

On the Line

momma2fan

<http://storymaster.the-code-monkey.com/> (2014)

Tags: StoryMaster, FanFiction.Net

Broken after the death of her fiance, Bella moves looking for a new start. She meets and loves again, only to be left broken once more. Can Edward teach her to love again? Is she really willing to put her heart on the line? AH. M because I'm paranoid.

On the Line

by
momma2fan

Produced By: <http://storymaster.the-code-monkey.com>

On: 4/8/2014

Retrieved For: momma2fan@gmail.com

Story URL: <https://www.fanfiction.net/s/8076125/>

Table of Contents

[1. Chapter 1](#)

[2. Chapter 2](#)

[3. Chapter 3](#)

[4. Chapter 4](#)

[5. Chapter 5](#)

[6. Chapter 6](#)

[7. Chapter 7](#)

[8. Chapter 8](#)

[9. Chapter 9](#)

[10. Chapter 10](#)

[11. Chapter 11](#)

[12. Chapter 12](#)

[13. Chapter 13](#)

[14. Chapter 14](#)

[15. Chapter 15](#)

[16. Chapter 16](#)

[17. Epilogue](#)

1. Chapter 1

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: As promised here is the new Soldierward story. I hope you enjoy it. I would like to say that I have no working knowledge of how things work in the military. I have looked some things up to try and make it more believable, but I am afraid that I may fall short. Please don't judge me too harshly.

This will be all in Bella POV unless I tell you otherwise. Now on with it...

I lay on my bed and stared at the ceiling. I kept waiting for this nightmare to end and I would wake up and he wouldn't be dead. My fiancé had been killed just days after he had stepped foot on sandy ground. I knew when he told me that he was being deployed that I would never see him again. Don't ask me how; it was just a feeling that I had deep in my gut. Alice would say that I was channeling her.

I rolled over to stare at the grey skies that were always present in my hometown of Forks, Washington. I stared at the water that rolled down my window and wondered where I was supposed to go from here. I had foregone college, because

Riley had proposed. I knew he was joining the army; he had been in boot camp during my senior prom.

I'll never forget that day. My mother had insisted on getting me a dress, even though I had informed her I wasn't going. She had set me up a hair appointment at the same salon that Alice was going to and had her to pick me up. After a few hours she had returned me home. Imagine my surprise when I walked in the door and there sat my boyfriend.

"Riley!" I screamed and jumped into his arms. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted you to make sure you made it to prom, baby." He smiled at me and kissed me.

"Come on Bella, let's get you ready." My mom said, dragging me up the stairs.

Once my transformation was complete, Mom had led me down the stairs to where Riley was waiting, in his uniform. We had a great time and the pictures were perfect. My mom had put them up on the mantle with all of the other milestones from my life.

I heard my door creak open and felt the bed shift behind me. I felt my mom before I heard her, "Bella, it's time to go baby."

I sniffed and slowly sat up. "Just give me a minute, please."

"Okay," I heard her get up and leave.

I looked at the picture that sat on my nightstand. I reached out with a shaking hand and picked it up. I traced the contours of his face and felt the tears start again. "How am I supposed to live without you? What's going to happen to me now? I miss you so much."

"Bella," Mom called from down the stairs.

"Coming..." I wiped my eyes and stood up, straightening my black dress and running my fingers through my hair. I slowly made my way down the stairs and found my parents waiting for me with solemn looks on their faces. "I'll be okay."

I followed them out to the car and looked out the window as we drove to the funeral home. I barely knew that the car had stopped; until my dad told me to that we were there. I opened the door and stepped out, not caring that the rain was falling on my head. I followed my parents inside and found myself face to face with Riley's mother.

"Oh, Bella, I'm glad you're here." Victoria hugged me.

"Sorry I'm late Vikki." I apologized.

"Oh sweetie no, I know how hard this is for you." She sniffled. "There are some things that we need to take care of, you know since...since the wedding won't be happening."

I just nodded and excused myself. I walked into the room and found Alice and her brother.

"Hey Bells, how you holding up sweetie?" Alice asked, rubbing my back.

"I'm taking it one hour at a time right now Ali. Right now I... don't know." I slumped against her.

"Is there anything I can do?"

I looked up at him and tried to smile, it came out more of a grimace. "Thanks Emmett, but there really isn't anything anyone can do."

Before anyone else could say anything the funeral director came in, "Folks we're ready to begin."

I watched as the mourners shuffled their way inside and sat down. "Alice I don't think I can do this." I whispered.

"Yes you can. Riley would want you to be strong. Come one, I'm right here, so is Emmett."

I walked to the entry and saw Vikki draped over his casket, begging to join him. She had lost her husband years ago. Riley was all that she had left and now he was gone. I watched as my dad walked to her and pulled her away and to a seat.

I slowly made my way forward, flanked by Alice and Emmett. I looked toward his casket and was secretly happy that it was closed. Even if he hadn't been hit with a bomb of any sort, I don't think I could have looked at his face. I slowly made my

way to my seat and immediately broke down, leaning in Alice for support. I wondered if I would ever survive this pain and if I could ever put my heart on the line again.

OTL

"Mom, I have to get out of here. I can't breathe. Everywhere I turn is another memory, another place that I can't go to because I went there with Riley."

"Okay, baby, I get that. But Bella it's only been six months. You have to give it time. I mean sweetie, you haven't taken his ring off yet."

I have taken it off of my finger, I now wear it around my neck on a chain. "Mom, I wear it as a reminder of what I've lost. I don't need a million more." I sighed and grabbed her hands, "I'm not asking for your permission mom. I'm telling you, I have to leave."

"Where are you gonna go?"

"Alice has opened a boutique and has a job for me."

"Bella...Alice lives in Oklahoma." Renee stuttered.

"I know that Mom. Jasper is at Fort Sill, so that's where she is. Mom I am nineteen and I have lost my fiancé, I need a change of scenery. Alice has found me a furnished apartment, off post. Please mom, I need you to understand."

I watched as her eyes filled with tears, "I do understand. I just

don't want my baby so far away."

I got up from the table and crossed to her, giving her a hug. "I need to heal mom. I can't do it here. I love you and dad, but I think it's time."

Renee patted my hand, "Okay. I guess we better start packing your stuff then. When are you planning on leaving?"

"My flight is Friday at noon." I had already made the arrangements. I was just afraid to tell my parents.

"Okay, well I'll get you started. You have to go tell Vikki."

"Mom, Vikki's gone. She left last night to go stay with her sister in Virginia." She had told me it was just too much for her here. "Besides, she paid for my ticket."

Renee just nodded and began helping me pack up my life so that I could start my new journey.

OTL

The flight was turbulent free and only lasted about three hours. When we finally set down, I breathed a sigh of relief. I waited for the smelly lady beside me to disembark and then took a breath of fresh air. I headed to the baggage claim area and waited for my three suitcases to come around the carousel. I had just grabbed my last bag when I heard my name.

"Bella!"

I turned and smiled my first genuine smile in months. "Ali!"

She wrapped her little arms around me and hugged me with all her might. "Welcome home."

"Thanks Alice."

"Well come on let's get going. How was the flight?"

"The one to Dallas-Fort Worth wasn't bad, the puddle jump to here..." I snickered.

"Sorry, I probably should have warned you. I hope you didn't get stuck with any terrible seat companions."

Bella smiled but didn't tell her about the smelly woman. "I missed you Ali. How's Emmett and Jasper and don't you have another brother?"

"Edward...he's, well he's Edward. I don't see him much. He is stationed at a different post. I actually think he was deployed a few weeks ago. I'll have to call my mom. Emmett was deployed a few months ago, so I haven't heard from him. I hope to soon though."

I nodded and trudged along beside her, dragging two of my bags behind me. We made it to her car and loaded up before making the fifteen minute drive to my new apartment. It was nicer than I had pictured. "Alice, I don't think I can afford this."

"That's why you have a roommate." Alice smiled innocently.

"Mary Alice Cullen, soon-to-be Whitlock, I am gonna kill you. I can't live with a complete stranger."

"I'm sorry, Bella. You'll like Rosalie I promise. She is Emmett's girlfriend and runs her own auto body shop. Her old roomie got married and moved out. I told her all about you and she can't wait to meet you. Give it a chance please."

I sighed and got out of the car, just in time to see a gorgeous blonde woman come out the door to the third apartment. She smiled and walked out to greet us.

"You must be Bella. The pixie here can't stop talking about you." She held her hand out to me.

I took it easily, already liking her. "You must be Rosalie. Thanks for letting me live here."

"It's no problem, really. And call me Rose." She smiled at me. "Come on let's get you settled."

I followed Alice and Rose into the apartment and immediately felt like I was home. The living room was spacious, even with a large sofa and love seat. There was also a rocking recliner off to the side. All of it faces a beautiful fireplace with a flat screen mounted above it.

The kitchen was a chef's dream. Stainless steel appliances, granite counter tops, I was in heaven.

"You'll be in here. I had it fumigated after Lauren moved out. I

would hate for you to sleep on that bed knowing what she had done in there. Anyway, this is it. You have your own bathroom. Let me know if you need anything else." Rose smiled.

"Thanks Rose. You have no idea...just thanks." I tried to smile through her tears.

"Oh, Bella." Alice said as she pulled me into her arms.

I cried into my friend's shirt and tried to remember why I had done this. When I finally had it under control I sat up.

"Sorry..."

"Bella do you know my story?" Rose asked.

"No, I didn't even know about you until we got here." I said wiping my eyes.

"Alice..." Rose groaned.

"Don't worry about it." I broke in.

"Alright, anyway. Bella I was engaged right out of high school just like you. Just like you my fiancé was killed, though not quite the way that yours was. Royce was killed in a bank hold-up. I was devastated. I thought that I would never fall in love again, but I have. It wasn't until I met Emmett that I realized that what I had with Royce wasn't the forever kind of love. I figured that mostly since I found out that Royce was unfaithful, but...I'm not saying that's how it is for you, I'm just

saying that you have to leave yourself open to a new love. You never know what could happen."

"Thanks Rose, but I think it's too soon to be thinking about that."

We talked for a while longer until Alice had to be back on post and left us. I turned in early, tired from my day of traveling. I decide that I would take the weekend to explore my new home before I started my job on Monday. I couldn't help but wonder what my future would hold in my new life.

AN: Okay, so I know that this first chapter was very angsty, but I promise they won't all be like this one. Keep in mind what you read in the summary. Bella isn't gonna get her happy ever after for a while. She hasn't met Edward yet. That will be explained later. We won't see Edward for a while...so please be patient. Leave me some love.

2. Chapter 2

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

I woke on Monday morning to the smell of coffee. I groaned and rolled over peaking at the clock, six-thirty. I pulled the pillow back over my head. No one gets up this early, unless they are in the army, which I am not.

"Bellaaa!" I heard Rose sing through the door.

"Ugg...go away."

I heard the door open and the bed sink. "Morning, you need to get up, if you want me to drop you off, before I go in. Here is some coffee. One cream, one sugar, right?"

I peeked out from under the pillow and looked at my new friend. "Yea, thanks. I'll hop in the shower and be done in a minute."

"Don't rush, we don't need to leave for about forty-five minutes." Rose said as she stood and left the room.

I finally rolled out of my bed and walked to the bathroom. As I started the shower I realized that today would be the day that my move really became permanent. As that thought took up

residence in my mind, I thought of Riley and the tears came again. I knew that I needed to do this, but somewhere in the deep recesses of my mind I couldn't help but think that I had moved to soon.

I washed away the tears and squared my shoulders. I stepped out of the shower and hurriedly dried off before dressing and doing my hair, wondering what the day could bring. I plugged in my iPod and cued up the music. When I heard the song that had come on my heart stuttered. I hadn't realized I had this on there. It was *Breathe Easy* by Blue. Great song, but it's about the loss of a lover. Too close to home right now, so I turned it off and continued to get ready.

A knock on my door reminded me that I have no car. "Bella, are you ready."

I took a deep breath and gave myself a pep talk. "Yea, coming."

OTL

We pulled up to Alice's shop and Rosalie stopped the car. I looked at the store front and was impressed; Ali had done a great job. I turned to Rose to thank her, but she stopped me before I said anything.

"Don't thank me. Just go in there and try to have a little fun. Call if you need anything." I nodded and got out of the car.

I stepped inside the store and looked around. There were

mannequins dressed in Alice's latest designs. Racks and racks of clothes as well as shelves, covered in any accessory that you might need. She even had hats.

"Well hello gorgeous."

I turned at the deep, yet feminine voice and saw the largest man I had ever seen behind me. He had long black hair and russet colored skin, his smile was bright white. I thought Emmett was big, but he had nothing in this guy.

"Um...hi."

"You must be Bella, I'm Jacob." He held out a large hand to me.

I took it in my own, surprised at how warm and soft it was. "How did you know?"

"Oh, well Ali-cat said you would be here today. I'm supposed to show you the ropes and get you acclimated." He led the way to the cash wrap and stopped, typing quickly into the computer that was there. "So tell me about Bells."

"Uh, well there's really nothing to tell. I was somewhere else and now I'm here." I wasn't ready to talk about my life before today with a complete stranger.

Jacob didn't get to respond since Alice came in at that moment. "Morning my peeps, what's happening?"

"Morning Ali, I was showing your new protégé the ropes and

trying to pry into her personal life, but she is very tight lipped." Jacob grinned.

"Oh Jakey how about you stop prying into hers and tell her all about yours? How is Embry or is it Sam this week?"

Jakey? I looked between the two of them and could see the glare coming from Jacob.

"I'll have you know that Embry and I are very committed to each other." Jacob grinned.

Alice giggled and looked at me. "Embry is his on again off again boyfriend. Sam is a one-night stand that he had a few months ago. So Bells how are you this morning? Did you get settled in? I'm sorry I couldn't hang, but Jazz surprised me with a trip to a bed and breakfast. We got back Sunday evening. Oh it was so romantic."

I had to swallow the lump from my throat when she mentioned a bed and breakfast. It didn't work. I found myself back in time to when Riley proposed.

The blindfold wouldn't allow me to see anything. "Riley, you know I hate surprises, where are you taking me?"

"Trust me baby, please. I wouldn't hurt you."

I could almost hear the smile in his voice and decided to sit back and just go with it. Before long I felt the car stop and heard a door open and close. Then he was at my door. I felt

his hand on my elbow, helping me out of the car.

"Okay, just a few steps and I'll remove the scarf okay?" Riley explained.

I walked forward a few paces and then was stopped. Stairs, is he nuts?

"I'm not nuts baby, come on I'll help you." He lifted me in his arms and carried me up the steps and I can only guess through a door, before he gently placed me back on my feet. "I'm gonna remove the scarf now."

I nodded and kept my eyes closed. I felt him sweep the blindfold away and slowly opened my eyes. I looked around as I got used to the light and found that we were in a cute little cottage. I turned and noticed a desk at the entrance.

"Welcome to the Volturi Bed and Breakfast. I am Aro Volturi, you must be Mr. Biers. I have your room all ready to your specifications. If you'll follow me we'll get you settled."

We followed the older gentleman up the stairs and down a hallway. He stopped in front of a door and opened it. Inside was a beautiful room awash in candle light. There was soft music playing and a small table set with dinner for two. I slowly walked into the room as Riley thanked the man and shut the door.

"Riley, what have you done?" I whispered.

"Do you like it?"

I turned and wrapped my arms around his neck, "I love it...I love you."

"I love you too. Come on let's eat." He pulled out my chair for me and then sat down across from me. He lifted the silver covers from our plates and then smiled at me. We feasted on filet mignon and new potatoes, before a knock sounded and a waiter brought in out dessert. It was a smooth chocolaty mousse that literally melted in my mouth. I had just scooped another bite when I felt something on my tongue.

I stuck my tongue out and plucked whatever it was off. I looked at my hand and froze. I was looking at a white gold princess cut, diamond solitaire. I looked at Riley and found him on one knee in front of me. The tears formed as he started to speak.

"Bella, I have loved you since I laid eyes on you. All I ever wanted to do is be with you and make you smile. Now I want to make you happy for the rest of my life. I love you so much. Will you do me the incredible honor of becoming my wife?"

The tears were rolling and all I could do was nod my head yes. That was also the first night we had made love.

"Bella, Bells!" Alice was calling my name and waving her hand in front of my face.

I blinked and came back to the present. "Sorry Alice, what did you say?" I wiped the tears from my face and looked at my friend.

"Where did you go sweetie?" Jacob asked.

I looked down at the floor, while my hand unconsciously went to the ring around my neck. I heard Alice gasp and looked up to meet her gaze.

"Oh, Bella, I am so sorry. I wasn't thinking."

"Alice stop, you can't worry about everything you say hurting my feelings. Everything is still raw and what you mentioned just brought that night up." I smiled gently, "Now, can you point me to the restroom? I would like to freshen up."

Alice showed me where to go and then went back out front. I heard her talking to Jake, I would not call him Jakey, I was sure she was telling him my story. I didn't mind, since that would be one less person I would have to tell. I fixed my face and then went back out to the shop. The rest of the day passed without incident and without any more tears. I even managed to laugh a little. All in all it was a good day.

OTL

The weeks passed and I settled into a routine. I worked with Alice and Jake. I met Embry and Rose's old roommate Lauren, boy is she an airhead. I loved working at Alice's, she had some really beautiful clothes and her designs kept getting

better and better.

I had been working there for about two months when the phone rang. Alice and Jake had gone to get lunch, leaving me there alone, so I picked it up.

"Ali's?"

"Hello? Is this Alice Cullen's boutique?" The smooth voice asked.

"Yes it is, how may I help you?" I didn't understand the sensations that were running down my spine when I heard that voice.

"Is my sister there?"

"No, I'm sorry. She stepped out for lunch. She should be back in about twenty minutes, can I take a message or have her call you?"

"No...uh, that's okay. Just tell her I called and that I will try her again when I can. Thanks." And he was gone.

"Huh, weird," I replaced the receiver in the cradle.

"What's weird?"

I looked up and smiled seeing Jasper. "Alice just got a call from someone claiming to be her brother, but he sounded nothing like Emmett."

"Might have been Edward."

"Oh, yeah. I keep forgetting she has another brother. So what brings you here?"

Jasper leaned against the counter, "I haven't seen my wife for a few days and thought I would stop in. Where is she?"

"She'll be back soon. Where have you been?" I wondered.

"I have been handling EIB testing for my division. So I have been wondering something for a while. How the hell is it that you have never met Edward before?"

I shrugged, "I don't know. He had graduated before we came to live in Forks and I was always visiting family on our breaks, then I met Riley and only hung out with Alice every once in a while. I guess our paths just never crossed. I mean he's what three, four years older than Ali and Em right?"

"Yeah, I guess, I just think it's weird."

