



Texts From Last Night

EverythingIDo

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Summary

Reunited for the first time since college for the week of Alice and Jasper's destination wedding, Bella and Edward are single at the same time for the first time. Once best friends, will they find more? AH, Canon Couples.

Tour de Franzia

Disclaimer: Stephenie Meyer owns Twilight, not me. I do, however, own this story.

The bold, italicized statements are from the website [www . textsfromlastnight . com](http://www.textsfromlastnight.com). If you haven't checked it out before, do it now. You won't regret it!

Story is in Bella's point of view, unless otherwise noted.

Enjoy :)

Chapter One: Tour de Franzia

May 2013

I walked down to the beach, a large bonfire acting as my Northern star. As I drew closer, the people that had helped me find myself came into view and I smiled. Though everyone else had arrived earlier in the day, I hadn't been able to get a flight out of New York until late that afternoon, so I was a little late to what I was sure would be first of many parties during the upcoming week of celebrating all things Jasper and Alice.

The past five years had changed us; we'd grown older, gotten real jobs, moved to opposite ends of the globe, and fallen in love. The only constant in our crazy lives was this: our friendship that lasted through four outrageous years of college and into our roaring 20s.

As I approached the crackling bonfire, the sand rustled beneath my feet and I saw up close the faces of the people who knew me better than I knew myself. The people I had spent my first nights away from home with and complained about cranky professors to, the people I shared countless nights I can't remember with and, most importantly, the people I would always consider my soul mates.

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A little over a year ago, Jasper had finally swallowed his fears and popped the question to our fair Alice. Finally, after a year and a half of planning, the event was here: their wedding in Charleston, South Carolina.

It was the first time we would all be together in the same place since the summer after our graduation from Yale when we had spent two weeks at the beach house Emmett's parents owned off the coast of North Carolina, drinking and laughing and saying goodbye to our reckless college years and each other.

Alice, always the obsessive-compulsive planner, was the master of ceremonies for the week ahead, right up until the minute she and Jasper were to say 'I do.' Because it was her wedding and she had been planning it since birth, no one dared to even think about making his or her own plans. We had learned quickly not to question Alice. None of the other guests or members of the wedding party were arriving until Friday, the six of us having coordinated our calendars a year in advance to spend a few days just being together again before two members of our tight knit group became a unit for all of eternity.

"Swan's here!" Emmett bellowed as I came into view. He stood and lumbered over to me after putting his red Solo cup onto the ground for safe keeping, wrapping his big arms around my waist and lifting me off the ground in a big bear hug.

I smiled; this was familiar. "Put me down, McCarty," I squealed, having a little trouble breathing due to his mass of arm muscles and their tightness around my midsection.

He chuckled and released me. "You're looking hot, Swan. Look out, Rose, you might have a little competition," he joked, winking in his girlfriend's direction.

"Yeah, you better stay on your game," I said, carrying on with the joke. Rose shook her head back and forth in a knowing way at Emmett's typical actions.

By now, everyone else was standing to greet me. Alice was the first to move in, squealing and jumping up into my arms like a monkey. "I'm so glad you're finally here!"

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I grinned and held my best friend to me; living on separate ends of the country had made me miss her desperately. "I've missed you, A," I said as she unwrapped herself from me.

"Look what Em bought," Jasper said from behind the small crowd surrounding me. I looked over Rosalie's shoulder to check it out; he had a box of the terrible boxed wine, Franzia, in each hand.

Oh shit. "You didn't..." I said fearfully, shooting daggers in Emmett's direction.

Edward piped up from my right side as he handed me a red cup of my own. "Of course he did," he said, "and you have some catching up to do." After my cup was securely within my grip, Edward greeted me with a hug as well, though he didn't attempt cutting off my air supply like Emmett. So kind of him.

"Tour de Franzia, round," she paused, unsure of how many years this tradition had been carrying on, "five or six?" Alice announced as she held her plastic cup up in a toast. Apparently we were going to start the week off just like many weekends in college; with terrible boxed wine that we used to think was hilarious and ironic.

None of us bothered to figure out the correct year as we nodded in agreement, joining our cups together and cheering.

I giggled and took a sip, the sour liquid coating my throat. "It's only fitting," Jasper added, "after all, Franzia is what brought us all together."

xXx

September 2006, Freshman Year

Bella's POV

(518) : apparently people get pissed when you take the bag of wine out of the franzia box and put it in your purse before leaving the party

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I warily followed my roommates, Alice and Rosalie, across campus towards the rambunctious fraternity house. Flashes of reminders from Renee and Charlie that I be careful about leaving my drink unattended and avoiding guys that seemed 'sketchy' ran through my mind.

I could hear the rented 80s cover band playing from the back yard. On the front of the house a sign had been hung announcing the event of the evening, 'Sigma Pi Alpha presents: Tour de Franzia 2006.'

It was mine and Alice's first fraternity party. Jasper, Rosalie's twin brother who we had yet to meet because of his crazy pledge process, had invited the three of us. Only Rose, who had been to the house a couple of times before to see her brother on the rare occasion he wasn't being ordered around by the brothers, knew what to expect. Apparently, the only beverage available for the entire evening was a terrible boxed wine, carrying on a yearly tradition of at least five years. They thought it was original and ironic. I thought it was an opportunity for free alcohol.

I looked at Alice to gauge her initial reaction. Her face read an emotion of excitement and apprehension; I felt roughly the same way. We headed towards the door, Rose in front with her head held regally, and were greeted with red solo cups full of the liquid of honor.

"Welcome to Sigma Pi Alpha, ladies," a burly guy with massive forearms welcomed us as we stepped through the front door. He seemed immediately in awe of Rose. "I'm Emmett."

"Hi," Alice stepped forward and extended her hand, "I'm Alice Brandon. This is Bella Swan," she gestured towards me, "and Rosalie, Jasper Hale's twin?"

"Ah," he said, recognition flashing across his face. "The infamous and beautiful, Rosalie Hale. Off limits, of course. Damn."

"What?" Rose seemed appalled.

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The guy boomed with laughter. "Jasper's one of my pledge brothers. He threatened us all on our pledge retreat last weekend. Apparently, we touch you, we lose the, uh, ability to reproduce."

Rose giggled. "I love my brother and his good intentions," she said, "but you're hot." For extra emphasis, she winked.

He grinned and stood up straighter. "Damn straight," he agreed proudly. Clearly he didn't have an ego problem. "Well, ladies, enjoy yourselves. Jasper is manning the Franzia pong tables downstairs." With the instructions, we turned and went in search of Jasper.

"Franzia pong?" I yelled to Rose over the music as we fought through the inebriated, loud crowd on our way towards the door that led to the basement of the house.

Rose nodded. "Beer pong with that boxed wine shit. They think it's clever," she seemed annoyed. I didn't know her that well yet, but, judging by the high number of designer bags in her closet, she was probably inclined towards more expensive wine that had been aged in wine cellars for decades.

I chuckled. This. was. awesome.

When we arrived downstairs, Rose spotted her brother instantly and dragged us over to meet him. Introductions were made and I couldn't be sure, but I think Alice fell in love on the spot.

"You ladies wanna play?" Jasper gestured to an empty table. Alice instantly agreed, pairing off onto a team with Jasper, while Rose and I followed suit, forming a team of our own.

I was shocked by my superior Franzia pong skills. Jasper said something about beginner's luck, but I disagreed. My clumsiness and overall lack of hand eye coordination meant only one thing: my talent in life was, clearly, drinking games that involved ping pong balls. College was going to be incredible.

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After the first game (Alice and Jasper won), a beautiful guy with a mess of bronze hair approached us. The owner of that head of hair and Jasper did the man handshake and he was introduced as "Edward, one of my other pledge brothers." I was suddenly in lust.

I heard the boys discussing an emergency situation involving solo cups that required Jasper's assistance, so Edward joined Alice's team and the game resumed.

Somewhere between midnight and two a.m., things started to get fuzzy. All I remembered was playing several rounds of Franzia pong and then going out back to hear the band play with Rose and Alice once Edward left for 'pledge duty' upstairs.

Things were a little less fuzzy beginning around two thirty a.m., I guess Alice and Rose cut me off after a while and I came out of my mini blackout. Yes, I was being that girl.

"I'm hungry," I announced at the same time Emmett and Jasper approached us. Edward was trailing behind them, attempting to remove a blond bimbo from where she had attached herself to the right side of his body like a leech.

Emmett grinned. "I'm always hungry, Swan!"

"We're officially off pledge duty for now," Jasper added, "Do you ladies wanna go grab a bite?"

Alice bounced up and down, playing it off as 'getting into the music' or something.

"Let's go," Rosalie answered for all of us.

Once we were sitting in the large, round booth at a diner a few blocks away that I think we walked to, the conversation quickly began to flow. We learned each others hometowns and that the three boys were roommates in the dorm across from ours. They had decided to pledge the fraternity in the fall so that

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by the time rush came around for the ladies in the spring, they could participate in the chauvinistic festivities that went along with it. Typical men.

After we ate, I looked into my purse to pull out my wallet and was greeted by a plastic bag filled with a pink liquid. 'No wonder it had been so heavy on the way over,' I thought. I pulled it out, a questioning look on my face as I held it up for examination. "Uh, guys?"

"Oh my God," Rose shot me a look of disgust while the other four began to laugh hysterically. I'm glad I was around to provide comic relief.

"What?" I asked, waiting for an explanation.

"Swan," Emmett gasped between his laughter, "you stole a bag of Franzia from my fraternity."

I dropped it on the table with a bang, knocking a fork into Alice's lap beside me. "No I didn't. Someone must have put it in here when I wasn't looking."

"You did," Alice added, her laughter starting to fade.

"What? When?"

"After your last game of Franzia pong," Edward said with a smirk. "You said it was your 'trophy for being kick ass with balls and cups'."

My mouth gaped. "Shit," was the only word I could think of. "Do you think anyone noticed?"

"Nah," Jasper patted me on the shoulder with a reassuring smile.

I admitted to myself that it was actually kind of hilarious and made a mental note to put it up after we got back to the dorm. It didn't look like it had been opened after it was removed from the cardboard box it came in so maybe it would last a few weeks in the mini fridge that Renee had insisted we buy at Target on our way into town. I'm sure this wasn't the way she had envisioned

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me using my new appliance, but what she didn't know would definitely not hurt her.

xXx

"I miss Franzia nights," Alice whined as she leaned her head onto my shoulder.

By now, we were sitting on the logs that had been placed around the campfire before my arrival. Emmett and Rose were sharing a log, his arm tossed around her shoulders as she cuddled in his side; it was a rare moment in time where they weren't either all over each other or bickering. Edward was next to them on a log by himself, his guitar propped up on his knee as his long fingers strummed against the strings, a calm melody floating into the air. Jasper was inside getting snacks because Emmett was, not surprisingly, hungry, and Alice and I were sitting together on a log.

I nodded in agreement. "Remember that Sunday after Tour de Franzia sophomore year?"

Alice groaned. "I wish I didn't."

"Pretty sure I was hungover all day..." Edward said.

"Me too!" Alice agreed. "I had to skip chapter."

"I didn't get off the sofa at the guy's apartment all day," Rose chimed in, sitting up out of Emmett's grasp.

Jasper had returned with snacks and Emmett was too enthralled with the food in front of him to add a comment. After catching on to our conversation, Jasper just groaned and sat down, shaking his head back and forth at the memory.

xXx

*September 2007, Sophomore Year
Jasper's POV*

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(203) : franzia sundays are my new favorite holiday

Alice, Rose, and Bella had learned the art of pre-gaming by November of our freshmen year, so by the time they showed up at the party around eleven, it was game on. Bella, as usual, exhibited her Franzia pong skills, occasionally throwing in a flip cup victory, and everyone else reaped the rewards.

Around two a.m., Alice started to get a little more touchy-feely than normal. For the past eight months or so, we had been dancing around each other in a weird game of cat and mouse. She would flirt, I would flirt, we would occasionally make out when we had both been over-served, but nothing beyond that. I swore it would be the death of me. To make matters worse, somewhere along the way I had picked up morals and didn't want to sleep with my friend while we were both too drunk to form complete sentences. It was terrible and, more than once, I had had to take a cold shower under the influence.

"Jazz?" she cooed in my ear, using the nickname that had been adopted for me by my college family as she walked towards me and stood in front of the stool I was sitting on, her petite body fitting in between my legs.

There were two of her when I looked up so I had a hard time deciding if she was in a playful mood or just wanted something. "Yeah, babe?" Franzia made me loving and protective, I suppose. My arms wrapped around her tiny waist.

"I'm tired," she was rubbing her tiny hands up and down my thighs. "Can you get us a ride home from one of the little freshmen?"

I looked over her shoulder and saw two Bella's and two Rose's looking in our direction with anticipation. Alice was such a little trickster and totally knew my weak spots. She was so adorable with her begging puppy dog eyes, though, that I couldn't say no. One day, I knew, when we were both ready to settle down a bit, I would make her mine. Not now, but someday.

"Sure, sweet thing, let me find Em and Edward, you all can just come stay out our place tonight," I pushed her gently away and stood, wobbling up the stairs and through the house in search of my boys. The house that the three of us had

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rented was closer to campus than their high-priced apartment complex and we had a couple of comfortable couches they could crash on.

When I returned to the basement, I found the girls in the corner acting secretive and knew they were up to no good. I snuck up behind Alice and wrapped my arms around her waist, lifted her up, and turned her around to face in the opposite direction.

"Ladies," I greeted Rose and Bella, wrapping one arm around each other their shoulders and pulling them close into my sides. Alice was fighting to get her way around me but I wasn't moving. Ha.

Bella looked up, panic in her eyes. "Hey, Jazz," she smiled.

"Hello, dear Bella. What's going on over here?" I looked down and found the reason for their privacy: three shot glasses and a bottle of Patron that was probably provided by Rose.

"Shots?" she asked, her eyes wide with mock innocence.

I grinned, this was going to be too easy. "And you aren't going to share with your dear brother?"

Her eyes cut to Rose, asking permission. She simply nodded, but rolled her eyes. "It was supposed to be for us girls..." she mumbled under her breath.

"Our little secret," I said calmly.

Two shots and a little more drunk later, Emmett and Edward found us and dragged us upstairs to the waiting SUV driven by a nervous freshman who stared at us in bewilderment as we tumbled through the doors.

Rose glared at him. "What? Haven't seen drunk girls before? Welcome to college. Now, take me home," she slurred. It's possible that her underwear or bra, or both, were showing, but that fact has never been confirmed nor denied.

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Emmett laughed and patted her on the head with pride.

The kid's eyes widened and he mumbled, "Yes ma'am," under his breath, and turned out of the driveway.

And that's the last thing I remember.

The next morning, I rolled over onto someone. Uh oh. Did I bring someone home last night? I hoped it wasn't that girl, Charlotte, who had been attempting to get in my pants for the past three months because she was, well, kind of dirty.

My eyes were still closed so I opened them slowly, carefully.

Alice.

Shit.

I lifted the covers. Boxers and jeans on, thank God. I glanced at Alice; she was still wearing her jeans and top from the night before.

She rolled over and groaned. "Jazz, quit breathing on me. You have morning breath." Such kind morning words.

I closed my mouth. "You slept in your jeans and top," I countered, knowing it would bother her.

She sat up quickly, too quickly. "It'll be ruined," she said before suddenly clamping her hand across her mouth, "I'm gonna be sick," she said through her fingers before dashing into the hallway and towards the bathroom.

"Bella, move!" I heard her say on the way.

She returned a few minutes later, a disgusted look on her face. "Bella puked before me. I could smell it," she announced with her nose scrunched up. It was way more information than I cared to know. "Let's go check on everyone else."

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I watched as she walked slowly out of my room and could tell she was hurting. I climbed out of bed and followed.

In the living room, Rosalie was sprawled on one couch, her leg hanging off and mascara smeared down her face. Bella took the other, though she was awake and curled up in the fetal position. On her face was a look of pure pain and agony. My hangover, suddenly rearing its ugly head, came in the form of a splitting headache that made me hate my sister for sharing her Patron. Why couldn't she have just said no like she normally did ?

I fell onto the couch next to Bella and closed my eyes. This sucked.

"I need food," Emmett walked in and announced. Imagine that , I thought.

Bella and Alice groaned. Rosalie didn't move. I hoped she was still alive because mom and dad would have definitely killed me if I let her die of alcohol poisoning at one of our parties.

Edward came out of his room shortly after with a similar expression of pain on his face. "Em, you wanna go grab food?"

"Is that even a question? Where's T-Monster?" T-Monster was the loving name that the five of us used to refer to Edward's on again, off again girlfriend, Tanya. She redefined the word psycho. Usually we refrained from referring to her in our not-so-kind way in his presence, but it slipped sometimes. Too bad.

Edward ran his hands across his face. "We're on a break, Em," he groaned. "Food?" He seemed very eager to change the topic, probably because he knew how much we all despised her.

Bella and Alice waved him off, Rosalie was still in a coma, and I offered to join them.

We returned from the local diner to find the girls awake, their eyes trained on the television as they watched E! True Hollywood Story: Child Stars.

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"We have an announcement," Alice said once we were all inside.

"Let's hear it," Edward said warily as he fell onto the couch beside Bella and stretched his arm across the back.

"Bella," Alice said, "will you do the honors?"

Bella nodded and stood. "The three of us," she looked to her female partners in crime, "would like to formally announce a new tradition: Franzia Sunday."

The boys and I stared at her blankly, so Rosalie added an explanation.

"I hope none of you boys have any tests or projects due tomorrow because, from now on, the Sunday after Tour de Franzia will forever be a holiday between the six of us; laziness, greasy food, and bad TV shows all around." She actually threw her hands into the air like an exclamation point.

I nodded slowly. "I like it," I said.

"I'm in," Emmett agreed.

Edward seemed to contemplate longer than most of his, probably because he had a thing for doing homework on Sunday evenings. Nerd. "I guess I'll do it," he finally conceded. Bella beamed at him in that way she did sometimes that made us all wonder why she was on/off with that Jacob guy.

Alice grinned widely. "You guys," she sighed whistfully, "I think Franzia Sunday might be my new favorite holiday!"

xXx

"I was literally hung over until dinner that night," Emmett said, finally in on the conversation. There was a cheeto hanging from the side of his mouth.

I giggled in his direction. "I just realized something," I announced, "tomorrow's Sunday!"

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Alice stood up and did a happy dance. "Franzia Sunday," she chanted as she pumped her fists in the air. "But, you guys, Monday we really have to do a lot for the wedding."

We all rolled our eyes and downed whatever was in our glasses.

"It's official then," Edward announced with a crooked grin in my direction, "Tour de Franzia 2013 has begun!"

Coffee and Realizations

Disclaimer: Edward, Bella, and the crew belong to Stephenie Meyer.

Chapter Two: Coffee and Realizations

The next morning, I stumbled down the stairs of the house that the six of us were sharing on the beach for the week, the smell of freshly brewed coffee luring me out of bed and into the kitchen. My body didn't seem to agree with Tour de Franzia as it had in my college years, so I was in dire need of caffeine and maybe some aspirin if my head didn't quit pounding.

Edward stood at the counter when I entered and, sweet Jesus, he wore nothing but a pair of faded pajama bottoms that hung deathly low on his hips. I silently climbed onto a stool at the breakfast bar and watched as he pulled a mug down from the cabinet and poured some of the dark liquid into it, savoring the view while I could before anyone noticed. Oh, the back muscles that rippled with his every move were a new addition to his physique. He definitely hadn't looked like that the last time I had seen him shirtless. I bit my lip to keep from sighing out loud.

After filling his mug, he turned around to face me and his hips moved backwards to rest against the edge of the counter. Bloodshot eyes met mine and he grinned crookedly while taking in my appearance. It looked like he felt the effects as well. Thank God I wasn't the only one; I knew Alice would be dancing downstairs soon all perky and full of sunshine and smiles.

"Morning sunshine," Edward mumbled in a mocking tone before he took a sip. The permanent bed head that he sported was even more out of control than normal and, for the first time since I had known him, my fingers itched to touch it, to find out if it was as soft as it looked.

After forcing myself to not drool over his defined chest and sculpted stomach, I folded my arms across each other and buried my head in them, groaning once I felt the cold granite of the counter top hit my forehead.

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"Want some coffee?" He asked with a low chuckle.

I nodded my head without lifting it. A steaming mug arrived in front of me shortly after and I lifted my head slowly so that I could drink from it. Perfection, both the coffee and the man in front of me. *Wait, what? Where were these thoughts coming from?*

Edward smirked at me, the look on his face knowing. "What?" I asked, suddenly embarrassed. *Had I done something last night that I should be ashamed of? Did I have drool down my face? Eye boogers? A missing tooth?*

He shook his head back and forth. "Nothing," he said. "Just remembering how you are about coffee."

I nodded my head, grinning at the fact that he had remembered my ridiculous obsession with the beverage. Truly, it could be classified as a disorder...if there were one for twenty-somethings that required large amounts of caffeine in order to function like a normal human being.

"Keeps me sane," I admitted with a sly wink. "Wait, you don't drink coffee...when did you start drinking coffee?" I pointed a finger at his cup accusingly. Throughout college, he had complained about my constant demands for the drink and acted all high and mighty about his preference for tea instead, always adding something about antioxidants and keeping his teeth white. *Lame.*

His smirk spread into a full, happy grin and his red-rimmed sleepy eyes twinkled. "The morning after you all but demanded it at my apartment..."

xXx

Bella POV

February 2008, Sophomore Year

(415): I hate fucking guys that don't drink coffee. My morning hangover and shame will not be cured by your stupid tea.

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Thank God the boys tended to accidentally leave their apartment door unlocked after a messy night downtown because my new, uh, friend from the night before happened to live a few doors down and I was in need of some coffee. And a toothbrush. Also, perhaps my dignity.

For some reason unknown to me, Edward was passed out , face down on the couch in the living room, instead of in his massive bed just down the hall, when I walked in. His messy hair stood out in a thousand different directions and there was drool coming from the side of his mouth. He still wore the same outfit from the night prior , and his cell phone was in three pieces on the glass table. It must had been a rough night, judging by the overall situation surrounding him.

Without bothering to wake him, I made a beeline for the kitchen and the coffee pot that I was sure would be waiting for me somewhere in the cabinets. After a thorough search, though, I couldn't find the appliance of my desire. Time to wake up Edward.

"Edward?" I yelled from the kitchen, not worried about waking the two other boys that occupied the apartment because I knew Emmett was probably awake and at the gym and that Jasper was at my apartment with Alice.

I heard the leather on the couch rustle, but he didn't answer. Rolling my eyes and scoffing, I stomped into the living room.

"Wake up," I hissed as I nudged his shoulder. "I need coffee."

He shook his head but didn't remove it from the leather. "No coffee," he murmured.

"I know," I said, poking his shoulder now, "you don't drink coffee. But I do. So where is it?"

"No," he lifted his head and glared at me, "we don't have any coffee."

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"What?" Surely he was joking.

"We. Don't. Have. Any. Coffee," he enunciated each word as he repeated his earlier phrase.

I narrowed my eyes at him. "What kind of college apartment is this? You don't have coffee?"

"You can have some tea, if you like." With that, he buried his head in the cushions again, attempting to put an end to our conversation.

Tea? All he had was tea? Of course, his general 'holier-than-thou' attitude kind of matched up with his preferences, but, seriously?

This was not okay. "Edward," I whined like a child before standing and climbing on top of him on the couch. I hoped I was cutting off his air supply.

He groaned from beneath me. "Get off," he yelled into the couch, his voice muffled as the leather absorbed it. I wiggled on top of him in response. Somehow, torturing Edward made my hangover lighten substantially.

"Why is your cell phone in three pieces?" I asked to further annoy him. Instead of wiggling, I bounced on top of him like an overeager child.

My question, and probably the squashing, forced him to sit up quickly, dumping me onto the floor in the process. "Tanya," he answered in one word.

"Ah," I giggled from the floor. Tanya and Edward had been dating since she claimed him as her own some time during the fall semester of our freshman year. To say the relationship was tumultuous was an understatement. Homegirl was psycho and none of us understood why he stayed with her. "Is that why you're on the couch? She kicked you out of your bed?"

He glared at me. "I'm on the couch because I fell asleep watching TV," he said through his teeth. "Tanya is not here."

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"Oh, so by that , you mean that you passed out after taking 'I miss Tanya' shots at the bars," I retorted quickly.

"Why are you such a bitch today? You aren't usually like this," he commented with a particularly evil glare that didn't scare me one bit. His response was just as quick as mine had been.

I shrugged. "Probably because you don't have any coffee," was my nonchalant answer.

Edward rolled his eyes and buried his head once again. Could he have been any more stubborn? Repeating my earlier actions, I climbed on top of him again , except this time I stretched out my body parallel to his. I settled in with a contented sigh, completely missing the sound of the front door opening.

"Oh, whoa, sorry guys," I heard Alice chirp from the doorway, a coffee carrier in her hands.

I looked up and it was official, I completely adored her. Jasper was standing behind her with a smirk on his face.

I jumped off Edward and turned to face her. "Hey Al," I said with a grin. Her eyes were wide with shock and something else I couldn't decipher. Pride, maybe?

"We weren't, uh, interrupting anything, were we?" Jasper asked, wiggling his index finger between Edward and myself.

I turned to Edward who sat up with a crooked grin on his lips. Apparently someone's hangover had dissipated quickly now that BFF numero uno had arrived.

"Bella was attacking me for not having any coffee on hand," he explained in a strange, defensive tone.

For some reason, Alice frowned. "Oh," she said dejectedly.

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"Oh?" I asked.

She shook her head back and forth as if to clear her thoughts. "I brought coffee!" she announced, holding up the tray proudly.

I rushed to her side and pulled a steaming cup from the cardboard contraption. "You, Alice, are my hero," I said as I inhaled the scent.

"I know," she said smugly as she headed towards the small kitchen to deposit the remaining cups of coffee on the counter.

"So, man," Jasper said as he fell onto the couch next to Edward with a loud thud, "your phone is in pieces."

Edward rolled his eyes. "Thank you, Captain Obvious."

Jasper looked to me with wide eyes. I mouthed the word 'Tayna' at him and he nodded in understanding.

"Um, Bella?" Alice asked warily as she returned to the living room and squeezed herself onto the couch next to Jasper even though there was another empty couch. For some reason, I was still standing. I blamed my inability to function properly on the lack of caffeine.

I turned to her. "Yeah?" The arrival of coffee was making me agreeable.

"Who do you know that plays on Yale's football team?" she gestured to my attire with a grimace.

I blushed. What with the lack of coffee and picking on Edward, I had forgotten that this morning I had exchanged my cute top from last night for a t-shirt that went down to the middle of my thighs. I looked a little bit like an Olson twin, what with the leggings and the gladiator sandals and the oversized t-shirt.

"Uh, I, uh..."

Texts From Last Night

Jasper chuckled. "Bella..." he arched an eyebrow and waited for me to answer.

Edward bit back his laughter.

I threw my hands up in the air. "Fine, I, uh, met a guy downtown last night and he, uh, lives a few doors down and I came home with him," the words came out rushed. "He plays on the team."

Alice gasped. "You had a one night stand?" she seemed so scandalized. It wasn't like she had any room to talk; she and Jasper had slept together on their second date and they only waited that long because their first 'official date' was a Greek function and they didn't want their first time together to be hazed by alcohol.

My face was on fire now. "Well, he is, uh, in my Biology class...so, I mean, I guess you could say I know him."

"So you were, what, studying?" Edward asked sarcastically.

I narrowed my eyes at him. "No," I bit out. "Just, stop, okay? Not all of us have on/off boyfriends or stable relationships to help with their, uh, needs." The conversation needed to end.

"Needs?" Edward asked. He was clearly enjoying this and I hated him for it.

"What's his name?" Alice jumped in before I could answer Edward's question.

"Jake."

xXx

I cringed at the memory, because with it came painful reminders of my relationship with Jake. At the time, I had felt that it was the beginning of something special, something significant. I had, regrettably, thought that he was 'the one.' I had been so, so wrong.

Texts From Last Night

The look on Edward's face told me he knew what my mind was working through. "So, no more Jake?"

I shook my head back and forth firmly. "No more Jake," I stated firmly.

By nothing short of a miracle, the two of us had made it through college still together. Our job offers following graduation, though, were on opposite sides of the country, mine in New York and his in northern California. I was more than willing to give the long distance thing a go, but Jake had other plans.

In what I now see as a last-ditch maneuver to keep New York City from stealing me away, he popped the question, shiny diamond ring and all, the morning after graduation. I, of course, turned him down, insisting that we at least try to make our cross-country relationship work. Too much effort had been put into my undergraduate work, too many contacts made, for me to simply pick up and move across the country because I didn't want to be separated. I didn't want to be that girl.

Jake saw things in a more black and white way; either we were officially together, for eternity, or we were done forever. Grandeur promises about taking care of me and assurances that his salary would be more than enough for both us were made and I freaked out a little bit. But then, he brought out the big guns, using our love and memories to wrap me around his finger and I agreed to marry him on one condition: postponing our wedding until I had given life in the big city a go. He agreed.

Everything was fine for the first year and half. We took turns crossing the country to see each other, swapped holidays and anniversaries in our new cities. The wedding was never really discussed, but there was an unspoken agreement that it would come eventually. Eventually, though, things started to change. I got wrapped up in my life in New York and California sucked up all of his time. Our phone dates became less frequent and, at one point, we found ourselves having to schedule time to speak. Instead of a relationship, it felt like I was working a business deal so, I broke it off.

Texts From Last Night

Looking back, I wasn't sure what kind of reaction I expected from him, but the relief I heard in his voice was certainly a surprise. Of course, I wasn't that upset our unconventional arrangement had ended; he seemed so happy in California and I couldn't imagine leaving the city. But Jake, I had expected him to pitch a fit and cry, maybe hop on a plane and show up at my front door begging me to reconsider. He didn't do any of those things. Instead, he laughed and told me he had wanted to call things off for six months now but didn't want to hurt me. Apparently, he had been dating a woman he met at work a few months prior; something about an instant connection and butterflies.

To say that I had been gun shy on the commitment front since, was a bit of an understatement. Jake's betrayal had hurt on a level that I hadn't initially expected it to. As a result, I hadn't made it past the third date with a man since for fear that he would eventually ask me to do something I wasn't prepared or willing to do.

"Do you...want to talk about it?" he asked tentatively and, well, I kind of did. Alice and I had scrutinized every aspect of mine and Jake's relationship, but a different perspective might be nice, if only to hear that I wasn't insane for not darting across the country with Jake the day after I accepted my diploma.

My mouth opened to answer with words I had trouble coming up with, when Emmett bellowed from the top of the stairs, "Franzia Sundaaaaaaay!" Saved by the burly teddy-bear of a man.

After a look from Edward that told me our conversation had not been laid to rest, I turned to greet Emmett. "Hey, Em."

"Swan," he grinned as he ambled over to me. "Looking lovely, as always."

I was pretty sure that I looked like death, so I rolled my eyes.

Alice bounced downstairs next with Jasper and Rose on her heels. They were all smiling happily while Edward and I frowned at them for interrupting our quiet, calm morning.

Texts From Last Night

"Good morning all," Alice actually lifted her hands into the air as if she was addressing the crowd at one of her fashion shows. Sometimes I hated her; I envied the way she somehow avoided hangovers her entire life; it was like she had a lucky 'no hangover' gene or something.

Even Rose managed a smile. "Is there any coffee left?" she asked.

Edward nodded mutely with a frown and gestured to the half-full coffee pot next to him. As Rose sauntered over to fill her empty mug, I met his gaze and smirked before rolling my eyes at the cheerfulness of our friends. I caught the obscene gesture he managed to send in my direction without the others noticing, and I shook my head back and forth, stifling a giggle. Of course they were all happy and full of joy; they all got some last night, while Edward and myself had both retreated to bed...alone.

I attempted to calculate the last time I had gotten some when a sudden realization came to me: for the first time since we had met over eight years ago, Edward Cullen and I were free and single at the same time. No Tanya, no Jake. Maybe that explained my sudden realization of his chiseled muscles and tempting, 'do me' hair...he was no longer someone else's property.

Oh, this had the potential to be very, very bad...or good, depending on how I looked at it. *Shit.*

Time to Pretend

Disclaimer: Twilight is owned by Stephenie Meyer. The story is mine.

Chapter Three: Time to Pretend

"I'm going to go, uh, take a shower," I announced quickly in an effort to clear my thoughts after chugging the last of my coffee before jumping off the barstool. Suddenly, I had an inexplicable desire to get away from Edward and the dirty thoughts that his bare chest stirred in my mind.

The couples were oblivious to my hasty exit, but Edward smirked and I heard him chuckle lightly as my foot got caught on the leg of the stool, forcing me to grip the counter to keep from face planting onto the hard floor.

My cheeks flushed as I straightened myself before I darted up the stairs and into the bathroom that was attached to my room, slamming and locking the door behind me before I turned on the water.

As I lathered my hair with the strawberry-scented shampoo I had been using since Alice suggested it our sophomore year at Yale, I forced myself to think of anything and everything besides the muscles on Edward's stomach and the little trail of hair that led into the waistband of his pajama bottoms.

I wasn't successful. *Damn it*

Instead, I tormented myself with memories of his long fingers and strong forearms, his hair that seemed frozen in time and his crooked smile that caused panties to dampen all over New Haven during our college years. And the lips, oh the lips, they wouldn't leave my mind as I transitioned from washing to rinsing. No need to repeat, I squirted conditioner into my hair and let out an audible sigh; I was hopelessly in lust.

Tired of fighting a losing battle with my over-imaginative mind, I allowed it free reign to wander from what was unlikely to happen in the future to the

Texts From Last Night

sure-thing past. I wondered - if there had been no Tanya, no Jacob, - could there have been an Edward and Bella? A third couple that would fill the void that loomed over our entire close-knit group of friends; everyone would be paired off.

I remembered my initial attraction to him, the night we had met the crazy trio that I now considered my brothers and my disappointment when he introduced Tanya as his girlfriend a few days later on campus. I couldn't help but cringe at the awkward freshman I had been, hoping that she would find a reason to dump him so that I could have him as mine.

Of course, then Jake had happened and all thoughts of anything Edward and Bella related flew out the window.

Suddenly, my brain remembered something; a certain night where, for a few moments, there was the possibility of an 'us' that extended beyond friendship. I couldn't believe the memory escaped me for so long...

xXx

Bella POV

August 2008, Beginning of Junior Year

(212) : I heard we made out

My arms were folded across my chest when Alice ambushed me in the kitchen, announcing that it was time to get ready for the evening. Never mind the pizza I was keeping an eye on in the oven; she seemed to have other plans for me.

"I'm not going out tonight," I told her for the third time in the past hour.

She rolled her eyes and placed her petite hands on my shoulders. "Yes you are," she assured me. With force hidden behind her tiny frame, she ushered me out of the kitchen and down the hall towards her large bathroom. "You just don't know it yet."

Texts From Last Night

Damn bossy pixie.

I rolled my eyes as she pushed down on my shoulders and forced me onto the small chair in front of the vanity.

" You're not allowed to play dress up with me tonight."

Alice giggled, knowing she would win...she always did. "Silly Bella," was all she chimed, grabbing her blow dryer.

I briefly scolded myself for showering; it had opened a door for her. Wet hair was like a siren song to Alice.

Over the sound of the warm air rushing around my head, I heard Rose yell something from the kitchen about eating the pizza in the over no matter who belonged to. I groaned, thinking of ways to get out of Alice's evil plan, and settled on the 'pulling at her heart strings' approach.

" Alice, I'm not ready to see...him , " I forced out in a pitiful voice. The words sounded forced because they were, so I stuck my bottom lip out for emphasis. I mirrored a five year old pouting because her balloon flew away.

' Him' was in reference to Jake.

A nasty rumor on campus claimed he and one of the female trainers for the team had engaged in a little extra 'physical therapy' in one of the training rooms after practice. I confronted him, he denied it all and so did his teammates, so I believed him. The pitiful puppy look in his eyes told me that 'nothing had happened.'

However, I told Jake that we needed to go on a break.

Texts and phone calls were easy to ignore most of the time, but I knew that if I was in the same bar as him, my resolve would crumble and we would end up back together before the night was over. It had been two weeks for crying out loud...two weeks.

Texts From Last Night

Rose and Alice assumed that my avoidance of downtown was a result of my sadness over our self-imposed break and didn't press the issue. I was glad that they were, for once, minding their own business because I couldn't summon the bravery to tell them that I was just trying to keep up appearances. It didn't hurt that I had cut down on showering and was eating a lot of ice cream for extra emphasis.

"We'll just avoid all of our normal places then. Bella, you have to get out of this apartment other than to go to class at some point." Her voice was full of concern and worry. I almost felt bad for my deception. "You're starting scare us."

I closed my eyes, because I knew that if I looked into hers as she began to curl my hair that I would spill my secret.

"Where could we go that he won't be?" I asked with a sigh. All the bars, it seemed, were our 'normal places' these days. It was kind of ridiculous.

Alice giggled. "Jasper said that we could all come over to the fraternity house if we wanted."

I contemplated this option as she finished my hair and disappeared into her closet to find an outfit.

Jake definitely wouldn't be there; he was in the 'rival' fraternity that liked to get into pissing contests with Sigma Pi Alpha over who could sleep with the hottest girls and throw the most outrageous parties. It was completely chauvinistic and annoying, but it did prove to be helpful tonight.

"I guess that could work," I admitted with defeat in my voice and because I was tired of sitting on our couch watching reruns of Friends and downing in chocolate while I pretended to be heartbroken just to prove a point that seemed sillier and sillier with each passing moment.

Alice squealed from inside her closet. "I have the perfect outfit then!"

Texts From Last Night

When we arrived at the house, it was quiet and seemed empty. I followed Rose and Alice down into the basement where we found the boys surrounded by their fraternity brothers, beers in their hands and some sporting event on the big screen television. They seemed unaffected by our presence.

"Hello!" Rosalie said in a loud voice to announce our arrival.

They all turned and the three we claimed as friends, grinned.

"Ladies," Emmett greeted us absentmindedly, most of his attention on the game.

Alice bounced over and climbed onto Jasper's lap, leaving Rosalie and I standing awkwardly behind the tattered couches as they greeted one another with a short, sweet kiss. Not into PDA, Alice called it their 'public kiss.' None of us wanted to see the private ones.

Edward walked over to greet us. "Can I get you both something to drink?" he asked.

We nodded and he motioned for us to follow him upstairs. When we arrived at the makeshift bar area, our feet sticking to the floor as we walked, Rose turned to me and grinned wickedly, "Shots?"

I should have said no, but I didn't. Instead, I agreed eagerly. "Edward, whatcha got in there?" He was standing behind the bar, pretending to play the role of bartender. It strangely suited him.

"Uh, we've got some crappy Vodka and some crappy Gin. I think that's it, unless you want this Jaeger that someone must have left last night," he held up the dark green bottle and frowned.

"We'll take the Jaeger," Rose said without hesitation and I wanted to slap the smirk off her face. She so knew what she was doing. It was part of the 'make Bella forget about Jake' plan that I had heard her whispering to Alice about while I was changing earlier.

Texts From Last Night

Edward grinned and placed it on the top of the bar, along with three shot glasses.

I quirked an eyebrow at him. "Three?"

" Three," he answered firmly, his eyes hard.

We chocked down the first round of shots, then a second and a third. By the fourth round, our ability to taste had flown out the window and I was pretty sure our laughter could be heard all the way across the house and downstairs.

" I'm cutting myself off," Rose announced before falling off the stool and onto her feet, stumbling back in the direction of the basement before Edward or myself could protest.

I turned to him and giggled, "Another?"

" Another." He poured us a fifth shot that would later be a mistake.

" To exes," he toasted as he held up his shot glass.

I mirrored his actions, wanting to question his statement, but my mind wasn't going at its full rate thanks to the liquor.

" To exes," I slurred in response.

" Bella," Alice began the next morning as we lounged on the couch watching E! News Weekend, "can I ask you an important question?"

I turned to her and nodded. "Sure, Al."

" Is Edward's hair as soft as it looks? I've always wondered..." Her voice hinted that there was more to the question that I had no idea how to answer.

" What?" I asked quickly, having no recollection of ever touching Edward's hair.

Texts From Last Night

Her eyes widened. "You know...last night..."

"No," I shook my head back and forth, my eyebrows furrowing, "I don't know about last night."

"You and Edward..." she continued with a prompting nod.

My eyes widened. "No, Alice, I slept in my own bed last night. There was no Edward."

"Uh..." she was hesitant to answer as she looked down towards her hands.

"Alice...look at me. What's going on?" I asked, panicked.

"You and Edward, you, uh..." For the first time since I had known her, Alice was speechless.

"We what?" I hissed at her between clenched teeth. My hands were clinched in fists.

"Emmett had to practically pull you two apart," she said in a small voice. "I think you did shots or something at the house?"

I nodded. "Yes, but Rose was with us," I reminded her.

"She was," Alice agreed, "but then she left and came back downstairs."

Shit.

"Fuckin' A," I was speechless. "Did we?" I really hoped we hadn't slept together.

"No," Alice said quickly, "you were just kind of...mauling each other."

I could feel my face burning. "Mauling?" I was horrified.

Texts From Last Night

Alice stifled a giggle. "Emmett's words, not mine. He said you were pretty hot and heavy and that there were shot glasses and beer bottles on the bar and a stool knocked into the floor."

I groaned and buried my face into my hands. Of all people to find us in a compromising situation induced my Jaegermeister, and it had to be Emmett, Mr. 'I Don't Know the Definition of Discreet.'

Flashes of kisses and random gropes flashed through my mind in a random, chaotic order. A brief flash of Edward's lips made mine tingle as they remembered how his felt pressed against mine...and the hair, definitely as soft as it looked.

"Did he tell everyone?" I asked when I was brave enough to face her again.

"Just us," she assured me, reaching across to pat me on the hand.

I nodded. "Okay," I felt mildly better. "I should probably tell Edward."

"Probably," Alice agreed as I reached across the coffee table to get my cell and type out a quick text.

Huh. I already had one waiting...from Edward.

I heard we made out. -E

Well, at least it was out in the open.

I'm hearing the same thing. Emmett and his loud ass mouth. -B

I hit send.

Never to be spoken of again? -E

Thank God he didn't want to make an issue out of it.

Texts From Last Night

Never. -B

"It's all good," I informed Alice after sending my response.

She beamed. "Thank God," she said loudly, "I was worried this would ruin us."

"Ruin us?"

"Yes, the six of us," she said as if it was the most obvious thing in the world, "if there was an awkward thing between some of us, we would never be the same."

I nodded, understanding her words. "Oh."

In that moment, I chose not to tell Alice that I had remembered flashes of the night before. Maybe if I never spoke of it aloud, I would forget it, like it wasn't real. I would forget that his kisses were sweeter and hotter than Jake's had ever been and that when he had whispered in my ear how beautiful I was that it had taken my breath away. I didn't want it to be real because I wanted it to work with Jake, because I knew that Tanya would never disappear, that I was simple Bella and she was model Tanya and that he was breathtaking Edward and that we would never, could never be together.

"Yes," she quickly said, "so, what do we want to watch today, Sex and the City or Tiffany's?" Thank God Alice mastered the art of changing the subject.

"Sex," I answered quickly, "I'm clearly not getting enough if I made out with Edward."

I told myself to deny any feelings that last night might have stirred up.

It was time to call Jake and let him come crawling back.

xXx

I wandered back downstairs after my shower, fully composed and hopeful that I wouldn't have to be near Edward when Franzia Sunday commenced.

Texts From Last Night

Wishful thinking didn't get me very far.

When I entered the living room, I found my five best friends in front of the television, a marathon of a reality show playing in front of them. I smiled; some things never changed.

The seating arrangement, though, made me frown. Of course, the only available seat was next to Edward on tiny loveseat. Alice and Jasper were occupying a large chair and Emmett and Rose were sprawled out on the large couch.

I took a deep breath and crossed to the loveseat, choosing to sit on the floor in front of it, my back against the cushions and my legs stretched out in front of me. Anything was better than sitting next to Edward right now.

"Bella?" I heard Edward ask carefully in a whisper from above me.

I turned to find him with a questioning look on his face. "You can sit up here, you know. I don't bite." He winked. I gaped at him.

I forced a smile after composing myself. "Oh, uh, okay," I mumbled and climbed up beside him, sitting as far away from his as possible, my body pressed up against the armrest as I made sure that not a single cell in my body touched his.

Edward looked at me like I had three heads.

"You okay?" he asked with concern.

I nodded, forcing myself to look anywhere but into his eyes. I settled on his hair and wondered if it felt like it had five years ago.

"I'm fine." Please, just don't grin.

He grinned. "Good."

Texts From Last Night

I smiled curtly at him and turned my attention firmly to the television.

It was going to be a long week.

Breakfast for Dinner

Disclaimer: You know the drill.

Chapter Four: Breakfast for Dinner

By dinnertime, it was clear that if any more episodes of Jersey Shore were watched, our IQs would drop and the boys would be fist pumping as they walked down the aisle at the end of the wedding on Saturday afternoon. Nothing on the show had changed in the past three years, unfortunately.

Rosalie was the one who snatched the remote control from Emmett's grasp and pressed the off button around six, putting us all out of our misery. I wasn't sure what I was happier for: the fact that our TV marathon had ended, or that I no longer had to endure sitting so close to Edward and his wandering fingers.

The day had been torture. I suppose because Edward and I had never really been attracted to one other in college, his touchy-feely ways had never affected me. But now, each touch left a lingering tingle that took way too long to dissipate and left me breathless, eager to run away without causing a scene. I was conflicted when Emmett threw me a life line.

He announced that it was time for his evening 'feeding', as if he hadn't been snacking all afternoon. I took the opportunity to quickly scramble off the couch and stated that I would take care of dinner...anything to be away from Edward. I really needed to get over this weird little crush I was developing. It had to be hazardous to my health and mental well being.

On my way through the door, I turned and offered up one of the only things in my cooking repertoire. "Breakfast for dinner?"

The jokes about New Yorkers eating out all the time were, unfortunately, true.

Alice clapped her hands together as Emmett questioned with a cheesy grin, "Will that include bacon?"

Texts From Last Night

I heard Edward laugh loudly so I turned to him, our eyes meeting as we shared an unspoken memory with silly grins on our faces.

xXx

Edward POV

July 2009, Summer after Junior Year

(469): You owe me 10 bucks. He wasn't in jail. Found him at 5:30 this morning when the smoke alarm went off. He passed out naked in the middle of cooking bacon. No idea where he was before.

"Do we have Emmett?" I called out to no one in particular as we all piled into the taxi that would take us to our respective apartment buildings.

Tanya was curled into my side like a needy child, whimpering something about feeling sick, so I forgot about Emmett and where he might or might not be and told the driver that we were all present and accounted for.

"Edward?" Bella called from the back of the taxi where she was sitting with Jake as the van started to move through the streets littered with drunken college students. "I think he's, uh, still at the bar arguing with those guys outside."

I turned to face her, forcing Tanya to rest her head in my lap so that she wouldn't vomit all over the taxi; I wasn't about to pay the \$50 fee because she didn't know when to cut herself off and sometimes had the tendency to get carsick.

"He was arguing?"

Bella nodded with a worried look on her face. "Something to do with sports..."

Shit. It was a terrible idea to get into an argument with Emmett about sports when he was sober, but an even worse one when he had been drinking.

Texts From Last Night

" Was he winning the argument?" I asked with trepidation in my voice.

She shrugged and turned her attention to Jake, swatting his hand away from where it was snaking up the front of her sundress. I rolled my eyes at their public display of affection. Jake was such a sleaze; I would never disrespect Tanya that way in public. In private on the other hand...

Jasper answered for her. "I don't think so."

" Should we be concerned?" Alice asked, looking up at Jasper with wide, worried eyes.

He shook his head back and forth, assuring her as he rubbed his hand up and down her back. "He'll be fine; either he'll get a taxi home or arrested."

" Arrested?" Rosalie squealed from her seat in the front.

She quickly brushed off her severe reaction to his possible predicament as simple worry for her friend, but we knew the truth...Rose and Em had not so secretly been hooking up for the past year. It was an unspoken understanding that we all pretended not to know, though we had a pool going with bets on when their 'relationship' would transition from fuck buddies to boyfriend and girlfriend. My money was on some time in November.

Jasper and I nodded nonchalantly and the girls began to freak out.

" We can't let him get arrested, Edward. If we do, he won't get into law school," Rosalie protested, making motions for the driver to stop and turn around.

I stopped her motions, telling the driver that turning around was completely unnecessary and that our idiot friend would be perfectly fine.

The irony of her statement wasn't lost on me, though. Imagine, Emmett could possibly be arrested for an argument that led to a fight, keeping him from getting into a school that would enable him to argue daily for a living.

Texts From Last Night

"Wanna bet? Are we speaking of the same Emmett?" Bella squealed.

I nodded, feeling drool from Tanya's mouth seep into my charcoal slacks. "Sure do."

She scoffed, but then accepted. "Ten bucks says he ends up in jail tonight."

I accepted her terms. "Ten bucks says he doesn't," I stated with arrogance.

"Fine," she folded her arms across her chest.

"Fine," I echoed with a smug grin.

"First stop," the taxi driver announced from the front as he pulled into the girls' apartment complex. I could tell from the tone in his voice that he was ready to get rid of some of us.

I watched as they piled out, Jasper trailing behind Alice as Rose staggered in by herself. I shot Jake an evil glare for some unknown reason, watching as he and Bella walked across the parking lot. "No jail!" I yelled to her retreating figure.

She turned to face me and grinned wickedly. "Suit yourself, just don't come crying to me when Emmett has to live on the streets because the two of you fucked up his life because you were too lazy to check on him."

"I won't," I answered as I watched Jake wrap his arm around her waist, walking side-by-side through the door or the girls' first floor apartment.

She was totally going to lose.

A loud, chirping sound woke me from a deep sleep well before sunrise. After sitting up quickly and rubbing the sleep out of my eyes, I identified the noise as the smoke alarm and jumped out of bed, not bothering to wake Tanya before I did...if there had been a real emergency, I would probably come back for her.

Texts From Last Night

What the hell?

The smoke bellowing from the kitchen led me to the source of the problem: burning bacon. After deciding that there was probably no real emergency, I located the fire alarm and pulled the battery out to stop the offending sound.

I entered the smoke-filled room and squinted my eyes to keep them from tearing up. On the stove was a skillet full of burnt bacon and on the floor was Emmett, naked with a Cheez-It stuck to his chin and his body wrapped around a fluffy orange pillow. If I hadn't been half asleep, I would have whipped out my iPhone and taken the best blackmail picture of my life.

I knelt beside him and shook his shoulder to wake him up. "Get up," I yelled at him.

He mumbled something incoherent so I shook him again. After several violent shakes, he jolted awake.

"Fuck, my bacon," he yelled as he jumped up quickly. "Oh, head rush." Unfortunately, the pillow fell to the floor.

"Emmett," I hollered to get his attention.

He turned to face me just as Jasper entered the room and immediately doubled over in laughter at the situation before him.

"Edward, fuck, you let me burn my damn bacon."

Jasper walked over lazily and rested his hand on Emmett's shoulder, consoling him. "That was all you, big man," he told him, biting his lip to keep from laughing.

"What?" Poor Emmett was having a hard time with the situation. I could only imagine what had happened after we left him downtown to have him end up in this state.

Texts From Last Night

Jasper shook his head back and forth. "Come on, Em, let's just get you up to bed."

"Okay," he said with a nod and allowed Jasper to lead him out of the room.

I rolled my eyes. "Thanks for leaving me with the mess," I called after them.

"Sorry, dude," Jasper yelled back at me. "Also, Tanya just puked in your bed."

Tanya could take care of my sheets later, I decided as I pulled out my phone to text Bella and remind her of our little bet.

xXx

"If there is bacon involved, babe, you are not allowed in the kitchen," Rose said as she bit back laughter, clearly remembering the same thing that Edward and I were.

Emmett frowned. "I've learned my lesson," he defended himself as he folded his burly arms across his chest. "And I'm sober now."

Rose nodded and rubbed his forearm reassuringly. "I'm sure you have, but for now, just let us take care of dinner." She stood and walked towards me in that way she did that made her look like she was floating. "I'll help you out, Bella."

"Thanks, Rose," I said, surprised that she was offering her services.

Alice agreed to help as well; apparently she had developed mad egg scrambling skills somewhere along the way, so we found ourselves together in the kitchen while the men sat on their rear ends and watched the end of a baseball game.

"So, Bella?" Alice asked in that way of hers that told me there was a question I might not want to answer waiting on the edge of her tongue.

I pulled my attention from the skillet I was piling bacon on to, "Yes?"

Texts From Last Night

"Why were you, uh, cuddling with the arm of the loveseat all day?" She asked nonchalantly, cracking open an egg and dumping it into a bowl.

They had noticed my avoidance of Edward? I had no clue how to answer her loaded question, so I decided the best solution would be to play dumb.

I felt my face redden with my tell-all signature blush and I turned to Rosalie for support. She merely grinned at me cheekily. "What are you talking about?" I asked.

Rose scoffed and answered for her. "Come on Bella, you were looking at Edward like he might bite you all afternoon," she said in a snotty tone that was typical of her.

"I was not," I defended myself, averting my gaze from them back to my task. I pleaded with my face to stay its normal shade of pale wonder bread. "I just, uh..."

"You were..." they led in unison.

I turned to them with an angry look on my face. "I don't really know what either of you are fishing for."

Rose quirked an eyebrow and Alice rolled her eyes.

"Whatever, Bella. If I didn't know you so well, I would think maybe you were developing a thing for Mr. Cullen," Rose said in a weird tone that I couldn't decipher.

I dropped a piece of bacon onto the floor. "What?" My voice squeaked as I hissed the words at them, careful to reign in my shock so it wouldn't be overheard in the other room.

Alice beamed at me and I knew that she had figured me out. "I am not," I lied as I bent over to retrieve the fallen piece of meat, knowing that she would keep quiet until later...probably when Rose wasn't around because sometimes her

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mouth was as big as Emmett's.

"Whatever you say..." she mumbled under her breath. I shot her a death glare as she innocently dumped the eggs into the skillet to be scrambled.

"I do say," I answered quickly, too quickly, but thankfully neither of them said anything.

Alice demanded that we all watch a movie after dinner to continue our day of laziness and bonding. After an intense argument between the group about whether or not watching a movie could be considered bonding since no talking would be involved, she got her way and did a little happy dance before she winked at me and sat down.

I knew her real reason for forcing *The Hangover* on us all, and it wasn't so that we could bond some more. Dear, sweet, Alice wanted to test me, to see how I acted when confronted with sitting in close proximity to Edward again. I made up my mind in that moment to prove her wrong, tingles be damned.

After breaking up with the arm of the loveseat, I inched closer and closer to Edward as the opening credits rolled, not wanting to jump directly to his side. Okay, so maybe I did want to jump directly to his side, but I also didn't want to draw too much attention myself...so I inched as diligently and stealthily as possible.

I tried to gauge Edward's reaction as I moved closer, but it was difficult. His eyes stayed locked on the movie and he laughed at all of the appropriate times, even though we had all watched the movie countless times in the past and could practically recite each character's lines.

When my left leg touched his right, though, his eyes cut to me. I looked up at him and grinned innocently, nodding to his arm in hopes that he would extend it across the end of the loveseat so that I could lean into his side. Sure, it was a bit extreme, but it was reminiscent of the early days of our friendship, when the six of us were together without the interference of significant others. Back then, Edward was my friendly cuddle buddy.

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He obliged to my request and I tried not to sigh too loudly in contentment as I felt his arm wrap around my shoulder, and pulled me into his side, but I'm sure I failed. It wasn't that I thought he was a sex god and I was interested in him, there was just something so soothing and comfortable about leaning against him that I couldn't help it... or so I deluded myself.

As I melted into his side, I couldn't ignore the weird tingles any longer. None of them had been present in the past when we were forced to share a small chair or, sometimes when there wasn't any other option, a bed. The feeling was new and...welcomed...and constantly present from my shoulder to my knee.

Turning my head, I looked and smiled sheepishly, glad that the lights had been turned off for the movie so that he couldn't see the blush creeping across my cheeks. He smiled back, the little light provided by the television screen allowing me the chance to stare into his eyes. They were beaming at me and I wondered if he felt what I did. Probably not, I assumed.

Unable to read what he was trying to imply, I whispered, "What?" I reassured myself that this was normal - okay even- there was nothing wrong with being wrapped up in Edward's arms and liking it too much.

"You still owe me those ten bucks..." He smirked as he trailed off, his arm tightening around my shoulders briefly as he whispered lightly into my ear.

My mouth fell open as I gaped at him, my eyes wide with shock. I couldn't believe that he had remembered the bet we had made half a decade ago. Hell, I had forgotten about it until Emmett said the word 'bacon.'

I smiled at him after picking my jaw up off my lap. "You...you remember that?"

"Unfortunately, the image of Emmett that night is seared in my brain." He cringed as he spoke, but couldn't hide the fact that he was attempting to keep the corners of his mouth from curling into a grin.

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Of course, I had been selfishly hoping that he remembered it because it was a bet between us, but of course it was because of our friend's ridiculousness.

"Gross," I said as the same image flashed through my mind as well before I remembered something important. "Wait, I paid you." My voice was a whisper, but it still hissed a little bit as I poked a finger into his chest. It was hard as a rock, so naturally, I melted a little.

He shook his head. "No you didn't."

I sat up, pulling myself away from him as I sat up. "I did too," I protested, "well I didn't technically pay *you*, but I gave the money to Emmett to give to you. It's just a technicality..."

Edward looked over my shoulder to Emmett, who was clearly pretending not to listen to our conversation as he played with Rosalie's hair and kept his eyes trained on the movie. The look on his face, though, told a different story...a story of shame.

Turning, I glared at him. "Emmett..." I trailed off.

His eyes widened. "What?" He feigned innocence, refusing to meet my gaze on the other side of the dark room.

"Did you give Edward the money that I owed him that time? When you burnt the bacon?"

"Uh, I, uh..." he stuttered, looking to Rose for rescuing.

She swatted him across the chest. "Don't lie, ass," she said, "you used that money to buy cheap shots for yourself at the bar after your accounting midterm."

"Oh, yeah, I remember that afternoon..." he drifted off, looking at Rose with goo-goo eyes. "That was the night we..." another swat across the chest, "...got really drunk."

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" *Right*," Edward and I said at the same time. I wasn't sure about him, but I was definitely not in the mood to hear about whatever Rose and Em did or did not do that night under the influence of what my money bought. Judging by the whispers and looks between them, it was possible that whatever it was would likely be revisited in the next couple of hours. I reminded myself to thank Alice later for putting me on the opposite side of the house from them.

I turned back around to face Edward. "So, Emmett owes you ten bucks," I stated.

He nodded, licking his lips. "Okay," he agreed, extending his arm again, opening up his chest to act as my pillow once more.

"Okay," I agreed, grinning as I leaned into him, this time with a little less hesitation, and inhaled the scent that was distinctly Edward.

Halfway through the movie the tingles started to subside as I grew more and more accustomed to sitting with half of my body attached to Edward's. Finally, it seemed, I was getting used to his newfound muscles and overall attractiveness that my friend now held.

And then...he started to rub little circles with his thumb across my shoulder and I melted into him even more if that was at all possible. Glancing up, the look on his face told me that his motions were completely unconscious, as if he felt so comfortable in our position that it was a natural thing to do.

My attention turned back to the movie, a small, satisfied smile resting on my lips. Within minutes, his tender touches lulled me to sleep.

Summer of Raised Surfaces

Disclaimer: All together now...they're not mine.

Chapter Five: Summer of Raised Surfaces

The next morning, I was bending over to lace up my tennis shoes when heard someone speak from the top of the staircase, disrupting the serenity and tranquility of the breaking dawn. "My, my, Bella Swan...a runner?"

I bolted up, reacting like a frightened kitten, and immediately matched a name to the smooth voice before I saw his face. It was Edward. I frantically ran a quick hand through my long, tangled hair, groaning at the fact that I looked like a hot mess. I tried not to think about it, since back in my college days appearance hadn't been a priority where Edward was concerned. Back then, he was just good, best friend Eddie (a nickname he loathed), not hot, single Edward. Now, I didn't know what to think, and I was growing more agitated by the minute with my wanton thoughts. I fussed with my hair for a few more seconds before turning around to face him.

Not that I wasn't pleased to see him, I just wasn't exactly looking my finest at the moment. Regretfully, I recalled that I had pressed the snooze button on my iPhone's alarm three times before rolling out of bed and clumsily dressing for my run. If only I had woken up at my intended time, I could have avoided looking like this in front of Edward. Hindsight...

"That I am," I answered, gnawing on the flesh of my bottom lip and fidgeting as I put my hair in a ponytail. I appraised his appearance and frowned. His unruly hair was, unfortunately, tucked under a baseball cap with a 'Y' for Yale embroidered across the front as it declared proudly the name of our alma mater. Like me, he was wearing workout clothes, his tennis shoes dangling from his long fingers in one hand; his socks nestled in the other.

He nodded, slowly licking his lips as he absorbed my answer, "And in the morning too?" I could hear the mock-impressed tone in his voice. Okay, so,

Texts From Last Night

maybe I hadn't been much of a morning person in college...

I resisted the urge to smack him upside his pretty head as he plopped down into a chair at the kitchen table to pull on his socks. Hitting, I noted to myself, probably wouldn't do me any good.

"Yes, in the morning," I snapped defensively as I folded my arms across my chest, unable to come up with a witty response because I was distracted by the way his shirt stretched tightly across his back muscles; the way they ripple with each graceful movement. I was mesmerized and a little bit speechless. For some reason, probably the same reason that left my tongue immobilized, his teasing didn't irk me as much as I led him to believe.

"Want some company?" He didn't look up as he asked, his gaze intently focused on the task at hand.

In general, I preferred to run alone unless I was participating in an event with my friend, Angela, from work. But then, unprompted images of Edward running alongside me, all sweaty and out of breath, appeared in my mind and I knew that I would make an exception.

"Uh, sure," I said, my face flushing from the surprisingly naughty nature of my thoughts. I was thankful for the fact that he was still looking down at his feet, because I really wouldn't have been able to come up with a good answer as to why I was blushing.

He finished tying his shoes, stood up, and flashed me a lazy grin. "Good," he said, "I left my iPod in Chicago and some company would be nice."

I chose to keep my feelings about running partners to myself and headed in the direction of the door. We needed to get this run started before I threw all inhibition out the window and jumped his bones. The way his athletic shorts hung on his hips did dangerous things to my libido.

Weird...

Texts From Last Night

"Ready?" I asked, pulling my head out of the gutter, and focused on the task at hand. I idly wondered if he was one of those crazy runners that sprinted everywhere instead of enjoying the repetitive rhythm as rubber met the pavement or, in this case, sand.

He followed me quickly. "I think the question is, Bella, are you ready?" His heady breathing tickled the nape of my neck, and I realized that he was standing directly behind me, his body mere centimeters from mine.

I jumped, not expecting him to be so close and spun around. He was smirking at me.

"What?" I asked.

He shook his head, the smirk refusing to leave his lips as he avoided my question. "Think you can keep up?" His eyes were sparkling with mirth as he challenged me.

Oh, two could totally play at this game.

Without warning, I dashed down the stairs that led to the beach and veered to the left, reaching the shoreline before turning to see what Edward was doing. I stopped and inhaled the salty air, relishing the gentle breeze coming off the ocean in long bursts. A moment ticked by before I realized that Edward didn't stop with me. Instead, he was jogging at a leisurely pace a few yards ahead. Gathering my wits, I shook my head back and forth, my ponytail swishing against my neck, and jogged quickly to meet up with him.

Surprisingly, we ran at a steady pace, side by side in sync, neither of us fighting to take control of the speed. Luckily, he wasn't a sprinter. The moments were comfortable, relaxed, and normal. I actually found myself enjoying the company of another as I ran.

Thankfully, Edward wasn't much of a talker. An occasional comment regarding the weather or avoiding the waves that crashed onto the pebbled sand that threatened to soak our feet, was all that left his mouth and I was glad. With the

Texts From Last Night

way those beads of sweat were trickling down his neck, I much preferred the sound of the waves crashing against the shore in the place of attempted conversation.

Half an hour into the run, I glanced at him out of the corner of my eye, gauging the expression on his face to see if we should turn around or if he could handle another mile or two. Of course, the smirk on his face told me that his stamina wasn't going to be a problem.

Stamina...

I inwardly chided myself. The mere mention of the word made my mind go straight down the gutter.

I distracted myself by repeating the question I had asked earlier, "What's with the smirking?"

He turned his head to look at me, our pace remaining steady. "What?"

"You've been smirking the entire run," I explained.

His smirk transformed into a smile. "Have you been checking me out our entire run?" He winked and I wondered if he was flirting with me when I noticed his eyes twinkled.

"No," I defended quickly, "just, uh, checking to make sure you can keep up."

"Oh, I can keep up, Bella," he promised. Something about the gleam in his eyes assured me he wasn't only referring to his cardiovascular health.

Smug ass. I rolled my eyes. "Seriously though, the smirking?"

"Well," he paused as if collecting his thoughts, "I just never pictured you as a runner."

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I scoffed, "Why not?" I wasn't one to brag, but I thought the tightness of my backside attested to the fact that I was, indeed, physically active.

"You weren't exactly an, uh, exercise junkie in college if I recall correctly."

What was with this man remembering everything about me from three years ago? Did he keep a notebook? A dossier with information about the five of us, filed away somewhere in his brain for instances such as this?

"I exercised," I said in a mock defensive tone, "just not in a, uh, traditional way..."

xXx

Bella POV

June-August 2008, Summer after Sophomore Year

(706): I just realized that all my cardio comes from dancing on tables.

June

"I'm bored," Rose whined from her perch on the barstool. "Downtown isn't as fun without our boys."

The term 'our boys' was in reference to Emmett, Jasper, and Edward. Jacob wasn't included because, well, no one except me could stand to spend time with him and he was usually too busy with football stuff in the summer to join us.

It was the first weekend of our summer in New Haven. Unofficially dubbed by us as the "Summer O' Shenanigans," we wear eager to make memories worthy of sharing with our grandchildren one day. The boys were, unfortunately, out of town for the weekend, leaving us on our own for entertainment.

I glanced at Alice, hoping she would have a plan to cure us of the monotony of the evening. "Shots?" she asked in a hopeful tone. As of late, Vodka shots had

Texts From Last Night

been our go-to 'activity' of choice.

"Shots," I agreed, followed by Rose who signaled the bartender and, after working her magic, and finagling a few rounds for free, a tray full of several more rounds was deposited in front of us. Vodka...hell yes.

"To summer," Rose toasted, holding up her shot glass.

"To Summer," Alice and I agreed in unison, both grinning wildly.

An hour and several shots later, the night improved significantly. The music was better, the people around us were more fun, and we had moved from the bar to a booth along the wall. Call me crazy, but I was having a hard time remembering why we were bored earlier. Oh, right, Lady Vodka had helped aid the night in its transformation from dull to lively.

The table in front of us was littered with small paper shot glasses, the kind that the bar we were in preferred to use due to the general rowdiness that tended to take place. Judging by the sheer number of them, wadded up and scattered across the table as they mingled with empty beer bottles, the night was going to be a success.

Around midnight, a couple of Rose's friends from Texas stumbled in to the bar, they were in town visiting relatives, and our party-o-fun grew by three.

"Oh my God, I love this song," Alice announced, standing up on the wooden seat of the booth as Bon Jovi's Livin' on a Prayer began to burst through the speakers.

"Me too!" Rose and I exclaimed at the same time, jumping up to join her. The Texas girls soon followed.

Before I could comprehend what was happening, Rose had pulled both Alice and myself onto the tabletop, our feet crushing the small paper cups and knocking the bottles into disarray as we danced around.

Texts From Last Night

"Emmett is going to be so mad he missed this," Rose whined over the music, her hands waving in the air above her as she shook her hips.

I was looking over her shoulder at the rest of the bar, checking to see if the other patrons were as out of control as we were. They were. I immediately felt less self-conscious, though I had little shame left anyway.

Rose's statement, though, brought my attention back to us. "What? Why Emmett?" I asked.

Rose froze, her hand reaching up to clasp across her mouth. "I just, uh, I mean, all the boys will be upset they missed this," she stammered. "Even Jake."

I immediately knew something was up with the mention of Jake; there was no way she would mention him within the same breath as our boys unless she was trying to avoid something.

Alice, always the omniscient little pixie, caught on as well. "Rose, is there something you need to tell us?" Her unspoken question was something along the lines of, 'Are you and Emmett screwing?'

Rose hung her head, her eyes trained on her hands as she twirled them nervously. None of us appeared to care that we were standing in the middle of a table having this conversation.

"Rose," I repeated, pressing her to continue in a firm voice.

She looked up at us, eyes wide and full of shame. "Promise you won't tell the others?" she squeaked out and I knew something good was coming.

Alice and I both nodded, assuring her that we wouldn't.

"Okay, well, uh," she stammered, "we hooked up after spring formal."

"That was in April," Alice said before gasping. "Wait, are you still hooking up?"

Texts From Last Night

Rose looked back and forth between us, biting her lip in a gesture similar to what I would do in the same situation. "Yes, now can we please just keep dancing?" Before either of us could speak, she turned around and continued dancing as if she never stopped.

After exchanging wide eyed glances, Alice and I reluctantly resumed our dancing as well, silently agreeing that we wouldn't broach the topic with Rose again until she was ready...or got caught red handed.

July

"Turn it up, I love this song," Alice squealed from the shallow end of the pool where she was perched on Jasper's shoulders.

She and Jasper dominated several other couples in the pool in a game of chicken fight that afternoon. They may have been scrawny, but they were ruthless in their pursuits. "Let me down, I want to dance," she, poking Jasper on the top of his head.

He chuckled before falling back in to the water, removing Alice from his shoulders as quickly and efficiently as possible.

Edward and I watched from our lounge chairs by the pool as she scampered out of the water and darted around in search of an available chair. As of late, Alice had developed a little affinity for music and, er, dancing on elevated surfaces when she heard a song she enjoyed. Never ones to leave our friend behind, Rose and I had joined in with her and her obsession, only pretending to not enjoy it.

"Party in the U.S.A.?" Jasper complained from the pool. Sometimes- okay all the time- he was such a music snob.

"Yes," I defended from my lounge chair after taking a long sip of the margarita I had brought with me from the apartment, "It's a great song for summertime."

Texts From Last Night

Edward snorted from his perch beside me. "Really, Bella? A Miley Cyrus song; are you twelve?"

"Yes, really, and I am most certainly not twelve." I refrained from saying something about the miniscule size my bikini and how it could attest to the fact that I was not a preteen.

"Why aren't you dancing to it, then?" He prodded, his eyes were challenging as he rested the biology textbook he had been intently studying against his chest.

I rolled my eyes. "I just haven't gotten up yet, Cullen." I stood, eager to prove him wrong. "Alice, get me a chair!"

August

"So, 'Summer O' Shenanigans'...success or failure?" Jasper asked from the corner of the booth we were all crowded into. We were in the same bar where it all began with three girls and Lady Vodka, only this time, the boys were present too.

"Success," I stated firmly, tipping my Bud Light in his direction. Rose and Emmett echoed my comment in unison. Alice and I snickered at their obvious closeness. Rose sent us a death glare that didn't shut us up.

Edward appeared to be clueless, shooting us a questioning look before agreeing as well that, yes, the summer had been a success.

"I think it's only fitting, then, that we end the summer the way it began," Alice claimed with exuberance as she pointed to the empty table in front of us.

Emmett's eyes lit up at the prospect of us climbing onto a table and getting low, Jasper groaned as he was clearly not okay with Alice shaking her thing in front of the masses, and Edward nonchalantly took a few long gulps from his beer.

"Oh, me too!" Rose agreed happily.

Texts From Last Night

I shook my head back and forth, not nearly drunk enough to climb up on a table and dance around. "Not yet," I stated, holding my hands up in protest.

Rose scoffed--the Queen Bitch at her finest--and climbed out of the booth. We all pretended not to see Emmett swat her behind as she scampered by him on her way out.

In less than a minute, she returned with a tray of shots. "Here," she shoved it in my direction, "we'll wait."

I shot her a disapproving smirk, but grabbed a shot in each hand anyway. "Fine."

She beamed proudly. Rosalie Hale, I decided, was single-handedly responsible for my stray from innocence.

"You know," Alice commented to no one in particular, "I think we had a theme this summer."

Rose and I looked at her quizzically. Of course, Alice always had to have themes and streamers and titles. "What is it?" Emmett asked.

"The Summer of Raised Surfaces," she replied with a giggle.

I jumped up, the Vodka already soaring through my veins since I had eaten a small dinner. "Come on, ladies," I held out a hand to each of them. They jumped up quickly.

Rose smiled at Emmett and he beamed back at her with wide eyes. Luckily, Edward and Jasper were too busy...climbing up on the seat to notice. Wait, climbing up on the seat?

"What are you doing?" I asked when I felt Edward slide up beside me on the small table.

Texts From Last Night

He turned and winked at Jasper. "We figured we could help end the summer, even if we didn't help bring it in," he explained.

I leered warily and he chuckled, rolling his eyes before telling me to, "Just dance, Bella." Of course, Lady Gaga was playing in the bar.

"Well, shit, I want in on this, too," Emmett said as he clamored to his feet and attempted to squeeze his way on to the table. Miraculously, we all fit and the table didn't crumble.

"To summer!" Alice squealed happily, throwing her arms in the air from her position in the center of the group.

I looked around and grinned as we all followed suit and threw our hands in the air as well, "To summer!" we cheered in unison.

xXx

"Ah, yes, the table dancing," Edward laughed as he remembered the 'Summer O' Shenanigans' along with me.

I giggled as we continued to run. The sun was slowly beginning to appear and add heat to the day. "That was a fun night," I said in a melancholy tone.

"It was," he agreed. "You were a good dancer."

"I was a terrible dancer. You were drunk," I argued. He, on the other hand, knew a thing or two about moving in time with the music. Really, the boy could dance.

"Not that drunk," He stated as our eyes met. His gaze was shockingly intense.

"Uh," I stammered, "you weren't?" And he had danced like that? Oh my...

He shook his head and grinned. "Nope, just joining in with the group. I drove home, remember?"

Texts From Last Night

Of course he remembered and I didn't. "Huh," I considered this, allowing the silence to be filled with the waves instead of a dumb statement.

"Did you know about Emmett and Rose then?" He asked, changing the topic.

I turned to him, my mouth gaping. "Yes," I answered quickly, "did you?"

"Jasper and I figured it out after their first night together."

I stopped in my tracks. "What?" I screeched as he continued to move. "You did?"

Edward noticed he was running alone and stopped to wait, turning around to face me as he jogged in place while I regained my composure and jogged to catch up with him.

"Spring formal, right?" he asked with a quirked eyebrow.

I nodded numbly. "I can't believe you two knew before Alice and me," I said. "We kept the secret--well what we thought was the secret--for months."

Edward chuckled. "We knew," he explained, "but he didn't know that we knew until a year later."

By now, we had silently agreed to turn around and were heading back towards the house.

"A year later?" My eyebrows furrowed as I tried to recall the timeframe.

He paused before answering, calculating his words carefully. "Remember the night that we, uh, you know?"

Finally, something that I remembered...I mean, how could I forget? Did he remember? "Yeah," I nodded.

Texts From Last Night

"Well the next morning he was, uh, trying to get information out of me...about you and me and, uh, what we did" he chuckled with embarrassment as he spoke, shaking his head back and forth. It was adorable and I swore I saw a bit of blush creep into his cheeks. But then again, it could have been from the running." I told him that I didn't ask him about Rose, so he shouldn't ask me about my, uh, private life."

Did that mean he had memories from that night? "Oh," I answered lamely.

"Of course," he continued, "I didn't remember a thing from that night, so I didn't have anything to share."

I released the tension in my forehead that I hadn't realized was there. If there was one thing the man didn't have tucked away in his 'college memories' file, I was glad that night was it. "Oh, good."

"Good?" he asked.

"Yeah, I mean, uh, I don't remember anything either," I lied. My eyes were drawn to his face as I spoke.

"Yes, well, I told him, that morning in fact, that he needed to make Rose an honest woman. You know, take her out on a few dates, but you know how stubborn Emmett can be and..." he shook his head back and forth and chuckled as he trailed off.

I nodded in agreement and finished his sentence. "...and he waited another year and a half before finally asking her out."

"Exactly," He shot me a breathtaking smile.

I looked away quickly, needing to avert my gaze, and realized that we were back at the house.

"Well," I said with a hint of sadness. I had been enjoying the conversation, "here we are."

Texts From Last Night

"Here we are," he agreed, and I couldn't help but think I detected a bit of sadness in his tone as well.

Into the Ocean

Disclaimer: I'm pretty sure that you all know the drill...

Chapter Six: Into the Ocean

I skipped down the stairs, fresh and clean from my post-run shower, wearing my new red bikini that I had bought specifically for this trip because, well, bikinis aren't exactly wardrobe staples on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. Over my shoulder hung an airy tote, filled only with my iPod and a book in case the day got boring, though I wasn't counting on whipping it out; this day was sure to be entertaining without my go-to distractions. If all else failed, Emmett would entertain us with the usual routine of drinking, drinking some more, and then doing something stupid.

A fierce argument was unfolding in the kitchen when I arrived downstairs; something about sandwiches and sand had both Alice and Emmett red in the face while their better halves looked on from stools behind the breakfast bar in amusement. From what I could gather, Emmett was bound and determined to bring all the necessary fixings for ham sandwiches down to the beach in case he had a "hunger attack." Alice, standing her ground with her tiny arms folded across her chest, pointed out to him for what I'm sure was the twentieth time that the food would perish in the heat before he had a chance to get hungry and that if he did indeed have a hunger attack she would personally run up the stairs to the house and whip up something for him to eat. It was quite the sight to see, tiny Alice with her little index finger jabbing into Emmett's beefy chest as they stood in the middle of the kitchen bickering.

Wanting a front row seat for the battle, I crept into the room and slid onto the vacant barstool that was conveniently located between Jasper and Rose. Edward was, sadly, nowhere to be seen.

"What's the count?" I leaned over and whispered into Jasper's ear.

Texts From Last Night

He chuckled under his breath, disguising it as a cough when Alice looked over to him and glared. "Round three," he said in a hushed tone, "Alice is about to go in for the kill."

I turned and raised my eyebrows to Rose, silently asking her which side she was on. She jerked her head in Alice's direction. "I don't want to deal with him when his ham and mayonnaise get all sandy."

"Damn you, Alice," Emmett's voice boomed seconds after Rose's explanation left her mouth. His proclamation was followed by the easily recognizable sound of the refrigerator door being ripped open.

We all turned to the odd-looking pair in front of us and waited for the verdict.

Emmett was frowning as he placed the meat and condiments back in their proper place within the appliance. "No sandwiches on the beach." His pained expression mirrored that of a young child that was being punished for breaking the rules.

Rose rolled her eyes at his obvious show for pity. "Did you pack the shot glasses?" she asked in an effort to change the subject.

I nearly shot out of my seat. Shots? It wasn't even noon. Hell, it wasn't even ten.

Emmett stood proudly and nodded his head to confirm that he had packed the shot glasses. "They're in the cooler," he stated as the hint of a smile threatened to fill his face, "just waiting to be filled...along with the beer bong." Rose clearly knew how to rejuvenate his happy meter.

"And," Alice added, her chipper mood returning as well, "they're plastic, so we can't get in trouble for having glass on the beach."

Alice was in on the morning shots, too? What ever happened to Mimosas and Bloody Marys? I had sort of been hoping to keep myself sober until at least five o'clock, but there was no way that would happen now.

Texts From Last Night

Of course, I probably could have just refused to join in on the drinking before lunch, but then I would be the lame friend and no one, no one, wants to be the lame friend. It's five o'clock somewhere anyway, right?. Bottoms up.

"What's this I hear about shots and bongs?" Edward asked, wandering into the kitchen with a lopsided grin and bare chest that the sight of made me quickly change my mind about the alcohol before noon.

Jasper was the first to answer. "Em and Rose found plastic shot glasses at some store in LA and brought them to have on the beach."

"For breakfast?" Edward seemed a little leery of the idea as well, but I couldn't be sure, I was having a hard time focusing on anything but his defined chest.

"No, not for breakfast," Alice answered in an obvious tone, "more like a mid-morning snack."

He turned to me and lifted his eyebrows in question. I shrugged in response. "Don't ask me, I came down during the great sandwich debate."

His eyebrows rose even further. "The what?"

"Alice won't let me take sandwich fixings down to the beach," Emmett explained in a voice that revealed how disappointed he still was. "We argued about it for a solid hour."

"That's probably for the best, man," he said with a wry smile. "Anyway, you should know by now to never bet against Alice."

"And why is that, Edward? Just think, three, well four, of my favorite things in one place. You guys," he gestured around the room, "liquor, Rosalie in a bikini, and cold cuts."

Jasper shook his head back and forth. "That's just wrong." I assumed his statement was in reference to the bikini comment; every now and then Jasper still had problems with the fact that Emmett and Rose were an item. These

Texts From Last Night

problems usually arose when someone mentioned the sexual aspect of the relationship between Emmett and Rose--no one wants to hear about the sexual escapades of the girl you shared a womb with.

Emmett winked at Rose as he ignored Jasper.

"Whatever, still no sandwiches," Alice chirped as she darted around the kitchen began to stuff snacks into a tote bag. "Can we just go down to the beach now?"

We all nodded, sensing that she was ready to go and she wouldn't take no for an answer.

"Emmett," she said, pointing to the cooler at her feet, "You get the cooler."

He lit up. "I'll get the cooler if I can leave the house last." I knew what he was up to. Sometimes Emmett uses his brain in ways that surprise us all.

Alice didn't catch on, probably because her mind was focused on what level of tan she thought would go best with the ivory of her wedding dress. "Fine, whatever," she finished her conversation with him with a flippant wave. "Jazz, did you pack my sunscreen?"

Jasper hid his annoyance at her current bossiness with ease. "In your bag, babe," he answered with a grin before heading out to the back porch to grab some chairs to take down to the beach. Edward followed, his lip stuck between his teeth in an attempt to hide his imminent laughter.

She sweetly smiled at him before prancing over to where Rose and I were still standing and watching her orchestrate the day for us. "I just want a healthy glow, you know? And tomorrow it's supposed to rain and, God, I refuse to be one of those brides that gets a spray tan the day before her wedding and looks like a carrot in all of her pictures."

In my mind, I gave myself five points for predicting where her thoughts were. I love Alice as if she were my own sister, really I do, but at that moment the word Bridezilla was flashing through my mind like a neon sign above a casino

Texts From Last Night

in Vegas.

Rose and I assured her that we knew exactly what she meant, but exchanged knowing glances as soon as her back was to us. We watched her exit the room before turning back towards the kitchen where Emmett was standing, an innocent whistle coming from his puckered lips as he avoided meeting our intent gazes.

"What?" he asked defensively when he noticed our glares.

Rose pointed her polished nail at him. "I know what you're doing," she said in an accusing tone.

He grinned toothily at her. "I'm just helping the bride-to-be, my dear, wouldn't want her pulling out her back right before the wedding."

A witty remark about Alice not being 80 years old was on the tip of my tongue, but I chose to keep it to myself. It was more fun at the moment watching Emmett come up with a rationale for his being in the house last than it was to be sarcastic.

She turned to me and rolled her eyes for what I am sure was the eleventh time this morning. "Let's go, if he wants to spoil his food, it's his prerogative," she said before grabbing my arm and pulling me out the door.

"You'll thank me later!" We heard Emmett bellow as the door shut behind us.

Emmett frowned when, at exactly eleven o'clock on the dot, he pulled spoiled ham and mayonnaise out of the cooler that was now full of melted ice and rapidly warming beers. The bread he had stuffed in to accompany it looked suspiciously soggy.

"Is this where I'm supposed to be thanking you?" I asked sarcastically from the beach chair I was sitting in with my legs stretched out before me and a freshly mixed rum and Diet Coke in my right hand. Alice had convinced me to drink a few minutes ago with a pouty lip and puppy dog eyes...or so she thought.

Texts From Last Night

Really though, all it took was one glance at Edward walking up the beach from the ocean to get me started. Lord help me, his abs...

Emmett looked up at me and glared. "Shut it, Bella," he spat as he attempted to salvage the cold cuts to no avail.

I giggled and returned my attention to the waves crashing in front of me while he turned to Rose and Alice for support. I continued laughing as Emmett complained about how he had nothing to eat at all now, and Alice congratulated herself on being right, pointing out to him that he wasn't having a hunger attack yet.

Lost in the relaxation that the water provided, I didn't notice Edward settle onto the towel next to my chair until I heard him sigh in contentment. Funny, I hadn't noticed it lying there when I sat down earlier. Had it been there for the past hour?

"How's the water?" I asked while reminding myself to close my mouth and breathe so that I wouldn't start drooling over his water-soaked body and the board shorts that stuck to his thighs.

Lying back across the towel he folded his arms behind his head and crossed his feet at the ankles. He was the epitome of relaxation and...pure sex.

"It's nice, a lot warmer than I expected this time of year." As he answered, he looked up, his eyes squinting into the sun and a breathtaking smile crossing his features. "You should give it a go."

I thought back to the last time I dove into the water of the Atlantic Ocean, the summer after we had all graduated from college, and chuckled to myself. The six of us had decided that an afternoon swim sounded perfect and, despite our near-blackout states, stumbled away from our beach towels and into the water. It was, in a word, ludicrous.

xXx

Texts From Last Night

Bella's POV

Summer 2010, Post-Graduation

(706): Just got kicked out of the ocean for being "unsafe"

"You know what would be so fucking great right now?" Jasper drawled in his lazy Texas twang from the beach towel he and Alice were sharing.

It was dusk and the setting sun painted across the sky was providing a spectacular ending to a relaxing day filled with drinking games and laughter.

Emmett, having just finished shot gunning a Natty Light, turned to Jasper with wide eyes. "What?"

"A swim!" Alice squealed as she peeled herself away from her boyfriend and dashed to the water.

In a surprise show of excitement and zeal, Jasper leapt up and followed her, a playful smirk stretched across his face. When he reached the water, he picked Alice up and spun her around, her legs flailing behind her as she shrieked in mock surprise.

I turned to Rose who was perched next to me, still dead set on having the perfect tan regardless of how much alcohol she had consumed over the last four hours.

"Wanna join?" I asked her, assuming that she wouldn't want to, choosing instead to keep her hair dry and neat.

She shrugged and wordlessly stood, gracefully walking to the water in that strutting way that I'm pretty sure she had perfected within days of learning how to walk. I followed, stumbling awkwardly a few times on weird piles of sand that had been sandcastles earlier in the day. If I was clumsy sober, I was hell on wheels drunk

Texts From Last Night

Edward and Emmett were the last to enter the water. Edward's slowness stemmed from his tendency to be a little bit of a baby when he was drunk, and Emmett, well, Emmett found it necessary to chug a beer "for the road" before entering the water.

Once we were all in, some glistening with water from head to toe and others, myself included, only knee-deep into the water, I watched my friends play like excited children. We were each paired off with another as we enjoyed the cool water and savored the last moments we would have together before officially entering the real world and separating. Edward and Emmett were tossing a football, somehow managing to catch each pass back and forth regardless of their probable double vision. Rose and Jasper were doing that weird twin thing where they seemed to have a conversation back and forth without speaking and Alice...well, Alice was complaining to me that the bikini she was wearing wasn't intended to actually get wet.

Nostalgia and sadness washed over me, the salty water swishing around my knees and the alcohol clouding my mind making me sentimental. I couldn't believe this was it, the end of four crazy years that would see us shooting off to all ends of the globe. Catching my eyes start to fill with tears, I closed them briefly and decided not think about the future, to live in the present. The alcohol was making me quite the little philosopher.

I turned to Alice, emboldened by the beer and cheap Vodka I had consumed alternately throughout the day that had yet to leave my blood stream and spoke in an attempt to keep from crying. "Then why did you wear it?" I didn't bother to think that she might be offended by my question before I uttered it in a clipped tone.

She shrugged, thankfully not upset, and looked down at the small pieces of material. "I thought it was cute," she explained as she toyed with the waistband of her bottoms, "and Jasper told me I looked really sexy in it before we left the house." Her words were slurred.

"I see," I said with a nod, suppressing my giggle.

Texts From Last Night

She continued. "You know what I bet he would think is even sexier?"

I hadn't a clue, seeing as how I had never considered what Jasper did or did not think was sexy. "Enlighten me, Alice." I knew without a doubt that she would have clued me in regardless of whether or not I asked.

My eyes widened as she reached up to pull on the string tied behind her neck. Oh no, she wasn't...

"If I..." she trailed off, turning around to face Jasper as my mouth dropped open. Yes, I was still a little bit inebriated but I wasn't completely incapable of being rational and, I mean, there were children around. Children!

As terrible as it was, I was incapable of stopping her. Instead, I stood there in shock, my mouth still gaping, when I felt a pair of wet arms wrap around my waist. I shrieked as I felt myself being lifted off the ground and carried away from the group.

Unsure of who held me, I wiggled back and forth in the arms, but the grip around me didn't loosen.

"Why aren't you wet yet, Bella?" A velvety voice teased into my ear. Ah, Edward.

