this kiss. His tongue swept slowly along my bottom teeth, and I grasped hold of his wife beater, needing the support. I was becoming aroused, and I wanted more, even though I knew I should back away.

This wasn't the right time.

However, right now my body was acting independently from my brain, and I tentatively swirled my tongue towards his. Edward moaned, the sound rumbling through his chest and up into my mouth. At the same time he managed to turn us around, so that I was flat on my back across the couch, and he was hovering above me.

We'd been here before. It had been the night Lily was conceived, and as our lips slowed we both sobered. It was as if we both realized that fact at the very same moment.

Edward didn't pull away immediately, though. His kisses slowed, until they were little more than small pecks, before we broke apart, left to stare at each other in shock. I covered my mouth with my hand, trying to even my breathing out, but I couldn't stop replaying the kiss in my head.

"I'm sorry. I got carried away," he whispered.

"It's not your fault. I didn't exactly stop you," I reasoned, and had to wrap my legs around his hips to stop him climbing off me.

He pressed his forehead against mine, his hair tickling my nose where it fell forward.

"Don't go, Edward. Stay with me; stay like this. Please?"

"I don't want to force this. We're doing so well and..."

His tone was tortured, but I needed for him to understand. This wasn't one sided.

I turned my head, placing small kisses across the black inked tree on his arm. My hands moved to hold his face, tilting it so that he could see the truth I was verbalizing.

"I want this too. I want you. Always have, and always will. We just have to take it one step at a time. We're doing so well. Please don't let this ruin that. We both made the choice."

His lips caressed mine again, slow and seductive, before he breathed, "I love you, Angel."

"I know," was the only answer I could give him.

I wasn't ready for more just yet, even though I felt it with every single cell in body.

*If I don't say this now I will surely break
As I'm leaving the one I want to take
Forgive the urgency but hurry up and wait
My heart has started to separate*

*Oh, oh, oh
Be my baby*

Oh, oh, oh
Oh, oh, oh
I'll look after you

There now, steady love, so few come and don't go
Will you, won't you be the one I always know?
When I'm losing my control, the city spins around
You're the only one who knows, you slow it down

Look After You ~ The Fray

End Notes:
Aww..they're getting there..slowly.

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 25: With Me by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hello.

**Huge hugs to my awesome beta, Maylin and my amazing prereader
Elusivekoolaid.**

Love to my Twi VB, Magan Bagan.

**Huge thanks to the ladies at RAoR & DeeDreamer16 in particular for
featuring Catching Spiders on the Sunday Spotlight. I was absolutely
floored. MUAH!**

SM owns all things Twilight

Bpov

"Should we be worried?" Edward asked as we left the doctor's office.

**He insisted on pushing the stroller, and I could see the worry etched across his face. Lily was
sniffing, snuggling up to her blankie for comfort.**

"You heard the doctor, she'll be fine. Edward, they were just shots. She needs them."

**He winced. I could tell it was uncomfortable; he hated to see her cry. She'd been inconsolable
for me, even after I'd stroked her face with her blankie, but the moment I'd placed her in
Edward's arms she'd calmed...a little.**

**"I just...I hate anything upsetting her." He stopped walking and met my eyes. "It hurts me
when she cries."**

**I smiled softly, and placed my hand on top of his, feeling the ever present tingle at our
connection.**

**"I know, but she had to have them. Now would you stop being such a baby and get us home.
It's freezing out here!"**

Edward grinned at me and started to push the stroller again. Lily had stopped her snuffling now, and was falling asleep. She was growing so fast that it was actually beginning to upset me. How ridiculous was that? In the space of eight weeks it was as if she'd doubled in size, and only yesterday we'd had to go out and buy her some new clothes.

From the moment I'd found out I was pregnant it felt like I'd been sucked into a cyclone, and only now did it feel like I was coming out. My world was no longer spinning, the air no longer suffocating, and my head was no longer in a constant state of confusion.

I knew what I wanted...and I was strong enough to reach out and take it. I just needed to make sure Edward was too, because there would be no second chance with this.

"So, um, it's my night off tonight." Edward muttered.

I nodded, remembering his last couple of nights off. We'd spent them cuddling and watching a movie on my couch. I was really starting to crave the time alone with him.

"Well, um, I kinda wondered if you wanted to go out. Together."

I stared at him, somewhat startled, and the confusion I was feeling was mirrored in his expression.

"I...Well...What about Lily?"

His smile was dazzling, as he wiggled his brows playfully.

"I already sorted that. Rose said she'd love to babysit for her for a couple of hours."

"I don't know," I replied, completely unsure of the emotions I was feeling.

I wanted to spend some time alone with Edward, but didn't want to leave Lily. It's not like I hadn't done that, but Edward had always been the one to care for her, not someone else. And it wasn't like I didn't trust Rose – I did, but I was...well, *scared*.

"Please? Just to see a movie."

We stopped at my apartment, and I picked up the base of the stroller so that we could lift it up the steps. It always made me smile when we worked together like this. We hadn't even needed to speak to each other to know what was necessary.

On that very thought I decided to give a little.

"I'm scared."

Edward pushed the stroller into the apartment and picked our daughter up, cuddling her to his chest. The sight always made my throat close with emotion, and my heart pound in my chest.

It was something I wasn't sure I'd ever see.

"Why, Angel? Rose knows what to do, and it will only be for a couple of hours. I think we need to get out of these four walls," he replied honestly.

"Why?" I breathed, sitting down on the couch, as my legs began to feel like jelly.

"Because we need to start trying. We need to begin being a real couple, that do real things together, and that includes going out on dates."

He came to sit next to me, his darkly inked arm pressing against mine. I chewed my lower lip nervously, as I worked through what he'd declared. His cards were on the table, and even though I'd given a little, I was still very guarded.

I was terrified.

But how long could I continue only giving him fifty percent? Was I the one now jeopardizing this relationship?

I gulped, offering Edward everything I could.

"I really can't help being petrified. In the past there was only each other to think about, but now there's Lily, and I really don't want to mess her up. We can't do that, Edward."

"I know, Angel, and I have vowed that we won't. We're not like that anymore; we're both changing. Please, just try. All I'm asking for is a couple of hours. A mini-date."

I snorted.

"A mini-date?"

"Yup," he grinned, knowing he was winning me over. "I'll even buy you a burger on the way home."

"Oh, well! With that kind of excitement, how can I refuse?"

He pushed his shoulder against mine softly, staring at me until I met his green gaze.

"We're gonna do this, Bella."

I nodded, and wanting to show what his resolve meant to me, I leaned forward and placed a kiss on his lips. I felt his indrawn breath, shocked at my action, but I knew he understood when he moved his lips gently against mine. My heart was crashing against my chest, as his tongue skimmed my lower lip. It was only when he shuffled Lily in his arms that we broke apart.

"Was that a yes?" he whispered.

I nodded, stroking his thigh, before standing up to fold away the stroller. As I walked into Lily's nursery I heard Edward's excited mumble to his daughter.

"Your Mommy said yes!"

I stifled a giggle, and left him to his elation.

/ CS

I didn't know what to wear.

I had no idea.

I'd been looking through my closet for the last thirty minutes, only coming up with maternity clothes, or my jeans.

My jeans won.

Alice would go crazy if she knew I was even considering going out on a date in jeans. Especially when I lived above a clothing store, but I didn't want to call Alice and explain. I wanted tonight to be about us. So I put on a pair I felt relatively comfortable in, and found a red shirt that had never quite fit right. My body had changed since having Lily, so when I put it on now it actually looked as if it had been made for me. Maybe it was my larger boobs.

I took one last look in the mirror, slicked on a little more gloss across my lips, and then went to meet Edward in the living room.

"Hey," I breathed, closing the bedroom door.

"She never woke up, and I told Rose we'd collect her on the way back."

I smiled, drinking him in. He always took my breath away, but during all the garbage I'd forgotten just how stunning he really was. He raised a brow at me, knowing very well that I was checking him out. I didn't stop, though. I raked my eyes slowly up his black jeans, towards his white button down, taking in the way he'd folded up the sleeves to his elbows, and also left the top three buttons open at the neck. His hair was its usual haphazard style, only tonight it was slightly damp.