I just shrugged again and turned to wait on a customer that had come in. After I was finished with her I turned back to Jasper. "I still can't believe that Ali agreed to go ahead with the wedding without her brothers."

"We didn't think that both of them were gonna get deployed. She talked to them and they understood. Otherwise we would have waited."

I smiled and nodded toward the door that Ali had just come

through, not seeing her husband.

"Hello Tinkerbell." Jasper grinned.

Alice squealed loud enough that she could have broken glass. I giggled as she ran and jumped at her husband, but then it hit me that I would never have that. I tried to stamp it down, but the pain in my chest was just too prevalent.

I looked away and decided to clean up the dressing rooms. I gathered all of the loose hangers and clothing and brought them back out front so that I could rehang them.

Half an hour later she had everything straight and back in its rightful place. She had just gotten back to the cash wrap, when the bell chimed above the door.

She looked up and met the clearest blue eyes she had ever seen. She was momentarily stunned but then blinked and found her voice. "Can I help you with anything?"

Blue eyes smiled, "Just looking at you is a help."

I rolled my eyes, "How long have you been holding on to that one?"

He put his hand over his heart, "You wound me. It's not very often that I walk in here and see a pretty woman. At least not one who isn't taken," He grinned.

I turned when I heard Alice giggle, "Wow, where did you come up with those lines?"

Alice walked forward and stood next to me at the counter. She winked at me and then hollered for her husband, "Jazz come and get the playboy." She then turned back to blue eyes. "Did you even introduce yourself, or did you just decide to try and pick up my best friend?"

Blue eyes stood up straight, "Best friend? This is Bella?" Alice nodded and he turned back to me. "I'm sorry if I made you uncomfortable Bella, my name is James, pleased to meet you."

I smiled, "You too." I turned to Alice, "I'm taking off."

"Where are you going?" She asked.

"Alice look at the date today. I'm gonna head up to Medicine Bluff. I'll call you later." I gave her a hug and then grabbed my things from under the counter. "It was nice to meet you James. Jazz I'll see you later."

I headed out the door and could have sworn I heard James tell Alice that I was hot. I shook my head to clear it. That was the last thing I needed. Especially today, on the day that I should have been getting married. My phone buzzed in my purse and I answered it quickly.

"Hi, mom."

"Hi sweetie, I was checking on you. How are you holding up?" Renee asked.

"I'm holding together. I'm heading to the bluff to do some thinking and reminiscing. I'll be home later. I love you mom."

"I love you too sweetie. Be careful."

I hung up and tossed the phone back on the seat. I sighed as I thought of the happiness I could have had. I knew I needed to let go, but I wasn't sure how or if I was even ready. Only time would tell.

AN: So now you know who man #2 is going to be. I couldn't decide between James and Mike, so I let my fingers decide and they typed James. So this will be the last update on this one until Sunday. I am going to start working on the new one, but my mini vacation is over and I go back to work tomorrow. I am glad that you all are enjoying this one. Till next time, leave me some love.

3. Chapter 3

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: I am amazed at the response to this story. I am also amazed that you aren't begging for Edward yet...thanks for that. I have to apologize. I didn't realize that in the middle of the last chapter I had accidentally written two paragraphs in third person. I just finished a story that was in third person, so I am having trouble getting back to first. Again, I'm sorry...

It had been two weeks since the day that would have been my wedding day. Two weeks of questions and no answers, of wondering what could have been not what was. It was at the end of those two weeks that I received something unexpected.

I was standing at the cash wrap when I heard the door chime indicating that someone had come through the door. I looked up and smiled at the large bouquet in front of me. "May I help you?"

"I have a delivery for Miss Bella Swan."

I couldn't imagine who would be sending me such an

extravagant display, but I wasn't going to refuse them. "That's me."

"Sign here, please." A clipboard slid across the counter to me. I signed my name and slid it back as the delivery person set the flowers down on the counter. "Have a nice day."

I smiled in thanks as I searched for the card. I finally found it and pulled it from the stem. I didn't recognize the hand writing so I pulled the note from the envelope.

Bella

I enjoyed meeting you. I would love to see you again sometime. Call me, 555-4102.

James

I was shocked. I had barely spoken to the man. Sure he was attractive, but I was still mourning the loss of Riley. Wasn't I? It's too soon for me to be thinking about another man. But the flowers were sure pretty. A mix of blues, pinks, yellows and white, the smell was heavenly. I felt my smile grow as I stared at them. I wasn't aware anyone had arrived until I heard a throat clear.

I blinked and met Alice's amused gaze. "Bella, who are these from?"

"James," I moved them to the back counter.

Alice squealed while clapping her hands and jumping up and down. "Bella this is so exciting."

"Take it down a notch Thumper. I'm not ready, it's too soon. Isn't it?"

Alice smiled gently and came over to me, "If you're asking me if it's too soon, then it's the right time." Alice sighed, "Honey, you don't have to jump into bed with him. Just go have fun, as friends. See what happens from there."

I nodded and turned to help the customer that was waiting. I would have to think it over.

~~OTL~~

"Bella come on, we're going out. You, me and Rose. I want to get my dance on and you need to let loose." Alice informed me as we closed up the shop on Friday evening.

It has been two days since I received the flowers from James and I still hadn't called him. I wasn't sure if I should or not. "Alice, I don't think so. Maybe some other time."

"Oh, hell no! You are gonna get your ass into that changing room and put on the clothes that I have in there and you are not gonna bitch. Now scoot!" Alice ordered.

I knew better than to argue when she starting acting like that. I reluctantly went into the dressing room and saw the blue silk wrap dress. I smiled knowing that this was one of her new

creations. I quickly got changed and then stepped out for inspection. I spun around so they could get the full effect. Alice was clapping when I finally faced front.

"Oh, Bella I knew that would look perfect on you. Now sit and I'll do your hair and makeup."

That's where I drew the line. "No Alice, I'll be doing my own makeup."

"But Bella..." Alice whined.

"But Alice..." I mocked.

Alice huffed and walked to the backroom. I had a feeling I knew what she was up to, I just hoped that I was wrong. I walked to the bathroom and touched up my hair and makeup before walking back out to the front to wait for Alice.

Alice walked back out, dressed to the nines and raring to go, "Bella, please let me just play up your eyes a bit." I shook my head. "Then will you please use this lipstick?" Alice held a bolder color than what I was wearing.

"No Alice. I am happy with the way I look and I am not trying to garner any more attention. So you can either be happy with the way I look and we can get this over with, or you can pout and I will go home, like I wanted to anyway. So what's it gonna be?"

I watched the decision play across her face, finally she

sighed, "Fine. Let's go."

~~OTL~~

We had been at the club for about an hour when Alice finally dragged me out on the dance floor. I must admit that the music had a very good beat and it felt good to let my body move freely. I was so lost in the sound that I didn't notice that I was no longer dancing alone.

There was a warm body behind me. I could feel the heat as he moved closer to me. I jumped when I felt his hands encircle my waist. I turned around and came face to face with James.

"Hey," he smiled.

"Hi." I removed his hands from my body and turned to confront Alice. "Did you do this? Did you know that he would be here?" I asked my voice laced with venom.

Alice looked at me in shock at the anger in my voice. "Bella, I..."

"Did you know Alice? Answer the damn question." She just nodded her head. "How could you? I told you I wasn't ready, but once again nosy Alice felt that she knew best. You are unbelievable!"

I turned on my heel and left the dance floor. I stormed to the table and grabbed my purse and then headed to the door. I was outside looking to hail a cab when I heard my name. I

turned and was once again looking at James.

"Bella, wait. I'm sorry. I thought you knew that I would be here. Alice told me that she was gonna tell you and I just assumed, you know."

"Look I get it. Alice thought it was okay to play match maker, but she knew how I felt about it. James I was gonna call you and tell you thanks for the flowers, but I got side tracked. I'm sorry it was rude."

James waved his hand at me, "Bella don't give it another thought. Look, can I take you home?"

I thought about it for a second, before nodding and following him to his car. We got to his car and I couldn't help giggle. It was a Ford Escape in metallic blue. Not a car I would have pictured him in. I smiled when he opened the door for me and then closed it once I was settled.

"Where to little lady?"

I looked over and caught the grin on his face. "Um, my car is at Alice's shop. So..."

"Alice's it is then." He put the car in drive and pulled out.

We talked about our interests on the way over. I was surprised at how much we had in common. He had me in stitches when he was telling me stories of some of the pranks that his unit had pulled. Granted they had gotten in trouble for

all of them, but he said they were fun nonetheless.

Fifteen minutes after we left, we pulled into the parking lot of Alice's and he shut off the engine. He turned to look at me, suddenly serious. "Bella, listen, I know that you have suffered a great loss and I am not trying to down play that, but would he want you to be alone?"

I looked at him stunned, "James, I..."

He held up his hand. "Hear me out please. Alice told me a little about your late fiancé. I know that I didn't know him, but I get the feeling from her, that he would want you to be happy."

"I am happy. At least as happy as I can be without the love of my life."

"Was he really the love of your life? I mean, your only nineteen, maybe he was meant to be your love for the moment. Maybe there is someone else out there for you."

I didn't know what to say. Was he right? Was Riley just a love that I thought as forever? Was I meant to be with someone else? "What do you want from me?"

"I want to be your friend. If, and this is a big if, it develops into something more, then I am not gonna fight it. I want to get to know you, if you'll let me." James looked down at his hands.

I looked at the man in front of me. While he was attractive, I wasn't physically attracted to him. Perhaps being friends with

him would be okay. I could always use more friends. Especially since my best friend had betrayed me the way she had.

"Okay. We can be friends, but James I don't want you to get your hopes up of anything happening between us, because I don't think, no I know I'm not ready yet."

"Okay." He got out and came around to my door, helping me out. He walked me over to my car and held open the door for me and again closed it as I settled behind the wheel. He made the universal sign for 'call me' to me and then turned to get back in his vehicle. I smiled and headed home, wondering how long it would be before I did call him.

~~OTL~~

"Bellllaaa!" Rose sang to me the next morning. I couldn't help but groan at what had become our morning ritual.

"Morning Rose," I mumbled from under my pillow.

"So a little birdie tells me that she pissed you of last night."

I sat up, "Wait, you mean she actually called you and told you what she did? Thanks for bailing on us by the way."

"Yes she called me. She was in tears and I had trouble understanding her, but I got the gist of it. Bells, you can't stay mad at her. You know how she can be when she gets an idea in her little head."

"I know Rose, but she deliberately went behind my back and tried to set me up. I told her I wasn't ready yet. But of course, Alice knows better."

Rose looked me in the eye, "Bells, don't get mad at me, but what are you waiting for? Riley isn't coming back. Don't you think he would want you to be happy?"

I looked down at my coffee and willed the tears away. "I know. And I know that he would hate that I am wallowing, but I still miss him so much. I don't know who I am without him."

"Well then maybe it's time to find out." Rose smiled gently. "Look, I'm off today and I know you are too. Let's you and me have a girls day. We can veg out in front of the TV. Watch movies and order in. What do you think?"

I nodded and that's exactly what we did. I turned off my cell phone and vegged out with Rose. We watched *The Notebook*, *Pretty in Pink*, *Pride and Prejudice* and *The Wedding Planner*. We had Chinese and pizza and gorged ourselves on ice cream and cookies. I felt like vomiting, but it was a fun time. I didn't think of Riley until we decided to turn in for the night. That alone concerned me.

Before I lay down to sleep that night, I pulled his picture up off the nightstand. I looked at it for a while and traced the familiar contours of his face. "I miss you. It's getting easier though. I will always love you Riley, but I know that it's time to let you go. You've been gone for nine months and I need to move on. Goodbye my sweet." I placed a kiss to my fingers and then

placed them on his lips. I opened the drawer and placed his picture inside. Finally I reached up and unclasped the necklace from around my neck. I watched it pool in the palm of my hand, the diamond shimmering in the light. I kissed the ring, the symbol of our commitment and then put it in the drawer as well. Finally letting him rest and my heart to heal.

AN: Okay, so I wanted to get this posted as soon as I could since I have been having so many problems with my internet services. I plan to have another chapter up on Sunday, providing that I can get online. We are getting closer to the appearance of Edward. I hope you all are still with me. Till next time, leave me some love.

4. Chapter 4

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: Thanks to all those who reviewed. I have to say I'm sorry to Ashley, keep in mind though that he won't be around long. Same goes to anyone else who doesn't like James. See you at the bottom, now on with the show...

"Hey girl, how was your weekend?"

I looked up and smiled at Jake as I walked into the store on Monday. I had called in on Sunday and told Jake I wouldn't be there. He didn't ask any questions, just said he would be fine.

"Um, it was okay. I had something I needed to take care of yesterday. Thanks again Jake for covering for me." I smiled as I reached up to kiss his cheek.

"Ah, no worries. Embry came and kept me company and it wasn't busy anyway." He grinned.

I nodded as I stashed my purse in the cubby beneath the counter and looked back at him. "Is she here?"

"She's in the back. Did you two have a fight?"

I thought for a minute and then decided to be honest. "Let's just say that she overstepped and didn't listen when I said no. I'm gonna go talk to her."

I walked silently toward the back of the store where Alice had her studio. I stood in the doorway and watched my friend as she pinned and placed fabric on a mannequin and began to form the design she had in mind. I cleared my throat and giggled a little as she jumped.

"Bella, sorry I didn't know you were here."

"I know. Alice we need to talk." I walked further into the room and sat on the loveseat she had in there.

Alice sighed and sat next to me. "I'm sorry Bella. I know that I shouldn't have tried to set you up. I just thought that maybe you needed a push. I mean James sent you those beautiful flowers and asked you to call him and you never did. I just thought I would help things along."

I let Alice ramble for a minute before I interrupted. "Alice exactly what made you think I was ready for that push? How many times did I tell you that I wasn't ready? You have to let me live my own life on my own terms. When I am ready to move on then I will know, not when you push me at someone." I shook my head. "Ali, you have to think. How would you feel if Jazz was gone and I pushed you at someone before you said you were ready?"

I watched the tears pool in her eyes as it finally sank in. "Bella

I am so sorry. It won't happen again."

I pulled her to me in a hug and smiled. Now I only needed to call James and see if he could meet for coffee later. I wanted to tell him about Riley. It was time. Even if I wasn't attracted to him physically I could at least get a new friend out of the deal.

The ringing phone interrupted my thoughts and I heard Jake yell for one of us to answer it. I was closer so picked the phone up off the cradle.

"Alice's, how can I help you?"

"Um hi, is my sister around?" The velvet voice greeted me and once again sent shivers down my spine.

I shivered involuntarily and looked at Alice, "It's your brother."

She giggled and took the phone. "Edward!" she squealed.

I grinned and left her alone to have her talk. I headed out front just as Jake finished with a customer. "Did you two make up?"

"Yes, we worked it out and then her brother called," I smiled. "Jake can I ask you something?"

"You just did."

"Ha ha, ass. Seriously, have you ever heard a voice that you were so drawn to that it sent shivers down your spine?"

Jake stopped folding the shorts and looked at me, "Like shivers, shivers? Like you wanted to be with, near, consumed by that voice?"

I nodded and laughed as I watched him hop and clap in glee. Whatever response he was going to make was interrupted by my cell phone ringing. I quickly grabbed it out of my purse, looking at the caller ID.

"Hi, mom."

"Bella, honey are you sitting down?"

That immediately put me on alert. "Mom, what's wrong? Is it daddy?"

"Bella honey calm down, your father is fine. At least I think he is. Bella, I've left your father."

"What do you mean you've left him? You love him. Don't you?"

"Bella, your father and I haven't been happy for a while. We were actually getting ready to split when Riley died. We stayed together to help you through all of that. I'm sorry honey, I hate that I have to tell you this, but it was time."

The tears were streaming silently down my cheeks. It wasn't every day that you heard your parents had split. I was under the illusion that they were happy together.

"Where are you mom?"

"I moved to Florida. It's sunny and warm and..."

She trailed off making me think that she was hiding something. "Mom, what aren't you telling me?"

I heard a sigh, "I meet someone else Bella. I am living here with him."

I was stunned, so stunned that my knees gave out and the only thing that kept me from falling to the floor was Jake, who caught me just in time. I barely heard my mom talking to me. I didn't hear Alice come in until she took the phone from my hand. I briefly heard her speak to my mom and then she dragged me to the back room.

"Bella, snap out of it. Tell me what happened."

I blinked rapidly a few times, before bringing her into focus. "My mom left my dad for another man."

Alice looked as shocked as I felt. We sat in silence for a while and then she spoke. "Well at least he found out now, while he's still young enough to move on."

"True, he is only forty-five. I just hope he's okay. You know that Charlie can't cook and I'm sure he's probably living on take out and the food at the diner."

Alice and I laughed and I was glad that she had been able to make me feel a little better. She told me to take the rest of the day off, so I left and went home, changed my clothes and

called James.

"Hello?"

"James? Hey, it's Bella."

"Hey, what're you up to?"

"Well I got some disturbing news today and I was gonna drive up to Lake Lawtonka. You feel like keeping me company?"

"Sure, you want me to pick you up?"

After we agreed that he would pick me up I packed us a picnic really quick. Half an hour later we were on our way.

~~OTL~~

James turned out to be a good listener, one whose ear I picked many nights after that first one. A month later we had been on several 'outings' as Jake called them. He and I refused to call them dates, although Alice disagreed. We had coffee, lunch, and dinner a few times. I played them off, but I was beginning to wonder if maybe he didn't think they were something else. My wondering was answered on a Saturday in August. There was something in the air that day, almost like a crackling.

I dressed for what I thought the weather called for. I had no idea what James had planned and since I wasn't thinking it was a date, I really didn't try very hard. I put on a blue

sundress with pink and yellow flowers on it. I slipped into a pair of low heeled sling backs and walked to the living room.

"Where are you going?" Rose asked.

I shrugged. "No clue. James said he wanted to talk to me, so..."

Rose looked at me over her magazine. "Bella, I need you to prepare yourself. I think that man is in love with you and is planning to tell you tonight."

"No way Rose. We're friends." I sank onto the couch looking at my friend. "Oh, no, do you really think that?"

"Bella you are so oblivious. I see the way he looks at you when you aren't looking. You may not see him that way, but he sees you."

"Rose! What am I gonna do? I don't want to hurt him but I don't want to lead him on either."

"I can't tell you that sweetie." Rose commented, just as a knock sounded on the door.

~~OTL~~

I realized that Rose was right when we got to the restaurant for dinner. It had a very romantic setting. I didn't know what I was going to do, but all I could keep repeating in my head was 'don't sleep with him', over and over. I am in big trouble.

James pulled out my chair and pushed me in, his hands lingering softly on my shoulders. When he took his seat across from me, I could see something new shining in his eyes. The candle light cast a beautiful glow, but it only served to make me more uncomfortable.