I relaxed a fraction. "I, uh, Alice is stripping for Jasper. In the ocean. With children around." With my free hand, I pointed in the direction of my best friend who was still holding onto the strings of her bikini. Jasper was staring at her with wide eyes and Rose was thankfully protesting loudly. Emmett was, of course, cheering her on.

He chuckled and I felt the vibrations across my back. "Rose has her under control, I'm sure," he assured me. "And you didn't answer my question."

"I did, too," I argued weakly, hoping that he would put me down because I was pretty sure that if I got dunked in the water I would have trouble finding my way back up in my current state.

Texts From Last Night

He was carrying me deeper into the water and, wait, why had I stopped protesting? "Did not," he countered.

I huffed. "Fine," I conceded, "I'm not wet because I just...well...I'm just not." Really, I didn't have an explanation.

Edward wasn't content with my answer and the next thing I knew, there was water up my nose and all I could feel was the salty water surround me. His arms remained loose around my waist for a few beats before burying me deeper in the water and letting go. Ass.

Miraculously, I fought my way back to the surface (it wasn't like we were in deep water; I was a bit melodramatic) and found myself disoriented. Turning a quick one-eighty, I found myself face to face with a smiling Edward, clearly proud of his ability to catch me off guard and deposit me helplessly under the water.

"I hate you," I attempted to seethe but found it impossible due to the lopsided grin being shot in my direction.

He took a step towards me. "No you don't."

"I do, too," I said in a vain attempt at keeping my dignity. This was probably futile, since I assumed there was hair plastered to my forehead and snot running down my face.

Edward was shaking his head back and forth, that damn grin still on his face, when I glanced over his shoulder to make sure Alice still had little pieces of fabric covering her body. Scanning the water and shore I couldn't find them.

"Where are they?" I asked hastily, my eyes darting quickly around me.

Edward turned around quickly. "Who?"

I smacked him on the back of the head in annoyance. "Everyone," my tone of voice was not pretty, "our friends, you idiot."

Texts From Last Night

Worry overtook me as my drunken self prayed that my friends weren't at the bottom of the ocean. Could people drown in less than a minute? Edward and I had only been away from the group for that long, right?

And then, in the midst of my panic attack, Edward started laughing.

I glared at him. "You're laughing?" He was insufferable.

He grabbed my hand and used my index finger to point to the shore, a little to the right of where our things were set up. Our friends stood with a lifeguard, looks of shame on their faces.

"Oh thank God," I sighed, my hand flying to my chest in assurance.

Edward was doubled over with laughter. "Still laughing..." I stated flatly, still failing to see the humor in the situation.

"Don't you see what's going on?" he asked.

Well, no, I didn't. I rolled my eyes. "No," I folded my arms across my chest, suddenly cold and feeling slightly defensive about his laughter.

"I think they're getting a talking to," he turned to me and reached for my hand, "come on." Pulling gently, he tugged on my arm and led me out of the water and towards the shore.

I blinked, unsure of what he was getting at. "A talking to?"

He chuckled and continued to lead the way. "Looks like Alice might be getting in a little bit of trouble."

"Trouble?"

"Yes," he seemed a little annoyed at my slowness but I still had a little water in my nose and alcohol running through my system, both of which were causing my mental facilities to slow. "For her stripping?"

Texts From Last Night

Ah, yes, the stripping. And the children.

"Oh no!" I gasped, unable to stop the laughter bubbling up inside of me.

"Should we join them?"

"Nah," he said, "we'll just wait to hear the stories when they get back to the towels."

I nodded silently in acceptance of his plan as we walked back to where we had spent our day under the sun. It wasn't long after we settled back on top of our towels that the group of four stalked back to where we were.

"Well?" I asked expectedly, knowing they would all be eager to share their story.

Emmett stood proudly. "We got kicked out of the water." I didn't understand what he had to be proud of in that statement, but I decided to humor him.

"Kicked out of the water?"

Alice answered for him. "They, uh, frown upon stripping on the beach apparently," she explained, "So they made us all leave. I guess you and Edward were off frolicking while it all happened."

I scoffed and Edward spoke. "We weren't frolicking," he said in a strange, defensive tone.

Rose rolled her eyes. "Whatever you say..." she trailed off and I had the sudden urge to set her straight but refrained.

"So anyway," Jasper interrupted his twin, "the lifeguards said we are a bit of a menace to society and need to leave the beach until we're all sober." Ah, looking out for the children, I see.

"So stupid," Emmett protested as he spiked the football he had been holding into the ground, "we're all legal and shit."

Texts From Last Night

Edward looked at him with wide, shocked eyes that seemed to be wondering how he and Emmett were friends at all. "Em, stripping isn't legal in public," he reminded him, "and if I saw correctly you were egging her on."

"Whatever," Rose cut in to the conversation with clear annoyance. "Can we just go inside and take showers before dinner? I have shit in my hair."

I made an executive decision because I was suddenly ready to get sand out of the unspeakable crevices it had managed to invade today. "Yes," I said loudly as I jumped up off the ground, hoping that everyone would quit grumbling and hear my pleas leave, "time to go inside."

"Dibs on first shower," Emmett proclaimed as he grabbed Rose's hand and began to run towards the beachfront house, "with Rose!"

We all groaned, each of us muttering something about staying as far away from the bathroom as possible, and watched as the happy, finally public, couple dashed towards the house.

xXx

"Hm...I don't think so." I wasn't a fan of how sand stuck to one's body once it was wet. Unless...

Edward was studying me, his eyes sparkling as his lips twitched from a smile to a smirk. "We'll see about that," was all he said before settling back down and closing his eyes.

I huffed. "No we won't."

"We will," he answered, refusing to open his eyes as he spoke in a lazy tone.

I could tell there was a hidden ultimatum in his statement. "Or?"

"Or...I'll see to it that you get in the water." Eyes still closed, a lazy smile now occupied his lips and I realized he was taunting me. "Just like last time."

Texts From Last Night

I licked my lips and took a deep, emboldening breath.

"I see," I said, "I guess you just won't be able to fully relax until you've gotten me all wet, huh?" Captain Morgan aided the question, for sure.

I'm pretty sure he choked on his own spit. "What?" he sputtered and sat up quickly.

I straightened in my chair; proud of the reaction I had gotten out of him. "Walked into that one," I said as a gratified smile grew on my lips and I playfully hit his back to help him with his choking fit.

"Damn woman," he groaned with an unfamiliar darkness in his eyes. Oh my.

"I, uh, was..." I wasn't given a chance to finish my sentence as he launched himself off the sand and tossed me across his shoulder within seconds. He was still sneaky and fast, I noticed as my drink fell out of my hands and splattered across the sand.

"Put me down!" I squealed as he ran towards the water, my hands balled into fists that I weakly pounded against his back in a vain attempt at being set back on the ground. I knew my efforts were useless. "You made me spill my drink," I whined as I stopped the hitting.

"Alice will fix you another one, I'm sure," Edward said with a laugh, speeding up his pace from a fast walk to a light jog that had me bouncing up and down across his shoulder.

I glared at his back. "Must you always do this? Is it like a weird tradition you have taken upon yourself?"

When he answered, his voice was softer. "Maybe I want to have more traditions with you."

I stilled, not caring that we were getting closer and closer to the water as my heart picked up it's pace. "You do?" I squeaked, unsure of exactly what he

Texts From Last Night

meant.

"Yep," he said, the teasing tone returning to his voice as quickly as it had left.
"Like this." His feet, I noticed, were splashing into the water.

And then, before I could contemplate his cryptic statement, I was under the water just like last time. This time, though, I somehow had remembered to hold my nose. My heart, on the other hand, was quickly running away from me.

Hair Gel and Beer Bongos

Disclaimer: The people belong to Stephenie Meyer...their ridiculous college years belong to me.

Chapter Seven: Hair Gel and Beer Bongos

I don't know if it was because I was a little buzzed from my drink I had been consuming before his attack, or if it was because Edward's arms were wrapped around me, but the gentle waves were calming, giving me the chance to steal a few seconds to think about the last couple of days.

Surprisingly enough, I ignored the sting of the salty water, and I opened my eyes, taking in my surroundings. Edward's feet were just beneath me, his toes digging into the sand as he held me beneath the ocean.

"Maybe I want to have more traditions with you."

His confusing statement echoed in my mind, and I wished that I had been able to see the expression on his face, the look in his eyes as he had uttered the words that made my heart flutter in a strange, unfamiliar way.

Had he meant them in a, '*I miss our friendship and maybe we should start that back up this week,*' way? Or more in a, '*let's hug and kiss and get to know each other in the Biblical sense,*' way? I was too shocked, at the time, by the words themselves to notice the tone of his voice.

One thing was for damn sure, I needed to figure out what he meant and fast, because the tiny voice inside my head was whispering, telling me I needed to admit that I wanted to make more traditions with him, too. But, I couldn't do that without knowing his intentions. It wouldn't be fair to my heart, or to his.

Before I could contemplate his mysterious words any further, I felt his arms tighten around my waist and the warm beams of the early morning sun hit the top of my head as he pulled me from the water. Edward placed me on my feet

Texts From Last Night

and regretfully, untangled his arms from around my middle.

"That's better," he murmured. I looked up at him, large water droplets falling down from my hair, into my eyes.

Damn, he looked even more delicious now, than he had just minutes ago on the beach.

I grinned up at him. "You were right," I conceded, my mind already racing with ideas on how to get him back for dumping me into the water against my will. Most of them involved me getting him under the water and under my hands.

"About what?"

"The water," I answered in a convincing tone. "It is warm."

Except, maybe I lied a little bit, and the warmth I felt wasn't only from the water, but also from Edward's close proximity.

"Are you admitting defeat, Swan?" he joked.

I scoffed, folding my arms across my chest in a way that increased my cleavage. Boobs, I had learned somewhere along the way, were one of Edward's major weaknesses.

"No, I'm just, uh, telling you that the water feels really good."

A hint of a smile ghosted his lips, and I knew he was forcing the corners of his lips to stay down as his eyes darkened a shade or two.

Of course, he didn't know about the little plan I was forming in my head, something that I liked to call 'payback's a bitch, no matter how breathtakingly gorgeous you look in a pair of swim trunks.'

Texts From Last Night

"Oh yeah?" I asked playfully, reeling him in with my girly powers of tossing my wet hair over my shoulder and smirking.

He took a step closer, unknowingly walking into my trap. "Yeah..." His voice darkened and I got a little excited and caught up in the game. Edward was so easy to lead into my trap. All I had to do was push out my breasts a bit, and his eyes zeroed in.

I took a step towards him so we were close. "Edward?" I asked, lifting my hands so that they rested on his chiseled chest. Reminding myself that I had a plan to stick to, I slid them down a couple of inches, savoring the feel of his warm skin beneath my fingertips.

He lifted his gaze lazily, meeting mine with hooded eyes, before nodding his head for me to continue.

"Payback's a bitch," I leaned up and whispered into his ear, before shoving him backwards into the water, his arms flailing around him as he fell into a crashing wave.

He emerged from the water within seconds, blinking rapidly and smirking. He waded back towards me through the water and my laughter was uncontrollable as I watched him try to look angry and fail.

"Bella," his voice held an allure that made my knees shake like jello as he stalked closer to me, "that wasn't very nice."

I licked my lips and straightened, quickly reigning in my laughter at the sight of him. "Oh, it definitely was on my end of things."

He shook his head, silently saying no. He stopped directly in front of me, and this time, when his arms snaked around my waist, I was just as tingly as before.

Lifting me up so that my back was to his chest, I anticipated another dunking and instinctively squeezed my nose shut to hold my breath without protesting Edward's impending actions. Honestly, I welcomed them as long as I could

Texts From Last Night

stay close to Edward. And, I suppose the water wasn't *that* cold.

I couldn't think as Edward pulled us both underwater, my mind choosing only to allow the sense of touch to take over. The only things I felt were his arms around my waist, his fingers spreading out across my stomach, and his hair brushing across my back.

Twisting in his arms, I opened my eyes under the water again, this time with less stinging, so that I could take in the splendor that was Edward Cullen underwater.

My eyes widened in surprise when I noticed his eyes were open too, taking in his surroundings and...me. Emboldened by the water's veil, I lifted my right hand to his face, enjoying the day old stubble that covered his strong jaw.

He grinned, obviously as affected by the water's veil of secrecy as I was. I grinned before coming to the conclusion that surfacing for air sometime in the next couple of seconds might be crucial to my existence.

As slowly as possible, without risking complications from lack of oxygen, I pulled my hand away from his cheek, and pointed toward the surface with my index finger. He understood, agreeing to my suggestion, and moved his hands to my hips as he hoisted us back to the surface.

"Kissy, kissy," I heard Emmett holler from the shore as soon as we surfaced. "Woowooo! Hot damn!"

Blushing, I bit my lip and waited for Edward to dispute Em's claims, however, I was met with silence. So much for that chivalry shit he was so in to.

I turned my attention back to my loud friend. "We weren't kissing, Emmett." My stance was defensive and Emmett could, unfortunately, tell.

"Sounds like you were," he taunted.

Texts From Last Night

I glared at him and stalked towards the shoreline. "But we weren't," I turned to face Edward. He was following me. "Were we?"

He shook his head sadly. I hoped his actions meant he wished that we had been.

"Happy?" I asked Emmett once Edward and I were on dry land again.

"Not really," he answered bluntly. I worried that he was going to say something about feelings and how we needed to get our heads out of our asses and admit ours, but instead he whined, "I'm hungry."

Well, of course he was. I chided myself for jumping to conclusions. Rose was by Emmett's side within seconds, her hand quickly swatting him across the back of his big head.

"Damn woman, what was that for?" he complained with wide, innocent eyes.

"You just went inside and made a damn footlong sandwich, Em."

"And?" he pressed.

I watched their exchange with weird fascination, thankful that Rose had taken the attention away from Edward and myself.

"There's no way you're still hungry."

"I *am*, though," he pouted, his beefy arms crossed over his chest.

I knew it was all a show, because he really, *really* loved it when Rose bossed him around.

xXx

Emmett POV

Texts From Last Night

March 2008, Sophomore Year

(609): *She made a guy cry in the bar. I will have her, oh yes, I will have her.*

"I hate this shit," I grumbled in Edward's ear over the roar of the music in the ballroom at the Omni Hotel in downtown New Haven.

He looked at me with surprised eyes. "Drinking?"

"No, idiot. Formals."

He shrugged. "I don't really mind."

Of course he didn't, Mr. Edward 'I wear khakis and a button down on a daily basis' Cullen probably felt like he was wearing pajamas right now or something.

"I do," I scoffed. "This suit makes me feel claustrophobic."

He chuckled and took a sip from his bourbon and coke. "Suits make Tanya frisky."

"Too bad I'm not here with a real date, then," I mumbled into my beer. "Damn Rose got to me before someone in her sorority that would actually put out could."

Across the bar, I saw Tanya lift her bony fingers into the air, beckoning Edward, so I nudged him in the arm. "The fame monster needs your attention," I told him.

Not bothering to correct my rude name for his bitch of a girlfriend, he tossed back the rest of his drink. "Have a good one, man." With a clap against my back, he disappeared into the crowd.

Sighing loudly, I took a long pull of my beer before checking my phone to see how much longer I had to endure in my monkey suit. Two hours. Fuck.

Texts From Last Night

"Emmett?" I heard Bella call out just as I had set down my beer so I could loosen my tie.

I looked up and her face had worry written all over it. "Is everything okay, Swan?"

"It's uh..." she trailed off and paused, "Rose needs a little help."

"Is she okay?"

"She's fine," she said with a quick shake of her head, "it's just, the guy she's talking to might not be."

Huh?

"Lead the way." I held my hand out in a gesture for her to proceed.

The sight that awaited me at the bar was definitely not what I had been expecting. Alcohol poisoning, maybe an attempted roofie, but definitely not a man with tears streaming down his face, pleading desperately with Rose.

"Everything okay over here?" I asked in an authoritative tone that was meant to intimidate.

The man continued to cry...what a pussy.

"Shit, Rose, what did you do?" The man was a blubbery mess and, I had to admit, the fact that Rose was responsible for his distress was hot as fuck.

She rolled her eyes, standing up straight and proud as she did. "This idiot here, Royce, thinks he's good enough to get with me," she said in a bitchy tone, "and I just told him the truth."

"Which is?"

Texts From Last Night

"That he isn't," she said as if it were the most obvious notion in the world. "I mean, Emmett, he's wearing a suit from Target for fucks sake."

Shit, even I had had enough decency to rent a tux for the evening. I bet he wasn't even here for the formal; either that, or he was with that slut Victoria that had been eyeing me all evening.

She continued. "And his hair...there's gel in it."

Well, if I had gel in my hair, I'd be crying too. "I still don't understand why Royce here is crying, though."

The man turned to me. "Have you ever been turned down by Rosalie Hale, dude?"

I grinned proudly. "As a matter of fact, she's my date. So, no."

His eyes widened and I could see him cower back as he noticed the size of my muscles. Before I could blink, he had disappeared into the crowd.

"Thanks, Em," Rose said, wrapping her arm around my waist and cuddling herself into my side, an action that felt surprisingly natural.

Instinctively, I leaned down and placed a kiss on the top of her golden mass of hair. "No problem, babe. Need another drink?"

She nodded, looking up at me through her long eyelashes. Damn, she was beautiful. Of course I had noticed before, I wasn't blind, but the realization that she had chosen me as her date over the multiple suitors she had strutting around campus like peacocks in heat stroked my ego in a big way.

I turned to the bartender. "Vodka and sprite and another Jamison on the rocks," I ordered, turning to Rose to make sure I had her order right.

She was smiling broadly. "You remembered my drink?" she asked sweetly, a tone that I only heard leave her mouth once before in reference to the new

Texts From Last Night

Chloe bag she had gotten on a weekend trip to New York City with Alice and Bella.

I winked at her. "Of course."

"That was...damn, Rose."

At some point in the evening, probably around drink five or six, I had thrown caution to the wind and pulled Rose out of the ballroom and towards the front desk of the hotel, making sure that none of our nosy friends were around. It had been too damn long since I had gotten any and damn if she hadn't been laying it on heavy since I 'rescued' her from Royce, the hair gel king.

An ass rub here, a nut grab there, and shit, I needed to get her alone.

It hadn't taken much convincing and, within minutes, we were in the elevator headed to our spontaneously rented room. Our hands all over each other and our lips crashed hungrily together for the first time. We made it to the room in record time, and I had her sprawled out on the luxurious king sized bed within minutes.

"Why haven't we done that before?" she purred, her hair fanned out over the pillow.

I shook my head, completely in awe of her. "I don't know," was all I could come up with.

We stared at each other silently for a few minutes before I saw her eyes brighten.

"Em?" she asked hopefully.

"Hm?" I lifted her arm and placed a soft kiss in the crook of her elbow.

She sighed. "How do you feel about, hhhmm, the idea of friends with benefits?"

Texts From Last Night

I trailed a few kisses up her arm. "As long as I'm your only, because once you get a taste of my benefits," I said decisively, "there won't be a need for other 'friends.'"

xXx

When Rose refused to give in and allow Emmett to go inside for more food because she was bossy like that and he was whipped, Emmett threw his hands up into the air in desperation.

"Whatever," he huffed and stalked towards the cooler, "maybe my hunger pains will subside if I down a few beers courtesy of Betty."

Betty was Emmett's beer bong that had, miraculously, survived through four years of college with minimal damage. Probably because he treated that thing like a child, I realized with a chuckle.

"I'll join you, Em," I was eager to get away from Edward for the moment in an attempt to quell the desire to touch him.

"Hell yeah, Swan," Emmett tossed in a fist pump for good measure. Apparently, yesterday had crossed the Jersey Shore point of no return. I mentally noted that if any hair gel mysteriously appeared in any of the bathrooms I would throw them out immediately.

Grinning, I crossed to where he stood and offered to hold the funnel for him first. He happily accepted and we were on our way.

"Ladies and...gentle ladies, care to join in as well?" Emmett asked the others, scanning the group for participants. Alice and Rosalie joined in, while Jasper and Edward were slow to board the beer bong train.

"Fine," Edward accepted last, tossing his hands into the air in mock defeat. "Since you're twisting my arm," he said sarcastically.

Texts From Last Night

Emmett beamed with pride once we all surrounded him in a circle. Completely in his element, I realized that if peer pressure had been a major at Yale, he would have graduated with the highest honor.

xXx

Edward POV

November 2006, Freshman Year

(432): From inside my college history class I see him waving his arms while holding a beer bong trying to get my attention

Lesson #39 of my freshman year: If my hangover this morning was any indication, Yale alumni still knew how to throw a fucking great party. I decided that if I could still get down like they did twenty years from now, I'd die a happy man.

It was the Friday afternoon of homecoming weekend and various celebratory events had already begun to rage campus-wide, enthusiasm spreading like wild fire. Less than a mile away, I knew that Emmett and the rest of our pledge brothers were busy catering to every whim and useless desire of our alumni that had made the trek to New Haven from Manhattan or Boston or wherever they had settled down to build their empires. Most arrived the night before, eager to get the festivities started and I, being the gracious host that I was, obliged their requests of reuniting them with the land of their glory days.

Of course, I had no pity for my friends that were being ordered around by their superiors because, much to my chagrin, Jasper and I were stuck in a stuffy lecture hall with forty-five other lost souls listening to older-than-dirt Dr. Banner outline the highlights of prohibition. The irony of the situation--learning about the outlawing of alcohol sales in the United States when all I wanted to do was chug beers--wasn't lost on me.

Which brought me to lesson #40 of my unofficial freshman year guidebook: Never sign up for a class that meets until 5 o'clock on Friday afternoons with a

Texts From Last Night

mandatory attendance policy, no matter the circumstances. Just don't. You'll regret it.

Unable to do anything about the fact that I was stuck inside, while the rest of my friends started their weekend early, I turned towards the back of the room to check the clock. A quick glance told me that I still had another half hour of torture.

I was turning back around to face the front to resume taking notes, when something that resembled the top of Emmett's head appeared into my peripheral vision. After staring at the window for a couple of seconds, my friend didn't reappear, so I nudged Jasper with my elbow.

When he turned to me with a questioning look in his eyes, I whispered, "Give me your cell." Mine had been forgotten at the dorm.

He reluctantly handed it to me without any interrogation.

*Before I could type out a quick text to Emmett to confirm his location, the phone lit up. **1 New TXT from: Emmett** flashed across the screen. Interesting. Naturally, I opened it without asking for permission.*

Look out the window, bro. -Em

I grinned, knowing my eyes hadn't tricked me, and returned my attention to the dusty panes.

Emmett was, as I had suspected, jumping up and down outside the lecture hall with a beer bong in his hands. Holding it up like a prize, beckoning us to join him.

I looked to Jasper for a strategy, confident he would have a solution to get rid of Emmett and the distraction he was providing.

Wrong. He was packing up his books.

Texts From Last Night

"What the hell?" I seethed, confused.

He shrugged. "Shit, Edward, it's Friday afternoon, and Banner is up there droning on and on about alcohol for Christ's sake. Emmett out there is a sign that we should get away from this hell hole."

"A sign?" I hissed. Banner was notorious for calling out students that left in the middle of class and I really didn't want to be one

"Yes," he whispered back, "a sign. Join or die."

I hesitated momentarily, before the promise of fun outweighed the possible embarrassment. I chose join. Luckily, Banner, the old fart that he was, didn't notice our exit.

We emerged from the brick building to find Emmett waiting for us on a wooden bench, the newly acquired beer bong cradled in his hands reverently.

"New toy?" Jasper questioned in a mocking tone.

Emmett stood quickly. "Jasper, Edward," he began, holding it up proudly, "I would like you to meet Betty."

"Betty?" we asked in unison.

He nodded with satisfaction. "Hell yeah! Betty here is going to bring us good times this weekend."

Jasper rolled his eyes and adjusted his backpack on his shoulder. "Only you, Em."

"You know you're jealous."

"Nah," I added, "we know you'll share."

Emmett scoffed. "Not after you knocked Betty."

Texts From Last Night

" *Seriously?*"

" *Yes.*"

" *Where did you get...Betty?*" I asked, humoring him.

" *Some alumni dude gave it to me,*" he explained, *"apparently he owns a company that makes them. Can you fucking believe that?"*

Jasper and I stared at him blankly. Was he serious?

" *Well, shit,*" Jasper said, *seemingly in awe that one of our alumni was so awesome.*

Emmett moved Betty back and forth between his hands. "Yes, so, now that we've all met Betty, let's go to the party."

We followed him through campus quickly, arriving at the fraternity house to find it already busting at the seams with co-eds.

I turned to Jasper and grinned. "Thank you for saving me from Banner," I admitted as Alice and Bella approached us.

He chuckled. "No problem, dude, just get me a beer. Where did Em get off to with Betty?"

Alice's eyebrows furrowed. "Who's Betty?" she asked innocently.

" *Emmett's new girlfriend.*"

" *Oh, huh,*" she contemplated this bit of information. *"Well, let's go meet her."*

Oh, Alice, you just wait...

xXx

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"Edward, you're up," Emmett announced after the two of us had funneled a beer to his liking.

Moving to stand by Alice, I watched as he walked to the middle of the group, and gripped the bottom of the plastic tube, bringing it to his mouth smoothly, while Emmett poured beer into the funnel.

I told myself not to openly stare, but I ended up having to turn to Alice in an attempt to distract myself from the way his adam's apple bobbed as he swallowed the foaming liquid.

"What's on tap for dinner, Al?" I asked, knowing she had planned every night this week for us way in advance.

She did her little happy dance and eagerly explained the evening she had orchestrated in explicit detail.

"Oh, Bella, you're going to love it. We're going to this little restaurant on Sullivan's Island called Poe's Tavern. It's *so* good, and then we can all take a walk on the beach or something."

She definitely had it all planned out, sweet little obsessive-compulsive pixie that she was.

"That sounds great, Alice," I encouraged.

She flashed me a bright smile, and said, "It will be," her voice exuding confidence in her plans.

"Rose's turn!" Emmett boomed, drawing my attention back to the center of the circle.

Edward had disappeared from the group, and I had wondered where he ran off to when, out of nowhere, I felt a warm arm snake its way around my shoulders.

Tingles shot down my spine...must be Edward.

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Sliding my eyes to the left, I confirmed my suspicions, and I sighed contentedly, scooting closer towards him with a smile forming on my lips, enjoying the sensation as his index finger slid across my shoulder in a comforting path.

In the center of the circle, Emmett was attempting to beat his previous record of consuming four beer funnels without stopping, so luckily, the attention wasn't on our unusual stance.

When Jasper started to pour the fifth beer into the bright red funnel, Edward removed his arm slowly, his warm, long fingers dusting across my back in a teasing pattern.

I whimpered lightly at the loss of contact and looked to my left, getting captured in his predatory gaze.

In his eyes, I saw a glimmer of their true depth, mysteries teasing the surface; things that had been agreed upon between us without words these last few days.

He understood the need to tread lightly with this unveiled attraction we had unknowingly stumbled upon. He *knew* that both of us had been hurt in the past.

He *knew* that there were still two very important conversations we needed to have: one about Jake, and the other about Tanya.

He *knew* our friends would be examining our every touch and smile, looking for hidden meanings in them.

But most importantly, he *knew* what his every touch did to me.

Psychotic Girl

Disclaimer: Twilight isn't mine, I just like to play with the characters.

Chapter Eight: Psychotic Girl

Founded to honor the spirit of Edgar Allen Poe, Poe's Tavern on Sullivan's Island was bustling with activity when we arrived. Nestled on a street corner less than two blocks from the ocean and surrounded by palm trees, the front porch was crowded with individuals waiting for a table or spot at the bar when we arrived. Once again, it appeared that Alice had chosen a winner.

"I'll go let them know we're here," Alice announced as we approached the building, bouncing up the stairs and disappearing before any of us could respond.

Within seconds, she had reappeared and signaled to us from the top of the stairs to join her inside. As the five of us trudged up the stairs to join her, I couldn't ignore the stares of those around us who were clearly upset over the fact that we were being seated before them.

Instead of seating us in the regular dining area, Alice and the waitress led us to a tall table in the bar area that seated six. It was a wise decision, I decided, given the general loudness of our party and the close proximity to the bar. Clamoring onto the high chairs, our seating arrangement fell into a very elementary school pattern of boys on one end and girls on the other. Lucky for the coupled pairs, they were able to sit next to their better half. I, on the other hand, was forced to pine after Edward from the opposite head of the table. Not that he was my official better half or anything but, hey, a girl could dream.

Before dinner, I had unfortunately drawn the short straw, leaving me with the responsibility of being sober for the rest of the evening so that I could drive us back to the house following dinner. So, when the waitress arrived to take our drink orders, I politely declined her offer of whatever beer they had just acquired on tap and opted for a glass of water. It didn't slip by me, either, that,

Texts From Last Night

from the other end of the table, Edward had chosen a coke.

Jasper noticed, too. "Your liver need a break, bud?" he asked in a joking tone.

Edward tensed and glanced nervously across the table at me. I raised an eyebrow in questioning before he answered. "Uh, yeah, something like that." His eyes didn't leave mine as he answered.

"Whatever, man," Emmett piped in as he puffed his chest out, "I guess you're just getting to old to hang with the big dogs."

"I am not," Edward protested defensively. "I'm just being responsible."

I really, really hoped that 'being responsible' translated to 'being sober so that Bella isn't the only one.' Judging by his embarrassed reaction, I was ninety-nine percent certain it was. Knowing that he was probably staying sober for my sake made me sit up a little straighter with pride and happiness.

Rose sat down the menu she was perusing and joined in on the taunting. "That's what Bella is doing tonight," she argued. "Loosen up, Edward."

Edward looked uncomfortable. I decided to jump in and throw him a bone.

"Jasper, everything on the menu looks great, what do you suggest?" Alice had told me while fluffing my hair before dinner than she and Jasper used to come here all the time with her parents when they used to visit the island, so I hoped the question would distract him from Edward and his chosen sobriety.

It did, as Jasper launched into a detailed explanation of different items on the menu before finally stating simply that, "The burgers are really what they're famous up and down the coast for."

I grinned at him. "A burger it is then." Before I glanced back down at my menu, I caught Edward's eye and noticed him mouthing a silent, 'thank you.' I nodded in acceptance.

Texts From Last Night

Our waitress reappeared shortly after with a tray of drinks and a notepad to take our order down on. Everyone but Rose ordered one of the restaurants signature burgers, each of us opting for a different specialty named after a Poe story or poem; I chose the Pit and Pendulum and across the table I heard Edward order the Tell-Tale Heart. Rose, always conscious of her health and body, opted for a Grilled Chicken Salad.

Conversation flowed casually between the six of us as we waited for our food to arrive. Occasionally Alice would pull Rose and me aside to talk about something important for the wedding that the boys would have no interest in and every now and then I would hear Emmett boom something about a bachelor party. For the umpteenth time since we had all been reunited, I found myself noticing how comfortable we all were with one another, regardless of the time we had spent apart.

Eventually, our food arrived and the conversation slowed as we inhaled what was set before us. Jasper had been right; the burgers were divine.

By the time the meal wound down, the table was littered with empty pitchers of beer and clean plates--the sign of a good evening in my book.

Emmett insisted on picking up the tab while the rest of us hurried outside to wait for him, eager to offer up our table to one of the several parties still waiting to be seated. When he joined us, Alice proclaimed, as per her plan, that we were going to walk the couple of blocks that separated us from the beach and go for a walk.

As we walked, the traditional pairing off occurred--Alice with Jasper, Rose with Emmett, and myself with...Edward. Okay, so, maybe it wasn't completely traditional, but it worked.

"Thanks for...earlier," Edward mumbled once we had separated a little from the group. A few feet ahead, I could see where the gravel ended and the sand began.

Texts From Last Night

I turned to him and smiled. "No problem," I assured him. Really, he had no reason to thank me. "Couldn't let your liver get a bad rap," I joked, casually bumping my fist against his bicep.

He chuckled. "I'll have you know, my liver is in prime condition, Swan." As he spoke, he patted his flat stomach proudly.

"Oh, is it now?" I countered.

"Yes."

"I sense a challenge."

He stopped walking, grabbing my elbow to stop me as well, and extended his right hand in my direction. "Before we leave on Sunday," he began, "we'll have a contest to see whose liver has survived the best."

I grasped his warm hand in mine and nodded as the customary tingles shot up my arm. "You're on."

The list of things Edward and I had to do before the end of the week was quickly growing. Something told me, though, that the Jake/Tanya relationship wasn't too far off.

"You know you'll lose, right?" His eyes were twinkling in the low light of twilight.

I shook my head back and forth, biting my lip. "I think you should be the one preparing for defeat, Cullen."

Oh, my, a drinking contest with Edward? Thinking back, I couldn't recall a time in the past when we had engaged in such an event. To be honest, the idea of spending time with him where my inhibitions were swallowed with each shot was definitely alluring.

Texts From Last Night

He was silent for a moment, his eyes fixated on where my lip was trapped between my teeth before stating, "We'll see," and releasing my hand. Turning, he was walking again within seconds.

I chuckled to myself as I followed after him, my feet hitting the sand shortly after his did. Stopping briefly, we both bent over to pull off the shoes we were wearing.

As we cleared the brush that set the beach apart from the rest of the island, my breath caught in my throat at the sunset that appeared before us. It was...breathtaking.

"Damn," Edward said, evidently in as much awe by the scenery as I was.

I nodded numbly. "Yeah."

Up ahead, I could see that Jasper and Alice had headed west, towards the setting sun, in their walk, arms wrapped around one another as then undoubtedly discussed how excited they were to finally become husband and wife in less than a week.

Rose and Emmett were, I noticed, sitting on the beach and making out like a couple of teenagers. I was tempted to yell at them to get a room, but Edward spoke before I had the opportunity.

"Come on," he held out his hand to me and I melted, "let's walk this way."

My hand held firmly in his; Edward pulled me in the opposite direction of our friends, both couples failing to notice that we had escaped them with our hands connected and fingers entwined.

He was silent as we began to walk, seemingly gathering his thoughts as his thumb drew circles on the top of my hand.

"Can you believe it's finally happening?" He asked suddenly as a wave crashed against our bare feet.

Texts From Last Night

I wasn't sure what 'it' was referring to. Did he mean the sparks shooting up my left arm that hadn't stopped since he enveloped my small hand in his large one? Or, was it the undeniable chemistry between us he was referring to?

"What, exactly?" My voice squeaked as I spoke, but I needed clarification.

He chuckled. "Alice and Jasper's wedding," he clarified, "damn, Swan, you're losing your edge."

I giggled nervously. "Oh, *that*. No, I can't believe it's finally here. It seems like yesterday she called to tell me he had finally popped the question. That was what..."

"...a year ago," he finished my statement for me and I couldn't help but beam up at him.

"I guess it was," I agreed. "Wanna sit?" A glance over my shoulder told me that the sun was just minutes away from setting and I desperately wanted to see it disappear into the water.

He nodded and led us to the dry sand. We sat, shoulder to shoulder, both of us with our legs stretched out before us and our arms propped up behind us for support. Every few seconds, I felt Edward occasionally brush his pinky against my hand.

"So, Bella, why no date for this fine, Southern affair?" He continued with his little game of twenty questions once we were seated.

I shrugged. "Could you imagine bringing a random date into this insanity?" I asked in a joking tone, referring to the hilarity that is my close circle of friends.

He chuckled at this, nodding his head slowly in acceptance. "Touche," he admitted. "No one serious for you, then?"

"No one serious for me," I confirmed. "And you?"

Texts From Last Night

Please, please let the answer be no.

He shook his head before answering. "No one for me."

"What about Tanya?" I blurted out, realizing that, though he had been informed of the end of Jake and me, Tanya had never been mentioned. Without noticing it, I had opened up the floor in the 'let's talk about our exes' conversation.

"You mean T-Monster?" He asked. Looking up at him, I could see the humor dancing in his eyes.

"Um, yes," I cringed, hating the fact that he knew our nickname for his psycho ex-girlfriend.

"Well," he began, "we, uh, ending things a couple of months after graduation."

The rest of us had assumed he would pop the question sometime after college, even though we couldn't imagine dealing with her as part of our tight-knit group for the rest of our lives. I wanted to ask what had happened between them, suddenly feeling a deep desire to know what the crazy woman had done to make Edward call things off with her, but bit my tongue. After all, it was his story to tell.

He continued. "Looking back, I should have known some time during sophomore year that it wouldn't work out," his voice was low, evidence of the disappointment he felt in himself. "Would have saved myself a lot of trouble."

"But..." I said, urging him to continue.

His hands were in his hair, a move I remembered him employing in the past during stressful situations. "But...I didn't, of course. Did I ever tell you what she did the Thanksgiving I took her home to meet Carlisle and Esme?"

Edward POV

November 2007, Thanksgiving Break Sophomore Year

Texts From Last Night

(314): Actions speak louder than words. Her actions scream crazy.

In an effort at being a good, kind boyfriend, I invited Tanya to my family's home in the heart of Chicago for Thanksgiving. With her family on the other side of the country in Alaska, it only seemed fitting that I bring her with me to spend the holiday with my family, as opposed to her flying several thousand miles for four days or, worse, sitting in New Haven all alone.

Before we had boarded the plane and departed Bradley International Airport, though, I was having second thoughts. Normal, sane Tanya had apparently been left in New Haven and crazy, bipolar Tanya would be joining me in Chicago.

As I had parked my Volvo in the airport parking lot, she had stuck her lower lip out and said, "Babyyyy, why couldn't your dad just send a jet to pick us up? I thought you were, like, loaded. My daddy would have sent a jet..."

"Eddiiiiieee, do we really have to go through this long security line thing?" She had whined as we approached the panel of metal detectors that stood between the flight gates and us.

"Ew...these floors are disgusting. And I have to take off my shoes? I can't believe people travel like this normally. It's practically barbaric." This cupcake of a statement had garnered her lovely stares from our fellow passengers and plenty of eye rolls from the security personnel.

And the crowning glory of the morning was, "Edward, cookie, is that baby going to be on our plane? What if it, like, cries the entire time? Or, oh God, what if it gets ill?" Needless to say, the mother of said child had not been pleased.

By the time we boarded the plane, I was mortified and refusing to warrant her ridiculous questions with an answer. Of course, she thought I was mad. Really, I was just embarrassed...and highly worried about what Carlisle and Esme would think of her. So, as soon as the pilot announced that the fasten seatbelt sign was being turned off, I leaned my seat back and pretended to be asleep for

Texts From Last Night

a bit of reprieve.

Really, though, nothing could match the mortification I felt when, on Thanksgiving morning, she decided to help my mother and Grandmother Cullen in the kitchen.

Esme was thrilled and so glad to finally have another hand in the kitchen, especially one that wasn't coming up on seventy years old. And it seemed like a great plan at first, Tanya and my mother bonding while my father and I played an early morning rounds of golf.

I had never been more wrong about something going well in my life.

When Carlisle and I arrived back at the house, we were met with complete and utter chaos.

Grandmother Cullen was upstairs in one of the guest rooms, meditating and, to quote Esme, 'trying to find her inner goddess of patience and peace.' Esme, on the other hand, was furiously stirring the already-mashed mashed potatoes. And Tanya, well, Tanya was nowhere to be found.

"Um, mom? Where's Tanya?" I asked with trepidation as Carlisle and I entered the kitchen, my father immediately rushing to comfort my clearly upset mother.

She turned to me and glared. "Upstairs," her answer was in a clipped tone that sounded strange coming from her mouth.

I grinned politely at her before rushing up the stairs.

"Tanya?" I called out when I reached the end of the hall that led towards the bedrooms. Though she had been assigned one of the guest rooms for the week, she had been sneaking into my room once everyone else was in bed, so I wasn't sure where to begin my search.

A muffled sob from behind my door led me in her direction.

Texts From Last Night

"Tanya? Are you in here?" I knocked gently on the door.

She didn't answer, so I opened the door and carefully entered. The lights were off and the curtains were drawn, so I turned on the light resting on my dresser before turning to search for her. I spotted her in the middle of my bed, curled into a ball and crying.

"Edward?" she called quietly, her voice muffled by my pillow and the snot that was collecting on her upper lip.

I dashed to the bed, settling on the edge as I rubbed reassuring circles on her lower back. "What happened, T?"

She sniffled a couple of times before answering. "I made your grandmother mad, I think."

Oh no. No one messed with Grandmother Cullen. "You think?"

She wiped her nose with my pillow. I cringed.

"I may have said something to her about how much I admired her wedding rings..." she trailed off.

Again, I cringed. Grandfather Cullen had died a few years prior, but it was still a touchy subject and, though Tanya hadn't finished her sentence, I could guess where it was headed. She wanted my grandmother's ring.

"She haaaates me." It came out more of a wail than a statement and hurt my ears.

"I'm sure she doesn't hate you," I assured her, though I wasn't sure how comforting I sounded because once you were on Grandmother Cullen's bad side, you stayed there. "What did you say?"

"I, um, told her that I wanted her rings one day, you know, in the future...when we get married." I loved it when I was right.

Texts From Last Night

Red flashed before my eyes. Married? We had only been dating for a little over a year...and I was nowhere near ready to settle down, especially with Tanya.

"You what?" My voice probably sounded much more angry than I intended for it to.

She was biting her lip nervously, her eyes wide as saucers.

"There's more isn't there?"

She nodded. "When Grandmother Cullen told me that she would rather be buried in her rings than give them to me, I moved on to Esme."

There were flames in my eyes now. There was no way in hell that Tanya would get the rings my father had given to my mother on their wedding day.

"You know, I just told her that one day I hoped to have a family ring and that if maybe Grandmother Cullen wouldn't give me hers then she could...I mean, I thought that she would want her only son's wife to have something special like that."

"Tanya, you cannot be serious," I pleaded as I pinched the bridge of my nose with my thumb and forefinger, "please tell me that conversation didn't really happen and that I'm dreaming."

"I could lie, if you want," she said in a hopeful tone.

My hands flew up to my hair and I began to pull at the ends, a nervous habit of mine. "No, the truth is better," I said.

"Should I...should I leave?" she stammered. "I could probably change my flight."

I shook my head back and forth, forcing a smile onto my lips as I stood from the bed. "No, just, uh, let me go talk to them. I'll tell them it's all a big misunderstanding or something..."

Texts From Last Night

"But, Edward," Tanya reached up and grabbed my hand to stop me. "I wasn't kidding. I really do want one of their rings one day."

Well, shit. For now, a lie would have to do.

"Okay," I said to appease her, "let me go talk to them and see if I can clear the air until we go back to New Haven tomorrow evening."

"You're kidding me," I said after Edward finished recounting his tale. I had always known Tanya was off her rocker but this story solidified my belief. "That is so...Tanya."

Edward sheepishly down at me. "I wish I was..."

"What did Esme say when you went to talk to her?"

I had always adored Edward's family, having met them several times when they were in town for parent's weekends or birthdays.

He chuckled. "She told me that if I ever considered marrying her they would cut me off and possibly disown me."

His words surprised me. Carlisle and Esme had never blatantly been unkind to Tanya in front of me, but they had never been particularly warm to her, either. To hear this, though, helped me understand their fondness for the rest of us.

"I'm guessing you never took her home for another holiday?"

"Never," he confirmed with a smile that made it all the way to his eyes.

It didn't make any sense to me, why Edward had remained with Tanya throughout college when his family clearly had such a blatant distaste for her.

"I guess I stayed with her because it was comfortable," he answered my unspoken question with a shrug, leaving me with a gaping mouth. "I knew that would be your next question, Bella. It was on the tip of your tongue, right?"

Texts From Last Night

I gazed up at him and nodded, the last bit of sunshine reflecting in his deep green eyes mesmerizing me as I did.

He continued. "After college, though, I didn't have any more use for her, I suppose. Do I sound like an ass?"

"Not yet..." I answered warily. If he said something about how the mind-blowing sex kept him with her though, I would jump up and run away.

"I suppose I led her on for four years, had her thinking that maybe she would be getting one of those rings she wanted so badly along with a house and a white picket fence and a dog," he said, "but really, I didn't want any of that with her."

In that moment, I empathized with him completely. Only, I had thought I wanted those things with Jake, only to learn once I was away from him in Manhattan that he was my comfort zone, my neat and tidy boyfriend that worked for me in New Haven but nowhere else. We didn't *fit* anywhere else.

"Ass yet?" he asked with a cautious smirk.

"Not at all," I began as I reached up across to grab his right hand in my left, "In fact, I kind of know exactly how you felt."

"You do?" He seemed sincerely shocked.

I nodded, smiling at him. "I kind of did the same thing with Jake..."

"Led him on?"

Shrugging, I shifted my gaze to the darkening water and answered, "In a way, yes. I mean, I agreed to marry him for Christ's sake, when really, all I wanted was to see if I could find myself without him. At the time I guessed I would have been okay with marrying him, but I wasn't desperately waiting for a ring of anything."

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Edward's eyes were wide when I turned to look at him again. "You were engaged to him?" He whispered and I wondered how my brief engagement had never been a topic of conversation between us.

The voice inside my head whispered that, after college, conversation had ceased between Edward and myself. Thinking for a few seconds, I realized that it had.

How had I managed to stay in touch with everyone else--even Emmett--over the past three years and not Edward?

I nodded, biting my lip again. "If you could even call it an engagement. He gave me a ring but I refused to wear it in Manhattan, knowing that he would never find out all the way in California if I did. We did the long distance thing for a while, but it just got so *hard* and, by then, our relationship was basically over."

Edward was silent for a minute or so, digesting everything I had just dumped on him. "And the two of you ended things...just like that?"

"More or less," I said, "actually, thinking back, he *laughed* at me when I told him I wanted to call off the wedding and told me he had had a girlfriend in California for a couple of months."

The tension on Edward's face following my statement was evident in the dimming light.

"Bella," he said in a pained voice, "I am so sorry he did that to you."

I shrugged nonchalantly. To me, it was old news. "It's not really a big deal."

"It is," he argued. "Jake had no right to treat you that way."

"Edward, really, what's done is done," I told him, though my words didn't seem to calm him as his eyes lit on fire.

Texts From Last Night

"Have you...been in a serious relationship since?" His words were spoken carefully, slowly.

"I've dated...nothing really serious, though."

He nodded, continuing to digest our conversation it seemed. "Me neither."

"Really?" I asked, a little shocked that Edward hadn't been dating frequently. He was, after all, completely gorgeous and kind and oh...I needed to stop.

Grinning, he said, "Really."

"For the past three years?"

"I've dated occasionally," he defended, "but nothing serious, just like you. Plus, medical school has been a bit intense."

"Oh, right." How had I forgotten he was still studying and following his dream of becoming a doctor like his father? "Medical school...there is that."

His lips slid into a breathtaking smirk and he released my hand from his. Without missing a beat, he moved to wrap his arm around my shoulder and pull me into his side.

"Are you cold?" He breathed into my ear.

I suppose I had been, but the unnoticed shivers stopped the instant his warm arm had been draped around my shoulders.

"Uh, no," I answered, having a hard time finding words as the sea breeze wafted his intoxicating scent into the air.

"Jake didn't deserve you," he stated, his breath tickling across my cheek due to our close proximity. "You are aware of that, right?"

Texts From Last Night

I bit my lip, refusing to meet his gaze as he spoke. If his eyes were the shade of green I assumed they were if they matched the intensity of his voice, I wouldn't be able to keep myself from launching onto him.

"I know," I whispered in agreement. "Tanya didn't deserve you, either."

And she hadn't; I firmly believed the words that came out of mouth.

Feeling him shrug against me, he mumbled the words, "I was different then, Bella." There was a strangely shameful tone in his voice that made me frown.

I bit my tongue to keep myself from announcing to him that yes, he was different, but that we all were and I was grateful for it. Our pasts and our futures had shaped us, but in a good way. They had made us all more whole, more complete, made us the people we were today. So maybe he had led Tanya on, but he was still loyal to her regardless of her deranged outlook on life...I certainly couldn't say the same thing for Jake.

When I turned to him, his eyes were the shade of green I had feared just a moment earlier. Forcing myself to stay seated on the sand as opposed to straddling myself across his lap, I spoke, "We were all different then..."

"Yeah," he mumbled softly, his eyes once again focused on my lips as he spoke "we were."

He was going to kiss me; I knew he was going to kiss me. As he slowly leaned forward, I heard my name slide out of his lips in a low, gentle tone until mere centimeters separated him from me. I could feel his breath on my lips, coming heavier out of his mouth with each passing second.

I licked my lips in expectation as he mumbled, "Sweet, sweet Bella," and lifted his right hand until it met the skin on the back of my neck causing goose bumps to rise on my skin and the tingle I had grown so fond of the past couple of days to shoot down my spine.

Texts From Last Night

Then, suddenly, he pulled away, his hand falling quickly from my neck as he jumped up off the ground. I stared up at him, stunned and hurt at the same time. Ignoring the hand he had extended to help me up, I clamored up from the sand.

I was furious, turning quickly to get away from him and his teasing actions. If he didn't want to see where this, this...thing between us went then fine, I wouldn't give him the opportunity.

As I took my first step, he reached out and grabbed my shoulders, spinning me around. "What?" I hissed when we were face to face again.

"Emmett," he offered as a vague explanation.

I narrowed my eyes at him and stood there silently. "Emmett, what?"

"Emmett," he repeated, "I heard him and Rose headed this way."

"And?" I needed a better explanation before he was off the hook for leaving me hanging with my eyes closed and lips wet.

"And," he paused, his hands flying off of my shoulders and into his messy hair, "Damn it, Bella, I wanted nothing more than to kiss you but, really, do you want Emmett the human megaphone to interrupt?" His voice was deep and low. The general huskiness of his shocked me in a good way.

He wanted to kiss me? *He* wanted to kiss *me*? Sure, the deepness of his eyes and general actions had arisen my suspicions, but to hear him say the words...my heart swelled. Almost instantaneously, the hurt and pain I had felt from his supposed rejection fell away.

The look on my face must have given away my joy. "Don't act so surprised, Swan, of course I wanted to kiss you," he muttered suavely, his hands reaching out to grasp my waist.

Texts From Last Night

More elated smiles beamed from me to him as my mind failed to process words to say in response.

"Yo, Edward and Bella, let's get this show on the road! There's a bottle of Jack waiting for me at the house that needs to be in my stomach, pronto," the source of Edward's hasty withdrawal from my personal space made his presence known.

I winked at Edward as he pulled his hands away swiftly. "Damn, Emmett."

He winked in return, leaning over and placing a quick peck on my cheek before acknowledging our unwanted friend.

"Chill the fuck out, Emmett, we're coming." Gesturing for me to follow, he stalked off in the direction of their voices, the bodies of our friends hidden in the near-moonless night.

When we arrived within seeing distance of our friends, both couples were waiting impatiently. Alice, not surprisingly, had her arms folded across her chest and was tapping her foot against the sand in a rapid pattern.

"Are we...interrupting something?" Jasper asked when we stepped in front of them.

"No," Edward and I bit out in unison.

Jasper shot us both a look that said, 'I know you're up to something,' but didn't say anything. I had forgotten how observant Jasper was...damn him. At the same time, Alice momentarily forgot her annoyance and did a happy bounce that told me she would be confronting me as soon as we were alone.

"Let's get this show on the road then!" Emmett, my current nemesis, bellowed when he noticed our appearance, immediately throwing his hands into the air with exasperation and sighing loudly with annoyance.

Damn, Emmett was impatient...and right now, I hated him a little bit.

Jack and Kiss

Chapter 9: Jack and Kiss

Alice appraised me with curious glances as we stood in the kitchen; she was opening a fresh bottle of wine as I pulled down a pair of long-stemmed glasses from the cabinet. Outside, on the back deck with a view that overlooked the ocean, the boys were passing the time, taking shots of the Jack Daniels Emmett bought, while Rosalie had already made her exit for the evening, saying something about being worn out from the long day as she lumbered sleepily up the stairs after passing out in the back of the Tahoe on the drive home.

"Why do you look like your puppy just died, Bella?" Alice asked while her right hand twisted the manual corkscrew into the bottle of Pinot Grigio.

I battled with myself internally for what seemed like an eternity. Should I tell my best friend in the entire world that I had been mere centimeters away from kissing Edward until Emmett interrupted us, or do I keep it a secret just a little bit longer?

Choosing secret, I answered, "I don't have a dog," and hoped that would appease her for the moment because I knew that if she badgered me continuously, I would spill my guts to her and I hadn't decided if I wanted to go down that road yet. I found that I kind of liked flirting in secret, knowing it could possibly lead to more with Edward. That no one else knew about it was kind of ...thrilling.

She giggled, rolling her eyes. "You do know that whatever it is, I'll figure it out eventually, right?"

"Mmhmmm," I answered wordlessly, picking up the newly opened bottle from where it rested on the counter in front of her and poured a liberal amount into my empty glass.

Alice followed suit before daintily picking up her glass, and looping her arm

Texts From Last Night

through mine. With a gentle pull, she led us through the house in the direction of the back deck. Realizing that we were headed outside, I whisked the bottle of wine off the counter and into my free hand as I passed by it.

"Good Lord," she said in awe as she slid open the glass door to find the boys in the midst of throwing back a row of shots that they had balanced on the railing. At first glance it appeared that there were three tiny glasses for each man. "Jasper is going to be a pill to deal with later tonight."

I pitied her briefly; Jasper and whiskey weren't the best of friends.

Emmett grinned cheekily at us when he heard the door slide open.

"Ladiesss," he slurred a little bit. Out of the corner of my eye, I saw Edward roll his eyes.

"Emmett," I greeted him in a clipped tone. He was still a little bit on my bad side from his ill timing earlier on the beach.

The big oaf noticed my cold greeting. "Swan, why so frosty?"

I licked my lips and set the bottle of wine on the ground, glancing quickly at Edward before answering. "No reason."

Edward quirked an eyebrow in my direction that seemed to say, 'the hell there wasn't' and I took a big gulp of my wine. I couldn't handle the dark shade of green his eyes had become since our near-kiss on the beach without a little bit of liquid courage.

"We're doing shots, baby," Jasper said as he ambled over to Alice, his arms flailing awkwardly as he stumbled towards her, tripping briefly over a lounge chair on his way.

She crinkled her nose at him. "I can see that, Jazz." Oh, he was in the doghouse.

Texts From Last Night

"Are you mad?" Also, he was possibly drunker than he had been in a very long time.

A forced smile appeared on Alice's lips as she tenderly reached up to brush the hair that fell into his eyes out of the way. "No, I'm not mad," she said, "but just know that when you get sick later this evening, you're on your own."

He pouted down at her, the look in his eyes similar to that of a young boy getting scolded by his mother for eating too many cookies after dinner.

"I'm gonna sleep and head on," he said, mixing his words with a small headshake.

Alice nodded up at him, silently telling him that she understood his jumbled statement as she placed a tiny hand on his cheek. "I'll be up in a bit."

He grinned and walked over to the sliding glass door, fumbling with it clumsily for a few seconds before he finally pulled it open. Slipping inside, he didn't bother to close it behind himself.

"Night man," Edward called to his retreating figure with a small wave.

It seemed the Hale twins were having a hard time keeping up this evening; both of them were out of commission before eleven.

"Emmett," Alice bit out as soon as Jasper was out of earshot and Edward marched over to shut the door, "you are so not on my good side right now."

Edward snorted as he slid the door close, his back to the rest of us. I turned to him and he craned his neck to meet my gaze and winked. Oh, he was still a little pissed at his beefy friend.

And that brings the tally to three Emmett-haters for the evening.

Emmett's eyes widened innocently. "We were just having a little fun, Al," he defended himself. "Jasper is a big boy."

Texts From Last Night

Alice smirked. "I know that he is, but damn, Emmett, you know how he is when he drinks whiskey. It makes him sick and girly."

"Girly?" Edward and I asked in unison, our eyes meeting when we realized we both spoke at the same time.

She glared at us, seemingly having forgotten that the two of us were there. "Yes, *girly*, he starts moaning on and on about emotions and feelings and his hair."

Everyone but Alice doubled over in laughter. "Oh, shut it," she scolded, "don't act like you don't all have your blackout vices."

Edward straightened and smirked at Alice, his face growing serious. I knew what memory was coming to his brilliant mind and bit my lip to keep from laughing.

"That we do Alice," he paused to toss back his still-full shot glass, "remember what you used to tell people?"

xXx

Alice POV

February 2007, Freshman Year

(301): please quit telling ppl youre Alice Cullen when youre drunk

"Vodka," I said in a pouty voice from the futon in our dorm room, "I need Vodka."

It was Valentine's Day and I, for the first time in my life, was upset that I had no one to share the day with. It hadn't bothered me in high school, being alone, but now that it seemed like everyone around me was pairing off for a weekend full of romance and flowers, I was.

Texts From Last Night

"Quit bitching," Rose said as she pulled curlers from her long, blond locks and fluffed it endlessly. "You know that if Jasper would get off his ass the two of you would be spending the weekend together swooning and whispering sweet nothings."

I felt my face flush. "What are you talking about?"

She turned to glare at me. "You know what I'm talking about," her eyes rolled, "all the two of you do is make googly eyes at each other when we're all together."

"That's not true," I protested. Was it?

Bella burst through the door, tossing her messenger bag on the floor as she entered. "It is," she confirmed as she stalked over to her closet and pulled a bottle of vodka out of where it was hiding in her laundry basket amidst her dirty clothes.

I pouted some more and folded my arms across my chest. "Well, even if it were true, he wouldn't act on it...ever."

"We know," Bella and Rose said in unison.

I huffed. "Give it," I said, reaching out a hand for the Vodka.

Bella relinquished the clear liquid, but only after taking a long pull of her own. I took the bottle into my hands and took a long, burning chug.

"Whatever...screw Jasper," I zoned out, thinking of literally screwing Jasper before puling myself back in. "Let's just go out and do a lot of shots."

"That's the spirit," Bella said with a grin as Rose nodded her head eagerly.

Several hours later, the three of us toasted to being single for the fifth time that evening around a table at Temple Grille in downtown New Haven. The boys were on their way to meet us and Edward was bringing his leech, Tanya.

Texts From Last Night

We all hated her.

"Bella," I slurred as the boys entered. "Why don't you date Edward so that we don't have to deal with that monster?"

"T-Monster?" she asked, giggling wildly in her drunken stupor.

I nodded happily, bouncing a little at the nickname she had just made up. "Ohmygosh that's perfect! Yes, T-Monster," I screamed a little too loudly, "let's get rid of her."

"Okay," Bella agreed, "but should I date him? Won't that be...weird?"

A vision of the two of them, dancing together and whispering into each other's ears as they twirled around a dance floor, flashed through my mind. I blamed it on the alcohol and pushed it away.

Too much Vodka.

"Uh...maybe not?" I said, secretly hoping that the vision in my head would maybe one day come true.

"Yeah, I'm going to go with no, because it would definitely be weird," Bella said with a firm nod of her head. "What else could we do to get rid of her?"

"Oh, I know!" What seemed like a brilliant idea at the time popped into my mind and I jumped off the stool quickly.

Rose and Bella looked at me with wide eyes and I placed my arm on the tabletop and slid all the shot glasses to one side. "Help me up," I said as I climbed into the chair and placed a heeled foot on the table, feeling much more stable in my 3-inch heels than I probably was. "I have a brilliant idea."

The looks on their faces told me they were nervous about what I was going to say, but I ignored them. I was determined to get T-Monster out of our lives, no matter the cost.

Texts From Last Night

"Excuse me," I yelled as I stepped onto the table and saw the boys plus one blonde bimbo enter. "I have an announcement to make."

Six pairs of jaws below me dropped. "My name is...Alice Cullen."

My theory: maybe, just maybe, if I could convince people that I was Edward's secret wife that no one knew about then I could be kicked to the curb. My loopy, Vodka-filled thought process didn't see the gaping loophole that was the fact that I had been friends with most of the people in the bar for months.

The bar fell silent. Looking in Edward's direction, I saw his eyes harden as he moved quickly towards me. Within seconds, I was being pulled off the table and tossed over his shoulder.

"What the fuck, Al?" he asked in an angry voice.

Oops.

"I, uh...uh," couldn't come up with a good excuse.

"She's had a lot to drink," Bella defended me as Edward placed me on my feet.

I nodded once I was upright again. "Yeah," I slurred, "I've had lots of shots. Ooohh that rhymes."

Both of the Edward's standing in front of me were blurry as I swayed back and forth.

"Shit, how much has she had to drink?" Jasper, oh, Jasper was at my side. I think I purred.

"Jazzzzz," I was so happy to see him. "My name is Alice Cullen for tonight."

"And why is that?"

Texts From Last Night

I leaned in to whisper in his ear but my mouth landed on his neck. Yummy. "Because," I whispered after regaining my composure, "I think it'll get rid of T-Monster."

"T-Monster?" he whispered back.

I pulled away and giggled, mouthing the word, 'Tanya.' Jasper laughed. I died.

"I see," he said once his usual seriousness had returned. "I don't think it'll work."

I frowned. "Why not?"

Jasper lifted his hand and pointed in the direction of the rest of our friends were on the make shift dance floor that coeds were currently grinding to Get Low on. Edward and Tanya were making out freely amongst the mass of inebriated college students as their bodies gyrated to the music.

Well...damn.

Jasper wrapped his arm around my waist and I turned to him. "Wanna make out?" he asked with a smirk.

I bounced a little and nodded because, even if I didn't have a Valentine, and couldn't get rid of Tanya, I could at least get a little first or second base action courtesy of my crush. Thanks, Cupid!

xXx

I thought back, remembering that night and my reluctance to even consider the idea of dating Edward. With sudden clarity, I realized that in the past couple of days, my mind had changed without my even noticing.

My moment of sudden brilliance was broken by Alice gasping loudly, no doubt remembering the same night that Edward and I were. Stomping her tiny foot against the wooden planks of the deck, she frowned and placed her hands on

Texts From Last Night

her hips in defiance.

"That was a long time ago," she said in a defensive tone, "and I only said it once."

"Twice," I corrected with a chuckle, remembering how hilarious it had been at the time. "Don't feel bad, though, Alice. I always make grilled cheese and complain about my love life...or lack thereof...when I'm blackout, or even just a little drunk, to be honest."

She glared at me for a moment before softening her gaze following the end of my statement. "Really?" Her voice was tiny and weak.

I nodded to confirm the truth of my statement. Behind me, I could feel Edward coming closer, fingertips reaching up to dust across my shoulder in a movement so quick I wasn't sure it had happened.

"I'm sorry, Bella," she said, "I didn't realize...God all of us flaunting our love this week must be terrible."

Shrugging, I answered, "It's not that bad." I couldn't help but turn to see what Edward's response to this conversation was. A glance to my left revealed a frown on his face.

Emmett was standing there looking confused. Instead of asking for clarification, he shrugged and poured himself another shot. It was a good thing he was so beefy, otherwise his alcohol intake from the night would be at a lethal level.

Still out of the loop, he interrupted the saddening conversation to dare Alice to chug her wine. Never one to back down from a challenge, she did it.

"Get it girl!" He cheered her on with a booming shout as the wine quickly disappeared.

Texts From Last Night

She grinned at him, the alcohol seeming to take away her annoyance. "I'm still a little bit mad at you." The tone of her voice, though, seemed to indicate that her anger towards Emmett was receding.

"Sure, sure," he said before collapsing onto the wooden floor of the deck with the bottle of whiskey nestled between his Indian-crossed legs and a shot glass in each hand. He looked like an alcoholic Buddha. "Whew, it feels good to sit down."

Alice joined him on the ground after refilling her wine glass and handed the now half-empty bottle to me, a pitying look still etched on her petite features. I glanced down at my own glass. Funny, it was already empty. I quickly refilled it as Edward grabbed my elbow and pulled me onto the other side of the deck.

My eyes widened and I tried to silently tell him to be careful, because the two biggest loudmouths in our group were less than ten feet away, but he ignored me and pointed in their direction. Emmett goaded a now-giggling Alice into taking a shot with him, it seemed. I released a deep breath, knowing that neither of them would be paying attention to us.

"Bella?" Edward asked once we reached the dark shadowy railing on the other side of the deck. He turned to face the ocean, his arms folded across the edge as he looked out at the crashing waves that were hidden by the darkness.

I mirrored his stance. "Hm?"

"I've been thinking," he began. Instantaneously, I worried that he had changed his mind about what the kiss-that-almost-was on the beach.

"Okay..." I proceeded with caution in my voice. Please, please, I begged mentally, don't regret getting close to me. Oh, I wished he could read minds.

Sliding my eyes to the left, I saw that he was in deep thought as he carefully selected the words he would use to form his question.

Texts From Last Night

"I was thinking that maybe, if you wanted to, we could go to the wedding together?" He sounded nervous, his question rushed, and the only thing on my mind was that he didn't say something along the lines of, 'I changed my mind.'

"We are going to the wedding together, Edward. In case you forgot, we're both in the wedding party." I mean, duh. He had only had a couple of shots...right?

He laughed nervously. "I meant as, uh, dates." The fingers of his right hand ran through the messy mop on his head.

Dates? Edward was asking me on a date? To the wedding of our best friends? I wasn't sure if I was thrilled, or shocked, or both. I was certain it was a combination of both.

He took my silence as a bad sign. "I mean, we don't have to, if you don't want to. I just figured, you know, since we were both here alone and, you know, on the beach, we came so close to...kissing..." I never heard him stutter like he did just then. Where was the self-assured, sexy, heartbreaker Edward that I'd known since I was eighteen?

I reached over and grasped his nervously twirling hands in mine. "Edward," I said in hopes of getting him to shut up, "I would like nothing more than to be your date on Saturday night."

He turned to me, his eyes bright and happy and so very close to the danger shade that made my heart quicken. "Yeah?"

I nodded and smiled. "Yeah."

A yelp from Alice broke our moment and, surprisingly, I was glad. If she hadn't, the possibility of me leaning in and kissing him right then and there was extremely high.

"Get it out, Emmett!" Alice squealed and I turned to assess the situation.

Texts From Last Night

Edward was standing so close behind me that I felt him laugh. I inched closer to our still-sitting friends to see what was crawling, or resting, on Alice that made her flip out.

"It's his spit," Edward whispered into my ear in explanation. I tried not to whimper at the feelings his breath brushing across the back of my neck.

I turned to him. Spit?

Good God, he was licking his lips. "Emmett tried to spit, the wind caught it, and it flew into Alice's hair."

All I heard was something about Alice's hair, my eyes fixated on his tongue and the wetness of his lips as he spoke.

Alice broke my Edward-induced haze by brushing past us and into the house, her eyes full of fury because of the noticeable wet, glistening glob in her hair.

"Emmett," I barked, turning to face him, "Gross."

He didn't seem affected by her anger of the accusations of his nastiness. In typical Emmett fashion, he seemed pleased with himself.

I turned to Edward. "I'm going to go check on her," I told him, knowing that she would probably be dealing with sick Jasper and the mess in her hair at the same time.

He nodded his understanding and gently squeezed my hand before I headed towards the door leading inside. A final glance outside as I slid the door shut revealed Edward taking Alice's place on the ground and picking up a shot glass.

An hour later, I left Alice with clean hair and Jasper curled around the toilet, a pillow beneath his knees and a blanket lying across the vanity for later. I was oddly proud of her for standing her ground and leaving her fiancé on the cold tile of the bathroom alone. From the hall as I exited, I had heard him whine that

Texts From Last Night

in five days she would have to stand by him in sickness and in health, to which she responded, "Pretty sure that doesn't include whiskey vomit."

In fact, I didn't think I could love her more.

Once in my room, I quickly changed into my favorite pair of silk pajama shorts and a ribbed white tank top that was worn, a little bit see-thru, and frayed at the ends. Letting my hair out of the ponytail I had pulled it into while helping Alice remove Emmett's spit wad, I sauntered into the bathroom to brush my teeth.

Toothbrush hanging from my mouth, I wandered back into the bedroom to remove my earrings and watch, only to find something, well someone, I hadn't been expecting.

I gasped and jumped as I noticed the surprise visitor standing in my doorway; it was a miracle I didn't choke on my toothpaste. He looked indescribable leaning against the doorway, his hair disheveled from the sea breeze and his hands casually tucked into the pockets of his khaki shorts. The light blue button up he was wearing had been unbuttoned a little at the top, revealing the dusting of hair that covered his chest.

Perfection.

"Edward!" I exclaimed, my voice muffled by the toothbrush. I held up a finger, telling him to wait, and rushed back into the bathroom, completely mortified that he had barged in on my nightly routine. As I finished cleaning my teeth, I fluffed my hair and smoothed out my clothes.

Emerging from the en suite again after rinsing my mouth out, I was half expecting him to be gone, vanished as if he had been a figment of my imagination.

He was still there and the lustful look on his face made me wish that I were wearing a bra under my thin tank top.

Texts From Last Night

"Hi," I whispered in an awed tone as I approached him, a small grin forming on my lips in response to the smirk that his were making.

"Hi," he echoed, taking a step forward in my direction to meet me halfway.

"What are you-" he cut me off as he stepped directly in front of me, his movements had been much larger than mine, and placed a finger on my lips to quiet me.

I looked up at him, questioning his intentions with my eyes. A lopsided grin appeared and I felt my knees go weak from the combination of it and the warm feeling of his fingertip against my lips. If I wanted, I could have opened my mouth and pulled it inside; it took every ounce of my willpower not to. Without speaking or removing his finger, he grabbed me by the waist and pulled me towards him.

"Shhh, Bella." His voice was deep and husky, the same tone it had been on the beach.

I nodded in understanding as he removed his finger from my lips to trail it up my jaw line before his entire hand came to rest in the hair at the nape of my neck. He leaned in, his eyes the same shade of dark green as they had been earlier in the day, and his breath breezed across my face.

"Where's Emmett?" I asked breathlessly before I got my hopes up. If he interrupted us again, it was likely that I would just sit him down and make him watch, even if I had to put duct tape across his mouth for the rest of the trip.

I felt the vibrations from his chuckle in my chest as he wrapped the arm that was resting on my waist tighter and pulled me flush into him. Oh, it felt nice. "Passed out on the deck," he said in a serious tone.

I leaned back and glared up at him. "Edward," I chided. Yes, I was still a little pissed at Emmett, but surely he hadn't just left him out there.

"Relax," he smirked, "he's on the couch."

Texts From Last Night

After swatting him playfully across the chest, I closed my eyes and allowed my head to return to its previous position, no longer meeting his gaze as I focused intently on the muscles in his chest that were defined by his thin t-shirt.

"Bella." My name came through Edward's lips like a caressed prayer and I lifted my eyes to his. "I'm going to kiss you now," he said as if I needed a warning. Probably, I did.

Gently, teasingly, he pressed his lips against mine as if to test the waters, to insure that this step was okay. Flavored with whiskey and what I could only describe as *Edward*, the kisses were soft and short and left too much to be desired. It was obvious that he was trying to be a gentleman, to carefully take the leap from friendship to something more tantalizing.

I, however, had no self-imposed code of chivalry to follow and desperately wanted him to claim me, make me his, if only with his lips and tongue. My hands, which until this point were hanging limply and awkwardly at my sides, lifted to his shoulders, sliding up over his strong neck, and into his hair that I had been dying to touch for the past three days.

The copper locks were as soft as they looked. After running my fingers through the strands as he continued with the painfully slow kisses, I gripped onto his scalp and took control, deepening the kiss myself as I pulled him towards me.

His reaction was immediate, almost as if he had been waiting for me to give him permission to give up the formal act and lose control. I scratched my fingernails against his scalp, and he groaned into my mouth, pulling the hand that had been resting at the nape of my neck away, and moving it to rest on my hipbone. Our kisses turned desperate and rushed.

One fluid moment later, I was sitting on the edge of the dresser with Edward standing between my legs that were dangling loosely around him. Moving his hands slowly, methodically, down my thighs, he grasped behind my knees and lifted until my lower limbs were wrapped tightly around his waist, all the while claiming me with his lips.

Texts From Last Night

I gasped into his mouth and felt myself mold against him perfectly, his lips leaving mine to trail short, wet kisses along my jaw before moving on to my neck. I paid little attention to the murmurs of adoration coming from him between kisses, but the effect they had on me was a different story. I felt a familiar ache begin to develop in the pit of my stomach.

Seconds later, Edward's lips were on mine again. This time his kisses were longer, more intense and full of promise, our tongues danced together and his hands blazed a burning trail from my knee to my hip, back and forth in a teasing circuit. When it became necessary to breathe, he pulled back and rested his forehead against mine. Our eyes met, both on fire.

"I couldn't sleep without feeling your lips first," he murmured, his voice husky and deep and his breathing labored. The deep, sexy tone had visions of us, our limbs tangled together as we moved together beneath the sheets, swimming through my head.

I smiled broadly. "And?" It seemed as if he had more to say.

"And, fuck, why didn't we do that before?"

I giggled, my head falling back without realizing the opportunity I presented to Edward. He growled deeply in his throat and attached his lips to the column of my neck. Gripping my thighs, he pulled me forward so that our hips met and I let out a soft moan at the delicious contact.

"We were otherwise spoken for," I somehow managed to choke out in a weak tone despite his distracting lips and their descent towards my collarbone as his hands moved from my thighs to my hips, his fingers playing with the hem of my tank top.

After placing gentle kisses all the way across my collarbone, from left to right, he pecked his way back up to my chin. "Right...that," he mumbled before adding, "I like this tank top."

Texts From Last Night

"Mmhmmm," I agreed, the connection between my brain and tongue lost when his addicting kisses spread like wildfire, his teeth biting gently onto the sensitive flesh of my earlobe.

His large hands slid beneath the bottom on my tank top and splayed out across my stomach and sides, his fingers kneading and exploring as his lips made the return trip across my jaw and onto my lips. I gasped briefly at the feeling of warmth that sparked through my body as he explored my skin, his long fingers brushing the underside of my breasts, before his mouth met mine again.

Three more kisses and he pulled away slowly, catching his breath. "I should go," he said in a pained, forced voice.

"Okay," I murmured, pulling my lip in between my teeth again. I fleetingly realized that if this nervous habit kept up, I would end up chewing it raw before Alice's wedding and she would be pissed if I had chapped lips in the photographs.

Looking up into his lustful eyes, I wanted nothing more than to force him onto my bed and beg him to stay. I knew, though, that that would give him the upper hand and I desperately wanted to keep that for myself, to let him think he was wooing me, when in fact I was the one having to restrain myself whenever I was in his presence.

He unwrapped my legs from his waist and slid me off the dresser so that he was standing between my legs. Lifting his right hand, he cupped my cheek. "Thank you for agreeing to be my date," he mumbled, his eyes searing into mine.

I nodded numbly. "Mmhmm."

"And for letting me kiss you..." His voice took on a velvety tenor and I melted. I briefly rethought my plan of keeping the upper hand.

I grinned happily at him, my hands lifting up to caress his face. "I assure it was my pleasure."

Texts From Last Night

"I hope you realize it'll be happening again."

My hands slid into his hair. "I hope so," I murmured in response.

He smirked down at me with a dazed look in his eyes, his hands still resting loosely on my hips. "Goodnight." No move to exit was made.

"Night Edward," I giggled, realizing he was still directly in front of me, not a single inch closer to the wide open door.

He shook his head a couple of times as if to bring himself back down to Earth. "Right, sleep."

"Yeah," I bit my lip again. Damn. "Sleep."

His hands fell from my waist and I reluctantly removed my hands from his hair, quickly brushing my nails against his scalp as I did, just to tease him. A quick peck against my lips and what I think was another low growl in the bottom of his throat, and he was sliding through the doorway leaving me very hot and bothered.

A/N: Edward POV of the kiss can be found in the outtakes for this story. Link on my profile.

Raining on Tuesday

Chapter Ten: Raining on Tuesday

A crack of thunder resonating through the beach house woke me from a blissful sleep filled with dreams of Edward and magical, hypnotizing kisses being trailed from the crook of my elbow to my neck. Sitting up quickly in bed, I glanced out the window and noticed that there was rain to go with the thunder and lightning as big, fat raindrops pelted against the window rapidly. I couldn't tell the exact time because there wasn't a clock on the bedside table, but from the low lighting outside, it must have still been early.

Sighing to myself, I fell back against my pillows and pulled the blankets up to my chin, wishing that the kisses hadn't been a figment of my imagination and that I could close my eyes, open them again, and that Edward would magically appear under the sheets like a genie. Rainy mornings, in my mind, were always equated with sexy afternoons spent tangled in the arms of a lover and, right now, I wanted Edward to be that lover. I blamed the Keith Urban song and Jasper for introducing me to it sometime during college when he had gone through that weird country music phase.

As my mind wandered back to Edward and what I wished he were doing to me, it inevitably traveled back to the kiss we had shared the night before. Before long, my mind was one big pile of mush and the raindrops against my window had lulled me back to sleep.

When I woke again a couple of hours later, the rain was still coming down, though the raging storm had passed over us. I rolled over and flopped my hand around on the bedside table in search of my iPhone. After locating the piece of technology, I unplugged it from its charger and pulled it to me.

Eight o'clock. Why on earth couldn't I sleep past that hour?

Figuring that everyone else was likely still in bed, either attempting to rid themselves of epic hangovers or just catch a couple of extra hours of sleep, I

Texts From Last Night

decided to shower and make myself presentable for the day. After all, my hair was probably a huge rat's nest of sleep and mini-make out session, so a shower was necessary.

I stumbled through my morning routine, unable to get the mind numbing sensation of Edward's lips on mine out of my mind, and dressed in a pair of denim shorts and a white boyfriend tee, leaving my hair wet and wild to dry naturally. I didn't bother with make up, instead only swiping a bit of strawberry Chap Stick across my lips. Theme of the day: simplicity.

By the time I was as presentable for the day as I was going to be, the alluring scent of coffee was floating up the stairs and filling my senses. Oh, I needed it.

In the kitchen, I found Jasper, his head buried in his arms as the coffee brewed.

"Rough night?" I asked in what I hoped was a sincere tone. I'm pretty sure, though, that my voice was unintentionally sarcastic.

He grunted in response. The coffee maker made a noise to announce that it was finished brewing.

"Coffee's done," I told him when he didn't make a move for the dark liquid.

"Not mine," his muffled voice said in response.

I didn't ask any further questions, choosing instead to play finders-keepers with the freshly brewed java.

My hand was wrapped around the handle of the coffee pot when another one covered it. I knew that hand; it was Edward's.

"That's my coffee," he purred into my ear, his voice deep and still a little husky with sleep. I whimpered and hoped Jasper still hated life enough at the breakfast bar to not look up and see the expression on my face.

Texts From Last Night

I tried to cover my reaction. "Care to share?" Looking over my shoulder, I batted my eyelashes at him flirtatiously.

His lips formed a hard line. "Sure."

Oh, he looked delicious. His hair was still damp from a recent shower and he was dressed simply in a black t-shirt and jeans that hung loosely on his hips. His green eyes were smoldering, passionate.

I grinned and pulled the pot away from the machine and poured some into my mug, keeping my eyes on his. "Thanks," I answered nonchalantly. I broke his intense gaze when really, all I wanted to do was push him up against the counter and kiss him again.

Upper hand, Bella, upper hand.

"Mmhmmm," he murmured as I handed the pot to him.

"Movie day!" Alice announced as she bounced into the kitchen and threw her arms into the air.

The day was, I realized, playing out in an eerily similar fashion to Sunday--not that I was objecting. The sun had gotten the best of my pale skin the day before and, unless Alice wanted a tomato standing in the Maid of Honor position in the wedding photos, it needed a little bit of a break.

Edward rolled his eyes briefly and lifted his mug to his lips. While his attention focused on our perky friend, I took the opportunity to appraise him fully for the first time that morning. I didn't notice anything different from my initial ogling, except that he was beautifully barefoot, looking relaxed and comfortable without shoes and socks on.

"I've got to do a bit of work," Edward said after swallowing.

I turned to him, frowning. An Edward pillow had been provided to me during the last TV/movie marathon and I wasn't reluctant to admit that I wanted one

Texts From Last Night

again.

He noticed the look on my face. "Didn't you say you had some stuff to catch up on, too, Swan?"

Um...huh? Sorry, but could you repeat yourself? I was too busy daydreaming about how perfect of a pillow your chest and shoulder are.

"I...uh," A good response was failing to come to mind.

He smirked. "Something about editing?"

Well, of course I had something to do that involved editing. I was, after all, an editor.

Oh, right, he was trying to help me. Did he want me to work with him? Or just pull me away from the group?

"Oh, yeah, I, uh, have a couple of chapters to edit for the book I'm working on." I pulled the answer completely out of my ass. Sure, I had brought my laptop with me and, yeah, I could always get a head start on things, but there was nothing pressing that needed to be done.

Edward grinned at me. "Maybe we could set up in the kitchen?"

I nodded. Yes, he *did* want to sneak me away from the group. I smiled at him, pretty sure that every single tooth in my mouth was showing.

"Sure," I said.

Alice stomped her foot in defiance. "You have to watch movies with us," she bit out.

"Sorry, Al, just for a couple of hours?" I pleaded with my eyes as I spoke. Sure, I hadn't told her about the situation with Edward yet, but hopefully she would be able to take some sort of hint. "Important stuff."

Texts From Last Night

"Just let them, Alice," Jasper emerged from death to say. I wanted hug him, but was afraid it might send him back to the Valley of the Dead.

She contemplated this for a bit, but finally answered. "Fine," before stomping off into the living room to wake Emmett, who I noticed had fallen into a comatose state on the couch.

After breakfast, everyone assembled in the living room while Edward and I set up our charade in the kitchen. At least, I thought it was still a charade. Judging by his actions, however, he could have been serious about the whole work thing.

He pulled out his laptop, sat it on the table, and actually began to work on something. I did the same, pulling up the chapters I needed to edit and pretended to read them and add notes. Really, though, all I did for half an hour was glance between the screen of my laptop and the perfect bone structure of Edward's face.

I wanted to touch him again, wanted to feel his hands on me as his lips forced mine apart and his tongue caressed mine. And the little bit of stubble that he was letting build up on his jaw line...I desperately wanted to feel it beneath my fingers. Doubt flooded my mind, though, as I feared that he wouldn't want to go there with me again.

"I hope you realize it'll be happening again." His heated statement from the night before echoed in my mind.

Or did he?

I was rereading the same sentence for the tenth time since sitting down at the table when a plan to test his will formed in my mind.

Sliding my bare foot across the tile of the floor, I casually brushed it against Edward's, keeping my eyes on the screen of my computer as our skin touched. To make it appear that I was working and not intentionally brushing my foot across his, I tapped my fingers across the keyboard. Random, disorganized

Texts From Last Night

letters popped up in my blank word document as my foot met his.

I could hear his fingers briefly stop their clicking movements across his keyboard, but he made no other move to signify that he felt my advances.

Oh, he wanted to play that game.

Slowly, I ran my foot further towards him, brushing it across his ankle before I lifted my leg at the same time that I lifted his jeans with my big toe. As my foot moved higher, I pushed the arch into his calf that I had made bare, placing teasing touches up and down the length of his lower leg.

My ministrations were met with more faltering on the keyboard, this time combined with a sharp inhale of breath. His eyes never left the computer screen.

On the inside, I did a happy dance because I had managed to have some sort of effect on him. Without meeting his gaze, I pulled my foot back and acted as if nothing had happened.

Things were calm for a few minutes and I actually managed to read an entire paragraph when, suddenly, Edward's foot was sliding up my calf. I couldn't even attempt to mask the gasp that flew out of my mouth as his skin met mine.

Damn him. I should have worn pants.

Refusing to look up and meet his eyes as his foot moved higher, I focused on a random sentence in the chapter. I probably should have chosen an entire paragraph, but at that moment, all I could handle was a short stringing together of words.

"I'm so damn dehydrated," Jasper complained as he trudged into the kitchen. I could hear the whiskey hangover in his voice.

Edward's foot fell away in a swift, sudden move. "Sucks, man," he said in a normal, completely unaffected voice.

Texts From Last Night

"Damn Emmett," Jasper mumbled from where his head was stuck inside the refrigerator. When he was entirely visible again, a bottle of water was in his hand.

"Getting a lot of work done, you two?" he asked. I couldn't tell if he was being sarcastic or not.

I nodded lamely and Edward answered, "Sure."

He nodded and disappeared back into the living room.

Edward shot me a look that said, 'That was close,' before his foot was sliding up my calf again. I was pretty sure that footsie had never been this damn sexy in grade school.

An hour later, I had only made it through two pages. On average, each paragraph took me ten minutes to get through. Edward had continued to tease me with his feet and sometimes with his fingers, reaching across to brush my hair out of my face or trail his thumb across my wrist.

It was torture and I feared that eventually the weird sexual tension in the room would bubble over into the living room.

"Bella," Edward whispered and I immediately forgot everything that I had read in the past two minutes.

I looked up quickly and noticed the intense, lustful look in his eyes.

Uh oh.

"Yeah?" my voice cracked as I answered.

"Can you, uh..." He lifted his right index finger and pointed to his computer screen. "I have a grammar question."

Texts From Last Night

I shook my head, telling myself that the look in his eye was my imagination.
"Oh, uh, sure."

Leaning forward, I was waiting for him to turn his laptop to show me his point of inquiry, only for it never to happen. Instead, he reached forward and cupped my chin between his thumb and forefinger and pulled me forward.

A quick peck on the lips and he pulled back, leaving me standing there dumbly with my eyes closed and lips gaping.

"Hey guys." Damn Rose. What was with her and Emmett? "Can I join you two in here? Why are you standing? Bella, why are your eyes closed?"

I groaned and slowly opened my eyes.

"I need a drink," Edward and I said at the same time. I turned to him, eyes wide. He smirked.

"I'll get it," I said. "Beer?"

He nodded. "That's fine."

After retrieving two beers from the refrigerator, I lumbered back over to the table to find that Rose had set up her laptop at the head of the table, effectively sitting herself in between Edward and me.

"Guys," she said as we twisted the caps off of our Bud Lights, "it's not even noon."

"I don't care," I said at the same time that Edward said, "I'm on vacation."

She scrunched up her nose. "Who gave you two bitch pills this morning?"

We both glared at her and chose not to answer.

"O-kay, well," she paused, "I guess we should get to work then."

Texts From Last Night

By lunchtime, I had actually made significant progress in my work, but the quality of what I had done was questionable; between the two of us, Edward and I had gone through a 6-pack.

After finishing off my third beer, I looked up and my eyes widened.

"Oops," I said, looking across the table and giggling at Edward. I wanted to kiss him so badly it almost hurt.

"Yeah," he chuckled as he shot me a devastating grin, "oops."

Rose was annoyed. "I hate you two sometimes," she mumbled as she pounded so furiously against her keyboard that I feared for its safety. "This is just like that time you thought it would be fun to bring a damn flask to the study room during finals."

"Whatever, Rose," Edward said with exasperation. "You're just upset you didn't think of it first. And besides, Emmett started it and you joined in."

xXx

Edward POV

May 2007, Freshman Year

(248): You would get kicked out of the study lounge for being drunk the Monday of finals week.

"The fuck, Em?" I asked as Emmett reached into his jacket pocket and pulled out a shiny silver flask.

Jasper, Emmett, and I were sitting in the study room that was nestled on the first floor of our dorm, preparing for the finals that we all had in the morning. Or, at least, Jasper and I were. Em was drinking and the girls were on their way down to join us.

Texts From Last Night

"What?" he asked innocently as he twisted the cap off and took a sip.

I stared at him, mouth agape, and tapped my pencil against my literature notebook.

"Don't you have a final tomorrow?" Jasper asked, breaking his concentration and glancing up from his political science book.

The three of us may have been known for our partying skills but I, at least, knew how to separate work and play.

Emmett shrugged and nodded. "Yeah, I do," he said, "but I've come up with a system. I get an answer correct on the review that our TA posted online and I take a swig of Jack. I get a question wrong, well, no whiskey for Emmett."

"You can't be serious."

Jasper turned to me. "He's serious." He didn't seem concerned.

By now, the blonde girls with obviously fake breasts that were studying together at the table in the corner opposite from us were shooting daggers of death in our direction. From the looks of it, we were being a little too chatty.

I threw my pencil on the wooden table and sighed loudly, reaching up to run my hands through my hair as I leaned back in my chair.

"Hi guys!" I heard a chirpy voice from the doorway. Alice.

I turned in the direction of her voice and grinned. For a little hyper thing, she could somehow always manage to keep Emmett, and the rest of us, in line.

Behind her was Rose, who I knew could keep him in line for sure if Alice failed. Bella was third to enter, her hair tied up on the top of her head and a pair of glasses I had never seen before perched on the bridge of her nose. She was no match for Emmett, but she knew her shit when it came to Lit, and for that I would be eternally grateful.

Texts From Last Night

"Bella," I called, momentarily distracted by Emmett's drinking habits, "just the person I needed to see."

"I won't help you with your English final," she deadpanned.

Well, damn. "Why the hell not?"

"Because," she sighed with exasperation as she dropped her books on the table. "I have a final to study for, too."

"Emmett has liquor," I bribed with a hopeful smile.

She frowned. "And?"

"Maybe he'll share?" It was a long shot, but I tried it anyway. "Or I'll make him share."

The look Emmett sent it my direction told me that there was no chance in Hell he had been planning on sharing. Oops. To make his point, he stated firmly, "I won't share."

I gave him a pointed look but he didn't back down.