I could recall with perfect clarity what it felt like to have my hands running through that hair. In fact, I dreamed about it. Every night over the last few weeks I'd replayed our time together; the night Lily was conceived. Sometimes more than once. It was a slow torture, because we really had been perfect that night.

I would wake up whimpering and sweating, my body still tingling from the memory of his touch. It would take me a while to realize that Lily had been what woke me from my haven. I was in a constant state of want.

"A picture would last longer," he grinned.

"I guess," I shrugged. "But a picture doesn't show the real you, does it?"

He took a step closer, smirking.

"And do you want that, Angel?"

"I think I'm the only one that already sees that."

It wasn't until I verbalized the words that I realized they were true. Edward had repeated them many times to me, and I'd ignored them, thinking that he was merely talking in riddles.

But he was right.

I did know him. And I always had.

Edward gave very little of himself to others, and yet he'd given me everything he could. I saw a part of him that no other person had seen.

I'd seen him vulnerable and at his lowest.

Edward exhaled, pulling me close and wrapping his arms around my waist.

"You finally worked that out, huh?"

I nodded, rising up on my tip toes and kissing his chin.

"I did, and I'm sorry."

I placed my arms around him, pushing my hands into the back pockets of his jeans. He grinned, clenching his ass playfully and moving his hands to smooth the hair from my face.

I felt whole with him this close, and I knew at some point I had to let my guard down and allow him to enter. Something inside of me was telling me it was different. *He* was different.

"Are you going to be OK?"

I blinked, confused by what he was referring to.

"Going out without Lily..." he muttered.

I held back the emotion that threatened to spill and smiled up at him.

"I won't know until I try, will I?"

His lips met mine, gently moving and seeking approval. I moaned against his tongue, wanting to deepen it, but Edward pulled away.

"Let's go," he croaked.

I wanted to whine in protest, but instead let him usher me towards the door and down the steps. I was about to start to walk over to my car when Edward shook his head slowly, and placed his hand in mine.

"I thought we could walk. Walk and talk."

"Oh!"

His hand squeezed mine, and he whispered, "Only if you want to."

I nodded, smiling slightly and following his lead. Conversation was stilted at first and centralized around our daughter. It was a safe topic, and one neither one of us had to really think about. However, I could feel us edging towards something, as we neared the cinema. It was something I wasn't entirely sure I wanted the answer to, but as we began to talk about the later stages of my pregnancy I couldn't stop the question from blurting out.

"If I'd have told you – If you'd have known, would you have stayed? Would you have...asked me to...end the pregnancy?"

Edward gave a deep, rumbling groan and stopped walking. My heart pounded in my chest when he moved us towards the side of the building, backing me into the wall. His hands framed my face, and even in the twilight I could see the sharp intensity of his stare.

I gulped.

"Angel," he whispered, his voice a complete contrast to the ferocity oozing from him. "I would never have made you stop something so perfect. Never. Even in my fucked up state I would have seen the beauty. I know that with complete conviction."

"I had to know..."

"I can't tell you I wouldn't have left. I wish I could. I spoke to Rose about it a while back, and she asked me the same question. I'm going to be honest, because I swore I would never be anything other than truthful to you. I probably would have left. My intentions would've still been the same, but I can tell you that I would've been wrong, Bella. So very wrong."

I closed my eyes, needing a reprieve from his blazing expression. His thumbs stroked my cheekbones sending sparks coursing through my body.

"Look at me," he asked quietly.

I inhaled and opened my eyes, meeting his gaze again.

"There has to come a time when we accept the shit that's past and move on. Every day I try to prove to you that I've changed; that I'm here to stay. Bella, when are you going to let me in again?"

"I...I...I never let you go," I stammered, watching a smile bloom across his lips. "I tried, Edward, but there can never be anyone else for me. I know that."

"Then we do this. Yes?"

I didn't answer; he didn't allow me to because his lips crushed mine with a passion I'd only ever experienced with him. His hands never left my face, holding me firmly, but I felt the tremors. His entire body was shaking.

I wrapped my fingers around his wrists, gently pulling away from his lips but not letting go. The exhilaration he felt was written all over his face.

"Aren't we going to miss the movie?" I breathed, mirroring his smile.

His fingers caressed my cheek, as he twisted his wrist to check his watch.

"Still want to go?"

I caught the unsaid words, but I wasn't ready to be completely alone with him after our declarations. I was the one that moved us forward, and as I entwined my fingers in his I could tell he wasn't reluctant. Any time we spent alone was precious, no matter what we did.

"Come on," I grinned. "Let's go and be alone in the dark."

The side of his mouth lifted in a cute little smirk, and his fingers tightened around mine for a moment.

"I am here to do your bidding, Master. I am your slave..."

"You're quoting Dracula to me?" I asked, a little startled.

Edward shrugged and tugged me into the movie theater.

"You shouldn't be so surprised. I read it with you so many times, Bella. I know it just as much as you do."

"I've ignored so much..." I muttered, feeling stupid.

He squeezed my hand again, before kissing my knuckles.

"We're both guilty of that, but we've turned a corner, Angel. So let's set it aside and enjoy the darkness."

He wiggled his brows, eliciting a bubble of laughter from me.

"This should prove interesting."

He said nothing further, just went about his own little journey, insisting on paying for everything. I'd eventually put my foot down and bought my own popcorn. He'd laughed, still chuckling as we took our seats at the back of the room.

"You know, I never asked what the hell we're watching," I stated, as I got comfortable in the chair.

"Nope, you didn't."

He popped a *milk dud* into his mouth, trying to hide his smirk, but failing. I poked at his arm, intending to get him to confess, but I ended up tracing the black inked branches instead. He gave a slight shiver, but didn't move his arm.

"So are you gonna tell me?" I prompted again, just as the lights dimmed.

He placed his lips against my ear and whispered.

"Wait and see."

It was my turn to shiver then, and I tried to concentrate on the screen, rather than Edward's proximity. However, it became increasingly difficult because each time he lifted a *milk dud* to his lips his arm skimmed against mine. And he made it worse still when he placed one against *my* lips.

I stared at him, locked in his forest green gaze. My lips parted slightly, allowing him to slip the small treat into my mouth. I lapped at his fingertips, seeing his eyes darken even in the dim light. I would normally only see that transition when he became angry, but I knew this wasn't the case. So, wanting to tease him a little more, I licked again.

I knew at this point I was playing with fire.

I was effectively showing him I was ready - that I wanted more from him. I was opening my heart and hoping like hell that he wasn't going to hurt me. I was drawing a line in the sand, setting our past aside and moving forward with our life now.

"Kiss me," I breathed, my lips moving against his fingers.

I didn't need to ask him again, because his mouth met mine as the movie started. I became lost in his affection for the next hour. We kissed. We touched. We caressed, but most of all, we gazed at each other. It felt like he was seeing the real me, because that was what I was projecting.

I was finally happy being me, and maybe all the shit we'd gone through had been for a purpose. Maybe we were never meant to be together until now. This was our time...and I wasn't about to let it slip through my fingers.

"I guess it doesn't matter what the movie was now, huh?" Edward said quietly.

My hands rested on his thigh; my fingers stroking his inside leg. I heard him swallow thickly, as he skimmed the tip of his nose down my cheek.

"Do you want me to stop?"

"No," I whimpered. "I...I..."

"You don't need to say anything more. The *no* was enough."

Our kisses became heated, and deeper as the movie played in the background. Our hands never got too intimate, stroking arms, legs or faces. It was like being a teenager again, and I was loving this new aspect to us.

A groan came from Edward when a couple of girls giggled, and he gently parted our lips. He kissed the tip of my nose, but then I jumped as a boom thundered through the speakers. He chuckled, hugging me close and soothing me.

I inhaled his scent, and checked my watch. It was an unconscious action on my behalf, but Edward seemed to understand it, because he picked up my purse and cocked his head for us to leave. I frowned, but stood up and followed him as our fingers entwined.

"What's wrong?" I questioned, as he dragged me out of the door.