The waiter came and took our drink orders and then left us. James looked at me then and I knew. I knew it was coming and there was nothing I could do to stop it.

"Bella, I need to tell you something."

I took a drink of my water, "Okay."

I watched as he took a deep breath, "I don't know when or how or what, but Bella I...I have fallen in love with you. I am so in love with you." He held up his hand when I would have interrupted. "I'm not fool enough not to know that you don't feel the same. I can tell when you kiss me. I just needed you to know. Especially now."

"Why now? What's wrong?"

"I received my orders today. I ship out in two weeks."

My reply was put off by the waiter's return. We ordered our dinner and the conversation stilled. When our food arrived I was still unsure as to what to say and therefore conversation stopped. After he had paid the bill, we headed to his car.

"Bella, I know you don't love me, but I think you at least care

for me a little." he said as we drove to his place. We always went there and watched a movie. He parked the car and we got out and walked to his door.

I had been extremely silent during the evening and knew that I needed to tell him what I was thinking. When we were inside and he had closed the door I turned to him, "James I do care about you. You have been a very good friend to me when I needed one. I'm sorry that I don't return your feelings, but at least know that I do care about you."

He smiled and walked toward me, pulling me into a hug. I relaxed and hugged him back. I wasn't prepared when the tone of the embrace changed. I felt him pull back a little and then lean his head down and place his lips to mine.

There was no passion in the kiss, but I still felt myself being led to his bedroom. I felt almost powerless to stop what I knew was going to happen. Although I wasn't in love with him, I let him slowly undress me and lay me down on his bed. It was as though I wasn't in my body as I felt him cover me with his and then when I felt him moving in me. I learned that James is a very selfish lover. He was all about himself. So while I couldn't bring myself to regret letting him make love to me, I didn't get anything out of it.

As I lay in his arms afterwards, I prayed for the numbness to dissipate and for love to come into my heart. I knew James wasn't the one I was meant to be with. I knew now that Riley wasn't either, but I did wonder if there was someone out there for me. As I drifted to sleep, I heard a velvet voice echo in my

head.

~~OTL~~

The next two weeks passed in a blur until I found myself standing with Alice as we waited for Jasper and James to leave. Alice was crying as she clung to her husband. I knew how she felt. I had felt the same when Riley had left. This time it was different, I wasn't sending the man I love off, more like my best friend and sometime lover.

"I'll write to you every chance I get and I'll call you when I can."

"Okay. Don't worry about me James, just take care of yourself." I smiled.

We heard the order to board and it seemed as though everything started moving in fast forward. James picked up his duffel and then grabbed me in his arms. He hugged me tightly to his chest and whispered, "I love you, Bella."

I didn't say anything, but he had come to expect that. Instead I reached up and kissed him. I kissed him as if I was never going to see him again and then I let him go. He smiled at me and touched my cheek before he walked off and boarded the plane. He turned one last time and waved to me and then was gone.

I turned and left the airfield and walked to the car to wait for Alice. I knew that she was going to stand and watch the plane

take off, but I couldn't. After a while Alice joined me and we drove back to the store. I would have thought that she would go home, but she said that she needed a distraction that only the store could provide. When we arrived back Alice went to her studio and I joined Jake at the counter.

"Well, how did it go?" Jake asked with a grin.

I shrugged, "Alice is a mess ass you saw. Me, eh, I'm fine."

Jake nudged me in the side, "Did you tell him you love him?"

I looked at him shocked, "Was I supposed to lie?" Jake shrugged. "In any case no, I didn't tell him that I love him. I can't tell him what I don't feel."

Little did I know at the time that the man I was supposed to be with was heading my direction and the one I had just said goodbye to was never coming home.

AN: Okay here ya go. James is gone and Edward is coming. Leave me some love. I might have another one up tonight or tomorrow morning, if not then I will see you on Thursday!

5. Chapter 5

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: I am not one to beg and I appreciate all the alerts and favorites, but your words give me encouragement to keep writing. So read this and then hit that review button. Having said all that, here is some Edward POV. See you at the bottom...

I miss my family. My brother, my sister, and my parents. Well my parents were in Seattle with me, but I still missed my siblings. I had spoken to Alice on more than one occasion, but Emmett was overseas and unreachable. I had avoided being deployed again due to a knee injury I sustained in training. I was almost complete with my physical therapy and would have about four weeks of down time before I was shipped out. I've been thinking of heading to Oklahoma and visiting, especially since Jasper just deployed.

I told my immediate supervisor my plan and that I would be off post for the next four weeks unless otherwise needed. He signed off on the appropriate form and I went home and packed. I called my parents and told them of my plans to surprise Alice and they immediately decided to join me. My father made the flight arrangements and we agreed to meet

at the airport. I hung up and finished packing. I knew that I needed one person to know that we were coming, so I called Jacob.

"Hello?"

I still couldn't get over the fact that the big russet man was gay. "Hey Jacob how are you?"

"Ooh, Eddie is that you? What are you doing sweet thang?"

"Jacob I hate it when you call me that. Listen where are you?"

"I'm at the shop, why?"

"My parents and I are trying to surprise Ali and we are flying in today. Make sure that she doesn't leave and I will text you when we land."

"You got it. She'll be glad to see you. She's having it kind of rough since Jazzy deployed two weeks ago."

"Alright, talk to you later man." I disconnected before he could make any more comments and picked up my bags and headed out the door.

I made it to the airport in record time and found my parents easily. Carlisle and Esme Cullen were a striking pair. I could only hope to find a love that lasts like that when I am their age. At twenty-four, I had no prospects. Not that I haven't dated, I have, but I've just never found that someone who I

want to spend the rest of my life with.

I hadn't said anything to anyone, but I was being haunted by a voice. I had only heard it twice, but it was ingrained into my head. I knew she was working at Alice's shop, but that it. I couldn't stop thinking about that voice and wanting to know the woman behind it. This was my chance.

~~OTL~~

BPOV

I watched Jake checked his phone for the tenth time in an hour. I couldn't figure out what was going on. Finally I couldn't take it anymore. "Jake will you stop checking your damn phone all the time. Are you waiting on something, because you are annoying the hell out of me?"

Jake looked at me in shock, "Jeez, Bells what the hell crawled up your ass?"

"Sorry Jake, I'm just in a bad mood."

Jake just hm'd at me and turned back to his phone just as it chimed with a text. "Do me a favor Bells. Go in the back and keep Alice there until I holler for the two of you, please."

I looked at him curiously for a second then shrugged and walked to the backroom. When I turned the corner what I saw made me giggle. Alice looked up at me and smiled sheepishly.

"Too much?" She asked.

"Alice you are sewing black dresses and tops and..." I walked over and fingered a silk robe, "Robes? Alice he's coming home. Stop acting like you are in mourning."

Alice tried to smile, but it looked more like a grimace. "Bella, I hate to bring it up, but how did you get through it, you know?"

I sighed and sat down, "You just do Alice. It's hard and you worry, but then you get a letter or an email or he calls. You have to live for that and live for him so that he has something to come home to. It gets easier. It's only been two weeks, give it some time."

"Don't you miss James?"

I looked at her and smiled, "Not like that. I miss our conversations, but I'm not in love with him Alice."

"Do you want to be?"

I shrugged, "Sure, but I'm not gonna settle. I don't feel that spark with him Alice. Someday, maybe..."

"Someday...I know you are gonna be happy with the man of your dreams Bells. I have this feeling it may happen sooner than you think." Alice grinned.

I shook my head, Alice and her feelings. "We'll see."

Jake poked his head around the corner before Alice could comment. "Sorry to interrupt, but could you come out front

please."

Alice stood up, "Is anything wrong?"

Jake was quick to shake his head, so we followed him out to the shop. There were three people standing there and Alice's squeal told me that she knew them. I walked out from behind Jake and saw Carlisle and Esme, Alice's parents and a man with bronze hair, whom Alice was currently wrapped around.

"Bella," Esme broke through my stare.

I ran to her and she wrapped me up in her arms. I breathed in her familiar scent and felt like I was home. "I've missed you," I whispered.

We pulled back from our hug and she looked me deep in the eyes. "You look better, sweetheart. Happier I think."

I smiled, "I'm trying. Being with Alice has helped."

"We're glad to see you with some color in your cheeks. Come on, you've never met Alice's other brother. Let me introduce you."

Esme led me over to where Alice was standing with the bronze haired man. When I looked up, I had to suck in some air. His eyes were the most intense and beautiful green I had ever seen and I found myself getting lost in their depths.

Alice's voice broke me from my stare, "...this is my older brother Edward. Edward this is my best friend Bella."

Edward held his hand out to me. "It's nice to finally meet the girl who has more pictures in the house than me," he chuckled.

I place my hand in his and immediately felt a spark travel up my arm, "You too."

If Edward felt it too he gave no indication. I withdrew my hand reluctantly from his and turned to Carlisle. He smiled down at me and put his arm across my shoulders. "How is it again that the two of you have never met?"

I shrugged. "He was in college I guess or whatever when we moved to Forks. I guess we just weren't around you all at the same time." I turned to look at Edward. "I have heard a lot about you though; Ali talks about you all the time."

He nodded and grinned, "Yeah, I feel like I've known you forever with how much Alice talks about you."

Before we could say much else the shops phone rang. I heard Jake answer it and then call for me. "Bells, it's for you."

I walked up to the counter, "Hello?" I heard crackling over the line and then James' voice broke through.

"Hey Bella, how are you?"

"I'm fine. Busy, but good."

"I miss you. Do you miss me even a little?"

"James we've been over this. You cannot concentrate on me while you are over there. You have a job to do. I miss my friend, but you know that is all."

"I know. I was just hoping that the old saying was true. You know, absence makes the heart grow fonder. I'll try to call again soon, I love you Bella!"

And then he was gone. I placed the phone back in the cradle and turned to look at Alice. "Oh, Bella."

"What Alice? I'm not going to lie to him and tell him something that I don't feel. James is a nice guy and a good friend, but that is all. He is my friend. He needs to concentrate over there." I was getting tired of explaining to Alice that I wasn't in love with James.

Esme spoke before Alice could, "Bella, we know that Riley's death hurt you, but sweetie have you tried to move on?"

I looked at the woman who was like a mother to me and couldn't stop the anger from spewing in her direction. "Yes Esme, I have tried to move on. I went out with James, but never felt anything. I even had sex with him, trying to feel anything at all. I felt disgust for myself. Riley's death didn't just hurt me, it broke me and I am still not fixed. All I ever hear is move on, time to get over it. How the fuck would you feel if it was Carlisle, Esme or if it was Jasper, Alice? Don't stand there and tell me to move on, I've tried dammit!"

I shoved past all of them and out the front door. I was almost

to my car when I heard someone call my name. I swung around ready for another confrontation, when I saw it was Edward.

"Bella, wait a second." I watched him half jog, half limp over to me. When he stopped I looked at him and waited. "Listen, I know that we just met, but I feel like I have known you for years, from my parents and siblings, so stop me if I overstep." I nodded and waited. "I am not going to presume to tell you to get over the loss of the man you love, but I want you to remember something."

"Okay..."

"Now I know this might sound hokey but...before you can let yourself love someone else, you have to love yourself first. Someone once told me that. I know what you're thinking. If you let yourself love someone that you are betraying Riley, trust me, you're not. Bella I knew Riley. He was only a class behind me, so we were friends. I *know* that he wouldn't want to see you like this."

I couldn't stop the tears from falling. How could this man, who I had just met, have nailed everything I was feeling right on the head? "I'm scared." I whispered.

"Scared of what? Falling in love again?"

I nodded, "What if it happens again? Edward I would never survive it if I put myself out there and then something happened to him."

Edward reached out and brushed my hair behind my ear, "You can't think like that. Bella you are barely twenty, you have your whole life ahead of you. Don't close yourself off from something or someone who could be part of it."

I nodded and wiped the tears from my cheeks. "Thanks. I'll try, I just don't want to get so wrapped in someone that I forget me, or I become a distraction."

Edward chuckled and then looked serious again. "Well I can understand the losing yourself part, but the distraction thing you can't help. I know that for a fact, because you have been distracting me since I first heard your voice."

~~OTL~~

Alice's family had been in town for the last week. I had avoided them since that first day. I knew that I needed to apologize to Esme for shouting at her, but instead I stayed away. Until I couldn't anymore.

I put my key in the lock of the boutique door and walked in. I went to the backroom and flipped the breaker to turn the lights on. When I turned back around I screamed. Sitting in the dark in a chair was Esme.

"Isabella Marie, you have a lot of explaining to do young lady. Why have you been avoiding me all week?"

I sighed and sank into a chair. "I'm sorry, Esme. For yelling at you, for avoiding you, for everything. I just couldn't face you

after the way I behaved."

"Bella, honey, I love you. No amount of shouting or avoidance can change that. You are like a daughter to me and I just want to see you happy. I'm sorry that I pushed." Esme said as she grasped my hand in hers.

I smiled softly, "I understand where you're coming from Esme. Edward talked to me and helped me a little."

Esme smiled, "Ah, yes Edward. That boy has been full of questions all week, wanting to know everything he can about you. I escaped this morning so I could find out what has my son so twitter pated."

I blushed, "I don't know Es. I mean he called here a couple of times and I answered every time. There was something about his voice that just stuck with me. Even when I tried to date James. He told me the other night that my voice has been a distraction for him, because he keeps thinking of me too. What do you think it all means Esme?"

"I can't tell you that Bella. You're gonna have to figure that out for yourself."

Esme left after that and I opened the store. I wasn't sure what to think. Edward was asking about me, trying to learn more. I couldn't stop thinking about him and that scared me. He was in the army. Could I really take the risk and be with another man who could potentially leave me forever? Was I even ready? These thoughts would plague me for the next few

days, until Edward showed up on my doorstep.

AN: Sorry about the little cliffie. I am beginning chapter six today, I might just have it up this evening, but first cleaning and laundry are calling my name. Enjoy and leave me some love!

6. Chapter 6

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

I held the door open and looked at the man in front of me. "What are you doing here?"

He held up a helmet, "It's a nice day, come take a ride with me."

"Edward, I..."

He interrupted, "Come on Bella. It's not a date, just two people getting to know one another."

I giggled, "Isn't that usually what happens on a date?"

Edward chuckled, "I suppose, but I promise this is not a date. Now go put on some jeans and grab a jacket."

"Alright, come on in. I'll be right back." I turned and heard the door shut and Edward walk in. I made my way back to my room and pulled on my favorite worn jeans and a blue V-neck shirt. I pulled on my hiking boots and ran a brush through my hair. I reached into the back of my closet and grabbed my well-worn bomber jacket. I grabbed my shades and walked out to find Edward looking at a picture of me and Riley outside

my parents' house.

"That was taken the day he deployed. He wouldn't let me go with him to see him off."

"That doesn't surprise me. He never did like to see a girl cry." Edward turned and looked at me. "You ready?" I nodded and followed him out the door.

I felt my jaw drop when I saw the bike sitting at the end of my drive. It was a candy apple red Ducati Multistrada 1200. It was a beautiful piece of machinery.

"Where did you get this?" I asked as I walked forward to admire her sleek lines.

"I rented it for the weekend. Do you like it?"

"Like it? Edward it's beautiful. Why are we still standing here? Let's go." I was excited and ready to feel the wind in my hair.

Edward laughed and pulled a helmet out for me. "Here..." he placed it on my head and grinned, a crooked little grin that made my knees weak. "Safety first and all that. How long has it been since you've been on one?"

I thought back to the summer after my graduation when Riley and I had taken a road trip on his bike. "Almost three years. I haven't been on one since the summer Riley took us out." I watched as Edward swung a leg over the bike and the cradled it between his thighs, I felt the wetness pool in my

undies at the sight.

"Okay, well hop on and hold on tight. Remember to lean with me on the curves okay?" He held out his hand to help me get on.

"Okay." He strapped on his helmet and started the bike. I wrapped my arms around his waist and we were off. When he first hit the gas I slid forward on the gas so my thighs were hugging his legs. It felt fantastic, all heat and man. He patted my hand, checking that I was okay. I gave him a thumb up and he gunned it, I felt like I was flying.

I watched the scenery fly by as we drove. It wasn't until the bike started to slow that I realized Edward had turned off the highway. I was so lost in my thoughts that I didn't realize tears were streaming down my face. As soon as he stopped and turned off the bike, I whipped off my helmet, jumped off the bike and ran for the nearby trees.

"Bella!"

I heard Edward running behind me, but I didn't stop. When I reached the cover of the trees I sank to my knees and leaned back against one. I didn't care about the dirt getting on my knees or the bark digging into my back.

"Bella? Are you okay? What is it?" Edward reached me and sat on the ground beside me.

I wiped the tears from my cheeks and looked up at him, "I'm

sorry."

Edward reached up and caught a tear, "Talk to me. What happened?"

I sniffed, "You know that Riley had a bike, right?" He nodded so I continued. "We took a bike trip after I graduated. It was great, he took me to a bed and breakfast and..." I broke off as tears started again.

Edward pulled me to his chest, "Is that when he proposed?" I nodded. "I'm sorry Bella, I had no idea. If I had known..."

I sat up, "No Edward. You couldn't have known. It's okay, I just didn't think it would still get to me like this. I mean it's almost been a year. Will I get over this?"

"I can't answer that for you Bella. Only you can answer that. Think about it though, you got the awkward rebound out of the way."

I couldn't help but laugh. "I guess you're right." I watched as the expression on his face changed from playful to serious. He looked down and played with a blade of grass, "What? So serious all of a sudden."

He looked up, but didn't meet my eyes. "Bella, when you are ready, I'd like to be the one you choose."

I looked at him in shock, "Edward, I..."

"You don't have to say anything now, just know that when you

are ready, I'm here." He met my eyes and leaned toward me slowly, almost asking permission. When I didn't move or look away he softly pressed his lips to mine.

My eyes fluttered closed and I felt that spark travel all the way down my spine. I whimpered at the loss when his lips left mine and opened my eyes when I heard him chuckle. I grinned back at him. He wrapped his arm around me and pulled me to his side. We sat like that and watched the sunset. It was the most relaxed I had felt since Riley had died.

~~OTL~~

He had gotten the call a week and a half before he was originally supposed to go home. When he told me he was leaving, I felt reality crash down around me and I felt like I couldn't breathe. After he called me I had dropped the phone and looked at Rose, before locking myself in my room and staying there. For two days I sat on my bed and stared at the wall trying to make heads or tails of why I was feeling this way. I came to only one conclusion; I was in love with him.

It had taken me a year to fall in love with Riley and after only two weeks I loved Edward. I couldn't move. I refused to come out of my room. Rose had threatened to call Alice, I didn't care. Alice had shown up and banged in the door, I didn't answer. I didn't want to see anyone. Not even Edward. Until I heard his voice.

