

The image shows a close-up of a parachute canopy, highlighting the intricate weaving of the fabric and the way it is folded. A solid blue horizontal band is superimposed over the center of the image, serving as a background for the title text.

Parachute

KitsuShel

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Summary

After finding an abandoned child on the streets of Seattle, Bella Swan raises him for five years as her own. What happens to their life when his biological family is found? AU/AH

Prologue

AN: *Twilight and all of its characters are owned by Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement is intended.*

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*I wanna take you with me
To life with no more yesterdays
We can start again awake and so excited
And change the way we always push
We always pull*

*I'll open up and be your parachute
And I'll never let you down
So open up and be my human angel
And we'll only hit the ground
Running*

Parachute ~ Train

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Prologue

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Taking a deep breath in through her nose, Bella pulled over to the side of the road just before a long driveway. Glancing in the rear-view mirror, she gazed at her eight-year-old son. His leg was bouncing as he stared out of his window, a nervous trait that he'd picked up from her. He ran his hand through his mop of unruly brown hair, which had bronze highlights running through it. His emerald green eyes flicked towards hers quickly, before glancing back out the

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window. She knew the kid like the back of her hand; he was her best friend, after all.

"Jack? Are you okay?" Bella asked quietly.

He nodded swiftly. "Just nervous, Ma, you know?" he responded, glancing back at her.

Bella nodded in understanding. More than halfway across the country was so far away from home. Here, just miles outside of Chicago, was a family that Jack hadn't seen in over five years. Neither of them knew what to expect, since she'd been too nervous to call and speak with anyone. This whole trip had been on the spur of the moment. As soon as the private investigator that was hired, Jay Jenks, had found the Cullens, Bella booked their tickets to Chicago, not thinking things through thoroughly. Now, she was riddled with doubt.

Maybe it was better left alone, she wondered. Jack was legally her son. There was no way to prepare for what might happen when they knocked on that door. Could she share him? Could she give him up?

Bella's heart instantly started to hammer in her chest and knew that the last one wasn't an option. She couldn't survive without him; he was her life.

Turning the ignition and putting the car back in drive, she was tempted to just turn back around, head to the airport and fly them right back to their little, cozy three-bedroom house near Seattle. But she knew she couldn't do that, and Jack deserved to face his past and reconcile it with his present. She turned up the mile long driveway and pulled up to the front of the enormous three-story house. With another deep breath, Bella turned off the car and unhooked her seat belt, as did Jack. After climbing out of the driver's seat, she walked over to where her boy was already standing by the rear passenger door.

He reached out blindly for his mother's hand, unable to take his eyes off of the house. She wrapped his small hand in hers and started to walk forward, up the stairs that led to a large porch which held a swing on either side. The house was white with blue accents, having a very Southern feel to it.

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"Are you ready?" Bella asked, looking down at Jack.

He nodded nervously. "I feel like I'm going to puke though," he groaned lightly.

She chuckled, thankful for the small break in tension.

"Here we go," she whispered and she pressed her finger to the doorbell.

This was the beginning. Their lives would change drastically after this; she was sure of it. She prayed it was for the better and not the worse.

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[illegible]

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AN: 5/29/11, in honor of Parachute's one year anniversary, the lovely HolletLA is re-beta'ing our lovely story from the beginning. I'm not sure how long the process will take, but I'll leave a little mark (~O.o~) at the end of the most currently Beta'd chapter!

If you're reading this right now, I thank you in advance and hope you enjoy the story!

~Shel~

Chapter 1

Chapter One

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September 23, 2005

"Bells! Time to get a move on, baby girl, or you'll be late!"

Groaning, Bella Swan rolled over and peeked under the covers to check out the clock on her bedside table. **[7:38]**

"Shit, shit, shit!" she yelled, jumping out of bed. "Stupid freaking alarm. Argggh, I'm going to be late!"

Hastily, she grabbed a pair of jeans, a well-worn Rolling Stones shirt and clean underwear from her drawer, before rushing out of her room to get to the bathroom. Her father, Charlie, was leaning against the wall between the two rooms with a smirk on his face.

"Oversleep, baby girl?"

Bella growled and shut the bathroom door with a huff. After quickly changing and brushing her teeth, she took a deep breath and looked into the mirror while brushing her long, dark brown hair. Her eyes were round, large and chocolate colored. Her skin was pale and her smile could light up a room, although she thought that she was rather plain. Pulling her hair up in a ponytail, she dashed back into her room to grab her knapsack.

Charlie stood in the pale yellow kitchen and secured the lid on his daughter's travel mug, which was now filled with hot chocolate, her morning beverage of

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choice. He stepped out into the hall just as she was coming down the stairs. She grinned and hugged him.

"Thank you, Daddy! You're a lifesaver!"

Charlie blushed slightly and scratched the back of his neck as he walked her out the front door.

"Make sure you say 'Hi!' to Alice and Angela for me."

Alice Brandon and Angela Weber were two of Bella's closest friends. All three of them went to Forks High School together and decided to take some classes at Port Angeles University for two years before transferring to UW. Angela's mother passed away last year, leaving Mr. Weber and Angela to care for her twin 11 year old brothers. Angela felt better about waiting until the boys were starting high school before transferring to UW's Seattle campus. Bella and Alice had decided to follow their best friend's lead and stay close to home for a little longer.

Jumping into her beat up old Chevy, which had been a sixteenth birthday present from Charlie, Bella started off towards Port Angeles. If she could push Bessie to go the speed limit, she might just make it to class on time.

Almost four hours later, Bella emerged from the Fine Arts building. An hour and a half to get there and then a two hour Journalism class, made for one cranky and hungry Bella. Luckily, she was meeting the girls just a few blocks away at a little cafe, ironically called Brunch. Walking the three blocks to the cafe briskly, Bella pulled out her phone to check her messages. Two missed calls, one from Alice and one from her sort-of boyfriend, Jacob. She and Jake had been friends since they were kids and fell into an easy relationship. It was more like hanging out with a best friend than a boyfriend. Though, it was not for lack of trying to get into her pants on Jake's part. She just wasn't sure if that was a step that she wanted to take with him. Alice was all for her losing her V card and becoming a "grown up". Angela was the complete opposite, championing her decision to wait for the right person.

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She put her phone back into her pocket as she opened the cafe door, deciding that she would call him back later. She waved at Jodie at the hostess stand and walked over to their usual table by the window. Angela and Alice were already there waiting. Dropping her bag on the floor, she slid into the chair with a sigh.

"Ugh, I hate school. Why did I sign up for a 9:00 am class again?" she groaned, as she laid her head on top of her arms on the table.

Alice giggled.

"Because you need the credits?" Angela piped up. Bella's stomach growled and their waiter approached, as if on cue.

"Can I get you ladies the usual?" a deep, slightly Southern voiced drawled. Bella looked up and smiled half-heartedly at Jasper, who worked there part time while going to law school. He also happened to be Alice's boyfriend.

"Yes, please, Jazz!" Bella smiled up at him. Jasper was tall, about 6'5" with slightly shaggy honey-colored hair, which curled around his ears and bright ice blue eyes. He was a kind man with a relaxed and calm demeanor. He complimented Alice's hyper pixie-like attitude. Anyone could feel the love radiate off the two of them whenever they were near each other. Bella was in complete awe of their relationship and perhaps a little jealous. She'd never tell Alice, but she and Jasper were one of the biggest reasons why she couldn't sleep with Jake. She was absolutely sure that she didn't love him, other than as a friend, so she wanted to give herself to someone who loved her and treated her like Jasper did Alice. When she was a child, her parents argued constantly until her mother up and left them when Bella was 10. Renee Swan had been a bit flighty and a free spirit, but no one would have expected her to abandon her little girl and never look back. That was almost nine years ago and no one had heard from Renee since, other than the occasional postcard she sent to Bella. They were usually post-marked from places all around the world, from exotic locales to small towns.

"I'm so happy that today is Friday! What are we doing this weekend, ladies?" Alice chirped, as Jasper walked away to grab their usual assortment of food.

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Angela smiled and shook her head, knowing already that she'd go along with whatever Alice suggested. Bella chewed on her bottom lip slightly, in thought.

"I'm having dinner with my dad and Sue on Sunday night," Bella replied. "I think they're finally going to tell me that he proposed and that she's moving in."

Bella shook her head and smiled. They thought they were being so secretive, but Sue's son, Seth, was best friends with Jacob and he had already spilled the beans to her earlier in the week. Sue was a sweet, kind-hearted woman who lived on the Quileute Reservation not far from Forks. Her husband, Harry, had been one of Charlie's best friends for over 10 years before he passed away about five years ago. They had two children, Seth, who was 16, and Leah, who was Bella's age, 19. Seth was adorable and clearly inherited his mother's sweet disposition. Leah, on the other hand, was miserable most of the time and came across as resentful of her mother's relationship with Bella's father.

"Oooh, I hope they let me help with the wedding plans," Alice squeed and clapped her hands. Angela laughed softly at her friend's excitement. Alice was always excited for any reason to throw a party.

"Why don't we all head into Seattle tomorrow morning and do some shopping for the special occasion?" Alice suggested. Bella snorted.

"Like you need any reason to go shopping?" she asked her excitable friend. Alice had the decency to smile somewhat sheepishly.

"I would be down for that," Angela piped in. "There's a book I've been meaning to pick up for a while now and a trip to the city would be nice."

Bella nodded her head in agreement. They had all worked their behinds off the past few weeks, getting ready for finals. They deserved a break. Jasper and Jacob were more than likely working all weekend, as usual, so it would be nice to have a girl's day.

"Sounds like a plan, ladies. Now, let's get through the rest of the day's classes before we get too excited about the weekend." Bella winked at her friends.

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Early the next afternoon, Bella found herself shoved into a dressing room by her short, bossy friend.

"Alice," she whined, "it's only dinner with my dad and his girlfriend. Why do I need a new outfit? You know how much I hate this kind of shit."

Angela snickered from the chair where she was skimming through the book she had bought earlier.

"Oh, Bells!" Alice exclaimed. "What am I going to do with you? Mark my words, one day **I will** make a shopper out of you!"

"Good luck with that. You've been trying for the past five years and it hasn't gotten you anywhere yet," Bella laughed.

Bella picked up the tiny black strapless dress that Alice had sent in with her.

"You know, Allie, if I wore this tomorrow, Charlie would have a heart attack."

"True, but that doesn't mean that you can't try it on and maybe save it for a later date! Every girl should have a little black dress."

"Alice," Bella sighed, "sweetie, I think this would qualify as a handkerchief on me."

Suddenly, their conversation was cut short by a high-pitched screeching sound. Poking her head out the dressing room, Bella saw a little girl around seven years old who was clinging to a rack of dresses, refusing to let go.

"No, I don't wanna go! I wanna new dress!" she shouted at a weary-looking woman. The woman rolled her eyes and jerked the girl by her arm.

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"Dammit, you are so annoying. Why can't you just sit down and shut up for two minutes while I pick something up? Really, I don't know why the hell I bother." The woman pulled the girl away from the rack and out of earshot.

Bella turned with wide eyes and looked at her friends. Angela looked upset and Alice was shaking her head.

"That right there is why I'll never have kids," Alice commented. "They're so loud and whiny."

Angela shook her head. "Kinda like you, huh?" Alice grabbed the closest thing to her, which happened to be a shoe, and tossed it at Angela, giggling.

"Seriously though," Angela started, "it's not the kid's fault that the mother couldn't be bothered to listen to her and talk her down gently. I've handled worse temper tantrums from the boys much better than that. I don't get some people. Why have a kid if you're going to be mean or talk badly to it?"

Bella sighed, thinking about her own mother. She remembered Renee being sweet and kind, making cookies with her on the weekends. The most prominent memories she had of Renee were of her and Charlie yelling and arguing with each other. Afterwards, Renee would always take her frustration out on Bella by either snapping at her or ignoring her.

"Sometimes, people make the wrong choice. Having a kid to save your relationship or unprotected sex are common. Mostly, I think women go into motherhood thinking things will be one way and then get disillusioned when reality hits. Some roll with the punches and do their best. Others turn into cold bitches or just drop their kids off at the neighbor's and never come back."

Both Alice and Angela lowered their eyes sadly, knowing exactly how much that last comment hit home for Bella. Renee had done just that to Bella. No one knew what made her choose that day to take her daughter three doors down and drop her off at Angela's house for a play date and just never come back.

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"Sorry, Bells," Angela spoke quietly. Bella walked over to her friend and pulled her into a hug.

"Nothing to be sorry for, Ange. That was a completely valid question. It really does suck when some people are crappy parents, but I'm glad your mom was awesome. I really miss her, too."

Alice joined into the hug and wiped a few stray tears from the eyes of her girls.

"What do you say we take a break and get some lunch?"

Bella and Angela smiled.

"Best idea ever, Allie!"

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Three hours later, the girls were carrying their purchases and making their way back to Angela's little Acura. Two blocks from the car, Bella heard a noise. It sounded like someone was crying softly. They were just passing by the mouth of a tiny alley and the sound got stronger.

"Guys, wait up," Bella said as she started to walk into the alley. Alice reached out and grabbed her arm, looking at her wildly.

"Are you freaking crazy? There could be a killer down there waiting to chop you up! Or a wild animal that will eat you!"

"Alice, we're in the middle of Seattle. There aren't any wild animals wandering around. Trust me on this, I'm a cop's daughter, remember? I can take care of myself."

Alice looked skeptical and didn't let go of her arm. Bella heard a small sob and felt something pulling her into that alley, like an invisible string.

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"Please, Allie, I just have a feeling. I need to check it out."

Alice let go of Bella's arm hesitantly, still looking wary.

"You have five minutes. If I don't hear anything from you after that, then I'm coming in guns blazing!" Alice practically shouted.

Bella smiled reassuringly at her friends and quietly walked back down the alley. The crying had softened a bit and was now interspersed with sniffing.

"Hello?" she called out. "Are you hurt? Do you need some help?"

Quiet immediately enveloped the small place. Bella continued to walk, stepping around trash littering the ground and broken bottles. There was graffiti along the wall and a dumpster that was pressed against a wall at the end of the alley. Next to it was a worn-down door that was boarded up. In the small space between the dumpster and the wall, a tiny form was curled up into a tiny ball, shaking like a leaf. Her brows furrowed in confusion. The body was too small to be an adult, but why would a child be hiding in a filthy alley?

She reached out and touched the child's dirty hair softly. Its head jerked up and she found herself staring into the greenest eyes that she'd ever seen. They were staring back at her, wide with fear.

"Pp-ple-ease, don't hurt me," a voice asked, barely above a whisper. Bella felt her heart break and tears sting her eyes.

"I'm not going to hurt you, sweetheart," she said as calmly and gently as she could. "I want to help you. Are you hurt? Where are your parents?"

The child started to sob again and threw himself into her arms. Bella was startled and fell back on her behind. She wrapped her arms around the kid and felt something burn in her chest. In that instant, she felt something shift. She knew right then and there that nothing would stop her from helping this little one. She ran her fingers through his crusty hair and wondered again how one so young could just be all alone like this. Both his clothes and hair were caked

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with mud and he smelled of urine and vomit.

When the boy quieted a little, Bella tried asking her questions again.

"Hey, Little Bit, I'm not going to hurt you. I want to help you. Can you tell me your name at least?"

"Ja-ack."

"Well, Jack, my name is Bella. Are you hurt, sweetie?"

"N-n-no, but I hungee." The boy's statement was punctuated by a loud grumble from his stomach. Bella started to shift to stand up and Jack tightened his hold on her neck.

"Ssshh, don't worry, Little Bit, I'm not letting you go. We're going to get off of this dirty ground and go to my friends outside of this alley. Then we're going to go get something to eat, okay?"

"Yes, please," he said. Bella wondered once again where his parents were. The kid was terrified, yet still polite, so he had to have a decent family somewhere, but then where the hell where they?

"OK, then that's our first stop. Jack, do you know how old you are?"

He held up three fingers.

"You're three years old, baby?" she asked in confirmation. He nodded.

"All right, do you know where your parents are, sweetheart?"

"I-I don't know," he started to sob again. Bella rubbed his back comfortingly as she stepped out onto the sidewalk.

Both Angela and Alice looked shocked to see Bella come out of the alley carrying a small child in dirty clothes.

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"Bella, what's going on?" Alice asked. Bella shrugged.

"I don't know, Allie. His name is Jack and he's hungry and all alone. Let's get him something to eat and I'll call my dad. Angie, why don't you take our bags to the car? Allie, do you think you can run back to one of the stores and grab him an outfit to change into? We'll head over to the McDonald's down the street and see about cleaning him up a little."

The girls nodded their agreement.

"Bells, make sure to take some pictures with your phone, just in case we need them as evidence or something."

"I was thinking the same thing," Bella said as she nodded. Whoever was responsible for hurting this little boy would be in some serious shit. She wasn't a violent person, but she was having some pretty vicious thoughts at the moment.

A couple of minutes later, after cleaning him up a little in the restaurant's bathroom, the girls had Jack settled into a booster seat while he dug ravenously into a pile of chicken nuggets. Bella's eyes started to tear up once again as she dialed Charlie's number on her cell phone.

"Hey, baby girl! How's your shopping trip going?" he asked kindly. She let out a watery sigh and Charlie immediately knew something was wrong.

"Daddy? I need your help."

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Chapter 2

AN: I am not a social worker nor do I have any knowledge in how a matter like this is actually handled. This is fiction, so roll with me. ;-)

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September 25, 2005

Bella rolled her head and felt her neck crack slightly, as her fingers continued to stroke the hair of the child sleeping on her lap. Running her fingers through Jack's hair, she was reminded that the poor thing really needed a bath. He lay sleeping half on his chair, with his head in her lap. They were sitting in a waiting room at the Seattle Justice Center, which is where the main branch of the Seattle Police Department made its home. Her father had disappeared into Chief Volturi's office as soon as they arrived, almost four hours ago. Aro Volturi had been a friend of Charlie's since their days in the Academy together. Charlie could very well have been in Aro's shoes had he not wanted to stay in sleepy Forks to raise his daughter.

Bella sighed and closed her eyes. It had been such a long day. After Bella got off of the phone with her father, the girls had decided to take Jack shopping for some new clothes and a few toys while waiting for Charlie to drive up from Forks, which was about a 3 hour drive. Knowing him, he probably drove the cruiser and used his siren the way. The thought of that brought a small smile to Bella's face. As the girls were walking around and shopping, they tried to discreetly pepper Jack with questions, trying to figure out what had led him to be separated from his family. They weren't able to get much more out of him than they already had, except that he had been driving for a long time with his mommy. When he wasn't in the car, she was off somewhere while he played by himself.

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Bella felt her tears well up once again, for what felt like the hundredth time today, when she thought about when Jack was interviewed by the police a few hours ago. The child psychologist they brought in, Miss Zafrina, had been able to get him to open up a bit more. They learned that his name was Jackson, but his MeMe called him Jacky. He lived with his mommy and daddy, in a place with lots of trees and water. He was able to tell them that he was three years old and his birthday was at Easter time. He had a fish named Nemo and a bed shaped like a race car. He stayed overnight with his MeMe and PopPop a lot of the time, but he couldn't tell them any "real" names.

When he was asked if he knew how long he had been all alone, his answer literally broke Bella's heart.

"I dunno. It was when the man met us at the park. He told Mommy that she had to ditch the kid or she wouldn't get it. She told me to stay on the bench and that she would be back soon." His little eyes welled up with tears.

Upon hearing that, Bella gasped and looked at her father, whose face was etched with disgust.

"What man was that, Jack?" Zafrina asked, "Your daddy?" He shook his head quickly.

"No, my daddy was at home when we left in the car."

When she asked Jack to describe what anyone looked like, he told them that the man was big, with long yellow hair and that his mommy was tall with orange hair and blue eyes. His daddy and MeMe had green eyes and brown hair, just like him.

Once they were through asking him all of their questions, Charlie disappeared into Aro's office, leaving Bella in a waiting room to comfort Jack. He was exhausted and fell asleep almost immediately. Angela and Alice had left for home once Charlie had arrived to bring Bella and Jack to the SPD. They promised to drop all of her bags off at the house before heading home. Alice made her promise to call once everything got sorted out.

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About an hour later, Bella felt a nudge on her shoulder and realized that she must have fallen asleep. She blinked her eyes and saw her father's face.

"Dad?" she asked. He smiled kindly at her.

"Come on, baby girl, let's get out of here."

She felt her chest tighten and started to panic.

"But what about Jack?" she asked, tearing up once again. "I can't leave him!"

Charlie shook his head. "It's okay, sweetheart, he's coming with us."

Bella shot him a confused look. Granted, she didn't know the ins and outs of the law, nor was she a social worker, but this seemed highly out of the ordinary. Charlie shot her a sheepish smile, recognizing the look on her face.

"Aro called in some favors for us. There are no children reported as missing with his description in Washington State. They're going to check out the rest of the country's databases in the morning to see if they get any hits. Normally, Child Protective Services would be out here and take him to a group facility until they could place him with a foster family. Once his parents were found, he'd be returned to them pending an investigation of neglect. Although in this case, like I said before, Aro pulled some big strings and got us appointed as temporary guardians."

Bella gave a sigh of relief. She had somehow become attached to this little boy over the past ten or so hours. She gently lifted his upper body and shifted him so that his head was on her shoulder and his legs around her waist. She rubbed his back and smiled a little.

"We're going to have to get him a car seat," she mused out loud.

"I'm already on it, 's almost midnight and too far to drive him home without one, so Aro's offered to let us stay at his house tonight. We can pick up a seat before we head home tomorrow."

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Bella nodded and smiled gratefully. Charlie reached out to carry Jack, but she refused to let him go. Charlie helped her up and put his hand on the small of her back instead. As they walked out of the station, Bella heard him mumbling under his breath about her being too stubborn.

It wasn't that she was being difficult, she just couldn't let him go right now. It hurt too much.

After settling herself and Jack into the back of Charlie's cruiser, Bella quietly drifted off.

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September 26, 2005

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The next morning, Bella awoke feeling something warm pressed against her left side and shoulder. She glanced down to see Jack nestled firmly against her, his emerald eyes staring at her face. She smiled and he grinned back at her.

"Good Morning, Little Bit," she yawned, covering her mouth.

"G'Morning, Miss Bella."

"None of that," she laughed. "You can just call me Bella. No need to call me Miss."

Jack smiled brightly at her, but then suddenly his face clouded over and he looked pained.

"What's wrong, buddy?" she asked, concerned.

"I hafta go potty," he whispered.

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Bella shifted herself out of the huge, comfy bed and reached out for his hand. Glancing around the unfamiliar room, she tried to figure out which way to go. There were two doors, on opposite walls. She figured one must lead to the hallway and the other to a bathroom. They'd just have to learn by trial and error. They walked over to the door closest to the bed and were very happy to find a spacious bathroom. It had a claw foot bath tub, along with a large vanity and a toilet in its own little alcove.

She stopped for a moment, wondering if he needed help with anything. As if reading her mind, Jack walked over and lifted the toilet lid, getting ready to do his business. Her cheeks reddened slightly at the boy's innocent lack of modesty. She stepped out of the bathroom, giving him some privacy. As she walked back into the bedroom, she noticed a pair of bags from their shopping trip yesterday, seated on a chair in the corner of the room. She picked up the larger one and saw a note on top of the items inside.

...

Dear B,

I had a feeling that you might be needing these. Call when you get home! Hope everything goes well for Jack!

Love, Alice

...

Bella smiled. Alice's "feelings" were well-recorded as being amazingly accurate most of the time. Inside of the bag, she found a change of clothes and a toiletry bag which contained two toothbrushes, toothpaste, a hairbrush, deodorant, body wash, shampoo and conditioner. Upon closer inspection, she noticed that the soap products were child friendly and tear-free. The smaller bag contained an outfit for Jack, including socks, underwear, a little pair of black Nike's and a small black Mariner's baseball cap. Bella smiled and shook her head. Alice really did think of everything and she was certain that Charlie would get a kick out of the hat. He was a huge Mariner's fan.

"Bella?" she heard Jack call.

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She turned around and saw him standing by the bathroom door. She smiled at him and he grinned back. He ran at her and hugged her legs tightly. Bella squatted down and wrapped her arms around his shoulders. After hugging for a moment, she pulled back to look into his eyes.

"How would you feel about a bath to get some of the dirty yucky stuff out of your hair, Little Bit?"

He nodded swiftly and clapped, oddly reminiscent of Alice. She stood and picked up the toiletry bag and reached for his hand. Together, they walked back into the bathroom and started to fill the tub. Bella noticed that Jack looked thoughtful for a minute.

"What's up, buddy?" she asked. He shook his head and looked sad.

"My daddy baths me with lots of bubbles." Bella felt her heart clench a little. She put her hand on his shoulder and came down to eye level with him.

"When we get back to my house, I'll make sure we have plenty of bubbles for however long that you're there." He nodded and smiled.

Once the water was ready, Jack stripped down and Bella helped him into the tub. After a good soak and scrub to remove some of the grime off of his body, Bella started to wash his hair. After rinsing out the shampoo, she applied a small amount of conditioner. She giggled when he started to hum softly as she lightly scratched his head, while working in the conditioner. He let out a little sigh.

"My MeMe scratches my head when she baths me. It feels nice."

Bella was surprised when he looked up at her with tears in his eyes.

"Am I ever gonna see her or PopPop again?" his voice asked, sounding scratchy. "I miss dem. What about my daddy? Bella, I want my daddy!" he started to wail and sob, as tears fell quickly down his cheeks.

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Not knowing what else to do, Bella pulled his soaking wet body into her arms.

"Sssshhh," she whispered into his slick hair. "I promise you that I will do everything I can to find your daddy, sweetheart. I promise."

She held him until he was calm enough to finish up his bath and then wrapped him up in a fluffy white towel that was folded on a rack on the far wall. She held him a little bit longer until she was sure that he was okay and then she helped him get dressed. Once they were both ready to head downstairs, she gathered up their belongings and reached for his hand again. After his moment in the bathroom, Jack seemed relatively calm. She guessed that getting that out of his system helped him get a hold of his emotions, if only for a little while.

She couldn't even begin to comprehend how he must be feeling. When her mother had left, at least she still had her dad and her home. Poor Jack had nothing but the clothes on his back. He was practically just a baby. She was amazed at how well he was taking everything at the moment. She wasn't going to kid herself. There would be bad times and temper tantrums coming, she knew. She wondered if it would be best to get him some counseling when they got back to Forks.

That thought almost made her stop in her tracks. What was she doing? Making plans when she wasn't even sure if he would still be with her tomorrow. His family could be found today or tomorrow. It could be next week or next month. Hell, it could be next year or never at all. What was she getting into? Was it worth it? She was falling head over heels for this little boy and her heart would definitely be broken when he was returned to where he belonged.

She looked down at him, just as he glanced up at her. He gave her a toothy grin. His sparkling green eyes reached in and touched her soul. Right at that moment she knew her answer.

Yes, it was definitely worth it.

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While Bella and Jack had been upstairs getting ready, Charlie was already out and about. Always having been an early riser, even after a night like the previous one, he was awake at the crack of dawn. After getting dressed and having a quick cup of coffee with Aro, the two men parted ways. Aro headed back to work, promising to call Charlie and keep him abreast of what was going on with Jack's case. Charlie decided to head out to the nearest store so that he could grab a car seat for the little guy. Once in the store, he couldn't help but leave with a little something extra as well. On the way back to Aro's, he decided to stop and pick some breakfast up for everyone.

He was just walking in the door with the bag of food when Bella and Jack descended the stairs. It was obvious to Charlie's eyes, and nose, that the boy had gotten a bath. He was now wearing a pair of blue jeans and a black t-shirt, with matching black sneakers and a Mariner's ball cap. His mouth quirked and he felt his mustache twitch at that sight. Even when she wasn't around, Alice was putting a smile on his face.

"Hey kiddos," he said as he set the food on the dining room table.

"Hi, Mr Charlie!" Jack answered politely.

Charlie couldn't stop the smile that started to spread across his face. He had never met a more polite and well-spoken kid before in his life. It was difficult sometimes to remember that he was only three.

"Here, I brought us some breakfast before we head home. Do you like pancakes and bacon, Jackson?"

Jack's eyes lit up and he nodded enthusiastically.

"I sure do!"

Charlie took the three platters out of the bag and placed them on the table. Without thinking about it, Bella opened the little cellophane bag that housed a

Parachute

napkin, plastic knife and fork, as well as Jack's container and started cutting up the pancakes for him. When she was finished, she poured a packet of syrup over top of them for him. She placed the container back in front of the overeager boy, who just smiled up and quietly said, "Thank you!"

She looked across the table at her father and saw that he had an eyebrow raised, while looking between her and Jack. Realizing what had just transpired, she shrugged lightly and dove into her own pancakes. Neither one of them commented on how naturally Bella cared for Jack.

Once they were all finished and cleaned up from breakfast, Charlie went to put their bags into the car, while Bella got Jack settled into his new car seat.

"Hey, Dad?" Bella hollered back at Charlie. "Are you sure that you have this hooked up right?"

Closing the trunk, he stood upright and playfully glared at his daughter over her teasing.

"Baby girl, it's my job to know the law and properly securing children in cars happens to be part of the law. Thus, I am infallible here."

He walked over to the driver's side door and winked at her before getting in.

"Plus, I had the guy at the store help me hook it up."

Bella laughed as she climbed in the passenger side of the cruiser. One thing she would always be thankful for was her awesome relationship with her dad. He wasn't one for showing much affection, but he was funny and loyal and easy to get along with. She glanced back at Jack, ready to apologize for the barrier between them, when she noticed that he was already occupied digging through a shopping bag that had previously been sitting next to him. She watched in amazement as he pulled out some toys, coloring book with crayons and some picture books. She glanced sideways at her dad and saw him smiling into the rear-view mirror, watching Jack.

Parachute

"You know, you really are an awesome dad," she said quietly. Charlie blushed and focused on pulling out of Aro's driveway and onto the road.

Talking lowly, so that Jack wouldn't be disturbed by what was being said, Charlie told Bella a little about the conversations that he had had with Aro earlier in the day. There had still been no mention of any child matching Jack's age or description on the West Coast. There had been a recent report in Phoenix, AZ about a three-year-old boy named Carter, who had wandered away from his mother at a park, but that child was described as having brown hair and blue eyes. Jack's hair was more of an auburn and his eyes were grass green.

It was decided that Bella and Charlie would have to appear in front of the Seattle courts to officially petition to be his temporary guardians. There was only so far that Aro's strings could get them. Charlie had already spoken with Sue, who suggested that she could watch Jack while Charlie was working and Bella had class. Between them and their friends, they had an amazing support group to shower the lost little boy with love.

As they headed for home, Bella couldn't help but feel hopeful yet anxious about the whole situation. As much as she wanted Jackson to be reunited with his family, she didn't want to lose him from her life. He had already attached himself to her heart. All she could do now was have faith that everything would work out for the best.

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Chapter 3

AN: In this chapter, time passes quickly. There are a ton of little things that happen that we don't get to see at the moment. There are snippets shown in later chapters and outtakes that are also posted to my FFn. The bulk of this story was always meant to take place at the time frame of the prologue, where Jack is 8 and Bella is 24. There are dates scattered throughout the story to help out with any timeline confusion. :-)

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Days passed, yet no one stepped forward to claim Jack. Sue and Charlie finally got around to announcing their engagement. They chose to get married on New Year's Eve, just over three months later. Their explanation for the short time period was that they had known each other for over a decade and were deeply in love. There was no reason to wait any longer. Sue started to slowly spend more time at the Swan household. Getting to know her and see her often made it much easier for Jack to be left alone with her on days when Bella had to go to class.

Jack quickly bonded with everyone, especially Seth. It was like he had the brother that he'd always wanted. Jack also had all of the females wrapped around his little fingers, including Leah, although that didn't help lessen the animosity that she held toward Bella.

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October, 2005

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Weeks went by with still no word about Jack's family. Bella and Charlie went to court in Seattle and were granted official temporary custody. In mid-October, Alice designed Bella and Jack matching costumes for Halloween. Apparently, the idea had been all Jack's and Bella was kept in the dark. When October 31st arrived, Alice came over with the costumes. She laid a bag on Bella's bed, before going into Jack's room to help him get into his outfit. Jack was so excited and had been bouncing off the walls all day in excitement for Trick-or-Treating.

Bella walked over to the garment bag on her bed and took a deep breath, not knowing what to expect as she unzipped it. Looking down at the items in front of her, she cocked her head to the side, trying to figure out what it was supposed to be. There were a pair of tight blue jeans, a pair of white and black cow-print chaps and a white blouse with yellow trim around the wrists and collar. At the bottom of the bag were a red hat and a pair of red boots.

"Alice!" Bella hollered as she walked into the hall. Alice poked her head out of Jack's room, smiling innocently.

"Yes, Bella dear?"

Bella narrowed her eyes at her friend.

"What the hell is this?" she asked, gesturing to the costume in her hands.

"That's Jessie!" Jack piped up, stepping around Alice. Bella couldn't stop the grin from taking over her face when she saw his outfit.

He was wearing a pair a deep blue colored jeans and brown cowboy boots. He had on a yellow checkered shirt, a red bandanna around his neck, a vest with cow print that matched her chaps and a sheriff's star pinned to his chest. Bella clapped her hands together when he tipped his brown cowboy hat towards her. He immediately covered his face with his hands and giggled. Alice laughed and shook her head.

Parachute

"He's been practicing since Jasper taught him that the other day."

"C'mon, Bella! Get dressed so we can take pictures and get some candy!" Jack squealed at her.

"Okay, okay, I'm going!" Bella laughed as she went back into her room to change.

A few minutes later, Alice came in to help her braid her hair into two even plaits and put some freckles on her face. Once Bella was all suited up and put her hat on, she started laughing softly. She looked like she was twelve. She caught Alice's eye in the mirror and turned around to hug her best friend.

"Thank you, Allie," she whispered into her hair. "You made him so happy. I can't thank you enough."

Alice shook her head.

"You don't have to thank me. It really was my pleasure! He is such a great kid and so fun to be around. I can totally understand how you fell in love with him so fast."

Bella blinked back tears and cleared her throat.

"Okay, well then. Let's get this show on the road."

The girls headed downstairs to find Jack seated next to Charlie on the couch watching TV. Once he noticed Bella had come downstairs, he jumped up.

"Oh, wow! Bella, you look awesome!" Bella grinned and thanked him.

Bella noticed Charlie's mustache twitching, like he wanted to smile but he was holding it back.

"Laugh it up, Dad. You're lucky they didn't dress you up like Mr. Potato Head."

Parachute

Charlie blinked and Alice laughed.

"Nah, I almost did make him a Buzz Lightyear costume though."

He blanched and quietly turned back to the game on the screen. Bella laughed and gathered up their jackets in case it got too chilly and Jack grabbed his pumpkin shaped bucket.

"I'm working the night shift so I won't see you until the morning," Charlie called after them. "Have fun and be careful!"

"Will do! Thanks, Dad!"

"G'Night, Mr Charlie!" Jack called in a sing-song voice.

Together, they walked hand in hand down the street.

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November - December, 2005

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Thanksgiving came and went. The Swan's held an enormous dinner and invited their friends and families to join them. Sue came early that morning and helped Bella prepare a meal and desserts that could feed an army, which they essentially were. Angela came with her father and brothers. Alice, her parents and Jasper showed up as well. Seth and Leah also came, as did Jacob and his father, Billy, who was Charlie's best friend. Dinner was a boisterous affair with everyone, with the exception of Jake, fawning all over Jack and his indomitable charm. It did not escape Bella's notice that Jake seem put off by the the attention that the boy was getting.

She had barely seen Jake over the past few weeks. Their phone conversations had occurred less frequently as well. Most of Bella's time not spent at school

Parachute

now revolved around Jack, which Jake obviously wasn't thrilled about. He hadn't said anything outright negative yet, but Bella knew it was coming and she was dreading that conversation.

Since Leah had her own apartment, Charlie, Sue, Bella and Seth sat down and talked about how their living arrangements were going to change. As a family, they decided against moving and instead opted to refurbish half of the Swan's large basement into a room for Seth. They would also turn the guest room officially into Jack's room. Alice had it painted and redecorated in less than a week.

Two weeks after Thanksgiving, Bella, Jack, Alice and Angela were shopping at the Port Angeles Mall, picking up a few Christmas presents. After stopping for lunch, the group passed the mall's Santa Claus. Bella stopped and asked Jack if he'd like to sit on Santa's lap. It must have triggered a memory or something else, because he started to throw an epic tantrum and began crying and sobbing that he wanted his daddy. It wasn't the first time something like this had happened, but it was certainly the worst so far.

Bella called the next day and made an appointment with a psychologist in Port Angeles. Jack started seeing a therapist once a week. Kate Rhodes was a young woman with a kind heart, who specialized with children who had been kidnapped or abandoned. Some sessions he would be by himself, but for the most part, Bella was right by his side. He had been having nightmares off and on since he had come to live with Bella and Charlie. After a few weeks seeing Kate, the nightmares slowly decreased, until they only occurred during stressful situations, which were thankfully few and far between.

Kate advised Bella to encourage Jack to talk about his family and what his life was like before he came to live with her. It would help him ease the pain of losing them, but would also be a way to keep their memory fresh in his heart. They would curl up together in his bed every night and talk a little bit before Jack fell asleep. Bella started to feel as if she really knew these people, well, as much as she could without knowing their real names and what they looked like. MeMe was an awesome cook who liked to bake cookies with him and smelled like flowers all of the time. Her yard had lots of flowers and a swing for him.

Parachute

PopPop was a doctor and he would always kiss his boo-boos after putting on a band aid. Bella didn't know if he was actually a doctor, or if Jack was using his imagination, but she wasn't going to say anything and upset him.

Jack had an uncle named Em, who would always tell jokes and play with him. He was "huge, like a mountain" Jack would describe. The person he would talk about most often, though, was his father. He told her that his daddy was his "bestest friend," besides her of course. They would play ball or go to the park to play on the slides or just take walks. He read him a story every night before he went to bed and taught him to play the "anno". She couldn't figure out what an "anno" was based off of his description (It was black and white and made noise when you touched it.), no matter how hard she tried.

Bella did find it odd that he never willingly spoke of his mother. Any time that she would bring her up during their nightly chats, Jack would clam up and not want to talk about her. He opened up slightly more during their therapy sessions. Bella started to get the picture that his mother wasn't around much. When she was, she was mean and mad all of the time. Just thinking about the woman, who was more than likely the cause for all the hurt that Jack was dealing with now, made Bella's blood boil. There were quite a few times where she was thankful that Kate had had a play room for Jack to go while Bella decompressed her own feelings to Kate, so she could be the rock that Jack needed.

Every night, after their ritual chats, Bella would tell Jack a story, usually made up as she went along. After he would fall asleep, she would tuck him, kiss his cheek and then head toward her laptop where she would write up the story she had told him that night. Her plan was to print them out for him to take with him whenever it was time for him to leave them. That line of thinking still depressed her a little, so Bella tried not to think of it and instead focus on the here and now. She succeed for the most part, but every now and then the sadness would seep back in.

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Late December, 2005

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Unlike their hectic Thanksgiving, Christmas was a quiet affair. Bella, Jack and Charlie spent the morning opening gifts from Santa and then making breakfast together. Sue and Seth came over later that afternoon to exchange gifts and have dinner. Leah opted to stay in Seattle with friends, which made Sue a little melancholy. Bella did her best to lighten the mood while they worked on dinner as the guys horsed around and watched sports in the living room. Sue seemed lost in her own thoughts when Bella reached out and placed a hand on her shoulder. She looked up at her future step-daughter, surprised. Bella smiled sadly.

"I know you're upset about Leah not coming and I'm really sorry about that. I don't know what I've done to make her not like me."

Sue started to interrupt, but Bella stopped her.

"Please let me finish?" she asked. Sue nodded and Bella took a deep breath.

"I love you, Sue. You're so wonderful and kind and you treat my dad so well." Her voice started to break a little at the end, while tears welled up in her eyes.

"I can't ever thank you enough for loving us like you do. I know you're going to tell me not to, but I had to get it out. I'm really honored to have you as a mom."

Sue reached out and hugged Bella fiercely.

"I love you, too," she whispered. "Don't worry about Leah, she'll come around."

Bella pulled back slightly and gave Sue a skeptical look and Sue laughed.

"She feels like I'm betraying her father by marrying Charlie. She's young and has barely even lived. She'll learn and grow out of it. I have faith in my daughter."

Parachute

"Now, let's see to these pies so the boys don't go hungry."

Sue winked at her and they continued cooking with a blanket of peace and contentment hanging in the air.

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December 31, 2005

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New Year's Eve day turned out to be dry and bright, a contrast the usual rainy and overcast weather for Forks. Sue and Charlie's wedding was held at sunset and went off without a hitch. Jack was the ring bearer and wore a little black suit with a white shirt and red tie that matched what was worn by Charlie and Seth. Billy had been Charlie's best man when he'd married Renee, so this time around he opted to ask Seth to stand up for him while he became his stepfather. Seth was honored and happily took his place beside Charlie.

Sue's six-year-old niece, Claire, was the flower girl and took her job very seriously. She spread wildflower petals with precision and somewhat comical seriousness. Bella and Leah, who both wore dresses made out of a soft red color that matched the gentlemen's ties, slowly made their way up the aisle to the front of the small hall where the ceremony was taking place. Sue followed not far behind them, wearing a simple, yet elegant ivory dress that fell mid-calf.

Jack crossed over and stood next to Bella, reaching out to hold her hand during the ceremony, earning him chuckles from almost everyone in attendance. Bella paid them no mind and held his hand tightly while their family expanded even more.

Once "I do" was said and the wedding completed, the reception kicked into full swing, Jack found himself standing on top of Bella's feet as they danced around the room. No one had seen the little boy so carefree and happy before. He was

Parachute

passed off to dance with Sue while Bella danced with Charlie and then Seth. Jacob was in attendance as Bella's date, but he was nowhere in sight when she looked around for him. Much to Jake's chagrin, by the time he found his way back to the dance floor, Jack had already reclaimed his spot attached to Bella's side.

When the time came for the bouquet toss, Sue aimed straight for Bella, but she artfully dodged it. Alice jumped up and caught it with ease. Bella walked over to Jasper and gave him a slight elbow to his side. He wrapped his arm affectionately around her shoulders and winked. Bella smiled, already having the knowledge that Jasper was going to propose to Alice on Valentine's Day. While she still had her moments of lingering jealousy, she was so very happy for her friends. They couldn't be anymore a part of her family than if they were tied by blood.

Charlie didn't even bother throwing out the garter. Instead, he chose to walk over and place it smack in the palm of Jasper's hand, earning him ribbing from the other men in attendance. Jasper never once seemed to mind it. He knew where his heart and soul belonged.

Together, they all laughed and danced until Jack fell asleep in Bella's arms at around 11:30 PM. He had been trying to hold out to see the fireworks when the New Year hit, but the long day had proven to be too much for the little guy.

Ten minutes until midnight, Bella scanned the room for Jacob, hoping to get a New Year's kiss. When her eyes landed on him, he was dancing very closely with Leah. Bella narrowed her eyes as she saw his lips brush against her ear as he whispered something to her. Leah blushed and gazed up at him adoringly. As far as Bella knew, Jake and Leah couldn't stand each other, so to say this occurrence was odd would have been an understatement. There was obviously something going on between the two of them and it made her angry.

Was this why Leah acted so badly towards her? Because she had a thing for her boyfriend? Bella really hoped that that wasn't the case. If it was, then Leah would lose any ounce of respect that Bella had for her at all.

Parachute

What bothered Bella more in that moment was the realization that she didn't care. She didn't care one bit about whatever relationship Jacob had going on with Leah, other than feeling angry and mortified about being played around with. She didn't care about Jacob, period. She had put off breaking things off with him for too long, out of a misplaced fear of being alone. As she gently stroked Jack's silky hair, she realized that she had never really known what love truly was until he had come into her life. Sure, she loved her friends and her dad, but not like this. Not like she loved Jack. He had become her whole world and she was resolved to let nothing stand between her and the happiness and joy that he brought into her life.

As the clock struck twelve, she leaned down and gently pressed her lips against the sleeping boy's forehead.

"Happy New Year, baby," she whispered quietly into his ear, as she held him tight.

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AN:

I know there wasn't much Jack in this chapter, but the filler was necessary to move the story forward. I promise to make it up to you. ;-)

~O.o~

Chapter 4

Warning: This chapter deals with domestic abuse and attempted sexual assault. Please be warned.

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Mid-January, 2006

Bella drove down the stretch of dirt road that led towards the Black's house, down on the La Push Quileute Reservation. She had put off breaking up with Jake long enough. She knew that she didn't love him, so she wasn't going to drag it out any longer. At first, it was just easier than being alone. After the last couple of months, she saw less of him than before they started dating. It was time for a change. Plus, she knew that Jacob had not grown attached to Jack like everyone else had. He still viewed him as an outsider. As bad as it made her feel, she'd choose Jack over him in a heartbeat, which she guessed she essentially already was.

Knowing full well what Bella had planned for the day, Charlie decided to take Jack and Sue into Port Angeles to do some shopping. Not only would it give Bella time to do what she felt was right, but give her time to get her emotions in order afterwards. There wasn't a whole lot to do in PA, but Charlie wanted to be closer to home, just in case she needed him.

As she was pulling in front of Jacob's house, she saw Leah pulling away. She shot Bella a dirty look and sped off. Bella's jaw almost hit the floor. She felt a tight tug in her chest, deep down knowing why Leah was there. She had called Jake to let him know that she was coming over. He must have had to stop whatever rendezvous they had going on. As much as she didn't want to be with Jacob any more, it still stung to know that he betrayed her. With her step-sister,

Parachute

no less. She swallowed the hurt and felt anger prick under the surface of her emotions.

She stepped out of the car and slammed the driver's side door shut. She walked slowly up the three steps to the front door, trying to calm herself and steel her nerves. If she was the slightest bit unsure about her decision, Leah's catty display nailed the coffin and sealed it shut.

Jake was at the door, opening it with a wide smile, before she even had a chance to knock.

"Hey, Bells, what an awesome surprise! Come on in!" he gestured and stepped aside to let her in.

"What was Leah doing here, Jake?" she asked out of curiosity, wanting to see what excuse he'd come up with.

"Ah, her mom sent over some food for Dad," he explained nervously. Bella cocked an eyebrow.

"Really? That's funny, seeing as how Sue and Charlie are out for the day and Leah hasn't been by the house in a couple of weeks."

Jake's eyes widened.

"What? Did you forget that Sue lives with us now?" she challenged him. He shrugged.

"I dunno, maybe she stopped by before she left."

Bella narrowed her eyes at him.

"Don't lie to me, Jake. You know I hate that."

"C'mon, Bells, baby, it's not my-"

Parachute

"Don't," Bella said coldly. "Don't call me that."

"What? Bells or baby? What's wrong?" he asked, sounding confused.

"Both, only people I love can use those nicknames and you, Jacob Black, are off of that list."

"Okay, what the fuck is going on, Bella? I'm not in the mood for this shit," he said, starting to get pissed off and not understanding what was going on. Bella laughed coolly and shook her head.

"I know you're screwing around with Leah."

Jacob took a step back, like he had been burned by her words.

"Bell-"

"No," she cut him off, "you don't get to speak. You get to listen. I am mad as hell that you chose to cheat on me, instead of being a man and breaking it off with me first. I am furious that you chose to do it with my step-sister. Do you know how damn awkward that's going to be for all of us now? Sue and Charlie included?"

"You can't tell them, Bells, please. It was a mistake. She seduced me."

Jacob looked at her with hopeful eyes. Bella scoffed and his eyes turned hard.

"That's bullshit Jake and you know it. You slept with her because she was an easy lay and willing, whereas I was not. Trust me, this makes me so grateful with my decision to hold back on that part of our relationship."

Now it was Jake's turn to scoff.

"Really? You held back on me for years, Bella. Years. The best I got off of you was a blow job now and then. I'm a man and I have needs. Leah was all too happy to take care of those needs."

Parachute

He looked thoughtful for a minute, not knowing the fury that was building inside of her chest.

"I think I have a solution," he smiled at her. Bella eyed him suspiciously.

"I'll break it off with Leah if you give it up to me."

Bella started to laugh. She felt tears trickle down her face and felt her lungs burn for air. Jake watched on, confused at her reaction.

"What's so funny? I think that's fair. I'm only with her because she puts out."

Once she got control of herself, Bella shook her head.

"You were really serious about that? Oh my God, how stupid can you be? I drove all the way out here to break up with you. I don't love you like I need to and I never will. I realize that now. We both need a clean break to move on with our lives."

He looked surprised. "Are you serious?"

She looked at him like he had grown a second head.

"Yes, I'm freaking serious. Even if I hadn't found out that you were screwing around behind my back, I still would have broken things off today."

Jake stepped forward and grabbed her arm.

"You're not doing anything," he said darkly.

"Excuse me? What are you talking about?" she asked, starting to feel frightened.

"You're not breaking up with me. You're going to stay here with me and talk this out. Then we'll head up to my bedroom and have some fun."

Parachute

He smiled menacingly at her.

"Get your hands off of me, Jake," Bella told him in a quiet, calm voice that was the complete opposite of her racing heart.

"No, you need to learn your place. You belong to me and I won't deal with this bullshit anymore," he said coldly.

Bella gave him a confused look.

"What bullshit are you talking about, dude?"

He narrowed his eyes and tightened his hold on her arm painfully.

"I'm not sharing you with that brat anymore."

She gasped, the slight fear she felt at his actions turning swiftly into blind rage.

"H-H-How dare you!" she sputtered angrily. "That little boy is more of a man than you'll ever be."

"We'll see about that," he responded as he pulled her towards him roughly.

She tried to yank herself backwards, out of his arms, to no avail. She felt his breath hot on her ear.

"I can make you forget all about him, Bella, just give me the chance," his lips whispered into her ear.

She felt a shudder of revulsion course through her body. Jacob, mistaking it for desire turned his face and started kissing her neck and face. He crushed his lips to hers and she pushed feebly against his solid body. When she refused to open her mouth to his tongue, he roughly bit her bottom lip.

When she cried out in pain, he took advantage and shoved his tongue into her mouth. She loosened one of her arms, which had been trapped against his

Parachute

chest, and soundly smacked him across his cheek. He pulled away from her mouth, his eyes blazing in a combination of anger and lust. He gripped her by her arms and swung her over his shoulder. Rushing over to the stairs, he ascended them two at a time. Bella shifted and tried to wiggle out of his grasp, but it was like iron.

"I swear to fucking God, Jacob Black, that if you don't get your hands off of me right now, I will have my dad shoot you in the balls," she screamed at him.

Ignoring her, Jacob entered his room and tossed her onto his bed. He smirked at her and stalked slowly over to her as she backed away, only to be stopped by the wall that the bed was pushed up against.

"Go ahead, yell all you want. No one can hear you. My Dad's at a council meeting and won't be back for hours. You can say whatever you want, but it'll come down to he said/she said. We've been dating for years, no one will believe that I forced myself on you."

Bella's eyes widened. "You fucking prick," she whispered, in shock. "I am so going to have your balls on a platter."

Jacob laughed heartily. "Damn, Bells, why can't you be this feisty all of the time?"

He reached for her, but she ducked under his arm and scurried off of the bed. He caught her by the back of her shirt and ending up knocking her onto her ass. As she was falling, she heard her shirt ripping. Jacob eyed her exposed, bra-clad chest hungrily. Bella pulled her ripped shirt across her chest to block it from his view. She scrambled to her feet and elbowed him the gut as he went to grab her again. His arm flung out and he backhanded her across the face. She felt her cheek explode in pain and cried out, clutching her face. He took a handful of her hair and drug her back towards the bed.

Kicking and screaming for him to let her go, neither one of them heard the car pull up outside, nor the front door open and shut. They certainly paid no heed to the feet thundering up the stairs until it was too late and Jacob's door was

Parachute

flung open. Leah stood in the middle of the doorway, panting and vibrating with fury.

"What the fuck are you doing, Jacob?" she screamed at him. She looked over at Bella on her knees, sobbing with her shirt torn. Leah's heart absolutely shattered in that moment. She picked up the closest thing she could get her hands on, which happened to be a picture frame of Bella and Jacob at her Senior Prom, and threw it at his head. He ducked and turned to watch it smash against the wall behind him. That gave her the perfect opportunity to dart across the room and grab the baseball bat standing in the corner of the room.

She swiftly picked it up and pointed it at him.

"Step the fuck away from her," she snarled at him. Jacob backed away from Bella slowly, with his hands in the air.

"Leah, babe, it's not what it looks like!"

Leah's eyebrows rose as high as they could physically go.

"Did your parents drop you on your head as a child, dickhead? What the fuck is wrong with you?" she yelled at him.

She walked over to Bella, keeping eyes and bat trained on Jacob the whole time. She reached a hand down to her step-sister and helped her up.

Bella looked up at Leah, so very thankful to see her in that moment. She wiped her eyes and took Leah's hand.

"Thank you, Leah," she whispered. Leah looked surprised, but then shook her head sadly.

"Don't thank me, I still have a lot of groveling to do to you later," she said with a sad smile.

Parachute

Bella straighten her shoulders and walked over in front of Jacob. He tried to give her a sexy smile.

"Bella, sweetie, this was all just a misunderst-"

Jacob never got to finish his sentence. Bella punched him in the jaw and then kneed him in the groin when he was distracted. As he doubled over in pain, she nailed him with a perfectly executed uppercut.

"Trust me when I say that I will be the least of your problems once both of our fathers find out about this," she said with as much confidence as she could muster.

Leah took her arm and they walked out together. Leah walked over to her passenger side door of her car and opened it to help the injured girl in. Bella looked at Leah in surprise and confusion. She just shrugged at her.

"You're in no shape to drive. Also, my car is more expensive than your beat down truck, in case Jacob wanted to take a tire iron to it or something. He'd be stupid to do that, but we both know the boy ain't got much for brains."

Both girls laughed slightly and headed home.

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When Leah pulled up next to the Chief's cruiser, which was parked in front of the Swan's house, Bella was shaking and clutching her ripped shirt to her chest, clearly in shock. She turned the car off and stepped out. As she was shutting her door, she noticed that Bella was just staring straight ahead, not even noticing that she was home. Leah sighed and walked around to the passenger side door and opened it. Bella looked up at her, startled. She reached her hand out for the upset girl to take. Bella hesitated, but then slowly put her hand in

Parachute

Leah's. She helped Bella out of the car and shut the door behind her, before wrapping an arm around her shoulders in comfort. They walked quietly up to the front door and inside of the house.

Leah poked her head into the living room, trying to avoid possibly having Jack see Bella so upset. Thankfully, it was empty, so she walked over and settled Bella onto the couch. She walked out into hall and called out for her mom. Sue walked out of the kitchen, wiping her hands on her apron. She smiled brightly at Leah, glad to see her daughter was coming around.

"Leah, what a surprise! We just got back from shopping a little while ago. What brings you by?"

"Ma, where's Charlie and Jack?"

Sue shot her daughter a confused look, upset at how Leah's voice was shaking and she looked like was going to be sick.

"Charlie's in his office and Jack's taking a nap. Why? Leah, baby, what's wrong?"

Sue rushed over to Leah and put her hands on her daughter's face when she saw her start to cry.

Hearing the voices in the hallway, Charlie poked his head out of his office to see what was going on. As soon as Leah saw Charlie's concerned face, she started to sob.

"Charlie, I-I'm s-so sorry," she sobbed. "I was so wrong."

Charlie walked over and pulled Leah into a hug and softly patted her back. It was a little uncomfortable for him, seeing as how he wasn't a very emotional man, but he had been opening up much more since Jack came into their lives.

"What's wrong Leah?" he asked.

Parachute

"Be-Bell-Bella," was all that Leah could get out through her tears. Charlie's blood ran cold. He put his hands on her shoulders and pushed her away slightly until he could look into her face.

"God, Leah, where's Bella? What's wrong with her?" he asked, starting to panic. Leah pointed towards the living room. Charlie gently maneuvered her into Sue's arms and then rushed into the other room. Bella was sitting on the couch, with her knees pulled to her chest, sobbing quietly.

"Bells?" he called softly, his voice rough with unshed tears and fear. Bella looked up at him. Her face was lined with tear tracks and there was a nasty bruise forming on one of her cheeks. His eyes widened and anger coursed through his blood at the thought of someone laying their hands on his baby girl. Those thoughts then turned murderous as he saw her disheveled and torn clothes, as she jumped up and flung herself into his arms.

He caught her and picked her up, carrying her back over to the couch. He sat down and cradled her in his lap. Rubbing circles on her back, he tried to calm and comfort her.

"Ssh, it's gonna be okay. Who did this to you, baby?" he tried to ask calmly. "Tell me who did this to you."

"J-J-Jake," she cried. Charlie was frozen in shock for a minute. He couldn't believe that Jacob could do this. He started to shake slightly with anger when he felt a hand on his shoulder. He looked up into Sue's teary eyes. She sat down next to him, as Leah took a seat in his recliner. Looking over at his step-daughter, who had thankfully pulled herself together.

"I want the whole story. Now," he demanded. Leah nodded at him, with a watery gaze.

"I've been sleeping with Jacob for about 6 months now."

Both Charlie and Sue shot her shocked looks.

Parachute

"Oh, God, Leah, how could you?" her mother asked. She put up her hand.

"Please, I realize that I deserve it, but let me get this all out first?" she asked sadly. Her mother nodded.

"He told me that he liked me. A lot. That Bella wasn't 'fulfilling his needs'. I was so stupid. I had such a crush on him for so long and I naively thought it was going to be okay. That if I gave him what he wanted, he'd choose me over her."

Leah kept her eyes settled on her feet, too ashamed to look into anyone's eyes. Knowing how much she must have disappointed her mom, the only person in this world that she truly loved, hurt so much.

"I spent last night at his house. This morning he got a call from Bella saying that she wanted to come over. I finally got up the nerve to ask him to choose me over her. I told him that I loved him and wanted to be with him officially. He laughed and threw my clothes at me. He said that I was only a fuck to him and that Bella was the only girl he loved. I got dressed and stormed out of the house. I waited until she was pulling up before I left though. I wanted her to know that I had been with him, without actually saying the words."

She stopped and took a steady breath.

"I got a couple of miles away and I couldn't control my anger, so I turned around. I was going to either fight for him or completely ruin his relationship. When I got to the front door I heard yelling and banging, so I just walked in. As I did, I heard Bella screaming and telling him no and I guess instinct just kicked and I ran upstairs and threw open his door. He was gripping her by the hair and her clothes were torn and she was crying. I don't think I had ever felt so helpless and furious at the same time. I just, I couldn't believe my eyes. I picked up something and threw it at him to give me a chance to grab his bat. I threatened him and he let her go."

Leah smiled slightly, remembering the next part.

Parachute

"She was so brave. She walked up to him and told him that you were going to kick his ass, Charlie."

"Damn right," he mumbled under his breath. "I'm going to have his balls, too."

"She hit him, then kneed him in the crotch before she upper-cutted him. It was amazing. I got us out of there, but we had to leave her truck behind."

Everything was quiet and she slowly looked up. Her mother was looking at her with a look of pity. She looked over as Bella disentangled herself from Charlie and walked over to her and knelt in front of her.

"Thank you so much, Leah. I know you don't like me, but you saved me. I don't think I could've gotten away from him without you."

Leah's tears started to overflow once again as she got down on the floor as well and wrapped her arms around Bella.

"Oh, Bella. I am so, so sorry. I never hated you. I was jealous and envious and so very stupid. You are amazing and I really hope you can forgive me some day."

Bella hugged her back fiercely. Charlie and Sue stepped out of the room to give the girls some privacy. Sue talked Charlie out of driving down to La Push and beating the hell out of Jacob. She used his love of the law very effectively. Instead, Charlie sent his deputy, Mark, down there to arrest him and throw him into a holding cell until Charlie went into work tomorrow. Another officer swiftly stopped by the house to take both her and Leah's statements.

Jacob was arrested and put on probation. Charlie also made Bella file a restraining order against him. A few more weeks passed and Bella never heard a word from or about Jacob, other than when Alice mentioned, a few days after the incident occurred, that Jake was seen sporting a pretty bruised up face. When she confronted Charlie about it, he adamantly swore that he had nothing to do with it. Speculation was that some boys from the Rez had jumped him to teach him some respect. Inwardly, Bella jumped for joy that the asshole had

Parachute

gotten the beating he deserved. Three weeks later, Jake was arrested and given five years in jail for public intoxication and attempted assault on another girl.

Leah mentioned once or twice that he tried to call her often. That is until she changed her number and moved to a different apartment complex. She hadn't heard from him since. With all of that drama seemingly behind them, Bella and Leah started to get closer and eventually began to form a sisterly bond. It wasn't overnight, but instead a slow healing process. They were determined not to let Jacob steal that from them as well.

Jack himself was the one who really did the best job of getting Bella's mind off of the clusterfuck that had been her relationship with Jacob. They spent even more time together, going on outings and picnics. About half of the time it was just the two of them. The other half was either with Sue and Charlie, or some combination of Jasper, Alice, Angela and her boyfriend, Ben. Some days, Bella and Jack would sit on the back porch swings and write stories together about a little boy who found himself in an adventure everywhere he went, no matter how boring the location. The hero's name was appropriately named Jack Attack.

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June, 2006

Bella sat on the swing on the Swan's back porch, watching Jack and Charlie play with his new pool and water slide. She smiled as she got to see a side of her father that she had never really seen before. She didn't remember much when she was Jack's age and when she was older, it was all of the arguments and tension in the house that she recalled, none of the fun times. After Renee left, Charlie continued to throw himself into his work.

Parachute

Now, it was like he was getting a second chance. It was amazing how much this little boy had changed all of their lives.

Just then, Bella felt something whiz past her head and then splatter against the wall, wetting her slightly. She looked back at the pool to see Charlie doubled over in laughter and Jack grinning.

"Nice one, Jack," Charlie managed to get out through his laughter. She watched as Jack reached down into the water and pick up another water balloon.

"Don't do it, Jack," she tried to say in a warning tone, but could barely hold back her own giggles. She was up and squealing as he let the balloon fly towards her.

The next hour found the three of them chasing each other with water balloons, and at one point Charlie picked up the hose. Shortly after all of the excitement wore down, Bella found herself back on the swing, stroking Jack's hair. She was amazed at how far they had come as a family in just under a year. Jack was like the magic glue that held them all together.

She still hadn't given up on finding his family, but there was literally nothing to go on. She sighed and felt a little crack in heart for the little guy. She would do her best to make sure that he felt nothing but love. Nothing would ever come before him, she was sure of that. Alice wanted her to start going out on dates, but she just wasn't ready. She wasn't sure when she ever would be. Although she knew that what she and Jacob had wasn't love, it had still shook her beliefs on relationships down to the core. She trusted him and he hurt her. Physically and emotionally. She wasn't ready to deal with that kind of vulnerability again.

For now, it would just be her and Jack. Her family was all that she needed right now.

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AN: Eek, sorry, the Jake drama kinda got away from me, lol. I can promise you pure fluff in the next chapter, though! Happy Jack times! ^_^

As always, reviews will get a separate little teaser from the one I put up on the Fictionators.*hugs and kisses*

Chapter 5

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March 31, 2007

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Oh, kiss me, beneath the milky twilight

Lead me, out on the moonlit floor

Lift your open hand,

Strike up the band and make the fireflies dance

Silver moon's sparkling

So kiss me

...

Bella hummed and sang softly while she was mixing pancake batter for breakfast. Since she was trying to squeeze in enough classes to graduate this year, free time with Jack had been cut down this past semester. Alice and Angela continued on with their plan to go to UW last year, while Bella stayed at Port Angeles University to be closer to Jack. They made it a weekly date to get together every Sunday and hang out. Starting with making breakfast surrounded by music and then various activities throughout the day, depending on whatever Alice had planned. Today was an exceptional Saturday. When Jack had told them that his birthday was on Easter, Bella backtracked through

Parachute

the calendar to the year Jack was probably born, 2002. Easter Sunday had been on March 31st, so that's the day they decided to celebrate his birthday. The plan was to make a big breakfast and then have Charlie and Sue take him out for a couple of hours while Bella and Alice finished up his surprise party.

Bella giggled as the song changed to Jack Johnson's "Banana Pancakes." She was, in fact, making Banana Walnut pancakes since they were her Jack's favorites. The irony was not lost on her. She walked out into the hall and poked her head into the living room where the little boy sat watching cartoons.

"Hey, Jackie, wanna help me mush some 'nanas for your special pancakes?"

"Sure!" he called as he shot up from his seat on the couch and rushed to her side. He grabbed her hand and started to tug her into the kitchen.

"C'mon! Let's go! I'm starving!"

Bella shook her head and laughed at his eagerness, letting him pull her into the kitchen. She sat Jack on the counter and handed him a bowl with a couple of ripe, peeled bananas and a wooden spoon for him to mash them with. She went back to the batter, adding in some chopped walnuts and then the mashed bananas. She grinned when she noticed Jack nodding his head to the Madonna song that was now playing. His auburn locks swayed across his forehead.

Bella set the bowl of pancake batter down on the counter and spun around to pick up Jack, just as the song's chorus came on.

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"Cherish the thought

Of always having you here by my side

Oh baby, I cherish the joy

You keep bringing into my life

Parachute

I'm always singing it

Cherish the strength

You got the power to make me feel good

Oh baby, I perish the thought

Of ever leaving, I never would"

...

Singing, she danced around the kitchen while he laughed and squealed. Making a turn just a little too fast, then ended up sprawled on the floor, still giggling.

"I love you, Mommy," he sighed happily.

Bella's eyes shot to his in surprise. She sat motionless in shock while Jack looked at her with nothing but love and hope. She felt her eyes sting with tears and contemplated on how to respond to him when they were interrupted.

"Happy Birthday, my favorite nephew!" Alice called from the kitchen door. Jack jumped up and raced into her arms. While hugging Jack, Alice gave Bella a watery smile, indicating that she had heard the previous exchange and was giving her friend a moment to process. Bella nodded and silently mouthed "Thank you" to her. Jasper appeared at Alice's side and swept Jack into his arms.

"Hey buddy! How about we go watch some toons and leave the women folk to make us some grub?" Jack eagerly nodded, always happy to spend time with Jasper, who looked at Bella and winked. She knew that he was just joking around and more than likely heard Jack's admission as well, figuring that Bella needed some one on one time with Allie. When the boys disappeared from the room, Alice rushed over to Bella and hugged her.

Parachute

"Are you okay, babe? That has got to be the sweetest thing that I have ever seen!" she exclaimed. Bella blinked the tears from her eyes and smiled.

"It was pretty cute, huh?" she asked as she turned back to start cooking the pancakes on the griddle. Allie walked over and put her head on Bella's shoulder.

"What's wrong, Belly?" she asked. Bella sighed.

"What do I know about being a mom, Allie? Shit, I'm only 20! I don't know what I'm doing most of the time!"

Bella grimaced when she heard Alice's twinkling laughter.

"Oh, Bella," she giggled, "no one really knows how to be a parent until they actually are. All you can do for Jack is love him and be there for him. From what I can see, you're doing an awesome job," Alice tried to comfort her.

"Damn right she is," Charlie added gruffly, standing in the kitchen doorway with Sue. Bella looked up at her dad and smiled.

"Thanks, Daddy."

"No thanks needed. You're not even blood to that boy, not that it matters, but you're already ten times the mother that Renee was."

Bella's cheeks pinkened at the high praise from her father. It meant a great deal to her. She went back to flipping her pancakes as Charlie sat at the table.

"Do you need help with anything, Bella?" Sue asked.

"Nah, I'm good. Is Seth home?" Sue shook her head no.

"He spent last night at Jared's house," she answered as she sat next to her husband.

Parachute

"Now, where did this talk about being a good mother come from, Bells?" Charlie piped up.

"Jack said 'I love you, Mommy' to her earlier," Alice answered. He raised his eyebrows at his daughter.

"Really? Can't say that I'm surprised, that little boy thinks you hung the moon."

Bella smiled softly as she plated up breakfast. She felt the same about Jack. She absolutely adored him and couldn't love him anymore than if he was hers by birth. Her hang up was what would happen when his real family came back into the picture. Would Jack's feelings change once his "real" mommy and daddy found themselves in the picture again? She shook the thoughts out of her head. She knew that they would get her nowhere but depressed. She would enjoy and love Jack with everything that she had. What happens will happen.

She placed the serving plate on the table just as Jasper and Jack wandered back into the room. Jack gave her a blinding smile and she grinned right back at him. With everyone seated at the table, they all started to tuck into their breakfast. When they were finished, Charlie pushed his chair back.

"Well, birthday boy," he said to Jack, "what do you think about a little road trip to the movies today?"

Jack's grass green eyes sparkled in excitement.

"Yes, Pops! I would really like that!" he practically shouted.

Every single time that Jack called him Pops, Charlie beamed with pride. This time was no exception. Jack had still been seeing his therapist Kate, but on a monthly basis at this point. She continued to stress how important it was that Jack needed to have freedom to express his feelings and memories. He started calling Charlie 'Pops' last September. Jack came home from Pre-School one day in a somber mood. One of the boys in his class had spent the previous summer with his grandparents and made fun of Jack for not having any. He looked up at Charlie with his big, innocent eyes and asked if he would be his

Parachute

PopPop, too. Charlie choked up and they agreed to call him Pops. That touched Charlie more than words could explain.

On their refrigerator hung several pictures that he had drawn. One of him, Bella, Charlie, Sue and Seth, as well as one of just him Bella and Charlie. Right next to those was a picture of his other family. Daddy, MeMe, PopPop and Uncle Em. No matter what, though, Jack continued to refuse to discuss his mother. It was like the woman didn't exist.

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An hour later, Charlie, Jack and Sue had left for Port Angeles and the dishes were washed, dried and put away. Jasper and Ben were out in the backyard, trying to set up the white tent that Alice had bought for the party. Angela and Ben had shown up just before Charlie pulled out of the driveway and hid around the block, until Bella called them to let them know it was safe to come over. Angela and Alice were also graduating this year, Angela with a degree in Journalism that she was already putting to good use by working at the Seattle Times as an intern and Alice was majoring in Fashion Design while also minoring in Graphic Design. She was working at a high end boutique to gather experience for opening up her own store once she graduated and had the capital. Bella had chosen English as her major and had absolutely no clue what she was going to do with her life once she graduated. She toyed briefly with the idea of getting her Masters in Education and becoming a teacher, but her heart wasn't really in it.

As the guys struggled with the tent, the girls set up a few tables around the yard. One long one for food and the homemade cake with blue icing that Bella had made Jack and another for presents. There were also about 6 round tables and two dozen folding chairs that they set up. Like with everything else she did, Alice went a bit overboard, inviting all 12 kids in Jack's class, as well as any siblings who wanted to come plus a handful of their mutual friends. Half of

Parachute

Forks would more than likely make an appearance at some point during the party, which started at three P.M.

At around two o'clock everything was pretty much ready to go and the decorations were up. The only things left to do were to bring out the food, but that would wait until closer to the party time. Alice asked the girls to come into the house with her and they headed to the living room. Bella and Angela settled on opposite ends of the couch and got comfortable while Alice nervously fingered an envelope in her hands.

"Allie, what's going on?" Bella asked. "Is something wrong?" She exchanged a concerned look with Angela, who shrugged and shook her head, indicating that she didn't know what was going on either. Alice broke out in a huge grin and shook her head. She walked over to Bella and handed her an envelope that was addressed to Isabella Swan, but at Alice's address.

Bella stared in shock at the envelope in her hands. She looked up at Alice, who merely smiled and nodded for her to open it.

"Alice?" she asked, her voice thick with emotion. "This is from HarperCollins Publishing. What did you do?"

Allie clapped her hands in excitement. "Just open the damn thing and see what they said!"

With shaking fingers, she ripped open the flap and pulled out the paper. Alice bounced in nervousness and tried to peer over her shoulder.

"Holy shit," Bella breathed out, her wide eyes shot up to Allie's.

"Well? Come on! Don't keep us in suspense!" Alice shouted.

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" Dear Ms. Swan,

Parachute

After receiving a copy of your story, "Jack Attacks the Museum", we at HarperCollins Publishing are pleased to inform you that we would definitely be interested in publishing it. Your story fits with our wonderful line of childrens books here at HarperCollins and therefore we are very interested in setting up a meeting with you to go over the terms.

If you have any additional comments or questions please call my office. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Tanya Denali,"

...

Bella looked up at her friends with wide eyes. Angela was grinning and Alice looked the cat who swallowed the canary.

"Holy hell," she said, somewhat breathlessly. "They want to print my story!" Bella jumped up and started to squeal. The other girls quickly joined in and soon they were dancing around the room.

"Well, now, ain't this a sight? What's got you ladies so riled up?" Jasper drawled from the doorway. Ben was standing next to him with an amused look on his face.

"Our Bella is going to be a published author," Alice replied, hugging her best friend tightly. Bella smiled at him and held up the letter in her hand.

"Since your meddlesome girlfriend doesn't understand the meaning of personal boundaries, she sent one of my stories to HarperCollins and they decided that they want to publish it!" Bella affectionately ruffled Alice's spiky hair. She quickly backed away and wagged her finger at Bella for messing with her hair.

"What happens now?" Ben asked. Bella grinned.

Parachute

"I'll call Miss Denali on Monday and set up a meeting with her. Now, we get ready to give this little guy the best birthday ever."

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At 4:30 P.M., Jack's birthday party was in full swing. The temperature was cool, but nice enough for just light jackets or sweaters to be worn comfortably. Kids ran screaming around the yard playing various games while the adults mingled. Bella had been cornered by Mike Newton, a former classmate, who was in the process of asking her out for the hundredth time when Alice saved her by announcing that it was time for cake. Bella quickly excused herself and walked over to Jack, who was looking at the cake in anticipation. He looked up at Bella with shining eyes and held out his arms for her to pick him up. She grinned and reached down for Jack to lift him up and settle him on her hip.

Alice lit the candles and everyone started singing 'Happy Birthday.' When the song was finished, Jack closed his eyes and then blew out all five candles on his cake. He turned and looked at Bella with an incredibly serene smile.

"I wished for you to be my Mommy, B," he whispered in her ear. Bella's eyes started to burn as she squeezed him tight. She pulled back and looked at him.

"Is that what you really want?" she asked in a shaky voice. He nodded emphatically.

"Please? Can I call you that now? I promise I'll be extra good and eat my peas every time! Okay, maybe not every time, but you know what I mean!" He looked straight into her eyes, pleading with her.

"Of course you can," she whispered against his forehead, "I would love nothing more. Does this mean that I can call you my son, too?" she asked, joking around. Jack's face settled into a serious look.

Parachute

"Don't be silly. You can't be my mommy if I'm not your son, too. You just have to share me with Daddy."

Bella nodded, her emotions starting to overcome her.

"Okay," she whispered, "I don't mind sharing, as long as I get to love you no matter what."

Jack kissed her on her forehead this time.

"Always, Mommy."

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April 2, 2007

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The Monday after Jack's birthday party was extremely hectic. After Bella got out of her last class of the day at 1 P.M., she made her way to the Law Offices of Whitlock & Stanley. Jasper's father, Peter and his best friend David, had formed their partnership ten years ago. Jasper now worked there with them, mainly handling odd jobs and research until he could get his feet wet with a real case. He had passed the bar six months ago and was chomping at the bit to put himself to good use. Before he and Alice left on Saturday, he made Bella promise to stop by the office today. He was going to talk to his father and see if they could help her with how she could proceed with officially adopting Jack.

She had called and spoke with Tanya Denali earlier in the day as well. They had spoken in detail about the contract that HarperCollins was offering. A three year deal with advance, as well as royalties for any related products, with Bella writing an additional four 'Jack Attack' books for the series. The money

Parachute

sounded incredible, so she was glad to be meeting with the Whitlocks so she could show them a copy of the contract that Tanya had emailed her. Bella made plans to meet with Tanya next weekend in Seattle for lunch to discuss the contract more, as well as any questions or concerns that she may have.

Bella pulled up outside of the office and parked her truck. She went inside and let the receptionist know that she was here to see Jasper. He came out almost immediately, his father following behind him. Peter Whitlock had his son's bright blue eyes and honey blonde hair, although his was cropped short.

"Bella, my dear," he said as he wrapped her in a hug, "I'm glad to hear you're doing so well."

No matter how many years she had known the Whitlocks, it always felt odd to hear Peter's soft, Bostonian accent. His wife Charlotte, was born and raised in Texas. It was an odd chain of events that brought the couple, happily married for 25 years now, together in the first place. Charlotte swears it was destiny that made her stop in the small cafe in Seattle while she was on vacation with her parents and met Peter, who was just starting his law career. It was rough when she had to go back to Texas with her folks, but she returned to Seattle just under a year later as his wife. They had been inseparable since.

Peter placed his hand on the small of Bella's back and ushered her into his office. Jasper followed and sat in the chair next to hers in front of his father's large oak desk. Peter steepled his fingers under his chin and looked Bella directly in the eye.

"Now, after sifting through all of the facts that you and Jasper have given me, I've got to say that this is highly unusual. Under normal circumstances, the child would have become a ward of the state. I don't really see any major obstacles in your attempt to adopt the boy, but your age and income might hurt you in this." He shook his head, deep in thought.

"Okay," Bella said as she swallowed thickly. She had known that this wouldn't be easy.

Parachute

"I still want to fight. My age shouldn't be that big of a factor. I'll be 21 in September and I love that little boy with all of my heart. As for income, I wanted to run that by you today while I was here. I received a contract offer from a well known publishing company to turn some of my stories into Children's Books. The money that they're offering sounds incredible, but I wanted to see if you'd like to look it over for me."

Peter nodded, "Sure, do you have the contract on you?"

Bella shook her head. "I'm not meeting Tanya until next weekend, but she emailed me a copy."

"Ok, then, how about this. Why don't you forward a copy of it to me and we'll look it over. Jasper can fill you in on what we find. Also, I think we would have a better chance with the adoption if we waited a few months to pursue it. It will give you some time to establish your writing career and make you seem like a more stable parent. Sound good to you?"

Bella nodded, "Thank you, Peter. I really can't thank you enough." All three of them stood and Bella shook Peter's hand. He then clapped Jasper on the back.

"Think nothing of it. And don't even think of offering to pay us. Your lawyer here can use the experience."

Jasper looked at his father with wide eyes. "Seriously?" he asked. "You're giving me a chance?"

Peter laughed and nodded. "I think you're ready for it. As long as Bella doesn't mind?"

Both of the Whitlock men looked in her direction. She smiled and shook her head.

"No objections here, I have faith in you, Jas."

He reached out and took Bella into his arms for a big hug.

Parachute

"I promise not to fail you, B. I will fight my ass off for you and Jack," he whispered into her hair.

"I know you will," she responded. Clearing her throat, she stepped back and made her way to the door.

"Ok, thanks then. I've got to pick Jack up from school, so I'll talk to you later, Jasper. And thanks again, Peter. I know you don't want to hear it, but I appreciate everything you're doing for me." She smiled and started to walk out of the door.

"You're welcome, sweetheart," Peter laughed softly.

Bella practically skipped to her truck and started to make her way to pick up Jack. She couldn't keep the grin off of her face, her heart exploding with happiness.

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AN: Hello my lovelies! By my outline, we only have 2 more chapters before we meet up with the Prologue! Who else is excited?

As always, reviewers get a special little tease sent out on Monday, as well as the ones on *The Fictionators* and *Pic Tease*.

Love you guys!

Chapter 6

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April 7, 2007

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Bella sat at a table in a quaint little Seattle cafe, nervously twisting her napkin. Butterflies had invaded her stomach while she anxiously waited for Tanya Denali to show up. They were supposed to meet at noon and it was a quarter after. Her leg started to bounce slightly as well, her nerves starting to fray.

The bell over the cafe door chimed and Bella looked up. A woman in a black skirt and a deep purple blouse entered and glanced around the room. When her eyes settled on Bella, she started to stride over confidently. She was breathtakingly beautiful with waist long strawberry blond hair and violet blue eyes. Bella swallowed the lump in her throat and tried to settle her nerves. The woman stopped at her table and sat her briefcase on the empty chair.

"Ms. Denali?" Bella asked as she stood to greet her. The woman nodded, offering Bella her hand.

"Ms. Swan, let's cut the introductory bullshit and get right to the chase."

Tanya Denali smirked as she watched Bella's eyes widen in surprise. This was going to be fun.

"Uh- of course," Bella stuttered out slightly. Tanya laughed melodiously.

"Oh, Bella," she sighed as she placed her hand on the younger woman's

Parachute

shoulder. "I'm just messing around with you."

Both women took their seats and their waitress came over for their drinks orders.

"A coke for me, please," Bella politely responded.

"I'll take a Pomegranate Margarita," Tanya spouted off with an air of authority.

Bella raised an eyebrow and Tanya shrugged.

"It's been a long week," she smirked, leaning back in her chair. She eyed Bella carefully before speaking again.

"I will warn you now, I can be outspoken and abrasive, but I am damn good at my job. As soon I read your story, I knew I wanted to work with you. In an industry where we get the same story, but with different characters, told over and over, it's exciting to see something truly unique. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?"

Feeling instantly at ease with the beautiful woman, Bella started to tell her about her life and how she came to where she was now. Tanya sat back and listened to Bella share her tale. She was even more pleased with her decision to pursue this girl, especially after hearing how well she could tell a story first hand. It was enrapturing.

When she was finished, Bella folded her hands in her lap, waiting for Tanya's reaction.

"So, let me get this right, after all of that, you still haven't been able to find this kid's parents and you're in the process of adopting him?"

Bella nodded and smiled.

"Huh," Tanya murmured. "This could totally work in our favor." The wheels in her head started spinning a mile a minute. She hadn't been merely bragging

Parachute

when she proclaimed that she was good at her job.

"What do you mean?" Bella asked, feeling confused over Tanya's far away look. Her eyes snapped back to Bella's and she grinned.

"This whole situation. Everything can blend easily together. Your stories are clearly modeled after your boy. I can seriously already see them on a Best-Sellers list. Being upfront about that can only work in your favor and gain you major exposure. If you get as big as I think you can, we can set up a charity that benefits kids in situations like Jack. With national recognition, not only can you help other kids, but the probability of finding this kid's parents dramatically increases."

Bella's eyes narrowed, thoughtfully. She hadn't thought of anything like that, but she loved the idea.

"Sorry, I'm getting ahead of myself," said Tanya. "We need to talk about the contract and get you in print before we even consider anything more elaborate. Speaking of the contract, what do you think of it?"

"I am totally fine with it. I had my lawyer look it over and he sees nothing wrong with the offer. I'm excited to sign on!" Bella said, excitedly.

Tanya smiled wide. She could easily picture herself being a role model and friend to Bella. Her writing was truly amazing and she was sure that the girl would go very far.

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August 25, 2007

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The next few months flew by quickly. June came and the girls all graduated with their respective degrees. Angela's internship turned into a full time job, starting at the bottom rung and working her way up the ladder. Alice was promoted to assistant manager of her boutique and Bella got a job working part time at a bookstore, refusing to touch the advance from the HarperCollins, unless it was an emergency. Her father continued to refuse to take money towards rent, so Bella insisted upon buying groceries and sharing the cooking with Sue.

During the second week of August, Bella received a call from Jasper letting her know that Jack's adoption was finalized. His name was officially changed to Jackson Charles Swan. No one knew if they'd ever come across his birth family again, so this was decided to be the best option. Bella got Jack settled and registered for Kindergarten, and Alice insisted that everyone get together for a congratulatory dinner for Jack being officially a Swan.

Charlie decided that he wanted to have a barbecue and everyone readily agreed. Exactly one month from the two year anniversary of when Jack came into their lives. The little boy sat excited at one end of the picnic table in their yard, telling Jasper all about his new school that they went to visit the day before. Bella, Alice and Angela sat at the other end of the table chatting about their respective jobs. Well, mostly it was Bella and Angela listening to Alice talking a mile a minute, but they were used to their friend and loved her dearly, so they listened raptly. Ben and Seth stood over with Charlie by the grill, talking about sports, while Sue and Leah were in the kitchen putting the finishing touches on their dessert, a triple chocolate fudge cake.