The sharp night air was biting, and I snuggled into his side to keep warm.

"Nothing's wrong. We weren't watching the movie, and as much as I wanted to stay and keep kissing you, you want to be back home with Lily. I do, too."

A loud exhale was my only response. He'd read me so well, or was it only because he felt exactly the same?

"Let's go and get our daughter, Angel."

Just those words on his lips had me melting into a puddle of emotion. I looked up at him, halting our steps, as Edward waited for me to speak.

"She's really ours, and we're going to be OK, aren't we?"

"We're getting there, and, Bella? We're going to be fucking perfect," he declared with force.

I trusted him.

I believed him.

"Edward? Will you stay tonight?"

He nodded, kissing my forehead and moving us along the path.

"You never need to ask. Ever. You and Lily are my life now, and wherever you are, I am. If it takes ten years for me to show you I mean every word, then I'd happily keep trying."

I swallowed, as my throat threatened to close, but I managed to croak out, "You don't have to try anymore. We're yours."

*I don't want this moment to ever end
Where everything's nothing without you
I'll wait here forever just to, to see you smile
'Cause it's true, I am nothing without you*

*Through it all, I made my mistakes
I stumble and fall, but I mean these words*

*I want you to know
With everything I won't let this go, these words are my heart and soul
I'll hold on to this moment you know, 'cause I'll bleed my heart out to show
That I won't let go*

*Thoughts read unspoken, forever in doubt
Pieces of memories fall to the ground
I know what I didn't have so, I won't let this go
'Cause it's true, I am nothing without you*

With Me ~ Sum 41

End Notes:
<p>*"I am here to do your bidding, Master. I am your slave..." Direct Dracula quote.</p> <p>Thank you all for still reading, and still reviewing.</p> <p>xx</p>

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 26: Pieces by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

The usual huge thanks to my beta, Maylin & pre reader Elusivekoolaid.

Love to my Twi VB - Magan Bagan

The chapter you've all been waiting for...

SM owns all things Twilight.

EPOV

It'd been three weeks since that first date, three weeks in which I had never been happier. We'd fallen into a smooth pattern, both trying to do what we could for the other person, and our new family.

Bella had begun to work in the store again; just a few hours each day. She'd protested when I told her I'd ask Rose for more hours. I didn't really want her working just because she had to. I could do that. But she hadn't listened; she wanted to go back to work. However, those two or three hours she worked gave me the opportunity to repair a few things around my house...and work on a little project I had started.

We were growing closer than we'd ever been before, and each night after Lily had been rocked to sleep we would talk. Really talk. My honesty with her shocked me, especially the first night I'd told her a story about a particularly brutal beating my father had given me. Bella had cried, and not just because of the horror, but because I'd actually relayed it to her.

It was getting easier to tell her those things.

We were going to make this work. I just knew it, but I wanted us to go slowly. Even though every bone in my body screamed for her.

I missed our conversations on the nights I was working, and I'd spend most of my time, standing in the cold at the door to Rose's bar, thinking of my two girls. Either that or boring anyone that would listen with stories or photos of them.

Rose and I were doing better too. She'd been on hand whenever I'd had a small freak out, whether it'd been about Lily, Bella or any random panic. She'd been the last person I'd expected to help me, but the first person who was there.

People seemed to be surprising me a lot lately.

Everything was changing, and I liked it. When I smiled I actually felt it; it wasn't fake, and my heart no longer felt like a lump of rotten flesh.

"OK, she's finally settled. Did you order some food?" Bella asked, as she closed the door to Lily's bedroom.

I nodded, taking in her frazzled appearance. She needed a break, but when I'd mentioned another date she'd refused. She didn't want to be apart from the baby while she was so fractious.

"Come and sit down, Angel. You look worn out."

I patted the seat on the couch next to me.

"I'm exhausted. She's been so grizzly today. The doctor says she's teething, but can it really be this bad?"

"I don't know. I mean, her cheeks are pretty red, and her gums are really warm."

She sat down next to me, snuggling closer when I slipped my arm around her shoulders. Her head nestled against my chest and when she spoke my groin tightened.

"I'm just worried. And tired. I'm so tired, Edward."

I hugged her tighter, kissing the top of her head. I hated seeing her this down. It concerned me, and made me anxious. Would something like exhaustion drive her back to the pills?

I swallowed and decided I needed to talk to her about this. In the past I would have buried it, not wanting to upset her, but I knew now by doing that we'd only start the cycle of hurt all over again. Clarity made me take a deep breath and verbalize my concern.

"Are you OK, Angel? I don't just mean physically either. I want you to tell me if you feel down, or if anything gets too much."

I felt her still. She was obviously startled at my question, and for a moment I wondered if she would answer it. I felt a weight lift from my chest when she finally did.

"Everything is fine, Edward. I really am just tired. I...well, I'm actually better than I can ever remember. We're in a good place."

"Yes," I agreed softly. "We're doing good."

"We are, but I'd want you to tell me if things weren't. Could you do that?"

"Before? No I couldn't, but I know I'd be able to now."

I groaned, as the doorbell interrupted our conversation, and went to get our food delivery. After that talk was minimal, because we were eating. I'd laid out the white paper cartons of Chinese food on the small table and handed her a set of chopsticks.

"You're kidding, right?" she snorted.

"What?"

"You know what!" she accused, pointing the chopsticks at me but smiling.

I shrugged and dipped into my noodles. She shoved at my shoulder, and huffed as she stood up, walking towards the kitchen. I could hear her random mutterings but couldn't decipher what she was complaining about. I tried to recall something, anything, in our past that would give me a clue as to what her little tantrum was about.

"Holy fuck!" I spluttered when I realized. "You still can't eat with them? Seriously?"

She glared at me; her brown eyes shining black, as she poked a fork in my direction.

"You know I can't use them."

I laughed, smiling at her when she sat down next to me.

"How many times did I try to teach you? I can't believe you still can't do it."

I touched her hand, intent on helping her, but she grumbled.

"Wanna give it another go?"

"Not tonight. I'm starving and can't be bothered with the hassle. Next time?"

I agreed, pleased that we talked of a *next time* without panic setting in.

I ate the rest of my food rapidly, wanting to have her back in my arms on the couch again, and I sighed in contentment when she did just that. She handed me a book, whispering, "Read to me," before snuggling back against my chest. I knew what the book would be before I even glanced at the cover. I opened it on the page she had marked, enveloped her in my embrace and started to read.

"The fair girl went on her knees and bent over me, fairly gloating. There was a deliberate voluptuousness which was both thrilling and repulsive, and as she arched her neck she actually licked her lips like an animal... I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited, waited with beating heart."

Bella gave a low, soft sigh and placed her hand high up on my thigh. I gulped and continued.

"But at that instant, another sensation swept through me as quick as lightning. I was conscious of the presence of the Count, and of his being as if lapped in a storm of fury. As my eyes opened involuntarily I saw his strong hand grasp the slender neck of the fair woman and with giant's power draw it back, the blue eyes transformed with fury, the white teeth champing with rage, and the fair cheeks blazing red with passion."

Her hand swept down my thigh, and then back up again. Her finger came precariously close to my zipper, and my throat constricted painfully. I tried to speak again, to continue to read, but my mouth seemed unable to form the words.

Her head tilted upwards, so that her lips were close to the underside of my jaw. I couldn't do anything but remain still, close my eyes, and enjoy every sensation she produced in me. I was

aware of every stroke of her thumb on my knee, every sweep of her fingers on my thigh, and every light tickle of her breath across my neck. My words had long since ceased, and the air was becoming increasingly charged with electricity. Our bodies seemed to gravitate closer to each other, each seeking something but cautious of the next step.

I knew what I wanted, but was internally chastising myself for even thinking it. Our relationship was going perfectly as it was, without adding sex to the mix, but I wanted it all.

I wanted what we'd thrown away.

The tip of her nose skimmed across my jaw, and she breathed something quietly into my ear.

I turned, intent on asking her to repeat herself, but my lips instantly meshed with hers. I dropped the book, and held onto her shoulder, though I wasn't sure if I was trying to hold her off, or bring her closer.