Day three found me still on my bed, still staring at the same place on the wall. A knock sounded on my door and I ignored

it, just like all the rest. "Bella open the door, please."

I felt my eyes well when I heard his voice on the other side. He knocked again. I got up and leaned against the door. "Bella, please, I can't leave without seeing you."

I unlocked the door, but didn't open it and shuffled back to my bed. He opened it softly and came in, shutting it quietly. He walked over to where I was laying and sat beside me. He reached his hand out and stroked my hair.

"Talk to me."

"I can't." I whispered.

"Bella, nothing is going to happen to me."

I sat up quickly, "Don't say that. Riley said that to me and then he died. Don't fucking say that to me Edward." I got up off the bed and walked to the adjoining bathroom.

"Well what the fuck do you want me to say Bella? I didn't plan to come down here and meet you. I wasn't looking for any attachments. But I did meet you and even though I tried to fight it I couldn't." I watched as he ran his hand through his hair in what I have come to know as a nervous gesture.

"What Edward? Just tell me." I said as I walked to him. I couldn't take my eyes off of him. I watched every move he made as he brought his hands up to my cheeks.

His gaze held mine, "I am in love with you Bella. I don't know

how or when it happened, but I am completely and totally lost in you."

I couldn't stop the tears as they fell down my cheeks. I brought my hands up to his still on my cheeks. "Edward, I can't..."

He interrupted me by placing his lips to mine. He applied light pressure, but when I didn't pull away he increased it slightly. He nipped at my lower lip, before sucking it into his mouth. He released it only to trace it with his tongue, begging for entrance. With a sigh I opened up to him and felt his tongue caress my own. I tentatively slipped my tongue into his mouth and we began a sensual dance.

He finally pulled away panting, "I love you Bella. I don't care how long it takes or what I have to do, I am going to make you see it."

"Edward, please, don't promise me anything. If anything..." he cut me off by putting his finger to my lips.

"I will write to you, email and call when I can. I know you feel something for me Bella. I could feel it in your kiss. You may not be able to tell me now and you may even be looking for a way out, but soon you'll tell me." He kissed me again and then turned to leave. "Walk me out?"

I took his outstretched hand and followed him to the door, just as a knock sounded. Edward pulled it open and then stood aside as two uniformed men walked in. I heard Rose gasp,

but I knew they weren't there for her.

"Miss Isabella Swan?" I nodded and gripped Edward's hand tighter in my own. "I'm sorry to inform you ma'am that Private James T. Hunter was killed in action. Here are his personal effects..."

I didn't hear what else they said. I vaguely was aware of Edward thanking them and telling them goodbye. He led me to the couch and sat down, pulling me onto his lap.

"Bella, baby, are you alright?" He asked rubbing my back.

I nodded and I looked at him. Looking in his eyes I realized two things. I loved him with all my heart and soul, but I couldn't do this. I wouldn't survive if anything ever happened to him. If I lost Edward, it would kill me.

I got up from his lap and put the box down that the army had given me. I walked to the window and looked out. "Edward, I love you, I do. But I can't do this. I can't sit at home and wait for another visit like this one. I can't do it again."

I heard him get up. "Bella..."

I turned to him, stopping what he was going to say. "I love you, but I would never survive if anything happened to you. You helped me heal and see that I can love again, but I can't be with you. I can't wait for you. The thought of it hurts too much." I walked to him placed my hands on his cheeks and ignoring the tears pouring down my face, pulled him to me and

kissed him with all of the love that I felt flowing into the kiss. Then I let him go and I walked away, closing the door to my heart.

~~OTL~~

EPOV

If my parents had anything to say about my red rimmed eyes, they kept it to themselves. She loved me; I had to keep that with me. She may have said she wouldn't wait, but I wasn't going to let her forget. I was still going to email and write. I would wait awhile to call, but I was going to be as in her face as I could be. Starting now.

I pulled out my laptop and booted it up. I sent Alice a quick text to get Bella's email address, while I waited for my email to pop up. Alice responded quickly and wished me luck. I smiled and sat back as I started to type.

To: bswan(at)gmail(dot)com

From: sgt(dot)ecullen(at)gmail(dot)com

Subject: Can't get rid of me

Bella,

I am sitting here on the plane that is taking me away from you and I am wondering how things got so out of control. I know you're scared baby, I am too. But I refuse to let that

fear keep me from the one thing I love the most in the world and that is you. You won't be able to avoid me forever. I am still alive. I am still going to be alive when I come back stateside in eight months. Please don't give up on me. On us.

We have a beautiful future ahead of us, sweetheart. I can see it. I can see you in white walking toward me. I see us making love on the beach on our honeymoon. I see our children playing in our backyard. I promise it is all going to happen. Believe it Bella. I will be coming home to you.

I leave in another week. I hope that you will at least call me before I go. I am thinking of you always, my love.

Yours Forever,

Edward

I reread what I wrote and then pressed send. I closed my computer and leaned back, falling asleep to visions of my future with Bella by my side.

AN: Do you think that she was overreacting? Let me know what you think. Next update will be on Sunday. Till then happy reading.

7. Chapter 7

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: I've had some questions as to why Bella received James' stuff. James had Bella made his next of kin, so therefore when he died she would receive his things. She is actually gonna get a shock in this chapter, but it will also help her come to a decision. Thanks for reading and reviewing. I appreciate it...

I read that email over and over again for two days. I cried to the point that I had to wear my glasses, because my eyes were so dry and raw that my contacts hurt. Alice was starting to give me shit because I refused to respond to him. She was actually starting to piss me off and I was about to my breaking point. Jake had backed off after I growled at him once.

Today started out like any other, I read the email, cried and then went to work. Today though, Edward was shipping out. I knew that I needed to call him, but would that be giving him hope or me. I got to the shop and stashed my stuff, keeping my phone on me. I looked up as Jake came in and told him I would be in the back for a little bit. He just nodded in understanding.

I went to the backroom and sat down on the loveseat. I pulled my phone from my pocket and dialed the familiar number. He answered after the second ring.

"Hello?"

"Hi." I said quietly.

"Bella?"

"Yeah, you wanted me to call and I uh...well I needed to hear your voice."

"Baby, you never have to explain why you are calling. I miss you. Are you okay?"

"Honestly, no. I miss you Edward. I don't know how to do this. I just..."

"You just what? Talk to me Bella, please. Babe, I'm leaving in a few hours and I need you."

I couldn't stop the tears that were falling. "I need you too, Edward. This is just hard. When Riley left it hurt sure, but this...I feel like I'm being swallowed. This is what I meant when I said I couldn't wait for you, but that feels like what I am doing. I need you to help me."

"Bella, I love you. I need you to hear that and remember it. I'm not going to die over there. I am careful and well trained. Bella please believe me baby, Riley was a rookie, he was

still green when he went over there. I have been twice already and I have come home safe every time. I promise you, I will come home to you and we are going to have a wonderful and happy life."

I sniffed, "You sound so sure. I want to trust that, I do, but I am so scared. I love you so much. Please be careful over there and come home to me. I mean it Edward; I won't survive if I lose you too."

"I promise baby. I love you. God, Bella, I love you so much. Who would have thought it would happen so fast. I think we were meant to find each other now. I have to go, sweetheart. Watch for my letters and emails and I will call when I can. I love you, Bella."

"I love you, too. Be safe." And he was gone.

~~OTL~~

I sent my first email to Edward two days after we had talked on the phone. It was getting so hard to tell myself that I wasn't going to wait for him, that I was going to try and date, especially when I refused to date. I refused to do anything except go to work, go home, and hang out with Rosalie.

I was avoiding Alice except when I couldn't. I was still so mad at her for pushing and not listening when I told her that I couldn't be with her brother. But, still I found my thoughts drifting to him daily. I would remember his eyes and his smile, the way his arms felt around me. I missed him holding me. I

missed his lips, the way they pressed to mine. I just missed him. So I knew I needed to email him. He needed to know that I was working toward a decision. One that would change both of our lives.

To: sgt(dot)ecullen(at)gmail(dot)com

From: bswan(at)gmail(dot)com

Subject: Thinking

Edward,

I have been sitting here thinking of you for days. I replay our conversation over and over again in my head. It's like I am analyzing every word. Did I give you hope that I would be here waiting for your return? I know in my heart that that is what I am doing; I just refuse to admit it in my head.

I miss you. I miss your voice, your smile, and the way you kiss me. Mostly I miss your warmth. I feel so cold since you left. I haven't been sleeping well. I am plagued by nightmares of what could happen to you. Since I can't sleep, I have been listening to music a lot. I even found a song that perfectly tells you what I am thinking and feeling. I am going to give you a link to it. It's by an Irish boy band called Westlife. I had never heard of them but the song is perfect.

I think I have been melancholy enough, so I am going to sign off. I love you and I miss you please be safe.

Yours,

Bella

P.S. Here is the link...

[http://www\(dot\)youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=Rv_qQ-J2RD0](http://www(dot)youtube(dot)com/watch?v=Rv_qQ-J2RD0)

I hit send before I could change my mind and then decided to call it a night. I lay on my pillow and wondered what Edward was doing and if he was thinking of me. I hoped that he was doing his job and not worrying about how I was. With those thoughts I immediately regretted sending that email. He was gonna be more worried now.

I threw off my covers and went back to the computer worried that perhaps I already had a response. I noticed I didn't so I pulled up YouTube and found the link to the song I had sent Edward. I turned it on and closed my eyes.

Day after day

Time pass away

And I just can't get you off my mind

Nobody knows

I hide it inside

I keep on searching

But I can't find

The courage to show

To letting you know

I never felt so much love before

And once again

***I'm thinking about
Taking the easy way out***

[Chorus]

***But if I let you go
I will never know
What's my life would be
Holding you close to me
Will I ever see
You smiling back at me
How will I know
If I let you go***

***Night after night
I hear myself say
What can't this feeling just fade away
There's no one like you
Can speak to my heart
It's just a shame we worlds apart
I'm too shy to ask
I'm too proud to lose
But sooner or later
I've got to choose
And once again
I'm thinking about
taking the easy way out***

I finally drifted off to sleep, the song playing a constant loop in my head and heart.

~~OTL~~

It had been a week since I sent the email and I still haven't heard back from Edward. I kept telling myself that he's just busy or on a mission or something of equal importance. Anything to keep from thinking the worst. It was on the Monday after that I had a visit while I was at work.

I was in the back when I heard the bell ring above the door. I knew that Jake was out front so I didn't go out; instead I stayed back and helped Alice fold pants and shirts. I was surprised when Jake came in to get me.

"Hey Bells, there is a guy in uniform out here to see you."

I looked at Alice and started to shake. "Alice call your parents, now! Jake please tell him I'll be out in a moment."

Jake nodded and went back to the front, while Alice quickly dialed her parents to get an update on her brother.

"Mom, have you heard from Edward lately?...So you've had no visits?...Okay...No everything is fine. Love you too." Alice hung up and turned to me. "He's fine Bella. Let's go see what this is about."

We walked out to the front and I looked at the man waiting for me at the counter. He was holding a large manila envelope and leaning against the counter.

"I'm Bella, can I help you?"

He cleared his throat, "Yes ma'am, I am here to deliver this to you. It's from the estate of Private James T. Hunter." He held out the envelope to me.

I took it with shaking hands, "Why am I receiving anything from James' estate?"

"Ma'am, Private Hunter's will had you listed as the sole beneficiary. If you have any questions you can contact the number provided on the documents. Have a good day ma'am."

I nodded and looked over at Alice and Jake who were staring at me expectantly.

"Well, don't leave us hanging, what's in it?" Jake asked.

I looked down at the envelope in my hands and slowly opened it. I pulled out the enclosed documents and gasped loudly. "Holy shit!" I stared at the check in my hand.

"Bella, what is it?" Alice asked, her voice raising an octave in concern.

"It's a check...um, Alice I need to go home," I hadn't taken my eyes off the paper in my hand.

"Okay, are you okay?"

I nodded and walked over to retrieve my belongings and then walked out of the store like a zombie. I don't remember driving home. I don't remember getting into the house. I have no recollection of anything since I was given James' estate

papers. I barely heard my phone ringing. Something however made me answer it.

"Hello?" I asked distractedly.

"Bella, are you okay?"

"Edward?"

"Yeah, baby. It's so good to hear your voice."

I couldn't help the tears that started coming through. "Oh, Edward I have been so worried. I haven't heard from you."

"Don't cry sweetheart. I'm fine. You sound off, are you alright?"

I swallowed, "You have no idea how not alright I am. Edward, I got a visit today from a military person. I don't even know who he was, but he gave me an envelope and told me that I was the sole beneficiary of James' estate."

"What? Really? Wow, baby. What was in it?" Edward was full of questions.

"Um, well...it had a check and some other documents."

"Bella you're not telling me everything."

"Edward the check was for two-hundred and fifty thousand dollars."

"What!"

"Where would he get that kind of money? Surely a private doesn't make that much, right? Edward what am I gonna do with this?"

"He must have had investments or something; I know I never made that as a private. As to what you should do with it, I can't answer that. I know what I would love for you to do, but that's a decision for you."

I smiled wondering what he wanted me to do, "What do you want me to do?"

I heard him laugh at something in the background, *"I want you to go to college Bella. I want you to go to Seattle, stay with my parents if necessary, but go home and go to school. I would love for you to be there when I get home."*

Not 'if', but 'when'. "I'll have to think about it. I miss you."

"I miss you too, baby. I have to go now though, love. I love you and I loved the song you sent me. I'll talk to you soon."

"I love you too, be safe." And he was gone.

I thought about what he said and wondered if I was ready to go home. Back where the memories of Riley were the strongest. Tomorrow it would be a year. One year since I had gotten the visit from the death brigade, as I had come to know them. I had some serious thinking to do.

~~OTL~~

I took the weekend to think. I drove back up to Medicine bluff and just sat and thought. I talked to Riley, I talked to James, and I tried to figure out what to do. Finally I called Esme.

"Hi Bella, how are you dear?"

"Hi Esme, I'm okay I guess. Do you have a minute? I need to talk to you about something."

"Of course, what's going on?"

And I told her. I spoke about the money, about Edward's idea, everything. She was very receptive to the idea of me staying with her and Carlisle and going to school. She agreed when I told her that I was going to call the number I had been left to find out more about the money. She listened as I bounced ideas off of her and while I expressed my concerns about moving in from Riley with Edward. Esme assured me that she would support whatever I decided to do. I hung up after an hour and I felt a little better. I resigned to call that office on Monday and make my decision from there.

~~OTL~~

I dialed the number and listened to the phone ring before it was finally picked up. I told the person who answered the reason for my call and waited to be connected to the appropriate person.

"Miss Swan, thanks for holding. My name is Marcus Volturi, how may I help you?"

"Well, I received a package from your office regarding the estate of Private James T. Hunter and I was actually trying to get some information."

"Okay, well, I handled that case personally..."

I listened as he explained that James had no surviving family and had received an inheritance when he was eighteen. James had made changes to his will shortly before his deployment. He had told Marcus that he wanted me to be well taken care of. I thanked him and hung up, sitting back on the couch in shock.

Rosalie walked in and smiled, "What did you find out?" She grinned when I told her. "Wow Bella, you know how to find all the good ones?"

I shrugged and grinned, "Just lucky I guess. So, um, Rose... I,"

She held up her hand, "I'll bring home some boxes and we'll start packing tonight okay?"

I nodded, "Thanks Rosie. I'm really gonna miss you."

"Oh we'll see each other again. I'm checking into moving the shop, so is Alice. Emmett and Jasper got their transfers, we spoke to them yesterday. We'll all be in Seattle with you."

I smiled, happy for the first time in a few months. I was ready to start living again. I was ready to start living for Edward and our future.

AN: HAPPY MOTHER'S DAY to all you mothers out there. So Bella is moving and getting ready to start a new life, again. James really gave her a gift, huh? Leave me some love, I should have another chapter up today after I visit with my mother. Later!

8. Chapter 8

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

Edward,

My laptop has shit itself and I don't want to impose on your parents to use the house computer so I am actually sitting here and writing a letter. I have been back in Seattle for about a month and I am preparing myself to start classes. I think I have everything I need minus a working computer, so I am glad of that.

Your parents have been very generous and are letting me borrow a car until mine gets here. I don't know what the delay is, but I have been assured that it should be here soon. Tomorrow is Saturday so I am going to make a drive that I have been putting off since I came back here. I am going to go see Riley.

I have to tell him goodbye if I am ever going to be able to completely be with you. I know that putting away his pictures and removing his ring was a start, but I hadn't met you yet. Now I have and now that I know how much I can't live without you, I have to let him go.

I like to think that he would be happy that I am moving forward with someone he was friends with. Someone that he trusts to take care of me. I know that that person is you. I am here for you and I am waiting for you. Come home soon. I love you.

Yours Always,

Bella

I read her letter and smiled to myself. She was waiting for me. She was mine. I couldn't wait to get home to make her mine in every way imaginable. I wanted to feel her against my skin. I wanted to know what it would be like to slide into her and finally feel at home. Because that's what she was, she was my home. She was my everything. She was the only reason that I had put in for a transfer to the training facility. I did not want to deploy again. This would be my last tour and then Bella and I could begin our life together. Only seven more months.

~~OTL~~

The drive to Forks took about three hours. Three hours for me to think. About Riley, about Edward and about me. I wondered what my future would hold. I knew that it would be with Edward. I could feel it. Somehow I just knew that he would be home and that all our dreams would come to fruition. I just had to be patient and keep hoping and praying.

I pulled into the Forks cemetery three and a half hours after I

had left Seattle. I parked the car and sat staring out at the gray stones that lined the property. So many, all lined up in neat little rows. Family, friends, loved ones. It was a depressing sight, but also a reality.

I took a deep breath and picked up the flowers I had brought to place on his grave. I slowly made my way down the rows until I came upon the one marked with his name.

Riley Samuel Biers

Beloved son and fiancé

He died for his country

May 6, 1989 – July 10, 2010

I fell to my knees in front of him and let the tears fall silently down my cheeks. I sat the flowers in the vase next to his marker and wiped my eyes. "Hi. I miss you. Every day it gets a little easier, but I still miss you. I've moved back to Seattle. I'm staying with Alice's parents. Do you remember them? I heard that you were friends with Edward. I've met him, he's nice.

"I met someone, Riley. Someone that I have fallen in love with. Actually it's Edward. I like to think that you'd approve, since you were friends with him. How did I not know that? You know it's funny, all the years that Alice and I have been friends I never met him. I'm happy with him Riley. I could be happier of course, if he wasn't overseas, but I have to trust him when

he says he's coming home. This is the hardest part for me. I have to let you go. I can't have a future with him if I am still hanging on to the past. That's what you are Riley, my past and Edward is my future." I stood up and brushed the dirt from my knees. "I'll always love you Riley." I kissed my fingers and placed them on his headstone, "Goodbye." I turned and walked away.