"Please, Bella," I pleaded. Biology, chemistry, and physical science I could handle, but Literature...not exactly my strong suite.

She rolled her eyes and flipped open a notebook. "No," she said with finality.

I gave up and turned to Emmett. "Give it," I said. If I was going to learn this shit on my own, I was going to need a drink or two.

"I'm not sharing, Edward."

My jaw clenched. "I'll go upstairs and refill it when it's empty."

Texts From Last Night

The girls in the corner were clearly furious; one of them was making a move to stand and come over to chastise us.

Jasper noticed and decided to take care of the situation. We all watched with fascination as he stood suavely and strutted over to clear the air. As he spoke, their frowns turned to smiles and, within minutes, they were practically eating out of the palm of his hand.

" Thanks, ladies," I heard him say as he turned to head back to our table, a smirk and look of pride on his face.

" You get the hoes off our back?" Rose asked a little too loudly once he was seated. Surprisingly, they didn't seem offended.

" That I did," Jasper said, still smirking.

Alice was frowning. "What did you promise them?"

Jasper chuckled. "Nothing, Al," he assured her. "I just told them that we were having a big post-finals party and that they were invited."

" There's no party," Emmett commented.

Holding a finger up to his lips to quiet our friend, Jasper grinned. "I know that, Em, but they don't."

" I like it!" Rose exclaimed, evidently thrilled to have the bimbos off our backs. "Celebratory shot?"

My hands flew to my hair again, tugging at the strands. How on earth was I supposed to get any studying done if my friends wouldn't lay off the alcohol to study?

The flask was passed around. When it arrived in my hands, I couldn't just say no to the amber liquid hidden inside, so I took the shot. The burning sensation as it crawled down my throat calmed me, prepared me to tackle Lit...sort of.

Texts From Last Night

Eventually, we were all taking a shot for correct answers to study guides. Papers were passed around the table, random questions and answers were called out and, soon, the girls in the corner of the lounge were angry again.

"Excuse me," one of them said as she swayed over to our table. "Can you guys, like, leave? Some of us are trying to actually study."

"Hells no!" Emmett bellowed, tossing a fist into the air. "This is our study par-tay!"

The girl rolled her eyes. "What are you studying, big guy?"

"Economics," he answered. "Supply and demand. You see, I've got this supply," he held up his flask. "And this demand," he gestured to the five of us.

Oh, the girl was fuming. "I'm going to get security. You know alcohol is prohibited in the dorm. I could get you all in trouble."

Bitch.

"That won't be necessary," Alice piped up, closing her books and beginning to stack them together. "We'll just go."

Emmett began to protest, but Rose managed to quiet him. The rest of us followed suit.

On the way out, Emmett turned to flip them the bird. "Later, bitches."

xXx

Rose scoffed and rolled her eyes. "No I didn't." The weakness of her voice betrayed her, as did the smile she was fighting.

I turned to Edward to find him watching me, a smirk on his lips as his eyes found mine. He winked.

Texts From Last Night

I tore my gaze away from him at the same time I felt his foot settle on my knee. I darted my eyes to Rose and back to him. He shrugged.

"More beer?" I asked, standing quickly as his foot fell to the ground. If he wanted to play the footsie game with Rose around, I was going to need more to drink.

Hadn't it been just yesterday that I had qualms about drinking before noon? This trip was turning me into a lush. All blame, I decided, rested on Edward's perfectly muscled shoulders.

He cocked his head to the side and answered. "Sure."

"Rose?"

She continued to pound her fingers against the keyboard. "Fine," she caved with a sigh, "bring me one too."

Pulling the refrigerator door open, I stared inside blankly for a moment before deciding to just grab an entire 6-pack again. What the Hell, right? Like Edward had said, this was vacation.

Dropping the drinks on the table, I fell back onto my chair and officially gave up on my work, choosing instead to check my e-mail.

I scanned through my inbox quickly. Mainly, it was filled with messages from stores and restaurants, announcing specials and new items. A few here and there were from authors I was working with; I ignored them. *This was vacation*. None of the messages really caught my attention, though, until I noticed a name that rarely graced by inbox: Edward M. Cullen.

My eyes darted up to see that he was, surprisingly, focused intently on the screen of his MacBook that matched mine. I realized with a grin that our laptops made us look like a too-coordinated couple that matched their outfits and electronics.

Texts From Last Night

I opened the e-mail.

To: Isabella Swan

From: Edward M. Cullen

Subject: Challenge

Bella,

Remember our discussion on the beach? I'm thinking today might be the perfect time to follow through.

Edward

The perfect time, indeed.

I grinned and refused to look at him as I typed out a response.

To: Edward M. Cullen

From: Isabella Swan

Subject: Re: Challenge

Edward,

It's on. Hope you brought your big boy drinking pants.

Cheers,

Bella

I heard his computer ping to announce the arrival of my e-mail and smiled to myself. If I was so magnetically pulled to Edward sober, I could only imagine what the effect of alcohol would be.

Texts From Last Night

A slow shiver ran up my spine and I reached for my beer, eager to get a head start.

Glancing at Edward, I noticed that he was doing the same. Oh, it was going to be a good day. And our poor friends had no clue what was going on...

One Tequila, Two Tequila

Chapter Eleven: One Tequila, Two Tequila

"It stopped raining!" I heard Alice squeal from the living room with glee.

Please, please attempt to corral everyone outside for more fun in the sun so that Edward and I can have the house to ourselves, I pleaded in my mind.

Rose shut her laptop quickly and stood up, collecting her things within her arms. "Might as well get a head start," she said with a nod towards the living room. "I'm gonna run upstairs and change into my beachwear." It seemed that she and I had the same idea in regards to what Alice was probably plotting.

My eyes met Edward's as Rose made her exit. In his eyes, I could see that he was forming a plan. "Al? Can you come in here for sec?" he yelled without breaking my gaze.

Within seconds, our bouncy friend was standing in front of us with a smile on her face. "What's up, guys?" she asked.

Edward spoke first. "The thing is Alice, I'm pretty sure you're about three seconds away from telling us to go change for the beach. Am I right?"

She nodded.

"I'm also pretty sure that I have a lot of work left to do." I liked where this was going.

Alice frowned. "Edward," she began in a condescending tone, "you're a med school student. What kind of work could you be doing that is so important you can't take a break?"

My eyes widened. What *had* he been working on all morning? All the typing he had done hadn't really seemed like studying to me.

Texts From Last Night

Edward gaped at her for a second but quickly responded, "If you think you could do a better job with what I'm doing, then feel free to take over," he gestured to his computer.

Alice didn't bother to look at what he was working on, instead responding with a disgusted face. "Fine," she said in a sad voice. "What about you, Bella? Will you come out to the beach with us?"

I had never loved having sunburnt skin more.

"My skin's still a little tender from yesterday," I answered in a pained tone. Really, my sunburn was all but gone, but I wasn't about to sit in the sand if I didn't have a shirtless Edward to gawk at and daydream about.

She pursed her lips and studied the two of us for a moment. I forced myself not to look at Edward's reaction to her intense stare, knowing that if I did, it would provide her with ammunition.

"I'm disappointed that the two of you won't be spending the afternoon with us, but I understand," she finally answered. "If I didn't know better, though, I'd say-"

Emmett dashing into the room and tossing her over his shoulder cut her statement off. All of my annoyance with him from the previous day drifted away in that moment.

I breathed a sigh of relief, certain that her next words would have been something along the lines of, 'you two are hiding something from the rest of us.'

"Little one, let's go change for the beach!" Emmett exclaimed as he hightailed it out of the room with a squealing Alice. "Leave those two lame-o's inside if they want to miss out on all the fun."

If he only knew...

Texts From Last Night

I returned my gaze to Edward, who was, like me, letting out a sigh of relief. "That was close," he stated with a serious look on his face.

"Do you think she's figured us out?" I whispered, leaning across the table a bit so that he could hear me.

"No," he said as he leaned forward in his chair, "but she's pretty close to it, I'm sure."

I nodded in acceptance, as Jasper casually strolled through the kitchen and up the stairs with a nonchalant wave to the two of us as he passed through. Edward leaned back in his chair and began typing again.

"What are you *really* working on?" I asked, curious after Alice's comment about medical school.

He looked up at me, a smirk forming on his lips. "I was typing out ways to get rid of everyone so that we could be alone for our little game."

My jaw dropped. "For the past two hours?"

He nodded, his lips spreading to a full grin. "Um...yes."

"And?"

"And what?"

"What did you come up with?"

He chuckled as he lifted his left hand to run it through his messy hair. "Well, they've gotten more creative as the morning has gone on. My first idea was to just tell them to leave us alone," he said.

I giggled as he continued.

Texts From Last Night

"That obviously wouldn't have worked," he explained. I nodded in agreement. "They're pretty silly, Bella."

"I want to hear some," I protested as he made a move to close his laptop.

He sighed as his eyes started to scan the screen. "Let's see," he said as he began to read off his favorite ideas. "Three: start kissing Bella in front of Rose. Seven: tell Alice there's a sale at her favorite boutique in downtown Charleston. Eleven: throw Bella over my shoulder, grab a bottle of liquor, and drink outside in the rain. Thirteen: make an excuse to go out and find a bar..." he continued to list off his ideas. They were adorable, ranging from silly to genius; each one made me swoon.

He stopped after twenty-nine: scream 'fire!' then lock everyone outside. "That's it."

"I kind of liked number three," I said confidently. Rose probably would have flipped out, but I wouldn't have cared with Edward's lips on mine.

Edward laughed. "Seven would have worked for sure," he added.

I nodded in agreement, giddy over the fact that he had spent the better part of two hours plotting ways to get me alone. "Definitely."

"Last chance, guys," Alice said as she stepped into the kitchen wearing her bikini and cover-up, the rest of our group trailing behind her in a nice, straight line.

I pretended to pout. "Sorry, Alice," I said at the same time that Edward said, "You all have fun." Someone, it seemed, wasn't making apologies.

The foursome nodded and paraded out into the blazing sunshine, each person mumbling something resembling goodbye as they pulled sunglasses over their eyes.

"Shots?" Edward asked as soon as they were out of earshot.

Texts From Last Night

I nodded eagerly as he stood and strutted over to the pantry. "Tequila, vodka, gin, or rum?" he asked, his head buried in the cabinets. "Or all four?"

I shook my head. Remembering the old rhyme of 'beer before liquor, never been sicker' I announced, "No mixing," in an adamant tone. "We're already taking chances with beer before liquor."

"True. So, tequila, then?" I heard the unmistakable sound of bottles being rearranged in the cabinet before he stood with a full bottle of the liquor; the label was printed in Spanish making it unreadable to me, but I could tell it was the good stuff. Thank God Alice had expensive taste.

I jumped up from my chair. "Yes, tequila! I think there are some limes in the refrigerator." I moved to get them as Edward collected shot glasses.

After grabbing the citrusy fruit, I picked the salt up and met Edward at the island in the middle of the kitchen. "Do we want to do this in here?" I asked.

He shrugged. "We could go up to my balcony," was his simple offer.

"Your balcony?" I blanched, not believing that he had been given a room with a balcony.

Edward nodded. "Yes, my balcony. I was the second one here, so I got to choose my room right after Alice and Jasper."

Of course he did.

"Let's go up there, then."

After slicing a lime into small, perfect wedges, Edward and I traipsed through the house and up to his room where his private balcony was waiting.

It felt strangely normal and comfortable to be spending time alone with him. Though our friends weren't too far away, it was nice knowing that they wouldn't be running in and accidentally interrupting a private moment.

Texts From Last Night

Upon entering Edward's room, I forced myself to look away from the king sized bed that looked unspeakably comfortable; it was heads and tails above the double bed that occupied my room. Instead, I kept my eyes trained on the back of Edward's head as she glided through the room to open the French doors.

"Will they be able to see up us here?" I asked as he pulled the doors open, the sun and salty air hitting my skin immediately.

He shrugged and turned around rapidly, taking me by surprise. His arms flew to my shoulders and he pulled me close as he stepped backwards onto the balcony, taking me with him; the bottle of tequila residing in his right hand bounced against my back gently as we walked. Without prompting, my hands dropped the small bag containing the limes, shot glasses, and saltshaker as my arms embraced his trim waist. When his backside hit the railing, he stopped.

Suddenly, his lips were on mine as he kissed me soundly, catching me off guard. I didn't even attempt to hide the whimper that came from my mouth when he pulled away.

"Did you hear any squealing?" he whispered into my ear in a deep, husky tone that made my knees weak.

"No," I answered, unsure of the reason for his question as my heavily lidded eyes opened to meet his.

"Then I'm pretty sure we're safe." He was smirking down at me, his arms loosening their hold on my shoulders.

I took a small step back. "You play dirty," I commented.

His smirk slid into a lopsided grin. "I will neither confirm nor deny the fact," he muttered. "Now, ground rules?"

I arched an eyebrow. "Rules?"

Texts From Last Night

"For the game," he explained. "How the winner is decided and the winner's reward."

I giggled. "I'm pretty sure we both know who's going to win, Edward."

"We do?" He asked in a playful tone.

I nodded. "Think about it, your sheer body mass indicates that you'll have a higher alcohol tolerance than me," I said. My explanation seemed so obvious; I wondered why he hadn't thought of it first.

"So, what you're saying is that this is basically an excuse to get drunk together? Lower inhibitions?" His eyes narrowed as he took a step towards me, closing the small gap between us.

Where had chivalrous Edward from the night before gone? I wasn't sure how to react to this new, forward Edward. Not that I was complaining.

My mouth fell open and I gaped up at him. Had I been implying that? I'll admit that the thought *had* briefly crossed my mind, but only fleetingly and in the middle of the night when he wasn't around.

"No," I paused, "well, maybe. I don't know."

"Bella," Edward prodded, "are you trying to get me drunk and take advantage of me?" His tone was teasing as he trailed a finger down my jaw line, but the darkening of his eyes told me that he was somewhat fond of the idea, thrilled with it even.

I smiled innocently and shrugged. "You'll never know, will you?" I asked, avoiding his question by throwing him another one.

He growled playfully, sliding to the right to grab the bag that held the shot glasses and limes. "We definitely need rules, then," he muttered as he began to empty the bag of its contents.

Texts From Last Night

I tapped my chin with my index finger as I moved to sit in one of the desk chairs. "Winner?" I asked.

He shrugged. "I suppose winner is declared when the other person refuses to drink any more."

"I can deal with that. What about the winner's reward?" My mind was racing with ideas, but they were all naughty and would undoubtedly result in the two of us naked.

Edward's attention shifted from where he was carefully arranging the limes and shot glasses on the small table to me. Shit, his eyes were darker with desire than I had even seen them. Maybe I should rethink the naked reward?

He licked his lips, an action that I could help but mirror. "The winner..." he trailed off.

"Gets help from the loser getting ready for dinner," I blurted out the first thing that came to mind, suddenly nervous about what he was going to come up with. His eyes were such a dangerously dark shade of green. *What the Hell, Bella?*

Edward grinned. "I can deal with that," he said, using my words from just seconds earlier.

I held out my right hand and said, "Shake on it?"

He nodded, bringing his hand to mine. Instead of a quick, simple shake, though, he used our connection to pull me forward. A short peck on the lips followed and then he stated, "I prefer to kiss on it."

"Fair enough," I said in an airy tone, caught off guard by his close proximity and the way the sea breeze was blowing his distinct scent all around me.

After releasing my hand, Edward looked down at his watch. "So, first shot, 12:37 p.m.," he said as he moved to hand me a shot glass.

Texts From Last Night

While he filled it with the tequila, I grabbed the salt and licked the skin on my left wrist before dumping the white crystals on it. When finished, I traded Edward the saltshaker for a lime wedge.

I watched with hooded eyes as he sensually licked his own wrist, his eyes never leaving mine as he did. There was nothing innocent about his actions; he knew exactly what he was doing.

After dumping salt onto his own hand, he reached for a lime. Holding up his shot glass, he toasted simply, "To challenges."

I grinned, clinking his glass with mine. "To challenges," I echoed before licking my wrist and downing the shot. To chase the liquid down, I quickly lifted the lime to my mouth, savoring the bitter taste of the fruit before pulling the rind from between my lips.

Edward hissed as he removed his own lime from his mouth. "Damn, I haven't had a tequila shot in so long. And definitely not this early in the day," he explained.

I giggled at his reaction to the liquor. "I haven't done shots of *anything* this early since...my twenty first birthday," I admitted in a wistful tone.

"That was a shit show if I've ever seen one," Edward commented.

I nodded in agreement. "I was a mess."

"You were," he said with a lopsided grin. "A hot mess, though."

xXx

Bella POV

September 2008, Junior Year

(785): First shot of my 21 st . 11 a.m. in econ class. Success.

Texts From Last Night

" Pssst, Bella," Rose hissed from her seat in the aisle next to me. In the front of the classroom, a slideshow detailing the supply and demand curve was being skimmed through by a T.A.

I turned to her quickly, ignoring the annoyed looks from our classmates due to the tiny ruckus we were causing. I glared at them. Hell, you only turn twenty-one once, and I would be damned if I let a silly little class keep me from enjoy my day. Being the first of our group to become legal, I was aiming to set the bar high, beginning as early as possible.

" Huh?" I asked as I leaned over.

She grinned at me, the look on her face screaming that she was up to something sneaky. After holding up an index finger telling me to pause, she leaned over to retrieve something from her purse.

When her blonde head resurfaced, she was holding a tiny water bottle in her right hand. Though it was only halfway filled with clear liquid, I was certain it wasn't water. I immediately had the urge to apologize for making fun of her for drinking out of the small, 'what's the point' bottles.

" Vodka?" I whispered hopefully. A red haired boy with lots of freckles turned to around and made the universal sound for 'shut the fuck up' at me, an angry glare on his face.

Nerd.

She nodded. "Happy birthday," she whispered in response before sliding the water bottle across her desk to me. I grabbed it eagerly, twisting the cap off and downing the liquor before someone in class smelled it.

Apparently, Rose was going to help me with the bar setting.

" Thanks, Rose," I said as I recapped the now empty bottle and handed it to her.

Texts From Last Night

She waved me off. "What are friends for, right? By the way, are we still heading straight to the bar after class? Emmett and Edward want to know," she gestured to her BlackBerry.

I nodded. "Yeah, the one that opens at noon," I told her. "Temple."

She nodded and began furiously typing a message to our friends. "They're in," she leaned over and whispered a few seconds later.

I smiled as my limbs started to tingle a little from the liquor.

"It's the birthday girl!" Emmett announced as Rose and I entered Temple Grille. He was sitting at a round booth in the back with the rest of our crew, plus Tanya. I glared at her as we approached because it was my birthday and I could. Also, because I hated her and always glared at her...today, I just had an excuse.

Jake was, like always, at football practice and would be meeting up with us later.

"Yeah!" I exclaimed as he held out a double shot of something green to greet me. "It's my birthday, bitches!"

Without hesitation, I downed the liquid. Waiting for me on the table were four more, one from each of my friends.

Alice pulled out a camera and frowned. "Damn it, Em, I wanted to document each of her shots," she said in a pouty voice. I could tell she was a little upset that I had vetoed wearing a sparkly, furry crown that said, "I'm 21!" across the front.

"It's okay, Alice. Here, Emmett, hand me the empty glass back. Rose, give me the water bottle from earlier." I figured that if she couldn't document the actual shots being taken, she could get the next best thing.

Texts From Last Night

Once I had the remnants of my first two shots in my hands, I stood up and posed. Alice was thrilled that, for once, I wasn't complaining over her obsessive picture taking.

When the first picture of the day was taken, I made a move for the next available shot glass.

"Wait," Edward said, holding up his hand to stop me.

I huffed; annoyed that he was standing between my celebration and me. "What?" I bit out.

He smirked at me as he held a sharpie in my direction. "Give me your arm," he ordered.

I held out my right arm and asked, "What are you doing?"

He chuckled, looking up at me from his eyelashes as he murmured, "Marking you." With that, he drew three lines on my arm. "To keep up with your shots," he added.

Smiling, I nodded. "I like that plan," I commented. "Can I take my next shot now?"

"That one is from me," Jasper announced as I lifted the glass to my mouth.

"Thanks, J." I winked playfully at him, he winked back, and I downed the liquor in one swift gulp. "Shit, what was that? Rubbing alcohol?" Out of the corner of my eye, I saw the unmistakable flash of Alice's camera.

It was repulsive and I felt like my throat and esophagus were on fire.

Jasper chuckled. "Moonshine," he explained with a proud grin. "I snuck it in. You might wanna drink a glass of water before drinking anything else, it'll knock you on your ass."

Texts From Last Night

" Fuck no," I said, already feeling the effects of the shots I had already downed. "Just hand me another shot." As I waited, I held my arm out for Edward to add another dash.

He did before handing me two glasses. I raised an eyebrow in questioning. "Irish car bomb," he offered.

I grinned; I had mentioned to him a few weeks ago that I had always wanted to try one.

" Just drop the shot glass into the regular sized glass," he added in explanation.

" You remembered," I commented with a smile. "Thanks, Edward."

He nodded his welcome as I dropped the small glass into the larger one and lifted the drink to my lips. Alice took a picture.

After the Irish Car Bomb, I declared that I was in need of a little break and probably some food.

" You never had lunch?" Alice asked in a worried tone, lowering her camera to the table since I was obviously taking a break.

" Um, no?" I said innocently. "I had breakfast, though."

" That was four hours ago and it was only a little bowl of cereal," Rose added, standing and marching over to the bar to order a burger and fries for me.

" That was stupid, Isabella," Tanya remarked in her nasally, bitch voice. She always found it necessary to call me by my full name like she was my grandmother or something. It bothered me.

I glared at her, already starting to feel the effects of the liquor. She glared back, a smug grin on her face.

Texts From Last Night

"Ladies," Emmett cut in, "back down."

I released the tension in my shoulders and relaxed against the booth, enjoying the strong buzz that was starting to take over.

Within minutes, Rose had reappeared with food and my favorite bar song, Benny and the Jets, was playing over the speakers. All was right with the world.

I took a total of three bites of my food before I was standing on the booth, the heels of my brown boots meeting the grainy wood of the seat.

"Bella, you should eat," Alice scolded weakly from beneath me as she grabbed her camera to document the moment.

I shook my head down at her and threw my arms into the air. "It's my birthday, I can do what I want," I yelled to no one in particular as I began to twirl around to the chorus of the song.

*Say, Candy and Ronnie, have you seen them yet
But they're so spaced out, B-B-B-Bennie and the Jets*

I attempted to twist my hips to the music and sing, not caring that I looked like a fool to the rest of the patrons as I went to my happy place with Elton John.

*Oh but they're weird and they're wonderful
Oh Bennie she's really keen*

In a swift move, I leaned down and grabbed another shot, this one dark amber. SoCo and Lime, I figured. Edward had moved to the other side of the booth and I needed him to mark my arm.

She's got electric boots a mohair suit

I wasn't about to let a measly little table get in my way, so I stepped up onto it briefly before planting my feet on either side of Edward. "Mark me," I slurred

Texts From Last Night

as I held my arm into his face.

He obliged and I accidentally on purpose stepped on Tanya's hand before climbing back up on the table.

*You know I read it in a magazine
B-B-B-Bennie and the Jets*

When the song ended, I sat back down in the booth and reached for my food as if nothing had happened.

"That was quite a show," Tanya commented, her tone full of sarcasm and hate.

I glared at her. "You can leave, if you like," I said, my mouth full of food. I'm sure it was disgusting, but I couldn't have cared less.

She pouted and turned to Edward for support. He merely shrugged his shoulders and said, "She's the birthday girl, T."

She huffed and puffed like the big bad wolf before finally yelling for everyone to move so that she could exit the booth. "Don't call me tonight, Edward," she said on her way to the door.

I giggled and reached for another shot. "Sorry, I didn't mean to make her mad." Of course, I was lying. There was little I loved more than claiming any sort of victory over Tanya.

"Don't worry, B," Alice said as I held my arm out to Edward. "They'll be back together by next weekend."

"It's true," Edward sighed as he drew a fifth line on my arm and handed me the final shot from the table.

xXx

Texts From Last Night

I quirked an eyebrow in response to his comment. "God, I must have had twelve marks on my arm by the end of the night...but, a hot mess?" I asked.

He nodded. "Bella, you had to have known you were--are--beautiful. Even when you're so drunk you can barely function." The end of his statement caused him to chuckle briefly.

I shook my head back and forth, training my eyes on the wooden floor of the balcony. "Girls like Tanya and Rose are beautiful. Bella Swans are not beautiful," I argued.

He moved to the edge of his seat, reaching over to take my hands in his. "Bella Swans *are* beautiful," he said in a sure tone. "I might have been too preoccupied to know it then, but you are breathtaking. Always have been. Did you never notice the guys on campus craning their necks to get a second look as you pranced by?"

My eyes flew up to meet his, still so dark and so full of desire. "Really?" my voice was weak, but the confidence radiating from his statement had me starting to believe his words.

He nodded, moving his hands to bury them in my hair. Pulling me closer, he brought his lips to mine and kissed me fiercely.

I sighed into his mouth as he slid off of his chair so that he was resting on his knees in front of me. Opening my mouth for him as I slid to the edge of my own chair, his tongue slid in quickly as I reached out to grab onto to him, to pull him closer.

My hands met his face, my fingers being prickled by the stubble that was beginning to form along his jaw line. I wanted to feel it beneath my lips.

Edward was lavishing attention on my lower lip when I pulled back and moved my lips to his jaw, leaving warm wet kisses as I made a trail from his chin to his hairline. The further I went, the further his head fell back in pleasure. "Bella," he sighed as the desire that he had awoken the night before began to

Texts From Last Night

course through my body again.

As I retraced my trail back towards his lips, I slowed my kisses, aware that if I didn't slow us down, all bets would be off, literally and figuratively.

I stopped in front of his lips and murmured, "We should take another shot."

He nodded mutely as I sat back in my chair and reached for the tequila, a playful idea entering my mind. Maybe it was a combination of the beer from earlier and the first shot entering my bloodstream, or maybe it was Edward's compliments, but suddenly, I was emboldened.

I grabbed both glasses and the bottle, handing them both off to Edward with a look that told him that was his job. With a smirk on my lips, I reached for a lime and the saltshaker. After a moment of contemplation, I lifted my right arm to my mouth and placed my tongue in the crook of my elbow, licking until there was enough moisture to hold the salt.

"Bella," Edward said in a warning tone when he noticed my actions.

"Hmm?" I asked, looking at him innocently.

He narrowed his eyes at my arm.

"Oh, this?" My voice was still innocent as I held it out towards him as I reached for a lime.

He nodded, an odd-sounding whimper coming from his mouth. Ignoring him, I placed the lime in my mouth.

"Do you want me to," he gestured to my arm, then to the lime.

I nodded, grinning around the piece of citrus. His eyes widened before he grinned, a full on, shit-eating, happy grin.

Texts From Last Night

Slowly, he leaned forward, reaching for my arm in the process. I had expected him to simply lean forward and lick the salt from my skin, but he surprised me and took his time. Beginning at the base of my wrist, he placed slow, gentle kisses up my arm until he reached the crook of my elbow and opened his mouth, his tongue darting out to collect the salt.

Moving quickly, he grabbed one of the shot glasses and downed the liquid before leaning forward to dig his teeth into the lime wedge. His lips lingered against mine for a moment before he squeezed the juice out of the fruit and pulled away with it.

"Damn," I said when my mouth was empty and I was able to speak again.

Edward winked as he reached up to pull the rind out of his mouth. "Damn, indeed." His eyes were twinkling with joy and happiness and, as always, lust.

"My turn?" I asked in a hopeful tone.

Three Tequila, Floor

A/N: A little Edward point of view for my lovely readers :) Also, Twilight still isn't mine...I just checked.

Chapter Twelve: Three Tequila, Floor

EPOV

"My turn?" Bella asked in an unnecessarily hopeful tone. I mean, really, did she even have to ask whether or not I wanted her to fucking lick my skin after she had so generously offered hers to me?

I winked at her. "Just tell me where," I said boldly, my statement a sure testament to the tequila that was beginning to enter my bloodstream.

Her eyes widened and she sat back a little, clearly surprised by my answer. As she plotted her move, she pulled her lower lip in between her teeth like she always did when she was nervous or unsure of herself.

"Will you take off your shirt?" she asked slowly, carefully.

I nearly choked on my own spit--that was the last thing I had expected her to request. How fucking long had she been such a vixen?

Misreading my reaction, Bella quickly made a move to cover her tracks. "I mean, if you don't want...I could just...I mean...your elbow would work, too, or your neck," she spluttered.

"No, no, I want to," I shook my head as I spoke. "I was just surprised is all."

"Oh, okay," she grinned at my answer and then fell silent, clearly waiting for me to oblige her.

Texts From Last Night

I smirked and wordlessly lifted my black t-shirt over my head before tossing it to the side carelessly. When I glanced at Bella, she was biting that damn lip again.

Without looking, she reached to her left to pick up the shaker of salt. As she did, I reached for a lime to place in my mouth.

"Can you, um, lie down?" She was so nervous--it was adorable. "On the floor," she added, pointing to the grainy wood floor of the balcony.

I nodded and slid out of my chair and onto the floor, moving quickly until I was supine. I was dying to know what she was up to, but I didn't bother to ask. The suspense she was leaving me in was hot as Hell--I was getting hard from anticipation alone. Well, anticipation and tequila.

"That's better," she mumbled and I grinned around the lime that I had placed in my mouth.

I was definitely a fan of bold, buzzed Bella. Tequila was quickly becoming my new best friend.

Suddenly, and without warning, she moved so that she was straddling my thighs, her hair whispering across my bare stomach as she leaned forward and licked a blazing trail across my navel. My body stilled in complete shock.

Based on the nervous tone of her voice earlier, I would have thought it impossible for her to gain enough courage to take so much control. But, damn, she was surprising me. Instantly, I was craving more, much more, than she was giving me. My dick had immediately responded to her; there was no doubt in my mind that she could feel my growing erection beneath her body.

"Shit, I forgot the salt and my shot," she said before climbing off me to retrieve the necessities. It's possible that I groaned a little as she brushed against my hardness in her haste.

Texts From Last Night

She moved quickly, dropping the salt onto my wet skin as she settled onto my thighs again. My hands flew to her hips once she was settled in an effort to keep her from inching upward. I knew my efforts were pointless, though; she could feel the sexual energy as well as I could.

And then she was leaning forward again, her tongue retracing the path it had made earlier as she gathered up the trail of salt in preparation for her shot. I had to bite my tongue to keep the moan from escaping my lips in response to her actions. It didn't work. I felt her chuckle against my stomach as the sound escaped.

Oh, she knew exactly what she was doing to me. And she liked it. *Fuck*, she was going to be the death of me.

She sat up quickly to throw the shot back before she was leaning down again, this time trailing lazy, wet kisses from the base of my throat upward until she was nibbling on my chin. Her ability to go so long between the tequila and the lime was a feat in itself, but my mind was more focused on how amazing it felt to have her body pressed against mine.

When her lips closed around the lime in my mouth, my hands tightened around her hips. She gently sucked the juice out of the lime before pulling it from between my lips, dropping it onto the floor beside my head, and grinning down at me with fire dancing in her eyes.

I licked my lips, collecting the lime juice that had spread around them. Bella was glorious, all glowing and lovely as her hair fell around her face, highlighted by the sun that was gleaming behind her.

"Your turn?" she asked playfully before rolling off me without further contact.

Damn tease.

I sat up slowly and regained my composure. "Yes, my turn."

Texts From Last Night

It would have been wise of me to grab the shot glasses and tequila and insist that our next shot be taken in the innocent, traditional fashion. Unfortunately, or fortunately, depending on who you're asking, the wise part of my anatomy wasn't doing the majority of decision making in that moment. Instead, I was starting to think with my, uh, little brain.

Bella was sitting up Indian style, her arms stretched behind her supporting her body. I didn't bother to hide the perusal of her figure that I made as I plotted my move. Even in my inebriated state, my eyes skimmed every perfect inch of skin that I could see and my mind imagined the bits that I couldn't.

Having her take off her shirt so that I could repeat her actions was definitely not an option; if her shirt came off, all of my control would be swept away with it. Her arm was also out, having already gone that route. That left me with two options since her back was inherently included with her stomach: her legs and her neck.

Her neck was tempting as always, though my tongue had tasted there before. The desire to taste something new, something unfamiliar to me was strong so, I chose leg.

"You're plotting," Bella observed at the same moment I came to a decision.

I chuckled. "I prefer to call it strategizing." Her eyes narrowed.

"Whatever you want to call it, have you come up with something?" Her tone was playful, giddy almost.

I nodded slowly. "I have."

"Are you going to share?"

"I'm about to," I said before moving to pull the tequila off of the small table it had been on before the body shot extravaganza had begun. "You could start by lying down...on your stomach."

Texts From Last Night

Her eyes widened in question no doubt wondering what path I had chosen. "Okay..." she said as she moved to lie on her stomach, her head propped up on her hands.

Employing the same approach as she had earlier, I leaned down without warning and left a trail of wetness on the back of her knee that I quickly doused with salt. As I went through the familiar routine, I ghosted my unoccupied hand across her calf. I heard her inhale sharply when my tongue met the often-ignored skin. Silently, I handed her a lime, leaving it up to her as to whether or not she wanted it in her mouth before returning my attention to the lower half of her body.

With the fingers of my left hand, I traced a teasing path from the middle of her calf to her knee. In response to my touch, goose bumps rose on her skin despite the warm breeze circling around us. "Fuck," she breathed in response to my simple touch.

After making the same circuit from her calf to where her short shorts ended, I leaned over and slowly trailed kisses along the back of her thigh, savoring the sharp intake of breath that came from her the moment my lips met her skin. Eventually, I moved on to licking the salt from the back of her knee; her skin tasted as sweet there as anticipated.

I sat up and swallowed the shot quickly before stretching out next to her and searching for the lime; it was in between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand. "Looking for this?" she asked, holding it in front of me with a playful grin.

I nodded, my throat burning from the tequila. She moved her hand forward and I met her halfway, taking the lime into my mouth and biting down quickly and dropping it from my mouth when the juice was gone.

Bella and I were lying parallel to one other, both of our heads propped up by an arm as we stared at each other, both of us waiting for the other to make a move.

Texts From Last Night

"Are you giving up?" I asked when she didn't seem to be preparing for another shot.

She shook her head back and forth. "Of course not, Cullen. Who do you think I am? Alice?"

"Fair enough," I answered. "It's just that...it's your turn." My mind was racing as I tried to guess where she might go next.

She smirked. "I know."

"What do you want me to do?" Damn if I wasn't putty in her hands.

"Nothing."

What?

My eyebrows shot up. "Nothing?"

She nodded. "I think it would be best if I took care of this one myself. Also, you should probably put your shirt back on." At the end of her statement, she nodded towards the beach and frowned.

I sat up quickly and turned to see what had captured her attention. After scanning our friends' set up on the beach, I didn't see anything amiss.

"See Alice?" Bella asked as she sat up and grabbed my shirt.

I shook my head. No Alice.

"I saw her skipping towards the house a few minutes ago," she said quickly as I pulled my shirt over my head.

"Shit," I mumbled.

Texts From Last Night

"Here," Bella said as she handed me a full shot glass and a lime. "Pretend we're toasting to something really important, like the wedding."

I chuckled and agreed, holding up the glass she had given to me and muttered in a bored tone, "To Jasper and Alice."

She giggled and we downed our shots at the same time, both inserting the limes into our mouths as a squeal sounded from the doorway.

Alice.

"What are you two doing?" she said in a worried voice as she stepped onto the balcony.

Bella turned to face her. "Shots?" she said in an innocent tone.

"But...but we have dinner reservations in two and a half hours." Alice's tiny foot was stomping on the ground. "And, Bella, we have final dress fittings in the morning and brunch...with my mother, Jasper's mother, and my grandmother."

"And?" Bella asked with a challenging stare on her face. Shit, she was drunker than I had realized--bold Bella was in full force.

Alice's eyes narrowed and I'm pretty sure that, if it were possible, her head would have exploded. "You cannot be a mess at dinner and you cannot be hungover tomorrow. And you," her index finger pointed in my direction, "you have tux fittings and brunch with the men."

I shrugged. "Don't pretend you don't know that brunch with the Hales and your father is code for drinking whiskey at noon, Alice."

The Hale men were notorious for starting the party early. Apparently, morning drinking was okay as long as it was done at the country club.

My statement earned more stomping from the frantic pixie.

Texts From Last Night

"Whatever," she said. "Just know that I will very disappointed in both of you if you ruin tonight and tomorrow for Jasper and me with your childish actions."

"Yes, Alice," Bella and I said in unison, our mocking tones matching.

"And you will be at dinner? Presentable? We will be dining at a very nice restaurant downtown."

We both nodded. "We will be downstairs with time to spare," I added.

Her eyes narrowed down at us, her eyes calculating as she bore an angry stare into our faces. "Good," she said before turning on her heel and marching back into the house.

Bella turned to me as soon as Alice was out of earshot and fell over in a fit of giggles.

"That was close," she gasped between bursts of laughter. "I felt like a damn teenager being caught drinking for the first time."

I joined in on the laughter. "Damn, so did I. Is she always that demanding?"

"Always, don't you remember?" Bella confirmed. "And because of that, I need another shot."

"Me too," I admitted. "What does that bring the count to?"

Bella bit her damn lip again and shrugged. This time, I couldn't help but lean across and save it with my own teeth. She gasped when I pulled away quickly.

"I had to," was my simple explanation when I settled back into my sitting position.

She smiled. "It's okay," she said. "I have no idea what the shot count is, though. Not too high, I'm sure."

Texts From Last Night

I nodded my head in agreement. "How about we do a few more vanilla? Just to be on the safe side?"

"I think that's a good idea," she murmured before reaching for the tequila.

One hour and three shots later, Bella and I were both officially drunk. As we lay on the floor, our legs against the balcony's railing so that our bodies were both making an L shape, we attempted to carry on something that resembled a conversation. In reality, though, it was just a lot of random statements. Eventually, we both gave up.

"Draw?" Bella asked, reaching across with her right hand to shake on it.

I nodded my head, ignoring her hand and moving to kiss her. "I kiss on it, remember?"

She giggled. "Sounds familiar." Her voice was slurring, but her eyes were alight with a carefree happiness that I was seeing for the first time since college.

"We should probably start getting ready for dinner," I commented, making no move to get up.

"Yeah..." Bella agreed lazily. "I need a shower, for starters." She gestured to her elbow and knee that were no doubt sticky from my tongue and the salt.

My mind was instantaneously filled with images of Bella in the shower, the water cascading down her body. "I do too."

We turned to face each other. "We could conserve water," Bella suggested with a wink.

It sounded like a great idea to me. "I like how you think," I reached across and tapped my index finger on her nose.

Texts From Last Night

She smiled at me and moved closer, her eyes on my lips. It was obvious she wanted to kiss me, but I was still a little scared of another Alice entry.

"No," I said, holding up a finger to her lips. "Inside."

She nodded. "Let's get a move on, then."

I nodded and stood slowly, the world spinning around me as I did. Shit, I was drunker than I had realized.

This could be very, very bad.

Bella scrambled to her feet before my mind told my body to help her up. Clumsily, she wrapped her arm around my waist and pulled me inside, sliding and locking the door behind us. I wasn't sure why she locked it, but I'm sure it made sense to her drunken self.

I gently pushed her towards the bathroom, telling her that I was going to lock the actual bedroom door to be safe.

Fuck me, when I entered the bathroom, she was sitting on the edge of the Jacuzzi tub wearing only her panties and bra. "Bella," I said in a warning tone as my eyes raked over her body.

I would not fuck her while we were drunk. I just wouldn't.

Shit, this is going to be hard.

She licked her lips. "Edward," she drawled my name, enticing me to her near-nakedness.

And then, she was giggling.

"What are you giggling for?" I asked, suddenly self-conscious.

Texts From Last Night

She shook her head back and forth. "It's just...do you remember that time at the beach after graduation? The bathtub?"

I narrowed my eyes at her, my mind drawing a complete blank, before I remembered.

xXx

Edward POV

Summer 2010, Post-Graduation

(250): do you remember how we all fit in that bathtub?

(1-250): tequila

"To the real world," Jasper announced as he held up his shot glass.

From our seats in the sand, we all mirrored his actions, echoed his toast, and downed our tequila.

Alice was next. "To being friends...forever," she said, a tear gleaming in her eye.

Like with Jasper's toast, we all echoed and swallowed the liquor.

The cycle continued until we had gone around the circle, each of us equipped with our own small bottle of tequila, our own saltshaker, and our own little bowl of limes. It had all been Alice's idea: a final toast to our college years on our last night at the beach.

My turn was last. "To...the hot tub!" I toasted, knowing it was stupid but not caring because everyone else had taken the good ones.

I was met with blank stares from my friends. "What?" I asked.

Texts From Last Night

"Edward," Emmett began, "there is no hot tub here."

"Yes, there is," I argued. I knew that I had seen one somewhere in his parent's enormous beach house.

He shook his head. "No," he paused, "there isn't."

"But it's fucking freezing out here and the water would be warm and...really?"

"Really," Rosalie deadpanned.

I turned and glared at her. "Well...fuck."

Jasper reached across and patted me on the back. "It's okay, man."

I nodded. "I'm just going to go inside and shower, then," I said, standing slowly and wobbling a bit.

Emmett jumped up and stopped me. "Wait!" he exclaimed. "We could always do what I used to do when I was kid."

I cocked my head to one side as I stared him down, wondering where on earth this story was headed. "Enlighten me," I said.

He looked confused, so I chose a different strategy. "Sorry, Em, tell me what you did as a kid."

"I just filled the Jacuzzi in the master bath with water and pretended it was a hot tub."

"You're kidding."

He shook his head back and forth. "Scout's honor."

"You weren't a boy scout, dumbass," Rose yelled from behind him.

Texts From Last Night

" So?" He turned around to face her.

" So," she said, "you can't say it, then."

" I can say what I want, Rose," he argued. "It even has those jets that make it seem more realistic."

I grabbed him by the shoulders and turned him back around. "You know what, Em?" I asked, eager to quit the arguing. "Let's do it."

" Yes! To the bathtub!"

It really didn't take that much convincing to get everyone else in on the plan to play in the bathtub. Within ten minutes, we were all standing in the bathroom wearing varying styles of swimwear as the water flowed into the porcelain tub.

" Is this shit kickin' or what?" Emmett asked as he fiddled with his iHome in search of the perfect music.

We all slurred in agreement.

Bella was the first to climb in, followed by Jasper who pulled Alice into his lap. I climbed in next to Bella, not bothering to keep my body far from hers; the Jacuzzi wasn't small by normal standards, but it wasn't made for six people. Emmett and Rose were last to join, taking up the remaining space.

Once we were all in, we talked and laughed and drank some more until the couples got handsy. Bella and I turned to each other and rolled our eyes. Water was splashing over the sides of the tub and, thanks to Emmett, there were water guns being used for extra fun.

" Wanna leave them to it?" she asked me with a slight chuckle.

I nodded quickly, eager to get away from the PDA. "Yeah, after you," I gestured for her to step out.

Texts From Last Night

After grabbing towels, we slipped out of the bathroom and down to the kitchen. I'm certain that neither of the couples noticed our exit.

"Emmett and his ideas..." Bella murmured as she dug through the cabinets, no doubt in search of something good like cookies or cheese-its.

"It wasn't so bad," I said. "There was a jet in my back."

Bella rolled her eyes. "Well, lucky you," she said.

"Lucky me," I agreed as she handed me the box of Oreos she had discovered.

"Should we check on them in a bit? You know, make sure no one has drowned?" she asked before popping a cookie into her mouth.

I shook my head. "No," I answered quickly, afraid of what we might stumble upon--once Rose and Emmett or Jasper and Alice got into the 'zone' as Bella as I liked to call it, all bets were off, no matter who was around.

Bella scrunched up her nose. "You're probably right."

xXx

"How could I forget?" I asked, our laughter filling the room around us. "That was a fun night."

She nodded. "Yeah, it was. Such a mess the next morning, though."

"It was," I confirmed, making a conscious effort to keep my eyes on her face and away from her breasts. "Much like we are right now," I was eager to shift the conversation back to the present.

Bella shook her head as if bringing herself back to 2013. "Right," she said, "shower."

"Yes, shower."

Texts From Last Night

She stood and walked over to me. I couldn't take my eyes off of her perfect curves and shapely legs.

"You have on too many clothes, Cullen," she said as she gripped the hem of my shirt. "They might cause a problem if you're trying to get clean."

Or dirty.

"As will these," I said, reaching down to pop the elastic band of her panties.

She gasped. "Edward," she said in a scandalized tone and playfully slapped me across the chest.

I trapped her hand and pulled her to me, stealing the kiss that had been stopped on the balcony. The playful, innocent tone of the last few minutes was gone in an instant, replaced with the damn near constant sexual tension that saturated the air when we were alone.

Our kisses were frantic, tongue and teeth and lips everywhere as clothes were shed and tossed away and one of us, I'm not sure which one, turned on the shower. We stepped inside, arms wrapped around each other, hands everywhere and bodies pressed together, as we stepped beneath the warm spray.

Not now, a voice inside my head reminded me as our wet bodies collided and Bella, or maybe it was me, moaned at the contact .

Damn.

I reluctantly pulled back from her, my hands stalling on her hips. She whimpered and launched herself forward again. "Edward," she whined against my lips as her hands landed on my shoulders.

My frustrated groan echoed off the shower walls as her hands trailed down my chest and stomach, stopping just above where I wanted them to travel the most.

Texts From Last Night

"We can't do this, Bella, not now, not like this." The words were painful to say as I grasped her hands in mine.

"Why not?" she asked, her breathing heavier than it had been moments ago.

Shit, she was turned on. I could tell just by the tone of her voice before she began to trail kisses and licks across my collarbone, her hands slowly moving lower, just inches from my aching dick.

"Because," I forced myself to say despite her distracting nips and bites, "if we do this now, there's a possibility I won't remember it in a couple of hours and I would hate myself for that."

Really, I knew that I would remember, but I wasn't so sure about Bella; there was no way her tiny body had anywhere near the same alcohol tolerance as mine.

She pulled back, moving her hands up to thread them through the hair, skimming them along my sides on the way. "Really?"

As her fingernails scratched against my scalp, it took every ounce of willpower in my body to say, "Yes," in a weak tone as my eyes rolled into the back of my head.

She nodded in understanding. "Okay," she whispered as she looked down at our feet. "We'll just shower." Her tone was pouty and sad and it pained me to make her stop. More than she would ever know, I'm sure.

I placed my index finger under her chin and lifted her head. "Hey," I said, "blame Carlisle Cullen for raising me a gentleman. I promise you, if I didn't respect you at all, we would have fucked ten minutes ago. Forget that, we would've fucked on the balcony."

Bella snorted and took a small step back. "We're naked. In the shower...and you just mentioned your father?"

Texts From Last Night

I shrugged. "It was the first thing that came to mind."

"Just hand me the shampoo," she said with a smirk, her anger over being stopped seeming to have dissipated.

We finished our shower quickly after it was clear that there wasn't going to be any activities that didn't aid the general getting clean process. As we were toweling off, though, Bella gasped.

"What's wrong?" I asked quickly.

She turned to me with wide, worried eyes. "I didn't get clothes out of my room before the shower and our rooms are at opposite ends of the hall. Someone will see me if I try to sneak over there in a towel."

"I'll go get you something," I said without hesitation.

Bella's eyes lit up. "You would?" she asked.

I nodded. "Sure, just let me throw on some pants. What do you want to wear?"

"It doesn't matter. You can just choose something as long as it's something Alice will approve of for dinner at that fancy place with the something or other," she said as I stepped into my room to get dressed. Her words were a little jumbled, and I knew I had made the right decision in the shower, no matter how hard it had been.

"Alice approved, got it," I said as I pulled the khakis I was planning to wear to dinner out of my closet and pulled them on, sans underwear. "Anything else?"

Bella didn't answer, so I stuck my head in the bathroom. She was standing there, biting that fucking lip again.

"Um, could you bring my make-up? And, um, don't forget...undergarments." She whispered the last word, her face reddening as if I hadn't just stood in the shower with her completely nude.

Texts From Last Night

Her *undergarments*, though? Shit, I hadn't even thought of that.

"They're in the top drawer of the dresser," she added. "Just, uh, grab whatever I guess."

"Okay," I squeaked out before practically running out of the room in search of clothes and, more importantly, Bella's panties and bra.

I stared at the top drawer of Bella's dresser for five minutes after choosing a navy sundress that I was sure would show off her tits. Yes, I had stopped us from making a rash decision in the shower, but I was still a warm-blooded man.

Shit, there were just so many damn options.

I desperately wanted to pull out the sexy pair that I found on the bottom, black and made entirely of lace, but I thought that might have been a little presumptuous. And then there was the simple cotton pair with little limes printed around the elastic band, but those seemed too childish and...friendly. Of all the things I was feeling toward her, friendly definitely wasn't one of them. Eventually, I settled on the black cotton pair with the ivory band made of lace; they were a little sweet and a little sexy.

After grabbing her make-up, the dress, the panties, and a strapless bra just in case she wanted one, I picked a pair of sandals for her to wear and darted out into the hallway as fast as I could.

"Edward?"

Fuck.

Get On My Level

Chapter Thirteen: Get On My Level

Alice was going to be *so* pissed. In less than an hour, Edward and I were expected downstairs to leave for dinner at some swanky restaurant downtown and I was completely and utterly shitfaced with no hope of sobriety reclaiming my body in the foreseeable future. Thank God Edward had volunteered to run down the hall and grab some clothes for me. I probably would have fallen in the hallway and just said, 'screw it,' and worn the damn towel to dinner.

I settled onto the edge of the bathtub while I waited for him to return, my eyes taking in the visible remnants of our afternoon. Clothes were scattered across the tile floor of the bathroom as steam from the shower circulated in the air, fogging both the mirrors and my vision. The faint scent of tequila and lime assaulted my senses, bringing to mind the fresh memories of our time on his balcony.

Oh, the body shots. When the idea first had first entered my mind, I had not envisioned them going that direction, expecting our tongues to stick to more vanilla locations--arms, wrists--rather than venturing into sexier, more enjoyable territory, like Edward's perfectly sculpted stomach. As I recalled how delicious the combination of the liquor and Edward's skin had tasted on my tongue, I considered sending a thank you note to the maker of whatever brand of tequila we had been drinking for making the day possible.

Then, the shower had happened. One minute I was standing in the bathroom waiting for him to lock the door to his room and join me, and the next I had stripped down to my underwear and was flush against his hard body. Something in the air changed; lines of friendship were blurred and quickly crossed. No longer were slowly making our way towards each other with innocent kisses and flirty banter. Suddenly, we had become potential lovers too frenzied and consumed with one another to break contact as we stepped into the shower.

Texts From Last Night

The water was hot, probably too hot, but with Edward's wet skin just inches from mine, I barely registered the scalding temperature. Where the air around us had been filled with tension before, it now crackled with pure, unadulterated lust.

The pull we felt towards one another was doubled as we stood in front of each other, wet and naked. Our mouths and hands were wandering wildly, the sound of the water hitting the tile as we wordlessly explored one another drowning our heavy breaths and gentle moans. Edward had tightened his grip and pulled our bodies together purposefully and then...Carlisle Cullen cockblocked us from nearly a thousand miles away.

Ever the gentleman, Edward murmured something about waiting and how he would have fucked me on the balcony if he hadn't been taught how to treat a lady properly since birth. Though my lady bits didn't agree with his chivalry, the rest of me was more than okay that he wasn't thinking of me as a quick lay while he was on vacation.

When my mind finished retracing the afternoon, I realized that the steam had fallen from the air, the mirrors were less fogged, and Edward was still down the hall retrieving my things.

I jumped up from the porcelain tub, wondering what he had gotten into other than my underwear drawer, and thoughtlessly made my way into the bedroom and over to the door. Cracking it open, I stuck my head out of the door in search of him.

"Edward," I hissed down the hall before noticing that he wasn't alone.

Shit.

Edward POV

"Edward?" I heard someone ask in a surprised tone as I exited Bella's room.

Fuck.

Texts From Last Night

I looked up from the pile of girly clothes in my arms to find Jasper standing in front of me with a goofy grin on his face.

"What's up, man?" He asked, his eyes clearly avoiding the bundle against my chest.

"I, uh," was all I could say.

Jasper folded his arms across his chest and eyed me up and down. "Are you wearing those gold gladiator sandals to dinner tonight, Edward?" He asked in a teasing tone, gesturing to the things in my hands.

I was dumbfounded. "Uh..." Fuck, why couldn't I come up with something legit to say?

"That's Bella's room isn't it?" He pointed to the doorway I had just emerged exited.

I nodded slowly. "It is," I answered warily.

"And those are her clothes?"

I nodded once more, confirming his suspicions. "She, uh..."

"Spit it out, Edward."

"She's in my room. She showered in there." There, I said it, figuring that Jasper could come to his own conclusions.

His eyes widened. "Alone?"

I bit my lip; apparently I had picked up the habit from Bella. "I was, uh, helping her. She's pretty wasted," I explained. "You know, from the tequila shots."

Jasper's head fell back as laughter bellowed from him.

Texts From Last Night

"Shut up, man," I hissed at him, leaning closer.

His laughter died down a bit as his gaze returned to meet mine. He appraised me with his eyes, wordlessly looking for the answers that I wasn't giving him.

"Shit," he said in a shocked tone as realization hit him. "You fucked her."

"No, I didn't," I answered quickly.

"You wanted to, though," he countered with a smirk.

I couldn't deny the fact, so I didn't say anything.

"Oh, you so did," Jasper said with a wide grin. "Where is she now?"

"In my room," I said through gritted teeth.

"Are you *planning* on fucking her?"

I rolled my eyes. "What's with the questions?"

Jasper shrugged. "Just wondering, man," he said. "The tension between the two of you is pretty intense."

"No, it's not," I answered defensively, sure that we had been pretty hands off in front of our friends.

Jasper arched an eyebrow at me. "You sure about that?"

I considered his comment, wondering if our friends had been discussing Bella and myself when we were out of earshot. The look on Jasper's face told me that they had. "Who else is in on it?"

Jasper chuckled. "Everyone but Emmett," he answered. "Rose said it was a bitch sitting with the two of you this morning in the kitchen and you know Alice, she's been thinking something was up since Sunday."

Texts From Last Night

"No shit?" I ran my hand through my hair as I asked.

At least he hadn't told me it was a bad idea, or that Alice had a 'bad feeling' about the two of us together. In fact, if I wasn't still a little bit buzzed, I would have said that he was almost happy with the idea of Bella and me being together.

"No shit," Jasper confirmed. Lifting his hand, he pointed behind me. "Uh, dude," he said.

"Edward," I heard my name being called for the second time in the span of ten minutes and spun around quickly to find the source.

Bella was standing in the doorway to my room wearing nothing but the towel I had left her in.

I turned back to Jasper with a warning in my eyes. "Not a word to Alice," I said. "We don't need to be confirming her suspicions just yet."

He nodded in agreement and patted me on the back. "Good luck, man," he said before brushing past me, nodding to Bella as he passed by her.

I turned around, grinning at the vision of Bella before me. She was wrapped in a fluffy white towel that skimmed her delicate curves, her hands holding the towel secure at the top. The towel barely covered her ass, exposing nearly every inch of her luscious legs. Her cheeks were flushed and her wet hair fell in waves around her face.

Fucking gorgeous.

Slowly, I began to make my way towards her.

"You clothes," I said, nodding to the pile in my arms once I was standing in the doorway with her.

She smiled up at me. "Thanks," she said. "I'm afraid to look."

Texts From Last Night

I feigned being hurt. "I'll have you know, Swan, that I'm a very stylish man."

She giggled. "I know," she said, her hands reaching up to take her things from he, her knuckles brushing across my chest as she did. "I just hope you brought more than a tiny little nightgown."

I chuckled. "The thought crossed my mind." An unbidden image of Bella dressed in a lacy negligee appeared in my mind and I didn't attempt to push it away.

"I'm sure it did," she said saucily. "But I think Jasper might have had something to say about that. What happened?"

"Long story short, we're busted. Hell, according to him, we were barely under cover. Jazz said he'd keep it quiet."

"Hmmm...," she said. "At least he didn't come by any earlier," she said before turning and making her way back into the bathroom, the towel loosening from her body, exposing more of the smooth skin of her back as she went.

To keep myself from rushing after her and removing the towel the rest of the way, I busied myself with finding a shirt and shoes for dinner.

"Good choice, by the way," she yelled from the bathroom as I was rummaging through my closet.

"Come again?" I asked.

She leaned through the doorway. "This is one of my favorite dresses." Her answer came in a sweet tone, accompanied with a smile.

I couldn't help but mirror her grin. "I thought it looked comfortable," I shrugged.

"It is," she agreed with a nod.

Texts From Last Night

I finished getting ready in the bedroom while Bella took her time drying her hair and doing girly stuff in the bathroom. Every now and then, I would hear something fall to the floor with a loud bang, always followed by Bella shouting, "I'm okay." I quickly realized that maybe 'I'm okay' was code for 'I'm still sloppy drunk from doing tequila shots with you.' I was secretly glad that the blow dryer was attached to the wall; in her state, I was pretty sure she could find a way to drop it in water and electrocute herself.

"Swan?" I called into the bathroom when the blow dryer finally shut off. "You almost ready in there?"

A quick glance at the clock told me we had less than fifteen minutes before we were scheduled to present ourselves to Alice downstairs, and I sure as Hell didn't want to be late.

Instead of answering my question, she opened the door and stepped out. "Ready," she said, placing her hands on her hips. "Except for one thing."

I quirked an eyebrow as I took in her flawless appearance: sun kissed cheeks, full lips, innocent doe eyes, and hair flowing softly around her shoulders. Fucking cock blocking Carlisle Cullen. "Which is?"

She slowly walked towards me with an evil grin on her face, stopping when our bodies were mere inches apart. Placing her index finger on my chest, she murmured, "You need to get back on my level."

I had no earthly idea what she meant by that. "Your level?"

She nodded. "Yes, my level. You need to do more shots. You've lost your buzz."

"That's probably not a good idea," I stated.

In truth, it sounded like a terrible idea. It was one thing for *one* of us to stumble to dinner, but it would be an entirely different story if *both* of us did. I could already see the inevitable steam coming out of Alice's ears as we tumbled

Texts From Last Night

down the stairs, a tangle of laughter and tingling limbs.

Bella made a face like she was a sad puppy and I crumbled to her wishes. Damn, I had been attracted to her for less than a week and already, she had a look that could bring me to my knees.

"Fine," I said through my teeth. "Bring me the damn tequila."

She bounced happily to the other side of the room for the bottle and a shot glass, returning in front of me in a manner of seconds. "Here you go."

"This is a terrible idea, just so you know," I told her as I poured the liquid into the tiny glass.

"No it's not," she said. "It's a great idea."

"Terrible one," I said as I lifted the shot glass to my lips.

"Cullen," she began, "I think you're just jealous because you've never been blackout drunk before dinner."

I scoffed. "Yes I have."

She eyed me carefully. "When?"

I poured another shot. "Senior year. Harvard-Yale game."

"You weren't blackout for that game," she argued, folding her arms across her chest as I downed the sour liquid again.

"Yes I was. You just don't remember because you were blackout, too," I challenged, poking her in the chest gently.

xXx

Bella POV

Texts From Last Night

November 2009, Senior Year

(713): *you win again, gameday.*

Apparently, every Fall Saturday in the Southern region of the United States was sacred. Football reigned supreme, families tailgated together (whatever that was...something to do with tents and grills and trucks) on the lawns of esteemed college campuses, liquor flowed like water, and the food was a standard mixture of chips and dip and grilled meat. Men wore God awful jerseys with the hero of their team's number inscribed on the front and back, women wore dresses in their team's color, and open container laws were either ignored or tossed out the window. Season tickets sold out months in advance to wealthy alumnus and students, leaving the average Joe to deal with scalpers on the corner.

At Yale, on the other hand, the drinking was discreet, tickets were sold at the gate of the stadium the day of the game, and whatever that tailgating thing was, well, it was unheard of. Team colors didn't really matter--standard attire was either a Yale t-shirt or something equally as comfortable. In reality, it wasn't surprising at all to find more students at the library or hanging out at their apartments than on campus as the Yale Bulldogs took on whoever it was they were playing that week.

Clearly, we had a few things to learn. Lauren, Jasper and Rose's friend from Texas that was in town for the weekend, was more than happy to teach us the "proper" way to enjoy football.

"First things first," she said as Rose, Alice, and myself stood in the middle of our apartment the morning of the Harvard-Yale game. "Bulldog blue dresses or at least a cute top and jeans are to be worn, preferably something that is loose fitting so that you can flask it."

"Flask it?" We asked in unison.

She stared at us like we were from Mars. "Yes," she said with a bit of bite to her tone, "flask it. Stick a floppy up your dress."

Texts From Last Night

" I don't have anything loose fitting," Rose stated with a frown.

" It's true," Alice confirmed with a nod. "She doesn't. Also, no floppy flasks here."

" Lucky for you three, I brought extra dresses and flasks," Lauren said, bending over to pull a set of thin, plastic bottles out of her bag as well as a blue dress for Rose to wear.

" Here." She handed each of us one.

We accepted them and smiled at her. "Thanks," was our unified answer.

It seemed as if the saying was true: everything's bigger in Texas, even the practices of college students.

After Lauren deemed our attire and attitude acceptable for a proper gameday experience, the four of us tucked the now-full floppy flasks we had been gifted into our purses for later use and hitched a ride to the boys' fraternity house with a pitiful pledge that Emmett sent for us.

" It's gameday, bitches!" Emmett bellowed as we entered the house.

Rose sauntered over to him and placed a kiss square on his lips before telling him that she needed a shot of 'something strong.' He asked us if we wanted some as well and, never ones to turn down free liquor, we followed him to the basement of the house.

Edward and Jasper were already downstairs with shot glasses and various bottles of clear liquid in front of them.

" Ladies," Jasper greeted us with a nod as we entered.

" Hi, Jazz, Edward," I said as Alice danced over to climb onto Jasper's lap like a monkey.

Texts From Last Night

I chose the vacant seat next to Edward. "What's good?" I asked, pointing to the various bottles in front of us.

He chuckled. "Whiskey or rum."

"I'll take some rum." It seemed like the best idea, considering I had the same type of liquor in my flask. I knew from experience that mixing liquors would put a damper on the festivities.

"Rum it is."

"You can't see it, can you?" I slurred, turning to the side as I stood in front of the mirror in the bathroom.

Several shots had been shared between the seven of us, Lauren included, and it was now time to venture to the stadium to watch our Bulldogs beat the, uh, whatever the hell Harvard's mascot was.

"Nope, you're good," Lauren assured me as I checked myself out. The floppy flask had been hidden beneath my dress for easy access once we entered the game, but I could only remember half of the process of getting it there.

I grinned. "Awesome," I exclaimed. "Shit, I wish Yale gamedays were like this all the time. I bet Texas is fuckawesome."

Lauren giggled at my outburst. "Every Saturday is a hot mess."

"Sounds like my kind of place," I said with a firm nod.

Lauren continued to giggle.

"Bella? Lauren? Are you ready?" Alice called in a slurred voice from outside the bathroom; she had already secured her flask. I looked to Lauren who nodded in confirmation that she was, in fact, ready.

"Show me how it's done," I said as we emerged from the room.

Texts From Last Night

Roughly twenty minutes after entering the Yale football stadium, I had decided that Lauren was my new favorite person the planet, despite the fact that she had made fun of how 'dinky' our field was compared to UT-Austin's. Having the ability to maintain my drunkenness throughout the entirety of the boring football game was epic.

"Go Jake! Yeah! Kick his ass!" I screamed from the stands as my fellow students cheered around me. In my hand, I held a Diet Coke from the stadium concession stand that had received a liberal amount of rum upon my arrival in the lame student section.

"Bells?" Emmett asked, leaning over to whisper-yell into my ear. We had all discovered that there was no real whispering at a football game.

"Hm?" I looked up at him with a happy grin on my face. I felt fucking fantastic.

"Uh, Jake's on the sidelines," he explained slowly.

"What?" I asked, turning to face the field again. "Nuh uh, he's right there," I pointed to him as he lined up with the team. "Number thirteen."

"No, that's number thirty-one. Jake is over there." He took my extended hand into his and pointed to where my boyfriend was standing on the sideline, looking at me with a befuddled expression on his face.

I bit my lip and waved, turning to Emmett once Jake was distracted by a teammate. "Oops," I said without an ounce of regret.

"Is that only Diet Coke in your cup?" Emmett asked with narrowed eyes.

I shrugged. "Maybe."

"It's not nice to be greedy, Bells," Emmett said as he began patting me down in search of my floppy flask.

Texts From Last Night

It was the last string of words I remember being uttered to me until late that evening.

xXx

"Indeed I was," she confirmed. "Damn rum and Diet Coke."

I chuckled, turning to set down the tequila and shot glass.

"We should head downstairs," I said when I spun back around to face Bella.

"Yeah," she agreed. "Should we," she pointed between us, "you know, go separately?"

"Probably wouldn't hurt," I admitted with a shrug, though I wanted nothing more than to walk down the stairs with her hand in mine. If the others were catching on to our charade, why not just give it up? After all, Jasper had seemed somewhat pleased with the idea of Bella and I together.

Bella nodded in understanding and I could see in her eyes that she wanted to go downstairs together, too.

"Hey," I said, pinching her chin beneath my fingers and pulling her closer. "Do you want to tell them soon? About...whatever it is we have going on right now?"

Her eyes widened and I worried if I had said too much, gone too far. "Yes," she answered simply. "As much fun as today was, I'm tired of hiding out. Not tonight, though."

I kissed her gently on the lips. "Soon," I murmured into her lips.

"Soon," she echoed before kissing me one more time and pulling away.

"Join us in five?" She called the question over her shoulder from the doorway.

Texts From Last Night

Smirking at her, I said, "See you then," before she disappeared from the room.

Taking Care

Chapter Fourteen: Taking Care

The six of us chatted and laughed and ate more than we ever thought possible during our meal at High Cotton in downtown Charleston. As we relaxed and enjoyed each other's company, I couldn't help but wish that the soon I had promised Edward of earlier could be, well, sooner. It was my own personal equivalent of torturous water boarding to watch our coupled friends touch and kiss and flirt at the table while Edward and I had to keep our lusty hands to ourselves.

"Dessert?" Our blonde waitress asked as she approached the table with six small menus. She ogled Edward as she approached; I gave her the stink eye as if I had some sort of claim on him.

Alice bounced in her chair like she did when she was excited and reached animatedly for the menus. "I do!" she exclaimed, clearly not at all worried about fitting into her wedding dress at the fitting tomorrow.

"Are you going to get anything?" Edward asked in a low tone as he slid his eyes to me. He had sobered quickly upon arriving at the fine dining establishment, probably due to the heady combination of the haughty, rich atmosphere and the delicious bread that we were given before our meal.

I shrugged, waiting to see what Alice declared concerning the menu; in keeping with the tradition of the week, this was her evening to command.

It didn't take long before the five of us knew her decision. "I think I want ice cream," she said, handing the menu back to the waitress.

The woman looked down at her with a frown. "We don't have ice cream on the menu, ma'am."

"I know," Alice answered with a grin. "That's why we'll take the check and

Texts From Last Night

then we're going to go around the corner to the ice cream parlor I saw before dinner."

After pursing her lips at the bride to be for a few seconds, the waitress turned on her heel and retreated into the restaurant.

"Is that okay with everyone?" Alice asked with a hopeful grin.

I snorted. "Clearly it isn't okay with little miss highlights." My voice didn't hide the disgust I held for our waitress that couldn't keep her eyes off Edward.

Edward knocked his elbow against mine. "Jealous?" he mouthed when I looked over to him with a questioning expression.

"Of what?" I asked, feigning ignorance and hoping he hadn't witnessed the stink eye from earlier.

He jutted his head in the direction of the waitress as she sauntered away with an obvious hair flip.

"Of course not. What would I be jealous of?" I scoffed in a whisper, quickly pulling my attention away from him. "And Alice, I think ice cream sounds like a great idea," I said to her before Edward could prod me any further.

"Thanks, Bella," she beamed at me with a happy grin etched across her face.

"You'll get no complaints from me," Emmett boomed, his voice echoing throughout the restaurant as he leaned back in his chair and rested his hands on his stomach.

Rose made an annoyed sound and mumbled, "Just what you need, Em, *more* food."

"Gives me more energy for later," He retorted with a suggestive wink. She rolled her eyes.

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Heels clacking against the hardwood floors alerted me to the return of Little Miss Wandering Eyes. *Really, what kind of waitress wears stilettos to work?* "Here's your check," she said in a bitchy tone turning to Edward and obviously undressing him with her eyes. "I wasn't sure how you wanted it divided up so..."

"I've got it," I said, reaching for the little leather folder and ripping it from her bony hand. Though I hadn't been planning on paying for everyone's dinner, I was more than ready to leave the restaurant and making a move for the check seemed to be the quickest way.

Jasper eyed me carefully. "You sure, Swan?"

I nodded as I pulled enough cash out of my wallet to cover everyone's meal, mentally patting myself on the back for having more than loose change in my wallet; usually, my ATM card was my go-to choice of payment.

"Yep," I said, popping the 'p' as I did. "Are we all set?" The question left my mouth in a hurried, rushed manner, the tone practically begging my friends to stand and exit.

The nature of my voice surprised me. Despite the fact that, in the past two days, I had developed feelings for Edward that I wasn't quite ready to address with myself yet, he was not mine to claim. Yes, we had kissed several times and, sure, we had shared a shower...but for all I knew, we were two friends that had suddenly realized the other was attractive.

That's not it and I know it.

I was pondering ways to climb inside my own head and tape shut the mouth of my conscious for reminding me of my feelings when it suddenly dawned on me that I *was* jealous, just like Edward had accused...of what, though, I couldn't be sure. Was it because I had wanted to lean over and kiss Edward halfway through our entrees and was too worried what my friends might say to do so? Or was it simply a natural reaction due to the ditzy waitress that couldn't help but stare at the man I had spend the entire afternoon with, kissing and

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desiring more, every time she approached the table?

As I debated the reason for the sudden arrival of Bitchy Bella, five sets of eyes widened briefly at me before returning to normal. Mumbles of thank you were muttered all around me.

I nodded and mumbled, "It was my pleasure," before tucking my wallet back into my purse and pushing back in my chair to stand.

"I'm walking with Edward!" Alice exclaimed once we were all standing, hopping over to where he was standing and extending her umbrella to him before looping her left arm through his right.

He nodded and accepted her request, the look on his face telling me that he knew questions were coming from the fiery little woman.

When we exited the restaurant, the rain from the morning that had returned late in the afternoon was still steadily falling, though it had slowed to a hazy drizzle. Because Alice had claimed Edward, I moved to walk with Jasper.

He grinned at me and lifted his umbrella, silently inviting me to walk under it with him.

"Have a nice afternoon with Edward?" He asked once we were following our friends in the direction of the ice cream parlor.

I nodded, turning my head slightly to up look at him. "It was a very nice afternoon."

"I bet," he said with a wink.

I gasped loudly, feigning scandal, before elbowing him in the side.

"How much did Edward tell you?" I voiced my question bluntly, knowing that if I didn't dance around it, neither would Jasper; he was one of those 'tell you how it is' sort of guys. I admired his honesty.

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He inhaled and puffed his cheeks out before slowing exhaling and speaking. "Just that he didn't fuck you..." And there it was, the short and frank answer I had been hoping for.

"But?" I prodded.

"But that he wanted to."

I couldn't help the smile that spread across my lips at his candid response. "Really?" I asked as if I hadn't felt evidence of the fact poking me in my stomach earlier in the day.

"Are you blind, Swan?"

I chuckled. "Is it that obvious?"

"I told him and I'll tell you--everyone but Emmett, because he's oblivious to anything that doesn't involve Rose, food, or sports, pretty much figures the two of you are a done deal." *A done deal, huh?* I wondered what that meant by that phrase, but chose not to ask.

"He told me," I informed Jasper as we rounded the corner.

"I figured he would."

"And Alice has figured it out, too?" Okay, so, maybe I *did* want to know more.

He chuckled. "She's suspicious, as is Rose. I'm sure the stunt you pulled at the restaurant won't help matters."

"What stunt?"

He stared at my blankly, obviously waiting for me to admit that the green monster called jealousy had taken me over at the restaurant.

Texts From Last Night

"Okay, fine," I admitted. "I just didn't like the way she was staring at Edward...like he was a piece of meat or something."

"A piece of meat?"

"Yes, like a piece of meat. She practically undressed him with her eyes, Jasper." *Had he really not noticed?*

"And you have never noticed women doing that to him before?"

I thought about his question for a brief moment, searching my bank of memories for instances of women ogling him in the past. I came up blank. "Not really," I said slowly.

"It's nothing new to anyone," he said, "but you."

"Huh," I paused. "I suppose I never noticed before."

"You mean you never noticed *Edward* before," Jasper clarified in a wise tone.

Before I could inquire further as to what his statement meant, we arrived in front of the ice cream parlor. I wanted to stop Jasper from going inside so that I could pick his brain a little bit more because, come on, the man was basically a walking spout of wisdom as of late, but I figured that would bring too much attention to us.

As soon as we entered the restaurant, Jasper disappeared from my side, taking up his usual post next to Alice as she debated the pros and cons of frozen yogurt and ice cream. I watched as he approached her, both of them nodding once in silent agreement with looks of victory on their faces.

Releasing a heavy sigh, I realized that I should have known better than to share secrets with one half of a betrothed couple. Of course they would share every important and interesting conversation they had with one another, including ones that address my sex life--or recent lack thereof.

Texts From Last Night

As I considered Alice and Jasper's sneaky scheming, I approached Edward where he stood in front of the counter with a sexy look of concentration etched on his handsome features.

"Whatcha getting?" I asked as I snuck up behind him, quickly squeezing his sides before moving to stand beside him.

He looked to his right and met my gaze. "Chocolate," he said to both the teenager behind the counter and me.

"No toppings?" The boy asked.

He shook his head back and forth slowly. "No toppings," he confirmed. "Waffle cone."

"Good choice," I commented when his order was complete as I shifted my eyes to take in the various flavors available to me. "I think I'm going to go with the dark chocolate in a cone as well," I told the boy.

When I glanced over after placing my order, Edward was looking at me with a foreign expression on his face; it was a combination of fascination and humor. "What?"

"Nothing," he answered quickly.

I poked him in the shoulder, knowing that there was a reason for strange mixture of emotions on his face that he was refusing to share with me. "Edwaaaaard," I urged like a stubborn child.

He playfully rolled his eyes as our ice cream was handed to us. We both quickly paid before strolling to a small table in the corner of the shop to sit at and enjoy our cones in.

"So, did Alice pepper you with questions?" I asked once we were seated, following my question with a lick of my ice cream cone.

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He nodded and echoed my movement. It was impossible to tear my eyes away from his tongue as it slid across the cold dessert. That tongue...my mind immediately flashed with an erotic fantasy that was certainly not appropriate for a family establishment such as the one we were in.

"Indeed she did. Jasper?" He asked, brining me back from my sudden daydream of his sweet tongue connecting with my skin over and over.

"Of course," I answered, my voice squeaking as I regained my composure.

"What did you tell him?" The look on his face was wary, cautious.

"You know, the usual...that we fucked twice in the shower and were planning on leaving as soon as we finish our ice cream to do it again," I said with a nonchalant shrug. Sometimes, it was just too damn easy to joke with him.

Edward's mouth fell open as he was rendered completely speechless by my joke.

I giggled and reached across to pat his arm reassuringly. "Joking..." I trailed off to take another bite of my ice cream. Bitchy, jealous Bella from earlier had been replaced by bold, horny Bella. "Lover boy," I added with a wink before he could answer.

He arched an eyebrow at my playful name-calling. "Lover boy?" He cleared his throat awkwardly as soon as he voiced the question. It was his voice's turn to squeak.

I smirked, taking a long lick of my dark ice cream as my eyes bore into his. His emerald eyes darkened at my action.

"Mmhmm," I moaned as I swallowed the bittersweet mixture. It didn't slip my mind that our friends had become suspiciously absent, though I knew that Alice was more than likely their disappearance.

Texts From Last Night

"Shit, Bella," Edward whined as his eyes remained glued on my lips. "You've got to stop doing that."

"Stop doing what?" I asked in an innocent tone, knowing exactly what it was that I was doing to bother him.

He licked his ice cream and swallowed before saying in a tense tone, "You know exactly what."

"Eating my ice cream?" It's possible that I threw in an extra bat of my eyelashes for extra emphasis as I continued to play my innocent act. "We wouldn't want it to melt, right?"

He gulped and nodded. "Sure."

"You know that chocolate is an aphrodisiac, right?" The question left my mouth without being granted clearance from my brain, but judging from the look on Edward's face, it was more than okay. Welcome, in fact.

"I do," he smirked as he spoke. "Is that why you ordered it?"

As if I needed an aphrodisiac to turn me on when he's around lately...

"Maybe," I answered with a shrug as his eyes settled briefly on my lips before roaming across my face to study it carefully.

His eyes narrowed as he lifted the cone in his right hand to his lips again. "And you definitely did," he said with confidence.

"Are you sure about that, Cullen?"

"Very, Swan," he assured me. "If I was a betting man, I'd say you are feeling a bit...unsatisfied from our shower earlier." Oh, he was bold. Also, one hundred percent correct.

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I wanted to lean across the table and kiss him so badly in that moment, or possibly drag him to the bathroom and beg him to fuck me on the counter, and was less than a second away from throwing all caution to the wind when the chime on the door rang and I heard Emmett yell, "The train's leaving whether or not you two are on it."

Edward rolled his eyes as I raised my palm to my forehead.

When I looked up, Edward's hand was extended to me. "Let's go, Swan," he said as I slowly placed my hand in his. "They stuck us in rear seat, I believe."

"Oh joy," I said sarcastically as we exited the shop.

"I know you hate the rear seat," Edward whispered as we walked towards the SUV, the huskiness of his voice getting more intense with each word. "But I promise I'll make it worth your while."

My ears perked up and my panties dampened at his tone. "I'm holding you to that." *And so are my lips and my neck and my...* I was getting carried away.

"Good," he said, the lustiness of his tone still heavy as he opened the door for me.

Climbing into the car was a feat, as we had to scale the mountain otherwise known as Alice and Jasper. They had claimed the middle seat and refused to move an inch as we fought our way over them and into the rear of the vehicle. I'll admit that it wasn't too awful, considering that Edward accidentally grabbed my ass as I tumbled into the seat.

"It's time for you to start making it worth my while," I leaned over and whispered as Emmett pulled the Tahoe away from the curb and I clicked my seatbelt into place.

Edward chuckled quietly. "I'm about to start. Would you like to know my plan of just how it is that I'm going to make this ride and the rest of this evening worth your while, Bella?"

Texts From Last Night

I turned to him, biting my lip and nodding once as our eyes met. The voice, the smoldering stare, the man behind the chiseled features and perfect body...I wanted it. All of it. Tonight.

He licked his lip and shifted himself in the seat so that he could comfortably speak into my ear. His hand cupped my face as he began to talk in a low tone filled with longing. "First, I'm going to wait for our friends to retreat into the giant ass house that the Brandon's so graciously rented for us this week and then I'm going to--"

He was cut off by Emmett slamming on the breaks and yelling, "Fuck off!" to the terrible driver in front of us.

Edward turned his head to the front and glared at Emmett and his terrible driving abilities before returning his attention to me. I think I heard him mutter, "Fucking constant cock blocker," under his breath in a hateful tone that echoed my internal sentiments.

Once we were moving again and Rose was talking the beast in the driver's seat down from his epic road rage, Edward playfully bit my earlobe before continuing. "Once that idiot is inside, I'm going to pull you out of this godforsaken vehicle and claim your mouth with mine," his fingers trailed down my arm as he paused to place a chaste kiss on the base of my neck before returning his attention to my ear. "And then, I'm going to take you upstairs and claim the rest of you."

As his breath tickled across my neck and his words registered with my mind, I felt my head fall back and a small whimper escape from my mouth.

Alice turned around. "Are you okay, Bella?" she asked in a worried tone.

My eyes widened and I lifted my head as Edward jerked away from me, his hands leaving me in a rush.

"She's not feeling too well, Al," Edward said before I could get a word in. "Right, Swan?"

Texts From Last Night

I nodded furiously. "Right my, uh, my stomach is, you know, something funny from dinner...or maybe the ice cream. I bet it was that damn waitress; she probably put something in my food. Like her spit."

Alice's look of pity was masked by the knowing grin that spread across her lips. "Maybe you should get some air and then head upstairs for some rest once we get to the house."

"I think that would be best." I feigned a pitiful, sick tone.

"I'll make sure she's taken care of," Edward added.

You better.

"Thanks, Edward," Alice said before turning back around. "Wouldn't want one of my bridesmaids to be ill or *tense* for the fitting tomorrow."

"It'll be my pleasure," he assured her with a shoulder pat.

My eyes widened as my mind screamed, *too obvious*, and Emmett took a left hand turn.

"Well thank fuck we're finally home," Emmett said as he pulled into the driveway. Funny, I hadn't noticed the ride, or experienced the carsickness, this trip. "Damn retirees don't know how to use turn signals or drive fast enough," he complained as he turned off the car and opened the door to climb out.

Edward let out a hearty laugh from his seat next to me while Jasper released the seat in front of us so that our exit from the vehicle would be more graceful than our entrance. I climbed out first and Edward helped my ass again. Once we were both outside, it was clear that our friends had rushed inside to avoid the rain that was now coming down strongly.

"It's raining," I stated the obvious. "Looks like a snag in your plan."

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Edward took a step towards me as I stepped backwards, my back hitting the side of the Tahoe. "Depends on how you look at it."

I placed my hands on his shoulders and cocked at eyebrow at him. "How's that?"

His hands moved to rest on my hips and he stepped so that our bodies were dangerously close. "I like the rain," his fingertips were drawing circles on my hipbones, "especially because of how fucking hot it makes you look."

I felt in no way hot or sexy as I felt my hair soak through and my dress stick to my skin. Really, I figured I looked like a drowned rat that had mascara running down it's cheeks. The man in front of me on the other hand looked like a divine being as his usually messy hair began to flatten and the rain sparkled on his face.

Edward must have sensed my reluctance to enjoy the wetness that was covering my body. "You look absolutely breathtaking, Bella. Your lips," he murmured before leaning in to kiss me slowly, "are shining in the fucking streetlight." When he pulled away much too quickly for my liking, I moaned at the loss of contact and latched my fingers into his hair to bring him back to me.

He spoke again after leaving a searing kiss on my lips. "Your skin is glistening from the water droplets that are collecting on it," he bent slightly to place kisses from one shoulder blade clear across my body to the other, paying special attention to my collarbone and the base of my neck.

"Your breasts," he slowly slid his hands up my sides until each hand was firmly cupping my breasts through my dress, " *shit*, you aren't wearing a bra," he groaned. His hands faltered, shaking slightly. Breathing into my neck, he said, "Your fucking *naked* tits are being hugged by your flimsy little sundress that is soaked through and your nipples," he ran a thumb over each erect peak as his voice became heavier with each word, "are literally crying out to me."

Without warning, his head dipped down and he took my left nipple into his mouth as his other hand continued to massage my right breast. I didn't bother to

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hide the loud moan that emerged from my lips.

"Fuck, Bella, the things you do to me," he smiled against my chest.

His tongue flicked out to tease me through my dress, and I whined his name. My head fell back against the window of the car and I closed my eyes to take in every ounce of pleasure that Edward's talented mouth was responsible for.

"Tell me what you want, Bella," Edward said, pulling away briefly to pose the question.

"You," I panted, trying to recall a time in my life when I had been so turned on by such simple actions. "I want you. In your bed, on the beach, in the car, right fucking here on the damn ground for all I care."

Edward's body was flush against me before I could register his movements, his lips attaching to mine with a sense of urgency. "I. Fucking. Need. You," he said between kisses.

Neither of us made a move for the door. Instead, his hands returned to my hips and slid further down, his right hand not stopping until it had attached to my thigh and lifted my leg. Hitching it around his waist, he pushed his body further into mine so that our hips were connected and his erection was pressed against my aching center. Both of us moaned at the increased closeness that our new position afforded us. He wrapped his arms around me, bunching my dress around my waist.

He didn't answer as he pulled my other leg around his waist and lifted me so that I was deliciously lodged between him and car. His hands were on my ass and his lips were back on mine with fervor and, damn, if all rational thought didn't fly out the window as our tongues tangled together with need.

"Goddamn cockblocking Carlisle Cullen."

Huh?

Texts From Last Night

"Fuck, we have to go inside. I can't do this out here," Edward murmured against my lips. "Wrap your arms around my neck." I yielded to his wishes and grabbed onto him. No warning was given before he pulled me away from the vehicle and turned so that we were headed towards the house.

"What about," I attempted to begin to ask Edward a question but his lips were at my ear again, nibbling on that sweet spot that he had just discovered, and I lost all train of thought.

He stopped walking but continued to hold on to me, one hand planted firmly on each ass cheek; I was growing quite fond of the touches to that particular part of my body.

"Here's the plan," he murmured as his eyes bore into mine. The large raindrops being trapped in his long eyelashes made him blink quickly. "You're weak from getting sick so I need to carry you. Yeah?"

I giggled and adjusted my dress as he placed me on the ground so that he could change my position in his arms. It didn't pass by me that he had to adjust *himself* before picking me up again.

"And I need you to take care of me, because?" I challenged in a playful tone.

I could feel his chest move with laughter. "Because, baby, the taking care of that I'm going to be doing tonight is going to make you feel better than you ever have."

Edward walked swiftly through the house in an effort to avoid our nosy friends as we escaped upstairs.

"Bella's sick!" he called through the house when we reached the bottom of the stairs. "I'm going to make sure she's alright and then, uh, climb in bed. I'm beat."

I buried my head in the space between his neck and his shoulder to keep from laughing as I placed a playful bite into his skin.

Texts From Last Night

"You have to be quiet," Edward whispered as he began to climb the steps. I nodded that I understood, my forehead rubbing against his collarbone.

"So do you," I whispered before placing an open-mouthed kiss onto the base of his neck.

He hissed in response. "Damn woman, will you stop for a second?"

I shook my head back and forth wordlessly and placed three more kisses against his neck. He increased the speed at which he was walking.

"Eager?"

"Hell yes," he declared as we finally arrived in front of his room and he placed me on my feet.

No more words were exchanged as he began to kiss me again, both of us walking towards the bed as soon as the door was shut and locked behind us. No time was wasted with playful touches or tender caresses; the past three days of dancing around one another had been enough foreplay for both of us.

Our kisses were broken only when the removal of heavy, wet clothing required it and, before my mind had time to catch up with what was going on with my body, I was supine on the bed I had dreamed of lying in earlier in the day.

Edward was above me, his hair still damp from the rain and his eyes dark with desire. Supported by his elbows, his chest hovered above mine and the rest of his body, including the part that I wanted the most, was nestled between my legs. When he trailed his hand down to my aching center, I stopped him.

"No," I whimpered, my entire body so heavy with desire that I felt as if I wouldn't be able to function again until I knew what it felt like to have him inside of me.

His eyes widened with alarm. "No?" he asked in a worried tone, his eyes searching my face for answers.

Texts From Last Night

Shit.

I bit my lip and lifted my head to kiss him gently on the nose. "No," I repeated as I moved his hand away from me and gripped his cock between my fingers, gently pumping it one time before directing it towards my entrance, "you can do that later. I want you now. I *need* you now."

To emphasize my need, I let go of his dick, reached around and cupped his ass in my hands, pulling him forward as I lifted my hips in search of much-needed friction.

He grinned at me devilishly. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm damn sure." I trailed my hands up his back, my nails scraping gently across his skin before linking them together at the base of his neck.

He leaned down and kissed me firmly as he eased himself forward slowly, his movements full of hesitation and tenderness. "Condom?"

"No, I'm on the pill," I breathed, thankful that I had remained on the pill even though the frequency at which I had sex had declined rapidly after my break-up with Jake.

A heavy sigh was released by Edward and suddenly the atmosphere around us changed; no longer was he concerned about being gentle and keeping me safe. Instead, he thrust into me suddenly, making cry out in surprise and pleasure at the same time as I stretched to make room for him. His lips were on mine suddenly, absorbing my cry as our tongues met briefly before he pulled away again, this time to bury his head in my neck.

"Fucking tight," he murmured into my hair as he wrapped his hand around my left thigh and lifted my leg to rest over his shoulder. "So good."

"So good," I echoed in an incoherent mumble as my other leg wrapped around his waist and he filled me completely.

Texts From Last Night

We matched one another, thrust for thrust, as the room filled with the sound of skin hitting skin and gentle moans echoed off the wall. It had been so long, too long, for me and all too quickly I felt my walls begin to tighten around Edward; his constant caresses and fiery kisses were no match for my half-hearted attempts at waiting on him to come.

"I'm going to...fuuuuuck," I sighed into Edward's neck as I tightened completely around his cock and my body was flooded with more pleasure than I had even thought possible. It was indescribable, the complete and utter satisfaction that I felt.

"That's it, baby, so damn good," he murmured as he continued to pound his dick into me quickly. "Stay quiet," he added as a gentle reminder.