It didn't matter, Bella was the driving force behind this, and she wanted to be closer. Her hand came up, cupping my face, as her lips mated tenderly with mine. A low rumble started to emanate from my chest, only made worse when the very tip of her tongue touched my teeth.

I'd dreamed of this moment many times, but had been certain it would never happen again. However, the more her tongue probed my mouth, and the more she adjusted her body next to mine, the more I began to accept that it was exactly where we were heading. I just needed to know that this really was what she wanted.

I pulled away slightly, looking down to see hurt lacing her features.

"Angel, I need to know. Is this really..."

"I miss you so much, Edward. I want to feel you."

"I just don't want you to regret..."

Her kiss stopped me from saying anything more. It was deep and thorough, and she clung to my shirt, tugging herself closer. The way her lips moved across mine soothed my anxiety, giving me the confidence to take the lead.

She shifted her leg across my lap, gripping my shoulder tightly, and holding my face in her hands. I gulped at the sight above me.

She was all I'd ever wanted. And all I thought I could never have.

"Oh, Angel," I uttered.

"Shush," she soothed. "It's time. It's *right*."

I nodded in acceptance, and kissed her again. I tried to be gentle, holding as many emotions as I could at bay, because I didn't want to overpower her. But every cell in my body was boiling with need, demanding I make her mine again. We were going to be together, because there was no other way for either of us.

We were two halves of a once fucked up whole.

Her small whimper had me holding her hips, and moving her to straddle my lap completely. Our kisses continued, and the deeper they became, the more she rocked against me. I had to separate our lips, because I was choking on the words.

"I love you, my Bella. I love you."

I didn't want her to respond just yet. I didn't want her to feel obligated, so I buried my face in her neck and began nibbling and sucking the thin skin there.

"I..." was all she managed to gasp out, before she was lost in the feelings my lips produced.

...But I wanted more. I wanted her stretched out beneath me. I wanted to see the ecstasy on her face as I surged inside her. I knew how amazing we were together, and I snapped as the memory flooded my head. It was too much.

I hauled her up , making sure her legs wrapped around my hips and grasped her ass. She gasped, obviously surprised, but the side of her lips lifted in a small smile. Her hair spilled over her shoulder, as she cocked her head to the right. It was so long now, that it actually tickled my wrist.

"Can I take you to bed?" I asked.

She licked her lips and nodded swiftly. My stomach swirled in both desire and unease, as I carried her towards her bedroom. I walked in silence, our eyes never disconnecting. I nudged the door open with my shoulder, and then closed it gently with my foot, still keeping her close.

Bella's fingers began to toy with my hair, combing through the mess at the front, and then teasing the shorter hair at the back. I was shivering from the delicacy of her touch, and I wanted to ask her again if this was alright. Bella read my mind, gave a short nod and placed a small peck on my nose. That small gesture had my knees buckling, and we tumbled onto the bed. She giggled, but made no attempt to move from underneath me.

She really did want this.

Finally accepting the reality of the situation. I cupped her face in my palms, watching her eyes darken with desire. Sparks were shooting up my arm from our connection.

"Angel..."

"Shh," she said placing a finger to my lips. "Please stop fighting it. I want you."

"Will you be OK? I mean the baby..."

"Edward!" she grumbled impatiently. "Just make love to me."

I wrapped my arms around her and kissed her. It was slow and thorough; she kissed me back just as desperately. Her hands moved across my back, eventually slipping underneath my shirt and skimming the edge of my jeans. Bella surprised me when she started to lift my shirt, and tried to tug it up over my head.

The problem was, she hadn't undone any buttons, so it got stuck on my head. This time she laughed loudly, and tried her best to help me out of my shirt. We were still snickering when I

tossed it across the room, and I was actually pleased it happened, even though I'd looked rather stupid. It had lightened the mood, and relieved much of my anxiety.

Bella remained on the bed, her hair spilling across the pillows, her body waiting for the blanket of mine. When I leaned back over her, her hands instantly flattened against my chest, and she looked up at me, her eyes sparkling with unadulterated lust.

"Lily?" I whispered, looking up at the flickering light on the monitor.

"She's sleeping, Edward." Her face saddened in rejection. "If you don't want to..."

I cut her off with a searing kiss. My fingers combed through her hair, as my mouth devoured hers. I was aching with want, but was willing to wait as long as it took for this to be perfect. I didn't have to wait though, as her hands were on a quest to remove my jeans. She was shoving at them with the heels of her feet, eventually moving them off my ass.

"A little unfair that I'm naked, and you're not," I pointed out, cocking a brow playfully.

"I don't have to be," she replied, her voice quivering.

So slowly, and carefully I removed her T-shirt and leggings, kissing each piece of skin that I exposed. She'd tried to cover herself, tried to hide underneath the sheets, but I had batted her hands away. I was determined to show her that I still found her attractive. Her body may have changed, but she was still beautiful.

Still mine.

I moved to settle next to her, and placed my hand on her waist. My fingers tickled her rib cage and each time I grazed her flesh she hissed. My heart kicked up a notch when she smiled at me and began to run her fingers through my hair.

"I've always loved your hair, you know? When I pictured Lily before she was born, I hoped she'd have hair like you," she muttered. "Though maybe not as wild."

I moved my head further into her hand and closed my eyes, adoring the sensation of Bella touching me without any barriers. My hand crept up to her breasts, questioning her with my eyes. Her first response was to try to cover herself again, so I waited. I didn't want to force her into anything.

Bella eventually shifted slightly, allowing me to see her breasts, and touch them without it troubling her. We sighed in unison as I massaged them tenderly. She was holding onto my bicep tightly, her fingers tracing the black tattoo, before she pulled me on top of her. I adjusted myself into a better position and felt my erection graze her sex. Bella felt it too; she groaned at the same time I did. She even rocked her hips slightly.

"I want this, Edward," she uttered.

My mouth crashed against hers and we kissed fiercely. There was an intense passion to our actions. It was all based on each other's need and we both wanted it as much as the other. I didn't want her to regret this night, but I couldn't stop this now. We rapidly turned into a mixture of limbs, touches, and crumpled sheets.

I linked my fingers into hers, joining us together in every way I could. We stared at each other, as our heavy breathing filled her bedroom. I could feel her heart beat against my chest; it matched the pace of my own.

That was when it dawned on me.

"Shit, I don't have any condoms, Bella. I never expected..."

"The drawer," she stated. "Edward, I bought..."

I shifted, retrieving the foil wrapper and kissing her slowly. She moved her leg higher to rest round my waist. It nudged my erection so very close to her wet sex. I groaned as she rocked her hips, and whimpered "Please."

I covered my cock as quickly as I could, squeezed our linked fingers and entered her. We both stilled for a moment, both at a loss for words. It was only when she began peppering my jaw with kisses, and clenching her thighs that I started to rock against her.

I held tightly to her hand, as I pulled back slightly and thrust into her fully, being as gentle as I could. We moaned, and began to meet each other, thrust for thrust. I intended to keep the pace slow and shallow, but Bella had other ideas. She wrapped her legs higher up my torso, making the angle much deeper, and I groaned loudly.

No other person could ever make me feel this way.

We rocked together in the darkness, our bodies, fingers and lips connected. We didn't speak, the only sound came from our strangled cries, as our orgasms scorched our systems. But even that didn't make us separate. I turned us over, pulling her to my chest and kissing the top of her head...and that was when my heart almost burst with love, because she whispered the words I thought I'd never hear again from her.

"I love you, Edward. I know I always will."

We lay entwined together in her bed, the only sounds in the room were our gentle breaths, soft whispered words of love and the faint hum of the monitor that detected our daughter's breaths.

*I'm here again
A thousand miles away from you
A broken mess, just scattered pieces of who I am
I tried so hard
Thought I could do this on my own
I've lost so much along the way*

*Then I'll see your face
I know I'm finally yours
I find everything I thought I lost before
You call my name
I come to you in pieces
So you can make me whole*

Pieces ~ Red

End Notes:

There you have it...was it what you hoped for?

This song has been reserved for this chapter from the very start...