I sat in the car and let the tears run. That was one of the hardest things I have ever done. The hardest was when I lied to Edward and told him I couldn't wait, especially when that had been what I was doing all along. I had been waiting for him.

The sound of my phone ringing caused me to jump. I pulled it from my bag and answered it. "Hello?"

"Baby?"

"I was just talking about you." I smiled.

"You were? To whom?"

"I'm at the cemetery. I was talking to Riley."

"Bella, are you okay?" I could hear the concern in his voice.

"I told him goodbye Edward. I'm all yours, so you better come home soon."

I could hear his whoop of excitement and giggled. *"I love you,*

you know that!"

I laughed louder, "I love you too."

"I have to go baby. I got you a present, it's at Mom and Dad's. Love you!"

I didn't get to say anything back before he was gone. I hung up my phone and drove over to my dad's. His cruiser wasn't there so I decided to go to the station. I checked with the receptionist, but she said that he was out. I told her to tell him I had been here and settled back in to drive home, curious as to what Edward had done.

~~OTL~~

I opened the door of the garage and stepped into the kitchen, where I smelled something heavenly. "Esme, what are you making that smells so wonderful?"

Esme looked up when I walked over and smiled, "Homemade chicken and dumplings."

I smiled, "So Edward called me and said that he had gotten me something and that it would be here. Do you know what it is?"

Esme grinned, "It's in the living room."

I walked through the dining room and crossed the foyer and stepped down into the living room. I looked up and was

surprised at what I saw. I dropped my bag and flew across the room and straight into his open arms.

"What are you doing here?"

"I got a four day R&R so I came home to see you. I missed you." He said against my ear, his warm breathe smooth against my skin.

I leaned back and pressed my hands to his cheeks, "I missed you too," I whispered before leaning up and pressing my lips to his.

It started out soft and quickly become strong and deep. Edward's tongue swept out across my lower lip, tracing it, begging for entrance, which I gladly granted. On a sigh my mouth opened to him and his tongue came in to dance with my own. I could spend all day kissing Edward. The way his lips felt against mine. His taste...sweet, yet all man. The way it felt when his one hand held me close at the waist, while the other tangled in my hair. It was the perfect mix of soft and passionate.

Edward pulled away first and rested his forehead against mine. "I missed you, love," he said breathlessly.

"How is it possible that you are here now? You've only been gone five weeks. Not that I'm not glad to see you I am, but... how?"

Edward shrugged and pulled her to the couch and onto his

lap. "I traded around with someone and made a deal to come now. Unfortunately that means I won't be able to come back until New Year's, but you'll be knee deep in finals and stuff, so I'll be able to spend the last of your break with you."

I just nodded and leaned my head against his shoulder. I was content to sit here and just be, but I knew that my time with him was limited. "So when do you have to go back?"

"My flight leaves early the day after tomorrow. What would you like to do?"

I looked up at him and grinned, "Is that your bike in the garage?"

Edward laughed and nodded, "Wanna go for a ride with me, baby?"

I nodded and smiled before kissing him again. We broke apart when a throat cleared behind us. We looked back and saw Carlisle standing there.

"Sorry to interrupt, but your mother said that dinner is ready."

Edward and I got up and joined his family for dinner and conversation. We talked and laughed, it was the first time I had felt completely at ease since Riley had died. I knew then that Edward had healed me, maybe not fully, but almost. Our next obstacle would be in the bedroom.

~~OTL~~

My chest was pressed to his back as we flew down the highway. It felt good to be alone with him, but I knew that there was a conversation that needed to take place. I watched the scenery fly by and tried to figure out where we were going. I saw something beautiful up ahead and tapped his arm, pointing with my own. I saw him nod and then pressed myself tighter against him.

After a while he pulled down a road that I didn't know was there. He soon pulled to a complete stop and helped me off, before climbing off himself. I took off my helmet and handed it to him as he stowed his. He turned then and smiled at me, "Feel like going for a walk?"

"Sure," I smiled and took his outstretched hand.

"There's a small pond over this way. I used to come here just to think. I came here the day that I decided to enlist. It was one of the hardest decisions I've ever had to make, well except telling my mom."

We reached the clearing and I saw the small body of water in front of me. It seemed to be in the middle of a meadow full of wild flowers. I thought it must have been beautiful in the sunlight, but at dusk it was a bit hard to tell.

"What's on your mind Bella?" Edward asked beside me.

I shrugged, "Nothing." I felt Edward stop and knew he wasn't buying it. I sighed and turned to him.

"Talk to me Bella. What's going on?" He pleaded while bringing his free hand up to rest on my cheek.

I leaned into his touch and closed my eyes. When I opened them I looked into his emerald gaze that was burning into mine. "I need to know something...please don't get mad okay?"

"I promise." He said solemnly.

"What are your expectations, with us while you're here?"

"Are you asking me if I am expecting sex?" I nodded not trusting my voice. "Bella I am not going to push you into something you're not ready for. I know that you aren't ready to take our relationship there yet. Granted, I am in love with you and I want to be intimate, but I can wait. There is no rush." I exhaled heavily. "Is this what you have been worried about?"

"Edward I have only been with two people. Riley, but we were both virgins at the time and he kinda just fumbled around, sorry. With James I was numb and just trying to feel something. I don't want to disappoint you."

Edward chuckled, "Bella, you never could. When we make love that is what it will be, making love. My other 'experiences' have been cold and without feeling. It was fucking in its purest form. Trust me, when I am with you, everything feels like the first time. I love you Bella. I'm in this for the long haul."

I smiled and wrapped my arms around his waist, hugging him close. "I love you too."

We walked over to the water and sat down watching the sun finally sink for the night. We sat wrapped around each other talking, laughing and making out like teenagers. Finally we headed back to the bike and back home. That night I slept peacefully in the arms of the man that I love. My dreams were even pleasant, yet shocking.

I knew that I was dreaming, because it was cold outside with a light dusting of snow. I looked around and recognized the bed and breakfast where Riley had proposed.

"Hello sweetheart."

I turned and gasped when I saw Riley in front of me. "Riley?"

"Yeah, it's me."

I ran to him and wrapped my arms around his neck. "I miss you so much."

"I miss you too Bella." He leaned back and away from me. "We don't have much time so I need you to listen okay?" I nodded my head and waited for him to continue. "I want you to be happy. Edward is a good man and he loves you a lot. I couldn't have asked for a better person to come take care of you. I need you to know that James is okay. He wants you to accept his gift and make yourself a better future however you see fit. Now listen, sweets, this last part is important."

"Riley, what?"

"Edward will return to you, just not when he thinks he will. There will be an accident. I don't know when or what happens, but don't be scared okay. He isn't going to die like I did. Remember that Bella and hold it in your heart. I have to go now. Remember Bella I am always watching and I will always love you."

"Riley wait..."

I sat up panting and with tears on my cheeks, "Riley..."

"Bella?" Edward's voice was groggy from sleep. "Is everything okay?"

"Yeah, just a dream. Go back to sleep." I lay back down beside him and snuggled into his chest, the beats of his heart lulling me back to sleep. I hoped that Riley was wrong, but deep down I knew he wasn't.

AN: There you have it. Now I am not familiar with Army procedure, but I don't think that Edward leave was allowed, so please allow me some creative liberties here. Leave me some love and I will see you on Thursday. Till then...

9. Chapter 9

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: I want to thank everyone for their reviews. Sorry I didn't respond to all of them, but I did read every one of them. A lot of you have said that you are glad that Edward will be coming home to her sooner than he thinks. I think you need to go back and read the last chapter...That is not what Riley told her. See you at the bottom.

The days after Edward left seemed endless. I went to my classes and did my assignments, but I felt numb. I was scared to death that my dream was going to come true. Every time the phone rang or someone knocked I panicked. Carlisle was threatening to prescribe Xanax. So I just hid in my room.

I became a *Bingo* on Facebook addict and played daily. When I wasn't studying or checking my email for word from Edward, I was playing. About a month after he had left I found a new distraction. Alice and Rosalie finally arrived and I had them to help me.

"Have you heard from Edward yet?" Alice asked me when we met or lunch one afternoon.

"No. It's been over a month and I am tired of emailing myself." I whined.

"Bella you have to relax. When Emmett was busy doing mission or what have you, I wouldn't hear from him, for days sometimes weeks. I even went almost two months, especially when was first deployed. You have been lucky in my opinion to have the contact that you have. You'll hear from him when he can contact you."

"Thanks Rose." I tucked back into my sandwich and we continued our lunch. When we were finished we parted ways, they went back to work and I went to class. As I sat and listened to my professor drone on I couldn't help but wonder if he was alive.

~~OTL~~

Beep...Beep.

I reached over and banged on the alarm clock, hoping to stop its incessant beeping. All I succeeded in doing was knocking it to the floor. I groaned and pulled the pillow over my head. The beeping didn't stop. I finally sat up and kicked the offending machine until it quieted. I lay back down only to hear the beeping again.

"What the fuck? I unplugged you!" I screamed, only then did I realize that it was actually my cell phone that was beeping. I leaped at it and saw that I had a new message. I missed his call!

'Hi, baby. I guess you're sleeping. I just wanted to let you know that I'm okay and I will contact you again soon. I am on a mission and I can't tell you about it, but I am safe. I love you Bella. Take care of my heart; I've left it with you. Bye, babe!'

I cried when I heard his voice and knew that at least for now he was safe. I ran down the stairs and found Esme in the kitchen. I had told her about the dream and warning from Riley, so she had been just as concerned as me with no word from Edward.

"Esme!" I skidded to a halt in the kitchen. I wasn't prepared to see her and Carlisle locked in a passionate embrace. "Oh, sorry...uh, yeah." I turned to make a hasty retreat.

"Bella, its fine. What's up?" Esme giggled.

"Um...Edward called me. He's fine. He just wanted me to know, so I thought I'd tell you."

"Where has he been?" Carlisle wanted to know.

"He couldn't tell me. Just that he was on a mission and was safe."

His parents were satisfied with that so I went to get ready for my day. I showered and changed quickly and ran out of the house, not wanting to further embarrass myself. I got on campus early and went to the library so I could get some work done. I hoped that maybe he would call again, but I

heard nothing else and it would be two more days before I heard anything.

~~OTL~~

I finally settled into a routine. I would go to class, spend some time in the library and get some studying done. I had decided on a major and was happy with my choice. I even decided to get a job on the campus paper to add to my resume. Alice and Rose were happy that Edward was safe and Emmett and Jasper were due back from training anytime. Esme wanted to have everyone over for dinner, so we decided to make a night of it and do some karaoke.

Dinner was anything but silent. Laughter and joking from the guy and stories of how they had fared on their training exercises. Emmett had come home with a plethora of new jokes and had decided to share on with us.

"Okay...stop me if you've heard it." He paused and took a deep breath. "A senior citizen drove his brand new Corvette convertible out of the dealership. Taking off down the road, he floored it to 80 mph, enjoying the wind blowing through what little gray hair he had left. "Amazing," he thought as he flew down I-94, pushing the pedal even more. Looking in his rear view mirror, he saw a state trooper behind him, lights flashing and siren blaring. He floored it to 100 mph, then 110, then 120. Suddenly he thought, "What am I doing? I'm too old for this," and pulled over to await the trooper's arrival. Pulling in behind him, the trooper walked up to the Corvette, looked at his watch, and said, "Sir, my shift ends in 30 minutes. Today

is Friday. If you can give me a reason for speeding that I've never heard before, I'll let you go."

The old gentleman paused. Then he said, "Years ago, my wife ran off with a State trooper. I thought you were bringing her back."

"Have a good day, sir," replied the trooper..."

The laughter surrounded the table; I think I even peed a little. When we finally calmed down, I excused myself to get ready to go, Rose and Alice trailing behind me.

"Well Emmett is certainly in rare form tonight." I told Rose as I changed into a new pair of pants.

"Yeah, he's gonna be worse at the bar." Rose grimaced. I laughed as I got changed and then we were out the door.

We arrived at the karaoke bar and found it to be packed, which made me nervous. I didn't think I could sing in front of all these people. Rose and Alice weren't hearing it though.

"Bella, you are gonna sing your little heart out. Let's have a drink first though okay?" I nodded and we found a table.

After a few drinks I felt myself loosening up and laughing with my friends as we watched people butchering some of our favorite songs. Emmett finally got up and showed them how it was done, in his opinion at least, by singing *The Eye of the Tiger* by Survivor. Jasper, not to be outdone, got up and belted out *She's Country* from Jason Aldean.

I finally picked a song from the songbook, but didn't tell the gang what it was. I knew that Rose was planning on videoing my humiliation, so I at least wanted it to be memorable. When my name was called I walked up to the stage and waited for the music. When the piano started I looked out and felt my confidence grow.

*I can't imagine, any greater fear
Then waking up, without you here,
And though the sun, will still shine on,
My whole world, would all be gone,
But not for long,*

*If I had to run, if I had to crawl
If I had to swim a hundred rivers, just to climb a thousand
walls,
Always know that I will find a way, to get to where you are,
There's no place that far*

*It wouldn't matter why we're apart,
Lonely minds or two stubborn hearts
Nothing short of God above
Could turn me away from your love
I need you that much*

*If I had to run, if I had to crawl
If I had to swim a hundred rivers, just to climb a thousand
walls,
Always know that I will find a way, to get to where you are,
There's no place that far*

*If I had to run, if I had to crawl
If I had to swim a hundred rivers, just to climb a thousand
walls,
Always know that I will find a way, to get to where you are,
There's no place that far*

Baby there's no place that far

I sang for Riley. For what could have been. For James and what never was. Finally I sang for Edward, I would move mountains if I had to, just to be with him forever.

~~OTL~~

We stayed and closed the bar. I even sang a couple more times, but nothing as meaningful as the first one. I was drunk and didn't want to disturb Carlisle and Esme by falling into the house so I stayed with Jasper and Alice. Emmett and Rose decided to stay as well and we made it a huge slumber party.

At around five in the morning we all passed out, me not before listening to the message that Edward had left me a month before. I still couldn't believe that it had been a month since the message, but over two since I had actually spoken to him. My emails still went unanswered. I couldn't help but be hurt. He had promised me that he would always come home to me. Part of me wondered if perhaps he was gone, but I just knew that I would feel it in my heart if he were dead. He was just in black out.

As I drifted to sleep I heard Riley's words ringing in my ears.

He will come home to you, just not when he thinks. Trust that. I had to trust that Edward was okay, if I didn't I knew I would go crazy.

"Bella, I need you to listen to me."

I turned at the sound of James' voice.

"James? I don't understand. What's going on?"

"Bella it's happened..."

I woke up screaming.

"Bella!" Emmett grasped my shoulders. "Look at me."

I blinked a few times and finally looked into Emmett's blue eyes. "I need to go home, Emmett. Now!" I stood and started pulling on my shoes. The rest of them followed suit and we were soon out the door.

"Bella will you please tell me what's going on?" Alice pleaded.

"Something's wrong, Ali."

Alice nodded and wrapped her arms around my shoulders. Thirty minutes later we were pulling into the drive at the Cullen's home. I heard Jasper mutter under his breath.

I looked and finally saw what he saw. There along the curb was a black sedan, two men were opening the doors and getting out.

I was out of Jasper's car before he had completely stopped it. I ran to the front door and shouted for Esme and Carlisle. They both came running at the panic in my voice. When they saw the uniforms behind me they froze.

"Excuse me, we're looking for the family of Sergeant Edward Cullen."

Carlisle cleared his throat, "We're the Cullen's."

"Sir I am sorry to inform you that your son..."

I didn't hear what was said, I didn't feel the arms catch me as my world went black.

AN: Runs and hides! Sorry for the cliffy. Leave me some love and you'll get a new chapter on Friday.

10. Chapter 10

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

For the next few days I drifted in and out of consciousness. I kept having the same nightmare over and over. I would wake up screaming, soaked in sweat. Then I would feel a stick in my arm and drift off again. The words I was fighting against were floating in my subconscious. *Missing...His chopper went down...Unaccounted for...Still searching.*

I heard voices as I started to surface. "Do you think she'll be okay Carlisle?"

"I don't know Es. She's had a rough year. A weaker person would have ended it all. She has a strength that I wish I could understand."

I moaned, "Edward..."

"Bella, sweetie, it's Esme. Can you hear me?"

I nodded slowly, "Edward gives me strength," I choked out. "It really happened didn't it?"

I heard Esme's voice catch, "Yes. He's listed as MIA."

I couldn't help the sobs that racked my body. Esme put her arms around me and I clung to her. I couldn't do this again. No matter what Riley had told me. I released my grip on Esme's shirt and lay back against my pillow. "He'll be okay." I looked into Esme's eyes, "He promised me. Edward wouldn't break his promise. I would know if he was dead. I would feel it, he's alive."

Esme nodded and then she and Carlisle left me to get cleaned up. After a shower I felt a little more human and felt the need to do something that I hadn't wanted to since Riley had died. I quietly went down the stairs and into the music room.

I stared at the white baby grand piano that sat in the center of the room and wondered what it would be like to hear Edward play it. Renee had insisted that I take lessons and she was very happy when I picked it up easily.

I slowly walked over and sat down on the bench. I lifted the lid and gently touched the ivory keys. I gently pressed and heard the sound that drifted around me. I settled into position with my fingers poised above the keys and slowly began to play. *Unchained Melody* was the song that came to me. I don't know how long I sat there and played, but I was tired and emotionally drained when I was done.

"I didn't know you could play like that."

I turned and smiled at Carlisle. "My mom insisted that I learn to play."

"Edward can play like that. I haven't heard it in a while. You play with such emotion. Feel free to come in here whenever you need to Bella. This house needs to be filled with music again."

I smiled gently, "I will. Thanks."

~~OTL~~

It took a couple of weeks before I left the house to do more than sit on the deck. I finally went back to class, my professors had been very understanding about my situation. They had made sure to email me my assignments and I was caught up. I just didn't have the heart to be here anymore. What I wanted to do was get on a plane and go find my boyfriend.

My only solace came when I would sit at my computer every night and email Edward. I know he couldn't answer back, but it was therapeutic for me to 'talk' to him and tell him about my day and what I was feeling.

October 2011,

Edward,

We have been told that you are missing. I am not sure how to handle that uncertainty. I know you're not dead. I would feel it if you were. I knew that Riley was gone before they told me. I sensed that he was somewhere else watching over me.

I miss you so much. Sometimes I think I might go crazy. Your dad has prescribed me an anti-anxiety medication. I have been having attacks since you went missing. My only comfort comes in the form of music. I have been playing your piano every day. Did I ever tell you that I could play? I can. Renee insisted on it.

I haven't told my family that you are missing. I don't want to hear them tell me that you are never coming home and that I should forget you and move on. I won't. You are my life now. I have nothing without you, I am nothing without you.