I could tell that his release was imminent but that he was holding back, so I leaned up and placed my lips to his ear, whispering, "Fuck me, Edward." My voice was breathy, light and earned a growl from deep in his throat.

"Bella," he said through gritted teeth while following my command, releasing into me in three warm spurts that launched me into another orgasm.

When he collapsed on top of me seconds later as we both attempted to regain our breath, I lifted my hands up to run my fingers through his messy hair. "That was..." I mumbled, unable to find an adjective strong enough to describe the pleasure he had been the source of.

He lifted his head and smirked down at me, his eyes on fire. "The first of many orgasms for you tonight," he finished my statement and I felt my heart, and lady parts, swell at his words before my head fell back onto the pillow and I fell asleep.

Noise Complaints

Chapter 15: Noise Complaints

EPOV

I fucking hated Kenny Chesney.

I hated him in high school when my graduating class chose the song "Young" to represent us to future generations. I mean, really, who did my classmates thing they were kidding? We lived in Chicago for Christ's sake, not some hick town in southern Alabama. Then, I hated him in college when Jasper went through that weird country music phase and made us listen to the music that the bald country crooner sang over and over and over--I had thought my ears were going to start bleeding from all the whining about women, beer, and fucking tractors.

It was ridiculous.

But now, standing under the streetlight in the rain with Bella, I found myself identifying with the man whose music I had been avoiding for the better part of my adult life. Damn him, there *was* something fucking sexy about the rain...and at one point, the redneck had sung a song about it.

As my mind began to replay the song that I thought had been erased from my memory, Bella said something about the rain being a snag in my plan. She was wrong. The rain, to my surprise, was working out quite well.

I took several steps forward, trapping her between the vehicle and myself. Her hands came up to rest on my shoulders and her eyebrow cocked in a playful manner, challenging me to inform her as to why I suddenly liked the rain.

Seeing her there, with her clothes plastered to her body, her hair hanging around her, and water collecting on her fucking pouty lips, I hoped it rained all goddamn week.

Texts From Last Night

When there were mere centimeters separating our bodies, I grasped her hips in my hands. She was going to find out just why the rain was not a snag in my plans. Gently, I caressed her hipbones as I leaned down, my lips grazing her ear as I murmured, "I like the rain, especially because of how fucking sexy it makes you look."

The doubt that immediately etched across her face was evident even in the darkness of night. As my eyes skimmed over her glistening features, I formulated a plan. She needed to hear, and to feel, how tantalizing a wet Bella was to me.

"Your lips," I muttered as I leaned in to place a slow, lingering kiss upon them, "are fucking shining in the streetlight."

She gasped slightly, and when I felt her warm breath on my lips, cool from the rain, I had to kiss her again. I attached my lips to hers again, this time eliciting a moan from her when I pulled away. Taking control, she slid her fingers through my wet hair and dragged my mouth back to hers.

"Your skin," I said after forcing myself to break the kiss, "is glistening from the water droplets collecting on it." To emphasize my point, I leaned down to drag a trail of kisses across her body, from one shoulder to the other. As I lavished attention on her collarbone and neck, I savored the taste of her skin; salty and sweet, Oceanside and fucking *Bella*.

When my tongue had tasted every inch of skin I could reach, I pulled away and refocused my attention. Slowly, I slid my hands up her sides and started, "Your breasts," as I cupped them in my hands.

Holy mother of God, she was braless.

"Shit, you aren't wearing a bra," my mouth said. 'Fuck me, please,' my cock said. I groaned as her nipples hardened under my touch. Continuing in a weak tone, I said, "Your fucking *naked*tits are being hugged by your flimsy little sundress that is soaked through and your nipples," I ran a thumb over them as I spoke, "are literally crying out to me."

Texts From Last Night

I didn't warn her before I leaned down to pull her pebbled nipple into my warm mouth, feeling the need to have it between my lips in that moment. She moaned loudly at the contact, causing me to smile against her breast, glad that my simple actions had resulted in such a response. "Fuck, Bella, the things you do to me," I said against her body as her cry of pleasure made my dick twitch in anticipation.

I continued to tease her nipple, darting my tongue out to further her arousal as my fingers dug into her hips and pulled her closer. I was quickly losing control. I had to know if she wanted this, wanted me. "Tell me what you want," I begged.

"You," she panted and my heart soared as I felt my dick strain against my khakis. "I want you. In your bed, on the beach, in the car, right fucking here on the damn ground for all I care."

That's all I needed to fucking hear.

I straightened and crushed her body against the side of the Tahoe, needing desperately to feel her body as close to mine as possible. My lips damn near attacked hers as I choked out the words, "I. Fucking. Need. You," between hard kisses.

I needed her closer.

Trailing a hand down her side, I hitched one of her legs around my waist and ground my hips against hers, forcing my hard cock against her. The contact resulted in loud moans from each of us as I wrapped my arms around her and bunched the sexy little dress she was wearing around her waist.

I needed more.

Wordlessly, I wrapped her other leg around my waist, lifting her so that she was wedged between the car and me. My hands moved to rest on that delicious ass of hers as our tongues battled for dominance. I felt her, warm and wet against my hardness.

Texts From Last Night

I wanted her.

I needed her.

Fuck it, I was going to have her.

I gripped her tighter, my hand searching for her panties. I was seconds away from undoing my pants and ripping her panties off when a sudden sheet of rain reminded me that we were outdoors. Shit. Outside in the rain was no better than the shower--I was raised better than that.

Goddamn cockblocking Carlisle Cullen.

Bella's eyes widened in question. I must've spoken out loud.

I groaned before murmuring, "Fuck, we have to go inside. I can't do this out here," against her lips. "Wrap your arms around my neck." I pulled Bella away from the vehicle and began to nibble on her ear.

The conversation in the car ride over with Alice flashed into my mind as I walked towards the house with Bella in my arms and I remembered that, as far as the others were concerned, she was feeling ill from dinner.

I stopped, refusing to let go of her ass and pulled back to face her. "Here's the plan," I said, appreciating her flushed cheeks and swollen lips as I spoke. "You're weak from getting sick, so I need to carry you. Yeah?"

She giggled as she nodded and I placed her on the ground, biting back a groan as she adjusted her dress so that her mile-long legs were no longer revealed to me. I took the opportunity to adjust myself, figuring that a tent in my pants would foil my plan if we ran into any of our friends.

"And I need you to help me, because?" She asked saucily as I lifted her in my arms.

Texts From Last Night

I chuckled at her question. "Because, baby, the taking care of that I'm going to do tonight is going to make you feel better than you ever have."

I dashed through the house, hoping that we wouldn't cross pass with any of our nosy friends. I had a beautiful, sexy woman in my arms that I planned on being inside of very, very soon. My dick couldn't take any more cockblocking.

When I reached the bottom of the stairs, I yelled something about Bella being sick before taking them two at a time, adding something about how I was going to take care of her before climbing into bed as well.

Bella had to bury her face in my neck to keep from laughing and I nearly dropped her when she nipped my skin playfully.

"You have to be quiet," I warned her in a whisper, hoping that she would catch double meaning of my words. Evidently she did, nodding against neck before reminding me that I needed to be quiet as well.

Then, she placed an open mouthed kiss on my neck that had me straining against my pants even further. Damn, it had been years since I had been this turned on by a little foreplay.

I hissed. "Damn woman, will you stop for a second?"

She answered by placing three more kisses on my neck. I took her response as a no, so I picked up my pace, racing down the hall toward my room once I reached the top of the stairs.

"Eager?" She teased.

Was she not aware of the situation in my pants?

"Hell yes."

We arrived in front of my room seconds later and I hastily placed Bella on the floor and shut the door behind us, making sure that it was locked to avoid any

Texts From Last Night

unwanted interruptions from our friends with unfortunate timing.

Wet, heavy clothes were lost quickly as Bella and I wasted no time with words or slow, lingering foreplay. It was as if both of us knew that the past three days had essentially been leading up to this moment and there was no need for build up or questions, no required words of adoration and praise.

I lifted Bella onto the bed and she fell back, her wet hair fanning around her as if she had just climbed out of the ocean or pool. Briefly, I glanced at her perfect body before stretching out over her.

Later, I told myself when the desire to familiarize myself with her curves arose.

As I hovered above Bella, my lower body settled between her widespread legs, her eyes darkened and she took her bottom lip into her mouth.

Was she nervous? Not ready?

To be sure, I trailed a hand down her side, stopping when I reached her center.

"No," she pushed it away hastily, her voice a whimper.

"No?" *Fuck.*

She leaned up to kiss me gently on the nose. Repeating the halting word, she grabbed my aching cock in her tiny hand and pumped once before pulling me towards her entrance. "You can do that later," she panted, "I want you now. I *need* you now."

Oh. Fuck. Me.

My chest puffed out at her words as I realized two things. One, there *would* be a later, this wasn't a one-time thing, and two, she wasn't hesitant...she was ready, eager.

Texts From Last Night

I grinned down at her. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm damn sure," she responded as her manicured nails scraped up the skin of my back before stopping at the base of my neck; goosebumps rose against my skin in response.

With assurances that this was what she wanted, I moved forward slowly, leaning down to kiss her as I did.

Shit, I realized suddenly that we weren't using any form of protection. "Condom?" I asked, immediately regretting any pause it might put in our movements.

"No, I'm on the pill," she breathed and I sighed loudly, needing to be in her as soon as humanly possible.

One quick thrust and I was there.

Holy shit. Wet. Warm. Tight. Fucking Perfect.

The feeling of being inside Bella was like nothing I had experienced before, not with Tanya, not with anyone. If the look of pleasure on her face was any indication, it was the same for her. Leaning down, I attached my lips to hers, taking the gasp that was on the tip of her tongue and absorbing it into my mouth as our tongues greeted each other quickly. I pulled away and moved my mouth to her neck, needing to taste her skin again; the pure taste of Bella was something I could have feasted on for the rest of my life.

"Fucking tight," I murmured against into her hair as I grabbed her left leg and lifted it so that it was draped over my shoulder. "So good." She smelled like strawberries and rain.

She echoed my sentiments in a breathy mumble as she wrapped her other leg tightly around my waist. I continued to thrust into her; the sound of *fucking* was the only noise filling the room as we moved together, knowing that it wasn't going to be long before either of us climaxed.

Texts From Last Night

I could feel Bella's walls start to tighten around me and then she murmured, "I'm going to...fuuuuck," before her entire body went rigid as her orgasm overtook her.

My head was buried in her neck as she came, not affording me the privilege of seeing her face at the moment that pleasure flooded her body. *Later*, I promised myself.

"That's it, baby, so damn good," I panted as I continued to move within her, pulling my head away from her neck to gaze down out her. "Stay quiet."

She nodded in agreement before leaning up and leaning close to my ear, her warm breath tickling across my skin. "Fuck me, Edward," she moaned into my ear.

Her dirty words sent me over the edge. "Bella," I sighed before releasing into her with one last thrust, feeling her walls tighten around me again as her back arched, my release launching her into another orgasm.

"That was..." she said in a sated tone as I collapsed on top of her, both of us panting to catch our breath as we came down from our mutual highs.

Fanfuckingtastic. Fucking Perfect. Amazing. Indescribable.

I lifted my head and smiled down lazily at her and immediately wanted to kiss the silly grin off her face. "The first of many orgasms for you tonight," I vowed as her eyes drifted shut.

As she drifted off to into a lazy slumber, I pulled out of her and rolled onto my back, dragging her with me as I moved, planning to wake her up shortly. Very shortly.

My plan to wake up Bella with kisses or something romantic and girly was squashed when, a couple hours after our initial romp, I woke up to her sitting on her heels between my thighs, gloriously naked and glowing.

Texts From Last Night

"Hi," she said with a sheepish smile as she leaned forward to place a kiss on my stomach. "You're awake."

I sighed at the contact. "I am."

"I'm sorry I fell asleep."

"I'm not." I attempted to sit up and rest my weight on my elbows, but Bella vetoed my move as she stretched across me and pushed me back down onto my back.

She giggled as she returned to her original position. "This is for you, for my falling asleep after you promised me more orgasms."

Hell yes, I wouldn't argue with her logic as she wrapped her lips around the head of my already hard dick. Slowly, inch by inch, she engulfed me in her mouth. My eyes drifted shut as she hummed around me, her tongue sneaking out every so often to trail along my length as her head bobbed up and down.

Unable to resist watching her any longer, I sat up on my elbows and marveled at the sight of her plump lips wrapped around my cock. It wouldn't be long, I knew, before I exploded. Her hands trailed up my thighs before coming to a stop on my pelvic bone, her fingers tracing gentle patterns that completely contradicted the act that her mouth was performing just inches away.

"Bella," I warned her through clenched teeth, "I'm going to come."

She moaned against my cock in agreement, causing me to release into her mouth quickly, groaning loudly and uncontrollably as I did.

After releasing me from her between her lips with a pop, she sat back on her heels, licked her lips playfully, and shot a shit-eating grin at me. "Delicious."

I growled, sat up, and pulled her to me forcefully, molding our naked torsos together. "You're amazing," I said before crashing my lips onto hers and immediately running my tongue along her pillowy lips and inside her mouth.

Texts From Last Night

She moaned and pressed herself into me, her hands tangling in my hair as she ground her center into mine.

"You," she pulled away and looked me in the eye, "owe me another orgasm."

I cocked an eyebrow at her, stealing one of her patented moves. "I'm aware of that, Swan," I said as she wiggled against my length, causing all the blood that had just returned to my brain to flood down to my dick again.

She smiled and moved to place open mouthed kisses on my neck when there was a knock at the door. Bella's eyes, open wide with fear, flew to meet mine before she turned her head to shoot daggers at whoever was standing on the other side of the door.

"Shit," we whispered at the same time.

"Is everything okay in there?" It was Alice, thank God; at least she was kind of in on whatever this was that was happening between Bella and myself.

"This is your fault," Bella joked, poking me in the chest before climbing out of the bed.

"My fault?" I asked innocently.

She gave me a pointed look before beginning to order me around.

I didn't even pretend not to ogle her naked body. "Get in the bathroom," she hissed as I sat there and simply stared at her perky breasts that were now eye-level.

When I didn't move, or blink, she shoved me playfully and said, "Go."

I nodded mutely, still staring, and climbed out of bed. "Toss me a robe," she ordered.

"Uh, guys, seriously...is everything okay? Is Bella still sick?"

Texts From Last Night

Bella turned to me, a finger pressed to her lips. "Not a peep," she hissed quietly as she donned the robe and turned to open the door.

I sat in the bathroom, tapping my fingers against the countertop restlessly as Bella talked to Alice. After hearing her say a pitiful hello to our friend, I zoned out, thinking about the shower that was in front of me and what I planned on doing to Bella in it.

Less than a minute had passed before she returned to the bathroom, shutting and locking the door behind her.

"Well?"

"Well," she began, "we received a noise complaint."

xXx

Bella POV

January 2009, Junior Year

(650): Cops showed up at 4 am to address a noise complaint and she called them pussies for not doing shots with us.

"It's my birthday, it's my birthday," Alice cheered as she danced around the living room of our apartment in a pink ruffled dress with a black feather boa around her neck and a sparkly crown on top of her head.

"Little one is legal," Emmett boomed as he handed her a shot glass filled to the rim with Vodka.

As opposed to a celebratory wild night on the town, Alice had opted for a party at our apartment to ring in her 21 st . It was fine by me , as it allowed us to get a little crazier than was typically allowed at the bars. So, instead of a night complete with a shot book and random strangers buying her drinks, it was just eight of us (Tanya and Jake included) at the apartment with plenty of alcohol

Texts From Last Night

and music.

" Yay!" She said as she tossed back the shot and did a little dance before marching over to the poster on the wall and adding a check next to 'Vodka shot.'

Rose was standing beside me, a bottle of tequila in her hand and a container of lime juice in the other; she had declared earlier in the evening that she was tired of cutting up limes and that this was easier.

" Alice is going to hate life in the morning," Rose declared as we watched our tiny friend pull Jasper up off the couch and force him to dance with her.

" That she will."

I watched as Edward rounded the breakfast bar that separated the kitchen from the living room. Tanya was hanging from his arm like the leech that she was ; he had a shot glass in each hand.

" For the birthday girl," he said suavely as he approached Alice and handed her the glass.

She smiled and accepted the fruity-looking concoction. "Yum," she cried after downing the shot.

Edward smirked at her. "Have fun tonight, little one."

" You're leaving?" She pouted as she said the words. "Already?"

He cut his eyes to Tanya before answering. "She's got an early morning, I've got to take her home," he explained with a shrug.

Alice narrowed her eyes at Tanya menacingly . "Fine, bitch, take one of my best friends away."

Everyone's eyes widened at Alice's words.

Texts From Last Night

" Alice," Jasper warned as he walked up behind his girlfriend and placed a reassuring hand on each of her shoulders. "Be nice."

She brushed him away. "No, it's my birthday and I want Edward here," she stomped a high-heeled foot on the ground.

" You've got me, A," Emmett attempted, standing and walking towards her with his arms spread wide.

" And us," Rose said, grabbing my arm and pulling me closer to the mess that was unfolding in the middle of the room. Jake trailed behind me like a lost puppy.

" And him," I jerked a thumb towards Jake. Alice scowled at him but didn't say anything. He didn't notice her indifference.

Jasper kissed her gently on the neck. "And me, babe."

She folded her arms across her chest and glared at Edward and Tanya. "Fine, leave."

Edward looked wounded and like he might tell Tanya to catch a taxi to her apartment. He turned to her. "T, are you sure you can't just stay? I'm sure one of the girls would share their room until I was ready to leave."

Three sets of female eyes shot daggers at him. Apparently, he felt the anger being directed towards him as he corrected himself, "Or maybe not."

" Damn straight," Rose said.

" Whatever, Edward, if you're going to go, just go. I'll see you later," Alice said before removing herself from the circle we had formed . She moved to the kitchen in search of another drink. "This is my day and I'm not going to let that bitch ruin it," she added from the kitchen.

Texts From Last Night

Edward looked at us with a frown on his face before moving to the kitchen. "Alice Cullen," he said, eliciting a laugh from her at the mention of the little inside joke that the two of them had kept up since my birthday. "You don't hate me, do you?"

The six of us were quiet as we strained to listen to their exchange; Jasper walked to the iHome we had attached to the sound system and turned off the music so that we could hear better .

" No, I'm not mad at you. I just wish that she wasn't taking you away from us again."

" Again?"

" Yes, again. Every time things start to get fun, she starts complaining and you take her home and probably fuck her."

Edward was silent for a minute before answering.

" Alice, you know it isn't like that."

" Yes it is. I told you before, if I could get rid of that dog Jake, you and Bella would be perfect for each other. Why won't you just listen to me?"

I turned to Rose and rolled my eyes. Behind me, I heard Jake scoff.

" Can we please not go there again?" Edward begged.

" Yes, but only because it's my birthday and I don't want to deal with your drama. Go with Tanya. I'll see you tomorrow, E."

" Thanks, Al, have a good one, alright?"

" I will," she assured him before rejoining all of us in the living room. When she appeared, I dashed to the iHome and turned on her favorite artist of the moment, Lady Gaga.

Texts From Last Night

" Ready to dance your ass off, birthday girl?" I asked as Edward and Tanya slid through the front door without really saying goodbye to anyone .

Alice giggled and began twirling around with her hands in the air. "Turn it up, bitches!"

At two a.m., we made hot dogs to keep up our strength for dancing and drinking.

At two thirty a.m., Alice took a power nap that lasted half an hour while the music blared around her.

At three a.m., the birthday girl declared that for the rest of the night/morning, only 80s music was to be played .

At three thirty a.m., energy levels were lifted thanks to Cyndi Lauper and Michael Jackson.

At four a.m., there was a knock at the door.

" Maybe Edward's broken up with T-Monster and returned to the party!" Alice did a happy dance as she stumbled towards the door.

" Doubtful," Rose murmured under her breath with a look of hatred on her face.

" Shit," Alice said as she swung the door open . "You are not Edward or T-Monster."

" What's going on, A?" Emmett asked, turning down the music and walking over to the door.

Emmett's eyes widened and we heard him say, "Can we help you, officer?"

I shoved Rose in the bathroom ; she had yet to reach her milestone birthday none of us were up for a trip to jail tonight . I stepped in place beside Emmett

Texts From Last Night

at the door.

"... noise complaint," was all that I caught of the officer's statement.

"I see," Emmett said in the voice that he reserved for his parents and professors. "I'm very sorry about that, sir. It's just that it's our friends birthday," he gestured to Alice, "and we were celebrating. We must not have realized how loud we were."

"Two of your neighbors, from different apartments, called to complain."

"Really?"

The officer nodded. "Are you kids drinking this evening?"

Emmett nodded slowly. "Yes, sir."

"I'm going to need to see ID's for the five of you, then." My heart hammered in my chest. Was Rose included in the five?

I turned around and spotted Jake sitting on one end of the couch by himself. With a relieved sigh, I realized that they were referring to him.

"Sure, sir, hold on a sec," Emmett said.

The five of us scrambled to find our purses and wallets in the mess that the living room had become and quickly presented our IDs to the officer.

"So, you're the birthday girl?" He asked Alice as she handed him her ID.

She nodded happily. "Would you like a celebratory shot?"

The five of us stood still in shock as we waited for the officer's response to her inappropriate question. To our relief, he laughed.

"No, kid, I'm good."

Texts From Last Night

"Pussy," she retorted with her chin jutting out snobbily.

I gasped, Emmett pinched his nose with his thumb and forefinger, Jasper looked like he might start crying, and Jake stood there stupidly.

"Ma'am, because it's your birthday I'm going to let that slide. Here's your noise violation," he handed us the ticket he had written out while we retrieved our IDs. "Keep it down, alright?"

"Yes, officer, thank you," Emmett grabbed the ticket out of the man's hand and promptly shut the door before Alice could stick her foot in her mouth again.

"Alice, what the hell?" he asked once the door was shut.

She was sitting on the ground with her arms crossed. "What? He looked like he needed to be loosened up a bit, all stiff in that ugly uniform. Too bad he couldn't have a little fun. Pussy."

xXx

"A noise complaint?"

She bit her lip and nodded once before continuing. "Apparently your, uh, release was a little louder than we thought. Don't worry, I told Alice that I puked on you and you freaked out."

"Did she buy it?" I asked as she unwrapped the robe from her body. It was a good thing my entire question was out before she undressed, otherwise the words would have left my mind completely at the sight of her breasts and stomach and legs and...

Bella shrugged. "Maybe, I couldn't tell. When she looked at my obvious sex hair I told her it was a rat's nest from the rain and the puking."

"Ah." What had she said? Sex? Something about nesting? Shit, she was naked.

Texts From Last Night

"Come on, let's shower," she said as she pulled me away from the counter I was leaning on and wrapped her arms around my neck. "You owe me for dealing with Alice."

Dresses and Confessions

Chapter Sixteen: Dresses and Confessions

"Well, it's about damn time," Rose grumbled as I entered the kitchen the next morning after showering and making myself presentable for a day with the matriarchs of the Brandon and Hale families.

I glared at her playfully, unable to feel any anger due to the fact that I had gotten laid for the first time in months and was still basking in the euphoria. "Sorry," I said with a content sigh, "I forgot to set an alarm."

"Sure you did." Ignoring the doubtful look on Rose's face as she spoke, I moved to grab a bottle of water from the refrigerator.

"Where's Alice?" I asked when I turned around, shifting the subject away from me quickly.

"Already at the bridal boutique. Her mother and grandmother picked her up a half hour ago. I told her I would wait on you," she explained with while examining her nails, a sure sign of boredom and annoyance.

"Thanks, Rose," I said carefully. "What time are they expecting us?"

"Ten thirty."

I glanced at the clock, "It's eleven. Why didn't you come get me?" My voice was panicked, upset that I had been too caught up in the afterglow to make sure I was where I needed to be for my best friend.

She shrugged, a playful smirk appearing upon her lips. "Honestly, I wasn't sure what I would walk in on."

I felt my face redden. "What are you talking about?" I decided to play it cool, despite the fact that my skin was no doubt betraying me.

Texts From Last Night

"You were sick last night, right? I don't do well with people getting sick."

I let out a breath I didn't realize I had been holding. "Oh."

"What did you think I meant?" Her eyes narrowed.

"I wasn't sure," I answered honestly.

Sighing, she reached for her purse and grabbed the keys to the Tahoe off the counter. "Let's go," she announced, dangling the keys in front of my face.

I nodded and followed her through the house and out to the SUV. The moment I saw it, my entire body began to tingle at the memory of the night before. I stopped suddenly, my mind flooding with images that had me aching for Edward and his touch, to feel his skin against mine again. It was a little bit disconcerting, really, how attached I suddenly felt to the man.

Shaking my head to clear my thoughts, I told my vagina to chill out because her new best friend was busy doing other things, rounded the front of the car and climbed into the passenger side. Every other vehicle in the driveway was already gone, as Jasper had scheduled the tux fitting at some ungodly hour that Edward had been making a fuss about when he woke up. I won't even pretend that I didn't whine and beg for him to stay, tempting him with promises of carnal pleasure. I came close to victory before he chose his bro before his ho.

"So, you're feeling better?" Rose asked, breaking the silence of our ride as we neared downtown.

Turning to face her, I nodded. "I am, thanks."

"That was nice of Edward to take care of you."

Again with the blushing. "He was very, uh, helpful."

She snorted. "I bet." As she spoke, she pulled up in front of the bridal boutique that Alice had bribed into allowing us to use to try on our dresses, Maddison

Texts From Last Night

Row. It was charming, very Southern, and exactly what one would expect to find in the high end shopping section of downtown Charleston.

Like a cookie crumb trail left for unsuspecting children, Alice's incessant chatter and high pitched squeals led Rose and me to her as we entered the boutique and began to search for the private dressing area she had reserved for the morning. Though Alice had designed her gown and our bridesmaid dresses, the boutique was providing our shoes and accessories as well as their alteration services, should we need them.

"You're here!" She squealed when we rounded the corner and our reflection appeared in the mirror, tossing her hands up in glee. "Thank God. Jane, do you mind grabbing the bridesmaid dresses? Mother, Mimi, you remember Bella and Rosalie, don't you? Bella wasn't feeling well last night so I gave her a little extra time to sleep." Her mouth was moving a mile a minute and it didn't surprise me at all that she was able to get her entire series of questions out before taking a breath.

The bridal consultant nodded quickly and disappeared down the hall, no doubt to seek a private moment of silence while locating our dresses.

"Of course, darling. It's so good to see you both again," Alice's mother, Caroline, said as she stood to greet us both with a warm hug. "You remember my mother, Cece, yes?"

We both nodded and greeted her as well. Both women were, not surprisingly, petite like Alice and equally as kind. In addition to their size and disposition, both women were the epitome of high society--well dressed, well mannered, and each holding a glass of champagne in their right hand.

"Doesn't she look like a princess?" Caroline asked, pointing at Alice as she returned to her chair.

My eyes widened and I turned to face Alice again, realizing for the first time that she was standing in her wedding dress. How on earth I had managed to miss that huge detail during the last ten minutes I wasn't sure.

Texts From Last Night

"Oh my God, Alice, you look...there are no words for how breathtaking that dress is." It was the truth, Alice looked indescribable in the one of a kind creation.

She beamed as Rose echoed my sentiments. "Do you really think so?"

We both nodded furiously, more words of adoration flowing from our mouths as she turned and twirled on the small stage in front of the mirrored area.

The compliments were still flowing when Jane arrived with a dress draped over each arm. "Here are your dresses, ladies," she said with an excited grin as she appeared before us. They were short, cocktail length, and like nothing I had ever seen in a wedding before. Alice truly was an innovator in her field.

"Try them on!" she announced as Jane handed them to us. Rose and I turned to face one another, excitement written across both of our faces, before dashing towards the individual dressing areas nearby.

Alice had truly outdone herself with the design of the dresses, as they were original and completely flawless. I knew that no alternation would be necessary and that the colors she had chosen would be a perfect complement to the Charleston foliage and her gown. With a goofy grin on my face, I stepped out of the dressing room and met another beaming face--Rose.

The bride to be squealed again when she saw us and Jane cringed. The Brandon women seemed unfazed by the outburst. "They look so beautiful on the two of you!"

"You've got real talent, A," Rose said in a joking tone as she stepped up to join Alice on the stage.

Alice stood proudly as I joined them so that Rose and I were standing on either side of the bride to be. "I know." It was a rare moment of pride as Alice was never one to boast her talent, but she deserved it.

Texts From Last Night

It was a perfect moment as the three of us stood together, smiles on our faces and one of us in a wedding gown for the first time. I couldn't help the tears that sprung to my eyes in response to the happiness I felt and noticed immediately that Rose and Alice were in the same state of joy. With a happy sigh, Alice opened her arms, pulling us close to her as Rose and I folded our arms around her waist.

"I almost can't believe it," she whispered in awe as we stood together in a peaceful silence, neither of us having the words to respond to her comment.

"We'll leave the three of you alone," Cece said, standing and motioning for Caroline to follow her out of the dressing area.

"Can you believe I'm getting married?" Alice said in the same quiet tone as her previous statement, her eyes meeting ours in the mirror.

"It's about time my brother makes you honest," Rose said with a dry laugh as Alice playfully elbowed her in the side.

"You're living in just as much sin as I am, sister. Think your boy toy will ever pop the question?" Alice asked in response.

Rose shrugged. "Probably, I caught him looking at rings online last week."

Alice bounced happily. "Really?" she shrieked.

Rose nodded as if it was no big deal so Alice turned to me. "What about you, Bella? Do you see marriage in your future?"

I should have known the question was coming, but it caught me off guard. Did I see marriage in my future? Of course I did, always had. As much as it scared me to admit it, I even imagined a couple of kids running around with pudding on their faces and finger paint on their fingers.

"I, uh," Alice needed an answer, I knew. "I mean, maybe someday, if I meet the right person."

Texts From Last Night

Alice cocked her head to the side, a knowing grin on her lips. "That's interesting."

"Interesting?"

"Yeah, I mean, I don't know I just figured that after Jake you might be a little leery of the idea."

"I'm not leery of marriage, Alice," I protested. "I'm just not going to jump into an engagement because someone is afraid I'll spread my wings without them there to hold me down. I'll settle down one day, you both know that."

Rose cocked an eyebrow. "Someday? Honey, we aren't getting any younger."

"We're fucking twenty five," I deadpanned. "Did my mother rope the two of you into this conversation?" Renee had been on my back for the past couple of months about how I needed to 'meet a nice boy and settle down, give her a couple of grandkids.' It was annoying as Hell.

Alice giggled. "No, of course not, Bella. We just, you know, worry about you sometimes."

"You worry about me?" I was suddenly seeing a little bit of red because there was nothing I hated more than pity. Unwrapping my arm from Alice's waist, I pulled away from her side and turned so that I was facing them both head on.

"Well, yes," Alice said sheepishly.

Rose added, "I mean really, B, when was the last time you got laid?"

Cue intense blushing and lip biting.

"I, uh," I stalled, not sure if I wanted to go there right then. Really, I was torn between not telling them at all and screaming that Edward had given me no less than five orgasms the night before.

Texts From Last Night

Two sets of eyes widened and Alice gasped. "You weren't sick last night," she stated as realization settled on her features.

"Uh," I decided that I wanted them to come up with the answer themselves. "You fell for that?"

"You fucked Edward last night," Rose said before Alice could answer, a smirk appearing upon her lips.

I shrugged. "More than once, actually," I murmured, looking at the ground as I twirled my hands around each other.

Alice shrieked. "Finally, you little slut! I knew you looked more relaxed this morning. I can't believe you lied to me last night."

"Sorry," I said, even though I wasn't. Of all the things I felt, sorry definitely wasn't one of them.

"I forgive you, but only because you had good reason to do so."

"Thanks, Al," I said sarcastically.

She patted me reassuringly on the shoulder and smiled widely. "So, how was it?"

"Yeah, was he huge? A moaner? I've always kind of wondered about him..." Rose interjected.

I pretended to be offended by their questions, making a scandalized face and holding a hand to the base of my throat. "No, no details."

"Oh pleaaaase, Bella," Alice said, holding her hands together and begging. "Just a little bit? Was it good?"

Rose rolled her eyes. "Alice, if it wasn't good, I don't think it would have happened more than once. So, obviously it was. Give me more, Bella."

Texts From Last Night

I jerked my head in Rose's direction in agreement. "What she said. The first part."

Alice pouted. "Is that all you're going to give us?"

The pixie looked innocent and naïve, but we all knew that deep down she was a bit of a nosy freak. "For now," I sighed. "Maybe I'll give you more after I get a couple drinks."

"I'll take that for now," Alice conceded, holding her arm out for me to rejoin them in our triple embrace.

Once again, we were standing together in front of the mirror, three best friends. A door opened and Cece and Caroline reentered. "Ladies, I hate to break up your sweet moment, but we have to meet Mrs. Hale at the club in a half hour," she tapped her wristwatch as she spoke.

Alice nodded to inform her that she heard her statement and squeezed us to her one final time before releasing us. With a deep sigh, she smiled and stated in a serious tone, "Gird your loins, girls."

Rose laughed bitterly. "That's the truth. Caroline, Cece, you might want to take a moment to mentally prepare for what you are about to encounter. My mother can be a...handful."

Exactly half an hour later, our two car caravan pulled through the gates of the Charleston Country Club and drove down the long driveway that led to the clubhouse. The road was lined with magnolia trees that had no doubt been standing for centuries, giving the entire area an air of old charm and sophistication that had been the essence of the Antebellum South.

Caroline instructed us to hand our keys to the valet and, the next thing I knew, we were standing in front of one of the most intimidating women I had ever met. Though I had met Mrs. Hale several times when she and Mr. Hale had been in New Haven for parent weekends, she never failed to terrify me a bit.

Texts From Last Night

"Rosie, dear," Mrs. Hale said in a stiff tone as she appraised her daughter from where she stood in the middle of the opulent lobby. "Hello."

I was quickly reminded of where Rose's icy mannerisms originated. Eleanor Hale was elegant and flawless, much like her daughter, but she lacked the warmth that Rose radiated in spite of her bitchiness.

"Mother," Rose greeted as she kissed her mother on the cheek. "You remember Bella?"

"Isabella, yes." She glided over to me and kissed both of my cheeks as if she were a European socialite as opposed to the wife of a Texas oil baron. "Are you well?" Behind me, I heard Rose mutter something about me being 'very, very well...satisfied,' but I ignored it.

"Mrs. Hale," I said in greeting, unsure why she was asking about my well being in such a strange manner but I confirmed that I was, indeed, fine.

"Please," she scoffed, "Mrs. Hale is my mother in law. Remember, I prefer Eleanor."

"Of course," I said, though she had already moved on to Alice and the Brandons.

She greeted them in the same stiff manner as she had her own flesh and blood, but Alice didn't seem fazed by it at all. She still threw her arms around the older woman's neck despite the fact that Mrs. Hale, er, Eleanor, refused to hug her back.

"Shall we?" Eleanor asked after introductions and greetings were completed, lifting her hand and gesturing in the direction of what I assumed was one of many dining rooms.

We followed her down the wide hall until we reached the end of it and, to my surprise, the door was opened and we were ushered onto a large balcony. "I took the liberty of reserving a table outside," Eleanor explained.

Texts From Last Night

It was clear that none of us were bold enough to argue with her, so we nodded in agreement and sat around the large round table. A waiter appeared within seconds.

"We'll take five mimosas, dear, and keep them coming," Eleanor ordered. As the young man scurried away, she made a show of placing her napkin in her lap before saying, "Now, let's have some wedding talk, girls."

EPOV

"You look beat, man," Emmett leaned over and whispered as Jasper chatted on the other side of the room with his father and Mr. Brandon. We were in the card room at the Charleston Country Club, enjoying drinks and hors d'oeuvres in place of brunch.

I sighed and turned to face him. "I'm exhausted," I admitted.

He smirked. "Bella keep you up all night?" As he asked the question, he wiggled his eyebrows suggestively.

"What?" I asked, my eyes widening with shock. There was no way Emmett had figured out what was going on last night, was there? Sure, he was a lawyer...but unless he was working a case, it usually took him a little while to catch on.

He elbowed me in the arm. "You heard me, bro."

"I don't know what you're talking about," I said, reaching over and taking a pull of the whiskey on ice that was resting on a small table next to my chair.

"Come on, you can tell me," he goaded. "Was it disgusting or what? We all heard you yelling downstairs."

Wait, what? How could finally hooking up with Bella be anything close to disgusting? Was Emmett blind? Did I sound like I was unhappy during sex?

Texts From Last Night

"Of course not," I scoffed. "It was...hot." I wanted to say perfect, but I didn't want to sound like a total girl.

Emmett scrunched his nose up as a look of horror appeared upon his face. "Whatever you say, man."

Suddenly, it dawned on me. He hadn't figured it out; he was referring to the charade we had been putting on, telling everyone that Bella was ill so that they wouldn't question our disappearance.

"Wait, Em, what are you talking about?"

He narrowed his eyes and challenged me. "What are *you* talking about, Edward?"

Before I could answer, Alice's father stood and clinked a knife against his glass and announced that a toast was in order. I'll be honest, I didn't listen as he went on and on about Jasper, about how he couldn't have handpicked someone better for his Alice than him. Blah, blah...I was too preoccupied with coming up with an answer to Emmett's question that would appease him. Really, though, I was hoping that he would forget about it altogether.

Of course, he didn't. Sometimes-smart bastard.

As soon as Mr. Brandon returned to his seat, Jasper moseyed over to where we were sitting and pulled up a chair. "What did I miss over here?"

"I was just asking Edward a question, J, and you know what? He gave me a confusing answer," Emmett said in his lawyer voice. I rolled my eyes.

"Oh did he?" Jasper turned to me with a cocked eyebrow and a knowing look in his eyes. The smug fucker already knew what the deal was, but I was glad he was playing dumb. "Care to fill me in?"

I sighed and rubbed my strangely sweaty palms across the khaki fabric that covered my thighs. "Uh, well, you see..." I began. "Shit, I'm just going to come

Texts From Last Night

out and say it. I fucked Bella."

Jasper smirked casually and Emmett fist pumped. "'Bout time you tapped that," he said in a loud, immature tone.

I turned to Jasper. "They allow him to practice law in California? What the Hell?" I asked quietly.

Jasper shrugged. "Apparently, yes," he said. "Seriously, though, you and Bella? That's great man."

I nodded, unable to stop a silly grin from spreading across my lips.

"I have to agree with Em, it's about damn time. We all knew it was coming."

"You did? Even you?" I pointed to Emmett.

He pretended to be offended. "Hey, I'm smarter than you think, Eduardo. I could tell there was something going on between the two of you that day on the beach."

"Well...damn."

"Damn straight," Emmett said proudly.

No further questions were asked, thank God, because if one of them asked me how Bella was in bed, despite the fact that I knew neither of them were attracted to her in any way, I probably wouldn't have reacted very kindly.

"Here's the thing, though," I added as an afterthought, "don't mention it around the girls. I don't know if Bella's told them yet."

"You got it," Jasper said at the same time Emmett said, "Sure, bro."

I settled back into my chair, finally able to fully relax knowing that it wouldn't be long before Bella and I no longer had to hide whatever it was that we were

Texts From Last Night

from our friends. As sexy as it was to sneak around, it was clear that it frustrated both of us to keep our hands to ourselves in front of them.

Visions of all the places I could kiss Bella were flooding my mind when I felt my phone vibrating in my pocket. Pulling it out, I glanced at the screen to see that I had a new text from the vixen herself.

"Excuse me," I said, standing quickly and exiting into the hall before opening the message.

Save me from the ice queen.

I chuckled and typed out a response.

Eleanor Hale?

The one and only. Where are you?

Charleston Country Club, card room.

Meet me somewhere?

Where did you have in mind?

Outside of the ladies room, third floor.

Fuck yes. I began walking before my response was complete, the sudden desire to see her overwhelming me completely.

Be there in five.

As I hurried through the ornately decorated halls of the country club, I could already feel myself getting hard in anticipation. *Really, Edward...do you think she's going to fuck you in the bathroom of the damn country club?* I blamed my dick. It had been so long since I had gotten off by someone other than myself and now, it seemed, it was needy and insatiable. Damnit.

Texts From Last Night

When I finally saw her standing in front of the ladies' room, I sped up like the overeager ass that I was becoming. She heard me, apparently, and looked up from where her gaze was trained on the floor.

"Hi," she said shyly once I was in front of her.

"Hi yourself," I said, reaching out to cup her face in my hands and pull her in for a quick kiss. "How's brunch with the ladies going?"

She rolled her eyes. "Brutal. They're discussing flowers and lace and shit and all I want to do is drink the endless supply of mimosas that Eleanor ordered."

"That sucks." I rubbed my thumbs across her cheekbones. She nodded against my hands.

"It does," she agreed. "But, I told them I had to take an urgent call from my mother so I have a little bit of time before they send out a search party," she said in a playful tone as she looped her index fingers through the belt loops of my pants.

"Did you now?"

She pulled her lip between her teeth and nodded shyly. "Mmhmm."

I nearly groaned at the sight. "Where can we go?" I asked urgently.

Bella looked back and forth furtively before moving to the right and leaning against the door to the ladies room and pulling me in by my belt loops. Well, fuck me; maybe we *were* going to get it on in the restroom.

She giggled and locked the door when it shut behind us, assuring me that all of the stalls were empty as she had been standing guard while waiting for me to arrive. Without warning, she removed her fingers from my belt loops and slid her arms up my chest, fisting my polo in her hands and pulling me to her with force, our lips crashing together.

Texts From Last Night

I reacted immediately, pushing my hips into hers as I backed her against the door we had just entered. Shit, if it was locked I was going to use it to my advantage. Our lips moved against one another's desperately, teeth and tongue everywhere as my hands worked the buttons of her blouse. As hot as it made her tits look, I knew they looked even better without a barrier.

"Damn baby," I said, pulling away and placing a kiss in the middle of her neck. "I wasn't expecting this."

She moaned. "You like it?"

"Hell yes," I said, pulling back so that I could push her blouse off her shoulders as I lifted my arms so that she could lift my shirt over my head.

I stepped forward so that our bodies were meshed together again, her back pressed firmly against the door. Our kisses slowed a bit, but the thrill of the moment seemed to heighten our reactions to one another as our tongues fought for dominance. I felt her shiver as I trailed my hands down her side until they were resting at the waistband of her shorts, my fingertips pausing to dust across her breasts as they moved.

Reflexively, her hips moved forward as I made quick work of her shorts, unbuttoning them and sliding them down her legs, not bothering to wait for her to step out of them as I dipped my fingers into her panties. "So wet," I groaned as my fingers slid across her folds.

She moaned as her lips fell away from mine, her head falling back against the door. I placed opened mouthed kisses along the swell of her breasts as my fingers worked her slowly, avoiding her most sensitive areas and making her squirm. "Edward," she breathed as she bucked her hips, no doubt in search of the friction that I was denying her.

"Yes?" I asked playfully against the skin of her chest, my tongue darting out to taste her.

Texts From Last Night

"Mmm, Edward, I want..." she moaned, her hips bucking again as her hands slid into my hair.

I smirked, knowing that I had her right where I wanted her. "Tell me, Bella. Tell me what you want."

"I want, oh God," I pulled the cup of her bra down with my free hand and dragged my tongue across her nipple. It pebbled immediately and I repeated my action, earning me more moans and sighs. "Inside me," she answered vaguely. "Your hands, your dick, whatever," she added. "Fuck, quit teasing and make me come."

My dick twitched in response to the demanding tone of Bella's voice.

"Edward," she pleaded and I finally gave into her demands, easily sliding two fingers inside of her wetness as my thumb massaged her swollen clit. "So good," she said, her voice throaty.

"Good, baby?" I asked, straightening and bringing my lips to hers. Her walls began to tighten around my fingers as I continued to pump them in and out of her quickly.

"So good," she moaned again. "So close, Edward."

I inserted another finger and kissed a trail along her jaw to her ear. "Come for me, Bella," I whispered and she did just that, crying out in ecstasy as she clamped down on my fingers. As she came, I couldn't help but stare at her in fascination because the image of Bella's face contorting with pleasure was quickly becoming one of my favorite sights. I continued to pump my fingers inside of her until she came down from her orgasm, pulling them out of her as her body sagged against mine.

I wrapped one arm around her waist for support and lifted the other to cup the back of her head, pulling her forward for a slow, gentle kiss. "I think it's getting close to search party time."

Texts From Last Night

She pulled back and sighed. "Are you," she nodded towards my obvious bulge where my dick was painfully straining against my pants. "Do I need to?"

I shook my head back and forth. "I'll manage," I said.

"If you're sure," she said slowly as she bent down to pull up her shorts and grab her shirt. We redressed quickly, exchanging silly grins and looks as we did.

"Thanks, Edward," she said as we stepped out into the hall. She leaned forward and kissed me sweetly before whispering, "I owe you one tonight," against my lips. Without saying another word, she disappeared around the corner.

With a sigh, I looked down at the bulge in my pants, mentally telling my dick to chill the fuck out because I was damn sure she would be helping me out later because, thankfully, the night before had not been a one time thing.

As I walked back towards the card room, I fleetingly wondered if I would *ever* get enough of her.

Blushing

Chapter Seventeen: Blushing

As I strolled through the ornately decorated hall that led me back towards the balcony where we had been having lunch, I tried to suppress my smile. I knew that if I didn't at least attempt to suppress my happiness and wipe the I-just-got-some-in-the-bathroom smirk off my face, then Alice and Rose would know something was up the second that I stepped foot outside. So, I tried. Really, really tried. I thought of everything I could to make myself less giddy-puppies being abandoned, a store not having my size in a pair of shoes I adored, that one time I was five minutes late to the ticket booth for a play I had been dying to see on Broadway before it ended and didn't get a ticket-but none of it worked. Apparently, I was...genuinely happy.

Damn, Alice was *so* going to know something was up.

I'll admit, I hadn't expected the innocent text message that I had sent to Edward begging him to save me from the ice queen to result in such a public display of affection. In fact, I had mostly expected him to simply respond that she was, in fact, icy before launching into a detailed description of Mr. Hale's weird, aristocratic mustache that curled up at the ends. But, of course, he surprised the hell out of me by coming to my rescue and was standing in front of me less than ten minutes later, cupping my face in his hands and kissing me.

It was sickeningly sweet, to be honest, but I was swooning.

"Sorry," I announced as I stepped outside to find the waiter refilling drinks. "My mother...you all know how she is."

Caroline and Eleanor nodded in understanding, as Alice and Rose appraised me with narrowed, calculating expressions on their faces. Deep in thought, Alice cocked her head to the side.

"What did I miss?" I asked, settling into my seat between Alice and Rose as

Texts From Last Night

they continued to openly stare at me.

"You missed a fascinating conversation about hairstyles for Saturday," Cece said in a bored tone that told me she wished she could have escaped with me.

I raised my eyebrows. "Is that right? What a shame."

Rose scoffed. "I'm sure you'll be filled in at some point."

I took a large sip of my mimosa before murmuring, "I don't doubt it," at the same time that Alice began violently coughing, having evidently choked on her drink.

I acted quickly, reaching over to swat her across the back as she continued to gasp for air. "Did you choke?"

She nodded, her eyes wide as her face began to turn red. After a few moments, she began to breathe normally and her skin began to return to its normal shade. As she reached for the glass of water resting on the table next to her champagne flute, she nodded vaguely in my direction. I knitted my eyebrows together in confusion as she continued to gape at my chest. Looking to my right at Rose, I hoped that she might be able to offer an explanation, but she merely shrugged in response.

"Bella?" Alice asked, drawing my attention back to her.

"Yeah?"

She didn't speak as I trained my eyes on her, instead making a weird gesture against her midsection. Assuming that it might be related to her choking incident, I began to pat her on the back again.

"Stop!" she squealed. I retracted my hand quickly.

I shook my head back and forth once. "I don't understand what you're trying tell me with your signals, Alice," I whispered.

Texts From Last Night

She rolled her eyes and looked over my shoulder to Rose, an expectant expression on her face. I turned to face my other friend once again. "What the hell, you two?"

Rose had a knowing grin gracing her lips that made me nervous. I looked to Alice again to find her bouncing up and down in her seat, doing that weird gesture again. To me, it looked like one of those cryptic signals that a first base coach might make to his players.

"Seriously? What is going on? Did I miss something else while I was gone?"

"Oh, you missed something alright," Rose said, the knowing tone of her voice matching the annoying look on her face.

Alice gasped. "Rose!"

She shrugged and confidently said, "I'm just stating the obvious, Alice."

I laid my hands on the table, palms down. "This is ridiculous. Tell me what is going on. Now," I said through my clenched teeth.

When both Alice and Rose refused to answer me, Eleanor chimed in. "I think what they're trying to say, dear, is that you missed a button on your blouse."

I could feel my entire body flush with embarrassment. *Could they tell what I had just been doing? Was it obvious in that I-just-got-finger-fucked-in-the-bathroom kind of way?*

Glancing down quickly, I realized that I had, in fact, missed a button on my blouse and, in turn, messed up the entire thing. "Shit," I mumbled under my breath as I refused to look up from my lap.

Rose leaned over and whispered in my ear, "What the hell happened when you were on the phone, B?"

Texts From Last Night

I cut my eyes to her and refused to answer. Alice leaned in from her side. "Oh my God, your mother didn't call did she?"

Rather than answer her, I simply ducked my head and looked up at her through my eyelashes.

"Bella, did you see *him*?" she whisper-yelled.

I was sure that my face was the same color as the strawberries that had been resting in the middle of the table since our arrival. Avoiding her intruding questions again, I bit my lip nervously.

"Obviously, Alice," Rose whisper-hissed. "Did you screw Edward in a broom closet?"

I shook my head quickly. "I did not screw Edward in the bathroom," I hissed. "Can we please just drop this?"

"No," Alice and Rose whispered at the same time. I glared straight ahead, unable to look at both of them at the same time.

"Wait, you said that you didn't screw Edward in the bathroom," Rose continued as she poked me in the arm with a manicured nail. "I said broom closet."

Fuck, they were going to figure it out.

I opened my mouth to speak, but couldn't come up with a statement that would help my situation.

"So you did see him," Alice assumed when I remained silent.

I nodded slowly, my lower lip trapped between my teeth.

"And you fucked him?" Rose asked.

Texts From Last Night

Nonverbal communication was working well for me, so I didn't bother with words, instead shaking my head back and forth.

"Then why is your shirt buttoned wrong?"

I wanted to place tape over Alice's mouth to shut her up, I was so *done* with this conversation. Glancing across the table, I could see that the elder women were, thankfully, engrossed in a conversation about the rehearsal dinner menu.

"Clearly, he took her shirt off, Alice," Rose cut in. "Just tell us how far you went, B. I'm fascinated by public play." *I'm sure you are.*

Normally, this conversation wouldn't have bothered me, especially considering the unlimited supply of mimosas that kept appearing in front of me. But in front of their mothers and a grandmother, I was completely mortified.

"Alice," I looked at her pointedly before turning, "Rose. This conversation is done for now. I will not discuss my sex life in front of your mothers and Cece. Maybe, and that's a big maybe, I will give you details later." The entire statement was whispered and, miraculously, seemed to appease them as they nodded in understanding.

Realizing that the rehearsal dinner menu had apparently been settled upon as the elder women had quieted, I stated loudly that I needed to go fix my blouse and made a move to stand.

Eleanor was looking at me, a curious expression on her botoxed features. "Isabella, there's no need for you to fix it. After all, I'm sure it's been that way since we left the boutique."

I wanted to lean across the table and give her a massive hug for saving me, but I restrained myself. Eleanor wasn't what one would call a hugger. Instead, I nodded to her and weakly said, "Probably so," as I sat back down in my chair.

Rose snorted and downed what was left of her mimosa as Alice again peppered me with questions. Eventually, I turned to her and glared angrily. "Alice, drop

Texts From Last Night

it," I snipped. Seriously, had the woman not heard my statement less than a minute prior?

The diameter of her eyes doubled as she took in the expression on my face. "Later?" she asked hopefully. Clearly, the woman was fearless...and possibly equipped with selective hearing.

I nodded, knowing it was the only way to appease her. "Later."

As my face slowly returned to its normal shade of pasty white, conversation resumed as our food arrived. Alice got bouncy and excited when Rose and I told her our plans for her Bachelorette night the following evening and Caroline made a comment about how she wished she could attend because it sounded like such a good time. For a brief moment, it seemed as if Alice was considering inviting her and the other women along, but then Rose made a noise resembling an angry growl that clearly had her reconsidering. In general, as plans were made and laughter was heard all around, it seemed as if my moment of shame had passed and, luckily, it had been mostly pain free.

"So, tell me Alice, who did my son choose as his second groomsman to complement your lovely ladies?" Eleanor asked as our plates were cleared away.

"Didn't he tell you?" Alice asked, her eyebrows lifted in surprise.

Eleanor shook her head. "You know my son is a man of few words, dear. If the information isn't critical, I tend to not learn it until the last minute."

"Oh," Alice nodded in understanding. "Well, he chose Edward. Do you remember him? Tall, crazy hair..."

"Beautiful eyes and completely gorgeous," Eleanor finished. "Rose, darling, if I ever left your father, I might considering being a cougar for that young man."

It was my turn to choke on my drink.

Texts From Last Night

"Mother!" Rose was completely scandalized, as she should be.

I was blushing again as Alice patted me on the back and handed me a glass of water.

"What?" Eleanor asked innocently. "You know the man is sex on legs."

"Oh my God," Rose said in a horrified tone as she buried her head in her hands. "I cannot believe we are having this conversation," she said, her voice muffled.

"I'm sure Bella agrees," Eleanor said with a wink in my direction. "Am I right?"

My mouth fell open. "Uh, sure, he's, um, very nice looking."

"Nice looking? I think the term god-like might be more appropriate. I remember when Jasper brought him to Texas with him one week during the summer after their junior year..."

xXx

Edward POV

Summer 2009

(847): So I used to make fun of Texas a lot, then I got here and I where I could get my tequila in a to go cup with a straw and I realized that this is the only place I ever want to be.

"So, Jazz, what should I expect? Cowboys everywhere? Lots of dust and cows? Men carrying guns on their belts?" I asked as our plane descended towards the Dallas/Fort Worth International Airport.

He turned to me with humor in his eyes. "Edward, my family lives in Southlake, one of the most affluent neighborhoods in the state. There are no real cowboys and there are certainly no cows just walking around."

Texts From Last Night

"And the guns?"

He shook his head back and forth with a sly grin on his face. "Maybe on Friday nights. Football can get kind of intense here, you know."

"I've heard," I commented as I pondered his answers. "What about cowgirls?" I wiggled my eyebrows as I asked the question.

"I think it's an unofficial law for all women in Texas to own a pair of cowboy boots, if that means anything," he answered with a wistful look on his face. "I think even my mother has a pair."

I nodded my head slowly as I considered this. Cowboy boots on girls, in my experience, could definitely be a hot look. "I can deal with that."

"My mom in cowboy boots?" Jasper seemed horrified by the notion.

*"No, idiot, **girls** in cowboy boots."*

"Oh." He sounded only somewhat relieved.

"Who do you think I am?"

"A horny twenty-one year old that is on a break with his girlfriend for the summer."

Touche. "Seriously, though, your mom?"

Jasper grimaced. "You haven't seen my mom since her most recent facelift," he explained with a frown.

Texas was, in a word, scorching. Seriously, there was no way to describe the terrible combination that was the heat and the humidity. As Mr. Hale drove us through the busy city streets that would lead us to their suburban neighborhood, I wondered if the weather in Texas was similar to the climate in Hell.

Texts From Last Night

"This your first time in the South, son?" Mr. Hale asked. Though I had met him before at various events in New Haven--parents' weekends, Rose and Jasper's birthdays--it was different to see him in his own element.

"Yes sir, how can you tell?"

"You look like you're considering whether or not this is what Hell feels like," he explained with a hearty chuckle.

"Actually, I kind of was," I admitted sheepishly, hoping that my immediate hatred of the heat and humidity wouldn't offend him.

"Ah, you'll get used to it," he said as he made a sudden turn off the road and into the parking lot of what looked like a Mexican restaurant. "You boys want a drink?"

"I'll take a water," I answered without hesitation as he pulled into an empty space up front. The combination of the heat and the long flight had me feeling a bit parched. "Thanks."

He smirked. "Water? That's all?"

"I guess so." I shrugged. "Maybe a Powerade?"

Jasper turned around to face me. "He means a drink drink Edward, like beer or whiskey."

I arched an eyebrow at the mention of whiskey, knowing Jasper didn't equate it with happy times.

"Don't worry, I'm getting a rum and coke," he assured me. "What'll it be?"

I grinned like a fat kid that had just been given a huge cake just for the hell of it. "Uh, I'll have tequila with pineapple juice."

"Pussy," Jasper said under his breath.

Texts From Last Night

"Fine," I stated, not wanting to look like a girl to my friend's father, "straight tequila, then."

Mr. Hale's eyebrows rose in surprise and a grin spread across his face. "Straight tequila it is. I'll be right back, boys."

A few minutes after he disappeared inside the restaurant, I leaned forward and asked Jasper, "So you can just carry drinks around here?"

He nodded. "No open container laws. It's incredible."

"Damn, that is nice. Why can't everywhere be like Texas?"

"Because then we wouldn't be able to say that everything is bigger in Texas," Jasper said in his decidedly Southern drawl.

As we pulled through the streets of Southlake, sipping our drinks as Mr. Hale saved his for later, I couldn't tear my eyes away from the houses we passed-each one was impossibly bigger than the first. Jasper had definitely not been kidding about everything being bigger in Texas, that was for sure. As a matter of fact, the houses here made my parent's 4,000 square foot home in Chicago look like a shack

After parking and unloading our bags, we followed Mr. Hale into the house. In the massive foyer, Mrs. Hale was waiting with a tray of drinks that looked fruity and full of alcohol. As we stepped closer, it was clear that her face had been lifted once again, but she still looked the same to me-fake and afraid of aging.

"Edward," she cooed as I stepped forward, "it is so good to see you again."

I internally cringed as she placed the tray on a table and threw her arms around me in an awkward hug. Jasper hid his laughter at my obvious pain.

"Have a drink," she gestured to the tray after releasing me. Though I was feeling slightly drunk from the straight tequila I had consumed on the way

Texts From Last Night

over, I took one anyway. If college had taught me anything, it was not to turn down free alcohol.

"Thanks, Mrs. Hale," I said as I began drinking.

She fucking winked. "Eleanor, dear, remember?" she corrected. "Why don't you boys run along and go for a swim?"

Jasper shrugged. "Sure, wanna go swim Edward?"

Truthfully, a swim sounded great on two levels-first, it would get me away from Eleanor and second, it would relieve me from the scorching heat.

"Yeah, that sounds good," I told Jasper before nodding at Eleanor and murmuring, "Thanks for the drink."

"Dude, your mom winked at me," I commented once we had changed and were wading into the refreshingly cold water of the pool.

Jasper laughed loudly. "No she didn't. Really?"

I stared at him blankly. "Would I joke about that?" Maybe it was the facelifts, maybe it was the awkward hug, but the woman had me a little on edge.

"I guess not," Jasper said with a shrug. "Just don't act on it. She's probably wasted, anyway."

"I'm pretty sure you don't need to worry about me acting on it, Jasper. Fuck, it's your mom."

"Speaking of..." he trailed off, looking over my shoulder. "Here she comes."

I turned around to find Mrs. Hale waltzing towards the pool in a classy one-piece, cocktail in hand. Her piercing gaze was focusing on my bare chest, making me feel uneasy and antsy, so with a sigh, I dove under the cover of the water. When I popped back up, Jasper was laughing heartily.

Texts From Last Night

"You want another drink, man?" He asked as we lifted ourselves onto the rafts that had been floating in the water when we arrived.

"Yes, please," I answered without hesitation.

"Mom? Are there more drinks?" Jasper called out.

"No, hon, you'll have to go get something from the store," she answered from her perch on a cushioned lounge chair. "Your father's friends cleaned out the entire damn liquor cabinet last weekend and I've been too swamped to replenish it."

Translation: she had been too busy tanning and lunching with her friends to go to the store. Either that, or the help had the week off. Really, it was a miracle that Jasper had turned out to be so damn normal-one would never suspect the wealth that his family held by simply glancing at him. Rose, on the other hand, was a different story...

Jasper turned to me and lifted an eyebrow, a smirk forming on his lips. "Ready for tequila-to-go round two?"

More take-out drinks? Hell yes. I suddenly realized that, regardless of how edgy Mrs. Hale made me feel, it was going to be a sad, sober day when I had to leave Texas.

xXx

"He and Jasper must have been drunk for at least half of the week," Eleanor said with a giggle as she thought of Edward. "He was thrilled with the fact that there were no open container laws."

I was quickly realizing two things: first, Eleanor's iciness melted once she had some alcohol in her system and second, she had a little bit of a cougar-crush on my...whatever Edward was to me.

Texts From Last Night

"Bella knows all about how hot Edward is, mother," Rose commented with a smirk. " *Trust me.*"

I gave her the same stink eye that I had shared with the waitress at dinner the night before. "Rose," I hissed in an attempt to keep her quiet.

She laughed and rolled her eyes. "Admit it, you're dying for everyone to know that the two of you are finally fucking."

I froze, blush returning to my face for what seemed like the millionth time that day.

Alice gasped. "Oh my God, Rose, I can't believe you just said that!"

"You're one lucky lady," Eleanor commented. "I could always tell he had an eye for you, even though *both* of you were blind to it."

I was so shocked by the topic of our conversation that I barely registered her comment about Edward being attracted to me.

Across the table, Cece was grinning and Caroline was clapping happily and bouncing a little, looking very much like Alice when she got excited. I considered asking Eleanor to expand upon her statement about Edward and his eyes, but she began talking again before I had the chance.

"Is he good in bed? He always looked like he would be good in bed...a passionate lover, if you will," Eleanor said, adding to my humiliation. *So much for asking about Edward's supposed attraction...*

"This is not happening," I said to myself as I lifted my hands to rub circles against my temples.

Cece spoke next. "What about size? Ever since I met the boy at Alice's birthday that year in New Haven, I've wondered..."

Texts From Last Night

Had Cece Brandon seriously just asked me how big Edward's dick was? I was mortified and afraid my eyeballs might pop out of my head, so I leaned forward and rested my forehead on the table, ignoring the conversation around me as I closed my eyes and attempted to go to my happy place. My happy place filled with images of Edward.

"Ask her where she really was when her 'mom called'," I heard Alice say with a giggle and, though I didn't see it myself, I would put money on the fact that she had used air quotes. I wanted to scream that she was a traitor. After all, I thought she was on my side here...the good side, the side that didn't want to talk with their friends' mothers and grandmother about her sex life.

When it was clear that I wasn't going to lift my head to share my exploits with them, Rose shared for me. "She fucked him in the bathroom," she said nonchalantly, as if it was normal for me to go around hooking up with men in bathrooms.

I sat up quickly. "I didn't fuck him in the bathroom," I yelled loud enough to quiet everyone.

Five mouths gaped in shock as they looked to me for an explanation. "I mean, uh, we just, did other things," I continued lamely. "Okay?"

Cece and Caroline nodded as Eleanor smirked and said, "Hell, I don't blame you. If he was mine, we'd be humping like bunnies."

I cringed, an unbidden image of Eleanor and Edward doing the deed. "Uh..."

"Well," Cece announced, breaking the awkward silence as she leaned down to get her purse, "as lovely as this meal has been, I believe it's time for my afternoon nap."

"Yes, that's a great idea," I said with a little too much excitement. "Naps are nice." *And I'm an idiot.*

"They are, dear." She stood and gestured towards Caroline. "Well, let's go."

Texts From Last Night

It was kind of incredible, the power that the eldest woman at the table held. With a simple statement, she had managed to put an end to my complete and utter humiliation. The love I had been feeling towards Eleanor when she saved me earlier in the meal was quickly transferred to Cece. Sweet, sweet Cece.

Within a matter of minutes, our table had been cleared and the six of us were standing at the front of the country club waiting for our cars to be brought around by the valet. They arrived quickly, goodbyes were exchanged, and before I knew it, I was alone with Rose in the car again. I was glad no one else was around so that I could freely share what was on my mind.

"I hate you," I mumbled as we drove across the bridge that led to the area of Charleston we were staying in, my gaze trained out the window at the passing scenery.

Rose laughed dryly. "You love me."

"No," I said. "I very much hate you right now. I can't believe you told your mother about Edward and me. That was the most embarrassing moment *of my life*."

"She was going to find out eventually. And, really, you know you've done worse. Remember that time your mom saw pictures of you and Jake on Facebook?"

xXx

Bella POV

September 2008, Junior Year

(313): I did not join FB to see my only child straddle that boy in all her pictures.

"Alice, no, you cannot upload those to Facebook. Please, please don't," I begged from where I sat next to Alice at one of our favorite study spots. We

Texts From Last Night

were supposed to be studying for mid-terms but, obviously, we were distracted.

She giggled and pressed the 'upload' button. "Too late," she stated innocently before shutting her laptop. "They're kind of hot, I don't know why you wouldn't want everyone to see them."

The pictures in question were from two nights prior. After leaving him in limbo for a couple of weeks, I had finally caved and let Jake back into my life. Of course, that translated to having a few too many cocktails downtown and engaging in some dirty dancing. Judging by the photographs Alice had snapped, we hadn't exactly been hands-off.

"My mother has facebook, Alice," I said with a groan. "And not much of a life, especially if she's on the road with Phil."

Alice frowned. "Oh. Oops."

"Yes, oops. I give her five minutes."

"Five minutes?"

My phone beeped, announcing the arrival of a new text message. Flipping it open, I read it quickly before showing it to Alice.

***I did not join FB to see my only child straddle that boy in all her pictures.
-Mom***

"That was only a minute," Alice said in awe after she read the message.

I shrugged. "Some days she's more bored than others, I guess," I mumbled as I typed a response.

Must have been my evil twin :) -B

Isabella Swan, you need to remove those immediately. -Mom

Texts From Last Night

Blame Alice. -B

Alice isn't the one in the pictures, is she? -Mom

She was behind the camera which is just as bad. -B

No, it isn't. Bella, BEHAVE. -Mom

I rolled my eyes dramatically.

Yeah, yeah. You're just jealous of my life. Lots of studying to do...love you! -B

"She'll get over it," I assured Alice when I got no response from Renee.

Alice giggled. "Jake sure seems to like them. Look at his comments." She turned her laptop so that I could read where Jake had already commented on the pictures. The words, 'hot', 'sexy', and 'daaamn baby, we look good' filled the screen.

I blushed at his reaction.

"Maybe you should thank me?" Alice puffed her chest out as she spoke. "I'm sure those will do wonders for your sex life."

My phone began to ring and I glanced down, all of my breath leaving my lungs as I saw who the caller was. I mumbled, "If I make it out alive," before pressed the button to answer.

"Um...hi dad."

As soon as I picked up, he launched into a tirade about the pictures. Apparently, Renee had attached them to an e-mail and typed 'VERY IMPORTANT' in the subject line to catch his attention. Of course, it did, as he was still over the moon for my mother and would do, or in this case read, anything she asked. As he went on and on about how embarrassed and

Texts From Last Night

disappointed he was, I felt my face redden and my stomach grow queasy.

"What do you have to say for yourself?" He asked at the end of his 'I'm very disappointed' speech.

"Sorry?" I really didn't think anything else would help the situation, so I stuck to the basics.

"That's all? Sorry?"

"And...it won't happen again."

"It damn well better not happen again, or I'll see to it that that boy is never able to have children."

I gasped. "Dad!"

"Don't test me, Bells. I know people."

I rolled my eyes. "I know that you know people, Dad. Just...chill out...okay? It, uh, it won't happen again."

"Good," he paused. "Now, good luck with your mid-terms."

"Thanks," I said sheepishly.

"Oh and Bells?"

"Yeah?"

"Jake is next on my list to call."

xXx

"That's irrelevant and today was much worse. You could have at least done it with a little more class," I argued. "So, you owe me."

Texts From Last Night

"I owe you?"

"Yes, you owe me...big time," I confirmed.

She sighed loudly. "Fine, what do you want?"

"I don't know yet. I'll let you know when I do."

"Fine."

"Fine," I echoed as she turned the Tahoe into the driveway next to the house.

My annoyance and embarrassment fell away as we stepped into the house and I spotted Edward on the couch, a cold beer in his hand and a grin on his face as he watched a baseball game with Jasper and Emmett.

"Hey guys," I said as I entered the room and joined Edward on the couch, putting space between us so as not to draw attention...if that was possible at all; I doubted it with Rose around.

"Hey," Jasper and Emmett said in unison without removing their attention from the game. Edward turned to me and grinned. "Swan," he said with a smirk that made me want to kiss him so badly it hurt.

I sighed and settled back against the cushions as I watched with envy as Rose climbed into Emmett's lap and he planted a sweet kiss on her forehead, murmuring, "Hey baby," as he did. Edward, I noticed, was watching too and I'm fairly certain I heard him groan.

The baseball game dragged on as Edward and I sat there with grumpy looks on our faces. At least, he had a grumpy look on his face. I'm sure though that if I looked in the mirror, I would look very unhappy, too. Also, as the game had progressed, we had inched closer to one another without really noticing. It didn't hit me that our bodies were mere centimeters away until I heard Rose huff in annoyance.

Texts From Last Night

"Just touch her already. Damn," Rose said with an annoyed sigh as she glared at Edward from across the room.

I looked down to see that his hand was hovering over my thigh, ready to be placed on top of it at a moment's notice.

Edward turned to me with wide, questioning eyes, no doubt curious as to why Rose would be ordering us to engage in a public display of affection.

I looked up at him, biting my lip and explaining in a shy tone, "They figured it out this morning."

His lips slid into a sexy grin. "Good," he said, nodding towards Jasper and Emmett, "because I told them before we, uh, you know...the bathroom," he whispered the last two words of his explanation.

I flushed at the mention of our secret rendezvous. "You did?" The surprise was evident in my voice.

He nodded slowly and reached across the space between us to cup my cheek in his hand. "I did," he confirmed as he closed the space between us, his other hand coming to rest on my thigh. "Was that okay?"

I leaned into his hand and smiled. "Rose told Eleanor and the Brandon women, too."

"I don't care," he said in a low voice as he leaned closer.

"I don't either," I breathed. I could feel his breath on my lips as we sat there, our faces close but neither of us moving. "Edward?"

"Yeah?" He asked, his eyes focused hooded and focused on my lips.

"Kiss me, damnit."

In The Moment

Chapter Eighteen: In The Moment

EPOV

When Bella and Rose arrived back at the house after brunch, I wanted nothing more than to toss my arm around Bella's shoulders and pull her into my side as we watched the end of some baseball game. I also wanted to kiss her and lick her and, God help me, fuck her senseless. Ever since our secret meeting at the club, I had been dying to get my hands on her again. I knew, though, that none of those actions were acceptable in front of our friends, some of which were surely still in the dark about our...status.

As we sat next to one another on the couch, I attempted to focus my mind on the game in front of me. Unfortunately, every time the announcer mentioned a player's arrival at a new base on the diamond, my mind immediately went to the gutter. First base...Bella's mouth. Second base...Bella's perfect breasts. Third base...

"Just touch her already," Rose said with a sigh, breaking me away from my daydream before my mind could conjure up an image of Bella's sex, wet and ready for me. "Damn."

I looked down, suddenly aware of the fact that my hand was hovering awkwardly over her thigh. Shifting my gaze so that my eyes met hers, I was met with the delicious image of her lip between her teeth as she explained that her girlfriends had been enlightened earlier in the day. Relief flooded through me as I told her that I had also shared the events of the previous night with my boys. When she told me that Eleanor Hale and Alice's mother and grandmother had been let in on our secret as well, I briefly wondered how that conversation came about, but my train of thought was lost completely when our lips were suddenly centimeters away.

Her breath blew across my lips and she demanded that I kiss her in a forceful

Texts From Last Night

tone that was one of the sexiest things I had ever heard come from her mouth. Fuck me if bossy Bella didn't make my dick take notice. I quickly obliged her request, pressing my lips to hers tentatively--we had what I was certain to be a captive audience.

Bella, though, clearly wasn't a fan of the slow, gentle kiss I had bestowed upon her. Instead, she trailed her tiny hands up my arms and over my shoulders until they were knotted together at the base of my neck, pulling me closer to her as her tongue slipped out to slide across my bottom lip. A low moan escaped from the back of my throat as I opened my mouth to hers, our tongues meeting and mingling together, as my hands flew to her hips and I lifted her swiftly into my lap, her legs straddling my waist as she pressed her chest against mine.

When we eventually broke for air, she rested her forehead against mine, smirking down at me silently.

"Woowooo!" I heard Emmett bellow from across the room, followed by a loud smack from what I assume was Rose. "Ow, shit babe."

"Leave them alone," Rose murmured.

Bella was still facing me, her lips now spread into a wide smile as she beamed down at me. After placing a quick peck on my lips, she turned to face our friends.

"You like that, Em?" she asked in a playful tone with a wink.

He nodded, patting his thighs with his palms. "Wanna come share that with me, Swan?"

Even though I knew he was kidding, I wrapped my arms around Bella's waist and pulled her closer so that her center was pressed against my hardness. She gasped at the realization that I was ready for her, all thoughts of joking with Emmett clearly forgotten as she whipped her head around to meet my gaze again.

Texts From Last Night

"Upstairs?" She mouthed wordlessly.

I nodded in agreement as I slid her off my lap. "I, uh, need a nap," I announced, lifting my arms over my head and stretching.

Jasper snorted as Emmett and Rose rolled their eyes.

"Yeah," Bella added, "I think I'm going to take quick shower so I'll, uh, be back...later." Before her sentence was complete, she had stood and was darting towards the stairs.

I jumped up from the couch and followed her. "Um, yeah," was the simple explanation I gave.

When I caught up with Bella, I wrapped my arms around her from behind and lifted her off the ground, her back to my chest as I carried her up the stairs for the second time in a 24-hour span, my lips attached to her neck as I walked.

"I really do need to shower," Bella said breathily as we neared my room. I placed her on the ground as she turned to face me, her palms resting on my chest. "Or maybe a bath?"

I licked my lips as she smirked up at me, rendering me speechless with the lustful look in her eyes. "I could deal with a bath."

"Yeah?"

I nodded. "Definitely."

Bella turned and entered my room then, leaving me standing in the hallway as she began to unbutton her blouse, dropping it on the floor as she sauntered towards the bathroom. I followed slowly, my eyes taking in the trail of clothes she was leaving as I heard the water turn on in the bathroom. After quickly undressing, I opened the door to the bathroom to find her already in the water, her perfect body laid out to me as the water had yet to reach a level that would cover her entirely.

Texts From Last Night

"Shit, Bella," I groaned as I stood stone still, my eyes raking from the top of her body to the bottom, stopping briefly to linger on her breasts and bare pussy.

She smiled, her eyes closed as she ran her hands across her stomach. "Are you just going to stand there?"

"I, uh, sorry," I mumbled as I stepped into the hot water. Bella instinctively sat up, making room for to slide in behind her. I wrapped my arms around her waist and pulled her into my chest, our legs intertwined as they stretched in front of us.

"It's different, isn't it?" she asked as I kissed the back of her neck gently.

I slid my arms from her taut stomach to tease her breasts, causing her to gasp. "What is?"

"This," she moaned. "Us. Now that everyone knows, I just, I don't know..." She was getting emotional and serious and...girl...on me. Damnit, I couldn't take girl.

"I know," I murmured in agreement because I did know what she meant, even if she couldn't articulate it properly. Her ability to speak her mind diminished significantly when my hands were on her breasts. "We're...real now."

I trailed one hand down to her center, sliding a finger through her slick folds. Her head fell forward in response to my touch and I smirked, leaning forward to place an open-mouthed kiss on her bare shoulder.

"Real," she gasped as I slid a finger into her. "No. Stop."

"Stop?" I asked, stilling my movements.

Instead of providing an answer, she reached down and pulled my hand from her. In one quick movement, she turned so that she was facing me, her legs wrapping loosely around my waist as she reached down to take my hard cock between her tiny hands.

Texts From Last Night

"It's your turn," she explained as she began pumping her hands up and down, twisting her hands occasionally as she alternated between fast and slow. "I owe you."

I grinned as my held fell back in pleasure and she leaned forward to place a kiss on my chest. "Does this feel good?"

"Always, Bella," I moaned as I felt the pressure building in the pit of my stomach, signaling my impending release.

"I want you." Looking up, I felt myself twitch at the sight of her eyes focused on the spot where her hands were working my erection.

"You have me," I assured her gently.

She shook her head back and forth. "No, inside of me," she added, stilling her movements and pulling her hands away.

My hands flew to her hips within seconds and I lifted her swiftly, sheathing myself inside of her as she gasped at the sudden fullness that I'm certain she felt.

"Fuuuck," she breathed, our eyes meeting as the moment froze around us. "You feel so good."

I leaned forward and captured her lips forcefully. "So do you," I said against her lips when I pulled away, thrusting upwards as she began to move against me.

Our lips met again as we moved together, our bodies slick with wetness from the bath as the water splashed around us, spilling over the side of the bathtub as our movements became less gentle and more forceful. The sweet moans coming from Bella's mouth increased in frequency as our bodies moved together and I knew she was close, her legs wrapping tighter around me as I felt her body start to shake with pleasure. Sliding my hand between us, I pressed my thumb to her clit forcefully, sending her over the edge.

Texts From Last Night

"Edwaaaaard," she moaned as her body stilled around mine. My name falling from her lips in ecstasy sent me over the edge with one final thrust upward and a loud groan.

Bella's head fell to my shoulder as her arms fell loosely to her sides. "Fuck," she sighed against my skin.

I chuckled lightly and lifted her head so that her eyes met mine. "I'm kind of crazy about you," I admitted carefully as I cupped her cheeks in my palms, my thumbs rubbing against her cheekbones. My outburst hadn't been planned, but in the post-coital bliss that I felt it sort of tumbled out of my mouth, completely bypassing any sort of brain-to-mouth filter. "You know that, right?"

She nodded, her lower lip trapped between her teeth as she lifted her arms to run her fingers through my hair. "Yeah, I know. I'm kind of crazy about you, too."

I nodded, feeling a toothy grin on my face as my heart swelled in my chest. "Good," I said as I lifted her up to slide out of her. "Come on, I wasn't joking about that nap."

BPOV

Early that evening, after a nap that was filled with more wandering hands than actual sleeping, Edward and I huddled together on the couch in the living room as our friends darted around the apartment doing various things. Rose and Alice were putting together salads and baked potatoes to go with the steaks Em was taking care of on the grill and Jasper was making a business call. Edward had his laptop resting on his thighs as he searched for a perfect venue for Jasper's bachelor party the following evening. Occasionally, I would share my thoughts, but mostly I was simply enjoying the feel of his arm wrapped around my waist as I melted into his side and contemplated the events of the afternoon.

I had been relieved to discover that all of our friends were now in on our...relationship...or whatever it was that had developed between us. Honestly, things had happened so quickly that I wasn't sure what to think. One day

Texts From Last Night

Edward and I were really good friends that had never imagined more and the next, we were making out like horny teenagers after doing shots of tequila. It was one thing for us to be all over each other physically, but when Edward admitted that he was crazy about me, I couldn't help but feel worried and thrilled at the same time. Had he meant that he was crazy about me in a I-want-to-be-with-you-in-a-relationship way? Or in a I-like-sticking-my-dick-in-you way?

"This could be fun," Edward commented, breaking my train of thought, as he clicked on the link for some cigar bar downtown. "Jasper likes cigars."

I answered noncommittally, too lost trying to find out whether Big Edward or Little Edward liked me better to form an opinion. "Mhmm."

He looked down at me and frowned. "No?"

I cuddled closer into his side and grinned up at him. "No, I mean, yes I think it's a good idea. I'll like it."

"I think so, too. It says here that there's a bar upstairs and a cigar shop downstairs. Seems pretty chill," Edward continued, going on and on about how perfect he thought the place was for Jasper's last night of freedom.

"Yeah," I agreed as I got lost in my thoughts again. I realized that, even if Big Edward did like me just as much, if not more, than Little Edward, I didn't know what to do with that bit of information. I definitely knew that *I* liked Big Edward in a way that was completely overwhelming, but what would that matter when I boarded a plane to LaGuardia at the end of the week? Three days...that's all I had left with the sexy, sweet man I was cuddled against before medical school and Chicago took him away from me again. As sadness at the mere prospect of leaving Edward threatened to overcome me, I chose to, for the time being, to close my eyes and ignore the facts that were staring me in the face.

"Bella?" I heard my name as soon as I saw the back of my eyelids.

Texts From Last Night

"Yes?" I asked without opening my eyes. Edward tightened his arm that was wrapped around me, pulling me impossibly closer to him as I sighed in contentment. There was something about being in his arms that was comfortable, peaceful...perfect.

"I need a favor." Damn, it was Rose.

I sighed and refused to open my eyes, instead focusing on the intoxicating scent that was Edward. "If anyone owes a favor, it's you," I spat, not bothering to hide my resentment over the fact that she was interrupting my nap.

"What favor?" Edward asked as Rose huffed.

I sat up and opened my eyes. Turning to Edward, I winked and told him I would explain later before shifting my attention to the blonde standing in front of me with a frown on her face. She had an apron draped over her clothes that read, 'Cocktails First, Questions Later' and a beer in each hand.

"What do you need?" I asked in an exasperated tone. "I was kind of comfortable here."

"Can you go check on Emmett out there?" She nodded towards the deck. "You know how he is when he cooks. Also, Alice won't let me leave the kitchen."

"So, basically you just don't want dinner to get charred? Why can't Jasper go?"

"He's on a work call or something." Oh, right. Work.

"Pussy," Edward whispered into my ear, causing me to lean over and giggle against his shoulder before finally giving in to Rose's demands.

I rolled my eyes and stood, placing my hands on my hips in a sign of annoyance. "Fine, but you owe me double now."

She smirked. "Fine. Here, take the beers with you," she held the bottles out to me.

Texts From Last Night

After leaning down to place a short kiss on Edward's lips, I made my way out to the deck. When I arrived outside, I discovered a jolly Emmett behind the grill, whistling an unknown tune as he flipped the steaks we were having for dinner.

"Rose sent me out for quality control," I said in greeting as I slid the glass door behind me.

He turned to me and shook his head back and forth. "I burned that damn bacon one fucking time..." he trailed off before his eyes settled on the beer in my hands. "One of those for me?"

I handed the one I had yet to drink from to him. "It's all yours, big boy."

"So, how'd she get you out here? You and Eduardo looked cozy on the couch in there."

"We were," I grumbled. "But now she owes me double." I realized that the statement made me sound a little ridiculous and like a petty middle schooler, but I really didn't like that Rose had pulled me away from my Edward pillow because, clearly, Emmett had the food under control.

"Owes you double?" He asked as I made my way to one of the adirondack chairs near the grill.

"Well, let's just say she blurted out everything about Edward and me at brunch to fucking Eleanor Hale so, yes, she owes me."

"Did she really?" A proud grin spread across his face.

"Yes, she told her everything," I said. "And then Eleanor told me all about her cougar crush on Edward."

Emmett's laughter boomed in response to my statement. "Cougar crush? Shit, that's priceless."

Texts From Last Night

I folded my arms across my chest and glared at him.

"Sorry. Admit it, though, it is kind of funny."

"Kind of," I stated, still glaring. "But not really."

Emmett shrugged as he shut the grill and ambled over to plop down on the chair next to mine.

"He really likes you, you know," Emmett said after a few moments, his voice a bit softer than normal.

I shrugged. "I know that we're very physically attracted to each other."

"Seriously, Swan, he wouldn't have taken that step with you, his friend, if he didn't feel there was more to your relationship than what Little Edward felt," he explained. I cringed at the fact that Emmett was casually mentioning Edward's dick in conversation, using the term that I had recently taken up. "Think about it," he added.

"I know, I just..."

"You just...what?" Emmett asked, thankfully interrupting my thoughts.

"I don't know, Emmett, but what happens when we leave this little bubble we've existed in?" That's what it was, this entire week: a bubble. Edward and I worked in this bubble, we kissed and made love and laughed in this bubble. What was going to happen when the bubble popped and we boarded separate planes back to our lives?

He shrugged and answered simply, "I don't know, Swan." It wasn't the wise answer I was looking for.

"Where's that lawyer wisdom?" I asked, reaching over and playfully punching him in the arm. For all the joking shared between the six of us concerning Emmett's intelligence, or lack thereof, we all knew that deep down there

Texts From Last Night

existed a man that aced his SAT's and maintained a nearly perfect GPA in college before attending law school at UVA.

"I'm on vacation," he grinned, his dimples showing. "But do you want to know what I think as a friend to both of you?"

"Enlighten me." *Please.*

"I think you shouldn't worry about what's going to happen on Sunday. Just live in the moment." As he spoke, he opened the grill and transferred the steaks onto a waiting plate. "Come on, let's go eat," he said with a nod towards the door.

As I followed Emmett back into the house, I attempted to convince myself to take his advice, but I couldn't seem to wrap my head around the idea of being with Edward for three days without considering what was going to happen when we parted ways on Sunday. Before I had time to consider it any further, though, he was standing in front of me.

"You're sitting with me at dinner," he said with a sly grin as he grabbed my hand and pulled me towards the table. "Alice can't have you to chat with tonight."

"Okay?" I asked with a quirked eyebrow, looking to make sure that Alice was in on this plan.

He turned to me, a lopsided grin that made my knees weak gracing his lips. "Aren't you glad to not be the fifth wheel anymore?"

"Yes," I agreed as I sat in the chair he had pulled out of me. "I am." I really was.

"So," Alice said loudly, drawing the attention of everyone at the table to her. "What are you doing for Jazz's bachelor party tomorrow?"

Texts From Last Night

"It's a secret," Edward answered with a smug grin as his hand came to rest on my knee.

Alice folded her arms across her chest. "I want to know," she pouted.

Edward shrugged innocently. "Sorry."

"No strippers, right?"

"Definitely no strippers," Emmett chimed in. "Right, J?"

Jasper nodded.

"I don't understand," Alice said with furrowed eyebrows. "Not that I'm complaining, but, why can't Jasper have strippers?"

Edward and Jasper exchanged a look before Jasper nodded at Edward to continue. "Let me preface this story, Al, by saying that we were forced to go and it was before the two of you were official..."

xXx

Jasper POV

January 2007, Freshman Year

(971): I have two black x marks on my hands

(503): Yep you got cut off last night after a stripper bent over in front of you and you screamed very loudly 'I can see your soul from here'

(971) dammit I wish I could remember that

I woke up with a raging headache and a dry mouth. With a sigh, I sat up in bed and ran my fingers through my hair before throwing the covers off of myself to discover that I was still wearing everything I had worn the night before,

Texts From Last Night

including my cowboy boots. For the life of me, though, I couldn't remember anything past doing shots with my pledge brothers at the house.

Think, Jasper.

I remembered starting the night with shots, Vodka and Jagerbombs ...a terrible combination. Then, I vaguely recalled the idea of going to a strip club being tossed around by two of my most despised pledge brothers-Riley and Laurent. They were both complete asses with tempers and slight drug problems.

And then...nothing.

Outside my room, I could hear that the TV was on in the common area of our dorm, meaning that either Edward or Emmett was awake and, hopefully, coherent enough to provide the missing puzzle pieces of my night.

*I stumbled into area holding the TV to find Edward stretched out on the couch watching reruns of M*A*S*H.*

"Nice boots," he commented as I collapsed into the couch opposite the one he was resting on. It was rock hard and smelled like ass, typical of all the dorm furniture.

"Shut up ass," I countered. "Can you explain my evening to me?"

The motherfucker laughed. "Where should I start?"

"The house," I answered, cringing.

"Shit, Jazz, that's all you remember?"

I nodded slowly.

"Damn," he said. "Well, to begin with, we went to a couple of bars downtown. You did a couple of shots and made out with Alice, I believe."

Texts From Last Night

"Nooo," I groaned, throwing my arm across my eyes. Alice Brandon had been on my radar for months now and I hated knowing that I had ruined any chance with her because I was a drunk idiot .

Edward noticed my self-hatred. "Don't worry, she was pretty wasted, too. No harm, no foul," he paused briefly before continuing. "So, after the bars, Riley and Laurent started talking about going to that strip club again and, by that time, you were pretty much game for anything."

"So we went?"

He nodded. "Yes, we went. Check your hands."

I looked down. "X marks?"

Edward fucking laughed again. "They cut you off."

"Why?"

"Let me begin by saying that you definitely chose the best seat in the house so, props for that."

"Get on with it, Eddie," I said, using the nickname I knew he hated.

"Use it again, no story for you," he growled.

I nodded. "Fine. Continue."

"So, anyway, there was this stripper...bit tits, scary face, dancing in front of you thinking she was all sexy, really she was just disgusting, but you, uh, saw the good in her."

"The good in her?"

"Well, you see, she had these crotchless panties on and, well, when she bent over in front of you to show you the goods...you might have yelled something."

Texts From Last Night

I felt my jaw clench. "What did I yell?"

More laughter. "You screamed that you could see her soul."

I closed my eyes and groaned loudly. "Fuck, no I didn't."

"You did," Edward confirmed.

"And no one has it on tape?"