Jack tired of his conversation with Jasper so he bounced over to Bella and climbed into her lap. He laid his head on her shoulder and sighed. She smiled and closed her eyes contentedly. She honestly couldn't picture her life without him anymore. She pulled back a little and smiled at him.

"Hey, I have a present for you. Do you think you deserve it?" she teased him. His smile was bright and happy.

Parachute

"Of course! I've been a good boy!" he exclaimed, clapping his hands. Noticing the uncanny resemblance to her best friend, Bella shot a pointed look at Alice, who looked away and whistled. Jasper snorted and buried his face in his girlfriend's shoulder. Angela just shook her head and laughed.

She tightened her hold on him and stood up, resting his weight on her hip. Everyone followed them into the house, not wanting to miss Jack's reaction to his gift. Bella sat him down on the couch and walked over to pick up the small jewelry box that was resting on the mantle. She sat down next to Jack and handed him the shiny blue wrapped box.

"Since you're officially a part of our family now, I wanted to give you something that will always remind you of how much we all love you," she smiled as Jack tore open the paper in excitement. He carefully removed the lid and gazed curiously at the silver bracelet laying amidst pale blue tissue paper. She reached in and pulled it out of the box and gestured for him to give her his hand.

Bella fastened the clasp of the sterling silver I.D. bracelet over Jack's wrist. He looked up at her with wide, watery eyes as he ran his fingers over the letters that were etched in the metal.

"It has your name, Jackson Swan, our address and my phone number engraved on it. As long as you have it on you, you'll never be lost again."

Jack threw himself into her arms, with tears streaming down his face.

"Thank you," he sobbed. "Thank you for loving me so much!"

"Oh, baby," she sighed, crying along with him. "I never had a choice. You're my son."

The two held each other tightly, while the others in the room gazed at the pair in wonder and love.

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Parachute

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January 23, 2008

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"Odds and Ends Bookstore, how may I help you?" Bella answered the phone, during a rather boring shift.

"May I speak with Bella Swan, please?" an older woman's voice asked.

"That would be me," she answered.

"Hello, Ms. Swan! This is Mrs. Davis, the principle at Franklin Elementary and I was wondering if you had a moment to speak about Jack?"

Bella felt panic rise up in her chest slightly.

"Is everything okay, Mrs. Davis? Do I need to come down there?"

"No, no, Ms. Swan," the older woman spoke in a kind voice, "everything is fine. Jack is a wonderful little boy. Very well adjusted, considering everything that he's been through in his short life. I'm actually calling today to ask if you knew of his musical aptitude?"

Bella's brow crinkled in confusion. "Musical aptitude? No, I didn't. I'm not sure I understand what you're talking about."

"Mrs. Walker, our Music Teacher here, was introducing the kindergarten students to some musical instruments when Jack walked over and sat at the piano in her class room. He sat there staring at the keys until Mrs. Walker asked if he knew how to play. He nodded and then proceeded to play beautifully. She was so excited that she called me down to her room to see for myself. When I got there, he was playing 'Mary Had a Little Lamb' perfectly."

Parachute

Bella's eyes widened. She didn't recall him ever mentioning that he could play the piano. Like a flash of lightning, she remembered some thing that he had told her a long time ago.

"Daddy always reads to me at night. He talks in silly voices and makes me laugh. He taught me to play the anno and we pack ice a lot."

"What's an 'anno', Jack? I don't think I've heard of that." Bella tried to ask him gently, so that he wouldn't get frustrated.

"You know, an anno. It's black and white and makes noise." He looked at her like she should have known what he was talking about. Bella nodded and smiled, pretending to understand him.

She smacked herself on the forehead. "Anno," she mumbled to herself, "He was trying to say piano!"

"What was that, Ms. Swan?" Bella looked at the phone in her hand, startled. She had forgotten that the principal was still on the phone.

"Nothing, sorry Mrs. Davis, I was just remembering something. Do you have any suggestions for me?"

"Mrs. Walker is going to send the names of a few piano teachers in the area, in case you'd be interested in letting him foster his talent."

"Of course," Bella responded, "If I had known, I would have found someone sooner. I'll talk with Jack when I pick him up today and see if this is something that he wants to pursue. Thank you so much for letting me know, Mrs. Davis."

"No problem, Ms. Swan. I meant what I said earlier, he is truly an exceptional child. Have a good day."

"Thank you, again, ma'am. Goodbye."

Bella hung up the phone and stared at it dumbly for a moment.

"Interesting," she murmured.

After picking Jack up for school, she made plans to have him start taking lessons from Mrs. Mallory on Wednesdays. Once his teacher found out how talented he was, Saturday afternoon was added as well. By the middle of June, he could play Brahm's Lullaby by heart.

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July 3, 2008

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Jack Attacks the Museum was released into print and had done amazingly well. Critics touted her unique take on children's imagination. It was quickly rising to the top of the Best Seller's list. Tanya arranged for her to take part in a two week book tour around the country, the last week of June through the first week of July. Sue offered to come with her and Jack, so that he would have someone to watch him while Bella did signings. Charlie decided to take some vacation time and join them for the second week, meeting up with them on July 3rd in Orlando, Florida. They were then going to spend 4th of July at Disney World, every six year old's dream.

During the first couple of signings, Bella was completely overwhelmed. She wasn't expecting there to be a line out the door of people who wanted her to sign their book or get a picture with the author. She was gracious and sincere with every single fan who came up to her. By July 3rd, Bella had actually started to get comfortable with her signings and chatting with her fans.

She was halfway through her session when she heard Jack's voice.

"Mama! Mama! Look who we found!"

Parachute

She looked up to see him weaving his way through the small crowd. When he got to the front of the line, he crawled under the table and popped up on her side. He gave her a triumphant grin.

"Hi, Mommy!"

Bella laughed and pulled him in for a hug and kissed his head.

"Hi, baby. What were you yelling about now?" she asked. He giggled and pointed off towards the side of the crowd where Sue and Charlie stood arm-in-arm. Charlie gave her a small wave.

"Ah, you and Sue went to pick up Pops from the airport?"

He nodded enthusiastically. He looked towards the woman who was patiently waiting to get her book signed. His eyes widened when he saw what book she was holding.

"Hey!" he exclaimed, "That's my book, Mama!"

"Yes, it is," Bella grinned at him. "You remember the other night when I was telling you that I would be signing copies of our book for people?"

He nodded and looked up into the woman's face.

"Didja like it? I thought it was awesome!"

"Oh, yes! It was very good! My daughter loves it. Are you Jack?" she asked. His eyes widened comically.

"Yes," he whispered, "How do you know my name?"

"Why, it's your book, isn't it?" the woman laughed.

"Oh, yeah, that's right," he started giggling.

Parachute

"What's your name, Miss?" Bella asked, as she made the motion to sign her book. The woman smiled widely.

"Could you please put my daughter's name? It's Monica."

"Sure, no problem!"

The woman looked at Jack again and cocked her head to the side.

"Would you mind signing my book as well, Mr. Jack?"

Jack looked shyly at Bella, who bit her lip and nodded slightly.

"Sure, I don't mind," he said quietly.

Once Bella had written her inscription, she pulled Jack onto her lap to help him sign the book. He carefully took the pen and wrote in his blocky child's script, Jack Swan. The next few women fawned over and adored Jack, while he ate up the attention with glee. Charlie and Sue left with him after 20 minutes and his adoring public were sad to see him go. Bella heard nothing except how much people loved her story and how cute Jack was, for the rest of the day.

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July 4, 2008

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After a good night's sleep, everyone was excited to be exploring Disney World today. Since it was a very busy day at the park, Bella made sure to lecture Jack about staying with the adults and taking extra precautions not to let him out of her sight if she could help it. They had a fun-filled day playing games and

Parachute

riding every ride that Jack was able to get on. He completely fell in love with the Buzz Lightyear ride. Bella and Charlie even rode Space Mountain twice while Jack and Sue sat on a bench eating ice cream.

They decided to have dinner at a restaurant in the Magic Kingdom park before heading out to go find a good spot to see the Fourth of July fireworks. As the group of four were leaving the Plaza Restaurant when they heard a voice calling out to them.

"Charlie? Charlie Swan, is that you?"

Bella turned towards the voice and felt her body freeze in shock. It had come from a woman, looking to be in her late 30s, early 40s. She had light brown hair with hazel eyes and a smattering of freckles across her nose. It may have been a dozen years since she had seen her, but Bella knew her mother instantly. Renee Swan looked as if she'd barely aged a day since she left Forks all those years ago. Bella bristled and her stomach felt like a bowling ball was now residing in her stomach. She instinctively tightened her hold on Jack's hand as Renee's eyes met hers.

Renee smiled brightly and let out a big breath.

"Oh, Bella, you've grown into a beautiful woman." She took a step towards her daughter, who stepped back at the same time. Renee's brow furrowed in confusion as she gazed at Bella. She looked down at the little boy who was clutching her hand and her face grew cold.

"Is he yours?" she hissed, pointing at Jack. She spun on Charlie and leveled a glare on him. "You let her ruin her life? I can't believe this. I thought that she would be better off with you! I was clearly mistaken!"

Bella stood watching her parents interact for the first time in twelve years and felt a mix of emotions. On one hand, she was furious that her mother would refer to Jack in such a way. She had no idea what had been going on in their lives. It was her own choice and she had no grounds to be upset with her now. There was another small part of her that was upset and saddened that she had

Parachute

disappointed her mother. She quickly locked that piece of her up to analyze another day. Right now, Jack was her number one priority, not her estranged mother. Bella looked down and caught Jack's frightened gaze. She gave him a smile and squatted down to his eye level.

"It's ok," she whispered to him, "just ignore her. We'll talk about it later, once she leaves." Jack nodded hesitantly, still obviously skittish.

Bella turned back towards her mother and noticed that her father's face was bright red and even Sue looked like she was about to blow a gasket, which was saying something. Sue was the calmest and kindest person that Bella had ever met. She had never seen her this angry ever before.

"Do not speak about my daughter or grandson in that tone, Renee. You walked out of our lives a long time ago and don't have a leg to stand on."

Renee was vibrating with anger and was about to respond when a tall man with sandy blond hair placed his hand on her shoulder.

"Babe, is everything alright?" he asked, glancing at all of them. His eyes lingered over Bella in surprise.

"Oh, wow, Bella! It's a pleasure to meet my step-daughter! I'm Phil," he said holding his hand out for Bella to shake. Bells shakily held her out to his and he warmly shook her hand. He smiled brightly at her and then at Jack. He got down to Jack's level and held his hand out to him as well.

"Hello, little man. How do you do?"

Jack smiled tentatively. "Hello, sir, I'm Jack."

"It's nice to meet you, Jack," Phil smiled. He looked over and his smile dropped when he noticed his wife's angry face. Renee reached out and grabbed his hand and pulled him away from the Swan's. Bella glanced over at Charlie from the corner of her eye and was glad to see that he had calmed down.

Parachute

"Well, that went well," Bella stated wryly. Charlie turned and gave his daughter an incredulous look.

"What? Shall I curl into a ball and cry? She's not getting that satisfaction. Let's just go find a spot to watch the fireworks and explain what happened as gently as we can to Jack."

Charlie gazed at Bella for a moment, admiring how strong his daughter had grown. He nodded and they made their way over to a nice grassy area. After sitting and explaining to Jack that Renee was Bella's mama and she wasn't a nice person, Jack's only question was if he would have to call her Nana, too.

"No, baby," Bella said gently, running her fingers through his hair.

"Good, I didn't like her. I'm sad that she was your mommy, Mama. She was mean, like my first mommy."

Bella's heart clenched and she wondered if she should push him for more information or let it go for now. The loud pop of the first of the fireworks being set off made her decision for her. As the four of them laid back and watched the bursting of beautiful lights, Bella couldn't help but be thankful that things had worked out like they had for her growing up. If Renee had stayed, she was sure that she wouldn't have turned out to be the woman that she was today. She wouldn't have such a great step-mother in Sue and she most assuredly wouldn't have Jack. He was the most important thing in her world and she wouldn't trade that for anything.

Once the fireworks were over, they started to make their way out of the park and back to their hotel. They only got a few feet before Bella felt a hand touch her shoulder. She turned and looked into Phil's sad eyes.

"I'm very sorry for how your mother acted. I don't want to make excuses for her, but Renee has," he paused for a moment, "issues. She's working through them, but it's difficult."

Parachute

"So was growing up with a single father after my mother abandoned me," Bella replied frostily. Phil looked sheepish.

"I can't even begin to imagine how you feel, but I really would like you to keep in touch with me. I know Renee loves you very much and I'm sure one day she'll be able to explain everything for herself."

He handed her a business card and Bella took it and put it in her pocket.

"I'm not making any promises," she told him. He smiled and hugged her lightly.

"I'm not asking for any." He smiled and walked away.

She turned back and caught up to where her family was waiting for her. Maybe someday she'd reconcile with Renee. Until then, she wasn't holding her breath.

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Chapter 7

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August 12, 2009

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Bella laughed and smiled as Jack sang along with Lady GaGa's Poker Face. The stations that she got in Forks were crap, but here in Port Angeles, their options were moderately better. She was really starting to regret not bringing her iPod along for this trip. She glanced at him out of the corner of her eye when he stopped singing. He was staring at her. She turned her head towards him briefly, before settling her eyes back on the road in front of her.

"What?" she asked. Jack reached over and turned the music to a lower volume before speaking.

"You know, now that we have a ton of money, why dontcha buy a new car? Something cool!" he said excitedly. Bella shook her head.

"What's wrong with the Chevy? It's a classic and she gets us where we need to go."

Jack rolled his eyes and scoffed at her.

"Mom, I'm seven and even I know that this is not the definition of classic."

She raised an eyebrow at her son.

"Really? And what kind of car do you think we should get?"

Parachute

"A Porshe! Or a Hummer! Or maybe a Ferrari," his eyes lit up in excitement.

"Hold on there, Little Bit," she laughed, "we have more important things to focus on at the moment."

Bella pulled into the driveway of a small two story house on a street filled with about a dozen other houses. There were children playing on the sidewalks, and a few older people rocking on porches. All in all, the neighborhood had a completely relaxing and friendly feel to it. Jack looked up at the little house and cocked his head to the side.

"Who lives here, Ma? Why are we here?"

Bella bit her bottom lip softly and gave him a small smile.

"We're looking at it to see if maybe we'd like to live here. It's about a ten minute walk from your school and a lot closer to the bookstore."

Jack turned and gave her a confused look.

"Why do we have to move? Can't we stay living with Pops?"

Bella worried her lip for a moment, trying to figure out how to word her response.

"Jack, moving here to Port Angeles will be good for us. Pop and Sue like to be alone sometimes, plus wouldn't it be nice sleeping in an hour later every morning? We'll still see everyone. Pop said that you can even stay at his house every weekend if you'd like."

She watched Jack as he stared at the house with his brow furrowed. She reached out for his hand and gently squeezed it.

"Come on, let's at least go in and take a look, okay? Nothing needs to be decided today."

Parachute

Jack nodded and started to get out of the truck. Bella met him at the hood of the Chevy and reached out to hold his hand. They walked onto the porch and up to the front door. Bella inserted the key that the Realtor had given her when they met yesterday and her and Jack walked inside. The house opened up into a small foyer with a closet to the side, as well as a round table. Bella could just picture coming home there and tossing her keys on the table and her coat on a hook. They stepped into the hall, and on the left opened to a living room which was about the size of the one back at Charlie's. To the right was a small dining room and an open archway which lead into a kitchen, much bigger than what they were used to. The room was done in a white and black theme and the appliances were all stainless steel and looked brand new. Off to the side of the room, there was a nook with a cushioned bench and small, round white table with three chairs. Behind the table was a black, glass paneled door. Jack walked over to the door and looked out to the concrete patio and grassy area.

"I know the yard is a lot smaller than Pop's, but there's the big playground about three blocks up. Plus, I figured you'd want to stay in Fork's on the weekends and sometime during the summer anyways," she explained to him, nervous about his reaction. She had fallen in love with this house the first time she had stepped foot into it. She was hoping with everything in her heart that he would be amicable to moving here. She needed him on board because she would never think to force him to move somewhere that he didn't want to be.

Jack turned to look at her with contemplative look on his face and nodded. She breathed a sigh of relief that he was at least thinking about it. After working hard over the past four years to give him a loving and stable home, Bella knew this might be a hard sell, but she was willing to fight for it. She had an ace up her sleeve.

"Wanna go check out upstairs?" she asked, jerking her head towards the stairs. They were situated in the middle of the hallway, in a direct path to the foyer. Jack nodded again and they walked up to the second floor.

"There are three bedrooms and two bathrooms up here," Bella started to explain. When they got to the top of the stairs, she motioned towards three doors on the left.

Parachute

"The room in the middle is the bathroom. I thought maybe that you could take one of the rooms and we could use the other as a study. Over on the right here is the master bedroom. I'll have an en-suite bathroom, which just means that my bathroom is attached to my room."

She walked over the the door on the right and opened in up so Jack could walk in and look. The room was a soft cream with dark wood accents. It comfortably held a queen sized bed, a pair of dressers, a walk-in closet and a large window seat that could hold two people comfortably. The bathroom was done in the same color scheme and held a toilet, a long counter with sink and a deep claw foot tub, as well as a glass enclosed shower.

Jack's eyes widened and he whistled.

"Dude, it's huge in here!"

Bella grinned, glad to see his excitement growing. They left and turned to check out the other rooms. The first bedroom was simple, holding a full sized bed, dresser and small desk. The bathroom was half the size of the master bedroom's, holding a sink, toilet and glass shower. It was about the same size as the bathroom back in their current home. With one room left, Bella knew that this was the time to play her ace. She stood in front of the room and turned to him.

"I saw this room and immediately thought of you. I honestly think that you'll love it, but if not, don't feel bad about telling me so, okay?"

He nodded his head in assent and turned the knob.

When Jack walked into the last room in the hallway, his eyes lit up. There were two nice sized windows that over looked the yard. A bed was nestled in a corner underneath one of them. A dresser sat next to the bed and a small desk was situated in the other corner of the room, in front of the second window. There were shelves that completely encircled the room at around six feet high.

Parachute

He walked over to one of the shelves and reached up to touch it reverently. Bella had come to adore that Jack had an appetite for books that was as voracious as hers. It was one of the many things that made her feel like he was truly her son.

Jack walked over to the window by the desk and gazed outside. He turned to her with his eyes ablaze.

"When can we move in?"

Bella grinned from ear to ear.

"Really? You like it?"

Jack grinned right back at her.

"I love it, Mom. I think it's going to be good for us," he said as he walked over and hugged her, wrapping his arms around her waist. Sighing, she ran her fingers through his hair, which almost reached up to her sternum at this point. She couldn't believe how fast he was growing and changing, but she knew there would always be some part of him that would remain that lost little boy that she found years ago.

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With the help of their family and friends, including Seth and his buddies, Quil and Embry, Bella and Jack were finally all moved into their new house the first week of September. Alice had gone to town decorating and livening up the place. Bella tried to reign her in, but Alice was a force that couldn't be contained, especially when she felt she had a debt to repay.

Parachute

She and Jasper had decided to hold off on their wedding plans until both of them were financially and professionally secure. Jasper achieved that fairly quickly, but Alice had had trouble financing her plans to open up her own store. Six months ago, after Bella had deposited another rather large check from her book sales, she approached Allie about becoming an investor in her venture. At first, Alice declined, stating that she wanted to do it all on her own. She eventually relented when Bella argued that borrowing money from her would be the same as the bank, except that Allie would not be paying interest.

In the end, it was decided that Bella would become half-owner of the business and Alice would design and add to Bella and Jack's wardrobes however she saw fit. Alice went ahead and named the store, Bella Cuore, without letting Bella know ahead of time. It roughly translated to 'Beautiful Heart' in Italian and she saw it as a fitting homage to her best friend, who had the most beautiful heart that she had ever come across. The shop opened at the end of August and it had literally knocked everyone's socks off. Just under two weeks old and they had had to hire an assistant for Alice, not counting to the two girls they had originally hired as sales clerks. They planned on being super busy through the holiday season, so Alice and Jasper planned to have a small ceremony on Valentine's day.

Alice asked Bella to be her maid of honor and Jack to be the ring bearer. Since her father had passed on while she was still a little girl, Alice had even asked Charlie to give her away and he readily agreed. This wedding was one of the few times that Bella actually used her semi-celebrity status to charm people into helping her out. She was able to sweet talk and over-pay to be able to hold the wedding reception at the Fairmount Olympic Hotel. It was almost impossible since Valentine's was such a huge day for weddings, but Bella was able to pull it off. They would be married at a small church and then everyone would meet at the hotel for the reception. She had even organized to have a few rooms set aside for out of town guests.

Bella would run the shop while Alice was away on her honeymoon. It shouldn't be a problem since she was going to be working there off and on during the week while Jack was in school. Another big change was that Bella also bought

Parachute

the little bookstore off of Mrs Dabney, who was more than happy to sell it to someone who loved the store as much as she had over the years. She and her now-deceased husband had opened the store back in 1971 and she was settling down into retirement and to enjoy her grandchildren. Bella's plan was to upgrade the store along and convert the building next door into an adjoining coffee shop. She would drop Jack off at school and then oversee the work on the bookstore. She'd then either go spend sometime with Alice at B.C. (their nickname for Bella Cuore) or do some writing. She'd pick up Jack after school and they'd go home to make dinner together and do his homework before hanging out, watching a movie or playing a video game.

As the school year progressed, Jack started to make more friends, since he lived in a closer neighborhood. His two best friends, Riley and Garrett starting showing up after school to do their homework together. Most nights, they'd end up staying over for dinner as well. Riley's mother could barely cook anything edible, so the boy was thrilled to have another dinner option, besides Garrett's house. Garrett, on the other hand, was all too happy to hang out at Jack's because he had a crush on Bella. To be honest, both boys did, but Riley was much better at hiding it. Once homework was finished, the boys would hang out front and teach Jack to skateboard until Bella called them in for dinner.

Bella was thrilled to see Jack making friends and interacting with other kids his age. Riley and Garrett were good kids. Both were polite; Garrett overly so. She chuckled every time he tried to act smooth around her. His crush was rather obvious. The boys were a good influence on Jack, pulling him out of his shell a little and in return, Jack was a good influence on them by helping them keep up on their school work.

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December 5, 2009

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Bella was sitting on her deck, proofing her work on the latest Jack Attack book. It was the third one in the series, Jack Attacks the Aquarium. Her first published, Jack Attacks The Museum had done very well and hit the top ten on the best seller's list. The second, Jack Attacks the Zoo made it all the way to the number three spot. Tanya was extremely positive that this one was going to be at number one before too long. But then again, Tanya was biased. She had grown into a fairly close friend, loyal and fierce. No matter what was going on in their lives, Tanya made it a point to make sure she came over to their house for dinner, usually every other week. She became close with Jack and put huge effort into setting up the charity on behalf of the Swans. The Lost Treasures Foundation was set up to give help and support to lost, abandoned and kidnapped children. There was also an off-shoot that dealt with helping families of missing children as well. Five percent of all of the Jack Attack's sales went straight to LTF. Bella also volunteered for guest appearances at various events that the charity held, in hopes of spreading awareness and inspiring others to step up and support the worthy cause.

Finishing up, Bella hit save and emailed a copy of the finished draft to Tanya. She sighed and stood up, stretching her back. She had been sitting in the same spot for just over two hours, since Jack had left with Riley and Garrett to hang out at the park and enjoy the snow that they had had over the past couple of days. There had been a big snow storm, which started on Wednesday night and didn't end until yesterday morning. She had decided not to take the trip to Forks this weekend because of it. It was the first one that they had missed since moving. She walked over and pulled open the curtains, allowing in the bright sunshine as she gazed out over the peaceful winter scene.

Bella turned from her spot at the window when her phone started ringing.

"Hello?" she answered.

"Hello, is this Mrs. Swan?" a cheery voice responded.

"This is Bella Swan," she replied hesitantly.

Parachute

"Hello, Mrs. Swan, I'm calling to inform you that your son, Jack, has just been admitted here at Port Angeles County Hospital."

"Oh, my God, is he alright?"

"There's not much I can tell you over the phone, but he seems to be doing fine. He took a tumble and the doctor here thinks that he might have broken his arm, but we need you to come down here before we can treat him."

Bella was already rushing downstairs to grab her purse and coat.

"I'll be there in 15 minutes," she answered before hanging up.

When she got to the hospital just over ten minutes later, she walked up to the E.R. receptionist.

"Hello, my name is Bella Swan and my son Jack was brought in. Can you tell me where he is?" she asked, almost frantically. The woman smiled kindly at her and picked up her phone. She placed it back in the cradle after speaking to someone else for a moment.

"Someone will be right out to take you back to him, Ms. Swan. He is a beautiful little boy. So brave," she smiled. Bella tried to smile back, but she was sure it came off as more of a grimace.

A nurse came out a few minutes later and took Bella back to Jack. He sat on a table, cradling his arm. His face was pale and pinched in pain, but he made no sound or any other show of pain. His eyes met hers and her heart broke at seeing his pain. She walked over and carefully pressed his head to her shoulder and ran her fingers through his hair.

"Oh, baby," she whispered, "how did you do this?"

"We were practicing ollies in the park when I hit a patch of ice and the board flew out from under me. I landed on my arm. Ry panicked and got his older brother to bring us here."

Parachute

"Jack, you should have called me! I would've come straight to you, sweetie. I was only a few blocks away."

"I'm sorry, it just hurt so much that I didn't think about it at the time. I'm pretty sure that Ry and Max are still out in the waiting room. Can you tell them it's okay to go?" Bella nodded and went to speak with the boys while the technician took Jack for x-rays. She found Riley and his brother sitting in the waiting room.

When he saw Bella, Riley jumped up and walked over to her. He looked like he had been crying.

"Miss Bella, is Jack okay? I'm so sorry, I told Garrett that it was a bad idea."

Bella gave the boy a small smile. At least he had had the sense to get Jack help. She reached out and hugged the boy.

"It okay, Ry, he'll be fine. They sent him up for x-rays and he'll probably get a cast. You guys should head home. I'll have him give you a call when we get home."

Riley nodded and his brother walked over. She turned to the tall boy, who looked about 17. He had Riley's dirty blond hair and grayish blue eyes.

"Ms. Swan, sorry about not calling you. I didn't know the number and the runts were too freaked out to let me know."

She put her hand on his shoulder and smiled at him.

"That's okay, I understand. Thank you so much for getting him to help. That's the most important thing. I promise either he or I will give you a call when we get home," she told the boys as they made their way out of the hospital.

By the time she made it back to Jack's room, he was waiting patiently with a doctor. He had sustained a small fracture of his left ulna and would be in a cast for 6-8 weeks, depending on how well he healed. The doctor assured her that

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children heal much more quickly than adults and that Jack should follow up with his pediatrician in a few weeks for him to check it out. Worried that he might upset Alice, Jack chose a black cast to match his suit for the wedding, just in case it didn't come off in time. When he told her that, Bella shook her head at how sweet he was and made a mental note to make sure she told Allie about it.

Jack was soon discharged and they headed back the house. On the way home, they made a stop at Rite-Aid to pick up a prescription for pain medicine for Jack, and a white marker to sign Jack's cast with. Bella had the honor of being the first one to sign it. Once they got in, Jack made a beeline for the phone and called his friends to let them know how everything turned out. Bella used that time to call Charlie on her cell phone and let him know what had happened as well. He was the second-most protective person about Jack, just behind herself, so she knew he'd probably be upset.

Charlie took it fairly well, reminding her about all of the time that he had spent in an E.R. on her account, since she was an inherently clumsy little girl. When she had wrapped up the call, she went to check on Jack. He was curled up on the couch, fast asleep. She walked over and unfolded the blanket that was across the back of it, and place it gently over her sleeping son. She kissed his forehead and tucked the blanket around his shoulders. She'd let him rest for a few hours before waking him up to eat something. She headed into the kitchen to figure out what to make for dinner, leaving the sleeping boy to dream.

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June 10, 2010

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Parachute

Bella sat in the office of the bookstore and finished printing up next week's schedule for the six employees that worked there. Her manager, Steven, ran the store efficiently and Bella barely had to step foot in the door anymore. That was a good thing, considering that Jack's last day of school was next week. Then it was summer vacation. They had yet to sit down and decide what their general plans were. She planned to have a sit down this weekend and have a family discussion about it.

She grabbed her purse, and the schedule, and headed out into the employee lounge to post the schedule. As she was making her way out of the door, she waved good bye to the girl at the register, Rebecca, and stepped out into the sunshine. Her phone started to ring almost immediately. She glanced down and noticed that it was Angela.

"Hey, Angie, what's going on, girl?" she asked.

"Bella, you are not going to believe this," she said in a shaky voice. Bella immediately became concerned.

"Ange, what's wrong? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I'm fine, it's not me," she replied. "I was doing some legwork on an interview that Mike has with Senator Wilder in a couple of weeks. It turns out that his son is a lawyer in Chicago with some pretty prominent clients."

"Oh-kay," Bella drew the word out. "But why does that have you so spooked?"

"I think I found Jack's parents!"

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AN:

Parachute

Uh oh! Guess what's coming up next chapter? I'm super excited! I know some of you might be disappointed that I skipped over the wedding, but I might be persuaded to do an out take of it later on.

Don't forget to check out the Parachute Blog (Link is on my Profile!) on Monday for a pic and teaser for the next chapter! Every review gets a special teaser for the next chapter, which will remain private and not posted on the blog!

Thanks for all of the love and support!

XoX

Shel

Chapter 8

AN: There was too much going on in this chapter, so for the sake of my love of symmetry, I've written more and separated it into two chapters! I was just going to post both tomorrow, but something came up and gave me the excuse to post this one early. (No fear, though! Chapter 9 will post tomorrow and we'll officially be at the Prologue!

Parachute has been nominated for FanFic of the Month on the Twilight FanFic Addicts page! Voting is only for the next couple of days, so if you love the story, please go vote for us! Link is on our Profile/Homepage!

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June 11, 2010

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The rain beat against the window as the lightning flashed across the sky. It was half-past midnight and Bella sat at her desk, staring at her computer screen trying to digest the information in front of her. When Angela had called earlier, Bella quickly walked over to her car and unlocked the doors so that she could sit down for this conversation.

"What? How? Who? Where?" Bella started firing off, while her heart was beating rapidly. She was both scared and excited by the possibility.

"Well if you give me a moment, I can explain everything," Angela laughed lightly.

"Okay, okay, I'll shut up. Please continue," Bella responded, shakily.

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"Alright, I was asked earlier today by Mike Newton to do some research on someone he's interviewing this week, a big business man from Chicago. His name is Edward Cullen. After doing some basic research, I found out some major shit once I dug deeper. Five years ago this coming September, his three year old son, Jackson was kidnapped in Phoenix, Arizona while the wife was visiting her mother. He was never found."

Bella's heart, which had just started to calm down, started beating quickly once again. Something was niggling in her mind about Phoenix. Something sounded familiar, but she couldn't place it.

"So, wait, this is Jack's father? What was he doing in Seattle if he was kidnapped in Phoenix? He told the police that he was with his mother when she left him, did she kidnap him? Oh my God, we can finally figure some of this mess out!" she exclaimed. "What kind of people are they, Ang? Are they going to take him away if we try and contact them?"

Bella felt her chest tighten and tried to ease the panic attack that she figured was coming.

"I don't know, Bella," Angela replied sadly, "I wasn't able to dig too deep before Newton pulled me away for something else. Although, I do know that the mother wasn't charged with kidnapping and was part of the publicity campaign that they ran asking for information on their lost child. Something doesn't feel right. I think there's something much bigger going on. My suggestion would be to call your dad and Jasper, and get them in the loop. Maybe they can find out more than I was able to."

"Thank you so much, Ang," Bella replied, "I appreciate you calling me right away. I promise to call both of them as soon as I get off the phone with you. Now that I think about it, I'll call Tanya too. She might be able to pull some strings and get some dirt."

"Sounds like a plan, Bells. Do me a favor though? Don't do anything rash. Jack is important to all of us and what you need is to come up with a game plan before telling Jack, or trying to contact the Cullens."

Parachute

Bella nodded before she realized that her friend couldn't see the gesture over the phone.

"I understand, Ang," she replied. "I promise I won't do anything without discussing it with Jazz and Dad first. I've got to go now, it's almost time to pick Jack up from school. Love you."

"Love you, too, Bells! It'll all work out. I'm sure of it."

Taking Angela's parting words of comfort to heart, Bella took a deep breath and started to make some calls.

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Another flash of lightning pulled Bella from her thoughts and she gazed at the pictures on the screen. The young man was tall with brownish red hair, almost a copper color and emerald green eyes. The woman was also tall, with long red hair and stunning blue eyes. Victoria and Edward Cullen. It was taken six years ago at a charity ball for the hospital where his father was the Chief of Surgery. She stared into the smiling man's eyes and there was no doubt that this was Jack's father. He had his mother's facial structure, but his coloring and smile were all daddy's.

She had done some Google research to prepare her for lunch tomorrow with Jasper. He was going to find out as much as he could before meeting at the cafe where Bella had first had lunch with Tanya, who was also going to be joining them with whatever she could find out. From what Bella found on the Internet, the Cullens had done a few interviews on local television stations and put up missing poster signs and canvased the Phoenix area. She couldn't find one mention of Seattle. Angela was right. Something wasn't feeling right about the whole situation. The mother knew more than she must have been letting on. That was the only answer that she could come up with.

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Apparently six months after Jack went missing, his parents divorced and Edward threw himself into work, quickly moving his company, Cullen Corporation, up to one of the top acquisition firms in Chicago. Victoria stayed in the limelight as a social butterfly, appearing as arm candy for different powerful men over the years. Looking into her smiling face online, one would never have guessed that this woman's child was ripped from her life just a few years earlier. No, Victoria Preston-Cullen either had no heart or was a very good actress. Bella was betting on the former being the main issue, with a little of the latter on the side.

She leaned back into her desk chair. Something didn't seem right and it was bugging the hell out of her. Something about Phoenix kept popping into her head. She closed her eyes and sighed.

A particularly wicked flash of lightning jerked her awake. She stretched her neck and rubbed the sleep from her eyes.

She heard a noise and flashed her eyes towards the door. A tall woman with deep red hair stood there, staring at her. Bella felt a chill run down her spine as the woman's cold blue eyes bored into hers.

"He'll never be yours," she spoke in a beautiful, lilting voice as she took a step towards Bella.

Bella's heart started hammering in her chest and she felt sweat break out on her forehead.

"You can't have him back. You left him!" Bella yelled at the woman. "Get out of my house!"

She caught a movement out of the corner of her eye and saw Jack standing in the corner of the room. The woman followed Bella's gaze and cocked her head to the side.

"Jackson?" she called and held her hand out. Jack walked obediently over to her, without sparing Bella another glance. They turned and started to walk out

of the room.

"NO!" Bella screamed. "Victoria, no! Don't take my son!"

The woman stopped and turned to look at Bella, smirking.

"He was never in Phoenix," she whispered as the door closed behind her.

"NO! JACK!" Bella screamed.

She felt arms wrapping around her and heard a quiet sobbing. Her eyes snapped open to see Jack curled in her lap crying. She looked all around the room in panic, but no one was there.

"Oh, God, Mom, are you awake now? I heard you crying and you called my name. When I came in you were sleeping and wouldn't wake up!" Jack cried out desperately, clinging onto her. She rested her cheek on his head.

"Ssh, baby, it's okay," she whispered, "Mama was having a bad dream. It's alright now."

Jack calmed down and wiped the tears from his face.

"Well, don't scare me like that again, okay?" he admonished her. Bella smiled and nodded.

As Jack went to slip off of her lap, his hand hit the keyboard, which turned off the screen saver. His eyes widened as he was entranced by the smiling picture of Edward and Victoria. He reached out a hand and lightly brushed his fingers across Edwards face.

"Daddy..." he whispered. His head whipped around quickly. Bella couldn't decipher the look on his face. It almost looked like disappointment.

"You found him? And you didn't tell me? Why? Why wouldn't you tell me?" he asked in an accusing tone.

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"Jack," she started in a soothing voice, "I just found out earlier today. I was going to tell you as soon as I found out any more information. All I knew was their name and that they live in Chicago."

She noticed his stance loosen and relax. His gaze went back to the picture. After a moment, he gave her a small smile.

"I knew, Ma," he whispered as he touched the screen again. "I knew I'd see him again. You can't give up on love." He turned and looked at her with tears in his eyes.

"You taught me that, Mom." He nodded and rubbed his eyes. "What do we do now?"

Bella breathed in through her nose and then let it out slowly.

"First things first, I'm having lunch with Uncle Jazz and Tanya tomorrow to gather some more information about the situation. I know you must be excited to find out more, but I'm scared that if we rush into this, then I'll lose you."

She blinked back her tears and Jack threw his arms around her neck and squeezed.

"As much as I want to see my family again, I love you more. You'll never lose me," Jack whispered in her ear.

They sat like that for awhile before Bella turned off the computer and tucked Jack into bed. Eventually, the thoughts running through her head slowed enough for her to fall into an exhausted slumber.

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Parachute

The next day, after she dropped Jack off at school, Bella headed to the cafe. When she got there, Jasper was already seated at a table, poring over some documents that he had spread around the table. She dropped into a chair and gazed over some of the papers.

"What have you found, Jazz?" she asked. He smiled at her sadly.

"Well, the information out there is a huge clusterfuck. It's really odd. Victoria and Jackson Cullen left Chicago on Saturday, September 17th to go visit her mother in Phoenix. According to the mother's statement, Victoria and her grandson were there the entire time. On the 24th, the mother phoned into the Phoenix Police Department and reported her son as missing. She said that they had been at a park and she turned to speak to another mother for a few minutes. When she turned back, Jackson was gone. She swore that it had been less than five minutes."

Jasper rested his elbows on the the table and steepled his fingers under his chin.

"It's not adding up. You found him in Seattle on the 24th. The only way that that could have happened is if the kidnapper got him early in the morning and drove up to Seattle. But that still doesn't fit in with the time frame of when you guys found him. Or the fact that he claimed that his mother was with him there. There's just no way that he could have been in two places at the same time."

"Because he wasn't," Tanya spoke as she dropped a thick folder in the middle of the table. Jasper reached out and started flipping through it's contents as Tanya slid herself regally into her seat. Even after these past few years, the confidence that she exuded still amazed Bella.

"Holy shit," Jasper said quietly. He looked quickly up at Tanya and then back to the folder. "How the hell did you get this stuff?"

"I know a guy who knows a guy," she offered, smugly. "I'd go into more detail, but then I'd have to kill you."

Parachute

Seeing the look in her eyes, you couldn't help but believe her. Realizing this, Jasper let the comment go and went back to perusing the documents. Bella sat, fidgeting slightly, while waiting for someone to clue her in.

"Well? Is anyone going to tell me what's the hubbub?" she asked impatiently. Tanya looked at her and gave her a triumphant smile.

"Mama has a problem with nose candy. Five years ago, she was arrested for possession of illegal pain killers and marijuana. Her family was old money in Chi-Town, so they had it covered up. Over the years, her addictions got worse and she turned to harder stuff. Ecstasy, cocaine and Valium seem to be her drugs of choice these days. My guess is that she was either stepping out on her husband with her dealer, or she was sneaking off to rehab. My money's on the dealer. There's no doubt in my mind that she was in Seattle for something, and her mother was covering for her."

Tanya rested her chin on her hand and looked contemplative.

"I'm so tempted just to put a hit out on her ass. After just dumping your kid in a park to go off and get high, especially a kid as awesome as Jack, you don't deserve to be breathing."

Jasper gave Tanya a wary look and gestured to the folder.

"Can your guy take care of that, too?" he asked sarcastically. She gave him a devious smile.

"No, that would be my other guy from the Jersey Shore," she winked at him. Jasper blanched and went back to reading.

"If Jack was reported missing, then why didn't he come up in the system?" Bella asked, her confusion growing instead of diminishing. "My father's a cop. We should have been able to find them so much sooner than this."

"There's a copy of the Phoenix police report in there. Read it and then you tell me," Tanya gestured to the papers. Jasper fished it out and his eyes widened as

Parachute

he read over it.

"No fucking way," he breathed.

He looked up at Bella and handed her the paper. After skimming through it, three things stood out glaringly: Carter Cullen, red hair and blue eyes.

Suddenly, she was taken back in her memories. Back to the night when she first found Jack and he was sleeping on her lap at the station.

There had been a recent report in Phoenix, AZ about a 3 year old boy named Carter, who had wandered away from his mother at a park, but that child was described as having red hair and blue eyes. Jack's hair was more of a brown with auburn highlights and his eyes were grass green.

"Are you kidding me?" Bella almost screeched. "She described her child wrong? Who the fuck does that?"

"My guess? She was still high on whatever and the police mistook her spaciness for grief. His full name is Jackson Carter Cullen. She got confused and used his middle name and told them that he looked like her, so they put down red hair and blue eyes. No one would have thought twice to double check her report because she was his mother."

Tanya shook her head slowly. Jasper closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose.

"That means if she skipped off to Phoenix after losing him in Seattle, he had to have been on the streets alone for what? Two or three days?" He asked, his voice shaking with barely contained fury. Bella bit her lip and felt tears sting her eyes.

"I'm afraid so," Tanya stated sadly. "There's something still not right here. How would she have known to get to her mom's, if she was out of it enough to leave her kid in a park? Someone had to have been with her. She might not remember being in Seattle, but I'm betting the accomplice does."

Parachute

Tanya sat thoughtfully for a moment before continuing.

"It was probably someone that she was screwing and didn't want to get in trouble. Not only with her big shot husband and family, but also with the cops. I mean, who the hell just forgets about their kid? What kind of a woman does that?" she asked in disgust.

Jasper shook his head. He looked at Bella who had been mostly quiet throughout the conversation today. A little too quiet.

"Bells?" he asked, "Are you okay?"

She turned and looked at him with her brown eyes haunted. She smiled weakly and shook her head.

"No, how can I be okay? I couldn't love that little boy anymore if I had actually carried him for 9 months. I can't imagine what kind of a bitch his bio-mother is." She took a deep breath.

"All of his memories from when he was younger were happy and loving surrounding his father and grandparents. No wonder he would never talk about his mother. She's a monster."

Her eyes turned determined and she gave herself a quick nod.

"We have to go to them. They deserve to know that Jack is alive and he's well. I don't think just calling them and saying, 'Hey, how are you doing? I just found out that my adopted son is your kid.' would go over well. We need to do it in person."

"Hold on a sec there, Bells," Tanya started, "you need to slow your roll. You can't just waltz in there unprepared. What if they call the cops and have Jack removed from you? I'm pretty sure you would have a heart attack on the spot. Frankly, I'm surprised that you're even considering it."

Parachute

"Considering it? Why wouldn't I? If that were my child that were taken from me, I would damn well want to know. Plus, it's Jack's choice. I can't keep him from this. I love him too much."

"Even if it means letting him go?" Tanya looked her square in the eyes. Bella closed her eyes to hold back her tears. When she opened them, they were glistening, but strong.

"In a heartbeat. It would kill me, but it's what he deserves."

For the first time in their friendship, Bella saw a tear roll down Tanya's face. She swatted at the irritably and looked away.

"I guess there's a first time for everything," Jasper started, "but I have to say that I agree with Tanya, to some extent. Give me some time to look over the adoption laws and talk this over with Dad. I understand you wanting to go to the Cullens, but I need to make sure that we're prepared for the possibilities on our end, okay?"

Bella nodded and her thoughts started to drift to the 'what-ifs' before the ringing of her phone pushed them aside. Smiling, she was happy to see that it was Jack on the other end.

"Hey, baby," she answered.

"Hey, Mom! Are you almost done with your lunch?" he asked. She could hear Charlie laughing at him in the background.

"Yes, sir."

"Cool, cause I can't wait to show you the fish that Pops and I caught today! He said that you knew how to fillate them and cook 'em. Is that true?"

"Yes, it's true, but I think you mean fillet, not fillate."

Parachute

Tanya spit her drink out when she heard that. Jasper wiped the spittle off of his cheek and glared at her. She shrugged unapologetically and grinned.

"Oh, okay. I guess I'll see you in a little while?" he asked.

"Yes, Little Bit, I'm leaving here shortly. I'll stop by the store and grab something for dessert. Sound good?"

"Yes!" he yelled. She was laughing, picturing him doing a fist pump. "Love you, Ma! Bye!"

"Bye sweetie," she said before hanging up. She looked over at Jasper.

"Do what you have to. I'm going to look into arrangements for visiting Chicago. You make sure that I don't lose my baby, Jazz."

Jasper nodded, solemnly. "I promise that we'll do our best, Bella. You know we love Jack, too."

Bella smiled slightly.

"I know. We'll be okay," she whispered, praying that it was true.

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Chapter 9

AN: Alright, the moment you've all been waiting for! Well, almost. ;-)

If you haven't listened to the song yet, I highly suggest listening to it towards the end of the chapter. It really is a great song and I think it says so much about Bella and Jack's relationship! Just a reminder, it's called ***Parachute*** by the group ***Train***.

As always, every single reviewer will get a teaser on Monday for the next chapter! Sqeeeee!

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June 11, 2010

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Charlie cast his line out into the lake, watching Jack out of the corner of his eye. It was obvious that the boy had a lot on his mind.

"Well, kid," Charlie started, "you look like you need someone to talk to. That's why we're out here. Nothing like the peace and tranquility of fishing to help clear your mind. I come out here a lot more now that you and your mom moved into your own place."

Charlie noticed that Jack flinched a little when he mentioned Bella. Jack sighed and continued to gaze out over the water.

"Will she?" he asked. Charlie raised an eyebrow.

Parachute

"Will she what?"

"Will she still be my mom if we go to Chicago to meet my family?"

When Jack turned towards him, Charlie's heart broke at how the boy's eyes were filled with sadness. He cleared the emotion out of his throat.

"Of course she will. Bella will love you and consider you her son until the day she dies. One thing you gotta learn about us Swans, Jack, is that when we love, we love forever, just like the actual birds. You'll always be a part of our hearts."

Charlie blinked back tears as Jack let his drip down his face.

"I don't want to leave you or mom, Pops. Please don't let them keep me!" he cried.

Charlie reached out and took the boy in his arms and held him tightly. He cleared his throat.

"Don't worry, kiddo, we won't let anything bad happen to you. We'll fight tooth and nail for you, Jack, if that's what you want."

He felt Jack's shuddering breath as he tried to calm himself. He pulled out of Charlie's arms and rubbed his face. He looked up and smiled, the red rim around his eyes made them look greener than they ever had before.

"I'm done crying over this," he said firmly. "No matter what happens, I'm coming home with Mom. Even if I have to hide myself in her suitcase."

Charlie laughed lightly and ruffled the youngster's hair.

"Ha, you sound just like your mom. She said almost the exact same thing when we went to visit her grandmother in Portland, when she was about your age. Grandma Swan joked around about keeping her and she quickly said no thank you. Later that afternoon, I found her hiding in my suitcase, saying that she

Parachute

was making her getaway and that Grandma couldn't keep her because she belonged to me. I don't think I had laughed that hard in years."

Jack smiled. He loved it when his Pop told him stories about when Bella was younger. They really were a lot alike.

"Speaking of your mom," Charlie started, "why don't you give her a call and let her know that we'll be having fish for dinner? I'm sure she'd love to hear your voice."

Jack quickly nodded and pulled his Firefly(*) out of his pocket and gave Bella a call.

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Later that night, Bella sat on the couch with Jack's head resting in her lap. She was running her fingers through his hair as they sat and discussed their travel plans with Charlie after dinner.

"So, what's next, baby girl?" Charlie asked, taking a swig of the iced tea he was holding. Bella thought for a moment before she responded.

"Tanya gave me the number of one of her 'guys'," Bella laughed and shook her head, using her fingers to make quotation marks in the air. "I called Mr. Jenks a little while ago and left my number for him to call me back. He's a private investigator and he can get me the exact address and location of the entire Cullen family in Chicago, according to Tanya. My idea right now is to just find out what I can. I'd like to see if we can make arrangements to go out there next week, after Jack's last day of school."

Charlie tugged lightly on his mustache, thinking things over.

Parachute

"Are you sure that's a good idea? What are you going to do? Just show up on their doorstep and knock?"

Bella nodded and he looked at her incredulously.

"This is something that they should find out in person. It feels so cold to just have my lawyer contact them and set up a meeting. His family didn't willingly let him go. They looked for him and it had to have broken their hearts."

Charlie shook his head and sighed.

"If that's what you feel is best, then I'll support your decision. Just make sure you wait until Jasper can double check that your I's are all dotted."

Jack turned his head and gave Charlie a confused look.

"What does that mean?" he asked. Bella smiled and continued to scratch his head lightly.

"It means that we need to make sure that we know as much as we can, and to make sure that we don't do anything wrong," she replied.

"Oh, okay. Why didn't you just say that, Pops?"

"Eh, it's just an expression, sheesh," Charlie grumbled good-naturedly.

"Tanya suggested that we rent a hotel room for a week or so to see how things go. If they are good, then she knows a guy who can rent us a house to stay in for the summer." Bella rolled her eyes at the thought of Tanya and her "guys."

Charlie's eyes widened.

"So, you could possibly be gone for the whole summer?" he asked as he swallowed back his anxiety. He hadn't gone more than two weeks without seeing Bella or Jack for the past five years. Even then, most of the time they were only about a two hour drive away. Two and a half months suddenly

Parachute

seemed like an eternity to him.

"I don't really know what we're going to do yet. We're playing it by ear. I was hoping that you and Sue would come out and visit us a time or two, once we get to know the Cullens. Maybe we'll fly back for a weekend or something. Of course, that's if we even end up staying there. I'm not sure how this is going to play out yet, Dad."

"Well, whatever you choose, I've got your back, baby girl," he said, nodding.

"Thanks, Daddy," she smiled. "I think Jack and I will fly out there and rent a car. Jasper mentioned that he and Alice would like to come with us at first, to help smooth things over if we need it. I think it might be a good idea. You know how easily Allie wraps people around her finger and Jazz's presence as a lawyer might be helpful. I was thinking about asking him to drive out with my Aston and then they can take over the rental. Jazz has been dying to get his fingers around Nevaeh's steering wheel."

"I still have no idea why you named your car that," Charlie chuckled.

"It's Nevaeh is Heaven spelled backwards. I figured it was a perfect name for her," Bella smirked as Charlie tipped his head towards her in agreement.

"Well," Charlie started as he stood from his seat, "I'm gonna head out. Sue should be getting home from work soon. She sounded pretty excited by the thought of a home cooked meal waiting for her. Thanks again for packing her up a plate, Bells."

Jack got up and walked over to Charlie, hugging him tightly.

"Thanks for taking me fishing today, Pops. I enjoyed the peace," he smiled. Charlie squeezed him before letting him go.

"Any time, kid. You're a natural," he winked.

Parachute

Bella walked into the kitchen and grabbed the plate she had made for Sue. She took it back into the living room and handed it to her father and then reached around to hug him from the side.

"Thanks, Dad. And don't mention it about dinner. I'm happy to be able to give Sue a break now and then."

Bella and Jack stood in their doorway and watched Charlie drive away. Jack looked up at her and smiled. He reached out and squeezed her hand.

"It'll be okay," he said with conviction in his voice, "I promise you."

Bella smiled back and they stood together watching the stars for a little while.

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June 14, 2010

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"Hello, Odds and Ends, this is Bella. How may I help you?"

"Ms. Swan? This is Jenks. I've got some of the info that you requested from me on Friday."

Bella felt the butterflies in her stomach start to flutter.

"Sure, Mr. Jenks, just give me a moment to go up to my office," Bella replied before placing him on hold.

"Laurent!" she hollered as she walked away from the front counter.

Parachute

Steve poked his head out from behind a stack of books that he had been shelving.

"Yes, boss lady?" he laughed.

"Keep it up, Mr. Laurent and I'll have to find a new manager," she tried to say sternly, but failed in capturing her giggles. Steven Laurent was a hard person to be mad at. His personality was sweet and he was always friendly. He was also very handsome, with a light brown, almost a tan skin color and sea green eyes. She hadn't had a boyfriend since the Jacob fiasco and only went out on a few dates. Steven asked her a couple of weeks ago and she declined because she was his employer, but now she was considering changing her mind after they returned from Chicago. She was a 23 year old virgin and was starting to feel lonely. Jack could only fill up so much of her heart. There was still a space that was empty.

"I've got a phone call to take up in the office. I'm not sure how long I'll be, so can you keep an eye on the counter?"

"Sure, Bella, not a problem," he smiled.

Bella walked into her office and flopped down into her comfy chair, before picking up Jenks' call.

"Sorry about that Mr. Jenks."

"No problem, Ms Swan," he replied, "and please call me Jay or Jenks."

"Only if you call me Bella," she laughed.

"Yes, Miss Bella. Now, getting down to business. I've come across some information for you. I'm going to fax you a copy of everything, so don't worry about writing it down. Victoria Preston-Cullen currently lives in downtown Chicago, in a penthouse that her father, Marcus Preston owns. He is a very powerful bank president. I wasn't able to get a home address for Edward Cullen, only his business address, which is also in downtown Chicago. Cullen

Parachute

Corporation is not the largest Acquisitions Firm in the city, but it is the most lucrative. Apparently after their divorce in April of 2006, Mr. Cullen disappeared off of the map, unless it was work-related. In the six months between Jack's disappearance and their divorce, Mr. and Mrs. Cullen spoke with various media outlets in Chicago and a few in Phoenix. The police were working under the assumption that the child was abducted for ransom because of his wealthy parents. They were sure that the kidnapper would bring the child to Chicago and try to blackmail his parents. As the months went by and no word or clues were ever uncovered, a police officer suggested to Mr. Cullen that they make peace with the strong possibility that their child wouldn't be returned. That was the end of the Cullen's relationship with the Chicago P.D. in regards to Jackson. They turned to private investigators, who also turned up nothing."

He paused for a moment.

"If I may interject my opinion for a moment, Bella, I find myself agreeing with the suggestion that Mrs. Cullen was with another person. A person who knew how to cover their tracks extremely well. After obtaining the flight records from the date that Victoria Cullen supposedly left Chicago in September of 2005, I could find none. My assumption is that she traveled under a fake alias to avoid getting caught going to where ever she was heading."

"Aren't the airport security measures supposed to be very tight? How could she have gotten through with fake identification?" Bella asked.

"Like I said before, Mr. Preston is a very powerful man, as is Mr. Cullen. Being tied to both of them, Victoria had access to the best of anything she wanted. She easily could have had perfect fake documentation, not to mention a vast amount of money to grease anyone's palm who questioned her."

Bella shook her head angrily. The more she thought about Victoria Preston, the more she wanted to claw her eyes out.

"What about the rest of the family? Did you find out anything on his grandparents?"

Parachute

"Yes, indeed. I have an address for as Esme and Carlisle Cullen. They live about 45 minutes outside of Chicago, in Highland Park. He's the Chief of Staff at Children's Memorial Hospital and she owns an Interior Design company. She's also very well known for her work with various charities. They have another son, Emmett Cullen. He and his wife, Rosalie own Cullen Customs, located in the Edgewater area. They build custom cars, as well as restorations."

Bella let out a large breath.

"Alright then. Anything else?"

"Nothing at the moment. I'm working on getting a hold of any other useful information regarding acquaintances and family friends. I'll keep you posted."

"Thank you, Jay, I appreciate it."

"No problem, Bella, that's what I get paid for," he laughed lightly.

Bella hung up the phone after saying goodbye and fired up her computer. Jack's last day of school was in two days, so she was able to book them a one way flight to Chicago on Friday. She booked a room for her and Jack, as well as reserving one for Alice and Jasper, who were planning on getting into Chicago sometime on Monday. She was very thankful that they would be bringing her baby, Nevaeh, so she could drive her over the summer. Jasper was just excited to be able to take a road trip in her.

She closed up the computer and gathered her things to get ready to pick Jack up from school. She planned on telling him about their leaving on Friday over dinner. She was curious as to what his reaction would be. He was hard to get a read on over the weekend. On one hand, he seemed excited to see them again, but on the other he was reserved and quiet about the whole thing. She understood how he felt though, she was feeling the exact same way.

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June 18, 2010

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Bella needn't have worried about Jack's reaction. He was both excited and nervous about how everything was going to work out. He was in total agreement about leaving as soon as possible to get it over with, good or bad. Jasper assured them both that even if the Cullens were going to be forceful about the situation, Bella had legal and binding custody since Jack had been turned into a ward of the state. They could choose to take her to court and then it would be for a judge to decide. Both Jazz and his father were of the mind set that the worst case scenario would be that Bella would be relegated to visitation, but they decided to worry about it if the time came.

The night before their flight, Bella and Jack got into their first real fight. Tensions were running high and both were nervous about the next day. After making sure her bags were packed and ready to go, she went in Jack's room to check on his. He had had his skateboard shoved into the middle of his suitcase and Bella told him to take it out. She and Jack argued back and forth until they realized how stupid their fight was and started laughing. They hugged each other and Bella turned it into a tickle fight, falling onto his bed.

"I'm sorry, Mom, I'm just worried and excited and nervous about tomorrow. I didn't mean to yell at you," he apologized, after they settled down.

"It's okay, Little Bit," she kissed him on the forehead, "I feel exactly the same way. How about a compromise? I'll pack your board in Nevaeh along with our other clothes that Jazz and Allie are bringing for us?"

He smiled and nodded.

"Thanks, Ma," he said while snuggling next to her on his bed. "I love you," he whispered as his eyes drifted closed.

Parachute

Bella laid her cheek on his head and let her eyes close as well, reveling in the comfort that holding him gave her.

The next morning, they gathered up their bags and stowed them into the back of Charlie's truck, before hopping in while he drove them to the airport. He hugged and kissed them both and promised that he would be out to visit them sometime over the summer, if they decided to stay. The flight itself felt like it lasted a blink of an eye. As they stepped off of the plane at O'Hare, they made their way to pick up the few pieces of luggage that they brought and then went in search of the car rental.

Once they were all situated in the black, Volvo XC60, Bella and Jack drove in search of food before plugging the Cullen's address into the GPS. An hour and a half later, they both found themselves with their hearts beating erratically as they passed into the Highland Park area.

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I wanna take you with me

To life with no more yesterdays

We can start again awake and so excited

And change the way we always push We always pull

...

I'll open up and be your parachute

And I'll never let you down

Parachute

So open up and be my human angel

And we'll only hit the ground

Running

...

And when the world gets sharp

And tries to cut you down to size

And makes you feel like giving in

Oh, I will stay, I will rain

I will wash the words and pain away

And I will chase away the way we push

The way we pull

You're beautiful

...

I'll open up and be your parachute

And I'll never let you down

So open up and be my human angel

And we'll only hit the ground

Running

Parachute

...

And if it feels like we might drop

It will stop

So don't look down

It wouldn't be the same without you

This life is too good to give up on

...

I'll open up and be your parachute

And I'll never let you down

So open up and be my human angel

And we'll only hit the ground

And we're gonna hit the ground

Running

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Parachute ~ Train

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Parachute

Taking a deep breath in through her nose, Bella pulled over to the side of the road, just before a long driveway. Glancing in the rear view mirror, she gazed at her eight year old son. His leg was bouncing, as he stared out of his window, a nervous trait that he had picked up from her. He ran his hand through his mop of unruly brown hair, which had bronze highlights running through it. His emerald green eyes flicked towards hers quickly, before glancing back out of the window. She knew the kid like the back of her hand. He was her best friend, after all.

"Jack? Are you okay?" Bella asked quietly. He nodded swiftly.

"Just nervous, Ma, you know?" he responded, glancing back at her.

Bella nodded, understanding. More than halfway across the country was so far away from home. Here, just miles outside of Chicago, was a family that Jack hadn't seen in over five years. Neither of them knew what to expect since she had been too nervous to call and speak with anyone. This whole trip had been on the spur of the moment. As soon as the private investigator that was hired, Jay Jenks, had found the Cullens, Bella had booked their tickets to Chicago, not thinking things through thoroughly. Now she was riddled with doubt.

Maybe it was better left alone, she wondered. Jack was her son. There was no way to prepare for what might happen when they knocked on that door. Could she share him? Could she give him up?

Bella's heart instantly started hammering in her chest and knew that the last one wasn't an option. She couldn't survive without him. He was her life.

Turning the ignition and putting the car back in drive, she was tempted to just turn back around, head to the airport and fly them right back to their little, cozy three bedroom house near Seattle. Bella knew that she couldn't do that and that Jack deserved to face his past and reconcile it with his present. She turned up the mile long driveway and pulled up to the front of the enormous three story house. With another deep breath, Bella turned off the car and unhooked her seat belt, as did Jack. After climbing out of the driver's seat, she walked over to where her boy was already standing by the rear passenger door.

Parachute

He reached out blindly for his mother's hand, not being able to take his eyes off of the house. She wrapped his small hand in hers and started to walk forward and up the stairs that lead to the porch, which was large and held a swing on either side. The house was white with blue accents. It had a very Southern feel to it.

"Are you ready?" Bella asked as she looked down at Jack. He nodded nervously.

"I feel like I'm going to puke though," he groaned lightly. She chuckled, thankful for the small break in tension.

"Here we go," she whispered and she pressed her finger to the doorbell.

This was the beginning. Their lives would change drastically after this, she was sure of it. Bella just prayed that it was for the better and not the worse.

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AN: (*) A Firefly is a type of phone geared towards kids. Parents have control over it's incoming and outgoing calls, if they choose.

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"Mrs. Cullen?" Bella asked. The woman's smile became unfathomably larger.

Bella's eyes widened and her mouth dropped open in shock.

Esme tilted her head slightly to one side, confusion also settling upon her face.

"No effing way," Bella whispered, her jaw still hanging open.

inside the house interrupted.

"Esme, love, who's at the door?" a deep male voice called. A handsome man, about the same age as Esme, with dirty blond hair and grayish-blue eyes came into view. He smiled kindly at Bella before looking questioningly at his wife.

"Carlisle," Esme responded, "this is Isabella Swan, the author who created the Lost Treasures Foundation that I work with."

Bella felt an unknown emotion pull at her chest when this woman, who she didn't even know, gave her a look of immense pride.

"Well, it is a pleasure to meet you Ms. Swan. What brings you to our doorstep?" he asked.

"Oh!" Esme piped up, "Where are my manners! Would you like to come in, dear?"

Bella felt Jack grip the back of her jacket, before stepping slightly into view, to peek around her body. Esme craned her neck slightly to view the boy who was acting so shyly.

"Actually, that would be wonderful. I think we might be awhile," she laughed nervously.

Esme shot her another confused glance.

"I don't understand," Carlisle said.

"This is my son, Jack. We're pretty certain that he's your grandson."

Jack stepped fully from behind Bella and smiled nervously at his grandparents.

"Hello," he said quietly.

Parachute

Both Esme and Carlisle's jaws dropped dramatically. Esme's eyes rolled into the back of her head and she fainted in Carlisle's arms. He caught his wife quickly and swept her up, never once taking his eyes off of Jack. His brow furrowed and he glanced at Bella.

"I think you two should come in."

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Bella and Jack followed Carlisle through a large white marble foyer and into an enormous living room. It was wide and open, with a white carpet and large sectional couch and a black chaise lounge, as well as a few sitting chairs. There was an intricate stairway in the center of the back of the room. To the left of that was a large pool table. Bella and Jack sat on the smaller part of the couch while Carlisle laid his wife on the largest section in the middle.

He looked up at them and smiled softly.

"She'll be fine. I'll be right back. I'm going to get her some water," he spoke. He stood up and walked over to glass double doors on the right side of the room. As he opened them and walked into the kitchen, Bella felt like she had walked into a dream. From what she could see, it was a chef's wet dream. A very large marble island, 6 feet tall cabinets and plush chairs, all done in shades of tan. It was amazing. She pulled her eyes away from the kitchen in order to look around the living room more.

Right in front of the couch was a huge screen hanging on the wall and a fireplace blended in to the left of it. On the other side of the room was a white baby grand piano and what looked to be a projector on the ceiling. The plants and greenery dispersed around the room gave off a homey feel.

Parachute

Carlisle walked back into the room carrying a glass of water and sat down by Esme's head. He started to gently touch her face and whisper in her ear. Bella looked over at Jack, feeling as if she were intruding on a private moment. Jack looked up at her, concern for his grandmother written all over his face. She gazed over his face, noting the similarities to the woman resting on the couch. Jack's eyes were the same color green and his hair was just a shade darker with the addition of his auburn highlights. There was no doubt in her mind that these people were Jack's family.

"Oh, my," she heard Esme say, "I am so sorry, you must forgive me."

Bella turned to look at the older woman. She was a little paler, but otherwise seemed fine. She sat next to Carlisle, his right hand rubbing circles on her back while his left held one of her hands firmly. Bella smiled and shook her head.

"Please don't apologize," she told her. "I'm afraid this is my fault. I didn't feel comfortable sharing something of this magnitude over the phone. We wanted to tell you in person." Bella looked down at Jack and he nodded, encouraging her.

Esme's gaze went back and forth between Bella and Jack. She could clearly see the love that wound between the two of them and a million questions started to swirl around her.

"How?" she asked, as tears started to trickle from her verdant eyes. "What happened? How did you find him? How long have you known we were his family?" Both she and Carlisle looked at Bella expectantly.

"It's a very long story," Bella chuckled, humorlessly. "Let me start at the beginning."

Bella started to tell the Cullens her tale, starting with finding Jack in the alley and taking him to the police station. She didn't get very far. They were interrupted with the sound of the front door opening and a loud voice calling out of the foyer.

Parachute

"Mom! We're here!"

Bella felt something tighten in her stomach as she prepared to come face to face with Jack's father. Her nerves were at an all-time high and she briefly wondered if Dr. Cullen could prescribe her something to help prevent an ulcer from forming. She turned to look in the direction of the voice, but instead of being met with Edward Cullen, she was faced with one of the largest men that she had even seen. He had to have been at least 6'5" and well over 200 lbs, but it was all muscle. He had the same color hair as Esme, but the grayish blue eye color of Carlisle. When he walked into the room and noticed that they had company, he shot Bella an apologetic smile, flashing a very cute pair of dimples. By his side was a stunning blonde with sapphire blue eyes. She was just a few inches shorter than the man, probably standing around 5'10" or so. She eyed Bella and Jack disinterestedly.

"Emmett, Rosalie," Esme said. "This is Isabella Swan and," she cut herself off and looked helplessly at Bella and Jack. He took a deep breath and stood up.

"Jack. Jackson Swan," he said confidently. Emmett's eyes widened as he gave the boy a closer look. Rosalie's hand flew to her mouth and tears filled her eyes.

"No way," he whispered. Esme cleared her throat slightly.

"Isabella and Jack, this is our son, Emmett and his wife, Rosalie," Esme spoke in a somewhat shaky voice. Bella's heart went out to the woman, who must have been almost completely overwhelmed by emotion at this point.

"Just Bella is fine," she smiled and nodded.

Emmett and Jack both stood staring at each other. Jack cocked his head to the side and smiled softly, before closing his eyes.

"Did you fill a blow up pool with chocolate pudding?" Jack asked, opening one eye and squinting at Emmett. Esme let out a small sob and Emmett grinned through the tears dripping down his face.

Parachute

"Yep. Your grandma was so mad at me and she hosed us down outside before she let us back into the house. She has pictures of it somewhere."

Emmett dropped to his knees and started to cry harder.

"Jack," he whispered out in a strangled moan.

Bella watched as Jack's eye widened and his eyes filled with tears of his own before he flew at his uncle and threw himself into his arms.

"Uncle Em," he cried.

Bella covered her mouth to hold back her own sobs as her tears flowed freely. She was so focused on the scene in front of her that she didn't notice Rosalie move, until she felt the couch next to her dip. Bella glanced at the girl now sitting next to her. Rosalie gave her a warm smile and reached for her hand, squeezing it tightly.

"I don't know the whole story yet," she said quietly, "but you have just given my husband back a piece of his heart and for that I will always be in your debt." She stood up and went over to Emmett, placing her hand on his shoulder. Jack pulled away, only to be pulled into a tight hug by both of his grandparents. Emmett wrapped his arms around Rosalie's waist as he tried to dry his tears. When he was more composed, he walked over and reached for Bella's hand, helping her up. He squeezed her tightly and whispered in her ear.

"I don't know who you are or how this happened, but thank you so much."

He pulled back and looked into her red puffy eyes and kissed her on the cheek, before taking his wife's hand and sitting down on the other side of the couch. Bella sat back down and turned her attention back towards Esme and Carlisle. Jack caught her eye and smiled. He pulled away from his grandparents and started to walk back over to Bella.

"I think Mom should finish telling you our story," he said as he took his place next to her.

Parachute

"Mom?" Emmett asked. All four sets of Cullen eyes looked at Bella curiously. She smiled slightly while Jack nodded.

"Yeah, she's my mom."

"I adopted him almost three years ago, although he's been with me longer," she explained.

"How is that possible? How can you adopt a kid who's parents didn't give their okay?" Emmett asked, confusion clearly written across his face.

"He was found wandering the streets of Seattle all alone. No one came forth to claim him, so I was given temporary custody of him. Two years after that, he was declared a ward of the state and I was legally able to adopt him."

She knew this was going to be hard and difficult for them to believe, so she was prepared for this.

"Let me start over," she said. "My name, as you know, is Bella Swan. When I was nineteen I found Jack in a dark little alley in Seattle, filthy and hungry. My friends and I took pictures to show the police and then fed him and cleaned him up. My father, Charlie, is the chief of police in our small town. I called him and he came up to meet us when we went to the police station. Ummm, there were no missing children reports or amber alerts at the time that matched Jack's description. He was scared and all alone, so my father pulled some strings that allowed us to take him home with us as temporary guardians while we searched for his family. After two years of looking and failing, he was considered a ward of the state and I was allowed to adopt him. With the support of my father and his wife, I was able to finish college and work part time while supporting Jack. Once my books started getting published and we didn't have to worry about money anymore, we moved out on our own. I also started the Lost Treasures Foundation to help out kids like Jack and their families. There was that small hope going into it that we might come across his lost family through the charity."

She paused for a moment and took a deep breath.

Parachute

"One of my girlfriends works at the Seattle Times and was researching information about Edward Cullen for an article being written on him. She made the connection that my son was his. I made some calls and met with my lawyer, agent and a private investigator. Once it was confirmed that Jack was indeed the same boy, I made flight arrangements. His last day of school was yesterday, so we flew out today. This all happened in the span of a week, so I was nervous and to be honest, a little scared. So that's why I didn't call ahead or anything. I wanted to share this with you in person."

"I don't understand," Esme started, "how he couldn't be found. When he disappeared in Phoenix, his mother filed a missing person's report. We appeared on the local news, begging for him back."

Bella swallowed the lump in her throat that the older woman's agony had caused.

"We wondered that ourselves. After some deeper digging by the P.I., we're fairly sure that Jack was never in Phoenix."

"Wait," Emmett interjected, angrily, "how is that even possible?"

"There were no flight records for Victoria Preston or Cullen on the day she supposedly left. There was, however, a Millie and Carter Preston on a flight that day to Seattle. From the information we were given, those are her parent's names, but Carter was listed as a three year old. She went to Seattle for whatever reason and left him there before going to Phoenix and reporting him missing two days later."

Esme covered her mouth with her hands.

"No," Carlisle said, shaking his head disbelievingly. "That couldn't have happened. Victoria had issues, but I don't think she could have abandoned her child."

Esme turned her head sharply at her husband and started speaking in a harsh tone.

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"Really? You don't think that the spoiled little bitch could have done something so heinous? Have you forgotten how she barely had any interest in him as a baby? How Edward would work himself to the bone, not only with his job, but to be mommy and daddy to that little boy while his mother was out partying? Have you forgotten just how badly she behaved while her child was missing? She acted like she couldn't have cared less. She slept around with anything that had money and she destroyed my son."

She stood up angrily and paced over to the glass windows facing the back of the house. Both Rosalie and Emmett looked shocked and Carlisle looked like a child that had just been scolded. Bella looked down at Jack, who's face was completely blank, but she could see anger and hurt swirling behind his eyes. She caught his gaze and smiled softly at him and squeezed his hand, trying to convey a feeling of comfort. He nodded slightly, letting her know that he understood.

When Esme had calmed down, she walked back over to the couch, sitting once again next to her husband. She looked Bella dead in the eye with a hardened gaze.

"I apologize to you once again," she said. Bella started to shake her head but Esme raised her hand for her to stop.

"No, please, let me finish. To reiterate what I was saying a few moments ago, yes, I absolutely believe that Victoria was capable of doing just what you describe. It's sad and heart-breaking, but I have a feeling in my gut that you're 100% right." She blinked away tears.

"I think it's actually worse than that," Bella replied.

"How so?"

"We're pretty sure that she flew to Seattle to meet someone and it involved drugs. That person must have gotten her to Phoenix because I'm certain that she wasn't in any condition to do so. I also think her mother covered for her. I have copies of some of the information in my bag. One of the things is a copy of the

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police report from Phoenix. Victoria described Jack as looking like her, so they put down red hair and blue eyes. The real kicker is that his name is listed as Carter Cullen. When we were at the Seattle P.D. that night, I'm pretty sure that was one of the names on the list that they compared Jack to. No brown haired, green eyed children named Jack were missing."

Everyone looked shell-shocked by the time she was finished speaking. Esme looked stricken and Carlisle wasn't any better. Rosalie smiled sadly at Bella, who could hear Emmett cracking his knuckles. She wondered briefly if he was angry at her for anything that had happened.

"So, you mean to tell me," he started angrily, "that this is all Victoria's fault? When I get my hands on her-"

"Emmett," Carlisle warned him sternly, cutting his eyes towards Jack, "now is not the time or place for this. It will be discussed in great detail later, I promise you."

Emmett nodded jerkily, still trying to control his rage. Bella couldn't blame him in the least. She herself wanted to throttle this Victoria creature until she was no longer breathing. Not only had she caused Jack an immeasurable amount of pain, but also to this entire family as well.

"I can't believe that I've been working with the foundation that you started because of my grandson and I never even knew it. I never made the connect between Jack and Jack Attacks. The irony is too great to think about right now," Esme said, still dumbfounded.

"So what happens now?" Rosalie asked. That was the question that was on the other three adult's minds, but they were too afraid to ask.

All eyes cut to Bella. She blushed slightly and tried very hard not to stammer over her words. This was the part that she was most frightened of.

"Uh, um, we have hotel reservations at the Trump International for the next week. We figured that we would play it by ear after that."

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Esme waved her hand dismissively.

"Oh, no, that just won't do. You are more than welcome to stay here with us for as long as you're in town. Which I'm hoping is a while," she said as she wistfully glanced at Jack. Emmett scoffed.

"You're talking as if you'd just let her walk out of that door with him, if that's what she chose."

Bella looked up at him, in panic. This is what she had been afraid of. Her hands started to shake slightly, even with knowing that she had legal documentation that would give her the legal right to take Jack with her. Emmett looked at her and smiled sadly.

"Don't get me wrong," he said kindly. "I like you and you did an awesome job of taking care of little man here, but we're his blood. You can't just pop him in front of us and then take him away."

"Emmett McCarty Cullen," Esme said sternly. "You will not talk to her like that. She is his mother."

He looked up at his mother incredulously.

"She is not his mother. Victoria is. As much of a piece of shit as she is, she's his mother."

Jack jumped to his feet, shaking slightly.

"Bella is my mother. You won't take me. I wanted to know you guys and find you again," he started shaking his head back and forth, "but if you think that you're going to take my mom from me, then you're crazy." He stood defiantly in front of Bella, silently challenging someone to argue with him.

Esme walked over to him and placed her hand on his shoulder, smiling slightly.

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"No one is going to take your mom from you. I promise," she spoke softly to him.

"You can't say that!" Emmett yelled. "You can't make a promise like that to him! Edward is his father. Do you think that he'll just keep his mouth shut when he finds out? Let this stranger walk away with his kid that he's been mourning over for the past five years?"

Esme's eyes flashed dangerously and stood up to her full height.

"She is his mother in every way that counts. It's plain to see that she loves and adores him and the feeling is quite obviously mutual. As much as I missed my grandson, I love him enough to not threaten to rip him from the only mother he knows. I know this is difficult, but it's something that can be worked out. I will not allow you nor your brother to steam roll over this girl."

Emmett closed his eyes and ran his hand over his face.

"You're right, Mom, I'm sorry. But if I feel like this, can you imagine how Edward is going to react? He's going to go ballistic. You need to start thinking of some way to break this to him easy."

The room grew quiet, which was soon broken by the sound of a slamming car door.

Esme looked up and met Bella's eyes. A look of sheer terror ran through them before she covered them up in a determined mask.

"Well," Esme sighed, "looks like there's no time but the present."

Jack's eyes darted to the foyer as he sat down next to Bella. He reached out and squeezed her hand, nervously. Bella's stomach felt like there were a million butterflies floating around in there. She bit her bottom lip and cut her gaze to the foyer as well, when she heard the front door close.

"Mom? Dad?" the velvet voice called, "Who's car is next to Em's?"

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A slightly disheveled figure, just a few inches shorted than Emmett appeared in her view. His brownish copper hair was a mess from running his fingers through it and he had his suit jacket slung over his left shoulder. Emerald green eyes filled with curiosity connected with hers and she felt her world spin off of it's axis. Her heart started to thrum like a hummingbird's and her mouth went dry. His lips curled up and he flashed her a crooked smile.

"Well, hello there."

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AN: Please don't hate me for the ending! I had always planned this chapter to end with him! Originally, it was just hearing his car door slam, but I figured I owed you guys a little bit more than that! I promise, this is the last cliffie for awhile! Edward will be featured very prominently in the next chapter and I have EPOVs set aside as outtakes as well!

Remember to check out our Blog! ([kitsushel . blogspot . com](http://kitsushel.blogspot.com)) We've added a bunch more pictures that go with this chapter! Plus we always post our chapter and pic teasers there every Monday! Except for the review teaser. You only get that one by reviewing. ;-)

We also have a Twilighted thread now! The link is on my profile! Feel free to check it out and chat with us! Or hit me up on Facebook or Twitter! I love to hear from people!

Chapter 11

AN: Hello there! First off, I need to thank Moni and Bree (Grope-Worthy Cullen and Bree Roe on FB) for their hard work Beta'ing and being my sounding boards! I love them both so much! Secondly, I was thinking about apologizing to my Verucas on Facebook for teasing them with quotes all week, but then I changed my mind because I know you love it!

Lastly, new pictures of people and places went up on the Blog (kitsushel.blogspot.com) for this chapter! I also put up a contest entry in which I had written with my first lemon, called The Cake Boss! I've already had comments about what/what not to carry over into Parachute, lol!

Love you guys and I hope you enjoy the chapter! Teasers for Chapter 12 will go out on Monday as usual!

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"Well, hello there."

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Bella's eyes were locked on his green ones and her heart began racing a mile a minute. He was even more handsome in real life. His copper hair had a slight shine to it in the light and his body was lean, with a hint of muscle underneath his dress shirt. She was pulled from her gazing by Esme, who rushed over to his side and starting speaking in quiet tones. She couldn't hear what was being said, but she watched as his smile fell and his eyes grew darker and cut to her side, where Jack was seated. His face contorted in an odd combination of anguish and elation. He quickly brushed past Esme and walked over to the couch.

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He dropped to his knees in front of Jack and reached out slowly to cup his face. She watched as two tears dripped down from his eyes as he tenderly stroked the boy's cheeks. Bella glanced down at her son and saw that he was grinning widely and his eyes were transfixed on his father's face. A smile broke out on Edward's face and he gently pulled Jack into his arms.

"Jackson," Edward sobbed and he clutched his son to him tightly.

"Daddy," Jack cried into his father's shoulder. "I missed you."

"Oh, my God," Edward cried hoarsely. "I love you so much. I never thought I'd see you again!"

Bella wiped the tears from her eyes and looked away, feeling like she was intruding on their intimate moment. Her gaze swept over the room's other occupants, who were also in tears. Emmett couldn't tear his eyes off of his brother and newly found nephew, while Rosalie held onto her husband around his waist. Esme was leaning onto Carlisle, her eyes also glued to the father and son reunion. Her eyes flicked over to Carlisle and his gaze met hers. He smiled sadly and nodded to her. It was as if he knew how difficult this was for her and was trying to comfort her. She couldn't be sure that that was his intention, but she would take comfort where ever she could at this point.

After a few minutes, Edward and Jack's tears started to recede. Edward sat back on his knees and kept staring into Jack's face, as if he were afraid that the boy might disappear at any moment.

"I can't believe it. The detectives told us that we should move and make peace, but I wouldn't, I couldn't believe that you were gone forever."

Jack smiled softly at his father.

"I'm okay. I've been loved and I'm happy."

Jack looked up at his mother and smiled widely, his entire aura radiating with love and adoration towards her. Edward followed his son's gaze and eyed Bella

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suspiciously.

"And who are you?" he asked with a slight tone of indignation, which was a complete 180 from how he had looked at her at first.

"She's my mother," Jack answered matter-of-factly.

Edward's eyes flew back and forth from Bella to Jack and then back again, questioningly.

"I don't understand. Your mother's name is Victoria. Is this a form of Stockholm Syndrome?" he threw at Bella.

Esme gasped and Bella's jaw dropped open in shock. She was completely floored that this man would think that she had kidnapped his son, only to show up on his doorstep five years later.

"Excuse me?" Bella asked, incredulously. "How dare you? You know nothing about us!"

Jack shot a confused glance between his father and the woman he considered to be his mother.

"What's that mean?" he asked. "What's Stockholm Syndrome?"

Bella kept her irate glare on Edward as she answered Jack's question.

"It's where kidnap victims start to love and care about their abductors."

Jack's eyes widened in surprise.

"Are you serious? Mom didn't kidnap me! Her and Pops saved me!" he cried out.

"Pops?" Edward asked, raising an eyebrow.

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"My father," Bella answered. She thought for a moment before adding, "He's a police chief."

"Oh, so I'm guessing that he was instrumental in helping you get away with this? Making sure that you didn't get into trouble?" he asked, angrily.

Bella felt her hackles raise and her hand itched to slap this beautiful, arrogant jackass across his face.

"Edward!" Esme spoke authoritatively. "Enough. Hold your tongue until you know the full story. If you keep up with this attitude, well, let's just say that you're not too old to be put over my knee!"

He looked properly chastised and glanced back at Bella, who was still glaring at him slightly.

"I apologize, ma'am. Please forgive my assumptions and tell me how you came to be in possession of *my* son," he said to her, sounding very ingenuous. She also didn't fail to notice the emphasis that he put on the word *my*.

Bella closed her eyes and pinched the bridge of her nose, trying to stay calm. She knew that somewhere inside of this man was a kind and caring father, who's heart had been ripped to shreds five years ago. Wounds like that were deep and they had a tendency to fester. She knew that he was only worried about Jack and she wanted to be patient with him. She re-opened her eyes and tried to keep an indifferent look upon her face, but it was difficult.

She had never had this type of reaction to a man before. She wanted to punch him in the face and then kiss it all better. Now was definitely not the time for her long-dormant hormones to surface. Being attracted to Jack's father was not something that she wanted to deal with right now, especially when his view of her was so poor.

"I accept your apology, Mr. Cullen. I can not begin to understand how you must feel, nor what you have gone through. If you can hold off on your judgement and listen with an open mind, I will be happy to tell you everything

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that I know."

She tried to smile at him, but she was sure it looked more like a grimace. He nodded and moved to sit on the couch in the other spot next to Jack.

He reached out took one of Jack's hands and held onto it as if it were a lifeline. Bella took a deep breath and started to re-tell their tale once again.

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Thirty minutes later, Edward sat next to Jack shaking his head, in both incredulity and anger.

"This can't be possible," he said irately. "We hired the best detectives and combed everywhere we could think of. Nothing ever came to light."

Bella sat thoughtful for a moment.

"If I may ask," she interjected, "who was the person primarily in contact with the detectives?"

Edward's eyes shot to hers, wide with surprise.

"Victoria," he said quietly. Bella nodded.

"It seems to me like she didn't want Jack to be found. I'm not trying to be rude here, but why didn't you have a bigger role in this, other than funding it?" she asked as gently as she could.