I will write to you soon, my love. I miss you and I am thinking of you always. I love you.

Yours,

Bella

After I hit send I left my room and headed down to the music room. I wasn't sure what I would play today, but it was a good distraction. Somehow the love theme to *The Godfather: Speak Softly Love* flowed from my fingertips. I lost myself in the music for a while, not knowing that I had an audience.

When I was finished the loud applause surprised me. I turned and found Emmett, Rosalie, Jasper, and Alice behind me.

"Wow, Bella. How long have you been playing like that?" Alice wondered.

"Since I was about fourteen. I just never played for you." I smiled softly.

"Play something else," Emmett demanded

I nodded and turned back to the keys. *Edelweiss* flowed through me and I smiled at its soft tones. When I was finished I laughed when I heard Emmett complaining.

"She could at least play something I know." So wanting to shut him up I whipped into Queen's *Bohemian Rhapsody*. "Now that's what I'm talking about."

"Emmett stop being an ass." Alice complained. "Play something else Bella then we want to talk to you."

I nodded and turned back to the keys once more and began to play *Right Here Waiting* by Richard Marx. It was a song about a love that had been separated and I can't think why I hadn't played it before. When the final notes died away, I closed the lid and stood up. I followed my friends out to the living room and waited for them to start talking.

~~OTL~~

I finally called my parents a month after Edward went missing. My dad was supportive and offered his help in all that I might need. My mom however, well she was busy in her new life and gave me some unwanted advice.

"Hi, Mom."

"Oh, Bella, how are you honey? How is Edward? Will I be hearing wedding bells soon?"

My eyes filled with tears, "Well not exactly Mom. Something happened on one of Edward's missions and now he'd MIA."

"Oh sweetie, I'm sorry. How are you holding up? Do you need me to come home for the funeral?"

I gasped, "Mom! He's not dead, he's missing."

"That's the same thing Bella. He may as well be. Honey, I think that it's time for you to stop dating men in the service. You don't seem to have the best of luck."

"Thanks so much for your support Mom. Are you telling me that I am bad luck? Not exactly something that is going to make me feel better. I gotta go, thanks for listening. Bye." I hung up before she could make me feel any worse.

I walked into the kitchen and found Esme sitting at the table stirring a cup of tea, while talking on the phone. I smiled at her, but she didn't return it. She indicated that I should sit and then held up a finger.

"So there isn't anything else you can do?...You'll just keep a look out....Well when will we get any more information on him?...I understand, I don't like it, just please keep us posted. Thanks," she hung up and then looked at me sadly.

"What's up?" I asked.

Esme sighed and then took my hand in hers. "They've called off the search for Edward. They said that they will be making unofficial inquiries, but right now with so many troops getting out, they don't have the man power."

"Are you kidding me? That's it? He's been missing for over a month and now they have given up! No! That is unacceptable!" I jumped up from my chair and ran to my room, where I called Emmett and Jasper for reinforcements.

"Hey, Em, listen I need you and Jasper's help. Would you mind coming to the house?" I listened for a minute, "Thanks Em, see you soon."

I sat down at my computer and did some research while I waited for them to show up. An hour later, the guys came into my room with Alice and Rosalie in tow.

"What's going on Bella?" Alice asked as she plopped onto my bed.

I explained to them about the call that Esme had received and how frustrated I was. I had been reading about cases of missing persons and that sometimes they are just forgotten until someone complained enough.

"I am not going to let them forget about Edward. If I have to write a letter a week just to find out some answers then that is what I am going to do. So Emmett, Jasper who do I write to first? My congressman?"

After getting encouragement and advice from them I sat down and composed a letter to Jason J. Jenks explaining my situation and asking for help. After Emmett and Jasper had read it and approved it, I printed and mailed the letter. Now all I had to do was wait.

~~OTL~~

She was probably going out of her mind worrying about me. I had promised Bella that I would be coming home to her. I refused to break that promise. Now though, things looked bleak. When the chopper crashed, my ankle was twisted and my wrist was broken. I have plenty of superficial lacerations and one fairly deep gash on my arm. Luckily I am not alone and one of the two guys with me was a medic. How lucky was that?

I have no idea where we are and our minimal supplies had dwindled days ago. We needed to find shelter and water or we weren't going to make it. We traveled at night and slept during the day, trying to save what little energy we had for when the sun was not at its peak.

"How're you holding up, sir?"

I turned to look at the blonde man at my side, "I'm alright Caius. Are you okay?"

"I'm good. We're gonna have to find shelter soon. I need to look at your arm and Alec is still losing blood from his leg."

"I know. We'll find something." I prayed that we would find something and that maybe it would have food and supplies, otherwise we were never gonna get out of this desert alive.

We walked for about another hour before I saw it. I blinked and rubbed my eyes making sure that it wasn't a mirage.

"Caius, do you see that?"

"Sir, I see a lean to, or maybe it's a shack."

"That's what I'm seeing too. Let's head in that direction, but keep watch. It could be a Taliban post." He nodded and between the two of us we half dragged and half carried Alec to the shelter.

We stopped about a hundred yards from the building; it was actually a small house and would be perfect. At least it would be if it was unoccupied. I left Caius and Alec and walked forward to check it out. All I had for a weapon was a hunting knife. With my wrist broken and my arm damaged, I wouldn't be much good in a hand to hand situation.

I checked the house and surrounding areas for any signs of life, when I found none I went to the door and opened it slowly. I looked around the small structure and found that it was in fact uninhabited and looked to be stocked with food and water. I sighed in relief and then went back to get my comrades. Perhaps we would be alright.

AN: Okay, so now you know that he is alive...maybe not well, but alive anyway. Sorry for the cliffy, but it needed

to be done. I hope you enjoyed this chapter. I was planning to drag his disappearance out, but can't seem to do it. So keep reading and reviewing, we've almost hit 100, so keep em coming. Till next time.

Here are the links to the songs that Bella is playing. This is how I imagine that she sounds...

Unchained Melody -

[http://www\(dot\)youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=W8vSMGXwZrA&feature=related](http://www(dot)youtube(dot)com/watch?v=W8vSMGXwZrA&feature=related)

The Godfather: Speak Softly Love -

[http://www\(dot\)youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=-mzSh5iSOLA](http://www(dot)youtube(dot)com/watch?v=-mzSh5iSOLA)

Edelweiss - [http://www\(dot\)youtube\(dot\)com/watch?v=tupTJEFN6x0](http://www(dot)youtube(dot)com/watch?v=tupTJEFN6x0)

11. Chapter 11

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: Thanks to all of you for reviewing last chapter. We actually broke 100 reviews.

Special thanks to anitadek for your support. I worry when I write Soldierward stories that I will offend someone with my lack of knowledge. I am glad that you are enjoying it.

I also want to remind all of you that this story is un-beta'd, so all the mistakes are mine.

I plan to post two chapters today, but I am unsure if I will be able to. I am actually in some pain since I have done something to the muscles in my neck and upper back, the pain travels down my left arm. Bear with me....

Now on with the show....

October 31, 2011

Edward,

Happy Halloween! Alice tried to convince me to go to her

costume party, but I refused. She says that she understands, but I don't think she does. She has never lost so much in her life. I hate to see what would happen if she ever did. I don't think your sister could face it. I don't know how I do.

I miss you so much that sometimes I think I might choke on it. I have a permanent lump in my throat that I can't swallow past. Kinda puts a damper on the appetite. Esme is starting to worry since I have started losing weight.

I'm trying, Edward, I really am. I don't want you to come home and find a shell of what you left. So I get up I go to my classes, but they all seem like nonsense. I know that you wanted me to get my degree, but I don't have the drive without you. I love you...

Yours Forever,

Bella

After I hit send I close my computer and crawl back in my bed. All I want to do is close my eyes and go back to a happier time. When Edward was here and he was holding me. His scent is long gone from the pillow beside me and I miss how close I felt to him. I wonder how I will survive this separation.

I closed my eyes and was instantly asleep. It wasn't long before I was dreaming.

"Hi, baby."

I turned at the beautiful voice, "Edward?" My hands came and covered my mouth at the same time that the tears started. "Oh, God, you're dead aren't you?"

Edward rushed forward and grabbed my wrists. "No! Bella look at me, feel me, I am not dead!"

I did feel him. I felt the familiar spark the minute his skin touched mine. I opened my eyes and met his green gaze.

"You're not dead? Then why are you here?"

"You tell me, babe, this is your dream."

I shot awake. I hadn't dreamed of Edward since before he left. I knew then that everything was going to be fine. I don't know how I knew, but I felt a sense of calm and peace. Not that he was dead, but that I would see him soon.

~~OTL~~

I stumbled down the steps of the campus and felt a hand on my elbow to steady me. I turned and found myself looking into a pair of ice blue eyes. I cringed away from him and mumbled thanks, before heading off in the opposite direction. Something about that guy gave me the creeps.

I hurried to my car and left campus and headed for Rosalie's shop. My car was making a funny noise and I wanted her to check it out. When I pulled in she was outside waiting for me and waved me through the open garage door. I parked and

got out.

"So what's wrong with it Bella?" Rose walked around and pulled up the hood.

"I don't know, you're the mechanic not me. It's making a weird grinding noise and it smells."

"Okay," she grinned as she leaned under the hood and started poking around. "So how are you? Things okay?"

I smiled, "Yeah, I mean there's still no word, but you know. I had a dream about him on Halloween."

Rose popped out and looked at me. "Really?"

"Yeah, he was telling me that he was okay."

"Well..." she got back under the hood, "Your dreams have been kinda prophetic. Why should this one be any different?"

I smiled, "You got anything to drink around here?" I hopped off the stool I was sitting on, effectively declaring the subject closed.

I heard Rose chuckling when I came back out with a soda in my hand. "What's so funny?"

"You have a stowaway. There is a rather large opossum stuck up in your engine block. It must have crawled up in there and fallen asleep. He's dead now though. You may want to call Esme, this is gonna take a while."

I sighed and pulled out my phone, "Hey Esme, you busy?...I'm stuck at Rose's, you think you could come get me?...See you in a few." I disconnected.

Rose's giggles followed me out of the garage and even though I knew she couldn't see me, I flipped her the bird, just as Esme pulled up.

~~OTL~~

Another month passed and still no word from Edward. I spent Thanksgiving with the Cullen's and my dad drove up to join us. I still wasn't speaking to my mother. Her callous comments about my luck with men still pissed me off. My dad was worried for me. He hoped that Edward returned home to me, but he was worried about what would happen if he didn't.

"Esme, dinner was amazing. Thanks for having me."

"Charlie, it was our pleasure. Bella is a part of this family, so by extension so are you."

I watched as my dad leaned forward and placed his elbows on the table, "Will you still feel that way if Edward doesn't come back? Bella has already lost so much, I worry that she won't be able to take it if she not only loses him, but you by extension."

"Dad!"

Carlisle held up his hand, "No, Bella. I understand what you're

saying Charlie, but if our son never returns, Bella will still be Alice's best friend and a daughter to us. She will *a/ways* be a part of this family."

"That's a moot point Dad, because Edward *is* coming home." I slid my chair back and left the table, heading to the only solace I could find. Music. I felt my heartache lesson as I got lost in the notes. I knew that he was coming home.

~~OTL~~

November 2011

Edward,

Thanksgiving has come and gone, still with no word from you. Are you still with us? I am trying to keep the hope alive, but it is so hard. I miss you so much. I want to hear you voice in my ear and feel the shivers that run down my spine. I want to go for a ride on your bike and cling to you as my legs and body mold to yours.

You have to come home to me. I need to feel your arms around me. I need to feel your lips pressed to mine. I know that you are doing all that you can. I feel it in my heart.

I love you, always,

Bella

I sent the email and closed my laptop with a sigh. I headed to

my bathroom and started the shower. I set it as hot as I could and prayed that the warm water would melt the tension from my spine. The nightmares had started the night of Thanksgiving. I dreamed of smoke and fire and death. It had been two days and I have given up on sleeping. I kept my screams muffled so that Esme and Carlisle were oblivious.

I turned off the shower and dressed in a pair of jeans and one of Edward's sweatshirts. I swam in it, but I wanted, needed to feel close to him. It smelled like him, so it felt like he was close by.

I skipped breakfast and headed to the campus. I had some time to kill before my class, so I went to the library. I felt eyes on me the minute that I walked in and turned to the left and saw those same blue eyes staring at me. I grimaced and turned to the other side of the room. I couldn't figure out who that guy was but he was giving me the creeps.

~~OTL~~

We had been lucky to find the little house fully stocked with food and medical supplies. Caius immediately got Alec settled and redressed his wound, before turning his attention to me.

"I'm fine." I muttered.

"Humor me, sir." Caius chuckled.

I let him check my arm and redress the wound. After he was complete, I checked out our accommodations. The kitchen

was stocked with non-perishable items, so we could eat. I also found a stash of bottled water. Upon further investigation I had found an old ham radio and thought that it might come in handy, if it worked.

That had been fifteen days ago. We had been planning to move, but Alec had come down with a fever and infection, so we stayed. He was finally on the mend and I had been able to get some sleep, from my constant watch. So far no one had discovered our whereabouts, but I wasn't sure how much longer that would last. I'm pretty sure that we had been declared MIA, I was damned sure gonna make it so that we didn't become POWs as well.

I turned back to the guys in the living room. "How're you feeling Alec?"

"Better, stronger. You gotta plan?"

I grinned, "You're the science guy, see if you can get that thing to work. I have a date for New Years and I refuse to be late."

They chuckled and we settled in to work. Once we had the message out we would have a small window to get the hell out of dodge before we were found, so I wanted to get it out and go. I just hoped that this would work.

"Hang on baby, I'm coming. I'm coming." I whispered to the moon.

AN: So there it is, he has a plan. I have decided that until I get him home that each chapter will end with EPOV. Well, I am going to start on the next chapter, but I have an interview for a new job tomorrow...Cross your fingers for me please! Leave me some love and I will see you tomorrow evening.

Story Rec: Labels by samekraemer

Awesome story!

12. Chapter 12

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: Thanks for all the reviews. A lot of you have asked who the blue eyed stalker is. Think about what character hasn't been used yet. That's who it is. I won't be revealing him until the next chapter.

Thanks also for the good luck wishes on my interview. I think it went well and I hope to hear back from them in the next few days.

Now on with the show...

December 2011

Edward,

Christmas is in three weeks. I can't believe how fast the time had gone. I've bought you a couple things that I know you will like, at least I hope so.

I bought my dress yesterday for your parents' New Year's party. Remember you promised to be here. I am holding you to that Edward. I want you to kiss me at midnight. I want to

dance with you.

I love you. Come home soon...

Yours,

Bella

I knew that his inbox was probably getting full, but I wanted him to know that I was thinking of him. I really hoped that he was able to keep his promise and come home for the New Year.

As I sat down to write a paper for one of my classes, I couldn't help but wonder what he was doing, if he was safe and if he was thinking about me. I stopped those thoughts and got back to work, but was interrupted again by a knock on the door.

"Yeah," I called distractedly.

"Hey Bells, whatcha doing?" Alice skipped into the room.

"I'm studying and trying to write this paper," I said without looking up.

"Come out with us. Its Thursday, I know you don't have class tomorrow, come on."

"No."

"But Bellllaaa!"

"I said no Alice. I am busy and I don't feel like going out." I flipped the page in my book looking for the information I needed. Alice's next words stopped me cold.

"Edward would want you to go out and have a life. He wouldn't want you to stay home waiting for him to come back. You need to live Bella."

I slowly raised my head and stared at her. "Excuse me?" I couldn't believe her. "Alice I am getting an education and waiting for the man I love to come home to me. You are talking like he is dead. He's not. I am not going out tonight or any other night, because I don't want to go out and party without Edward. Without him the party has stopped. Get used to it Alice and back the fuck off of me."

"I'm sorry Bella. I just hate to see you going through this again. Losing Riley almost killed you. I just don't want you to go down that path again. You're my best friend Bella, I love you."

"I love you too, Ali and I know that you are concerned, but you don't need to be. I'm fine."

Alice sighed and then stood up, "Alright."

I heard the door click as she left and I went back to my studying, wondering if she was right. Was I waiting for something that wasn't going to happen?

~~OTL~~

I walked through the doors of the campus library and immediately headed for the stacks. I knew that the reference book I was in need of would be right there. I quickly pulled it from the shelf and went to the check-out desk. Once I was done, I rushed out the door in an effort to avoid the creeper, not fast enough apparently. As I walked out the door I ran into a brick wall.

"Sorry," I mumbled and looked up.

"No problem, sweet thing."

I moved around him and trotted to my car. I started it up and sped out of the lot and back home. Who the hell is that guy?

I got back home and ran up the steps to finish my paper. An hour later I was done and decided to lie down for a while and hope that the nightmares stayed away. I hadn't been sleeping well because of them.

"Bella..."

I tried not to turn around, but I couldn't avoid it. I met the blue eyes of James. "Your turn?"

"Bella, you need to relax. He's trying."

"I know that James, but it gets harder every day. I haven't heard from him in almost six months. How can I be sure that he is still alive?"

"Because I'm telling you that he is. There is a small house that he is staying in. He found an old ham radio and he and his two comrades are trying to fix it to send a signal out. He is so close. Please don't give up on him."

I felt the tears on my cheeks and all I could do was nod and then he was gone.

I woke up with wet cheeks and decided that I needed to talk to Esme and Carlisle about my dreams. It was time to stop holding this in.

~~OTL~~

Esme and Carlisle were shocked. I had told them all about my dreams, the ones with Riley and James and the ones where Edward showed up.

"So you've been talking to the guys and you knew that something was going to happen to Edward?" Esme asked cautiously.

I nodded, "I had that dream before Edward left when he surprised me this past summer." I looked down and felt the guilt rise. "I'm sorry I didn't tell you guys, but I was afraid that you would think I was crazy."

Carlisle reached out to my hand. "Bella we understand. Actually it explains how you have been holding it together so well. I can't speak for Esme, but I was worried that maybe you didn't love him enough to be concerned."

I looked up shocked. "Carlisle, I love him with everything I have in me. When I lost Riley, I never thought that I would ever love anyone ever again. With James I was just going through the motions. When you guys showed up in Oklahoma and I saw Edward for the first time, I knew. I knew that he would be the one to put me back together. That's why I fought it so hard. I felt that if I got close to him, I would somehow be betraying Riley."

"Oh, Bella," Esme sighed.

"I know. When I had that dream, the one where Riley warned me, he told me that he was happy for me and that Edward was a good man. He gave me...I don't want to say permission, but that's essentially what it was. He was telling me that it was okay to move on. I think I needed that."

"So this dream you had today? James told you that Edward was trying?"

I looked back at Carlisle. "Yes, so I need to get Jasper and Emmett here so that they can find out about whether or not a signal has been sent."