Edward shook his head back and forth. "Unfortunately, no. It was epic, though. I couldn't tell if the stripper was flattered or offended."

"I bet she was flattered."

"Probably."

"Maybe she's one of those strippers that has a soul, like she's dancing to pay for college or some shit..."

Edward quirked an eyebrow in my direction.

"Or maybe not..."

"Yeah, I'd say not."

"And I got home how?" I asked, ready to move on with the piecing together of my night.

Edward sighed. "The usual, we got a pledge to drive us."

"Got it," I said as I heard Emmett's door open from down the hall. A random blonde that I had never seen before snuck out of the room he shared with Edward, dashing through the room quickly in what I assumed was the same outfit she had worn the night before.

Texts From Last Night

I looked to Edward for an explanation. He shook his head back and forth and mumbled, "Daddy issues," under his breath. "I had to sleep on this couch."

A short time later, Emmett stepped into the living room. "Hey, Jazz, I can see your soul from here!" He bellowed as he moved to the kitchen in search of breakfast.

"Fuck you, Emmett."

xXx

"You're kidding, right?" Rose asked when Jasper finished retelling the story.

He shook his head back and forth. "I wish I was," he said with a sigh. I turned to Alice, a look that combined horror and humor was etched on her face.

"You okay, Al?" I asked.

She nodded slowly. "I think so. I agree with Edward and Emmett, though, no strippers is probably a very good idea."

"It is, babe," Jasper agreed, leaning over to place a kiss on her cheek. "And I'm sure Edward has something...tame...planned for the evening."

"I make no promises," Edward said, holding his hands up.

I turned to him with wide eyes and he winked, assuring me without words that he would be a good boy. It was strange, really, the overwhelming possessiveness I had developed for him in such a short period of time. I mouthed the word, "Cigars?" to him and he nodded.

When dinner wound down, Rose and Emmett volunteered to handle clean up, leaving the rest of us with nothing to do. Alice suggested a walk on the beach, as the sun was close to setting and she loved watching it dip beneath the ocean. Edward and I agreed to join the other couple, but when our toes touched the sand, we chose to veer to the left while they went to the right.

Texts From Last Night

After walking hand in hand for a few minutes, we stopped at a vacant spot in the sand and immediately sat, my back to Edward's stomach and his head resting on my shoulder. The only sound around us was the gentle lap of waves crashing against the sand and an occasional seagull flying nearby. I enjoyed the tranquility, but couldn't help the nagging thoughts in the back of my mind.

"You're quiet," he commented as the sun began its departure for the day.

I twisted my neck to meet his gaze. "I could say the same about you," I countered, unsure of what explanation I could give for my quietness that would appease both myself and him.

"What's on your mind, pretty girl?"

I smiled weakly. "A lot of things."

"Hey, don't worry, I promise no strippers," he joked before continuing. "Really, though, what's going on in that head?"

"I'm thinking about...you."

"Me?"

"Yes."

"Good thoughts or bad thoughts?"

I grinned. "Good, of course."

"Then why are you frowning?" he asked, concern etched on his face as he placed a chaste kiss on my neck.

I shrugged against him. "Because," I paused, organizing my thoughts. "I have to say goodbye to you in three days and...nevermind."

"Bella," he urged.

Texts From Last Night

I closed my eyes before continuing, only opening them when my gaze was trained on my nervously moving hands. "I just...Edward, I know it sounds completely ridiculous, but I've never felt about anyone the way I feel about you and we've only been whatever the hell we are for two days. It scares me that I've allowed myself to feel so much so fast for someone that has responsibilities in a town seven hundred miles from me that he has to go back to..."

His eyes were wide and full of wonder when I looked up to meet them. "Bella," he said, his voice firm and solid. "I'd be lying if I didn't say I felt the same way because, yeah, I'm scared shitless of the feelings that have developed between us so quickly. But at the same time, I know that they wouldn't have developed at all if we weren't friends first, you know?"

"You just want to be friends?" I asked, panic in my voice.

Edward leaned forward and kissed me soundly before speaking again. "That would be a big Hell no because now that I've done that, I don't know when I'll be able to stop," he said. "All I'm saying is...let's just see how the rest of the week plays out and then go from there. I mean, we still have a date on Saturday, you know."

I smiled at the mention of the wedding and the memory of us agreeing to be one another's dates before we had acted on our physical attraction.

"Yes, we do," I agreed. "So...we'll just let things happen this week?"

He nodded. "Naturally, comfortably, whatever."

"Okay," I agreed. It wasn't ideal, as I was a girl and, though I wasn't quite as anal as Alice could be, I usually liked to have a plan. "And, you know, it's only a short flight between Chicago and New York..." I began before Edward chuckled and held a finger up to my lips.

"Stop," he murmured. "Three days of living in the moment, okay?"

Texts From Last Night

I nodded slowly and leaned in to press my lips against his. "Okay."

Relaxing Surprises

Disclaimer: I don't own Twilight. I do own Alice's awesome bachelorette day, though.

Chapter Nineteen: Relaxing Surprises

Rose, Alice, and I were preparing to leave the house Thursday morning for Alice's day-long bachelorette party when Jasper approached us with a smirk on his face and a beautiful blue, silk tie dangling from his right hand.

"What's that for?" I asked, eyeing it speculatively as he approached.

"To help the two of you out," he shifted his gaze between Rose and me.

Rose narrowed her eyes at him. "Explain yourself."

"As much as I love my dear fiancé, I'm sure that all of us know that she has an uncanny ability to figure out a destination just minutes into a trip."

He paused while Rose and I nodded for him to continue. "This," he lifted the tie, "is to keep her in the dark. I mean, I'm sure you ladies have surprises planned, am I right?"

We nodded in unison. "I never considered blindfolding her," I turned and whispered to Rose.

She shrugged in response, informing me that the idea hadn't crossed her mind either. "Thanks, Jasper," she reluctantly murmured, reaching for the tie.

Jasper pulled his hand back. "Ah ah ah, let me do it."

"Do what?" I asked.

Texts From Last Night

His smirk grew. "Tie Alice up." The seductive tone of his voice was meant only for his fiancé, as evidenced by her girly giggles.

"Oh, gross, Jasper," Rose huffed, swatting her brother across the shoulder. "Leave it in the bedroom."

Alice continued to giggle as Jasper pulled her to him before turning her around so that her back was to his front. Wrapping the tie loosely around her head, he paused to lean forward and whisper something in her ear, causing her to blush profusely.

"Stop," Rose demanded, holding up her hand in protest. "Tie it or leave, J."

He grumbled incoherently before pulling away and expertly tying the knot. After placing a final kiss on the back of her neck, he exited the room.

"Ready?" I asked as Alice fanned herself and Rose rolled her eyes.

"Yes," they both answered, Alice's tone breathy and Rose's demanding.

We hadn't even made it halfway between the beach house and our destination before Alice began to pepper us with a series of questions from the backseat. "Where are we going? Will there be food or fluffy bathrobes there? What about male dancers...I promised Jasper that if he couldn't have strippers, neither would I. Oh, am I dressed appropriately for both day and evening? What are we doing-"

"Alice, listen to me," Rose cut her off. "Everything that happens today is supposed to be a surprise. So, unless you want to spoil it for yourself you'll quit asking questions and relax."

"Relax?" She asked, as if it the word had recently been added to the English language.

"Yes, relax. You know, that thing people do when they want to let loose and ignore everything around them," she sighed. "You were well acquainted with

Texts From Last Night

the word in college, Al."

I could practically hear Alice's eyes rolling behind Jasper's tie. "I know what relax means, Rose, but thank you for clarifying. What I mean is, how am I supposed to relax? I'm getting married in two days. There is so much to do...turn around and take me back to the house, oh my God, I don't have time to do this today." The level of crazed hysteria in her voice increased with each syllable that left her mouth.

I turned around in my seat to look at her. "Al, listen, just sit back and take a couple of calming breaths," I ordered. After pausing for a moment, she complied. "Here's the thing, I don't think you're worried about wasting time, you're worried about not being in control of the day. Am I right?"

She reluctantly nodded as Rose mumbled, "Nail, meet head."

"So, do you know what you're going to do? You're going to pull that wedgie out of your ass and let loose for the day. Would Rose and I let you down?"

"No, I just..."

"You just nothing," Rose said, her eyes focused on the road, "Ditto to what Bella said, pull that wedgie out of your ass and let loose. Capiche?"

"Capiche," Alice mumbled. "But if..."

"Alice," I practically growled. "Don't."

"Oh look, we're here!" Rose announced with seemingly perfect timing. "Al, just let me park the car and we'll get you inside to take that blindfold off."

A glance in the backseat told me that the bride-to-be was happy was again, as she was bouncing up and down with a massive smile on her face. "Okay!" She agreed readily as Rose pulled into a parking spot up front.

Texts From Last Night

Getting Alice safely inside the spa that we were to begin our day in was no small feat, as the parking area was made of cobblestone and Alice had insisted on wearing stilettos. "It's my bachelorette party, damnit, I'm going to wear heels," she had stated prior to leaving the house. They were completely unnecessary, but Rose and I had agreed earlier in the day that we were going to pick our battles carefully with the highly-strung woman. Footwear wasn't a deal-breaker that needed addressing.

"Oh, you must be the bride-to-be," the woman cooed as Rose and I worked to remove the tie from around Alice's head. "We're almost ready for you, just take a seat over there," she pointed to a small seating area as I winked at her for remembering the stipulation of our reservation-no announcing of our chosen treatments before Alice's blindfold was removed.

I nodded. "We'll move once we get this off," I assured her.

"Take your time."

"Damn, if he wasn't my brother, I would wonder if Jasper had been a boy scout during his childhood," Rose scoffed as her fingers worked to loosen the tie.

Alice giggled. "He's gotten really good at tying knots."

"Imagine that," I stated at the same time Rose practically yelled, "Too much information, Alice."

"I meant from sailing, you two and your dirty minds."

"What was that you were telling us about his birthday, Al?" I prodded, knowing that Jasper's talent for tying knots in ties had little to do with sailboats.

"I'm not listening," Rose chanted over and over as she continued to work the knot. "My brother, my brother..."

Texts From Last Night

The back of Alice's neck flushed. "Oh, I forgot that I told you about that, Bella."

"Mmhmm, not listening," Rose hummed. "Got it!"

The tie fell and Alice began bouncing as she turned to wrap her arms around Rose and me. "A spa? What are we having done? Massages?"

"Massages, manicures, pedicures-the works," I answered as she pulled away. "Welcome to phase one of your bachelorette party."

"Phase one?" Her eyebrows furrowed with confusion. "What's phase two? Is there a phase three?"

Rose held up the tie and smirked. "Can't tell you yet." We had agreed to keep Alice on a need-to-know basis throughout the day in an effort to maintain the element of surprise. It wasn't easy to keep Alice in the dark, but we were going to try our damndest.

There might have been foot stomping in response to our refusal to give up the goods, but luckily it was interrupted. "Are you the Brandon party?"

"We are!" Alice squealed, her annoyance with our secrets forgotten. "What's first? Massages? Or maybe that'll be last, you know so that the relaxation doesn't wear off as quickly? Oh, I bet that's it..." she rambled as she skipped towards the spa technician that was waiting for us and immediately disappeared around the corner.

Rose and I followed in the direction Alice and the spa worker had skipped off, finding them in a small, warmly decorated room with three areas for manicures and pedicures set up. As soft classical music played through the hidden speakers, we were instructed to change into the fluffy bathrobes that were resting on the back of each chair. Before my mind could register the relaxation that was about to hit it, I was sitting in a comfortable spa chair while one woman worked on my feet and another worked on my fingernails.

Texts From Last Night

"This is perfect," Alice said with a sigh from her chair.

I grinned. "Glad you like it," I said without opening my eyes. "There's much more, though."

"More than the massages?"

"More than the massages."

"What is it?" *Shit, I shouldn't have said anything.*

Rose agreed, apparently. "You shouldn't have said anything until we blindfolded her again," she said softly, her eyes closed as well.

"I figured that out too late," I agreed before Alice began her series of questions again. I cut her off at the word 'what.' "Stop, Alice, just relax. I promise you'll love it."

When she simply shrugged and murmured, "Okay," in agreement, I immediately decided that whatever was in this room to relax her, I needed to buy for Jasper as a secret wedding gift-in bulk.

Apart from the music and the quiet sound of nail files being dragged across recently-buffed and shined finger and toenails, the room fell silent again. As I enjoyed the soothing atmosphere, I realized that it was the first time in a long time that I could recall being completely and utterly at ease. I wasn't worried about work, or my crazy roommate in Manhattan. I wasn't worried about what I was doing for dinner that evening or whether or not the train I took to the office would be on time. I wasn't worrying about letting my eyes linger too long on Edward's bare chest or long fingers. I just...was.

That is, until we transitioned from the manicure/pedicure room to the massage room and Alice decided that delving into my love life while being rubbed down by a masseuse was perfectly acceptable.

"Bella?" She asked innocently as Rose began to snore lightly from her table.

Texts From Last Night

"Mmhmm," I murmured, refusing to open my eyes.

"I, uh, was wondering if, um..." She trailed off, apparently getting tongue-tied on her words.

"Spit it out, Alice."

She made a scene of inhaling a deep breath of air before asking in a rambling rush, "What's going to happen with you and Edward? I mean, you're both leaving and today is the last time we'll get a chance to talk and I worry about you alone in New York sometimes so I just wanted to..."

"Get it out there?" I asked, still relaxed and ready to answer her question. Edward and I had gone over this already...we were good.

"Yeah."

"We've agreed to take things slowly for the rest of the week, you know, just kind of live in the moment and cross that bridge when we come to it."

Silence.

"Alice?"

"Are you sure about that? Does that ever really work, Bella?"

"Why wouldn't it?"

She sighed. "Nevermind."

Her strange answer made me question our decision. Was living in the moment going to work for Edward and me? Was I capable of not thinking about what was going to happen when we returned to our respective cities? I mean, clearly I had already begun to question it if I had brought up the issue the day prior.

Texts From Last Night

"No, Al, tell me what's on your mind," I demanded, a few ounces of relaxation leaving my body.

She sighed again. "I don't want to butt into your relationship."

"I think you already have, so just tell me. Please."

"Bella, I just worry that you're going to separate at the end of the week and be miserable for months before getting your heads out of your asses and admitting that you care for each other and are willing to do what it takes to make it work. Are you willing to do that?"

"I'm willing to make it work, yes," I said, thinking she was done with her bit of advice. "I just don't want to focus on the future when I could be focusing on the present..."

She cleared her throat, alerting me that she wasn't done inserting her opinion. I chose to quit talking and listen.

"I've watched the two of you together for years, first as friends and then as whatever it is that you two are now. Lovers, I suppose is the appropriate label for now. Do you want to know what I see?"

"Yes." I desperately wanted to know, needing an outside opinion that wasn't male because as much as I loved Emmett and respected his advice, it clearly had its faults.

"I see two people that are perfect for each other, both in the romantic and the platonic sense. I see two people that are stubborn and, at times, afraid of rejection and change. But, most importantly, I see two people that are falling in love."

I pushed the masseuse's hands away from my body and sat up. Suddenly, there were tears in my eyes that were threatening to fall that I needed to brush away. "Really?" I asked weakly.

Texts From Last Night

"Yes, my blind friend, Bella," Alice said without sitting up. After gathering myself, I laid back down and gestured for my masseuse to resume her ministrations.

"Thank you, Alice," I muttered with sincerity.

"You're welcome," she said cheerily. "Now, while my future sister in law is asleep, let me tell you what Jasper said before we left the house..."

As I listened to her prattle on and on about her and Jasper's love life, I realized that she had chosen not to insert her own solution to the problem I was facing in regards to my newfound relationship with Edward. Though I was shocked that she wasn't meddling, I was eager to find a solution on my own, one that worked for us that was truly *ours*. But first, I had to get through the rest of the day with my girlfriends.

After a quick dinner in a ridiculously good restaurant downtown, Rose and I managed to hold Alice down long enough to place the makeshift blindfold over her eyes again. This time, she didn't complain nearly as much considering that we told her our destination was a short walk away. When we arrived out front, I left Rose with Alice and sauntered inside to announce our presence.

"Senna?" I called as I traipsed through the entryway of the shop, separating two thick curtains just enough to slide between them and reveal the rest of the store to me.

I heard something rustling in the back before someone yelled, "Just a second!"

As I waited, I examined my surroundings. Everything was exactly as I had requested: two bottles of champagne on ice and three waiting champagne flutes, a garment bag overflowing with soft, colorful pieces of clothing, and a large mirror on the far wall.

"Isabella," I heard my name being said softly from behind me. "Are your friends here?"

Texts From Last Night

I turned and nodded, being met with the smiling face of one of my most talented authors, Senna. "They're waiting outside. Senna, it looks gorgeous in here, you'll have to thank Zafrina for me."

When I had arrived in Manhattan, fresh out of college, the first compilation of stories to come across my desk were that of a young, hopeful author from South America: Senna. I fell in love with her writing style and the stories she told and, despite our regional differences, we became fast friends. Though most of our communication was via e-mail, she made several public relations trips to America and, eventually, settled here permanently, choosing the southern city of Charleston as her home. Zafrina was Senna's sister, and the inspiration for several of the stories in her most recent novel on the joys of sisterhood.

Though Senna had been blessed with a talent for the written word, Zafrina's gift placed her either behind a sketch pad or a sewing machine. As I had sat down to plan Alice's bachelorette weekend, the pair instantly entered my mind as Zafrina's talent was beautiful, one of a kind lingerie-something I knew Alice would be able to put to good use in the coming months while at the same time indulging her favorite pastime...shopping.

She grinned as she approached me, her arms open as she pulled me in for a hug.

"Thank her yourself," she said as another wall of curtains separated and a striking woman appeared in front of me looking very much like Senna, but taller and with a more heart-shaped face. "Here she is."

"Hello, Isabella," she greeted. "Are you enjoying our city?"

"Very much so," I said. "It's been a wonderful week. Again, thank you for doing this for us tonight."

"It is, how do you say in America, our pleasure," Senna remarked. "After all, if not for you, we would still be in the jungle somewhere."

I rolled my eyes. "You had the internet, you were never in the jungle," I joked.

Texts From Last Night

Senna shrugged. "We were close to it," she responded, her tone as full of joking as mine. "Still, we owe you. Now, where are those friends you speak of?"

"Oh," I had been so caught up in reuniting with two of my favorite people that I nearly forgot about Alice and Rose. "Outside, let me go get them."

I returned moments later with one of Alice's arms over my shoulder as Rose and I carried her into the shop, blindfold still wrapped around her eyes.

Senna and Zafrina giggled at her appearance. "She's tricky, this one," I told them. "We had to pull out all the stops to keep this a secret."

"I understand," Zafrina said, pointing to Senna. "My sister is the same way."

"Um, guys, can I take this off now?" Alice asked with a hint of annoyance.

Rose chuckled and reached up to pull the blindfold away, this time choosing not to bother with the knot itself.

"Oh my God," Alice gasped as she turned around and around, examining her surroundings with a designer's eye before landing on the designer herself.

"You're, you're..." She was utterly speechless as she dashed towards Zafrina and wrapped her arms around her neck. "I love your work!"

"Thank you, Alice."

"You know my name? Bella, Rose, oh my God how did you manage this?" she asked.

Rose shrugged. "It was all Bella."

"Senna, her sister, is one of my authors," I explained simply. "Apparently, they're under the impression that they owe me a favor."

Texts From Last Night

"I can't believe this, it's so perfect," Alice said, her voice full of awe as she slowly walked towards the garment wrap and reverently ran her fingers over the fabrics. "Are these for...me? You'll buy some too, right?"

The four of us nodded. "Whatever you like, Al, and there's champagne."

She rushed to my side and threw her arms around my neck. "Thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"We'll leave the three of you alone," Senna said, gesturing towards the wall of curtains. Without another word, she and Zafrina disappeared behind it.

I turned to Alice. "What are you waiting for? Try something on!"

Two hours, four glasses of champagne, and more lingerie in our hands than we knew what to do with, the three of us exited the store, tipsy and smiling. Alice had declared Senna and Zafrina her new best friends and chosen a teddy set that matched Jasper's tie to tease him with that evening.

"Bella, what did you get?" Alice asked as we climbed into the taxi that Senna had called for us.

"A couple of things..." I teased.

"For Eddie boy?" Rose asked, poking me in the side.

I giggled like a schoolgirl. "Maybe."

"That's a yes," Alice declared before shifting her attention to Rose. "What did you buy?"

"Too much," Rose answered bluntly. "Especially considering that Em will probably just rip it all off."

Alice gasped. "You can't rip off a Zafrina original." She sounded completely appalled.

Texts From Last Night

"Tell the corset I bought to tell him that."

"Oh, you bought a corset? I thought Alice scared you off those forever," I added.

Rose laughed loudly. "Alice, holy shit, I had forgotten about that!"

xXx

Rosalie POV

Halloween 2009, Senior Year

(603): My roommate just did the walk of shame in last night's corset back to our room to find her dad there. THAT'S why I go to school out of state.

"There's someone knocking on your front door," Emmett groaned from beside me in bed.

I pulled the covers up over my head. "They'll go away."

"They've been knocking for ten minutes," he countered.

"Why didn't you wake me up?"

"I just did," he said, pulling the covers back and grinning down at me. "Gonna go answer it?"

"Bella will."

"She went home with Jake last night."

"Alice?" I asked, hopeful.

"Went home with Jasper..."

Texts From Last Night

I threw the covers back and pulled on a pair of shorts to go with the oversized t-shirt I had slept in. "Fine, I'll go down."

"Come back soon," he called after me.

I rolled my eyes and stumbled down the stairs. With a loud sigh, I threw open the door. "This better be fucking Bella or...hello, Mr. Brandon."

"Rosalie," he greeted, his eyes frowning at my appearance. "Is Alice here? I was in New Haven for a meeting so I thought I would stop by and say hello..."

In New Haven...for a meeting? Alice was going to die when she showed up. Where the Hell was that little pixie?

"She's, uh..."

Mr. Brandon was looking over my shoulder. Slowly, I turned around to see Emmett barreling down the stairs wearing only his boxers and a pair of gym shorts.

"Mr. Brandon?" He stopped in his tracks when he saw who was standing in front of me. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to see Alice, Emmett, is it? Are you going to let me in?"

"I, uh, sure, come on in. Alice isn't..." As I spoke the words, I saw her stroll up behind him wearing her outfit from the night before.

Oh, Jesus.

Of course, of all the nights she spent at Jasper's, she chose this one to not wear one of his shirts home, choosing instead to arrive in her skinny jeans and black corset top.

"Daddy?" she asked innocently. "What are you doing here?"

Texts From Last Night

Mr. Brandon cleared his throat. "I'm here to see you. Is everything okay?"

Up close, I could see that her make up from the night before was smeared around her eyes.

She shrugged. "Everything is fine, Daddy, I'm just, uh, coming back from breakfast with a friend."

Emmett snorted while I attempted to gesture to Alice that she needed to put on some clothes that were more appropriate for daytime.

"Uh huh," Mr. Brandon said. "In that?"

Alice looked down, a horrified expression appearing on her face. "Shit," she murmured under her breath. "I'll be right back."

xXx

"Eh," Rose began, "my dad's not going to be at my place of residence this weekend, mainly because he'll be spending all of his spare time at the golf course. Yours will, though, Alice. Did you buy a corset?"

Her face paled in the dim light of the taxi. "I, uh, am going to hide it until Jasper and I are in Italy."

"I think that's a wise decision," I agreed.

"Me too," Rose chimed in.

"This y'all?" The taxi driver asked a moment later. I looked up and, suddenly, we were home.

"It is," Alice told him as she reached for her wallet and handed him enough cash to cover the trip and a generous tip. "Have a nice night."

Texts From Last Night

As we stepped into the house, Alice reminded Rose and me that we were to meet back in the living room in twenty minutes for a couple of drinks to "top off the day." Wanting nothing more than to wrap my arms around Edward, I quickly dropped my bags off in my room before dashing back downstairs in search of him, finding him alone on the back deck. He was leaning against the railing, his hands folded in front of him for support; I smiled at the sight of him. Quickly and carefully, I slid open the glass door and stepped out onto the deck, not at all surprised when he turned around and grinned at my presence.

When I saw the wide grin that spread across his face upon my arrival, Alice's words from earlier echoed in my mind. '*...I see two people who are falling in love.*' I'm not going to pretend that the heady, four-letter word didn't make my heart swell at the same time it made my head spin; my heartfelt tears earlier were evidence of that. I knew that it was soon, too soon, for the mention of that word and it overwhelmed me.

Stepping forward, I forced my best friend's words away and focused on his lips, the way he looked in the moonlight, just like Edward and I had agreed upon the night prior. I knew that I had been determined to find a solution earlier in the day, but the sight of his smiling face made me rethink my strategy. Tonight, I would live in the moment. Tomorrow, I would confront this falling in love business that Alice had revealed to me at the spa. It wasn't wise, I realized, but at that moment, I just wanted to be in the moments I had with Edward.

"Hey, pretty girl," he said as I approached. Once I was within reach, he placed his hands on my face, rubbing his thumbs across my cheekbones before pulling me in for a sweet kiss.

When we broke apart, I wrapped my arms around his waist and buried my nose in his chest, the feeling of contentment I felt in his arms instantly easing my doubt worry. "I missed you."

"I missed you, too. Did you ladies have fun?"

"We did. Unfortunately, Alice has declared that the evening is not over."

Texts From Last Night

He chuckled, his chest vibrating against my cheek. "Well of course she has."

"How was Jasper's day?"

"It was great, he kicked our asses in golf and then we went to that cigar shop downtown, which he loved."

I sniffed him unabashedly. "You smell like cigars."

"Sorry," he murmured, leaning away from me.

I pulled him back towards me, wanting to bury myself in him again. "Don't be," I said. "I like it."

"You do?" He leaned down and whispered in my ear as he snuck his hands under my shirt and began to rub gentle circles on the small of my back. I realized that, as good as the masseuse's movements had felt today, nothing compared to Edward's touch.

I nodded into the crook of his neck as he placed a kiss on mine.

"You know what I like?"

"Not getting your ass kicked in golf?"

He laughed as his hands trailed higher. "That," he paused. "And you."

I lifted my head and looked up so that our gazes met. Smirking, I murmured, "I like you, too, mister."

"Don't go meet Alice," he begged shamelessly as our faces inched closer. "Just sneak upstairs with me..."

"I can't," I said, our faces so close that I could feel his breath on my lips.

Texts From Last Night

"You can," he argued, pulling my hips forward so that our bodies were flush against one another, his hardness pressing against my stomach.

I groaned. "My duty tonight is to the bride," I said weakly, wanting nothing more than to drag him upstairs and completely forget about any and all of my responsibilities that didn't involve Edward.

"Tomorrow night I won't see you," he continued, his voice edging on being whiny.

I lifted my hands to run them between his silky locks. "Sorry," I murmured. "Two drinks and I'll be upstairs, I promise."

"Just two?"

"And maybe a couple of shots," I added.

Edward arched an eyebrow. "Hhmmm, drunk Bella?"

I winked. "It's a possibility."

"I like the sound of that."

"I'm sure you do," I murmured, leaning forward to lick the shell of his ear.

He shuddered. "God, woman, I am not above taking you on this deck."

I backed away, a sudden idea popping into my mind. "Sorry, *man*, should I add that there's a surprise on your bed for you?" At the moment, there was no surprise on his bed, but if I could make it back upstairs without being detected by Alice and Rose, there would be.

He nearly began panting, licking his lips before speaking. "A surprise on my bed? Is it you...naked?"

Texts From Last Night

I placed a big, wet kiss on his lips before answering. "Hm...that's later," I promised. "Just wait a few minutes before heading upstairs, alright?"

"Alright," he agreed, pulling me forward for another kiss, this one full of promises for later.

As I slid through the door, he murmured, "Go get your girly drink on," before playfully smacking my ass.

After successfully making it upstairs to lay out Edward's surprise, I returned to the main floor and downed two shots of vodka and a sex on the beach like it was my job. Of course, Alice and Rose noticed my haste and didn't pass up the opportunity to hassle and embarrass me.

"In a hurry to get somewhere, B?" Rose asked, a knowing smirk on her lips.

I attempted to make an innocent face, but failed miserably. "No," I said weakly, my voice nearly a whisper.

"Where's Edward?" She continued.

I leaned forward and buried my head in my hands, knowing that my lie was written all over my features. "Upstairs."

"And?"

"And," I paused, dropping my hands from my face. "I may or may not have left some lingerie on his bed when I was upstairs dropping off my bags."

"Just go," Alice said with a wave of her hand.

I shook my head back and forth, lifting my hands to protest despite the fact that I was seconds away from jumping up and disappearing from their sight. "No, no, it's your day."

"It's nighttime now," she remarked. "Go, get your man."

Texts From Last Night

"Are you sure?"

"GO!" Alice and Rose said, throwing their hands in the air and smiling at me.

I placed sloppy kisses on each of their cheeks before running to the stairs, only tripping twice along the way.

Edward was sitting cross-legged in the middle of the bed when I slowly opened the door, his eyes hungrily taking in the three sets of lingerie I had laid out earlier.

"Hi," I whispered as I stepped inside, my body buzzing slightly from the alcohol I had imbibed.

He looked up with wide eyes. "Bella," he sighed as dangled a black, silk teddy from the index finger of his right hand. "You are a complete and total tease."

I giggled and bit my lip before walking slowly towards the bed, hoping that my hips were swaying in a seductive manner. "So, you like them?"

"I...yes. I would like them even more if they were on you," he nearly whispered, his voice hoarse. "Or the floor, after being on you..."

I climbed onto the bed and plopped down next to him. "Choose one," I demanded.

He ran his hands through his hair. "If I lie back and close my eyes will you surprise me? Because there is no way I can make up my mind on short notice..."

"I'd love to," I agreed readily, grabbing the bunch of silk, satin, and lace before darting towards the bathroom to change.

Though I had bought several items from Zafrina, there was one panty/babydoll set that I had been dying to wear for Edward from the moment I saw it hanging on the packed rack. A sensual shade of midnight blue and cut from a delicate

Texts From Last Night

lace, the panties were a cheeky cut that hid little of my ass and hung dangerously low on my hips. The babydoll was made from the same lace and was equally as revealing, completely sheer from my bust down and covering so little of my breasts that it was a wonder my nipples were concealed beneath the thin fabric.

Once dressed, I turned to check myself out in the mirror. It was ridiculous, really, how confident and sexy two simple pieces of fabric, combined with the need I had observed in Edward's eyes, could make me feel. With a happy sigh, I mussed my hair up before turning towards the door that would lead me back to my man, even if he was only mine for two more days.

When I slid through the doorway, though, I didn't find a relaxing Edward. Instead, I found something else...

A Damn Good Thing

Chapter Twenty: A Damn Good Thing

EPOV

As soon as Bella mentioned the surprise that was waiting for me on my bed, I wanted to know what it was. Badly. Really fucking badly. Unfortunately, it took her forever and a day to take care of things upstairs, so I was forced to wait while my mind conjured up images of what surprise could be in store for me. I imagined everything from furry handcuffs to a cheesy t-shirt from the gas station with the phrase, 'Evacuation Plan: Grab Beer and Run Like Hell' printed across the front.

Finally, I glanced through the window one last time to see that she had reappeared in the living room, a shot glass in her hand as she laughed about something with Rose and Alice. Without a moment's hesitation, I slid open the door and ran through the house, completely failing to see Jasper before I tackled him on the stairs.

He chuckled as he pushed me off of him and stood up. "Whoa, Edward, in a hurry?"

"I...um..." Hell yes, I was in a hurry.

Resting his right hand on my shoulder, he simply stated, "It's lingerie."

My eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "What is?"

"The surprise that I assume you're heading toward," he explained slowly, a knowing smirk spreading across his lips.

"Oh, yeah that's where I'm going," I said. "So, if you'll excuse me..." I pointed in the direction I had been heading.

Texts From Last Night

"Sure man," he said, clapping his hand against on my shoulder before pulling it away and continuing down the stairs. "Have a good one."

When I reached the top of the stairs, I stopped, a sudden thought coming to my mind. "Wait," I yelled after Jasper as I turned on my heel to look down the stairs. He turned around to face me, eyebrows lifted. "How the hell do you know?"

He winked. "Alice already gave me my surprise...well, both of them, actually."

"Nice," I nodded, grinning cheekily. "So, tonight?"

"You might want to put on some music or something."

"The tie?" I asked, more aware of the significance of the tie than I wanted to be, especially after the in-depth story he had shared with Emmett and me on the eighth hole that afternoon at the golf course.

He nodded firmly. "The tie."

"Music," I said, more to myself than Jasper. "Got it. Anything else?"

He shrugged. "Just, uh, keep in mind what we talked about earlier, yeah?"

I closed my eyes and looked down at my feet. "I will," I confirmed, though the mention of our earlier conversation struck fucking fear in me. It involved feelings that I definitely didn't want to deal with tonight.

"Later man," he waved before disappearing around the corner.

Pushing Jasper's reminder to the back of my mind, I turned on my heel and continued down the hall to my room. Once inside, I shut the door behind me and turned towards the bed.

My lips turned up into a giddy smile at the three sets of lingerie resting innocently on the foot of my bed. One set was a bright, siren red, another the

Texts From Last Night

delicate shade of champagne, and the third a mysterious shade of dark blue. I took three long steps forward to examine them, running my fingers slowly over the varying fabrics before climbing onto the bed to wait for the woman that would be wearing the items later.

Though my body was resting comfortably on the large bed, my mind refused to shut down and relax. Instead, it was busy forming a plan. I knew that Bella didn't need to be seduced because, hell, we had a damn hard time keeping our hands to ourselves around each other, but she did need to be--deserved to be--romanced a bit. Jasper had been right earlier, it was time to get my head out of my ass and either show or tell her how I felt about her. For the time being, I chose show.

After dragging my hand down my face slowly, I climbed down from the bed in search of the iPod dock I had packed on a whim. Finding it quickly, I grabbed my iPod and selected a playlist that I knew Bella would enjoy and queued it up, pressing the pause button so that it would be ready when I needed it. When I was done with that, I wasn't sure what else to do. I had never attempted to woo a woman before. Sex and fake romance with Tanya, sure, but with her, all it took to make her melt was a cheap bouquet of flowers and a couple of candles.

Candles...I could work with that.

Having discovered several stowed underneath the sink in the bathroom and in the hall closet, I moved quickly to retrieve them, placing them in drawers and beneath blankets and pillows around the room for quick recovery. I found a book of matches in the top drawer of the bedside table and stuck it in my pocket, knowing that I would lose them if I hid them anywhere else.

With a sigh, I climbed back onto the bed, choosing this time to sit in the middle of it and further examine my surprise. Each piece was sexy in a unique way, but I noticed my eyes kept returning to the delicate, dark blue set. That one, I wanted to see on Bella first. Fuck if my dick didn't agree.

I heard the doorknob click as I ran my hand across the deep blue fabric, looking up to find Bella in the doorway, whispering a greeting. I murmured

Texts From Last Night

something about her being a tease, *which she was*, as she approached slowly. Her hips were swaying in a way that made me want to tackle her to the floor and rip her shorts off, but I managed to control myself. *Down boy.*

Giggling, she asked me if I liked her surprise. I wanted to yell, "Fuck yes," but chose instead to tell her that I wanted to see them on her. Of course, my voice broke like a damn 13-year-old boy's, so I added something about the lingerie falling to the floor.

And then, she was on the bed next to me, asking me to choose and I knew that if I didn't get her out of the room somehow, my work hiding the candles and readying the iPod would be for shit. Also, she looked so fucking gorgeous, a little bit drunk and asking me my opinion on my surprises. I really didn't think I could hold out if she kept looking at me like that...those fucking eyes, that pouty fucking mouth, and *shit*, her perky ass tits....she had to get out of my line of sight or I was really going to fuck her senseless.

I decided to leave it up to her. "If I lie back and close my eyes will you surprise me? Because there is no way I can make up my mind on short notice..." In my mind, I was praying that she would choose the blue set.

As she grabbed the items in her hands, she murmured that she would love to before disappearing into the attached bathroom.

I waited until she shut the bathroom door before jumping off the bed and retrieving the candles I had hidden, placing them on flat surfaces and lighting them one at a time. When I passed the iPod dock, I pressed play and closed my eyes briefly as the soft, classical music began to filter through the air. Opening my eyes, I returned my attention to the task at hand.

I had three candles remaining to light when I heard a soft gasp. Looking up, I saw Bella standing in the doorway to the bathroom, her hand clasped over her mouth, wearing the dark blue lingerie set that I had wanted so desperately to see her in.

Texts From Last Night

"Sweet fuck," I said under my breath as my eyes took her in, a grin spreading across my lips. The deep blue shade of the fabric, I think it was lace, made her lightly tanned skin look as if it was glowing. Her long legs were on glorious display, making me want to touch and lick every inch of them. The best part of the ensemble, though, had to be the...boob area? I don't know what the proper name for the flimsy bit of fabric that barely covered her nipples was, but it was perfect and gave her the best fucking cleavage I had been witness to.

She stood completely still as I drank her in. At some point, her hand had dropped from where it was covering her mouth as she was now biting her lip nervously.

"Come here," I whispered when my eyes finally finished their tour of her body and returned to meet her gaze.

She stepped slowly towards me. "When did you...where did you?"

I reached forward and grabbed her hands in mine, pulling her towards me before placing my index finger over her pouty lips to silence her.

"I have a few tricks up my sleeve, too," I answered vaguely.

She smirked up at me, her eyes playful. "What do you think?" she asked, looking down at her ensemble.

"I'm pretty sure you know what I think," I murmured as I reached for her right hand to place it over the obvious bulge in my pants.

"Oh," she breathed. I removed my hand, but she didn't drop hers.

"And you haven't even seen the back..." She added playfully before taking a small step backwards.

I licked my lips as I watched her turn around, her hair flowing over her shoulders as she moved. When her back was completely to me, she turned her neck to glance at me over her shoulder, a sexy grin on her lips.

Texts From Last Night

Though I had thought it impossible just minutes ago, the view from the back was even more spectacular than the one from the front. Her ass was on display, barely covered by the cheeky bottoms, as was her back, only covered by a two strings of fabric that met in a bow between her shoulder blades.

"Bella," I groaned, my eyes lingering on her perfect ass and the legs that were connected to it. "You're perfect."

She sighed in response, a noise I took as an invitation to approach her. So, I did, not bothering to turn her around as I stepped up behind her, placing a lingering kiss on her lips as I placed my hands on her hips. When we broke apart, she shifted her neck to face forward again.

"Beautiful," I sighed as I slid my hands towards each other, my fingers meeting in the middle of her stomach. "I like this color, it makes your skin fucking glow."

"Midnight blue," she said breathily.

"Ah, I had been referring to it simply as 'dark blue'."

She giggled and whispered "That works too," before placing her hands on top of mine and sliding them towards her sex, dipping both of our hands beneath her panties before placing two of my fingers between her already dripping folds.

"Pretty girl, you're soaking," I hissed into her ear before pulling her earlobe into my mouth.

She moaned in response before turning her neck again and pulling my lower lip between her teeth. "I have been for a while now." As she spoke, she began to move two of my fingers against her clit.

I groaned at her statement. "Since when, baby?"

Texts From Last Night

"Since I tried this on at the store," she responded, her words strained as I continued to work my fingers over her. Slowly, she pulled her hands away from mine and lifted them behind her to thread them through my hair. "And daydreamed of wearing it for you..."

"Damn." She was a complete vixen.

"Yeah," she sighed. "Damn."

We were silent as I continued to pleasure her, sliding my fingers lower to bury two inside of her. Surprising me, she reached down and pulled them back out. "Turn me around," she demanded. "I want to feel you."

I obliged her request, turning her in my arms. Once we were face to face, she pulled my face to hers, kissing me hungrily as she shoved her tongue into my mouth. Sliding her hands down, she pulled the shirt I was wearing from the waist of my pants and pulled on it, showing me that she wanted it off. I lifted my arms, eager to feel her skin against mine.

When my chest was bare, she wrapped her arms around my shoulders and attached her lips to mine again, this time kissing me at a more leisurely, sensual pace. Moving my hands to her back, I found the bow that held the top onto her.

"Can I take this off?" I asked before as I gently pulled on the end of one of the strings.

"Please," she pleaded. "I want to feel you."

I tugged gently and, within seconds, the blue lace was lying on the floor. She moaned as our skin connected. Grasping her ass in my hands, I squeezed it gently before sliding my hands up to her hips and lifting upward. Following my lead, she jumped up, wrapping her legs around my waist at the same time that she wrapped her arms around my neck, her boobs resting directly in front of my face.

Texts From Last Night

"Like the view?" she asked playfully as I ogled her, placing a short kiss on one of her pebbled nipples.

Walking towards the bed, I whispered, "So fucking much," before placing her on the edge. She shifted backwards as I stood at the foot of the bed and began unbuttoning my pants. Within an instant, she was back in front of me, her hands replacing mine as she deftly undid the button and the zipper before pushing them to the floor. Obviously pleased with herself, she fell back onto the bed and patted the space beside her as I stepped free.

I climbed up to settle beside her, propping myself up on my elbow as I tangled our legs together and used my other hand to brush her hair away from her face. She smiled sweetly at me, a look of pure contentment on her face as her eyes fluttered shut.

"Edward," she pleaded, my name sounding perfect coming from between her lips.

"Hm?" I asked as my fingers skimmed across her body, down between her breasts to where her hips met the panties she was still, for some unknown reason, wearing.

I answered her request with a slow, lingering kiss. No tongue, no hunger, but a promise. When we broke apart, I lifted myself to my knees and moved to sit at her feet, lifting her right foot and placing a kiss to the arch of it before moving to her calf, then her knee, then her thigh, before moving to her left leg and tracing my way back down.

She moaned my name as I worked over her silky legs before moving to settle above her, leaning down to pull her pebbled left nipple into my mouth, swirling my tongue in circles across it before releasing it with a pop and moving to the other side, my left hand rising to play with the abandoned breast.

When she groaned loudly, I shifted to kiss a trail down her flat stomach, coming to a stop at the top of her panties before sliding them down the legs I was now fully acquainted with. Settling between her thighs, I placed teasing

Texts From Last Night

kisses everywhere but where she wanted me until she sighed in a breathy tone, "Please."

A quick swipe of my tongue between her sweet folds and over her clit and her hands were in my hair, short fingernails scraping against my scalp as I dipped a finger inside of her. She moaned at the contact and I lifted my eyes to see her, stretched out on her back, the comforter to the bed fisted in her hands as her body writhed back and forth. After inserting a second finger, I heard her breathing start to accelerate as her walls clinched around me, her body shaking with orgasm.

BPOV

When I unclenched my fists and opened my eyes, Edward was hovering over me with a proud grin on his face. Smirking playfully up at him, I lifted my legs and wrapped them around his waist, catching him off guard as I pushed on his shoulder to roll him over.

Once he was settled on his back and I was straddling his hips, I leaned down and placed a gentle, lingering kiss on the middle of his chest before slowly licking my way down, my tongue skimming over his stomach and through the sweet patch of hair that disappeared beneath the band of his boxerbriefs. When my mouth reached the band, I pulled away and dipped my fingers below, fisting his cock between my hands, one on top of the other.

"Bella," he moaned. "You don't..." His words caught his throat when I began to pump him up and down, pulling my hands away without warning and making quick work of his boxers.

"I do," I disagreed. I wasn't officially keeping count, but I was fairly certain that I had been on the receiving end of several more orgasms than he had in the past few days. "Just relax, babe."

He sighed and propped himself up on his elbows, watching as I leaned forward and placed the tip of his cock in my mouth while cupping his balls in my hand. "You're lips, around my cock, Bella, is an image I will never forget," he said in

Texts From Last Night

a strained voice.

I released him quickly and dared him, saying, "Maybe you don't have to," before resuming my actions, taking him as deep as possible before beginning to bob my head up and down. He fell onto his back, his hands immediately burying in my hair.

Feeling him twitch in my mouth, his hands moved from my hair to hook under my shoulders. Suddenly, my mouth was empty and Edward was pulling my body to align it with his, lifting me expertly before placing me back down, sheathing himself inside of me.

"I want to come inside of you," He told me, groaning at the same time that I did in response to the contact.

I grinned and leaned forward, placing my hand on his chest, my hair falling around my shoulders as I began to lift myself up and down. He moved his hips with mine, leaning up every few thrusts to kiss either my lips or my breasts.

"Edward," I gasped as I felt my body start to catch fire. Lifting a hand, I cupped his chin and lifted his face, which was, at the moment, glued to my chest, so that our eyes could meet. "Look at me, I want to see."

When he did, his eyes were ablaze with desire and lust and something else, something new and foreign. If I were a betting woman, I would have put down good money on the fact that my eyes echoed the same things.

Our eyes locked on each other's as we continued to move together. Edward grabbed my hips and began to control my movements, quietly murmuring the words, "Come with me," as I felt him twitch again, this time inside of me.

I nodded and increased my pace, clawing at his chest, shoulders, whatever I could get my hands on when I felt my walls tighten around him at the same time that he came, filling me completely. After riding out my orgasm, I collapsed onto him, our bodies both slick with sweat. With a content sigh, he lifted a hand to run it through my hair.

Texts From Last Night

"Pretty girl," he whispered into my ear. "That was..."

I lifted my head to look at him, a smile spreading across my face as I took in his satisfied expression and drooping eyes, knowing that it wouldn't be long before we both fell asleep. "Perfect," I finished for him.

"Perfect," he echoed as his eyes closed completely.

xXx

Both of us were clearly exhausted, seeing as how we both fell asleep without bothering to move, Edward's cock still inside of me. When I woke up what couldn't have been more than a couple of hours later, though, the room was no longer lit romantically and the bed was empty.

"Edward," I whispered loudly into the room.

"Shh," he cooed. "I'm over here."

Following his voice, I found him sneaking back into the room from what I assumed was the kitchen.

"You hungry?" He asked as he climbed back onto the bed, a bag of pretzels and a bowl of grapes in his hand.

I hadn't realized it before, but I was kind of famished. "Starved, actually."

After relighting two candles on the bedside table, he sensually ran the fingers of his right hand across my lower back and murmured, "Work up an appetite?"

"Something like that," I sighed as I leaned into him, my head resting on his shoulder as he handed me a small bunch of grapes.

As we snacked, we discussed our day more in depth. I gave him more details about Senna and Zafrina and the kindness they had shown to us, and I also enlightened him as to Alice's annoyance with being out of the loop for the day.

Texts From Last Night

He shared with me the details of their golf game and went on and on about the cigars they had smoked, but really, all I cared about was how good it felt to be wrapped in his arms again.

I realized, suddenly, that I never wanted it to end.

"Um, Bella?" He asked, breaking the silence as our conversation had settled into a comfortable silence. His voice was shaky, sounding nervous.

I turned, taking in the beautiful glow of his face in the candlelight. "What's up?" I asked, running a finger down the side of his face, from one end of his jaw to the other.

He closed his eyes briefly before speaking softly. "I kind of...well...I don't know how I feel about our agreement from last night."

Glancing at the clock, I saw that it was a couple of minutes after midnight.

It was Friday, the tomorrow I had decided to wait for before having this conversation.

I inhaled a deep breath before answering, choosing not to waste time wondering whether or not good or bad things would come from his sudden outburst.

"I have, too," I admitted slowly.

His eyes met mine. "You have?" He asked, a hint of hope in his voice as he sat up straight.

I nodded. "Yeah, I just...shit, I don't know how I feel anymore because I can't help but think about us. Living in the moment doesn't work for me, Edward."

"Is that a good or a bad thing?"

Texts From Last Night

I shrugged, pulling the sheet that was wrapped around my body closer. "I'm not sure, good...bad...maybe a little bit of both."

Edward tossed his arm around my shoulder and pulled me into side, placing a gentle kiss on my shoulder before speaking. "First of all, Bella, you should probably know that I'm not letting you go, not until we've tested whatever this is between us outside of this beach house," he paused, searching my face for what I assumed was fear. "I want to know if this," he gestured between us, "is the result of the lovey-dovey atmosphere around us, or if it's something real."

I knew it was real, could feel that it was, but I didn't want to send him running for the hills, so I kept my mouth shut.

When I nodded at him, he continued. "Tell me, Bella, are you scared shitless of the long distance thing because of Jake?"

"You're not Jake, Edward," I said, shaking my head back and forth, firmly believing what I had said as truth. There was not a single characteristic that Edward shared with my ex.

"Damn straight I'm not," he scoffed playfully as I nudged him in the side. "So, here's the thing, let's just get it all out there right now. I like you, a whole fucking lot, Bella. More than I've ever liked anyone, for the record-"

"Ditto," I inserted, causing him to pause.

He arched an eyebrow. "Ditto? Really, Bella, you like yourself as much as you've liked anyone?"

I giggled. "Sorry," I paused to kiss him gently. "As you can probably tell, I like you a hell of a lot and want to explore this thing between us, this week and next week and the week after that...long distances be damned."

He smiled brightly at me. "You're sure?" He asked, his voice cracking with a hint of doubt.

Texts From Last Night

Lifting my head, I kissed him soundly. "I'm sure."

He released a breath that I'm pretty sure he had been holding for the entire conversation. "Well, thank God. I've been scared shitless of that conversation, so worried that you were going to say it wasn't worth the possible heartache. You know, Jasper made me do it. I really thought I could, you know, just show you how I felt with the candles and shit, but then we were sitting here and it was so comfortable and *right*, that I couldn't *not* say anything."

"Alice might have mentioned that it needed to happen, too, on the massage table, no less," I told him with feigned annoyance. "I'm just glad that you said something first because I was too much of a wimp to break the ice."

He rolled his eyes at my comment. "Alice has him so fucking whipped."

"That is very, very true," I agreed with a light laugh.

As we settled back under the covers, once again tangled in each other, I felt at peace, completely and totally, for the first time in the long time.

"Edward?" I asked when the kisses calmed and the casual groping slowed down.

"Huh?" He asked, his voice muffled by the pillow we were sharing.

"Where did you, um, get the iPod that was playing earlier?" The day we had run on the beach, I recalled, he had mentioned leaving his iPod in Chicago.

Instead of answering, he pulled me closer and began to tease his fingers along my navel, attempting to distract me in the best way.

I giggled and pushed his hands away from me. "Seriously, where did you get it?"

He sighed, pretending to be exasperated before saying quietly, "I, uh, found it in my suitcase."

Texts From Last Night

"Uh huh," I said dryly.

Another sigh as he buried his head in my neck and placed a kiss beneath my ear. "Fine, you caught me," he slowly admitted.

"Caught you how?"

"I wanted to talk to you alone for a bit," he admitted slowly. "I heard you down the hall while you were getting ready for your run, so I hid my iPod and followed after you."

"You sneaky bastard," I cried, gently swatting him against the chest. "Smart, though."

"Why's that?"

"I hate iPod runners, especially at the beach."

"Well its damn good thing I left mine at home then, huh?"

Instead of answering verbally, I leaned forward, kissing him soundly in agreement. Yes, it was a damn good thing, I thought as he rolled me onto my back, the erection nudging my thigh letting me know he was ready for round two.

A/N: Reviews are appreciated aaaand reviewers get a tease :)

Bridezilla Begins

Disclaimer: Twilight belongs to Stephenie Meyer, as do the people in this chapter. I do, however, own their crazy adventures.

Leah is the best beta in the world. That is all.

Thank you to everyone that has added this story to their favorite and alert lists, as well as those of y'all that I can count on to review every chapter. You rock! I have to say, though, that a lot of you expressed concern over Tanya showing up at the wedding. Have no fear, I'm not bringing that psycho near the crazy party that is likely to ensue (I mean, really, have you met my characters?) after Jasper makes Alice his wife. Also, a lot of you have asked how much time Edward and Bella have together in "the bubble", so to speak. Right now...2 days...then back to the real world.

Chapter Twenty-One: Bridezilla Begins

Friday morning passed by in a complete blur, as Alice woke Rose and me up at the ass-crack of dawn, pounding on the doors to the rooms we were sleeping in before the sun had dared made its appearance for the day. I protested and begged Edward to make an excuse for me to stay in bed for just an hour or two longer, but in the end, I dragged myself away from his warm embrace, threw on some athletic shorts and a tank top, and trudged downstairs for a warm cup of coffee.

'Hello, Bridezilla,' I wanted to say when I stepped into the kitchen to find Alice with a determined look on her face and a clipboard in her hand. I watched as she stared at it with a look of stern concentration, no doubt adding and subtracting from her never ending list of things to do.

"There's Starbucks on the counter," she stated without looking up, pointing with the sparkly pen in her hand towards the coffee carrier. "I got you your usual. Same as always, right?"

Texts From Last Night

I smiled, remembering in that moment why Alice was my best friend, despite the fact that the look on her face was a little bit scary.

"Same as always," I nodded as I inhaled the comforting aroma. "What's the plan?"

Rose strolled into the room as Alice looked up and began speaking. With a small wave, she made her way towards the coffee carrier and found the cup with her name written across the side.

Alice inhaled deeply before launching into her spiel. "First, we will drop Rose off at Charleston Place downtown, where my parents and the Hales are staying so that they can get everything together for the rehearsal dinner which is, as you know, the responsibility of the groom's family. Thank God Eleanor Hale and I were on the same page for this portion of the wedding." She paused, looked down at her clipboard, jotted something down, and immediately began speaking again. "Also, while we're at the hotel, we'll unload the gift bags for out of town guests that Emmett and Edward are delivering to everyone's hotel of choice. My mother will look after them until the boys arrive to hand them out."

I wanted to ask what was so important about the gift bags that they needed looking after, but didn't dare interrupt her monologue.

"Once Rose has been dropped downtown, you and I will run over to Maddison Row to pick up the dresses before stopping for a quick lunch somewhere TBA with the wedding planner, you know, to make sure that all of the ducks are in a row. After lunch, we'll return to the house so that you can help me get everything packed for the honeymoon so that I don't have to do it tomorrow, then Rose will somehow find a way back here," she stopped and looked up at Rose, a worried expression on her face. "You'll be able to find a ride, right?"

"I think I can handle it, *mom*," Rose said dryly with a roll of her eyes before taking a long sip of her coffee.

Texts From Last Night

"Great," Alice said shortly, completely ignoring Rose's snarky remark. "After Rose returns, we'll have a drink on the beach with Jasper, Emmett, and Edward before coming inside to get ready for the rehearsal and rehearsal dinner."

She stopped, took a deep breath, and smiled broadly. Simply hearing everything we had to do over the course of the day left me exhausted.

"What are the boys doing today?" Rose dared to ask.

Alice looked down at the clipboard. "I have it all outlined, would you like to hear it? I already told you what Emmett and Edward are doing in the morning..."

"Nope," Rose answered quickly, causing Alice to frown. "Just making sure they wouldn't be sitting on their asses."

"What's this about asses?" Edward asked, suddenly appearing behind me and whispering in my ear as his hand found my ass and squeezed it once.

I turned and grinned up at him, lifting the ball cap he on his head and placing a short kiss on the tip of his nose. "Rose was just making sure that you men weren't going to be sitting on yours all day," I explained.

"There will be no ass sitting, that's for sure," Jasper said as he sauntered into the room, a sheet of paper in his hand. "First we'll..."

Rose held up a hand to stop him. "No need, J," she said.

He shrugged and dropped the sheet to his side. "If you say so," he said. "Alice, babe, do you need anything here before we head out to get started with everything?"

She shook her head back and forth. "Just a kiss from my fiancé..."

"I think I can handle that," Jasper said, sliding over to where she was standing and kissing her deeply.

Texts From Last Night

"Again, you are my brother," Rose said, averting her eyes and pretending to gag.

xXx

By the time Alice and I returned to the house following lunch, I wanted nothing more than to take a long nap followed by a warm, relaxing shower. Of course, Alice had other plans, and dragged me upstairs so that I could help her pack.

As she held various items of clothing up, it was my responsibility to choose which suitcase they would go in--the one she was taking on their honeymoon or the one that was staying behind. Really, though, I wasn't sure why my opinion was necessary as, several times, Alice would veto my decision and toss something in the suitcase opposite of what I had suggested. Finally, though, after what felt much longer than an hour, we were lying next to each other on the floor, our heads next to each other as we chatted aimlessly.

"So..." She began after a lull in our conversation. I knew what that word meant coming from Alice's mouth, she was about to delve into something serious.

"So..." I echoed.

Alice sat up and looked down at me. "Did you tell Edward?"

"Tell Edward what?" I asked, playing the innocent card as I pulled myself to a sitting position, folding my legs beneath me.

She rolled her eyes. "You know what, Bella. Our conversation...yesterday..."

"Oh, that," I said. "The conversation from yesterday..."

"Yes, that," she sighed. "Did you talk?"

I couldn't help the smile that spread across my face as I recalled the night before, my hands shifting to my lap. "We did," I responded.

Texts From Last Night

"And?" She urged.

"And," I paused for a moment, watching my hands as I nervously played with my fingers. "We decided to do away with the living in the moment shit and agreed that we wanted to see where this thing between us goes once we're outside of this bubble we're living in now."

Alice squealed before pleading, "Tell me more!"

So, I did. I told her how Edward and I had agreed that we both liked each other very much, and that we wanted to take our relationship further after the week ended. I also told her about my silly insertion of, "Ditto," into the conversation, as well as how Edward has been scared shitless of the conversation and that, surprisingly, he had been the one to initiate it.

Alice listened, surprisingly quietly, nodding every now and then as I shared. When I stopped, grinning broadly still, she spoke.

"I'm so happy for you!"

"I'm happy for me, too," I admitted for the first time in a long time.

Without missing a beat, the questions began. "Who's visiting who first?" she asked.

"I'm not sure, I guess it'll depend on his school and my work schedule."

Alice frowned. "That needs to be discussed."

"It will be," I answered hotly, suddenly a little defensive. Wasn't it enough that the two of us had agreed that our budding relationship was significant enough to try to make it work long distance?

"If you're sure," she stated without looking up.

"Alice..." I ground out through my teeth.

Texts From Last Night

She sighed loudly. "I just, Bella, I want to see both of you happy, so badly. I worry that if you don't have a plan in place when you leave, that you'll let life get in the way and lose touch again."

"What do you mean, lose touch again?"

"I mean," she said, "that for the past three years you have maintained contact with every one of us except Edward. Why is that?"

Her question caught me off guard and I fumbled to come up with an answer that wouldn't make me sound silly. "I...I...don't know."

"You do, too, know," Alice disagreed with narrowed eyes. "So tell me. I want to know. Why did you forget about Edward? You know, he always asks Jasper about you, wonders what you've been up to. He missed you, Bella, missed your friendship."

"I didn't forget about Edward," I answered defensively. "He was my best friend, Alice, second only to you for Christ sake. What was I supposed to do? Call him with my pitiful stories about how Jake proposed and that the idea of being married to him scared the shit out of me? Or, maybe I could have called and cried on his metaphorical shoulder when I found out that Jake had been cheating for months with some...some whore from his office?"

"Yes," Alice cut in. "You should have done both of those things. That's what friends do for each other."

I shook my head, laughing bitterly. "And screw up his perfect relationship with T-Monster? I don't think so. The bitch hated me enough, it would have been worse if I went crying to her almost-fiancée. Besides, when I got to Manhattan, I just wanted to find out who I was on my own, to be strong for myself."

Alice reached across and laid a hand on top of mine. "He broke up with her after graduation," she said softly. "And you are strong, you always have been."

Texts From Last Night

"I am not, not really," I answered. "And I didn't know he had broken up with Tanya, Alice. Friendships work two ways, you know. He could have called me if he missed me that much."

"He thought you were with Jake."

"Never mattered before, did it?" I countered.

Alice took a moment to consider her words before speaking. "You know, Bella, I'm beginning to think that both of you are the two most stubborn people I've ever encountered. He thought you were with Jake, you thought he was with Tanya. Damn, maybe if one of you had gotten your shit together before now we wouldn't be in this mess."

"Mess?" I knew that the next couple of months were going to be difficult for Edward and me, but I certainly didn't consider our relationship a mess.

"I'm sorry, maybe mess isn't the best word to use. Perhaps...situation."

"Okay, what do you mean by situation?"

"I mean," she paused, her eyes searching mine, "maybe the two of you wouldn't be living in separate cities."

"Are you saying that you think we would have gotten together before now?"

She nodded.

"Seriously?" I asked, taken aback.

Another nod. "Seriously," she agreed. "We've kind of all known it would happen eventually. Even in college, there was something unexplainably perfect between the two of you, but you both seemed happy with Jake and Tanya."

I snorted. Happy was not the word I would have chosen to describe my relationship with Jake. Barely satisfied, maybe, but not happy. Happy was what

Texts From Last Night

I felt now, with Edward, despite the fact that Alice was attempting to make me face the facts of a relationship that I had laid to rest months prior.

"Well, hindsight's 20-20, huh?" I asked, eager to get away from any and all conversations that involved Jake.

"Really, hindsight's a bitch," Alice said with a giggle. It seemed as if she was satisfied to move on to a lighter topic of conversation until she asked, "So, you're okay with doing the long distance thing again?"

I nodded. "It'll be different with Edward," I stated resolutely.

"It will," Alice agreed. "God, Bella, you should see the way he looks at you, it's like you hung the moon and then the stars. He always has, really."

"He has? He does?" I asked, doubtful.

"Always. It just took both of you a little while to realize it."

"That's for sure," I said with a chuckle that Alice joined echoed.

Her laughter made me smile. "Thank you, Alice."

"For what?" She asked, her eyebrows furrowing.

"For making me get my head out of my ass yesterday, and for being a nosy little shit."

She grinned. "You know you love me. Just promise me you'll make a plan?"

I sighed, leaning over to wrap her up in a hug. "I'll talk to Edward about making a plan," I grumbled into her hair as she wrapped her arms around me. "I'm not going to let him get away this time, as a friend or as...more."

"That's all I ask," she answered and I could hear the smile in her voice as we broke our hug.

Texts From Last Night

As she pulled away, the door banged open and Emmett bellowed, "Fuck yeah, girl on girl action up here," as he tossed his first in the air.

I rolled my eyes and stood, crossing to where he stood. "You're too late, bud," I stated as I clapped my hand against his chest and pushed past him into the hall.

I could hear the frown on his face as he murmured, "Damn," before I heard Rose come up behind and smack him. "Ass," she said to him playfully.

I wasted no time dashing down the hall towards Edward's room, anxious to see him after having spent the morning and afternoon apart. As I speed walked, I admitted to myself that I needed to get my act together, seeing as how in a day and a half I would have to go a hell of a lot longer without seeing his handsome face in person. The irony wasn't lost on me, that Edward and I had gone roughly three years with very minimal contact but now the idea of being apart from him for a day saddened me.

When I didn't find him in his room, I turned and headed downstairs, finding him in the living room, discussing something in angry, hushed tones with Jasper.

"Hi," I stated lightly from the doorway, announcing my presence. "Am I interrupting something?"

Edward looked up and shook his head, his face brightening at my presence before motioning for me to join him on the loveseat. After cuddling up next to him, I asked, "What were you two talking about?"

He sighed. "About Alice's silly rule of separating boys and girls for the evening."

I frowned, his statement from the night before about not seeing me the following night returning to my mind. At the time, the meaning hadn't registered as I had been too focused on his body pressed up against mine, but now it did.

Texts From Last Night

"Where are the three of you staying?" I asked weakly.

"Alice reserved a suite for us at Charleston Place, where most of the other guests are, but I was in the process of begging Jasper to let me stay here."

"And I was reminding him that this was Alice's weekend and to not go against the plan," Jasper added.

I looked into Edward's eyes and nodded. "You need to do as you're told, babe," I told him, though it pained me to intentionally shorten our time together.

"Are you sure?" He asked, his voice low so that Jasper wouldn't hear.

"I'm sure," I said, sealing my statement with a kiss as I slid closer towards him. "We'll be together most of tomorrow, remember, Date?"

A small smile spread across his lips as he leaned in. "I do remember, Date," he answered, his voice husky and his breath fanning across my face.

"I'm going to go, uh, check on Alice," Jasper said, obviously uncomfortable at the PDA we were seconds away from starting.

"Okay," we answered at the same time, giggling when we realized what we had done before joining our lips together.

"You know," Edward said as he pulled away. "Tomorrow will be our first real date."

"It will," I agreed, smiling at him. "Wait, real date? As opposed to..."

He nodded. "Yes, real date...I'm not counting the fraternity and sorority date nights we dragged each other to in college when Jake and/or Tanya were busy."

"Yes, those," I remembered. "They definitely don't count, mainly because I didn't kiss you then."

Texts From Last Night

He grinned before leaning over, placing his mouth on the shell of my ear and whispering, "No, you did not. So, *Bella*, you put out on the first date?"

I giggled and pushed him away playfully. "I haven't decided yet," I answered coyly.

"Is that right?"

I nodded, biting my lip as I took in his piercing eyes and unruly hair. *Fuck yeah, I'm putting out.*

"Anything I can do to convince you?" He asked, moving forward and placed the span of his hands on the sides of my stomach. "Because I can be very persuasive," his voice dropped as he spoke, his fingers digging into my sides.

"Yeah?" *As if I would need convincing...*

"Yeah," he echoed before attacking me with tickles.

I giggled, gasping for breath as he dug his fingers into my sides and my stomach before lifting my shirt and attacking my skin directly, eventually moving us so that he was hovering above me as he continued his ministrations.

"Stop, stop," I giggled, attempting unsuccessfully to get some tickles in myself.

With a smug grin, he leaned down and placed an open mouthed kiss on my neck, stilling his movements. "Say it," he begged.

"Say what?" I asked breathlessly, completely lost in the feel of his lips moving against my skin.

"Say you'll stay with me tomorrow night," he said, his voice hinting towards desperation as he looked up to meet my gaze.

I nodded, my mouth falling open with surprise at the look in his eyes, a combination of hope, desperation, and lust.

Texts From Last Night

"Of course I'll stay with you tomorrow night," I said before reaching up to thread my hands behind his neck and pull his lips back to mine.

xXx

Eventually, Edward and I had to pull ourselves away from each other for the obligatory drinks on the beach that Alice had planned to happen at roughly three forty-five that afternoon. We were each limited to only one beer.; Alice didn't want us to get sloppy that night, before we were ushered upstairs for showers.

I felt like I was at summer camp and Alice was the bossy head counselor.

The six of us quickly showered and, by four o'clock on the dot, were in the Tahoe, heading towards the location Alice had chosen for the wedding. It was the first time that any of us, other than her, would be seeing the outdoor site in person.

When we pulled up to the inconspicuous location, I tried to picture it the way Alice had described it during her packing extravaganza, frowning when I couldn't.

"It's just down that trail, tomorrow there will be tea lights lining the walkway," Alice announced as Emmett put the Tahoe into park and we began climbing out.

As he had grown fond of doing, Edward helped my ass out of the vehicle.

We followed Alice down the short trail and, suddenly, the private beach area she had described earlier was right in front of us. Other than a row of single row of folding chairs sat out for the sole purpose of creating an aisle for the rehearsal, the clearing was empty all the way to the Atlantic Ocean. Though I could imagine the decorations just as Alice had described them to me earlier, I was amazed by the simplicity of the location.

Texts From Last Night

Alice pointed out what would go where as she led us towards where her parents, the Hales, and the minister performing the ceremony were waiting so that we go through the motions. She explained that the decorators had a large tent on stand-by in case of rain, and reminded Rose and me that the three of us would be arriving in a vintage carriage pulled by two white horses.

And just like that, my illusion of simplicity vanished.

Edward and I walked together and he squeezed my hip sweetly when, after greeting everyone, we were told to separate so for the run-through. It went by quickly, Alice and Jasper refused to say the vows until the following day, and we were suddenly back in the car, heading towards the rehearsal dinner.

xXx

The rehearsal dinner was held at the in-house restaurant of Charleston Place and, when our group arrived, all of the out of town guests were waiting at their tables in the private dining room that the Hales had reserved.

Place cards were set at the head table in the front of the room for the six of us, as Alice wanted us to be set apart from the rest of the group. She had told us that we were the most important people in the room to her and she wanted us together. Also, because there were going to be hors d'oeuvres instead of a meal at the reception, tonight would include dinner as well as toasts from Edward and myself, the best man and maid of honor, respectively.

I'm not going to lie, I was nervous as Hell despite the fact that I had written the speech I would be sharing before leaving New York. Though Edward's hand was comforting on my thigh, I knew that it would slide away when I stood to speak; therefore my only true comfort was the copy of my toast that I had stuffed into my purse before rushing out of my apartment towards the airport.

Between dinner and the arrival of our desserts, Edward stood, champagne glass in hand, and asked for everyone's attention. When he glanced down at me, I worried that he was going to say, "Ladies first," but, luckily, he simply winked and turned to face the group gathered and waiting for him to speak.

Texts From Last Night

After clearing his throat, he began, his voice steady and confident as he spoke.

"When I walked through the door of that my tiny, cramped dorm suite on that sweltering August day in New Haven, I never expected to stumble upon these jokers," he nodded towards Jasper and then to Emmett, "that ultimately became my best friends. Really, I expected a computer nerd that was addicted to World of Warcraft or something, knowing my terrible luck with randomly selected things. Instead, I found Jasper, the music-loving psychology major, and Emmett, who I thought at first might be a meathead but soon learned was smarter than he seemed. Though I have countless stories that could incriminate both of these men, I'll save Emmett's for when he decides to finally make an honest woman out of Rosalie," he paused as everyone laughed and Emmett boomed, "One day, baby," with a fist pump.

With a chuckle, he continued. "Jasper, my man, tonight, I'm telling the story of the morning after your first date with Alice..."

XxX

Edward POV

December 2007, Sophomore Year

(315): I woke up face first on my living room floor arms outstretched towards the Christmas tree

Feeling the bed beside me, I was glad to find it empty as I attempted to gather my bearings and recall what had happened the night before. Looking down, I realized that I was wearing a horrible Christmas sweater and, at the foot of my bed, rested a sequined Santa hat.

Ah, yes. Tacky Christmas.

Bella had reluctantly agreed to be my unofficial date, as Tanya had already gone home for winter break, something about not having any finals to take. Whatever, she had probably blown her professors to get out of taking them--it

Texts From Last Night

wouldn't have been the first time --that was for sure.

It had been a fun night, filled with beer pong and flip cup and ridiculous outfits.

The best part of the evening, though, had been watching Jasper attempt to impress Alice as though they hadn't been friends for the past year and a half. It was there their first date, though, so I suppose I could understand how pussy-whipped he was acting, running all over the fraternity house in search of her favorite drink or snack.

After pulling off the itchy sweater, I grabbed a t-shirt and pulled it over my head before stumbling out of my room towards the kitchen in search of breakfast and maybe some tea. Bella, I knew, would be passed out on the couch when I walked out and, I was kind of looking forward to waking her up in an annoying manner because, shit, she was an easy target.

Except, she wasn't asleep when I walked out. Instead, she was sitting up on the couch, a blanket wrapped around her shoulders as she shook silently with laughter, her gaze on the Christmas tree. The only light in the room came from the lights on the tree, as the dark shades on the windows were drawn tight.

Had she done some sort of drug the night before that I was unaware of?

Shifting my gaze slowly, I found the source of her laughter.

Jasper.

Passed out, face down, with his hands stretching towards the Christmas tree. I couldn't be sure, but I think there was drool coming from the corner of his mouth.

"What the Hell?" I asked as I heard a door down the hall open.

Bella quit laughing and managed to say, "I found him like this a few minutes ago. Why isn't he with Alice? They snuck away from the party early, I thought."

Texts From Last Night

I shrugged. "I haven't a clue," I answered.

"Morning," I heard someone mumble behind me. Turning around, I found an uncharacteristically disheveled Alice. "Where's Jasper?"

Bella erupted into laughter again, as did I.

Alice stomped her foot in annoyance. "No, really, where is he?" She demanded.

I was bent over, my hands grasping my stomach I was laughing so hard. Unable to form words, I simply stepped aside so that she could see her new beau, passed out.

"Oh no," she breathed. I realized in that moment that he was dressed only in his boxers. "I wondered why he never returned with the glass of water I wanted..."

XxX

As he told the story, laughter emanated from every person in the room, including myself. Somehow, the memory of Jasper begging for the Christmas tree in his sleep had slipped my mind, and it made me light up to hear it again.

Edward continued to speak, saying something else about what a good friend Jasper was before turning to the front and lifting his champagne glass. "To Jasper and Alice," he toasted.

"To Jasper and Alice," everyone echoed as he turned to me, our eyes meeting before we both drank and he nodded in my direction, signaling that it was my turn to honor the happy couple.

With a deep breath, I leaned down to pull my notes from inside my purse, fumbling around for a moment when I couldn't find the sheet I could have sworn I had printed out and stuffed inside.

And then, I remembered my tendency to be a complete and total spaz.

In honor of Texts From Last Night turning legal in chapter age, tell me, what would you wish for if you were the one that got to blow out the birthday candles?

See y'all next Tuesday :)

P.S. Follow me on Twitter: [everythingido3](#)

From the Heart

Disclaimer: Twilight belongs to Stephenie Meyer.

Chapter Twenty-Two: From The Heart

And then, I remembered my tendency to be a complete and total spaz.

In my mind, I could clearly see myself rushing around my apartment in the city, checking my purse to ensure that I had packed my boarding pass and personal identification before rushing to the door...without the copy of my speech. It was, I realized, sitting on my kitchen counter beneath my empty coffee mug.

A string of colorful expletives ran through my mind as I straightened in my chair, empty-handed and freaking out. I turned to Edward, who was now seated, with a harried expression on my face as I attempted to communicate with my eyes the stress I was feeling in that moment.

"I can't find my speech," I whispered quickly. In front of us, there were several tables of Alice and Jasper's friends and family waiting anxiously for me to stand and share my warm, fuzzy feelings about the duo.

His eyebrows furrowed as he leaned in and whispered back, "Don't you remember what you were going to say?"

My mind was as blank as the stare that I was directing at him.

He frowned. "I'll take that as a no?"

"More like a big, fiery Hell no," I corrected as I racked my brain for something, *anything*, that I had been planning to say. Of course, nothing came to mind.

"What should I do?" I asked him, my voice still low, as I was conscious of our audience.

Texts From Last Night

Edward was the epitome of calm. "Speak from the heart," he suggested with a shrug of his right shoulder.

My eyes narrowed at him for a brief moment as I considered his suggestion. "Speak from the heart? I don't know if I can even speak from my brain right now, much less my heart," I hissed.

"Yeah, speak from here," he nodded, his hand moving to rest on his chest above where his own heart lay. "You know, how do you feel about Jasper and Alice? About their role in each other's lives and in yours."

Why did he have to be the sappy one at the moment?

"Well, let's see, right now, I really just want to murder Alice for making me give this speech and I'm not sure that impulse comes from the heart." A glance over his shoulder told me that, if the look on her face was any indication, Alice wanted to murder me, as well, for leaving the rest of the guests hanging.

Edward laughed lightly. "No, you don't. Now, stand up, think about how much you love non-Bridezilla Alice, and kick some maid-of-honor-toasts' ass."

"Ha," I laughed dryly. "We'll see about that."

Leaning forward, he brushed a kiss across my lips. "You can do it, pretty girl," he stated confidently before swiping a finger across my cheek.

I nodded, a little lightheaded from the lingering feel of his lips against mine, and gathered my thoughts. Edward was right; I needed to speak from the heart. The words were there, I just needed to dig them up and spit them out with some semblance of elegance. As I slowly stood, I allowed his words of assurance repeat in my mind while I slowly collected my thoughts.

You've got this, Bella, I told myself as I was standing completely, lifting my head to smile with attempted confidence at the guests that were waiting with expectant looks on their faces. After taking a deep, shaky breath, I spoke.

Texts From Last Night

"I've known Alice and Jasper since college," I began lamely, mentally slapping my palm against my forehead at my stupidity. "Ironically enough, Alice, Rose, and I were randomly assigned to be roommates just like Edward, Jazz, and Emmett..." I trailed off as my eyes scanned the tables in front of me, unsure of where my ramblings were headed.

I looked down at Edward in search of inspiration. He simply nodded and smirked up at me, his hand resting over his heart again.

I turned to face the crowd again. "Uh...now is probably the time to tell you all that I had a speech written out before now. It was filled with a sweet, heartwarming story and words of wisdom for the happy couple. But it's, unfortunately, on the kitchen counter in my apartment in New York," I giggled nervously at my statement.

No one else laughed.

Shit. Fuck. I hate my spastic, forgetful tendencies sometimes--okay, all the time.

I took a deep breath, attempting to force my mind to work when suddenly, a memory from years ago surfaced in my mind. I knew instantly that it was the perfect one to share, smiling as I my posture straightened with my newfound confidence.

"This one next to me," I jerked my head in Edward's direction, "suggested that I simply speak from the heart, which I will. But first, I'm going to share the story of the day Alice realized that Jasper was the one for her..."

xXx

Bella POV

January 2008, Sophomore Year

Texts From Last Night

(512): boyfriend complimented me on my new prada shoes today. he is officially either gay or the man im gonna marry. knowing my luck it's all of the above.

" So, Alice, how are things with Jasper?" I asked as she hung a dress up in my closet. It was our first week back after winter break and we were catching up as I watched Alice put away the clean laundry she had returned to New Haven with.

She sighed wistfully. "He's perfect, Bella."

I make a gagging sound. "You've been on two dates."

" But we were friends way before that," she countered proudly. "Which is more than you can say about Jake..."

" Hey," I said, attempting to act embarrassed. I really wasn't though. "To each his own."

" If you say so," Alice sighed, clearly still in her happy place.

" When's your next date?"

" Tonight."

" What are you wearing?" I asked, knowing that if I did it would buy me a few minutes to close my eyes while she went through her closet.

" I think I'm going to wear..." I heard her voice become muffled as she disappeared into the depths of her closet. Because it was the standard-issue size for a college town apartment, she was always complaining that it wasn't a walk-in.

" This," she said, emerging with a pair of black skinny jeans, sequined top, and shiny heels.

Texts From Last Night

" You do realize it's not New Years Eve, right?" I asked when I saw the sequins.

She rolled her eyes and held up the shirt. "They're black sequins," she explained. "Perfectly acceptable for a January evening. Besides, I'm going to wear a sweater over it."

" Well as long as you're wearing a sweater..." I trailed off sarcastically.

" It'll be fine, Bella," she assured me with a smile and a wave. "Anyway, it's not like I'm going to be wearing it long after dinner."

" That's my cue to leave," Rose said from the doorway. Neither of us had noticed her arrival, as she had snuck in quietly.

I turned to her, laughing loudly. "Alice is going to have sex with your brother," I said bluntly.

" Hasn't she already?"

" No," Alice said quickly. "We didn't want our first time to be hazed by alcohol," she glared at both of us, as we were guilty of that very thing. "And our second date was during the day."

" So, tonight?" I asked.

Alice bobbed her head up and down with excitement. "I think tonight's the night."

" See you two later," Rose said, dashing down the hall and slamming her door loudly.

Alice erupted with laughter. "She'll get over it."

" I hope so," I said. "So far, she seems to handle it really well. I think it's because the two of you have been make-out buddies for the past year and a half."

Texts From Last Night

Alice pondered this before stating, "Probably so."

" Yeah, so, I'll leave you to get ready. Details tomorrow?"

" Details tomorrow," she promised as I climbed off her bed and left the room.

xxx

The next morning, Alice banging on my bedroom door awakened me.

" Enter," I yelled with sleep in my voice, refusing to lift my head from my pillow.

Within seconds, Alice was bouncing on my bed, pulling the covers away from me with haste.

" I have to tell you about last night!" She squealed.

" Okay, tell," I said, pulling myself up and steeling myself for a story of Jasper-Alice sex.

She stared off dreamily before beginning. "Well, we went to dinner and then to a movie and then, at the end of the night..."

" You did the deed?" I asked.

Alice rolled her eyes. "No, well yes, but...he complimented my shoes."

" That's great, Alice," I said, unsure of why it was such a big deal.

She nodded proudly. "Bella, he knew that they were Prada. I think he's The One."

I couldn't help but snicker. "Because he knew your shoe brand?"

She glared at me. "Well, yes. It's on my list of qualifications."

Texts From Last Night

" You have a list?"

" Of course, don't you? Anyway, Jasper meets all of them so far. It's...crazy really."

" That's great, Alice," I said, pulling her into a hug despite the fact that I thought she was a crazy little woman for wanting a man that knew shoe brands.

There was another knock at my door. "What's the ruckus in here?" Rose asked, peeking her head in.

" Your brother knows Prada," Alice said, her voice fluffy again.

Rose rolled her eyes. "That's all?"

" And he's really good in bed," Alice added. "Like, crazy good."

Rose stared blankly at her. "Too much information, Alice. I'm going back to bed."

xXx

Alice was giggling when I finished and Jasper playfully rolled his eyes. "For the record," he held his index finger up as he cut in, "my mother got the same pair from my father for Christmas, so I just, uh, remembered them."

"I did not, son," Eleanor called from the audience, throwing a playful wink in Alice's direction.

"Whatever," Jasper grumbled under his breath. Alice leaned over and placed a sweet kiss on his cheek, instantly having him grinning again. "I thought it was hot, Jazz," I heard her say lightly to him.

She would.

Texts From Last Night

"All joking aside," I continued with laughter bubbling up in my words, "there is not a doubt in my mind that Alice and Jasper are truly meant to be and, even though I'm Alice's maid of honor, I consider Jasper one of my dearest, best friends as well. Their relationship is one built on trust and loyalty, one that I'm certain many of us in this room hope to emulate one day."

I paused to look down at the happy couple as I felt tears begin to collect in my eyes. "Jasper, Alice, I love you both and I'm thrilled that I am able to stand beside the two of you tomorrow as you promise each other forever." Reaching down, I grabbed my champagne glass and held it up, toasting the happy couple as I clinked my glass against Edward's.

He nodded, smirking and winking at me, before taking a sip of the bubbling liquid and extending his other hand to meet my empty one, pulling me back down to my seat as the conversation began to resume around us.

"See, pretty girl," he leaned over and whispered once I was settled. "From the heart...works every time."

I turned to him and grinned. "From the heart," I echoed before leaning over to place a sweet kiss on his lips.

xXx

"You know what I think?" Emmett asked seemingly out of the blue as our dessert plates were cleared.

"That my tits are going to look good in my dress tomorrow?" Rose asked at the same time that Jasper asked, "That you're still hungry?" I couldn't help but giggle at their obvious questions.

"Yes and always, respectively to the first two questions, but no to my question," he sighed with a roll of his eyes. He paused a moment before continuing, "I was thinking that we should do this more often."

Texts From Last Night

"Do what more often? Eat? Go to weddings?" Edward asked, his voice bubbling with laughter.

Emmett narrowed his eyes in Edward's direction. "No, dipshit, that we should all reunite more often. Think about it, when was the last time we were all in the same city at the same time?"

"Our graduation trip," Jasper answered with a sigh. "And now."

"Exactly," Emmett said proudly, holding up his right pointer finger for emphasis. "You see, it's completely unacceptable how often we see each other when, clearly, we have a blast when we're together. So, I have an idea: annual reunions. We could rotate hometowns, or maybe choose a fun destination each year, like Vegas or Miami."

Alice began bouncing in her seat. "I like it! Almost like a family reunion?"

"Yes!" Emmett declared. "Like a family reunion; I like the way you think, little one."

Edward and I nodded emphatically, stating, "I'm in," at the same time before turning to each other and exchanging bewildered looks before curling our lips into smiles.

I shrugged before turning to Emmett. "I'll volunteer my city first," I offered, thrilled with the idea of having my best friends in what I considered one of the greatest cities in the world.

"New York City shopping! We're in, aren't we Jasper?" Alice inserted before consulting him. He nodded quickly, obviously understanding that there was no use in attempting to dissuade her.

Rose and Emmett exchanged a look. "We're in, too," Rose said after a nod in her direction from Emmett.

Texts From Last Night

I turned to Edward, the final 'yes' to receive. "What about you?" I asked, reaching over to run my hand once through his hair.

He nodded, a grin on his face that didn't quite reach his eyes. "Sure, sounds great."

I narrowed my eyes briefly in his direction before accepting his weakly given answer. "It's settled then, New York City...next summer?"

"Next summer," the group echoed, beaming smiles etched on each face before everyone began speaking at once.

"What dates do we want to do it?" Alice asked.

"Where will we stay?" Rose posed as Emmett asked, "You'll take us to the best restaurants, right Swan?"

Jasper held up his hands to quiet us all. "One at a time, right Bella?" He asked with humor in his voice.

"Yes, please," I said before beginning to answer their questions. The dates could be decided later, I told Alice before explaining that my apartment was tiny for the six of us, so we might want to find a hotel for everyone to stay in. As for Emmett, I promised him only the finest cuisine that the city had to offer.

In the back of my mind, though, was Edward's strangely unexcited answer followed by his complete silence as details were discussed. As the established couples retreated into their own worlds to make plans for the following summer, I shifted in my seat so that my entire body was turned to his, determined to find a reason for his sudden change in attitude.

He was frowning, his gaze focused on his lap.

"Hey," I said softly, reaching over to pull one of his hands between both of mine. "What's going on in that head?"

Texts From Last Night

He lifted his head quickly. "What? Oh, no, I'm fine, just, uh, realizing that the week is almost over."

I nodded my head slowly, completely unconvinced by his answer. "Is that all?"

"Yeah," he answered with a tight smile.

I furrowed my eyebrows in his direction, pursing my lips as I searched his eyes for answers. "Okay," I finally stated when I found none. "It really did fly by, huh?"

"Too quickly," he stated, still frowning.

With a sigh, I leaned forward and placed my lips on his quickly. Pulling away, I whispered against his lips, "You sure you can't sneak over tonight? You know, for a little extra time together..."

His breath fanned against my lips as he exhaled deeply. "Don't tempt me, Bella."

"What if I want to?" I moved to whisper in his ear. He hissed.

"Bella," he bit out, a hand moving to wrap around the side of my face as he turned it so that his mouth was at my ear. "Doesn't Rose owe you a favor?" His question seemed completely random, until I realized that his breath was becoming shallower.

I pulled back and met his gaze. "Two, actually."

He lifted an eyebrow. "And are there parameters on this favor?"

"No," I said, my tongue sneaking out to wet my lips. Edward's eyes moved to them and, suddenly, I forgot that we weren't alone. "None," I said lightly as our surroundings fell away.

Texts From Last Night

Edward smirked, the sadness in his eyes disappearing slightly. "Let me talk to her, see what she can work out," he breathed, his face moving towards mine again. "I'll come up with something."

"I don't want to make Alice angry."

"We won't make Alice angry. I just want to see you, for a little while. You know, tuck you into bed and all," he whispered, his voice suave and sexy.

"Tuck me in...right," I said doubtfully, our faces still so very close.

He chuckled, his breath blowing across my face. "I'm serious, you perv," he joked as he moved his lips closer to mine. "Besides, I have a surprise for you."

I wanted to attempt to get some information on his surprise, but of course Emmett chose that moment to interrupt us, clearing his throat loudly before leaning over and whispering, "Eleanor Hale is eyeing the two of you."

We quickly separated as Edward glared at Emmett. "Rose, can I have a word?" He asked, looking past Emmett towards his girlfriend before standing and motioning towards the door that led to an opulent hallway.

Rose looked confused, but quickly stood and followed Edward outside.

"What was that about?" Emmett leaned over and asked me.

I smirked. "The favor or two that she owes me."

"I knew that was going to bite her in the ass," he said, throwing his head back and laughing loudly. "What are the two of you planning? A secret rendezvous?"

"I honestly have no idea," I said. "Edward's being secretive about something."

"Oh," Emmett answered quickly...too quickly, in fact.

Texts From Last Night

"You know what it is," I accused, pointing a finger at him.

His eyes widened. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Yes, you do. It's the surprise. You know what the surprise is."

I could tell that he was biting his cheeks to keep from speaking. "I'll never tell," he eventually squeaked out before standing quickly and dashing out of the dining room.

Weird.

xXx

Roughly a half hour later, Edward and Rose strode proudly back into the dining room with Emmett on their heels. The big, burly man looked a little like a lost puppy dog as he trailed behind a smug-looking Edward and snotty looking Rose. It was really very strange.

When they rejoined us at the platformed table, Edward winked at me before simply stating, "Don't go to bed too early, Swan."

I pleaded for an explanation, but he wouldn't budge.

Almost as soon as Edward and Emmett returned, the guests began to file out of the dining room, and it wasn't long before all that remained were Alice and Jasper's parents, grandparents, and the six of us. As the couple of honor spoke with their families, no doubt reiterating details for the following day, Edward pulled me aside.

"Just head home with the girls and act normal," he whispered into my ear.

I pulled back and cocked an eyebrow at him. "What are you up to?" I asked in a questioning tone.

Texts From Last Night

He shrugged and smirked. "Again, it's a surprise. I can say that I won't be spending the night, unfortunately, but that I will be seeing you."

"I suppose I can deal with that," I said with mock annoyance. "So you'll be able to tuck me in?"

He nodded before leaning forward and placing a kiss on my nose. "I'll be there, pretty girl. Just leave your door unlocked."

"Your door," I corrected him quickly.

"My door?"

I bit my lip and nodded. "The bed in your room smells like you," I explained weakly.