Edward's eyes burned brightly and furiously into her.

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"I was heart broken," he half-growled. "Vicki was never the mothering type, so I did everything for my son. Bathed him, dressed him, fed him. All on top of working my ass off to provide for them. When Jack disappeared, Vicki took the lead in the effort to find Jack. She felt guilty because it happened on her watch. I curled up in a corner with a bottle of Jack and cried my heart out," he sighed and rubbed his eyes.

Bella felt her heart crack for everything that he had been through. From all of Jack's memories that he had to share, he had always painted his father as loving and amazing. She couldn't begin to imagine the agony he had felt when he found out that his son had disappeared.

Bella bit the corner of her bottom lip and reached out to touch his hand in comfort. Edward jerked his away as if he had been burnt. Her eyes widened and she looked up, only to see his emerald ones blazing at her in anger yet again.

"Don't touch me," he snarled. "You have no idea what we've been through."

Her anger spiked once again and this time, she couldn't hold it back.

"Are you freaking serious?" she yelled. "Do you think any of this was easy for us? I was nineteen. Nineteen, dammit! I worked and went to school and cared for a lost and scared three year old! I practically put my own life on hold in order to give him the love and comfort that he deserved."

She jumped quickly to her feet, her hands shaking at her side in anger. She started to pace slightly in front of the couch, trying to will herself to calm, but it wasn't working.

"I could have left him at that police station and let the damn state take care of it, but I didn't. I stood up and chose to do it. I had to make difficult decisions on a daily basis. Things that I shouldn't have had to worry about, but I did. Because I loved him. For the past five goddamned years, I've loved him and I've made sure that he was fed and clothed and taken care of. I made sure that he had the best education that I could afford and that he knew that he was loved.

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I've bled, sweat and cried over this child. So screw you, Mr. Cullen, and the horse you rode in on," she seethed in fury.

She stopped and looked down at the twin sets of green eyes on the couch. All of her anger dissipated immediately when she saw the tears on Jack's face. It was her turn to drop down to her knees and she hung her head.

"Not once. Not one time have I ever regretted taking him in. I love him more than my own life and I would do it again in a heartbeat. I know you're angry, but I swear upon my life that we did everything that we could think of to find you. Every legal action that we took, we followed the law. It's all well-documented. We even attended therapy for years to help both Jack and I cope with the situation."

She looked up at Edward, who's eyes were wide and no longer filled with anger, but with tears.

"I swear to you, that I did everything I could," she implored him in a voice that was hoarse. Edward closed his eyes and breathed deeply.

No longer being able to stand seeing his mother in pain, Jack threw himself into her arms and squeezed her. He ran his hands through her hair, like she had done to him many a time.

"Sshh, please don't cry anymore, Mom," he said softly in her ear. "I'm sorry I've made things so hard for you."

Bella started to sob at that point.

"You silly boy," she whispered. "You didn't make it hard. You made it perfect. You are my life, Jack, and I would never change a thing."

Jack continued to whisper and soothe his mother while his father watched the scene quietly.

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Bella pulled away from him after a few minutes and rubbed her face with her hands. When she looked around, she noticed that the room was conspicuously empty, apart from Edward. He cleared his throat and stood, offering her his hand to help her up. When she was back on her feet, she chanced a look at Edward's face. He looked nothing but sad and resigned at that moment. He smiled slightly and took her hand.

"Let's start over, please. I'm Edward Cullen, it's a pleasure to meet you."

Bella nodded her head and squeezed his hand. "Bella Swan, the pleasure is mine."

Before either could get another word out, Esme interrupted.

"Bella? Jack? Why don't you guys come into the kitchen? You must be starving after your long trip."

Edward looked apprehensive, almost like he had something else he wanted to say to her, but Jack's grumbling stomach made it a moot point.

The boy's ears turned pink and he smiled sheepishly. Bella smiled and reached out for his hand. Jack entangled his fingers with hers and they followed Esme into the kitchen. She glanced over her shoulder, only to see Edward still standing where they left him, wearing an indecipherable look upon his face. She quickly turned her gaze forward and was immediately enveloped in awe. The kitchen was much bigger than she had originally thought. She ran her hand over the marble top in a gentle caress. There was a tray full of sandwiches, condiments and chips resting at one end of the island.

"Emmett," Esme addressed her younger son, "please take the food out to the solarium."

He smiled and nodded. He picked up the tray and he walked through a set of doors off to the side of the room. Esme turned and smiled at Bella and Jack.

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"What would you dears like to drink? We have just about anything that you'd want. Water, soda, iced tea, lemonade or I could make some coffee."

"Lemonade would be fine," Bella answered softly, looking down at Jack, who nodded in confirmation. Esme grinned and took some glasses out of a cabinet and placed them on a tray. She walked over into the enormous refrigerator and pulled out a glass pitcher of lemonade, which looked to be homemade with lots of lemon slices floating in it.

Jack stepped over to her and took the pitcher from her hands.

"Let me help, please," he smiled at his grandmother, who beamed right back at him. Esme looked over at Bella with a teary gaze.

"Such a gentleman," she remarked. Bella snorted and then covered her mouth in embarrassment.

"Sorry," she giggled slightly. "He is a little gentleman, when he wants to be. He helps out, holds doors and let's women go first. Unless it's a fight for the last cupcake or to get to the tv first, he's golden."

"That's so not true," Jack laughed, while shaking his head.

"Oh, don't even," Bella argued back, laughing now herself.

Esme looked between the pair of them, adoring the way they interacted.

"Come on now, let's have some lunch. I want to hear more about your lives!" Esme tried to cheerfully interject, picking up the tray of glasses. Bella and Jack followed her through the door into the solarium. The room was practically made of glass, ceiling and walls with wooden trim and accents. A large table with a beautiful center piece sat in the center of the room, surrounded by comfy chairs. Rosalie stood placing plates around the table, while Emmett picked from the tray of food, thinking that no one was looking.

Parachute

"Emmett, please, act like a grown up?" Esme asked, smiling. Carlisle sat at the head of the table, shaking his head.

"Mae, he's Rosalie's problem now, dear," he laughed.

"Thanks a lot, Carlisle," Rosalie grimaced.

Emmett looked at Bella and Jack and rolled his eyes playfully. Bella sat on Carlisle's right, with Jack sitting between her and Esme, who sat at the opposite end as her husband. The seat directly across from Bella was empty and Emmett sat in the middle with Rosalie sitting on Esme's right.

Emmett leaned across the table and looked directly at Bella.

"I want to apologize for earlier, Bella," he said earnestly. "It's been a very emotional day and I did not mean to make you feel threatened. I just panicked at the thought of you leaving so quickly. We were all heart broken-"

He cut himself off and cleared his throat, before he became too emotional. Bella reached out to touch his hand and gave him a small smile.

"I completely understand. No apologies are necessary. I knew this was going to be hard for everyone, which is why I wanted to do it in person."

"Really? You thought that coming here and blindsiding us was a better choice?" his velvet voice spoke from behind Bella. She closed her eyes as a tingling sensation washed over her. When she opened them, Edward was sliding into the empty chair across from her. He looked her dead in the eye as he waited for an answer.

Bella chewed on her bottom lip as she thought of a response.

"It was a very emotional moment when we discovered your whereabouts," she explained calmly. She looked directly in his eyes. "The only phone number that my investigator could come up with was your business number. I'll be honest, I was nervous and too frightened to call you at work and explain everything over

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the phone. We weren't 100% sure that Jack was your son, although I'd say we were 98% certain.

"Could you imagine getting that call from someone who couldn't give you an absolute certainty that your little boy was found? God forbid if we were wrong, it would have torn your heart apart again," she implored him with her eyes to believe her.

Edward blinked and looked away. Bella looked down at her hands resting in her lap and sighed. She felt Jack's hand touch one of hers and she looked over at him. He gave her a smile that was so similar to his father's that it was uncanny. She had only seen Edward Cullen's smirk the one time and it was forever emblazoned in her memory now. She smiled back at him in silent communication.

In an attempt to ease the tension in the room, Carlisle cleared his throat a bit as he started to fill up his plate.

"So, Isabella," he asked, "what do you do with your time when you're not writing?"

Bella finished chewing her bite of ham and cheese sandwich before answering.

"I own a bookstore/cafe and am a silent partner in my best friend's clothing boutique."

"Ah, so you're a bit of an entrepreneur?"

Bella smiled and shook her head.

"No, it all kinda fell into my lap. I worked at the bookstore for a couple of years before the owner decided to retire. I had the capitol to take it over, so I did. Alice was saving up every penny that she earned and refused to marry her fiance until they were financially stable. With the money that I had made from the books, I was in a good position to help her. She would have done the same for me."

Parachute

Edward scoffed and she looked over at him.

"Is there something wrong with that?"

Edward narrowed his eyes at her and responded in a cold voice.

"It sounds like you've put forth a lot of money into these ventures. Wouldn't it have been a better choice to maybe invest some of that money in your future?"

Her anger started to simmer in her veins once again. She flexed her left hand into a fist while her right was still captured in Jack's warm embrace.

She took a deep breath in through her nose.

"Yes, it was a lot of money to spend, but it was worth every penny. I have a retirement account set up for myself as well as a college savings account for Jack with about 250 grand sitting in it. We're quite comfortable."

She leveled a cold glare at him. Every time she felt like she had made headway with him, it was like they took two steps back instead.

The table sat quiet as everyone ate in silence. When they were all just about finished, Esme and Rosalie cleared some dishes from the table and disappeared into the kitchen.

"Well," Carlisle smiled, "Bella, would you like to take a tour of the house?"

She smiled and nodded, happy to escape the uncomfortable silence. She and Jack followed Carlisle out of the room and into the living room again.

"As you can see, this is our living room. The doors behind the pool table lead to an outdoor patio and our pool." He walked over to a set of doors that were parallel to the kitchen and opened them to reveal an office. Inside was a large oak desk with bookshelves behind it. There were several chairs resting in the room and a table full of family pictures.

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"This is the office. Edward uses it mostly at night when he's home."

Bella gave a Carlisle a curious look. "He lives here?" she asked.

"Yes, he has for a little over four years now," Carlisle answered sadly. "It's not my story to tell."

"Of course," Bella nodded quickly.

He led them back to the living room and up the staircase to the first floor.

"There are four bedrooms on this floor. Esme and I have the master bedroom, Emmett has one for when he and Rosalie visit and there's one guest room. Edward lives on the third floor." Carlisle stopped in front of a room and hesitated before opening the door. Inside, the room was painted in shades of blue with a sports theme. He looked nervously at Jack.

"This is your room. We never lost hope that you'd come home to us one day. Esme wouldn't let anyone in here. She comes in to dust once a month and I usually find her sitting on the bed staring at pictures."

Bella felt tears prick her eyes picturing poor Esme mourning her grandson for the past five years. She looked over at Jack who had a smile on his face as he glanced around the room.

"It's very cool, PopPop."

Carlisle gasped at hearing Jack call him that and put his hand over his mouth. Jack walked over and hugged him instinctively. Bella felt something tighten in her chest at the tearful sight and blinked her tears away.

Carlisle cleared his throat again and he ushered them to the last door on the second floor. He turned to Bella and smiled.

"I have a feeling that this will be your favorite."

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Bella smiled and wait for him to ceremoniously open the door. Her jaw dropped straight to the floor as she gazed into the coolest library that she had ever seen. She walked into the room with shelves lined around it. The middle of the room was open, surrounded by a railing. She walked over and gazed down into a room below them. Those walls were also filled with books and there were a few large comfy-looking chairs in the center of the floor. She looked around in amazement.

"The stairs are over there," Carlisle smiled and pointed to the opposite corner. She quickly walked over and carefully made her way down the spiral staircase. There were a pair of glass doors that lead out to a patio. She looked up at Carlisle and Jack and grinned up at them.

"You were right, Carlisle," she laughed. "I think I'm in love."

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After Bella had had her fill of lusting over the Cullen's library, the three of them headed back to the living room, where Esme awaited them. She smiled and sat the book she was reading on the couch before standing.

"Did you enjoy your tour?" she asked, smiling.

Both Jack and Bella smiled and nodded.

"You have a beautiful house," Bella answered.

"Thank you, dear," Esme answered.

Suddenly, Bella yawned, trying to cover it behind her hand. She looked at the time on her watch and saw that it was almost four o'clock in the afternoon. The flight and traveling had taken a lot out of her.

Parachute

"Excuse me," she said after a second yawn. "I'm sorry, but I think we need to be getting to our hotel."

"You're leaving?" an angry voice called from the other side of the room. Bella looked up and saw Edward striding over to where they stood. Bella nodded.

"Yeah, we have a reservation at the Trump. It's been an exhausting day and we should get some rest."

She looked into Edward's panicked face and her heart completely shattered this time.

"We'll be back tomorrow. I promise."

The panic started to ease, but it didn't disappear completely.

"Oh, dear, that's totally unnecessary!" Esme exclaimed. "You are more than welcome to stay here. We have plenty of room."

Bella's eyes widened as she contemplated the consequences of doing just that. The Cullen's would have more time with Jack, but Bella was still unsure as to whether or not that was a good idea.

"Oh please, Bella," Esme practically begged. "It's a much nicer solution all the way around! I would love to spend more time with both you and Jack!"

She felt what little resistance she had melt when Esme gave her a little pout. Bella looked down at Jack and smirked.

"So that's where you get that from," she joked. Jack smiled widely.

She sighed and squatted down so that she was eye level with him.

"It's your call. We'll stay here if you want or we'll go to the hotel. I'm good with whatever you're comfortable with."

Parachute

Jack looked up at his grandparent's happy smiles and then at his father's anxious face. His eyes slid back into his mother's gaze.

"It's fine. We can stay here if that's cool," he looked at her expectantly. She nodded in approval and stood up.

"Thank you, Esme, we'd be happy to stay here."

Her eyes connected with Edward's once again, but this time they were completely blank as they stared right back at her.

'Please let this not be a mistake.' she thought to herself.

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Parachute

"I apologize deeply for my son's behavior today. He has a bit of temper these days," Carlisle explained. "He's been through so much and it's left scars that you can't see. That doesn't excuse his behavior towards you, but I hope that you can forgive it. Esme and I will talk with him and try to knock some sense into him." He gave her a tight smile.

Bella nodded and looked at her feet.

"I understand," she practically whispered. "I can't begin to imagine what's going on his head. I wouldn't have come here if I meant any harm." She frowned.

"I'm worried that it will upset Jack if he continues like this, though. I won't take any more of his disrespect towards me. While I understand he has issues, I am not a doormat." She shook her head.

He nodded in understanding.

"No one wants to hurt Jack anymore than he's already been." Carlisle looked deeply into Bella's eyes and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Everyone's emotions are running haywire right now. Give it some time, please. You are an incredible woman to have done what you did. No matter which way you look at it, you saved my grandson's life and I will forever be in your debt. I will make it quite clear that anyone who gives you a hard time is to answer to me."

Bella gave him a watery smile and hoisted the bags on her shoulder as they made their way back to the house. She stopped in front of the door and turned to look at Carlisle once again.

"Thank you for your support, Carlisle. I love Jack with all of my heart. Now that we've found you all, I want you all to be a big part of his life, but let me be clear on something. He is my son and I won't leave here without him."

Carlisle was taken back at her fiery words, but his admiration for her only grew. It was as clear as day how much she and Jack meant to each other.

Parachute

He nodded curtly and set down one of the cases in order to open the door for her.

"Thank you," she said quietly as she walked into the house.

"No, Bella Swan," Carlisle whispered behind her back, "thank you."

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Carlisle carried the bags up to the guest room next to Jack's room. She followed him inside and her jaw almost dropped to the floor. The room was enormous and gorgeous, with floors that were hardwood and walls with a creamy beige look. Immediately to her right, there was a queen sized bed with a purple comforter, which sat across from a fireplace set in the middle of one wall, which was flanked on both corners, about five feet high, windows on either side. The left side of the room contained a small alcove, with three more of the same-sized windows and a pair of sitting chairs. The wall directly across from the foot of the bed had built in shelves on either side of a wooden cabinet.

He set the suitcases down on the bed and smiled at her. He walked over to the cabinet door and opened it, revealing a large walk-in closet. There were clothes hanging on racks and a small chest that sat in the middle of the room. It was almost the same size as Jack's bedroom back home. In fact, she thought to herself that she could probably fit a small bed in there and still be fairly comfortable.

"This is the closet, obviously," he chuckled. "Don't worry about any of the clothes, they're things that Esme hasn't gone through to donate yet."

Bella's eyes widened as she glanced over the many expensive dresses and blouses that lined one of the walls. She blinked and composed herself before turning to Carlisle and smiling in return.

Parachute

"Thank you, this is more than I expected. I appreciate your hospitality."

Carlisle sighed. "You're welcome. It's the least we can do. Esme and I want to make this situation as comfortable as we can for all of us. I seriously think that she or Edward might have had a panic attack if you two left right now."

Bella nodded sadly. This was turning out to be more difficult than she had anticipated.

"Well," Carlisle said as he cleared his throat. "I'm going to go find Esme and let her know that you're getting settled."

Bella looked nervously at the room's exit, wondering what Jack was up to. Carlisle followed her gaze and gave her a slight smile.

"If you're wondering where Jack is, I think he's in his room at the moment."

She looked at him in surprise and then laughed. "Am I that obvious?"

Carlisle's smile widened. "You two are like magnets. You move, he moves. It's quite fascinating to watch actually."

Bella's heart skipped a beat. She hadn't meant to come across as a bitch to anyone, but her emotions were scattered all over the place. She was frightened, nervous and anxious, but there was also a part of her that felt excited at the prospect of getting to know the family that Jack came from.

Carlisle left the room and Bella followed quietly behind him, carrying Jack's backpack. His door was open so she walked in and set the bag on the bed. He was sitting on a chair gazing out of a window that over looked the backyard and pool area. When he heard someone enter the room, he looked over and smiled at his mother. He walked over and wrapped his arms around her waist. Bella automatically encircled her son and she ran one of her hands through his hair.

"So, what are you thinking right now?" she asked.

Parachute

"I'm thinking that this is a very cool house. Esme and Carlisle are super nice, as well as Em and Rose. I keep trying to remember more things, but I can't. I feel like I'm trying to grab a kite, but the string keeps slipping away."

Bella sat down on his bed and situated Jack so that he was standing between her legs and that their eyes were level. She smiled at him and stroked a finger down his cheek.

"It's ok, Little Bit. You were just a baby when you were last with them. You're not going to remember much, but it'll be fine. You can make more memories. It's so clear how much everyone loves you and missed you."

Jack's eyes watered and he smiled slightly.

"I know, but it still bothers me. I think I remember my dad the most. I remember sitting at the piano with him, his smile and the way he smelled. I'm so happy that we came here, Mom. My heart feels likes it going to burst out of my chest!"

Bella smiled and smoothed down his hair before resting her hand on his shoulder.

"That's good, baby. You deserve this. To know everyone again and to be happy."

Jack leaned forward and rested his head against her shoulder.

"I am happy. I was happy," he whispered. "It just feels like I found a puzzle piece that was missing, y'know?"

Bella nodded. "I know, sweetheart."

Jack pulled back and looked into her eyes. His mouth was set in a hard line and he looked upset. Bella cocked her head to the side in confusion.

"What's wrong, Jack?"

Parachute

He shook his head and stayed silent.

"You've got to tell me what you're thinking, baby. I can't read your mind."

"I don't like the way that Em and Dad talked to you. It wasn't fair and I'm angry about that."

Bella gave him a surprised look and then grasped his shoulders firmly.

"Jackson," she said in her stern, mothering tone, "while I understand that you're upset, you are still a child. As much as I love you and adore that you'll stand up for me, I am the grown up. I can take care of myself. I want you to remember your manners and not talk back to them like that again."

She sighed and cupped his face lightly between her hands.

"Your father is angry. He loves you very, very much and you were taken away from him. I'm sure that hurt him so very badly and even though you are here in front of him, it still hurts. I think we both need to be patient and understanding because this is just as hard for him as it is for us, maybe more so."

Jack nodded and sighed.

Both of them looked up, startled when they heard someone clear their throat from the doorway. Bella's heart clenched when she saw that it was Edward who stood there, with tears in his eyes.

"I-" he started, before stopping to swallow. "I was just wondering if you'd like to sit and talk for awhile, Jack?"

Jack looked up at Bella and she nodded. They needed this time to re-connect. Jack stepped back and she stood up. She smiled and looked down as she made her way out of the room. Before she was fully out of the door, she felt a shock-like tingling make it's way up her arm when Edward reached out to touch her. He pulled his hand away and looked at it curiously. He looked up into her eyes and gave her a small smile.

Parachute

"I'm so sorry," he said quietly. "May I talk with you later as well? I'll try not to be a jerk." He gave her a small, yet sexy, smirk.

She smiled and nodded. She looked back at Jack and caught his eye.

"I'll be next door if you need me. I'm going to make some calls to Pops and Allie, okay?"

Jack nodded and sat down on his bed, turning to look at his father anxiously. Bella sighed and went back to her room and tried to quell her racing heart. She absently ran her hand over the spot where Edward had touched her. It felt like the imprint of his fingers was etched into her skin now. It was very disconcerting.

She picked up the suitcases and put them in the closet, shutting the door behind when she left. She kicked off her shoes, pulled out her phone and flopped down on the bed.

She dialed her dad's number, but it went straight to voicemail. She left him a message letting him know that they were safe and sound, staying with the Cullens and that she'd try to call him again later. She called Alice next.

"Hello Bella-Boo!" her chipper friend chimed out. Bella sighed, instantly feeling better hearing her voice.

"Uh-oh! I don't like the sound of that sigh. Is it not going well?" she asked, her voice was laden with concern.

"Ugh, Allie, it's more difficult that I thought it'd be. I mean, I knew it wasn't going to be unicorns and butterflies, but I'm pretty sure his dad hates me."

"What?" she asked, incredulously. "You freaking saved his son from God-knows-what could have happened on the streets. How could he hate you?"

Bella sighed. "Maybe hate is too strong of a word. Intensely dislike maybe? I mean, I represent everything that he lost. I'm sure he's hurt and angry. I'm not

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the one he should be pissed at, but I'm the one in front of him. It's freaking tortuous though. He's so damn hot. Like, melt-your-panties-with-just-one-look hot." She groaned.

Alice giggled. "Oh, my. Bella Swan, it sounds like you have a crush. This is completely unheard of. I might need to call Angela to get this on the front page."

Bella couldn't help but laugh right along with her friend.

"Shut up, Al. He's just so, so, ugh!" she exclaimed. "He seems like such a nice guy one minute, and then a total jerk the next. I wanted to slap him at one point, but then when I said we were going to the hotel, he looked like he was going to have a panic attack, so we decided to stay here."

"Wait, you're staying in his house instead of the hotel? Bella, is that really safe? I mean, I know you want to make everyone happy, but you've gotta think about your own safety, seriously!" Alice chastised.

"Calm down, woman. It's his parents house, which is enormous and beautiful. I figured it would be fine, since I was calling you and Dad to let you know where I would be. Just in case you needed somewhere to start looking for the body."

"Bella, do not joke about this! I am going on record as saying that I completely disagree with this decision."

"Duly noted, Alice."

Alice sighed. "You do realize that Jasper is going to flip his lid that you did this without talking to him first, don't you?"

Bella heard someone talking to her in the background and her confusion soared.

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"Allie? Where are you and where's Jazz? Aren't you guys supposed to be on the road already?" she asked.

"Sorry about that, Bells! Something came up at the shop and I won't be able to get away until Monday afternoon, but I'm going to fly out as soon as I'm finished. Jazz left earlier today to keep on schedule. He didn't want you to be out there any longer than necessary without support."

Bella felt tears prick her eyes when she thought of how awesome her friends were.

"Thanks, Allie, I don't deserve you guys," she said quietly. Alice laughed lightly.

"Just keep that in mind when Jasper is tearing you a new one for not keeping him in the loop," she giggled. "I'll try and break it to him gently when he calls me later on."

Bella smiled and shook her head.

"Thanks, Allie. I'll let you go and talk to you later, okay?"

"You got it, Bells! Be safe, okay?"

"Yes'm! Love you, Al," she responded.

"Love you, too, Bell! Give Jackie a kiss for me!"

"I will! Bye!"

Bella hung up her phone and sighed. She hadn't thought of Jazz's reaction beforehand and she grimaced thinking about it now.

"Oh, well," she sighed and closed her eyes.

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Bella rolled over and groaned at the awkward position her neck was in. The room was dark, with just moonlight shining in from the windows. She picked up her phone and noticed that it was after ten o'clock and her battery was almost dead. Remembering that she had left her charger and laptop bag in the car, she sat up and turned on the lamp next to the bed. She stood and walked into the en-suite bathroom, using the facilities and running her fingers through her hair to get out any tangles.

When she was finished, she threw on her shoes, opened the door and stepped out into the hall. She quietly made her way down the stairs and was walking past the kitchen when she heard voices from within.

"Edward, please," she heard Esme say. "Try to be nicer to the poor girl. She's been nothing short of amazing with him. She could have ignored the information she received about us and continued to live their lives, but she chose to take the risk of bringing him back to us. I won't let you chase her away by being so confrontational with her. This time, we may never see him again."

Bella's chest was tight until she let out a breath that she didn't know she had been holding. Her brow furrowed as she thought over Esme's words. Was she trying to force Edward into being nice to her because she was scared she'd take Jack away?

"I know, Mom, I'm sorry." His velvet voice wrapped around her and she closed her eyes, momentarily forgetting what she had come down here for.

"I'm not mad at her and I know it wasn't her fault. I just want to wrap my hands around Victoria's neck," he said angrily.

"Then you need to stop pushing that off on Bella. It's not right, son," she heard Carlisle interject. Edward let out a frustrated growl.

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"I know that! I just-" He stopped. "I don't know what I feel," he finished quietly.

Having heard enough, Bella stealthily stole her way out of the front door and down to her car. She had managed to open it and gathered her things in her arms before she heard the front door open. She looked up and saw that Edward was standing there, looking at her. She made sure that she held everything securely before shutting the door and locking up. As she made her way back towards the house, she noticed his stance was tense.

"Is everything alright?" she asked. He nodded curtly and opened the door for her. She walked in and up the stairs in a sort of confused daze. Why had he come outside and looked at her that way? Was he afraid that they were sneaking out in the middle of the night? Once she thought about it, she figured she couldn't really blame him for his paranoia, so she left it alone and made her way up to her room. She plugged her charger into the wall and sat the laptop bag on the bed. She turned and was startled to see Edward standing in the doorway. She hadn't heard him follow her upstairs.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I didn't mean to scare you. I was just wondering if you had a moment to talk?"

"You know, your mood swings are starting to give me whiplash," she said softly.

He grimaced and was just about to respond when Jack's voice sounded out behind him.

"Mom?" he called. Edward turned and stepped into the hallway so that Bella could pass. Jack was standing there in his Batman pajamas.

"What's wrong, sweetie?"

"I had a bad dream. Can you sing to me?" he asked in a small voice.

Parachute

She looked at Edward quickly and saw that his eyes were resting on Jack with a sad look on his face.

She walked over and took Jack's hand and walked him back to his room.

"Sure, baby, I would love to."

She turned back to see Edward still standing in front of her door, somewhat awkwardly.

"Would you like to join us?" she asked.

His eyes widened and he smiled slightly while nodding. She smiled back and they walked in Jack's room. Edward sat down in the chair by the door and Bella curled up in bed with Jack.

"What would you like to hear?"

Jack thought for a moment before responding.

"Lullaby, please?"

Bella smiled and started running her fingers through his hair while she sang.

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*Good night my angel time to close you eyes
And save these questions for another day
I think I know what you've been asking me
I think you know what I've been trying to say*

*I promised I would never leave you
And you should always know
Where ever you may go
No matter where you are
I never will be far away*

Parachute

*Good night my angel now it's time to sleep
And still so many things I want to say
Remember all the songs you sang for me
When we went sailing on an emerald bay*

*And like a boat out on the ocean
I'm rocking you to sleep
The water's dark and deep
Inside this ancient heart
You'll always be a part of me*

Do do do do...

*Goodnight my angel now it's time to dream
And dream how wonderful your life will be
Someday your child will cry and if you sing this lullaby
Then in your heart there will always be a part of me*

*Someday we'll all be gone
But lullabies go on and on
They never die that's how you and I will be*

...

Bella fell silent once the song was over and listened to Jack's even breathing. She took a deep breath in through her nose and let it out slowly. She didn't get to sing him to sleep much anymore, but when she did, she reveled in it. She glanced up at Edward and saw that he was leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and face in his hands. As soon as she saw his shoulders shaking slightly, she carefully extricated herself from the bed. She walked over quietly as she could and placed a hand on his shoulder. He looked up at her, his green irises standing out brightly in his red rimmed eyes. Tears were running down his face as he held in quiet sobs. She reached down for his hand and led him out of the room, so as to not disturb Jack.

Without either one of them saying another word, they went into Bella's room. She slid off her shoes and sat down on the bed, patting the spot next to her. He

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looked at her tentatively.

"You wanted to talk, right? Might as well be comfortable."

He nodded stiffly and wiped his face before removing his own shoes and sat down next to her, leaning against the headboard.

"I want to start by saying how very sorry I am that I've been. . . difficult with you." He swallowed thickly.

"Victoria and I dated in high school and have always had a volatile relationship. I thought that we were in love, and thought it was like that because we were both passionate people. I was a year younger because I skipped a grade early on. We both got into Northwestern and got a little apartment off campus. The summer before our sophomore year, Vicki found out that she was pregnant. She was a few months shy of 19 and I had only just turned 18. Neither one of us were prepared, or ready to be parents, so I had to talk her out of an abortion. I couldn't bear the thought of her killing our child. I offered her anything I could to get her to bring it to term and then I would take care of it. She refused and disappeared for about a month. She showed back up at our apartment looking haggard and worn. My first thoughts were that she had gone through with it and I was devastated. She quickly corrected me and told me that if I wanted the baby, then I would have to marry her. Her father was a big shot in the community and it would ruin their family's reputation if she had a baby out of wedlock. Thinking that I loved her and wanting nothing more than to keep my child safe, I agreed."

He reached out and absentmindedly began rubbing her palm with his thumb.

"We had a quick wedding at City Hall at the end of August, which our parents were opposed to, but nothing would change our minds. At the end of the next March, our baby boy was born. I was ecstatic and over the moon. Victoria just seemed like she couldn't care less. I chalked it up to postpartum depression, and hoped that it would get better. We were both able to finish out the school year, thanks to my mother taking care of Jack while we attended class. Her parents bought us a penthouse apartment so that we would have more room for

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the baby, and we continued to go to school with Esme babysitting Jack. My mom adored him so it was never an issue for her. Victoria coasted through school, not really caring about what she was doing. I have no proof, but I think her father pulled some strings or used some bribes to get her through. She barely had any interaction with our son. I'd pick him up after class and take him home, feed him, and then bathe him before reading or playing with him. Jack was my reason for existing."

Bella felt tears in her eyes as Edward's voice cracked on his last sentence and his tears started to drip slowly down his face.

"When Jack was around two, Victoria started going on spa weekends with her girlfriends once a month, which turned to twice a month, and then eventually every weekend right before he disappeared. I was happy to spend my time with Jack, so I never really thought about it. We graduated the summer after he turned two. Victoria went to work at some fluff job that her father made up just for her. I started to work at an acquisitions firm at the bottom and worked my way up through a pair of promotions the first year. In mid-September that year, Victoria said she was taking Jack with her to visit her mother in Phoenix. Even though Vicki didn't really have a lot of interaction with him, he was still her son. I was so busy with my newest promotion and was working long hours, so I thought that it might be a good idea for him to spend some quality time with her."

Bella tried to steel her heart for what was coming next. She had lived through her perspective, but now she was finally getting to hear Edward's.

"I called them every night. I spoke with them the first night they were gone, but for the next few after that, she said that he was sleeping. When she called me to tell me that he was missing, my heart shattered. I called work and took a leave of absence and was on the next flight to Phoenix. I was scared and angry that she had allowed something like that to happen. When I got to her mother's house and found out that he had been reported missing for over 48 hours before she even thought to call me, I was livid. I called my lawyer, James, and interrupted his vacation visiting family. He flew right down to Phoenix and worked with Victoria and I to set up interviews with anyone who was in the

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vicinity of the park where she said he was taken from. I grew more withdrawn and took solace in the bottom of a bottle once two weeks had passed. I gave up in despair and allowed James to find a Private Investigator. He started reporting back to Victoria when I was too wasted to hear what he had to say. After a month in Phoenix, the local police told us that we should make peace and go home. I mean, who the fuck says that to a parent? It broke me, it really did. We finally decided to go home and Vicki went right back to life as normal, as if her child had never been there to being with. I bought an air mattress and slept in his room for the first month of being home. Victoria tried to seduce me back into bed and it worked. I tried to bury my despair and hide in the arms of my wife, but I couldn't go through with it. I couldn't allow myself to hide while my son was scared out there somewhere. No matter what anyone said to me, I couldn't allow myself to think that he was gone for good. I just couldn't. I knew if I let that happen, I wouldn't be able to pick my life back up."

His voice grew steadier as he continued on.

"So, I threw myself into work and let it take over my life. I decided to start my own firm and it shot up right from the starting gate. Six months after Jack disappeared, I found out that Victoria was sleeping around and had been for quite awhile. On her next "spa weekend" I packed up everything I owned and all of Jack's things and had Emmett help me move it here. I went back to leave her a letter and in my anger, I trashed our bedroom. I hadn't felt that much pleasure since before Jack disappeared. I ended up staying here because I too far gone in depression to care about anything other than working. I've slowly pulled out of it and started socializing more, but still nothing took my mind off of Jack. Every day got easier to bear and on the day that I realized that, I broke down and cried my eyes out."

He closed his eyes and when he opened them again, they were full of tears.

"When I walked in here today and I saw you, my heart skipped a beat. That hasn't happened to me in such a long time. When Mom walked over and said that you were Jack's adopted mother and you brought him to see us, my heart expanded and shattered at the same time. I saw him and I knew who he was. I would have known if she had never said anything. My heart felt like it was

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going claw its way right out of my chest. When I held him in my arms, I felt all of the years melt away and I was whole again. When he spoke so lovingly with you, my jealousy and anger at the situation took over. You are the very last person in the world who deserved any of that. I am so damn sorry, Bella. I hope you can forgive me."

He started sobbing and Bella wrapped him in her arms. He rested his head on her shoulder and cried his heart out. After a few minutes, she felt his breathing even out and she looked down to see his face peaceful and asleep. Her heart ached after hearing his story. She brushed a piece of hair across his forehead and gazed at him, noting that he looked like an angel as he slept. An exact replica of his son, who had cemented himself into her heart five years earlier. She reached next to her and turn off the lamp and settled into a more comfortable position, with Edward's head still resting on her shoulder and her arm wrapped around him.

She closed her eyes and sent a silent prayer above that this older version of Jack would leave her heart intact when it was time for them to go back to Washington.

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I want to let you guys know that on **Friday, September 10th**, TLammy is hosting a **#Readalong for Parachute on Twitter**. It'll be my first time participating in one and I sincerely hope that some of you join us as well!

I'll be posting directions on how to participate on the Blog next week! Feel free to follow me there as well! (AT)KitsuShel

Chapter 13

AN: The song used in this chapter is up on the Blog!

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June 19, 2010

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The sun filtered in through the multiple windows around the room. Bella groaned and cracked one eye open, only to immediately shut out the brightness. She would definitely have to remember to close the curtains next time. As she yawned and stretched, her hand hit something soft and feathery. She opened her eyes fully this time and saw her fingers resting on auburn hair. Warm green eyes smiled happily at her. She sat up quickly and glanced around the room before turning back to the person in her bed.

"What are you doing?" she asked, slightly confused at his presence. Jack grinned and sat up to hug his mom tightly.

"Morning, Ma," he mumbled against her shoulder. Bella laughed lightly.

"Morning, Little Bit. Were you watching me sleep again, Creeper?"

Jack shrugged his shoulders, not refuting her comment.

"I was waiting for you to wake up. Dad and MeMe were making breakfast when I woke up a little while ago. I came up a few minutes ago to let you know, but you were still asleep and I didn't want to wake you."

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Bella sighed thinking about how sweet this kid was sometimes. She didn't know what she had done in this life to deserve him, but she was extremely grateful. She rubbed her hand up and down his back soothingly, trying to enjoy his warmth before having to go downstairs and face reality.

After a few moments of silence, her stomach betrayed her and rumbled loudly.

"Wow, do you have a monster in there? Should I tell MeMe to set you two plates?" Jack laughed and scampered off of the bed out of Bella's reach.

She narrowed her eyes and mock glared at her son.

"It's not nice to tease your mother five minutes after she's fully awake. What have I been teaching you all of these years?"

Jack cocked his head to the side and his brow furrowed in thought.

"To always put the seat down when I'm finished?"

Bella laughed heartily and shook her head.

"Yes, but that's not what I meant, wise guy."

Bella stretched her arms above her head and let out a small groan, cracking her neck slightly.

"Okay, kiddo. Why don't you change out of your PJ's while I do the same. We'll meet back here in 10 minutes. Sound good?"

Jack nodded enthusiastically and ran off to his room. Bella laughed and shook her. She walked over to the closet and pulled an outfit and her toiletry bag out to freshen up in the bathroom. She ran a brush through her hair and put it up in a ponytail before brushing her teeth. She threw on a pair of jeans and one of her favorite concert tees. It was red with white paint strokes spelling out "Viva la Vida". She had been in love with Coldplay after seeing them in concert a few years before.

Parachute

She walked back out into the main room and into the closet again to dig out her red flip flops. While she was still waiting for Jack, she picked up her bag that contained the scrap book that she had been putting together for Jack's birth family. She had started making herself one and decided to make an extra one in case this day ever came. She wanted to be able to share what had happened in his life with them whenever the day came to meet them. She ran her hand over the cover and smiled. She just knew without a doubt that this gift would be welcomed and enjoyed by the Cullen's. She placed the book back into the bag and tossed the strap up on her shoulder.

Jack appeared back in her room less than a minute later. He was wearing wearing black shorts and his favorite Tony Hawk shirt that was white with black and red designs. Bella grinned when she noticed that he was wearing his black and red skate shoes. Jack noticed his mother's grin and shrugged.

"I miss my board," he sighed.

"I can tell," she laughed as she followed him down the stairs.

When they arrived at the kitchen, Esme was bustling around the kitchen all alone. Bella felt a curious wave of disappointment that Edward wasn't there. She was nervous to see what his reaction would be to waking up in her bed. It felt like they had made some kind of connection last night. She was hoping that today wouldn't be awkward between them.

Esme looked up and smiled when she noticed Jack and Bella.

"Good morning, dears! Breakfast is in the other room. There are pancakes, scrambled eggs, bacon, sausage and home fries. Is there anything else that you'd like?"

Bella smiled and shook her head. "No thank you, Esme. That all sounds wonderful."

"Come on then, let's get you two fed." Esme dried her hands off on a dish towel and took them both by the hand, to lead them into the Solarium.

Parachute

Edward and Carlisle were already seated at the table with their plates in front of them, reading the newspaper. Both men stood up when Esme led their guests into the room. Bella's eyes met Edward's and he smiled shyly at her before averting his gaze. Although he looked away from her, he kept a soft smile on his face. That made something small flutter in Bella's stomach.

"Good morning, Bella," Carlisle said, a wide smile upon his face. "Did you sleep well?"

She felt her cheeks heat up slightly and looked over at Edward from underneath her lashes. His gaze back on her and he looked at her nervously.

"Very well, actually," she responded. She fought a smile as she watched as Edward smile into his napkin and look down at his plate. The day was beginning to look up considerably.

She sat in the same seat as yesterday, directly across from Edward, who looked at her and smiled.

"Hello again, Bella," he said in his smooth, velvety voice.

"Good morning, Edward," she replied softly.

Esme shot Carlisle a triumphant look over Bella's head and grinned mischievously. Carlisle shook his head and internally laughed at his silly wife. He turned to Bella and struck up a conversation as she filled her plate.

"So, Bella, do you and Jack have any plans for today? Or for your visit in general?" he asked curiously.

Bella set her plate down and looked at Carlisle while bashfully shaking her head.

"I hadn't thought that far ahead, honestly. We'll be here for the whole summer hopefully, so I'm sure we'd like to explore. Like I said before, my friends are driving my car here and should arrive sometime Monday morning. I know

Parachute

Alice is eager to check out the malls and boutiques." She laughed lightly.

Esme clapped from her spot at the end of the table. "Oh! That is definitely my department," she said happily. "There are so many options!"

Bella laughed and looked down at Jack, who smiled back at her. He knew as well as she did that Alice and Esme would get along quite well. He looked over at his father, who's countenance had turned thoughtful.

"Hey, Dad?" he asked. Edward looked over at his son with such adoration and awe on his face that Bella had to blink back back tears.

"Yes, Jack?"

"Do you know if there are any skateparks around?" he asked eagerly.

"A skatepark? What's that?" he asked, looking at Jack in confusion.

"Oh, sweetheart," Esme responded. "It's a park where skaters and BMXers can practice their moves and tricks."

Everyone at the table slowly turned their heads and looked at Esme in surprise.

"What?" she asked defensively. "I'm down with the kids."

"Oh, yeah," Carlisle teased her. "You're the bomb."

Esme rolled her eyes and tried to hide her smile. "Well, I'm fairly certain that there's one in Elk Grove Village, which is about 45 minutes away. I'm sure we can take a ride out there one day to check it out."

Jack grinned and nodded excitedly.

"That would be awesome. I'd need to wait until Nevaeh gets here anyway. My board is loaded on her."

Parachute

Edward raised an eyebrow in questioning. "Nevaeh?"

"She's Mom's car. It's completely awesome. I picked her out," he said proudly.

Bella bit her lip and rolled her eyes at Jack's enthusiastic love for the car.

"Wait until you see her, Dad! It's ice blue and the top comes down. When we drove to the beach for the first time with the top down and music blasting, it felt like Heaven. So, we named her Nevaeh because it's Heaven spelled backwards. Cool, huh?"

Bella's eyes widened at how he was able to get all of that out of his mouth without stopping for a breath. She looked around and saw that the other's were gazing at Jack with love and happiness. She knew that no matter what, she made the right choice.

Once everyone was finished breakfast, Bella insisted upon helping Esme with the clean up while Edward, Jack and Carlisle went into the living room. After the dishes were all clean and everything put away, Esme turned to Bella and hugged her tightly. The move took Bella by surprised and she patted Esme on the back lightly and laughed.

"What was that for?" she asked as Esme pulled away and wiped a tear from her eye. She was shorter than Bella by a few inches so she angled herself to better look Bella in the eyes.

"You've brought my family back to life," she said quietly. "I can never thank you enough."

Bella gave her a teary smile and hugged her this time. "You guys gave me Jack. Well, not literally," she laughed, "but figuratively. I think I'm the one who should be thanking you."

Esme smiled and shook her head. "Shall we just agree to disagree?" she asked the younger woman. Bella nodded.

Parachute

"Yes, that sounds like a good idea."

"Well then," Esme said while taking off her apron and laying it on the counter top, "let's go see what our boys are up to."

She held her arm out and Bella linked hers through it as they set off into the living room. The tinkling of ivory keys could be heard as they entered the room. Esme stopped and gasped as she took in the sight before her.

Jack was sitting at the piano, playing softly, while Carlisle and Edward stood by beaming at him in pride. Edward caught her eye. He walked over to her quickly, with a grin on his face, and reached out for both of their hands. He pulled them over towards the piano as Jack continued to play.

"You did this?" he asked Bella, in awe.

Her brows furrowed in confusion and she shook her head.

"Um, no, I don't know how to play."

Without missing a note, Jack rolled his eyes at his mother's obtuseness. "He means that you got Mrs Cope to teach me."

"Oh!" she said as she began to understand. "Yeah, once I found out that he could play, I hired someone to help him continue to learn. It seemed like such a waste to not let him develop his talent."

Edward grinned at her and it made her heart stutter. The way he was looking at her now was such a sharp contrast to just 48 hours ago.

"Sing with me, Ma?" Jack asked her, grinning.

Bella blushed and shook her head emphatically. He looked up at her and pouted.

"Please, Mama?"

Parachute

Her heart melted and she sighed, sitting down next to him, as he started the melody from the beginning. She closed her eyes and let one of her favorite songs wash over her.

...

*Come up to meet you, tell you I'm sorry
You don't know how lovely you are
I had to find you
Tell you I need you
Tell you I've set you apart*

*Tell me your secrets
And ask me your questions
Oh, let's go back to the start*

*Running in circles
Coming up tails
Heads on the science apart*

*Nobody said it was easy
It's such a shame for us to part
Nobody said it was easy
No one ever said it would be this hard*

Oh take me back to the start

*I was just guessing
At numbers and figures
Pulling the puzzles apart*

*Questions of science
Science and progress
Do not speak as loud as my heart*

Parachute

*Oh tell me you love me
Come back and haunt me
Oh and I rush to the start*

*Running in circles
Chasing our tails
Coming back as we are*

*Nobody said it was easy
Oh, it's such a shame for us to part
Nobody said it was easy
No one ever said it would be so hard*

I'm going back to the start

...

Bella opened her eyes once Jack played the last note. She smiled down at him and he beamed back in pride.

"That was beautiful!" Esme exclaimed. She had a few tears running down her face. "If you weren't such a great writer, I'd say you'd have great career in singing. I'm too selfish and love your work to say that, though." Esme winked at her and Bella ducked her head shyly at the praise. When she looked up again, Edward was watching her with an odd look on his face that she couldn't quite place.

She pulled her eyes away from his and suddenly remembered the scrap book. She hopped up from the bench and went to retrieve her bag, which she had left in the kitchen.

"Excuse me, I'll be right back. I just need to grab something that I wanted to give you!"

She rushed into the kitchen and was back again in no time. She smiled at their curious gazes and suggested that they all get comfortable on the larger couch.

Parachute

Edward sat in the middle, with his parents on either side of him as Bella pulled the large photo album out of her bag. She looked down at the cover and then back at Edward nervously.

"Um, I never knew for sure what happened to Jack before I found him, so I was never sure about your involvement in his life. When we went to therapy, Kate encouraged us to talk about you guys as much as Jack was comfortable with. What he could remember and share were loving and happy memories, so I had a feeling that you would be sad to miss out on things that happened in his life. I kept a scrapbook of memories to share with Jack's family if the day ever came and here we are."

She ran her hand across the tan cover that had 'Jackson Swan' written across is in dark blue paint.

"Yeah, so, um," she stuttered as she handed the book to Edward. He looked deeply into her eyes before casting his gaze onto the book. He took a sharp breath in through his nose and then smiled up at her reassuringly. She swallowed the lump in her throat as he flipped open the cover and started to look over the pictures. Each one had a quote or few lines written underneath of it.

The very first picture was of her and Jack the first night that she had found him. Charlie snapped a picture of them sleeping with his cell phone while they were at the SPD. Jack was curled up on her lap and even in the picture you could tell how vulnerable he was. It seemed like an odd choice to add to the album, but the picture was their beginning and it belonged there. As they stared at the first picture, not one of the Cullen's eyes were dry.

The three of them continued to pour over the scrapbook until they were at the last page. It was a picture of her and Jack from the wedding. It was a candid shot that the photographer had caught of the two of them laughing while dancing. She thought that it had been a sweet way to end it.

Edward closed the book and cleared his throat before running his hand over his face to dry his tears. He looked up at her and gave her a watery smile.

Parachute

"Thank you so much for that. I appreciate it with all of m-m-my heart," he stammered out, tears filling his eyes once again. "Excuse me." He stood and headed out of the door behind the pool table to the patio. Bella looked away when she saw him hunch over the railing, his back shaking with uncontrolled emotion. She looked back over at the couch and saw Esme lovingly running her hand over the book's cover. She glanced up at Bella and smiled.

"That was very thoughtful of you. As much as it breaks our hearts that Jack was lost to us, I'm so very glad that it was you who found him."

Carlisle nodded and wiped his own eyes before walking over to the piano, where Jack was still playing softly. Still holding the book, Esme stood up and started to walk away.

"I'm going to put this in the study. Would you like to walk with me, Bella?"

Not having much else to do, she got to her feet and followed Esme, who carried the photo album over to the book case to find a proper spot for it.

Bella walked over to the desk and her eye caught a square piece of crystal with wording etched on it. She leaned closer and gasped. She swung her gaze back to Esme, who was smiling at her somewhat sadly.

"I have this same poem hanging on the wall in our living room," Bella said quietly. Her fingers involuntarily reached out and caressed the words gently.

...

Not flesh of my flesh,

Nor bone of my bone,

But still miraculously

My own.

Parachute

Never forget

For a single minute;

You didn't grow under my heart,

But in it.

...

"Esme?" she asked. "I don't mean to pry, but why do you have a copy of the The Answer (to an Adopted Child) in your office?"

She gestured towards a seat in front of the desk, as she sat in the other. She closed her eyes and thought for a moment before speaking.

"My mother was 14 when she had me. She was abused by her step-father and then forced to give the baby up for adoption by the state, who had stepped in. By that point, it was too late. A child's innocence was taken from her and another life was thrust upon her. I was adopted by a kind couple who were physically unable to have children. They loved me with every breath in their bodies and I never wanted for a single thing."

Bella's eyes widened and her heart ached for that hurt little girl and how Esme must have felt when she found out that she was the product of that kind of abuse.

"My adoptive mother, Caroline Platt is beautiful, inside and out. When I was about twelve, she sat me down to explain that I was adopted, although she didn't go into any details on the circumstances until I was much older. I have always felt extra blessed and thankful towards my parents. They chose me. They chose me. That kind of knowledge bolsters your self-confidence, let me tell you that." She smiled at Bella.

"I met Carlisle in college and it was love at first sight. We married right after graduation. He was just starting Medical School, so we agreed to hold off on

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having children. Two years later, I was notified by a lawyer that my biological mother, Elizabeth Masen, had passed away after giving birth to a little boy. She and her husband had been in a car accident and neither one of them survived, but they managed to save the baby. Since I was my brother's only flesh and blood relative, I was given the option as to whether or not I'd like to take him. I was in utter shock until Carlisle came home from school that day and took care of me. We talked about it long into the night. We came to the decision that a baby would be just too much for us to handle right now."

Esme stopped for a minute, lost in memories, before she continued with her story.

"So, the next day, we made our way to Children's Hospital to sign papers stating that I would relinquish my rights to the state. While we were waiting for the social worker to show up, a nurse asked us if we'd like to see the baby. My curiosity got the better of me and I said yes. She brought over this tiny little blue bundle. He had a head full of reddish hair and bright green eyes, from the day he was born the nurses later informed me."

She swallowed and her voice started to roughen with unshed tears.

"One look at him and my heart was lost. All I had to do was look at Carlisle and he knew as well. There was no way I could give him up. Edward Masen Cullen came home from the hospital with us two days later and we officially adopted him. Things were tough here and there, but we had both sets of our parents to lean on, which helped tremendously. Two years later, I was pregnant with Emmet. Carlisle was in his residency and things were hard, but never once did we lose sight of our love and happiness."

She gestured over to the plaque on the desk. "My mother gave that to me on Edward's first birthday. It was reminder that even if he and I hadn't have shared the same bloodline, I would have loved him just as much. That's a big part of the reason I am so adamant about your place as Jack's mother. I know what it's like to be a part of an adoptive family. Giving birth doesn't make you a mother. Caring and loving that child does. Victoria was never once a mother to that boy. As far as anyone is concerned, in my eyes you've always been his mother.

Parachute

He was just waiting for you in the right place, at the right time."

Bella's tears overflowed her eyes and she started to sob. Esme stood and pulled Bella into her arms.

"Come here, dear girl. Shh, it's all right. I've only known you a day or so, yet I love you so much, Bella. God truly blessed us all in the end."

"Thank you, Esme," Bella whispered, as her tears started to abate.

"Hush now. Why don't we get ourselves cleaned up and maybe relax by the pool? Emmett and Rosalie are coming over a little later and I'm sure they'll want to spend some time with you as well as Jack."

Bella nodded and smiled at Esme. There was something about this family. She was so at ease and overwhelmed at the same time. It felt like that she belonged there. That she was always meant to be a part of this family.

And that scared the hell out of her. She knew without a doubt at this point, that her heart would break at the end of the summer, but she made a resolution then and there to try and enjoy it while she could and not think too much about the future.

...

O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o

...

Chapter 14

AN: Pics used in this chapter are up on the Blog! (kitsushel . bogspot . com)

Also, I want to send a big thank you to Stratan who has signed on to Beta Parachute with us! Super exciting!

...

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...

Bella smoothed the front of her white bikini before grabbing a matching white cover up. She slipped on a pair of white flip flops and brushed her hair into a ponytail. She stood back and smirked at her reflection in the mirror. She wasn't a vain person, but even she had to admit that she looked good. The top was adorned with an oval jade stone on each strap right above her breasts, and the bottom held three of the same stones situated on either hip. It flattered her figure nicely. She pulled the cover up over her head and settled down on the bed with her laptop while waiting for Jack to finish getting changed.

In the span of 24 hours, there were half a dozen emails from Tanya. Most of them were in her normal rambling style, but one stood out from the rest. It was a reminder that she was committed to do a two week book tour in the middle of August. Bella let her head drop back against the headboard and muttered a quiet expletive. She had completely forgotten about the previous engagement in all of the excitement and nerves over coming to Chicago.

'How am I going to deal with this?' she wondered to herself.

She had no time to continue her pondering when Jack ran into the room wearing his John Cena swimming trunks.

"Hey, Mom?" he asked, while grinning at her.

Parachute

"Yeah, kiddo?"

"You can't see me!" he yelled as he waved his hand in front of his face.

Bella rolled her eyes and silently cursed Vince McMahon and World Wrestling Entertainment.

"Nice. I think you need an Attitude Adjustment," Bella called out before jumping off of the bed to chase him.

Jack flew out of the room and Bella chuckled as she stopped to grab her phone off of its charger. She dropped it into a pocket of the cover up and skipped out into the hall, almost immediately smacking into a wall of hard muscle. She looked up and here eyes connected with deep green ones. Edward smiled widely and reached out to steady her by grabbing onto her shoulders.

"Whoa there, Isabella. In a rush?" he asked.

She bit her lip and blushed. His brow furrowed slightly as his gaze lingered on her pinkened cheeks. One of his fingers reached up to gently touch her face. Right before connecting, he abruptly dropped his hand. He swallowed and looked away, almost like he was embarrassed.

He looked back at Bella and gave her a sheepish smile. All she could do was blink in confusion at what just transpired.

"I, um," he started to say, before clearing his throat. "I was just coming to escort you poolside, since Jack just took off without you."

"Yeah, well, you power bomb a kid once and he gets all nervous when you threaten him with other moves," she said in a completely straight face.

Edward's eyes widened.

"You power bombed him?" he asked incredulously.

Parachute

She giggled and shook her head.

"Hey, he was the one who jumped on my back. I just returned the favor. It was a very soft mattress, I promise!"

Her giggles turned into outright laughs and Edward quickly joined in.

"You're very unexpected, Isabella Swan," he said after composing himself.

She cocked her head to the side and looked up at him curiously.

"Is that a good thing or a bad thing?" she asked.

"A good thing," he replied seriously. "A very good thing."

The pair got lost in each other's eyes until they were interrupted by the pounding of feet on steps. Jack skidded to a halt in the hallway at the top of the stairs. He looked between his parents curiously, not quite sure what to make of them standing so close to each other. He walked over to his mother's side and looked up at his father.

"Is everything okay here, Mom?" he asked Bella, while never taking his eyes off of Edward.

Bella suppressed a giggle at Jack's attempt at bravado. She placed a hand on her son's shoulder, which caused him to look up at her. She smiled at him and nodded.

"Everything is just fine, Jack. We were just about to head outside."

Jack nodded and smiled somewhat apologetically at his father, before walking back towards the stairs. Edward smiled at Bella and she noticed his eyes were alight with happiness and mirth.

"He's very protective you," he stated. Bella smiled and looked in the direction where her son had just disappeared.

Parachute

"Yes, he is. Let me assure you that the feeling is mutual."

She looked up into his eyes and was glad to see that the twinkle in them hadn't faded. Instead, he continued to smile and nodded.

"I'm beginning to understand that."

Bella swallowed the lump in her throat, wondering just what that statement implied. She made a motion with her hand towards the stairs.

"I guess we should get going?" she asked.

Edward nodded once and placed his hand on her elbow as they walked to the stairs. As they walked slowly down, side by side, he began to speak.

"Do you mind telling me more about him? I don't really know what to ask specifically because I want to know everything. I want to know what he was like when he first came to live with you. When did he lose his first tooth? Does he still believe in Santa Claus?"

Bella smiled and held back a laugh at his over-eagerness.

"He was shy, quiet and very polite with me at first. He was jittery and nervous around everyone else at first. It took a little while for him to warm up to anyone who wasn't me or my dad. He was six when he lost his first tooth. It was loose and he was playing with it instead of paying attention to what was going on around him and caught an elbow to the face. He was too excited to see his tooth on the floor to care why or even who hit him. It was my step-brother and a complete accident, by the way. He didn't realize Jack was there until it was too late. No, he doesn't believe in Santa anymore, but he refuses to let me know that. He and my dad had that conversation a few months ago. My dad said that Jack was very adamant that I not find out and have it ruin my Christmas."

She shook her head and laughed at the memory.

Parachute

"He is absolutely the sweetest, kindest kid that I've ever met," she sighed.

Edward looked down at her and she noticed that his smile had turned sad.

"I'm sure a lot of that is from your influence," he said quietly.

Her heart ached for Edward and she desperately wanted to see his eyes alight with joy again, not sadness. She stopped on the bottom stair as he continued to the landing. When he noticed that she had stopped, he turned around and gave her a questioning look.

She gave him a small smile and placed her hand on his shoulder. Being a step higher than him gave her the advantage of being able to look him directly in the eye.

"He missed you," she said quietly. "He never once forgot that he had a Daddy who adored him somewhere. I know that this hard. You have him in front of you, and you just want to be happy and squeeze him tight, but there's also heartache at the thought of how much you've missed."

Edward's eyes widened as Bella's words hit him straight in his heart. She watched as he attempted to blink back tears. She placed her hand on his cheek and his eyes were drawn to hers once again.

"Enjoy this. Be happy. Your little boy is in your life and nothing can take that away from you." Her brow crinkled in thought before continuing.

"I don't know what this summer will bring, or how we'll deal with everything when it's time for us to go home to Washington, but I promise you that I won't take him away from you in the metaphorical sense. I wish I could just drop everything and move us closer to you, but we have a home and family and good friends waiting for us there. We'll figure this out as we go, but I want to give you my word that you'll never again know heartache like you did five years ago, Edward. I don't know if this sounds presumptuous of me, but I can't just leave him here and pretend like nothing ever happened. I need us to be on the same page."

Parachute

She drew in a shaky breath and battled with her own tears. He looked away to compose his thoughts and then turned back to face her, his eyes were a stormy mix of emotion.

"I understand your position, but I just got him back. While I understand that you guys are going back to Washington at the end of August, I don't want to have this conversation right now. I appreciate you trying to establish that we're on the same page. I assure you that we are. Right now, I'd just like to go outside and enjoy having both his and your company." When he made the reference about enjoying her company as well, he shot her a sexy smirk.

She felt her pulse start to race and her skin felt like it was on fire. A cough echoed throughout the living room and Bella pulled her away quickly. Both she and Edward turned their heads and saw Emmett leaning against the kitchen door jamb, shaking his head.

"You're moving kinda fast, aren't you, little brother?" he chuckled.

Bella's jaw dropped and her face flamed in embarrassment. She quickly walked past Emmett, giving him a cursory nod hello, before heading out the door that lead poolside.

"What the fuck, Em?" She heard Edward growl and shout at Emmett before she was out of earshot.

She took a few deep breaths to calm her red cheeks as she made her way over to where Esme and Rose were lounging by the pool. It was fairly large, surrounded by artfully placed stones and lounge chairs. Behind the pool was a wall that led into a small hillside. A pool house sat off on the left side and a hot tub was built into the stone at the head of the pool. The water was glistening and was a deep aquamarine color. She had never seen anything like it before. Carlisle was at a large barbecue grill situated on the right side of the patio. Jack was relaxing and floating on his back in the middle of the pool.

A devious thought entered her head and she quickly pulled off her cover up and placed it on the lounge chair that was closest to her. Esme caught her eye and

Parachute

winked at her, as if she knew just what Bella was about to do. Holding her nose, Bella took a running leap and cannonballed right next to her son, who suddenly found himself coughing and sputtering as he came up from under the water. He wiped his face with his hands and looked around annoyed. When he caught his mom's laughing figure, he dove under the water and started grabbing at her feet. Laughing, Bella felt Jack pull her under water.

Playing and splashing in the pool, Bella and Jack payed no attention to the various eyes that were watching them interact. Edward and Esme both held identical smiles of adoration and joy while watching the scene before them play out. Rosalie and Carlisle were smiling, happy to see the joy that was currently surrounding their family. Rosalie's eyes sought out her husband and her smile fell when she came across his frown. Emmett's lips were pulled together in a straight line as his eyes cautiously flicked between Bella and his brother. When he looked around and he caught his wife's gaze, he smiled slightly and shook his head at her inquiring look. He'd share his thoughts with her later.

Edward slipped off his sandals and sat down at the edge of the pool, lowering his legs into the water. He continued to watch Jack and Bella swim around playfully. Jack quickly noticed his father's presence and his face split into an enormous grin.

"Dad!"

Bella turned to see Edward watching them from the side of the pool and smiled shyly at him. He returned her smile and winked. She ducked under the water to conceal a little happy squeal that threatened to bubble of her throat. When she re-surfaced a moment later, she felt Jack wrap his legs around her waist from behind.

"Dad!" Jack called again. "Come help! She's too strong for me!"

"Oh, you little cheater!" Bella playfully admonished Jack. She watched as Edward thought for a moment before pulling his t-shirt over his head and sliding gracefully into the pool. Her eye's widened as they took in his muscled

Parachute

chest and abs. He was built in more of an atheletic way, rather than Emmett's body builder type. She felt a rush of arousal run through her veins as he stalked towards her through the water and started to back away slowly.

"No, no, no," she said while shaking her head. "Back off, Edward."

He shook his head slowly back and forth. "Nope, I'm gonna help my son."

She giggled and dove under the water, with Jack still attached to her back, as soon as Edward dove for her. After a few minutes of chasing, he eventually caught her. Once Jack realized that the chase was over, he grew disinterested and went off by himself. Edward and Bella were treading water in the deepest section and watched as Jack swam over to talk to Carlisle. Edward smirked and looked down at Bella.

"You guys swim like fish," he remarked. She gave him a confused smile.

"Why does that sound like that's meant as a question?"

He shrugged. "Isn't Washington cold and wet all of the time?"

She laughed lightly. "Not all of the time. It can be pretty sweltering in the summer; very humid."

She looked off into the distance and was lost in thought for a moment.

"Hey," Edward said softly, "where did you go?"

Bella shook her head and smiled.

"I was just remembering when Jack learned how to swim. It actually wasn't that long ago. A little while after we bought our new car, we made a road trip down to a Bed & Breakfast in Eureka, on the Northern California coast. I was paranoid about swimming in the ocean, so I insisted that both of us take swim classes beforehand. Jack is so amazing. He picks up everything so fast. He was swimming like a fish after the first class. I was lucky to be floating at that

point."

Edward grinned and laughed, thoroughly enjoying how animated Bella got while describing his son. His affections towards the girl were growing by leaps and bounds. He rubbed the back of his neck and smiled sheepishly at her.

"Ah, I'm sorry about Emmett earlier. He can be douche sometimes."

Bella glanced over in Emmett's direction and began to worry about his expression. He was watching them with an intense stare that was just shy of a glare.

She grimaced and looked back at Edward, who shrugged and rolled his eyes when he saw the expression on his brother's face.

"Like I said, douche."

Bella giggled and shook her head. "It's okay. We just can't seem to get a quiet moment together without someone interrupting."

"Dad!" Jack called from the other side of the pool. "Come check this out!"

"Case in point," Bella pointed out. Edward laughed and smiled apologetically before making his way over to his son.

Bella watched him swim away before heading back over to the loungers. Esme was grinning affectionately at her and patted the chair on her left. Bella smiled and pulled herself out of the pool. Rosalie handed her towel from her spot on Esme's right.

"Thank you, Rosalie," she responded quietly.

"No problem, Bella," she countered. "Please call me Rose."

Bella nodded and dried herself off before spreading the towel the across the chair and laying down on it. Her eyes were immediately drawn towards the

Parachute

water where Emmett had joined Edward and Jack batting around some inflatable balls.

"It's so good to see them acting carefree and happy again." Esme sighed.

"I agree," Rose added. "I met Em just a few weeks before Jack was taken and it was difficult to watch the change in him. I didn't meet Edward, or Jack for that matter, until after everything in Phoenix went down. I think I've honestly only seen him smile once in the past five years. I haven't caught a frown on his face once today. It's an amazing change."

"I'm afraid your husband doesn't like me very much, Rose," Bella said softly. Esme reached over and gently patted her arm.

"It's not you," Rose answered. "Well, I guess it is a little bit you. Mostly, it's his heart trying to heal and having a hard time believing that Jack is actually in front of him again. We've also been trying to have a baby for the past couple of years and haven't had any luck as of yet."

"Give him some time, Bella," Esme said. "I'm sure **all** of my boys will love you in no time."

Bella blushed slightly and looked back at the scene in the pool, trying her best to ignore the inflection that Esme had put on the word 'all'.

The rest of the day passed in a blur of good food, laughter and even a few tears as Bella and Jack shared more of the little moments that had made up their journey. By the time Bella was resting alone in bed that night, she felt quickly into a dreamless sleep.

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Parachute

The next morning, Bella woke early and walked quietly down to Jack's room. She opened his door and sneaked in to his room, quickly slipping under the covers and snuggling against her son's back. He stirred and groaned softly. He rolled over and smiled at her sleepily.

"Mornin', Mom," he said amidst a giant yawn. "Are we still making Sunday breakfast, even though we're not at home?"

Bella nodded and smiled. "Why do you think I'm here, silly?"

Jack stretched and pulled himself out of bed.

"Okay. Meet you at the kitchen in five?" he asked. Bella grinned and nodded, before heading back to her room to grab her iPhone and speaker dock. She wore a pair of black yoga pants and dark blue tank top, leaving her feet bare. She stole her way down to the kitchen and set up her 'Breakfast' playlist and pressed play. As *No More Kings* filtered through the kitchen, Bella rummaged through the Cullens' well stocked fridge for ingredients and started to hum.

A minute later Jack skidded to a halt in the kitchen doorway and started to sing and dance. Bella grinned and set the eggs on the table that she had been holding. She started to bounce and started to dance her way over to her son, while joining him in singing.

...

*It never really mattered
I was always under control
Monkey hear, monkey think
There is no fear in this dojo*

*I was a super hero
King of 1985
I showed no mercy
I was always Cobra Kai*

Parachute

But I caught a crane kick to the face

(uh huh)

I guess he sealed my fate when he said:

Sweep the leg (johnny)

Sweep the leg (johnny)

Sweep the leg (johnny)

Oh good God now you gotta believe me

...

Bella stopped abruptly when she heard a throat clear behind her. With cheeks flaming, she turned to see Esme smiling in the doorway.

"What are you two up to?" she asked.

"Oh, this is our Sunday tradition," Jack responded proudly. "We make breakfast together while singing and dancing. It's so much fun, MeMe. You should join us!"

The song changed to Michael Bublé's song, "Haven't Met You Yet" and Esme grinned.

"I think I will. I love this song," she exclaimed as she reached for Jack's hands and started to dance around with him.

...

I'm not surprised

Not everything lasts

Have broken my heart so many times,

I stopped keepin' track.

Talk myself in,

Parachute

*I talk myself out
I get all worked up
Then I let myself down.*

...

Bella giggled and went back to cracking the eggs into a bowl and whisking them. She watched Esme and Jack dance around the room and sighed contentedly. This was everything that she had hoped for when she made the decision to come to Chicago. She caught a movement by the door and looked over to see Edward and Carlisle standing there with matching bemused gazes.

The song ended and Esme swept Jack up in a huge hug. "Where did you learn to dance so well?"

Jack blushed slightly and shrugged. "We took dance classes for Aunt Allie's wedding. I was the Best Boy," he told her proudly.

Carlisle walked over and ruffled his hair. "Of course, I have no doubt you were the best boy there."

Bella laughed, which drew everyone's eyes to her. "He means that he was the Best Man, but since he's a little guy still, we all called him the Best Boy."

Comprehension dawned on everyones face and Carlisle smiled at Jack. "That was a big honor, huh?"

Jack nodded seriously. "Yes, it was, but Allie and J said that I was perfect for the job."

Before anyone could say anything else, the doorbell rang and Edward said that he'd get the door. As soon as he turned away, the music on Bella's iPhone stopped and it started to play Alice's ring tone.

...

Parachute

Hey soul sister,

Ain't that Mister Mister

On the radio, stereo,

The way you move ain't fair, you know!

Hey soul sister,

I don't want to miss

A single thing you do...

Tonight

Hey, hey, hey

...

She smiled at Esme and Carlisle before excusing herself from the room to take the call.

"Hello?" she answered just as she saw Edward answer the door.

"Bella?" she heard Alice call through the phone. "I'm just calling to warn you-"

"Where is she?" she heard a familiar voice call. Bella's head whipped towards the front door just in time to see Jasper stride past Edward into the foyer. Bella's eyes widened as Jasper's narrowed when he caught her gaze.

"Jasper's on his way?" Bella replied for Alice. She heard her best friend sigh.

"I'm too late, aren't I? Shit. He must have driven through the night instead of stopping. He only hung up with me a moment ago to let me know that he was almost there. I'm sorry, Bella. He's pretty pissed, so I hope he doesn't cause any issues for you."

Parachute

"No, it's okay, Allie. I can deal with him"

Jasper cocked an eyebrow in challenge when he heard that comment.

"Okay then, please call me later and let me know if everything's all right? My flight should get in tomorrow afternoon around two."

"Sure, no problem. I'll talk to you later."

Bella hung up the phone, not once taking her eyes off of Jasper.

He crossed his arms in front of his chest.

"You've got some 'splaining to do, Lucy," he told her in an eerily calm voice that belied the emotion in his eyes.

She nodded and pursed her lips. Her gaze flicked over to Edward who looked one part pissed and one part confused as hell.

This was not going to be fun.

...

[illegible]

...

AN:

The songs used in this chapter were:

Sweep the Leg - No More Kings

Haven't Met You Yet - Michael Bublé

Parachute

Alice's ringtone was *Soul Sister* by Train. It's one of the songs off the same album that *Parachute* is from. (*Save Me San Fransisco*)

Chapter 15

...

[illegible]

...

Bella narrowed her eyes and stared at Jasper's lanky form, which vibrated with barely concealed anger. She had no clue why he would be so furious. At worst, she figured that he'd be annoyed at her decision to be so open and trusting with the Cullen's.

"What are you doing here?" she asked calmly.

"I drove your car, remember?" He rolled his eyes. Bella nodded in acknowledgment.

"You know what I meant. Why are you here a day earlier than we planned?" she asked in annoyance.

"This might be a conversation better held in private," he said snidely and looked over his shoulder at Edward, who was still standing by the doorway with his face still a mask of annoyance and confusion. She caught his eye and smiled slightly, trying to let him know that everything was okay, but she wasn't expecting the frown that marred his beautiful face. She shot him a confused look, but he was already staring daggers into Jasper's back.

Her head turned when she heard a commotion from the kitchen. The door swung open and Jack flew out of the room towards his uncle.

"JAZZ!" he yelled as he threw himself into Jasper's arms. Jasper laughed and hugged the little boy tightly.

"Jack-O! I missed you, kid! Have you been behaving for Mom?"

Parachute

Jack hopped down to the floor and put his arm around Bella's waist.

"Yes, sir. I sure have."

Jazz grinned then ruffled Jack's hair.

"Where's Allie?" Jack asked. Bella smiled at him.

"She was held up at the shop and will be here tomorrow," she said quietly. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Esme and Carlisle standing off to the side. She smiled and grabbed Jasper's arm and lead him over to Jack's grandparents.

"Esme, Carlisle," she started, "this is my good friend, Jasper Whitlock. His wife, Alice, is my best friend and partner in the boutique."

The Cullens smiled at Jasper and welcomed him warmly.

"It's a pleasure to meet you both, Mr. and Mrs. Cullen," Jasper responded, adding on his Southern accent to smooth things over. Bella rolled her eyes slightly at his attempt to charm them. Esme grinned and Carlisle reached out to shake his hand.

"Please call us Esme and Carlisle! Of course, it's wonderful to meet you, Jasper. We've heard so much about you and your wife from Bella and Jack. You're very welcome here. We were just about to make breakfast, if you'd like to join us."

"Thank you, ma'am. I am a mite hungry after driving all night. Do you mind if I borrow Bella for a few moments, though? We have a few things to discuss." Jasper smiled at Esme.

Esme smiled and turned to Bella.

"Of course, dear. Feel free to use the study if you need some privacy. Jack and I will finish breakfast. Is that all right with you, Bella?"

Parachute

"Thank you, Esme. We won't be too long." Bella gave Esme her best smile and nodded.

"Take all the time you need, dear!"

Jack and Esme disappeared into the kitchen while Carlisle made his way over to check on Edward, who still hadn't moved from his spot across the room. Bella turned to Jasper and jerked her head in the direction of the study.

"Let's get this over with," she grumbled and walked to the other room. Jasper followed quietly.

The door to the study slammed closed behind them. Bella whirled and glared at Jasper. She was furious and embarrassed at how he acted earlier.

"I can't believe how stupid you've acted, Bella! What happened to working as a team?" he asked angrily. "You could have been hurt. Have you said anything that would jeopardize your guardianship of Jack?"

"Really, Jasper?" Bella yelled. "Do you really think that little of my intelligence?"

Jasper grimaced and fought to keep the stern look on his face. "You still don't get it, do you? You put not only yourself, but Jack in danger. You should have waited until Alice or I got here. Anyone could have opened that God-damned door! And staying here? That's a monumental screw up, in and of itself!"

Bella stood with her arms crossed in front of her chest, seething in anger. She took a step towards one of her best friends in the world and shoved her finger into his chest. "Granted, it may not have the best idea to come here by ourselves, but don't you dare accuse me of being reckless with Jack. My instincts and judgement have brought me this far. You should trust me by now!"

"Bells, it's not your judgement that I'm worried about. How can you trust these people? You don't even know them."

Parachute

Bella stopped and took a deep breath in through her nose.

"I know them well enough, Jazz. I know that that man out there loves his son desperately and has been in heartache for five years. I know that Esme and Carlisle are two of the kindest people that I have ever met. Jack has an entire family that loves and adores him. They never asked for any of this!" Bella's chest was heaving after her rant. Jasper looked at her in astonishment. "Are you finished?" he asked coldly.

Bella shook her head and sighed. She stepped closer to him and pressed her palm to his face. "Jasper, I love you. You're like a brother to me. I'm thankful to have you in our lives, but you can't protect us from every single thing."

"That doesn't mean that I wouldn't die trying, Isabella."

She laid her head against his shoulder and felt her anger slowly draining from her body. Her head knew that he was only trying to protect her and Jack, but another part of her felt indignant that he'd go off on her like that.

"Oh, Jazz," she whispered against his shirt. He reached around and wrapped her up in a tight hug.

"Dammit, Bella. I don't meant to trample on your Civil Liberties, but you two are my family. The thought of you out here all alone with no one to protect you made me see red. I love you guys."

"J, while I can understand protecting the people you love, I'm really upset that you just barged in here like that. It was rude and unfair. I'll tell you the same thing I told Jack the other day. I'm a grown woman and I don't need anyone to protect me. I can stand up for myself."

Jasper pulled back and looked down at her, with an odd look on his face.

"Why would Jack need to defend you, Bella?" he asked, suspiciously.

Parachute

"Shit," she muttered under her breath. Jasper's eyes widened and his body tensed up.

"Number one, what happened, Bella? Number two, is it going to piss me off?" he asked in an angry voice.

She pulled away from him and walked over to a row of pictures.

"Well, regarding how you came in here guns blazing, I'm sure whatever I have to say at this point will piss you off."

Jasper put his hands on his hips and narrowed his eyes at her.

"Bella, this situation is precarious enough as it is. Do not make it any harder. Please tell me everything."

She sighed and sat down in one of the wing-backed chairs while she relayed the past two day's events to him. By the time she was finished he was looking at her with his jaw on the floor.

"Are you kidding me? Are you fucking kidding me right now, Bella?" he asked incredulously.

Bella bit her lip and looked over at him with wide eyes.

"What?" she asked, innocently.

He shook his head and ran his hands roughly through his honey blond hair.

"Do you have any idea what kind of fire that you're playing with? You should have waited for us. You're too sweet and trusting. That can be used against you. If these people choose to take you to court and fight for Jack, it can get very ugly."

Bella's eyes widened in disbelief.

Parachute

"What do you mean, Jazz?" she asked quietly.

"Bella, Jack's adoption was based on the fact that he was abandoned. If the Cullens can prove that Victoria kidnapped him or was at fault 100% for his abandonment, the pendulum swings in their favor. You've said yourself that they never would have let him go. Are you really that naive to think that they'll just let you walk out of the front door and not have any legal claim to him themselves?"

Bella swallowed and looked down at the floor. When she met his gaze again, she had tears in her eyes.

"No, I'm not that naive, Jasper. I thought of every scenario before we came here. The potential benefits and positive outcomes outweigh the negative. I've gotten to know them a little and I've come across nothing that points in the direction that they'll take Jack from me. They love him too much to rip away the only mother he's ever really known. I know everything that can happen. I've had nightmares about the worst case scenario and I've daydreamed about the best. There's nothing you can say that will change my mind. I know I'm doing the right thing, even if there's a possibility that it will hurt me in the end."

Jasper dropped to his knees in front of Bella and wiped her tears away.

"Don't cry, Bell. Please. I can't stand this uncertainty and feeling like the floor will drop out on us at any moment. I don't want either of you to get hurt, and I'm sorry if I came on a little strong earlier. I was scared that something bad would happen, and I wouldn't be there for you."

A knock sounded at the door and Jasper called for them to come in. The door opened and Edward poked his head in. A look of pain flickered quickly over his face before settling into a blank mask. He cleared his throat and looked at Bella.

"I just wanted to let you know that Mom said breakfast was ready and also to see if everything was okay," he responded, somewhat awkwardly.

Parachute

"Everything is fine," she answered quietly, giving him a small smile. He nodded and left hastily.

"I wonder what has him so worked up?" she pondered to herself. Her eyes flashed to Jasper when she heard him let out a small guffaw.

"What? What's so funny?" She asked. He shook his head and smirked at her.

"Really? You don't see it?"

She looked at him in confusion. "See what?" she asked.

"We're kind of in an intimate setting," he said as he motioned towards where he was still kneeling in front of her. "My money is that he thought I was your boyfriend and he was disappointed."

Bella's eyes widened. "You've got to be kidding me. Edward doesn't see me like that," she declared adamantly.

Jasper cocked an eyebrow playfully and shook his head.

"Whatever you say, Bells. Now, can we go grab some grub before my stomach claws it's way out of my gut?"

Bella laughed. "It's your own fault for going all 'Knight-in-shining-armor' and driving through the night. Aren't you exhausted, by the way?"

She looked at him a bit more closely and noticed the light blond stubble on his chin and his slightly blood-shot eyes.

"Yeah, but I knew I wouldn't be able to get any kind of rest until I got you guys, so I figured 'what the hell?' and just kept on driving."

Bella shook her head and stood up, taking his hand and leading him over to the door.

Parachute

"Well, then, let's get you fed, my friend."

...

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When Jasper and Bella made their way into the Solarium for breakfast, she noticed immediately that Edward was missing. Carlisle, Esme and Jack sat around the large table, tucking into pancakes and bacon.

"I'm afraid that I need to apologize to you, Mr. and Missus Cullen," Jasper drawled out, laying his charming accent on thick. Bella fought the urge once again to roll her eyes.

"I was was very rude when I barged in here earlier. Not that it's any excuse, but I was worried about my friends."

Carlisle waved his apology aside and stood to shake his hand.

"It's not a problem, son. I can certainly understand being protective of your friends," he responded. Esme nodded her assent from across the table.

"Bella and Jack are like your family, correct?" she asked. Jasper nodded.

"Yes, they are. Bella is the sister I never had and Jack is my nephew." He looked over and smiled kindly at them.

"Well, then, how can we be upset? Our grandson is lucky to have had such good people looking out for him."

Esme motioned for them to have a seat at the table. Bella sat down next to Jack as Jasper sat across from them. Esme quickly noticed that Bella's eyes searched the room before sitting down and she had to hide her smile.

Parachute

"Edward wasn't feeling too well, so he went back to bed," she said quietly, answering Bella's unspoken question.

Bella turned and shot Esme a confused look. He had seemed fine just a little while ago. She looked over at Jasper who cocked his eyebrow at her knowingly. Bella shook her head at him and began to fill up her plate. Carlisle and Esme engaged Jasper in conversation while Bella was consumed with her own thoughts, which tumbled over each other as she sat there and contemplated what Jasper had said to her earlier. Could Edward really have been upset that Jazz was her boyfriend? It didn't make sense to her. After a few minutes of poking at her food, her thoughts were interrupted by Jack.

"Did you hear that, Mom?" he asked excitedly.

"Hear what, baby?"

"Today is Dad's birthday! Can we make him a cake?"

Bella's eyes widened and she looked at Esme, who only smiled sadly at her.

"Oh! For real? Today is his birthday?" Bella asked, somewhat stunned. Esme nodded.

"Yes, today is indeed his birthday. Your showing up when you did was such a blessing. We haven't really celebrated anything in years."

"Huh," Bella muttered quietly as the wheels started to turn in her head. She turned to Esme once again.

"Would you mind if I helped Jack make him a cake?" she asked. Esme's smile was blinding.

"Of course! I don't mind at all. I think he would love it."

Bella chanced a look at Jasper out of the corner of her eye. He was looking down at his plate with a blank look on his face, so she had no way of gauging

Parachute

his reaction. Jack was thrilled, so that was the only thing that mattered to her at the moment as she smiled at her grinning son.

Esme and Jack cleared the dishes and Carlisle wandered off to check on Edward, leaving Bella and Jasper alone. He leaned back in his chair and gave Bella a thoughtful look.

"I think I understand now. They are completely disarming, aren't they?" he asked. Bella smiled slightly and nodded.

"They're good people, Jazz."

Jasper nodded, still contemplating what he wanted to say. After a moment, he took a deep breath and let it out.

"I still don't agree totally with you deciding to stay here, but I guess I can see why you would. You need to try and see things from my perspective, Bella. Not only am I one of your best friends and Jack's uncle, I'm your lawyer. I want nothing more than to protect you two."

She sighed and leaned forward to rest her forearms on the table and rubbed her forehead with her palm.

"Jazz, I understand where you're coming from. Really, I do. But I need to follow my heart and my heart says that the Cullens need this as much as Jack does. They're his family; part of his heart as much as I am. I'm sure we'll figure this out as best that we can, so that no one is left out."

"Well then," he sighed, "I guess I'll take off for the hotel. I need to get settled in and call Alice." He grimaced and Bella laughed.

"Good luck with that one," she giggled. "You deserve whatever she's going to throw at you, jerk."

He joined her laughter and stood up, following Bella into the kitchen.

Parachute

Jack was drying dishes while chatting away with Esme. Jasper bid farewell to her before Bella and Jack walked him out.

Jack ran straight over to Nevaeh and hugged the front end, which caused the adults to break out in laughter. He stuck his tongue out at them.

"What? I missed her."

Bella walked over and ran her hand along the hood.

"I did too, Jack," she said as she ruffled his hair. After exchanging keys, Jasper drove off to the hotel, leaving a promise that he'd bring Alice over as soon as they could tomorrow.

Jack rummaged around for a minute in the back seat until he pulled out his board, smiling from ear to ear. He tucked it under his arm and pulled out one of his bags. Bella grabbed a pair of her own, before shutting the door and locking up.