***All quotes are directly from Dracula by Bram Stoker :)**

Thank you.

[**Back to index**](#)

Chapter 27: I Caught Fire (magan bagan) by lambcullen

Author's Notes:

Hi, sorry it's later than usual - message at the bottom.

Huge thank you to my beta, Maylin. I wish I could hug you for what you've done. I love you.

Huge thanks to Magan Bagan, my wonderful Twi VB

Thanks to my prereader, and awesome friend, Elusivekoolaid.

SM owns all things Twilight.

EPOV

I lay on my side and watched her.

I couldn't sleep; hadn't been able to for most of the night. I'd fed Lily a couple of times, but mostly I stayed next to my angel and watched her. She'd probably hate knowing that, and I had to admit, it was somewhat creepy, but I couldn't stop. It was as if my whole world was lying next to me, and I couldn't focus on anything else.

How girly was that?

My head was warring with my heart. I wanted to keep watching her and to let her rest, but my body cried out to touch her, taste her and make love to her. We'd spent so long without the complete comfort of the other person that now it was painful to be apart.

I leaned over, kissing her naked shoulder lightly, and when she didn't stir I moved my lips and placed soft, open mouthed kisses across her neck, shoulders and back. It was only when I began to move down her spine that she shifted gently.

"Mmm," she purred.

"Morning, Angel," I whispered against her skin.

"It wasn't a dream then?"

Her reply was in a sleepy drawl, but I heard the seriousness behind it.

"No. It wasn't. It was so very real, and so fucking amazing."

Bella tried to turn onto her back, but I placed my hand at the base of her spine, halting her.

"I haven't finished my exploration, Bella."

A light giggle floated up towards me, warming my insides and making any morning after anxiety disperse.

"Well, I wouldn't want to cause you any heartbreak..."

We both froze at her words. It wasn't really what she'd said, it was the reality of her statement, and my reply with nothing more than a nod. This wasn't going to affect us; I wouldn't allow it to any longer.

This was our fresh start, and our precious little daughter was our savior.

I moved my lips back to her spine, feeling her muscles relax underneath my touch.

"I love you."

I kissed her.

She exhaled softly.

I kissed lower.

"I really fucking love you."

She arched her back, bringing her skin back into contact with my mouth.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

My voice was barely more than a whisper, but the urgency could not be mistaken. I needed her to hear it.

My hands ghosted the cheeks of her ass, causing her to raise it off the mattress, as she moaned, "I love you. I can't remember a time when I didn't, Edward."

I closed my eyes, reveling in her words, and the sensation of her warm flesh beneath my fingertips. My lips devoured her shoulders, and unable to stave off my desire any longer, I stroked my fingers down the dip of her ass cheeks and between her thighs. She was already wet, so with one small slip I pushed them into her sex.

The groan that came from her reverberated through her entire body. It made my tongue vibrate as I lapped at her spine. I thrust my fingers slowly, feeling her tighten around them as she met me push for push. I nibbled on her neck, sucking on the skin and trying to stop the urge to mark her as mine.

I didn't really need to prove it.

She was mine.

Lily was mine.

They were my family.

"Ouch! Edward!"

I blinked, rearing back, but I kept my fingers inside of her.

"Sorry, Angel. Guess I got a little carried away."

Her gaze met mine, and my heart melted. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes wide and wanting.

"I need you," I stated. "I need you so very badly. All I see is you. All I think of is you. It's you, only you."

It made her smile seductively, and her answer was to push back against my fingers. A growl clawed up my throat, and I withdrew long enough to sheath my erection in a condom. Bella tried to flip over onto her back again, but I stopped her.

"I want to see your face, Edward. I don't want you to shut me out."

I frowned.

"Is that what you think I was about to do?"

She chewed her bottom lip, still gazing over her shoulder at me. I lowered my head, kissing her tenderly, passionately, and sweeping my tongue into her mouth. I slid it against hers, feeling her muscles relax under my kiss.

When she was calmer, her body fluid, I turned us over so that I was on my back, and I finally allowed her to break free of my embrace. She straddled my hips and placed her palms flat against my chest. Her hair fell in a dark curtain around her face and shoulders, hiding the mark I'd made on her neck.

"Like this then?" I asked, raising a brow.

"I just need it all. Does that make sense? I need the connection, to see truth in your eyes as well as in your touch."

I understood, and my throat closed from the emotions she produced. I nodded, bringing my hands up to hold her hips, as my erection nestled against her sex. She licked her lips and rocked tortuously slowly against me. I had to grit my teeth to stop from thrusting, but it was futile, because Bella took charge. She leaned forward to kiss me, moving her hips and encompassing my cock.

Our loud, erotic moans filled the room.

"We've missed so much, wasted so much time," I croaked, skimming my hands down her back.

Her lips caressed mine, as she shushed me.

"I don't care anymore. Without our past we wouldn't have Lily. Edward, we wouldn't have *this*." She kissed me fiercely. "I can't regret this. I *refuse* to regret this."

Her hips rolled, eliciting a hiss of pleasure from both of us. I framed her face with my hands, making sure she was with me when I uttered my next words.

"I don't deserve you. I never will, but I know you're mine. I promise you I will never let you down again. You or Lily. And I'll do whatever it takes to make myself better for you both. I love you so fucking much."

A tear fell from her eyes as she blinked. It landed on my chest, absorbing into the skin above my heart. I'd been the worst kind of fool. This woman had always been *the one*, and I'd known it, but in my twisted logic to protect her from my demons I'd given her her own...and yet we were still here, together in ways I'd only dreamed about.

So this was where it stopped.

I swallowed the guilt, and kissed her with everything I had. I let it convey all the feelings I should have showed her, and hoped what we shared now would begin to heal the lacerations we both had.

Just like last night, our love making wasn't fast, it wasn't heated. It was slow and gentle but still had the ability to bring me to tears when I finally came.

I cried out, gripping her hips tightly, before she flopped onto my chest, panting with the force of her own orgasm. I opened my mouth to speak at the exact moment our daughter's cries came through the monitor.

We both burst out laughing. Lily certainly had perfect timing.

"I'll go," I grinned. "Gotta go to the bathroom anyway."

Bella rolled onto her back, pulling a sheet with her, and wiping her eyes with the back of her hand. I stared at her, wanting to remember the image of this moment forever. She knew because the tears began to well in her eyes again, before she whispered, "I love you."

I blew her a kiss, knowing I was turning into one hell of a sap, and went to clean up in the bathroom, before collecting our child.

I brought her into Bella's bedroom and nestled her between us. It took only a few minutes before she was sleeping soundly again.

"Are you OK?" I asked, reaching over to smooth a few strands of hair from Bella's face.

"I'm just a little overwhelmed."

"But we're good?" I questioned nervously.

She leaned into my palm, and turned her face to kiss the center of it.

"We're good. Better than ever."

We stared at each other, just listening to the sound of our daughter sleeping between us. I wanted to say something, but then it wouldn't be anything that I hadn't already declared this morning. So I lay content, snuggling with my family.

My future.

It seemed like only seconds later that a knock on the front door woke me. We'd all dozed back off, and not wanting to disturb my girls, I slipped on my jeans and went to see who it was.

"Bells, can you – Oh!"

"Um, hi, Alice."

I stepped aside, allowing her to enter, and buttoned up my jeans before I turned to face her.

"Bella?" she questioned sweetly.

"She's sleeping with Lily."

"Uh huh," she nodded knowingly. "Looks like they weren't alone."

I took a seat across from her, resting my elbows on my thighs and staring at her. I was waiting for the warning from her, but she surprised me.

"She really made you work for it this time, huh? Good for her. You've been an ass, but I see the change, and clearly Bella does too."

"Does that mean you're gonna stop riding my ass?"

She grinned, "Now, come on. I thought we'd reached an understanding."

"If I remember correctly it was 'fuck her up and I fuck you up.' Am I right?"

"You're so clever," she replied sarcastically, but was still smiling at me.

"So what can I do for you, Alice?"

I walked to the small kitchen area, and filled the kettle with water before switching it on.