Esme stood up from her seat and went to the phone. I watched her dial and wait, "Emmett?...Baby I need you and Jasper to come to the house. Can you come right now?...Yes darling I will feed you....See you soon."

We waited in the living room for Em and Jazz. We didn't wait long, of course with the promise of food Emmett would have

rushed right over. We settled them with a plate and then I began talking. I told them everything I had told Esme and Carlisle and then waited for the shit storm to start.

"Well, Bells I think you've been hanging out with Alice too long. She's starting to rub off on you." Jasper laughed. I didn't.

"I'm serious you guys. They can't be wrong. Just humor me, okay."

Emmett looked at me with his head cocked to the side like he was trying to figure something out, either that or he had to shit. Finally I got restless under his scrutiny and got up from the table. I reached into the fridge for the soda that Esme kept on hand and popped the top.

"Okay, here is what I think we should do. I'll contact my CO and Jasper will do the same and we'll have them make discreet inquiries. Maybe they can come up with something." He turned to me, "You said it was an old ham radio?"

I nodded, "That's what James said."

"Okay, well the only thing he can do with that would be Morse code. That won't be hard to track since it's hardly ever used."

"Then how will they understand it?" Esme wanted to know.

"Just because it's an archaic form of communication, we are still trained to know it. You never know when it could come in handy." Jasper explained.

"How long do you think this could take?" I wondered.

"I don't know Bella. Could be hours, days, or even weeks or months. Try and be patient." Emmett smiled.

"I'll try. I just want him home." I sipped my soda. "Do me a favor, tell your CO's that I will pay to have an extraction team sent, if necessary."

They nodded and then left.

~~OTL~~

Christmas Eve 2011

Edward,

Christmas is tomorrow. I hope that you have been found and that you are on your way home to me. We have a date next week. You promised me. I miss you, I love you.

Merry Christmas,

Bella

It had been two and a half weeks since I had told Emmett and Jasper about my dreams, premonitions, whatever and they haven't told me anything. I knew that once the inquiries started that they would most likely be put under a gag order, but I had hoped that they would at least try and tell me something.

I was sitting out in the garage, straddling Edward's bike, lost

in the memory of our drive when Rose walked out. She smiled as she stopped beside me.

"How're you holding up sweetie?"

"Today is harder than any of the others have been. I miss him Rosie." I couldn't stop the tear from sliding down my cheek.

Rose wrapped me up in her arms and let me cry on her shoulder. She held me as the sobs wracked my body. The idea of another Christmas without the man I loved was too much for me to take. What I wanted to do was curl up in bed with a bottle of vodka and drink myself into oblivion, but that wouldn't help. So I plastered a smile on my face and wiped my eyes.

"Thanks Rose."

"No problem," she grinned.

"Bella, Rose can you guys come back in please." Alice called from the kitchen.

We entered the house and walked to see the family gathered in the foyer staring at the door.

"What's going on?" Rose asked.

"There is a soldier on the other side of that door and I can't... we can't bring ourselves to answer it," Esme whispered.

Squaring my shoulder's I stepped forward and opened the

door. "May I help you?"

"Is this the Cullen home?"

"Yes, come in."

"Thank you ma'am. I am looking for," he looks down at his paper, "Carlisle and Esme Cullen?"

"That's us," Carlisle said fearfully.

"Sir, I am here to inform you that Sgt. Edward A. Cullen has been..." I didn't hear what he said as the world went black.

~~OTL~~

Alec managed to get the old radio to work. I almost laughed at the irony that we would have to send our signal by Morse code, but then that's all we had.

"Okay, Sgt. What do you want me to say?"

"Tell them that there are three survivors of the helicopter crash from September. Tell them where we are and that we require immediate extraction."

I watched as Alec sent our message out over the airwaves. I told him to send it every ten minutes until we got a response. Five days after our first transmission, we got some feedback. I sat on my haunches taking watch while Alec deciphered the response. I thought I saw movement on the peripheral and hollered to Caius.

"Stay here. I thought I saw something, I'm gonna go check it out."

"I'll cover your six."

I nodded and ran to the nearest cover. When I got to the location where I had seen the movement it turned out to be a snake crawling through the brush. I immediately headed back to the shelter of our safe haven.

"Whatcha got?" I asked Alec.

"The team will arrive in two hours. It took me an hour and a half to decipher it, so that leaves us with about thirty minutes."

I smiled, "Gear up! We're going home."

The tree of us stood and waited and finally we saw a dot of black in the distance. I grinned and stepped out as the chopper landed. I saw a man in fatigues hop out and make his way to us.

"Sgt. Cullen?"

"Yeah," I looked back at Alec and watched as he shrugged.

"Let's get you out of here sir."

"What day is it?" I hollered once we were safely inside the chopper.

"December fifteenth."

I nodded. After debriefing and checked out at the hospital we should be home on Christmas day or the day after. I just wanted to get home and hold my baby. My Bella.

AN: So he's been rescued. I apologize now for the lack of knowledge on my part of military operations. I did take some liberties here. I have no idea if Morse code is still in use. Leave me some love. I may have a new chapter up on Thursday, if not I'll see you Saturday.

13. Chapter 13

Disclaimer: All characters are the express right of Stephenie Meyer. No copy right infringement intended.

AN: Well thanks to all who have reviewed. We reached 135, so thanks. I'm glad that so many of you are enjoying this story. But we're not done yet.

On with the homecoming...

When I came to I was laying on the couch in the living room with a cool cloth on my forehead. I tried to sit up, but was pushed gently back down by Carlisle.

"Stay put, young lady. You knocked your head good."

"Is he alive?"

Esme's face appeared in my line of sight. "Yes sweetie, he should be home in a couple days."

Then the tears fell. "I'm sorry, I just can't believe he's finally gonna be here. We've all waited so long."

Esme wrapped me up in her arms and I gripped her shirt as the sobs wracked my body. When I finally calmed enough, the family decided to call it a night and everyone turned in.

Christmas was tomorrow and although I knew that I needed to rest I couldn't sleep.

After lying in bed for a few hours without falling asleep, I gave up and went downstairs. The fire was still burning though it was mostly embers now. I added a log and then sat back wrapping a throw around my shoulders and just stared at the flames. I tried to remember what it felt like to be held in Edward's arms, but I couldn't.

Our relationship and time together had been so brief that we didn't have time to form lasting memories. We had taken a few bike rides together and he had spent one night with me. Although I loved him, I wondered if I really knew him. And if I didn't how could I really love him.

"Bella?"

I turned and saw Alice in the entryway. "Did I wake you?"

Alice yawned and walked over to sit beside me. "No, I really haven't been sleeping. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

Alice sighed, "Bella, what happened to us? We used to be so close and could tell each other anything."

"I don't know Ali. When we were in Oklahoma, it seemed like you were trying to push me into things I wasn't ready for. Then when Edward went missing, you acted like you were

more concerned with partying and having fun than what I needed or was going through. Jasper was home. You knew that he was alive and sleeping next to you. I didn't have that luxury."

"I'm sorry, Bella. I just didn't want you to forget how to be you. When Riley died you seemed to close off and I just wanted by best friend back. When you met James and he became interested, I thought that he would be perfect for you to be with. I never thought about what it would be like for you. But, now, Bella you seem like your old self only different somehow."

"I am different. I'm not that wide-eyed little girl that thought I was going to have the perfect life, with a husband and two-point-five kids before I was thirty. I know that nothing in life is guaranteed. I lost my first love, Ali I never thought I would fall in love again. James showed me that I was worthy of love, but your brother. Alice, Edward has shown me that I am capable of loving deeper than I ever thought possible."

"Oh, Bella," she smiled.

"Now I'm scared." I whispered.

"Scared of what?"

"What if Edward and I don't have what it takes to have a relationship? Alice we confessed our feelings the day I found out that James was gone. That's not a healthy way to start anything. Then he was deployed. We have had a total of three

days together as a couple. I can't help but wonder if we have what it takes to get make it."

"Bella, there isn't an army couple in the world that doesn't feel like that, especially after a deployment. You and Edward just need sometime and everything will be fine. I promise, remember, never..."

"Bet against Alice, I know." I sat up and hugged her, "I think I'll head up now. I have a long drive tomorrow."

"Goodnight."

~~OTL~~

I had everything packed up and was on the road to Forks by nine in the morning. Esme had packed up some of the leftovers from dinner last night for me to give to Charlie. I made her promise to call me if Edward showed up before I got back. With promises that she would, I got on the road.

I arrived at my dad's about three hours later and stopped the car. I smiled when my dad came out to help me get my packages.

"You look happy, what's going on?"

He blushed, "I uh, well..." He scratched the back of his head.

"Dad?"

"Bella, I've sorta been seeing someone and she's here to have

Christmas with us, along with her kids."

"Really, who?"

"Sue Clearwater."

"Harry's wife?"

"Harry passed last year, about the same time that you left. We started talking and I was helping out with Seth and one thing led to another and well..."

"Dad, its fine. I like Sue and I know that when Mom took off that hurt you. I'm glad that you're happy. Now can we get inside, it's freezing out here?"

He laughed and helped me bring in the packages. Once we were settled inside, I walked into the living room to greet Sue and her children, ten year old Seth and sixteen year old Leah. "Merry Christmas guys."

It turned out to be a fun afternoon. We exchanged gifts and had a nice dinner. It wasn't until after they left that my dad asked me about Edward.

"Have you heard anything?"

I choked on my coffee, "Sorry, dad, I meant to tell you. They found him. He should be home in a few days."

"That's good, Bells. I'm happy for you." He looked up at the clock, "You about ready?"

I nodded and we headed to his truck. Half hour later we stopped at the cemetery and walked to the grave of my dead love. I brushed the snow from his stone and the kneeled down to him.

"Merry Christmas Riley, I miss you. We brought you a little something. It's not much, just a poinsettia, but it's all yours. Edward is coming home. I'm sure you already know that. I'm scared Riley, I don't know if we have what it takes to make it. Although we've been together all this time, we haven't been together."

I heard a throat clear behind me and smiled up at my father, "I guess it's time to go. I'll talk to you soon."

I followed my dad back to his truck and we headed back to his house. When we arrived back, he walked me to my car. "Call me when you get back so that I know you made it home."

"I will," I reached up to hug him. After kissing his weathered cheek, I pulled away. "I love you dad, Merry Christmas."

"Love you, too, Bells. Be safe."

I smiled as I got behind the wheel and pulled away. I called Esme to tell her that I was on my way back and she told me to be careful as well. I told I would and then I headed home.

~~OTL~~

The Cullen's had decided to hold off on having Christmas until Edward made it home. So the day after found us still waiting. After lunch, I was tired of waiting around and decided to get a jump start on a paper that would be due when we got back to classes. I went up to my room and gathered my things before heading down to tell Esme and Carlisle where I was going.

"Hey guys, the campus library is open today. I'm gonna head down there for a while. I'm going stir crazy sitting here."

"Alright sweetheart, do you want us to call you if he shows up?"

I nodded and then kissed her cheek before heading out to my car and off to the campus.

I walked through the doors and wasn't surprised to find the place almost deserted. Only about three people were sitting at tables. I found a table and got started, immediately getting absorbed.

I looked at my watch and found that three hours had passed. I got up to stretch my aching muscles and walked to the vending machines that were in the hall. After grabbing a soda and a candy bar, I headed back only to find that my table was now occupied by the creepy blue-eyed guy that I had been seeing around. I walked over and started to pack up my things. I wasn't about to share a table with a creep.

"What's your hurry beautiful?"

"Sorry, my boyfriend should be home by now. Excuse me."

"Awe, why you gotta lie to me sweet cheeks?" He stood in my path.

"Excuse me," I tried to go around him, but he shifted again to block me. I once again tried to move around him and he once again blocked me. "Please move."

He just grinned, "What's your name gorgeous?"

I wasn't about to tell this lunatic my name so I countered his question, "What's yours?"

"Mike. Why don't you ditch this place and we'll go grab a drink." His sneer made him even less attractive.

"Like I said, I have a boyfriend and he is waiting for me."

"Like I said, stop lying to me." He reached out to grab my arm, just a voice sounded behind him.

"Touch her and I will rip your arm off."

Mike turned and looked at the man standing behind him at the same time I did. My gasp caught them both by surprise. I pushed the idiot out of my way and ran to him. He caught me as I leapt at him. The impact of my body into his made him stumble back a little, but he stayed upright.

"Shh, baby, it's okay." He whispered in my ear.

"I can't believe you're here." I pulled back and looked in his eyes. "I missed you." I whispered.

"I missed you," he hugged me to him. Neither of us noticed when the creep slunk away.

"Get me out of here."

He nodded, but we didn't leave. Instead his lips met mine in the sweetest, most passionate kiss we had shared. He sucked first on my top, then my lower lip. On a sigh, my mouth opened to him and he wasted no time slinking his tongue in to dance with mine. We broke apart when oxygen became an issue.

"Let's go," he whispered. I nodded and we left the library hand in hand.

~~OTL~~

The helicopter ride seemed to take forever, but soon we were landing at a safe location. We were then checked over in the infirmary, before we were shuffled off to the waiting Black Hawk that would transport us to the airport where a plane was waiting to take us to Germany. Alec was admitted for I.V. fluids and my shoulder was looked at closely for any signs of infection. When they found none, I was released to a nearby hotel* and took a long awaited shower. Five days later Alec was released and the three of us were on a plane back to the states. We were immediately taken back to our base for debriefing. We were debriefing for four days and I knew

that I wouldn't be at the house on Christmas day, but I would definitely be there the day after.

I slept in an actual bed that night and slept for about twenty hours. When I woke up it was about one in the afternoon. I got up showered and shaved and once I was dressed, I headed to my parents' place. I couldn't wait to see Bella.

I pulled up the drive and smiled as the front door burst open and my family came pouring out. The one person I wanted to see the most was missing. I got out of the car and was immediately wrapped in my mother's arms.

"Edward, I'm so glad that you're home. I've...we've been so worried about you." She pulled back and grabbed my face, "Are you okay, my darling?"

I grinned, "I'm fine mom. I was injured in my shoulder, but I'm fine. It's healing well."

"Esme let the rest of us say hello." Carlisle chuckled.

My dad pulled me into a hug, "Welcome home son."

"Thanks dad."

Everyone took their turn until I finally made it to Alice. "Missed you pix."

"Missed you too." She pulled me into a hug and I felt her tears soak into my shirt.

"Hey, don't cry. I'm home and I don't have to go back." She pulled away and wiped her eyes. "Where's Bella?" I asked, looking at my family.

"She was going stir crazy, bro. She headed over to the campus library for some down time." Emmett explained.

I turned and headed right back to my car. "I'll be back." I got in and sped toward the library. However I wasn't prepared for what I saw.

I stood off to the side and watched her for a while. Every once in a while she would lift her head up and stare out the window. She looked exhausted. Even the minimal make-up that she wore couldn't cover the bags under her eyes. I watched as she got up and headed over to the vending machines. She had lost weight too. If I hadn't been watching her so closely I would never have noticed the man that sidled up to her table. Bella didn't look like she was too comfortable with him.

I walked closer to listen to what he was saying. "What's your name gorgeous?"

I chuckled when I heard her ask, "What's yours?"

"Mike. Why don't you ditch this place and we'll go grab a drink."

"Like I said, I have a boyfriend and he is waiting for me."

"Like I said, stop lying to me."

I watched as he reached out to grab her and decided to make my presence known. "Touch her and I will rip your arm off."

He turned and looked at me and I could tell he knew that I was serious. Once Bella stepped out from behind him though, she was all I saw. She ran to me and threw herself into my arms, almost knocking me off balance. I felt her tears as she buried her face in my neck.

"Shh, baby, it's okay," I whispered.

"I can't believe you're here," she pulled away and looked into my eyes. "I've missed you."

"I missed you," I hugged her to me. Neither of us noticed when the creep slunk away.

"Get me out of here."

I nodded, but made no move to go. Instead my lips met hers in the sweetest, most passionate kiss we had shared. I nipped first on her top, then lower lip. On a sigh, her mouth opened to me and I wasted no time slipping my tongue in to dance with hers. We broke apart when oxygen became an issue.

"Let's go," I whispered. She nodded and we left, with Bella's hand firmly encased in mine.

AN: Okay, he's home. Next chapter will contain a lemon,

which should be up on Sunday. Till then leave me some love.

14. Chapter 14

Disclaimer: All characters are the property of Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement intended.

AN: Happy Memorial Day! Let's take a moment to thank and remember all of our service men and women. To all those who have served or will serve, I offer my sincerest thanks.

See you at the bottom...

I was getting frustrated. Edward has been home for two days and he refuses to touch me. Sure we share a kiss here and there, but he won't show me any of the passion he did before he left. I know that I am the one who wanted to take it slow, but this is pure torture.

I stormed into Alice's shop on the day before the Cullen's New Year's Eve party and decided that I was going to vent my frustrations to her. She was the know-it-all.

"Alice!" I holler as I walk toward the backroom, where I know she is hiding.

"What?"

I fall onto the loveseat she has stashed back there and let out a frustrated sigh. "Alice am I ugly?"

She looks at me with an arched brow, "Excuse me?"

"Am I ugly? It's not a hard question."

"Bella, are you fucking kidding me? No you are not ugly. What's up?" She puts down her sewing tools and gives me her full attention.

"Edward won't touch me." I giggled when she groaned. "I'm serious Ali. Before he left we shared the most passionate kisses, hell he slept in my bed then. Now, he treats me almost like a sister or a very close friend. Why doesn't he want me Alice?"

Alice sighed and pinched her nose, like I have seen Edward do a million times. "Bella, Edward has only been home for two days. You guys have barely had a relationship. I am sure that he wants you. Give it some time."

I scoffed, "Sure that's easy for you to say. I'm sure that when Jasper came home you two fucked like bunnies."

"Bella that's different, he's my husband." Alice smiled gently.

"I would be willing to bet that any other couple that has been separated by deployments, even if they aren't married, couldn't wait to get their hands on each other."

"Look Bella, give him some time. Remember he was missing

for months. That's gotta take a toll on someone."

"I know you're right Alice, I just love him you know?"

"I know you do. Come on let's stop all this drama and try on your dress for the party. I bet Edward is going to love you in it."

I plaster a smile on my face and go put my dress on so that Alice can do the final alterations. It doesn't need any though. It fits perfectly. "Ali you've out done yourself. This is perfect."

My dress is a floor length satin dress in an ice blue. Spaghetti straps help hold it in place. It flows down my body, while enhancing my bust with the sweetheart neckline.

Alice is bouncing and clapping, "Bella it's perfect. I can't wait."

"Will you help me? Do my hair and makeup?"

"Of course," Alice smiled.

We stood staring at my reflection in the mirror and I hoped that Edward would love me in this dress. I hoped I would get my old Edward back.