Edward's eyes darkened at my statement. "Okay," he said, "leave my door unlocked."

xXx

When we made it back to the house, Rose begged Alice and I to walk with her on the beach. I attempted to deny her request, pleading with my eyes that I needed to wait for Edward to arrive, but she simply winked before pulling me aside and whispering, "Just follow my lead."

Oh, she was in on it. Smooth, Edward.

After gathering flashlights, the three of us headed outside towards the waiting surf. As we turned to left and began walking, we giggled at the feel of the gentle waves crashing against our feet.

"I'm getting married tomorrow," Alice sighed wistfully as she ran ahead of us and twirled in the breaking waves. "Can you believe it?"

Rose and I smirked as we followed after her.

Texts From Last Night

"I can believe it," Rose stated when we caught up with a still-twirling Alice. "I'm fairly sure my brother has loved you from the moment he saw you."

"I know," Alice said confidently. When Rose looked at her with surprise, Alice explained that he had told her of his immediate love on their third date.

Of course, the mention of their third date launched Alice into a detailed description of some of the best dates she and Jasper had been on, culminating with the night he proposed on the plot of land he had bought outside of Austin, Texas with a home for the two of them in mind.

When she finished, Rose made a show of acting tired, lifting her arms above her head and yawning loudly. "I'm exhausted, Al," she said in what I could tell was a fake-tired voice. "Don't you think we should head back and get some beauty rest for tomorrow?"

Alice turned to face her. "Yeah, probably so. Are you tired, Bella?"

I was tired, but not ready to go to bed. Still, I knew that Rose had a plan in mind, so I made a show of yawning as well. "Exhausted."

Alice skipped once before grabbing each of hands and pulling us back in the direction of the house. "The sooner I go to sleep the sooner I can get married, right?" She asked as we were pulled along.

"Right," Rose and I agreed in cheery voices.

The walk back to the house was much shorter than the one away from it and, the next thing I knew, I was hugging Alice and Rose goodnight, wishing them both sweet dreams of weddings on the beach.

After making a quick stop in my room for something to sleep in, I moved down the hallway to Edward's room. When I arrived, the door was cracked with light from inside seeping out into the hall. Pushing the door open, I imagined that I would find a waiting Edward. Instead, I found Rose sitting on the edge of the bed.

Texts From Last Night

"Hello," I said dubiously as I stepped inside. "Can I help you?"

"Just here to clue you in," she explained as she stood. "This is part one of the owed favor, by the way."

"Okay." I was still doubtful. "Spill, please."

"Here," she said, handing me a handwritten note. "Read it."

With narrowed eyes, I opened the note. It was from Edward.

Bella,

Meet me on the beach at ten thirty. Look for the plaid blanket. Your surprise is waiting with me.

Edward

I lifted my eyes from the cryptic note and frowned, wanting desperately to know what the surprise was. I felt a little bit anxious, too, not because of the surprise itself, but because I didn't have a clue what it could be. I hoped it wasn't anything too dramatic and grand; it would make Sunday morning even harder. Besides, hadn't last night's impromptu romance been enough for one week? I was quickly learning that Edward's skills at wooing were excellent.

Rose was still standing there when I looked up, a suspicious grin on her face. "You know the surprise too, don't you?" I accused.

She shrugged innocently. "It's possible."

"It's not anything too...intense is it? Like, it won't freak me out?" I asked, wanting to know what I needed to prepare myself for.

Rose rested a hand on my shoulder. "Just...be patient, okay?"

xXx

Texts From Last Night

When Rose met me with the note, it was ten o'clock so, luckily, I only had a few minutes to wait for Edward to arrive. Of course, those few minutes seemed like an eternity as I waited. To busy myself, I changed into a comfortable pair of shorts and a lightweight sweater, as the sea breeze had been chilly when Alice, Rose, and I were out earlier, before running a brush through my hair and sliding on a pair of flat sandals.

Ten-oh-five. *Great.*

By ten twenty, I was frazzled, my mind filled with crazy ideas as to what Edward had with him. I quickly pushed them aside. By ten twenty-one, I was downstairs with a glass of wine in my hand, nearly filled to the brim. I chugged it in three big gulps. Finally, at ten twenty-five, I deemed it a decent time to head down to the beach. From the stairs that led from the house to the sand, I could see a checkered blanket, a single candle, and Edward. He was early.

I managed to refrain from running towards where Edward was sitting, instead walking slowly towards where he was sitting. When I was behind him, I squatted down, sliding my legs around his outstretched ones and snaking my arms around his waist, resting my cheek against his warm back.

"Well, hi," Edward said, craning his neck to look over his shoulder at me.

"Hi," I said into his back. "I'm on pins and needles, you know."

"Why's that?" He asked with humor in his voice.

I sighed. "Because of the surprise you've been teasing me with this evening."

"You're nervous about a surprise?"

"Yes," I said quickly. "What's if it's something that freaks me out?"

He was quiet for a moment before answering. "I hope it doesn't freak you out," he finally said, his voice quiet and suddenly unsure as I felt his body tense beneath me.

Texts From Last Night

Pulling away from him, I moved to sit beside him, leaning my head against his shoulder once we were side by side. "Am I going to freak out?"

I looked up at him as he trained his gaze down on me. "I don't think so," he murmured before dropping a kiss on my forehead.

"Then give it to me," I demanded.

He laughed as he lifted a hand to brush the hair that had blown into my face away. "Ever heard that patience is a virtue?"

I nodded. "Who said anything about being virtuous?" I countered.

"Touché."

I grinned proudly.

Edward sighed. "Okay, close your eyes."

I did as I was told, feeling him pull away slightly as the sound of the roaring ocean took over my senses.

"Hold out your hands," he demanded. Again, I obeyed, and he placed something lightweight in them. It felt like a magazine or a small stack of paper, but I honestly was clueless.

Edward kissed each of my closed eyelids before murmuring, "Open."

My eyes fluttered open to meet his green ones before shifting to my hands. In them, resting a large manila envelope. "What's this?" I asked, my eyebrows furrowed in confusion.

Edward slid his hands across my shoulders before telling me to open the envelope, a happy, shy grin on his face. I couldn't help but grin back as I slipped my hand beneath the seal, opening it inch by inch before sticking my hand inside to retrieve whatever was waiting. I moved my hand around for a

Texts From Last Night

moment before settling on a set of rectangular papers. With what I'm sure was a confused look on my face, I pulled the papers out and sat them on top of the envelope, unable to read the writing in the darkness.

As if sensing my inability to see, Edward lifted the candle that was sitting off to the side and moved it to rest beside us, illuminating a small circle around us that included the papers in my hands. Able to see, I scanned the top sheet.

"Is this?" I asked, my voice full of shock and wonder as I shifted my gaze to Edward.

He nodded before confirming my suspicions. "A plane ticket."

Up next: Edward's explanation of his surprise for Bella and her response...in his point of view! Also, the beginning of Jasper and Alice's wedding day!

As always, thank you to my darling reviewers, alerters, and favoriters (I'm aware that isn't a word, hehe). I completely failed at responding to reviews this week, but I did read and adore each and every one of them. Y'all are the best readers and you'll be hearing from me this week!

See y'all next Tuesday...until then, reviewers get a tease :)

Warnings and Happy Tears

Disclaimer: Twilight doesn't belong to me. I do, however, lay claim to a wonderful beta named Leah.

Sorry for the delay...in the hoopla that was the marathon of Twilight, New Moon, and Eclipse that I saw last night, I didn't have a free second to post. I have a feeling everyone is still on an Eclipse high, though, so you'll forgive me for being a day late with this chapter :)

Chapter Twenty-Three: Warnings and Happy Tears

EPOV

"You got everything?" Emmett asked as I climbed out of the passenger seat, a blanket tossed over my shoulder and a small bag in my right hand.

"Yeah man, I think I'm good," I assured him with a small grin. "Thanks again, for doing this. You know that you could have said no."

"And have Rose kick my ass for not helping her take care of her favor? No thanks. Also, I've got to do my part to help my babies fall in love.," he said, his voice a high-pitched imitation of a proud mother for the latter part of his statement.

I straightened at his words. *Fall in love? Is that what Bella and I are doing? Can you fall in love with someone in less than a week?*

"Don't look so surprised," Emmett stated in response to my obvious shock.

"I...I'm not...surprised? What would I be surprised about?" With each word I sounded less and less confident.

Emmett shook his head back and forth, his eyes full of laughter. "Just go, Edward. It's almost ten-thirty."

Texts From Last Night

"Oh, right," I said, glancing at the clock on the dashboard. "Well, uh, you'll be here...?" For the life of me, I couldn't remember the terms of our agreement from earlier, my brain a complete pile of mush after his mention of the big, scary 'L' word.

It was official: I had become a girl.

"I'll be here at midnight," he reminded me.

"Right," I confirmed. That gave me an hour and a half with Bella. Really, it was more time than I had expected, but less time than I wanted. Honestly, though, I'm pretty sure that if I had asked Emmett to pick me up a week from now instead of later that night, he would have balked at my crazy request.

"Hey," Emmett called out as I moved to shut the door. "Good luck."

"You act like I'm going to propose of something," I said, sticking my head through the small area between the door and the frame.

He shrugged. "The scared shitless expression on your face looks like you're about to."

"It's just a plane ticket," I murmured before slamming the door shut, attempting to convince myself more than him.

I turned to begin my short trek towards the sand when I heard Emmett yell, "Just a plane ticket my ass," before pulling away from house at a rapid speed, his tires squealing against the pavement.

The thing was, I wasn't sure what my spontaneous purchase meant, to me or to Bella, and especially to our relationship. I knew that it meant I wanted to visit Bella in her city before next summer; that was a given, it had been for a couple of days now. I also knew that I wanted Bella to visit me in Chicago. Beyond that, though, I was completely and utterly stumped.

Texts From Last Night

Earlier in the day, when Bella had offered New York as the first destination for our annual reunions, it had struck me in a way I hadn't expected. As my friends chattered excitedly around me, I had realized that I didn't want Bella to be in New York a year from now, that is, unless I was there permanently as well. Of course, that conclusion led to a series of questions I had no idea how to answer: Did I want Bella to move to Chicago? Did *she*, would she, want to move to Chicago? How invested was she in her life in New York? Should I begin researching residency programs in her city in case she refused to move? And, most important, was I making assumptions about our relationship that were completely unfounded?

The questions and answers floating through my brain were copious and in short, I was overwhelmed. My mind was a strange mixture of confusion, happiness, anticipation, and fear. Fuck, since Emmett had planted the 'L' word in my head, it was like it was a neon sign flashing over and over, guiding me to a clusterfuck of emotions I didn't understand. Pushing my doubt and confusion aside, I focused on the task at hand: giving Bella her surprise and hoping she didn't think I was jumping to conclusions.

After spreading out the blanket I had grabbed from the closet at the hotel and lighting the small candle I had made Emmett stop at the store for, I placed the envelope containing the ticket to my left and attempted to settle down. As my eyes scanned the lightly cresting waves in front of me, I felt a familiar set of legs wrap around mine as a feminine set of arms slid around my waist.

I turned my neck to face her, exchanging a simple greeting before she told me how anxious she was for her surprise. After expressing her nervousness in regards to what I was about to give her, I felt my own body stiffen before she moved to sit beside me. I told her that I hoped she wouldn't be freaked out, finally telling her to be patient before asking her to shut her eyes and hold our her hands.

Looking to my left, I picked up the envelope that was waiting, playing with it in my fingers for a moment. As she sat quietly, her eyes closed and her lips separated; I prayed that she wouldn't freak out because, well, her freaking out wasn't a possibility I had even considered until she mentioned it.

Texts From Last Night

I took a deep breath before carefully setting the ticket in her open hands. "Open," I murmured.

Her eyelids fluttered open slowly, meeting mine before shifting to assess the object I had placed in her grasp. I grinned as she opened the envelope with painfully slow preciseness before sliding her tiny hand inside and pulling out the piece of paper that was making my heart palpitate with nerves.

Get it together, Cullen.

She looked at it with confused eyes. Realizing that it was probably due to the darkness of night that surrounded us, I lifted the candle and moved it to illuminate the paper.

"Is this?" She asked, her voice full of wonder and surprise as her eyes flickered to mine. *So far, so good.*

I nodded once. "A plane ticket," I said, a hopeful smile stretching across my face.

Bella's smile matched mine as she looked down to study the sheet again. "But it's for you..." She trailed off, shaking her head back and forth slightly as confusion appeared on her features.

I placed my index finger beneath her chin to lift her face. "It is," I told her. "I just, well, I was going to hold onto it and surprise you sometime in the next couple of weeks but then I just, I wanted to be able to visit you in New York, and I didn't want to walk in on you with some other guy and I don't know what your work schedule is like so I just wanted to..."

Her lips crashing forcefully into mine cut off my ridiculous ramblings. As she flicked her tongue across my upper lip, I felt her hand that wasn't grasping my plane ticket slide against my cheek and into my hair as she pulled herself up and moved to settle herself across my lap. Her lips moved against mine, our tongues mingling briefly, before she pulled away and rested her forehead against mine.

Texts From Last Night

"You just wanted to...what?" she panted with a smirk on her face.

"Give you a little warning before I sneak in and kiss you in the city that never sleeps," I amended my earlier statement.

Her smirk spread into a grin. "So I should always be aware that you could be lurking around the corner?"

"Something like that," I agreed. "You never know where I'll pop up, Swan."

"Hmmm," she rubbed her nose against mine in an Eskimo kiss. "I like the idea of that."

"Just the idea?"

She giggled before stating in a sincere tone, "I want you to visit me New York."

"Good," I said before pecking her lips gently.

"And you should know," she added, "that you won't have to worry about finding me with some other guy. You're the only one for me right now, Edward."

"That's so good to hear," I mumbled. "Wait, just right now?"

She rolled her eyes. "You know what I meant, dork." As she spoke, her hand swatted against my chest playfully.

And just like that, the anxiety I had felt earlier about handing her that simple sheet of paper completely diminished. In its place was left a giddiness between Bella and myself, a sense of joy over the tangible evidence she held in her hands that we were determined to make this new relationship between the two of us work.

Texts From Last Night

We remained on the beach until just before midnight, talking and sharing and making out like teenagers. Though there was no doubt that both of us would have liked nothing more than to make love beside the ocean, the sense of urgency we had felt throughout the week seemed to have dissipated a bit as we realized that there was no rush, that the end of the week didn't mean the end of us. It gave me hope that maybe our relationship was more than the physical connection we had discovered.

Goddamnit, I really was turning into a girl. A beautiful woman, willing to make love to me on the fucking beach, and all I wanted to do is wrap my arms around her and hold her close. Love apparently made my balls turn into ovaries.

As soon as the thought, and the 'L' word flitted through my brain, I felt my whole body stiffen. Fucking Emmett and his motherfucking head games. He knew saying that shit would mess with me.

Sighing, I relaxed and pulled Bella close, breathing her in for the last few minutes we had together that night.

After reluctantly standing and folding up the blanket, Bella and I held hands as we slowly walked back to the house so that I could tuck her in like I had promised. We were careful to stay quiet as we entered the house; Alice and Rose were evidently both in bed as the lights were off and the house was silent, so we snuck up to my room.

Bella stripped down to her bra and panties when we arrived, climbing into bed as she mumbled something about being too exhausted to trek down the hallway for something to sleep in. With a chuckle, I grabbed one of my undershirts and tossed it to her, waiting for her to slip off her bra before pulling it over her head. My intentions were purely selfish: I wanted something that smelled of her sweetness. And I wanted a good look at her tits.

Maybe my balls aren't completely gone, after all.

Texts From Last Night

"Thanks," Bella said as she pulled the shirt over her head, her voice muffled from the fabric as it covered her mouth.

"You're welcome," I stated, walking towards the bed and settling on the end. Checking my watch, I realized that Emmett was probably waiting already.

"Time to go, Cinderella?" Bella teased when she noticed my actions.

I looked up and frowned. "Unfortunately, yes. If not, Emmett turns into a pumpkin," I paused, taking her appearance before dropping my voice, "Damn, Bella, do you know how sexy you look in my clothes?"

She bit her lip and shrugged. "It smells like you."

"It'll smell like you tomorrow," I countered.

"Probably," she agreed, patting the empty space beside her in the bed. "Come here," she pleaded.

"No can do." I knew that if I climbed into bed beside her, I wouldn't be climbing out of it until the following morning.

She pretended to pout, folding her arms across her chest as she stuck out her bottom lip. I stood, moving to lean over and kiss the pout off her lips.

"Goodnight," I breathed against her mouth.

"Night," she sighed, fisting her hands into my shirt and pulling me close, her eyes moving across my face before she placed a wet kiss on the base of neck, her tongue darting out to tease my skin.

I groaned, my knees feeling weak, as she sucked gently for a moment before making a trail from my Adam's apple to my jaw, finally settling her lips underneath mine again. After placing several short kisses on my lips, she trailed her tongue across my bottom lip before pulling away, a playful smile on her face.

Texts From Last Night

"Night," she repeated before squirming further beneath the covers. "Sweet dreams."

I gaped at her. *Was she fucking serious?*

"What?" She asked. It was evident she knew exactly what she was doing.

"Nothing," I said through my teeth. "I'm just going to go take a nice, cold shower now."

She giggled as she rolled over onto her side. "Have fun."

"I won't," I ground out as I turned and stalked towards the door.

As I crossed through the doorway, I heard her call after me, "I'll make it up to you tomorrow night, after our date."

"You'd better, pretty girl," I returned with a wave before dashing towards the stairs and out of the house.

Emmett was, thankfully, already waiting for me. If he hadn't been, there was a huge possibility I would have said 'fuck it' and gotten into bed with Bella.

After pulling open the door, I jumped into the passenger seat and slammed the door behind me.

"Everything go okay?" Emmett asked with trepidation as he backed out of the driveway.

"It was great," I told him. It's possible that I was grinding my teeth in response to Bella's teasing act she pulled upstairs.

"Then why are you all pissy?"

I turned to him and glared.

Texts From Last Night

"Ooooh, blue balls?" He asked, his eyebrows wiggling suggestively. The situation in my pants could hardly be described as blue balls...navy or black maybe, but I was definitely beyond blue at this point. *Damn Alice.*

"Something like that," I grunted as I attempted to readjust myself with little discretion.

"So, it went really well then? You're visiting in New York?" He continued to prod as he turned onto the main road.

"Yes," I confirmed, my mind reverting back to the image of Bella in my white undershirt, her face full of innocence as she teased me.

"Did you tell her about earlier?"

"What about earlier?"

"You know, how you were upset?"

I cut my eyes to him. "When was I upset?"

"At dinner, when she offered New York for our first reunion."

"How did you know I was upset?" Had he developed an ability to read minds in the last three years?

"I could just tell...you got all moody and quiet and Bella asked you what was wrong and you gave her some bullshit answer."

I was a bit taken back by his observations; I had assumed that he had been caught up in making plans with the rest of the group as I brooded.

"So...what gives?" He continued to fish for information.

I inhaled deeply as I contemplated how to best answer him. Should I lay it all out there, tell him how I sincerely felt about Bella? Or should I give him

Texts From Last Night

another bullshit answer that he would probably accept but see right through?

Exhaling, I spoke. "Promise you won't call me a whipped pussy?"

He laughed for a moment before composing himself. "I won't."

"Okay," I paused for a moment as my hand moved up to rub across the back of my neck, a sure sign that I was either unsure or stressed. "It's just that Bella said that about wanting everyone to visit her in New York and, well, I realized that I didn't really want her to be living in New York next year because it means that she'll be away from me still. I know it's kind of absurd of me, considering that we haven't even put a label on our relationship but, I don't know, I just look at her and see a future."

Emmett was quiet as he contemplating my ramblings, something I realized I had done for the second time that evening.

"I don't think it's absurd," he finally stated.

"You don't?" I asked quickly.

"Not at all. Think about you, the two of you were best friends in college, so you already knew everything about each other. You're past all the 'get to know you' shit and can move on to the 'falling in love' shit."

"And..." I said when he paused.

"And it just makes sense with the two of you, I don't know. I can't explain it, Edward. It's like Rose told me the other night...she looks at the two of you and can't remember what it was like before you were a couple, even though it was like four days ago."

"She said that?"

He nodded. "She did."

Texts From Last Night

"That's...crazy, though."

"It's not," he paused as we pulled up to the hotel and climbed out of the car, handing our keys to the valet in the process. When we were walking through the lobby towards the elevator bank, he continued. "Edward, if I were you, I would quit obsessing over the time thing. If you see a future with her now, unless something drastic changes in the next couple of days, you'll continue to see a future with her later. The two of you have obviously agreed to continue dating long-distance and are both clearly dedicated to making this work, so just make it work."

"Make it work," I echoed, my mind conjuring up images of that guy from the TV show about designers that Alice used to watch for hours on end our sophomore year. I'm not going to lie; I might have watched one or ten episodes with her on a particularly boring Sunday afternoon.

"Yeah, do it. Now, let me get some beauty sleep, *girl*."

I glared at him before jumping on his back as he stuck his key in the door to our suite. "Shut up, dick."

"Pussy," he countered as I licked my finger and stuck it in his ear.

He growled as the door swung open, tossing me onto the floor before flopping on top of me as we wrestled around. Eventually, Jasper emerged from his room to break us up.

"Both of you are dicks," he said as he rubbed his eyes sleepily. "I'm fucking getting married in the morning and if either of you have so much as a bruise on your skin, my bride will kill me."

I climbed off of Emmett, wiped my hands on my thighs, and turned towards Jasper. "Sorry, *dad*. I knew you'd get married and lose your sense of fun."

His eyes widened as he launched himself at me. I laughed as he knocked me to the floor, joining in on the wrestling that Emmett and I had been engaged in

Texts From Last Night

before.

"I'm still fun," he panted as we rolled around.

"Whatever," Emmett bellowed from above us. "Edward, you need help down there?"

"Only if you're on my side," I grunted.

"I'm on it," He said, reaching down and pulling Jasper off of me to take his turn wrestling with the groom.

The three of us rolled around on the floor for what seemed like hours, acting like little boys as we took turns wrestling each other. By the time we settled down, we were all on our backs, panting as we attempted to catch our breath.

"Fuck," Emmett sighed. "The two of you wore me out."

Jasper sighed. "Me too. Damn."

"Count me in on the wearing out as well," I added, holding a finger in the air.

Silence settled upon us for a moment before Jasper spoke. "I'm getting fucking married tomorrow."

"Yeah..." Emmett and I trailed off at the same time.

"I should probably get in bed," he added. "Alice will kill me if I have bags under my eyes."

"You are so fucking whipped," Emmett laughed.

Jasper sat up. "If I wasn't exhausted, I would wrestle you again for that comment."

"Fair enough."

Texts From Last Night

I sat up and ran my hands through my hair. "I'm going to head to bed as well."

"Don't forget your cold shower," Emmett inserted.

"Shut up," I groaned, standing and dragging my feet towards my room.

"Cold shower? Did Bella turn him down?" I heard Jasper ask.

"Nah," Emmett corrected. "You can blame your dear Alice for this cold shower."

xXx

BPOV

"Wake up, wake up, wake up!"

Someone was on top of me, squealing like an excited child on Christmas morning. Opening my eyes, that someone was revealed as a very excited Alice Brandon, already dressed in the white, terrycloth romper that matched the black ones Rose and I were to wear while preparing for the wedding.

"Alice," I groaned, squinting in response to the sun that was beaming through the open curtains. "Why are you waking me up so early? What time is it?"

"I'm getting married to Jasper today!" She chirped as she rolled off of me, completely ignoring my questions as she settled on her side using her elbow as a prop for her head.

The happiness that was dancing across her features erased my annoyance at being woken up at what I assumed was an ungodly hour. Turning onto my side, I tucked my hands under my cheek and grinned at her.

"Are you nervous?" I asked with a grin, unable to fully believe the fact that my best friend was getting married.

Texts From Last Night

"I'm more nervous about the decorations and everything than I am the wedding itself. The vows don't scare me, I know Jasper's the one for me," she stated confidently.

"So, no cold feet?"

"Not even lukewarm," She offered, shaking her head back and forth with a beaming smile on her face.

"Wait, what are you wearing, Bella?" Her expression shifted from giddy to filled with horror as she reached over to pull the sheet covering my upper body down, revealing Edward's white tee.

"Um, Edward's undershirt."

"Why?"

"Because it's what he gave me to sleep in yesterday," I answered defensively, attempting to pull the sheet back up.

She arched a sculpted eyebrow as she held the sheet firmly in place at my waist.

"And it smells like him," I added in a dreamy voice, hoping to distract her.

Luckily, it did. "Oh, you've got it bad, babe," she cooed.

I turned my head, burying my face in my pillow. "I know," I said, my voice muffled by the fluffiness beneath my face.

"Was it terrible being apart?" She asked, her voice soothing as she reached over to rub circles across my back.

I shrugged against the pillow, knowing that if I turned over the sly grin on my face would reveal that Edward and I had disregarded her boy-girl division the night before.

Texts From Last Night

"You do realize that you'll be spending more than one night apart soon, right?" She asked before suddenly gasping. "Oh, shit, you're going to be spending more than one night apart soon. I didn't even think about it when I made the two of you separate last night. You must hate me..."

I rolled over and frowned. This sweet, considerate Alice was the Alice I had missed when Bridezilla took over at some point in the middle of the week. As I took in the sad look on her face, I wanted nothing more than to turn her frown upside down; it was her wedding day, she wasn't supposed to be upset over something so silly.

"It's okay, Alice, really. I don't hate you," I said slowly because Edward and I hadn't spent our entire night apart. In fact, the time we spent together had been so bittersweet that I couldn't find a reason to complain.

"Are you sure?" She asked in a small voice as my mind recalled the sweet, shy smile on his face when he explained the plane ticket.

I nodded, pulling my lips into a smile. "I'm sure," I confirmed before sitting up and pulling her petite frame to mine. "Now, that was too much regular-Alice. Where's Bridezilla? I need to know my itinerary for the day."

She giggled against my shoulder before breaking our hug. "Well, since you asked..."

xXx

Alice cried on and off all morning and into the afternoon of her wedding, stopping briefly when it was time to apply her make-up before continuing with the big, fat tears that trickled down her face. They were happy tears, of course, but they were plentiful regardless.

The first round of tears fell when Rose and I rode with her to the wedding site to make sure the wedding planner was keeping the decorators in line. Apparently, the frazzled woman was doing her job because, when we stepped into the clearing where vows would be exchanged in a few short hours, Alice

Texts From Last Night

gasped and tears began to slide down her cheeks.

"It's just like I always imagined," she stated, walking slowly around the area, her hand trailing across chairs and flower arrangements as she carefully avoided the aisle she would walk down later in the day.

"Isn't it beautiful?" She turned to ask Rose and me.

We nodded enthusiastically. "It's like a dream, Alice," I said.

"It is," Alice agreed with a sigh. " *My* dream."

The second round of tears began to slide down Alice's cheeks later that afternoon when her mother and grandmother arrived at the hair salon as the hair stylist was perfecting her up-do, a gift bag in each other their hands.

"What's this?" Alice asked as they approached.

The women smiled. "Your Somethings," Caroline explained.

When Alice's eyebrows furrowed in confusion, I explained it for her. "You know, Something Old, Something New..."

"...Something Borrowed, Something Blue," Rose cut in.

"Oh, right. Silly me." Alice extended her legs so that her feet were elevated. "I already have my blue. See," she explained, pointing to her shiny toenails. "And my dress is my new."

Cece giggled as she examined her granddaughter's toes. "That's a first," she said. "I like it."

"Thank you," Alice grinned. "It was the pedicurist's idea."

"It's...lovely," Caroline said, though her tone wasn't very convincing. "Honey, I have your Something Borrowed."

Texts From Last Night

Alice took the bag that her mother was holding and peeked inside. "It's your veil from when you married Daddy," she commented, her voice full of surprise.

Caroline nodded. "It'll need to be steamed before you can wear it, to get the wrinkles out, but the hotel agreed to have it done when we finished here. I know you had planned on a birdcage veil, but I was cleaning out one of the guest room closets last weekend and..."

"It's perfect," Alice interrupted, her voice filled with tears as she stood from her chair to wrap her arms around her mother. "Thank you, Mom."

"You're welcome, baby," Caroline said, pulling away and fanning her hands over her face, likely to keep the tears that had gathered in her eyes from falling. "Now, mother, give her the old."

Cece handed Alice a small bag. Quickly, she pulled out a small, velvet jewelry box. With wide eyes, she lifted her gaze to her grandmother. Cece nodded, urging her to continue, and she slowly pulled open the box, gasping at what was resting inside.

"Your earrings," she said simply. "I've always loved this pair."

"I'm aware, darling, which is why I'm giving them to you on your wedding day," Cece explained, placing a soft hand on Alice's shoulder.

I turned to Rose and smiled, tears welling in both of our eyes in response to the display in front of us.

"Look," Alice said, bouncing over to the two of us and proudly holding up the box. "Aren't they beautiful?"

"They're...breathtaking," Rose sighed and, truly, they were.

"Thank you," Alice breathed as she turned to wrap Cece in her arms.

Texts From Last Night

"You're welcome, dear," she stated, echoing Caroline's earlier sentiments. "Now, the two of us have appointments across town for our own hair," she gestured towards Caroline. "We'll see y'all at the house?"

"The carriage leaves at five," Alice reminded them, resulting in laughter as the two women drifted from the room, Caroline murmuring, "I can't believe my baby girl is getting married," as she exited.

The third set of tears fell later that afternoon while the three of us were changing into our dresses for the ceremony.

Alice was standing in her gown, the straps resting on her shoulders as the back hung open, waiting for the two of us to help her zip it up, when she noticed a simple envelope resting atop the bed, a single white rose sitting next to it.

"What's that?" She asked, pointing to it as confusion marred her features.

Rose turned to me and shrugged.

"I don't know, Alice," I answered for both of us. "Do you want it?"

"Yes, bring it to me. Please," she pleaded, obviously unable to move without tripping over her undone gown.

I quickly grabbed it and handed it to her, noting that her name was written in Jasper's messy scrawl across the front. With little patience, Alice tore open the envelope and pulled out a piece of simple, white stationery.

"It's from Jasper," she sighed dreamily as she began reading the note, her eyes filling with tears once again as her hand fluttered to her mouth. When she finished, she lowered the note to her side with one hand as she wiped her tears with the other.

"What does it say?" I asked quickly.

Texts From Last Night

"Lots of sweet things. That he knows I'll look beautiful tonight, that white has always been one of my colors; that it's been torture being away from me; that he can't wait to," her voice broke with her tears, "call me his wife...and so, so much more."

My own eyes welled up in response to the sweet sentiment.

"He must have snuck in and left it for you while we were gone this afternoon," Rose said. "My brother is such a sap," she added with mock sarcasm.

Alice scoffed as she carefully wiped away her tears. "He's not a sap, he's romantic."

"I know, babe, he's soulful," Rose admitted with a smirk.

"Yes he is," Alice agreed with a happy smile. "Now, zip me up. I only get to wear this dress once so I'm going to be in it as long as I can."

"Not if Jasper has anything to say about it," I joked, bending over to pull the zipper up as Rose adjusted the straps.

Alice nodded in agreement. "True," she giggled tearfully.

Finished zipping, I moved to stand in front of my best friend. Rose joined me and we stood there, gaping out our friend in wonder. Though we had been staring the fact in the face all weekend, making jokes about Bridezilla both to her face and behind it back, it was finally real. She was...a bride.

I was about to begin gushing about how perfect she looked and what a surreal moment it was, when she lifted her arms and began shooing Rose and me away. "Go get your dresses on, crazies," she ordered before moving towards the dear. "My parents and grandmother are arriving shortly and I want a few moments with them," she added before descending the stairs.

Following her orders, I moved towards my own room in search of my dress, stopping momentarily to pull my phone out of my pocket to check the time.

Texts From Last Night

Surprisingly, I had a couple of missed calls and a text message. The missed calls were from work, but the text message was from Edward.

I can't wait to see you walk down the aisle tonight, Bella. I know you'll look beautiful. I'm looking forward to our first date, too ;)

I blushed and swooned at his words, my mind automatically jumping to conclusions when he mentioned me walking down the aisle. Of course, I knew it was ridiculous to imagine myself walking down an aisle towards Edward in anything but the green dress I was wearing tonight, but I couldn't help it. Instead of dwelling on the possible meaning behind his statement, I hit reply.

I can't wait to see you in your tux. There better be dancing and cake involved in this date.

He responded almost instantly.

There will be both, pretty girl. See you soon.

I sighed at his use of the phrase 'pretty girl'. It was something he had recently adopted when referring to me and, I'll admit that, though the words were simple and sweet, they still had the power to make me feel cherished and desired.

As his words echoed in my mind, I quickly pulled on my dress and slipped my feet into my shoes, preparing myself for the fourth time that Alice would cry that day...when she saw Jasper waiting proudly for her at the end of the aisle.

Who's still squealing over Eclipse, or is planning on squealing over it sometime in the next couple of days? Ahhh, it is definitely the best of the 3 so far! If you've seen it, what was your favorite scene? I'll share my favorite scene next week, so as not to spoil it for those that haven't seen it yet :)

Coming up: A little bit of the wedding and a lot of reception fun! As always, reviewers get a little tease.

At Last

Chapter Twenty-Four: At Last

"Dance with me, pretty girl?" Edward asked the moment we stepped onto the dance floor at Jasper and Alice's reception, wrapping a strong arm around my waist and pulling my body against his.

The wedding had been truly magical. From beginning to end, every moment was filled with either sweet, happy tears or twinkling laughter and cheek-splitting smiles. The happy couple exchanged traditional vows during twilight, as the sun began to disappear beneath the ocean. Rings were exchanged, pronouncements by the minister were made and, at the end of the event that had brought the six of us back together, Jasper and Alice shared their first kiss as husband and wife.

Following the ceremony, Alice bossed a photographer around for half an hour, moving the small wedding party all around the wedding site for photographs before choosing to end the session by dragging the six of us down the short path to the edge of the ocean. Shocked cries echoed between the five of us when Alice stepped into the lightly crashing waves, drenching the bottom of her dress in salt water. The bride, surprising all of us, merely shrugged her shoulders before leaping into her groom's arms and kissing him soundly on the lips.

After dipping our feet into the water, Alice announced that it was time to move on to the reception, pausing between the beach and parking area to make sure that the photographer knew how to get to the reception venue. After his assurances, the six of us climbed into the larger carriage she had rented for the bridal party. Several bumps and a lot of humidity later, we arrived at the reception and were ushered forward, the leader of the band announcing the bridal party as we took to the dance floor.

"There's no one else I'd rather dance with," I breathed into Edward's shoulder as I wrapped my arms around his neck. He sighed contentedly.

Texts From Last Night

"This dress is...perfect on you," Edward murmured against my neck, his voice deep as his breath tickled across my skin as his fingers traced along my lower back.

"Mmm," I agreed, running my fingers across his shoulders, "I like you in a tuxedo."

"I do believe you're not the only one."

"Excuse me?" I asked with a small giggle, pulling back to examine the look on his face.

He chuckled as he ran a reassuring hand up and down the length of my back.

"Eleanor Hale," he offered succinctly.

I arched an eyebrow, urging him to explain himself further.

"She not-so-innocently pinched me on the ass as I escorted her to her seat at the wedding."

"She did not," I argued, feigning horror. "Did anyone see?"

"Probably Mr. Hale. He was walking behind us."

"Did he give you an evil glare? The stink eye?"

"I have no stink eyes to report," he paused, cocking his head to the side. "I'm pretty sure he caught on to the joke when she turned around and winked at him."

"Oh my God, I can't believe she did that. I take that back, I can believe she did that, especially after her comments the other morning."

"What comments the other morning?" Edward asked, intrigued.

Texts From Last Night

I blushed, remembering Rose outing my sexcapades with Edward to the elder women at brunch. "Just, uh..."

"Ladies and gentleman, the bride and her father will now share the traditional father-daughter dance," the bandleader announced loudly, effectively halting the conversation Edward and I were delving in to.

Pulling away and extending his hand to me, Edward grinned and led me off the dance floor and towards the table we were sharing with the rest of the wedding party.

"I'm assuming by the blush on your cheeks that you were going somewhere fun with that story, pretty girl. You'll tell me later?" He leaned over and whispered once we were seated.

I turned to him and nodded. "It'll probably make you blush, too."

"Very little makes me blush," he responded, his voice dropping to a seductive whisper.

My breathing hitched in response to his tone, as did another part of my body that shouldn't be responding to anything in polite company.

"Just watch the dance," I hissed uncomfortably, earning a light chuckle from him as he leaned back, tossing a strong arm across the back of my chair.

Alice and Mr. Brandon danced to Natalie Cole's *Unforgettable*, both with dreamy tears in their eyes. The entire time, Mr. Brandon was, no doubt, telling Alice how happy he was for her, how proud he was in this moment and, hopefully, that he couldn't have chosen a man better than Jasper to make hers forever. When the song ended, Jasper stepped onto the dance floor, his mother's arm tucked into his elbow before pulling her into dancing position. As they twirled to *Simple Man* by Lynard Skynard, I turned to Edward and winked.

Texts From Last Night

"Ready for the rest of the story?" I asked. Conversation had picked up around us, so clearly speaking was no longer prohibited.

"Give it to me," he answered, sitting up straight and turning to look me dead in the eye.

I leaned back and giggled before speaking. "Okay, so you remember the morning we all went to brunch at the country club?"

"How could I forget?" He asked, his eyes darkening.

"Yes, well," I paused, aware that I was blushing again. Edward smirked at my response. "When I returned to the table, I'm pretty sure what we did was written all over my face, but, it was also written all over my, er, clothing."

"You've lost me," Edward stated, his eyebrows furrowing.

I glanced at the dance floor, noticing that other couples were slowly trickling out to join the dancing duos. Mr. Brandon had moved to dance with Mrs. Hale, Alice was now paired with Jasper's father, and Jasper was dancing with Cece. With a small grin in response to the tenderness of the moment, I shifted my attention back to Edward and recounted the story of brunch, beginning with my crazy friends pointing out my mismatched buttons. I recounted Eleanor Hale sharing with us the story of Edward and Jasper's trip to Texas and their permanent state of drunkenness while there, continuing up to the moment that she said she would be all over him if he was hers.

When I finished, Edward was bent over with laughter, his arms wrapped around his midsection as he struggled for breath.

"It is not funny," I protested, slapping him across the back. "Quit laughing, I was mortified."

"I...I...can't...oh my, Bella...that is...the best story..." he managed to speak between fits of laughter.

Texts From Last Night

"Keep laughing and I'll pawn you off to her," I joked.

He sat up quickly, attempting to put on a straight face as his eyes flashed with a hint of fear. It was my turn to laugh.

"Gotcha," I said, pointing my fingers at him like a ridiculous cartoon character.

"You wouldn't," he leaned forward and growled into my ear.

"No, I definitely wouldn't. You're mine."

"Good," he said. "By the way, do you know what else she did? After the pinching and the winking?"

"I'm not sure I want to," I said with leeriness.

"She told me that you were one lucky lady," he offered, tossing in a lopsided grin for good measure.

I melted. "She did?"

He nodded. "And do you know what I told her?"

I shrugged.

Edward leaned forward, his mouth by my ear once again. "I told her that I was the lucky one."

"Damn straight," I said, my voice more full of emotion than I had intended for it to be.

"And then she said that if I was ever up for someone with a little more experience....," he continued, completely ruining the moment with a joke.

"Stop right there," I leaned back and said, playfully holding up a hand to halt his words.

Texts From Last Night

"What? You wouldn't want to share me with an older, obviously not satisfied woman?" He continued with humor in his eyes. "She might be able to teach me some tricks."

I shook my head back and forth slowly, biting my lip as I did.

"Never, I'm the only one that's going to be teaching you tricks," I said as Rose and Emmett stood up to return to the dance floor, making motions for us to follow as the band began to strum the opening cords to Van Morrison's *Brown Eyed Girl*.

"Good," he whispered into my ear. "I don't want you to share me with anyone, pretty brown eyed girl."

I turned my head to catch his lips in mine before he stood, making a show of pulling my chair out before taking my hand and leading me to the floor. As we danced, he crooned the lighthearted words into my ear, punctuating the lyrics that made mention of my eye color. It was in that moment that, suddenly, I realized how little time we had left before we would say goodbye and, though I knew that we had definite plans to see each other again, it saddened me.

Edward noticed my stiffening posture. "Hey, what's wrong?" He asked as he extended his arms to twirl me around.

"Nothing," I answered with a curt smile. "I'm fine."

"You're not fine," he retorted. "Your eyes aren't smiling."

"Edward, I'm fine, really."

He narrowed his eyes, clearly doubting my answers. "It's because I'm a bad dancer isn't it?"

"You're a wonderful dancer and you know it," I corrected. "Really, it's nothing."

Texts From Last Night

"Bella," he chided, pulling me flush to his body as the song ended and a slower one began. "Tell me what's going on in that head of yours."

When I looked up into his eyes, I knew that any hope I had of keeping my feelings a secret was completely, well, hopeless.

"I don't want to leave," I stated.

"We're not going anywhere," he said, shaking his head back and forth.

"I mean that I don't want to leave tomorrow," I corrected him. "I want to stay here forever. With you."

He smirked.

"Why are you smirking?" I asked before I could hold my tongue, realizing that the defensiveness of my tone was a result of my not wanting to leave.

He frowned. "Because you said you wanted to stay with me. I don't know. It was purely instinctual."

"Oh."

"I want to stay here with you, too," he added.

"You know it isn't that easy."

"I'm aware of that, yes," he paused, pulling my head to his shoulder. "Bella?"

"Hm?"

"Let's just enjoy the evening, okay? Do a little more dancing, a lot more drinking, and have fun with our friends. We can deal with the heavy stuff in the morning, or later tonight."

Texts From Last Night

I lifted my head to look at him. The earnest look in his eyes nearly made my knees weak. "Okay," I answered, unable to think of anything better to say. "Let's get a drink, then."

"I'm pretty sure Emmett's ahead of us on that one," he nodded his head towards our table. Following his gesture, I shifted my eyes to find Emmett, sitting in his chair with six shot glasses lined up in front of him.

"Where did he get those?" I asked Edward as we began to walk off the dance floor.

"Yesterday, when we were doing Alice's errands, we snuck over here and hid them, along with tequila and vodka, in one of the storage closets."

"You are bad boys."

"I'll take that," Edward said with a shrug. "I mean, I guess if you don't want any..."

"Oh no, don't you go pulling that card. I want shots, and I want them now."

"Swan, what's your poison?" Emmett asked, hearing my outburst.

"What does the Bar de Emmett have?" I asked as Edward pulled out my seat and I collapsed into it.

He boomed with laughter. "Whatever your pretty little heart desires, Swan."

"Two tequilas," Edward leaned forward and requested, holding up his fingers.

I turned, narrowing my eyes at him. "What if I don't want tequila?" I asked, suddenly feeling bold.

"I know you want tequila," he said, his voice lowering before he whispered, "Remember the last time we had tequila?"

Texts From Last Night

"Tequila it is," I turned and said to Emmett before I dragged Edward to the nearest broom closet.

Emmett chuckled as he poured four shots of tequila, two for us and two for him and Rose.

"To Alice and Jasper," we toasted before downing the shots. We were fully aware that it was the first of many tributes to the happy couple.

"Are Jasper and Alice not allowed to toast themselves?" Jasper drawled as he approached the table with Alice tucked under his arm.

"You are," Rose said, "we just figured you were too busy attending to your guests to drink with us."

"I'm going to need liquor to attend to my guests," Alice explained as she extended her hand towards the shot Emmett was already preparing.

"Here you go, Al," Emmett said with a beefy grin. "Enjoy," he added as he handed her a lime wedge.

"Limes, too?" I asked, a little shocked at his preparedness.

"Limes, too," he confirmed. "I'm always prepared."

"Clearly," I said with a hint of surprise in my voice.

"It was my idea," Edward leaned over and breathed into my cheek.

"It was, huh?" I craned my neck to face him.

He nodded, smirking again. I arched an eyebrow.

"You have a plan," I accused. "And it involves me."

Texts From Last Night

He wiggled his eyebrows suggestively. "When it comes to you, pretty girl, I've always got a plan--and you seem to always like it."

"Alice likes plans," I corrected, allowing myself to get sucked into a private world with Edward. Reaching over, I pulled one of his hands into my lap and began running my fingers across his palm. "I like...spontaneity."

"You like plans, too," he breathed. "You just don't realize it."

"Hm, so maybe I do like plans. What else do I like?"

His breathing hitched. "Um, well, er, you like tequila and plane tickets to New York City and dark chocolate ice cream and that thing I do in the shower..."

"I love that thing you do in the shower," I corrected with a sigh, my mind conjuring up images of our first night together.

"Yes, I'm aware..." he trailed off, his lips moving to trail down my neck.

He stopped his movements when a throat cleared behind us. I couldn't be sure, but I was ninety nine percent sure it belonged to Mrs. Alice Hale.

I pulled away, turning to face her with a sheepish smile on my face. "Um, hi, Alice."

"Bella," she sing-songed. "I need some help in the little girls' room."

"Right now?" I asked as I stood, reluctantly pulling away from Edward.

"Please," she asked, blinking her eyelashes at me rapidly.

"I'm coming," I assured her as I reached her side, grasping her hand in mine as we stepped through the crowd towards the restroom.

"Thanks, Bella," she sighed as we slipped down the hall. "I didn't want my dress to get any dirtier than it already was from the ocean and the sand."

Texts From Last Night

"So, I'm the dress holder?"

"Yes," she said. "Just like Halloween our senior year."

"Halloween our senior year?" I asked, attempting to conjure up a memory.

"Mmhhh, I dressed up as Lady Gaga and you had to help me every time I had to pee," she explained. "Don't you remember?"

"I remember drinking a lot, which I suppose translated to peeing a lot. Yes, vaguely I recall spending a lot of time in the bathroom. And then...nothing."

"You blacked out," she stated simply.

"I figured as much. You were really into Gaga that year," I commented as I helped her lift her dress so that she could do her business. It was a good thing the bathroom was a large with a single toilet as opposed to one with several small stalls.

She sighed. "I remember. God, I thought she was a genius."

"Didn't you, like, write her a quasi love letter or something?"

"No," she laughed. "I prayed to her."

"Ah, yes, winter finals..."

xXx

Bella POV

December 2009, Senior Year

(703): just prayed to lady gaga in hopes it will help me pass my fashion merchandising final...what is my life?

Texts From Last Night

"What the hell are you doing?" I asked Alice with a frown. It was the middle of finals week and, luckily, I had just taken my final one that afternoon. Others, like Alice, hadn't been as lucky--she had tests until the last day of the testing term.

"Praying," she stated simply. "I need to ace this final to pass this class."

I feigned horror. "You mean, Alice Brandon might...fail...a class?"

"Shut up," she said without opening her eyes. "I have a bad case of senioritis."

"I see," I sighed, my eyes landing on the magazine resting on her desk. "Wait, why is there a copy of People Magazine open on your desk?"

"I'm praying to the fashion gods."

"And who might they be?"

"You know, the usual," she answered vaguely.

"No, I am not aware of the usual."

She huffed with annoyance, opening her eyes and looking up at me. "You know, Tim Gunn, Stacey London, Rachel Zoe, Lady Gaga..."

"Lady Gaga?"

"Yes, Lady Gaga," she nodded. "The woman's practically a genius."

"Um, okay, Alice. I'll leave you to it," I said, still a little confused as I turned to leave the door.

"Wait," she yelled, halting my movement. "Can you, um, bring some five hour energy drinks? You know, in case this doesn't work?"

"Just in case?"

Texts From Last Night

" It never hurts to have back-up."

" You are one twisted little woman," I joked. "How many do you want?"

" Two, please," she smiled. "I owe you, Bella."

" One day, I know you'll pay me back," I said before closing her door and grabbing my keys and purse. I was going over to hang out with the boys later, which always resulted in a lot of drinking, so I needed to take care of this while I was sober.

After stopping at the nearest convenient store, I returned to the apartment to find Alice still praying over the photos of her idols.

" I think that might be sacrilegious or something," I stated, causing her to jump with surprise.

" I don't care right now."

I ignored her comment, knowing there was no fighting with her. "I know you don't. Here are your drinks," I held the bag above her face. She hastily reached for them.

" I owe you, seriously," she repeated.

" Don't worry about it," I assured her. "I get to party tonight and you don't."

" Fair enough," Alice giggled before opening the shot and downing it. "See you tomorrow."

xXx

The next morning, I woke up sprawled out across my bed; face down, still in my clothes from the night before. Typical, I suppose. My head was pounding; Emmett and Edward had tempted me with tequila and margarita mix, something I had a very, very hard time turning down.

Texts From Last Night

I jolted from where I was resting by a squealing Alice. Standing slowly, I stumbled towards the door before sticking my head out.

"Shut up," I yelled, "some of us have hangovers."

She fucking giggled.

"Stop being cranky," she said, bouncing towards me. "It worked."

"What worked?" I asked, rubbing my eyes.

"The praying," she said happily. "Lady Gaga blessed me. I'm ninety nine percent sure I aced that test!"

xXx

"It worked, didn't it?"

"I passed with flying colors," Alice said proudly. "But, I also had two five hour energy drinks and stayed up all night."

"That's probably what did it, not Gaga."

"Yes, probably not Gaga, or Tim Gunn," Alice agreed. "But, you know, I guess I finally did pay you back."

"How so?"

"This week," she explained. "I brought you and Edward together."

"I think that liquor brought Edward and I together," I joked.

Alice frowned. "That's not it and you know it."

"I know that's not it," I agreed. "Hey, he gave me a plane ticket, did I tell you?"

Texts From Last Night

Alice's face lit up. "No, you didn't tell me. That's great, Bella!"

"I know," I agreed, unable to keep the grin off my face. "It's for him, to fly to New York. He said he didn't want to make assumptions, and he didn't know my work schedule."

"That's so sweet, Bella. That boy has major skills."

"That is for damn sure," I agreed with a giggle. "In more than one area of his life."

"Bella, you are so, so bad," Alice chided jokingly. "Okay, I'm done," she announced, reaching for some toilet paper.

"Okay little girl, enough about the revival of my sex life," I joked. "Let's get you situated again."

"I think I'm just going to take my panties off."

"But you're dancing," I protested.

"Yes, but my dress is long. Think of how Jasper will react when we change before leaving and he finds out I've been going commando all night," she countered, a wicked twinkle in her eye.

"Alice, you're evil."

"You could do it, too," she winked. "God, Edward would absolutely die. I saw the two of you making eyes at the table; that's the main reason I interrupted."

"I figured as much. Your timing was too impeccable. I can't, though," I argued. "My dress is knee-length, unlike yours."

"Well, true, it might not be a good idea for you. I'm taking mine off, though," she stated as she stood, reaching under her gown to slide her panties down her legs. The determined tone of her voice kept me from arguing.

Texts From Last Night

"Whatever you want, Mrs. Hale," I told her as she tossed them into the trash.

She giggled. "Oh, my God, I'm Mrs. Hale now," she said as if suddenly realizing it for the first time.

"You are," I agreed with a smile. "Come on, let's get you back to your husband."

"My husband..." she sighed as she looped her arm through mine and pulled the door open. "I love the sound of that."

xXx

As the evening progressed, there was more dancing, a little eating, and a lot more drinking. Eventually, I pulled myself away from the tequila and switched to beer, intermingling it with the occasional glass of celebratory champagne. Alice and Jasper made the rounds, speaking with each of their guests personally between sharing dances on the floor and sneaking over to us for more liquor, courtesy of Emmett. They also took time to cut their cake, a sweet moment that saw them smashing pieces of the three-tiered beauty into each other's mouths that the photographer captured.

Edward and I spent time with Rose and Emmett before returning to the dance floor as well, wrapping ourselves in each other's arms as the band began to play Etta James' *At Last*. It was, admittedly, one of my favorite songs, regardless of the fact that the song was somewhat overused and cliché, and, I realized, very fitting for Edward and myself. He had, I admitted to myself, come along at a time when I didn't even know what I needed, taking away the lonely days I didn't know I was experiencing.

At last, my love has come along

My lonely days are over

And life is like a song

Texts From Last Night

I sighed against his shoulder as we moved, his arms wrapped protectively around my waist. As we danced, I found myself imagining things that, honestly, scared me a little. I pictured myself in a white dress as Edward held me in his arms. I imagined him making me in his the most formal, tangible way as we exchanged vows. I imagined him sliding a sparkling diamond onto my finger as he kneeled in front of me, a shy smile on his face. I imagined being his forever.

"Your wheels are turning," Edward murmured into my hair.

I nodded against his shoulder. "Mmhmm."

"Should I be worried?"

"Probably," I giggled, aware of how fast my thoughts had moved. I was a little worried, and they were my thoughts. If I had spoken my thoughts out loud, he certainly would have run away.

"Are they sad thoughts?"

"No," I said quickly, lifting my head to smile at him. "Happy thoughts, definitely."

Oh, yeah, at last

The skies above are blue

My heart was wrapped up in clovers

The night I looked at you

"That's good," Edward whispered before leaning down to capture my lips in his. "I like happy thoughts."

I hummed against his lips, moving my hands to slide them into his hair and pull him closer, moving my lips against his slowly in an attempt to convey my

Texts From Last Night

feelings. Though it scared me to admit it, I was suddenly aware that I was in love with Edward, completely and irrevocably. It had happened quickly but, for some reason, it just seemed...right.

Oh, yeah, at last

The skies above are blue

My heart was wrapped up in clovers

The night I looked at you

"I agree," I said, leaning back to smile up at my Edward.

Oh, yeah when you smile, you smile

Oh, and then the spell was cast

And here we are in heaven

For you are mine

At last

He sighed loudly. "How long until we can get out of here?" His eyes darkened as he spoke.

"Alice and Jasper are changing," I answered, blushing at the memory of Alice removing her panties. "It might be a while though, she had a surprise for him."

"A surprise, huh?"

"No panties," I whispered, feigning scandal.

Edward face expressed mock shock. "Yep, it'll be a while. Do you have any surprises for me?"

Texts From Last Night

I cocked an eyebrow before whispering, "You'll never know."

"Hm," he narrowed his eyes. "I'm going to guess no."

"You guessed correctly," I sighed, lifting myself to hug him.

"Together a week and already the heat is gone," he joked, shifting his hips forward to remind me that his words were sarcastic. My hips met his obvious hardness and he groaned.

"Definitely gone," I moaned in agreement.

Edward grabbed my hand and tugged my arm, pulling me off of the dance floor. "Here they come," he explained. "What are our duties, again?"

"Carry their bags to the car, make sure everyone has sparklers to light, then get the hell out of here."

"Bags, sparklers, alone time."

"Exactly," I looked up to wink at him as we approached the newlyweds.

"Where is your stuff?" Edward asked them quickly.

I turned to him and glared. "What?" he asked.

"Don't rush them," I chided as Alice giggled.

"Trust me," Jasper cut in, his voice hoarse from all the excitement. "We're in just as much of a hurry as you are."

Alice giggled like a schoolgirl before leaning over to kiss Jasper's cheek. "Does everyone have sparklers?" she asked.

"If they don't, they will," Edward said, holding up the package he was holding.

Texts From Last Night

"Okay good," she said before turning to Jasper. "Are you ready?"

He nodded before shifting his attention to Edward and myself. "Thanks for everything you two; the week and weekend were, truly, perfect. We couldn't have done it without our best friends."

I felt another round of tears spring to my eyes; this was, I realized, the time to say thank you and the time to say goodbye.

"Oh, Alice," I sighed, pulling her to me and wrapping my arms tightly. "It was my pleasure and thank you, for bringing all of us together again."

"You deserved it," she whispered into my shoulder. "Don't let him go."

"I'll try my best not to," I assured her before pulling away and moving to hug Jasper.

"Enjoy Italy," I told him. "We'll see you soon."

"We?" he asked, laughter in his voice.

"Oh, hush you," I sighed, blushing. "Be good to her."

"I always am," he assured me before pecking me on the cheek.

Alice and Edward were saying goodbye and she was, I'm sure, giving him words of wisdom that she had been saving up for days.

"Okay," she announced when they pulled away. "The two of you head on out there, we'll follow shortly."

Edward and I nodded in unison before turning to the door. "Love y'all," I murmured before we stepped into the hallway.

After making sure that everyone had sparklers and something to light them with, Edward and I joined the parallel lines that had formed by the entrance for

Texts From Last Night

the pair to walk through before climbing into the awaiting car, quickly lighting our own sparklers when Jasper and Alice arrived at the end of the line. The moment was over almost before it started and, the next thing we knew, Alice and Jasper were gone.

"Well, it's over," I turned to Edward and sighed. "Crazy, really."

"Yep," he agreed, throwing an arm over my shoulder and leaning down to attach his lips to my ear. "Ready to get out of here?"

"Definitely ready."

Long note, but I PROMISE it's all important!

So, overwhelmingly, you all loved the proposal scene in Eclipse. Of course, there were a few of you that were partial to the fight scene and Major Whitlock, but most of you adored Edward on bended knee. Not surprisingly, that was my favorite scene, too! Call me a little old fashioned, but I swooned when he described how he would court her with the tea and porches and stolen kisses. Thanks for responding to my question, I loved hearing your thoughts on the movie! So far, I've seen it twice and, admittedly, will probably see it again within the week.

I made a Polyvore for this chapter so that everyone could see the dresses and decor for the wedding we've been waiting for for 23 chapters. Included are Alice's "somethings." Link is on my profile!

The music in this chapter can found on YouTube if you want to listen, or even on iTunes for download if you want to take it a step further. All of the songs are sweet wedding favorites. Here's the list, in case you're interested:

Unforgettable by Natalie Cole

Brown Eyed Girl by Van Morrison

Texts From Last Night

At Last by Etta James

Simple Man by Lynard Skynard

As always, thanks to my spectacular beta, Leah, for helping with this chapter. She's amazing.

Thank you also to my loyal readers and reviewers. With each update, I look forward to your thoughts on the chapter. As always, review and you'll get a tease!

Up next: Their last night together before heading back into the real world...

Goodbye For Now

Disclaimer: Twilight belongs to Stephenie Meyer. This story belongs to me.

Warning: You might need tissues towards the end, or the beginning, depending on how weepy you're feeling.

Also, this chapter is ridiculously long. A special thanks to my beta, Leah, for handing this beast and helping with the angst.

Chapter Twenty-Five: Goodbye...For Now

The four of us rode from the reception back to beach house in relative silence, likely due to the sheer exhaustion each of us felt combined with the removal of Alice's incessant chatter. As Emmett drove through the streets of Charleston, I wasn't sure what I preferred--the constant banter between Alice and...everyone, or the calm serenity of the summer evening. The farther we drove, the more I leaned toward Alice--at least the conversations she always deemed necessary distracted me from my thoughts. Right now, my thoughts were not uplifting me like my best friend's comments tended to do; as hard as I tried, I couldn't keep my mind from drifting to my impending separation from Edward.

Apparently, Edward's thoughts were traveling down the same path as mine, if the desperate way his arms were wrapped around my body was any indication. With one arm draped over my shoulder and the other snaked around my waist, he was clinging to me like a life preserver. Not that I was any better, having intertwined my fingers with his and leaning into his embrace as he crushed me into his side. By the time we pulled into the driveway, his lips had joined in on the action, pressing almost non-stop against the heated skin of my neck.

"Edward," I sighed at Emmett and Rose climbed out of the car, slamming the doors shut behind them. "We have to go inside."

"No," he mumbled against my skin. "Let's stay right here."

Texts From Last Night

"We have to spent time with Rose and Emmett," I weakly protested as his tongue darted out to lay a path across my shoulder before the kisses resumed in earnest.

"No. Time. With. Anyone. Else." Each grumbled word was punctuated with a kiss. "Just you," he finished, lifting his head to meet my gaze.

Even though I was sitting, my knees felt weak as I absorbed the desperate look in his eyes. Edward was radiating pure desire--desire to stay with me, desire to take me upstairs and claim me, desire to ignore the outside world and stay in our precious, perfect bubble; sweet God in heaven, Edward Cullen *craved* me, and I him. It took everything I had in me not to climb into his lap and tell him to forget about Emmett and Rose, forget about Chicago, and forget about everything but me and the feel of our skin when it touched.

"Just a few minutes, then you can have me all night," I assured him weakly as I attempted to peel his arms away from my body, the short sentence taking more to say that I could have imagined. If I didn't separate from him soon, I would likely have trouble remembering who Emmett and Rosalie *were*, much less why we should spend time with them.

"It's starting to rain," he stated randomly.

"And?" I asked, confused by the outburst as I moved my hand to rest it on the handle of the door.

"I have fond memories of the rain," he moved to place a kiss in the middle of my chest, covering my hand with his to stop me from opening the door. "Of you in the rain."

My body flushed as the memory of the first night we were together. *Had it really been less than a week?* Suddenly, I found myself unable to remember what life felt like before Edward and I stumbled into this easy, loving relationship.

Texts From Last Night

"Mmm," I agreed as I recalled the feel of his hard body pressing me against the side of the vehicle, my leg hitched around his waist as the rain drenched our bodies. "So do I."

"Wanna make more?" He was good, too good, because I came seconds from completely forgetting that I had promised the couple inside that we would spend time with them. In that moment, nearly all I could think, all I could breathe, was...Edward.

I buried a hand in his hair and lifted his head from where he had buried it in my cleavage. "Edward," I groaned, forcing his eyes to meet mine. "We have to go inside."

"No we don't," he protested, attempting to lower his head once more. I firmly held onto his hair to keep him in place.

"We have a promised visit to see each other, right?"

He nodded.

"Who knows when we'll see Emmett and Rose after this weekend. It'll probably be an entire year from now, don't you think?"

Another nod, this one more resigned due to my pleading. *How in the Hell did I become the voice of reason?*

"Thirty minutes," I stated simply, not willing to give them any more time than that. Yes, they were my dear friends, but it wasn't their touch, their kiss that I would be missing when I was in my bed, alone, in a city bustling with love and opportunity.

"Thirty minutes and that's it," Edward countered with a knowing smirk. "I get you alone for the rest of the night."

I grinned at his eagerness. "I'm all yours, babe."

Texts From Last Night

xXx

Emmett and Rose were waiting in the living room when we stepped inside after pausing briefly on the stairs, the rain and the desperation that we felt compelling us to stop and share a long, wet kiss in the middle of the outdoor stairwell before making our way into the house.

"You look like drowned rats," Rose commented dryly when she noticed our arrival.

"Good thing the tux is going to the cleaners first thing Monday morning," Edward joked as he fell onto the couch before pulling me into his lap, both of us soaking wet but not caring enough to seek out towels and fresh clothes. Not yet, anyway.

"Good thing I'm only wearing this dress once," I added with a chuckle as I toed off the heels that had been eating at my feet all day, noticing that Rose and Emmett had changed into more comfortable clothing. I hoped the change in attire didn't mean that they were expecting us to hang out with them for an extended period of time, because we definitely had other plans.

"Yes, it's a very good thing," Edward mumbled into my ear as he fingered the hem of my dress. I swatted his hand away playfully, unable to contain my blush as he huskily added, "Because I can't guarantee what it'll look like when I'm through with you."

Rose and Emmett were narrowing their eyes in our direction.

"Are we, uh, do you want to just, you know...go upstairs? Get a room?" Emmett asked with a suggestive wink.

"Yes," Edward said emphatically. I turned to glared at him before firmly stating, "No, we want to see the two of you."

"We really would understand..." Rose inserted before adding sarcastically, "I mean, we'll see you in a *year*."

Texts From Last Night

"A year is too long. There's no telling what could happen in a year. Which is why we're staying down here," I explained, answering for both Edward and myself.

"For thirty minutes...well, twenty-eight now," Edward inserted, wincing as I pinched him in the thigh for making our friends feel unimportant.

I rolled my eyes as he reacted dramatically to the small bit of pain. "Yes, well, someone's a little eager."

He simply shrugged in response to my statement, shooting a knowing smirk in Rose and Emmett's direction.

Turning to Rose, I spoke in an attempt to distract myself from the man that was doing his best to engross me. "So, thoughts on today?" I asked, launching us into a discussion of the highlights of the day.

"It was beautiful. Perfect. Magical. Alice outdid herself and I don't think that I've seen Jasper smile that much in one day before," Rose answered quickly before Edward or Emmett could even attempt to get a word in. "Oh, and I loved the lanterns dangling from the trees. They looked so completely different than when we saw them this morning."

"I loved the lanterns, too! Could you believe the transformation from when we were there earlier? I guess with the guests and the bridal party everything just...fell into place."

"It did," Rose agreed before shaking her head back and forth, a look of dismay on her face. "I just...I can't believe my brother is married."

"Sometimes, I completely forget he's your brother. That must have been surreal..."

Rose shrugged. "It was definitely emotional. But, you know, I couldn't have handpicked someone more perfect for him. God, what if he had married some bitch that I hated?"

Texts From Last Night

Emmett snorted as the three of us silently accepted her statement. "I still can't believe that Jasper cried while saying his vows."

Rose slapped her palm against the back of his head. "Ass," she said. "It's an intense moment."

"Yeah," Edward inserted. "Just wait, I bet that you'll cry like a baby on your wedding day."

"I will not," Emmett stated, folding his arms across his chest.

"Wanna bet?" Edward challenged him, raising his eyebrows and sticking out his right hand for Emmett to shake.

"Yeah. Yeah, I do. A hundred bucks says that when I make Rose honest one day that I don't shed a tear," he said, extending his hand to shake Edward's.

"You've got a deal, big man."

"We'll see who has to pay," Emmett said lightly as he pulled his hand away.

"Speaking of making Rose an honest woman..." I trailed off, my words lingering in the air as I trained my gaze on Emmett.

He fucking blushed before asking in a dumfounded tone, "What?"

"I think she's asking if you're going to pop the question any time soon," Rose explained with a small smile on her face.

"Oh, I knew that baby," he said, leaning over to plant a kiss on her cheek. "But you know that's a secret."

"Uh huh," Rose answered, seemingly unconvinced. "A fucking state secret."

"Baby, when I propose, it's going to dazzle you."

Texts From Last Night

"Dazzle me?" She seemed skeptical.

He nodded confidently. "Just be prepared..."

"I've been prepared for two years, Em."

"Hush woman," he sighed, shuffling a few feet to his left to pull Rose against his side. "I'm just getting all of my ducks in a row."

Edward's laughter broke my eyes away from the exchange in front of me. "Are you afraid she'll say no, man?"

"He knows I won't say no," Rose sighed dreamily as she wrapped her arms around his neck and placed a kiss on his cheek. "Besides, we're in no rush."

"Don't you want to plan a wedding?" I asked, suddenly being struck with the desire to plan a wedding of my own.

"That's what Alice is for," Rose answered with a giggle. "Honestly, Emmett and I would be content to head down to Vegas, right baby?"

"No," he argued. "We're going to have a big ass wedding followed by a big ass party. I want to show you off in a white dress that I know you'll look ridiculously hot in."

"Hah, white," I joked, earning a playful glare from Rose as Edward accused, "And that, my man, is why I'm going to win the bet."

"Because I want a big wedding?"

"Because you're kind of a pussy," Edward explained before pulling me closer against him, using my body as a shield against Emmett.

"Yeah, use Bella to protest yourself. I suggest you sleep with one eye open," Emmett attempted to state with anger in his voice, though I could see a smile hinting at the corner of his lips.

Texts From Last Night

"Boys," Rose cut in, holding up her hands to halt them. "Enough acting like children."

"Back to today," I said loudly, attempting to reign the conversation in as Edward leaned up and whispered, "Eight minutes left," in my ear.

Shaking my head back and forth to regain my composure despite my body's reaction to his breath against my skin, I demanded, "Okay, y'all, short and sweet--one at a time, let's share our favorite moment of the day."

"You sound like Alice," Rose commented.

I glared at her before stating quickly, "I'll go first. My favorite part of today was watching Alice and Jasper share their first dance; their joy was literally bouncing off of their faces. Okay, Rose, you go."

"Okay, um..." she trailed off, tapping her finger against her chin. "I loved seeing my brother so ridiculously happy, from beginning to end. Also, being able to officially call Alice my sister at the reception. That was a sweet moment."

"You called her your sister?" I asked, my voice low as I felt tears fill my eyes in response to the tenderness of the moment.

"I did," she confirmed, tears threatening to appear in her own eyes. "Okay, Emmett, your favorite moment."

He took his precious time before cheerfully answering, "I was going to say when Jasper cried--because it was a sweet moment--but I know you hard asses won't believe me now, so...the second best was when little one got her dress dirty in the ocean. That was priceless!"

"I still can't believe she did that," Rose drawled. "It was so out of character."

"I thought it was epic," Emmett boomed. "So, yeah, there you go. Edward?"

Texts From Last Night

Edward sighed, his eyes lingering on mine as he considered his answer. I could tell by the look he was shooting in my direction that the odds of his answer reducing me to a puddle of goo were very, very high.

"I uh..." he paused, blinking rapidly several times before continuing. "The look on Jasper's face when he saw Alice for the first time, standing at the end of the aisle in her dress with this huge smile on her face, only for him. It was a cool moment."

"I didn't even think of glancing at Jasper when Alice walked down the aisle," I commented, realizing that Edward was probably the only one that thought to take in the groom's reaction to his bride.

"He was just...in awe of her, the woman he was going to call his wife," Edward explained with a small smile.

As he finished speaking, I turned to face him, our eyes meeting in a searing gaze that had me daydreaming, wondering what his face might look like if I was the one to walk down the aisle in a white dress, taking my last steps as a single woman. Would he be in awe of me, as Jasper was of Alice? Would I be able to see his breath hitch when we locked eyes? I could almost see him, his mouth set in a smile that looked like his face would split in two, his eyes shining with love, his body practically glowing with the happiness we both felt as I walked toward him, my forever. Losing myself in his green orbs, I lost track of everything around us. That is, until Emmett interrupted.

"So, your city next year, Bella?" He asked, clearing his throat.

"Yeah, I mean, that's what we agreed on before, right?" I answered slowly, pulling my eyes away from Edward's to return my attention to my friends. As I spoke, I suddenly began to doubt my offer. *Did I want to be in New York City a year from now if it meant being apart from the man I had come to love?*

Rose narrowed her eyes, obviously catching on to my doubt laced in my tone.

Texts From Last Night

"Are you sure? I mean, everyone could come out west to Em and me." The look she shot me told me that, though she had offered a solution to my maybe-problem, we would be discussing my odd answer in the future.

"No," I shook my head back and forth, shaking the doubt away. "New York is fine. Isn't it?" I turned my head to ask Edward, as if he had a say in my life a year from now.

He nodded, smiling at me. "New York is perfect."

"Well, I'm sure that as soon as we get our calendars to Alice it'll all be planned," Emmett joked, obviously attempting to lighten the suddenly heavy mood.

"That's for sure," Edward agreed, his light laughter making my back shake against his chest.

As Edward and Emmett bantered back and forth about Alice and the trip that would, no doubt, include too much shopping for their manly psyches to handle, I glanced at the clock. The eight minutes that Edward had warned me of earlier were long past and, suddenly, I wanted nothing more than to be alone with Edward. It was as if, in that single moment, every emotion I had been bottling up throughout the day--love, fear, hope, longing, happiness--were threatening to bubble over.

Turning to face him, I mouthed, 'Ready to go upstairs?'

He lifted his hips in response, his hardness pressing into my backside and, just like that, the room was no longer gloomy, instead charged with a buzzing sexual tension. Maybe it was just Edward and I, but I could have sworn I witnessed a heated look between the other couple. Biting back a moan, I faced Emmett and Rose again, a sly smile on my face. Emmett was shaking his head back and forth knowingly as Rose smirked.

"We're, uh...upstairs," I stated dumbly as Edward stood, not bothering to put me down before moving towards the stairs.

Texts From Last Night

"Goodnight, see you in the morning," I called as he adjusted my body so that he was carrying me like a monkey, my arms sliding around his neck as my legs wound around his waist, my dress bunching awkwardly around my thighs.

After climbing the stairs two at a time, Edward kicked open the door to his room and carried me inside. Assuming that we were headed straight for the bed, Edward surprised me when he didn't stop moving until we were in front of the French doors leading to balcony.

"It's raining, remember?" I asked as I slid off of him to place my feet on the floor so that he could pull the doors open.

"I remember," he stated simply as I gazed longingly at the inviting bed.

"Then why..." My sentence died off when he turned around swiftly, wrapping his arms around my waist again as he pulled my body to his before stepping onto the balcony. Before my body could comprehend that it was in the rain, Edward's lips were forcefully on mine in a searing kiss that took my breath away.

As the rain fell against our skin, Edward slowly pulled away and placed his hands on either side of my face, smirking down at me as we both attempting to catch our breath.

"Do you remember our first night together? How needy and urgent we were? I didn't take my time with you, Bella, didn't show you how much you mean to me, how much you have always meant to me, first as a friend and now...this."

"You did, Edward," I shook my head back and forth, wondering where desperation in his voice was coming from. "There was no doubt in my mind how you..."

He stopped me with a chaste kiss. "Let me finish, please," he pleaded, closing his eyes briefly.

I bit my lip and nodded for him to continue.

Texts From Last Night

"I brought you out here, pretty girl, to ask for a fresh start, a new beginning. This week has been, well, it's been pretty damn perfect and so much more than I imagined when I first heard of the trip. But tomorrow, everything changes. I go back to Chicago, you go back to New York, and it's going to be hard, Bella, really hard. I won't be able to kiss you whenever I want," he briefly touched his lips to mine. "Or touch you, or hold you," he continued, moving his hands from my face to slide them slowly up and down my sides, his fingers dancing across my fabric-covered skin.

"I know that we've agreed to make this work long distance and I have no doubt in my mind that we will, because what we have is something so special and unique but, Bella, I just...God, this sounds so juvenile...I just, I want to go back to Chicago knowing that you're mine."

"You know I'm yours," I cut in, lifting my hands to frame his face with my fingers, tracing them along his jaw.

He narrowed his eyes. "I want to call you my girlfriend."

"Your girlfriend?" I asked, my eyes widening with shock. "And you'd be my boyfriend?"

He nodded slowly, doubt creeping into his features.

"It sounds kind of silly," I admitted, despite the fact that it was also one of the most endearing things I had heard him say.

His face fell with disappointment.

"I mean, if you don't want to, I understand. I mean, some people are kind of turned off by titles..." He trailed off, his head falling forward so that he could study the ground nervously.

I grabbed his chin between my thumb and forefinger, lifting his head once more. "No, I want to it's just...I feel like this is so much more than that. Of course I want to be your girlfriend, Edward."

Texts From Last Night

"It is more than that," he agreed with a wide smile. "So much more than that."

In that moment, I wanted to say the words, the three words that had been on the tip of my tongue all evening. I loved him. I knew that I loved him and, though I didn't necessarily need to hear the words come from his mouth, I was pretty sure that he loved me too. His perfect words, his reverent touch, the look in his eyes every time they met mine, all told me that his love for me was deep, real.

Though my brain screamed that it was too soon for such a serious declaration, my heart told me that it was time.

Lifting onto my toes, I wrapped my arms tightly around Edward's neck and leveled my face with his. "Edward," I sighed before pressing a kiss onto his nose, his forehead, his chin. I wanted him to feel my love before I shared it with him so that if there was any doubt in my voice, my actions would prove my sincerity.

His eyes fluttered shut as I peppered every inch of his face with kisses, his breathing becoming shallow and labored. "Open your eyes," I ordered lightly.

As his deep green eyes met mine, I whispered the words that I was too scared to speak any louder. "I love you," I stated simply, my voice strong and confident despite the fact that I felt like my heart was doing somersaults beneath my ribcage.

His eyes widened with shock briefly before beginning to search mine, no doubt seeking out confirmation that the words I had uttered were genuine.

"Bella," he breathed, my name rolling off his tongue with relief, as his eyes darkened, no doubt having found whatever they were searching for. In an instant, his arms were around my waist, pulling me against him, as he buried his face in my hair.

"I love you," he sighed. "So much."

Texts From Last Night

"You do? You mean, it's not too soon?" I asked, suddenly doubtful. Though I trusted my heart, I suddenly was flooded with memories of the last man I had loved, the man that said he loved me, but that I now knew had said whatever he thought would keep me around.

"No baby, it's not too soon," Edward said, leaning back to look at me in response to my doubtful tone.

"Are you sure? I mean, it hasn't even been a week..." I was shaking my head back and forth, my eyes on the ground. "We aren't just getting caught up in all of the wedding hoopla, are we?"

"Bella," he said, lifting his hands to frame my face again as he lifted it back up. "Stop doubting yourself, doubting this. I'm not *him*, sweetheart. I don't say things I don't mean. "

I nodded, my eyes falling to the floor even though the rest of my face was trained forward.

"Pretty girl," he pleaded, "what do I need to do to convince you that this is real?"

I looked up at him through my eyelashes, and the frown on his face broke my heart. Truly, the thought of my doubt hurt him. It was then, suddenly, that I knew he was being honest, that he truly did love me. I also knew that I loved him; I felt silly for even thinking of second-guessing myself when, just moments before, I had been completely sure of my love for him.

"You're right," I stated confidently. "I'm being ridiculous."

His frown diminished slightly. "I wasn't going to say that..." He smirked.

"You were thinking it," I countered, feeling my lips twitch into a smile.

"Regardless, I do love you Edward...so much that it's almost hard to believe."

Texts From Last Night

Edward smiled; his grin so wide that I worried his lips might permanently freeze in their cheery position. Sliding my hands slowly up his neck and into his wet hair, I lifted myself against him and planted my lips on his, wasting no time before sliding my tongue across his lower lip and into his warm mouth. Now that those three, sacred words had been said out loud and confirmed, I wanted the physical act of our love to take over. Words would sustain our time apart, but while we were together I wanted to *feel* his love.

Edward sighed into my mouth, moving his hands into my hair despite the up-do held in place by enough hairspray to singlehandedly deplete the ozone that Alice had insisted upon, our tongues moving together slowly, making silent promises for the future that were based on the words we had just exchanged. Gently, I pulled my lips away from his and nibbled a line across his jaw until my lips met his ear and I pulled his lobe between my teeth.

Edward moaned at the sensation as he removed his hands from my wet hair, trailing them down my body to my hips. Pulling me against him, he murmured into my ear, "Let's go inside and get dried off, love."

I nodded numbly in response to his request, my mouth refusing to leave the sweet spot on his neck it had recently settled upon. With his hips, Edward slowly began to nudge me towards the door until, finally, the rain was no longer pounding against our heated skin. It wasn't until I was without the water that I realized it had continued to fall, so caught up in Edward and the feel of his hard chest against mine that everything else had fallen away.

Once we were inside, I reluctantly pulled my lips away to work on removing his clothing, wanting to feel his bare chest against mine, to make a memory of his chest muscles as they brushed against my breasts.

"This is going to be tricky," I sighed as I began to peel the wet dress shirt away from his skin. Urgently, my fingers found the buttons, but couldn't open them deftly due to the water's pruning effect. Sighing with defeat, I placed my hands on either side of the shirt and tore it open, surprising Edward and myself with my strength as buttons flew across the room.

Texts From Last Night

"Damn, baby," Edward sighed as I lifted the wet fabric from his skin.

I shrugged. "Hope it wasn't expensive..." I stated ruefully, though I wasn't at all sorry for my actions.

"Fuck, I'll buy a hundred of those shirts if you'll do that to them," he breathed, his hooded eyes following my movements.

"That can be arranged," I winked, sliding the shirt off his shoulders and placing an open-mouthed kiss on the center of his strong chest before dragging my tongue lower.

"Turn around," Edward hissed as my tongue met his happy trail, tugging on my shoulders in an effort to straighten my body.

I stood slowly, my tongue retracing its previous path before doing as Edward had requested. Turning so that my back was facing him, I sighed as his fingers worked the pins out of my hair, allowing it to fall, tendril by tendril, onto my shoulders. Once my hair was free, he brushed it over my shoulder before placing his mouth on the base of my neck, trailing reverent kisses down my spine before stopping at the top of my dress.

As his lips met the fabric, he lifted his fingers, dragging them slowly across my skin before opening the small button at the top, then leisurely sliding the zipper down, and I couldn't help the moan that escaped my lips. His touch was so careful, so loving, that I couldn't stop myself.

"Edward," I breathed for no reason other than to say his name as his fingers slid down my back, taking my dress with them.

"Yes, my pretty girl?" He asked, brushing the dress away from my body before pushing the wet fabric off my body and onto the floor.

I turned around, needing to see him in front of me now that my dress had been discarded. His hands didn't leave my body as I whirled around to face him, simply trailing across my skin before settling on my hips. With a smile, I

Texts From Last Night

stepped forward, sliding my fingers along the waistband of his dress pants before bringing them together in the middle, my eyes focused on his waist as I made quick work of his black belt. After sliding it through the loops, I tossed it to the floor, savoring the way that his pants hung low on his thin hips.

"Fuck," Edward hissed as I lightly trailed my fingers over the bulge in his crotch before undoing the button and pulling his zipper down. Sliding my hands across his pelvic bone, I buried my hand beneath his pants, inside the elastic of his boxers, and slowly moved both items of clothing down his legs.

After kicking off the dress shoes he was still wearing, he stepped out of his pants and boxers, still refusing to remove his hands from my body, moving to stretch his fingers across the small of my back.

"Edward," I moaned when he pulled me forward, my aching center coming in contact with his exposed hardness.

"Yes, love," he asked, his lips attaching themselves to my collarbone.

"Make love to me," I requested, my request full of emotion as he lavished attention on my clavicle.

He nodded, gulping nervously as he lifted his head from my skin, his eyes full of adoration as they met mine. Moving to slide his arms around my shoulders, his lips captured mine. Our kisses were slow and loving, much like his touch earlier, as we both attempted to take our time, to truly show each other our love. As our tongues met, Edward pulled us towards the bed, his hands everywhere--my hips, my back, my shoulders, my breasts--as we moved. My own hands found purchase in his hair that I loved so much, my fingers moving through the strands as he moaned softly against my lips. In one quick movement, he grabbed my hips and turned, lifting me effortlessly onto the bed.

As I felt the comforter meet my back, Edward stretched his body over mine, his mouth moving to my neck, my collarbone, as he alternated between open-mouthed kisses and little nibbles on my skin. His hands moved to make quick work of my strapless bra before tossing it across the room carelessly.

Texts From Last Night

"So beautiful," he murmured as his mouth moved to wrap around my left nipple.

I gasped at the sensation, my hands resting on his shoulders as he lavished attention on my breasts before moving to my stomach. When his tongue darted out against my thigh, I moaned, lifting my hips in an effort to move his mouth where I wanted it.

"Be patient, pretty girl," he breathed against my skin, his breath hot against my center.

I groaned, moving my hands to his hair as his tongue continued to touch my skin everywhere except where I most wanted. "Please," I pleaded, my fingers tugging on his silky strands.

He chuckled lightly against me before sliding up my body so that we were face to face again. "Tell me what you want," he demanded before burying his head in my neck, his lips attaching to the sweetest spot beneath my ear, making me cry out in ecstasy. It was good, so, so good.

"You, Edward, I just want you," I moaned as his fingers trailed down my chest, across my stomach, until finally dancing across the top of my panties, sliding them as far down my legs as he possibly could without moving. Helping him, I slid my legs back and forth against each other, finally kicking the small scrap of silk across the room.

My head fell back as his fingers trailed across my wetness, but I wanted more, needed more. "I...you, inside of me," I panted as his fingers brushed across my clit, causing my hips to buckle up in anticipation. I was already so ready, so eager for him that I couldn't imagine containing my hunger for his body much longer.

"I want you," he murmured against my neck, finally pulling his lips away from where I was sure there would be a mark against my skin the next morning. "Oh, pretty girl, I want you so badly."

Texts From Last Night

"Then have me," I stated confidently, sliding my hands across his muscled back before moving them around his hips and down, wrapping my fingers around his hard cock. He moaned at the sensation as I pumped my hand up and down several times, his breath increasing as I felt him begin to pulse against my fingers.

"Stop," he growled, his voice deep and lusty as his eyes met mine, hooded and dark. "Or I won't be inside of you when I come," he stated, his voice pleading with me to slow down, to allow him to take his time loving me that night. He wanted to, I realized, say goodbye for now in the best way he knew how.

I nodded, my eyes moving across his beautiful face before removing my hand from him and sliding it up his side, my fingers stopping to lavish attention on the rivets of his muscles. With a groan, he sat back on his heels, pulling my legs together before bending my knees and sliding them apart, opening me up for him. Falling forward again, he rested his elbows on either side of my head before slowly sliding into me, both of us moaning at the sensation of being joined again. I fleetingly realized that if we were this elated to be together after only being apart for one night, then the next several weeks were going to be pure Hell.

We were silent as we began to move against each other, both of us breathing heavily as I slowly moved my legs to wrap them tightly around his waist. Edward's thrusts were tender, gentle...but I craved more.

"Harder, love," I panted against his shoulder.

He complied, moving one of his arms from beside my head to wrap it around my thigh, pulling both of my legs higher, affording us a deeper position as he began to move more quickly. Without realizing what I was doing, my lips found his shoulder and my teeth sunk into his skin, biting against him as I felt my walls start to tighten around his cock.

Edward moaned, whether in response to my impulsive action or the feel of where our bodies were joined I wasn't sure, increasing his speed as I placed a kiss over my mistake before moving my head to mesh our lips together.

Texts From Last Night

"I'm so close," he mumbled between kisses, "Come for me, Bella, I need you to come."

I nodded before capturing his bottom lip between mine and lifting my hips to meet his before suddenly, "Edward, I'm...I..." I couldn't find words as I came, my body going completely still before collapsing in a heap of euphoria as Edward continued to pump into me, his breathing labored as sweat, or leftover raindrops, dripped from his forehead onto my chest.

"That's good, Bella, so fucking good, I'm right there..." he murmured before falling over the edge himself, spilling his seed into me in several long spurts before collapsing on top of me, his weight comfortable and warm against my weak body.

After a moment, he attempted move to roll onto his side, no doubt removing wanting to remove his comforting weight from me. Instinctively, I wrapped my arms around his neck, clenching me legs around his waist. "Stay," I pleaded, wanting him close to me before he was a thousand miles away. "Just...stay."

"Whatever you want, pretty girl, I'll give it to you." His voice was so full of promise, I wanted to beg him to never leave, to forget about everything in Chicago, but I bit my words back.

"Say it again," I urged instead, wanting to hear his declaration from earlier.

He grinned proudly before simply stating, "I love you," he whispered, his voice thick.

"And I love you," I echoed, lifting my arms to brush the hair that was sticking to his forehead away. "Without a doubt," I promised, believing my own words.

After placing a kiss on my nose, he looked down at me with a mischievous smirk, his usual joking tone making a return. "We're pretty damn good aren't we?" He asked and I was relieved that the evening wasn't going to be completely overtaken with heady emotions.

Texts From Last Night

I nodded, my own lips pulling into a smirk of my own as I held on to the recent memory of our lovemaking, hiding it away for a rainy day when I needed to recall his touch, his kiss. "I'd say we're pretty fucking spectacular."

"Um, did you...bite me?" He asked carefully, his fingers trailing across the mark I had left on his shoulder as he gazed down at the mark.

I lifted my hands to cover my blushing face, hoping that the redness spreading across my body could be passed off as exertion. *Yeah, definitely something I wouldn't forget.* "I, uh..."

"It's okay if you did, pretty girl," he cooed, his voice encouraging.

"Really?" I asked shyly.

He nodded. "Really," he confirmed before lifting himself up and slowly pulling out of me. "Uh, can I move now?" he asked.

I giggled and pushed playfully on his shoulder. "Yes, get off me, fatty," I joked.

"That hurts," he feigned pain as he tugged me over to rest across his body. "I think you need to kiss it and make it better."

"I can do that," I said before placing a kiss on top of where his heart beat rhythmically beneath his skin.

No words were spoken as I settled into his side, my arm draped across his midsection as I rested my head on his shoulder, closing my eyes and inhaling the distinct scent that embodied him--in it, I found warmth and comfort and love.

"When does your flight leave?" He asked after several quiet minutes, his fingers trailing across my arm as he finally asked for the details of our separation, a moment I had been anticipating with dread for days.

Texts From Last Night

"Hmm, around ten. I have to leave the house around eight to get through security and everything."

"That's early," he commented.

I opened my eyes, resting my head on my elbow as I absorbed the frown on his face. "I wanted to get back so I could catch up on work. It was before, you know..."

"Me?" He asked, smirking proudly.

"Yes, it was before you." I giggled at his confidence.

"Can't you change it?"

I considered his request for a moment, wanting nothing more than to extend our time together, but knowing that it would be impossible while only prolonging the inevitable. "Probably not this late," I stated sadly. "Why, when does your flight leave?"

"Not until the afternoon," he answered. "Around four, I think."

"So you'll be here all alone until then?"

He shook his head back and forth. "I think Rose and Em are staying until Monday morning, so I can hang with them."

I sighed before lying back down against him. "When are you coming to New York?" I asked carefully, wanting to change the subject to a happier topic, choosing to focus on being together again instead of saying goodbye.

"What's your work schedule like?"

"Flexible," I answered quickly. "I mean, I don't have any major commitments coming up."

Texts From Last Night

He was quiet, seeming to ponder this. "My parents are coming into town this weekend, then I start classes back the week after that. Maybe three weekends from now?"