"I came to see if Bella could watch the store this afternoon for me, but it looks like she's busy."

"We were sleeping," I protested, gaining a raised brow from her.

"Naked?"

I opened my mouth, but what was the point in denying it?

"It only happened last night. We...erm, we were careful-"

"Oh, please!" She interrupted, holding her hand up in a gesture for me to stop. "I do not want to know. Let's just move on, shall we?"

I snorted, spooning some instant coffee into the mugs.

"Do you want me to wake her? Lily's in there, but I can if you really want?"

She shook her head, and reached into her rather large purse.

"I was going to go to your house next anyway. Saves me the journey." She held out an envelope and waited until I took it from her. "I hope you're OK with this."

I opened it, frowning when all I saw was cash.

"What's this?"

"Yours. I was a little bit naughty," she answered sheepishly. "When you told me I could take whatever I wanted from your shed, I did...but then I sold it in the store. That's what you made."

I just stared at her, and then back at the money in the envelope.

"You sold my work?"

"Yes, and people loved them, Edward! I mean, really loved them. I have none left, and I was kinda hoping you'd make more..."

My first instinct was to yell at her, to rage at her for selling them behind my back, but I paused, took a deep breath and tried to work it through in my head. The old me would never have been able to work this through. I would have just snarled and kicked her out. However, she'd only done what I'd told her to – which was to take whatever she wanted. Then there was the money that people had paid for them...

"People really bought those bits of wood and broken glass?" I asked in amazement.

"Yup, and if you're ready, they want more. I have someone that really wants a custom piece."

"Wow..." was all I could say.

"Alice?"

We both looked over to the bedroom door, to see a still sleepy looking Bella exiting with Lily in her arms. She was wearing my T-shirt, it hung off her shoulder and almost hit her knees. She looked beautiful. I walked over, wrapping my arms around them both and kissing her forehead.

"Alice came to ask you something about the store."

"Hmm, OK..."

"I made coffee," I whispered, nuzzling the little piece of skin underneath her ear. "I'll go and change Lily's diaper. You talk with Alice."

She shivered, shooting a hooded gaze that made my jeans tight, and my mouth dry. I pressed my mouth gently against hers, intending to devour her, when Alice coughed.

"Save it. Neither me, nor your daughter want to be involved in your smoochfest. Shoo!"

I grinned, thanking her and telling her I would think about the custom piece. The money would certainly come in handy, especially for my project back at my house. I took Lily from Bella's arms, kissing her on the forehead again and left her talking to Alice, but she stopped me.

"What custom piece? What am I missing?"

"Alice will no doubt explain. You go and have coffee with her, I'll see to this little darling."

She nodded cautiously, but followed Alice into the kitchen anyway.

"Right, Cherub, let's see what we have for you to wear today."

I laid her down on the changing station, and stared at her. Her legs began to kick as I grinned, and tickled her ribs playfully. It made her legs kick a little faster...and then she smiled.

She fucking smiled!

"BELLA!"

My heart was crashing against my chest in excitement, but my shouting had scared her and her bottom lip stuck out, before she began to cry. Bella came rushing into the room, as I was picking her up and trying to soothe her.

"What? What's wrong? Oh my God, is she OK? Edward, tell me!"

Her terror filled eyes were darting from our screaming little girl, to me. She waited as I bounced and shushed Lily, bringing my lips down to her ear and humming. Eventually she calmed, nuzzling into my neck.

"Are you going to tell me?" Bella demanded.

"Sorry. I didn't mean to scare everyone. She's fine, I promise. Angel, she smiled! She fucking smiled!"

Bella's jaw dropped as Alice giggled and clapped behind her. "Can you make her do it again? And you really need to watch your mouth around her, Edward!"

"But she cried. She wasn't happy." Bella stated, stroking the back of her fingers down Lily's cheek.

"That's because I yelled for you to come and see. *I* scared her."

"Did she really smile? You really saw her do that?"

Alice moved slowly away, trying to melt into the background. I didn't say goodbye, just let her go, because I was locked in a very private moment with my girls.

"She really did, but it seems like it wore her out, because she's asleep now."

I lowered my head, kissing her mouth before moving my lips along her jaw and down her neck. She sighed, pushing herself further into my touch.

I wanted her again. I wanted to make up for everything we'd missed, but I knew rushing things wouldn't help. We needed to continue at this pace, and let it all develop over time.

"I love you, Edward."

"Christ, Angel, I love you too. I love you both."

She kissed my chin, before turning back towards the living room.

"I'm going to see what time Alice wants me. Will you be able to look after Lily?"

I nodded. "Can I take her to my place?"

"Um, sure...you don't need to ask, you know?"

I smiled, but said nothing further. I did know, but I was always cautious. I didn't want us to argue about things that didn't really matter. We were doing so well, and we were both trying so hard. I just needed to be honest with her, no matter how trivial.

/ CS

It turned out that Alice needed Bella to work most of the afternoon, so I got Lily dressed, and placed her in her stroller. It always made me feel proud, pushing my little girl down the street. I couldn't stop the smile from spreading across my face. Everything was working out. I was actually getting somewhere, dealing with my past and carving out a future.

A future with my angel.

Bella was the only person who had been with me through it all, no matter what shit I'd put her through. I was determined she wouldn't regret doing that.

"OK, Cherub, lemme show you what Daddy has for you."

I lifted Lily from her stroller, unlocking my front door and taking her into my house. It was too quiet, too empty. It needed a family to fill it, and hopefully when my little project was finished, it would have exactly that.

This house was once sad and broken, along with the people in it, but I was going to turn that around. I was going to make this a real home.

My home.

"Now downstairs doesn't look like much, but don't judge Daddy. Just wait until you see upstairs."

I carefully took off her little coat, and placed it onto a worn armchair in the corner of the room. She snuggled into my chest, getting comfy but she didn't close her eyes. She was gazing around the rooms as if she knew why she was here.

I climbed the stairs, watching her little face and hugging her closer, breathing in her purity.

"Are you ready?" I whispered, kissing her forehead.

Her eyes met mine, and I opened the door at the top of the stairs.

"Welcome home, Lily."

I slowly twirled her around the room, noting as her eyes tried to focus on the new pink world around her.

"This is your new bedroom, baby. It's pink, fluffy and so very girly. I hope you like the color."

She smiled.

My baby girl smiled again.

My heart swelled, and my eyes began to sting with unshed tears, but I wouldn't cry. This was the first room I'd decorated; the first room I'd made mine. I was going to keep the house, and redesign it all. It was going to be a beautiful home for my family, and by doing that the happiness of my future would make the tears of my past fade.

*Seemed to stop my breath
My head on your chest
Waiting to cave in
From the bottom of my...
Hear your voice again
Could we dim the sun
And wonder where we've been
Maybe you and me
So kiss me like you did
My heart stopped beating
Such a softer sin...*

*(I'm melting, I'm melting)
In your eyes
I lost my place
Could stay a while*

*And I'm melting
In your eyes
Like my first time
That I caught fire
Just stay with me
Lay with me
Now*

*Never caught my breath
Every second I'm without you I'm a mess
Ever know each other
Trust these words are stones
Why cuts aren't healing
(why cuts aren't healing)
Learning how to love*

I Caught Fire ~ The Used

End Notes:

One more chapter left.

I have my first book out on the 27th January :D

It's available to pre-order now.

Thank you.

x

[Back to index](#)

Chapter 28: 1234 by lambcullen

Author's Notes:
<p>Hi. Thanks for waiting.</p> <p>Message at the bottom.</p> <p>SM owns all things Twilight.</p>

It'd been six months since I'd returned. Six months since I'd become a father, and six months since my life had started. That was exactly how I saw it. My life had changed inexplicably, and I could pinpoint it to one night.

The night Lily was conceived.

That was when everything had reached a pinnacle, and even though I'd left, my future had been set in motion. I'd been saved by a woman who most people would consider weak, and yet that couldn't be further from the truth. Her devotion, her compassion and her strength were what had gotten us here, and if my angel hadn't been steadfast in her resolve – in her love, Lily wouldn't be with us now...and neither would I.