"We need to take a road trip to sight see tomorrow. What do you think?" she asked him.

Jack nodded enthusiastically. "Sounds awesome, Mom."

"Ok, then. It's a date. Now, let's go see about making a cake, kiddo."

...

O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o

...

Bella worked on stirring melted chocolate chips for piping words, while Jack spread some fluffy chocolate buttercream over a cooled chocolate cake. Jack decided on a completely chocolate cake for Edward after Esme mentioned to him that his father was a chocoholic. She looked over and smiled at how Jack

Parachute

was trying hard to make the icing perfect and smooth.

Bella placed a piece of wax paper down on the counter before pouring the melted chocolate into a plastic storage bag. She used a pair of kitchen shears to snip the tip and began piping out the words 'Happy Birthday DAD' and a few small decorative lines. She set the paper aside to let the candy harden so they could place it on the cake later.

She walked over and threw her arm around Jack's shoulder as he stood in front of the cake, looking at it proudly. He looked up at her and grinned.

"Looks good, doesn't it?" he asked.

She laughed and hugged him tightly with one arm.

"Yes it does, Little Bit. I'm sure he'll love it."

Jack looked thoughtful for a moment. "I think I'm going to go up and check him."

Bella smiled and nodded. "Sounds good. I'll finish cleaning up here. You go ahead."

She watched as Jack left room and sighed. Everything was jumbled up inside of her, and she couldn't think straight. After straightening up the kitchen and placing the cake in the fridge, Bella found herself standing in the library. She ran her fingers along the railing as she slowly made her way down the winding staircase. Once she hit the bottom of the stairs, she wandered over to the bookshelves on the left side of the room. There were many of the classics; a good number of them were first editions. She picked out a well-loved Winnie the Pooh anthology, by A.A. Milne, and settled into one of the over-stuffed chairs.

She sunk quickly into the tales of the little bear and his friends. Before she realized it, almost two hours had flown by.

Parachute

Bella smiled to herself when she came across one of her favorite quotes of all time, which came from *The House at Pooh Corner*.

...

Piglet sidled up to Pooh from behind.

"Pooh!" he whispered.

"Yes, Piglet?"

"Nothing," said Piglet, taking Pooh's paw.

"I just wanted to be sure of you."

...

In that moment, she knew exactly how Piglet had felt in that moment. Life comes at you so quickly, that sometimes you just need to be reminded that you're not alone.

She closed the book silently and pulled out her phone to check the time. It was well after four p.m., so she decided to see what Jack was up to and maybe check her email. She stood and stretched her arms over her head. A voice from the landing above startled her.

"You know, I always loved reading that book to my boys at bedtime."

Bella looked up and smiled warmly at Carlisle, who was leaning on the upper railing. His flaxen hair shimmered slightly in the late afternoon sun that was pouring in from the windows.

"Emmett especially loved Pooh while Edward was more of a Tigger fan."

Bella laughed lightly. "I can just picture that."

Parachute

Carlisle grinned. "Em would run around asking Esme for a "smackerel of honey" all of the time. Once he started that, Edward would be bouncing around the house in no time. I miss those days sometimes," he sighed, but the smile stayed on his face.

"Jack was looking for you a little while ago so I figured that I'd check in here."

She nodded and made her way quickly up the stairs. "Thank you," she responded as she stepped onto the landing.

Carlisle smiled. "It was my pleasure. Last time I checked, he was in the living room watching Dragon Ball CSI."

Bella snorted out a giggle and covered her mouth with her hand. "Excuse me," she murmured in embarrassment.

Carlisle looked amused, but confused at her reaction. "What was so funny?"

"Oh, um, it's called Dragon Ball Z Kai. It's a cartoon that he likes."

"Eh, Esme is the one who's hip, not I." Carlisle laughed lightly and shrugged.

Bella patted him on the shoulder comfortingly. "It's okay Carlisle. It's hip to be square," she said as she walked out the room. She grinned as his laughter followed her down the hall.

...

[illegible]

...

A little while later, Bella hid inside of the kitchen, along with Esme and Carlisle, waiting for Jack to bring Edward in for a surprise. Esme quickly lit the candle on top when they heard Jack's voice come closer to the kitchen.

Parachute

"Come on, Dad! Please? You know you want ice cream, too."

Bella laughed as she listened to her son pull out his charm. It was usually devastating.

"Ugh, you're going get me into trouble, aren't you?" Edward sighed and then quickly laughed.

As they entered the room, Jack shouted, "Surprise!"

Edward's eyes widened as he took in the scene before him. His gaze came to rest on Bella and his face broke into a wide smile. Upon seeing that, Bella felt her chest warm and tighten. The fact that something so simple made her happy was a cause for concern to her. She had only known him a few days, but she was becoming attached to him as quickly as she had his son. The Cullen charm was definitely not working in her favor.

"Wow," he said, in awe. "Thank you so much. It looks amazing."

"I helped Mom make the cake, and I frosted it. She did the writing, though. Her's is prettier."

Edward looked down and Jack and smiled before looking up Bella. "Thank you," he mouthed silently to her. She nodded shyly and looked down.

After the cake had been cut and eaten, Esme suggested that they have a movie night. Jack, who loved that idea, rushed upstairs to get change into his pajama's and brush his teeth. Bella watched Edward leave the room and heard the front door shut shortly afterwards. Something twinged in her chest and she suddenly felt sad. She looked up and noticed that Esme was watching her.

"You know," Esme said to her kindly, "I think he might be a bit overwhelmed. I'm sure there's lots of things on both of your minds. Maybe you could scratch each other's backs?"

Parachute

Bella raised an eyebrow at Esme. She was beginning to think that the older woman was trying her hand at Cupid. She shook her head and let out a small sigh. She bit her lip and her eyes found themselves locked on the door that he had walked out of.

'What the hell,' she thought to herself, before setting down the towel she was holding and followed his path. She opened the front door and found Edward staring off into the distance, while seated on one of the front porch swings. Upon hearing the noise from the doorway, he glanced over in her direction and gave her a small smile before resuming his viewing. Bella walked over and sat down next to him. She turned and leaned her back against the side, pulling her right leg up and underneath of her. He turned his head slightly and smirked at her.

"How does it feel to be an old man?" she asked, trying to hide her smile.

He smiled widely and shook his head. "I'm not old."

Bella laughed and shook her head. She noticed that his smile fell as he stared off into the sunset. She nudged him with her foot and he turned to give her a small, sad smile.

"In my mind, I feel like I'm still 22," he sighed. "I haven't really celebrated a birthday in almost five years. It never felt right. It always hurt to realize that another year passed without him."

Bella's chest ached and she reached out to squeeze his shoulder in comfort. He swallowed quickly and attempted to change the subject.

"I'm surprised that your boyfriend didn't hang around longer."

"Oh!" Bella said in surprise. "Jasper isn't my boyfriend," she laughed. Edward turned to look at her in confusion.

"He's not?" he asked. His voice sounded much lighter than before.

Parachute

"No, he's more like a brother. He and his wife, Alice, are my best friends. They were supposed to drive up together, but she was held up by work."

His face relaxed and the tension seemed to ease from his body.

"Oh, okay," he said quietly. A breeze picked up and the wind blew a few strands of her hair across her face. Edward reached out tentatively, almost like he was afraid to touch her, and tucked her hair behind her ear. His hand lingered for a moment and her breath caught in her throat. His eyes had darkened and taken on a deeper quality. He took in a deep breath and closed his eyes.

When he re-opened them, she saw that they had changed, but she couldn't quite decipher the new emotion showing in them. He pulled back and smiled at her.

"Well, I guess we have a movie to watch?" he asked as he stood up and reached for her hand. Bella glanced at his long fingers before looking up at him shyly from under her lashes. She smiled and placed her hand in his.

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AN: As always, Teasers get sent to everyone who reviews! Love you guys and see you next week!

Chapter 16

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June 21, 2010

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Bella felt the morning sun warming her face when she slowly started regaining consciousness the next morning. She felt something that was hard, yet soft at the same time, pressed warmly against her side. She sighed and shifted, nuzzling closer to the soft smell of sandalwood with a hint of orange. She was happy and content to not open her eyes and just languish in a morning daze. She could hear the last movie they had watched the night before playing in the back ground. After watching one of Jack's favorites, Toy Story, they popped in The Lion King. Jack had passed out shortly after Scar killed Mufasa and Bella followed not long behind him. The movie must have played on repeat all night, but she wondered briefly why Edward hadn't turned it off.

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"It's our motto," she heard Pumbaa say on the TV.

"What's a motto?" Simba asked.

"Nothing. What's a motto with you?" Timon replied.

...

That part of the movie never failed to crack her up. She giggled and felt an arm wrap around her waist. Surprised by the movement, her eyes opened slowly

Parachute

and connected with smiling green ones.

"What's so funny?" Edward asked in a voice that was deep and gravelly from sleep. With no small amount of willpower, she tore her eyes away from his to take in their positions. Edward was lying flat on his back, with a still sleeping Jack wedged between him and the back of the enormous couch. Bella was laying on her left side, curled up half on the couch and half on Edward himself, with her right leg throw over his. She flexed her hands and felt one under her head and the other resting comfortably on Edward's abdomen. Under his shirt and touching bare skin.

As soon as she realized, she pulled her hand away like it was on fire. The quick movement and jostling resulted in her knocking herself off of the couch and landing on her ass on the floor. She laid back on the carpet and closed her eyes in embarrassment and continued to listen to the movie play.

...

"And I got down-hearted"

"How did you feel?"

"Every time that I-"

"Hey, Puumba, not in front of the kids!"

"Oh, sorry!"

...

Bella forgot about her predicament on the floor and erupted in a fit of giggles once again. She opened her eyes and looked up at Edward, who turned to look down at her from his spot on the couch, his face lit with mirth.

"Hakuna Matata to you, too, this morning, Bella," he laughed heartily. He held out his hand to help her. She grinned and pulled herself up and onto her knees.

Parachute

Edward was propped up on his side, smiling at her. Jack peeked his head over his father's shoulder and shook his head at her.

"Fall off of the couch, Ma?" His voice was sleepy and confused.

"Of course," she laughed lightly. Jack sat up and yawned. "What's for breakfast?"

Bella looked at Edward and shrugged.

"You guys were talking about going sightseeing today, right?" He asked, somewhat nervously, to which she nodded in response.

"Well, I was thinking that maybe you might like a tour guide? We could stop and grab breakfast on the road."

Jack grinned and looked at his mom with excited eyes. Bella smiled, enjoying the idea of spending more time with Edward and Jack together.

"That sounds like a great plan. Thanks for offering to be our guide," she responded shyly. Edward grinned.

"Not a problem at all. I'd be glad to spend some time with you two."

Jack jumped up off of the couch and fist pumped.

"Awesome! I'm going to get ready!" he shouted as he ran up the stairs. Edward followed his son's sprinting form until he could no longer see him. He turned to Bella and laughed.

"Does he always have that much energy in the morning?" he asked, incredulously. Bella shook her head as she stood.

"You have no idea. He sleeps like the dead. It takes forever to get him up, but once he's awake, he's a ball of energy."

Parachute

"Huh," he murmured thoughtfully, still seated on the couch. Bella cocked her head to the side slightly and quietly observed him for a minute. She was ever so grateful that they had all decided to change into their pajamas before watching the movie last night. Edward was wearing a pair of black sleep pants and a black sleeveless undershirt. His hair was sticking up in several different directions, but completely flat in the back, and his sharp jaw was covered in a day's worth of scruff. He clasped his hands together and stretched his arms above his head, letting out a soft groan.

Bella bit her lip as her eyes traveled over the flexed upper arm muscles of his biceps. He was well-developed, but not overly so, and it was clear that he spent some time in the gym. Her gaze traveled back to his face, only to find his emerald eyes doing their own appraisal. Last night, she had chosen to wear a pair of comfortable black shorts and dark purple cami. She watched as his eyes trailed up her body, feeling her skin ignite under his gaze. When he lingered on her lips, her tongue unconsciously ran over her bottom lip, which caused his eyes to shoot up and meet hers. The apples of his cheeks pinkened slightly as he looked away and rubbed the back of his neck. She thought that his sheepishness was adorable.

"Well, I'm going to follow Jack's lead and get ready. How does thirty minutes sound?" Bella asked him quietly.

Edward looked up and smiled.

"Sure, that definitely sounds doable."

Bella smiled to herself and made her way up to her room to shower and change, leaving Edward sitting on the couch.

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Parachute

Forty-five minutes later, the trio stood in front of Nevaeh, with Edward's eyes widened in surprise and appreciation for the beautiful car. Jack giggled at his dad's reaction and climbed into the backseat to buckle himself in. Bella shook her head and nudged Edward towards the passenger side door.

"Come on slow poke, we'll never make it out the driveway at this rate," she laughed.

Edward blinked and pulled himself out of his daze. He opened the door and sat down on the soft tan seats. He ran his hand over the blue and wood grained dashboard reverently as Bella started the car and lowered the top down.

"This car is beautiful. Aston Martin, right?"

Bella nodded proudly. "She's a 2010 Aston Martin Volante. Most of it is all custom detailed. The ice blue color was surprisingly difficult to find."

She plugged her iPhone into it's slot and selected her driving playlist. The upbeat melody of Train filtered through the speakers.

...

Wanna hear some funky Dixieland

Pretty Mama come and take me by the hand

...

Edward looked over at her in surprise. "Wasn't this from a Doobie Brothers' song?"

Bella laughed lightly.

"It's called 'I Got You' by Train. It samples 'Black Water', which was the Doobie Brothers' song."

Parachute

"What's a Doobie Brother?" Jack piped up from the back seat. Edward shifted in seat and looked back at his son.

"They were band from the Seventies. Way before your time, little man."

"Oh, ok. I didn't realize you were that old, Dad."

Edward's eyes widened. "I-I'm not that old," he started to stutter. Bella let out a loud guffaw and he playfully glared at her.

"Haha, yuck it up, Ms. Swan. You're not that much younger than me."

Bella sobered up, but her eyes still held a glint of mischievousness, which enthralled him.

"Ok, guys," she said as she pulled onto the highway, "where to?"

Jack looked out of the window thoughtfully before turning back to Edward.

"You guys got any IHOPs around here?"

Edward smiled. "Yes, we sure do. There's one on Lincoln Ave, not too far from my office actually. Does that sound good to you, Bella?"

She smiled and said, "Sure. I am totally down for some blueberry pancakes!"

Edward grinned and they continued on their way, chatting the whole time. By the time they reached the restaurant, they had learned much more about each other. Bella learned that Edward's favorite color was blue and he preferred Classical and hard rock, but really enjoyed all kinds of music. He shared bits of his past as Jack and Bella shared theirs as well. As they were parking, Jack was finishing up a story that he had been telling Edward about the last time he had hung out with his Uncle Seth.

"And then the girl walks up to him and asks him for his phone number. She was kinda creepy, so he gave her Jake's number."

Parachute

Bella's surprised eyes flashed in Jack's direction as Edward's looked towards her.

"Who's Jake?" He asked, not entirely sure that he wanted to know. Bella and Jack spoke at the same time.

"No one important," Bella replied.

"He's a jerk," was Jack's reply.

Edward looked between the two of them, confused.

"Wait, what did I miss?" he asked as Bella's eyes bored into Jack's. She wanted to know just how much Jack knew about Jake, but didn't want to delve into that conversation in front of Edward.

"He's a bad person who was mean to Mom. Everyone hates him. I heard Pops telling Nana that he wanted to throw him back in jail."

Bella's eyes widened and her heart sped up. Did her father not tell her that Jake was out of jail already? As far as she knew, he still had three more years on his assault and attempted rape charges.

"Bella? Is this guy dangerous? Is everything okay?" Edward asked with concern laded in his voice. Bella swallowed thickly and nodded.

"Everything's fine. Jacob is not an issue," she spoke quietly, trying her best to reassure him, even though she had her own doubts. His eyes searched hers for a moment and what he saw must have convinced him enough to let it go.

He gave her a soft smile and suggested they head in to eat.

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Parachute

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"So, tour guide," Bella said to Edward as they were leaving the restaurant, "where to next? This is your show."

After buckling up, he sat quietly for a minute, contemplating their next destination.

"Well, we can check out Navy Pier? There's a huge Ferris Wheel, miniature golf and children's museum. I haven't been there in years, though."

"Want to check it out?" Bella asked Jack, who just grinned and nodded in response. Edward smiled and started giving directions.

"Actually, now that I think about it, my office is between here and there. Would you guys like to stop by and check it out?"

Jack bounced happily in his seat.

"Oh, totally! Can we, Mom?"

Bella laughed and said, "Sure. As long as it's not a problem for you, Edward."

He smiled and shook his head. "It's not an issue at all, Isabella. I'd love to show you guys what I do."

After about a ten minute drive, they pulled up in front a massive glass and steel office building.

Jack whistled as he stepped out of the car. "Wow, this place is huge."

Edward grinned and led them inside.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Cullen," an older man spoke as he held open the door for them.

Parachute

"Hello, Dave. How's your day going?" Edward responded in a friendly manner. Dave smiled in surprise, not used to the jovial man before him.

"Very well, sir. Enjoy your day." The man smiled and nodded to Bella and Jack, wondering if they were the cause of Mr. Cullen's uplifted spirits.

Bella pulled nervously on the hem of her short-sleeved pink and gray plaid button down shirt while they waited for the elevator to arrive. There were two other women waiting, both dressed nicely in skirts and blouses. Bella cringed at the thought that they were walking into an upscale office wearing jeans and sneakers. She took a deep breath and tried to put it out of her mind. Edward was wearing blue jeans and a black t-shirt, and he didn't seem phased one bit, so she told herself to suck it up and deal.

The elevator finally came and Edward pressed the button for the 23rd floor, before he smiled at both her and Jack, ignoring the other occupants of the elevator completely. When they reached their floor, Bella looked around in awe. The floors were all hardwood and the walls were a soft cream color, adorned with various works of art. He led them over toward the left side of the spacious room, where a beautiful brunette, with ice blue eyes, sat at the large reception desk.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Cullen," she simpered, as she stood from her seat and batted her eyes lashes at him. "I was told you wouldn't be in the office for a few weeks."

Bella quirked an eyebrow at the girl's blatant flirtatiousness. She looked over at Edward and noticed that his posture immediately straightened and his voice took on a cooler tone.

"Gianna," he nodded to the woman. "I'm only stopping by to grab a few things and to show my family around a little bit."

Bella's eyes cut to his face, surprised to have herself included in that statement. He smiled gently at her before leading her and Jack towards the large corner office.

Parachute

"Family?" Gianna asked, confused. She didn't spare Bella a second glance, but her jaw dropped as soon as she got a good look at Jack. "Oh my God," she whispered and sat down quickly. As soon as Edward's door closed behind them, she picked up her phone and dialed.

"Jane? You are not going to believe who just walked in here!"

After Edward shut the door behind them, Jack ran over to the immense window behind his father's desk.

"Wow, this is so cool. I can see the whole city!" he exclaimed. Edward laughed as he sat in his chair and turned on the computer.

"Not quite, but it certainly is a great view."

Bella looked up from her spot in front of his bookshelves and noticed that when he spoke, he was looking directly at her. Her heart beat picked up a notch and she felt her cheeks heat up a little. She returned her gaze to the books in front of her and ran her fingers across the spines.

"Mom! Look! We can see that big Ferris Wheel that he was talking about from here!"

Bella walked over next to Jack to gaze out over what was indeed a spectacular view of the city. She felt a slight hum in her skin with her increased proximity to Edward. After responding to a pair of emails, he shut the computer back down and pulled out a few folders from a drawer. He turned his chair to watch them gaze out of the window and leaned back in comfort. Having the pair of them in his office made the drab room come to life. Jack turned around and smiled at his father.

"So, that lady out there said that you were off for awhile?"

Edward nodded and smiled back at his son. "Yes, I own the company so I arranged to take some time off. I wanted to spend as much time as I could with you. I couldn't imagine letting you out of my sight anytime soon."

Parachute

Bella felt tears prick her eyes at his heartfelt statement and continued to stare out of the window, trying to give father and son a moment.

Jack reached out and hugged Edward, who squeezed back just as tightly as the boy. Jack pulled back and sat on his dad's leg for a minute as he perused the four framed pictures on his desk. There was one of Esme & Carlisle, another of Edward & Emmett and one of Edward and Jack, which looked to have been taken shortly before he disappeared. The fourth one drew Jack's attention the most. It was of Edward beaming into the camera, holding a baby wrapped in a little green blanket. He looked back at Edward and pointed at the photo.

"Is that me?"

Edward smiled sadly. "Yes, that's you. It was the day we brought you home from the hospital. You were born on Good Friday, so they let us take you home on Easter Sunday."

Bella looked over her shoulder to look at Jack, who reached out to brush his fingers across the picture.

"You look so happy," he said quietly.

"Of course I was happy, Jack. You were the best thing that ever happened to me. I loved you from the moment I first laid my eyes on you."

Jack looked up into his father's face, with his own eyes wet with tears.

"Didn't it," Jack swallowed and blinked before he could continue his question. "I mean, did it make you sad to see these pictures everyday and know that I was gone?"

Edward took a deep breath and let it out in a sigh.

"I'm not going to lie. It hurt every single day; every single time I glanced up and saw one of your photos. It also helped me stay strong, though. I knew without a doubt that I'd see you again someday. Whether it was during this

Parachute

lifetime or afterwards, I knew it was only a matter of time."

Edward reached out and hugged Jack tightly once again. This time, Bella couldn't tear her eyes away. She felt her heart swell in her chest and briefly wondered if her heart was safe from Edward Cullen and whether or not she wanted it to be. The more time she spent with him, she learned more about this amazing man. He seemed too good to be true sometimes.

They composed themselves, and Edward gathered up the files that he was taking with him. He straightened up from his chair and motioned towards the door.

"Ready to have some fun?"

Jack nodded quickly and reached for Edward's hand as they walked towards the door. Bella felt a small pang of hurt and she felt a little left out. She took a deep breath in through her nose and followed silently. She told herself that she should be happy that they were bonding. They needed moments like this to bridge the gap that the past five years had produced. As much as she told herself to settle down, a lonely feeling took up residence in her heart. Jack was always his to begin with, she thought sadly.

Jack suddenly turned his head and looked right at her and smiled. He held out his other hand for her to take and that was all it took to calm her insecurities. She sighed and mentally chastised herself for being jealous of their connection. Jack's heart had more than enough room to love both of them. His warm fingers laced with hers and their palms pressed against each other, giving Bella the instantaneous feeling of being home.

When Edward reached out and opened the door, a tall, lanky man with short, dirty blond hair stood there. He gave Edward a friendly smile and shook his hand.

"E," he spoke with a light English accent, "what's got all of the women in this office abuzz today?" His eyes cut to Jack and smiled kindly, before turning his gaze on Bella. His deep blue eyes widened and he grinned from ear to ear.

Parachute

"Well, hello you, dear," he said in a reverent voice. He looked back at Edward, still grinning. "Who are these treasures, my friend?"

"Demetri, this is my son, Jack, and his adoptive mother, Bella. Jack, Bella, this is Demetri Martin, one of the senior partners here."

"No shit?" Demetri asked, incredulously. He reached out and ruffled Jack's hair. "I've heard a lot about you, little one. How did this all come about, E? When did you find out? I thought we were mates?"

Edward shook his head and laughed. "It's a long story, Tre. How about you come over to the house for dinner one night and we'll get caught up?"

Demetri turned his mega-watt smile on Bella again. "Will you be there, gorgeous?"

She blushed and nodded, not seeing how Edward's eyes narrowed at his friend.

"Ok, enough flirting," Edward said gruffly, "we have plans for the afternoon."

Demetri looked at his friend and raised an eyebrow, before slyly shifting his gaze back to Bella.

"It was good to meet the both of you," he said as he shook Jack's hand before reaching for Bella's and lifting her knuckles to his lips.

"I'll definitely be taking you up on that dinner offer, E," he said before winking at Bella and walking away.

Jack tugged on Edward's hand, which broke him from his glaring daggers at Demetri's back. He looked at his son and his face morphed back into a smile and the three of them made their way back to the car.

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Three hours later, exhausted and stuffed with junk food, Jack plopped down on a bench between his parents. His eyes focused on the giant Ferris Wheel and groaned.

"Oh, I think I'm gonna be sick. Why did you let me eat so much?" He whined at his parents.

"It's your own fault. I told you to stop, but you wouldn't listen," Bella laughed. She looked at her watch and pursed her lips.

"What's wrong, Bell?" Edward asked. Her heart skipped a beat at his use of her nickname. She looked over at him and smiled.

"Alice's flight lands in less than an hour. How would you feel about coming to O'Hare with us to meet her? Jasper will be there to pick her up, so I was thinking that maybe we can all go out to dinner," she asked tentatively.

Edward gazed thoughtfully out over the water for a few moments before nodding and smiling at her.

"Sure, I'd love to meet your friends."

"Oh, god, don't talk about food right now, please?" Jack groaned. Bella laughed again and stood up. She reached down and pulled him up. She threw her arm around his shoulder and rubbed his belly with her other hand.

"Maybe next time you'll refrain from trying to out-eat a grown man?"

Edward chuckled as he followed them. Bella hesitated when she reached the car. She looked over at Edward's confused face and tossed him her keys. He caught them easily and grinned.

"Really? Are you sure?" he asked excitedly. She nodded and let herself in the passenger door.

Parachute

"Well, I figure that you know your way around better than I do," she said as she buckled herself in. He reached out with his right hand and squeezed one of hers. Surprised at the contact, she glanced up at him and returned his smile. She felt giddy the entire drive to the airport when he never removed his hand, except when he needed it to turn the wheel, but he always went right back to holding hers.

When they arrived at the airport, Bella shot Jasper a text to see where he was. They headed over to meet him once she got his response. As soon as Jack caught sight of his uncle, he took off running and launched himself into his arms. Jasper laughed and swung the boy around.

Bella smirked at Jack and raised an eyebrow when she and Edward caught up with them.

"Stomach isn't hurting now, is it?" she asked sarcastically. Jack smiled and shrugged noncommittally.

Jasper straightened up and held his hand out to Edward.

"I'm sorry that I didn't get a chance to introduce myself yesterday. I'm Jasper Whitlock. I apologize for just bargin' in your home like that. I wasn't thinking clearly."

Bella smiled as she watched Jasper's charm and charisma put Edward at ease.

"I apologize as well. You took me off guard, and I didn't help matters by disappearing."

Jack walked over and leaned against his mother as Jazz and Edward struck up a conversation about what, she had no idea. Her attention was focused on where her best friend would be emerging from shortly. Even though it had only been a few days, she missed Alice like crazy. A few moments later, people started emerging from the Seattle gate and Bella stepped up on her toes trying to find Allie. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a small blur of black and pink before being knocked into from the side. She stumbled slightly before righting

Parachute

herself and felt Alice's arms wrap around her middle.

She sighed and hugged her best friend. How the girl could move so fast in high heels is still beyond her.

"Oh, Bells! I've missed you! I'm sorry I haven't had the chance to talk much these past few days!"

Bella pulled back and grinned at Alice. She was wearing a pink sundress and her should-length black hair was pulled back in a clip.

Jasper took Allie from her arms and kissed her soundly. Alice smiled up and him and grinned. She looked over at Edward and her mouth formed the shape of an 'O' for a moment before smiling brightly at him. She walked over and hugged him tightly.

"You must be Edward!" Alice exclaimed. "He looks just like you! It's uncanny."

Edward smiled and nodded. "Yes, I'm Edward, and you must be Alice? It's a pleasure to meet you. I've heard nothing but good things about you. Pink looks absolutely stunning on you, by the way."

"I think this is going to be the start of a beautiful friendship, Edward."

She hooked one arm through his and the other through Jack's as they started walk off towards the exit. Bella looked over at Jazz, who only shrugged back at her and held out his arm.

Bella laughed and put her arm through his as they followed the pair of Cullens, who were currently getting their ears talked off.

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AN: Pics of Nevaeh and Demetri, as well at the music used in this chapter, are up on the blog! ([kitsushel . blogspot . com](http://kitsushel.blogspot.com))

Chapter 17

AN: Just a thank you to each and every person who reads this story! I *heart* you all! As always, each and every review gets a teaser on Monday, in addition to the ones that get posted on the blog!

A few people have mentioned that they didn't know that there were Outtakes! Why, yes, yes there are! A new just happened to post the other day, too!

Love you guys and see you next Friday!

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June 22, 2010

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The next morning was a hectic blur of activity. During dinner last night, Alice had decided that the group should split up into girls and boys the next day for some bonding time. After quick calls to Esme and Rose, everything was all set. The men and Jack would check out the skatepark and batting cages while the women would have some spa time and do a little shopping. Bella groaned internally, but went along because she liked the idea of Alice getting to know the Cullens.

Before she made her way downstairs for breakfast, Bella picked up her phone to make a call to her dad. It had been too late to call when they got in last night, so she figured she'd do it now. She looked at the clock and saw that it was just about 8:30 am in Chicago, so she should be able to catch him before he left for work. After several rings, a sleepy voice answered.

Parachute

"Lo?"

"Seth? What are you doing up at 6:30 in the morning?"

"Well, I was sleeping before my annoying sister woke me up," he laughed.

"Mornin' Bella, is everything okay?"

"Yeah, everything's fine. I just wanted to talk to Dad before he left for work."

"Sure, sure. Hang on a sec, and I'll take him the phone."

She heard shuffling in the background and the opening of a door.

"Hey, Seth?" She asked.

"Yeah?"

"What's this I hear about you giving out Jake's number to unsuspecting girls? That's pretty messed up, bro."

"That little rat!" Seth laughed. "It was his old number. It was the only thing I could think of, off the top of my head. I'm not that much of a douche that I'd send a girl off to a potential rapist, Bells."

Bella cringed at hearing the last part of his sentence. Even though it was over and in the past, that day still showed up in her nightmares from time to time.

"How did Jack know that it was Jake's number anyway? I was wondering about that."

"Oh, he asked if I really gave her my number, and I said no. When he asked who's it was, I just answered without thinking. Then I explained that it was kind of a stupid thing to do and that he should never do something like that."

"Right, uh huh. Are you going to be a bad influence on my son, Seth?" She joked.

Parachute

"Who, me? Nah, you know I'm just about perfect."

She laughed and shook her head. She smiled when she heard her dad crack a comment about how perfect his speeding ticket last week was.

"Oh hey, Seth, one more question."

"Shoot."

"Why didn't you tell me that Jake was out of jail?"

"Oh, look at the time. I really need to get back to my beauty sleep. Love you, sis! Here's Charlie."

Bella rolled her eyes at Seth's duck-and-cover routine.

"Mornin' baby girl. Is everything okay?" Charlie asked in his gruff, yet warm voice.

"Everything is fine, Daddy," she said quietly. "I wanted to talk to you about something though."

"What's up, Bells? How can I help?"

"You can start by telling me the truth. When did Jake get out of jail? And why didn't you tell me?"

"How did you find out? Did Seth spill his guts?"

"No, you did."

"I'm not following you," he said in confusion.

"Jack mentioned that he overheard you telling Sue that before we left. Can you please answer me? I deserve to know."

Charlie sighed.

"He got out around four months ago. He was a model prisoner and since it was his first time, they let him out early on probation. Billy refused to let him move back home plus he didn't want any trouble from me, so he's in Olympia now. I had a little chat with him and he's promised to stay away from you. I've got some connections down there who are keeping an eye on him. I didn't see any reason to worry you, baby."

Bella felt a shiver run down her spine at the mention of Olympia, but she pushed it off to the side for now.

"I understand why you did it, Dad, but that was something that I really should have known."

"You're right, I should have told you. I'm sorry, Bells. I was just trying to look out for you," he responded sadly.

"I know, Dad. Look at it this way, at least I would have been prepared and knew to stay away from Olympia or been more careful."

Her and Jack's last trip to Olympia a few months ago ran through her head. The feeling of being watched through the store's window and the flash of black hair she saw started to make sense and it chilled her to the bone. She swallowed and tried not to think about it now.

"I'll let you go, Daddy. We have some outings planned today and I've got to give a kick start," she giggled.

"All right. I'm sorry again, baby. Give Jack a hug, and tell him that Pops said 'hello'. Love you guys."

"I'll tell him to give you a call later. We love you, too," Bella replied before hanging up.

Parachute

She took a deep breath and tried to clear her thoughts before waking up Jack. That proved to be moot when he suddenly flew into her room in his pajamas and his hair askew. He was grinning and his eyes were wide with joy.

"Good morning there, kiddo," she laughed.

"Hi Mom! I'm going to the skatepark today!" He practically shouted. She could feel the excitement vibrating off of him.

She grinned right back at him and hugged him tightly.

"You sure are. Make sure you don't let your Dad break anything, okay?"

Jack giggled and nodded.

"Okay, let's head down and eat some breakfast before we get ready, okay? What are you in the mood for?"

"Cereal is fine with me!"

He grabbed her hand and they walked silently down to the kitchen. A little while later, they finished up and cleaned their bowls and spoons. When they entered the living room, Emmett and Edward were standing off to the side of the room in a heated discussion. She looked over at Jack and nudged him towards the stairs.

"Why don't you go get ready?"

He looked back at the two men questioningly before smiling up at her. His happiness to get back on his board was coming off of him in waves. He nodded and took off running up the stairs. Bella turned her attention back on the brothers, who were now silent and watching her. When she met Edward's eyes, he grinned and walked over to her.

"Good Morning, Bella."

Parachute

"Morning, Edward. Hello, Emmett," she said softly.

"Hey," he responded somewhat reluctantly. She felt her hackles start to raise, but tried to stamp them down by joking around. She turned towards Edward and grinned.

"Are you sure you're up this, old man? Jack will probably wear you out in an hour," she teased.

He laughed and shook his head.

"I may be out of practice, but I'm pretty sure I can keep up with an eight year old."

She scoffed and rolled her eyes playfully.

"It's that kind of attitude that will get you into trouble, Mr. Cullen. I know these kind of things," she mock-whispered while tapping her temple.

Bella laughed brightly during their back and forth banter, but noticed Emmett's stiff posture out of the corner of her eye. She bit her lip and decided that there was no time like the present to find out just what his problem was. She looked up into Edward's face and smiled.

"Do you think you could go check on Jack, to make sure he remembers his helmet and pads? He has a tendency to forget things when he gets excited."

Edward nodded and grinned before turning and heading up the stairs. When he was out of sight, she whirled to face Emmett and put her hands on her hips.

"What is your problem?"

"I don't know what you're talking about," he replied in a voice as blank as his face. She narrowed her eyes and took a step forward, so she wouldn't have to raise her voice.

Parachute

"Yes, yes you do. I want to know what problem you have with me, that makes you feel the need to glower at the back of my head whenever you don't think I'm looking. Pretty soon Edward or Jack are going to notice, too, and I'll be damned if I let that happen. Both of them have already been hurt too much without adding you to the pile."

Emmett drew a deep breath in through his nose and leaned towards her. His eyes flashed in anger.

"You don't know what the hell you're talking about, little girl. You don't know," he swallowed thickly, "anything."

She straightened her posture and glared at him, determinedly.

"You're right, I don't know what has you so upset, and I can't fix it unless you tell me."

"You can't do anything," he scoffed. His eyes narrowed and he pursed his lips. "On second thought, there is one thing you could do. Leave."

She was taken aback at the vehemence in his voice.

"Leave here and don't come back. Leave my nephew here with his family, where he belongs."

"Emmett!"

Bella whirled around when she heard Edward's growl form behind her. He was standing on the bottom stair, glowering angrily at his brother. She felt a burning sensation in her gut and wondered if there was something wrong with her for thinking that Edward looked incredibly hot when pissed off.

"Edward, I'm sorry," she started to stammer, "I didn't mean to-"

His gaze swung to her and its intensity cut her off mid-sentence. His gaze softened when her eyes widened. He gave her a sad smile and shook his head.

Parachute

"Don't," he started to say before pausing. "Don't apologize for standing up for yourself. He had no right to speak to you that way."

He turned and glared at Emmett again.

"She is Jack's mom, every bit as much as Esme is ours. Do you think any less of me because I was adopted? She's part of our family now and there's nothing you or anyone else can do to take that away. Haven't you thought of what it would do to Jack if she just left him here? Trust me, no one wants Jack to leave their sights ever again more than I do, but in his eyes, Bella is his mom. Anyone with eyes can see that. Forcing them apart will only shatter his heart. He's already been through more than anyone should have to deal with, especially a child. For Christ's sake, Em, what do I have to do to get through to you? You need to apologize to her. Right now!"

Emmett just stared blankly at him, allowing no emotion to show on his face.

"Apologize," Edward ground out between his closed teeth.

Emmett looked her dead in the eye and spoke in the most sarcastic tone that she had ever heard.

"I'm sorry for upsetting you, Bella. Please, feel free to take Jack away at any point and break all of our hearts again."

She gasped and Edward took a step towards Emmett. She put her hand on his arm to stop him and Edward looked at her in confusion.

"Don't fight with your brother over me, please."

He looked at her as if she had lost her mind.

"Look, trust me on this? Please?"

Edward eyed her warily and stepped back away from Emmett, who just stood there, looking confused.

Bella turned to him and sighed.

"Can we please talk privately? This shit needs to be hashed out before I lose my mind."

Emmett narrowed his eyes and nodded. He gestured towards the study and Bella started to walk away when she felt Edward grab her arm.

"What are you doing?" he asked quietly. She smiled slightly at him.

"I'm trying to mend some fences here. Have faith."

He started to run his hands through his hair and pace.

"Edward," she said calmly. He looked up at her with panicked eyes. "Calm down. It's okay."

He took a deep breath and let it out slowly.

"I just don't want you to get hurt," he said quietly. "I mean, he won't physically hurt you, that's not in his nature. I just don't want him saying hurtful things to you. It's bad enough that I did that when we first met, Bella. I just, I can't, I don't have the words."

His eyes implored hers for understanding. She smiled and leaned up on her toes to kiss him on the cheek.

"It'll be fine, Edward. I'm a big girl."

She walked away from his stunned face and into the study with Emmett, who shut the door firmly behind him. He turned and gazed at her with eyes that were finally overflowing with emotion. He ran his hand roughly through his short-cropped hair, in a manner eerily similar to his brother.

"I'm sorry," he choked out. A few tears dripped down his face and Bella's anger from earlier melted.

Parachute

"She broke him. She tore his heart out and lost his son. He's never been the same." He continued to stumble over his words, his tears streaming down his face now.

"I was his best man and I stood by and let him marry that bitch. We all knew she was wicked, but no one wanted to hurt him. Even when she wanted nothing to do with Jack, we all stood by and did nothing because Edward was content with that. His son was all he needed. When Jack disappeared, a part of him died. Anyone who knew him before could see it clear as day. I failed. I failed as a brother and an uncle. I fucking failed as human being."

Tears trickled from Bella's eyes, but she couldn't bring herself to interrupt him.

"He's been completely closed off for years. Now, you waltz in, and it's like the past five years never happened. He's himself again. And it's not just because of Jack. It's you, too. He's falling for you, and you're going to break him. Just like she did. And I'm not going to be able to stand by and watch that again. I just can't see that happen again."

His wide, wet eyes begged hers to understand. She felt her heart break and walked over to where he was leaning against the desk. She placed her head on his chest, over his steadily beating heart and closed her eyes.

"I won't hurt him, Em, I promise," she whispered. "Even when we go back home at the end of the summer, I won't take Jack away from you. You guys will always be a part of his life," she swore adamantly. Emmett reached around and wrapped his arms around her shoulders, rested his head on top of hers and continued to cry.

"I've been an ass and I owe you a huge apology Bella. Both Ed and Rosie have been trying to make me see that, and I stubbornly refused. I hope you can forgive me someday."

She wrapped her arms around his waist and sighed.

Parachute

"I'm not gonna lie, it hurt. Especially because I did nothing to deserve it. It was rude and unfair and just plain mean, Emmett. I can't forgive you right away, but give me a little time, okay? We can move forward from here. Edward was right, we're family now. Family means that nobody gets left behind or forgotten."

Emmett pushed her away and looked down at her with surprise on his splotchy face.

"Did you seriously just quote *Lilo and Stitch* to me?" He asked incredulously.

Bella stepped away from him to allow him to straighten himself.

"I'm a mom to an eight year old. What's your excuse for knowing that's what it was from?" She winked at him and giggled.

He blushed and then grinned.

"I like you, girl. I'm sorry I've wasted time in seeing that," he said as he bumped her shoulder.

"So," she said as she walked towards the door, "we're good?"

He stopped and looked at her seriously before smiling.

"We're good."

She smiled back and found Edward still pacing in the living room. When he saw her, his relief was eminent across his face.

"Are you okay?"

Emmett's words filtered through her head once again, as she looked up into Edward's worried eyes.

"It's you, too. He's falling for you..."

Parachute

She wondered if it was really possible that this wonderful man was seeing her that way. She certainly knew that she was in danger of falling hard for him. Could he really be feeling the same?

"Yeah, everything is fine. I told you it'd be okay."

She smiled and he sighed. He searched her eyes to make sure that she was telling the truth. Satisfied with what he found, he nodded.

"I'm going to finish getting ready. Are you okay?"

She nodded and watched him turn away, with one last sideways glance at his brother. Emmett looked over at her and laughed softly.

"I told you that he has it bad," he whispered. Her heart skipped a beat and she felt her face flush.

"I've got to get ready. Where's Rose, by the way?"

He shrugged sheepishly.

"I was in a bad mood this morning, so she didn't want to drive over with me. She's going to meet you girls at the spa."

Bella shook her head and patted his shoulder.

"Good luck with that, Em," she called as she headed upstairs.

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Two hours later, Bella found herself in the middle of the best massage of her entire life. Esme was right next to her and the groans coming from that woman

Parachute

were almost obscene. There were a few times when Bella might have giggled if she hadn't been making the same noises. Alice and Rose were seated across the room getting manicures and pedicures while they chatted like old friends. It warmed her heart to see how quickly the Cullens had accepted Alice and Jasper into their family dynamic.

All too soon, Esme and Bella traded places with the others.

"So, Bella," Esme started as she eased her feet into the warm water, "what are you intentions with my son?"

"Wha-what do you mean?" She stuttered.

Esme laughed.

"I'm only teasing you, silly girl. Although, it's quite obvious that you and my son are taken with each other. It does my heart good to see him coming alive again."

"I'm sure that has everything to do with Jack coming back into his life, not me."

Esme eyed the younger woman carefully for a moment.

"You can't see what everyone else does, sweetheart. While having Jack back in his life is a blessing that Edward had prayed for, you're the blessing that his mother prayed for before we lost Jack at all."

"I don't understand?" She asked Esme, confused.

"It's no great secret that none of our family particularly like Victoria. I used to hope and wish on stars that my son would find the love of his life. We all knew that she was not it. We all turned a blind eye because if Edward was happy, we had no right to interfere."

"Huh," Bella mused, "Emmett said something similar to me this morning."

Parachute

Esme raised an eyebrow.

"He wasn't rude to you, was he? He and I had a long chat the other day about his behavior during the barbecue. He promised that he'd behave."

Bella blushed slightly. He didn't deserve her protection, but she also didn't want to start any more drama, so she told a little white lie.

"We talked out our differences. Everything should be fine now."

Esme beamed at her.

"Good, good. I'm happy to hear that."

After a few minutes of silence, Alice and Rose strolled over and plopped into the chair on either side of Bella and Esme.

"So, Bells," Alice chimed in, "what's going on with you and Edward?"

Bella dropped her head back against the wall and groaned as Esme had a fit of giggles.

"What?" Alice asked. "What's so funny?"

"I-I just-I just-" Esme cut herself off gasping for breath between giggles. Bella pulled her back up and mock-glared at Esme.

"Esme had just got done asking me what my intentions for her son were," Bella responded dryly.

Alice's eyes widened and Rose immediately joined in with Esme. Alice shook her head and patted Bella on the back.

"Poor Bella," Alice sighed before breaking down in giggles with the others.

Bella rolled her eyes, but couldn't keep the smile off of her face.

Parachute

"Are we finished? I'm starving," she said, trying to change the subject.

"Sure," Esme said, still slightly out of breath, "I could eat."

Bella stood up and headed back to the changing rooms, leaving the trio of hyenas behind.

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Less than an hour later, the four of them were seated at a table in a nice restaurant that Esme had raved about. They had just placed their order when Bella noticed an older couple, around Esme's age, take notice of their group. The man and woman spoke quietly to each other, neither taking their eyes off of Bella's table. The woman nodded and the pair hesitantly made their way over.

"Good afternoon, Esme," the handsome gentleman spoke softly.

Bella noticed Rosalie's eyes widen and Esme's posture stiffen. Alice shot her a confused look and all Bella could do was shrug slightly.

Esme took a sip from her water glass before she turned and smiled vapidly at the couple standing off to her left side.

"Marcus, Diane," she said. The man's face fell slightly at Esme's cool tone.

"Esme, please," the woman said as she placed her hand on her husband's arm.

Esme's eyes flash angrily for a moment, before flicking her gaze to Bella.

"This is neither the time, nor the place for this discussion," she spoke with an eerily calmness.

Parachute

"But Victoria-

Bella gasped and covered her mouth as Esme cut off the woman.

"Do not," Esme spat angrily. "Do not start this conversation right now. I guarantee it will end badly."

The man's gaze had fallen on Bella when she gasped and he continued to eye her curiously, as if he knew her from somewhere. Her eyes met his sea blue ones and she couldn't help but fall into their warmth. She wondered briefly if this handsome, kind-looking man could have spawned the devil in red-headed flesh.

He smiled kindly at her before looking back down at Esme, who was now looking back and forth between Marcus and Bella. He placed his hand on the small of his wife's back.

"We're sorry for interrupting your meal, ladies. Esme, we've been trying to say our piece for five years. I sincerely hope that you'll hear us out at some point." He tipped his head. "Have a good day, ladies."

He shot one last look at Bella before smiling to himself and leading his wife away.

Bella's brows pulled together in thought as she tried to understand what had just happened.

"Bella?" Esme called her quietly. Her gaze flickered over to the older woman's concerned face.

"Yes, Esme?"

"Have you met Marcus before?"

"No," Bella shook her head, "I've never seen either of them before. I don't know what that was about."

Parachute

"I'm sure you realized quickly, but those were Victoria's parents. Well, Diane doesn't really deserve that. Marcus is Victoria's father. Di is his second wife. She and I were college room mates and best friends. Until Victoria hooked her claws into Edward. Things became strained with them after that. We haven't actually talked civilly since Jack went missing."

"Is Victoria's mother still in Phoenix?" Bella asked. Esme nodded sadly.

"Yes, Millicent moved there after she divorced Marcus and took half of his money and seven year old daughter. Victoria came running back to daddy when she was sixteen because Millie had blown through most of her savings."

Esme ran her hand across her lips as she thought, before she dropped her hands in her lap and smiled.

"Let's not worry about that now, shall we? We'll just enjoy our lunch and then talk with our other halves when we get home, okay?"

Bella didn't fail to notice Esme's sly wink and pointed glance, alluding that Edward was hers. She inwardly sighed and wished that was actually a possibility.

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When they arrived back at the house, the guys were already there. Upon entering the foyer, they heard a combination of laughing and cursing mixed with groans. The sight before them made Bella's heart stop. Edward was laying on the couch holding a large ice bag on his head, that obscured half of his face. The cursing and groaning were coming from him, while Carlisle and Emmett were doing the laughing.

Parachute

Jasper and Jack were seated on the smaller couch, playing a video game. Bella quickly rushed over to Edward's side and knelt next to him. She reached out gently moved some of his hair off his brow. He immediately quieted and opened the eye that was visible. He tried to smile, but it looked painful. She gave him a soft look.

"What happened?" She asked quietly.

He moved the bag away and she saw a nasty purple bruise on his upper cheek and left eye. There was also a little cut on his lower lip.

"I had a date with the ground," he said, grimacing. Emmett slapped his leg and started laughing again. Bella swung her gaze at him and shot him a death glare, which immediately silenced him.

"Damn," Carlisle whispered, "she's good."

"Yeah, Mom can be scary when she wants to be," Jack piped in, not removing his eyes from the screen.

"Hush, you," she laughed lightly. "Jack, what happened to your father?"

"He was trying to do a kick flip and face planted."

Bella looked down at Edward, who looked completely mortified. Her heart melted, and she leaned down to kiss his forehead.

"Are you okay?" She asked.

"Besides my destroyed ego? A few bruises. I'll heal."

His eyes locked with hers and she felt heat travel her neck to her chest.

"Ahem," someone cleared their throats. Bella and Edward looked up to find everyone besides Jack and Jasper staring at them.

Parachute

"What?" Edward asked.

Esme caught Bella's gaze and mouthed the words, 'I told you so.'

Bella rolled her eyes and looked away quickly. Edward moved over and patted for her to sit next to him. She carefully sat next to him while the others sat near their husbands. She looked down at him and sighed.

"We ran into some people at lunch today that upset your mom," she said quietly.

Edward quickly looked over to Esme. "What happened? Who was it?"

Esme smiled sadly. "Marcus and Diane."

Edward sat up and winced. "Are you serious? What the hell did they want? Shit, did they ask about Jack?"

Bella's phone began to rang with an unknown number, so she excused herself and walked out to the patio to take the call.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Ms. Swan?" a deep, yet musical voice asked.

"Yes, this is she. Can I help you?"

"I sincerely hope so. We met earlier today. My name is Marcus Preston, and I have a proposition for you."

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Parachute

recognized you almost immediately when you were at lunch earlier today, so I called and spoke with an acquaintance of mine, Brian Murray, to find out more about your stay in Chicago and how I could get in contact with you regarding a business proposition. You may not know the name, but he is the president of HarperCollins. He was very interested in what I had to offer."

"Really? And they just gave out my private phone number?" She asked incredulously.

"Well, it wasn't quite that easy," he chuckled. "I had to call in a few favors and sweet talk an intern who was working for Ms. Denali in order to get your number. It was well-worth it."

"That is a little disturbing, Mr. Preston. I can't for the life of me understand why you needed to speak with me directly. Tanya handles all of my press and publicity."

"Hmmm, while this is a business proposition, it also includes a personal gray area. I'd appreciate it if we could meet in person to sit down and discuss it in length. Perhaps for coffee?"

She took a deep breath and felt her brow furrow as she thought it over. She wondered what this personal area was about. Did he know about Jack? She honestly didn't think his tone relayed that idea. Her guess was that it had more to do with using her to mend fences with Esme, but she wasn't completely sure.

"Would this have anything to do with your relationship with Esme? I'm sorry, but I won't be used as a pawn in any way, Mr. Preston."

"Isabella, it's Marcus, please. I have no wish to use you as a pawn in any way, my dear, but yes, the personal aspect of this business arrangement also affects Esme and her family. I would really feel more comfortable discussing this in person. Please, could you meet with me and I will be happy to go into every tiny detail of my proposition."

Parachute

Bella sighed, feeling herself cave. She was fairly certain that this had nothing to do with Jack. Her burgeoning curiosity took over her common sense.

"Okay, I think that's doable."

"So, then, you'll meet with me? On Friday?" He asked, sounding hopeful.

Bella swallowed and closed her eyes, pushing past her fears and insecurities to answer his question.

"Yes, I'll meet you."

"There's a coffee shop, at the Drake Hotel, called Lavazza. Does two pm sound alright with you?"

"Sure, I'll be there then."

"Thank you, Ms. Swan, you won't regret this."

"I hope I don't," she whispered to herself after hanging up.

She stood quietly looking out over the scenery before taking a deep breath and dialing the phone.

"Talk to me, babe," a slightly husky female voice answered.

"Hey, Tahn, I need your advice," Bella sighed.

"Wow, your tone of voice sounds serious. Is Sexy Daddy giving you a hard time again? I mean, just from looking at his pictures, babe, he could give it to me hard any day."

Bella shook her head and laughed lightly at Tanya's crass comment.

"No, it's not him. It's actually his ex-father-in-law, Marcus Preston."

Parachute

She went on to explain to Tanya about meeting the Prestons at lunch and the bad blood between them and the Cullens. When she finished telling her about the phone conversation that she had just ended, Tanya was livid.

"So, you mean to tell me that I have a back-stabbing little hussy working as an intern? That shit is not cool. Giving out an author's personal information is clearly a breach of confidentiality. Trust me, Bella, I'm going to find out who it was and their ass is grass."

"I didn't tell you to get anyone fired, Tanya. I feel bad now," Bella whined slightly.

"Well, tough shit. You break the rules, you get your hand slapped. What if they had sold yours or someone else's number to a psycho? They had no right to do that. End of discussion," Tanya stated with finality. "You're too God damned nice for your own good, Bella. I swear you have no sense sometimes."

Bella cringed at her friend's abrasiveness, but knowing that was just how Tanya was, she took it with a grain of salt.

"Fine, consider it dropped. Now, what should I do about this situation I'm in now? I don't want to lie to anyone, but I also don't want to tell them until I know the whole story. How do I come out of this and not be the bad guy?"

Tanya sighed and hummed.

"Well, for starters, I would make sure you tell Alice and Jasper."

"I was already planning on that. I may be naive at times, but I'm not stupid enough to go into this without any backup. I've learned from my previous actions. Jasper would have my head." Bella grimaced.

"Okay then. I would take them with you and have them sit a distance away from you, but in plain view, just in case GrandPaw tries anything shady. It doesn't sound like anything horrible, but you know I like to cover every base. I'll see what info I can ferret out on my end. Maybe I can find out what Mr.

Parachute

Preston offered Brian. Maybe he needed a kidney or something."

Bella giggled.

"I think it'll be okay, chica," Tanya sighed. "Though, I would make sure to tell S.D. when you're finished. You don't want him thinking that you're hiding anything from him or being shady. That could work against you in the long run."

"S.D.?" Bella asked.

"Short for Sexy Daddy. God, I miss you. It's been too long. Damn job running me ragged. I think I'll be swinging by Chi-Town soon for a date. You gonna show a girl a good time, BellaBee?"

"I'll see what I can do, Tahn. I miss you, too," Bella sighed.

"Look, let me let you go. I've got an intern to hunt down. Give Jackie a kiss for me, and tell him Aunt Tanya says hello, okay?"

"Sure, sure. I'll make it extra slobbery, too," Bella laughed.

"That's my girl! Later, babe!"

"Bye, Tanya."

Bella closed her phone and leaned against the railing of the patio. She'd try and talk to Alice and Jasper before they left and let them know what was going on. Her mind continued to turn though, wondering just what it was that Marcus Preston needed her for.

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Parachute

The next few days went by in a blur of hanging out as a group and visiting various spots in Chicago. Edward was still a little sore from his fall on Tuesday, so they kept their activities limited. Emmett and Carlisle continued to tease him mercilessly, while Jack expressed his pride in the fact that he tried. It was those words that made the aches and pains worth it.

Bella had managed to pull Alice and Jasper aside before they left and gave them a brief synopsis and they spoke in more detail over the phone the next day. Alice came up with the idea that Jasper could hang out nearby while Bella and Alice went to Lavazza. For once, Jasper agreed with one of Bella's ideas. He also thought that finding out what Marcus wanted before upsetting anyone else was a good idea. On Thursday night, Alice shared that she thought it would be best if they asked Rose to come along with them. Not only would it defuse any suspicion with the family, but having a Cullen there would also work in Bella's favor if anyone got angry that she didn't tell them sooner.

Bella told Rosalie about their plan during the drive to pick up Jazz and Allie from their hotel, which wasn't too far from The Drake. Rosalie was slightly annoyed that Bella didn't mention the plan ahead of time, but she understood Bella's reasons behind it. Rose also let Bella know that she would have her back should she need it when Bella told the rest of the family what had happened.

The three women made their way into the coffee shop just before two o'clock and noticed that Marcus was already there waiting for Bella. He raised an eyebrow when he noticed that her friends were with her. Alice and Rose took a seat on the other side of the room, giving Bella privacy, but also staying within line of sight. When Bella neared the table, Marcus stood and held a chair out for her.

"Thank you," she said quietly.

"I see that you've brought reinforcements with you. Very clever," he remarked.

"Are suggesting that said reinforcements are necessary? That doesn't instill much confidence in this meeting, sir."

Parachute

Bella sat back in her chair and couldn't keep the small smirk off of her face. Marcus smiled warmly at her, and she could feel her defenses melting away.

"No, not at all, my dear. I just find that that was an intelligent move. You should always be prepared when walking into an unknown situation. My already high respect for you had increased exponentially. I can assure you, though, your friends are not needed in this case, but I'm happy to see their support of you all the same."

She bit her lip and studied him carefully. His silver hair was cropped short and his eyes were a beautiful slate blue color. He had crow's feet around his eyes and a kind smile. She sighed and folded her hands together on top of the table.

"Okay, so let's get down to business. What do you want from me?"

He smiled brightly. "Straight down to business? Why does that not surprise me?" He paused for a moment before continuing.

"I was to hold a charity gala here in Chicago, benefiting Lost Treasures. I would require your assistance in putting together any publicity for it, including your name recognition and photo ops."

"I don't understand what that has to do with me directly. Tanya handles all of the press releases and things of that nature." Bella gave him a confused look. Marcus folded his hands together and rested his chin on them.

"I don't know how much you are aware of, regarding my familiar ties with Esme, but we share a grandson, who has been missing for five years. My daughter, Victoria, was married to Esme's son, Edward. The divorce was messy and painful since they were already dealing with the loss of their child. Victoria's own childish behaviors made everything worse. She was spoiled and had, ahem, issues. When everything was finished and the dust settled, Esme placed the blame for Victoria's actions upon my shoulders for enabling her for so long. These past few years have been difficult, not only dealing with the loss of my only grandchild, but close family friends in Esme and Carlisle. Diane was heartbroken that Esme turned her away, even though she had nothing to

Parachute

with the situation, except guilt by association. I've watched my wife suffer without her best friend for too long, and I think you can give me the opportunity to attempt to make amends."

Bella narrowed her eyes. "So you are planning to use me," she accused.

Marcus sighed. "No, Isabella, I want to use the Gala as a means to an end. You are just along for the ride."

He smiled sadly at her. For some reason or another, Bella believed every word that he had said. She shook her head.

"I don't see how any of this will help. If she hasn't given you the time of day before, what makes you think she'll change her mind now?"

"I'm going to publicly ask her to co-host the event with me. She'll be pressured to accept and thus have to spend time with us. I haven't figured the rest out yet." He looked at her with an adorable confused look; one that she had seen on Jack many times.

Bella shook her head. "As much as I may feel for you, Marcus, I cannot betray Esme like that. As soon as I have the chance, I'm telling her all about this meeting. I want you to be aware that I won't allow her to be blindsided. That being said, Lost Treasures means the world to me and I will do whatever I can to help make your Gala a success."

Marcus rested his hands in his lap and gave her a serene smile.

"I would expect nothing less, Isabella. Warning Esme ahead of time will not change my course of action. This pettiness has gone on far too long. It's time to bury the hatchet."

"I do have one question, Marcus. How did you convince Mr. Murray to add this Gala to my schedule? I'm supposed to be unavailable."

He gave her a sheepish look and reached into the breast pocket of his suit.

Parachute

"I promised him this," he said as he slid a folded piece of paper across the table to her. She unfolded it to find a check made out for \$500,000 to The Lost Treasures Foundation. "In addition to a matching \$500,000 at the Gala."

Bella's eyes widened and she looked up at him in shock. "A million dollars? You're donating a million dollars to Lost Treasures?"

He nodded and his eyes shone slightly with unshed tears. "I donate a large sum every year and can't think of a more worthy cause. If you and this Gala help me heal old wounds in addition, then that's a small price to pay."

Bella sighed and briefly wondered how the hell she was going to break this to Esme and not cause World War III.

Marcus looked at his watched and grinned.

"It has been enlightening Miss Swan, but I need to be heading out soon to pick my daughter up from the airport."

Bella's eyes widened. "Victoria?"

Marcus shook his head.

"I haven't spoken with her in almost two years now. Last I knew, she had checked into a rehab near her mother in Phoenix. I'm speaking about my younger daughter, Irina. She's mine and Diane's daughter. She's Victoria's exact opposite in every way. I feel horrible even thinking it sometimes, but she's the good daughter. Victoria always was a problem child, and I admittedly made it worse by spoiling her to make up for my absence in her life."

He sighed and gave her a sad smile.

"You have a son, don't you, Isabella?" He asked and she could only nod slowly.

Marcus stood and reached for her hand. "Treasure every single day with him and never take a moment for granted."

Parachute

He laid a gentle kiss on her fingers and stepped away from the table.

"It was a pleasure, Miss Swan. I look forward to working with you."

He smiled one last, kind smile before leaving the coffee shop. She barely had any time to digest what had just happened before Rose and Alice descended upon her with a million questions. After spending another hour in the shop speculating and coming up with a game plan, the general consensus was to break the news to Edward first and then Esme second.

Alice hopped up to her feet and grinned.

"You know what you need, Bell?" She asked excitedly.

"Oh, no," Bella groaned. "What now, Al?"

Alice exchanged a mischievous look with Rose and they pulled Bella up and out of the coffee shop.

"Seriously, where are we going, guys? I'm not in the mood for surprises. I just want to go home and curl up with Jack."

"We'll be quick, I promise," Rose smiled. "We just need to make a quick stop."

An hour later, the girls left Victoria's Secret with a bag for each of them. For the first time, Bella was actually excited about what she purchased.

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Later that night, after everyone Esme and Carlisle had retired for bed, Jack curled up with Bella on the couch opposite of Edward, who was propped up with a ton of pillows. Her hand absentmindedly ran through the boy's hair and

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he hummed a contented sound. She heard a soft laugh come from Edward and looked up to see that he was smiling adoringly at her and Jack.

'Is it worth it?' She thought. 'Is potentially falling in love with him worth the heartache I'll feel at the end of the summer?'

His eyes moved up to hers and he sent her a brilliant smile that made her breath catch in her throat.

The better question to have asked would have been, if it was even possible to avoid it happening any longer.

Within a few minutes, Jack was out cold. Bella shifted her body towards Edward and sighed. He looked at her questioningly.

"What's wrong, Bella? You look like you have a lot on your mind."

She sighed and nodded. "I need to tell you something, but I'm afraid that you'll be upset with me."

His brow furrowed and he cocked his head to the side a bit.

"Now I'm intrigued." He gave her a hesitant smile, obviously preparing for the worst.

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly before continuing.

"I had coffee today with Marcus Preston."

Edward's eyes widened and his mouth popped open in shock. He recovered quickly and narrowed his eyes, anger glinting on the surface.

"Continue, please. I need to hear the story behind this," he said, his voice shaking slightly.

"He called me on Tuesday. Remember the call that I took outside?"

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Edward nodded slowly, not removing his eyes from hers.

"He said that he had a business proposition for me that involved The Lost Treasures Foundation. He had already called and spoke with my publishing house's president to get the okay on the project, so I was sort of stuck between a rock and a hard place. He bribed someone to give out my phone number and called to ask me if I would meet him somewhere for coffee so that we could iron out the details. I didn't want to involve any of you just yet since I wanted to wait and see what he was playing at."

She watched his his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed.

"Well?" He asked. "What did he want?"

"Ultimately? He wants to get back into your mom's good graces because he and Diane miss her."

Edward scoffed and rolled his eyes.

"So, what? Are you going to let him use you to accomplish that?" He asked angrily.

She narrowed her eyes at him.

"No one is using me. Thanks to Marcus working a deal with Mr. Murray, I am pretty much obligated to helping him. He wants to pull off a major fundraiser for Lost Treasures in honor of his grandson. He hopes that not only will it add awareness and funds to Lost Treasures, but help mend ties with Esme. He wants to ask her to co-host it with him."

Edward pursed his lips in thought. "Did you tell him about being Jack's mom?"

Bella shook her head. "No, I didn't want to make that decision without you."

"But you went along and met him without talking to me?" He asked sarcastically.

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She sighed. "I told you, it was business. And utter curiosity. I'm telling you now because this is the first opportunity that we've had to be alone today. Please don't be angry about this. I didn't mean any harm."

He sighed and his eyes softened.

"You know it will get back to him eventually. I really don't want to have to deal with that when it happens," he sighed.

Bella observed him quietly.

"Why? He seems like such nice man. I mean, from what I gather, he did a bang up job of raising his daughter, but he's not solely to blame for that, is he? Is there some other piece of the puzzle that I'm missing?"

Edward shook his head. "Not really. There was just so much bad blood and mud slinging during the divorce. I had my demands and Victoria had hers. Neither one of us would back down or compromise. Marcus knew what she was doing was wrong, but he stuck with her and hired her the best lawyers money could buy. It ended up costing our family a lot financially and emotionally to get her out of our lives. My mom won't forgive or forget that, and I can't really blame her."

"He mentioned her in conversation, and I almost panicked," she laughed lightly, trying to break the tension. "Apparently he cut all ties with her and hasn't spoke to her in two years."

She looked up and saw surprise written all over his face.

"Huh," he murmured. "I guess he finally had enough of her as well."

Bella reached over and took his hand. Their gazes met and she smiled at him.

"I know you guys have been hurt, but don't you think that maybe he might be right? That it might just be time to heal the wounds that are still there, under the surface?"

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Her other hand caressed Jack's hair and she looked down at him and sighed. When looked back up, Edward was studying their clasped hands.

"Maybe you're right," he said softly. "If nothing else, having Jack come back into our lives, bringing you with him, has made me believe in miracles." He smiled slightly and shook his head.

"It definitely won't be overnight, but we can try."

Bella smiled brightly and squeezed his hand, happy that they were one step closer to healing the old wounds completely.

Edward smirked at her and cocked his head to the side.

"What?" She asked.

"You're the one who has to tell my mother, though."

Bella laughed and tossed a pillow at him, careful not to wake up Jack. Edward laughed loudly and then covered his mouth quickly when Jack stirred.

"Huh, maybe we should get him to bed," he said quietly, while standing up. He put his arms under the boy and easily picked him up. He started up the stairs and towards his room.

Bella sighed and leaned down to tuck him in. "I remember when it used to be that easy."

She straighten up and noticed the sad look on his face. She quickly realized what she had just said and placed a hand on his arm.

"Hey, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to remind you about everything and make you sad."

He shook his head. "No, don't be sorry. It's going to take some time, but it'll heal. I mean, it won't ever go away completely, but one day I'll be able to listen

Parachute

to you talk about the years I missed and be okay. I want to know everything I missed, I really do. It just hurts, you know?"

"I feel so selfish sometimes, considering what you lost, but I can't wish for it to have never happened. He's my whole life," she whispered, gazing down on the sleeping boy.

Edward took her by the hand and led her out of the room and down the hall to hers.

"Goodnight, Bella," he said as he wrapped her in a warm hug. She placed her head against his chest and breathed in deeply. She hugged him tightly before letting go.

"Good night, Edward," she whispered back and then watched him turn up the stairs to his room. She leaned against the doorway and smiled goofily before turning in for the night.

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Chapter 19

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Parachute

"You asked, Mom, and I'm only being honest. He's put both of you between a rock and a hard place. It's hardly Bella's fault."

Bella looked over at Edward and smiled in thanks for his defense of her.

Esme closed her eyes and sat back in her chair. She sighed and looked directly at Bella.

"I'm sorry, Bella. I know it's not your fault. I should expect this manipulation from him by now." She smiled sadly.

Bella's brow furrowed in thought.

"It's going to come out sooner or later that Jack is alive, and I'm his adoptive mother. I think we should get it over with sooner and let him know."

Esme looked at her incredulously.

"Are you joking? Please tell me you're joking."

Bella quickly glanced at Edward, who was staring at the floor, before looking back at Esme in surprise.

"What? He's going to find out. We should be proactive about this. I mean, he's Jack's grandfather, right?"

Esme's nostrils flared. "No, he's nothing to my grandson," she practically snarled. "Victoria gave up her parental rights during the divorce proceedings. Trust me; we paid a pretty penny for her signature. How's that for love? Signing away any rights to your child for a hundred grand?"

Esme scoffed and ran one of her hands through her caramel brown hair.

"Esme," Bella sighed. "I understand that there's bad blood between your families, but is it truly irreparable? He really sounded heartfelt. Victoria signed away her rights, but are you certain that Marcus and his wife had anything to

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do with that? I need to keep Jack's best interests at heart. I think telling Marcus before he finds out on his own and blows a gasket is a good idea."

"Are you implying that I do not? That jackass enabled Victoria and spoiled her rotten. He certainly didn't care about our friendship or his grandchild while he was hiring the best lawyers for his daughter to bleed Edward dry. He knew that Victoria was up to no good and in the wrong, but he still chose her side when the shit hit the fan."

"Wouldn't you have done the same thing?" Bella asked. "Even if you knew that your son was wrong, wouldn't you have stood by him? Could you just abandon him? I can't even imagine walking away from Jack if he needed me, right or wrong."

Esme glared at her. "Bella, you're young and naive. You haven't seen the worst that life has to offer. Sometimes, as a parent, you need to cut the strings."

Bella felt righteous indignation well up in her chest. "I haven't seen the worst that life has to offer? Are you kidding me? I found a toddler in a dirty alley. He was filthy and half-starved. I was beaten and almost raped by someone who was supposed to have loved me," she seethed in anger. She noticed Edward's head pop up at last declaration, but she chose to ignore him for now.

"My mother left us when I was a kid so she could whore around the country and "find herself." I can count the number of times that I've spoken to her over the past five years on one hand. My dad has been a cop for twenty years. Don't tell me that I'm naive."

Esme pursed her lips. "Poor choice of words on my part. My stance will not change. The Prestons don't deserve any contact with Jackson at all."

"I'm sorry to say it like this, but it's not your choice, Esme. It's mine and Edward's. Marcus deserves to know that his grandson is alive and well, at the very least," Bella implored.

Esme's eyes turned hard and her lips formed a frown.

Parachute

"Well, then, I guess there's nothing left to say, is there?" she said in a cold voice.

"Esme, please. I'm not trying to hurt you," Bella replied softly. She had expected this reaction, but it still stung.

"It's a little too late for that now, Bella."

Esme stood from her spot behind her desk and silently left the room.

Bella leaned forward in her chair and dropped her head in her hands. She heard Edward stand and felt his hand rub her back.

"That went well," he said softly. She looked up at him with wide eyes.

"Are you serious?"

He smiled sadly and shook his head.

"No, but I did tell you that this wasn't going to be easy. You and Esme are more alike than either of you realize. You're both fierce protectors of your family. Give her some time to cool down."

Bella nodded and sighed.

Edward smiled one last time before leaving Bella alone with her thoughts.

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The next few days passed in tension and awkwardness. Esme ignored Bella when she could. In the times when she couldn't, she was polite to the brink of being cold. Even though Bella felt that she was in the right, she still felt sorry

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that she had brought about a rift in the Cullen home. She spent more time sightseeing with Alice, Jasper, Jack and Edward. Emmett and Rosalie even accompanied them one day.

On Tuesday afternoon, Jack was out with Emmett and Edward, so it was just Esme and Bella home alone. Bella found herself standing outside of the study giving herself a pep talk. Jack had commented this morning on the silence between Bella and his grandmother. She had only smiled and reassured him that everything was all right. It was the first time that she had ever really lied to Jack, even if it was a small white lie. Bella wasn't even sure herself about where she stood with Esme at the moment, but she was about to draw a line in the sand. She raised her hand and knocked, before walking into the room.

Esme looked up from a stack of invoices that she had been going over and frowned when she saw Bella.

"Is there something you need, Bella?" she asked frostily.

Bella swallowed and walked over to stand in front of the desk. She looked straight in Esme's eyes and nodded.

"Yes, I need to speak you," she answered softly.

"Well, speak then." Esme raised an eyebrow and leaned back in chair to listen.

"First off, I wanted to apologize for this air of discomfort that has settled between us," Bella motioned her hand in the air between them, "I don't feel that I'm wrong in my position, and I can't apologize for standing my ground," she sighed.

Esme gazed at the younger girl blankly. Bella bit her lip and steeled her resolve.

"I think it would probably be best if Jack and I went to stay at a hotel for the time being. Since Alice and Jasper are leaving on Friday, we should be able to take over their room."

Parachute

Esme's eyes widened and her jaw dropped. Tears formed in her eyes and she let out a small cry.

"No, Bella, please don't! I'm sorry if I've been acting childish, but I can't bring myself to accept that Marcus is being genuine. Please don't leave!"

Bella rushed over to Esme's side and took her hands.

"Esme, I wasn't suggesting that to hurt you or get back at you for anything. I didn't think it was fair for any of us to be dealing with this awkwardness, especially Jack. I just wanted to give you some space."

Esme stood and pulled Bella into a hug. "Please don't go," she whispered again. Bella nodded and held her tight. She had started to think of Esme as another mother-figure in her life, and as much as she felt Esme was wrong in this situation, she couldn't help but feel her heart ache at the thought of Esme hurting.

"Can we please just settle this then? I hate having you mad at me," Bella said softly.

"Oh, Bella," Esme sighed, "I was never angry at you, just with the situation. I took it out on you, and I'm so sorry. You didn't deserve it."

Esme took hold of Bella's hand once again and led her over to the chairs on the other side of the desk. She took the seat across from Bella and wiped away an errant tear before continuing.

"I was upset and wrong. I knew exactly what you were trying to say, but I deliberately ignored it in order to hold onto my anger. If Edward had been in a similar situation, there would have been no way I could've turned my back on him. I honestly do believe though, that there is a time where you need cut ties in order to let your child fail or fall on their own. I'm not suggesting you abandon them completely, just make them aware that you won't always be there to bail them out."

Parachute

Bella gave Esme's hand an encouraging squeeze and gave her a small smile.

"Oh, Bella, you just don't understand," Esme sighed. "I'm sorry I called you naive the other day. I know you've dealt with your own demons, but they couldn't possibly compare to Victoria. That woman is pure evil. She's petty and spiteful and mean. I still can't believe that my sweet Jack shares part of her DNA. It's incomprehensible to me sometimes. She cut wounds into our family that are so deep, I'm not sure if they'll ever heal."

"I understand, Esme, but that shouldn't stop you from trying. I was the one who found Jack in that alley. I dealt with the nightmares and panic attacks and overall sadness. I helped him through that. I would give anything to be able to have felt all of that for him. I'm honestly afraid of what will happen if I ever cross paths with Victoria."

Esme looked at Bella in surprise.

"Oh, dear, don't worry about her. None of us will let her anywhere near you or Jack. That'll be a cold day in hell," she swore.

Bella shook her head.

"No, Esme, you misunderstand. I'm afraid *for* her. When I think about what she's done to Jack, and now knowing what she put Edward through, I just-" Bella broke off her sentence to rein in her fury. "My fingers itch to be wrapped around her throat. I want to simultaneously choke the life from her and make her know what it feels like to be lost, alone, and hungry for days like Jack was. I've never in my entire life been a violent person, but I dream of causing her pain in the worst way."

She averted her gaze from Esme's, feeling embarrassed for her emotional outburst. She felt a touch to her chin and looked up into Esme's grinning face.

"It's nice to know that we are definitely on the same page in regards to what matters most."

Parachute

Bella felt tears prick her eyes and nodded. Hell would be too good of a place for Victoria to end up in.

"What about the benefit, Esme? Will you take part in it?" Bella asked.

Esme nodded determinedly. "I don't know if Marcus is sincere or not, but I'm not going to let you deal with him alone, just in case he isn't on the up and up. Plus, he was totally right. I can't say no because of Jack. Lost Treasures benefits so many children and families that need help. We have our happy ending, too many others don't."

This time Bella let a tear slip down her cheek.

"I love you, Esme. Honestly and truly, I do." Bella sniffed and reached for a tissue from on top of the desk.

Esme reached out and enfolded Bella in her arms. "Oh, Bella, dear. I love you, too. I'm so sorry we've been at odds these past few days. I promise not to close off like that again. If we butt heads, we'll talk it out, okay?"

Bella nodded and felt like a giant weight had been lifted off of her shoulders.

"On a completely different note," Esme said, "would it be all right with you if Carlisle and I took Jack on an overnight trip to visit my parents? They're eager to see him. They live just outside of Milwaukee, which isn't very far from here."

"Of course, Esme. When were you thinking of going?"

"Well, I was thinking maybe Saturday, if that's okay with you? Carlisle is off this weekend, so we could drive up in the morning and drive back on Sunday. Is that okay?"

"I'm fine with it, but we should include Edward in the discussion as well."

Esme smirked and shook her head.

Parachute

"What?" Bella asked in confusion.

"I spoke with him earlier today and he told me the exact same thing. I don't know if you fully grasp what it means to me when I see how you two are developing with being co-parents. Victoria was never a mother to Jack, even when she was around. Edward was like a single parent. Sharing Jack with another parent, meaning you, is just as new to him as it is to you. But you guys are handling it with grace, and it leaves me in awe. Your relationship is complicated, yes, but so simple at the same time. It's like it was just meant to be."

Esme smiled serenely at Bella and squeezed one of her hands.

"What do you say about making some treats for when the guys get back?"

Bella smiled and nodded, glad that the tension between her and Esme was over.

When the boys returned a few hours later, Edward was pleasantly surprised to see Bella and his mom laughing and baking together in the kitchen. He smiled and kissed his mother on the cheek, before turning and doing the same to Bella. She felt her cheeks warm up and turned her face slightly to hide her blush. Esme gave her a knowing smirk and turned to face her son.

"Hello to you, my son. May I ask why I received a call earlier from my nephew asking when he was invited to dinner?"

Edward's eyes widened slightly and his eyes shot to Bella's confused face for a moment before shrugging at his mother.

"I may have mentioned that he should come over for dinner to catch up sometime. I wasn't specific."

Esme narrowed her eyes and saw right through his attempt at nonchalance.

"Well, good. I took the liberty of inviting him over tomorrow night."

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Esme smiled innocently at Edward's startled reaction and turned towards Bella.

"I believe you've already met my nephew, Demetri, right?" Esme asked. Bella nodded.

"He's your nephew?" Bella asked, surprised. Esme smiled.

"Yes, my sister, Carmen, who was also adopted, is his mother. Her husband, Eleazar, is originally from London, so the three of them have dual citizenships. They're living in London at the moment, actually. Tre and his older brother, Alistair, are partners in Edward's firm."

Bella looked over at Edward, who was uncomfortably staring at his feet.

"Oh really? Edward didn't mention that they were cousins. He seemed very nice," Bella spoke softly. Edward looked over at her and smiled sheepishly.

"Sorry," he responded, sounding very unapologetic. "I was excited to be spending the day with you and Jack."

He shot her his charming, crooked smile, and it felt like something poked her in the chest. She smiled slightly and looked away, trying to decipher these new and exciting feelings that Edward brought out of her.

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"So, we ended up stuffing Ed into the dryer to hide him from Emmett. We completely forgot about him until Aunt Esme asked about him. Our mum tanned our hides that night, but it was worth it."

Bella sat back and let out a few giggles. She had to admit that Demetri was absolutely charming and funny. Jack took to "Uncle" Tre almost immediately,

Parachute

captivated by the stories about his father and uncle when they were his age. Bella tried to stay quiet and observant for the most part, but Tre would find a way to pull her back into the conversation. She noticed Edward's face turn sour a few times, but she chalked it up to embarrassment, but she secretly hoped it was because of the way that Tre would lightly touch her hand from time to time.

She also noticed coy little looks that were passed between Esme and Carlisle. She chose to ignore those completely.

"So, Isabella," Demetri said, "what do you think about joining me for dinner on Friday night?"

Bella blinked and was frozen by the tingle that shivered down her spine when Tre spoke her name in his slight accent. It sounded way too nice. She toyed with her napkin for a moment and hesitated. She really didn't want to go out on a date with Tre while her heart was slowly, but surely becoming Edward's. She opened her mouth to let him down gently when Carlisle spoke up.

"I think that is a wonderful idea, Bella! Tre can show you some of Chicago's nightlife. I'm sure you'd have a great time," he said enthusiastically. Bella was surprised by Carlisle's eagerness.

"Um, I would, but I have some writing that I really should be getting-"

"Oh, Bella!" Esme interjected. "It'll be fine! Since Jack is coming with Carlisle and I on Saturday, you'll have the whole day and night free to get some writing done." Esme grinned and winked at Bella. Still somewhat confused, she turned to Tre and nodded.

"Sure?" she responded to him, but it came out more like a question than an answer. She heard a thump from across the table and saw that Edward's jaw was clenched and his fist was wrapped tightly around his fork, staring at his plate.

Demetri ignored his cousin's small tantrum and smiled brilliantly at Bella.

Parachute

"Wonderful. May I pick you up at seven, then?"

"Sure." Bella nodded. She smiled genuinely at him. He really was a sweet guy and she figured it wouldn't hurt her to have a little fun for once.

She couldn't help but notice the smirks shared between Esme and Carlisle when Edward stood and excused himself from the table.

Once Demetri had left, a short while later, Bella tucked Jack into bed and sat with him to read a little before he fell asleep. As she closed his door, she heard a familiar melody coming from the stairs leading to the third floor. Without thinking, she quickly found herself at the top of the stair and walking towards the open door where the music was coming from.

...

*Oh, got no reason, got not shame
Got no family I can blame
Just don't let me disappear
I'm 'a tell you everything*

...

*So tell me what you want to hear
Something that were like those years
Sick of all the insincere
So I'm gonna give all my secrets away*

...

*This time, don't need another perfect lie
Don't care if critics ever jump in line
I'm gonna give all my secrets away*

...

Parachute

She stood in the doorway and gave the room a cursory glance. The walls were a dark wood and the carpet was a deep blue that matched the drapes. There was a black leather couch facing the fall wall, which held an enormous flat screen television. Her gaze fell on the man lying in the middle of the immense bed, staring at the ceiling. Edward laid spread eagle in the middle of his dark brown and blue bedding, singing softly along with the song.

A soft smile touched her face. Even though she felt like she was intruding, it was nice to be able to see him when he was off guard. He was honestly the most handsome man she had ever encountered and she had never had a reaction to anyone else like she did with him. It absolutely baffled her at times. She reached up and lightly knocked on the door frame. His eyes quickly flew towards the door and he immediately sat up, silencing the music.

He ran his hands through his hair and gave her a small smile.

"Hey, Bella. Is everything okay? Do you need something?"

'Yes, you,' her subconscious sighed.

She shook her head. "No, I just followed the music. It's one of my favorites songs lately."

He scooted over to the side and patted the bed next to him. Bella walked over and sat in the offered spot. They both leaned up against the headboard and stretched their legs out in front of them. He picked up the small stereo remote and started the song again from the beginning.

Bella closed her eyes and let the music wash over her, in addition to feeling the warmth from Edward's body just inches away from hers. After a few minutes, the song ended and shifted into a Ray LaMontagne song and Bella smiled widely, not bothering to open her eyes.

"What's put that smile on your face?" She heard his velvet voice ask. She shivered from the sound.

Parachute

"Are you cold?" he asked. She shook her head slowly.

"No, I'm fine. This is an awesome song," she said softly.

"That it is," he chuckled.

...

*When you kissed my lips with my mouth so full of questions
It's my worried mind that you quiet
Place your hands on my face, close my eyes and say
Love is a poor man's food, don't prophesize*

...

*I could hold you in my arms
I could hold you forever
And I could hold you in my arms
I could hold you forever*

...

She opened her eyes and turned her head slightly to the right. She smiled into the deep green staring back at her. After a few moments, something more upbeat started to play and broke the spell that they were under. Bella cleared her throat and stood up.

"I should be heading to bed. Thanks for sharing," she said quietly.

He smiled at her. "Anytime, Bella. Good night."

She smiled and waved from the doorway. "Good night, Edward."

She continued to hum 'Hold You In My Arms' on her way back to her room and as she settled in for the night.

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Parachute

the larger couch. All three of them held different expressions on their faces. Esme looked proud, while Jack looked astonished. As hard as she tried, she couldn't quite make out Edward's expression.

Bella turned, showing off the black dress that showed slightly more cleavage than she was comfortable with.

"I knew it would fit perfect, Bella! You're going to knock his socks off!" Esme exclaimed.

Out of the corner of her eye, Bella noticed Edward's uncomfortable look at his mother's comment and wasn't sure what to make of it.

"Do you really have to go? Why can't you just stay home with me and Dad?" Jack frowned.