"That sounds like an eternity," I whined into his neck. "But it'll have to do." Already, I was dreading the idea of a long distance relationship with Edward. As I savored the feel of his body against mine, I knew that I was entering foreign territory--the long distance relationship I had had with Jake was based on familiarity, not on love and devotion. Our separation was going to be...hard.

I suddenly hated Chicago, and medical school, and Jake for taking up my time in New Haven, and Tanya for being a bitch and...

"I'm sorry, pretty girl," he stated, turning his head to catch my eyes in his and draw me back from my internal rant. "I don't like this any more than you do."

I bit my lip as my eyes began to fill with tears. "I want you to be closer," I said, moving to straddle him as I wrapped my arms around his neck, wanting to be as close as physically possible.

"Bella, love, look at me," he pleaded as I slowly lifted my head from his chest. "You're crying," he stated the obvious.

I blinked, attempting to send the tears away, only succeeding in sending them down my cheeks instead. It was impossible for me to fathom, in the span of ten minutes, how I had gone from being horrified over the fact that I had bit him to feeling so many other, deeper emotions that I could barely contain them.

"I don't like it when you cry." He lifted his hands to brush my falling tears away with his thumbs.

I shook my head back and forth. "I don't like crying."

"Then don't," he begged. "Please."

Texts From Last Night

"I can't help it," I whined, my voice rising in pitch as the tears increased. "I just...I can't."

"It's okay, pretty girl," he sighed, pulling me against his chest as I soaked his skin with my tears. I could hear the heaviness in his voice, feel that he was attempting to convince himself at the same time that he convinced me.

"Soon, right?" I asked hopefully.

"So soon you'll wonder where the time went," he stated, his tone encouraging, hopeful.

I disagreed completely. "Doubtful," I countered. "But we'll have to make it work."

"Make it work," he echoed, attempting to imitate Tim Gunn, no doubt hoping that his joke would lighten the atmosphere.

"You did not just bring Tim Gunn into the bedroom..." I challenged, feeling my frown lines disappear as his chest vibrated with laughter. Before I could catch myself, I was laughing as well.

"I did," he confirmed. "Too far?"

"Maybe not if we were Alice and Jasper," I giggled. "But definitely because we're Bella and Edward."

"Bella and Edward," he sighed. "I really like the sound of that."

"Well, I really like you." I pulled myself up to place a kiss on his lips.

"Well, I love you," he retorted when I removed my lips from his.

I gazed down at him, aware that I looked like the lovesick woman that I was as I greedily poured over his chiseled features. "It's a good thing I love you too, then, huh?"

Texts From Last Night

xXx

The next morning, I woke up in an empty bed. Sitting up, I noticed that Edward's suitcase was packed and waiting by the door. *Shit, I haven't packed.* Jumping out of bed, I pulled on the nearest shirt of Edward's that I could find, the one from the previous night. Of course, after looking down and remembering why there were no buttons to be buttoned, I flushed before sliding it off and pulling on another one. Really, they all smelled of his sweet scent, so I wasn't picky in regards to what I used to cover my nakedness.

After adjusting the second shirt, I dashed down the hall to find my bedroom door already open. "Edward?" I called, knowing he was the only one that could possibly be rummaging through my room.

"In here," he called from the bathroom.

"What are you..." I trailed off when I found him bent over, pulling my things from the small drawers and placing them in my toiletry bag. "You don't have to do that."

"I don't mind," he shrugged, a warm smile on his face. "Plus, I woke up at sunrise, literally, and couldn't go back to sleep. I thought you might like a little extra sleep before we have to get to the airport."

"Thank you," I said, stepping forward and wrapping my arms around him from behind. "What time is it now?" I asked, my voice slightly muffled by his back.

"A little after seven," he answered as I pulled away slowly, bending over and burying his head beneath the sink to grab a bottle of lotion.

I nodded, accepting his answer, before moving into the bedroom to gather my clothes together. As I began to toss shirts and dresses and whatever the hell I had brought with me haphazardly into my suitcase, I called out to Edward, "By the way, why is your suitcase already packed? Your flight doesn't leave for hours."

Texts From Last Night

"I, uh, I'm just going to go to the airport with you."

I halted my movements, completely dazzled by his consideration. "Are you sure?" As thrilled as I was at the prospect of spending a couple of extra hours with him, I hated the idea of him sitting in an airport for six unnecessary hours.

"I'm sure" he said as he stepped out of the bathroom, my toiletry bag hanging from a finger. "Here."

"You're going to be at the airport for hours," I murmured as I took the bag from him, dropping it into my suitcase in the same manner in which my clothes had been falling. "Are you sure you want to subject yourself to that torture?"

"I don't mind, really. Plus, you know that if you drive yourself, you're going to be crying the entire way there and I can't risk you driving in that state."

"Who says I'll be crying?" I asked, pulling my lower lip nervously between my teeth because he knew me too well. There would certainly be crying, and a lot of it. In fact, I could feel the tears threaten as I simply imagined the moment we would say goodbye.

No, not yet, don't ruin the entire morning. The moment was too sweet and light to taint with tears. Standing straighter as Edward began to speak, I told myself to enjoy the present and save the pain that was coming for later; there was no point, I realized, in dragging it out.

"I do," he answered confidently, stepping forward and sliding an arm around my waist. "Plus, we can spend a couple of extra hours together and I can wait at your gate with you until you have to board. That way, you won't have to sit alone and cry."

"You think I'm going to be torn up over you, huh Cullen?" I joked, poking him in the chest.

"Yes." His voice was full of self-assurance. "At least, I hope you are."

Texts From Last Night

"Why's that?"

"Because, I love you," he paused. "And because--if you repeat this to Emmett I will have your ass, Swan--I'll probably shed a tear or two, as well."

My eyebrows lifted in response to his confession. "Is that right?"

"It's the honest truth," he answered earnestly.

"Well in that case..." I trailed off, biting my lip again. "I think it's completely necessary that we share airport weepy-time."

"Airport weepy-time?" He chuckled.

"Yes, airport weepy-time. It makes it sound better, more like nap time than something sad."

"Speaking of time, are you done almost here?" He nodded towards my closet and dresser.

"Almost," I said, pointing to the messy suitcase at my feet. "I just have a few more things to toss in."

"Is everything going to fit?" He asked, looking at me skeptically.

"Yes," I answered hotly. "I'll make it fit."

"I think there are some things you're forgetting in my room..." He trailed off suggestively.

My eyebrows furrowed in confusion until I remembered: the lingerie. "Save it for when I come to Chicago," I offered lightly.

"You're coming to Chicago?" he asked, his face lighting up like a Christmas tree.

Texts From Last Night

"Of course," I stated as I turned to disassemble my underwear drawer. "You come to New York, I come to Chicago, it's only fair."

"God, I love you," he sighed, leaning in to kiss my forehead before moving quickly towards the door.

"Where are you going?"

"To pack my new favorite things," he explained before disappearing.

"You better not do anything dirty to my pretty things," I called after him, giggling at his excitement as I tossed a bra into my suitcase.

"Wouldn't dream of it," he yelled back, laughter in his voice as it carried down the hall.

xXx

After a sleepy goodbye to Rose and Emmett who had, apparently, stayed awake well into the night, Edward and I loaded our bags into my rental car and set off for the airport. The ride was silent, save for the occasional comment on the weather and a short debate over whether or not the airport would be crowded. Though our sporadic comments were casual, there was an underlying tension in the car, a feeling of dread that neither of us wanted to address. It went without saying that the carefree moments spent in my bedroom were soon to be overshadowed by something heavier, something both of us were dreading: goodbye.

Too quickly, we arrived at Charleston International Airport and unloaded our bags before checking in for our separate flights. It was a surprisingly quick process and, for once, I didn't feel completely grossed out as I walked through the airport barefoot in the dreaded security line. Probably, it was because I was too focused on the feel of Edward's warm hand on the small of my back, refusing to break contact as if he was going to lose sight of me at any moment.

Texts From Last Night

"All clear?" Edward asked as I stepped through the metal detector, his hands literally reaching out to touch me as he had been forced to separate.

"All clear," I nodded, stepping into his embrace. "You?"

"The man behind the machine looked at me kind of strange. Probably, it was because of the lingerie I have in my carry on." His attempt at a joke didn't lighten the situation.

"You didn't check the lingerie in your suitcase?" I asked, my mouth falling open in shock as I felt my cheeks grow warm with embarrassment.

"Nah," he said, patting the bag proudly. "I wanted it near me at all times."

"You're sick," I said, poking him in the side as I allowed myself a small bit of laughter.

"You love it," he sighed as he leaned down to place a kiss on my temple. "So, what gate are we headed to?"

"Uh," I paused, looking down at my boarding pass. "Gate A5 it looks like." As I read over my flight information, the fact that Edward and I were separating in under an hour hit me like a ton of bricks.

I froze, tears springing to my eyes as my body stopped in the middle of the terminal. My breath caught in my throat, and I struggled to contain the emotion I had been fighting all morning. It was as though time had stopped and all I could feel was the emptiness of our impending disconnection.

"Gate A5 it is," Edward stated as he continued walking, noticing that I had stopped when his hand slipped from my waist. "I'm actually A3, so it'll be..." He trailed off as he turned around to locate me, his eyes settling upon my hunched shoulders as a tear fell from each of my eyes. With him standing in the middle of the airport, looking at me sadly, I couldn't control the sob that wracked my body.

Texts From Last Night

"...perfect," he finished his sentence uneasily, dropping his carry on bag to slide his arms under mine and lift me off the ground. He held me silently for a moment, rocking me side to side while I cried into his neck. "Let's get to your gate, okay?" He whispered when my body stopped shaking with the force of my tears.

I nodded numbly, allowing him to move away from me just enough to retrieve his bag, hating myself for breaking down like that. "You'll stay with me?" I asked despite already knowing the answer.

"Bella," Edward sighed, stopping us again as he turned to face me. "Where else would I go?"

I shrugged, completely unsure of where else he would go, but simply knowing I wanted to make sure he would be with me. "I don't know," I mumbled.

"Hey, we're only three gates away from where you need to be. Can you make it to your gate in one piece, or do you need a piggy back ride?" His question was voiced happily and I knew that he was trying to cheer me up, but I was unable to stop the tears from falling. Just the thought of going to the gate, the last place where I would see Edward for three weeks, was enough to cause my very heart to break.

"Shit, Bella, come on, I can't handle it if you're crying the entire time," he said with a sigh before pulling me by my hand down the terminal.

"You said you might cry," I mumbled.

"I meant when we said goodbye, at the gate, not in the middle of the airport, pretty girl."

"I'm being silly, aren't I?"

"No, you're not. I'm flattered, really."

Texts From Last Night

I huffed. "You would be. Only you would find this-" I gestured to my swollen eyes, my red nose, my splotchy skin, "flattering." Somehow, I managed to force a small smile onto his lips.

"We're here," he announced, dragging me over to a set of two ridiculously uncomfortable airport chairs. "Did you eat breakfast?" He asked once we were sitting and I was wiping at my eyes.

"No, but I'm fine," I assured him, the thought of eating making my stomach turn.

"Are you sure?" The caring tone of his voice brought a fresh round of tears to my eyes. How long had it been since someone had cared for me so tenderly? So unselfishly? There I was, crying like a baby in the middle of an airport, and, instead of telling me to get my shit together, he was asking me if I wanted something to eat.

"I'm not really hungry," I explained, attempting in vain to wipe my eyes. The more tears I wiped away, the more fell. "You can get something, if you like."

"I had a bagel this morning," he grumbled as he lifted his arm to wrap it around my shoulders.

I shook my head back and forth before settling into his side, the annoying armrest between our chairs digging into my ribs. "Why on Earth did you wake up so early?"

"I have no idea," he sighed as he lifted his arm to wrap it around my shoulders.

"Freak."

Lifting my eyes to check the clock on the wall, I saw that it was nine-fifteen, less than twenty minutes until my flight began to board.

"Your freak," he countered.

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I looked up at him. "My freak," I confirmed with a nod and, damn, more tears. He was mine, and in twenty minutes, I would be carrying my broken heart to New York, alone.

"Are you going to be okay?" His eyebrows furrowed with concern.

I nodded weakly. "I'll be fine," I assured him as I closed my eyes, feeling somewhat silly for all the waterworks. "It must be Alice, crying all day yesterday and rubbing off on me."

"She cried on her wedding day?" His voice was full of disbelief.

"Happy tears," I explained, opening my eyes and waving my hands in front of my face like a moron.

He nodded slowly. "You aren't crying happy tears are you?"

"They're kind of happy tears, I suppose."

"Kind of happy tears?"

"Yeah," I paused. "You know, happy because of everything that happened this week, but sad because it's ending."

"It isn't ending, Bella, it's beginning."

"I know, I know, but...it's ending for now," I countered shakily.

He sighed, resigned. "But you'll be happy?" he asked, his hand running across my hair.

"I'm happy, Edward, just not in this moment."

"In New York, though, you'll be happy?"

Texts From Last Night

"I'm meeting my friend Angela at our favorite deli for dinner," I offered, shrugging. Feeling that familiar lump in my throat, I wondered if I would be able to stop the tears long enough to eat dinner with her. It felt like they would never stop.

"Please be happy, pretty girl," he whispered, pulling my face to his as the first boarding call for my flight echoed around us. "This week has been so amazing, I don't want the real world to tear us down because we've grown so ridiculously codependent." He chuckled lightly at the end of his sentence, clearly as bewildered by how attached we had become as I was.

"I'm happy, I am," I assured him tearfully. "Really." *Even though I feel like a broken puzzle piece*, I thought to myself.

"Do you need to go?" He asked as the second boarding call for my flight echoed over the speakers.

"Probably," I said without moving.

"You have to stand up, pretty girl." Again, with the pretty girl; if I wasn't a puddle of goo already from the night before, I was going to be straight jello by the time I arrived at LaGuardia. Runny, teary, snotty jello.

I wrapped my arms around his neck, crushing him to me. "I will in a minute."

"You have to go," He said, standing and pulling me with him.

I stood shakily on my feet as his arms snaked around my waist. "Hey," he said, squatting down so that our faces were level. "I love you."

"I love you," I echoed, smiling through my tears.

"Three weeks," he stated.

I nodded as a tear slowly trickled down my face. Lifting a hand, I brushed it away as he bent down to hand me my carry on.

Texts From Last Night

"Text me when you land?" He asked as he hung my bag on my shoulder.

"Of course," I whispered shakily.

He nodded, his own eyes red around the edges, before pulling me into his arms, his lips crashing into mine as I heard the final boarding call for my flight. "That's me," I mumbled against his lips, refusing to be the first one to move away. He rested his head on my shoulder, my body trembling as my tears fell onto his shoulder.

"Be safe," he whispered before pulling away. "I love you."

"I love you, too," I stated, not bothering to stop the tears that were falling as I turned and stepped towards the dwindling line of passengers waiting to board the plane.

After handing the stewardess my boarding pass, I stepped forward, my vision blurred with wetness. Turning around, I had every intention of waving to Edward, but he had already disappeared into the crowd moving throughout the terminal. I put my hand on my shoulder where his head had just rested, imagining the feel of him close to me. I gasped when I felt the dampness of my shirt.

My Edward had cried on my shoulder.

With a teary sigh, I made my way onto the plane, quickly finding my seat and stowing my carry on before pulling out my iPhone to turn it off.

I had a text message waiting, from Edward.

I couldn't bear to watch you walk away with tears in your eyes, pretty girl. I love you. Text me as soon as you land.

My heart swelled at his words before I hit the reply button.

I miss you already. Love you.

Texts From Last Night

As the plane taxied down the runway, I realized that I was not a broken puzzle piece, or a girl walking around with a broken heart. My heart was still with Edward, in the airport, at the beach house, wherever we had shared time together in the past week. Quickly, I sent him a final text before turning off my phone.

Be careful with my heart, I've left it with you.

For the first time in my life, I wasn't excited about returning to New York City. I wanted nothing more than to be with Edward--I wanted to be home.

Don't hate me...I promise that I'll bring them back together because, y'all, I don't do well with angst. Ask my beta, it took me two drafts of this chapter to get it decent because, well, I like happy much more than I like sad.

Coming up: We'll find out how Bella handles readjusting to life without Edward.

I heart you all, hardcore! As always, reviewers get teased. If I missed you last week, forgive me...alerts were fail.

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The New Yorker

Disclaimer: Twilight belongs to Stephenie Meyer. This story, though, belongs to me.

Chapter Twenty-Six: The New Yorker

"Where to, lady?" The taxi driver asked as he pulled away from the curb at the airport.

I rattled off the location of my Upper West Side apartment before settling against the seat, my eyes trained out the rain-soaked window as the city began to come into view. If there was one thing I had learned during my time as a New Yorker, it was that taxi drivers kept their mouths shut, preferring to do their job in silence. As I absorbed the city, glistening with moisture from the sprinkling rain, I was thankful that my driver wasn't an exception to the rule. My eyes felt heavy from the tears I had shed throughout the morning and, every now and then, I felt a prickling sensation, warning me that I was on the verge of another momentary breakdown.

As we sped through the streets, I was thankful for the clouds that had settled above the skyscrapers, the gloomy weather matching my mood. Halfway through the fight, my body simply ran out of tears to cry and I fell asleep against the window, drooling. The elderly woman in the seat next to me had woken me up as the plane taxied toward the gate, a pitying smile on her face as she shook my shoulder gently. She didn't ask any questions and didn't offer to share her own life story, but I could tell by the frown on her face that she knew the feeling, that the loneliness written all over my face was familiar to her. Somewhere, she probably had an Edward, a man she had walked away from, either for a short time, or a lifetime.

Soon, my neighborhood came into view, but I barely comprehended the fact, my mind too preoccupied with thoughts of Edward, wondering how he was spending his time in the airport, if he was in as miserable a mood as I was. As I daydreamed, I felt a tear trickle down my cheek. I pictured him, sitting alone,

Texts From Last Night

his head in a newspaper, or maybe a magazine, as he sat in an uncomfortable chair at his gate, watching as flight after flight boarded before it was finally his turn. My heart ached at the idea of him, sitting alone for hours before returning to an empty apartment in a city where he spent more time in the lab than out with friends.

Maybe I wasn't out of tears, after all.

Eventually, my driver pointedly cleared his throat to bring me back down to Earth before announcing our arrival. I paid him quickly, offering a small smile in his direction before declining his offer to help me with my bags. As I glanced at my building, dark brown and drenched with rain, I had to literally tell my feet to move, hoping that if I simply stayed in the taxi instead of reentering reality that three weeks would fly by and I would find myself in Edward's arms again.

It was still raining, but I couldn't find it within myself to care as I stepped onto the sidewalk, slowly pulling my suitcase behind me as I stepped up to the door. My face was already wet, so I figured I might as well invite the rest of my body to the pity party. At least if I was wet all over, it wouldn't draw attention to my drenched cheeks.

Stepping into my building, I wrung the water out of my hair, grabbing it all in one hand before twisting it over my shoulder. Grateful that there was no one I knew lingering in the lobby, I hurried towards the elevator, pressing my floor number and the door close button at the same time, eager to make it upstairs and collapse onto my bed without having to make small talk.

Of course, fate had other plans, and my certifiable roommate was lounging in the living room, evidently Hell bent on tormenting me. *Couldn't she see I was having an epic moment of feeling sorry for myself? That a part of my heart was no longer with me, instead on its way to Chicago in the hands of Edward?* I chided myself for answering her ad on Craigslist when I had moved to the city, desperate for a roommate that seemed at least somewhat sane. How I had made it through three years of her shenanigans, I wasn't sure.

Texts From Last Night

"Well, hello, hot mess," Jessica commented as I swung the door open, dragging my bags behind me.

I simply glared at her, willing myself to have the power to shoot daggers from my eyes, before turning on my heel and taking the five short steps to my shoebox of a room. Moving slowly, I prayed that by some miracle, my room wouldn't be empty, but that Edward would be lounging on my bed, a grin on his face like our separation was a big, hilarious joke.

Swinging open my door, I held my breath, but my room was empty. Everything was in the exact place I had left it before catching my flight, before taking a trip had ended in love and a heartbreaking goodbye.

"Have a nice trip? Doesn't look like it," she snickered, her voice carrying through the apartment. "Did all the love remind you of what the *normal* population has? Honestly, Bella, it's no wonder you're alone. Why don't you just get a few cats to keep you company?"

At her words, I dropped my bags in the doorway and turned back around, my fists clinched against my side as anger boiled beneath my skin. "I had a great week, for your information."

An evil smirk played on her lips. "Riiiiight. I'm sure the world's biggest pencil sharpener is a ton of fun."

"You know what? I'm not even going to bother," I huffed, throwing my hands up in the air before whirling around to reenter my room, slamming the door loudly behind myself. It was true that I had rarely gone on dates, and even less frequently spent the night out, but at least I wasn't spreading my legs for half the city like she was.

What a slutmuffin.

Patting myself on the back for not stooping to her level of disgusting, I climbed over my bags gracefully before collapsing onto my bed face first, my arms and legs sprawled out like a starfish. Admittedly, I could have told her about

Texts From Last Night

Edward, about our days and nights together filled with laughter and new love, but I felt that she didn't deserve to know.

"I'm going out," I heard from the hallway. "I'll probably have Mike over later."

Instead of answering her with the string of profanities that were waiting on the tip of my tongue, I grabbed my pillow and yelled into it, the fluffiness muffling my cries. Of all days, today certainly was not the one that I wanted to hear noises coming from her bedroom. The walls in our apartment seemed to be, unfortunately, as thin as paper.

It wasn't bad enough that I was without Edward. Somehow, the universe had decided that I should also be subjected to Jessica and Mike's piss poor imitation of lovemaking. I swore if she called him 'Big Daddy' again, I was going to walk in there and throw cold water on them in the middle of their 'session.' With my eyes covered, of course.

The front door slammed and I rolled onto my back, staring at the ceiling as I folded my arms behind my head. It had been less than five hours, and the ache in my chest since saying goodbye to Edward hadn't decreased in the slightest. If anything, it had increased in size. Realizing that there was no way I would accomplish anything of worth until I met Angela for dinner, I sat up, peeled off my damp clothing, and set the alarm on my phone and laid down for a nap, grasping my shirt in my hands as if having the remnants of Edward's tears would bring him to me.

xXx

As a general rule, navigating New York in the rain is something that most residents of the city dread. Taxis are nearly impossible to come by, the subway terminals become ridiculously hot and crowded and, no matter how hard one tries, getting wet cannot be avoided. After waking up from my nap and pulling on a fresh pair of jeans and a tank top, though, I found myself making an exception to the rule. Instead of attempting to hale a taxi or hop on the subway, I grabbed my umbrella and decided to walk the five blocks to the deli where Angela and I had planned to meet. I knew that I needed some fresh air, a few

Texts From Last Night

minutes to clear my head before facing my friend, puffy eyed and frowning. Besides, I didn't want to tempt fate and get stuck with a chatty taxi driver or, worse, have to make small talk with a colleague on the subway.

The walk was short and as I pulled open the door to the deli, my head was just as foggy as it had been before leaving my apartment, still filled with longing for Edward. Wondering if the feeling of wanting to be constantly near him would ever go away, and secretly hoping that it wouldn't, I scanned the dining area quickly, finding Angela waiting in a small corner booth, her head stuck in a menu. I took a deep breath before approaching, willing myself to look happy despite the fact that I was breaking apart inside.

"Hi," I said as I approached, sliding into the booth and placing my umbrella at my feet.

Angela's eyebrows furrowed. "Did you...walk here?"

"Of course," I scoffed, as if I walked five blocks in the rain everyday.

"Okay..." Her voice was skeptical as she returned her attention to her menu. "How was the trip?" She asked without looking up. *Good, more time to pull myself together.*

I bit my lip, attempting to focus on my own menu to avoid another round of tears as sweet memories flooded my mind. "It was great," I managed, my voice miraculously void of sadness. *So far, so good.*

"Anything exciting to report?"

"Um...not really," I looked down, my fingers playing with the frayed edge of my menu.

"Bella," Angela prodded. "What do you mean...not really?"

I was biting my lower lip when I looked up, shrugging.

Texts From Last Night

Angela scrutinized me with her eyes. "Your eyes are puffy and your nose is red. You've been crying," she stated.

I nodded pathetically, my lip still trapped between my teeth. I felt it quiver nervously.

"Also, there's something...different about you," she added, still examining. Suddenly, she gasped. "You met a guy, didn't you?"

I felt myself blushing as I continued nodding, apparently having gone mute from walking in the rain. Luckily, a waitress arrived to take our order, saving me from her questions for at least a moment. Unfortunately, I could practically see the wheels turning in her brain as I ordered a grilled chicken salad, the look on Angela's face eerily similar to the one that Alice donned when planning and plotting.

The waitress had taken a total of two steps away from the table before her attention returned to my recent revelation.

"Well," she began, "who was he?"

"His name is Edward," I offered, knowing that the lack of communication between us for the last three years would leave her guessing. Angela was vaguely familiar with the distinct personalities that belonged to Alice, Rose, Jasper, and Emmett, but I rarely, if ever, mentioned Edward.

"Uh huh. Home base?" She asked.

I giggled lightly, my mood lightening as we settled into the game that the two of us played after one of us met a new guy. "Chicago," I said, my frown returning quickly as I said the name of the city I now wanted to demolish with a second great fire for taking my man away.

"Bummer. Occupation?"

Texts From Last Night

"He's in medical school." I hadn't thought to ask him, but I wondered how much longer he would be tied to Chicago, if his schoolwork was nearly completed and where he had considered applying for residencies.

"Nice," she grinned with approval. "Hair color? Eye color?"

I closed my eyes, images of his messy hair and piercing eyes appearing before my lids. "Brown, but more of a bronze, especially in the sun and green eyes, piercing green, with little flecks of gold here and there," I breathed as I slowly opened my eyes, having envisioned him so clearly that I almost expected him to be sitting next to Angela, a smirk playing on his beautiful face.

"Those are nice adjectives. Body?"

"There are no words," I sighed, feeling my cheeks heat as I recalled the delicious feel of his skin against my own.

"Damn, Bella, you're smitten."

If only you knew the extent of it.

In that moment, I chose not to divulge the depth of my relationship with Edward, fully aware that if I did, she would probably have a coronary just seconds before attempting to talk me down what she would assume was simply an 'I've finally been fucked' high. After my split with Jake, I had been so guarded, keeping my heart in a box with a key I held tightly in my grasp, refusing to give even a small piece to anyone. To fall in love, so suddenly and intensely, would seem so out of character that it would be literally unbelievable. As I got over saying goodbye to the man I had cared for so deeply in some capacity for the past seven years, I didn't have it in me to defend our love.

I shrugged, a small smile forcing its way onto my lips. "I guess I am, yeah."

"Are you going to see him again? I mean, was it a one time thing?"

Texts From Last Night

"Definitely not," I responded quickly, my voice clipped at her suggestion that Edward was a simple wedding fling. Her eyebrows shot up in surprise and I realized that she had assumed I was answering her first question. "I mean, wait, no it definitely wasn't a one time thing."

"How many times was it?"

I cocked my head to the side, unsure of the exact number. The first night, and the shower, and...suddenly, my skin was burning for his touch.

"Oh my God, you slut!" Angela said, a joking tone in her voice as she reached across the table to punch me in the shoulder.

"He's coming to New York in three weeks," I offered in an attempt to change the topic.

"Interesting..."

"What do you mean?" I asked as the waitress arrived with our orders.

"I mean," she paused, pouring a generous amount of dressing across her salad. "It's just surprising. You go away for the week to be in the wedding of one of your college friends and, suddenly, you're head over heels for a guy?"

"Pretty much," I stated simply before stuffing my face with a forkful of salad. *Don't say it, Bella, don't tell her that you're in love with him.*

Angela chewed slowly, her eyes doing that thing where she scrutinized me again. "Did you know him before?"

"Before the wedding?" I asked, my mouth full of food.

"Uh huh."

"I did," I answered succinctly.

Texts From Last Night

"And?"

"And, we were friends in college. It was no big deal."

"How good of friends?"

For some reason, the innocent question brought to mind a fresh memory, one from our college years that reminded me how close Edward and I had been, despite the fact that we were both in relationships with other people. Though Alice might have been my best friend, I realized that Edward was pretty damn close to the top of the list, even then.

xXx

Bella POV

March 2009, Junior Year

(425): You started crying because you didn't get to wear your rain boots this week so I turned on the shower and let you jump around in it.

(206): You're the best friend ever

"What are you doing tonight?" I asked Edward as we sat on the main quad. Somehow, our schedules had aligned so that we had a break together on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Dubbing it E/B time, we would find an open space in the grass and hang out, studying talking, people watching, or whatever else we wanted to do. E/B time had no rules, other than that it was supposed to be relaxed and drama free.

"I'm not sure," he answered from his position on his back, eyes closed as he soaked up the warm spring sun. "You?"

"Well, Alice and Jasper are going on a date, Emmett and Rose are going on a date, and Jake and I are...off again."

Texts From Last Night

"Tanya made out with some random guy in a bar last night, so, we're off, too."

"Sorry."

"No worries." He sat up. "Wanna do something?"

"I have a fresh, not yet opened bottle of Vodka hidden in my room..."

"I'll bring the Jello," he offered, a smile spreading across his face before he fell back onto his back. "Strawberry, right?"

"So, then he told me that he hated you."

"And that's why you broke up with him?"

I nodded. "Yes, that's what I'm trying to tell you."

Edward and I were sitting in the middle of the living room at my apartment, empty plastic cups once filled with Jello shots scattered around us.

"Why does he hate me?"

"I have no idea, Edward," I sighed, more exasperated than I would normally be due to the alcohol.

"Is he...jealous?"

"What would he be jealous of?" I asked, genuinely curious.

Edward shrugged. "I don't know, maybe our friendship?"

"Like there's anything to be jealous of," I scoffed. "We drink together. We hang out together. Every now and then we share a bed, fully clothed of course. But, it's not like we're fuck buddies." I whispered the last word, as if it was scandalous and forbidden.

Texts From Last Night

His eyes hooded. "Definitely not fuck buddies."

" So, see, he needs to chill out."

" If you say so."

" Edward?"

" No, I won't be your friend with benefits," he joked, winking.

*I felt my body flush. "That's not what I was asking," I said, clearing my throat.
"You know what?"*

" What?"

" I got new rain boots this week, Alice made me buy them."

" Okay?" He shook his head back and forth in confusion.

" And," I paused dramatically, leaning forward on my hands and pouting. "I didn't get to wear them."

" That's a tragedy," he said sarcastically.

I glared at him. "Make it better, Eddie?"

" I will if you don't call me Eddie."

" Okay, Edward. I won't call you...um...that name."

He stood, a smirk on his lips, and extended his hand to help me up. I scrambled to my feet and he picked me up, bridal style, before carrying me towards my bedroom .

" No fuck buddies, didn't we just agree on that?"

Texts From Last Night

" Damn, you're wasted Swan."

" I love Vodka," I sang. "Where are you taking me, E?"

" Where are you rain boots?" He asked, ignoring my question as we entered my room, fumbling around for a light switch, almost as wasted as I was.

" Closet."

" Ah, of course." He sat me on the bed before rummaging through my closet. "Got enough clothes?"

" I live with Alice."

" Right," he nodded. "Okay, are these them?" He asked, holding up a bright yellow pair of rain boots with daisies on them.

" Yes!" I cheered, holding out my hands. "Gimme!"

" Patience, B," he smirked.

I folded my arms across my chest and pretended to put as he grabbed my feet and pulled off the socks I was wearing before sliding the boots onto my feet. "There you go."

" That's it?" How disappointing.

" Well, you said you wanted to wear them."

" I wore them in the store, idiot. I want to wear them in the rain." I pouted silently, Vodka tears springing to my eyes.

He was silent, contemplating my statement.

" Okay then," he said after a moment. "Up you go." Suddenly, I was over his shoulder.

Texts From Last Night

"Where are you taking me?" I squealed, beating him against his back.

"I'm going to make rain for you," he stated. "In the shower."

The next morning, I woke up in the floor of the bathroom, my clothes damp, my head pounding, and the ceiling light on.

"Alice? Rose?" I called, hoping that one of them had a clue as to what the Hell I was doing.

Silence.

Slowly, I pulled myself up from the floor and stumbled into my bedroom. On my bed, I found Edward, sprawled out wearing his jeans and one shoe.

"What the fuck?" I asked loudly.

He sat up quickly, completely disoriented as he ran his fingers through his hair. "Bella? Why are you wet?"

"I was hoping you could tell me..."

He erupted into laughter. I folded my arms around my hips and jerked my hip out, tapping my foot against the carpeted floor. "What?"

"You were complaining about not wearing your boots," he gasped through his laughter, pointing to my feet. I looked down. I was still wearing them. "So, I helped you out."

"By standing me in the shower?"

He nodded. "You seemed to have a good time jumping around in the puddles."

I sighed. It appeared that his intentions had been good, although his plan was muddled by Vodka. "Where are your wet clothes?"

Texts From Last Night

He pointed to the floor. "Come on, let's get them in the dryer."

xXx

I sighed, placing my fork on the edge of my plate. "We were pretty damn good friends, what does it matter?" My tone made my exasperation clear as I worried that we were headed down a path that would force me defend something I didn't want to.

"It doesn't," Angela murmured after a long pause, her features softening. "You know how I am."

"Yes I do, *mom*."

"I just don't want to see you get hurt again," she explained.

"Edward won't hurt me."

"If you're sure." She seemed to believe my words, though I could see the doubt in her gaze.

"I am," I voiced confidently, hoping that there wouldn't be more questions to follow.

She nodded slowly, accepting my answer before speaking, her voice lighter than it had been. "Just let me know if I need to kick his ass."

I arched an eyebrow, challenging her. "Wait until you see him, you definitely will be rethinking that statement."

"I bet I could take him." Smiling, she lifted her thin arm, attempting to produce a bicep muscle. "I'm fierce."

I laughed loudly at her comment, the mood in our booth suddenly lighter as I remembered why the two of us were such good friends. "I'll tell him to watch out," I assured her, still laughing.

Texts From Last Night

"You do that," she snickered, turning her attention once again to her food as my phone began to ring from inside my purse.

I pulled it out, a smile spreading across my face as I read the caller ID: *Edward Cullen*.

"Do you mind if I answer?" I asked Angela, my finger hovering over the send button.

She shook her head back and forth, mouthing, 'Is it him?'

I nodded. "Hello?"

"It's raining in Chicago, pretty girl," the voice I had fallen in love with breathed. Though I knew my heart wouldn't feel whole again until I was in his presence, I did feel a little piece sliding back into place at the simple sound of his voice.

"It's raining here, too," I felt a blush creep onto my face as a memory of his face, his hair, dripping with moisture from the sky floated through my mind. Coupled with that memory was the one of us declaring our love as the water beat down on our skin, the two of us oblivious to everything but each other as we stood on the balcony.

"Is it?" He asked, his voice dropping. "I like the rain when you're in it..."

"Uh huh. I'm at dinner with my friend, Angela," I offered, alerting him to the fact that I was in a public place.

"Oh," he paused, clearing his throat. His obvious uncertainty was adorable. "I'll, uh, let you go then."

"Are you sure?" I asked, my gaze flickering to Angela as she motioned to her arm again, like she had when attempting to make muscles before. I didn't want him to hang up, wasn't ready for his comforting voice to leave me. "Oh, wait, I have something to tell you."

Texts From Last Night

"What's that?"

"Angela says that if you hurt me she'll kick your ass. You should see her muscles." The idea of tiny Angela attempting to leave a simple bruise on Edward was the bright spot in my otherwise depressing day.

"Scary?"

"Terrifying," I said sarcastically, rolling my eyes playfully.

"I miss you," he exhaled from the other line. "My apartment's lonely."

"Mine isn't. Jessica is having her flavor of the week, Mike, over tonight. I miss you, too, though." *Desperately, completely, with my entire heart.*

Angela scrunched up her nose in response to my comment regarding Jessica, fully aware of the implication of my statement.

"I'm sorry, baby, I wish there was something I could do."

"It's fine, I'm used to it by now," I paused. "I meant Jessica, not missing you."

"I knew what you meant, Bella. We'll just have to give her a taste of her own medicine when I'm in town..." He trailed off, his voice husky and deep.

"Again, I'm at dinner with Angela..."

"Oh, right, uh, I'll definitely let you go this time. Love you."

I froze, torn between saying the words that I knew he wanted to hear and sending Angela into shock if I actually did say them. "Uh, I'm glad you made it safely, too."

"Bel--"

"Bye!"

Texts From Last Night

I quickly hit the 'end' button before turning to Angela, plastering a smile on my face. It felt foreign and uncomfortable. "So, what are you up to tonight?" I asked, hoping that she wouldn't draw attention to the strange end of my conversation with Edward.

She literally began to glow. "I'm, uh, hanging out with Ben."

"Ben from accounting?"

"Ben from accounting," she confirmed. "I finally, just, asked him if he wanted to get coffee one day last week."

"It's about damn time." I was happy for her, really I was, but how terrible was it that I was jealous of her? It upset me that the man she was dating and possibly falling in love with lived a mere three streets away from her while my man, my Edward, was in another *state*.

She sighed wistfully, a dreamy look on her face. "He's so great. We're going to a show tonight."

"That's great, Angela," I cheered, reaching across the table to cover her hand with mine. "Do you need to head out?"

"Yeah, we should probably make our way to the counter to pay," she said, reaching for her purse and standing.

I followed her towards the counter, picking up my umbrella as I did.

"Ang?" I asked, noticing that her toe was tapping anxiously against the checkered linoleum floor. "How about I get this one? Go, meet Ben."

"Are you sure?" The relief she felt was written on her face.

"I've got it," I assured her, grabbing the check from her hands and shoving her towards the door.

Texts From Last Night

"Thanks," she murmured gratefully before quickly moving towards the door. Smiling at her response, I turned to face the counter. "Bella?" I heard her call as I handed the waitress my receipt.

I turned to face her. "Yeah?"

"Even though I can see that you're hurting from goodbye, it's nice to see you so...happy. Your face lit up when he called."

I blushed, a grin spreading across my face. "You too, Ang. Have fun."

xXx

That night, I listened to the raunchy noises coming from Jessica's room, annoyed and bitter. I wanted Edward to be with me, to hold me as I told him about my dinner with Angela before distracting me with his own lips and hands. But, he wasn't there. He was in Chicago, in his own apartment, alone. When the noises finally died down, I settled into bed and reached for my cell, locating his number quickly and pressing the send button.

He answered on the second ring, his voice hoarse with sleep. "Bella?"

"Hi," I whispered. "I didn't mean to wake you."

"No, no, it's okay, what's up?" I could hear rustling in the background as he likely moved to sit up.

"I, um, I just wanted to hear your voice," I answered lamely, unable to come up with anything better to say.

"I like hearing your voice." Despite the sleep that riddled his tone, I could hear his smile. In turn, it made me smile.

"I like hearing yours, too." *Excellent, I sound like a preteen.* "How was your evening?"

Texts From Last Night

"Boring. I got take-out and caught up on some studying." I pictured him, sitting at a table as he poured over a book, wishing that I could be there to bring him snacks and coffee. *And, now I sound like his mother.*

"Ah, the exciting life of a med student."

"Yeah, I'm living pretty fast and furious here."

"Clearly." *Come live fast and furious here.*

"Do you have work tomorrow?"

I nodded, and then remembered that he couldn't see me. "Yeah, I uh, I'm going for a run in the park before, though."

"That's nice." He yawned.

"Wait, do you have class? Am I keeping you up?"

He chuckled lightly. "No, not until next week, remember? I've just got some things to catch up on, nothing major."

"Oh, right."

"Yeah."

"Are you excited for your parents to visit?" This time, it was my turn to yawn.

"Sure." He yawned again. "I haven't seen them since Christmas."

"That's a long time." My eyes were starting to get droopy.

"Bella?"

"Hm?"

Texts From Last Night

"Go to sleep, pretty girl."

"But I..." I want to hear your voice, I want to know that you're there and that you're okay and that you're not the only one that feels like their heart is missing from their chest.

"We had a busy week, you need to get some rest of you'll be playing catch-up for days."

"I want to..." Keep talking to you, to catch the next flight from New York to Chicago just to sleep in your arms. I want this separation to not be hard.

"Bella, shhh, I want to stay on the phone as badly as you do, but please, sleep."

I sighed, the soothing tone of his voice winning out over my desire to stay on the phone, to have some sort of connection with him. Sometimes, I wondered if he had a sixth sense for speaking to me in a way that calmed me, making me feel completely adored and loved. A strange analogy about him and the horse whisperer skipped through my mind, but I brushed it away.

"Okay," I finally sighed, resigned.

"Okay. Goodnight, Bella. I love you."

"I love you, Edward. Talk to you tomorrow?"

"Of course, pretty girl. I'll be missing you until then."

His final words, so sweet and pure, made me want to curl up and cry myself to sleep. I pressed the end button and tossed my phone onto my bedside table, checking first to make sure that my alarm was set for my run in the morning before doing just that.

xXx

Texts From Last Night

Eventually, I settled back into my daily routine. A morning run in Central Park followed by coffee from the Starbucks around the corner from my building. Work all day, dinner with friends or with myself before settling in for the evening. What I didn't settle into was the ache in my chest that refused to dissipate each time I thought of Edward, of how he was so far away and how much I missed him. With each passing day, I became more comfortable with the feeling, but it was still there, in every memory of our time together, both in Charleston and in college. Even though Edward and I had never shared time in the city, I saw a piece of him in everything--the doctor, hurrying down the sidewalk with his BlackBerry in his hand, the bottles of tequila behind the bar at my favorite restaurant, a forgotten button dropped haphazardly on the carpet. Though the familiarity was nice, it wasn't him.

Though I had a hard time shaking my longing for Edward, I was able to find little bits of joy to fill the void left behind. Instead of sitting inside my apartment, moping on the couch in front of the TV while Jessica paraded her flavor of the day in front of me, I fell in love with the city again. I went to concerts on weeknights in the middle of Central Park, usually with friends but sometimes alone. I grabbed my favorite book and took it with me to a coffee shop, enjoying a nice glass of coffee and classic words. I went to a wine tasting, and, afterwards, allowed Angela to drag me to a lingerie store for something to surprise Edward with when he visited.

Slowly, the apathy I had felt towards the city when my plane departed Charleston floated away and, like before, I found myself wondering if I would be willing to leave, even if Edward asked me to. *Who am I kidding? If Edward asked me to jump, I would probably ask him how high.* Regardless, when we would talk at night, either on the phone or through our new favorite form of communication, Skype, I could tell that he seemed genuinely thrilled with the idea of me finding happiness in the city again.

Before I knew it, it was the Wednesday of the weekend he was coming to visit. My mood had brightened significantly with each day that I marked off on my desk calendar with a big, red Sharpie. As I sat at my desk, having just finished marking through another day, I shook the mouse to wake up my computer before logging in to my e-mail. A grin spread across my face as I saw one from

Texts From Last Night

Alice, obviously home from her honeymoon and checking in.

To: Bella Swan

From: Alice Hale

Subject: Home Sweet Home

Bella,

WE'RE HOME!

Jasper and I had a great time in Italy--it was more beautiful and romantic than either of us had anticipated, truly a wonderful place to celebrate after such a perfect week with friends. Now that we're home, it's been a whirlwind of moving into the house and organizing all of our individual things to make it more a home. You'll have to come visit once we're settled! You might want to wait until the fall, though; it's hot as Hell here right now.

Rose told me that you and Edward were inseparable after the wedding and that they basically had to tell the two of you to get a room. I need details! When is he coming to New York? Are you planning a trip to Chicago? Don't leave me waiting too long for an answer!

Oh, also, the photographer has the site up for photos from the wedding! I'll attach the link, the ones from the ocean are completely breathtaking. I know, you hate pictures of yourself, but I promise these are worth it!

Ciao,

Alice

P.S. Did the four of you settle on a date for NYC Reunion 2014? Keep me updated :)

Texts From Last Night

Though I wasn't 'on the clock,' so to speak, I did have another half hour before I could leave the office without looking suspicious. So, I clicked on the link, hoping to find images that captured the unique friendship that the six of us shared.

I wasn't disappointed.

As I scanned through the photographs, not bothering to enlarge them so that I could take in as many as possible at a time, I felt a smile creeping onto my face. I recalled Alice bossing around the poor photographer, dragging the six of us from spot to spot at the wedding site and arranging us in poses. When I reached the photographs taken on the shore, I was completely in awe. Alice was right: they were completely breathtaking. The photographer had, as I hoped, captured our friendship in a series of stills. Our smiles were genuine, as was the frozen laughter on our faces.

Suddenly, I missed them nearly as much as I missed Edward. I missed Alice's overflowing heart that often overshadowed her tendency to micromanage our lives. I missed Emmett, always eating when he wasn't blowing our minds with his bouts of brilliance. I missed Jasper and his relaxing nature that mellowed all of us, that held us together. I missed Rose and her bluntness, that she wasn't afraid to tell the truth. But, most importantly, I missed the bond that we shared, the easy, carefree way that we interacted no matter the time that had spanned between contact.

"Bella?" I heard my name from the doorway, looking up to find Angela standing there, an expectant look on her face as she snapped her fingers to get my attention.

"Uh, yeah?" I asked, slowly pulling my eyes away from the computer screen.
"What's up?"

"You're kind of...crying."

I lifted my hands to my face, feeling the tears that had wetted my cheeks without my awareness. "Oh...I guess I am."

Texts From Last Night

"Whose transcript is it? A new one from Zafrina?"

I shook my head back and forth. "No, it's, uh, just some pictures."

"Pictures that are making you cry? Are pictures supposed to make you cry?"

I smiled. "They're happy tears, I promise. I'm looking at the photographer's website for the wedding."

"Oh, can I see? Is your man in them?" She wiggled her eyebrows suggestively.

I rolled my eyes playfully at her question, sliding my chair to the left as I waved her over. She hurried to my side, bending at the waist so that she could see the images more clearly.

"That's Alice, the bride obviously," I said, pointing to the screen and smiling. "And her husband, Jasper. Then there's Rose, his sister, and her almost-fiancé, Emmett."

"Almost fiancé?"

I giggled. "He's taking his time with asking her to marry him."

"And that is..." She trailed off, lifting her hand to point at Edward.

"Edward," I breathed, my eyes zoning in on the perfect planes of his face.

"I see," she smiled. "He's sex on legs, I know why you miss him so much now."

"Angela!" I scoffed, embarrassed as I punched her in the arm.

"What? It's true. He's hot. Are there more of him? And why does everyone look so surprised?"

Texts From Last Night

"Because Alice had just gotten dress dirty in the water. She's a little bit obsessive about her clothing," I explained as I smiled at the sight, making a mental note to order a copy of the photo that captured the six of us better than anything had before. "But, yeah, there are more, I just haven't checked them out yet."

"Well get to it, B, I want to see more of your man."

I playfully glared at her before following her orders, grabbing a notepad and pen while I waited for the site to load at a painfully slow pace.

"Damn, look at that," Angela breathed as I jotted down a short list of items I wanted to pick up from the grocery on way home.

"What?" I asked, looking up quickly before dropping my pen in surprise, the metal clinking against the wood of my desk.

On the screen in front of me were twelve images of Edward and myself, playing in the surf, our arms wrapped around each other as our gazes met. Mouths open, we were obviously laughing at a forgotten joke, each of us with our attention focused solely on the other. One would have to be blind to miss the obvious love shared between us as we stared at each other, completely absorbed in the moment and oblivious to the camera.

"You fell in love in Charleston, didn't you?" Angela breathed, her eyes greedily scanning the pictures.

I nodded, my eyes full of tears again as I bathed them in the site of Edward and I together. There were no words suitable for describing how I felt in that moment, seeing concrete evidence of the love that we shared. I was utterly and wholly speechless.

Angela wrapped her arm around my shoulder. "It's time for you to spill the beans, girl. All the beans."

"Are you sure you want all the beans?"

Texts From Last Night

"I want the entire beanstalk, yes."

I bookmarked the website with the photographs, jotting down a note to order several of them before turning to face Angela. "Where do you want me to start?"

"Oh, I don't know, the beginning would be nice," she answered sarcastically as she moved to sit in the chair across from my desk, sitting back and preparing herself for storytime.

I sat back in my chair, readying myself as I smoothed my blouse. "Well, like I said at dinner my first night back, we were friends in college, really good friends, in fact. Jake always hated him, though, always telling me that he felt threatened by our friendship and whatnot. Plus, Edward was dating this bitch, Tanya. We called her T-Monster."

Angela snorted at the nickname before inserting, "Hated Jake. Complete ass."

I glared at her, telling with my eyes to be quiet and listen or she wouldn't hear the story.

"Anyway, there was never anything deeper between us then, but then this week..." I trailed off, returning in my mind to our first night in Charleston with the Franzia and the bonfire. I recalled the way he smiled, how, suddenly, I was aware of his beauty.

As my memories traveled through the week, I shared everything with Angela, from Franzia Sunday up until our bittersweet goodbye at the airport. She listened, absorbing my words greedily.

"So, that's it, really. It just kind of happened," I said lightly when I was finished, placing my palms on my desk.

"And, you're still here, why?"

"What do you mean?"

Texts From Last Night

"I mean," she paused. "Why are you still in New York? You should go to him."

"He's going to be here this weekend. I'll see him in two days."

"No," she shook her head back and forth. "Why aren't you upstairs, talking with someone about transferring to Chicago? You know that we have an office there."

"No, I didn't know that," I said, completely shocked. "When did that happen?"

"I don't know, five years ago? Before we even started working here."

"Really?" *How had I missed that when I started? I suppose I didn't have a reason to consider it.*

"Yes, really. Do I need to make the appointment for you with our boss?"

"No, no," I retorted quickly. "I just, uh, let me see how everything goes this weekend, okay?" The idea of suddenly moving to Chicago, after being with Edward for a grand total of three weeks, completely overwhelmed me. Not because I wasn't sure of our relationship, but because I wasn't sure of myself. Did I want to be that girl that left the place that had been so good to her for a man?

"Are you worried it won't be the same?"

"Of course not," I hurriedly answered. "It's just, I love New York, and I love working in this office. Everyone here is so talented and has been so welcoming of me."

Angela nodded curtly before standing. "I think you know the question you need to ask yourself then," she said before turning to the door.

I pulled my eyebrows together, not sure what she meant.

Texts From Last Night

She smiled weakly. "I think you needed to ask yourself what you love more: New York, or being with Edward."

xXx

I was completely blindsided by Angela's statement, the rest of the workday passing by in a weird blur as I attempted to organize my thoughts. Somewhere deep down, I knew that New York wasn't my forever, it never had been. One day, I wanted to get married and have children, raise them in a sweet town, away from the hustle and bustle, like I had been. At the same time, though, it was the place I was meant to be right after college, the place that had allowed me to find myself and, ultimately, healed my broken heart. But, was my time here really done? I felt like there were so many places that I still wanted to see, things I wanted to do. I hadn't gone to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade, or to see the Rockettes perform their Christmas Spectacular at Radio City Music Hall. Despite living in the city for three years, I had failed to experience it all. I knew that if I was basing my decision to leave the city on nonexistent children, then I obviously wasn't sane enough to be making such a monumental decision in the first place. Plus, Chicago was an urban area, like New York. So, I would simply be making a lateral move, not one forward or backward.

At the same time, though, I knew my love for Edward transcended my love for the city I was in; there was no doubt of that. Yes, the distance was hard and, sure, I would love to wake up in his arms every morning, but were we ready for that? *Was I ready for that?*

My mind was still racing that evening when my phone rang, a call from Edward.

"Hey," I answered quickly, falling onto my bed as I waited for his voice on the other line.

"What are you doing, pretty girl?" My heart jumped at the sound of his familiar voice and I smiled at his greeting; the nickname for me he had begun using in Charleston had become a regular thing and, still, I swooned every time.

Texts From Last Night

"Just...thinking."

"What about?"

"My favorite things," I answered vaguely, twirling a lock of hair between my fingers.

"Hm..."

"Like, you...and New York City..."

"You know," he paused. "Your two favorite things are meeting each other soon..."

"Two days," I said excitedly, feeling my heart heal a little bit more as I said the words. I knew that the healing would be temporary, that when he boarded his flight back to Chicago on Monday morning that my heart would break a little again, but I was happy to have whatever time with him that I could.

"Actually, um, I kind of have something to tell you..." He trailed off and, immediately, I worried that he was going to have to cancel his trip. Tears sprang to my eyes and I anxiously ran my hands through my hair.

"Okay?" My voice was leery, shaking with fear.

"I'm, uh, on my way to the airport."

"You're...what?" I'm pretty sure that my neighbor across the hall heard my excited squeal.

"I'm coming to New York tonight. My flight leaves at nine."

"Is this a joke?" I asked, my voice squeaking with glee as I looked down at the holy yoga pants and stained tank top I was wearing. "Because, I swear, if this is--"

Texts From Last Night

"Not a joke," he laughed lightly.

"Wait, don't you have classes and labs and medical things to learn?" *I need to shower, and change, and clean up all of my shit before you get here and run away thinking I'm a slob that doesn't believe in cleaning products.*

"Apparently, there's some kind of rare surgery happening somewhere in Europe at the end of the week that our professors were invited to observe. I don't know the details, I quit listening after they said they were going to cancel class for the rest of the week."

"So, you're really coming early? Here? To see me?"

"Yes," he laughed at my seemingly silly question. "I'll be there in about...four hours, if you count security and everything."

"When does your flight land? I'll meet you at the airport."

"You don't have to."

"I want to, I want to spend every possible moment with you."

He paused as if considering this. "It's going to be late..."

"I don't care. I want to see you as soon as humanly possible," I stated, the pleading tone in my voice hinting towards desperation. "Please, Edward."

"Fine," he sighed in defeat, clearly unhappy that I would be climbing into an unfamiliar taxi after dark. "My flight lands at 11:53."

"I'll be there," I said proudly, glancing at the clock and noting that I needed to leave around eleven thirty. *Three and a half hours* .

"I can't wait to see you." His voice dropped an octave, the huskiness present in his tone causing goosebumps to rise on my skin.

Texts From Last Night

"I can't wait to see you, either," I murmured, taking my bottom lip between my teeth before my eyes settled on the mess that was my room. "But, uh, I should probably go, you know, get ready."

"Are you trying to get me off the phone?" He asked, feigning offense before his voice dropped. "Wait what are you wearing?"

"Yes, I'm trying to get you off the phone, perv," I answered quickly, giggling. "You sprung your arrival on me and my apartment is a mess."

"I guess it's a good thing I didn't just show up on your doorstep, huh?"

"It's a very good thing."

"Duly noted. I'll call you when I land. Wait, Bella?"

"Make it quick, mister."

"What are you wearing?"

"You'll find out when you get here," I answered coyly as I threw a pile of dirty clothes into my laundry hamper.

"Damn tease. I'll call you once I'm off the plane."

"Okay, sounds good. Wait, Edward?" I stopped, straightening as I stood in the middle of my messy bedroom.

"Yeah?"

"I really mean it...I can't wait to see you," I said, stopping my movements to ensure the sincerity of my words.

He exhaled deeply into the receiver. "You have no idea, pretty girl, how anxious I am to see you."

Texts From Last Night

Next up: We find out how Edward spent their weeks apart, as well as his visit to New York...all in his point of view!

Leah is a lovely beta. You can thank her for the term 'slutmuffin' and Big Daddy, because she's effing awesome like that.

As always, thank you for reading and reviewing. You all set the bar high last chapter with your beautiful, sweet reviews...I loved each and every one of them. Your kind words are always appreciated.

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Empire State of Mind

Chapter Twenty-Seven: Empire State of Mind

EPOV

Even on a cloudy summer night, Manhattan was spectacular from the sky. As the pilot announced our imminent arrival at JFK, I looked through the window to my left and took in the skyscrapers before me, identifying the most recognizable ones--the Empire State and Chrysler Buildings. As the city lights grew closer and closer, I smiled to myself at the realization that somewhere beneath me in the hustle and bustle that is the city that never sleeps, Bella was on her way to meet me.

After waiting not-so-patiently to exit the plane, I sat with my backpack in my lap like an overeager nerd while I waited my turn, my knees bouncing anxiously. I wasted no time taking in the atmosphere of the emptying airport, instead, I pushed my way through the thin crowds, following the signs to baggage claim and, ultimately, Bella.

When I reached the baggage claim area, I realized that in my rush, I had gotten to the area before the baggage from my flight. Not that it was an uncommon occurrence as checked bags tended to take forever to arrive, but I also realized that I had appeared before any of my flight-mates. Glancing around and finding no sign of Bella, I chose an uncomfortable looking bench and sat down, pulling out my cell phone and powering it back on. No missed calls, but a text from her.

Leaving my apt now, hope you packed your rain gear. Can't wait to see you!

I looked outside. Shit, it was raining. *Of course.*

With a shake of my head, I turned back around to face the carousel, willing my bag to arrive so that I could get out of this airport and pull Bella into my arms.

Texts From Last Night

When nothing materialized, I sighed and typed out a quick response to her text.

Waiting on my bag. Tempted to leave it behind. Dying to see you.

"So, see me," I heard someone that sounded awfully similar to the other half of my heart say. I narrowed my eyes, examining my phone to note that I had yet to send the text I had composed, and slowly lifted my head.

"Did I say that out loud?" I asked dumbly, completely failing to capitalize on the fact that Bella was inches from me, grinning as I sat there like an idiot. "Shit!" I exclaimed as she nodded in answer to my question. Standing quickly, I wrapped my arms around her, holding her small frame tight against my body.

"Uh, hello to you, too." My chest muffled her voice, but I squeezed her harder as her arms wrapped around my neck; nothing could compare to the feel of Bella's body against mine, warm and soft and perfect.

Unable to contain myself, I lifted her off the ground, adjusting her so that we were eye level. Without hesitation, I crashed my lips against hers, not caring that we were in the middle of an airport, only concerned with the fact that we were together again. When Bella squirmed a bit before hooking her feet around my knees, I knew that she was clearly not bothered by the public display of affection, either.

Our tongues touched briefly before I pulled away, meeting her excited gaze before murmuring, "I've missed your lips."

"I've missed your tongue."

"I've missed your..." As I spoke, I slid my hands from the small of her back to palm her ass, using actions instead of words to let her know where my sentence was heading.

She rolled her eyes playfully, lifting a hand to place it over my mouth. "We're in public," she chided, feigning scandal.

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"I was going to say eyes," I answered, my fingers squeezing her backside, contradicting my words.

"No you weren't."

"I wasn't," I conceded, squeezing a final time before returning my hands to her hips.

Mischievously, she moved her lips to my ear and whispered, "I've missed your ass, too."

Sweet fuck. The feel of her breath against my skin as I held her body against mine was damn torture and I had to tell myself repeatedly that it would be a bad idea to drag her to the nearest restroom and fuck her against a stall. Of course, the fact that I was already holding her, making it easy to whisk her away, didn't help.

Groaning lightly, I put a little bit of space between us in an attempt to reign myself in, sliding Bella down my body until her feet hit the floor. As I placed her on the floor, she looked up at me through her eyelashes, pulling her supple bottom lip between her teeth in a move that she knew made me ache.

"So, uh, where's your bag?" She asked innocently, her fingers skimming along my shoulders as I chanted over and over in my head, "*Public restrooms are dirty.*"

"Uh, not here yet," I answered slowly, lifting my eyes away from her mouth to focus on the baggage carousel.

She turned to me, lifting an eyebrow. "Did they say it would be delayed?"

"No, no they didn't."

"Then should we check? Maybe it got lost or something..."

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"It's probably on its way. I, uh, kind of ran here," I explained, rubbing my hand against the back of my neck, suddenly feeling a little embarrassed by my mad dash through the airport.

"From the gate?"

"Yes," I answered succinctly.

"For me?" She asked, eyes wide and shiny.

"Yes, for you, silly girl."

"I thought you seemed a little sweaty under there," she smirked playfully as she ran a hand across my chest, her fingers toying with the cotton of my t-shirt. I bit back a moan at her touch, feeling skin heat beneath hers.

Pressing my lips against the shell of her ear, I whispered, "I can help you work up a sweat too, if you like."

She shuddered a bit as my breath fanned across her ear, but straightened quickly. "I'm sure you can." It was obvious that she was attempting to sound unaffected, but the hint of want in her voice gave her away.

"There's my bag," I said, spotting my suitcase over her shoulder as it fell onto the carousel. With a smirk, I stepped away from her slowly, dragging my fingers across her back, and quickly pulled my bag from the conveyor belt.

Hauling the bag behind me on its little wheels, I returned to Bella's side, wrapping her tiny hand in mind as we headed wordlessly towards the exit.

"Damn, you weren't kidding about the rain gear." I'll admit, I had been hoping that the rain gear comment had been in reference to something other than the, er, ground getting wet...but apparently she had been speaking literally, not figuratively.

"Why would I have been?" She asked innocently.

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I shrugged as she skipped towards an available taxi, glad that we were under an awning. "I don't know, sorry...I'm kind of tired. Ignore me. I probably should buy a raincoat or something because I didn't check the weather." I knew I was rambling, but she was leaning in the window of the taxi saying something to the driver and her ass was distracting me, as were her legs and her back and...

"Ready?" She asked, waving her hand to get my attention.

I shook my head to clear my thoughts before nodding quickly and walking towards the taxi. After tossing my bag in the back, I climbed in beside her and shut the door.

"Remember our agreement?" Bella asked the cabbie and I grinned like a devil, hoping that she had struck a deal with him to keep his eyes on the road while we got reacquainted.

"Yes ma'am, Battery Park, right?" He asked as Bella cuddled into my side, lifting my left arm to settle against me.

"That's right," she confirmed, looking up at me with a brilliant smile on her face.

"Battery Park?" I asked, my eyebrows furrowing in confusion. *Fuck, it sounded like she wanted to actually go somewhere, not sit here and make out like horny teenagers.*

"I want to show you something. It's one of my favorite places in the city."

"It's raining."

"I know."

"And it's almost midnight."

"Yes, I'm aware."

Texts From Last Night

"And I have bags in the taxi that should probably be taken inside."

"I know," she stated soundly, her voice full of excitement. "You're taking care of that for me, right, Carlos?"

Who the fuck is Carlos?

"Yes ma'am," the taxi driver said from the other side of the partition, nodding slightly.

Oh.

"I should probably just sit back and enjoy the ride, huh?" It was clear that Bella had a plan and that attempting to interrupt it, and no matter how badly I wanted to be inside of her after our separation, that it would be best if I would just sit back and shut up.

"I promise you'll love it," she said, lifting my hand and placing a kiss to my palm. It wasn't sure to me whether she was referring to wherever it was she was taking me or to the city as a whole. I realized that I didn't care, as long as she was in my arms.

"Okay."

xXx

"You were right," I murmured into her neck, her hair tickling my lips as I spoke. "I do love it."

We were sitting in a small gazebo in the middle of Battery Park, looking out at the sparkling lights of the skyscrapers as they mirrored off the Hudson River. Around us, the rain was still falling, though we were relatively dry as we sat wrapped up in each other, the city moving around us. On the street, Carlos was waiting in his taxi, meter running and a hot dog from the nearest street vendor in his hand.

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"I'm glad," Bella whispered, and I could hear the smile in her voice as her eyes took in the familiar sites of her city. "I wanted to bring you here first, before we did anything else. I wanted to show you my favorite place in the city at the best time of day to enjoy it."

I stilled, suddenly feeling overprotective. "You come here at night? Alone?" My arms instinctively tightened around her waist.

She laughed dryly at my question. "Not usually this late, no. But I love to come here in the evening with a book or a something that I'm in the process of editing. By nightfall, the tourists have made their way to Broadway or to their hotels to sleep and, just like that, the city is perfect."

"You love it here, don't you?" I asked, even though I knew the answer to my question. As much as I could feel her love for me in every touch, every loving phrase, I could see the love she had for the place she had come to call home in the smile that danced across her features as she pointed out various landmarks and points of interest.

"I do," she answered with no hesitation as I tightened my arms around her waist. "It's...magical. Every day, there's something new. It never gets old."

"I know the feeling."

She turned her head, her eyes examining me as she attempted to detect the meaning behind my words. "What's your New York?"

"You," I answered simply, truthfully.

Though it was dark, I knew that she blushing, her lips folding into a small smile.

"Ready to see another part of the city?" She asked, lifting her hand to slide it through my hair.

"I'll go wherever you take me."

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Jumping up, she exclaimed, "Let's go then," and we ran through the rain to where Carlos was waiting, eating what I assumed was hot dog number two.

xXx

"So, this is home," Bella stated wistfully as swung open the door to her apartment, stepping to the side so that I could enter what I assumed was the living room.

I nodded slowly, dropping my bag as I examined my surroundings. The apartment was everything I had expected--only slightly larger than a shoebox and decorated in an eclectic combination of furniture from IKEA and other unnamed places. Though the massive flat screen television opposite the couch seemed a bit flashy for Bella's taste, everything else echoed her personality--warm, comfortable, friendly.

"I know it's small," she continued as I began to walk slowly through the room, stopping every now and then to pick up an item or read the spine of a novel. "But rent's a bitch in the city and I'm too lazy to move."

"Too lazy or too stubborn?"

"Maybe a little bit of both," she admitted with a giggle as I stepped into the area designated as the kitchen. Bella met me in front of the sink, wrapping her arms around my neck and smiling up at me.

"Hi," I breathed against her skin, my fingers digging into the small of her back as I pulled her close, her hips meeting my thighs as her fingers dipped into the hair at the base of my neck.

"Hi," she echoed, a smile stretching across her face. "I'm glad you're here."

"I'm glad I'm here, too."

"Wanna see my room?"

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I nodded quickly, not hesitating at all before answering, "Hell yes."

She giggled, removing her hands from my hair to lace her fingers through mine, gently tugging on my arm to pull me in the direction of a short hallway.

"Mine's on the left," she explained as we walked the short distance. "That's Jessica's," she added, jerking her head to the right.

"The slutmuffin, right?" I asked, referring to the nickname Bella had used several times in reference to her roommate with a revolving bedroom door. Usually, she chose to use the moniker late at night when she would call me to help distract her from the noises across the hall.

"Right," she nodded with a chuckle and she opened the door to her room. "And this is where the magic hasn't happened since I moved in, unless Jessica was up to something while I was gone, which I really don't want to think about..."

I arched an eyebrow, moving to wrap my arms around her waist and lift her off the ground, her legs immediately folding around my middle. "You've washed your sheets, right?"

She nodded eagerly. "Of course."

"Then, I think we should consider coming up with a better description for your room."

"What did you have in mind?" She asked suggestively.

"I'm thinking...the place where the magic is about to happen and will continue happening all weekend long?"

She smirked playfully before pulling my head towards her, our lips meeting gently before she pulled away commenting, "You're so cheesy."

"Just honest." I shrugged against her before turning us and moving to sit on the edge of the bed, Bella's legs still wrapped around my waist as I settled onto the

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mattress.

"So damn sure of yourself..." She trailed off, her eyes lingering on my lips.

I lifted my hips against hers, the evidence of the arousal I had been unable to talk down since she stepped into my line of vision at baggage claim coming in contact with her center. She moaned gently, her fingers digging into my shoulders as I repeated my action.

"You love it."

"I do," she confirmed, her voice breathy as her head fell back. "Fuck, Edward, I've missed you. Has it really only been two and a half weeks?"

"Seems longer, pretty girl," I said before leaning forward to attach my lips to her neck, desperate to taste the skin I had been deprived of as my tongue slid across the sweet spot beneath her ear.

After murmuring her agreement, she leaned her head back down to attach her lips to mine, kissing me deeply as I opened my mouth to her. Our tongues danced, got reacquainted, and, suddenly, the atmosphere in the room changed from sweet and loving to desperate and needy.

"I want you," she demanded against my lips, pulling at the shirt I was wearing until I lifted my arms so that she could pull it over my head. Instantly, her lips were everywhere--my chest, my neck, my arms, the top of my stomach, and I found myself pulling at her so that we were face to face again before she worked her way into my pants.

"What? Why are you..."

I cut her off with my lips, biting gently against her bottom lip before soothing it with my tongue. "I need to be inside of you," I moaned into her mouth, my words a little bit muffled but definitely understood.

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Leaning back, she lifted the t-shirt that hugged her chest so damn perfectly over her head, revealing a deep purple lacy...thing...that definitely couldn't be described as a bra. She caught me gaping, my mouth wide open as I stared at her body, her breasts barely contained by the flimsy material.

"You like?" she teased, her fingers trailing down the front of my body until she reached the top of my jeans, her fingers undoing the button before sliding down the zipper. As she lifted herself slightly, I followed her movements, though I wasn't able to help her remove my pants as my hands had somehow attached themselves to her chest, my fingers flicking over her pebbled nipples as I felt the air meet the bare skin of my ass, my thighs.

"I'll take that as a yes," she giggled as I reached behind her to undo the clasp.

"Its...there are no words...but I want to see you."

"Fair enough," she breathed before unbutton her jeans. After tossing her bra across the room, I helped her slide her jeans off, pulling her lacy panties with them.

When we were both naked, everything stopped and, suddenly, the atmosphere changed again. Both of us were panting as our skin touched for the first time in weeks, but there was also a calmness surrounding us, as if everything was right again with the world now that we were together.

Lifting a shaky hand, I brushed a stray strand of hair away from her face before leaning forward to place a kiss on her forehead, then her nose, then her sweet, pouty lips.

I felt her smile against my kiss, her lips curving upward as they moved against mine.

"This is right, isn't it? Us, together?" I asked when we pulled apart for air, my eyes opened, as I was suddenly desperate to confirm that this wasn't a dream and that Bella really was in my arms.

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Her beautiful eyes were filled with shiny tears, a contradiction to the smile on her face. "It's so right, Edward, so, so right."

"Everything's off without you," I admitted.

She nodded, her eyes telling me that she knew exactly what I meant as a tear slipped down her cheek--that we were both glad to be back to our daily routines, but that something had happened on the shores of South Carolina that had altered us completely. We had entered the week as solitary individuals, content in our independence, but ended the week as two halves to a whole.

"I hate that you're in Chicago," she blurted out, instantly closing her mouth tightly as soon as the words tumbled from her lips.

I shook my head back and forth, lifting my fingers to run them across her lips until she loosened them. "I hate it, too."

"Chicago? Or that you're apart from me?"

"Both."

"Really?" She gaped, her mouth falling open in surprise. "You hate Chicago? But it's your home."

Despite the fact that my dick was literally aching to be inside of her, I answered her question, though in the back of my mind I wondered what had possessed me to begin *talking* at a time like this.

"It's really lonely and my apartment is really boring compared to yours," I answered, lifting my hips against hers in an effort to remind her of what we had been heading toward.

"It's because you don't have a slutmuffin," she moaned as my dick slid against her wetness, joking for a moment before stopping herself. "Wait, why are we talking right now?" Thank God we were finally on the same page.

Texts From Last Night

"Because it's probably the right thing to do." *The fuck is the wrong with me?* There were centimeters, literally centimeters, between our bodies and I was continuing our conversation?

She reached down and wrapped her fingers around my length, causing me to hiss in anticipation. "Or, maybe not. Yeah, no talking, more touching."

Her hand pulled back suddenly. "Sorry, I didn't mean to."

"You're apologizing about touching my dick?"

"Yeah?"

"Don't," I said, reaching for her hand and returning it to its previous position. "Okay, let's talk," I demanded as she began to pump her hand up and down. *Fuck, I should turn in my man card now. What the Hell was it about Bella that made my balls shrivel into ovaries?*

"Seriously? Right now?"

"Seriously. I'll just--fuck, that feels good--come out and say it. A year from now, I don't want to be in Chicago."

Her movements stopped.

"What?" Her shock was written all over her face.

I nodded, my eyes meeting hers as her fingers loosened on my dick. "A year from now, I don't want to be in Chicago," I repeated before adding, "especially if you're not there with me."

"So, where do you want to be?" She asked carefully.

"Wherever you are."

Texts From Last Night

Her eyes widened minutely before returning to their normal size and, again, her lips melted into mine in a kiss that said more than words could. *I love you. I want to be where you are, too. I want this.*

Without words, Bella lifted her hips slightly before lowering herself onto me, both of us moaning loudly at the familiar contact. Our hips moved together and it wasn't long before I felt her walls clenching around me as she cried out, her fingernails digging into my scalp as my lips wrapped around her right nipple. Two more thrusts and I spilled inside of her, crying out as we collapsed onto the bed behind us, a tangle of limbs and sweat.

No words were exchanged as we lay there wrapped in each other's arms as the rain beat against the small window in Bella's room. Eventually, her breathing evened out and I found myself nodding off as well, only to be woken by a loud banging noise coming from the general vicinity of her bedroom door.

"You've got to be kidding me..." I murmured, sitting up carefully as to not wake Bella before climbing out of the bed, pulling her door open slightly as I hid my nakedness behind it.

"Can I help you?" I asked the woman on the side. Judging by the slutty attire and lipstick smeared across her face, I figured it was the sluttmuffin herself.

Her mouth opened and closed several times as her eyes traveled from the top of my head to the middle of my chest. No doubt she was imagining what was hidden behind the door as she made assumptions about my messy hair that probably screamed, "I just got fucked!"

"I'm Jessica," she purred. *Disgusting.*

"Edward," I stated simply, not extending my hand for fear of contracting a disease.

"Bella's...boyfriend?" She asked carefully, confusion etched on her features.

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I nodded, pressing my lips into a flat line as I watched her move from foot to foot nervously.

"I didn't think you were real."

I threw my head back and laughed before stating, "And I didn't think you would really be as big of a bitch as she described," before slamming the door in her face.

Bella woke up as I climbed back into bed, folding my body around hers as I palmed one of her boobs. "What was that?"

"The walking STD."

"Jessica?"

"In the red, blistered flesh."

She giggled, the sound vibrating against my chest. "That's terrible, Edward."

"Truth hurts," I sighed before tucking my head into the crook of her neck and falling asleep with her scent wrapped around me.

xXx

Bella and I spent the next three days with each other, enjoying the city and being together again. She took both Thursday and Friday off, choosing instead to spend the day with me. Both days were spent traipsing from one end of the island of Manhattan to the other, stopping at every tourist destination along the way--the Statue of Liberty, Wall Street, the shops on Fifth Avenue, and Central Park were several of the highlights, as were off the wall places that Bella had discovered while living in the city.

On Friday night, we went to dinner with her friend Angela and the guy she had recently started dating, Ben. After dinner, we joined them for drinks at a bar Bella went to occasionally, Off the Wagon. Ben was hilarious, Angela was

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sweet and protective of Bella, and, apparently, it was tequila night.

Bella thought it would be hilarious to reenact some of the scenes from our afternoon of tequila and body shots so, we did. Angela pretended to be scandalized, but Ben didn't even attempt to be offended, instead reaching a fist across the bar to bump it against mine. By the end of the evening, both of us were drunk and Bella attempted to drag me into an adult novelty store, something about pink cats, but I managed to pull her away and into a taxi.

Though I had been convinced that I loved Bella before leaving Charleston, my feelings were solidified during my trip to the city. I realized that not only did I love her, but that I loved when she was happy and, it seemed, New York City was something that made her really, really happy. So, on Saturday afternoon as she skipped gleefully through a patch of sun on the sidewalk in Central Park, I realized that there was no way I could ask her to leave her city, no matter how desperately I wanted her in Chicago with me. Truthfully, I wasn't sure Chicago could bring her the kind of happiness that New York did. The atmosphere was different, the people were different, even the landscapes were different. New York was her home, and Chicago was just the place I lived.

My flight on Sunday wasn't set to depart until six o'clock, leaving us plenty of time for a late brunch and a little more sightseeing. Bright eyed and glowing, Bella took me to her favorite place for brunch on the Upper East Side after a lazy morning in bed, touching and caressing our goodbye. We ordered omelets and mimosas and avoided the fact that I was going to be leaving for the airport later that afternoon. When the waiter arrived with our check, though, I knew I had to address the inevitable.

"So..." I began lamely as I tucked my credit card into the little black folder holding the check.

"So?" Bella asked expectantly, leaning forward in her chair.

"I have to leave this afternoon."

"You do," she agreed with a frown.

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"But I want to come back, for sure, and you're coming to Chicago soon."

Bella grinned before proclaiming cheerily, "Two weeks."

"Two weeks," I echoed with a grin. "Then I'll come to New York again, right?"

She nodded slowly before stating hopefully, "I hope you'll come back to New York."

As if I could stay away.

"Speaking of...I have to, um, ask you something and I want you to answer me honestly," I stated, clearing my throat as the question came out more formal and planned than I had expected. In fact, it sounded foreboding and I hadn't meant for it to at all.

Concern filled her eyes, no doubt in response to the tone I had spoken in. "Okay, shoot," she demanded in a shaky voice.

"You don't want to leave New York, do you?"

Her eyes filled with tears as silence settled around us. It was clear that she was attempting to formulate an answer that would be honest without hurting my feelings in any way. As I watched worry flood her features, I rubbed my thumb gently across her knuckles.

"You know, it's okay if you don't," I assured her, desperate for her to know that, from now on, my home would be wherever she was.

Her voice squeaked as she whispered, "Really?"

"Yeah, really," I smiled at her. "I mean, I kind of like it here and I only have one year left before my residency."

"No shit?"

Texts From Last Night

I laughed at her bluntness.

"Sorry," she collected herself, brushing the tears that had slipped down her cheeks away. "What I mean is...you'd want to come to New York? I mean, I know that people kind of get on New York highs when they come to visit, I wouldn't want you to make any..."

"Stop," I demanded, holding my hand up before sliding my chair over so that we were sitting next to each other. Throwing my arm across her shoulders as I pulled her into my side, I attempted to explain myself. "I'm not on a New York high and I'm not going to make a rash decision. I just wanted you to know that I really enjoyed my time here, with you, and that I would be okay with moving on to the next phase of my life here, also with you."

"Promise?"

I nodded, placing a short kiss on her nose as I cupped her cheek in my palm. "I've been thinking about it all weekend, before the weekend, really."

In all honesty, I had been toying with the idea of moving to New York from the moment that I said goodbye to Bella in the Charleston airport because in that second, an ache so deep that I hadn't been able to shake it for two and a half weeks had settled in my chest, deepening significantly when I saw the lights of Chicago that paled in comparison to those of Manhattan. Stepping into my cold, empty apartment was another painful experience and even my parent's trip into the city to visit me hadn't relieved the ache.

"You have?" She asked as a smile lit up every inch of her face.

"I was miserable for two and a half weeks, pretty girl."

"I think that I would quit being lazy and move out of my shoebox apartment if you were the reason..." She said, lightening the tone as she shifted her head back and forth in contemplation.

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"Would you...want to live together?" I asked slowly, carefully because all of a sudden the conversation had jumped light years ahead of where I had imagined it going. Sure, I was a little freaked the fuck out, but mainly I was enjoying the euphoric feeling that was bubbling up in my chest at the mere mention of a future with Bella.

She nodded happily before stopping suddenly. "Wait, are we moving too fast? We haven't even been together for a month."

"We've been friends for longer," I reminded her, lacing the fingers of my left hand with those of her right.

"True," she said, bouncing a little in seat with excitement. "You know what this means?"

"That we'll be roommates and we can have sex whenever and wherever we want? That you can walk around naked?" I joked, poking her in the stomach before placing a sloppy kiss on her neck.

"Yes, to all of that," she said blushing. "But it also means..." she held up her hand, pausing dramatically before stating, "no more slutmuffs!"

xXx

Our goodbyes at the airport were much less dramatic than they had been in Charleston. I wasn't sure whether it was because we knew that we would be seeing each other again in two weeks, or because we had discussed a future beyond next weekend, but either way it was a lot easier to step through security when Bella wasn't standing in front of me with tears streaming down her face.

Chicago welcomed me with sunshine this time, though my apartment was still empty and cold, void of the warm decorations and furniture that Bella's held. I called Bella to let her know that I arrived safely before quickly shooting an e-mail to my advisor, begging him to meet with me the following morning to discuss my options for my residency. I knew that the application process wouldn't begin until the spring, but I wanted to get as much of a head start as

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possible to ensure that I found a program either in or near New York. Luckily, my advisor was glued to his BlackBerry and returned my e-mail quickly, letting me know that he could meet with me the following morning at ten a.m.

The meeting went well and I left encouraged with my options. From what I understood, my grades would allow me to pick and choose the residencies that I applied to, though at some point during clinicals I would need to settle on a specific field. Though I had been leaning towards pediatrics for some time, my advisor assured me that I would be experiencing it all in the coming months and that I needed to keep my mind open.

My professors returned from Europe, jetlagged and giddy over the surgery they had observed. As I listened to each of them tell the same story only slightly differently each time in all of my classes, I couldn't help but zone out as I remembered my own weekend with Bella, familiarizing myself with the city that I hoped to one day share with her.

As the days progressed, I settled back into my routine and, before I knew it, I was on my way to the airport to pick Bella up for her visit to Chicago. Like in New York, our visit seemed too short, before she left, I pulled out a calendar and we planned out the next several months as far as visits were concerned. Bella would be spending Thanksgiving in Chicago with my family and me, though we would be spending Christmas apart, we would be reuniting in New York for New Year's Eve.

With each visit to New York, I found myself falling in love with the city just as Bella had. During every trip, Bella and I would go to the gazebo in Battery Park that she had taken me to that first night, sometimes taking a picnic or ice cream, but usually just enjoying time with each other. Restaurants and coffee shops were given the titles of "our favorite Italian place," or "our favorite place for coffee on a rainy day," and, soon, I found myself staying in Chicago less and less, opting instead for weekends in New York.

School was...there...and I completed everything that was necessary to work towards my degree, gathering applications for residencies so that I would be prepared when the time came to apply, though I would have to wait until May

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to hear from any of them. Clinicals were exhausting, but I enjoyed them as they solidified my belief that I wanted to become a doctor, which was a good thing, considering I had poured almost four years of my life into medical school.

By Thanksgiving, though, the weekends away had started to wear on me, physically, mentally, and financially. Though I understood that the trips back and forth were vital to mine and Bella's relationship, I was eager to have her in Chicago again, this time to spend time with my family. As I drove to the airport to pick her up, I found myself smiling with excitement, eager to see her and hopeful that her Thanksgiving visit would be much less dramatic than Tanya's had been.

Author's Note: Y'all. I am so, so, so sorry for how long I went between updates...between settling into a new job and winding up summer activities, time has simply been scarce. Please, please forgive me! Also, in regards to review replies, I know I failed. I have, however, read each and every one of your reviews and...holy cow...you pushed me over the 2,000 mark! I'm in awe. Seriously. All of you who continue to review, alert, and favorite this story-THANK YOU!

On a related note, there are only a couple of TFLN chapter remaining, as well as an epilogue (or two).

My beta is amazing, and has a serious talent for channeling boy brain. Also, my twitter ladies, I miss y'all...sorry I've been completely busy and sketchy lately...being a big girl isn't as fun as being silly with all of you is!

If you can find it in your sweet little hearts to review after I made you wait forever for this chapter, I'd like that :)

Up next: Thanksgiving with the Cullen's!

Keg Stands and Family

A/N: The people aren't mine...the story is. Note at the bottom :)

Chapter 28: Keg Stands and Family

By Thanksgiving, Edward and I had settled into as normal of a relationship as we could manage, despite the fact that we were living in two separate cities. I worked, he did the school thing, and we managed to see each other every couple of weekends. It wasn't what either of us would have preferred, but it was our reality regardless.

I flew out of New York the day before Thanksgiving for Chicago, barely making my late flight as I fought with the tourists pouring into the city for the Macy's Thanksgiving Parade and all of the holiday festivities that surrounded it. The line to make it through security had been horrendous and, just when I thought I had made it through the worst of it, I encountered what could only have been New York virgins, strolling through the terminals with wide, awestruck eyes. Two years ago, I would have empathized with them completely, but not today. Today, I had only one thing on my mind-Edward.

My flight was uneventful, calm and quiet like most red-eyes and, I was able to catch an hour or so of sleep despite my eagerness to see Edward for the first time in three weeks-the longest of our separations since the summer. It had been our longest separation of the summer, and I was more than a little anxious to see him. I awoke as the plane touched down, the jolt of wheels meeting tarmac jarring me awake and leaving me groggy.

The moment I saw Edward waiting for me in baggage claim, bundled up in a thick jacket, scarf, and hat, I was wide awake again, my speed picking up as I rushed towards him.

"Pretty girl," he greeted when I was close enough to hear, a toothy grin spreading across his face.

Texts From Last Night

Without speaking I threw myself into his arms, murmuring the words, "I am so glad to see you again," into his warm neck.

"You have no idea," he breathed into my hair as he squeezed me tight against him, lifting me off the floor for a moment before settling me back down and pulling back. "Nice flight?"

I nodded, my eyes reacquainting themselves with his before I added, "I was able to get a bit of sleep."

"That's good, because Mom is chomping at the bit to see you; she and Dad insisted on staying up late to see you when you got in. Is this your only bag?" He gestured to the small suitcase at my feet, completely forgotten by me.

"It is," I confirmed before addressing his other statement with, "Really?"

"Yes, really," he chuckled as he bent down to pick up my suitcase, slinging the strap over his shoulder before wrapping an arm around my waist. "She can't wait to see you. I don't think she's ever been this excited about me bringing someone home in, well, ever."

"I'm glad. Though, I'm pretty sure she's always liked me."

He looked down at me as he turned us in the direction of his car, a smirk on his lips. "Is that so?"

"I tell no lies."

"What makes you so sure?" He urged, his fingers dipping beneath my jacket and digging into my sides playfully, making me giggle.

"Remember that time," giggle, "that she came to visit," giggle, "and Alice and I took her to the bars?"

"No, I don't remember," he said, puzzled.

Texts From Last Night

More tickling as we approached what I assumed was one of Carlisle or Esme's cars and he dropped my bag by the trunk before pushing me against the side, planting both of his hands on my sides and moving them against my sweet, ticklish spots.

I was gasping with laughter as I said, "We let her pregame with us and," gasp, "she loved it so much that she wanted the whole 'experience'."

"You got my mom drunk?"

"Um...yeah."

He stilled completely, his hands remaining on me. "How did I not know this?"

"You were studying for a final, or something. It was the weekend she came into town to help you pack up your apartment before graduation."

"And I allowed her to go to the bars with you and Alice? What was I thinking?" As if it had happened the day before, he ran his hand through his hair nervously.

"I think that Emmett was there, too. You must have been stressed about your exams, or something."

"Why did she never tell me this?"

"It may have something to do with the fact that she did a keg stand that night. Quite impressively, I might add."

Edward's eyes widened. "Shit, no she didn't. And I missed it?"

"I sent you a text message, but you never responded. See, what happened was..."

XxX

Texts From Last Night

Bella POV

May 2010, Senior Year

(407): Your mom can still drink beer standing on her head! Talk to you tomorrow :)

"Mama C, what's going on?" Emmett bellowed as he opened the door to the apartment he shared with Jasper and Edward. "You know, Edward's at the library. We're all just, uh..."

"Getting ready to go out?" She asked with a knowing grin. "Hello Isabella, Alice," she added as she pushed her way into the apartment and gently placed her bags on the floor. We waved in greeting as she continued speaking. "What's your drink tonight?"

I glanced nervously at Alice who shrugged cluelessly. "I...uh...margaritas."

"Oh, I love a good margarita. Care to share? Edward said to make myself at home but, you know, I wouldn't mind having a little bit of fun."

"Are you sure? I mean, Edward should be back soon..." I said, worry filling my voice as I stood and headed towards the kitchen to fulfill her request.

She waved her hand flippantly. "He'll be at the library all night, just like his father when push comes to shove, that boy. I'm sure he won't mind if you three show me how it's done. Where are Rosalie and Jasper?"

"Studying, too," Emmett answered.

"Is that so? Well, we'll just have to have a little fun with out them, right?"

I handed her a fresh margarita and gestured for her to take a seat. Daintily, she planted herself on the sofa and took a sip of her drink. "Mmm...these are good!"

Texts From Last Night

"Mama C, are you going to go out with us?" Emmett called from the kitchen as he undoubtedly poured himself a shot. "You think you can keep up?"

"Hell yes!" She cheered before taking a large sip of her margarita. "I mean, that is if you're okay with an old lady crashing your party."

I felt a large smile spread across my face and turned to face Alice, seeing my smile mirrored on her own features. "We don't mind," she said sweetly. "Are you sure you aren't tired, though?"

"I slept on the plane and, you know, I can sleep when I'm dead."

"That's what I like to hear!" Emmett said, fistpumping as he entered the room. "Here, take this."

She eagerly accepted it. "Oooh, what is it?"

"A shot."

"Emmett..." I warned.

"What?" He shrugged. "Mama C wants to have fun, Mama C gets to have fun. And, for the record, it's a lemon drop."

"I love Vodka," Esme sighed before downing the clear liquid. "Thank you, dear. Now, girls, am I presentable for the evening?" She gestured to the jeans and blouse she was wearing. It wasn't very similar to the dresses Alice and I were sporting, but she looked stylish and put together.

"It's perfect," Alice assured her. "You'll be the hit of New Haven."

Esme tossed her head back, laughing. "I doubt that, dear, but thank you. Should we get this show on the road?"

"Well, uh, it's kind of early..."