We'd both worked hard to be where we were now, but I knew Bella had been the one to save us. Her love hadn't been wasted on me, and I would spend the rest of my life proving just how sorry I was.

I pulled up outside Alice's store, wincing a little as I climbed out. I tugged the sleeve of my shirt gingerly down my arm, feeling the burning scrape of the fabric against my tender flesh.

"Finally brought me more goodies, have you?"

I turned to see Alice standing in the doorway to the store. She appeared rather disheveled, her hair not as perfectly styled as usual, and she was wearing sweat pants. I didn't even think she could look at sweats without coming out in hives. She grinned at me, something that would always shock me. Alice had never been my biggest fan, but over the past few months I'd kept my promise to her and to myself. I think that was the only reason she was accepting of me now, but I knew it would take very little for her to alter the calm between us. Maybe one day we could be friends?

"I have a stool, two tea trays and about five framed mosaics. That sound OK?" I asked, taking her around to the trunk. "I've been a bit consumed with a project at home, but that's complete now so I'll spend more time on this." Her face lit up as she tapped the metal, wanting me to open it.

"Perfect!"

She began to lift the bubble wrap, looking at the items I'd made. She seemed happy with what I was giving her, and she lifted some from the truck.

"Bella's home?" I questioned, knowing I should have called her first.

Alice nodded and took a step closer towards me.

"You guys doing OK? I mean, I promised I wouldn't pry or stick my nose in, but I worry about them both...about you all, really."

"I get it, and you know how grateful I am that you watched over her while I was gone." I paused and took a deep breath. "I love Bella; I've known all along that she was meant to be mine, but I wasn't ready. I needed to be whole before I could make it right with her and I will. I'm getting there, Alice."

"I can see that, and that's why I don't give you shit anymore. So are you gonna quit being mushy and let me have the goods?"

I snorted, gesturing towards the work and nodded for her to take them. I was about to offer to help her when I saw Bella appear at the door to her apartment. I waved, warmth flooding my chest at the sight of her cradling our daughter in her arms. She took hold of Lily's arm, and waved it at me.

"You go and see your women. I'll lock the car and bring your keys up in a bit."

I grasped Alice's elbow and leaned forward, kissing her on the cheek.

"Thank you."

She shrugged as if it meant nothing to her, but her eyes gave her away.

"Can I ask about the sweats?" I inquired, but immediately wished I hadn't. I was certain she hissed at me.

"No. You can't."

I decided to leave it there. Our relationship was precarious at best, and pushing this would tip the scales. I bounced up the metal steps towards Bella's apartment, wanting to take Lily from her right away, but resisting for long enough to kiss my girl. Bella parted her lips, humming against my mouth and skimming her tongue along my lower lip. I pulled away, smirking.

"Feeling a little *playful*?"

She winked, nodding slowly and making my jeans tighten around the crotch area. It was exhilarating to be able to touch her, kiss her exactly how I'd wanted to for years. I had battled with it for far too long, so now I couldn't get enough.

"What time does Lily go down for a nap?" I questioned, quirked a brow.

"Now." Bella giggled and walked into the living room.

I stepped through the door, but my arm grazed the door frame, making me snarl. Bella's eyes went wide as she placed Lily in her swing and rushed back towards me, holding her hands out.

"It'll be fine," I rasped. "Don't touch it."

"What? Why not? Edward, you're hurt, let me take a look."

I groaned and moved to sit down on the couch. She tentatively sat next to me, helping as I eased up the sleeve of my shirt. I knew exactly when she realized what it was, and it wasn't the gasp that alerted me. It was the slow smile that spread across her lips, and the gentle flush that bloomed on her cheeks.

"You...you had another t-tattoo?"

"Yes," I whispered. "The tree was put there for a reason, to remind me that I was nothing. Rotten, twisted and no use to anyone, but I realized that's no longer true. I'm no longer black, withering or hollow, so I wanted to show that to the world."

"So you added a lily..." Bella breathed, touching the skin just beneath the red inflamed skin.

"Yes, but not just Lily. You're there too."

She frowned, analyzing the tattoo and seeing only a dark, dead tree with the newly inked lily at the base. I left her a few moments, knowing she wouldn't see what I did, but eventually spoke up.

"The color, Angel. The flower is obviously our daughter, but the color is *you*. You made the black slowly turn gray, and eventually it became a vibrant rainbow. You brought this tree to life. I love you."

Tears shimmered in her eyes, but they didn't spill.

"I can't believe you did this! When?"

I reached out, cupping her jaw in my palm, and stroking along it with my thumb.

"Yesterday. It was time. I'm not the same person anymore."

"No you're not." Bella placed her palm flat on my chest, right over my heart. "You're the person I always knew you were, but kept hidden."

"Not anymore," I stated with conviction.

I looked over to Lily, who was starting to nod off in her swing.

"I need to clean the tatt, wanna help?"

My angel giggled, knowing what I was inferring. She stood, taking my hand and led me towards the bathroom. I left the door open, needing to know the instant that Lily woke up. We both began to undress, our eyes only disconnecting when Bella switched on the shower. We started off slow, gentle, as Bella washed my arm. Her fingers ghosted the tender skin, the water cooling but her proximity inflaming.

"Do you like it?" I asked, needing her acceptance.

She held her lower lip between her teeth, tilting her head as she took in the newly inked flower. Her index finger traced the outline, keeping clear of the most painful parts of skin. The water trickled down my arm, soothing the area, but her touch was all I needed. Her touch made any pain fade into insignificance.

"I adore it," she said softly. "I wasn't sure when you turned up with that tree, but I grew to like it, and to be honest, a damn tattoo was the last thing on my mind. Now it's so much more. It's beautiful."

I kissed her; I just needed the connection. My mouth teased her as I backed her up against the tiled wall. Any anxiety I felt at getting marked again dispersed, knowing that my angel liked what I'd done. The tension in my stomach eased when her tongue slid against mine, and my libido kicked up a notch the instant her leg wrapped around my thigh.

The warm spray began to pummel against my back, relaxing my muscles and soothing my raw skin.

"Will Lily be all right out there?" I questioned.

"Stop worrying. She's asleep, the door is open."

I gazed at her, love making my heart swell. My eyes trailed down her throat and stopped at her chest. Her nipples were hard and begging for my attention. I couldn't hold back any longer. I lowered my head and placed my lips around one, swirling my tongue and teasing it with my teeth. She pushed herself against my erection, and combed her fingers into my wet hair to hold me close to her chest.

The steam of the shower began to billow around us, heating our already searing flesh. I lapped droplets from her breasts, feeling her fingers tighten in my hair, and her knees buckled. I gripped her tightly, eventually lifting her so that she could wrap her legs around my waist.

"I love you like this," I sighed, kissing her fiercely.

We gazed into each other's eyes; still amazed that I could finally be myself with her. I no longer needed to hide, or fight to keep my secrets. She knew me and loved me no matter how fucked up I was.

She cupped my face in her hands, kissing my lips and squeezing her thighs. I could tell she was breathing as heavily as I was, and her skin had a delightful rosy glow to it.

I wanted her forever.

"Angel, " I uttered. "This is real, isn't it? This is forever?"

"Are you proposing?"

"No. Not yet." My reply brought sadness to her eyes, so I quickly continued. "I'm making you a promise. As soon as we're better, and I don't just mean the therapy, you *will* marry me."

"I will?" she giggled.

"Yes, you will. I need the world to know you're mine. That I finally took my head out of my ass and saw the one person that was always there. The one woman that gave me everything I could ever want."

"Do I say yes now?"

I smirked at her. "There is no answer, because you're going to do it. You are my life, always have been. I'm no longer blinded by self hatred."

"I love you, Edward."

"I love you too, Mrs. Masen."

Her eyes shimmered at the name. She liked that; she wasn't the only one, it rolled off my tongue incredibly easily. In fact, I wanted to repeat it.

"Now, I really do have a much better use for my mouth."

My words came out in a husky rasp, as I lowered her to her feet and knelt on the floor of the shower.

"Oh?" she gasped as I placed my mouth on her sex.