"Sorry, kiddo. I'm just going on a date. I'll be back," she laughed. Jack narrowed his eyes.

"Fine, but you better be back by ten, okay?"

Bella shook her head and laughed. She looked over at Edward when she heard his chuckle and gave him a questioning look. He smiled and shrugged.

A moment later, the doorbell rang and Esme excitedly pounced to answer the door.

Bella ran her hand over the front of her dress nervously. She looked up and noticed that Edward was staring at her.

"What? Do I look okay?"

He smiled somewhat sadly and stood up. He walked over and touched a strand of her hair.

"You look better than okay, Bella. You look beautiful," he whispered.

Parachute

'Ask me not to go,' she begged him silently with her eyes. No such words came from his mouth, so she turned and followed Esme to the foyer where Demetri stood waiting, looking very handsome in a black trousers and a dark blue dress shirt. He reached out for her hands and kissed them lightly.

"You look absolutely stunning, Bella. Thank you for accompanying me tonight."

Bella blushed and thanked him quietly before allowing him to lead her to his car.

Little over three hours later, Demetri was dropping Bella off back at the Cullen house. He had taken her to a lovely French restaurant and then they made their way to a small jazz club. They sat and chatted over drinks for a good hour. She decided that she liked Tre very much and that he was a great guy, but he wasn't Edward. So when he asked her if they could go out again, while they were standing on the doorstep, Bella had no choice but to decline, letting him down as easily as she could. Imagine her surprise when he leaned down and kissed her cheek before smirking at her.

"What's so amusing?" she asked, slightly indignant.

"I really hope my cousin opens his eyes soon. You obviously care very much about him, and I can see the same in him. I've known Edward for a long time, so I'd like to think that I understand him very well. If things go as I suspect they will, I'll be expecting a thank you call sometime this weekend, my dear."

She continued to gaze at him in confusion as he walked away, back to his car. Demetri gave her a quick wave before driving off. She shook herself out of her daze and opened the door. Inside, Jack and Edward were sitting side by side on the couch, both in their pajamas, waiting for her. She raised an eyebrow and put one of her hands on her hip.

"What's with the welcoming party?" she asked.

Jack stood up and folded his arms. He looked at the clock and then back at her.

"You're late, Ma."

She rolled her eyes and made a face at him.

"I'm also an adult, Little Bit."

"No, no, no," he argued, trying to keep the smile off of his face and failing miserably. "We made an agreement before you left. Ten o'clock. It's now ten-fifteen. I think you need a time out."

She moved quickly and grabbed him by the waist to tickle him.

"I'll show you a time out, mister!"

Edward watched with a smile on his face, although he looked slightly nervous when Bella and Jack calmed down and she met his gaze.

"Okay, Jack," he said, "I let you wait up for your mom, but now it's to bed with you."

Jack sighed. "Fine, I get the picture," he laughed. He went over to hug his father and whispered something in his ear. Edward responded by laughing lightly and ruffling Jack's hair. Jack wrapped his arms around Bella's waist and kissed her cheek.

"Good night, Mom. Night, Dad!" He called out as he ran up the stairs.

Bella smiled and shook her head. She heard Edward clear his throat and looked over at him. The nervous look was back on his face.

"What's wrong, Edward?" she asked, concerned.

"I'm actually not feeling too well, Bella."

"What happened?" she asked, her concern growing. "When did you start not feeling well?"

Parachute

"Last night at dinner, actually."

She took a few steps closer to him.

"Is there anything that I can do to help you feel better?"

He looked determinedly into her eyes and nodded, before smiling shyly.

"Yes, you can. Go out on a date with me?"

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AN:

As always, every review receives a teaser for the next chapter, which, can I tell you will be awesome? ;-)

Also, all music used is on the Blog, as well as people and other pics! Link is on my profile!

Just a quick note! If you Tweet, check out TwiFicTrivia on Twitter on Tuesdays at 9 pm EST. I play religiously, it's pretty awesome!

$$=)$$

Chapter 20

There is an **AN** at the end that I'm pretty sure you'll want to read. I promise to keep it short. ;-)

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The next morning, Jack lounged across the bed while he watched his mother scurry around the room, packing an overnight bag for him to take on the overnight trip to his great-grandparent's house. He watched her in amusement and laughed. Bella heard his giggle and looked over at him.

"What's so funny?" she asked in confusion. He shook his head and grinned.

"Why are you so amped up, Ma? Is it because I'm going away overnight or are you weirded out about going on a date with Dad?"

Bella's eyes widened and she stopped in the middle of folding a pair of jeans. She blinked at him several times before cocking her head slightly to the side.

"How did you know about that?"

He shrugged innocently. "Who do you think told him to man up and ask you out if he liked you?"

She raised an eyebrow and sat down on the bed across from Jack.

"Did he? I mean, did he say that he liked me?" she stammered out nervously.

Jack gave her an incredulous look and said, "Duh. Why do you think I told him to ask you out?"

Parachute

"Okay, Little Bit. Spill. Tell me what he said," she said excitedly.

Jack rolled his eyes. "Isn't this a girly thing to do, Mom? I have a rep to uphold, you know."

Bella swatted him lightly on his shoulder, causing Jack to grin widely.

"Hush, boy, and humor your mother."

"Sure, sure," he said, laughing lightly. "We were sitting and watching a movie last night while we were waiting for you to get home. Dad was acting all weird and his leg was bouncing up and down, like he was nervous. So, I asked him what was wrong, and he said nothing. A couple of minutes later he asked if I would be okay if he asked you out on a date."

Bella bit her lip to contain the huge smile that wanted to erupt across her face.

"What did you say?"

"I said that I thought it was awesome. If he liked you, then he should ask you out. At least I'd know that my Dad had honorable intentions."

Bella's eyebrows shot up. "Honorable intentions? Kid, you're eight, not eighty."

"Whatever. You're still my mom, and I want to know that you're safe," he responded, matter-of-factly.

Bella reached over and pulled her son into a tight hug.

"Thanks, Jack," she whispered. "I love you, kiddo."

"I know, Mom. I love you, too."

She pulled away; wiping her eyes, and went back to the task of packing his overnight bag. Once it was finished, Bella dropped it at the foot of his bed.

Parachute

"So," Jack spoke up after a minute, "what did you say when he asked you?"

Bella shook her head and laughed lightly, remembering the previous night.

...

He looked determinedly into her eyes and nodded, before smiling shyly.

"Yes, you can. Go out on a date with me?"

Bella's eyes widened in surprise. That wasn't the answer she had been expecting.

"Oh! Uh, um," she stammered nervously and backed away slightly.

She noticed his smile fall slightly and she scrambled to fix it, but he held up his hand when she started to speak.

"Look, you know what? Never mind. Bad timing on my part." He smiled ruefully and ran his hand through his hair nervously.

Her heart began to beat in a staccato rhythm, and she couldn't help but smile. She turned and started to walk towards the stairs, leaving the confused man staring at her back. When she reached the bottom, she turned and grinned at him.

"If you're still offering, I'd love to go out on a date with you, Edward," she said quietly, but loud enough that he could hear. He beamed at her and let out a nervous laugh.

"Would tomorrow be too soon?"

She shook her head no and continued to smile.

"Okay, then. Goodnight Bella," he replied with a smirk.

Parachute

"Goodnight, Edward."

...

"So, are you going to tell me or not?" Jack asked, impatiently.

"Nope." Bella laughed and shook her head. Jack grumbled playfully and rolled his eyes before breaking out into giggles.

"Come on, kiddo. Let's go have some breakfast before you head out."

She swung her arm around the boy's shoulder, and they left the room.

"You were right, you know," she said softly as they made their way downstairs.

"About what?" he asked.

"I'm anxious about you being away overnight and nervous about the date. I haven't been on many."

Jack shrugged. "I don't think there's anything to worry about. I'll be safe with MeMe and PopPop. They won't let anything bad happen to me again."

When they stopped at the foot of the staircase, Jack turned to Bella and gave her a warm smile.

"Plus, my dad likes you. I know you like him, too, so I'm pretty sure you guys will have fun. Stop worrying."

"How did you get so grown up? It's not fair, you were supposed to be my little boy forever," she teased.

Jack gave her a serious look and shook his head slightly.

"No matter what, I'll always be your little boy, Ma."

Parachute

She smiled affectionately at her son and wrapped him in a tight hug.

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After doing her best not to have an emotional breakdown when Carlisle and Esme drove off with Jack, Bella made her way back up to her room, wondering why she hadn't seen Edward as of yet. Jack had run up to say goodbye and came back down with a goofy smile on his face. She tried to get him to spill what he knew, but the kid wouldn't budge.

She stopped in front of her door and looked questioningly at the card taped to it. Her name was written in an elegant, flowing script.

...

Bella,

I've planned a few things out for today and I wanted to make sure that you'd be comfortable, so I had my mother pick out some clothes for you.

I hope that wasn't too impertinent of me, but I'd like to surprise you.

If you're not okay with that in anyway, I'm sorry and feel free to ignore the clothes.

Meet me downstairs at noon, please. I'm looking forward to today immensely.

XoX

Edward

...

Bella looked down at the card in her hand and glanced towards the third floor stairs. She smiled widely and stepped into her room, shutting the door behind her. She walked over to the bed, where a knee-length brown gypsy-style skirt laid out next to a plum colored halter top. A pair of soft-looking brown boots sat on the floor in front of the night table.

She felt nerves try to usurp the anticipation building in her belly, and she pushed them down. She was looking forward to this and wasn't about to let anything ruin it. She eagerly jumped into the shower to start getting ready. Thirty minutes later, she was standing in front of a full size mirror, admiring the outfit that Esme had put together. The boots were surprisingly as comfortable as they looked and the skirt was a perfect length. She pulled her hair back into a loose pony tail and applied some lip gloss.

She nodded to her reflection and then turned to grab her purse, making sure her wallet and phone were safely tucked inside. She took a deep breath and glanced at the clock on the wall. 11:45. Not wanting to appear too eager by rushing down there early, she sat down with her laptop and checked a few emails. She opened one from Tanya and noticed that it was a long one, so she looked at the time and jumped up seeing that it was 12:03.

She ran her hand downwards and smoothed out the fabric of the skirt before heading downstairs. The butterflies in her stomach intensified with each step that she took. When she reached the bottom, her eyes locked with Edward's eager ones. He quickly stood from his seat on the couch and grinned. She took in his appearance and smiled. He was wearing dark wash jeans and blue plaid short-sleeved shirt, with a white tee peeking out from underneath.

Edward picked up a wicker basket with one hand and walked over to her, holding out his other for her to take. She placed her hand gently in his and bit her lip slightly.

"Shall we?" he asked, pulling her gently towards the door. She nodded and followed him willingly. He hesitated when they reached her car and glanced at

her sheepishly.

"Do you mind if take Nevaeh? If you do, we can take mine. It's not a problem." He gestured towards a black Audi R8 that was parked off to the side of the house. She shrugged and tossed him her keys.

"I don't mind. It's perfect weather for the top down," she responded with a smirk. He shook his head and laughed as they got settled into their seats.

"So," she began to ask, "are you going to tell me where we're going yet?"

"We're going to the Grant Park Music Festival in Millennium Park. They're having an Independence Day concert at the Pavilion. I thought that maybe afterwards we could walk around the park and have a picnic."

He gestured to the basket that he had placed on the back seat. She smiled widely and bounced a little in her seat.

"That sounds completely awesome, Edward."

...

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He smiled happily and started their drive into the city. Just under two hours later, they were nestled in their seats, listening to the final performances of the day for the orchestra. Bella sighed and smiled, her eyes closed and facing the sky, as the classical notes of Tchaikovsky's 1812 Overture swirled around the air. She felt Edward's hand gently begin to play with her hair and she bit her lip to stifle a sigh. He had been nothing short of amazing today, and she didn't want their date to come to a close any time soon.

She opened her eyes and turned her face slightly to the left. Edward's fingers still held onto a strand of hair as he smiled down at her.

Parachute

"Enjoying the concert?" he asked, in a low husky voice. She smiled widely and nodded happily.

"I'm glad. It's been amazing just spending time with you today, Bella. Thank you for coming out with me."

She reached out to squeeze his free hand and sighed once again. "It's been really nice. We still have the rest of the afternoon, right?"

He nodded. "Yes, ma'am. This is over at 2:30, so I was thinking a late lunch, and then a walk around the park. After that, we can play it by ear, okay?"

She nestled her head onto his shoulder and hummed her agreement. When the concert was finished, they surprisingly found a quiet spot under a large tree. Edward took a blanket out of the basket and spread it on the ground. Bella grinned and sat cross-legged while he started to unpack the food. There were a few containers spread about.

"What did you bring, Prince Charming?"

Edward looked up at her with a surprised look.

"You think I'm charming?" he asked with a smirk. She felt her face heat up, and she started to stammer.

"Uh, no, I mean, yes, but that's not what I meant."

She groaned and placed her head in her hands. She felt electricity as his fingers wrapped around hers to pull them away from her face. She looked up into his eyes and saw him smiling warmly at her.

"I'm sorry, Bella. I didn't mean to fluster you. Although your blush is completely entrancing," he said quietly, running a finger over her cheek. She shuddered slightly his finger's path felt burned upon her skin. She watched his tongue as it darted over his top lip, dampening it slightly.

Parachute

He pulled back and cleared his throat.

"For your dining pleasure, Ms. Swan, we have fruit, pasta salad, water, chips and PB&J for the main course." He winked at her.

"Well, that sounds impressive Mr. Cullen. Did you do this all by yourself?"

She watched his cheeks color slightly and his Adam's apple bob as he swallowed nervously.

"Erm, not exactly. Esme made the pasta salad and Jack made the sandwiches. He said they were your favorite. I just packed everything up."

He smiled sheepishly and shrugged when she laughed. She placed her hand on his forearm and smiled.

"This is really sweet, no matter who made what."

He nodded and looked down her hand on his arm shyly. She pulled away and grabbed a bottle of water and a sandwich.

"So, tell me more about Edward," she said as she got more comfortable.

He popped an olive in his mouth and chewed slowly as he gathered his thoughts.

"There's honestly not that much more to me than what you already know. I'm a workaholic who took the loss of his son very poorly. I cut myself off from everyone and everything that I possibly could." He sighed. "I honestly can't remember what life was like before then sometimes. It's sad because even though my relationship with Victoria was strained at the time, those three years with Jack were the best years of my life. I boxed those memories up and pushed them away to help ease the pain. I need to work on pulling them back at some point."

"Sorry, this isn't first date material," he laughed and smiled sadly.

Parachute

Bella shook her head.

"No, it's perfect," Bella argued quietly. "It's who you are. None of this is normal in case you haven't realized. You're on a date with your son's adopted mother, who you've only known for a few weeks."

He cocked his head to the side slightly.

"You don't have to say that, you know."

She gave him a quizzical look. "What do you mean?"

"Say you're his adopted mother. I know the situation can be awkward at times, but I think we've established that it is what it is. You're his mom, and no one can change that in his eyes. Not that I would even want to. You've been a wonderful mother to him and he's grown up so well."

He gazed at her intensely before dropping his gaze to the blanket and tracing a pattern on it.

"Have you - I mean, when was the last time you've seen Victoria?" she asked, hesitantly.

His brow furrowed as he thought.

"Two and a half years ago. The day we finalized our divorce."

Bella looked at him in shock. He nodded.

"Yes, Bella, she dragged out our divorce for almost two years, refusing to sign over one issue, and once we ironed that out, she brought up another one. Every time I had to see her face, it was like I was consumed in this fiery pit of hell. I saw Jack and the girl I used to know, but I also saw her betrayal and maliciousness. A part of me blamed her for Jack's disappearance, and then another part of me berated myself for thinking that. If I had had any inkling of what she had actually done, I would've escorted her to her maker in person."

Parachute

She watched his jaw clench and she wanted nothing more than to change the topic of conversation, but there still a question she need to ask.

She glanced away and gathered up her courage.

"What do you think will happen when Marcus finds out that Jack is alive? Will he tell her?"

Edward shook his head. "I don't know, Bella. If he told you the truth about not seeing her in years, then he might have finally come to his senses. We'll just have to cross that bridge when we get there."

Their eyes met, and he must have seen her worry because he reached out to hold her hand.

"Don't worry about her, Bella. She signed away her parental rights to him when we finalized the divorce. She never really wanted to be a mother anyway. I look back on the signs and get so pissed at myself for not seeing it sooner."

"You can't beat yourself up, Edward. Look at it this way, if you had done something sooner, it may still have ended badly for Jack, being in the middle of custody battle. She still might have lost him, but without me to find him."

His eyes shot to hers in horror. "I can't, I can't even think about something like that, Bella. It makes my chest hurt."

"I know, I hate thinking about it, too, but sometimes it can't be helped. You just need to focus on the here and now. Look at the positives. Your son is alive and healthy; happy and loved. The whole future is ahead of us now."

His eyes locked with hers and he smiled.

"Thank you, Bella. You'll never know how much I appreciate everything you've done."

Parachute

She smiled back at him and shook her head. "I owe you more thanks than you realize, Edward."

He shot her a quizzical look. Bella smiled serenely.

"Jack."

He nodded in understanding. No other words were needed.

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When they were finished up lunch, they packed up and dropped the basket off at the car before taking a stroll around the enormous park, hand in hand. Trying to stay away from any heavy topics, they shared stories about their respective childhoods. Hours flew by and before either of them knew it, it was almost five o'clock, so they decided to head back home. When they arrived at the house, Edward stowed the leftover food in the fridge and put the basket away. He pulled a bottle of wine from the fridge and gestured towards her.

"Would you like a glass, Bella?"

"Yes, please," she replied softly.

"Why don't you get comfortable in the living room, and I'll bring them out?"

She nodded and made her way over to the large comfy couch. She sat down and pulled off her boots, waving her feet back and forth to air them out before Edward returned from the kitchen. The last thing she wanted was for a funky smell to ruin the mood. She rolled her eyes and internally scoffed at herself for her cheesiness. She curled her legs under her and leaned back against the couch just as Edward came into the room carrying the glasses in one hand and plate of cheese with crackers in the other. She carefully took hold of the glasses and

he set the plate on the table.

The two of them sat and chatted for awhile before Edward took their glasses and sat them on the table.

"Dance with me?" he asked quietly. She smiled shyly.

"Um, I'm kind of uncoordinated. Plus there's no music."

He smirked and pulled out his iPhone and scrolled through a playlist before choosing a song. She smiled widely when she recognized "Unintended" by Muse begin to play. She placed her hand in his and he pulled her close, her arms automatically coming to rest on his shoulders and they began to sway.

...

"You could be my unintended

Choice to live my life extended

You could be the one I'll always love

You could be the one who listens to my deepest inquisitions

You could be the one I'll always love"

...

"May I ask you a question?" he inquired softly.

"Sure."

"What did you mean back when you said that you were attacked?"

She played with the collar of his shirt nervously before starting to speak.

Parachute

"My boyfriend at the time wasn't happy that we hadn't been physical yet, so he started sleeping with my step-sister, Leah, on the side. I mean, somewhere inside, I knew that I didn't love him the way that I should, so it never felt right to take that step with him. Looking back on things, I'm very glad that I didn't, even if it led me to be completely inexperienced, in that way, to this day."

She felt him tense up and looked into his eyes that were full of emotion. His jaw was clenched and his eyes were darkly angry.

She paused and swallowed before continuing. "I decided to break up with him, and he wasn't happy about that, so he tried to force me to comply, including roughing me up physically. Thankfully, Leah showed up and helped me get home. My dad had him arrested, and some of the guys that were friends with him beat the crap out of him when they found out what happened. After that, I pretty much stayed away from the opposite sex, except occasionally going out on dates that Alice had set up."

...

"First there was the one who challenged

All my dreams and all my balance

She could never be as good as you"

...

"Where is he now, Bella?" he ground out between clenched teeth. She started to rub his shoulders in comfort and she felt him relax marginally.

"I don't know, but I have a guess. My dad went into over-protective mode and has people keeping tabs on him."

His eyes flashed in annoyance. "Over-protective? He loves you, Bella, and wants you safe. I would have done the same thing. What would you have done if it was Jack that had been hurt by someone?" he asked.

Parachute

Her heart started to race and her eyes widened, but she answered honestly and without any hesitation.

"I'd find the bastard and kill them."

He chuckled slightly and raised one of his eyebrows. She smiled and shook her head.

"I see what you mean," she laughed. "I guess I never really looked at it from my dad's point of view."

After a moment, he spoke again.

"So, uh, regarding what you said earlier about not, erm, being with anyone, do you mean that you're a, um, virgin?" He stumbled over his words slightly.

She blushed and ducked her head before mumbling yes. He reached up and nudged her chin.

"Don't be embarrassed. It's nothing to be ashamed of. I'm not that much ahead of you. I've only been with Victoria, and the last time was almost six years ago."

He smiled kindly at her and tucked a piece of hair behind her ear.

...

" I'll be there as soon as I can

But I'm busy mending broken pieces of the life I had before "

...

She moved closer to him and rested her head against his chest as they continued to sway together.

Parachute

The song slowed and came to a stop, but Edward's arms did not let her go. She pulled back and gazed into his deep green eyes, falling into their depths. Emotions flickered across them that she couldn't quite comprehend. The song's beat soon turned deep and dark. A woman's soulful voice washed over them like silk.

...

"I was a heavy heart to carry

My beloved was weighed down

My arms around his neck

My fingers laced a crown"

...

As they continued to sway, Bella's fingers flexed through his hair as one of his hands pressed into the small of her back, bringing her close to him. His other hand worked its way into her hair, at the base of her neck and lowered his face to hers.

"I just want to try something," he whispered. "Stay very still."

Her heart started to beat erratically and fire spread through her veins as his lips gently touched hers and slowly began to move.

...

"And is it worth the wait

All this killing time?

Are you strong enough to stand

Protecting both your heart and mine?"

...

After what felt like eons, his tongue swept lightly across her bottom lip, and she opened herself up willingly, wanting to feel more of the emotion that he was evoking in her. Their kiss grew more insistent as their lips sucked and nipped at each other's, almost with abandon as their passion grew.

Bella let out a startled gasp as he pulled her tightly against him. She could feel the bulge of his erection press into her stomach. His fingers gently massaged her neck as his lips continued to work on hers. She had never felt anything like this. Her kisses with Jake had been sloppy and dull in comparison. Her heart had never beaten like this for anyone but Edward. He had changed her and made her open up to him more than she had ever thought was possible. For the first time in five years, she was thinking about herself and not Jack. She was allowing herself to feel and experience.

...

"I was a heavy heart to carry

But he never let me down

When he held me in his arms

My feet never touched the ground"

...

Gasping for breath, they pulled apart from each other slightly. Edward rested his forehead against hers and opened his eyes.

"Wow," he whispered, his gaze never leaving hers. She grinned from ear to ear.

"Wow, indeed."

Parachute

He leaned back in and placed another small kiss on her lips and her whole body sighed against him. He pulled her head against his chest and held her close.

"I don't think I've ever felt like this before, Bella. You make my head spin and my chest ache, just by smiling at me."

She looked up at him in surprise. "Really?" she asked incredulously. Not that she was unaware of his attraction to her anymore, but it still somewhat shocked her to know that his feelings were so in tune with hers. He smiled shyly.

"Yes, Bella, absolutely," he whispered.

"I feel exactly the same," she said softly. He hugged her tightly and sighed against her forehead. A moment later, her stomach growled and he laughed.

"How does pizza and a movie sound?" he asked. She beamed up at him and nodded.

"That sounds completely perfect."

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Music used in this chapter: **Unintended by Muse** and **Heavy In Your Arms by Florence & The Machine**.

AN:

First off, I love each and everyone of you. Whether you read and review or just read. You still rock!

Secondly, if everything goes as planned, I'm going to be writing my behind off to get you guys another update on Tuesday, in addition to the Friday one. I'm

Parachute

writing a JackPOV for the Fandom for Preemies compilation and I'd like to story to be caught up to it by the time it's available in November. It might not happen, but there's a good chance for it.

Chapter 21

AN: This chapter is a little shorter than normal, but look at it this way, you're not only getting it early, but Friday will have another regular chapter. Thanks to Stratan who Beta'd this so quickly!

...

Here is where we gain a little bit in regards to the story's M rating. There is a Lime in the early part of this chapter. Read the **AN** at the end of the chapter for more info on the future occurrence of anything else of the citrus variety. =)

...

[illegible]

...

Bella stretched like a cat as she woke up and curled around her pillow, sighing. She shifted deeper into the comfortable bed, feeling the softness of the sheets brush against her bare legs. When that thought registered with her fully, she sat up quickly and flung the sheets from her body. She glanced down with wide eyes and noticed that she was clad only in her purple shirt and dark pink boy shorts. Her mind started working at a furious speed trying to remember getting into bed, but the last thing she recalled was the first thirty minutes of *The Proposal* with Edward.

After their phenomenal kiss, Edward had ordered pizza, and they continued to chat over wine until their dinner came. After everything was cleaned up, they curled up together on the couch to watch the movie. She ran her fingers through her hair trying desperately to recall how she had gotten in bed last night. Her only conclusion was that Edward had carried her to bed and undressed her to make her comfortable. Her cheeks reddened at the thought of him seeing her so exposed. She shook her head and hopped out of bed to pick out an outfit for the day.

Parachute

In the bathroom, she turned on the shower and stripped off her clothes to step under the hot spray. She sighed and let the heat relax the tense muscles in her back. She lathered and rinsed her hair with shampoo and conditioner, trying to unravel the knots that had accumulated in her sleep.

As she soaped up her body, she couldn't help but let her thoughts wander back to that awesome kiss from last night. She had neverbefore felt desire like what he inspired in her; it wasan all -consuming and completely new experience. Remembering the electric feeling of his hands on her body as they twirled around the living room, she slowly ran her hands over her wet skin. She ran one hand down her stomach while the other cupped and gently squeezed one of her breasts. Her hand slipped across her mound and between her wet lips as she recalled his blazing eyes and the way his lips felt against hers. She felt the slow, yet steady burn in her abdomen, much like the tightening of a coil. It continued to wind, shooting her desire through the roof. Not long afterwards, she found herself climaxing and calling out his name softly.

She placed one hand against the shower wall to steady herself and calm her unsteady breaths. Once she was back in control of her body, she quickly finished her shower and got dressed. She spared a glance at her laptop, remembering that she had yet to read Tanya's email. Just as she was about to reach for it, her stomach growled loudly and she opted to get some breakfast in her first.

Edward was sitting at the kitchen island with a cup of coffee reading a newspaper when she entered the room. Thoughts of what she had done just shortly before raced through her head and her cheeks blazed. He looked up and his eyes lit up when he saw her.

"Good morning, Bella." He grinned. "Did you rest well?"

She smiled and bit her lip in embarrassment. "Yes, I slept well. Yourself?"

"One of the best nights ever."

Parachute

She nodded shyly and pulled down a bowl for cereal. She sat next to him and started to eat some Lucky Charms. After a few minutes of silence, she felt his eyes on her. She raised her eyes and shot him a questioning look.

"What?" she asked. He shook his head and looked away, smiling.

She finished her breakfast and washed the bowl out in the sink. Before her nerves got the better of her, Bella turned to face Edward and rested her hip against the counter.

"Hey, Edward?"

He looked up and smiled gently at her. "Yeah?"

"Last night, did you carry me upstairs?"

He nodded. "Yes, I didn't want to wake you."

She swallowed nervously and shifted her weight from one foot to the other, looking downward.

"Did you, uh, undress me as well?" She felt her face heat up in embarrassment. She chanced a glance at his face. His eyes were widened in surprise and he blinked at her.

"Um, no, I didn't. You did that all on your own."

"Huh? I- I don't recall that," she responded warily, to which he smiled wickedly.

"Well, after I set you down on the bed, you started to slide off your skirt, getting comfortable I presumed. I closed my eyes and backed out of the room."

She closed her eyes and groaned in mortification. She heard his chair scrape against the floor and she assumed that he was escaping. She was taken by surprise when she felt his arms brush hers on either side of her body, as he

Parachute

leaned against the counter behind her, effectively creating a cage. She opened her eyes and was met with his mirth-filled ones.

"Or did I?" he asked softly before dipping his head and kissing her slowly. Her blood began to sing and rush through her veins. Her hands ran their way up his chest through no conscious thought of her own.

The slamming of the front door and voice of their son pulled them apart.

"Mom! Dad! We're home!"

Edward's eyes danced with happiness as he deftly stepped away from her. "I assume that we should talk about this between the two of us," he motioned between their bodies, "before we talk about it with him?"

Bella nodded, still in a daze.

"Okay," he said quietly. He sat back down in his previous seat right before Jack came barreling into the kitchen.

"There you are, Ma!"

The boy walked over and wrapped his arms around her waist.

"Oh, Jack, I missed you, kiddo," she murmured against his hair.

"Me, too, Mom."

Jack pulled away and went to give Edward a hug as Esme and Carlisle stepped into the kitchen. Carlisle winked at her while Esme looked excited. She sat down in the chair that Bella had previously vacated and tapped her fingers on the marble.

"So? How did the date go?" she asked excitedly. Her husband stepped up behind her and rubbed her shoulders.

Parachute

"Es, let's not get ahead of ourselves, shall we?" he asked with laughter in his voice. Edward rolled his eyes playfully at his mother before smiling at Bella.

"It was very nice, Mom. The music was great and the company was stunning. We learned a good deal more about each other," he responded, keeping his eyes locked with Bella's the entire time.

"Cool," Jack piped in. "Did you have fun, Mom?"

She glanced at her son and nodded. "Yeah, I did. It was a lot of fun."

Esme looked between Edward and Bella, beaming.

"Awesome. I'm glad you had fun. You deserve it," Jack said as he leaned back on the counter next to Bella. She put her arm around his shoulder and laughed.

"Thanks, kid."

"No problem. Did you know that my Great Gran is nuts? Like, really crazy?"

Bella's eyes widened. "Jack! That's rude!"

Her eyes shot towards Esme and was surprised to see the older woman shaking with laughter.

"No, Bella, it's okay. My mom is certifiable. In a good way, of course."

Bella shot the older woman a confused look and Esme only shook her head in response.

"Seriously, Ma, she was so funny. I've never met an old person like her before. Most old people are cranky, but she was totally cool."

Bella hung her head in embarrassment. "Jack, stop calling people old. It's not very nice."

Parachute

He cocked his head and gave her a quizzical look. "But, she's old. Why can't I call her old?"

Edward, taking pity on poor Bella, caught Jack's eye and motioned towards the door.

"Come on, Jack. Let's take a walk and I'll try to explain, okay?"

Jack shrugged and followed Edward out of the room. Carlisle smiled and leaned forward to kiss Esme on the forehead.

"I'll be in the study if you need me, wife. See you later, Bella," he said as he left the room.

Esme eyed Bella for a moment before sighing and standing up. She opened a cabinet and pulled out a coffee mug.

"I think I'm going to need this."

A few minutes later, the two women were seated side by side, deep in conversation.

"I've set up a meeting with Marcus and Diane for Tuesday," Esme said quietly. Bella's eyes widened, surprised that Esme had not only set up a meeting with the Prestons, but at how quickly it would be occurring.

"So soon?" Bella asked. Esme nodded.

"We need to work things out for the Gala, right? The sooner the better. It's up to you and Edward, but I think you were right about telling them about Jack. I can only imagine the scene he'd cause if he found out that we were intentionally deceiving him. As much as I don't like the idea about Marcus being in Jack's life, I realize now that it would be sinking to Victoria's level if we acted dishonestly."

Bella placed her hand on the older woman's shoulder and squeezed it gently.

Parachute

"For what it's worth, it's the right thing to do."

Esme smiled sadly, before jumping slightly when the front door slammed open once again.

"MOM! We're here!" Emmett's loud voice carried through the house.

Bella let out a chuckle. "What is it with these Cullen boys and announcing their arrival?"

Esme laughed and shook her head.

"We're in the kitchen, Em!" she called out in response. A moment later, Rosalie walked into the kitchen. She smiled warmly at Bella and Esme.

"Good morning, ladies. Emmett is in the living room getting lectured by his father."

Esme laughed and jumped up. "This I've got to see."

Bella and Rosalie followed her into the living room to see Edward and Jack sitting on the couch, watching in amusement as Carlisle scolded Emmett.

Emmett looked over and smiled widely at Bella, rushing over to give her a hug. The gesture surprised her until she heard Carlisle speak up.

"Don't think that running to Bella will get you out of this, Emmett."

Em winked at Bella before turning to face his father again.

"I know, Dad. I'm sorry for barging in here like a madman. I promise to act my age in the future."

Carlisle sighed and shook his head, but everyone could see him fighting a smile.

Parachute

Jack noticed his mother and jumped up to talk to her.

"Hey, Mom? PopPop was just telling Dad that he'd like us to come with them to a Fourth of July picnic that they're going to. Can we? Please?"

He batted his eyes and pouted out his bottom lip at her, but she only rolled her eyes and laughed.

"The Puss-in-Boots look doesn't work on me, kiddo."

Bella turned towards Carlisle. "What's this about a picnic?"

The older man smiled warmly. "The hospital where I work holds a Fourth of July picnic every year. Edward usually stays home, but we'd love it if all of you could come with us this year."

Her eyes cut towards Edward, who was looking at her expectantly.

"Do you want to go?" she asked.

He nodded.

"With us?"

He rolled his eyes. "No, Bella, I thought maybe I'd go with Rosalie and leave Emmett with you."

"Actually, Edward," Rose responded, her lips twitching while she tried not to smile, "I'd rather go with Bella and leave you with Emmett."

"Aww, c'mon, babe! You can't leave me with the stiff," Emmett whined.

"Well, I'm sure Bella doesn't go barging into her mother's house acting like a savage," she teased her husband.

Parachute

Bella stiffened and looked down at the floor reflexively. She felt a soft touch on her hand and looked over to see Jack smiling at her in comfort.

"Bella?" Rose asked quietly. Bella turned to see her watching her hesitantly.

"Is everything okay?"

Bella nodded. "Yeah, sorry. Um, my mom and I don't exactly have that kind of relationship."

Rosalie shot her a confused look. "What do you mean?"

"She's mean," Jack said quietly. Everyone turned towards the boy, whose eyes were hard and cold. "Renee left her like *she* did me. At least Renee left Mom with her dad, not all alone."

Bella felt tears sting her eyes and she knelt down in front of her son.

"Hey," she whispered to him, "are you okay?"

Jack blinked and his expression warmed up. "Sorry, Mom."

"Don't be sorry, kiddo. I just want to know if you're okay."

He nodded and smiled shakily. "Yeah, I'm cool."

Emmett clapped his hands together jubilantly, trying to lighten the mood.

"So, who's ready for food and fireworks? I know I am!"

Edward and Esme groaned, while Carlisle sighed.

"Let me go grab my medical bag," he responded, before heading upstairs.

"Hey!" Emmett protested. "I'm not that bad."

Parachute

Esme put her hands on her hips and arched an eyebrow.

"Really?" she asked. "What about that time when your father had to stitch part of your pinky back on?"

Jack's eyes widened and he looked up at his uncle in awe.

Emmett's cheeks pinkened. "That was only once!"

Esme shook her head. "Once is more than enough, dear. We're not even counting the other times you've had me tearing my hair out."

Edward put his head in his hands, shaking in silent laughter. Bella glanced around the room and noticed that the others were watching him with a kind of awe. It was a startling reminder that he had been only surviving these past few years, not living.

Rose hooked her arm through Bella's. "Come on, let's go get you ready."

Bella laughed and followed Rose's lead. "Sure, why not?"

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Bella sat at a long picnic table, sandwiched between Carlisle and Esme as she watched Edward, Emmett and Jack toss around a football with a few other men and their children. Her mind worked in overtime and every 'what-if' she could think of swirled around in her head. She knew without a doubt that she was falling in love with Edward. There was a very good possibility that he was experiencing the same thing.

What if he wasn't?

Parachute

What if his affections were just because he's been lonely for so long?

What if his feelings were only because of the fact that she took care of his son?

What if they weren't?

What would happen at the end of the summer?

What would happen if they moved to Chicago?

What if they stayed in Washington?

Would the Cullens come for regular visits?

Or would they want Jack to live with them?

She honestly felt that they would never pull her apart from Jack, but how would they balance everything out?

Now that she had fallen in adoration with the Cullen clan, she couldn't imagine leaving them. But on the same token, she couldn't imagine leaving her own family and friends behind. The questions whirled around like a tornado, forcing her to blink back tears at their sudden force. She felt a nudge and turned to Esme, who was smiling at her.

"Hey, no frowning," she half-whispered. "Try to enjoy the day, sweetie."

Bella shook her head and smiled sadly. "I'm sorry, Esme. Too many thoughts running around in my head. I don't know what I'm doing."

Esme laughed lightly. "Oh, sweetheart! None of us know what we're doing. Life's a dance that we learn as we go. Everything will work out for the best, you'll see."

"How can you be so sure, Esme? I can't see how this will end happily."

Parachute

Bella sniffed and looked down at her plate.

"How can I not, Bella? Fate stepped in and brought you to love and keep Jack safe. Fate brought you and Jack back to us. I can't help but be hopeful for the future, especially knowing that my grandson is alive and safe and loved."

Bella blinked away the last of her tears and nodded, determined to enjoy the rest of the day.

She looked up just in time to see a small red-headed girl throw herself into Edward's arms. She gasped and her heart started to pound.

"Esme!" she whisper-yelled. Esme looked over at Bella in surprise.

"What's wrong?"

Bella nodded in the hugging couple's direction. "Who is she?"

Esme turned her head and her eyes narrowed while pursing her lips. "Irina."

Bella's eyes widened and she searched for Jack. She found him standing a few feet away, with Emmett whispering in his ear. She watched as Jack nodded and started making his way over to her.

He looked confused as he sat down across from her.

"Uncle Em said to come over here and chill out while he tries to figure out what's going on. He said the chick was my aunt and he wasn't sure how Dad wanted to play this out."

Jack leaned back slightly and shook his head. "I really didn't understand half of what he said, though."

Bella couldn't help but crack a smile. Jack was too cute sometimes.

Parachute

"He meant that he wasn't sure if your dad wanted Irina to know about you yet. We were planning on tell your other grandparents on Tuesday. So, if she finds out now, then she might tell Marcus and Diane, who would be very upset."

Jack nodded thoughtfully.

"I get it, but what if I don't like them? What if I meet them, and all I can see is Victoria?"

Bella raised an eyebrow. "Since when do you call her by her name?"

"I'm tired of saying 'her' all of the time, it gets confusing. She's not my mom, you are, so I can't call her that. So, I'm left with her name. Know what I mean?"

Bella gazed at her son, who was wise beyond his years, and sighed.

"Yeah, I know what you mean."

Carlisle crossed his arms on the table and leaned down on them.

"If you don't like them or if they scare you, all you have to do is tell one of us. I hope you give them at least a chance, though. They're your grandparents, too, and they love you very much."

Jack's eyes flashed angrily towards his grandfather. "Love me? Like their daughter did?"

The look of sympathy on Carlisle's face melted the boy's ire immediately.

"I'm sorry, PopPop. I promise I'll give them a chance and to let you guys know if I get upset."

Esme reached over to take jack's hand and squeeze it. She looked over his shoulder and smiled.

"It's alright, baby. Here comes your dad to let us know what's up."

Parachute

Edward sat down next to his son, a smile still on his face. Esme arched a brow.

"I take it that everything went well?"

He nodded. "Yeah, Rini just wanted to say hello. I told her that she should come to the meeting on Tuesday with her parents, though."

Jack scrunched his face up and turned towards his father.

"I'm confused. Why do you like her, but not Victoria or my grandparents?"

Edward's eyes widened and he looked at his son in surprise.

"Well, the reason I dislike Vic should go without saying. She hurt you and lost you. That's unforgivable. Marcus and Diane are a different story. It's complicated, but Rini was just a kid herself when you disappeared. Even though your mom and I didn't work out, I've always thought of her like a little sister."

Jack swallowed visibly. "Please don't call her that."

"Don't call who what?" Edward asked.

"Victoria. Please don't call her my mother."

Edward shot a worried glance at Bella before nodding. "Okay, I'm sorry. I'm sure that's painful for you, son."

"Thanks," Jack replied quietly.

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Parachute

Later that night, everyone found themselves leaning back against the grass watching a magnificent fireworks display. Jack was nestled in between Bella and Edward, Ooh'ing and Ahh'ing excitedly. She felt something brush her shoulder and she looked over to find Edward gazing at her and his fingers playing with her hair. He smiled beautifully before looking back up at the sky, his hand still resting on her shoulder.

Her heart started to race and she closed her eyes, relishing in the feel of his touch. She wanted nothing more than to feel it in other places. Just the thought of his fingers replacing hers in the shower earlier had her blushing furiously. She was extremely thankful for the darkness surrounding them. Still, the thoughts were extremely welcomed.

Just about an hour later, the five of them pulled up in front of the house. Jack was out cold, so Edward lifted him easily into his arms while Bella, Esme and Carlisle made their way to the front door. The light from overhead on the porch illuminated a shadow, which moved from its sitting position on one of the swings. Bella gasped in surprised when the blonde raised a perfectly shaped brow over her cool, violet eyes.

"Isn't this cozy?" she asked snarkily, before quirking her lips up into a smile.

"You should really try to make a better effort at reading your emails, Bella. Have I taught you nothing?" Tanya laughed.

Bella's face broke out into a grin and she ran into Tanya's arms for a tight hug.

"I missed you, B. Seriously, we need to get you more in tune with technology."

Bella pulled back and laughed, happy to see her friend. She felt more at ease instantly in regards to the meeting with the Prestons now. She knew without a doubt that she could count on Tanya to have hers and Jack's best interest at heart.

"Oh, how rude," Bella muttered. "I'm sorry, let me introduce you. Esme and Carlisle, this is Tanya Denali. Tahn, this is Esme and Carlisle Cullen."

Parachute

Tanya smiled kindly and held her hand out to shake theirs.

"It's a pleasure, Mr. and Mrs. Cullen. During our few and far between conversations lately, B has told me how wonderful you all are."

Bella rolled her eyes at the little dig, which caused Tanya to quirk an eyebrow in challenge, smirking slightly.

"What going on?" Edward asked as he carried Jack up the front porch stairs. He noticed Tanya and blinked several times.

"One of yours?" he asked, turning towards Bella. She nodded with an excited smile.

"What is it with you and people showing up randomly?" Edward smiled and shook his head in amusement.

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2nd AN: See you guys on Friday! Chapter 22's Teasers will go up on the Blog on Wednesday night and reviews will still get their teasers. =)

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Now, as for future occurrence of things with a citrusy nature, there will be intimate moments in this story as their relationship grows. However, anything graphic just won't gel with the natural flow of the story. If there happens to be a lemon or lime that I want to get into more detail with, I will post it in the Outtakes and not here. I feel that this a pretty good compromise.

Parachute

Bella and Esme looked at each before Bella turned to Tanya and shrugged.

"We're meeting with Marcus Preston and his wife on Tuesday to go over some details."

Tanya nodded again. "Why do I hear a 'but' in your voice?"

"We're planning on telling him about Jack as well."

"Hmmm," she replied, tapping a finger on her lips in thought. "I'm glad I got out here before then. No offense, to you, Mrs. Cullen, but I'd rather not have you walking into something like that unprepared, Bella."

Esme smiled and shook her head. "No worries, dear. I've heard wonderful things about your, um, tenacity."

Tanya grinned widely. "Ah, my reputation precedes me. I feel honored."

She knocked Bella on the shoulder with one of her own.

Esme sighed and rubbed her hands together.

"It was wonderful meeting you, Tanya, but I'm heading to bed. There's a guest room at the end of the hall on the second floor and you are more than welcome to use it. I'm sure Bella wouldn't mind showing you the way, would you dear?"

Bella shook her head and smiled. "Not at all, Esme. Sleep well."

"Thank you, Mrs. Cullen. I might just take you up on that offer tonight, since B and I have some catching up to do. Goodnight."

"Goodnight to you girls as well. Oh, and please call me Esme, Tanya."

"Sure, I'll try and remember that," she laughed.

Parachute

After Esme had disappeared up the stairs, Tanya turned on Bella with a mischievous glint in her eyes.

"Okay, so now that we're alone, tell me all about the walking God among men!"

Bella blushed furiously and bit her lip.

"Just so you know, I'm right behind you."

Both girls spun around to see Edward standing behind them with a small smirk on his face. Tanya flipped her hair over her shoulder and leveled a disinterested stare at him.

"I was talking about your father, dude."

Edward's eyes widened and his mouth opened, before closing again in surprise.

"Um, okay. Eww." Edward shuddered before smiling at Bella. "Do you think that I could speak with you for a moment?"

She nodded and walked with him to the bottom of the stairs. "What's up?"

"I just wanted to say goodnight and tell you that I wanted to kiss you very badly, but I wasn't sure how you'd react in front of anyone."

He gave her a bashful smile and her heart melted. Taking a step closer, Bella placed her hands on his chest and leaned up on her toes to place a small kiss on his lips. He smiled and gently moved his lips in time with hers. When the kiss ended, he leaned his forehead against hers and took a deep breath in through his nose.

"Goodnight, Bella," he whispered.

"Goodnight, Edward," she responded just as quietly.

Parachute

He pressed his lips to her forehead and squeezed her hands before making his way upstairs. Bella stood frozen to the spot until she felt Tanya sidle up to her. She turned her head and looked at her friend, who was smiling softly.

"You really like him, don't you?" she asked quietly. Bella responded with a nod.

"Good. He seems like a nice guy and you deserve that, but if he hurts you, there won't be enough left of him for the dogs to find."

Bella nodded solemnly, knowing that Tanya was not kidding one bit.

Tanya took Bella by the arm and pulled her slightly to the stairs. "Come on, let's go talk about boys in privacy. All I need now is for the good doctor to walk in on me telling you about how I want to hump his leg."

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July 6, 2010

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Tuesday morning found Bella bouncing her leg nervously, while waiting for Marcus's secretary to show them into his office. Edward reached out and placed his hand on her knee, automatically calming and stilling her.

She shot him a thankful smile and he leaned over to kiss her on the cheek.

"Calm down, beautiful. Everything will be fine."

Bella nodded jerkily and caught Esme's happy grin out of the corner of her eye. She had been all too happy with the little bits of affection that her son and

Parachute

Bella had been exchanging more frequently over the past few days. Carlisle had wanted to be there with them today, but the hospital had been short staffed, so he offered to drop Jack off at Em and Rosalie's house beforehand. No one wanted Jack present for this meeting, since they were unsure of the outcome.

Esme, who was seated next to Tanya, leaned forward to whisper to the couple.

"So, I think the best plan of action is for me to speak with Diane privately. We have a few things to hash out, and I think confiding in her about Jack beforehand will give us the advantage of possibly having her on our side."

Tanya nodded. "Good call. I have a few things that I'd like to talk to Mr. Preston myself about as well, so we'll get those settled and out of the way first."

The intercom on the secretary's desk buzzed. "Heidi, could you please see our guests into my office now?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. Preston."

The tall, thin brunette smiled kindly and motioned for the group to follow her. "This way, please."

"Why do I get the feeling that we're the lure dangling on a fishing pole?" Tanya commented quietly to Bella. She leaned towards her friend and whispered back.

"Because that's exactly what we are. We're the lure for Marcus to reel in Esme. He's definitely in for a surprise today."

Heidi opened a door and ushered them into a large office. Marcus sat regally behind a large ornate desk, while his wife and daughter sat across from him. All three stood to greet their guests. Irina's eyes lit up when she saw Edward, but then narrowed slightly when she noticed the grip he had on Bella's hand.

Parachute

"Esme, Edward, it's good to see you again. As well as you, Miss Swan," Marcus spoke with friendliness. He turned to Tanya and gave her a confused smile. "I'm afraid that we haven't met, Miss ...?"

Tanya smirked and placed her briefcase on a chair before holding out her hand to shake. "Denali. Tanya Denali. I'm Miss Swan's representative from HarperCollins."

Marcus blinked and gave her a slight nod. Esme stepped forward and took Diane by the hand, which caused a look of shock to cross her face.

"Marcus, Diane, do you think that Di and I could have a few moments alone?"

Marcus smiled brilliantly and nodded. Diane quickly led Esme out of the room and closed the door behind them.

"Well, then," Tanya started, "while we're waiting for them, I have a few things that I'd like to discuss with you, sir. If you don't mind?"

Marcus nodded once again and motioned to the five chairs that were arranged in front of the desk. Tanya took the middle seat and Bella sat next to her on the right. When Edward sat down on Bella's other side, Irina let out a little huff and pulled a chair over to sit next to him. Tanya turned to Bella and raised an eyebrow, but all Bella could do was shrug. She briefly wondered if the younger girl had a crush on him.

Edward caught her eye and smiled apologetically and Bella squeezed his hand in understanding. She saw Marcus give their clasped hands a pointed look before meeting her eyes with a questioning gaze.

Tanya cleared her throat and crossed her legs, staring down Marcus Preston.

"Mr. Preston, I must admit that on the one hand, I am in awe of your persistence in obtaining Bella's assistance. On the other, as her friend, I am furious that you attempted to manipulate not only her, but my company as well. I would highly suggest that you tread lightly from here on out. I am not a

person who should be trifled with."

Marcus sat back and raised an eyebrow. He turned to Bella and smiled slightly.

"You are a fiercely protected woman, Miss Swan. Not only by Ms. Denali here, but the Cullens as well. Such an enigma."

After a moment, he sighed. "I do apologize for the breach of protocol in obtaining your personal information, but I can't regret it. Not when Esme is in the next room talking with my wife."

Tanya folded her arms and leaned back in the chair. "The outcome of today's events remains to be seen, Mr. Preston. I wouldn't put all of my eggs in one basket."

Bella swallowed nervously and glanced to the right and saw Irina holding onto Edward's arm as she talked excitedly about her current university classes. Annoyance welled up in her chest, but she pushed it down. There was no way she was going to let herself be jealous of a child; a child that was only four years younger than herself. She swallowed the acid that slowly began creeping up her throat. She let go of his hand and ran her fingers through her hair. She felt him look at her in concern, but she couldn't bring herself to look at him right now. Not until she wrangled in her emotions.

Thankfully, she was saved by the door opening. All eyes turned to watch both Esme and Diane walk in, holding hands and red-eyed. Bella met Diane's gaze and the older woman gave her an encouraging smile and nod. Bella sighed a bit and felt less anxious. The smile on Marcus' face when he looked at Esme and his wife made her feel like she had done the right thing by encouraging the women to bury the hatchet. The look he sported was nothing more than plain love and adoration.

Bella coughed slightly and waited until Marcus met her eyes.

"Before we get into any of the Gala planning, there is one important matter of business that we need to take care of first."

Parachute

Marcus waved his hand and gestured for her to continue. Keeping her voice steady, she continued.

"As I'm sure you already know, The Lost Treasures Foundation is a charity that I set up to help lost and missing children, as well as their families. My son is one of those children, and I wanted to do whatever I could for others like him. We never gave up our search for his family, and we recently discovered them. It's no coincidence that we're Chicago right now."

She watched as understanding slowly started to dawn on him and an array of emotions flickered across his face.

"The Jack Attack series that I write is modeled after him."

Marcus covered his mouth with his hand and his eyes welled up with tears. Diane stood up and walked over to place her arms around her husband, comfortingly. Irina looked back and forth between her parents and Bella, utter confusion on her face.

"Wait, I'm not following."

Marcus wiped his eyes and took a deep breath.

"Are you trying to tell me that your adopted son is my grandson?" he asked in an eerily calm tone. Bella nodded curtly.

"Why didn't you tell me sooner? Was this some sort of punishment?" he glanced at Esme, who shook her head sadly.

"I'm sorry, Marcus," Bella responded. "I honestly didn't know how to tell you or how you would react."

His eyes blazed angrily at her and slammed his fist on the desk.

"What do you mean, you didn't know how to tell me? You say, 'Marcus, your grandson is alive and in my care,' that's what you say, Isabella."

Parachute

Edward jumped to his feet and stood directly in front of him.

"Don't," he growled. "Don't you dare take any of this out on her. You don't know a quarter of the story. If she had not been there for Jack, he'd probably be dead or worse. It was our decision to not tell you right away, Marcus, not hers. If this is how you're going to react, then we'll go and leave it as it is. You made your bed and alienated our family when you chose to enable Victoria's habits. You can't blame us for putting Jack's safety first."

Marcus swallowed thickly and trained his stare at the desk top.

"Marcus, Esme gave me the abridged version in the other room," Diane spoke quietly to her husband. "You should really hear what they have to say. Especially if you want to be a part of that little boy's life."

He looked up at Bella with such sad eyes and she knew instantly that he wouldn't be causing any issues for their family.

"Please?" His voice cracked as he tried to speak. "Please, may I see him?"

Bella blinked away tears and nodded.

Irina huffed again, annoyed at being ignored and in the dark.

"You have Jack?" she asked, turning on Bella with a hateful look. "Did you kidnap him or something?"

Edward went to open his mouth, but Bella silenced him with a hand on his arm.

"No, I found him alone and starving in alley when your sister abandoned him."

Irina's eyes widened and she gasped. "I knew it," she whispered, shaking her head back and forth. She turned on her father and glared at him. "I told you. I told you it was her fault, but you didn't want to hear it. There was no way that he could just magically disappear the way she said he did. You protected her at the cost of your own grandson!"

Parachute

She stood up and grabbed Edward's hand. "Please, Eddie! I wanna see him."

Edward sighed and looked down at Bella, holding her gaze for a minute.

'Don't do it,' she thought to herself.

He looked back Irina and smiled sadly.

"It's not just up to me, Rini. Bella is his mother, she has a say, too."

Internally, Bella let out a sigh of relief that he wouldn't go over her head for Irina.

"So, wait a minute," the younger woman interjected. "Jack's my nephew, but I have to go through you to talk to him? That's bullshit."

"Irina," Diane said in a warning tone.

"No, don't 'Irina' me, Mom! How can you be fine with her keeping Jack from us? You're just as bad as Victoria," she snarled at Bella.

Bella steeled herself and stood slowly, moving face to face with Irina.

"I admire your passion, but I'm not the person who's to blame here for anything other than loving my son and wanting him protected. I won't apologize for either of those things."

Irina's lower lip quivered and she burst into tears. She dropped to her knees and sobbed into her hands. Diane left Marcus' side and went to her daughter. Bella blinked away tears and looked away from the scene. As much as she knew that she was in the right, she couldn't help feeling bad for the situation that the Prestons found themselves in.

Bella felt a tug on her hand and she looked over at Edward, who gave her a sad smile, before pulling her into his arms. She laid her head on his chest and let out a few tears of her own. He gently tugged her over so they could take the

Parachute

seats to Tanya's left this time, allowing Esme to sit with Diane and Irina, who was now drying her tears. She looked up at Bella and gave her the most pitifully sad smile she had ever seen.

"I'm sorry, Ms. Swan. I've hated my sister for years, and I've missed Jack so much." She smiled wistfully for a moment. "I used to babysit him a lot when he was a baby. I used to get so mad at Victoria when she acted like he wasn't even there sometimes. I mean, I know that her own mother was kind of crappy, but most mothers want to do better for their kids, right?"

Bella nodded sadly, knowing that was one of the driving forces in her relationship with Jack. She was determined to be better than Renee.

"But Vic didn't care. She only cared about herself and her next score."

Diane gasped and looked at her daughter sharply. Irina laughed humorlessly.

"What? You didn't think I knew? All of the times Daddy paid someone off that she owed money to or paid someone off when she was picked up by the cops?"

Marcus closed his eyes and hung his head in shame, but Irina continued.

"What do you think made me try so hard to be better than her? Not that it really took much effort."

Diane looked at her daughter in sympathy. "I'm so sorry sweetie."

"I used to hear you two arguing over her all of the time, especially during the divorce. I didn't really care what happened to Vic, but I wanted Eddie to stay." She looked over at him adoringly and this time Bella could really see it for the pure and innocent emotion that it was. "You were my big brother. I may have disliked Victoria, but it was because of her that I got you and Jack. When Jack was gone, everything started to fall apart. And then when you two split up, I lost you, too. And my parents, too, pretty much. They were arguing all of the time and worried about what was going on with her. I didn't exist anymore. When I got accepted to Harvard, I jumped at the chance to leave her and get

out from under her shadow."

After a few quiet moments of letting everyone adjust to the emotional overload, Marcus broke the silence.

"When do you think we could see him?"

Bella looked down at her hands for a moment before quietly replying. "What do you think about today? He knows where we are and why we're here. He was actually pretty anxious about how everything would turn out today."

His face lit up and he gave her a hopeful smile. "Please? I promise that we will be on our best behaviors."

She turned to Edward and she didn't even have to open her mouth before he nodded at her and pulled out his phone to text Emmett.

"So," Tanya spoke up, lightening the mood, "while we're waiting for the rugrat, why don't we work on some Gala planning?"

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Little under an hour later, a date of July 30th was chosen for the gala, as well as a black and white theme along with a handful of other details. Tanya looked down at her planner and hummed thoughtfully.

"This should work really well. It's a week before we have to leave on your book tour, Bella, so it's perfect."

Edward looked at Bella quickly. "Book tour?" he asked in confusion. She blinked and nodded.

Parachute

"Yeah, I have a two week tour that I was previously committed to doing before Jack and I found out about all of you. It must have slipped my mind in all of the recent excitement."

He gave her an incredulous look. "Yeah, it must have," he replied somewhat sarcastically. She was just about respond when they heard Heidi's voice calling down the hall.

"Hey! Wait a minute, you just can't barge in there!"

"Look, it's cool, lady. My mom and dad are in there."

Marcus chuckled and shook his head. "Well, he still has your impatience, Edward."

Edward bit his cheek to keep from grinning. There was a knock on the the door and Jack poked his head in. As soon as he laid eyes on Bella, he smiled and walked into the room, shutting the door behind him. He stood stock still when noticed that everyone was looking at him. His eyes darted around the people in the room.

"Uh, can you guys stop the staring? It's creepy. I'm not a sideshow."

Bella laughed and stood up, holding her hand out to him. Jack made his way swiftly to her side and placed his hand in hers.

"Jack, I'd like you to meet Marcus and Diane Preston, your other grandparents and your Aunt Irina."

Jack smiled shyly at them. "Hi."

Marcus nodded, overcome with emotion and pulled the boy into a hug. Unsure of what to do, Jack patted him on the back awkwardly and Bella had to stifle a giggle. Diane stood off to the side, holding onto Esme. When Marcus pulled back, Diane enveloped Jack into a hug. This one seemed more comfortable for him and he hugged her back.

Parachute

When Irina's turn came, she seemed frozen, unsure of what to do. Jack cocked his head to the side, much like he had when he recognized Emmett and Bella watched the scene in fascination.

"Is your name Rainy?"

Her eyes widened comically and she grinned. "My name is Irina, but you used to call me Rainy."

He nodded and smiled at her before walking over to hug her. She closed her eyes and squeezed him tightly.

"I missed you, squirt."

Jack smiled and nodded, before making his way back to his mother's side.

Marcus wiped his eyes once again and smiled.

"What do you guys say to going to get something to eat? My treat."

Tanya stood up and stretched. "I've never been one to turn down a free meal, just ask Bella."

Bella laughed and shook her head. "You've got that right. Once a week, if Tahn is in town, she'll show up on our doorstep waiting to be fed, like a stray cat."

Tanya winked and pretended to swipe her claws at Bella, before hooking one arm through Bella's and the other through Jack's.

"Come on now, let's go some place fairly quiet so you guys can continue to catch up."

Bella felt a tug on her arm. Tanya turned her head to face Edward.

"Yes, dear?" she asked. Edward laughed and removed Bella from her grasp.

Parachute

"I'll keep a hold of this one, but I expect the boy child back in one piece later, okay?"

Tanya smirked. "Possessive, eh? Then I guess I shouldn't tell you that I slept in her bed last night?"

Edward stopped in his tracks as Tanya sauntered away with Jack and the rest of their group following. He turned to Bella and gave her a questioning glance.

Bella look up at him innocently. "What? Tahn likes to snuggle."

She nudged his shoulder and he shook his head, laughing heartily, as they moved to catch up with their group.

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Chapter 23

AN: Just a pair of quick reminders! There will be a Halloween Outtake popping up over the weekend and The Fandom for Preemies event starts on November 1st!

There are **over** 100 authors taking part, including a special Jack POV Outtake from Parachute. It ties into Chapters 23 & 24. If you can spare the donation, please do so! The March of Dimes is a very worthy charity! (Link to their site is on my profile and the blog!)

As always, all music used is up on the blog and reviews get a teaser on Monday!

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Later that evening, after everyone had settled in for bed, Bella stood awkwardly in front of Edward's door, her hand poised to knock. She swallowed the lump in her throat and gave herself a mental shake. This was Edward and she had no reason to be nervous, she mentally chastised herself. She took a deep breath and let her knuckles tap against the wood. When lunch with the Prestons had finished, Bella and Jack opted to spend some time with Tanya while Edward headed to his office to work on a few things. After an afternoon filled with shopping and sight seeing, they dropped Tahn off at her hotel and made their way back home.

Home. Bella smiled to herself when she thought of that word. It wasn't so much the house itself, but the presences that were contained within it. She could easily see herself falling in love with Edward, if she wasn't there already. Having him come home to her and Jack every evening after work made her heart yearn for the three of them to be a conventional family, even if she knew

it was impossible at the moment.

When they got back to house, Jack and Bella joined Esme and Edward for a light dinner. Afterward, Esme packed up a small basket to take to Carlisle, who was working an extra long shift at the hospital. When Bella had gone to settle Jack in for the night, Edward asked her to come up to his room when she was finished because he wanted to talk about a few things.

She was broken out of her thoughts when Edward opened his door, not even a minute after she knocked. He smiled brightly at her and motioned her to come inside. She smiled back shyly and stepped past him into the room. She had a few choices as to where to sit. A plush looking black chair in the corner of the room that she hadn't noticed before, the leather couch, or the large, inviting bed. She chose the latter, toeing her slippers off of her feet before climbing up onto his high mattress. She leaned back against his pillows and listened to the music playing softly in the background. She smiled when he recognized the voice of John Legend, and she turned to look at Edward. He was leaning against the closed bedroom door with contemplative look upon his face.

"John Legend?" she asked. He quirked an eyebrow and nodded with a smirk.

"My tastes are fairly eclectic."

She smirked right back. "Glad to know that that's another thing we have in common."

He shook his head and laughed quietly before taking a seat next to her on the bed. She shifted her body and looked up into his warm green eyes. She felt another piece of her heart slip away as she raised her hand to caress his cheek. She angled her face closer and pressed her lips to his.

...

*Kiss. Kiss. Kiss me on my lips.
We've been dancing 'round the moment
Now we're doin' it.*

Parachute

*Breathe. Breathe.
A sigh of sweet relief.
We've been holding it so long,
The wait was killing me.
Oh and we, are what we, have been waiting for.
So baby, open your mind, while I close the door.*

...

His lips caressed hers gently as their forms molded together. He shifted their bodies until they were side by side, facing each other on the bed. Edward pulled back and smiled down at Bella's closed eyes and blissful expression, before reaching out and moving a strand of hair behind her ear.

Her heart skipped a beat painfully when she opened her eyes and noticed the wary look on his face.

"What is it?" she asked quietly.

"Can you tell me about this book tour?"

She sighed and smiled slightly, relieved that it was something that was hopefully easy to fix.

"It's nothing major," she responded quietly. "Just a week or so and then I'll be back."

"Promise?" he asked in a strained voice.

"I promise. Now, less talking and more kissing, please."

Edward grinned, more at ease with her admission and resumed his previous exploration of her lips as she made a contented sound. They pulled apart, breathing heavily, a few moments later and Bella rested her head against his chest. She could hear his heart beating swiftly and she found herself soothed by the sound. She felt his hand caressing her back and she fought against purring

like a kitten.

"When do you want to tell Jack about us?" Edward asked quietly. Bella remained silent in thought for a minute.

"Well, I think sooner is better than later. What exactly do we tell him? What does 'us' even entail?"

He breathed in deeply and let it out slowly. "I say we tell him that we're starting to have feelings for each other and would like to date. It's simple and the truth, for the most part anyway."

She leaned up on her elbow and gazed into his eyes.

"You have feelings for me?" she asked in a small voice. He smiled adoringly and nodded.

"I do. I'm completely falling for you, Bella Swan."

She felt tears sting her eyes and she buried her face in his shirt, before any of them had a chance to escape.

"Edward," she sighed, holding onto him tightly. "I'm right there with you."

She felt him kiss the top of her head and sigh.

"Thank god. I was worried for minute," he laughed lightly, trying to lighten the mood.

She smiled and nestled her cheek against him, before closing her eyes and letting out a small sigh.

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The next morning, Bella awoke on her right side, feeling refreshed and like she had had the best night's sleep in her life. She felt something warm and soft curled up against the front of her body. She smiled sleepily and pulled Jack's familiar form closer. He shifted his body and burrowed deeper into her arms. She sighed contentedly and felt herself relax into the hard, yet relaxed form behind her.

Behind her? Her eyes shot open and she stiffened. She turned her head slowly and turned quickly back around as soon as she saw the mess of bronze hair that lay on the pillow next to hers. She bit her lip to keep from making a sound and her heart started to speed up. She had no idea when she had fallen asleep, nor how Jack had gotten in bed with them, but this was a scene that had been played out in her dreams over the past few weeks. She felt Edward's body move slightly and his arm came to rest around her waist, holding her tightly against him as he pulled her closer.

She was wondering how awkward this would end up being, when Edward splayed his fingers open across her belly and her heart started to soar.

"Good morning, beautiful," he spoke in a gravelly voice.

"Hey," she whispered back.

"Why are you whispering?" he replied in a low voice.

"We have company," she laughed quietly. She felt the bed shift and saw his bronze mop peek over her shoulder. A warm smile spread across his face as he rested his head on her arm, still watching their son.

"He's so beautiful, Bella. Sometimes, I'm scared that this is all a dream."

She turned her head and laid a kiss on the top of his head.

Parachute

"I know exactly what you're feeling. I've felt it every day for the last five years."

Edward squeezed her tightly and she giggled when he inadvertently hit a ticklish spot.

Jack popped open one eye and glared at his parents.

"You know, people are still trying to sleep here," he muttered sleepily. Edward barked out a laugh and shook his head.

"You know, Little Bit, you do have your own bed," Bella replied with a smile.

Jack turned his head and cocked an eyebrow. "So do you, Mom."

She felt a fiery blush rush to her cheeks.

"I- I-" Bella stuttered while trying to think of a comeback. Edward sat up and gazed down at his newly formed family and grinned.

"It was an accident, Jack. We were talking and fell asleep."

Jack yawned and nodded. "That's what I thought. I woke up a earlier from a weird dream and Mom wasn't in her room, so I came up here."

Bella ran one of her hands through his hair. "Do you want to talk about it, baby?"

Jack shrugged. "I don't really remember most of it, but I think I was lost."

Edward reached over and touched his shoulder. Jack looked up at him and gave him a half-smile.

"You'll never be lost again, Jack. I promise."

Bella blinked away tears as she watched her son nod and try to hide his own.

Parachute

"How about we go make some breakfast, kiddo?" she asked him.

"Sure, Ma. Can we have pancakes?" he asked excitedly. She laughed and nodded.

"That sounds fine."

Jack rolled away from her and landed on his feet before stopping and looking back at his parents.

"So, does this mean you two are together now or something?" he asked curiously.

Edward looked at Bella, unsure of how to proceed. She shook her head and smiled.

"Would you be okay with it, if we decided to date?" she asked.

Jack was quiet in thought for a few moments before nodding slowly.

"Yeah, I'd be cool with it. It's pretty obvious that you two like each other and are happy. I guess it kinda makes sense, but are you guys going to be all mushy and stuff?"

Edward shrugged and Jack made a face.

"Ugh, gross. Just try not to get all kissy in front of me, okay?" Jack called out as he sprinted from the room.

Bella laughed and sat up, removing her covers. Suddenly, Edward reached out and pulled her down, on top of his chest. His emerald eyes bore into hers before cupping her cheeks and pulling her in for a kiss. She made a face and covered his lips with her fingers. He quirked an eyebrow and she shrugged.

"Morning breath."

Parachute

He rolled his eyes and let her clamber out of bed. He rolled over onto his side and watched as she slid on her slippers. As she walked towards the door, he definitely noticed the extra sway to her hips and stifled a groan. Once she was safely out of his room, she allowed herself thirty seconds to do a little happy dance before heading back to her room to get dressed for the day.

When she found herself in the kitchen fifteen minutes later, Jack and Esme were whispering conspiratorially while standing at the stove making pancakes. She folded her arms and watched her son for moment, reveling in his happiness. No matter what happened between her and Edward at the end of the summer, she'd never regret bringing Jack here. He had found a missing piece, and he was whole again. She felt an arm slide across her back and pull her closely. She smiled up at Edward before gazing back at their son.

Esme looked up and grinned with a twinkle in her eyes.

"Good morning, dears," she said jovially. "I hear we have some interesting developments?"

Jack turned around and shrugged sheepishly at his parents, which caused Bella to shake her head and laugh.

"You gossip worse than the church ladies back home, kiddo."

"I blame Pops, actually," he quipped back. "He always has a good scoop."

Bella's jaw dropped slightly before guffawing loudly. Surprisingly enough, that fit her dad to a tee.

"Speaking of, we should give him a call later," she said after she caught her breath. Jack nodded eagerly before putting his attention back on his cooking breakfast.

Bella grabbed some juice from the fridge before sitting down at the dining room table in the solarium. Edward sat down next to her and absentmindedly began playing with her fingers.

Parachute

"What's running through that head of yours?" she asked softly.

Edward looked up and smiled. "I'd like to meet him."

Bella gave him a surprised look. "My dad? Really?"

"Yeah. I mean, he's such an important person to both of you. Plus, he's as responsible as you are for saving Jack. I'd like to show my gratitude someday."

Bella smiled at him kindly. "I'm sure he'd love to meet you as well, especially now that you're 'dating' his daughter, who's already the mother of your child," she laughed.

She took a sip of her juice before commenting again.

"Are you serious about that? I know he misses Jack something fierce and has been chomping at the bit to come and visit."

Edward nodded. "Definitely. Let me know when he wants to come, and I'll make sure to take the time off."

She leaned her head against his shoulder and sighed. She felt one of his hands cup her face and then his lips press against hers gently.

"Eww, come on! I thought I said no kissy stuff?" Jack complained as he set a platter of pancakes and bacon down on the table.

Bella looked up at him in surprise, but noted that his eyes were shining happily.

"Sorry, kid," his father laughed. "I never got my good morning kiss from your mom."

Jack nodded thoughtfully. "Okay, but I'm watching you two," he responded as he waved his pointed finger between the two adults. Bella bit her cheek trying to hold in a laugh while Edward failed and shook with laughter.

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July 27, 2010

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The next three weeks flew by, at what felt like lightning speed to Bella. Between visits with the Prestons to pick a venue for the Gala down to choosing caterers, she was just about exhausted. It felt like every time she turned around, either Esme or Diane were coming at her with a different idea or something that needed to be changed. She tried making it well known early on that event planning wasn't exactly her forte, but the other women wanted her to be an equal part in it. She had fervently wished that Alice had been able to come back to Chicago sooner. This would have been right up her alley, but she and Jasper weren't able to make it in until tomorrow afternoon. She was both nervous and thrilled that this Gala would be over with in three days.

The worse part about it all was that her free time to hang out with Edward had been severely diminished since he had gone back to work two weeks ago. She sighed and looked out the study's window as a gentle breeze moved through the trees. After work, he came home and spent most of his time with Jack, but they still made time to catch up with each other later in the evening. Their nightly make out sessions continued to heat up, but never really taking it too far. They also made sure to make their way back to their respective beds.

That night, after Jack had gone to bed, Bella made her way up to Edward's room. Since this had now become routine, she opened the door without knocking and slid into the room, before closing the door behind her. Looking around, she was surprised to see that the room was empty. She listened closely and heard the sound of water coming from the bathroom and assumed that he was in the shower. She felt heat rush to her belly when she pictured him naked and wet. She climbed up on the bed before reached for the remote on the night

Parachute

table and with a press of a button, music flowed around the room. She closed her eyes and sang softly to Muse under her breath.

...

*Make me feel again
Slide across my skin again
Let me uncover you, to rediscover you
And I will open up
If you promise to give in
On this perfect night
Let the two of us be one*

...

She heard the door and opened her eyes. Edward stood in the doorway wearing nothing but a surprised look and a black towel wrapped around his waist. She blinked and flushed with desire.

"Um, hey," he said nervously. "You're early."

She shrugged non-apologetically and bit her lip to stifle a groan when he ran a hand through his wet hair.

"Yeah, Jack fell asleep pretty quickly."

"Cool, just let me get dressed, and I'll be right back."

She rolled onto her hands and knees and crawled across the bed. His eyes widened as he gazed at the innocent, yet confident woman before him. She rose up so that she was sitting on her ankles, by the edge of the bed and winked at him.

"Or you could just come over like you are?"

Parachute

He swallowed thickly and slowly made his way over to the bed until he was standing right in front of her. She watched in fascination as his towel tented slightly. She reached out and ran a fingertip along his length and he let out a small, strangled cry. She pulled her hand away quickly and looked up at his in concern. His eyes were tightly shut and his fists were clenched.

"I'm sorry," she croaked out in embarrassment. His eyes flew open and the heat coming from them took her breath away.

...

*So we will be again, another time
And I will do all I need to do
To leave the others all so far behind
Just so I can be, just so I can be
With you*

...

"Don't be," he whispered just before reaching out and pulling her against him. His lips pressed against her passionately and his hands tangled in her hair. They slowly leaned back and soon he was covering her, while their lips worked feverishly. One of his hands slowly made its way down her neck, over her shoulder and down her arm to her hip, igniting goose bumps along the way. The other hand moved to cup the left side of her face while kissing her. Her legs fell open and he nestled in between them, almost naturally. Each time his erection rubbed against her in just the right spot, it sent shivers down her spine.

His free hand traveled up from her hip to cup her right breast and gently squeeze her nipple. She let out an involuntarily mewling sound and wrapped her legs around his waist. She felt his towel give away and the thought of him naked, grinding against her, helped catapult her over the edge of an orgasm. Bella threw her head back and shuddered as intense pleasure ripped through her. Edward continued rubbing, his motions getting more erratic as his lips trailed down her neck. Soon, he was groaning out his own release and whispering words against her skin that she couldn't understand.

Parachute

He rested his head on her chest, breathing heavily, careful not to put all of his weight on top of her. Her fingers automatically began to run through his hair and gently scratch his scalp, causing him to sigh. He pushed up on his elbows and gazed lovingly down at Bella's flushed and happy face, with one hand smoothing her hair back.

"Stay with me tonight, please. I sleep better with you in my arms," he whispered entreatingly. She couldn't find it within her to deny him, so she smiled and nodded. He smiled widely and brought himself to his feet, clutching the towel modestly in front of him.

"Okay, I'm going to get dressed and I'll be right back."

When he turned and walked over to the dresser, she received a very nice view of his naked bottom. She let out a low whistle, and he smirked at her over his shoulder.

"Are you checking out my ass, Miss Swan?" he asked cheekily. She pulled back the sheets and arranged herself comfortably among his pillows and giggled.

"Yes, Mr. Cullen. Yes, I was. It's a rather nice one, too."

He laughed and pulled on a pair of boxers and pajama bottoms. He turned off the light and slid into bed and wrapped his arms around her.

"Good night, Bella," he whispered.

"Night, Edward."

The room was quiet for a few moments, the pair nestled together in a spooning position, before he broke the silence.

"Bella?"

"Yes, Edward?"

Parachute

"I love you," he said quietly, but full of emotion. She turned her body so that she was facing him and let the tears spring from her eyes as she looked up at him in astonishment.

"You do?"

"I truly do," he responded with a smile. She placed her lips against his in a soft, sweet kiss.

"I love you, too."

She rested her head against his chest and fell asleep listening to the steady drum of his heartbeat.

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July 30, 2010

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The next three days were a flurry of activity. Bella and Jack picked up their friends from the airport while Esme and Diane made last minute arrangements on a few things. Then there was shopping for accessories to match their dresses that Alice had had shipped to Chicago last week.

Bella was nervous and exhausted by the time the day of the Gala had come. By six thirty, everyone was dressed and waiting for the limo to arrive when Bella noticed that Jack was missing.

"Has anyone seen Jack?" she asked in a concerned tone.

Parachute

"I think he's still in his room," Alice observed. "He's probably just a bit nervous. I'll go check on him."

Bella smiled and nodded gratefully to her friend. "Thanks, Allie."

Edward reached over and took her hand in comfort.

"It's going to be fine," he whispered and shot her a bright smile. "Tonight is a celebration of having Jack back in our lives and getting some people to lighten their wallets in the name of charity."

Bella squeezed his hand and nodded. A few moments later, she watched her son carefully as he made his way downstairs, with Alice by his side.

Something wasn't right. Sure, he was smiling and acting jovial, but there was something that was just off. Their gazes met and her worry increased exponentially. Jack's eyes were dull and missing his usual spark.

She pulled him quietly to the side and whispered in his ear.

"What's wrong, baby?"

He smiled genuinely at her and shook his head.

"Nothing, Mom. I'm just a little nervous."

She narrowed her eyes and nodded, although she wasn't convinced that he was telling the truth, but starting an argument right now wasn't really an option at the moment. She'd try and pull it out of him after the Gala was over, but for now, she smiled and reached for his hand.

Edward's words of comfort flittered around her brain, but they no longer provided her any peace. A growing feeling unease spread through her chest as she try to smile down at her son. Everything would be fine. Wouldn't it?

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Parachute

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AN: Music used in this chapter: *Cross the Line* by John Legend and *To Be With You* by Hoobastank

Chapter 24

AN: The Halloween Outtake posted yesterday! Head over and check it out! It's a short little thing. =)

Surprise!

This early update is brought to you by the Fandom for Preemies fundraiser. For those of you who questioned Jack's mood in the last chapter and parts of this one, the Outtake should clear a few things up. There are *over* 100 authors taking part, including the Jack POV Outtake from Parachute. It ties into Chapters 23 & 24. If you can spare the donation, please do so! The March of Dimes is a very worthy charity! (Link to their site is on my profile and the blog!)

Oh, and a nod to the super-freaking-awesome Stratan, who Betas for us!
mwah

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Even though she and Esme had previously visited the Crystal Ballroom at the Blackstone Hotel a few weeks ago, while scouting locations for the gala, entering the room once again took Bella's breath away. This time, instead of a gorgeous empty room with a Warholesque rug featuring a red and orangish chrysanthemum taking up the entire floor space, the room was filled with people surrounding a few tables and chairs. A portion of the area had been reworked to include a small dance floor and a small stage. Bella swallowed nervously and tightened her grip on Edward's arm as quite a few people turned their inquisitive gazes on the the family that had just entered the room.

She felt Jack standing just behind her, hiding himself from the spotlight for

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now. She reached behind her slightly and her son automatically clutched her hand. He took a deep breath and stepped slowly beside her. The murmurs that were going on around them grew a bit louder as he did so. His frightened gaze flicked towards his mother, who gave him a warm, comforting smile. Edward caught his gaze and shot him a playful wink, which helped calm his butterflies. Jack straightened his shoulders and smiled at his parents. Carlisle and Esme lead the small procession into the room and up to the large table in front of the stage.

As the group settled at the table, Marcus and Diane walked over with a man around their age with salt and pepper colored hair, introducing him to Carlisle and Edward as Diane squeezed Esme's hand before hugging Bella gently.

"My dear, don't you look stunning!" she exclaimed, stepping back to admire Bella's dress. It was a form fitting empire waist, white and black Alice Whitlock original with an oval opening in the valley of her breasts and straps that crisscrossed her chest.

"Thank you, Diane. You look lovely as well," she responded shyly.

"And who is this beautiful lady?" the new addition asked, turning his attention to Bella.

Marcus smiled proudly and reached out for Bella's hand.

"Dick, this is Miss Isabella Swan. She's the author who started The Lost Treasures Foundation and the amazing woman who adopted my grandson."

"Bella," Marcus continued, "this is Richard Daley, the mayor of Chicago."

"Miss Swan, it is an honor to meet you." Bella blushed slightly as the man took her hand and kissed it lightly.

When Mayor Daley's attention was distracted somewhere else, Tanya sidled up to Bella's side.

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"His name is Dick Daley? His parents must have been a little twisted. That's my kind of people." She waggled her eyebrows, which caused Bella to bite her lip to stifle the giggles that were bubbling up.

"Hey Bells?" Tanya asked.

"I don't think I want to hear it, but, what?"

"What would his wife say when asked if she loved her husband? 'Oh, yes! I love Dick Daley!' I'd respond and say, 'Yeah, me too honey!'"

Bella made a choking sound as she held back laughter. She gave the mayor a sheepish smile and elbowed Tanya in the side when he turned around to make sure that she was okay.

"Are you alright, baby?" Edward asked quietly in her ear.

She couldn't help but smile at sight of him in his tux.

"I'm fine, Edward. Tanya's being a whore though."

Tanya snorted and shook her head. "You love me for it."

"That I do, Tahn. That I do," Bella sighed, before winking at her friend.

Tanya wrapped her arm around Bella's shoulders. "Girl, you couldn't find a better friend."

Bella laughed. "Of course, I know you'll always be there with the bail money."

Tanya barked out a laugh. "Bail money? Hell, I'd probably be in the cell next to you."

Edward laughed and shook his head. "It's never a dull moment with you around, is it, Tanya?"

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She grinned cheekily. "No, Mr. Cullen. It never is."

Bella glanced around the room, her gaze falling on Demetri, and smirked. "Hey, Tahn, there's someone I want you to meet..."

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Leaving Jack at the table with Esme and Alice, Edward led Bella around the room to make rounds and introductions, his hand resting on the small of her back the entire time. They came to a stop in front of tall man with dirty blond hair that was in desperate need of a haircut. His hazel eyes were cold and predatory as he watched their approach. Bella felt a shiver run down her spine and she swallowed nervously. Something about this man set off every warning bell that resided in her head.

"Bella, I'd like you to meet my friend and lawyer, James Brooks."

James reached for her hand and Bella fought the urge to recoil from his touch.

"It's a pleasure to finally meet you, Isabella," he spoke in a smug voice. "Edward has told me all about you."

Bella had learned long ago to trust her instincts and now every single one of them was telling her to get away from this man.

"I'm afraid, then, you have me at a disadvantage, Mr. Brooks. I don't know much about you at all." She tried to keep her voice strong and steady, but she noticed his eyes widen and he smiled widely, showing off his teeth. In her mind, she compared that look to a shark tasting blood in the water.

"My, you are a firecracker, aren't you?" James turned to Edward and shook his hand. "Ed, good to see you. If you'll excuse me, I have some business to attend

to."

Right as he passed out of Edward's line of sight, he shot Bella a smirk that made her heart hammer in fear.

"Hey, are you okay, sweetheart? Your face is flushed," Edward said in a concerned tone.

Her wide eyes looked into his and she felt her paranoia simmer down. She took a deep breath in through her nose and nodded.

"Yeah, I'm fine. It's just a lot to take in," she responded as she gestured around the room.

He smiled kindly and took her arm. "Let's head back to the table then. I could use a break myself."

When they reached the table, Emmett pulled Edward off to the side to speak to an old friend so Bella took an empty seat in between Alice and Jack.

Jack was engrossed in a game on her iPhone, so she sat back and sighed. Alice rested her chin on Bella's shoulder and nudged her friend.

"Hey, Bell, who was that guy?"

Bella shot her a confused look. "Which one? There's a room full of them."

Alice's lips puckered and her face was etched in concern. "The last one."

Bella's nostrils flared and she grimaced. "James Brooks. He is Edward's friend and lawyer."

Alice's eyes clouded over and a far away look crossed her face. Suddenly, she blinked and looked straight into Bella's eyes.

"Stay away from him, he's bad news."

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"Allie?" Bella asked, confused. "Do you know him or something?"

Alice shook her head. "No, I just have a bad feeling about him. He looked at you like you were something to eat. It was creepy."

"Huh," Bella pondered while examining her nails. "I had the same kind of reaction. Like, I felt like my skin was crawling. I don't understand how Edward is friends with someone like him."