Texts From Last Night

"Early?" Esme frowned, confused, as she gestured to the clock. It was 10 o'clock.

"Downtown doesn't really get going until around eleven thirty," I explained.

"But, we could take you over to the fraternity house, introduce you to all of the brothers."

"I wouldn't want to make Edward uncomfortable tomorrow...knowing that his mother was traipsing around his fraternity..."

"He won't mind," Alice inserted, cutting her off.

"If you're sure..."

"We're sure!" Emmett declared, ending the conversation. "Let's go!"

xXx

Esme was a hit at the fraternity house-taking shots with a couple of the brothers after taking a tour of the areas of the house she didn't get see on the parent's weekend tour. Afterwards, Emmett goaded a pledge into driving us to the bars and, by midnight, she had dropped her polite exterior and was dancing with Alice and myself as she bought us drinks.

It was awesome and, repeatedly, I found myself thinking about how much Edward would have enjoyed seeing his mother loosening up and reliving her college years.

"Don't you wish Edward could see this?" I asked out loud at some point in the evening.

Esme nodded vigorously. "Yes, oh my, he might be mortified."

"Eduardo would love it. You know what?" Emmett asked, his face suddenly filled with glee.

Texts From Last Night

"What?" Esme asked, completely taken and intrigued by her son's friend.

"You, Mama C, need to do a keg stand."

She placed her drink on a table and held her hands up defensively. "Oh, no no no. I haven't done one of those in thirty years."

"No time like the present to see if you've still got it," Alice said, encouraging her.

"Do it! Do it!" Emmett chanted.

"Yeah," I added. "Show these college kids what you're made of!"

Suddenly, she straightened. "You know, I think I will!"

"Yo, Riley," Emmett hollered, getting the attention of their fraternity brother that worked at the bar. "Mama C needs to do a keg stand, pronto."

"You got it, Em," Riley said. "Mrs. Cullen, I presume?"

Esme nodded, grinning at him as he led her behind the bar. "You know Edward?"

"I do," he confirmed. "Do you know how to do this?"

"Has it changed at all in the last thirty years?"

Riley shrugged. "Not that I know of."

"Then let's do this bitch!"

Alice, Emmett, and I were unable to contain our excitement as we helped prep Mrs. Cullen for her keg stand, Emmett and I holding her legs as Alice held up her camera to capture the moment for eternity. After giving us a thumbs-up, Riley handed her the spout to one of the kegs in the bar and she was

Texts From Last Night

off...drinking beer as if it was her job. After a minute or so, she waved, signaling that she was done, and Emmett and I lowered her to the floor.

"Well?" Emmett asked as she wiped her mouth in a very unladylike manner. "How was it?"

"Just like riding a bike," she said with a large smile. "Someone needs to let Edward know!"

"Done," I said holding up my cell phone, text message already sending.

xXx

"Is that the same weekend that she wore her sunglasses as we packed up my apartment and demanded something greasy for breakfast?" Edward asked after I quickly recounted the tale.

By now, he had moved to toss my bag in the trunk and helped me into the passenger said before rounding the front of the car to take up residence in the driver's seat.

"One in the same," I answered with a smug smile. "I can't believe she never told you."

"Neither can I," he said, shaking his head back and forth. "I feel completely left out."

"Sorry, babe, we thought she told you." With a smile, I reached across and rubbed a reassuring hand across his thigh.

"She didn't," he countered, still frowning.

"You're really upset by this, aren't you?"

"Not upset, just disappointed that I missed it is all."

Texts From Last Night

"I'll have Alice e-mail me the pictures so you can see them."

"Please do. I want evidence."

Turning my attention away from him and back to the road, I laughed lightly at his reaction to my story.

"So," I began lightly after a few moments. "What's the plan for the weekend?"

It appeared as if we were getting close to the Cullen home, heading in the completely opposite direction of Edward's apartment in downtown Chicago. Slowly, the skyscrapers and city streets were disappearing as buildings and street corners gave way to sprawling patches of land and subdivisions.

Edward took a deep breath before beginning his spiel. "As we speak, my mother is preparing tea and a snack for you-she's convinced that you'll need something to eat after your flight. So, we'll have to visit with her and probably Dad for a bit tonight before heading to bed," he paused, groaning lightly.

"What's with the sour face?" I asked.

"I was hoping for some alone time," he whined, reaching over to place a warm hand on my thigh.

Rolling my eyes playfully, I brushed away his hand. "Keep it in your pants, big boy, I haven't seen your parents in years."

"I haven't seen you in three weeks," he countered.

I'm not going to lie, I wanted some alone time just as badly as Edward did, but I knew that I needed to make a good impression this evening. Sure, I had helped Esme Cullen participate in her first post-college keg stand, but that had been a different time. Then, I had been Edward's best friend, not Edward's girlfriend.

"Edward," I warned. "Please. This is important."

Texts From Last Night

He cut his eyes towards me as he turned into a large subdivision. "Bella, are you nervous?"

I shrugged. "No, I mean, not really..." I trailed off, my voice betraying me.

"You seemed fine at the airport." As he spoke, he slowed the car, hopefully in an effort to give our conversation more time.

"I was excited to see you, mainly, and now that we're so close it's just...real."

With a concerned sigh, Edward slowed the car again, this time stopping completely in the middle of the street. Turning to face me, he cupped my face in his hands. "Bella," he pleaded, "please, do not be nervous. My parents will love you just as much as I do."

I melted at his words, my heart swelling with love for the man across from me. "Yeah," I agreed as his eyes shined. "You're right. I'm being silly."

"Yes, you are," he agreed before pressing his lips to mine, pulling away before either of us could deepen it. "I love that you're concerned, though, because I can't wait for them to meet you as my girlfriend."

My lips spread into a grin at his words. "Let's go see them," I said before placing another gentle kiss on his lips.

xXx

Any and all fears I had in regards to 'meeting the parents...again' were squashed within moments of entered Carlisle and Esme's warm, beautiful home. From the moment that Edward opened the front door and announced our arrival, I could feel the love shared between the family extended towards me.

Carlisle and Esme both greeted me with a large hug, words of welcome and kindness filling the air. After ordering Edward to deliver my bag upstairs, Esme pulled me into the kitchen where, as predicted, a kettle of warm water was on the stove in preparation for tea and some simple snacks were plated on

Texts From Last Night

the breakfast bar.

"Was it a good flight?" She asked as she poured water into mugs already waiting with tea bags.

I nodded, sharing with her the same information I had earlier. She laughed when I added a bit about the wide-eyed tourists in the airport.

"Carlisle and I are very fond of New York City and, if I'm not mistaken, I think Edward is starting to share our opinion," she commented as she climbed onto the stool at the breakfast bar next to me and took a sip of her own cup of tea.

"I think he's starting to warm to it," I said, nodding in agreement as I echoed her movements.

"But, from what I can tell, he'd warm to wherever you are," she added with a knowing smile.

Her words were simple, but overwhelming at the same time. Of course, Edward had said nearly the same thing on his visit to the city when he assured me that he would be okay with relocating to the city, but it had never dawned on me that he would go *anywhere* that I was.

"Don't look so surprised, dear," Esme began when it became clear that words were failing me, reaching a hand across the space between us to rest it on top of mine. "That boy has been falling for you for years-I saw it when the two of you were at Yale."

"Really?"

"Really," she said with a sure nod. "Even when he was with that wretch, Tanya, I could see it; there was always something deeper to your friendship."

"I never realized..." I trailed off, my eyes trained on the cup in front of me.

"You know what they say," she paused briefly. "Love is blind."

Texts From Last Night

"And, apparently, so is Dad," Edward said, joining us in the kitchen with a frown.

"What did he do?" Esme asked, turning to look at her agitated son.

Edward sighed loudly as he settled onto the stool next to me. "Apparently, he is under the impression that Bella will be sleeping in the guest room."

My eyes widened briefly, but I quickly covered my alarm over the idea of having to sleep under the same roof from Edward but not have his arms around me.

"That's okay, I understand," I said quickly, attempting to tell Edward with my eyes to simmer down. "Your house, your rules."

Esme rolled her eyes. "Don't be silly. That man is so old fashioned sometimes that it's past the point of ridiculous."

I elbowed Edward in the side, winking at him as I remembered his chivalry that first day that we realized our attraction, his reluctance to consummate our relationship while inebriated.

"Bella," Esme said firmly, "I will speak with him. The two of you are grown and I am under no illusion that the two of you don't share a bed when you are together. Sleep with Edward in his room tonight, it's completely fine."

"If you're sure," I muttered slowly.

Edward placed a hand on the back of my neck, rubbing slowly. "She's sure," he answered before she had time to change her mind.

"I'm sure," she said with finality. "When the two of you get ready for bed, discreetly move her things down to your room and I'll take care of your father."

"Take care of me, how?" Carlisle asked, entering the kitchen in a similar fashion to Edward. As he walked, a warm smile on his face, I couldn't help but

Texts From Last Night

make comparisons between the two men, smiling at the fact that Edward would, more than likely, age well. Not that it mattered, I would still love him regardless of wrinkles and thinning hair, but it was nice to see that I probably wouldn't have to.

Esme winked coyly at her husband. "Oh, Carlisle," she giggled, batting her eyelashes. "Not in front of our son and his girlfriend..."

"Yes, please, not in front of your son," Edward said, covering his eyes like a child.

Carlisle laughed heartily as he joined us, all of the bar stools now occupied. The room grew silent as the four of us snacked and sipped on the tea Esme had provided until, suddenly, Edward made more noise than necessary as he settled his cup of tea onto the counter.

"Speaking of things to take care of, I have a bone to pick with you, Mom," Edward said as soon as the attention turned to him.

"Okay..." Esme said wearily.

"Edward," I warned.

He ignored me, instead turning his body entirely to face his mother. "Tell me, why was I never informed of the evening of debauchery you had with dear Alice, Emmett, and Bella?"

Esme's mouth fell open in surprise. "They never told you?"

"Told him what?" Carlisle inserted.

"That mom went out on the town with my friends, did keg stands, and no one ever mentioned it to me."

Carlisle's eyebrows rose, challenging his wife as well. "You did a keg stand?"

Texts From Last Night

"It was silly," Esme said, waving her hand flippantly. "No big deal."

"Apparently, Alice has pictures," Edward added.

Shit. I bit my lip nervously.

"Does she?" Esme asked, seemingly proud.

I nodded, lip still trapped between my teeth. "Mmhmm."

"I would love to see them!"

"Mom, you can't be serious."

"I want to see them, too," Carlisle added, grinning like the cat who caught the canary. "I haven't seen Esme doing a keg stand since college."

"Well, clearly, I am the only one in the room that hasn't seen my *mother* doing a keg stand."

I had to laugh at that comment, the hilarity of the entire situation becoming too much. Soon, Esme was laughing as well and, before I knew it, the four of us had filled the room with laughter.

"Please," Esme gasped between spurts of laughter, "just do not tell Grandmother Cullen tomorrow at Thanksgiving dinner."

"Oh, I will," Edward said proudly.

"You will not," I told him. "Grandmothers don't need to know things like that."

"Yes," Carlisle inserted, "please don't. Mother cannot handle information like that, plus I doubt she knows what a keg stand is anyway and we do not need to get into that..."

"Fine, I *might* not tell."

Texts From Last Night

"I'll accept that for now," Esme said gratefully.

"Speaking of tomorrow, what is the plan? Edward started to tell me, but then we pulled in the driveway and he wasn't able to finish," I asked, changing the story just a bit so as to avoid sharing my nervousness on the drive in.

The question was all Esme needed to launch into a spiel about what time we needed to be up for breakfast and to begin cooking, assuring me that I could sleep in as late as I wished. I knew that it would be impossible to sleep late, that I would feel like a load sleeping in while she began preparing for the big meal for the afternoon, but I thanked her anyway. As she continued, I felt my eyes begin to grow heavy, but managed to pay attention as she outlined what time the grandmothers would be arriving and approximately what time we would be eating. When she finished, I was leaning forward on my hands, forcing my eyelids to stay open.

"Oh, Bella, you're exhausted. Edward, take her to bed," Esme commanded without missing a beat.

"No, no, I'm fine."

"You're fighting to keep your eyes open. Please, go to bed," Esme said with a soft laugh.

"If you're sure, I mean, I hate to just go straight to bed...you and Carlisle stayed up late to receive me..."

"Don't you worry, there will be plenty of time for catching up while you're here. Go!"

I nodded, standing slowly from my stool. Edward trailed behind me, his hand resting on the small of my back as we walked towards the stairs. Once we were upstairs, Edward pointed me in the direction of his room as he went to gather my things. After sliding my shoes off, I climbed onto his bed, smiling when Edward's scent filled my senses. Completely at ease, I closed my eyes and drifted off to sleep without even changing out of the clothes I had traveled in.

Texts From Last Night

xXx

The next morning was spent chopping and stirring, measuring and baking. Esme and I make anything and everything necessary for a Thanksgiving meal, minus the turkey that Edward and Carlisle were planning to deep fry later in the day. It was surprisingly comfortable, sharing a kitchen with Edward's mother as we prepared for the biggest meal of the year. We swapped stories of my childhood and Edward's, laughing at the antics of both of our childhoods and, later, our college years.

Around three, Edward and Carlisle ventured out of the house to pick up the matriarch of the family, arriving back with her quickly. Grandmother Cullen was surprisingly spry and active for her age, bossing Esme and I around the kitchen as mothers are prone to do.

In the end, we ate at 5 o'clock, just as Esme had planned. The meal was delicious and I couldn't keep a smile off my face knowing that I had been responsible for a large part of it. After sufficiently stuffing ourselves, the group broke apart to slip into turkey comas in an attempt to make room for dessert.

"I can't move," I moaned as I fell back against Edward's bed, my head landing against the pillows as my eyes closed. "Too much turkey...too much stuffing...

"Ditto," Edward grumbled as he collapsed face down next to me; his head missing the pillows completely as he buried it in the comforter.

"I'm never eating again."

"What about dessert?" Edward asked, his voice muffled by the bed.

"I'm never eating again...after dessert," I amended with a smile.

Edward chuckled as he lifted a hand to teasingly run his finger across the sliver of flesh between my skirt and blouse, exposed by my supine position. Despite the fullness of my stomach, my skin tingled under his touch.

Texts From Last Night

"That's what I thought," he said. "Everything go okay with you and my mom?"

"Yeah, it went really well actually," I said with a smile, freshly-made memories from the morning flooding my mind. "She's great."

"She is," he agreed with a nod. "I missed you, though."

"Missed you, too," I said, reaching over to run my fingers through his hair. "What *were* you and your dad doing all day?" While Esme and I had been in the kitchen, I had somehow been completely oblivious to Edward's actions, completely content to spend time with his mother and not wonder constantly what he was doing.

"Just running some errands," he answered vaguely.

"Errands?" I asked, wanting more.

"Yeah, you know, guy stuff."

"Guy stuff. Right."

"Nothing major, just catching up on some things."

"If you say so..." I trailed off, still curious.

"I do say so," he said, changing his position so that he could lean up and press his lips to mine, effectively ending the conversation. It wasn't long before his sweet, simple kiss turned into something more and he had readjusted so that he was on top of me, his knee nudging my legs apart so that his leg could slide between mine.

"Three weeks is too long," he murmured against my skin as his lips moved to my neck, biting gently before soothing the spot with his tongue. "And I love having you in my house, laughing and spending time with my family."

"I love being in your house."

Texts From Last Night

"I think," kiss, "that even," kiss, "Grandmother Cullen liked you."

"Probably because I didn't ask for her rings," I joked as he kissed me across my jaw, his face coming to rest in front of mine again.

"Did you like them, though? Her rings?" He asked in a serious tone, his eyes dancing with hope and lust.

My eyebrows furrowed as I attempted to find the meaning behind his question. Did he simply want to know, or was there a deeper question involved?

"I, uh..." I stammered. "They're beautiful rings."

"So, you would, uh, like to, you know, wear them?" I could tell that he was nervous as he asked the question, his eyes darting away from mine as he hovered above me.

With a smile, I rubbed my hands across his back reassuringly. "Can I answer without sounding like Tanya?"

A small smile spread across his lips, the worry lines leaving his forehead. "Yes," he answered simply.

"Yes," I paused, placing a kiss on his lips. "I would wear them. Proudly."

Then, he was beaming, his lips spread wide as his the expression in his eyes changed to complete joy and happiness. "Good," he sighed, "because today, seeing you with my family, only solidified the fact that I want you in my life. One day, I'm going to make you my fiancé and, then, I'm going to make you my wife."

I gasped at his words, but couldn't find anything to say to match his statements. Instead, I savored the kisses he was placing on my neck, my breathing accelerating, a combination of lust and awe. Edward wanted me to be his wife, he wanted me to wear his grandmother's rings. He wanted me. Forever.

Texts From Last Night

"What do you," kiss, "say about," kiss, "that?" He asked, his breath fanning across my skin.

"I..." couldn't form words as his strong hand began to slide beneath my blouse, over the skin of my stomach before stopping beneath my breasts.

Pulling back, his eyes met mine again, full of love and lust and something else, something magical that told me his words were real and heartfelt. "God, you're beautiful," he murmured, more to himself than to me before bringing his mouth down to meet mine.

I wanted to tell him that I loved him, that I couldn't wait to one day be his wife, his partner, but his lips were on mine, then his tongue was sliding into my mouth, his hardness began pressing against my thigh and, suddenly, words seemed trifle.

My arms wrapped around Edward as our legs and tongues tangled. Quickly, his hands moved to begin undoing the buttons of my blouse. With each brush of his fingers, my body reacted to his touch, desire pooling between my legs.

"Three weeks...never again."

"Never again," he agreed, sitting up to brush my shirt over my shoulders before pulling it off completely. Taking advantage of his elevated position, I did some unbuttoning of my own, quickly releasing him from his shirt before pulling his body back to mine and attacking his lips with mine as he undid my bra and tossed it across the room.

"Damn," he breathed suddenly, pulling his lips away and dropping his head to my shoulder.

"Damn, yeah, this is good...I love feeling your weight on top of me..." I whispered against the warm skin of his shoulder as he froze above me. "Let go, babe."

"No," he paused, "my parents..."

Texts From Last Night

"Are downstairs," I interjected, wanting nothing more than to get his skin back against mine as I pulled against his shoulders.

"The walls are thin..." he trailed off, though I could hear the weakening of his voice.

"We'll be quiet," I assured him as I lifted up and pulled his bottom lip between my teeth. I could feel him giving in, forgetting that we weren't completely alone, as his tongue slid against mine.

"Shit, no, I can't..."

I rolled my eyes as he sat back on his heels, chest heaving and eyes heavy with lust. "I mean, what if my mom hears? Or, God, Grandma Cullen...I think she's still here...staying for dessert..."

"Edward..." I pleaded, my own voice thick with lust as I admired the view of his bare chest. "It's been three weeks..."

As he rubbed the back of his neck with his hand, I could see the conflict in his eyes. "We could, uh, stay at my apartment tomorrow night instead of here," he suggested, his voice laced with hope and a hint of disappointment.

I sat up, frowning, and crawled into his lap, straddling his hips as I wrapped my arms around his neck. "That would crush your mom...hasn't she been looking forward to this visit for months?"

"Yeah, she has," he whispered as he leaned away, putting space between our chests. "Sorry, your tits against my chest aren't helping the situation, Bella."

"Oh, sorry," I said, rocking my hips against his playfully.

Edward's jaw tightened. "Neither is that," he said through clenched teeth.

"You're such a damn bad influence...damn tease..." he joked, his hands finding my hips.

Texts From Last Night

"Sorry," I attempted to say innocently, though my voice had dropped an octave when his cock hit my aching center. "I just...want to make love to you."

His eyes flared with lust and, the next thing I knew, my legs were around his waist and he was telling me to hold on. "Shower," he answered my unspoken confusion. "But you still have to be quiet...or at least make an attempt."

"I'll try," I all but panted as we stepped into the adjoining room and he released me to lock the door and turn on the water. "Are you sure this is okay?"

"No, not really, but I..." he trailed off as I dropped my skirt to the floor and climbed onto the sink to begin to undo the garter belt I was wearing underneath. "Uh...do you need some help with those?"

I looked up at him through my lashes and shrugged suggestively before leaning back, my weight supported by my arms, and holding my legs out to him.

"I love your legs," he breathed as he took one large stride to stand in front of me, grabbing my right leg and finishing the job I had begun of undoing the snaps that held my stocking in place. Slowly, he began to roll the stocking down, placing a wet kiss on my leg every few inches as the room began to fill with steam from the hot shower.

"It's a damn good thing I didn't know you had those on under your skirt all day...fuck, Bella, what were you thinking?"

"I was hoping for," I gasped when he bit down on the skin of my ankle, "this."

"You are so fucking sexy." After pulling off the stocking on my right leg, he returned to his position right in front of me and, in a surprise move, playfully bit down on my throbbing clit before continuing onto my left leg as if nothing had happened.

"Shit," I moaned as my head fell back against the mirror and his lips continued to torture my leg.

Texts From Last Night

"Shhh," he warned against my ankle as he peeled off the last bit of my stocking and placed a gentle kiss to the arch of my foot. "Quiet, now."

"You need to have on less clothes," I stated curtly as I slid off the counter, aligning my body with his. In a flash, his hands landed on my hips, his fingers dipping below the lace of my cheeky panties as I deftly undid the button of his slacks, lowering my body as I lowered his them along with his boxer-briefs. After placing an open-mouthed kiss on the tip of his cock, I stepped out of my panties and stood up, sliding my body against his until I was standing straight.

Palming my ass, Edward pressed our bodies against the cold marble of the counter before lifting me once more, my legs instinctively folding around his waist as he moved us into the shower.

I gasped as the hot water hit my back suddenly, my head falling back as the water cascaded over my hair, my back.

"Down you go," Edward commanded as he placed me onto the floor. "Quiet, remember?"

"I remember," I confirmed as I took a moment to enjoy his beauty as the steam and water surrounded him. "Now, fuck me."

"I thought you wanted to make love," he joked, his hips grinding against mine playfully as he rubbed his thumbs against my pebbled nipples.

"Just...inside me...please," I pleaded, my voice desperate as I rubbed against him, wanting to feel the delicious friction between our bodies that I had been without for far too long.

Edward leaned forward, kissing me feverishly as his hand traveled down, sliding quickly down my stomach before landing where I wanted him most, two fingers entering me without warning. In and out, in and out, his fingers teased and twisted as my head fell back with pleasure. And then, as quickly as they had entered me, his fingers were gone and my back was pressed against the wall.

Texts From Last Night

Pausing briefly, Edward ran his hands across my hips, his fingers teasing my skin as I watched the water drip down from his hair, across his face, in his eyelashes. He was beautiful, even soaking wet, and he was *mine*.

"I love you," I murmured, reaching my hands up to cup his face, lifting his face with my hands so that our eyes could meet. "So damn much."

"You have no idea, Bella," he said, his voice deep and full of emotion as he lifted one leg, then another, to wrap around his waist.

My hands flew to his shoulders as he lifted me up before pulling me back down; his cock entered me as my back slid against the tile. We both moaned at the delicious contact, obviously having forgotten how full our stomachs had been mere minutes before.

Slowly, Edward began to move, skin against skin as steam filled the room, moans and grunts echoing off the tile. My hands were everywhere-his hair, his shoulders, his back, his stomach-as his slid across my ass, my hips, my breasts. With each touch, I felt the familiar electricity between us, savored it.

"Beautiful," Edward murmured as his speed increased, his voice husky and hot as hell.

My stomach began to clench as I felt myself come closer to orgasm. "My thoughts exactly," I whispered as his eyes met mine, darkened with lust.

"Are you close?" He breathed and it was then I realized that he was holding back, slowing down to prevent his own release.

I nodded, biting my lip as I felt my walls start to clench around him. Absorbing my cries, Edward pressed his lips to mine, his tongue sliding against my own as I crumbled around him, my body falling limp as my head dropped to his shoulder. Not long after, Edward's thrusts increased and, then, he was releasing into me, my mouth returning to his to absorb his own cries of pleasure.

Texts From Last Night

When he was finished, he bent his knees, sliding us down to the floor where we melted into each other. He placed lazy kisses across my chest as I held him to me, both of our breaths returning to normal.

"Quiet enough?" I asked after a moment.

Edward sat up, a grin on his face as he leaned over to shut off the water. "Probably, but if we weren't, I don't care."

"You cared earlier," I countered, my hands back in his hair as if they were magnetically attracted. It felt amazing, soft and smooth and wet, between my fingers.

He chuckled at my statement before placing a sloppy kiss on my neck. "I'm over it, now that you're naked and beneath me and I've been inside you."

My laughter mingled with his as he continued with the sloppy kisses. "We should get out of this shower."

"Mmmm," he hummed what I assumed was an agreement against my skin.

"I'm pruny," I added.

"I love you even though you're pruny."

"You better."

He looked up, his eyes sparkling. "Always."

xXx

Edward and I eventually made it downstairs for dessert, our hair dried and cheesy grins on our faces. Esme winked at us knowingly and, luckily, Carlisle seemed oblivious to our blushing faces and unhidden lingering touches.

Texts From Last Night

For the second time that day, we stuffed ourselves with delicious food, this time with pie instead of turkey, and gathered in the living room to watch *Christmas Vacation*, a Thanksgiving tradition at the Cullen house to, "Welcome in the Christmas Season," according to Esme.

As we watched, I used Edward as a pillow and, not surprisingly, fell asleep before the movie was even halfway over, not waking until the next morning, Edward's body curled behind mine as we snuggled under the comforter of his childhood bed.

The rest of my time in Chicago flew by and I hated saying goodbye to Carlisle and Esme on Saturday afternoon before Edward took me to catch my flight. Over the handful of days I had spent with them in their home, I had formed a special place for them in my heart, right next to Edward.

"So, you're visiting on New Year's?" I asked as I leaned down to pick up my carry on from where we stood next to the security line at the airport.

He nodded, stepping forward to wrap his arms around my shoulders. "I can't wait, pretty girl," he said, moving one hand to cup my cheek.

"It's more than three weeks," I added.

He frowned as he looked down at me. "I know," he said pitifully. "But with finals and promising Grandmother Cullen that I would be there at Christmas, I don't know when I'll be able to make it over to the city."

"I know," I sighed, pulling him closer to me. "I just hate it."

"I hate it, too. But, you'll be just as busy as me, right?"

"Right." The inevitable tears that came during our goodbyes begin to fill my eyes as I glanced at the security line out of the corner of my eye.

"I love you," Edward said, leaning forward to place a kiss on my lips.

Texts From Last Night

"Love you, too," I echoed, meeting his lips again, this time allowing my tongue to sneak out and say goodbye to his.

When we pulled apart, I smiled weakly and began to step away, my eyes trained on him as I walked backwards towards security.

"Call me when you land!" He shouted as I was about to turn around, despite the fact that I knew he would be texting me as soon as I was out of sight, a silly tradition that we had kept up since our first goodbye in Charleston.

I grinned at him and nodded, letting him know that I would be calling, before stepping into line. The next thing I knew, I was on the plane, pulling out my phone to shut it off before take off. As expected, there was a message waiting from Edward.

Counting the days until I see your face again. Love you, pretty girl. Have a safe flight.

Smiling, I typed out a response.

Twenty-seven, since you're counting. Loved this Chicago trip and love you.

After sliding my phone into my purse, I leaned back and shut my eyes, dreaming of New Year's and kissing Edward as the clock struck twelve.

Author's Note: So, yeah, I'm terrible. Forgive me, please, for the lack of updates lately. Between starting a new job and living in a new place, life has been ridiculously insane. Anyway, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter as much as I enjoyed writing it. I can't wait to hear y'all's thoughts! Coming up next (hopefully quicker than last time ;)): Christmas and, if I can fit it in, New Year's Eve!

As always, thanks to my beta, Leah. She's amazing and, thank God, has held on to her beta her while I all but disappeared from twitter for four months. I've missed you and adore you, bb!

Chicago to New York

Chapter 29: Chicago to New York

EPOV

When I was a child, one of the things I looked forward year after year was Christmas Eve--my extended family gathering at my parents house for a huge meal, the Christmas Eve service at church that we all attended together, and, finally, the day culminating in front of the TV, *A Christmas Story* playing over and over while my cousins and I each chose a present from under the tree to open.

This year, though, I was having a hard time getting excited for any of those things. The meal that Esme and my aunts were working on in the kitchen reminded me of Thanksgiving and, truthfully, the kitchen felt empty without Bella. Then, when I thought about watching *A Christmas Story*, images of her falling asleep in my arms on Thanksgiving afternoon watching *Christmas Vacation* played in my mind, making me miss her even more. And the thought of unwrapping a present...all I wanted to unwrap was *her*.

With a smile plastered onto my face for most of the day, I assumed that I had fooled my family into believing I was happy and content in their presence alone and that half of my heart wasn't missing. And, as I watched the opening credits of *A Christmas Story* scroll across the screen, I was sure that I was doing a damn good job of playing the part.

Of course, I was wrong.

Halfway through the movie, my vision of the TV screen was blocked by Grandma Cullen, her well-aged face now directly in front of mine...frowning. Not that it mattered that I could no longer see the movie--I was too busy daydreaming about Bella to focus on Ralphie and the Red Rider BB Gun he was pining for.

Texts From Last Night

"Come with me," she all but demanded, holding her aged hand out for me to take. Without question, I did as she asked, following her into the adjacent room.

After we were both seated, she turned to me, frowning. "I'm sorry," she said simply.

"What for?" I asked as I sat up straighter, completely unaware as to why she was apologizing.

"Forcing you to be here with us," she paused, a small smile spreading across her lips, "when you would clearly rather be somewhere else."

"No, no, there is nowhere else I'd rather be," I mumbled, my voice betraying me completely as my eyes danced across the room, meeting everything but her gaze.

She arched a gray eyebrow. "So, you mean that you wouldn't rather be in New York right now?"

I slowly shook my head back and forth, squeezing my eyes shut so that they wouldn't give me away.

With a sigh, she murmured, "I guess I'll have to see if these are refundable then."

My eyes flew open when I heard the rustling of paper. "What?"

With a sly grin, she held up a single airline ticket.

"Is that...I can't take that...no, I need to be here...it's snowing outside and..." Excuses tumbled from my mouth as I held my hands up in protest as I attempted to play the part that was expected of me. But, damn, the idea of spending Christmas with Bella was tempting.

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"Edward," she cut me off with a glare that could stop a serial killer in his tracks. "Stop making excuses. This is my gift to you. Merry Christmas."

"But, you said that all you wanted for Christmas was..."

"For everyone to be together, I remember," she paused. "But, then, I also remember what it was like to be in love and how much I resented *my* grandmother for forcing me to spend holidays with her when I wanted to be across town with your grandfather."

"There's a difference between down the street and in another city," I protested weakly, knowing that there was no way in hell I was actually going to turn down the tickets.

"Do you have any more excuses you would like to try?" Her lips pursed as she posed her question, daring me to challenge her again.

I felt myself smiling fully for the first time all day. "Uh, no."

"I didn't think so. Now, your flight leaves in three hours and is open-ended, so you can stay for however long as you like. I also took the liberty of..." She rambled on but all I could think was Bella, Bella, Bella...

"Grandma, I love you and I will owe you forever for this but, um..." I was anxious and a quick glance outside had revealed a steady stream of snow falling from the sky.

"You need go pack?" She asked, winking at me.

I nodded, smirking. "Something like that."

"Go, go," she said, shooing me with her hands as I stood, a shit-eating grin on my face.

"You are definitely my favorite relative, Grandma," I called over my shoulder as I dashed towards the stairs.

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"Just keep in mind how lovely great-grandbabies would be!" She retorted as I climbed the stairs two at a time.

I shook my head at her off-hand statement, but found a grin spreading across my face at the prospect of having children with Bella, something I had never been able to fathom in past relationships. Now, though, it just seemed...right. But, first, I needed to make her mine. Forever.

"Dad?" I called downstairs as I pulled the suitcase I had packed for the few days I would be spending at my parent's home out of my closet.

"Yes, son?" he answered quickly, his voice closer than I had anticipated.

I turned around quickly, surprised to find him standing in the doorway. "Uh, hey."

He chuckled lightly. "Hi."

"Do you, uh, happen to know where, uh...or if..." I rambled, unable to formulate the question that I had often wondered if I would ever have a reason to ask my father.

"The rings?"

My hand rubbed the back of my neck nervously as I swallowed thickly, my mouth going dry with nerves. With a small smile playing on his lips, my father carefully reached into his right pocket, his hand reappearing seconds later with a small, black box in his hand.

"How did you..." I trailed off, the realization of the magnitude of the moment hitting me like a ton of bricks.

"Son," my father paused as he tossed the small box across the room to me. As I slowly opened it to examine its contents, he continued. "Your grandmother has been dying to give these to you since she met Bella at Thanksgiving, but knew that it would...overwhelm...you if she gave them to you then. So, as soon as

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you darted up the stairs with your airline ticket, she walked directly toward me and slid them off her finger. I was going to hold on to them for you until you asked about them."

I shook my head back and forth, unable to form words as I felt a lump forming in my throat.

My father continued speaking as I stared at the rings, wondering what they would like on Bella's left hand, sparkling and saying to the world, "this one is taken."

"She told me that she knew you were ready and that there wasn't a soul on this planet she would rather wear her rings than your Bella."

"I can't...I don't...I haven't even..."

A reassuring hand was placed on my shoulder. "Son, you can give the rings to Bella tomorrow, or you can give them to her five years from now. Either way, they're yours now."

Tearing my eyes away from the rings, I glanced up at my father. His eyes were speaking volumes when his mouth wasn't. In them I saw hope and pride, but mainly love.

With a quick shake of his head, the tone of his voice changed from sincere to serious. "Now, we better get going or we won't make it to the airport in time. I'm assuming we need to stop by your apartment for clothes?"

My head bobbed up and down mutely, as I was still having a hard time forming words.

"Okay, then, see you downstairs in ten."

By the time my father and I reached the airport, the snow was falling thickly from the sky, blanketing the roads with white powder that was assuredly more dangerous than it looked.

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"Will you be okay getting home?" I asked as I pulled my suitcase from the trunk of my father's small SUV.

"I've lived Chicago for my entire life, son, I think I can handle a little snow."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," he said, rolling his eyes and he stepped towards me. "I'm sure."

"Okay," I said, not making a move towards the entrance of the airport.

"Okay," my father echoed, a knowing grin on his face.

"What?" I asked, looking down at my feet self-consciously.

"Those rings are getting heavy aren't they?"

"I feel like there's a brick in my pocket," I answered, glad that he knew the root of my reluctance to turn and leave. "I mean, I worry that it's too soon, that she'll say no, I need to talk to her father and..."

"Edward."

"Yes?" I asked, looking up from where I had been nervously twisting my hands.

He placed a gloved hand on my shoulder. "Do you want my advice?"

"Please," I mumbled, feeling like a kid again, asking my father to teach me how to ride a bike or throw a curveball.

He grinned widely before proceeding. "Take her father out for drinks or lunch, not dinner because then she'll be suspicious. Don't be too obvious about it. Then, wait for the right time. Bella doesn't strike me as the type of woman who has been dreaming of a grand proposal her entire life--but remember, it *is* a day she'll remember forever, so don't screw it up completely. And remember, just

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because you asked her father for permission doesn't mean you have to ask her the next day, unless you do something to hurt his little girl, his word is good. At the end of the day, it's about you and her."

I nodded, taking a moment to allow his words to settle. Before I could thank him or ask any more questions, he was speaking again.

"Damn, though, it's freezing out here and you have a flight to catch. If you need me, you can call me. And, please, if it happens on this trip, let your mother know the moment that it does. She'll be driving me insane the minute I get back."

I laughed as images of my mother, incessantly wondering whether I had proposed or not, flooded my mind. "Will do," I said with a grin as I stepped forward to wrap my arms around him. "Drive safe."

"I will," he assured me, his arms feeling the same around me as they had when I was a boy. "Good luck, son."

The streets of New York City were emptier than I had expected them to be, despite the fact that it was a holiday. Of course, I rarely looked out the window, as I was too busy looking at my cell phone, wondering if I should call Bella and announce my imminent arrival or simply drop in on her and her family. The closer we got to her apartment, though, I knew that I wanted my visit to be a surprise and that, if necessary, I would rent a room at a local hotel after making my presence in the city known. After all, it wasn't like Bella and I would be sharing a bed with her father under the same roof.

As if it had followed me from Chicago to New York, snow began to softly fall as the taxi driver maneuvered smoothly through the streets of the city as White Christmas blared through the speakers.

"You here for business?" The driver asked as he turned onto Bella's block. "This city...seems like it doesn't even stop on holidays."

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"Um, no, I'm not here for business," I answered, my knee beginning to bounce nervously as Bella's building came into view.

"Ah," he paused as he pulled towards the curb. "Love, then? Or, maybe, to see family?"

I smiled at his statement. "Love," I answered wistfully.

He turned to me, a smile on his own face. "Ah, then you're here to see what you hope to be family one day, yeah?"

"How can you tell?" I asked, patting the spot on my backpack where I had safely stashed my grandmother's rings.

He patted the seat next to him. "I take in a lot from the cab of this taxi, you know. Usually, it's one side of a cell phone conversation. But, you know, I've learned that you can tell a lot about what a person's going through by the look on their face and, you know what the look on your face says?"

I shrugged, not sure I wanted to have my facial expressions evaluated by a taxi driver, but figuring he was going to do it whether I asked for it or not.

"It's a lot of being scared shitless with a side serving of love."

"I see."

"So," he paused, nodding, "this one's on me. Get your bags and go see your girl."

I'm sure that I stared blankly at him for a solid minute before climbing out of the cab, but when I did, there was a strange sense of purpose in my step.

I was going to get Bella, and I was determined to make her mine by the time I left the city.

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Less than five minutes later, I was standing in front of the door to Bella's apartment, eager to make my presence known. After pulling my suitcase towards the wall and readjusting my backpack on my shoulder, I lifted my fist to knock on her door.

Three quick knocks, and I heard her voice. It sounded heavenly, so much clearer than it did on the phone.

"Who is it?" She asked carefully. I could hear the confusion in her voice, clearly wondering who in the hell could be arriving at nearly midnight on Christmas Eve.

"Uh...Santa?" I answered dumbly.

Silence.

Shit. I scared her away. She probably thinks I'm the creepy neighbor from downstairs she was telling me about.

Just as I was about to announce who I really was, the door flew open, revealing a very angry-looking Charlie Swan. "Santa?" he asked, his mustache twitching as he crossed his arms across his chest.

"Um...no...not so much," I stumbled over my words, my hand instantly gripping my hair nervously as I looked down at my feet.

I could feel Mr. Swan's stare as he looked at me expectantly, waiting for an explanation as to why I was on his daughter's doorstep so late.

"I'm Edward Cullen," I said extending my hand quickly. "Bella's..."

"...boyfriend," she finished for me, appearing behind her father with a smile on her face and a surprised look in her eyes. "What are you...you're here? Holy shit!"

Only three steps away from my arms...I want to kiss you.

Texts From Last Night

"I'm here," I said, my eyes taking in every inch of her that was visible behind her father...who was still glaring. I had to clench my hands at my side to keep from pushing him aside so that I could wrap my arms around his daughter and reacquaint myself with every inch of her body.

She looked at me, eyebrows furrowed, her eyes begging for explanation.

"Grandma Cullen," I offered, holding my hands up in a gesture that I hoped said, 'It was out of my control.'

"Ah," she said, her head falling back slightly as realization dawned on her face. "Well, uh, this is my dad."

"Uh huh," Mr. Swan said, his mouth barely moving.

"Dad..." Bella pleaded, pushing him aside a bit so that they were standing next to each other.

Two steps away...I want to hold you.

"Charlie Swan," he finally said, extending his hand for me to shake.

"Nice to meet you, sir. I believe we met in New Haven once."

"Mr. Swan," he corrected, frowning. "And, yes, I vaguely recall that. You had been...drinking...I believe."

"I'm sorry, uh...wow...that was a long time ago." Nervous was quickly becoming my middle name.

"Dad," Bella scolded again, poking him in the side as she took another step forward. "Aren't you going to invite him in?"

"Sure, yeah, come in son, you seem sober now. Bring your bags," he said gruffly before turning and entering the living room, saying something under his breath to Bella's mom, who was smiling kindly from her spot on the sofa.

Texts From Last Night

Grabbing my bags, I stepped inside, dropping them by the door and standing there awkwardly, bobbing my head up and down while everyone just stared at each other. It felt like high school dating all over again.

"Are you hungry?" Bella asked, breaking the silence and gesturing towards the kitchen.

"I'm fine, really."

"I think you need some food. In the kitchen," she said, trying to wink at me covertly but doing a poor job. I chuckled lightly before obliging her.

"Oh, right, yeah I am a bit hungry. Only had some peanuts on the plane."

"Great," she chirped, grabbing my hand and pulling me towards the kitchen.

Once we were safely in the kitchen, Bella wasted no time wrapping her arms around my neck and pulling my body against hers. When my arms wound around her waist, I finally felt home.

"Hey," I whispered into her hair.

"Hey," she echoed against my chest. "I can't believe you're here."

"Neither can I, really," I said, my fingers dipping beneath the hem of her shirt, desperate to feel a bit of her sweet, smooth skin. "Your dad still scares the shit out of me, and he thinks I'm an alcoholic."

"No he doesn't," she breathed against my chest. "He just doesn't know how to not be in the 'scary dad' role now that I'm grown. Yesterday, he told a man that was clearly gay in Bloomingdale's that he had a gun and a license to use it."

I swallowed heavily; even more fearful of the conversation I needed to have with him after hearing her last statement.

Texts From Last Night

We stood there for a few minutes, enjoying the comfort of each other's arms, before she pulled back. "Seriously, Edward, don't let my dad scare you. I'm a grown woman and he needs to figure that out."

"Well, I know that *I'm* aware," I said, winking.

She swatted at my chest playfully. "Shut it, Cullen."

I shrugged, my hands lifting against her as I did, exposing more of her delicious skin for my fingers to skim against. Groaning softly, I pulled her closer against me.

"I've already assumed that we won't be able to have a sleepover," I murmured in a pitiful voice, jerking my heads towards the living room where her father was, no doubt, listening carefully.

"Probably not," she said, lifting a hand to draw lazy designs against my chest. "There really isn't anywhere for you to sleep, anyway...unless you want the floor?"

"I'll get a room somewhere," I assured her, removing her hand from my chest and lifting her fingers to my lips, kissing them gently.

"At this hour?" She asked, sighing softly at the feel of my lips against her skin.

"It'll be fine," I assured her, lifting my other hand to brush a stray strand of hair behind her ear. "As long as your father doesn't mind me showing up at the ass crack of dawn tomorrow morning."

"Like I said, I'm a grown woman," she repeated, her eyes focusing on my lips. "He'll have to deal with it."

Taking a chance, I leaned forward and whispered into her ear, "Then stay with me tonight."

Texts From Last Night

She audibly moaned as I pulled her earlobe between my teeth.
"Don't...push...your luck."

I chuckled, pulling back. "When do your parents leave?"

Frowning, she paused briefly before answering. "Not until the 30th."

I groaned, my head falling to her shoulder. "I haven't seen you in weeks."

"You'll be able to see me until then."

"You know what I mean," I murmured against her neck. "And before you say it, yes, I'm pathetic. And horny."

She giggled before pushing me away lightly. "You're such a man."

"You want it just as bad as I do," I murmured, hoping that the tenor of my voice was the one that made her weak in the knees. For added emphasis, I pushed out my bottom lip. "Can I at least get a kiss? Just a small, measly..."

My statement was cut short by her lips crashing into my desperately, her tongue meeting mine hungrily as her hips ground against mine, instantly making my pants feel tighter. She whimpered as her hands slid into my air, deepening our kiss before we had to break apart for air.

I playfully narrowed my eyes at her, our faces close together. "And you're making me leave? Really?"

She shook her head back and forth, her damn bottom lip between her teeth again. "I'm not making you leave, *Mr. Swan* is."

I bit my tongue to prevent a smartass comment from tumbling out.

"Are you sleeping on the sofa?"

Texts From Last Night

A grimace crossed her face. "Yes, with two sheets below me to prevent the transfer of STDs from the slutmuffin."

"Oh, yes, we wouldn't want that."

She giggled before mouthing the word, "No."

Like the lovesick idiots that we were, we simply stood there staring at each other for a while. Until, of course, Mr. Swan interrupted.

"Bells?"

She closed her eyes in annoyance. "Yeah, dad?"

"Your mother and I are tired..." he hinted, his eyes lifting in my direction.

"And?" She asked, baiting him.

I held my hand up to stop her before moving into the living room. "Don't worry about it, Mr. Swan, I'm heading out myself...I've got to find a hotel before they all fill up."

All hope I had of him offering up a spot on the couch or floor were shot to hell when he simply nodded, mustache twitching again, and stated, "Better get going then."

"I'll walk Edward downstairs," Bella said, appearing the kitchen.

"Hurry back," Mr. Swan murmured before gesturing to the door.

Bella rolled her eyes. "Sure."

We were silent in the elevator, both clearly afraid that if we started something physical, then we would have to pull the emergency stop button to avoid cold showers on both of our ends. So, instead of making out with her like the horny, twenty-something that I was, I settled for twining my fingers with Bella's as we

Texts From Last Night

exchanged heated glances.

Damn, it's going to be a long couple of days...

New York City was truly a winter wonderland when the alarm on my cell phone went off at six a.m., hopefully in time to make it to Bella's apartment to see her before her parents arose for the day. After a quick shower, I hailed a cab and headed back downtown. By six forty-five, I was standing in front of Bella's door, fighting off a hint of déjà vu from the night before and praying that her father was still in bed.

I knocked softly, in case Bella was still asleep, and simply waited for an answer. Luckily, it wasn't long before the door flew open to reveal a sleepy-eyed Bella, clad in much more clothing that I preferred--a pair of flannel pajama pants and a Yale hoodie.

"Merry Christmas," I murmured as I placed my hands on her hips and pulled her closer, still barely believing that I was getting to spend the holiday with her and not in Chicago.

She smiled as she wound her arms around my neck, leaving little space between our bodies. "Mmm, Merry Christmas is right," she sighed appreciatively, the sound going directly to my crotch.

"Bella," I groaned, not bothering to move my developing arousal away from her.

"My parents are still asleep," she whispered into my ear, her voice etched with hope.

I squeezed my eyes shut, thinking of everything that I hoped could turn me off when, really, all I needed was the image of Charlie Swan walking out of Bella's bedroom to do the trick.

"Pretty girl, not with your dad in the next room."

Texts From Last Night

She sighed deeply. "I know, we can't. But, maybe we could I could make some coffee and we could exchange our gifts?"

"That would be great," I said, holding up the gift in my hand that was nothing compared to the piece of jewelry I had placed in my pocket for fear of the hotel staff developing sticky fingers.

She smiled before motioning for me to follow her into the kitchen. We chatted as we waited for the coffee to brew. I told her all about Grandma Cullen all but demanding that I fly to Chicago while she recapped her parent's visit to the city so far. It was comfortable, normal, and I hoped that things would be like this for us always.

Once the coffee was finished and poured in our mugs, we moved back to the living room. I waited while Bella searched for the gift she had gotten for me from under the tree, obviously ogling her ass.

"You first," she said, handing me a rectangular package wrapped in bright red and green paper.

I took my time opening the gift she had wrapped for me, taking care not to cut the ribbon while I pulled it off. Once all of the paper was removed, I slowly pulled the box open and peeled back the tissue paper. Beneath it, I found four silver frames molded together, each frame holding an image from our week in Charleston. There was one of Bella and me, dancing at the reception, another of us playing in the ocean after the wedding, a shot of the group of us on the beach the first night, and one of us that had been taken without our noticing, the looks on our faces making obvious the love that had so suddenly developed between us.

"Wow," I gasped as I stared at the images, wondering why this was the first time I had seen them.

"I told Alice not to share them with you so that they would be a surprise. I have another gift that's a belated Christmas gift for you, but it has to wait until my parent's leave."

Texts From Last Night

My eyes widened. "I like the sound of that."

"You should," she said, her voice changing to the tone that she reserved for the bedroom. "I had Zafrina send it to me from her shop."

I shot her a warning look, knowing exactly what came from that shop in Charleston and how much I loved it...both on and off of her. "Bella..."

She giggled. "Sorry, sorry."

I shook my head back and forth in an attempt to ward off the images of what Bella's other gift might look like. "Here, uh, open yours."

Bella accepted my gift and wasted no time ripping off the paper, a smile playing on her lips. She looked so sweet and innocent in that moment that I wanted nothing more than to pull her into my arms, so I did, lifting her into my lap as she worked on the tape I had placed on the box to keep everything in place.

"Edward!" She squealed, feigning scandal.

I shrugged against her. "Not sorry," I murmured, pushing down the neck of her hooding and placing a quick, open-mouthed kiss on her neck.

"Yeah, yeah," she mumbled as she lifted the top of the box off, moving the tissue paper out the way so that she could examine her gift.

"Um?" Bella asked, turning to me with questioning eyes. "A plane ticket?"

I nodded, lifting my hand to caress her cheek. "It's for the weekend of Valentine's Day, for us to go to Charleston. I rented a small house there for us, you know, to get away and just...be together."

Without hesitation, she threw her arms around my neck. "It's perfect. But don't you have class or clinicals or something?"

Texts From Last Night

"It doesn't matter if I know this far in advance."

"It's perfect. Thank you."

I placed a gentle kiss on her forehead, ghosting the words, "You're welcome, pretty girl," against her skin.

She sighed contentedly as she lifted her hand to gently tangle them in the hair at the nape of my neck, her lips touching my collarbone. After a moment, she pulled back, her eyes full of emotion. "Edward, I'm so glad you're here," she whispered, her voice breaking with emotion.

"Me too," I said, internally hoping that this was the first of many Christmas' spent together.

"I wish you never had to leave," she added, her eyes falling to her lap as she fingered the plane ticket she had just opened.

"Hey," I murmured, using my index finger to lift her face to mine. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Until after New Year's...I know," she grumbled, rolling her eyes with an annoyed scoff that I knew was intended for our situation, not me.

"Bella, baby, you know this is just as hard on me as it is you."

She nodded slowly, a single tear trickling down her face. Fuck, I hated it when she cried and, in that moment, I would have given anything in the world to make her stop. Hell, looking at her, with the Christmas tree blinking the background and those damn tears, I probably would have given up my almost-complete medical degree if she would stop crying.

Shifting a bit on the floor, I felt the rings in my pocket dig into my thigh.

The rings.

Texts From Last Night

My grandmother's rings.

A promise that I wanted her to be mine forever, even if we had to wait a few more months to make it permanent.

Now?

"I'm sorry," she sniffled, lifting her hands to brush the tears away from her cheeks, the sound of her voice breaking me from my thoughts.

Should I?

"You know how much I hate it when you cry," I said softly, replacing her hands with mine and brushing away her tears myself. My mind was racing with ideas--I could just pull the rings out and show them to her, or I could make her stand so I could kneel, or...

"Bella, what's wrong? What did he say to you?" I heard from behind my head and, without having to turn around, I knew who it was.

Ah, Mr. Swan. There's my answer: no, now is not the time.

If there was ever a voice of reason to prevent me from proposing to Bella while she was in her fluffy pajamas, it was his. Though he scared me a little bit shitless, I was thankful for him in that moment as the sound of his voice provided me with much-needed clarity.

Before I could stand and explain the situation, Bella was scrambling off my lap. "I'll be right back," she murmured before leaving the room.

Great.

"I...I uh...Mr...S-Swan," Awesome, I was now rambling.

"Edward," he deadpanned, "I hope you have a great explanation as to why my daughter is crying."

Texts From Last Night

Before my mind could catch up with my mouth, I blurted out, "I want to marry her, sir."

Shit. Definitely not the way I had planned on this conversation going. Damn rings, making me trigger-happy.

"And she was crying? I think you might want to rethink your strategy, then, son."

"Uh, no, no, I mean, she doesn't know, well, I mean, we've talked about it but I haven't...you know..."

"Proposed?"

I nodded mutely.

Smoothing his mustache with his thumb and forefinger, Mr. Swan's eyes bore into mine. I knew that he was sizing me up, still wondering why I hadn't answered his initial question.

"Neither of us handle the separation well sir, uh, Mr. Swan," I attempted to answer, my words sounding a bit on the mumbly side.

"I see."

"She was just, uh, having a moment I guess?"

"Uh huh."

"And, you know, I was about to reassure her when you walked in." I rubbed my palms against the fabric of my pants, attempting to remove the sweat from them.

"By proposing?"

Texts From Last Night

"Yes! I mean, no, no. Well, I was thinking about it because, well, I brought the rings with me because you never can be sure about hotel maintenance and so, they're in my pockets, and I thought about it but, well, shit."

"Well, shit, what?" If I wasn't mistaken, there was a smirk beginning to play on his lips. He was definitely enjoying my pain.

"I knew that I, uh, needed your..."

"Renee, hon, there's coffee in the kitchen, I think," Mr. Swan interrupted me without breaking my gaze.

My mouth hung open as I lost my nerve, looking over his shoulder to see Mrs. Swan make her way into the kitchen, a small smile on her face. In front of me, Mr. Swan continued to look at me expectantly, folding his arms and leaning back against the sofa cushions.

"...Permission," I finally whispered.

"Son," he finally stated, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees. "The last time I saw you, you were stumbling up the steps at a football game with a beer in one hand and what I assumed was a liquor drink in the other."

"That was five--" I attempted to cut in.

He held up a hand to stop me. "I don't care how long ago it was, it still happened. And, here this morning you're making my little girl cry." As if anticipating my explanation, he held up a hand again. "Whatever the reason, I don't like to see it."

"Neither do I," I inserted quickly.

"That's good, real good, but I'm not going to give you my daughter's hand that easily. I'll give you until when I leave to earn in. Can you work with that?"

Texts From Last Night

I nodded quickly, sure that I looked like a dumbass bobblehead doll as I extended my hand for him to shake. "Thank you, sir."

He merely grumbled in response before standing. "I'm going to get some coffee," he offered in explanation.

"Okay," I said, still a bit dumfounded that I had just attempted to ask Mr. Swan for his daughter's hand in marriage while he was wearing his pajamas--on Christmas morning, without offering an invitation for drinks, or lunch, or even a stroll down the street. I had been sitting on the floor on his daughter's apartment after making her cry, for fuck's sake.

I was so fucking screwed.

Not literally, of course.

Note: Life happens. I am so unbelievable sorry for not updating soon. I hope that you enjoyed the update regardless. As always, Leah is an amazing beta and I heart her more than words can describe.

Sadly, there is only one more chapter to go, followed by an epilogue. The last chapter will be posted sometime this weekend and the epilogue will follow next week.

If you haven't jumped the ship after it took me so long to update, thanks for sticking around. I'd love you hear what you thought of this chapter!

xoxo

Scotch and Diamonds

A/N: The story is mine. Of course, the people belong to Stephenie Meyer.

Chapter 30: Scotch and Diamonds

Bella returned to the living room a few minutes later, her frown replaced with a bright smile and her oversized pajamas replaced with a pair of jeans a sweater. Without hesitation, she placed herself back into my lap and yelled into the kitchen for her parents to join us to open their presents.

"Are you okay?" I gently asked her while we waited.

"Yeah, I'm okay."

"Really?"

"Really," she confirmed by placing a short kiss on my lips. "I was just having a silly girl moment. You know, thinking about how you would eventually have to leave instead of enjoying our time together."

To hear Bella voice her worries over me going back to Chicago again made my chest ache. I hated to see the hurt in her eyes that didn't match the forced smile on her lips.

The rings dug further into my thigh, bringing with them ideas that I thought Mr. Swan had helped me eliminate just moments earlier.

No, earn his trust, I told myself. If you don't, he'll never trust you with his baby girl.

I nodded mutely in response to Bella's comment as her parents reentered the room and began dividing up the small gathering of presents that rested beneath Bella's tree. It was nice, really, to see Bella interact with her family as ribbons were tossed and papers were torn. I was surprised, though, when Mrs. Swan

Texts From Last Night

handed me a small gift-wrapped package.

"For me? How did you know I would be here?"

"Well, I didn't, of course. But, I was going to have Bella give it to you when you came into town for New Year's. She told us you would be visiting then."

"Thank you," I smiled as I began opening the gift carefully. I couldn't believe that Bella's mother had thought to get me a gift.

"It's nothing big, just something that I saw in a shop at home that reminded me of something Bella told me about you when you were in college," she explained as I pulled back the tissue paper. "Really, it was more Charlie's idea than mine."

"A remote control keychain?" I asked, a bit confused as to what I had just opened.

"You telling me you aren't aware what that is, Edward?" Mr. Swan asked.

"No, sir, I, uh...does it open something?"

"You could say that."

"Let me see," Bella cut in, reaching over and pulling the gift out of the box. After examining it for a bit she rolled her eyes and turned to face her father.

"Really, Dad?"

"What?" I asked, confused.

"I'm just taking care of you, Bells."

"By insinuating that my boyfriend is an alcoholic?"

Texts From Last Night

My eyes widened at her comment, sudden clarity filling my mind. "You gave me a portable breathalyzer?"

"Of course," Mr. Swan replied quickly.

"It was supposed to be a joke," Mrs. Swan added, cutting her eyes to her husband. "I think."

Mr. Swan shook his head back and forth adamantly. "Nope, not a joke."

"Dad," Bella said through her teeth. "You cannot be serious."

"As a heart attack. I don't want my baby girl getting in a car with someone that has had too much to drink. With this, he can..."

I closed my eyes tightly and hung my head, tuning Mr. Swan out as he argued the merits of having the device he had given me on hand at all time. Bella argued back that I had changed, matured, but it all seemed to fall on deaf ears.

This is going to be harder than I thought.

Suddenly, Bella was laughing hysterically beside me. Unable to find any humor in the situation, I turned to face her, a blank expression on my face. When she failed to offer an explanation, I lifted my eyebrows questioningly.

"Oh my God, Edward, do you remember that time...junior year...with the breathalyzer you bought on eBay?"

Bella POV

December 2008, Junior Year

(708): you're just made I got the high score on the breathalyzer

"Are you done with finals?" Edward asked when I entered the living room on my apartment.

Texts From Last Night

I stopped in my tracks at the sound of his voice. He hadn't been invited and I wasn't wearing a bra. Knowing that he had already been made aware of my presence, I carefully folded my arms across my chest and fully entered the room.

" I don't have another one until Monday, so I've got a break. Wait, how did you get in here?"

It was the Thursday of finals week and it seemed as if Edward and I were the only two in our circle of friends left in town, the rest of us our friends having hit the finals jackpot, so to speak, and finished early.

" I have a key."

" Who gave you a key?"

" Alice," he shrugged, as if to say, 'no big deal.'

" Why the fuck did she do that?"

" Because she likes having me around, I guess."

I narrowed my eyes at him.

" Also because I was dropping off something one time that Jasper didn't have time to bring by and forgot to give it back to him. It's his key."

" So it's not really your key?"

" Not so much...no." He didn't even attempt to look guilty as he leaned back, relaxing further against the cushions of the couch.

" Then it's a kidnapped key?"

" I treat it well. It has a good life on my keychain."

Texts From Last Night

" So, wait, Jasper has a key to our apartment?"

" Yes," he paused. "Well, usually."

" What for?"

The look Edward gave me said, 'Why do you think, idiot?'

" Oh," I answered dumbly. "Who else has a key?"

" Emmett."

" Damn. All of these keys floating around..."

" You all forget to lock your door most of the time, anyway."

" So?"

" So," he mimicked. "Does Jake have a key?"

I scoffed. "Of course not. I don't like unannounced visitors."

" Even unannounced nighttime visitors?"

I could feel myself blushing. "Yeah, like Jake would make unannounced nighttime visits. He's not allowed to leave the athletic dorms after a certain time, remember?"

Edward rolled his eyes. "Do you really think he follows that rule?"

" Why wouldn't he?" I asked innocently. Jake would never do anything to jeopardize his playing time. Right?

When Edward didn't answer, I started asking my own questions.

" Well, does Tanya have a key to your apartment?"

Texts From Last Night

" Fuck no," he answered quickly.

" Well, why not?"

" Because she's a psycho bitch."

" Yet you still date her..." I trailed off, standing and walking towards the adjacent kitchen.

" Yeah, you know," he said, feigning drama, "it works."

" Kind of like Jake," I mumbled under my breath. What I wanted to say was, 'It doesn't work at all.'

" What was that?"

" I said, do you want something to drink?"

He jumped up and, within seconds, was in the kitchen. "What kind of alcohol do you have?"

" Why? Do you have a final tomorrow?"

" Why do you think I'm here?"

" Because there's a psycho bitch in your apartment?"

" Maybe," he shrugged.

I laughed. "Poor girl, where did you tell her you were going?"

" The library."

" Ah."

" I don't have another final until Monday. So...drinks?"

Texts From Last Night

" All I have is beer and, uh, champagne I think."

" Okaaaay."

" Hey, don't judge, it's the end of the semester and beggars can't be choosers."

" Fine, I'll take the beer."

I nodded before swinging open the refrigerator door and pulling out two beers--one for him, one for me.

" Sweet, we can use my new toy."

I scoffed as I twisted the top off my beer. "Your new toy ?"

" I bought a breathalyzer."

" From a cop?"

Again, with the look like I was an idiot. "No, from eBay."

" You bought a breathalyzer on eBay?"

" Yeah, so I can test myself, and my friends, at the bars."

" Why would you want to do that?" I asked, taking a long pull on my beer. Edward was already halfway through his.

He shrugged. "Want to see who can drink the most?"

" Edward, you're going to win. I'm a girl."

" But you'll score higher because you're a girl. Plus, do you have anything better to do? It's after eleven and I'm sure Jake is in the for the night." The comment about Jake reeked with sarcasm.

Texts From Last Night

" Fine," I sighed. "But I get something if I win."

" What about me?"

" Okay, you can get something too. What do you want?"

" I win...I get to keep the key to the apartment."

" Why would you want that?"

" So that I can sneak over and catch you without a bra on again."

My eyes almost bulged out of my head.

" Yeah, I can tell," he smirked. "Friends or not, tits are tits. Cold?"

" You are such a guy."

" More of a guy than Jake."

" Don't go there," I bit through my teeth.

He laughed loudly. "That's a touchy subject for you, isn't it? Why don't you just dump the pussy?"

" Why don't you dump the psycho?"

" Touché."

" Anyway, if I win, you have to go home to Tanya tonight."

" I would be doing that anyway."

" Nah, I'll be feeling so good about my winning that I'll let you have the couch."

Texts From Last Night

" Well, drink up, then, because I love this couch."

" You're just hoping that I'll come downstairs topless and forget you're here."

" Perhaps," he grinned, standing. "Need another beer?"

" Yeah," I said, watching him as he moved.

Nice ass.

Wait, what?

" Why are you looking at me like that?"

" Like what?"

" Like you want to claw your eyeballs out."

" Uh, no reason."

As we drank, we laughed and played silly card games, both complaining about how boring it would be to go to our hometowns for Christmas. Two hours later, the Breathalyzer was tested. Of course, I won, my blood alcohol level significantly higher than Edwards as I was much smaller, less muscled.

Ah, the muscles.

Wait.

Stop.

Jake is an athlete.

" I should go to bed," I stood, the room spinning a little as I did.

" No," Edward pleaded, "stay."

Texts From Last Night

" Only one couch," I shrugged.

Edward stretched out before squeezing himself against the cushions. "There's room," he smiled, leaning wobbly on his elbow.

He looked so sexy lying there; kind of drunk with his eyes heavy and that damn smirk on his lips.

Edward....sexy? Could friends be sexy?

" If you want to cuddle, go home to Tanya."

" Tanya doesn't cuddle, she smothers."

" For the millionth time tonight, you picked her."

" Please," he said, sticking out his lower lip. "There aren't any blankets."

" I can get you one."

" You're warmer," he whispered, the tone sending tingles to places that I had never associated with Edward.

I stood there, contemplating my options. Upstairs was safe, quiet, and...lonely. The couch was warm and, well, dangerous. Jake had been distant since finals began and, you know, I have needs. Needs that in my drunken state I was sure Edward would happily oblige.

" Bellaaaa," he pleaded, dropping his head and closing his eyes as he patted the cushions. "Come on."

I gave in, switching off the light and stumbling towards the couch. As soon as I stretched out against him, Edward's arm was round my waist and his head was buried in my hair.

Texts From Last Night

"Edward, that better be your cell," I said when, moments later, I felt something move against my ass.

He groaned as I shifted forward.

"It's T," he moaned. "Shit."

"Tell her about the bet."

"Not a good idea."

I shrugged against him. Good idea or not, he was actually very nice to cuddle against.

"Hey, babe," I heard him murmur into the phone. "I'm, uh, at the library."

I laughed out loud at his slurring statement.

"What? Oh, that was just, Bella."

Silently, I turned in his arms and took his phone from him. "T-monnnnnster?"

She shrieked, a terrible, sobering sound.

"Edward lost a bet. He isn't at the library. He's in my arms. On my couch."

When the words starting flying from her mouth, I pressed the end button on the phone.

"Bitch," Edward laughed, clearly playing.

"I don't care," I said, burying my head in his neck without turning around. "Sleep."

"We had so much fun with that thing, breathalyzing all the freshmen after Christmas break," Bella was saying, though there had clearly been another

Texts From Last Night

memory on my mind. "You, sir, are over the limit," she said in a manly voice, pointing randomly.

How had I not known it then? Even that morning, after we slept on her couch, I had gone home to Tanya, completely ignoring how good it felt for Bella to be in my arms.

Shaking my head to bring myself back into the present, I spoke. "It was the novelty item of the year."

"Sounds like the two of you had a lot of fun in college," Mr. Swan commented dryly. "Too much."

Bella blushed and I looked down at my hands. I couldn't tell if he was joking or not, until I felt his hand clamp down on my shoulder. "Edward, you know as Bella's father, I was her first drinking buddy."

The look in his eyes told me he wasn't finished speaking and, also, that there was a deeper meaning to his words. I swallowed thickly.

"Think you can keep up?" He asked, a smirk on his lips.

I looked to Bella for help. Her smirk matched his.

"Uh...yeah?" I wasn't sure how drinking with her father was going to earn me any points, but I didn't want to let him down.

"After lunch, then," he said with a final nod.

I mentally made note to eat a large lunch.

"You drank with your dad?" I asked later that afternoon as Bella and I went off in search of an open liquor store, as per Mr. Swan's request.

She laughed, her arm sliding around my waste. "I would hardly call it drinking; he would let me have a beer or two when we would go fishing on the lake once

Texts From Last Night

I got into high school."

"Should I be scared about this afternoon?"

"I don't think so," she said, smiling at me before pulling on my hand. "Here, this ones open."

"Tequila?" I asked her as we entered. Mr. Swan had put me in charge of choosing what we drank, warning me to 'choose wisely.'

"No," Bella answered quickly. "That will remind me of...you know...things with you that we can't do right now."

"Body shots?" I winked.

Bella squeezed her eyes shut, her hands flying to cover them. "Terrible image in my mind right now...my dad...you."

"Stop." I held up a hand. "I'm getting scotch."

"Yeah, scotch is good."

It was interesting, drinking with Charlie Swan. He wasn't a chatty drinker, preferring to drink slowly in front of whatever was on TV, which happened to be a cheesy Christmas movie. Every now and then, he would turn and size me up, but even those moments were rare.

After we made it roughly halfway through the bottle I had bought, he turned to me.

"Good choice."

I choked a bit on my scotch, my throat burning as I did. "Excuse me?"

"Good choice," he repeated slowly. "With the scotch."

Texts From Last Night

"Oh, oh, thank you, sir."

He nodded once, firmly, before turning back to the television.

"So," he said some minutes later. "You've known Bella for a while?"

"Yes, sir."

"Since college?"

"We met freshman year."

"And do you still drink like you did in college?"

I cringed internally, thinking about the previous summer and all the drinking the six of us had done. That was normal, though, right? It had been vacation.

"Only sometimes," I carefully answered. "You know, on vacation."

"I see."

There was a long, silent minute that stretched between us.

"You love her?"

"I do," I answered without hesitation.

"Did you love her then?"

I shrugged, considering his question. "I think I've always loved her, sir, but in a different way."

"A friend way?"

"Yes."

Texts From Last Night

"And you cared for her when you were friends? You treated her well?"

"Better than that ass-," I stopped myself, "I mean, jerk, Jake."

"Never liked that boy," Mr. Swan grumbled.

"That makes two of us, sir."

"You think you would have been better?"

"I wasn't really thinking about it then, to be honest."

"You were dating someone else?" He turned to face me fully.

I nodded. "Her name was Tanya. We met freshmen year and, you know, it was comfortable so we stayed together."

He grunted in response to my answer. "But now, you love Bella?"

"More than anything, sir."

"And you've known this after spending a week together and then living apart from one another? Where were you those three years when you weren't in touch?"

"That's the same question I've been asking myself for the past six months," I answered honestly. "But, if you'd like a literal answer, I was in medical school."

Mr. Swan nodded, encouraging me to elaborate.

"Mr. Swan, Bella was my best friend in college, even better than Emmett and Jasper. When we graduated, though, she was still with Jake and, you know, he hated me...obvious reasons...and I wanted her to be happy. I didn't want to get in the way."

Texts From Last Night

"So you left her alone?"

"Yes."

"Even when you knew they had broken up?"

"I didn't know."

"No one told you?"

I shook my head back and forth sadly, though I don't know if things would have gone differently if they had. Before our week at the beach, I had always placed Bella on the 'off-limits' shelf.

"I kind of shut myself off doing the school thing."

"How do I know you won't do that again?"

I met his gaze, attempting to be strong. "Because I love her."

"Because...you...love...her?" Mr. Swan spoke slowly.

He sized me up as I continued to meet his gaze.

"Son," he said, placing his now-empty glass of scotch on the table, "you better not break her heart."

I allowed myself to smile. "I won't, sir."

"I still have all my former cop equipment, Edward, and that includes a gun. Don't you forget that."

"I won't," I answered confidently, though I was also confident of something else: that I would do everything within my power to keep his daughter's heart safe with mine.

Texts From Last Night

With a small smile, he held out his right hand. I took it mine quickly, a beaming smile across my face as I murmured, "Thank you, sir."

"Remember she's my baby, Edward."

"I will. I always will," I assured him.

BPOV

Something was up between my parents. Ever since my dad and Edward and concluded their afternoon of drinking (though really you could barely call it that, they were hardly buzzed), they had been exchanging when they thought were hidden smiles and smirks. I thought that maybe it had been an afternoon quickie--something I didn't dwell on but saw as a possibility--but it continued for the remainder of their trip.

The nail in the coffin of their weirdness was hammered in when, at the airport, my mom whispered for me to, "Call her if I had any news," before boarding the plane. When I asked her what she could be referring to, her eyes got misty and she simply smiled.

"Do you think they were acting weird?" I asked Edward once we were back in the taxi, headed back to my apartment.

"No, why? Do you think they were acting weird?"

"Yes."

"Huh," he said. "I didn't notice."

Yeah, something was definitely up.

"Do you want to go straight back to your apartment?" Edward asked nervously, awkwardly.

"I don't care. Do you?"

Texts From Last Night

"I was thinking we could go to Battery Park."

"Oh! Yeah, I haven't been there in forever."

"Really? You want to go?"

"Let's go!" I exclaimed. Edward wasted no time in leaning forward to tell the driver of our change in plans, forcing him to make a scary U-turn through traffic.

We were silent until we arrived at the park, finding it crowded with tourist already arriving in town for the New Year's celebrations the following day. As we climbed out of the taxi, Edward grabbed my hand, pulling me close as we moved towards the same gazebo I had brought him to on his first trip to the city, surprisingly finding it empty.

I nestled myself into his side, wanting to see his face as we spoke, and smiled up at him.

"I think my parents liked you," I commented.

A slow smile pulled across his face as he tucked a strand of hair behind my ear.
"I liked them, too."

"Good."

"Good," he smiled.

"I'm also glad you were here; I was dreading spending the holiday without you. Thanksgiving was such a tease."

"So was Christmas, in some ways," he joked, winking.

"Oh, hush, you'll get your Christmas fuck soon enough," I joked back, tossing a saucy look his way.

Texts From Last Night

He feigned horror. "Such a crude woman, I can't imagine spending my life with her."

I gasped a little, but mostly covered my surprise. "Your life?"

I watched his Adam's apple bob up and down as he swallowed. When he reached into his pocket, my mouth fell open.

"Edward..." I trailed off, my voice airy and light. What was in his pocket? A ring? It seemed like the perfect setting and, suddenly, everything added up...my mother's comment, his urgency to gain my father's approval...

"Just getting my phone," he said, holding it out in his palm with a nervous grin on my face. "What did you think I was doing?"

Stupid Bella. You knew it was too soon to be thinking of that...

I swatted him across the chest. "I don't know," I said weakly, attempting to keep a disappointed frown off my face. "Making a gesture?"

"A gesture. Hm. What do you mean by that?"

Sighing, I closed my eyes and leaned my head back, feigning annoyance. Really, though, there was no way I could be annoyed with him; I knew the day would come for us. Feeling movement beside me, I opened my eyes. The space beside me was now empty. Frowning, I blinked until I felt a finger poke my knee. Looking down, I saw him.

"Oh shit," I murmured. There he was, on one knee, with a very familiar ring between this thumb and forefinger.

"I love your dirty mouth," he murmured as he pulled away the hands that had covered my mouth, placing a gentle kiss on my knuckles. "But I love you more. Do you know how much I love you?"

Texts From Last Night

I was speechless, sure that if his love was any near to the level that mine was, that I was fully aware of its depth.

"Bella," he said, taking a deep breath. My vision was already blurring with tears. "I've loved you for seven years--first as friends, and now as a lover. When I think of my life before I realized that love, though, it seems cold and foreign. Empty. Pretty girl, I don't want to think of life without you again. I don't know where life will take us, but I know I want you by my side. Will you do me the extreme honor of marrying me and becoming my wife?"

"Yes, yes!" I said quickly, sliding onto the floor of the gazebo beside him and pulling him into my arms. "I love you so much."

"I love you, too," he murmured against my hair as he stood, his arms still around me as pulled me to a standing position.

We stood there, our arms wrapped tightly around each other for what seemed like ages before he pulled back, holding the ring in front of me again. "Do you want to try it on?"

"I, uh, yes of course. Is it your grandmother's?"

"It is," he grinned. "She gave them to me the night she gave me the plane ticket."

"It fits perfectly," I sighed in awe as I wiggled my left hand, the ring shining brightly. "Wait, gave *them* to you?"

"I have her wedding band, also, for...later."

I grinned, realizing that with an engagement came a wedding. And with that realization, I knew I needed to call Alice, and my mother, and probably Rose.

But first, I wanted to spend time quality time with my fiancé.

Texts From Last Night

"God, that looks hot on your finger," Edward sighed as we climbed into a taxi after begging a tourist to take a picture of us together on my cell phone.

I slid across the seat and wrapped my arms around his waist. "Yeah, it does."

"You'll never take it off?"

I shook my head against his chest. "Never."

"Good," he said, "Because now that I've got you, I'm never letting you go."

The End

There it is, y'all, the final chapter of Texts from Last Night. I can't put into words how wonderful this journey has been and, at times, I'm still amazed by the love that this story has received.

A massive thank you to my beta, Leah, for being my sounding board and a wonderful help throughout this process, even when she would get a random e-mail from me after 3 months without an update.

Readers-thank you for sticking with this story even though it took much longer than it should have to finish. I've loved reading your reviews and interacting with you on Twitter.

Finally, the original Twitter girls-I adore you all, even though I've been absent for the past couple of months.

Please...share with me your final thoughts. Did I wrap it up nicely? Was the proposal up to par? How do you think their friends reacted?

The epilogue has been written and will be posted sometime in the next week or so...

xoxo

Epilogue

Epilogue

Summer, 2023

Every summer, I was amazed by how, simultaneously, so much and so little had changed in the last ten years. On this particular evening as I walked toward the bonfire that my husband and friends had built near the shore, I couldn't help but be reminded of the bonfire that had led me to my dear friends ten years prior, the memories of that fateful week on the Carolina shore flooding my memory, as they did most summers. In a beautiful combination of moonlight and firelight, I saw the faces of my lifelong friends--Rose and Emmett, smiling at each other as he lovingly rubbed her pregnant belly; Alice and Jasper sitting on a piece of driftwood, each of them with an eye on one of their rambunctious two-and-a-half year old twins as they played in the sand; and, finally, my Edward, smiling as he held our daughter in his arms, pointing out to her the constellations that we weren't privy to in the city.

"I brought snacks!" I announced once I was close enough, earning me a squeal from one of the Whitlock twins and a squirming Ella in Edward's arms. Always eager for a snack, that one. Emmett loved it; he finally had a partner in crime.

It was quite a change from the box of Franzia that had been opened the first night that I walked toward such a bonfire alone, but clearly marked the fact that our lives had transitioned from young adulthood to plain, old adulthood, complete with children and mortgages and 401k's.

After placing Ella on the ground so that she could run towards the food I had placed on a blanket in the sand, Edward approached me from behind, his arms wrapping around my waist as he rested his chin on my shoulder.

"Mrs. Cullen," he murmured into my ear, "did you bribe our sweet Ella with snacks so you could get me alone and have your way with me?"

Texts From Last Night

I turned in his arms, a smile spreading across my face. "My back-up plan is to tell Rose and Em that they need practice. Plus, I missed you last week when you were out of the city..."

Without missing a beat, Edward turned his head slightly and yelled in the direction of our friends, "Rose, Em you're on little girl Cullen duty. Knock before entering our room."

"Edward!" I squealed, swatting him across the chest.

He shrugged innocently before a playful smile appeared on his face and, the next thing I knew, I was being tossed over his shoulder and he was walking briskly through the sand in the direction of the house.

"Where are Mommy and Daddy going?" I heard Ella ask whoever was around to answer her question. I didn't bother to listen for an answer, sure that someone would provide her with an answer that would satisfy her innocent curiosity.

"Mommy and Daddy are going to have adult playtime, right babe?" Edward murmured so that only I could hear, one of his hands reaching up to palm my ass.

"Mmhmm," I agreed, starting to feel a bit sick from bouncing up and down against his shoulder. "But you might want to put me down."

"Why? Are you worried about my back? You feel the same as you always have, Bella."

"No, no, I just...I feel kind of sick," I said, moaning a bit at the end of my statement as I felt my stomach rumble.

Slowing, he placed my feet on the sand as we reached the edge of the stairs that led to the deck on the back of the house. Turning to me, he brushed my hair back and examined my face.

Texts From Last Night

"What's wrong? Did you eat something bad?"

"I've just been feeling a bit nauseas since the drive in. I'm fine," I assured him, leaning forward to peck him on the lips.

"You're sure?"

I nodded firmly. "Positive. Come on," I said, grabbing his hand in mine and pulling him up the stairs. "I'm sure our bedroom has missed us. I know I've missed it."

Every summer after our original week in Charleston for Alice and Jasper's wedding, the six of us had made an effort to schedule two weeks to spend together in the same coastal town. It wasn't always easy for three busy couples to take the time off work, but somehow we always managed to make it happen.

For the first six years, we rented the same house as that first year, but by the end of that summer there was talk of babies and growth and we knew it was time to sit down and have a serious discussion--to move on, or to squeeze it all in the current house. One afternoon, Rose and I were putting together sandwiches for everyone when she commented how nice it would be for us to have a place to go each summer that was truly ours, with photographs of our friendships throughout the years and rooms to build memories to last a lifetime in, a place to bring our yet-to-be-born children year after year. After some sweet-talking on our parts, the men started looking and so, the seventh year, there was one beach house, divided financially by three families, with room to grow in hopes of future children.

Some years, Edward and I would escape to the beach house for a weekend here and there, sometimes with our precious Ella and sometimes by ourselves. Other weekends, Rose and Emmett would have the house, and sometimes it was Jasper and Alice. The special weekends, though, were when we were all together, laughing and sharing memories while making new ones.

Children, of course, only added to the excitement. Surprisingly, Edward and I were the first to start a family, beginning with Ella the Christmas after our first

Texts From Last Night

summer at the new beach house. Jasper and Alice followed quickly behind, popping out a set of twins that spring. Emmett and Rose took a little while longer, as Em didn't ask propose until a summer before we bought the beach house, so this summer she was miserably pregnant, due in late August.

Life was a little crazy, but we loved it.

The next morning, a bouncing three-year-old awakened Edward and me, jumping on us and exclaiming that the waves weren't waiting.

"Come oooooonnn," Ella pleaded, holding onto to one of each of our hands. She was using all of the force in her little body and failing miserably to pull us out of the bed.

"It's only seven a.m., pretty little girl," Edward said, sitting up and rubbing his eyes. His hair was sticking out in every possible direction. The desire I had of wanting to rub my hands through it was just as strong as it had been ten years ago.

"Sooooo," she countered in a tone that only a toddler could make cute. If I was a betting woman, I would say that Alice had been giving her lessons.

"What if you go have Uncle Emmett make you some breakfast and we'll be down in a bit? You know he's probably already in the kitchen," I offered, slowly sitting up as I spoke.

Ella's eyes lit up like they do on Christmas morning, or her birthday, or, really, anytime some marginally exciting happened.

"Eggs and bacon?"

"No bacon!" Edward and I yelled at the same time.

"No bacon?" She was pouting.

Texts From Last Night

"Uncle Em isn't a good bacon maker," I explained carefully, rubbing my hand through her soft baby hair. She nodded without asking questions and scrambled off the bed, running quickly through the doorway in search of food.

At the second mention of food, my stomach began to rumble uncomfortably. With what I'm sure was a frown, I ignored it and turned to Edward.

"Last night was fun."

"It was," he agreed, grinning slyly. "And Ella survived without us."

"She did."

"Sometimes I wonder if she's Emmett's child," he joked, his eyes narrowing in my direction.

I giggled. "She certainly has his appetite." Pausing, I ran a hand through his messy hair. "But she has your eyes."

He smiled, his eyes crinkling with new lines that I loved; 'I'm loved' lines, I called them.

"God, don't mention food," I moaned, falling back to my spot on the bed, my eyes closing as I rubbed my stomach.

His concerned eyes were directly over mine when I opened them slowly. "Are you still feeling sick?"

I nodded slowly. "A little bit, yeah."

"So it wasn't the ride in?"

I shook my head back and forth. "Doesn't feel like it."

"Do you think it's a bug?"

Texts From Last Night

I shrugged. "I have no idea, Edward. Hey, maybe I'm pregnant," I joked, poking him in the stomach.

It was probably a cruel joke, considering Edward and I had been having a trouble conceiving since we had decided to try for another child after Ella's first birthday. Nothing, it seemed, was working. Though I hadn't mentioned it to Edward, I was starting to make myself content with the fact that maybe we weren't meant to have a large, rambunctious family.

His eyes widened, a combination of shock and excitement. "You think?"

"I was joking, don't get too excited," I sighed, pushing him over so that I could sit up. When I did, though, my head started swimming.

"Whoa," I murmured closing my eyes as I scooted to the end of the bed and leaned forward, my head between my knees.

Edward was behind me instantly, rubbing a warm palm against my back.

"Nausea, dizziness, how do your boobs feel? Tender? Any weird cravings, missed periods?"

"You tell me."

"You were craving *me* last night, though that's not strange at all."

"I was talking about my boobs."

"Oh, they felt normal, too."

"I was kidding, *Dr. Cullen*."

"And I just trying to help explain why you fill ill."

I inhaled deeply and sat up, feeling that it was safe to do so. "I can't be pregnant."

Texts From Last Night

Edward arched a challenging eyebrow.

"What?" I asked, crossing my arms over my chest.

"We aren't doing anything to *prevent* it," he said, shrugging. I could see a hint of a smile playing on his lips as hope danced in his eyes.

I sat there, silently contemplating the idea. *Could I be?*

Edward was silent as well, one hand running through his hair.

Finally, I spoke. "I don't want us to get our hopes up, but maybe I should take a test."

Edward was on his feet so quickly I was afraid I was going to be dizzy again. "I'm going to the store," he announced.

"Edward, no!" I jumped up. "We can't let anyone know."

"Ah, sneaking around in Charleston again, reminds me of old times..." he said wistfully.

I glared at him, completely unamused by his nonchalance (might not be a word). The disappointment on his face in response to my harsh look made me soften.

"Fine," I said reluctantly as I stood slowly. "I might need some more sunscreen."

"Yes!"

"I'm going with you and we're doing this in the store. If it's negative, I don't want Alice or Rose to find it."

"Okay," Edward said, wrapping his arms around my waist and twirling me around. "We'll do whatever you want."

Texts From Last Night

Two hours later, and three pregnancy tests later, it was confirmed--I was definitely pregnant. Edward, of course, wanted to tell everyone immediately. I told him we needed to wait, to give our little Cullen #2 a little more time to grow before announcing. Eventually, the doctor in him agreed that it was best to wait for at least a few weeks.

It was impossible, though, to hide my grin as I watched Edward help Emmett and Jasper plant a large umbrella in the sun. Between the news of the morning, and watching the wind win its battle against the men, I was practically glowing.

"Bellaaa," Alice chirped from her towel next to me. All at the same time she was reading, sunbathing, watching her twins play in the sand with Ella, and annoying the shit out of me.

Typical Alice, really.

"Uh huh?" I asked, pulling my gaze from our struggling husbands to her.

She just looked at me, daring me to tell her something she didn't know. I stared back, hoping that I could keep up the fight and not fall to her silent demands.

"You have news," she said in her all-knowing way.

I shrugged, caving. "Maybe. I'll give you five questions."

"You're moving closer to us?"

Alice and Jasper still lived in Texas, far too many miles from our home in New York City--a fact that both of us shared the hatred of. Of course, at the same time, Edward and I were certain we couldn't imagine raising a family anywhere else, we loved the culture and opportunities that were available to them in such a bustling metropolis.

"One."

Texts From Last Night

"Damn," she said, knowing she was wrong. "Um, you got a promotion? You're getting published again? A sequel to your first book?"

I snorted. "No to two, three, and four."

"Hey, baby?" Jasper called from where he was standing. "Do you know where the sunscreen is? I need some more for the kids."

Alice gasped suddenly, her eyes moving rapidly from Jasper, to my stomach, to my face, to Edward, and back to my stomach before finally settling on my face.

"You're pregnant," she stated bluntly, definitely without a lift at the end of her sentence signaling a question.

Damn it.

Without confirming or denying her statement, I simply closed my eyes.

"You didn't say five..." Her voice trailed off.

I ignored her.

"You didn't say five," she said, louder this time. "Oh my God, where's Rose?"

When I opened my eyes again, she was gone.

"What happened to keeping it a secret?" Edward murmured from behind me, his breath tickling against my skin.

"I guess you heard the exchange." I turned to face him, shrugging. "You know, Alice knows all."

He was silent for a moment, seeming to contemplate his answer. "Well, it's good to know that some things never change."

Texts From Last Night

I smiled as his statement, turning back to face the waves as he moved to sit behind me, resting his chin on my shoulder. And, as we sat there watching our daughter play with what we hoped would be her lifelong friends, I savored the moment.

Except, the moment ended five minutes later when I heard a very scary voice from behind me. Normally it wouldn't have taken her as long, but I figured that the pregnancy had forced her to waddle from the air conditioned house down to where we had set up in the sand.

"Isabella Cullen you better damn well not be hiding something from me," I heard Rose say as she approached.

"Rose! Babe! Did you bring snacks?" Emmett asked, patting his still-flat-after-all-these-years belly.

"Em, seriously?" Jasper asked. "You just had breakfast, like, an hour ago."

I felt Edward's chest move as he silently chuckled behind me.

"Yeah," I said, "some things really do never change."

"Bella!" Rose demanded, standing in front of me, her head blocking the sun.

"Rose!" I retorted, matching her tone.

She rolled her eyes. "Edward?" Her tone was sickly sweet as she attempted to get the answer she wanted from him.

I felt him shrug against me, sighing before saying, "Alice knows all."

Rose squealed and waddled back towards Alice, her swollen belly leading the way.

Leaning back against Edward, I closed my eyes and smiled.

Texts From Last Night

"You know," he commented, seemingly out of the blue, "every now and then I get in these weird moods where I evaluate my life, choosing the best and worst days and comparing them to each other. And you know what?"

"Hmm?" I asked, not bothering to open my eyes, but dropping my head against his shoulder.

"There have been a lot more 'best' days since that first summer here, the one where I found you again."

Turning my head slightly, I kissed him gently on the jaw, letting him know without words that I couldn't have agreed more. The crazy parties, the calm afternoons, the flirting and the sneaking around--all had been the start of the best years of my life.

"Today is one of those days," he added minutes later. "A 'best' day."

"Definitely," I agreed, my lips spread across my face in a beaming smile.

And I knew with sudden clarity as I leaned against my husband and watched my dear friends interact, that the best days were only beginning. Sure, jobs would be lost and found, babies would be born and grow, mortgages would be paid, and parents would pass on, but this--the friendship, the memories, and the laughter--would always remain, pulling us together when times were easy and hard.

A/N:

Thank you, thank you, thank you for your support of this story. I hope that you enjoyed the epilogue...I'd love to hear your thoughts, even if you have never reviewed before!

There's definitely a possibility for outtakes, so be sure to put me on alert.

Love you all!