I licked, eliciting another gasp, as she held my head close. My tongue teased her slit before delving my tongue inside. I could feel her thighs tremble with every lick, and her nails scraped against my scalp making me shiver.

I groaned as her taste danced across my tongue, so wanting more I swirled it over her clit, her fingers fisted in my wet hair. I closed my eyes from the onslaught of the water, and shifted her leg over my shoulder.

"Christ...perfect," I muttered.

I kissed, sucked and lapped at her until she was crying out and begging for a release. My erection ached to be touched, or buried inside her. I was desperate for the beauty that we created when we were joined. Bella let out a sigh when I stood and I captured it in my mouth. I devoured her lips, kissing her with urgency. My lust went into overdrive, knowing how perfectly we fit together.

"Edward," she panted. "Please."

"Don't ever beg, Bella. I'm yours. Forever."

Her eyes were dazed; she was completely carried away in our moment, but she knew what I was telling her. She felt the same way.

I lifted her again, nestling my erection against her sex. She immediately rocked against me, gaining a sharp hiss each time she writhed. Her fingers were wrapped around my bicep a little too tightly, but I wasn't going to stop her. The pleasure far outweighed any pain.

"I need you," she panted, as I adjusted myself at her entrance. "Forever."

With that declaration I buried myself deep inside of her heat. Her walls sheathed me tightly, making me moan, as her whimpers of pleasure floated around us. What should have been slow, gentle love making turned into a heated, fierce devouring. We were clawing at each other, needing everything the other person had to give. Our incoherent groans mixed with the sound of the cascading water, and I continued to thrust into her with force, as the water slowly cooled.

"Tell me," I panted, desperate to hear those words as I filled her.

Her lust-filled brown eyes focused on mine, as she panted out my name.

"I love you, Edward!" she shouted, completely consumed by her orgasm.

My thighs shook, as I felt her muscles clench around my erection.

I licked teasingly up her neck, from collarbone to ear, feeling an odd urge to mark her. It would be strangely erotic, and everyone would know she was taken. I didn't do it though, fearing her wrath. Instead, I lifted my head and watched her. She was beautiful in the throes of her orgasm, and my stomach began twitching, my balls were growing tight. My entire body demanded a release. Her chest was rising and falling quickly, each time her breasts came tantalizingly close to my mouth. I moved my hand to cup one, needing to feel every part of her. I tweaked the pert nipple and was rewarded by a groan of pleasure from Bella.

That was all it took to tip me over the edge.

I growled loudly, my head falling back as I came. My hands held her hips tightly, slowing my pace before slumping against her. We were both gasping for breath; both shivering and it had nothing to do with the water temperature. I kissed her shoulder between each sharp intake of breath, but eventually I had to set her down because my thighs were quaking. She wobbled and nuzzled my wet chest, her words muffled. I curled my finger underneath her chin, lifting her face until I could see her teary eyes.

"Angel?"

"I didn't mean to cry. I'm sorry."

I urged her to tell me what was going on, and even though she tried to divert my attention by kissing me hotly, she eventually confessed.

"I can't tell you how many times I've dreamed of you telling me that you loved me, that you wanted to *marry* me and now I have it. Right here."

"Was it a disappointment?"

"Are you kidding?" she spluttered, fighting through the tears.

When she shivered I led her from the shower and wrapped a towel around her, rubbing her shoulders.

"Just you saying it is all I need."

I leaned in and kissed her until we were both breathless. As we parted her nails skimmed the tattoo and I winced, pulling my arm back.

"Oh my God, are you OK? I forgot!"

I nodded, breathing through the pain and followed her out into the living room. We both stood staring at Lily, holding hands tightly. Bella cleared her throat, before shocking the shit out of me.

"Would you want more? Kids, I mean."

All I could do was gawk. Had she really just asked that?

"Sorry, I shouldn't have just thrown that out there. It wasn't a request, just an inquiry. Trust me, right now Lily is more than enough."

As if on cue, Lily wriggled and began to cry. Bella picked her up, soothing her and sending me to get dressed. I stood in the doorway to the bedroom and watched my girls. A lump of emotion rose in my throat, and I realized today was the day. I'd finished decorating every room in the house, and it was finally time for it to be a home.

"Can I take you both out in a little while?" I asked innocently.

"Um, sure, but where?"

"Surprise."

I smirked, wiggling my brows and went to get dressed.

/ CS

Bella didn't like surprises, but was relatively well behaved as I drove her to the house. She realized where we were going about five minutes away from the destination, but I still didn't ask her.

I wanted her to actually *see* what I'd done.

With that in mind, I gave her the key and took our daughter from her. She frowned, her eyes silently asking me what I was up to.

"Just open the door and see," I stated, feigning impatience.

Lily cooed and batted my face with her flailing arms, as we entered the house behind Bella.

"I fail to see how this is a sur...Wow!"

I sniggered. I'd hoped for this reaction, and now I was just wishing she would like the rest of the rooms. I stayed behind her, allowing her the luxury of a few moments alone to take it all in. The house wasn't large, but Bella wanted to digest every detail. She touched every piece of furniture I'd made, every wall I'd painted, and had cried when she saw the one photo I'd carried everywhere with me was now framed. It took her forty minutes to reach Lily's nursery, and by then I was positive she knew what I was going to ask her.

"You haven't done this so that you can sell it, have you?"

I shook my head and placed Lily into the large crib. Bella began chewing her lower lip nervously, as her fingers worried the hem of her top. I moved to stand in front of her, pushing my fingers to entwine with hers.

"There's one room left to see," I croaked out, leading her towards the master bedroom.

She stopped walking, shaking her head and tears welling in her eyes. My chest tightened with dread.

"I can't."

"Angel, please? I need-"

"I need you to mean it," she interrupted. "I need this to be real. You *have* to mean it."

I grinned, air inflating my lungs again.

"Oh, I mean it. I've never been more serious." I opened the door and let her walk first into the room, gaining the sharp inhalation of breath I'd hoped for.

"It's amazing! Oh, Edward."

I circled her waist with my arms from behind, placing my chin on her shoulder so that I could talk into her ear.

"This house was an empty shell, no love, no life, even when a family lived here. You can help change that. I'm not asking for now, because maybe it's too soon, but I want you here, with me. I want this to be ours, and yes, I want more children."

A sob escaped her lips a second before she said, "Yes. I want all this. Yes."

I scooped her up, taking her to the brand new bed, and placing her tenderly on the twilight blue sheets. I crawled up, kissing her languidly, before lying down to face her. Her face grew serious as she began to speak.

"In the past, when you were in a room I still felt alone. When you said you cared, it was as if you were asking what was for breakfast, and when you touched me I would cringe, because it only made the pain worse..."

"And now?"

"It would kill me to go back to that. I'm so proud of every step you've taken to get us here, and I hope one day there will be no therapists, no anger management and a house full of happy children. I love you, Edward Masen."

"Angel," I breathed. "You saved my life."

We hugged tightly, the love we felt flowing freely between us. We still had a long way to go, but we were finally on the same page. Bella Swan had kicked my ass more times than I could remember, and it had taken far too long for me to wake up. But when I'd finally opened my eyes I didn't receive the hate and accusations I'd expected.

I'd been given love unlike anything I'd ever experienced.

I'd been given life, and that was down to my Angel and our cherub.

They were everything I'd ever need.

*Give me more loving than I've ever had
Make me feel better when I'm feeling sad
Tell me I'm special even though I know I'm not
Make me feel good when I hurt so bad*

*Barely getting mad
I'm so glad I found you
I love being around you
You make it easy
Its as easy as 1-2-1-2-3-4
There's only one thing
To Do
Three words
For you
(I love you) I love you
There's only one way to say
Those three words
That's what I'll do
(I love you) I love you*

1234 ~ The Plain White T's

End Notes:

So... that's it.

THANK YOU to every single one of you that stuck with me for this fic. I know many of you didn't like the level of angst, but knew I was good for the HEA. Others hated the 'oops baby', but stuck with me anyway. I appreciate it so much!

I can't thank my beta, Maylin, enough. She is my rock. I love you, babes.

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xx

[Back to index](#)

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