Alice straightened up and shook her head. "Sometimes you can't see what's right in front of you."

Bella nodded thoughtfully before letting her gaze fall back onto her son, who was staring intently at the phone. She leaned to look over his shoulder and watched him typing on a dark screen.

"Whatcha doing, Little Bit?"

"I'm Tweeting."

Bella raised an eyebrow. "You're Tweeting?"

"Yeah, this place is kinda boring. I've been Tweeting back and forth with some friends."

"Like who?"

"Riley, Garrett, Bree, Dania, Ayden, Pika, Nic, Mal and a few others."

"Wait, are they kids in your class? Who names their kid Pika?"

Jack rolled his eyes. "Yes, and Pika is her nickname, Mom."

"Oh, okay."

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After a few minutes of Bella looking over his shoulder, Jack closed the app and set the phone down on the table. He look up at her and smiled.

"Are you bored, too, Mom?"

Bella huffed and sat back. "Yeah, so sue me."

Jack looked around the room and then back at his Mom. "How about we make a quick escape."

She cocked her head to the side. "Go on, you've intrigued Mother."

Jack stood up and reached for her hand. They stealthily made their way though the crowd and found themselves at a set of doors that led to a balcony. He motioned forward with his arm. "After you, my lady."

Bella curtsied and smiled. "Thank you, kind sir."

The two of them stood on the balcony for a few minutes, letting the warm, humid Chicago air lay upon their skin like a blanket.

Jack sighed. "I miss the air back home. It always smelled fresh. And the sound of the rain, I miss that too."

Bella smiled. "I know what you mean. When I was younger, I used to hate Forks. It was always so rainy and dreary, but over the years, it's grown on me. I've missed it, too."

"Mom, what are we going to do?"

She turned and looked down at Jack questioningly. "What do you mean?"

"When the summer is over. What are we going to do?"

Bella sighed sadly and looked out over the view of the city.

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"What do you want to do, Jack?"

He turned to her with wide eyes. "You can't ask me something like that!" he exclaimed.

She almost laughed at his comical reaction. "Why not?"

"I'm a kid! You can't put that kind of decision on my fragile shoulders."

She snorted and shook her head slightly. "Really, Jack? It's amusing to hear you talk like you're 40 and call yourself a kid in the same breath."

He shrugged. "Eh, I'm mature for my age, plus I have a superior intellect."

Bella laughed and nudged him with her shoulder. "Knock it off, brat."

A few moments of silence passed before she spoke again.

"We go home. That's what happens at the end of the summer. We go home and we keep in contact with everyone here. We come here for visits or they come to Washington."

Jack nodded thoughtfully. "I figured as much."

Bella looked down at him with tears stinging her eyes. She squatted down until she was eye level with him, being careful that she didn't harm her dress.

"What do you want, Jack? I know the decision is too much to put on you, but this is your life, too. I want to make sure that you're happy."

"I am happy. I'll miss everyone here, but I want to go home. To the rain and my friends and the rest of our family."

Jack looked up at her with his wide, innocent green eyes. He wrapped his arms around her neck and squeezed tightly.

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"I'll go wherever you want me to, Mom. You're my home."

Bella silently thanked Alice and her waterproof makeup as she felt tears stream down her cheeks. She hugged him back and stood up, lifting him off of his feet and keeping him in her arms.

"I love you so, so much, Jack. You're my world. I don't know what I would do without you."

After a moment, she placed him back on his feet and wiped her eyes. A throat cleared in the doorway to the ballroom and she looked over at Edward's concerned face.

"Is everything okay?"

Jack stepped up and nodded. "Yeah, everything is fine, Dad. You know how mushy girls get when you tell them you love them."

She smiled gratefully down at her son for his simple and sweet explanation. She knew that the three of them needed to talk about September as a family, but now was not the right time or place.

She smiled sheepishly at Edward and shrugged. He smiled sweetly and reached into his breast pocket and pulled out a small white handkerchief. She took it from his outstretched hand and dabbed her face, trying to eliminate any traces of tears.

"Do I look okay?" she asked softly.

"Yes, you look wonderful," Edward responded without taking his eyes from hers.

"Ugh, okay. Can we go back inside before you two get all kissy again?" Jack complained half-heartedly.

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Bella laughed and nodded, before leaving the quiet balcony for the steady din of the crowded room once again.

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A little over an hour later, Marcus took the the stage.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. First off, I want to thank you for coming out this evening to support such a worthy cause. As some of you are well aware, my name is Marcus Preston, and I am president of Northern Trust Co. Just about five years ago, tragedy struck our family when my grandson, Jackson, went missing. It was a blow that struck all of us deeply. Through twists and turns that none of us could expect, our story has a happy ending. Jackson was found and adopted by the wonderful woman that you'll hear from tonight. Not many other children will receive that kind of ending, so we're here tonight to raise funds for The Lost Treasures Foundation, which aids missing and abandoned children and their families. Please open your hearts and your wallets tonight."

He smiled at his captive audience and looked around the room, before gesturing towards a large table off to his right.

"In addition to our fundraising tonight, we also have some items set up for a silent auction, so please feel free to come up and take a look at some of the things offered. Now, without further ado, I'd like to introduce world famous author and my new personal hero, Miss Isabella Swan."

Bella swallowed nervously before standing and making her way to the small stage. She still had minor cases of stage fright, but it was nowhere near as bad as it used to be. She had Tanya and her headfirst approach to book signings to thank for that. She smiled graciously at Marcus, who assisted her up the few stairs to reach the podium. She took a deep breath and smiled out into the

crowd.

"Hello everyone. Thank you, Marcus, for your lovely words. I truly appreciate them. I'm here tonight to campaign for The Lost Treasures Foundation. I started it a few years back, shortly after I adopted my son, Jack, to help kids that were alone like he was. He was lost and alone when I came across him five years ago; a three year old who couldn't share who his family was or even where they were. The hows and whys of his appearance in Seattle that day are still somewhat of a mystery to all of us, but in the here and now, Jack is finding his happy ending. There are millions of children throughout this country, who are lost and alone, in need of love, comfort and shelter. LTF helps them find that. We also provide support to families who are bereft because their children are missing. Not everyone can have a happy ending, but we can strive to make those numbers go up. So it is with a heavy, yet joyous heart, that I thank each and every one of you for attending and helping to make it possible for LTF to continue changing lives."

She smiled and nodded once before stepping back. Marcus stepped up swiftly beside her and leaned into the mic. "Once again, thank you very much and enjoy your evening."

There was a smattering of applause as Marcus held his hand out to help Bella down the stairs. When she was safely on the floor, he leaned down to whisper in her ear. "You were absolutely wonderful, Isabella."

She smiled up at him shyly as they made their way back to the table, where she took her seat once again between Jack and Edward. Both hugged her and whispered congratulations and that she did a great job. She smiled and kissed them both on the cheek. After a few minutes of chatting with their family, Bella eyed Jack's wineglass speculatively.

"What do you have there, kiddo?"

Jack rolled his eyes playfully and chuckled. "It's grape juice, Mom, don't worry."

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She giggled and ruffled his hair slightly. A moment later, she felt Edward tug on her elbow. She turned to face him and couldn't help but return his breathtaking smile.

"Will you dance with me, please, Bella?"

She nodded and placed her hand in his, letting him lead her to the dance floor. A new song started softly as she placed her arms around his neck.

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The stars lean down to kiss you

And I lie awake and miss you

Pour me a heavy dose of atmosphere

'Cause I'll doze off safe and soundly

But I'll miss your arms around me

I'd send a postcard to you, dear

'Cause I wish you were here

...

She sighed. "I love this song, it's so pretty."

"Mmmhmm," Edward agreed in a hum.

"Bella, what were you guys talking about on the balcony? It looked like a tense moment."

"Can we talk about this later? I don't think this is a good place for that conversation."

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He placed a hand on her cheek and she leaned into it. "I just want to know if everything's okay, baby."

She melted at the sound of his voice calling her baby and looked up into his sincere eyes.

"It will be. The three of us just need to sit down and sort through some things in regards to how this all plays out at the end of the summer."

She watched his eyes sadden as he nodded and looked away.

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I'll watch the night turn light-blue

But it's not the same without you

Because it takes two to whisper quietly

The silence isn't so bad

'Til I look at my hands and feel sad

'Cause the spaces between my fingers

Are right where yours fit perfectly

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The awkward silence was killing her , so she tried to lighten the mood.

"So, what do you think about Tahn and Tre?"

Edward raised an eyebrow and glanced over at where those two were sitting and talking animatedly.

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"I think they have the potential to either be perfect together or murder each other. Either way, it should definitely set off fireworks."

Bella threw her head back and laughed.

"I think they'd make quite an interesting pair."

"That they would," Edward agreed.

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I'll find repose in new ways

Though I haven't slept in two days

'Cause cold nostalgia c hills me to the bone

But drenched in vanilla twilight

I'll sit on the front porch all night

Waist-deep in thought because

When I think of you I don't feel so alone

...

"Look, I'm sorry for the awkwardness a few moments ago," he breathed into her ear, sending shivers down her spine.

"No, it's understandable. You just got your son back, it's difficult to imagine him leaving again."

He pulled back slightly and gazed into her eyes passionately.

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"It's not just him, Bella. It's you, too. I love you. More than I've ever loved anyone else besides Jack. I can't lose you two."

Her throat closed and she felt tears welling up in her eyes.

"I don't how we're going to make this work, Edward, but I love you too, so very much. You won't ever lose either one of us, even if we're halfway across the country. We're right here," she said earnestly, placing her hand over his heart.

He leaned down and kissed her passionately, but quickly.

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When violet eyes get brighter

And heavy wings grow lighter

I'll taste the sky and feel alive again

And I'll forget the world that I knew

But I swear I won't forget you

Oh, if my voice could reach

Back through the past

I'd whisper in your ear

Oh darling, I wish you were here

...

She opened her eyes and smiled into his lovingly. "We'll talk about all of this later, I promise."

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He nodded and placed his lips against her forehead. She glanced over at their table and felt her heart start to hammer and paranoia flow through her. Jack was shaking and breathing erratically. She jerked herself away from Edward and rushed off to her son's side. Edward stood frozen for a minute, not understanding what the hell had just happened, but was quickly jarred into motion once he noticed Bella's destination.

She was at her son's side in an instant, running her hands over his face and arms, checking to see if anything was wrong physically. His breathing became increasingly labored and his eyes were wide as saucers. She grabbed his hands and rubbed them.

"Jack! Jack, sweetie, you need to calm down. Deep breaths, Little Bit. That's it, come back to mama," she soothed cooingly in his ear, while running her free hand through his hair. He turned his wide eyes to meet hers and opened his mouth to speak, but no sound came out. He blinked and swallowed.

"What is it, baby? What's got you so upset?"

His eyes cast back towards the woman in a blue dress who was standing a few feet away, in front of their table, smirking at a livid Edward and Esme.

"Victoria," he whispered.

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AN: The song used in this chapter was Vanilla Twilight by Owl City. Music and dresses are up on the Parachute Blog! (link on my profile)

The names of the people (other than Riley, Garrett and Bree) that Jack was Tweeting with are a nod towards towards to some completely awesom ladies that I chat and Tweet with often and who also dispense awesome advice that

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helps this become a better story!

So, thank you to DaniaMCullen, AydenMorgen, Pkmarita (Pika), NicWise and MostlyALurker (Mal). You guys make my day! *mwah*

Chapter 25

AN: Thanks for not breaking out the pitchforks after the last chapter's cliffy. ;-)

Thank you to everyone who has donated to the Fandom for Preemies cause!
Almost \$2000 has been raised so far! You all deserve a huge hug! *squishes*

Another huge thank you goes out to the ladies of the Parachute Support Group on Facebook. You guys always crack me up and bring a smile to my face! The pre-reader and teaser comments that I've been getting from them the past couple of weeks has been phenomenal! If you'd like to join them, the link is on my profile!

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Even though no one, except those in their immediate vicinity, had any clue that something was amiss, Bella still felt as if the room had gone eerily quiet. Standing before her was the woman who had frequented her nightmares and bloodiest fantasies. There she was, looking smug and confident, when she should have been behind bars or at the bottom of a ditch somewhere. Bella's blood began to boil and she felt her fury bubbling over as she stood up and walked over to that very same woman. Noticing Bella's approach, Victoria raised an eyebrow at her in challenge and it took everything that Bella had in her not to slap the smirk off of the other woman's face.

"What the hell are you doing here?" Edward hissed. Victoria's gaze focused on him, and she smiled widely.

"Edward, baby, you're looking well," she replied in a sickly sweet voice.

"Cut the shit, Victoria. What are you doing here?" he ground out angrily,

causing her to laugh lightly.

"Why, Eddie, tonight is in honor of our son, isn't it? What kind of mother would I be if I didn't pay my respects."

"Victoria Anne," Marcus chastised his daughter. His face was red and splotchy, a clear indication of his anger and embarrassment at his oldest child.

Bella's brow furrowed slightly. She had automatically assumed that he had been the one to inform Victoria of Jack's reappearance. If he hadn't, then who had? Her mind started whirling with possibilities and improbabilities. She looked around their group quickly before noticing James standing just off to the side, looking extremely annoyed and slightly angry. At first, she thought it was out of concern for Edward, but then she saw him catch Victoria's eye and shake his imperceptibly, as if in warning. Victoria pursed her lips and winked at him before placing her attention back onto Edward. Bella blinked and quickly looked away before either of them caught her watching. The wheels in her mind started spinning at lightning speed.

Why would James communicate with Victoria? What was that all about? They seemed very familiar with each other. Was he the one who informed her about the Gala? Suddenly, the uneasy feelings that she had earlier upon meeting him all made sense, as memories flooded her brain.

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(Flashback from Chapter 2)

"I dunno. It was when the man met us at the park. He told Mommy that she had to ditch the kid or she wouldn't get it. She told me to stay on the bench and that she would be back soon." His little eyes welled up with tears.

Upon hearing that, Bella gasped and looked at her father, whose face was etched with disgust.

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"What man was that, Jack?" Zafrina asked, "Your daddy?" He shook his head quickly.

"No, my daddy was at home when we left in the car."

When she asked Jack to describe what anyone looked like, he told them that the man was big, with long yellow hair and that his mommy was tall with orange hair and blue eyes.

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Bella looked over once again at James and his blond hair and wondered if his hair color was too much of a coincidence to overlook. What if Victoria had been having an affair with her husband's lawyer? What would've brought them to Seattle? She blinked and shook her head. She chastised herself for pulling such a crazy story out of thin air. Still, she made a mental note to have Jenks look into Mr. Brooks as soon as possible. Charlie had always taught her to trust her instincts; to be cautious and that it was better to be safe than sorry.

She swallowed her apprehension towards James and focused on the confrontation taking place in front of her. Victoria placed her hands on her hips and rolled her eyes.

"You need to leave, Victoria, before I put you out."

"Don't you think you're being a tad rude, Edward? I mean, it's been five years since I've seen my child. No one thought to inform me that he was alive and well? I had to learn from a third party. I never thought that you'd sink that low."

"He's not your son anymore. You signed away any parental rights that you had and washed your hands of him," Edward growled angrily.

"I wouldn't push that issue if I were you."

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"And why not, Vic? It's black and white. I was there when you signed the papers. It can't be anymore cut and dry."

Victoria smirked. "I was high at the time. You knew it, your lawyer knew, hell, mine did, too. I wasn't in my right frame of mind, and you took advantage of that. It's called collusion. If I were to force the issue, I could get that little piece of paper negated."

Edward's eyes widened and his nostrils flared in fury. "Why? Why the hell would you even attempt something like that? You never wanted to be a mother in the first place!"

She took a step closer and glared at him. "Exactly. You forced that on me."

His face lost all of its color and he went slack-jawed. "I- I never forced anything on you."

"Not physically, no. Emotionally, yes. If I had run off and had an abortion like I wanted, my parents would have disowned me thanks to you. I had no choice. Well, I have a choice now."

Edward straightened as tall as he could and looked at his former wife, wondering what he had ever seen that was attractive. "This is not a fight you'll win, Victoria."

Victoria's gaze landed on Jack's trembling form, an evil smirk resting upon her face. Bella felt an overwhelming wave of anger and protectiveness boil in her veins. She moved swiftly in front of her son, cutting off Victoria's view and placing herself squarely in the line of fire, meeting Victoria's startled gaze. She didn't care whose blood ran through Jack's veins, he was her son and she was protecting him until her last breath.

The red haired witch cocked her head to the side and eyed Bella speculatively, as if she were a hunter analyzing her prey. Victoria's icy blue eyes narrowed and she took a step forward. Bella shifted into a defensive stance and clenched her fists at her sides, thankful for all of her father's self-defense lessons. This

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bitch wasn't laying a hand on her boy's head.

Esme took a half-step forward and placed her hand up in front of Victoria, halting her movement.

"You go no further," the older woman spoke with authority.

Victoria swung her wide-eyed gaze onto Esme. "And who do you think is going to stop me, Esme?" she asked cockily.

"I am." Esme's furious green eyes never wavered. "You won't lay a hand on my family again. I'll see you in Hell first."

Marcus walked up to his daughter and placed a hand on her elbow. "Victoria, I think it's time for you to leave."

She looked up at her father with confusion written across her face.

"Daddy? Are you really going to throw me out?" She batted her eyelashes and pouted.

Marcus's countenance wavered for only a moment before steeling himself. "Yes, I am. I won't choose you over my grandson, Victoria. You've had too many chances already. Edward was right, you won't win this fight."

Victoria's jaw dropped open. "Are you fucking kidding me?" She pointed over at Jack and started to raise her voice. "This is bullshit. That's my son over there; I was the one who carried him and gave birth to him. I have every right to see him!"

Edward leveled a hard look at her. "Legally, you don't have a leg to stand on. You signed away your rights. That means you are nothing but an egg donor to my son."

Victoria's hand flew up and smacked Edward right across his cheek with enough force to turn his head.

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"Don't fuck with me, Edward. You have no idea what I'm capable of," Victoria spoke in a low, menacing voice. Bella quickly moved forward, but Tanya held her back by the arm.

"No, Bella, don't," her friend whispered in her ear. "I know you want to go all Mama Bear on Vicwhoria for putting her hands on your man, but look at her. She's doing it to garner a reaction. She's trying to goad you into doing something that might cost you Jack. Do not fall for it. She's bringing out the rope, let her hang herself."

Bella was livid, but she understood exactly what Tanya was telling her. She would just have to find a way to wrap her hands around the ginger's neck without an audience. She nodded jerkily, and Tahn let go of her arm.

Bella stepped closer to Edward and placed her hand on his back. He looked back at her quickly and grimaced. A bright red welt was already forming on his cheek and she felt her anger rise to an even more unhealthy level. Victoria's gaze focused back on Bella and she sneered.

"And don't get me started on you, princess. The innocent and saintly Isabella Swan." Victoria laughed evilly when she noticed Bella's eyes widen. "Oh, yes, I know all about you, Miss Goody Two-shoes. You would do best to remember that you're playing house with my family. A piece of paper will never make you Jackson's mother. You're just a warm body for his father's bed; a common whore."

Jack looked up sharply and glared in her direction. "STOP IT," he growled out, a sound similar to a wounded animal. "Leave my mother alone."

Victoria cocked an eyebrow and smirked, misunderstanding the boy's plea. Bella straightened and smiled sweetly, which caused the other woman's confidence to waver.

"He's talking about **me**, you moron. I'm his mother, not you, and there's not a Goddamned thing that you can do about it."

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Bella turned her back on Victoria and walked over to Jack, who was staring at her with wide, frightened eyes. He had one arm wrapped around his waist, as if he were trying to hold himself together. She smiled sadly, and he flew at her as soon as she opened her arms to him. She hugged her son tightly as his little body trembled.

"It's okay, Little Bit, no one's going to hurt you," she murmured quietly in his ear, while rubbing his back.

"Bella, why don't you take Jack to get some air?" Esme offered.

Jack pleaded up at his mother with sad, tired eyes. "I just wanna go home. Please, Mom?"

Bella nodded quickly and looked over at Edward, who was still deep in argument with Victoria and Marcus. James walked towards Bella and smiled.

"I'd be happy to take you and the little guy home, Miss Swan."

Bella looked up at him in shock, every part of her screaming, 'No chance in Hell, buddy.' Even though she had no proof, there was no denying that her intuition was telling that James Brooks was dangerous.

She felt Jack stiffen and start to tremble harder when he looked up at James. The boy swiftly turned his head and buried his face in her shoulder.

"That won't be necessary, Mr. Brooks," Demetri spoke up. "I'll be more than happy to escort Bella and Jack home."

Esme placed her hand on Bella's shoulder and whispered into her ear. "Go on, I'll explain to Edward."

Bella nodded and then shot Tre a thankful look. They gathered up their things and stole quickly out of the ballroom undetected.

Parachute

Bella and Jack curled up together in the back seat of Demetri's car as he and Tanya buckled into the front.

"You didn't have to leave, Tahn," Bella said quietly. Tanya looked over her shoulder and rolled her eyes.

"If I had remained in that room, you would definitely be dipping into your savings for my bail money, Bella. Someone was going to get maimed, either the creepy guy or the bi-" Tanya glanced at Jack and bit back the curse that was about to fly out of her mouth. "Well, someone was going to get hurt."

Bella nodded and looked down at Jack, whose head was resting against her shoulder with his eyes closed. Her heart broke for her son. Not only had he been dealing with nervousness about the Gala, but Victoria showing up must have thrown his anxiety into a whole other level. Jack sighed and shifted, opening his eyes and gazing into hers.

"I was scared. When I saw her, I was so scared. I- I've been having nightmares about her. That she takes me away from you and Dad. That she hurts one of you or she hurts me. I don't want to see her ever again. Please, Mom, please. Don't let her take me."

Bella's heart completely shattered as she listened to the distress in Jack's voice. In that moment, she could have committed murder and not thought twice about it. Victoria Preston deserved to be sitting at the gates of Hades right now, waiting to have her soul judged. Bella kissed the top of Jack's head and rubbed his back.

"Ssh, baby. It's okay to be scared, but no one will let her hurt you. There's no force on Earth that will take you from us. Now that he has you back, your dad will move mountains to make sure you're safe, and you know that I would fight like hell for you. There's a very long line of people willing to stand between you and Victoria."

Jack nodded and just stared off into space. Tanya turned in her seat and gave Bella a sad smile.

Parachute

"I think we should get Jazz to work on a restraining order as soon as possible," she said quietly.

"I was just thinking that myself," Bella replied. "We'll need to see about getting copies of their divorce record and where she signed away her rights to Jack. James is Edward's lawyer, and I don't know what his reaction will be to that, but we all need to sit down to discuss where we go from here. We need a plan of action to make sure that Jack is safe, no matter what."

"You'd probably be better off talking to Carlisle about that," Demetri chimed in from the driver's seat.

"What do you mean, Tre?" Tanya asked.

"Brooks had some family issues pop up around the time of the divorce proceedings and wasn't able to handle them for Ed. Carlisle had his own lawyer, Felix Howard, take care of everything for him. Personally, I think Ed was better off. I've never gotten a good vibe from that man, and I know I'm not the only one."

Bella sat back, somewhat startled by the revelation that James had had nothing to do with the divorce. She wondered briefly if he had an ulterior motive for staying away. Like, maybe sleeping with his client's wife? He wouldn't have wanted to be around for the divorce, in case Victoria tried to use their affair against him to get more out of Edward. Puzzle pieces were falling into place and she did not like the picture they were painting.

"Tre, this is going to sound completely off-the-wall, but do you recall if James has ever had long hair?"

Tre met Bella's eyes in the rear view mirror, surprise written across his face.

"Yes, he did. It used to be shoulder length, but he cut it a few years ago. Why do you ask?"

Parachute

Bella shook her head and decided to keep her suspicions to herself for now. She felt her unease with James' role in Jack's disappearance grow astronomically. Her gut was telling that he was there with them in Seattle. Now, she just needed to figure out why.

"No reason, just curiosity." Bella caught Tanya's questioning look and she shook her head slightly, trying to convey that she'd explain herself later. Tanya understood and nodded in acknowledgement.

"Tahn, remind me later that I need to call Jenks about a few things?"

Tanya's eyes widened and she nodded again, this time putting two and two together and whipping out her cell phone to send a text off to Jenks to start the process of getting dirt on Brooks as soon as possible.

A little while later, the car pulled up in front of the Cullen household. Jack had fallen asleep and was out cold, so Bella slipped off her shoes and arranged him in her arms to carry him to bed. Demetri stepped around to her side and offered to take Jack up for her, but she couldn't let him go. She needed to do this; to feel connected to her son right now.

"Unf, thanks," she huffed, "but I've got him, Tre. Shit, he's heavier than I remembered."

Bella shifted the sleeping boy and made her way inside of the house, leaving Tanya to gather up the few belongings that she and Jack had left inside of the car. When she got to the top of the stairs, she made the decision to lay Jack down in her room, figuring that it was going to be a rough night. She laid him down on top of the covers and sat down to remove his shoes and work his suit jacket off. She looked down at his peaceful face and let a few tears slip. It wasn't fair. He didn't deserve to hurt like this. She ran her hand down his cheek and sighed, before standing and taking his things into his room. She sifted through his dresser until she came across a pair of pajamas and took them back to her room. When she was finished getting him changed, she pulled back the blankets and covered him up.

Parachute

She heard a soft knock on the door jamb and looked up to see Tanya standing there.

"Hey," she whispered as she walked over to Bella and squeezed her shoulder. Bella smiled sadly and wrapped her arms around Tahn's waist in a hug.

"Listen, I've gotten the ball rolling on the James info and sent Jenks a message. I think I know where you're going with this. What if Victoria was meeting him and not some random dealer?"

Bella nodded against Tanya's stomach. "I'm not saying anything to Edward until we're sure."

"Bell, I don't know if that's a good idea. You two are just starting out in a relationship and you shouldn't begin by hiding things from him."

Bella pulled back and looked at Tanya with a pleading expression. "If we're right, this will hurt him. It will mean that not only did his wife betray him, but his good friend did as well. James is a lawyer, he would have covered his tracks really well. I don't want to say until we're sure."

Tanya nodded reluctantly. "If anyone can find anything on Brooks, it's Jenks. He should have something for us in the morning."

After a moment, Tanya sighed and hugged Bella's shoulders. "You're my best friend, Bell. I'm always on your side, you know? My silence is yours."

"Thank you, Tahn. Listen, how about we meet up with Jasper and Alice tomorrow? They're not heading back until Sunday."

Realizing Sunday's date, Bella groaned. "Dammit, my dad comes in on Sunday. What shitty timing Victoria has. Couldn't she have quietly fallen off the face of the Earth or something?"

Tanya patted her shoulder in comfort. "Look at it this way, maybe having Charlie around will help Jack feel more secure. You know how close the two

of them are."

"Yeah, that's true. Ugh, Charlie's going to go ballistic when he hears what happened tonight."

"Good."

Bella looked at her friend incredulously. "Good? Are you serious?"

Tanya smirked and nodded. "He's the only one of us who can legally shoot someone, remember?"

Bella snorted and shook her head. "Thanks for the image. I needed that."

"Anytime, bb. Listen, I'm going to head out. Tre is going to give me a ride back to the hotel. I'm sure the cavalry will be here soon."

Bella gave her a genuine smile. "Thank you so much for being here, Tahn."

Tanya leaned down and laid a kiss on Bella's head before walking towards the door. "Anytime, Bell."

"Hey, Tanya!" Bella called as the other woman was leaving the room. Tanya stopped and shot her a questioning look.

"Be nice, Demetri is a great guy. Don't do anything that I wouldn't do!"

Tanya rolled her eyes and shook her head. "Oh, Bella... that would make for a very dull Tanya, and we all know that the last thing that I will be called is dull." She shot her wink and left Bella giggling slightly.

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Parachute

Bella shifted restlessly a few hours later. Jack had an arm wrapped around her and her dress was stuck in places that were very uncomfortable. She turned and reached for her phone on the night table. She was shocked to see that it was three a.m. and there were fifteen missed calls, mostly from Edward. She sat up quickly and went to stand when she noticed a dark figure in the chair by the window. She turned on the lamp and Edward blinked, adjusting to the light.

He was sitting there, tie undone and suit jacket strewn across the back of the chair. His hair was in a wild disarray, as if he had been tugging on it anxiously, and his eyes were bloodshot. Bella sighed and walked over to him. He opened his arms and she curled onto his lap, resting her head on his chest, just above his heart.

"Why didn't you wake me?" she asked quietly. She felt his body rumble with his chuckle.

"You two looked so peaceful; I couldn't bear to disturb that, so I sat here watching. On one hand, I was thanking God for bringing the two of you into my life, but on the other, cursing his name for allowing Victoria to come within twenty feet of us."

She put her arms around him and squeezed tightly. "It'll be okay, Edward. She won't get anywhere near him."

He pulled back and looked fiercely down into her eyes with a fiery gaze. "You're right about that. If any harm comes to either you or Jack because of her, nothing short of the Heavens opening up will stop me from tearing her limb from limb."

Bella reached up and stroked his cheek with her hand. "Ssh, it's late. Come and try to get some rest. We'll talk about everything in the morning, okay?"

Instead of answering her, his hands buried themselves in her hair and his lips crashed against hers. It was a desperate sort of kiss, full of intensity and longing. She brought her other hand up to the opposite cheek and gently cradled his face, as the tempo of the kiss slowed and gentled. She pulled back

Parachute

and watched as his eyes slowly opened. A small smile formed on his lips and he kissed her softly one last time.

"Thank you."

"For what?" she asked, somewhat confused.

"For grounding me. For loving me. For loving our son. There are too many things to list right now, but each and every one only adds up to my undying love and gratitude for you, Bella Swan."

Her insides melted and she sighed. "You never have to thank me for any of those things, Edward. Now, let's get some rest."

She stood up and took his hand, pulling him to a standing position. She slowly unbuttoned his shirt and slid it off of his shoulders, revealing the undershirt beneath. She went to reach for his belt buckle and stopped herself, blushing.

"Erm, you can do this part. I'm going to change." She nervously pointed to the bathroom which caused him to chuckle.

She walked swiftly over to her dresser and grabbed her pajamas, retreating into the bathroom. When she emerged a few minutes later, she found Edward in his shirt and boxers sprawled out next to Jack, already in a deep sleep. She smiled and situated herself on the boy's other side, before reaching over to turn off the lamp. She closed her eyes and fervently hoped that the next day would be more peaceful than the previous one had been, before settling into a dreamless sleep.

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AN: I'll see you all on Monday with the teasers! *mwah*

Parachute

Bella nodded and felt her chest ache as she watched her son leave the room. She turned and looked at Tanya first thing.

"Did Jenks have any information?"

Tanya sighed and shook her head. "No, but he said he'll keep digging."

Bella groaned to herself and rubbed her temples, trying to stave off the headache that was coming on.

'What do I do now?' she thought. 'Do I tell him or wait? Dammit, I can't keep this from him.'

Jasper cleared his throat. "Since you and Jack are Washington residents, I'll file for a restraining order first thing on Monday morning when we're back home. Since she physically assaulted you last night, Edward, I would suggest filing one for yourself as well. You have enough witnesses that will attest to that. It will also be good to have it in case she follows through on her ridiculous idea of fighting for custody."

Edward absentmindedly rubbed his cheek and nodded. "I'll get James on that right away."

Tanya scoffed and shook her head. Edward glanced at her and shot her a questioning look.

"What's wrong with that, Tahn?" he asked. Tanya looked at her hands and shook her head, not wanting to betray her friend's trust.

Bella sighed and reached out to touch Edward's arm, which caused his gaze to turn to her.

"I don't think that would be a good idea, Edward," she said softly and his brow furrowed in confusion.

"Why not? He's my lawyer and one of my best friends."

Parachute

Bella shook her head slightly. "I don't know how to say this, except to blurt it right out. I have a bad feeling about him and I don't trust him. I think he was the one who told Victoria about last night as well as the man that Jack saw with her in Seattle, too. He seemed too unaffected by her appearance."

Edward's eyes widened and he sat back, stunned at Bella's line of thought.

"No, I think you're barking up the wrong tree. I trust James, he wouldn't do that to me."

Tanya's fist hit the table soundly. "Look, to be technical, you didn't think your wife would take your kid and abandon him on the streets either, did you?"

Hurt flashed across his face before he glared at Tanya. "If you want to get technical, this is none of your business," he responded coldly, throwing her words right back at her. Tanya's eyes narrowed.

"If Bella wants me to leave, Edward, then I'll leave. Though considering that I at least take the time to hear all of her reasons before blowing her opinions off, I don't see that happening."

All eyes turned to Bella and she threw her hands up in the air in frustration.

"Are you kidding me right now?" she half-yelled in anger. "This isn't a pissing contest. This is about protecting Jack."

She turned to look at Edward. "I know he's your friend, but I really feel like he's bad news right now. I don't even care if he was a blood relative, I don't trust him, and I won't trust my son's life with him. I won't bring it up again because you're close to him, but if Jenks gets back to us with any info pointing that he was with her in Seattle, all bets are off. Whether you choose to trust me on this or not is your own business. I know that this is difficult to hear, but I can't change the situation, though I wish I could."

She turned to Tanya next. "Look, I love you dearly, but throwing digs at Edward is only exacerbating the situation. Put yourself in his shoes. If someone

Parachute

came at you and accused me of doing something terrible, whether I was guilty or not, what would your reaction be?" Tanya looked down at the table, knowing that Bella was completely correct. "I appreciate that your first instinct is to protect Jack and me, but we're on the same side here. We need to work together. Let's not do anything hasty until we have all of the facts in front of us."

Bella placed both hands flat on the table and stared at her fingers. "The main goal here is that Victoria cannot be allowed near Jack again. He practically had a panic attack last night. I don't want him to have to go through that again."

Tanya looked up and offered an apologetic smile. "I'm so sorry, Edward. Bella's right; that was uncalled for and I apologize. I understand that this is a shock to you, but I can't apologize for protecting both of them with my life. They're like family to me, and I don't have much to start off with, so I may have a tendency to go overboard."

Edward nodded before looking away from her, his jaw still clenched tightly.

Tanya sighed. "What happened after we left last night?"

Emmett's lips quirked, trying to fight a smile. "Mom sucker punched Victoria when she started running her mouth again."

"Esme!" Bella gasped and glanced at Esme, who folded her arms in front of her and looked as proud as a peacock.

"What? She deserved it. I only regret not doing it sooner."

Bella shook her head and tried to hide her giddy smile at the thought of Victoria spread out on the ballroom floor. The wish that she had been the one to have knocked Victoria out last night was immense. She closed her eyes, immediately sobering when she realized that it was a good thing that they had left with Jack when they did. As much as Victoria deserved a righteous beat down, Jack didn't need to witness it.

Parachute

She sighed and stretched her neck, before looking around the table.

"What a clusterfuck. Oh, excuse my language," she apologized. Esme shook her head and laughed lightly.

"You're right, though. I cannot believe that bitch just showed up like that. The nerve of her! If Edward hadn't pulled me back, I might have done more damage to that pretty face of hers," Esme exclaimed angrily.

Bella nodded, agreeing completely with what had just been said. She took a deep breath and turned towards Jasper.

"Jazz, does she stand a chance of winning, if she chooses to fight for him?" she asked in a quiet, scared voice.

Jasper smiled kindly at her and shook his head. "In my opinion, not a chance in hell. There's enough speculative evidence that she abandoned him in Seattle as well as taking into account her rehab records. Not to mention the plain and simple fact that she signed away her rights to him. Even if she was under the influence when she signed, it's just another strike against her for the drug use."

Bella nodded. "So, the game plan is to file restraining orders and keep her the hell away from Jack, right?"

Everyone around the table nodded or agreed in some fashion. Alice leaned forward and voiced a concern of her own.

"What happens when you go on the book tour next week? Is Jack going with you?"

Bella took a deep breath and turned to Edward. She had meant to have this conversation with him earlier, but the past few days had been so hectic.

"Sorry, I meant to ask you about this sooner, but what would you think of Jack staying here with you, while Tanya and I went on the tour? I thought that maybe you guys could have some one-on-one time. If it's a problem, don't

Parachute

worry about it. He's used to coming on these things with me. Every time I wonder when his own fan club will pop up," she laughed.

Edward smiled brightly and nodded enthusiastically. "That's fine, great even. I've been working on smaller projects since I've been back to work anyway, so it's not a big deal. We'll have fun." He leaned down, close to her ear. "I know you're worried, but I'll keep him safe, Bella" he added softly.

Bella smiled sadly and nodded. Being away from Jack and knowing that Victoria was lurking somewhere was going to make her a nervous wreck, but she couldn't bring herself to pull him away from his father, especially when the time before they left for Washington was limited.

"I know," she responded, barely above a whisper. She stared off into the distance as conversations slowly started to break out around the table. She couldn't bring herself to focus on any of them. All she wanted was her son.

"I'm going to go and check on Jack," she said quietly, before standing.

She quickly made her way up the stairs to her son's room and rested her forehead against the wood, sighing. Not for the first time in these past few months, she was torn in half yet again. She was in love with Edward and didn't want to leave his side, but now she also wanted nothing more than to whisk Jack up in her arms and hightail it back to Washington, away from the threat of Victoria or James. Jack was her first priority. He had been from the moment she laid her eyes on him and he always would be.

She straightened up and knocked on his door before peeking in. He was lying sideways across his bed, tapping away at the laptop keys. He looked up and smiled at her. "Hey, Ma. Is everything okay?" he asked, frowning slightly. She shook her head and stretched out next to him.

"Yeah, it's fine. I just wanted to check on you. I know this has been rough. Do you want to talk about it?"

Parachute

The boy paused, before closing the laptop and turning on his side to lean on his elbow and face his mother.

"It was weird. You know, seeing her. Like, I was caught in a dream." He closed his eyes. "She looks the same as I remembered. I was really scared, but now I think I'm just angry."

He opened his vibrant green eyes and Bella gasped at the hostility swimming in them.

"Jack," she whispered, reaching out rub his shoulder.

"She doesn't get to win, Mom. I'm not a little baby that she can hurt; I'm bigger, and I can fight for myself now. I'm not scared of her anymore."

Bella reached out and pulled him into a hug, her heart breaking for everything this little boy had been out through.

"It'll be okay, baby. It'll all be fine," she whispered as she held him tightly.

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The next day, Bella found herself tapping her foot nervously as she waited for her father to disembark from his plane. She and Jack had both missed him terribly and the new drama surrounding them now didn't make things any easier. Edward wanted to come along with her, but she talked him out of it, not wanting his first meeting with her father to be in a busy airport. Instead, Esme offered to come and keep her company, which Bella gratefully appreciated. After a few moments, the older woman reached out and squeezed Bella's hand in comfort, when her nervous tapping started going overboard.

"Relax, Bella. It's going to be fine."

Parachute

She gave Esme a grateful smile and turned back just in time to see Charlie's face in the crowd of people deboarding the flight. His face was leaner, as if he had lost some weight and his cheeks were covered in stubble that she wasn't used to seeing. She grinned and her feet started moving of their own accord. She quickly found herself wrapped in her father's arms, the smell of Old Spice and leather assaulting her senses. It was an immediate comfort and brought tears to her eyes.

"Baby girl! I missed you guys so much! Where's my boy at?" he asked excitedly, a warm smile upon his face.

"He's back at the house with Edward. We're going straight there, unless you want to stop and grab something to eat?"

Charlie grinned and nodded. "Some coffee and a burger sounds perfect right about now."

He stepped out of their hug and took off his Mariners baseball cap when he noticed Esme smiling off to the side.

"Oh! Dad, this is Esme Cullen, Jack's grandmother."

Charlie reached out and took her hand gently and smiled. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Ma'am."

"The pleasure is all mine, Chief Swan. Jack speaks so highly of you."

Charlie's face blushed a soft pink hue and he rubbed his neck, sheepishly.

"Thank you, Mrs. Cullen. It's Charlie, please."

"As long as you return the favor and call me Esme."

Charlie nodded before returning his cap to his disheveled head of hair before taking Bella's hand. She smiled up at him and placed one of her hands on his cheek, rubbing his surprisingly soft stubble.

Parachute

"What's up with the facial hair, Dad? Are you trying to look hip?"

Charlie snorted and shook his head, shrugging. "Between Sue's new promotion keeping her at work for long hours and missing you two, I've been in a funk of sorts. Plus, we've been shorthanded since Mark had a heart attack a few weeks ago."

"Oh, no. How is he?" Bella asked in concern. Mark had been her father's deputy for over ten years. The fact that he was the one to have a heart attack made her instantly concerned over Charlie's health.

"He's fine, just resting easy for a little. He's bound and determined to get back to work soon."

She nodded and he nudged her with his shoulder.

"Baby girl, drop the sad face, I'm as healthy as a horse. I even had a full physical last month and it came out perfect. Now, what do you say about getting out of this airport and away from the tin can I flew in on? I can't wait to see Jack."

Esme let out a laugh and shook her head. "I know how you feel, Charlie. I hate flying myself."

The pair continued to bemoan their flight experiences as they made their way to the parking garage. Just about an hour later, they were pulling up in front of the Cullen home. Bella stifled a giggle at the excitement coming off of her father in waves as he quickly hopped out of the car and hefted his bag over his shoulder. His over-eagerness reminded her completely of Jack.

As they entered the front door, Charlie's eyes widened, taking in the view. His gaze stilled when it came upon Edward, standing in the middle of the room, waiting to introduce himself. Bella smiled softly at him and winked. Pulling her dad forward, she met Edward half-way across the room.

Parachute

"Dad, I'd like you to meet, Edward Cullen, Jack's father. Edward, this is my dad, Charlie."

Edward smiled widely and reached out to shake Charlie's hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Chief Swan. Jack and Bella have told me so much about you. It's an honor to get to meet you and thank you for everything you've done."

Bella swallowed nervously as she watched her father measure up the man she loved. After their experiences with Jacob, Charlie was particularly overprotective any time a man came to pick her up for a date. That was one of the major reasons her dates had been few and far between over the years. As she stood there anxiously awaiting whatever intimidation tactic that Charlie had planned, he completely shocked her by nodding and shaking Edward's hand firmly. Her jaw almost dropped as she watched her normally gruff father swallow and blink away tears.

"It's good to meet you, son. They've both told me great things about you as well. As a father myself, I can't imagine what you've been through, but I'm glad it's all worked out for the best."

Bella clapped a hand over her mouth to stifle a sob that she was fighting. She had seen her father be emotional over the years, but she never would have expected it at this moment. When she had first spoken to him and let him know that she was falling in love with Edward, he had sounded skeptical and concerned. A warm and friendly greeting between the two men had never crossed her mind, but she was thrilled with the outcome.

Edward nodded and blinked away his own tears.

"POPS!"

The three adults turned just in time to see Jack fly in the patio doors and launch himself at his grandfather. Charlie laughed and dropped his bag as he caught Jack and squeezed him tightly.

"Jack, God, I've missed you, boy!"

Parachute

"I've missed you, too, Pops! So much! Is Nana with you?" Jack asked excitedly.

"No, I'm sorry, kiddo. She couldn't get away from work this week, but you'll see her soon enough."

Bella glanced at Edward and she saw him flinch at the mention of them leaving, but he recovered quickly. She couldn't help but reach out and grab his hand. He looked down at her and smiled, squeezing her hand. When she looked back, Charlie looked pointedly at their hands and quirked an eyebrow. She groaned internally, knowing that she'd more than likely be facing the Spanish Inquisition when Charlie got her alone.

Charlie stood Jack back on his feet and ruffled his hair. "How have you been liking Chicago, my boy?"

Jack's face lit up and he started rambling on about the "super awesome skatepark" and the huge ferris wheel that he had fallen in love with. He took his grandfather's hand and started to drag him up the stairs. Esme chose that moment to quietly slip out of the room and into the study as well.

"Come on, Pops! You've got to see my room; it's awesome!"

Charlie shot Bella a helpless look but she merely shook her head and laughed. As soon as they were out of sight, Edward's arms were wrapped around her waist and his lips were attached to hers. The kiss started out passionately, but ended slow and sweet. She pulled back and looked into his eyes, smiling.

"Miss me, did you?" she laughed lightly. He rested his forehead against her and sighed.

"Like you wouldn't believe. I've done nothing but pace and be nervous for the past three hours."

She leaned up and kissed him swiftly, yet gently. "You had nothing to worry about. Both Jack and I love you; Charlie didn't stand a chance."

Parachute

He smiled at her before his face clouded over and his lips turned into a frown.

"What's wrong?" she asked worriedly. He looked hesitant for a moment before breathing deeply in through his nose.

"I spoke with James today about filing for a restraining order."

Bella stiffened and her jaw clenched of it's own accord. She nodded and looked down at her feet, willing herself to see things from his point of view. No one wanted to believe that their best friend could have possibly been sleeping with their wife, even though it happened all too often in real life.

His hand cupped the right side of her face and his thumb caressed the apple of her cheek. She looked back into his eyes and anguish was plainly written in them.

"Bella, please. Don't feel like I'm discounting your feelings. It's just... he's my friend. I can't question anything without proof. I promise you that I'll be more cautious around him until you're more comfortable. I love you, and I would choose you over him in a heartbeat, but I would hate to be put in that position."

"Oh, Edward," she sighed. "I don't want to put you in a position like that. I already said that I wouldn't say anything against James without proof. I adore you, but my first priority is Jack and James needs to start praying now if he did have anything to do with what happened five years ago."

Edward let a low growl out and he responded in a hard voice. "Bella, if it turns out that he had anything to do with Jack's disappearance, praying isn't going to do him a damn bit of good."

It felt so wrong, but his fierce protectiveness had completely turned her on.

They broke apart at the sound of a throat clearing behind them. Jack and Charlie stood at the bottom of the stairs, both with their arms folded across their chests.

Parachute

"I think we need to have a heart-to-heart, Edward," Charlie spoke in his best "tough guy" voice. Bella rolled her eyes and pointed at her father.

"Not necessary. Can you just be happy for me, Dad. Just this once, please?"

Charlie's eyes softened and he sighed. Just as he was about to respond, Edward stepped in.

"It's okay, Bella. I think it's a good idea. I'd like the opportunity to chat with the Chief."

Charlie gave Edward a speculative look before smiling genuinely and nodding.

The two of them made their way to the patio, leaving Bella and Jack to watch their retreating forms.

"So, Chief, what do you think about baseball?"

Jack turned to Bella and rolled his eyes. "They're going to be awhile. Wanna play a game?"

She laughed and shrugged. "What do you have in mind?"

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An hour later, Bella slammed the Playstation 3 controller down in disgust. She couldn't control the little football men on the screen to save her life.

"I'm done, I quit."

She heard a boisterous laugh and turned around to find Emmett leaning over the couch.

Parachute

"What are you doing here, Em?" she asked in curiosity. The burly man shrugged and smiled mischievously.

"There wasn't much work at the shop, so Rosie chased me out of her way. Plus, I wanted to see if my baby brother survived meeting the gun-toting sheriff."

Bella shook her head and laughed good-naturedly. "He's a police chief, not a sheriff. Last I checked, they were outside talking sports, so everything seems to be going well."

He nodded his head thoughtfully, before glancing at the patio doors. He tried to hide his concern, but she saw right through him.

"You were worried for him, huh?" she asked quietly. Emmett turned and fixed her with a serious expression, similar to the looks he had given her when they were first getting to know each other.

"Yeah. You know how I am when it comes to protecting him."

"He's a grown man, Em. You can't handle him with kid gloves, it'll only hurt him more."

Emmett looked at her helplessly. "What do I do then? Sitting back and doing nothing is not an option."

Bella kneeled up on the couch and hugged him tightly around the waist.

"I don't know, Em, but we'll figure it out, okay?"

"Yeah, sure," he responded sadly before turning to Jack. "Looks like you can use an actual opponent, huh, sport?"

Jack grinned up at his uncle and patted the spot next to him on the couch. "Sounds good, Uncle Em. She did her best, but Mom wasn't cut out for football."

Parachute

"Ha, ha, ha," Bella deadpanned before heading into the kitchen for a snack. After nabbing an apple, she came back to the living room to find that Edward and Charlie had joined the fray. She smiled and enjoyed the sight of her father playing Madden with Emmett. She squinted at the screen and almost laughed at the score. Charlie was was up by two touchdowns, his Seahawks leading Emmett's Chicago Bears, 21-7.

Edward looked up at her quiet giggle and motioned her over, to sit with him and Jack. She settled between her guys and Jack grinned up at her.

"Mom? Guess what?" he said eagerly.

"What?"

"Dad's taking us to a Cubs game on Wednesday! Isn't that awesome?"

Bella looked over at Edward and laughed. "Nice job, Cullen. I see you've found the way to my father's heart."

"No, we just share a common love of baseball. The keys to his heart also fit mine, actually."

Her heart melted at the adoration in his gaze as he motioned towards Jack and herself.

"Oh, Edward, you sap," she sighed as she leaned into his side. He laughed lightly and put his arm around her shoulder.

"Eh, you like it. Admit it."

She smiled to herself and agreed with him silently, resting her head on his shoulder.

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Chapter 27

AN: A huge nod and thank you to Stratan, who is an angel for putting up with my last-minute tendencies. =)

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August 4th, 2010

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Over the next few days, Jack, Charlie and Edward had been almost inseparable. Bella found herself on the verge of being jealous a few times, but the overall cuteness of their bonding moments made her quickly dispel the notion. The nightly make out sessions with Edward didn't hurt either.

Wednesday afternoon was bright and sunny; perfect weather for a baseball game. Bella sat on the end of the second row aisle, on the third base side. The seats were completely amazing and she briefly wondered how Edward had gotten a hold of them.

She turned and smiled at Edward, who was talking animatedly with her father about the last play that had taken place on the field. Jack sat on his father's left side, paying rapt attention to everything that the two men were saying.

Charlie turned and nudged Edward in the side. "I would have figured you for a Sox fan, Ed."

Edward rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly before responding. "Uh, the Sox are in Milwaukee this week."

Parachute

Charlie laughed loudly and slapped his knee.

Bella shook her head at the two men and smiled, before reaching into her jeans pocket to pull out her vibrating phone. She frowned as she noticed that a text from an unknown number was on her screen. Opening it, she gasped and covered her mouth.

Staring back at her was a picture of their group walking into the stadium, with Jack between Edward and herself. A caption beneath the picture read:

"I can get to you anywhere."

She swallowed and tried to quell the nauseous feeling in her stomach, closing the message quickly. Edward turned, giving her a concerned look.

"Is everything okay, baby? You look sick," he asked in a worried voice.

She gave him a watery smile and nodded briefly. "I'm going to go find the ladies room. I'm not feeling well, but I'll be fine."

He kissed her on the cheek and smiled kindly. She returned the gesture before getting up and making her way to the restrooms. The long line for the women's room gave her a chance to settle her emotions and to think rationally. As soon as she found an empty stall, she placed the lid down and sat on the commode. She opened the photo again and noticed that it was probably taken from about ten feet away, with Jack as the main focus. She weighed her options for a few minutes before coming to a decision. There was no point in ruining the rest of the game for the guys, so she would hold off on telling them until afterwards. Until then, she'd watch Jack like a hawk and stick close to Edward and Charlie.

An idea jumped into her mind and she pulled up her iPhone's App Store to find a call recording application. Once it was installed and ready to go, she placed her phone back in her pocket and left the stall, stopping only to wash her hands. She walked a few feet from the restroom, towards a quiet corner and opened the recording software to re-dial the unfamiliar number. The line picked up and Bella grimaced as she heard a recording say "Your call is now being recorded."

Parachute

She wished like hell that the person on the other line didn't catch that.

"He-hello?" Bella asked tentatively.

"I must say that I'm surprised you called back," a husky female voice replied.
"Don't you have any sense of self-preservation?"

Bella's brow furrowed, trying to recognize the semi-familiar voice. "Who is this?"

"You really have to ask, Ms. Swan?" The woman laughed lightly.

Recognition hit Bella like a punch to the gut.

"What do you want, Victoria?" she asked angrily.

"Tsk, ts, ts. Don't growl at me, Isabella. I have a proposition for you."

"What could you possibly have to offer me?" Bella asked incredulously.

"Jackson. I never wanted to be a mother. Edward knew that. Hell, both of our families knew that. I only wanted Edward and the power I got from being with him. He got off on being seen with me on his arm. Plus, he's always had a soft spot for me and my mouth, if you know what I mean."

Bella's stomach turned, the image of Victoria going down on Edward burning behind her eyes.

"What does this have to do with me?" she asked in a shaky voice.

Victoria snickered. "It's quite simple. I want you to take the boy and disappear. I want to swoop in and pick up the pieces of Edward's broken heart."

Bella's eye widened comically and she held back a hysterical laugh.

"Are you insane? What kind of a deal is that?" she asked incredulously.

Parachute

"Oh, but I'm not crazy. This is the easy way out for you. The guarantee that Jack will be yours, and yours alone. The hard way will be me sending you packing back to your podunk town. Without Edward or Jack."

"Oh really? And how do you propose that will happen?" Bella asked, her annoyance growing by leaps and bounds.

"I have a connection with Edward, and I know that I can easily find my way back into his bed. We've always had a... special bond, he and I. It can happen now, and I take both him and your son from you. Or, you can leave now and keep the boy. I only want Edward."

Bella scoffed at the arrogance of this woman.

"I was right before. You are insane. I love them both and there's no way I'm walking away from either of them. In case you're unaware, I have legal rights to Jack, unlike you."

"Oh, I know all about your rights. I also know that if Edward and I show a united front, you'll be squashed like a bug in court. But, if you disappear now, I can work my way in and sabotage every move that he makes to take Jack from you. We all know that's inevitable. Do you honestly think that just because Mama Esme adopted him that he'll let you just leave again with his son?" Victoria laughed gaily. "You are so wrong. I guarantee that by the time you're ready to go, he'll have filed an injunction to keep you there."

Bella's heart started to beat faster, thoughts of losing Jack spurring on an anxiety attack.

"No," she whispered. "You're wrong."

Sensing weakness, Victoria dove in for the kill. "Are you sure about that? Are you willing to risk your son with that gamble?"

"How can you be like this? I- I don't understand how you could not love that little boy."

Parachute

It was Victoria's turn to scoff. "Just because I carried that boy for nine months doesn't change the fact that I don't care about him. To be honest, he's better off with you anyway. I didn't need to look at him everyday and see my failures or the life that I lost when Edward knocked me up. He wanted to keep the child, so I was pressured to go through with it. I should have snuck off and gotten rid of it quietly, not telling anyone."

Bella stifled a sob at heartbreak she felt for Jack.

"I'm not giving in to you. You'll have to pry them from my cold, dead hands."

"That can be arranged, Isabella," Victoria responded icily. "But remember this, I'm your only hope of leaving Chicago with Jack."

Bella took a deep breath and leaned against the wall as Victoria ended the call with a 'click.'

She felt a touch on her shoulder and she jerked away instinctively. Her heart pounded as she whipped around to view the person.

"Baby, hey, what's wrong? Why are you scared?" Edward asked, starting to feel slightly frightened himself as he took in her wide, fear-filled eyes.

She let out a small sob and collapsed against his chest.

"Shh, it's okay, Bella. Did someone hurt you?"

When she didn't answer, he started to panic.

"Bella. Baby, please. You've got to tell me what's wrong. I'm going out of my mind here," he asked in a shaking voice.

"Vi-Vic-Victoria," she hiccuped out.

Edward's eyes narrowed and he looked around at the crowd, searching for a glimpse of red hair.

Parachute

"Where? What happened? What did she do to you?"

Bella shook her head and wiped the tears from her cheeks. She touched her phone's screen and it came to life, opening up the picture to show Edward. His eyes widened and his nostrils flared in fury.

"What the fuck is that?" he hissed, taking the phone from her hand to inspect the picture closely. He looked up at her, his eyes blazing angrily.

"Victoria sent this? How do you know?"

Bella swallowed and answered quietly. "I called the number back."

"I'm sorry, what was that?" he asked, not believing his ears.

Bella straightened her back and looked him directly in the eye. "I called back and it was her that I spoke with."

Edward groaned and handed her phone back. "Dammit, Bella. I wish you would have said something first. You don't know what she's capable of."

Bella partly understood where he was coming from, but a spark of annoyance flowed through her and out of her mouth.

"I beg to differ. I know exactly what that monster is capable of. I'm the one who found the child she abandoned, remember?"

Hurt flashed across his face, and he looked away. She sighed and reached for his hand, after a moment of awkward silence.

"I'm sorry. I'm upset and frightened. That's no excuse to take it out on you."

He looked back at her and it broke her heart to see his face closed off.

"Let's go back to our seats and stay together. We'll talk about this later," he said with no emotion in his voice.

Parachute

Bella sighed wearily as he took her hand and led her through the crowd. This Victoria mess needed to be cleared up soon. It was wearing everyone's nerves too thin. When they got to the seats, Charlie looked up in concern. She smiled slightly, which came off as more of a grimace.

"What's going on?" he asked gruffly, looking between Edward and Bella.

"It's fine for now, Chief," Edward responded smoothly. "We'll talk about it when we get home, okay?"

Charlie looked at Bella who smiled slightly and pleaded at him with her eyes. Her father nodded and turned his gaze back on the game. Bella looked over at Jack and she sighed in relief. He was gazing intently at the field, captivated by the game and completely unaware of the tension surrounding his parents.

After a few minutes of silence, Jack turned to his parents.

"Hey, Mom?"

"Yeah, Jack?"

"Do you think I could play baseball next year? Garrett is already on a team, and I think Riley is trying out, too."

She smiled and nodded. "We'll see when the time comes."

With their tense conversation earlier, there was no mistaking the way Edward stiffened next to her. Once they got the Victoria situation taken care of, they seriously needed to have a sit down conversation about how they were going to handle their separation. Neither one of them wanted to broach the subject yet, but time was closing in on them. Victoria's words started to eat at her. Bella remembered just how cold Edward had been to her when they first arrived in Chicago. If she was right about Victoria's connection with James, then she should would have first-hand knowledge on any legal matters pertaining to Jack and Edward.

Parachute

What if she was telling the truth? Did she have it in her to place all of her trust in Edward when it came to Jack? She didn't have the answer to that question, and it made her sick to her stomach. She wanted desperately to believe that Victoria was just playing mind games, but the anxiety still gnawed at her. The possibility of everything crashing down around her was consuming her thoughts.

After the game, Edward took them to a diner-like restaurant called Ed Debevic's. Jack had a ball, choosing to sit in a red vinyl booth and wearing his paper hat proudly. Edward grinned at his son's enthusiasm and motioned for Bella to slide into the booth first so that she was seated across from the boy. Edward sat down and shook his head at Jack's excitement.

"When your Uncle Em and I were kids, Grandpop Carlisle used to bring us here after every ball game we went to. I used to get a kick out of the fact that I shared a name with the restaurant."

Jack smiled at his father and laughed. "That's cool, Dad. I feel the same way whenever me and Mom go to this place called Jack In The Box back home!"

A waitress sauntered over their way and placed some menus on the table.

"Hiya guys, welcome to Ed Debevic's. I'm your waitress, Kelly. Can I start you off with anything to drink?"

Charlie ordered coffee while Jack and I chose milkshakes. She flipped her auburn hair and smiled seductively at Edward. "How about you, handsome? Is there *anything* that I can get for you?"

Bella felt her temper flare and she clutched her napkin tightly. Edward chuckled and shook his head.

"Yes, thank you. I'll follow my family's lead and go with a Chocolate Shake."

Bella felt a surge of joy when he placed an emphasis on the word 'family.'

Parachute

"Oh, and can we get an order of Outrageous Cheesy Fries, too?" Edward flashed the girl his panty-dropping smile and Bella rolled her eyes as the girl's eyes grew large and she nodded, before disappearing with their orders.

Charlie snickered and picked up his menu and Jack followed suit. As Bella opened hers, she felt Edward's light touch on her thigh. His hand was resting there, palm up and her heart warmed. She slipped one of her hands into his and he squeezed it affectionately. A few minutes later, Kelly returned with their drinks, her overall attitude was more friendly and less directed at Edward, to Bella's pleasure. Dinner passed with easy conversation and she felt her earlier anxiety loosen its grip on her heart.

After Jack was asleep, the adults convened in the living room. Carlisle and Esme were out on a date night, so it was just Bella, Charlie and Edward.

"So, what happened earlier, Bella?" Charlie asked, leaning forward and resting his elbows on the his knees.

Edward looked at her intently and Bella sighed.

"I received a disturbing message on my phone and went to the ladies room to compose myself."

Edward raised an eyebrow. "I think there's a little more to it than that, isn't there, Bella?"

Charlie looked between his daughter and her suitor, who he had come to like and admire over the past few days.

"Here, it's easier if you just see it, Dad."

Bella handed Charlie the phone with the picture open. The older man's brow furrowed and his mustache twitched. He looked up at his daughter, anger clearly evident on his face.

Parachute

"Who the hell sent this to you, Bella? Why didn't you tell me as soon as it happened?"

Edward threw his hands in the air before slapping them on his thighs. "That's exactly what I said!" he exclaimed.

Bella took a deep breath and ran her hands through her hair.

"You guys were having a good time, and I didn't want to ruin it. I was going to stick close to Jack and be aware of my surroundings. I wasn't going to do something stupid."

"Really?" Edward asked sarcastically. "What do you call replying to the psycho caller?"

Bella groaned internally and felt resentment build for the way he just kept blurting things out.

"You're getting on my nerves, Edward." She glared at him. "Let me tell it my way, please."

He rolled his eyes before looking down at his shoes. Bella turned to face Charlie, who was torn between looking amused at her interaction with Edward and ire for the person who sent Bella the picture.

"Yes, I called the number back. I wanted to know who they were and what they wanted."

Charlie ran his hands over the stubble on his face and sighed, shaking his head. "Bell, you know better. You should have waited until we could trace the call or tapped your phone. Who was it? What did they want?"

Bella bit her lips, debating on whether or not to share the info about recording the call. She hadn't had a chance to check and make sure it even worked, so she opted against sharing that piece of info.

Parachute

"It was Victoria, Jack's biological mother. She wanted me to take Jack and disappear from Chicago."

Edward's head jerked up quickly, astonishment written across his face.

"What?" he asked in panic. "Why?"

Bella gave him a rueful smile. "She seems to think it would be easier to get back into your life if Jack wasn't around."

Edward made a disgusted face and shook his head. "That makes no sense. Why would you just up and leave?"

Bella's heart felt heavy and she knew she should bring up her fears, but they hit too close to home and she couldn't voice them yet.

"I don't know. I did call her insane though," Bella chuckled darkly.

Edward snorted. "That she is."

Charlie eyed Bella speculatively, knowing his daughter well enough to know that she was holding something back. He made a humming sound before voicing another question.

"How did she get your phone number?"

Edward growled and flexed his hand. "My money is on Marcus. I knew his giving up on her was too good to be true."

Bella narrowed her eyes and cocked her head slightly to the side while gazing at the man she loved.

Can he really be that dense? she thought.

"I don't think so," Bella replied aloud. "He sounded completely sincere when Esme and I spoke with him the other day about the Gala outcome."

Parachute

"Then who else, Bella?" Edward asked in annoyance.

She shook her head sadly. "You don't want to hear it, Edward."

He groaned and leaned back into the chair. "Not this James nonsense again, Bella. Please."

Charlie looked confused. "Who is James?"

"My friend, who's also my lawyer," Edward responded.

Charlie turned to his daughter. "Bells? Why do you think this James would have given your number to Victoria?"

"I think he's involved with her."

Edward made a disbelieving noise and Charlie shot him a glare. "Don't be disrespectful, boy. Let her speak."

Edward looked back down at his feet, feeling properly chastised. Bella cocked an eyebrow at her father and mouthed the word thanks to him. He nodded and motioned for her to continue.

"Ok, first off, I have no real proof other than a gut feeling. Mr. Jenks is working on finding anything out. Secondly, other facts fit into the puzzle too easily. He matches the physical description of the man who was with Victoria in Seattle. He was supposedly on vacation out of the state when she up and split with Jack. He made eye contact with her at the Gala and gave her a gesture that made it feel like he was warning her about something. Lastly, he made Jack uncomfortable that night. He froze and then cowered when he caught a glimpse of James."

Edward looked up at hearing that. "He's just a boy, Bella. He was in a tense situation."

Parachute

Bella shook her head. "It was more than that, I'm sure of it. I trust Jack's reaction. He was uncomfortable with James, more than I was ,and that's saying something."

Charlie looked thoughtful and stroked his mustache. "I know it's hard hearing something bad about your friend, Edward, but I wouldn't discount Bella's feelings. She has good instincts, not only as a cop's daughter, but as a mother as well."

He looked at his daughter and smiled tightly. "It'll be okay, Bells. Do you want to leave Chicago early?"

She felt Edward's gaze on her like a laser as she shook her head. "No, I'm not letting her scare me off. We'll just need to be more careful. I'm going to call Jasper tomorrow and see how the legal work is going."

Charlie nodded. "If something like this happens again, you come straight to one of us, understood? I know you're a grown woman, but you're still my baby girl and Jack is my grandson. You two mean everything to me."

Bella felt tears prick her eyes and she gave him a swift hug, feeling a weight lift off of her chest.

"Yes, Daddy," she whispered into his shirt. "I promise."

After their conversation, everyone decided to retire for the night. Charlie made his way to the second guest room, where he had been staying. Edward lingered with Bella outside of her door, unsure of what to do. They were both still annoyed at each other, but neither made a move to leave.

Edward sighed and ran a hand through his hair, which made Bella smile sadly. She stood up on her toes and kissed him on the cheek.

"Good night, Edward," she murmured quietly before walking into her room and shutting the door.

Parachute

He stood there, stunned for a moment, before going up to his own room and preparing for bed.

At three in the morning, Edward woke up in a cold sweat from a nightmare. He quickly jumped out of bed and quickly found himself outside of Bella's door. He debated for a moment, before the need to see her overcame him. He opened the door and quietly made his way over to the bed. The covers were strewn about, as if she had had trouble sleeping herself. He gently eased himself into the bed beside her and pulled the quilt over them. She turned her body and molded against him, her head resting on his shoulder and her leg atop of his. She let out a contented sigh and threw her arm across his chest.

"I love you, Edward," she said quietly, yet clearly enough that he knew she was awake.

He kissed the top of her head. "I love you, too, Bella. So very much."

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August 8th, 2010

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The rest of the week passed too quickly, and soon Sunday appeared. The sky was overcast and gloomy, as if it were in tune with Bella's heart. She hated to see her father go, even if she was just going to see him again in less than a month. O'Hare was bustling with people and Bella held onto Jack tighter, feeling slightly paranoid. They reached Charlie's gate, but couldn't go any further without boarding passes.

Charlie squeezed Bella and she melted against her father's side in comfort. When his flight to Seattle was called, Charlie leaned down and kissed her on

Parachute

the cheek.

"I'll see you in a few weeks, baby girl. Everything will work out fine, you'll see," he told her quietly.

"Thanks, Daddy," she whispered in his ear. Charlie grinned and reached out to shake Edward's hand.

"Edward, it was good to meet you, son. Take care of my family, you hear?"

Edward smiled sincerely. "With my life, Chief."

The two men exchanged a look and Charlie nodded, before looking at Jack and holding open his arms. The boy hugged his grandfather tightly.

"I'll see you soon, Pops! Tell Seth and Nana and Leah that I miss them!"

"I will, kiddo. I promise," Charlie responded, blinking away tears.

After a few more parting words, Charlie finally boarded his flight. Edward wrapped his arm around Bella's shoulder as Jack ran across to watch the planes take off through the glass.

"Bella, can I ask you a serious question?" Edward asked quietly.

She looked up at him and smiled. "Always, Edward. What is it?"

He looked down at her, eyes full of love and adoration.

"What would you say if I said that I was considering moving to Seattle?"

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Chapter 28

AN:

I'm sure a lot of you are surprised by this update! Well, today is Thanksgiving here in the US, so I wanted each and every one of you to know that I am thankful for you! Thank you, thank you, thank you! Thank you for taking the chance and reading this and falling in love with Jack as much as I have!

Thank those of you who take the time to review every week! With this chapter, Parachute will more than likely catapult to over 10K reviews, which is mind-blowing to me! I never imagined it would touch so many of you! Thank you to Stratan, who Beta's this and puts up with my wonky writing schedule! Thank you to all of the gals on Facebook who make me smile!

And one last, special thank you to those of you that I chat with on Twitter and Skype! You make me laugh, cry and let me vent. I couldn't ask for better friends, even if I only know you behind a screen.

Sorry for the long note, but I figure that it should be acceptable today. Enjoy your holiday, if you celebrate it. If you don't, then still have an awesome day, know that I love you and enjoy the early update!

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August 9, 2010

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Bella bounced her leg nervously as she waited for the plane to touch down in Miami. She had three hours to rest and freshen up before her book signing. She

Parachute

picked up her iPhone and pulled up her calendar for the week, wondering once again if Tanya had it out for her. Seven different cities in eight days. Tonight, they would stay in Florida and then fly into Atlanta tomorrow, before making their way to Raleigh, NC. From there they would hit Washington, DC and then Philadelphia, PA. The bright spot was being able to spend a whole weekend in New York city before finishing up in Detroit, MI and then heading back to Chicago.

She felt a gentle touch on her arm and turned away from the window, to face a smiling Esme.

"Are you okay, Bella?" she asked quietly.

Bella nodded and gave her a smile in return. "Just nervous, Esme. These things are always overwhelming. Plus, I've never been away from Jack for so long."

Esme nodding in understanding and patted her shoulder.

"That's understandable. Everything will be fine. Hopefully, this week will go by quickly and we'll be home soon."

Home. The sound of that word made Bella bite her lip, to keep from grinning. She closed her eyes for a moment and relived yesterday.

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"What would you say if I said that I was considering moving to Seattle?"

Bella's mouth popped open and her eyes widened in shock. Edward rubbed the back of neck nervously and started to ramble.

"I mean, it's not set in stone, but I was thinking that it would be easier all around if I moved closer to you two. I love you both and want to be in your lives, not just every now and then when one of us could get away for a visit. And I don't want to uproot Jack from his home, but I-"

Parachute

She reached up and placed her hand over his lips, cutting him off. Edward raised an eyebrow and gave her a questioning look.

She smiled widely and said, "Ask me again."

He laughed lightly and shook his head.

"Bella, what would you say to the idea of me moving to Seattle?"

"I'd ask if you needed help packing," she responded happily before launching herself into his arms and kissing him soundly.

"Ugh, more kissing? Come on now."

The love-struck pair turned and regarded their son, who was watching them with an amused look on his face.

"Yes, more kissing. And you're next!" Bella exclaimed as she traded one Cullen for the other.

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"What has you smiling so beautifully?" Esme asked curiously, just before the flight attendants announced that they were free to exit the plane.

Bella wasn't sure exactly how to respond. Edward wanted to be the one to sit down and explain his desire to relocate to his parents. Plus, nothing was set in stone, like he himself has said. She decided to go with the partial truth.

"I was just thinking about Jack and Edward. I thought my life was complete with Jack, but Edward adds a whole other dimension. I can't picture our lives without him."

Esme gave her a motherly smile as they pulled down their carry-on bags and began to exit the plane.

Parachute

"Thanks again for coming with me, Esme. Tanya flew down a few days ago to get the ball rolling. The tours are hectic for her and it gets lonely when I'm by myself."

"Oh, sweetheart, I don't mind at all. The boys were going to spend the week at our cabin on the lake anyway, so I'm more than happy to spend some bonding time with you."

Bella nodded and led the way over to pick up their suitcases. As they waited, she looked around for Tanya and was happy to see her friend waving from across the room, accompanied by her assistant, Felix. Bella gave Tahn a quick hug and Felix smiled before picking up their bags.

"Come on now," Tanya said. "Let's get you two settled in at the hotel and rested before we need to head over to Barnes and Noble."

Esme linked her arm with Bella's and they quietly followed Tanya to the parking garage.

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Seven hours later, Bella said goodbye to the last of her fans and handed her the now-signed copy of "Jack Attacks the Library," her latest book.

"Thank you so much, Ms. Swan. My son, Shaun, loves your stories about Jack. He really enjoys that they're based off a real little boy."

Bella smiled and shook the woman's hand. "Not a problem. Thank you so much for coming out and waiting in such a long line. It was a pleasure to meet you."

As the woman waved goodbye and made her way out of the store, Bella noticed a person standing quietly off to the side of the table. She looked up and

Parachute

prepared a smile, but her face quickly froze in shock when she saw who it was. Her mother was standing there, fidgeting with her purse nervously. When she caught her eye, Renee greeted her with a strained smile.

"Hello again, Isabella. Do you think we could talk?"

Bella was caught off guard at the sound of Renee's voice. It sounded the same as she remembered from her childhood. When she looked into her mother's hazel eyes, she noticed that the wrinkles and tired expression on her face made her look older than her forty years.

"What is there to talk about, Renee?" she asked, doing her best to keep hostility out of her voice.

Her mother smiled sadly and nodded. "I know you probably hate me, but there's a lot that I'd like to explain to you."

"Bella? Is everything alright?" Esme asked, walking over to her side.

"Yes, Esme. Everything is fine," she replied with a kind smile. "Who is your friend, dear?" Esme asked, wary of the woman who had caused Bella to become uncomfortable and tense.

"Esme, this is Renee Dwyer. Renee, this is Esme Cullen. Esme is my son's grandmother," Bella explained, her voice betraying no emotion.

Renee's eyes lit up. "Oh, isn't that lovely. I'm Bella's mother."

Esme looked at Bella in surprise. When their eyes met, Esme's heart broke at the sad look in the young woman's eyes. Her "Mama Bear" instinct kicked into overdrive and she linked her arm protectively with Bella's.

"I'd say that it was a pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Dwyer, but I've never heard Bella mention you before."

Parachute

Renee's face fell and she dropped her gaze to her feet for a moment, before returning it to Bella.

"How is your son, Isabella? Jack, isn't it?"

Bella's eyes narrowed, wondering what kind of game her mother was playing.

"Yes, his name is Jack, and he's doing well. Thanks for asking."

Renee nodded and smiled slightly. "Phil kept a scrapbook for me with anything that mentioned your name and your books. I'm very proud of you, Izzy."

Confusion filled Bella's thoughts. "I'm not following you. Why would Phil keep a scrapbook of me for you? You've never cared before," she responded in a hurt-filled voice.

Renee's eyes filled up with tears and she blinked them away. "That's part of why I wanted to talk to you privately. I was diagnosed a few years ago with Bipolar Type I. It's taken me quite a few months to work up the courage to speak with you."

She looked away for a moment before looking back and continuing. "I know I'll never earn your forgiveness and that I'll never be 'normal', but I just wanted to try."

Bella swallowed the emotion lodged in her throat. "We're staying at the EPIC Hotel. Come over at eight and we can talk."

Renee moved to hug her, but Bella stepped back. Just because she was willing to listen, it didn't mean that she was ready to forgive sight unseen, so to speak. She quickly turned and practically ran to the back room of the store, desperately trying to keep her emotions in check. Both Esme and Tanya were closely behind her.

"Bells? Are you okay, babe?" Tahn asked quietly, moving to stand close to her friend and rub her back.

Parachute

She ran a hand through her hair and sighed. "Shit. Why did I say that? I don't think I could sit through a conversation with her."

Esme placed her hand gently on the younger woman's shoulder. "Why don't we head back to the hotel and have a drink. I'd be more than happy to lend an ear."

Bella nodded slowly and took a deep breath. "That actually sounds like a good idea."

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Eight o'clock came quickly and Bella nervously twirled a straw in the glass of her Fuzzy Navel. Esme watched her sadly with a heavy heart. When they got back to the hotel earlier, Bella opened up and told her all about her mother, or lack thereof. Esme's life had revolved around her family for the past twenty seven years or so, and she just couldn't imagine a mother walking away from such a beautiful and sweet daughter. The sound of a chair scraping across the floor made both women look up. Renee smiled apologetically as she sat down at their table in a secluded corner of the hotel bar.

Her eyes flickered warily in Esme's direction before speaking to Bella. "Thank you again for agreeing to meet me, Isabella."

Bella looked down at her drink and nodded, silently.

"It's nice to meet you again, Mrs. Cullen," Renee said quietly. "I guess I can hardly blame my daughter for not coming alone."

Bella jerked her head up and flashed an angry glare at her mother. "Don't. Please don't call me that. You haven't been my mother in over a dozen years."

Parachute

Renee smiled sadly. "I'm sorry, I'll try to not do that. But you should know that I've never stopped thinking about you."

"Then why did you leave? If you weren't happy with Dad, you could have still kept in touch with me. Do you know what's it like to have your mom just up and disappear, not giving a damn about you?"

Bella swiped away angry tears. "And don't get me started on how you treated me the last time I saw you. After ten years of not seeing you in person, you give me an attitude about being a parent? You?"

Renee swallowed and looked at her hands. "You're right. I was out of line when I saw you in Disney a few years ago. It was a shock, and I had no right to say anything."

She looked into Bella's face with wide, teary eyes. "As for leaving, I thought that you'd be better off. I started to notice things that were off about me, and I didn't know what to do. At first, I thought that my mood swings might have been brought on by pregnancy, but any test I took came up negative. The day before I left, I noticed that I was missing a chunk of time that I couldn't remember. Then I started to think that maybe it was Alzheimer's because both of my grandparents had suffered from it. I decided to leave quietly and hope that you and Charlie would get over me. You both deserved a happy, stable life. I couldn't give you that."

She blinked and fat tears rolled down her cheeks. "Trust me, Izzy," she said with a small sob, "leaving was the hardest thing that I've ever done, but I was scared, and I wanted you to be safe. I thought about you everyday. There were so many times that I just wanted to come home, but it wasn't until I met Phil four years ago that I realized just what I had done. I met him through his father, who was my physician at the time. I was hesitant to date, especially after my diagnosis, but he was determined. He held my hand and has been my rock ever since. I don't know where I'd be right now without him."

Bella sat back in her chair and let a few tears slip as she observed her mother. "What did you mean when you said that it wasn't until meeting Phil that you

realized what you had done?"

Renee smiled sadly. "He has a daughter from a previous marriage. Her name is Mary, and she's sixteen now. Spending time with her hurts so much sometimes because I can't help but think about everything that I walked away from." She chuckled slightly. "I don't regret leaving your Dad. We had lost our spark years before I left. We were too different; too opposite to be happy with each other. I will regret leaving you though. Until the day I die."

"So, what now?" Bella asked skeptically. "You're cured? Everything is all better so now you want to be a mom?"

Renee shook her head sadly. "No, unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. I'll never be "cured." I take meds and see a therapist, but there are still moments where depression or mania will break through and it feels like I'm over my head. Having someone who understands me and what to look out for with my disorder helps so much."

She looked up and locked eyes with her daughter. "I would like to be a part of your life. I know that you may never consider me your mother again or that I may not deserve the opportunity, but I hope you'll give me a chance someday."

Bella bit her lip and searched Renee's face, searching for any indication that she wasn't telling the truth. Finding none, she felt her heart start to melt slightly.

"Maybe someday, but not now."

Renee smiled and nodded. "That's more than I expected, thank you." She reached into her purse and pulled out a business card. "Here's my information, if you'd like to contact me."

Bella gazed down at the words written on the cardboard and felt herself smile slightly as she looked back up at Renee.

"You're an artist?"

Parachute

Renee smiled brightly. "Yes, I draw and paint. It started as therapeutic, but it became something more. I even volunteer at a local recreation center to teach a few art classes to kids."

"That's good. I'm glad you found something that helps."

A slightly awkward silence settled over the table before Esme cleared her throat slightly.

"It's getting late, and we have an early flight tomorrow, so I think I'm going to head up to the room. It was nice seeing you again, Mrs. Dwyer. I hope everything continues to go well for you."

Esme turned and leaned over to kiss Bella on the cheek. "I thought you might like a moment alone with her. I'll wait by the elevators for you, just in case," she said just quietly enough for Bella to hear. She reached out to squeeze Esme's hand and smiled appreciatively.

When the mother and daughter were left alone, they studied each other silently for a moment. Renee stood up and broke the silence with a small sigh.

"Well, I guess I should be going then. Please, think about what I've said. I'm not expecting things to change overnight, maybe not ever. But I had to take this chance."

Bella rose to her feet and watched her mother sadly. "I- I just need to digest everything. I'm not saying never, but I do need some time."

Renee smiled and quickly hugged Bella before she had the chance to pull away. "Thank you, Izzy," she whispered into her daughter's ear. She laid a gentle kiss on her cheek before smiling and walking away. Bella stood next to the table and watched Renee walk away, her heart heavy and sad, yet she felt a slight weight lift from her shoulders. She hadn't been called Izzy since she was a little girl. After Renee left, she refused to let anyone call her that anymore. She was surprised by how much she had missed the name.

Parachute

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Bella felt completely and utterly exhausted as she walked into her hotel room and flopped down on the bed. She sighed and closed her eyes for a few minutes, before she forced herself to sit up and change into her pajamas. She picked up her laptop and started up Skype. She no sooner logged on when an incoming video call from Alice was chiming in.

She smiled and accepted the call, watching Allie's face pop up on her screen. Her friend's blue eyes shone with excitement as she bounced slightly.

"What happened? What did she say? I can't believe your mom wanted to meet with you!"

"Allie, darlin', give Bella a chance to talk now," Jasper drawled from somewhere in the room. Alice visibly calmed down and nodded.

Bella sat the laptop down on the bed and leaned over on her elbow to get comfortable.

"It was definitely weird," she sighed. "The main gist of it was that she wanted me to consider letting her become a part of our lives again. She apologized for bailing and said that she had been diagnosed as Bipolar a few years ago."

Alice's eyes widened. "Whoa, heavy. What did you tell her?"

Bella shrugged. "I told her that it was a possibility, but I needed some time to think."

Allie nodded. "That's a good idea."

"Hey, Al, can I talk to Jasper a second?"

Parachute

Alice nodded and hopped off of her chair, Jasper quickly appearing in her place. He smiled kindly at her before speaking.

"I'm guessing that you'd like to know if I gave your father that cd I burned?"

"Yes." Bella nodded.

Jasper shook his head slightly. "Yeah, I did. Let me tell you, he was none too pleased when I had to inform him that the call probably wouldn't hold up in court. We can still use it as leverage off the record if Victoria has any ideas further down the line."

Bella chewed her lip and nodded thoughtfully. Jazz cleared his throat slightly.

"Look, I want to ask you something, and I don't want you to get mad at me, okay?"

Bella shot him a curious look. "Um, sure?"

"I get why you emailed me a copy, but why not show this to Edward? Do you honestly believe what was coming out of that Jezebel's mouth?"

Bella smiled sadly and shook her head. "No, not at all. Even if things don't work out between the two of us, he adores his son too much to have anything to do with her again. I mean, I'd be lying if I said that it didn't make me a little bit insecure at first, but I know how much she hurt him. That's something that you can't get over."

She took a deep breath. "As for not telling him, I might be wrong, but at the time, I was sure that he would run straight to James. And then James would run straight back to Victoria. Then, *bam*, our edge is lost."

Jasper ran a hand across his face and sighed. "Do you really think he would have gone to James with this?"

Parachute

She thought for a moment before nodding slowly. "Yes, I really think he would have."

"Okay, then I'm on your side with this one."

"Me, too, Bells!" Alice chimed in from somewhere next to Jazz.

Bella laughed lightly. At that moment, her phone started to play Edward's ring tone. She smiled up at her friends and waved her phone.

"It's my boys. Good night, guys!"

"Night, Bells!" they chimed together before closing the Skype connection.

"Hello?" Bella answered, bringing the phone to her ear.

"Good evening, Beautiful," Edward's warm voice responded.

"Hey, handsome. How's Jack? What are you guys up to?"

He chuckled lightly. "He's actually out like a light. We went fishing earlier and Emmett threw a tantrum when Jack caught more fish than he did."

Bella laughed, picturing that scenario clearly.

He sighed. "I love you. You just left this morning, and I miss you like crazy."

Her insides melted and she curled up with her pillow. "I love and miss you, too, Edward. It's been a long and hellish day. I tried to call you earlier, but it went straight to voicemail."

"I know, baby. I'm sorry, but the signal out here is shifty. I just got off the phone with my mom, who filled me in a little about what happened. How are you holding up?" he asked, concern lacing his voice.

Parachute

She smiled. "Much better now. It was a surreal experience. I'll tell you all about it later, but right now, I just want to listen to your voice and fall asleep."

He laughed lightly. "I think I can handle that. Would you like me to sing you to sleep?"

Her heart skipped a beat and she impossibly fell a little more in love with him. "Please?" she whispered.

"Hmmm, let me think for a minute."

The last thing she remembered as she closed her eyes was his voice settling over her like honey.

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So easy to forget all of the little things we do.

Like callin' for no reason, just to say the words, "Baby, I love you."

I know lately I've been busy, but a second doesn't go by without you crossing my mind. It's been so long since we had time, let's take a day and make everything alright. Just take my hand, fall in love with me again.

Let's runaway to the place where love first found us. Let's runaway for the day, don't need anyone around us.

When everything in love gets so complicated, it only takes a day to change it.

What I have to say can't wait, all I need is a day,

So let's runaway.

Let's runaway, just for the day.

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August 14, 2010

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Bella sighed and flipped through the cable channels in her New York City hotel room. Frustration getting the better of her, she turned off the device and opened up her laptop. She opened up Facebook and started to immerse herself in some games when her phone began ringing. She smiled at Edward's face on her screen and answered it.

"Hey, baby."

"Hello, love. What are you up to?" he asked.

"Bored out of my mind and waiting for Tanya to stop by with some clothes that she insisted upon foisting on me. What are you guys up to?"

She heard a dinging noise and his response was covered up by another male voice.

"What was that? Edward I didn't catch what you said."

"I'm sorry, Bella, can I call you back? My hands are full of Jack at the moment. He fell asleep on the ride."

"Um, sure. I'll talk to you later?"

"Sure, sure. Love you," he responded before hanging up.

She blinked and stared at her phone for a minute, wondering what the hell had just transpired. Why would he even bother calling if he was busy? And what was that ding? Her brow furrowed and she turned back to running her restaurant on Facebook. Ten minutes later, she was interrupted by a knock on the door.

"It's about time, Tanya," she grumbled. She walked over to the door and checked the peep hole, her jaw dropping at the sight before her. She flung open the door quickly and came face-to-face with a tired and disheveled Edward.

Parachute

He smiled wryly and held open his arms. "Hey, baby."

She grinned and jumped into his arms, kissing him madly.

Kiss

"What are you-"

Kiss

"Doing here?"

Kiss

He pulled back and chuckled lightly, adjusting her legs that were wrapped around his waist.

"We missed you. Can we head inside before someone calls security on us?"

She nodded and he walked into the room, not removing her from his grasp. As soon as the door was shut, Bella found herself pressed against it, with Edward's lips searing her own. After a few moments, their kisses slowed and he rested his head against hers, breathing heavily.

"Wow, hello to you, too, mister."

He smiled and kissed the tip of her nose.

"Wait," Bella said suddenly. "You said 'we.' Does that mean Jack's here, too?" she asked excitedly. She had missed her son terribly.

Edward smiled brightly and nodded. "I wasn't kidding about him falling asleep on the way over. He's going to be mad that he didn't get to see you right away, but I couldn't bring myself to wake him up."

"Where is he?"

Parachute

"He's in Esme's room, since she had an extra bed."

Bella narrowed her eyes playfully. "You planned this out, didn't you?"

He bit his bottom lip and nodded shyly. She ran her hands through his hair, scratching his scalp gently with her nails and causing him to groan.

"What am I going to do with you?"

His eyes popped open, vibrant and green. "I can think of a few things..."

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AN: The song used in this chapter was *Runaway* by Bruno Mars. The video is up on the Blog!

Chapter 29

AN: Okay, so this chapter is a tad shorter than normal, but you finally get your lemon. So, consider this your warning. It's not **overly** graphic, but it's definitely not a "fade-to-black."

One more note of thanks, The Fandom For Preemies raised over \$5000 for their cause thanks to many generous and wonderful readers! A big, sloppy kiss to any of my readers who contributed to that awesome goal! To those of you who couldn't, the JackPOV will be added to the Outtakes here around Christmas.

So enough from me! Onto your lemon, I hope it lives up to your expectations!
mwah

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[illegible]

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"I can think of a few things..."

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Bella's heart started to race and she felt heat sear her belly.

"I can think of a few things myself," she whispered back in a breathy tone. A corner of his mouth quirked up and he pushed his erection against her center, causing a groan to erupt from her throat. Edward's lips placed hot, open mouthed kisses across her jaw and down her neck. Desire, hot like a knife, shot through her veins.

"Edward," she gasped. "Can we move to the bed?"

Parachute

Without a word, his hands found their way down to cup her bottom and he walked carefully over to the bed, before depositing her gently.

Bella reached out for him and pulled him to stand between her legs. She nervously looked up into his heavy-lidded eyes and bit her lip. She was tired of stopping and ready to move forward.

"I want you," she said softly. "Please let me have you."

His eyes widened in surprise and a gentle smile formed on his face. "Anything you want, Bella," he responded quietly. "I'll give you the world; anything within my power. All you have to do is say the word, and it's yours."

"I just want you."

"Are you sure? You've waited this long, and I don't want you to regret anything," he responded with his voice full of sincerity.

She nodded. "I'm sure. I've been waiting for you."

His hands grasped the hem of his shirt and pulled it over his head, exposing his bare chest with a smattering of reddish hair. Her hands shook slightly as she fingered the button on his jeans and slid the zipper down slowly. His breath hitched as her hand brushed his hard length. Hearing that little noise inspired confidence in Bella. She pushed his jeans down, brushing her nose purposefully against his boxer-clad manhood and caused him to groan.

He stepped out of his pants, kicking off his shoes and socks as well. His hands slid down her bare arms and then back up, bringing the silky material of her camisole with him. She slid backwards onto the bed, resting her head against the pillows and held out her hand. His fingers entwined with hers as he crawled onto the bed and laid down beside her. Her heart was pounding, but she was eager to experience this with him.

"I love you," he whispered before pressing his lips gently against hers. One of his hands traveled with feather-like softness, down to her breast and cupped the

Parachute

weight of it in his palm. Her nipple puckered against the pad of his thumb and she lifted her leg over his hip, aching for friction. He smiled against her lips, pleased with her body's reactions to his own. He pinched her nipple lightly and she gasped.

"Edward, please," she begged, though she had no clue what she was even begging for.

"Ssh, let me make you feel good, Bella. I promise to make this special for you."

She felt tears prick her eyes as she gazed into his, which were shining with love and sincerity. His lips pressed against hers once again, this time, his tongue swept across her bottom lip, seeking entrance. She opened her mouth slightly and soon found herself lost into the kiss' intensity. She was so caught up that she barely noticed both of his hands sliding her shorts and underwear down her legs.

When she laid bare before him, she felt a flush work its way up from her chest. They may have had some seriously intense make out sessions before, but this was the first time she was completely naked before his eyes. He smiled down at her and brushed a few strands of hair behind her ear.

"You are the most beautiful woman that I've ever seen."

His hushed words were whispered with such sincerity and adoration, that she had no choice but to believe them. He leaned forward and rained kisses down her neck and across her chest, as his fingers began their exploration of the moist heat between her legs. His mouth latched onto one of her nipples at the same his fingertips brushed again her clit. Bella arched her back and let loose a cry of pleasure. After a few moments of his seemingly expert touch, her orgasm washed over her as he body shook and blood rushed to her head.

Edward slid his boxers off and kicked them to the floor, before settling between her legs. She felt his tip slide across her clit and she gasped, the sensation overwhelming.

Parachute

"Edward, please! I need to feel you," she whimpered.

He hissed as he brushed up against her wetness and then froze in his place. She looked at him, confusion written across her face.

"Condom?" he asked, sheepishly. "I didn't come here expecting this, Bella."

Her eyes widened and she shook her head. "No, I don't have one, but I get the shot. For female reasons," she clarified with a pink blush tinging her cheeks. "We should be fine."

He swallowed thickly and nodded. "I- I haven't been with anyone in a long time, and I've been tested since."

She smiled and reached up to brush her hand against his cheek. "I know, Edward. It's alright."

He leaned down and kissed her as he lined himself up against her. "This will probably hurt at first, so you have to tell me if you want me to stop, okay?"

She nodded nervously and he grasped her hip with one hand as he pushed in slowly. She felt herself stretch as he filled her up. A sharp twinge and burning made her wince when he buried himself fully inside her warmth. He became still and looked anxiously for signs of distress in her face, but her face was blank and her eyes closed.

"Are you okay?" he asked worriedly.

She opened her eyes and smiled a watery smile. "I'm fine, please don't stop."

He began to move slowly, lovingly and she wrapped her legs around his waist. Pressure started building inside of her and any discomfort she felt was soon replaced by pleasure. His thrusts became erratic and a drop of sweat slid down his cheek and splashed against her chest.

"Shit," he gasped, "Bella, I can't-"

Parachute

He groaned loudly and his body shuddered as he found his release. His arms shook with weakness and he rested his head against hers.

"I'm sorry," he whispered. "It was too much. I couldn't hold off."

She smiled serenely and pushed the damp hair off of his forehead.

"It was perfect, Edward. I'm glad I waited for you."

His eyes opened, bright with tears and he kissed her swiftly and hard. "Thank you," he spoke quietly against her lips.

He rolled gently off of her and walked silently to the bathroom. Bella closed her eyes and listened to the sound of water running in the bathroom. A few moments later, she opened her eyes when she felt his hand brush her face. She looked up at him, and he smiled tenderly.

"Come on, let's take a shower. The warmth will help ease any muscle aches."

She tentatively placed her hand in his and let him lead her to the large shower. They took turns washing each other before stepping out and toweling off. Bella blushed as she took in their clothes strewn on the floor next to the bed. She picked them up and set them off to the side before throwing on a fresh pair of pajamas. When she turned around, Edward was already in a pair of sleep pants, holding out a bottle of water and a few pills in his hand.

"Advil," he replied to her inquisitive look. "I want to make sure you're not sore tomorrow."

If it were possible, her heart would have fallen a little bit more for him. She swallowed the pills quickly and then wrapped her arms around him.

"I love you," she whispered against his chest.

"I love you, too, baby. Let's get some rest, okay? Our ball of energy will be up early and excited to see you," Edward chuckled.

Parachute

Bella smiled ear to ear. "I missed him- both of you, so much. I'm glad you came here."

"So am I, Bella. I hate being apart from you," he whispered before claiming her lips in a gentle kiss, before leading her to bed. They curled up together and sleep found them almost instantly.

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The next morning Bella awoke sprawled out on her stomach with one of Edward's arms thrown across her back. She turned her head to watch him sleeping peacefully, the sun playing with the copper highlights in his hair. She sighed and smiled, thoroughly sated and rested, even though she had only had about six hours of sleep.

A loud banging on the door sent her heart racing. Ignoring Edward's sleeping form, she pulled out of his embrace quickly and scampered across the bed. He sat up and sleepily rubbed his eyes, wondering what the hell was going on.

Bella flung the door open, not bothering to look out the peephole and swept her surprised son into her arms. He laughed and squeezed her tightly, wrapping his legs around her waist. She walked into the room, smattering kisses across Jack's face as he continued to giggle.

"Huh, I see it runs in the family," Edward muttered in a sleep-filled gravelly voice.

Bella stuck out her tongue at him playfully.

"Okay, okay, okay," Jack responded breathless from laughing. "Stop, or I'll pee on you, Mom!"

Parachute

She immediately dropped him on the bed as if she were burned. "Eew, gross, Jack!"

Edward hid a smile behind his hand, but Bella caught it and hit him with a pillow. Fifteen minutes and two deceased pillows later, the three of them collapsed together on top of the bed, exhausted.

"So, what do you guys want to do today?" Bella asked once they had caught their breath.

Edward shrugged and smiled. "I don't care. I've never been here before."

Jack looked up at his father with wide eyes. "Really? It's awesome. We've been here twice for Mom's book stuff."

The boy looked up at Bella and grinned. "Mom! Can we take him to the big toy store? And the zoo? And the hot chocolate place? Oh, how about the ice skating rink?"

"Whoa, Little Bit, take a breath," Bella laughed lightly. "I'm sure we can check some of those places out, but I don't think the skating rink is up and running in August."

His face fell slightly. "Oh," he said in disappointment.

"Maybe we'll come back over Winter Break, how does that sound?"

His face lit up again as he nodded eagerly. "That sounds good. That tree is so cool!"

"Ok, then. Let's get a move on and see some of the Big Apple."

After three hours of exploring, Bella, Jack and Edward settled into a cozy table at Serendipity 3 for lunch. Thankfully Bella had thought to call ahead to reserve a table for lunch, so they didn't have to wait too long to be seated. Edward looked over the menu and rubbed his face in thought.

Parachute

"So, what's good here, guys?" he asked.

"The food's ok, but you want to make sure you get a frozen hot chocolate. Those things are awesome," Jack explained.

Bella smiled and shook her head. "The boy speaks the truth, Edward. I'd take his advice."

A moment later, a girl with short brunette hair and pretty green eyes bounced over to their table. She smiled and introduced herself as their waitress, Brittany, pulling out a pad of paper as well as a pen. After their order was placed, she took their menus and bounced away once again. When she came back a short while later with their drinks, she patted Jack on the shoulder after placing his frozen hot chocolate in front of him. The boy stilled and blushed.

"Th-thanks," he muttered.

Bella looked at Edward, who grinned cheekily and shrugged. Bella shook her head. She definitely wasn't ready for her son to be interested in girls.

After lunch, they decided to take a cab to the Central Park Zoo. After entering the small, but beautiful zoo, Jack dragged his parents straight to the Sea Lions exhibit. Bella and Edward held hands with smiles on their faces as they watched Jack's enthusiasm. When he had his fill of the Sea Lions, they continued to explore. As they passed a pond with Black Necked Swans, Jack grinned and pointed.

"Look, Mom! Swans like us!"

Bella glanced at Edward out of the corner of her eye, gauging his reaction, but the smile never fell from his face. After a minute, Jack turned to his parents with a thoughtful expression.

"Can I ask a question?" he asked, tentatively.

"Sure, Little Bit," Bella replied with a kind look.

Parachute

Jack leaned back against the railing and eyed his parents carefully before speaking. "Well, now that we know where I came from, will my name change?"

Bella blinked, surprised at the question. "What do you mean, Jack?"

"I mean that my name is Jackson Charles Swan now, but I was born as Jackson Carter Cullen. Will my name change back?"

Edward gave his son a thoughtful look and walked over to squat down so that he was eye-level with the boy. "It depends, Jack. That's something that your Mom and I need to talk about. Do you want to change your name?"

Bella held her breath, unsure of what she actually hoped his response would be.

Jack's face scrunched up in thought. "I don't know. Can't I keep both?"

Edward barked out a laugh at his son's ability to think outside of the box. "What, like Jack Swan-Cullen?"

Jack shrugged. "Maybe. I don't know."

Edward stood up and put his hand on Jack's shoulder. "Like I said, your Mom and I need to talk about it first. We'll see what happens."

Satisfied with that answer, Jack continued back onto the Zoo path. Edward reached for Bella's hand and pulled her close.

"Was that okay?" he asked. "I mean, I guess we need to be on the same page with this stuff, right?"

Bella nodded and grinned. "Yeah, that was the perfect answer. We do need to talk about stuff like that, and I guess the sooner the better."

"Or we could just wait and change his name when we decide to get married," he replied casually.

Parachute

She stopped in her tracks and looked up at him in shock. "Say that again?"

His eyes twinkled with mirth. "I said, we could wait to change his name for when we get married."

"Bu-but," Bella began to stutter, "We've only know each other like two months! How can you think about marriage?"

Edward smiled down at her. "Bella, you're the one that I've been waiting for. I can't picture myself with anyone else for the rest of my life. It may not be soon, but my heart knows what it wants."

She felt tears prick her eyes and hugged him tightly. "You're such a sap," she sniffed.

"Says the woman who's sniffing," he chuckled.

She smacked him on the shoulder. "Shut up," she laughed, before turning to catch up with Jack. After exploring for a little while longer, they made their way over to the Children's Zoo. As they wandered through the Petting Area, a young woman with light brown hair and light blue, almost silver eyes smiled and started to talk to Jack.

"Hiya! I'm Lauren, and I work here. Would you like to pet some of the animals?" she asked brightly.

Jack nodded, his eyes filled with excitement.

"So, what shall we do next?" Edward asked as Jack made his rounds petting the various animals. Bella let out a loud laugh as she saw him jerk away from a goat that licked his face.

She turned to Edward and shrugged. "How about the toy store he wanted to go see? We went to FAO Schwarz last year when I was here for a signing. He was bummed that he didn't get a chance to try the big keyboard they have."

Parachute

Edward nodded. "Sounds like a plan. Should we head out once he's finished here?"

Bella agreed and turned back to watching her son having a great time.

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The store was crowded, which was to be expected on a summer weekend.

"Wow," Edward murmured, looking around the busy store. "This place is amazing."

"I know!" Bella laughed. "It's a kid's ultimate fantasy. Right, Jack?"

When her question was met with silence, Bella turned around, looking to find out why he hadn't responded, but he was nowhere in sight.

"Jack?" Bella called anxiously. Her head whipped from side to side frantically. "Jack!"

She squeezed past a few people and craned her neck around a display.

"Jack?" she called, her voice growing more frantic, her breath starting to become erratic.

She turned to Edward with wide, frightened eyes. "Where is he, Edward? We haven't even been in the store five minutes!"

Edward looked around, starting to panic himself. He had already lost his son once, he couldn't live through it again.

Parachute

"Shit! I don't know! He was here just a second ago. Come on, let's find someone to help us look."

Edward's hand squeezed hers tightly as he pulled her towards the customer service department. The crowd was heavy with people and her heart pounded in her chest painfully. She pulled her hand away and started to push through the crowd, heading back towards where she last saw her son.

"Bella, wait!" Edward called, but she was too far gone in desperation to listen.

She stopped for a minute and tried to think clearly, but her mind raced frantically. What would Jack most want to see in this store?

Immediately thinking of the answer, Bella tore off towards the escalators. She moved as fast as she could, pushing and squeezing through small space in between people, trying to get upstairs quickly. When she reached the top she started to rush through the large crowd in front of the giant piano, but someone grabbed her arm, somewhat roughly.

Bella turned her surprised eyes on a short, black haired woman, with dark eyes.

"Excuse me, Miss," the woman started in a steady voice, "you can't push through the crowd. You're making a scene."

Bella seethed with anger and pulled her arm out of the woman's grasp.

"Look," Bella stopped to look at the woman's name tag. "Sondra, I'm trying to find my son."

The woman sighed and rolled her eyes. "Miss, you need to calm down," she spoke with an authoritative voice. "Pushing and causing a potential accident isn't going to find your child quicker."

"Bella!"

Parachute

Her head whipped around to see Edward quickly closing the distance between them. "Did you find him?" he asked breathlessly.

She shook her head and the tears that had been on the edge of her lids fell in fat drops.

"Mom! Hey, look at this!"

Her head turned quickly and saw Jack waving from his spot dancing across the piano. She collapsed against Edward in relief, letting out a sob.

"Ma'am," Sondra said quietly, "Could you please step to the side? You're blocking the flow of traffic." Her expression softened and she smiled slightly. "Can I get you anything? Do you need to sit down?"

Bella stepped to the side and shook her head no, refusing to remove her eyes from Jack. Edward wrapped his arms around her and let out a sigh of thanks that Jack was safe. When his turn on the piano was finished, he made his way over to his parents, gazing at their expressions in confusion.

"Mom? Why are your eyes red? Were you crying? What's wrong?" he asked in quick succession.

Bella reached for him and squeezed him as tightly as she could. After a few minutes of rocking back and forth slightly, she pulled back and leveled him with a stern glare.

"Jackson Swan, you will never, *never* do that to me again, are we clear?"

His eyes widened, unused to hearing that tone in his mother's voice. "What did I do?"

"You wandered away from us without saying anything! In a packed store, no less! Do you have any idea what could have happened to you?"

Parachute

He grimaced and shook his head. "I'm sorry, I should have said something, but why didn't you call my phone?" he asked, pulling his Firefly glowPhone.

"I-I," Bella stuttered before closing her mouth with no response. She had honestly not even thought to call his phone. "I don't know. I was worried, and I panicked. I'm sorry, but you seriously can't do that to me again, kiddo. I think I've shaved ten years off of my life."

She hugged him tightly one more time before passing into his father's arms. For the rest of their visit to FAO Schwarz, Jack didn't stray from his mother's side, understanding that she was still upset. The rest of the evening passed quietly hanging out with Esme at the hotel until bedtime came, when everyone fell asleep quickly, drained from their emotional day.

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AN: A huge thank you goes out to everyone who has reviewed and pushed Parachute past the 10,000 review mark. You guys still astound me and make me squee with each and every one of your reviews! Also, thanks to everyone who has voted for us in the Avant Garde and Original Character Awards! Your votes mean a lot to me!

mwah

I'll see all of the reviews on Monday night with their teaser for the next chapter!

Parachute

Bella immediately felt better about going out with the prospect of Edward coming along. She turned and asked him what he thought about it.

"I'm fine with whatever you want to do, love. A night out for drinks and dancing sounds an awful lot like a date." He winked at her.

"Looks like this should be a fun night," Tanya responded in sarcasm, rolling her eyes at Edward playfully.

"Why can't I go dancing?" asked Jack. "I can cut a rug."

Bella bit back a laugh when everyone else turned and gave Jack a surprised look.

"What?" he asked in confusion.

"Cut a rug?" Edward asked. "Where did you hear that?"

He gave his father an exasperated look. "It's in a song from that group that Mom likes. 'Hey, Soul Sister.' I asked her what it meant and she said it meant to dance. Right Mom?"

Bella nodded and grinned as Jack started to sing softly.

...

They way you can cut a rug

Watching you is the only drug I need

So ganster, I'm so thug

You're the only one I'm dreaming of

You see, I can be myself now finally

Parachute

In fact there's nothing I can't be I

want the world the to see you'll be with me

...

Edward and Esme laughed as Tanya shook her head.

"Really, Bella?" she asked. "Can't you teach the boy any decent music?" Tahn reached over and ruffled Jack's hair. "Don't worry, kid. The next time I come over your house for dinner, I'll bring my Jay Z cds."

"You're such a smart ass, Tanya," Bella responded, holding back a giggle.

A few hours later, Bella was seated at a long table in the back of the bookstore, signing books while Jack and Edward shopped around. The event went smoothly and sooner than she expected, they were packing up to leave when Jack walked up to her with a book in his hand.

"Hey, Mom? Can we get this?"

She looked down at the book and raised an eyebrow. "Um, Jack? I don't think 'Tell Me Again About The Night I Was Born' is something you'd like."

His brow scrunched up in confusion. "Why not? It's about an adopted kid. Like me."

Bella crouched down in front of him and smiled. "Yes, but it's about a little girl who was adopted as a baby. She was from another country and her parents went there to pick her up."

"It still sounds cool."

"If you want it, Jack, we'll buy it."

Parachute

He nodded. "Yes, please. Can we look and see if there are any other books about kids like me?"

Bella blinked back tears and her heart ached for her son. "Sure thing, but I don't think there's any stories very similar to yours."

His nose wrinkled and he shook his head. "That sucks. We should write one, Mom."

Pride welled up in her chest and she pulled him into a hug. "Maybe we'll do just that, kiddo."

They left the store thirty minutes later with a large bag full of purchases, including the book that Jack had originally picked up, along with another adoption story, 'A Mother for Choco.' Edward, Bella and Jack headed out to hail a cab and meet Esme at a restaurant for dinner. On their way out of the shop, Tanya reminded Bella to be ready at eight o'clock sharp for their night out.

When the cab pulled up at a busy intersection and let them out, Bella gazed up at the large vertical sign that read: MARS 2112.

"Mars? Is this where we're going, Edward?" she asked curiously.

He looked around for a moment before looking over a railing and grinning. He pointed down and she saw a statue of a spaceship and the restaurant entrance.

"Cool," Jack whispered, staring down in awe.

"How on Earth did you find this?" Bella asked him.

Edward shrugged. "I Googled it."

Esme was waiting for them inside the cavernous restaurant, which actually looked like being on another planet. Various servers and actors were dressed up as aliens, and it literally made it an out of this world experience.

Parachute

As they were tucking into their respective dinners, Esme broached a sensitive topic.

"So, when are you two going to talk to me about moving?"

Both Bella and Edward's eyes widened and Jack's fork clanged onto his plate. He looked up at his mother, shocked.

"We're moving?" he asked, incredulous. "Wait, I thought we already talked about that?"

Bella shook her head, trying to console her upset child. "No, Little Bit, we're not moving."

"Then what did you mean, MeMe?" he asked Esme, who looked abashed.

Edward cleared his throat and smiled at Jack. "She meant me, Jack."

His eyes flew to his father. "You? You're moving? Where?" he asked, his voice growing with excitement.

"I'm not totally sure yet, but possibly Seattle."

Jack jumped up and threw his arms around Edward's neck.

"Dude! That would be so awesome!"

The boy pulled back and looked over at his mother. "Can he come live with us? Please, Mom? Pleeeeeeease?"

Edward laughed and patted Jack's back lightly.

"Enough. Your mom and I still have a lot to talk about, okay? Just know that I'm going to be as close to you as I can."

Parachute

Jack nodded and hugged his father once more before returning to his seat. Edward shot his mother a wry smile and she shrugged one shoulder.

"Sorry, I didn't think that through, obviously," she responded with a sheepish smile.

Bella touched her arm lightly. "It's okay, it was going to come out sooner or later."

Edward nodded in agreement. "I was going to sit down with you and Dad once we all got home. I'm sure you understand, but I can't just let them walk away, you know?"

Esme smiled lovingly at her son. "I know, baby. I knew it back on the very first day. Once you two got closer, it only cemented that fact in my mind. I'm a big believer in fate."

She clapped her hands together and smiled. "Now, Jack, let's discuss our movie options for this evening."

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Two hours later, Edward walked into Greenhouse, a club that was well-known for being eco-friendly.

"Be right back," Tanya said loudly over the music, "I'm getting the first round."

Bella nodded and looked around awkwardly. The club was beautiful, with bamboo walls and LED lights everywhere.

"Here!" Tahn handed each of them a shot glass with clear liquid in it.

Parachute

Bella sniffed and looked at her friend questioningly. "What is it?"

"360 Vodka. It's the specialty drink here 'cause it's organic."

Bella drank it quickly, feeling the liquor burn down her throat and warm her chest.

"Shit!" she gasped out.

Tanya shook her head and laughed before pulling Bella towards a dancefloor area. "Come on, Bells. Let's dance!"

Bella held back a little. "Uh, can I get a minute to acclimate?"

"Acclimate? Really? Let your hair down and have fun for once!" her friend cajoled.

She turned to Edward for some support, but he just shrugged and laughed.

"You might as well give in. She'll just pester you until you do."

Bella shot him a withering look and he pulled her close. He leaned down and his hot breath against her ear made her melt. "As soon as she's done with you, you're mine."

He stepped back and Tanya stepped in and pulled a dazed Bella out on the floor.

Tahn started to dance and press up against her. The music surrounded her, swirling like a tornado. She moved her hips and danced alongside Tanya's lithe body as she got lost in the sound.

"Excuse me," a deep voice spoke right next to her ear. She turned and saw a tall, handsome man smiling down at her.

"Would you care for a dance partner?" he asked.

Parachute

"No thanks," Bella responded. "I'm fine with my friend."

He looked over her shoulder and nodded in that direction. "Looks like she found someone else."

Sure enough, when she looked, Tanya was dancing with a blond young man. She shook her head and laughed before turning back to the man.

"The answer is still no, but thanks for asking."

"Ah, come on. I'm alone and you're all by yourself. What's the harm?"

"I think the lady declined your offer, pal," Edward spoke, sliding up against Bella from behind.

The man eyed Edward carefully before responding. "I didn't hear her ask you to save her, either."

"Well, I'm her boyfriend, so I don't need a reason," Edward growled, tugging her gently away from the man and further into the dance floor crowd.

She wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed close against his body.

"Well, aren't you the superhero tonight?" she laughed lightly.

He smirked and shook his head. "What if I'm not the superhero? What if I'm the bad guy?"

She laid her hand against his chest. "You could never be the bad guy, Edward. It's not in you."

The music started to pick up again and their bodies pressed tightly against each other's as they moved to the beat.

...

Parachute

You know I know how

To make 'em stop and stare as I zone out

The club can't even handle me right now

Watchin' you watchin' me, I go all out

The club can't even handle me right now (yeah)

The club can't even handle me right now (yeah)

...

Ninety minutes later, Edward helped both women exit a cab outside of their hotel. The cabbie winked at him as he was handed a few bills.

"Have fun tonight, buddy! Looks like your hands will be full."

Edward glanced at the plastered women and shrugged. "Thanks, man."

After dropping Tanya off safely at her room, he maneuvered a slightly less inebriated Bella into theirs.

"Ehdwar," she whispered drunkenly and pushed him towards the bed.

He smiled at her indulgently and allowed her to walk him backwards.

"Yes, Bella dear?"

"I wants you."

He raised an eyebrow. "Really? Now? How do you want me?" he asked as the back of his knees hit the bed, causing him to sit down.

Parachute

She stepped back and reached behind her, unzipping her dress and letting it slide to the floor. She looked at him with hooded eyes, standing in front of him, clad only in a pair of black lace panties and heels. He gulped and reached out for her, pulling her in between his legs.

He gently pulled her down to sit on his lap and pressed his lips against her. She shifted her body and straddled his lap, grinding down on him. They continued to kiss and touch. Edward slowly started kissing down her stomach and closer to her wet heat when he heard a small noise. His eyes shot up and he sat back, smiling. Bella's eyes were closed and her mouth partly open. She was snoring.

He sighed and looked down at the bulge in his pants, deciding that a shower was now in order. He slid off her heels and arranged the covers over her. When he was finished in the bathroom, he slid on a pair of sleep pants and curled up behind her, letting sleep overtake his mind.

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Bella awoke the next morning with a slight headache and a dry mouth.

"Ick," she muttered to herself. She opened one eye and squinted at the light. She shifted her body out from underneath Edward's arm and made her way to the bathroom. After using the facilities and brushing her teeth, she noticed that she was only in her underwear from last night.

She paused, trying to remember last night's events. She groaned when she finally realized that she had fallen asleep during foreplay last night. She had only made love with him once, but she was willing and eager to enjoy his attentions again. She pulled on a robe that was hanging on the bathroom door and walked back into the bedroom. She smiled as she noticed that Edward was now awake and sitting up, his hair a messy array of copper.

Parachute

"Hey," he spoke in a gravelly, sleep-filled voice.

"Good morning," she responded.

"How are you not hung over?" he asked in surprise.

"Oh, it was the organic Vodka. The bartender said that it was kinder on you the next day. He was totally right."

She sat down next to him and curled a leg underneath of her.

"Hey, can we talk for minute?" she asked, shyly.

He leaned over and kissed her cheek. "Sure, just let me use the bathroom."

A few minutes later, he returned and strode over to the bed, not bothering to change his clothes yet.

"You wanted to talk, so let's talk," he commented, leaning back against the pillows.

Bella narrowed her eyes and shot Edward an annoyed glare.

"How am I supposed to concentrate with you lounging there, half-naked?"

He shrugged his shoulders and rubbed a hand across his bare chest smirking.

"Edddddward," she whined.

He looked up innocently. "What? What did I do?"

She growled and pounced on top of him, causing him to chuckle. Their playful tickles and raucous laughter soon turned to passionate kisses and roaming hands. An hour later, they both lay naked and spent. Bella sighed in contentment and nuzzled her face into his neck.

Parachute

"I don't want to leave you today," she whispered.

"Me too, baby. It's only three days. Jack and I will be waiting for you in Chicago when you're done with the tour."

"I know, but I've just got a bad feeling that won't leave me be."

He rubbed her back gently. "Ssh, everything will be fine. We've got each other and that's all that matters."

After a few moments of silence, Edward shifted their bodies so that Bella was on her back and he was laying on his side, looking down at her.

"So, let's have this discussion that I distracted you from earlier." He waggled his eyebrows and she smacked his chest lightly while laughing.

"You're so bad. I love you," she said before kissing him softly on the lips.

"I love you, too," he answered. "So, come on now, talk."

She nodded and played with the light smattering of hair on his chest, carefully trying to avoid looking into his eyes.

"What happens in a few weeks when me and Jack head back to Washington? I know we've touched on the subject and talked around it, but I'm a planner and a worrier. I need to know what to expect."

He looked thoughtfully at her for a moment before responding.

"I don't know when exactly, but I do know that I am following you two. Granted, I do own the company, but other people depend on me, so I can't just drop everything and move across country. I'll need to sit down and talk with Tre and Al. See if we can come up with a plan of action. It may take a of couple weeks, maybe a month, but I'll be there."

Parachute

She smiled brightly and nodded. "I can deal with that. As long as I know what to expect and what's going on, I can deal with anything. You and Jack are my world, Edward."

He cupped her face gently and laid a sweet, yet passionate kiss on her lips.

"Ditto, Bella. After I find a place to live close to you guys, I'm not letting you out of my sight."

She looked at him shyly from under her eyelashes and gave him a small smile.

"Or you could just come to live with us."

"Why, Miss Swan!" he gasped in fake outrage. "Are you suggesting that we live in sin?"

"Well, Mister Cullen, it seems that we already share a son, so I guess propriety is out the window now."

He laughed loudly and pulled her against his chest.

"I adore you, Bella. My heart beats for no one else besides you and Jack."

"Are you always going to be so sappy, Edward?"

"As long as you and Jack are in my life, then yes Bella, I am."

"Good," she murmured against his skin, "I like you that way."

"Really? What if I were an ignorant ass?" he asked jokingly.

"Then I'd have to whip you into shape."

"Whips, Bella? Really? It's always the quiet ones," he sighed. "Should I invest in a blindfold and some handcuffs, too?"

Parachute

"Only if you want them used on you," she retorted cheekily.

He laughed and kissed her forehead. "I've fallen for you so hard, so quickly. I think that I'm beginning to understand my mother's belief in fate."

"How can you think about your mother while we're laying here naked?"

"Hush you, stop being a perv," he mock-chastised.

"Well, then stop trying to talk about Esme while I have no clothes on. Carlisle, on the other hand..." she trailed off.

"Oh, you little," he growled as he reached to tickle her foot.

Bella squealed and scampered off the bed, taking the sheet with her. Before he had a chance to chase her, his phone started ringing. He reached over onto the nightstand and frowned when he noticed the caller.

"Hey, James," he answered the call.

Bella narrowed her eyes in annoyance and perched on the edge of the bed, shamelessly eavesdropping.

"Today, actually. No, that's fine. Uh huh. Cool. Okay then, I'll see you Wednesday."

He hung up the phone and gave Bella a thoughtful look. "Out of curiosity, has your private investigator found out anything yet?"

She gave him a surprised look. "No, why? Is something wrong?"

He shook his head. "No, but," he paused and pursed his lips in thought. "James has sounded odd the last few times I've spoken with him. Like he's nervous about something. He just asked to meet with me about some documents on Wednesday."

Parachute

He sighed and ran a hand through his already tousled hair.

"As much as I want to believe you're wrong, I can't discount your apprehension. I just- I just can't picture him with Victoria. It always seemed like they hated each other."

Bella bit her lip in thought, carefully forming her next words. "Hate is a very powerful emotion. It's often said that there's a thin line between that and love."

She reached out and stroked his cheek with one finger. "Hey, let's not worry about James right now. I'll give Jenks a call later on and see if he's any closer to finding anything out. Maybe you were right and I was reading too much into things."

His shoulders sagged as if something heavy weighed down on them. She stood and held out her hand.

"Come on, let's take a shower before we have to get ready to leave."

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Bella kissed Jack on the head and hugged Edward tight as their flight leaving LaGuardia for Chicago was called.

"I love you guys and I'll see you in a few days."

"Bye Mom, I love you, too," Jack murmured as he hugged her tight.

"I love you, Bella," Edward whispered, resting his forehead against hers. "Be safe, please."

"I promise," she whispered back.

Parachute

Esme reached out and held Bella's hand as they watched their boys board their flight. As soon as they were out of sight, Bella let a tear slip.

"Oh, sweetheart," Esme said with a sigh as she put her arms around Bella's shoulders. "It'll be alright. I know it's sad."

Bella wiped her cheek and gave Esme a grateful smile.

"Look at it this way," the older woman mused. "Imagine how I'll feel when my son moves across the country permanently."

Bella gasped and tears built up in her eyes once again. "Oh, Esme, I'm so sorry. I never thought of that."

"Oh, quiet, silly girl," Esme laughed. "I know it's for the best. Even before Jack was taken, a piece of Edward was missing. You're that missing piece. You, him and that gorgeous grandson of mine complete each other. Although, another little one wouldn't hurt, you know."

Esme winked at her and Bella felt her cheeks flush.

"Ooooh, what did you say to make her blush that way, Mama Cullen?" Tanya asked as she plopped down in one of the hard seats across from them. "Was it about her and Eddie boy knocking boots?"

"Tanya!" Bella whisper-shouted. "Jesus, what is wrong with you?"

Tanya laughed and shook her head. "Come on, babe. It's not like the Marriott's walls are that thick, you know?"

Bella's blush intensified when she noticed Esme choking back a laugh. "I'm never living this down, am I?" she muttered.

"Nope," Tanya replied, popping the p at the end of the word.

Parachute

She narrowed her eyes at her friend. "Popping the p, really Tahn? Who even does that anymore?"

Tanya winked. "Apparently awesome people like me."

After a few moments of silence, Tahn broke the quiet.

"Sooooo, who's telling the shrimp? Me or you?"

Bella groaned and put her head in her hands, not looking forward to the Spanish Inquisition that would erupt when she told Alice about losing her virginity to Edward. "We have an hour until our flight, I'll do it now. If she hears it from you, she'll be pissed."

"Have fun!" Tanya called out as Bella made her way over to a quiet corner, flipping her friend off along the way.

The line rang twice before Alice picked up.

"Bells! How's it going? Are you having fun?" her friend chattered excitedly.

"Allie? Are you sitting down?"

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AN: Ok, so this was a bit of filler and fluff. Drama returns in our next chapter.

Just letting you guys know that while I'm unsure of the exact number of chapters left, I know that it's not many. Maybe eight? And no, there won't be a Parachute sequel. As a reader, I've ended up disappointed in a great number of ones that I've read, so I'm not even considering it. I love the story too much to possibly ruin it. We will have an epilogue though, for sure. =)

Parachute

See you guys on Monday with the next set of teasers! You're **definitely** going to want a piece of the review reply teaser. I swear it will be worth it. ;-)

Music used in this chapter was 'Hey, Soul Sister' by Train and 'Club Can't Handle Me' by Flo Rida. The music as well as the books mentioned are up on the Parachute Blog. ([http : // kitsushel . blogspot . com](http://kitsushel.blogspot.com))

Chapter 31

AN: First off, huge thanks to LaMomo for prettying this up and Stratan for Beta'ing!

Just an FYI, Parachute's Fandom for Preemies JackPOV piece will be posting sometime this weekend to the Outtakes. As will my one shot for the One Shot Sountrack Contest, *Misery Business*. Keep an eye out for those or put me on Author Alert if you'd like! I have a few other things up my sleeve as well. ;-)

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"So, how was it?" Alice asked, once she got the squeals of excitement out of her system.

Bella sighed and rubbed her face with her free hand. "It was..." She paused, trying to find the right words. "It was nice, I guess? Edward was very sweet and attentive. He gave me Advil and we had a warm shower together afterwards."

"Wait, he took care of you like that? Whoa, Edward Cullen doesn't do anything half-assed, does he?" Alice laughed lightly.

"What do you mean?" Bella asked.

"Well, most guys aren't like that. My first time was in the back of Jasper's pickup truck. It was quick, painful and messy. Do you remember what I said that night when I called you later?"

" **This** is what we hear so much about? I'd rather use my fingers," Bella responded in giggles. "Oh, man. I can still remember that clearly. You were so

pissed."

"I was indeed. I had all of that fairytale hype about how my first time was supposed to be all magical and crap. What baloney."

After a moment's pause, Alice sighed and a smile could be heard in her voice. "I'm glad that your first time went much better. I still kick myself for pushing you to lose it to Jacob. It was wrong, and I was too pushy."

"Oh, Allie. You just go overboard sometimes, but I know that you mean well," Bella said in an attempt to comfort her friend.

"Still," Alice continued, "I'm glad Edward was good to you. Maybe it paid off to have an older, wiser man."

"Al," Bella laughed out, "you make it sound like he's ancient."

A few giggles and laughs later, Bella sighed softly. "The first time really was nice, but the second time was amazing. I never knew I could feel so much at once."

Alice gasped. "A second time? You slut! I didn't know you had it in you, Bells. I'm such a proud mama." Alice pretended to sniffle.

Bella blushed and hissed into the phone. "Don't make fun of me Mary Alice. It's not nice."

"Oh, Bella," Alice responded, laughter still coloring her voice, "I wouldn't dream of it."

After a few more minutes of sharing too much info between friends, Bella hung up and made her way back to where Tanya and Esme were sitting. The former put down the magazine she was reading and smiled at her.

"How is Alice doing, dear?" Esme asked kindly.

Parachute

"She's doing well. She just got in a new shipment of some Egyptian fabric, so she's in heaven."

Tahn snorted. "Alice is usually easy to please. A little fabric, some designer shoes, naked Jasper."

"Uh, eww?" Bella drawled. "He's like my brother. Just, no."

Tanya laughed. "Well, that doesn't make it any less true, you know."

Bella shook her head and it on Tanya's shoulder, getting as comfortable as she could in the hard plastic chairs. She yawned and nudged her friend.

"I'm taking a nap. Wake me when it's time to roll?"

Tanya smiled kindly. "Sure thing, babe."

Bella closed her eyes and allowed herself to drift off.

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Later that night in Detroit, Bella collapsed into the bed in her hotel room. The day had been hectic after their flight landed. First, an interview with a local radio show and then off to another book signing. She had only had time for a quick phone call earlier with Edward just to check in that both of their flights arrived safely. After looking at the clock, she decided to try and see if he was still up.

"Hello, love," Edward's smooth, deep voiced caressed her ear.

She sighed, the tension in her body relaxing just by hearing his voice.

Parachute

"Hi babe," she murmured, leaning back against the pillows.

"You sound tired. Did Tanya wear you out?" he asked, his voice laced with humor.

"Yes, she did. I'm glad that we only do these once a year or so. They're completely exhausting."

"I can imagine," he responded.

Something in the background caught her attention.

"Hey, can you turn that up a little?" she asked him.

"Sure, hang on a sec."

She heard the low strains of music and then the rustling of covers. The music grew louder until she could hear it clearly.

"Sorry, I love this song," she said softly before starting to hum.

...

*Brick by brick, we can build it from the floor.
If we hold onto each other, we'll be better than before.
And brick by brick,
we'll get back to yesterday.
When I made your body shiver and
when you took my breath away,
you took my breath away.*

...

"You never said that you were a Train fan," she commented.

Parachute

He chuckled. "I wouldn't say I've been a fan, but I've never disliked them. That song you played in the car before had me give them a chance. I'm glad I did. There are several that make me think of you."

"Aww, you're so sweet," she murmured. "So, what did you guys do today?"

"Well, we had a nap when we got home, and then he talked me into going to the skatepark."

"Oh no," Bella groaned. "Did you make it home in one piece this time?"

"Ha, ha, ha," he replied in a deadpan voice. "I learned my lesson, so I stayed on the sidelines."

"That's a relief. I would worry about you being injured and all alone."

He made a humming noise in agreement. After a moment of comfortable silence, he spoke again.

"You know, I had a fantasy about you that night."

"Really?" she asked in surprise. "What kind of fantasy?"

He cleared his throat. "Oh, um, nothing much."

"Oh, come on, Edward!" she pleaded. "You can't bring it up and arouse my curiosity just to drop it."

She heard him mutter something that sounded similar to arousing being the correct term.

He sighed and chuckled. "I had a dream that you came to give me a sponge bath and take care of my wounds. Dressed like a nurse."

Her cheeks flushed and warmth spread through her chest. It was a powerful feeling knowing that you were desired.

Parachute

"That sounds interesting. What happened?" she asked, somewhat breathlessly.

"Ah, erm, are you sure you want to hear this? I'd much rather tell you in person," he replied, his voice lowering slightly.

"Well, that won't be happening for a few days unfortunately, so why don't you tell me now?"

She heard him swallow. "I- ah... why is this so awkward?" he asked suddenly. "I mean, we've seen each other naked and know each other's body well, but talking about it on the phone feels so weird."

She laughed and smiled. "You're right, it does feel a little awkward, but I still want to know. Please?"

"Fine," he sighed. "I dreamt that I was tossing and turning restlessly before you appeared in my doorway. You were wearing one of those old fashioned nurse outfits with a little white hat. You walked over and asked seductively if I needed a sponge bath, before stripping me and having your way with me."

"Really?" she asked, excitement bubbling under her skin. "What did I do with you?"

He groaned lightly. "You wrapped your hands around my shaft and stroked me."

"Shaft? Is that what you call it in your head?" she asked in curiosity.

"Erm, well, no."

She scrunched her nose and started to twirl a piece of hair distractedly. "Why don't you just say what you call it?"

"I don't know... I guess it's not polite conversation material."

"Well, this isn't exactly polite conversation, is it?" she asked, cheekily.

Parachute

He growled and dropped his voice an octave lower. "Really? What do you want to hear, Bella? About how your soft hands stroked my aching cock, slowly at first and then quicker until I came all over my stomach? Do you want to hear about how I woke up from that dream with sticky pants? How I hadn't had a wet dream since I was in high school?"

She let a small whimper. "Yes, that's exactly what I wanted to hear."

"Oh, Bella," he groaned, "you're going to be the death of me, woman."

"It'd be a lovely way to go though, wouldn't it?" she laughed. "Would it make you feel better to know that I thought about you as well?"

She briefly wondered where her boldness was coming from, but the thought flew from her head when she heard his gasp.

"Really? You do?" he asked in a disbelieving tone.

"Yes, why wouldn't I? You're a gorgeous, sexy man."

"But you were a, uh, virgin?"

She rolled her eyes. "Really, Edward? Just because I was a virgin doesn't mean that I've never touched myself or had an orgasm."

"Really?" he asked, shock clearly evident in his tone.

"Yes, really. I'm a 23 year old woman, and I have needs, too, you know."

"Wow," he muttered. "I never thought of it like that."

"Well, now you know. You've made my showers more enjoyable over the past few weeks."

She giggled at his stunned silence and put the phone on speaker so she could get changed for bed.

Parachute

"What's that noise?" he asked. "Are you getting naked?"

"No, well, sort of," she replied. "I'm getting ready for bed, so I can curl up and let your voice be the last thing I hear before I close my eyes."

He sighed. "That sounds like a good plan. I just wish it was my arms that you were falling asleep in."

"Me, too, baby. Wednesday will be here before you know it."

"I know. I don't know how I'm going to make it for weeks until I'm able to move."

That thought stopped her in her tracks and she sat down on the bed. She knew that he couldn't just drop everything and leave his life in Chicago, but suddenly the thought of weeks without him made her feel desolate.

"Hey, are you still there?" he asked when he had heard nothing for a few moments.

"Yeah, sorry, I'm here. Just got lost in thought."

"Don't."

"Don't what?" she asked.

"Don't second guess everything. It will be fine. * *We'll* * be fine."

She smiled to herself. "I know," she responded quietly. "It's my nature to worry, though."

"That's understandable, it's part of being a parent. Just don't doubt me or us. We're a family now, Bella. And nothing can change that."

She felt the sting of tears and smiled. He always knew just what to say to melt her heart.

Parachute

"I won't. I promise. I love, you so much, Edward."

"I love you, too, Bella. So much."

After a few moments, he cleared his throat slightly. "So, about these shower thoughts..."

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Bella tried her best to stay busy and occupied over the next day and a half, to make the time go by quicker. After speaking with Edward last night, she agreed to meet him at his office for lunch. Tanya was taking an early flight back to Seattle to get caught up some of her other clients, so Bella and Esme also caught a very early morning flight home. She walked into the Cullen house at nine a.m. and felt an immediate sense of home. As much as she was eager to get back to her own place, she knew that she'd miss this house and the family that made it a home. Jack was already out for the day with Emmett and Rose, so she trudged up to her room with her suitcase and sprawled out on the bed for a nap. She closed her eyes and drifted off after setting the alarm on her phone.

She awoke two hours later, feeling refreshed, and quickly changed into a pair of jeans and a button down shirt, opting for comfort over fashion for this afternoon. She stopped by Esme's room to say goodbye, but the older woman was sound asleep. She chuckled and wrote a note to leave on the kitchen counter, before heading out the door and into Nevaeh. When she arrived at the office, she parked next to Edward's little sports car and made her way into the building.

Bella stepped off the elevator on Edward's floor and smiled. She had missed him fiercely over the past few days and she was eager to see him. She turned towards his secretary's desk and smiled at the young woman seated there.

Parachute

"Hello again, Gianna," Bella said pleasantly.

Gianna looked up and gave Bella a warm smile. "Hello, Ms. Swan. Mr. Brooks is in with Mr. Cullen right now, but I'll let him know that you're here."

"Oh, no worries. I'll just send him a text message and tell him to take his time."

Gianna nodded and reached for the ringing phone. "Hello, Mr. Cullen's office."

She tuned out the girl's chattering and pulled out her phone to fire off a message to Edward. A few moments later, his office door opened and James Brooks stepped out, closing the door behind him. His eyes caught Bella and his smile made the hair on the back of her neck stand up.

"Miss Swan," he began in a sweet voice, "it's a pleasure to see you again."

"Mr. Brooks," she replied in acknowledgement.

His eyes shot over to Gianna, who was still pre-occupied on the phone.

"How are you doing? I heard that you've just returned from a book tour. Was it successful?"

She eyed him warily, nodding. "Yes, it was a busy trip."

He smiled and nodded as well. "Good, I'm glad that it went well. I'm happy that I've run into you, actually."

Her eyes narrowed. "Why is that?" she asked in suspicion.

He sighed and gave her a sad smile. "I know you care very much about Edward, but I'm afraid that things aren't always what they seem."

Her heart skipped a beat. "What do mean?" she asked, hesitantly.

Parachute

"Look, I know you're a nice girl and the Cullen family has fallen completely in love with you, except for one. I don't know how he sweet talked you into bed or made you believe that he loved you, but Edward is only using you. I don't want you to hurt anymore than you're already going to be."

She gave James an incredulous look. "Are you out of your mind? How dare you?"

"Seducing you and getting Jackson back has been his plan from the beginning. After everything that he's been through with Victoria and losing his child, do you honestly think that he'd give his heart away so easily?"

Her eyes widened and panic began to slowly build in her chest. "No," she whispered and shook her head, refusing to believe.

"Don't be naive, Isabella. I can prove it," he responded, opening up his briefcase and pulling out a piece of paper. He held it out to her, but she couldn't bring herself to take it. He shook it in her direction slightly and Bella reached out to take it from him slowly, as if the document were a snake waiting to bite.

She looked at the man in front of her one more time before letting her eyes scan the words written before her, each one adding a crack in her heart's armor, one at a time. Her eyes stung and her bottom lip quivered as the writing started to blur with her tears.

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Circuit Court of Cook County, Illinois, Domestic Relations Division

Petition for Sole Custody of Jackson Charles Swan

Edward Masen Cullen, Petitioner

vs.

Isabella Marie Swan, Respondent

...

The document looked official, with the city's seal at the top of the letterhead. A gasping sob wrenched at her chest and she crumpled the offending paper in her fist. She placed a hand over her mouth to stifle the noise as she backed away from James slowly. He gave her a sympathetic smile.

"I am so sorry, Bella. I told him not to do this, that it wasn't fair to either you or Jack."

She shook her head, tears falling freely over her cheeks and fingers that were still covering her mouth. Her heart lay shattered on the ground and she couldn't stand in that waiting room one moment longer. She turned and fled to the elevator, barely making it inside before letting her rage and hurt release. She hit the wall and screamed.

"No, no, no," she cried. Her back slowly slid down the wall of the elevator and she cradled her head in her hands and sobbed.

This can't be happening. It can't be true.

She tried to calm her emotions and harsh breathing as questions began to swirl in her head.

Why did he do this?

Did he set this into motion before we got together?

Were all of his feelings just an act?

"It couldn't have been," she answered out loud. "This is bullshit. I'm not leaving until I hear it from his mouth."

Whatever happened to client/attorney privilege?

Parachute

That last thought snapped at her mind. "Mother-" she said in a moment of clarity. "James, you rotten bastard."

The elevator dinged at the third floor, signalling passengers about to step on, so she quickly stood and rubbed her face, praying that she didn't look like too much of a mess. Her resolve was set. She was going to turn right back around and up to Edward's office as soon as the elevator made it to the ground floor. Edward would either crush her heart or be forced to see James for the conniving douchebag that he was.

A few moments later, her phone began to ring. As soon as she saw who the caller was, she started to wonder if Fate was on her side today.

"Please tell me that you have something, Jenks. Anything at all," she pleaded.

"Well, hello to you too, Miss Bella," the man chuckled lightly in response.

"Jenks, this is not a good time for jokes. Everything could quite possibly be crashing down upon my head. Please give me something I can use."

Immediately, Jenks was back in professional mode. "Yes, Bella, I do have something that you can use. It turns out that I couldn't find anything on James Brooks because he doesn't exist."

"Wait, how is that possible?" she asked in confusion.

"Well, it looks like he changed his name legally and had the records sealed. His birth name is James Davenport, and you won't believe where he was born."

"Where?" she asked, holding her breath and suspecting the answer already.

"Seattle, Washington."

"Son of a bitch," she exclaimed. She quickly smiled apologetically to the man who was riding the elevator up to the fifth floor. 'Sorry,' she mouthed.

Parachute

The man rolled his eyes and looked away.

"When did he move to Chicago?"

"Ten years ago. He changed his name shortly after moving there. His parents still live in Seattle and he usually visits them once a year. Would you like to take a guess which month he visited in 2005?"

She closed her eyes and rubbed her forehead. "September?"

"September," Jenks confirmed. "I took the liberty of having one of my people interview Mr. and Mrs. Davenport under a ruse and obtained a few more choice tidbits. They confirmed that their son is a lawyer in Chicago and has a long term girlfriend named Vicki, who just so happens to be a beautiful, sweet girl."

"Call Tanya and give her this info. She'll know what to do."

"Yes, ma'am. I'll keep my ear to the ground. If I find anything else out, I'll let you know."

Bella pocketed her iPhone and her hands curled into fists. The anger that she had experienced minutes earlier paled in comparison to the rage that coursed through her now. The proof that James was a part of Jack's abandonment was black and white in front of her face. She fully planned on marching back into that office and tearing a new asshole into anyone who dared get in her way.

When the elevator reached the final floor, she was alone. The doors opened and before she could step out, she found herself once again face to face with James Brooks. His eyes widened in shock and her fist flew without thought. He swiftly caught her hand and pushed her back into the elevator with his body weight.

"What the hell are you doing?" he hissed angrily.

"You- you-" she stuttered. "You piece of shit! I'm not leaving here until I talk to Edward. I know who you are and what you did to Jack. You're a miserable

Parachute

excuse for a human being!" she shouted in her fury.

Quicker than she could blink, one of his forearms was pressed against her throat menacingly while the other hand gripped her by the hair.

"You couldn't just leave, could you?" he ground out. "No, you had to be Miss High-And-Mighty. From the first moment I laid eyes on you, I knew you'd be a challenge."

Her heart started to beat erratically, fear filling up the space where fury had recently resided. The wild, angry look in his eyes made her blood run cold. She instantly regretted not holding back her temper until she was in full view of witnesses.

His hand let go of her hair and he let his fingers trail down her cheek. She tried to turn away, but the pressure on her throat increased, causing her to gasp and freeze.

"I can see why he's been so enamored of you. You're very beautiful and feisty."

He cocked his head to the side and shook it slowly. "You really should have just run. Taken the boy and gotten the hell out of Chicago. That would have made things so much simpler. Now I don't know what to do with you."

He leaned back and hummed slightly before reaching over and pressing the button for the parking garage. Seeing a window of opportunity, she twisted away from him and landed a solid kick to his mid-section, but he recovered quickly. Her fingers were mere inches away from the emergency button when James grabbed her hair and threw her roughly against the back wall of the elevator. When she attempted to rush past him, his fist connected with her temple viciously and then everything went black.

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Parachute

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AN: Ok, no killing me for the cliffie, okay? This is the way it's always played out in my head. You guys should know me well enough by now to know that I won't drag anything out.

Music used in the chapter was *Brick by Brick* by Train. (Off of the same album as *Parachute*)

Love, squishes and kisses until next week! Or Monday and the teasers, whichever comes first for you. Oh, and yes I know that next Friday is Christmas Eve, but I'll still be posting on schedule for my lovie!

(Srsly, don't forget to check out Jack's POV when it posts, which will probably be tomorrow night.)

Chapter 32

AN: Happy Holidays to those of you who celebrate! Keep an eye out this weekend for a special EPOV covering Chapter 31 & 32!

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Bella groaned and tried to clear the fog from her brain. Her arms were sore and her head was throbbing. She yawned and blinked slightly, trying to take in her surroundings. As she shifted in an attempt to sit up, her arms refused to move. Panicking, her heart began to race and she popped her eyes wide open. She looked around and found herself lying on a leather couch, her arms immobilized behind her back. After trying to move her hands without success, she ascertained that they were tied or bound together. She shifted and rolled onto her side, gazing around the room.

It was richly furnished with dark decor and, even though the temperature was cool, she felt a drop of sweat drip down her head and across one of her ears. There was an enormous bay window, which had a beautiful view of a forest that looked to be surrounding the house. Her hopes of escaping slowly dwindled as that thought filtered through her brain.

She wriggled her hands and tried to shift into a sitting position, when she was suddenly lifted to her feet. Cold, hazel eyes glared at her menacingly.

"Hello, sunshine," he murmured.

"What- Where am I? What are you going to do with me?" she asked in a frightened voice.

James cocked his head to the side slightly and smirked. "I haven't quite figured

Parachute

that out yet. I foolishly didn't think of a back-up plan, so now I have to wing it."

He pushed her onto the couch so that she fell into a sitting position again, and she tried to ignore the burning in her shoulders. Suddenly, a door somewhere slammed and James looked towards the entrance at the far side of the room they were currently occupying. Storming inside, her cloud of red hair flying wildly like she was in the middle of a hurricane, was Victoria. She stopped in her tracks and glanced at Bella with a shocked expression.

"What is she doing here?" Victoria asked. Her eyes grew wide and settled on her lover before her facial expression turned grim. "What have you done?"

James smiled and spread out his hands in an open gesture. "It seems that Miss Swan here has a big mouth and a big nose."

Sneering, he turned to Bella. "Didn't you ever hear about how curiosity killed the cat? You should have left."

As he continued to speak, his actions grew more agitated and he started to pull at the ends of his short blond hair. "Fuck!" he yelled, banging one of his palms against his forehead. "What do we do now?"

Victoria stepped over to stop his pacing and placed a hand on his shoulder. "What happened, James?" she asked in a calm, soothing voice.

"I handed her the custody petition and she ran off, like we planned for. But when I went to get the elevator, she was in there and attacked me. She *knows*, Victoria," he hissed. "She threatened to go to Cullen and spill everything that we've been trying to hide. She came at me, and I accidentally knocked her out. I didn't know what to do with her, so I brought her here and tied her hands."

Victoria sighed and looked down at Bella with a gaze that was part sympathy and part disgust. "It really would have been much simpler if you would have disappeared when I first tried to rattle you."

Parachute

Bella's temper flared, but she bit her tongue, recognizing the precarious situation she was in. She took a deep breath in through her nose before responding.

"Did you honestly think that I'd just hand my son over to you? You may not know what love is Victoria, but I do. I love them both with all of my heart."

"You weren't supposed to leave the boy," Victoria responded incredulously. "You were supposed to take him and run. Your presence here is what complicated everything. We could have gone on with our lives as they were, but bringing Jackson back ruined everything."

"What do you mean?" Bella exclaimed. "How did bringing Jack back here ruin anything? You didn't have to step back into the picture."

Victoria walked closer and ran a sharp nail down Bella's cheek in warning. "Yes, I did. Once he got over the shock of knowing that his son was still alive, Edward came to James to file a lawsuit against me for endangering the boy's life. After the Gala, James was sure that the boy recognized him, so we had to find a way to remove the two of you from the equation."

"But why abandon Jack in the first place? Why not leave him with his family and run off with James? How could you have done that? Don't you have a heart at all?" Bella's voice pleaded in anguish.

Victoria's face softened just a bit. "It was never my intention to abandon the boy. I was high and simply misplaced him." Her eyes cut over to James briefly, before continuing. "We had a spat right before he went to visit his parents in Seattle. I didn't want to leave things the way they were, so I made up a bogus trip about visiting my mother. I was nervous, so I decided to find a dealer and get high. I don't remember all that happened until I couldn't find Jackson and I called James, panicking. He picked me, and we went to look for the brat, but he was nowhere to be found. So he got me to my mother's house, and the rest is history."

Parachute

Bella's heart ached for her son, knowing that his birth mother truly hadn't cared for his well being at all.

"Why didn't you report him missing in Seattle? They would have found him sooner."

Victoria scoffed. "Really, Isabella? And risk my darling husband finding out that I lied about where I was? With one of his best friends? Are you mad?"

"So your tryst with Bobby Brown here was more important than your son?" Bella asked, her voice laced with venom.

Victoria raised a perfectly arched brow and simply nodded. "As I've said before, I never wanted to be a mother anyway."

Bella felt her stomach turn and bile rise up her throat in anger and disgust towards the other woman. "You're a real piece of work, you know that?"

Victoria rolled her eyes and focused back on James. "So what now, Jimmy? Do you have a plan?"

His cold eyes burned a hole through Bella, whose panic was increasing with every second that ticked away on the clock.

"Kill her." His voice was cold and emotionless.

Victoria's eyes widened in shock. "What? Are you out of your mind? We can't kill her!"

"Why not?" he asked, sounding like a child who was just told no by his parent.

"Because- because- because," Victoria stuttered, trying to find the right words as to not incense him. "It's murder, James! We'll go to jail!"

"No, we can cover it up. Spin a believable lie."

Parachute

Bella's heart started to race and her eyes darted around, trying to think of a way out of this mess. James was clearly deranged and she couldn't leave in Victoria's hands all her hopes that she'd get out of this mess. She decided to try and talk her way out of it.

"Edward will know, James. I was supposed to meet him for lunch. Gianna saw me. He'll put two and two together."

James tapped his chin in thought before nodding. "You're right, he will. We'll need to speed this up. Vicki, watch her for a moment." He turned and strode purposefully from the room.

Victoria flew at Bella, pushing her forward as the other girl struggled.

"Stop it!" Victoria whispered. "Unless you want to fucking die, then keep right on fighting me."

Bella ceased to move and felt Victoria's hands pulling at the knot in the rope around her wrists. "Why are you helping me?" she asked in confusion.

"I may be a shitty mother, but I'm not a killer, Bella. We've got to get out of here. He's come unhinged."

"Really, Vicki? Is that what you think of me?" James voice echoed throughout the room.

Victoria froze just as the knot slipped away and Bella felt her hands come loose. She fought the fire in her shoulders and kept her hands together so that James wouldn't realize that she was free. Victoria's ice blue eyes were large with fear as she turned to face her lover.

"James," she replied, imploringly. "It's not what it sounded like."

His eyes were hard with no small amount of wildness swirling around in them. "Really? I didn't just hear you say that I'm unhinged?"

Parachute

Victoria attempted to smile, but failed and could only bring forth a grimace. "I was just trying to gain Bella's trust, baby. You know I'm on your side."

He pulled out a gun from behind his back and looked it over pensively. "Since when is she Bella to you, Vicki?"

Victoria's face paled and she started to stutter. "Uh, she's not James. You must have misheard me. I said Isabella, didn't I?"

He cocked his head to the side and eyed her curiously. "Why are you lying to me, Victoria?"

"I'm not, Jimmy. I swear!" she pleaded with him.

With a sudden movement, his arm swung forward and a loud bang echoed through the house. A sound that was a cross between a scream and a groan wrenched itself from Victoria's mouth. Her hands clutched at her stomach and viscous crimson began to seep through her fingers. She raised one blood-stained hand and looked at it in horror.

"James?" she murmured in disbelief. "You- How could you-" her words were cut off by another bang and Bella felt something hot and wet hit her cheek as she turned her head away from the bloody scene.

James sighed and placed the gun back into his waistband before walking over and kneeling next to Victoria's prone body. He reverently brushed back her hair and smiled sadly.

"Oh, Vicky. I'm going to miss you so much," he whispered.

Seeing a moment of opportunity, Bella launched herself off the chair and out of the room. Knowing that there was no place for her to run and probably nowhere that she could hide where he wouldn't find her, she set off to find the next best thing - a weapon. Sliding into a large stainless steel kitchen, she found just that in the form of a rack of pots and pans hanging above an island in the center of the room. She quickly pulled down a large and heavy frying

Parachute

pan and hefted it over her shoulder, moving towards the door at the opposite end of the room. As she eased it open, she found herself facing a flight of stairs leading upwards. Just as she placed one foot on the bottom stair, she heard James's voice coming closer.

"Isabellllllla," he sang out. "Come out, come out, wherever you are."

She turned and flew up the stairs as fast as her feet would carry her. The hallway was dark and she couldn't see much until her eyes adjusted a few moments later. There were a series of doors on her left. She ducked into one quickly when she heard his voice coming up the stairwell. It was a small bedroom with no closet. She ran over to the window and looked down at the three story drop with nothing in sight to cushion her fall, in case she jumped. Visions of her broken and mangled body danced across her eyes. Hide or jump - and break something or possibly die? She swallowed the lump in her throat and lowered herself to the floor, squeezing underneath the bed. It was a lose/lose situation, no matter how she looked at it.

She laid on her back and stared up at the underside of the mattress, trying to regulate her breathing. The quiet of the room was broken as the door squeaked open slowly. She held her breath and her heart started to hammer. Her grip on the pan tightened and felt her nails dig into the soft flesh of her palm.

"Bella!" a far-off voice called. "James! Where are you?"

Relief instantly flooded her system at the sound of Edward's voice.

"Sonofa-" James muttered and turned back into the hall.

Dread and fear shot up her spine. James had a gun and Edward was more than likely unarmed. The man had had a psychotic break down and shot his girlfriend to death. Edward stood no chance. With her heart still in her throat, she eased herself out from under the bed and listened at the door, hearing nothing.

Parachute

"Where is she?" she heard Edward holler. "Don't stare at me like that, James! Where the fuck is she?"

Knowing that Edward had no idea what kind of danger he was in, Bella flung the door open and quickly made her way downstairs, as quietly as she could.

"SHUT UP!" James screamed. Bella stole through the kitchen and peaked into the study where she had woken up. Edward stood with his arms up and his eyes wide at the sight of James pointing the gun at him.

"James, calm down, man. Put the gun down. You don't want to shoot me," Edward said in a smooth, quiet voice.

"You don't know shit, Edward! You never did!"

"What are you talking about?"

"You, Mr. Perfect. You came from money and a loving family. You had the perfect girl, and you blew it all away. And for what? A kid?"

Edward's face clouded with confusion. "I don't understand. Just what did I blow away? A relationship with a woman who didn't give a shit about me? You're damn right I chose my kid first. I'd do it again in a heartbeat."

"You've always been a pussy, Edward. She needed someone to love her, and I could."

"Pussy?" Edward snarled. "Who's the one who's not man enough to face me without a weapon? Who's the one who killed the woman he claimed to love?"

James's gaze shot down to Victoria's body and Bella saw her chance. She rushed into the room and swung the pan with all of her strength against the back of his head. The gun clattered to the floor and James fell to one knee, grasping his wound. His furious eyes turned on her before lunging. She was knocked down to the ground, the wind taken out of her sails. The sounds of fighting were drowned out by the sound of blood rushing to her ears as her

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head bounced off the hardwood floor. When she opened her eyes a moment later, Victoria's lifeless sapphire ones stared back at her vacantly. Bella gasped and jerked away, her hand slipping and sliding in a puddle of vibrant ruby blood.

When she was able to pull herself into a kneeling position, she saw Edward on top of James, punching him viciously. James quickly knocked his former friend off of him and brought his knee up to connect with Edward's groin. Bella's eyes scanned the room quickly and her eyes connected with the shiny black Glock .45. She scrambled over and picked the gun up, before standing and taking aim directly at James.

"Get off of him," she yelled.

James froze and turned, his eyes zeroing on the gun in her hand. "You won't do it. I bet you've never even been that close to a gun before, pretty girl," he taunted her smugly.

She aimed the gun a little higher than his head and fired off a warning shot, which cracked the large window.

"Try me, asshole. My father's a police chief. Trust me, I know how to handle a gun."

She stepped closer to Edward as he maneuvered himself to his knees. James made a movement and Bella aimed the gun straight at his head.

"On your knees and put your hands on your head," she growled.

James scowled, but did as he was told. Sirens could be heard in the distance, growing closer. She wanted to rush to Edward's side and check on him, but her gaze remained steady on James. When the flashing lights of police cars were seen through the windows, James began to visibly panic. He launched at Bella out of the blue, causing the gun to go off, firing into the ceiling. James attempted to grab her, but she elbowed him in the gut and cracked him hard on the head with the butt of the gun. His body slumped to the ground in a heap and

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she fell to her knees, adrenaline coursing through her veins.

Bella turned her head slightly and met Edward's gaze for the first time since she left him at LaGuardia. He was struggling to his feet when his gaze connected with hers, his eyes the most verdant green against red rims. The relief radiating off him ripped right through her completely. Looking at him now, guilt weighed heavily on her shoulders for ever doubting him, even for the slightest moment. She stood slowly and stumbled into his arms.

"Oh, God, Edward," she sobbed, burying her head into his chest.

"Sssh, it's okay, baby. I've got you," he whispered into her hair.

She closed her eyes and breathed in his scent, starting to shake like a leaf as the adrenaline began to wear off. A loud crash was heard as the police broke down the front door.

"Everybody, freeze!"

Bella clutched Edward tighter, refusing to let him go.

"Put your hands where we can see them!"

Edward slowly released Bella and raised his hands. As she moved to do the same, a wave of vertigo hit her and she felt herself begin to fall. He quickly caught her and she heard him ask for a paramedic before words started to jumble together and she had to fight to keep her eyes open.

A medic flashed a light in her eyes as Edward stayed out of their way, speaking with an officer. Words continued to mesh together, not making sense. Concussion. Shock. Words continued to swirl.

She closed her eyes and let darkness take her under.

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Parachute

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Bella drifted in and out of consciousness during the ambulance ride to the hospital. She heard a man speaking rapidly during one of her more lucid moments.

"I placed an 18 gauge in her right arm and have a liter of saline going through it. Her pressure was low upon arrival, but we don't see any obvious injury."

"Is there blunt force trauma?" she heard another voice say, seeming distant, like her ears were clogged with plugs.

"Look! Her eyes are open. Miss Swan? Can you hear me?" a woman's nasally voice assaulted her eardrums.

She closed her eyes and drifted back off.

A few hours later, she slowly became aware of an irritating beeping noise. She attempted to blink, but her eyelids felt heavy and dry. Her head throbbed and her entire body ached as if she had been in a fight with Emmett over the last piece of cake. When she opened her eyes, she immediately closed them once again, blocking out the bright light. On her second attempt, she went slower, adjusting her eyes to the light.

She gazed lazily around the room, still feeling slightly woozy and nauseous. Her eyes landed on Edward, slumped in an uncomfortable-looking recliner, sound asleep. The monitor attached to her chest began to beep quicker as her heart rate accelerated. The noise jerked him awake and he looked over at her in panic. His eyes widened and he smiled brightly when he saw that she was awake.

"Bella," he whispered, before standing quickly and making his way to the side of her bed.

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"Ed-" she started to say, but broke off when her voice sounded scratchy. "What happened?" she croaked.

He reached out and gently stroked her hair. "You have a concussion, but you're going to be just fine," he murmured with no small amount of relief.

"What happened to James?" she asked, worried.

Edward smiled sadly. "He's in police custody. They're charging him with kidnapping, assault and murder. He won't be getting out of there anytime soon. How are you? Does your head hurt?"

She blinked and winced as she attempted to nod. Edward reached over and pressed the call button for the nurse on duty. After a few moments of just watching each other in silence, Carlisle walked into the room with a small dark haired woman.

"Hello, Miss Swan," the woman said cheerfully. "I'm Emily, the nurse on duty. Let's get you checked out, dear."

As the woman went on with her job of checking Bella's vitals, Carlisle stepped forward and smiled kindly at her.

"How are you feeling, dear?"

Bella shrugged one shoulder slightly. "My head hurts and everything aches."

Carlisle nodded thoughtfully. "That sounds about right. You have a mild concussion, but your CAT scans show nothing worrisome. We'll keep you here for observation overnight, and you should be good to go home tomorrow."

"Thank you, Carlisle," she responded gratefully.

He waved her off and smiled. "Bella, you're like my daughter and there's nothing I wouldn't do for my family," he responded sincerely.

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She felt tears prick her eyes and she blinked them away. The nurse patted her leg gently as Bella let out a yawn.

"Ok, sweetheart. I'll be right out in the hall, just press the button if you need anything. Try and get some rest."

Carlisle quietly thanked Emily before saying his own goodbyes, needing to get home to Esme and Jack. At the sound of her son's name, Bella's heart started to race.

"Sssh, he's fine, Bella," Edward said soothingly. "Calm down, love."

She took a deep breath in through her nose and sighed. "Is he okay? Does he know what happened?"

Edward hesitated before shaking his head. "No, I was waiting until you woke up before calling him to let him know that we weren't coming home tonight. I didn't want to worry him any more than necessary."

Bella squeezed his hand, letting him silently know that she agreed with his decision. "It's okay, I understand."

After a quick call to Jack, explaining just the basics that his mom hit her head and was in the hospital, Edward pulled the chair closer to the bed and laid his head next to Bella's leg. He looked up at her with his sad, green eyes.

"Today was one of the worst days of my life," he said in a soft, quiet voice. "I-I don't know what I'd do without you, Bella."

Her heart ached and tears welled up in her eyes to match his own.

"I'm so sorry, Edward," she sobbed slightly. "I never should have run in the first place or provoked him like that."

"Why did you leave, Bella? In the elevator's security video, you were clearly angry and upset."

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"Security video? Is that how you found me?"

He nodded, still looking heartbroken. She swallowed and gathered her nerves.

"When James came out of your office, he basically told me that you were only sleeping with me to get custody of Jack."

He sat up and his eyes widened in shock. "And you believed him?" he asked incredulously.

She shook her head. "No, not at first, but then he showed me a court document where you were petitioning for sole custody of Jack. I didn't think; I just felt my heart breaking. So I ran, but not five minutes passed before I forced myself to listen to reason. I made the decision to come back and talk to you before the elevator even hit the ground floor."

He leaned back and sighed, closing his eyes. She felt like he was pulling away from her and it made her chest feel heavy. The worst part was that she couldn't blame him in the least.

"I'm so sorry," she whispered brokenly.

His eyes popped open and he stood up, leaning over the bed rail to cup her cheek.

"Ssh, no crying. It's been a long day, and we're both exhausted. We'll talk more tomorrow, but for now, try to rest."

She nodded and few fat tears dripped down her cheeks. Edward used his thumbs to gently wipe them away, before leaning down and kissing her sweetly.

"Oh, thank God, you're okay," he breathed against her lips. "When I watched that tape, I could have killed him."

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She reached her arms around carefully and hugged him as tightly as she could. She scooted over and motioned for him to lay next to her.

"I don't think that's a good idea, Bella. I don't want to hurt you."

"Please? Just until I fall asleep. I want you to hold me," she pleaded with sad eyes.

He smiled and sighed, before lowering the bed rail and curling up next to her on his side. He gently wrapped his arms around her and kissed her forehead.

"It'll be okay," he whispered against her hair. She closed her eyes and let herself drift off to sleep peacefully, his scent filling her lungs.

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AN: Not too bad, see? Major drama didn't last long. I've always planned for Victoria to die, so I hope I did it justice. Please let me know what you thought of it! As an interesting aside, I'll be writing an Outtake in her POV (covering several parts of the story) for The Fandom Against Domestic Violence fundraiser. It should be pretty interesting.

I posted my o/s, *Adeste Fideles*, which I wrote for the Southern FanFiction Review's Countdown to Christmas. Check it out if you'd like! I think it's a sweet little homecoming story with a bit of lemon zest. =)

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He gently helped her to sit and smiled sadly as he sat down next to her.

"All we can do is be as honest as possible, without giving him more to worry about than necessary."

Bella sighed. "I know that, but the line between 'enough' and 'too much' gets blurred with him, since he's so inquisitive."

Edward nodded thoughtfully and then looked up quickly when the sound of running feet thundered down the stairs.

"MOM!"

The boy was a blur of feet and arms and floppy hair as he slammed into Bella. As much as her body ached, she wrapped her arms around him tightly, as if he were a life preserver and she was drowning. She breathed in his scent, a lingering mixture of his apple body wash and cinnamon from the cookies that he and Esme had baked earlier in the day.

"Jack," she sighed into his hair, tears welling up and spilling down her cheeks. "Oh, baby, I missed you."

He pulled back and his loving gaze turned into a look of horror. "Mom! What happened to your face?" He reached out and gently touched the side of her face.

His eyes flashed with emotion and he looked angrily up at his father. "What happened to her? Who did that?"

Edward swallowed and placed his hand on Jack's shoulder. "I think you should sit down, son."

The boy's eyes cut between both of his parents warily as he took the seat next to his mother. Edward smiled slightly at him and sat on the coffee table facing them.

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Bella turned slightly and took her son's hands in her own.

"There was an... incident yesterday when I went to meet your dad for lunch."

Jack eyed her curiously and nodded for her to continue.

"Mr. Brooks- James," Bella started to say, but stopped when she felt Jack stiffen next to her. His eyes were wide and frightened.

"Did he- Did he do that to you?" he whispered brokenly.

Bella felt tears prick her eyes again as she nodded. Jack's eyes filled with tears and his face scrunched up in pain. Bella rubbed his back lightly.

"Hey, calm down, baby. I'm fine. Everything is going to be fine."

"Why did he do that, Mom?"

Bella sighed. "Mr. Brooks is a sick man. He thought that by hurting me, he'd hurt your dad. He's in jail now and hopefully he'll be there for a very long time."

She hesitated and looked at Edward helplessly, not knowing how to breach the subject of Victoria. Jack caught onto her hesitation and narrowed his eyes slightly.

"What aren't you telling me?"

Bella's face flashed in surprise. "What do you mean?"

Jack rolled his eyes and shook his head. "I know you, Mom. There's something that you're not telling me."

She bit her lip nervously. "Victoria was there as well. James shot her and she died."

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The boy's jaw dropped in shock. "She- She's dead? Like, she can never hurt me again or take me away?"

Bella blinked in surprise. She wasn't sure of what his reaction would be, but that certainly wasn't it.

"Yes, baby. She can't hurt you, never again," she responded quietly.

Jack bit his bottom lip and nodded resolutely. "I mean, I guess it sucks that she's dead, but does it make me a bad person being kinda happy about it?"

Bella smiled sadly. "No, baby, it doesn't make you a bad person. It's just the way you feel. I'll call and make an appointment with us to see Dr. Kate when we get home, okay?"

Jack laid his head on her shoulder, nodding softly. Bella's eyes met Edward's and he gave her a confused glance.

"Kate is our therapist," she explained. "I think I've mentioned her before. We started seeing her when Jack was little to help him adjust. The last time we saw her was just before we came here to visit. Before that, it had been about a year."

Edward smiled sadly in acknowledgement and gazed at his son. It was quite easy to tell that the boy was agitated and upset, even though he tried to deny it.

A few hours later, Bella found herself curled up next to Jack on her bed. It had been such an emotional day and neither of them wanted to be apart from the other. She gently moved a few strands of hair from his face and sighed, thinking about how thankful she was that he had stayed home with Esme when she went to Edward's office. A horror scene of the possibilities played in her mind. James could have taken Jack instead, or both of them together. It could have been her son on the other side of that bullet instead of Victoria. Letting the worst case scenarios filter through her mind set her on the verge of a panic attack. The slightest notion of anything bad befalling Jack made her want to throw up.

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She was so consumed in her thoughts that she didn't notice Edward come into the room until he was sliding into bed behind her. Startled, she jerked her head to the side, which caused him to reach out for her in concern.

"What's wrong?" he whispered. "I didn't mean to scare you."

She sighed and leaned back against his chest.

"It's not your fault. I was preoccupied and didn't hear you."

"What's got you so worked up, baby?" he asked.

She blinked back tears and responded in a very small voice. "I was just wondering about what could have happened if I had brought Jack with me on Wednesday."

Her voice cracked on the last word and he wrapped his arms around her in comfort.

"Hey, cut that out. There's no sense in torturing yourself. You're safe. Jack's safe. Neither of them can hurt you again."

She swallowed and nodded. "I know that, but I can't pull my mind away."

He made a humming noise that she felt rumble through his chest against her back. "Well, how about we take your mind off of it?"

"And just how do you propose we do that?" she asked cheekily.

"Let's talk about this move of mine."

He was very clever because her heart started to beat quicker, her previous thoughts of dread replaced by anticipation.

"Well?" she replied, slightly breathless. "You have my attention."

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Edward chuckled lightly and rested his chin on her shoulder. "I know I said that I probably wouldn't be able to make it out there before Thanksgiving, but I now have a definite date for my last day of work - October 14th. As soon as things are cleared up that day, I'll be on a plane home to you two."

Her face split into a wide smile and she kissed him swiftly.

He chuckled and smoothed back her hair. "So I take it that's good news?"

She sighed and melted against his chest. "The best actually. Well, aside from you being able to go with us when we leave in ten days."

His body tensed, before letting out an enormous breath. "Ten days? Really?" he whispered incredulously.

Bella tried to swallow the lump in her throat before replying. "Yes," she whispered back. "Tanya called me earlier and our flight out is on Sunday the 29th."

"What about your car?" he replied in confusion. "I thought you were driving it home?"

"She's going to call around and find a transport for it. After recent events, I don't want to take any chances driving cross country."

He kissed the top of her head. "I guess that makes sense."

She closed her eyes and drifted off.

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The next day dawned bright and early with Bella alone in her bed. She stretched and yawned, looking around the room for any trace of Edward or Jack. Not finding any, she made her way quietly into the bathroom to go about her morning rituals. Once she was finished, she slid her feet into her slippers and threw on her robe before making her way downstairs.

Sounds of laughter and clanging pots echoed from the kitchen. When she reached the doorway, all she could do was lean against the jamb and feel her heart melt at the sight before her. Edward was at the stove frying bacon in Esme's frilly pink apron while Jack sat on the counter stirring something in a bowl.

"Why do seagulls fly over the sea?"

Jack giggled. "I don't know, why Dad?"

"Because if they flew over the bay, they'd be bagels!"

"What's a pirate's favorite instrument?"

"What?"

"A guitarrrrrrrrrrr!" Edward responded with the silliest pirate voice that she had ever heard.

Jack groaned and shook his head. "Really, Dad? You're so corny."

Edward laughed. "I'm kinda proud of that, son."

Jack's eyes lit up when he spotted Bella across the room.

"Hi Mom!" he called out, waving the spatula and in the process, flinging batter across his father's face.

Bella burst out into laughter as Edward slowly wiped the mixture from his cheek.

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Jack's cheeks pinkened and he smiled innocently. "Oops, sorry, Dad."

Edward glanced at Bella from the corner of his eye and grimaced. "It's okay, Jack."

Bella stifled her giggles and pulled up a chair at the island to sit down. Jack grinned at her. "Dad was just telling me some corny pirate jokes."

"Really?" Bella replied in amusement. "I know some corny jokes, but no pirate ones, I'm afraid."

Jack smiled excitedly. "Tell him the one about the mice, Mom!"

Edward turned and raised an eyebrow. "This I've got to hear."

Bella rolled her eyes. "What do cats call mice on roller skates?"

"Meals on wheels!" both she and Jack called out together, dissolving into fits of giggles.

"And I'm the corny one?" Edward scoffed, turning back to flip his bacon.

Bella stood and wrapped her arms around him from behind, resting her head against his back.

"I seem to remember explicitly stating that the joke was corny, Edward."

He turned his body slightly and captured her lips in a light kiss. "Good morning, baby," he whispered.

She looked up into his shining green eyes and smiled. "Good morning to you, too, handsome."

They both turned to look at Jack when he made a coughing noise. He was surreptitiously looking up at the ceiling, waiting for his parents to conclude their heartfelt moment. When he looked back down and noticed them watching

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him, he shrugged.

"What? The kissy-kissy is only cute for so long."

Bella blushed and hid her face in his shoulder as Edward let out a boisterous laugh.

"One day, kid, you're not going to think that," he chided his son.

Jack shrugged once again. "Maybe, maybe not."

Bella laughed lightly and returned to her seat. Soon Esme made her way into the kitchen and joined them for breakfast. Bella sat back and watched the adorableness of the moment pass by, taking in every corny joke and cheeky comment. Esme even jumped in with a few of her own.

When they were all finished, the boys ushered the ladies out of the room while they cleaned up their mess. Not wanting to miss the opportunity of speaking with Bella alone, Esme ushered her into the study to have a word with her. Bella sat in one of the wing-backed chairs as Esme took the other and reached down to take Bella's hands in her own.

"How are you doing, dear? I mean *really* doing? I've been worried about you," the older woman expressed in concern.

Bella sighed and looked down at their entwined hands. "I'm not going to lie and say that I'm completely fine, but for the most part, I'm okay. I have Jack and I have Edward and we're going to be fine."

Esme smiled brightly. "That's just what I wanted to hear. It's okay to feel overwhelmed and still upset over what happened, but as long as you remember that everyone is here for you, well, that's all I can ask. I'm here for you if you ever need to talk."

"Thank you, Esme," Bella whispered, feeling a lone tear make its escape down her cheek.

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Esme reached up and brushed the moisture away. "Now, how about Jack? Have you had a chance to sit down and have a heart to heart with him?"

Bella shook her head slightly. "No. We told him what happened and he seemed to take it better than expected. We spent some time decompressing and then fell asleep early."

"Why don't you take him out for awhile? Just some Mommy and son time? I used to do it for my boys occasionally. Carlisle would stay home with one while I took the other one out to lunch with me and to the park. I treasured those moments and I'm pretty sure they did as well."

Bella smiled appreciatively. "That sounds like a wonderful idea Esme. The only foreseeable problem would be getting Edward to go along with it. He's been understandably clingy the past few days. Not that I blame him; I needed him with me as much as he did."

Esme smiled mischievously. "Let me take care of my son..."

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Later that afternoon, Bella sat back on a park bench as the hot Chicago sun warmed their skin as it filtered down through the dense grouping of trees. True to her word, Esme had handled telling Edward about their outing and he had taken it better than she expected. He did ask that she call and check in after a few hours, just so that he'd know that they were safe. She sighed and bit her tongue, stopping herself from reminding him that in ten days, he'd have more to worry about than a two or three hour outing.

She looked over and watched Jack swing and play, as if he hadn't a care in the world. It made her heart ache to watch him like that. He deserved to be carefree and happy like any other normal child. With Victoria and James out of their

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life completely and the Cullens now a part of it, maybe it could start to happen now. Slowly but surely, their hearts would mend and they'd be happy, with no traces of lingering sadness.

She watched as he dug a soccer ball out of the bag that they brought with them and he began to kick it around, as well as bounce it on his knee. The light hit his hair at an angle that made it shine in a coppery brilliance. His green eyes met hers and her breath was literally taken away at how much he looked like his father.

Bella motioned to Jack and patted the spot next to her on the bench. The boy sighed, picking up the soccer ball that he had been kicking around and plopped down next to his mother. He laid his head against her shoulder and sighed again.

"I'm fine, Mom," he murmured quietly.

"How do you know what I was thinking?" She nudged him with her shoulder and laughed lightly, belying her current mood.

"I know you. You don't have to worry about me, you know. I'm fine," he replied, his voice steady and strong.

She reached up and ran her fingers through his unruly hair, praying that his words rang true.

"I don't really know what to think or feel about Victoria right now. I'm kinda sad that she died and I never got to tell her how much she hurt me, but I'm also kind glad that I'll never have to see her again. But I have you." He turned and looked up into her face, his eyes shining earnestly. "I know you love me and that you'll still love me no matter what."

Bella nodded, her voice silenced by overwhelming emotions. "Forever and always, Jack," she whispered in his ear as she hugged him tightly. After spending a little bit more time at the park, they packed up and then made their way to a restaurant for lunch. After flipping through the channels for a few

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moments, Jack plugged in Bella's iPhone and began to scroll through her playlists. The plinking sounds of a piano came through the speakers before a woman's voice began to sing prettily.

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*I wish I could sit down and read
All of the beautiful stories I need
I'd know all of the secrets they tell
And all of the fantasies I have as well*

*I'd go through every page
And I'd read every word*

*No matter how hard I try
Keep losing track of time
See how the days fly by
Even though everything, everything's fine
I wish, I just wish, I could find
Some peace of mind*

...

When the song drew to a close, Jack looked over at her and smiled. A real, heartfelt smile that she hadn't seen in so long.

"That was a pretty song, Mom," he mused quietly.

Bella nodded in agreement. "Yeah, I agree. Kind of fitting too, huh?"

Jack smirked slightly and looked out the window. "Yeah, I guess it is."

After a quiet and uneventful lunch, they headed back home. Edward was sitting at the piano, fingering the keys, when they walked into the house. He looked up at the sound of the door and smiled brightly.

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"Did you two have a nice time?" he asked, continuing to caress the ebony and ivory keys.

Jack slid onto the bench next to him and nodded. "I had fun. It was nice to just spend some time with Mom."

Edward caught Bella's eyes and she smiled, letting him know that everything was fine. He smiled and looked back down at the keys, before beginning to play Chopsticks. Jack laughed and joined in.

"You're just corny all the way around today, huh, Dad?"

Edward smiled happily. "It's your fault, kid. Being happy makes me silly."

Jack's fingers stilled momentarily as he looked up into his father's face thoughtfully. "That's fine then. I like you happy, so I can deal with the corny."

Bella felt her heart melt at her son's words. Edward leaned over and kissed him on top of his head. "I love you, Jack. I will always be happy as long as I have you and your Mom."

Jack smiled. "I love you, too, Dad. I can't wait until you move closer to us. It's going to be awesome."

Edward ruffled his hair and smiled. "I've been looking online at apartments, so hopefully we'll find something good."

"Will I have a room at your place?" Jack asked in curiosity.

Edward laughed. "We'll see."

Bella felt her heart clench and the smile slip slowly from her face. She turned and quietly turned to walk up to her room, while the boys went back to playing the piano and having a good time. She had never considered that she'd have to share her time with Jack, at least for a little while. It was only fair to his father, but her heart wanted the three of them together, as a family. She knew that it

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wasn't feasible for Edward to move in with them, no matter how much they loved each other. The fact still remained that they had only known each other for a few months. When Edward had mentioned to her about his plan for getting an apartment at first so that they could get to know each other and date like a normal couple, Bella had been understanding. Slightly disappointed, but understanding.

She meandered over to the desk and fired up her laptop, hoping to distract herself from the sad thoughts floating around her mind. After about an hour of playing some games, she was sufficiently distracted enough to pull up the new story that she was working on. A heart rendering tale about a lost little boy who found love and a family. Jack had given her the idea at the New York signing. It was close to their own story, but watered down and more simple.

A knock on her door caused her to look up, seeing Edward poke his head in the door.

"Feel like going out for dinner? Jack suggested Chinese."

"That sounds like a great idea," she responded, before hitting save and closing her laptop.

She walked over and placed her hand in his. Edward pulled her closer and kissed her gently, cupping the back of her head.

"Are you feeling all right?" he asked her, his eyes shining with love and concern.

She gave him a genuine smile and hugged him tightly. "I'm absolutely fine."

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AN: A shorter one this week, but the next part's tone is a bit different, so I didn't want to mesh them. Hopefully the promise of some sweet loving in the next chapter will make up for it. ;-)

I'm sorry that the EPOV hasn't posted yet, the holidays kinda kicked my ass, so it was pushed back. It should be up soon though!

Chapter 34

AN:

Parachute won two Avant Garde Awards- One for Best Bella and one for Best Kid, Jack. I want to thank you guys so much and share my adoration for each and every one of you! Whether you voted or not, reviewed or not, I still love all of you! Parachute would not have gotten the recognition that it has without your support. You guys truly are my inspiration!

This chapter contains a lemon, just to make you aware ahead of time.

Also, tissues may be needed at the end of the chapter.

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August 20, 2010

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Bella and Edward curled up in his bed, simply enjoying the quiet of the night and holding each other tenderly. She let out a small sigh and kissed his chest, right above his heart.

"Edward, can I ask you something?" she asked in a small voice.

He shifted slightly and brushed a strand of hair from her face. "Anything, baby."

She swallowed nervously, worried about what his response would be to her question. "The documents that James showed me, were they real?"

Parachute

He took a deep breath and nodded hesitantly. Betrayal pierced her heart and she felt tears spring to her eyes.

"Ssh, don't cry," he whispered, brushing his thumbs across her cheeks. "It's not like it sounds."

"Then how is it? Why were you petitioning for custody if you're moving across the country? Or was that a lie?" she replied with a small sob, her body beginning to shake.

He clutched her to his chest tightly, silently cursing himself.

"I'm so sorry, Bell. I mentioned it to James the day after you came here. I was upset and not thinking clearly. After that, I honestly forgot all about it, until he showed up in my office on Wednesday with the papers. I told him to get rid of them, and he got angry. I'm so sorry, I should have caught onto that sooner."

She hiccuped and sniffed, discreetly trying to wipe her nose on her sleeve. His chest rumbled underneath of her, letting out a faint chuckle.

"It's my fault that you're crying, feel free to use my shirt if you need to."

She leaned up and glared at him before sitting up and walking into the bathroom. The cool tile floor shocked her toes as she walked over to the sink, intent upon washing her face. She gazed into the mirror, not quite recognizing the girl looking back at her. Her eyes were a rich chocolate color, red from crying, and her hair was wild and tangled from Edward's hands running through it. She felt an upsurging of emotion and moved to the right, sitting down on the stool and resting her forehead against the marble counter top.

After a few quiet moments, she felt his hand on her shoulder, rubbing gently.

"I'm sorry, baby."

She turned her head, not raising it from the counter and found herself looking into Edward's remorseful green eyes as he crouched next to her. His hand

reached out to cup her cheek.

"I'm sorry, Bella. In my defense, I was emotional and I didn't know you. That doesn't excuse me, but it's all I can offer."

She sniffled. "I know, I get it. I would have been distrusting, too, in your position. I'm sorry that I doubted you. It was just such a shock."

He smiled sadly and kissed her cheek. "I know, baby. I'm so sorry for not listening sooner about James. Maybe all this could have been avoided."

She sat up and flung herself into his arms. "Can we stop with all of the apologies and move on?"

He kissed her temple and laughed. "That sounds like a plan to me." He stood up and took her by the hands, leading her over to the immense tub.

"How does a nice, hot bath sound?" he asked with a twinkle in his eye.

She grinned. "It sounds like heaven."

Not fifteen minutes later, Bella found herself neck deep in bubbles, resting against Edward's chest. Her mind was quiet and settled, for the first time in days.

"Marcus called me earlier today," Edward broke the silence with his soft voice.

"What did he want?" Bella asked, her voice laced with curiosity.

"He wanted to know if any of us would like to attend Victoria's funeral on Sunday."

She turned to face him, eyes widened in surprise. "Wow," she murmured. "I never thought of that."

Parachute

His hands played with strands of hair that fell loose from the bun on top of her head. "That's understandable. You've been through quite an ordeal yourself, love."

"Do you want to go?"

His brow furrowed as he pondered the thought, before shaking his head. "No, I said my goodbyes to her a long time ago."

"Should we-" she started, then stopping for a moment to collect her thoughts. "Should we ask Jack if he wants to go?"

Edward's eyes narrowed. "Why? It'll be a media circus. He doesn't need to be a part of that."

"I know, but, shouldn't he have the choice? She was his biological mother."

He smiled sadly and touched her cheek. "I understand where you're coming from, but I still don't think it's a good idea."

"I know, but I don't want him to miss out on this and regret it later on. I'm fairly sure he won't want to go, but I think he should have the choice."

Edward looked pensive for a moment before nodding. "Okay, we'll talk to him in the morning."

She leaned forward and placed her lips against his in a gentle kiss. "Thank you," she whispered.

He ran his hand down her slickened side, grazing the underside of a breast, making her shudder.

"Are you cold, baby?" he whispered against her ear, eliciting yet another shiver of pleasure.

"N-no," she stuttered. "You know what you're doing."

Parachute

"Do I?" he teased in his velvety voice.

She quickly turned her body and settled on his lap, her nipples barely covered by the water. His eyes took in her form hungrily.

Bella reached up and ran her wet hands through his bronze hair, tugging it almost painfully. "Two can play at that game, Edward."

He grasped the back of her neck and kissed her passionately, water and suds spilling out onto the tub's ledge and dripping to the floor. They quickly became too engrossed with each other's bodies that they failed to notice the cooling temperature of the water.

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Three days later, the men arrived to transport Bella's car back to Port Angeles. The finality of the action weighed heavily on everyone's mind.

All but their essentials and a suitcase each for Bella and Jack, was packed into the car and ready to go. Jack lovingly caressed the car's hood and sighed. He narrowed his eyes at one of the two movers. "Be careful with Nevaeh, okay?"

The man smiled humorously at Jack. "Yes, sir."

Jack nodded and walked back into the house.

"Boys and their toys," Esme responded with a smile, letting out a small giggle.

Bella shook her head and smiled, following her son inside the house. She gazed around the room, saddened by the thought that they would be leaving in less than a week. As much as she enjoyed being here, she missed her bed at home and their homey little kitchen. Jack would have a week to acclimate to being

Parachute

back home before school started. He was eager to see his friends again, as well as their family back home.

She walked over to the piano, where Jack was on the bench, playing a soft melody. She sat down next to him and returned his welcoming smile.

"Whatcha playing?"

"It's called *Moonlight Sonata* by Beethoven."

She closed her eyes and let the music flow over her. It was such a pretty, yet slightly haunting melody. When he was finished, he smiled at her sadly.

"Do you think I was wrong for not wanting to go yesterday?" he asked out of the blue.

Bella sighed. "No, Little Bit. I don't think you were wrong. I'm sure it was a difficult choice to make. Marcus, Diane and Rini are coming over to see you on Friday so they can say goodbye. They love you so much and will stay a part of your life, but you'll always have Victoria's memory popping up from time to time, but that's all it is - a memory."

He nodded. "I know that, but you'll be there to help me if I get upset, right?" he asked in a small voice.

She wrapped an arm around his shoulders, hugging him to her body. "Absolutely, sweetheart. I'll always be here for you."

A few moments later, Edward and Emmett emerged from the patio doors, looking hot and sweaty. Emmett had a basketball in one arm and a hand towel in the other. He grinned when he saw her and Jack.

"Bella! Just the person I wanted to see," he exclaimed jovially.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "What are you up to, Em?"

Parachute

He blinked innocently. "Who, me?"

She laughed. "Yes, you. What do you want?"

He smirked. "I was wondering if my boy there could come over and spend the night with me and Rose for some bonding time?"

Jack looked up at her excitedly. "Please, Mom? It sounds awesome!"

She shook her head and couldn't help but smile. She looked over at Edward and raised her eyebrow, silently asking his opinion. He nodded slightly and she could almost see the wheels turning in his head.

"Okay, but," she added when Jack jumped to his feet. "Bedtime still applies and don't let Uncle Em get you into trouble, you hear?"

Jack nodded enthusiastically and ran upstairs to pack a bag.

Emmett scoffed. "Why do people always think the worst of me?"

"Because we know you, Emmet." Edward laughed, knocking his brother in the shoulder.

"Watch, when my kid gets here, I'll show you all."

He blanched and pursed his lips as soon as he realized his slip.

"Em, are you- Is Rose pregnant?" Edward asked, his eyes widening with surprise.

Emmett rubbed the back of his neck sheepishly and nodded. "Don't say anything to Mom, please. Rose wanted to tell her together."

Edward clapped him on the back and pulled him in for a hug. "Congratulations, bro! When is she due?"

Parachute

"January 23rd. She's just about four months."

"Why didn't you say anything sooner?" Edward asked in curiosity.

Emmett shrugged. "We had just found out the day that Bella and Jack showed up. The timing never seemed right after that."

Bella stood up and smiled, walking over to kiss Em on the cheek.

"Congratulations, Em. As much as we tease you, I'm absolutely sure that you'll make a wonderful father."

Emmett blinked and cleared his emotion-clogged throat. "Thank you, Bella. That means a lot to me."

"I'm ready, Uncle Em!" Jack shouted as he rushed back down the stairs, backpack slung over his shoulder.

"Eager, little man?" Emmett joked, reaching out to ruffle Jack's hair.

"Well, we're leaving soon, so I want to spend some time with you and Aunt Rose."

Bella bit her lip and blinked away the moisture in her eyes. Emmett smiled sadly and nodded.

"Okay then, let's hit the road, Jack."

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Late that evening, long after Carlisle and Esme had gone to bed, Bella sat in the Cullen library, staring unseeingly at the book in her hands. Edward had fallen asleep on the couch a little earlier, so she sought out solace amongst the

Parachute

books. A well worn copy of an Edgar Allan Poe anthology sat open in her lap, the words from "A Dream Within A Dream," staring back at her.

She closed her eyes involuntarily as a velvety voice whispered in her ear.

...

*I stand amid the roar
Of a surf-tormented shore,
And I hold within my hand
Grains of the golden sand -
How few! yet how they creep
Through my fingers to the deep,
While I weep - while I weep!
O God! can I not grasp
Them with a tighter clasp?
O God! can I not save
One from the pitiless wave?*

...

"Is all that we see or seem, but a dream within a dream?" she finished, closing the book before turning to face his verdant gaze, a sinful smile lighting his face.

"I've always been a great fan of Poe's," Edward murmured softly, reaching out to stroke her fingers, which curled around the anthology's spine.

"He definitely was a master of sadness and the macabre."

Edward smirked. "Indeed. Why are you sitting here all alone? You should have woken me up."

She smiled. "You were tired, I didn't want to disturb you."

Parachute

He reached out to cup her cheek and she leaned into him. "You wouldn't have been disturbing me. I want to get in as much time with you as I can before Sunday."

He took the book from her lap and walked over to return it to its home. Bella stood and walked over to him, reaching for his arm. He looked down at her and his expression softened. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her close, breathing in her scent.

"I love you," she whispered, a lone tear falling silently.

"Ssh," he whispered against her lips. "Don't do this now. Don't say goodbye to me like this, please. Let's not waste any more time."

"I don't know what else to do," she pleaded. "I don't want to leave you, Edward."

"I know, baby, but everything will be fine. We'll be stronger for it." He leaned down and kissed her chastely. "This isn't the end, Bella. It's just a few months."

Bella ignored his words and pressed up against him. "Please, Edward. I need you."

He reached down, one hand cupping her cheek and the other gripping her bottom, and pulled her closer. His tongue delved into her mouth, tasting the sweetness of red wine still on her tongue. The kiss, which started out soft and gentle, quickly turned desperate and demanding.

Bella flung her arms out, grasping at the ledges while Edward pressed her back against the bookshelf. She let out a moan and flung her head back, ignoring the sting of pain from hitting the books behind her. She writhed and panted as his lips trailed down her jaw and settled at the base of her neck. One hand left its perch to run through his hair, lightly scratching his scalp.

"Fuck," he hissed, pressing his hips against hers, letting her feel his arousal.

Parachute

"Edward," she cried out lightly when he leaned down to push her shirt and bra cup out of the way, taking one of her nipples into his mouth.

"What, Bella? What do you want?" he asked in a gravelly voice.

"You. I want you," she murmured.

"Do you want me to take you here? Up against these shelves?"

A shiver went up her spine. "Yes," she whispered hoarsely. "Just like this."

His fingers slipped under her shirt, tantalizing her skin and brushing against the waistband of her jeans. He stepped back slightly to pull her shirt and bra over her head, not bothering to unclasp it. His thumb popped the button and slid the zipper down. With his lips still attached to her breast, Edward slid his hands down her hips, removing her pants and underwear at the same time.

She let out a tiny mewling sound when his teeth grazed her tender flesh as two of his fingers slipped inside of her. She writhed under his touch, the shelves scratching against her spine.

"Edward, please," she gasped. "I need you."

His pants were swiftly pooled at his feet and her legs wrapped around his hips. In one swift movement, he thrust into her, their matching groans of pleasure were drowned out in a kiss. They stood together, giving themselves a calming moment, before Edward began to rock against her quickly, keeping her pressed against the bookshelf. Her hands gripped his hair and she pressed her lips against his throat.

Edward placed his hands under her bottom, giving himself more leverage as he pounded into her, his movements desperate. It wasn't long until he lost control, feeling Bella's inner muscles clench around him, signalling her own release. He leaned forward, against her body, breathing heavily while sweat trickled down his temple and dripped onto Bella's skin.

Parachute

The pair groaned lightly as he slipped out of her and helped ease her legs to the ground, steadying her. He kissed her slowly and sweetly. She smiled and leaned into him for balance. After a few moments, Edward pulled back slightly.

"Come on, love, let's get dressed before my mother decides that she needs a midnight snack."

Bella's cheeks turned pink, embarrassed that she had completely forgotten about Carlisle and Esme in the midst of their passion.

He pulled up his pants and reached for his shirt, handing it to Bella to slip on. His eyes narrowed in concern when she grimaced while pulling the shirt over her head.

"What's wrong, love?"

She smiled at him lazily, euphoria still heady in her veins. "It's nothing really. My back is a little scratched."

"Turn around," he commanded, lifting the shirt to see a half dozen angry welts. "Oh, baby," he murmured. "Why didn't you say anything?"

She looked down shyly. "I barely noticed, trust me. That was hot, I'd definitely do it again sometime." She looked up into his eyes, showing him her sincerity.

He shook his head, but couldn't help the smile that formed on his face. After gathering up the rest of their clothes, he extended his hand to her.

"Come on, let's get cleaned up and put some cream on your back."

She placed her hand in his and let him lead the way.

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August 29, 2010

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Sunday came all too quickly for Bella. They spent the last few days exploring more of Chicago and revisiting some of their favorite places. Jack seemed to have a camera attached to his face at times, always clicking away. After a teary goodbye with Carlisle, Esme, Emmett and Rosalie, Bella left them with her promises to call and email on a regular basis, as well as return for frequent visits.

The drive to O'Hare was quiet in Edward's car, music softly filling the air. The strains of a familiar song began to play and Bella turned it up. With tears starting to stream down her face, she looked over at Edward, noticing that he had pulled to the side of the road. He unbuckled both of their seatbelts and leaned over the console, pulling her into a hug. Bella let out a sob when she felt Jack's arms wrap around them.

"Ssh, it's okay, Mom. I'm sad, too," he cooed into her ear.

...

*You and I were friends from outer space
Afraid to let go
The only two who understood this place
And as far as we know
We were way before our time
As bold as we were blind
Just another perfect mistake
Another bridge to take
On the way of letting go*

*This ain't goodbye
This is just where love goes*

Parachute

*When words aren't warm enough to keep away the cold
Oh no, this ain't goodbye
It's not where our story ends
But I know you can't be mine, not the way you've always been
As long as we've got time
Then this ain't goodbye
Oh no, this ain't goodbye*

*We were stars up in the sunlit sky
That no one else could see
Neither of us ever thought to ask why
It wasn't meant to be
Maybe we were way too high
To ever understand
Maybe we were victims of all the foolish plans
We began to devise*

*But this ain't goodbye
This is just the way love goes
When words aren't warm enough to keep away the cold.
Oh no, this ain't goodbye
It's not where our story ends
But I know you can't be mine
Just like the way you've always been
As long as we've got time
This ain't goodbye
Oh no, this ain't good bye, oh oh*

*Oh no this ain't goodbye
This ain't goodbye*

...

At the airport, Edward one last lingering kiss from Bella and bear hug from his son, before they made their way through security and left him standing in the middle of a crowd, his heart shattered to pieces, though only temporarily. Time

Parachute

couldn't move fast enough for him.

Meanwhile, Bella clutched Jack's hand tightly, knowing that he was the only other person, besides his father, that understood how she felt at the moment. The next two months would be long, but they'd shoulder them together, coming out stronger in the end, just like Edward had said. She would make sure of it. After one last glance and wave, Jack and Bella sat in silence, waiting for their first class seating to be called.

The boy leaned over and rested his head on her shoulder. She put her arm around him and sighed.

"Remember, Jack," she said softly, "this isn't goodbye. He'll be home with us soon."

"I know, Ma. It's just weird how everything feels different now."

She kissed the top of his head. "I know, baby. Life is full of changes, so you need to learn to grow and rise up to the challenges."

He reached out and took her hand. "And we'll do it together, right?"

She gave him a watery smile and nodded. "Always, Little Bit. Always."

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[illegible]

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AN: *sniff*

I wanted to drop a line down here to say that my previous estimate might have been a little off. We should only have another 2 or 3 chapters left of Parachute, before the Epilogue.

Parachute

Media used in this chapter are up on the blog. The song was *This Ain't Goodbye* by Train.

The lemon scene is dedicated to the H00rs of the Butter Lounge for their *Atonement* inspiration and for being awesome friends, through thick and thin. I adore you guys!

=)

Parachute

looked through the window and laughed lightly at the eager visitors waiting on the front steps. The door had barely opened when Jack found himself on the floor, tackle-hugged by Riley and Garrett.

"Dude!" Riley shouted. "We missed you! How was the flight? Did you take lots of pictures?"

"Were there any cute girls? Did you bring me anything?" Garrett interjected.

Bella shook her head and wandered into the kitchen to see if there was anything salvageable for dinner. Finding the cupboards bare, she decided that a shopping trip would be in order. Walking back to the living room, she found all three boys talking animatedly on the couch.

Jack looked up, the previous sadness now replaced with excitement.

"Mom! Can I? Can I, please? Pleeeeeeassssseeee?" he begged, bouncing in his seat.

She arched an eyebrow. "Please what?"

"Garrett was just telling us about the Flag Football team sign-ups. I really want to play this year. Please?"

She placed her hands on her hips, eyeing her son carefully. "Let me talk to your dad and we'll see."

Garrett's eyes widened and he looked at Jack, grinning. "Does that feel weird?"

Jack's brow scrunched in confusion. "What?"

"That you have a dad now."

"I always did have a dad," Jack responded. "I just couldn't remember where he was."

Parachute

"But still," Garrett continued, "after all of this time apart, does it feel weird now?"

Jack thought for a moment before shaking his head. "No, not really. It feels right."

Bella felt warmth fill her chest. "Hey guys, we need to hit the store. Feel like coming along?"

Both boys eagerly nodded, causing Bella to grin. She had missed these two almost as much as Jack had.

"Okay, then. Go ask your moms first, okay?"

Riley and Garrett shot off the couch and out the door, calling out behind them, "Be right back, Miss Bella!"

Jack rolled his eyes. "Suck-ups," he giggled.

"Yeah, but I missed them," Bella responded with a wistful smile.

Jack gazed into her eyes for a minute before nodding resolutely. She shot him a questioning look, but he merely shrugged in response.

"I wondered a couple of times if we made the right choice. You know, coming home instead of moving to Chicago."

Bella's eyes widened and she sat down on the couch next to him.

"What do you think?" she asked, almost afraid of his answer.

"I think this was the right one. I'll miss MeMe and PopPop and Uncle Em and Aunt Rose, but Pops and Nana and all of our family is here. Seth, Leah, Aunt Ali and Aunt Angela. Uncle Jasper and Ben, too. Not to mention my friends."

Parachute

He sighed and rested his head against her shoulder. "No matter what, we'd end up missing someone, right?"

She rubbed his back comfortingly. "I know what you mean. It's not really fair, huh?"

He nodded. "Yeah, it sucks, but there are more people here to miss. Does that make sense?" He turned his face so that he could look into hers.

She smiled sadly. "I promised to go back and visit, though, so it won't be too bad, right?"

He sat up straight and smirked, his eyes glinting mischievously. "You know what would make it better?"

She eyed him warily. "What?"

"A little brother."

Bella started to sputter in shock. "A wha-what?"

"Just something to think about, Ma," he replied before jumping up to let his friends back into the house.

She shook her head in disbelief. She wanted to be married and settled before having a baby. A thoughtful expression crossed her face and she wondered if Edward even wanted more children. That was definitely a topic to be brought up at some point. As much as she loved and adored Jack, the idea of growing and carrying a child inside of her was a joyful feeling.

She stood up and chastised herself for indulging in fantasy. What would be, would be.

When she opened the front door, the boys were horsing around on the front lawn and Bella couldn't help but smile. The errant thought of a younger sibling for Jack flittered across her mind again before she bottled it up for a later time.

Parachute

"Alright, gentlemen, what should we get for dinner?"

"Pizza!"

"Hot dogs!"

"Steak and potatoes!"

Bella, Jack and Garrett all turned to look at Riley in surprise. The boy merely shrugged.

"What? My mom can't cook for crap. Frozen pizza and take out gets old, dude."

Bella laughed and shook her head. "Steak and potatoes it is, Ry."

Riley smiled up at her. "Thanks, Miss B!"

She ruffled his hair before shuffling the three boys into her car. "It's not a problem, kiddo."

Fours hours later and two children lighter, Bella finished drying the dishes from dinner while Jack spoke animatedly on the phone with his father.

"Uh-huh, yes. Totally. Yes, sir. Good night, Dad! I'll talk to you tomorrow, here's Mom."

Jack handed her the phone, grinning. She arched a brow and took the handset from her son. She nodded towards the stairs. "Bath, kiddo."

"On it, Ma!" he shouted as he raced up the stairs.

She smiled and shook her head before greeting Edward.

"Hi," she murmured softly.

Parachute

"Hey, baby," he replied, his voice creeping over her like honey. "How was your first day home?"

"It was fine. It felt a little empty, though, if that makes any sense."

He let out a sigh. "It makes total sense, Bella. I miss you guys."

She felt tears sting her eyes and flopped onto the couch. "We miss you, too. Two months isn't that long, right?"

He chuckled. "47 days, actually."

Her heart melted. "You're counting?" she asked in awe.

"I may or may not be counting down the days on my calendar."

She let out a snuffle. "Edward, I love you so much."

"I know, baby. I love you, too. This is just a drop in the bucket compared to the rest of our lives, right?"

"You say the sweetest things sometimes. Every now and then, I need to pinch myself to make sure you're real."

He laughed. "I'll remind you of that when you're living with me and I drive you up the wall because I leave my socks everywhere."

Warmth filled her chest. "I like the sound of that."

"Of what? Me leaving my socks everywhere? Maybe you are indeed the perfect woman, Bella."

"No, goofball. The living with you part." She paused a moment before continuing. "Look, I just want to say something and then I'll drop it, okay?"

He hummed an agreement.

"I don't want to date you."

"Wh-what?" he sputtered, taken by surprise.

"I don't want to date you. I want to be with you; all of the time. These next two months-

"47 days," he cut her off.

"47 days," she corrected herself with a giggle. "This time apart is going to be enough time apart. After this separation, neither me nor Jack are going to want to be away from you for any length of time, Edward."

"Okay."

"Okay? Okay what?" she replied in confusion.

"Okay, no dating. No apartment. I'll move in with you."

Bella let out an Alice-worthy squeal, almost dropping the phone. She covered her mouth and tried to sober the giddy happiness bubbling up in her chest.

"Okay," she mimicked him. "As long as that's what you want," she added, growing serious. "I don't want to pressure you into anything. Knowing that I've been completely honest about how I felt, I can let it go. I'll be bummed out, but I'll move on. Please don't make yourself uncomfortable by trying to please me."

He laughed lightly. "Bella, I really don't want to be apart from you, either. I just wanted to do right by you."

She sighed. "Edward, nothing about our relationship is conventional. I know in my heart that you're it for me. I'm all too happy to share my life and home with you."

"Well, then it's settled then. I'll call off the apartment search."

Parachute

"Mom!" Jack hollered down the stairs. "I'm finished!"

"Sounds like you have a bedtime ritual to perform, so I'll say goodnight, love," Edward murmured in her ear.

Her happiness stayed roaming around her chest as she made her way up to Jack's room, but it moved over to make room for the sadness of their goodbyes.

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September 4th, 2010

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The following Saturday found Bella and Jack pulling up outside Charlie's house in Forks. Sue had invited them over for dinner and she was looking forward to catching up with her family. The car had barely come to a halt before Jack was out the door and racing up to his grandfather's outstretched arms. Charlie held the boy close and swung him around.

"Jack, my boy!" he exclaimed joyously.

"Pops! I missed you!"

"Do you miss the big city yet?" Charlie asked as he set the boy back on the ground.

Jack, nodded his head thoughtfully. "Yeah, but I'm happy to be home and in my own bed. Plus, Riley and Garrett need me around to keep them out of trouble."

Parachute

Bella hid a giggle behind her hand, knowing full well that Jack spoke the truth. Charlie ruffled his hair before turning towards his daughter.

"Well, that's good then. Why don't you head in and find Sue? I think she just took some cookies out of the oven." He was talking to Jack, but his eyes didn't leave Bella's.

After Jack had disappeared in search of the promised treats, Charlie pulled her into a bone crushing hug.

"Oh, Bells," he whispered brokenly. "Don't scare me like that again, you hear?"

Tears welled up in her eyes and she squeezed her father tightly.

"I promise, Dad. No more being kidnapped by psychos for me."

He pulled back and glared at her slightly. "I'm not kidding, Isabella."

She arched an eyebrow. "Neither am I, Dad."

His eyes widened, before breaking out in a chuckle. "You certainly pull off the 'Mom' look, don't you?"

She sighed and smiled. "I try."

Charlie wrapped an arm around her shoulders. "Come on, let's go inside."

Two hours and a full belly later, Charlie cleared his throat, causing her to look his way. He narrowed his eyes in her direction, causing the skin between them to furrow.

"Bells, would you mind coming out on the porch with me, so we can have a talk?"

Seth had taken Jack upstairs to play a video game, so Bella looked over the only other person in the room. Sue gave her a motherly smile and a quick nod.

Parachute

"Okay, Dad, sure," she replied, placing her napkin on the table and walked towards the front door.

The sun had just begun setting, casting a fiery orange shade across the sky. Her gaze was momentarily caught by the brilliant colors, until she heard her father's footsteps behind her.

Bella sat, lightly swaying back and forth, on Charlie's old porch swing. She turned and eyed her father, who was resting against the door jamb.

"So, what did you want to talk to me about, Dad?" she asked in curiosity, pulling one leg underneath her.

He took a swig from his beer bottle before sitting down on the porch top step, looking up into her face.

"I got some news about Jacob the other day. I figured that you'd want to know."

Bella's breath left her in one quick gust, her stomach dropping. "Is it bad?" she asked nervously.

Charlie smirked slightly and shook his head. "It depends on how you look at it."

She cocked her head to the side slightly. "I don't understand."

"You know he was living down in Olympia?"

Bella nodded, motioning for her father to continue.

"Well, he was dating a girl down there and it didn't take him long to show his true colors. He tried to rough her up, but the girl was black belt in karate. She broke his arm and pressed charges. Since it's his third strike, he's in the Pen for about 20 years without parole."

Parachute

Her mouth popped open in surprise. Charlie let out a loud guffaw, pointing at her comical face.

"That's pretty much how I felt," he replied. "Stupid boy," he muttered, taking another drink. He eyed her carefully for a moment before continuing.

"You certainly seem to be a magnet for trouble, Bells."

She sighed and shook her head. "Don't I know it."

After a few minutes of enjoying the crisp evening air, Charlie cleared his throat.

"So, when will Ed be here?" he asked, a little too nonchalantly.

Bella cocked an eyebrow. "In about six weeks, but why do I get the feeling that you already know the answer to that question?"

He shrugged innocently, but the light blush that bloomed across his cheekbones gave him away.

"Dad," Bella warned. "What are you hiding?"

Charlie's mustache twitched slightly as he shook his head. "Nope, you're not getting anything out of me."

She rolled her eyes and unsuccessfully tried to hold back a smile. Even though her curiosity was now piqued, she couldn't help but be thrilled that the two of them were getting along.

"Soooo," she drew out. "You really like him, huh?"

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw his mustache twitch again as he held back his own smile. "Something like that."

Parachute

She let out an exasperated sound and blew some hair out of her face. "What does that mean?"

He looked her dead in the eye and smirked. "I haven't dusted off the shotgun yet, have I?"

Bella rolled her eyes. "That's because I'm pretty sure that they wouldn't let you bring it on the plane."

Her eyes widened in realization and she began to shake her head back and forth. "Oh, no you don't! Daddy, I swear, if you break out the shotgun on him, I will never-

Charlie held up his hand and cut her off. "Okay, okay, calm down there, baby girl. I'm just messing with you. I do like Edward; he's a good man. He makes cute kids, too." He winked at her.

She laughed, throwing her hands up in the air. "Oh no, not you, too!"

"What? Who said what?" Charlie laughed.

"Jack. On the very first day back home. He mentioned a baby brother," Bella replied, shaking her head.

Charlie nodded, biting his cheek to keep from laughing. He coughed and stood up, growing serious. "Well, as much as I like Ed, there better be a ring on that finger before a bun in the oven. That's all I'm saying on that subject."

Bella groaned and put her head in her hands, causing Charlie to laugh again. He patted her on the back as he passed by and into the house. She straightened and looked upwards once more, the orange now blending into crimson, setting the sky ablaze. Her belly tingled in anticipation.

"One day," she whispered into the wind.

...

September 10th, 2010

He narrowed his eyes. "What's going on in that head of yours?"

Parachute

She bit her. "Can you move to a more, um, secluded location?"

His eyes widened and looked over his shoulder, before quickly scooping up his coffee and the laptop, moving to a far corner of the shop.

After setting back up, he leaned back in his chair and smirked. "Secluded, dear. Now, what did you want to talk about?"

"Talk?" she asked coquettishly. "Who said that I wanted to talk?"

After a few clicks on her end, a soft beat started up and she maneuvered the laptop to face the open area of the room. He watched, intrigued. That is until Bella stood in his view and started to sway seductively to the music. She ran her hands up her neck and released her hair from its band. She started to softly sing along and dance, leaving him in a state that was quickly becoming uncomfortable.

...

*Between two lungs it was released
The breath that carried me
The sigh that blew me forward*

*Cause it was trapped
Trapped between two lungs
It was trapped between two lungs
It was trapped between two lungs*

*And my running feet could fly
Each breath screaming
"We are all too young to die"*

...

As the beat quickened, her movements sped up and she twirled a few times, before whipping off her t-shirt, leaving her in a pair of yoga pants and

Parachute

camisole. His eyes widened as she dropped to her knees and began to crawl towards him, still singing her heart out.

...

*Now all the days of begging
The days of theft
No more gasping for a breath
The air has filled me head-to-toe
And I can see the ground far below*

*I have this breath
And I hold it tight
And I keep it in my chest
With all my might
I pray to God this breath will last
As it pushes past my lips
As I...*

...

He swallowed thickly and discreetly adjusted himself. She crawled up onto the bed, pushing the laptop further back, to make room for her to lay next to it.

"Fuck, Bella," he hissed.

She batted her eyelashes and pouted. "You didn't like my serenade?"

He closed his eyes and hit his head on the back of the chair, groaning. "Of course I liked it. But this," he waved his hand in front of his crotch, "situation while I'm in a bookstore filled with people is not my idea of fun. At least in private, I could have given you a show of my own."

He looked dead into the webcam and waggled his eyebrows, causing her to laugh heartily.

"There's always next time," she responded flirtatiously.

He smiled brightly. "Next time?"

She nodded eagerly.

He bit his lip and gave her a crooked smile. "It's a date, then."

...

[illegible]

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September 13th, 2010

...

The day started off bright and shiny, with even Jack waking up excitedly for a Monday. Ten minutes after she dropped the boy off at school, the skies turned murky gray and the heavens opened up, creating a deluge of biblical proportions.

"What a great way to kick off my birthday," she muttered to herself.

After a quick stop at the bookstore, she headed back home, her mood almost as dark as the sky. Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled. She made her way swiftly into the house and kicked off her sopping shoes, picking them up before making her way into the laundry room. As she stripped down, she was thankful that she hadn't had a chance to take the clothes from the dryer yet.

A knock sounded loudly through the house. Startled, she gazed down at her half-naked body and shook her head, quickly grabbing a pair of sweats and a white undershirt. Padding down the hallway in her bare feet, she wondered who the hell was at her door in the middle of a storm. Her heart started to hammer in her chest and she gasped when she looked out the peephole. Throwing open the door with abandon, she launched herself into Edward's arms, wrapping her legs around his waist and kissing every inch of his face.

Parachute

Taken off guard, he stumbled backwards, just barely remaining upright. His lips caught up with hers and his hands gripped her bottom tightly. They were so lost in each other that neither of them took notice that their clothes were getting soaked. The cold rain water dripped down their cheeks, as their kisses turned languid and adoring. Edward pulled back slightly, squinting through the downpour, but smiling brightly.

"Happy Birthday, baby," he murmured right next to her ear.

Thick, hot tears fell furiously down her face as Bella held him as if he were an apparition, waiting to disappear like a rainbow. He unlatched her legs and set her on the ground, before leaning down and kissing her gently once more. He pulled back and grinned, pulled something out his pocket, but the rain obscured her view.

Her chest almost exploded as he went down on one knee. He smiled up at her, rain pouring all around them, and held up a ring.

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[illegible]

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AN: Well, since this is the last time I'm really going to get a chance to rock your socks with a review reply teaser for Parachute, let's make it good shall we? Everyone who reviews this chapter will get a special extended teaser of the proposal plus a separate tease from the Victoria Outtake.

Before anyone takes this the wrong way, I've never asked once for a review and I won't start now. While I adore reading them and listening to what you guys have to say, if you choose to leave one, that's your choice. Since this is one of the last two chapters, I want to go out with a bang, so to speak.

Music used in this chapter was "Between Two Lungs" by Florence & the Machine. The video is up on the Blog!

Parachute

Love you guys and I'll see you next Friday!

=)

Shel

Chapter 36

AN: Well, here it is, the last regular chapter of Parachute! I've enjoyed writing and sharing it with each and every one of you! I am, and will continue to be, in awe of your devotion and love for this story. I hope you give my future writing a chance as well!

There will be no sequel to this and the Epilogue will post in two weeks from today. Keeping in my tradition of review replies, reviewers will receive a teaser from the Epilogue in exactly one week, so that you'll still get your Parachute fix in some form next Friday.

There's another small AN at the end. =)

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Bella stood, drenched from head to toe, in the middle of her front lawn. Hot tears streamed down her face as the chilly rain pelted her skin. Her mouth was slightly open in shock, as she gazed down with wide eyes at the man she loved more than life itself. Edward's hopeful, joyous face grinned up at her from his stance on one knee. The ring he held in his hand was a single brilliant diamond that was simple, yet elegant.

"Isabella Swan, I have been captivated by you since the moment I first laid eyes on you. That love only grew and expanded as I got to know you and saw first hand what a wonderful mother you are to our son. Forever could never be long enough for me to feel like I've had long enough with you. Marry me?"

She covered her mouth and let out a sob, before throwing her arms around him and shouting, "Yes!"

Parachute

They fell together, a mass of limbs and lips, their hearts both beating wildly. He pulled away slightly and pushed a lock of rain-saturated hair from her face.

"Let's go inside, please. I don't want you to catch a cold."

When they stood, his eyes were drawn to her white shirt, now completely plastered against her bare breasts, her nipples hard and straining against the fabric. His hand reached out to brush against her breast, causing her to become self conscious and cross her arms across her chest. She laughed lightly and nodded her head towards the house.

"Come on, let's get dry."

Edward let out a loud guffaw. "I'd rather keep you wet, love."

His hands wrapped around her waist and he pulled her back to his chest as they tumbled into the house. Sopping wet clothes soon littered the foyer floor and hands roamed greedily.

"Where is our bedroom?" he asked huskily, sweeping her into his arms.

Bella laughed happily and wrapped her arms around his neck. The sound of him calling her bedroom "theirs" completely melted her heart.

"Upstairs and to the right."

She giggled as he dropped her naked body onto the soft, queen-sized bed and crawled up next to her. His hands lovingly stroked her cheeks and brushed the hair from her face. He smirked and pulled them into a sitting position, sliding the diamond ring from his pinky finger. He had thankfully secured it there when Bella had thrown herself into his arms. He took her left hand and gently slid on the ring. She raised her hand, spreading her fingers and admiring the stone's beauty and brilliance.

"Edward, it's stunning," she murmured, breathlessly.

Parachute

He smiled shyly. "It was my birth mother, Elizabeth's. Mom saved it for me, and it's been nestled away all of these years."

She glanced at him curiously. "You never gave it to Victoria?"

He reached and cupped her cheek. "No, Bella. It was always meant for you."

She sighed and leaned into his hand. He pulled her to his chest and held her tightly for a moment before playfully singing.

...

*Forever can never be long enough for me
Feel like I've had long enough with you
Forget the world now, we won't let them see
But there's one thing left to do
Now that the weight has lifted
Love has surely shifted my way
Marry me today and every day*

...

She laughed lightly and poked his shoulder. "So that's why that line sounded so familiar."

He pushed her back against the mattress. "It doesn't make it any less true, though. I adore you, my future wife."

Edward slid his hands around her bottom and pulled her close, his lips roaming down her neck.

...

*Together can never be close enough for me
Feel like I am close enough to you
You wear white and I'll wear out the words "I love you"
And "You're beautiful"
Now that the wait is over
And love has finally shown her my way*

Parachute

...

*Promise me you'll always be happy by my side
I promise to sing to you when all the music dies
And marry me today and everyday
Marry me if I ever get the nerve to say hello in this cafe
Say you will, say you will, marry me*

...

Bella groaned and ran her hands through his damp hair; his fingers nimbly stroking her folds, before sliding inside.

"So wet, baby," he murmured against her lips. "Have you missed me? Missed the way I know your body, inside and out?"

He began to pump his fingers and rub her clit gently with his thumb. "Tell me, Bella. Tell me how much you missed me."

"I did. I missed you so damn much! Oh, God," she called out as an orgasm swept over her surprisingly quickly.

She laid back, panting slightly and groaning as he eased his fingers from her body. Her eyes narrowed when he shot her a smirk, sliding two fingers from his right hand into his mouth and closed his eyes. When his gaze met hers once again, his eyes were lust-filled with heavy lids. She reached up and pulled him down, crashing their lips together. She closed her eyes in bliss as he lined his body up against hers and eased himself inside. Once he was fully immersed in her warmth, Edward leaned his forehead against hers and sighed. It was a feeling not unlike coming home after a long absence, which is essentially what it was.

He cupped her cheeks and kissed her deeply, starting to thrust shallowly. "Do you feel that? The connection?"

Tears welled up and fell silently down her cheeks, emotion completely overwhelming her. "Yes, I do," she whispered against his lips.

Parachute

His lips quirked into a beautiful smile. "I can't wait to hear you say that again one day, hopefully soon."

Words escaped the pair of joyful lovers as they worked towards their completion, both striving to bring the other to great heights of pleasure. When all was said and done, they laid together, limbs entwined.

"Are you here to stay?" she asked in a light voice, absentmindedly running her fingers through his hair.

"If you'll have me, yes," he responded with a chuckle.

She waved her ring-clad finger in front of his face and laughed. "Well, I suppose. I've already agreed to be your wife, haven't I?"

He flipped her over with a growl and lightly attacked her neck with his lips and tongue. The front door slammed and they broke apart. Bella's eyes shot to the clock, astonished that it was now after three o'clock.

"Mom?" Jack called out. "Why are there wet clothes all over the floor?"

Bella and Edward jumped to their feet and she started to rifle through her drawers for something to wear.

"Bella!" Edward hissed. "My clothes are downstairs! What am I going to do?"

The look on his face was so comical that it took everything inside of her not to laugh. "Throw on my robe or something."

"MOM!" Jack screeched. "These are a dude's pants and shoes! OH MY GOD!"

The boy's feet pounded up the stairs frantically. Bella rushed and got to her door, just as she pulled a sundress over her head. Jack rushed into her room, his eyes scanning the room frantically.

"Jack, baby, what's wrong?" she asked, innocently.

Parachute

"Mom!" he screeched. "Whose clothes are downstairs on the floor?"

"Mine?" she responded, sounding more like a question.

"Not all of them. There are a dude's pants and shoes." He narrowed his eyes at his mother. "Are you cheating on Dad? Mom! How could you?"

The sound of something knocked over in the bathroom drew Jack's attention. His eyes widened.

"Is there someone in there?" he whisper-yelled.

Bella bit her lip and tried not to laugh as the boy stalked over to the door.

"Come out, now," Jack called out. "If not, I'm calling my Grandpop. He has a gun!"

She struggled to keep her face straight. "Jack, I think you should settle down. It's not what you think."

His eyes flew back and forth, between his mother and the bathroom door. "Really? Then what's going on?"

"Look, give him a moment to collect himself, and then we'll talk."

"Him?" Jack hissed. "I knew it was a dude."

The boy sat down on the edge of her bed and buried his hands in his hair, looking eerily reminiscent of his father. "Why, Mom? How could you do this to Dad?" he moaned pitifully.

The door to the bathroom cracked open and Jack shot to his feet, glaring at the door, his stance ready to kick the man out of his house. When Edward's head poked through the doorway, Jack's jaw dropped open comically.

Parachute

His father smiled sheepishly and stepped into the room, wearing Bella's baby blue plush robe.

"D-dad?" Jack stuttered, before breaking out into a huge grin. "DAD!" he shouted as he threw himself into his father's arms.

"Dad, you're here!" Jack sobbed out, causing Bella to cover her mouth and blink away tears.

Edward squeezed him tight, rocking slightly back and forth, as the boy's feet dangled in the air.

"I'm here, son. I'm not going anywhere," he responded, his voice thick with emotion.

When he was able to set the boy back down on his feet, Jack looked at his mother accusingly, his face still wet from his tears. "You knew the whole time! Why didn't you tell me?"

Bella smiled and shrugged.

Jack shook his head. "Party foul, Mom. Party. Foul."

Edward shot her a look of confusion and Bella rolled her eyes. "He heard from his uncle, Seth."

Edward grinned and rested his arm on his son's shoulders. "I'm looking forward to meeting the rest of your family."

Jack looked up and smiled brilliantly. " *Our* family, Dad."

Edward's face visibly softened, nodding. "Our family," he replied in agreement. He placed his hand on Jack's arm and led him over to the bed, where he sat down and looked the boy directly in his eyes.

"Do you remember the discussion that we had not that long ago?"

Parachute

Jack cocked his head to the side in confusion, momentarily before his eyes widened and nodded. Edward smirked and motioned for Bella to come over. She smiled bemusedly and walked over, allowing Edward to take her left hand in his, showing Jack the ring that rested there. Jack looked up at Bella with tears in his eyes and grinned.

"You said yes? We're going to get married? And be a real family?" he asked excitedly.

She sat down next to Edward and cupped her son's cheeks gently. "We're a real family, no matter what, Jack. But yes, we're going to get married!"

Jack threw his arms around both of his parents and squeezed tightly. "Oh my God! I can't believe it. That's so awesome!"

After a few moments, Jack pulled away and composed himself, before giving his father a double take.

"Dad, why are you wearing Mom's robe?"

...

O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O_o_O

...

Later that evening, after Edward had changed into dry clothes and the wet mess in the foyer had been cleaned up, the three of them were deciding on what to do for dinner when the doorbell rang.

Bella raised an eyebrow. "It's certainly busy around here today," she muttered as she went to answer the door. The rain had stopped right before Jack was let out of school and stars scattered throughout the dark and clear sky. The small group of people standing on her front porch was a surprise. Charlie, Sue and Seth were waiting, each with a bag or some sort of container.

Parachute

"Hey, what are you guys doing here?" she asked in bewilderment.

Sue laughed and grabbed her hand, squeezing tightly. "It's your birthday, sweet girl. We're here to celebrate it with you."

Bella smiled and felt her heart warm from the kind gesture. She startled, realizing that her family was still standing out in the cold air and stood back, allowing them to enter the house.

"Aww, you guys didn't need to do that. It's really sweet, thank you."

She closed the door and noticed that the trio had come to an abrupt halt. Peering over her step-mother's shoulder, she noticed that Jack was pulling Edward towards them, eager to make introductions.

Charlie's mustache twitched, an obvious sign that he was trying to hide a smile. "You don't waste any time, do you, boy?"

Edward grinned sheepishly and held his hand out to shake her father's. "Not in this instance, sir. My life is here now, so I was eager to get back to them."

Charlie finally allowed a full-fledged smile to emerge and clapped Edward on the shoulder. "That's a good answer, son."

Edward shook his head and chuckled. "Thanks, Charlie."

Charlie looked at Sue and winked. "We're forgetting our manners. Ed, this is my wife Sue and my step-son, Seth."

Edward leaned down to kiss Sue on the cheek and shook Seth's hand. "It's a pleasure to meet you both. Jack and Bella have told me a lot about you."

Seth grimaced playfully. "Don't believe everything you hear."

Sue laughed and swatted her son on the arm. "Come on, boy, let's get the food into the kitchen."

Parachute

At the sound of food, Jack perked up and sidled next to her. "Here, Nana, let me help you with that."

She smirked and handed Jack a container. "Such a good boy, unlike your uncle."

Seth rolled his eyes and laughed before following Jack into the kitchen. Sue turned to Bella and reached for her hands, gasping when she encountered the diamond ring.

"Oh my! What's this?" she practically squealed.

Bella looked nervously at her father, who looked remarkably calm.

"Edward proposed and I said yes," she replied happily.

Sue hugged her tightly. "Congratulations, baby! You deserve so much happiness!"

"Thank you so much, Mom," she whispered into Sue's ear. The older woman pulled back and looked at Bella in surprise, her dark eyes filled with tears.

"Oh, Bella. I love you so much. You've always been my daughter, you know that."

Bella sighed. "I know and I'm sorry that I've never said that before. You earned that title a long time ago."

She turned and was swept into a hug by her father. "Why are you taking this so well, Dad?" she asked suspiciously.

He winked at her and replied, "It's a secret."

Her eyes widened. "You already knew!" she accused, causing her father to shrug.

Parachute

"Maybe," he teased.

"Oh! Is that why you were so secretive last weekend?" she asked in surprise.

Charlie smiled and nodded. "Ed here called me up a day or two beforehand and asked me for your hand. I've gotta say, I was impressed."

Bella turned to her fiancé and raised an eyebrow. "I take it that he gave you his blessing?" she asked him.

Edward took her into his arms and kissed her forehead. "Yes, he did. With the provision that he'd shoot me dead if I hurt you."

Bella laughed and shook her head. "That sounds like him."

"Come on, guys," Sue called from the dining room. "Dinner's on the table."

After a delicious meal and a home-made birthday cake, Charlie and Sue gave Bella her presents, before heading back home. Jack and Edward shooed her out of the kitchen while they cleaned up, so she decided to re-arrange some closet space for Edward in the meantime. By 9:30 pm, Jack was passed out in bed while his parents curled up on the couch together.

"It's been quite the day, hasn't it?" he murmured quietly.

She sighed and leaned back against his chest. "It certainly has been," she sighed, contentedly.

The doorbell rang once again, causing her to huff in irritation. "Who could it be this time?" she muttered under her breath. As she stood, she shot him a cheeky look. "Your parents aren't about to show up unannounced, are they?"

He rolled his eyes and laughed. "If they are, I'm equally surprised." He rose and followed her to the door, his hand resting on the small of her back, but staying just out of view.

Parachute

Alice and Angela were on the porch grinning, each holding out a bottle of wine.

"Happy Birthday!" they called out in unison.

Bella shook her head and laughed. "You guys are crazy, but I love you."

Alice giggled. "We figured that you might want to drown your sorrows, considering that you were all alone on your birthday."

Bella bit her lip. "I wasn't all alone."

"Oh, we meant adult company," Angela replied with a sweet smile.

"My Dad, Sue and Seth were here and brought dinner and cake earlier," Bella replied, deliberately toying with her friends.

Alice rolled her eyes and sighed in annoyance. "Bell-ah," she drawled. "You know what we mean."

"Oh," she replied in fake surprise. "You're worried that I'd be all mopey and depressed because Edward wasn't here?"

Both of her friends looked adorably confused. In the past few weeks, no one had been able to mention his name without Bella looking as if someone had kicked her puppy, but now, she practically radiated with happiness.

"Bella, you're glowing," Alice laughed. "I'd almost wager that you'd got some." Her jaw dropped. "Ohmygosh! DidyoucheatonEdward?" she squeaked, rushing her words together.

Bella shook her head and muttered, "What is it with this cheating nonsense today?"

Angela's eyes narrowed as she heard a muffled sound from behind Bella. She reached out and pushed the door open a little more, surprised to find a very

Parachute

handsome man standing next to her friend. Even if she hadn't seen Edward's picture before, it would have been quite easy to recognize that this was Jack's father.

"Edward!" Alice squealed, wrapping her arms around his waist. "When did you get here?"

He chuckled. "Earlier today, Allie. I wanted to fly in and surprise my girl on her birthday."

He looked over at Angela and smiled, holding his hand out. "Hi, you must be Angela. I'm Edward."

Angela couldn't help but smile in return, glad to finally meet the man who had made her best friend so happy. "It's great to finally meet you, Edward."

Edward knew the exact moment that Alice spotted the ring; an ear-piercing squeal released from her mouth.

"Ohmygosh! Is that what I think it is?"

Edward politely extracted himself from the trio of women, leaving them to their chatting in the living room with an open bottle of wine. Now that he was here permanently, he didn't mind sharing her with her friends for a little while. His body was physically and emotionally exhausted anyway. He took the time to shower and change into pajama pants, promptly passing out not long after his head hit the pillow.

Just under two hours later, Bella made her way upstairs after saying farewell to her friends. It had been a nice surprise and showed her just how much they truly cared about her. When she walked into the bedroom and saw Edward sleeping peacefully, her heart melted. She felt more at ease in this moment than she had in years. It had been a long journey to get to where she was now, but she would never change a thing. Jack meant the world to her and she swore to protect him at any cost. He owned her, heart and soul, ever since the first moment that she had looked into his little green eyes.

Parachute

She truly meant what she had said earlier; they were a family no matter what happened. So many scenarios had crossed her mind on their way to Chicago, just three months ago. The worst case being that his family would be cruel and take him away from her. The best being that they agreed to let her continue to be his mother and share custody.

She glanced down at her ring and smiled. Not in any one of those scenarios did she ever imagine falling in love with Jack's father and planning a future together as husband and wife. At this moment, life was everything that she had always wanted, but never allowed herself to wish for. She knew, without a doubt, that they were where they were supposed to be now. All of their choices and actions led them here. This was the beginning of their happily ever after and she swore to herself not to take one moment for granted.

She quietly slipped into her pajamas and curled up next to Edward's sleeping form. He curled his arm around her waist and pulled her close to him, muttering her name quietly in his slumber. She clasped his hand with one of her own, a litany of prayer and thanks falling from her lips as she drifted asleep.

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AN: So, that's all she wrote. After our epilogue in two weeks, Parachute's completion will be a very bittersweet moment for me. I'm sad to see it end, but I'm excited about my next project! Once again, I thank each of you for your love and support. You've totally made writing this story such a pleasure for me.

One last note, I wanted to thank whoever nominated both myself and Parachute for six Walk Of Fame Awards. Parachute: Angst Goddess, Queen of Hearts and Story of the Year. I'm being completely realistic in our slim chances since we're up against some of the most enormous stories in FanFiction, lol.

Parachute

I, as a writer, am up for three as well: Rising Starlet, Hopelessly Devoted and Music Maestro. I sincerely hope that you give me consideration if you vote, especially for the Hopelessly Devoted award. It would be a great honor to know that I've done right by my readers in terms of updates and review replies.

I'll see some of you next Friday with the Epilogue teasers and those of you who choose to remain lurkers, I'll see you in two weeks when the Epi posts!

=)

Epilogue

sniff I'm almost heartbroken to see this end, but it's time to say goodbye!
You have all been an absolute pleasure to write for!

I know most people don't like ANs, but please read the one at the end? I'd totally appreciate it. =)

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July 13, 2012

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Bella gazed out of her kitchen window, seeking serenity in the large expanse of lush, verdant grass. There was a large tree house, which looked more like a small cottage, nestled low in an enormous tree, close to the middle of the yard. She felt the heat of a glare upon her back and took a deep breath before turning around.

Glittering green eyes met hers angrily, causing her to sigh.

"What now?" she asked tiredly.

"Why can't Riley and Garrett spend the weekend? It's not fair, Mom. I never asked to move to this stupid place!"

Bella rubbed her temples, the onset of a headache quickly attacking her temples.

"Jack, baby, we've already gone over this. Your dad is out of town for work, and I just don't have the energy to deal with all three of you this weekend. And

Parachute

knock it off about the house. You know you love it, and it's not that far away from our old one."

His eyes cut down to her bulging belly and sneered. "It's that thing's fault. There wouldn't even be a problem if you weren't having the baby."

Bella leaned against the counter. "Jack, we've been over this before, sweetheart. Just because we're having a baby-"

"Doesn't mean that I'm any less loved," he mimicked while cutting her off and rolling his eyes.

"Little Bit, please-" she started, before he cut her off.

"Argh, I hate you sometimes! I wish that baby would just die!"

With those parting vicious words, Jack stormed out of the kitchen, stomping loudly up the stairs. Six months pregnant and already dealing with erratic hormones, Bella burst into tears and walked into the den, dropping onto the couch and burying her face into a pillow. Fifteen minutes later, her tears hadn't ceased yet, so she picked up the phone and dialed her husband's cell number.

"Hi baby," his velvety voice caressed her aching heart. "Is everything okay?"

A fresh sob broke out of her chest.

"Shit, Bella! What's wrong? Are you okay? Should I call Charlie?" Edward starting spouting off questions in panic.

"No," she sobbed, "I'm fine."

"Then why are you crying like that, baby? What happened?" His voice softened to a soothing tone.

"Jack," she hiccuped. "He was mad that, *sniff*, the boys couldn't come over for the weekend."

Parachute

Edward sighed knowingly. Jack had been acting out for the past three months, ever since his parents told him about the baby.

"What did he say?"

"That he hated me and wished that the baby would die!" Bella began her sobbing anew.

"Ssh," Edward whispered. "You know he didn't mean it, Bella. Remember what Kate said a couple of weeks ago."

"I don't care what Kate said!" she wailed. "I don't care if he's only acting out because he feels safe and secure. I mean, I do care, *sniff*, but it's not fair! Neither me nor the baby deserve this. It hurts so bad." Her last sentence was barely more than a whisper.

"I know, I know," Edward replied calmly. "I wish I was there with you, baby. Ground him indefinitely and then we'll talk it over when I get home in two days. If he gets to be too much to handle, call my mom or Sue to come over and hand him his ass. Try not to stress yourself, love. It's not good for you or the baby."

She sniffed and wiped her nose with the back of her hand. "Alright," she replied quietly.

A few loud voices echoed over his voice and Edward sighed. "I'm sorry, Bella. The meeting is starting. I'll call you as soon as it's over, okay?"

"Okay. I love you."

"I love you too, baby."

The line went quiet and she hit end. She placed her head in her hands and quietly began to cry again. A hand touched her tentatively on the shoulder and she jerked her head up, meeting her son's remorseful eyes. His bottom lip quivered as he took in his mother's face, wet and blotchy from crying. She let

Parachute

out another sob, before pulling him down and into her arms tightly.

"I'm so sorry, Mom!" he cried. "I didn't mean it. I love you and I love the baby!"

She rocked them back and forth in a comforting gesture. "I know, Jack, but it still hurt so much. Please don't ever say anything like that again."

"I won't, Mom. I promise," he replied earnestly. They leaned back against the couch, neither releasing their hold on the other.

"You just can't say whatever pops into your head, Little Bit. You need to think about what kind of impact your words will have. Even though I knew you were mad and didn't mean what you said, it still hurt, baby."

"I'm so sorry, Mama," he whispered, hugging her tightly.

"You're grounded until you're thirty," she murmured against his hair, exhaustion settling over her.

"Understood," he chuckled softly.

"I'm serious," she yawned. "Wait until your father gets home."

Jack gulped audibly and nodded. "I know."

The notes of a song drifted through her head as she slipped into a peaceful sleep.

...

Words they'll try to shake you

Don't let them break you

Or stop your world from turning

When words keep you from feeling good

Use them as firewood and let them burn

...

Parachute

Soon, Bella's breathing evened out and soft snores filled the air. Jack's heart clenched and he truly felt horrible for lashing out at his mother. He had no idea what had made him say the things he had. She had never been anything but good to him and proved her love over and over again.

The phone chirped next to him and he answered it quickly, not wanting to wake her up just yet.

"Hello?" he asked softly.

"JACKSON CHARLES CULLEN! What is wrong with you, boy? Why would say something like that to your mother?" his father's voice boomed from the phone's speaker.

"Shh, Dad, please quiet down," he replied in a hushed voice.

"Quiet down?" Edward yelled. "Are you seriously telling me to be quiet? Boy, have you lost your mind?"

"No, Dad, please," Jack whispered, "Mom is sleeping next to me."

Silence fell quickly over the line.

"She's sleeping? Not crying anymore?" his father asked at normal volume, though his voice was still tinged with anger.

"Yeah, she fell asleep on me about ten minutes ago."

Edward sighed. "Jack, seriously. What would possess you to talk to her like that? She's overly emotional as it is and you sent her over the edge."

"I'm sorry, Dad. I wasn't thinking."

"You're damn right, you weren't thinking. I trusted you to be the man of the house while I was away, Jack. Sending your mother into hysterics in her condition wasn't part of the plan."

Parachute

Jack stayed silent, unsure of what to say next.

"Did you at least apologize to her?"

"Yeah, Dad. I said I was sorry and that I didn't mean it. I felt bad as soon as the words left my mouth. I would never want anything bad to happen to Mom or the baby."

"I know, son. We need to work on controlling your temper. It's alright to be upset, but it's unacceptable to lash out like that. Are we clear?"

"Yes, sir."

After a few moments of silence, Jack spoke up again.

"Did Dr. Kate really say that about me?" he asked hesitantly.

Edward groaned. "Yes, she did, but that doesn't excuse your behavior, Jack."

"I understand, but why would I act out because I feel safe? I don't understand?"

"No one really understands why the mind works the way it does, son. How about when I get back, we call her and talk to her together?"

"I'd like that, Dad. I don't want to make Mom cry like that again."

"I know, Jack. Look, I'll let you go. Tell your mom that I'll call her later."

"Okay, I will."

"Be kind to her, Jack. Please. She needs it right now."

"I will, Dad. I promise."

"Alright, I'll talk to you later. I love you."

Parachute

"Bye, Dad. Love you, too."

Jack hung up the phone and looked down at his mother's peaceful face, vowing to himself that he'd never raise his voice to her again.

Three days later, Edward walked in their bedroom for the first time in just under a week and he stopped short at the sight awaiting him. Jack and Bella were curled up together, sleeping. Jack's hand rested on his mother's belly, causing a contented sigh to well up in Edward's chest. He placed his bag next to his bureau and looked at the clock. It was well after eleven pm, so he decided to hop in the shower before joining his family.

Bella awoke several hours later, feeling overly warm and with a heaviness upon her stomach. She blinked her eyes open slowly and smiled down at Jack's peaceful face, fast asleep. She looked further down and her eyes widened as she noticed that the boy's hand was resting on her belly, covered by a larger hand that reached around from behind her body. She turned her head and pressed backwards, feeling her husband's hard chest against her back. She sighed and closed her eyes, falling back into a peaceful dream.

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September 15, 2012

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"Bella!" Laurent called from the stockroom of Odds and Ends.

She placed her hand on her burgeoning belly and carefully slid off of the stool that she had been sitting on at the front counter. She waddled a few feet before hollering back.

Parachute

"Yeah, Steve?"

He poked his head out of the door and smiled, his light green eyes crinkling around the edges.

"Did you want both stacks of the new Patterson book or just one?"

"One should be fine, it's been kinda slow this week," she replied, before deciding to stroll through the aisles to see if anyone needed help.

She had just finished helping a young woman find a book for her Lit class when the chime over the door sounded.

"Hi, Welcome to-" Bella cut off her greeting when she looked up and saw her father standing in front of her, looking nervous.

"Dad? Is everything okay?" she asked in concern, moving to his side as quickly as her girth would allow.

He rubbed the back of his neck and nodded. "I just needed to talk to you about something, and I didn't want to do it over the phone."

She shot him a confused look.

"It's about James Brooks," he added quietly, causing her eyes to widen.

She swallowed the lump in her throat and glanced over at Laurent, who was now at the front counter watching on curiously.

"Let's go up to my office," she suggested, motioning for Charlie to follow her.

"Steve, I'll be upstairs if you need me."

Laurent shot her a concerned look, but nodded. Leading Charlie up to her office, Bella settled into her comfy chair and motioned for her father to have a seat on the other side of her desk. Charlie smirked and shook his head.

Parachute

"What?" she asked, amused at his out of the blue reaction.

"It's just funny that I'm the parent here and you're in the big chair," he replied, his eyes glazing over for a moment before continuing. "I don't think I've ever said it enough, Bells, but I'm damn proud of you, baby girl."

She smiled and blinked back tears. "Thanks, Daddy," she murmured. "Now, what is this business about James?" she asked anxiously.

Charlie sighed. "As you already know, I have various connections and I've been keeping tabs on him."

Bella nodded, biting her lip and waiting for the worst possible scenario to escape her father's mouth.

"Well, I got a call earlier from my friend Danny, who let me know that Brooks was found dead today. The prison hasn't released an official statement yet, but he was pretty sure that he was shivved sometime in the shower this morning."

Bella blinked, not expecting that to have happened. She felt a strange twinge of pleasure shoot through her and cringed internally, not used to having such malicious thoughts.

"Shivved? Meaning that someone stabbed him?"

Charlie nodded grimly. "Someone sharpened a toothbrush handle, but I don't think you want to hear the details, Bella. It's pretty gruesome."

She felt her stomach turn and bile rise in her throat. Clearing her throat, she smiled as best as she could. "Thank you for coming to tell me, Daddy. I just need a moment to process this."

She ran a hand through her hair and leaned back, sighing. "I don't know what I'm supposed to feel."

Parachute

Charlie's brow furrowed slightly and looked at his daughter, carefully choosing his words. "There's no right or wrong answer, baby girl. How do you feel right now?"

She sighed. "I feel relieved that he's out of the picture, but also angry that it wasn't justice. He should be rotting in jail, being miserable."

Charlie chuckled, causing Bella to shoot him a glare. "I don't see what's so funny about that, Dad."

"It's not you, sweetie. Well, it is you, but not that way." He smiled kindly at her. "How did you feel when Victoria was killed?"

She stiffened in her seat. "What does that have to do with anything?"

Her father shook his head. "It has everything to do with it. How did you feel, Bells?"

She held her head high and met his gaze, knowing full well that she had walked right into his trap. "I was sad and angry and a little relieved."

Charlie tugged on his mustache thoughtfully. "Let me guess. Sad because of how she died, angry because she got off easy and relieved because she was never going to be an issue in our lives again?"

Bella broke his gaze, taking a sudden interest in her nails. She refused to look up when she heard his chair scrape across the ground. She let a few tears fall when she felt his large, warm hand on her shoulder. She looked up to find that he was kneeling beside her chair. She reached out and wrapped her arms around his shoulders, reveling in the comfort only her daddy could give her at that moment.

"Ssh, don't cry. It's fine, Bells. We all went through therapy sessions after that bastard took you. It's perfectly normal to feel like this. Don't beat yourself up over it."

Parachute

"I know, Dad. It's just a lot to take in, you know? I'll be fine." She leaned back to wipe her eyes when the baby moved and surprised Charlie, whose arm was still touching her abdomen.

She felt her chest warm and all of the previous sad thoughts flew out of her head as she watched her father's face fill with awe and adoration. She reached out for his hand and placed it on top of her belly. When the baby moved again, his eyes flew up to hers and a wide smile broke out over his whole face.

"Wow, I haven't felt something like that in over twenty-five years. It's even more amazing this time, because it's a baby inside of my baby."

She leaned down and kissed his cheek. "I love you, Daddy," she whispered in his ear.

Charlie reached out and cupped her cheek, his eyes shining with unshed moisture. "I love you, too, Isabella. You are the best thing that I've ever done in my entire life."

He kissed her forehead gently before standing. He stayed a few minutes longer, to make sure that she would be alright when he left. Once he was out of the store, Bella folded her arms on the desk, laying her head down and sighing. She knew that dwelling on things too much would drive her insane, so she closed her eyes and tried to focus on the positive. Like how Esme and Carlisle owned a beautiful little house about ten minutes away from theirs. They still lived primarily in Chicago, but bought a home in Washington over a year ago, so that they could visit whenever they wished. Esme was actually flying back here in two weeks, planning to stay until a few weeks after the baby was born. She wanted to be close by and help out in anyway that she could.

Over the past two years, Sue and Esme had formed a strong friendship and it made Bella incredibly happy to see how their lives had blended together seamlessly. Renee had even made good on her attempt to become a fixture in her daughter's life. They spoke occasionally on the phone, although things were still awkward. She had hope that things would work out well between them.

Parachute

Bella was broken out of her thoughts by the phone buzzing in her pocket. She pulled it out and smiled at the text message.

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Pizza or Chinese for dinner, Love?
~E
.

She laid a hand on her belly. "What do you say, kiddo? Pizza or Chinese?" As if comprehending it's mother's question, the baby gave a sharp kick after the second option. Bella laughed and rubbed the sore spot softly. "Ouch. Not cool, kid."

She grinned and replied to his text with one of her own, just slightly racier. His response was swift and expected.

.
groan
Really, Bella? How am I supposed to get through this meeting with a hard-on?
You're getting a spanking later.
~E
.

She bit her lip and grinned, getting the exact answer that she was hoping for.

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October 23, 2012

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Parachute

Bella rubbed her aching back and sighed. She had been sitting at her desk for over an hour, staring at a blank page of what was supposed to be her next Jack Attack book. She was under no obligation or contract for this one, which she was extremely grateful for at the moment. She decided that she finally had enough and waddled over to the couch for a nap. She laid her head against one of the decorative pillows and rubbed a tender spot that seemed to be the baby's favorite kicking place. Her due date was in less than two weeks and she was eager to meet her little one, as was the rest of the family. Alice was still grumpy about her and Edward not wanting to find out the baby's sex, but they wanted it to be a surprise.

A few moments later, she felt a large movement under her fingertips and smiled. "Settle down, kid," she murmured sleepily. "Let Mama get some rest."

Two hours later, she awoke and stretched, feeling cold and wet.

"Oh, shit," she whispered, thinking that she had peed herself in her sleep. She stood as quickly as she could manage and felt a twinge in her belly, as well as a small rush of liquid down her legs. Her eyes widened in a combination of excitement and surprise.

"Are you ready to join us?" she spoke to her stomach calmly, feeling the baby give a particularly hard kick, as if the baby was responding.

"Well, then, let's call Daddy."

She picked up the phone and dialed Edward's number, only to reach his voicemail. She tried the office next and his assistant answered.

"Edward Cullen's office, how may I help you?" Beverly asked in her sweet, kind voice.

"Hi, Bev, it's Bella. Is Edward around?" she replied, her nerves just beginning to fray at the edges.

Parachute

"Hi Bella! He's in a meeting with a client right now, do you need me to get him?"

She weighed her options and figured that she could make the other calls while she waited for him. "No, that's fine, just ask him to call me as soon as he's finished. It's really important."

"No problem!"

Next, she dialed Esme, who answered on the first ring. "Hello, my lovely daughter. How are you and my granddaughter doing?"

Bella chuckled slightly. Both she and Esme were convinced that this baby was a girl, while Edward, Carlisle and Jack were all certain of the opposite.

"Well, I think she's on her way, actually," Bella replied breathlessly.

"Oh my!" Esme exclaimed happily. "What's happening? Are you having contractions? Did you call Edward? Wait, what do you mean you think?"

"Calm down, Mom. Take a deep breath," she replied, on the verge of laughter. "I called Edward, but he's in a meeting with a client, and I didn't want to bother him. And as for if I'm sure, I'm leaking like a faucet and it's terribly uncomfortable, so I think so. I don't feel any pain though."

Esme took a deep breath. "Okay, okay, I'm calm. I'm on my way over to pick you up. I'll call Carlisle and Emmett since I'm sure they'll want to fly in sooner now. You call your Dad and then call Edward back. Screw the client, he'll want to know asap. Tell him to meet us at the hospital."

Bella giggled at her mother-in-law's use of language. "All right, all right."

She dialed her father next and he assured her that he'd call Alice to let everyone else know. "Seth will pick up Jack from school and bring him to the hospital afterwards. I can't believe I'm going to be a grandfather," Charlie laughed. "Well, I know I already am, but the birth part is completely different."

Parachute

Bella smiled and rolled her eyes. "Yeah, I think I get that part."

Charlie chuckled. "I'm sure you do, baby girl. Okay then, I'll let you go and meet you at the hospital, sweetheart."

"Thanks, Daddy."

Fifteen minutes had passed since her last call to Edward's office, so she tried again. This time, when Beverly answered, she had her patched straight through.

"Hey, baby, is everything okay?" his velvet voice caressed her ear. She sighed, instantly feeling relaxed.

"Yeah, everything is fine. I just thought you should know that your child is on the way."

Her reply was met with dead silence.

"Edward?"

"By child, do you mean that Jack is skipping school?" he responded. She could hear the excitement in his voice, letting her know that he knew just what was going on.

"No, dear, I mean that your spawn is attempting to claw its way out of my hoohah."

She heard the breath whoosh out of his body. "Is anyone on their way to get you? Should I come there or meet you at the hospital?" he asked, his voice growing in octaves as he went on.

"Your mom actually just walked in the door, so you can meet us at the hospital."

"What about Jack? Is someone-"

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"Already taken care of," she interrupted.

"What would I do without you?" he murmured. "I love you, Bella. I'm leaving here in five minutes."

"It's fine, baby, we're leaving now. I'll see you in a little while. Love you."

She hung up the phone and looked over to see Esme rushing down the stairs, carrying her overnight bag. Her normally immaculate hair was a disorderly array of caramel locks, reminding Bella of Edward's always tousled mop.

"Okay, I think I have everything. I've got the bag, I've called Sue and Carlisle and Rose. Let me put this in the car and we're good to go."

She rushed past Bella and out the door. Two minutes later, Bella heard the car start and pull away. She let out a chuckle and picked up her cell phone, dialing Esme's number.

"Hello?" she answered, her voice still frazzled. "I'm sorry, sweetie, can I call you back? I'm in a bit of a rush to get Bella to the-" Esme cut off her rant abruptly and muttered a quiet, "Fuck."

"I'll be right there, Bella."

She waited until her mother-in-law hung up before bursting out into laughter. Who would have expected the normally calm, cool and collected Esme Cullen to freak out more than the woman who was actually in labor? Not her certainly.

Ten hours later, Edward and Bella introduced their new daughter into the world. Her head was covered in dark blonde peach fuzz and her eyes were a dark blueish color. Bella cradled the little girl to her chest and nuzzled her hair.

"I wonder what color her eyes are going to be?" she mused, mostly to herself.

Her husband stretched next to her on the bed and gently rubbed the baby's back, gazing down on his wife and child with adoration.

Parachute

"We'll just have to wait a few weeks or so, I think. Jack's eyes were green from the beginning, which is really rare."

A knock on the door sounded and Jack's head poked in. "Can I come in?" he asked quietly.

Bella smiled brightly and motioned him over. "Of course you can, silly."

After their breakdown a few months ago, his behavior had changed drastically. It's like a switch was flipped and her son was back, instead of the little monster he had become. She only hoped that he stayed that way and didn't lash out again because of the baby. But, she knew that if he did, they'd work it out, like they always had; with love, strength and support from their family.

As Jack reached out and gently touched his baby sister's face, Bella somehow knew that she wouldn't have to worry too much about that. It was easy to see that this little girl would have everyone wrapped around her little finger immediately. A serene smile washed over his face as he gazed down at her.

"So, what's her name, Mom?"

"Ashley. Ashley Kara Cullen."

Jack looked up into his mother's eyes and nodded. "That's pretty, Ma. It fits her."

Edward looked over at his son and smirked. "I think we're going to have our hands full, Jack."

Jack let out an exaggerated sigh. "I know, right? I have so much to teach her. Like, how to read and ride a skateboard. Oh, and not to let any boys kiss her."

Bella raised an eyebrow. "What would you know about kissing girls?"

The boy's cheeks inflamed and he started to stutter. "Wha-what? I- I have n-no idea about that. Girls are gross."

Parachute

"Uh huh," Edward chuckled, shaking his head and enjoying his son's embarrassment. "Really? That's not what I heard Garrett saying the other night."

"Whatever, Dad," Jack replied with a laugh, rolling his eyes at his father before leaning down to kiss Ashley on the top of her head.

Bella's cheeks hurt from smiling so much, but it couldn't be helped. The joy that radiated in her felt like it would explode out of her chest at any moment. Her family was happy and healthy and now larger by one. She rested her head against Edward's shoulder and slowly started to drift off to sleep, exhaustion finally winning it's fight within her body.

Seven years ago, Jackson Cullen had completely changed her life and she would never want to change a thing. Not if it led her to this moment, holding her newborn daughter, nestled between her son and husband. She would always strive to be her family's parachute, holding them close should they fall. She knew without a doubt that they would always be there for her as well.

They would always hit the ground, running.

The End

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Ashely's picture/birth announcement can be seen on the Parachute Blog: (kitsushel . blogspot . com)

**** To clear up any confusion, Laurent's first name is Steven, we met him back in Chapter 9. ****

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Final Author's Note:

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I want to thank each and every one of you who have read this story, reviewed or pimped it out in some way. I never, ever expected it to get the response that it has. I am constantly in awe and amazed by you!

Thank you to so many people who have helped by pre-reading and pimping the story out over the months! Special thank you's to Meeple (Grove-Worthy Cullen) who was my first Beta and supporter, Eifeltwr who was the person to "pressure" me into writing my little plot bunny in the first place, Sondra and the rest of the girls on Facebook and the Parachute Support Group who have continued to be nothing but loving and supportive, as well as the ladies from Twitter and WCs. This story would have nowhere near as fun to write without all of you! Thank you to Stratan and LaMomo, who have been to two best Betas that any writer could have asked for!

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Quite a few people have asked about my next story, so here are the basics:

Title: Rabbit Heart

Pairing: Bella/Edward

Genre: AH/Drama/Romance

Summary: When a stalker gets too close to rockstar Izzy Dwyer, she makes a choice that brings her back to her hometown and leads her on a journey full of new love and friendships.

The story will start posting on February 18th and will follow Parachute's posting/teasing/review reply schedule. In fact, any reviews for this epilogue

Parachute

will be replied to with a RH teaser. I'm really excited to start this next one and sincerely hope that you guys will give it a chance as well! I've received some pretty awesome feedback so far!

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It is with a sad heart that I hit complete on our story, happy with where I'm leaving the end. There are still a few outtakes that I want to write (an EsmePOV and an EPOV of his naughty nurse Bella fantasy from chapter 17), so keep an eye out for those to be added to the Parachute Outtakes under my profile. **If you have any ideas or things that you would like to see in an Outtake, let me know in your review reply! I make no promises, but I will definitely give all of your ideas consideration!**

I'm also up for a few Shimmer Awards! Best Fluff (for Parachute) Best One Shot (for I'm Not That Girl) and Best Storyteller! Take a peek over there if you can! The Link is on my profile.

Shel

=)