~~OTL~~

Alice was putting the final touches on my makeup before I slipped into my dress. "Okay, you're all done."

I turned and looked at my reflection. She had kept my makeup

light, but beautiful. My hair had all been swept back at the sides only to cascade down my back in tight ringlets. "Alice... wow!"

"Thank you, now let's get you dressed." She helped me into my dress and zipped me up. I slipped into the silver heels and clipped the silver bracelet to my wrist. A pair of silver icicle earrings completed the look.

I turned to the full length mirror to get the full effect and was stunned at my transformation. I turned back just as Alice finished pulling herself together. Her dress was a deep purple and looked great on her.

"Alice you look gorgeous."

"Thanks, we better get down there I hear people starting to arrive."

I followed her out and down the steps. I kept my eyes down so as not to trip. A gasp stopped me before I made it to the last step. I looked up and met the emerald gaze of Edward. Seeing him in his dress uniform...*yummy*.

"Bella...you...uh, wow," he smiled.

I can feel the heat rise in my cheeks under his scrutiny.

"Thanks."

He put his elbow out to me and I placed my hand in the crook.

"I love you."

I looked up into his eyes and could see it shining back at me. "I love you, too."

The guests had begun arriving and Edward and I stood in the receiving line with his parents and sister and Jasper. I guess this is what it's like to be an important surgeon. Everyone that Carlisle had ever crossed paths with, lectured, taught or saved was in attendance. It was quite the crowd. A good thing the Cullen's have a large home.

The party was a huge success. Champagne flowed like water and I was well on my way to being tipsy. I was standing in the corner of the room like the perfect wallflower watching the man that I love flirt and smile at every other woman in the room but me. I grabbed another flute off the tray of a passing waiter and took a long swallow.

"Bella, don't you think you should slow down?" Rose sidled up to me.

I rounded on her, "Why should I? I might as well make a fool of myself. Seems that Edward is hell bent on doing exactly that. Why should I care what people think?"

Rose touched my shoulder, "Bella lower your voice."

"Why? Let them stare Rose. No one gives a shit about little broken Bella Swan. Least of all the people who say that they love her." I downed the last of my champagne and stormed out of the room. I rushed up the stairs and past Edward, just as he turned to look at me.

"Bella where...?" He grabbed my arm.

I yanked it out of his grasp. "What do you care Edward? Huh? You have ignored me all night. You can stay here and flirt all you want, but I don't have to stay and watch. Have a Happy New Year!" I turned to go up the stairs and came face to face with Esme. The tears in my eyes blurred her face, "I'm sorry Esme." I rushed past her and up to my room where I shut and locked the door.

I fell to my bed and let the tears fall freely. This was not at all how I expected this night to go. I wanted to look beautiful for Edward. I wanted Edward to love me and make love to me. I wanted my Edward back.

I don't know how long I lay there, but I finally got up and slipped off my dress. I pulled on a pair of shorts and a T-shirt, before walking into the bathroom to wash my face and brush out my hair. I walked back out to my room and was in the process of hanging the dress when there was a knock on my door.

"Bella please let me in. I need to talk to you." Edward pleaded through the door.

I looked at the clock and saw that it was still thirty minutes until the New Year. I sighed and went to the door. I opened it a crack, "Go down and find your midnight kiss Edward. I'm tired."

I moved to shut the door, but his foot stopped me. Using his

weight he pushed open the door and then came in, shutting and locking the door behind him.

"Edward, what the hell? What could you..."

My words were cut off by his mouth pressing to mine. I tried to push him away, but it was futile. He was kissing me with the passion I had been missing since his return. Even though the kiss is amazing, I am finally successful in pushing him away.

"Edward you can't just ignore me all night, flirt with every bimbo you come across and then expect me to be happy and welcoming when you decide you need me. I'm sorry, I don't downshift that fast." I back away from him and then curled up in the arm chair that sat in the corner.

"Bella I'm sorry. I didn't mean to ignore you. I hadn't seen these people in a long time and they all wanted to talk to me." He stuck his hands in his pockets.

"Who were those women Edward?" I watched as he ran his hands through his hair. Something he only did when he was nervous. I couldn't help but laugh as the realization dawned on me. "Are you telling me that I was surrounded by women that you have slept with all night? Really?"

Edward came to kneel in front of me, "They meant nothing to me Bella."

I stood up then as another surge of anger washed over me.

"They meant nothing, but the woman you claim to love, you won't fucking touch. I am so stupid. I actually thought that you wanted me. I wore that dress tonight hoping that you would want to be with me as much as I want to be with you. I am such a fool."

"Bella you are not a fool. I am. I've been keeping you at arm's length because I am afraid that if I touch you like I really want to...I'm afraid that I'll never let you go." I turned and watched him sink into the chair I had just vacated. He put his elbows on his knees and put his head in his hands. "I'm so sorry, Bella. I never wanted to hurt you. I know that you said you wanted to wait and I have been trying to respect that..."

"Edward look at me," I interrupted. I came to kneel in front of him this time. I waited until his eyes met mine, "Baby, I thought that I needed to wait. I don't. When I almost lost you, I realized that life is too short to put everything on hold because of fear. I lost my first love to this terrible fight and then a very good friend. When I thought that you were gone, it almost broke me. But you came back. I don't want to waste another second of any time that we can have together. I love you, with everything I am. I want to wake up in your arms. I want you to make love to me. I want to have babies with you. But if this isn't what you want tell me now, so that I can move on with my life." I made no move to stop the tears that were sliding down my cheeks after my little speech.

Edward stared at me before lifting his hand to wipe the tears from my face. He grasped my hands in his as he stood, pulling me with him. "Bella I have never loved anyone the way that I

love you. When I thought that I would never see you again... well those were some dark thoughts. When I came home and found that fucker harassing you, I wanted to tear him apart. But then you looked at me and it was like my whole world was back to normal. Then I got scared, because I don't want to lose you by pushing you too far too fast. I have had to force myself to stay away from you. I never thought you would think that I don't want you. I am so sorry. Please tell me that I haven't lost you," he cried.

I couldn't answer him. My heart was in my throat. I did the only thing I could think of. I pressed my lips to his and kissed him with all of the love I felt. Edward brought his hands up to my face, his thumbs gently caressing my cheeks. He swept his tongue out and ran it along my bottom lip, seeking entrance. I opened up and let him deepen the kiss, but couldn't shut off my brain as my tongue danced with his.

Reluctantly pulled away placing my forehead against his, "Edward, I need you to understand something. You can't push me away when you get scared. You have to talk to me. We'll never last if we don't communicate."

"I love you Bella. I promise to do better. Can I get back to kissing you now?" He smirked.

"Please..."

His mouth came back down on mine and immediately pressed his tongue to mine in that familiar dance. I don't know who started it, but I was suddenly laying on my bed with Edward

pressing gently down on me. I could feel his arousal against my thigh.

I reached for the buttons of his coat and made quick work of releasing them and slid his jacket off. It landed in a heap beside my bed. His shirt followed soon after.

Edward's mouth was blazing a warm trail down my neck and to the hollow point of my shoulder. I was writhing beneath him, aching for him to touch me. His warm hand made its way under my shirt and up my ribcage to gently cup my breast. I felt my nipple tighten at his touch and arced into him, with a breathless moan.

He lifted his head to look at me. His eyes had darkened and I could see the lust and love shining back at me. "Bella, if we keep this up, I won't be able to stop."

"Don't stop. Make love to me, Edward."

Needing no other encouragement he swept my shirt over my head and tossed it somewhere in the room. He brought his mouth down to my hardened peak and swept his tongue across it before sucking it into his mouth, eliciting a moan from me. I felt his grin as he kissed and nibbled his way to my other breast, lavishing the same attention on it. My hands were fisted in his hair, holding him to me.

When he felt that was enough, he kissed his way to my abdomen and to the waist of my shorts. He slipped his hand under the band and I lifted my hips to help him slide them off.

He continued his trail of kisses over my hips, my inner thighs, the top of my mound, but never where I needed him.

"Edward, please..."

"What do you want Bella?" I felt his warm breath on my center. "Do you want my mouth here?" He slid a finger along my slick folds.

"Oh, yes please." I begged wantonly.

I heard him chuckle as he brought his mouth to my dripping core. He flicked his tongue across my clit and I thought I would come off the bed. He set a leisure pace of gentle sucks and nips, before he inserted one, then two fingers. I groaned at the sensation causing him to clamp his mouth to me sucking and licking me to oblivion. Just as the clock struck midnight, Edward brought me to the most intense orgasm I had ever experienced.

"Edward!"

"That's it baby, let it go." He lapped up all my juices like a thirsty man drank water.

As I came down from my high, Edward shed the rest of his clothing. He crawled up my body and again brought his mouth to mine. I tasted myself on him and found it to be incredibly erotic and grew wetter from the taste.

"Edward, please, I need you now!"

I felt him align himself at my entrance, before gently pressing in. "Oh, god, so tight, so warm and wet. I love you Bella!"

Once he was fully seated in my heat, he stayed still for a moment so that I could adjust to his size. I've never felt so full or complete. I shifted my hips letting him know he could move. I was soon meeting him thrust for thrust.

"Edward..." I moaned.

"Oh, baby, I'm not gonna last long."

"So close, Edward, please." My nails were digging into his back as I brought my legs up to wrap around his back, locking my ankles and taking him deeper. We both groaned at the new sensations.

I felt my orgasm building and wanted Edward to come with me. "Baby, I'm gonna..." Lightning burst behind my eyes and my walls clenched down around him.

On a loud growl, Edward followed me into the abyss, calling my name. "Bella!"

We lay there for a moment trying to catch our breaths. Edward gently rolled off of me, pulling out in the process and I whimpered at the loss. He pulled me to his side and gently kissed my head.

"That was..." He started.

"Amazing, earth shattering..." I provided.

"Yes. Happy New Year, baby."

I leaned up to look in his eyes. "I love you. Happy New Year." I reached up to kiss him and we were once again taken in by the passion we felt. He made love to me again and I had never felt so alive.

We finally rested, exhausted from our exertions. I stayed wrapped in his arms all night, content to be loved and wanted and to finally be at peace. I didn't dream that night and knew that I was finally home.

AN: Sorry this chapter is late. It kind of took on a life of its own. Leave me some love. I may have another one up later today.

15. Chapter 15

Disclaimer: All characters are the property of Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement intended.

"EDWARD!" I bolted upright out of the nightmare.

I looked at my side and saw that the bed was empty. My nightmares had been growing steadily worse since New Year's. It had been two weeks and although we shared a bed every night, Edward was once again keeping me at arm's length. Pushing the covers off of me I padded to the bathroom and started the shower.

I've had enough. I stripped and stepped under the hot spray. I let my thoughts take over as I washed my body. First I was going to find a place to live, then I was heading to the nearest IKEA and filling said place. I would make it comfortable for me, since I would be living there...alone.

My decision made, I stepped out of the shower and dried off. I walked into the bedroom and went to the closet to get dressed. I also pulled my suitcases out of the top and began packing up my stuff. I filled on with enough clothes to get me through a couple of weeks and then slipping on my shoes, dragged it downstairs and to my car. I had to stop in the front hall to get my coat, purse and keys. I waited for any sound,

but heard none so I eased the door open.

"Are you gonna say goodbye?"

I turned and came face to face with Carlisle. "You probably think I'm a coward."

Carlisle shook his head, "No Bella I don't. I see an amazing young woman who has been through hell and back and is still walking. I know that Edward has been...less than attentive since his return. I also know that you called him on it."

"I did call him on it," I interrupted. "He promised me that he was just afraid of losing me. Well now he's gonna know how that feels. I deserve better Carlisle. You know that I love him, but I can't be the only person in this relationship."

He nodded silently. "Let me carry your bag."

I was surprised that he wanted to help me leave his son, but at least he wasn't trying to stop me. We reached my car and I unlocked the trunk. He eased my suitcase inside and then shut the lid.

"Edward loves you Bella. I only hope that he sees what he lost." Carlisle wrapped me up in his arms and with a kiss to my cheek turned and walked inside.

I took one last look at the house I had lived in and then got in my car, started it up and drove away. It wasn't until I got to the highway that the tears started. They didn't stop until I got

to Forks.

~~OTL~~

I pulled into Charlie's driveway three hours after I left. I slowly walked to the front door and rang the bell. I didn't feel right walking in, this wasn't my house anymore. I tried to smile when my dad opened the door, but it looked more like a grimace. "Hi Dad."

He opened the screen door and pulled me inside. "Bella, what are you doing here? Is Edward with you?"

At the mention of his name the tears started anew. "No...I left...him...daddy," my breathe hitching through my sobs.

I felt arms come around me and turned my head and looked Sue in the eye. I shouldn't have been surprised to see her. I buried my head in her shoulder and just let the tears fall, soaking her shirt.

"Did he hurt you Bells?"

I looked up at me dad and wiped my eyes, "Not physically, Dad, just emotionally."

"What happened, sweetie?" Sue asked.

"He's different. He ignores me, he flirts with anyone who has breasts and isn't a relative. It started on new year's. He blatantly flirted with women he had been with right in front of me." I went on and on telling them everything.

"Bells, I hate to say this, but do you think he may be suffering from some sort of PTSD?"

I shook my head, "He was checked out for all that Dad. He passed all of the psych evaluations with flying colors. I don't know, maybe he just doesn't love me."

"Oh, Bella, honey, I'm sure that Edward loves you. You just need to give him some time."

"I am that's why I left. If he wants me, he can come find me." I stood and walked to the bathroom to wash my face of the tears. After I was refreshed and feeling better, I said good bye to my dad and Sue and headed back out to my car, letting them know I would call later.

My phone started ringing as I got in my car. I pulled it out of my pocket and looked at it. *Edward*.

I tentatively answered, "Hello."

"Where are you Bella? Half of your stuff is missing from the bedroom."

"I'm not coming back."

"What the fuck does that mean? Bella, I love you. Come home." He pleaded.

"You say that Edward, but your actions speak louder. I'm sorry, I'm not going to stay with a man that ignores me and won't touch me. I deserve better. You love me, prove it." I

hung up before I lost my nerve.

I backed out of the drive and began my search for a place to live.

~~OTL~~

I had found a cute little house about two blocks over from my dad. It was definitely a fixer-upper, but I had enough money to get it done. I bought the house for well below the asking price. I guess the people that lived there just wanted to get out from under it.

It had two bedrooms, an eat-in kitchen with the laundry room off of it. The living room was spacious and I couldn't wait to decorate. I picked up the phone and called Esme. When she answered, I asked the one question that was bothering me.

"Do you hate me?"

I heard her chuckle, "No, sweetie, I don't hate you. I understand why you left. Now, why don't you tell me where you are?"

"I'll tell you on one condition..."

"I know. I can't tell Edward."

I laughed and told her where I was. "I bought it Esme, its mine. Would you like to help me decorate it?"

She readily agreed and said that she would bring the rest of

my stuff with her when she came. I smiled as I hung up and then drove back over to my dad's. I would stay there for one night and then I would move into my home. What I wasn't prepared for was Edward sitting on his front stoop.

I sighed and got out of the car. "How did you find me?"

"I know you. When it gets to be too much you always come to Forks."

I sat beside him, "Why are you here?"

"I need you to help me. I don't know what's wrong with me Bella, but I can't lose you. I love you. You are what kept me from giving up over there." He looked at me.

"Edward...you've hurt me so badly. I never thought that you..."

He cut me off, "I know. All I can say is that I'm sorry. When I came home today and saw some of your stuff missing, I went a little crazy. I called Alice and Rose to see if they knew where you were. Dad calmed me down and talked to me. He showed me what I had been doing and that I had slowly been breaking you, piece by piece." He stopped and got in front of me, taking my hands in his. "Baby, please tell me that I haven't lost you."

I made a decision then, looking into his pleading eyes. "Come on, I want to show you something." I got up and pulled him up with me and over to my car. We got in and I drove him over to

my new home. "I bought this today." I watched his face looking for a reaction.

He swallowed, "You bought this place? Bella it looks like it will fall in on your head."

I turned to him and placed my hands on his cheeks, "Our heads. I bought this so that we can start over. I want us to fix up this house together, but I need you to want it too. I need to know that you are going to be with me and me only. I am not going to stay in Seattle and be haunted by the ghosts of women that you have slept with. You told me that they meant nothing to you; I need you to show me. Stay here with me; help me make this our home."

He removed my hands from his cheeks and I watched him walk to the front door. He turned to me and I tossed him the keys. He opened the door and disappeared inside. I couldn't help but wonder what he was thinking as he walked through the inside. When he came back out he had a strange look on his face.

"What? Talk to me."

He grinned, "I can see it. I can see us sitting in the kitchen having breakfast, dinner, and family gatherings." He walked to me and grabbed my hands. "I want it. I want all of it with you. When do we start?"

I smiled, "Tomorrow. Your mom is coming down to help fix it up. I'm sure that your sister and the rest will be in tow."

"Do you think your dad has any sleeping bags or an air mattress? I want to stay here with you tonight. I want us to start fresh, here, tonight."

"Are you sure?" He nodded and I threw my arms around his neck, hugging him to me. "I love you."

"I love you," he pulled back to look at me. "I love you so much." Then he kissed me.

My dad ended up letting us borrow two sleeping bags and an air mattress and we spent our first night in our new home, making love and sleeping wrapped in each other's arms. I knew that our troubles weren't solved, but this was a step in the right direction.

~~OTL~~

Esme arrived at the house by nine the next morning and just like I thought she had brought reinforcements. Jasper, Emmett, Carlisle, Rose and Alice all came with her. They were all surprised to find Edward here with me. Esme pulled me to the side and asked me what was going on.

"I don't know Esme. He was at my Dad's when I got off the phone with you. We talked and while I don't know what's going to happen, I think being here is going to go a long way to helping us."

"Bella all I care about it that both of you are happy. Now let's look around this place and see what it is that the two of you

want done."

For the next few hours we ripped down old wallpaper off the walls and scraping peeling paint. Edward and I sat down with Esme's paint sample book and selected the colors for all the rooms.

"Hey! Come look at this." Emmett shouted from the living room.

We all went in to see what he was yelling about and were shocked. He had pulled up part of the carpet to inspect the padding underneath and had found hard wood floors.

"Pull it up the rest of the way Em." I requested. Edward, Jasper and Emmett all tugged and pulled the rest of the carpet from the floors. "Esme, look, they are still in great condition. They just need buffed and shined. I wonder if it's like this in all the rooms."

Emmett groaned, while Edward laughed. "Come on bro, let's go check." An hour later all the carpet was ripped up and all the rooms revealed original hardwood.

"Edward baby, this just got a lot better." I smiled as I wrapped my arms around his waist.

"And cheaper," he grinned.

"Hey!" I poked him in the side.

Esme poked her head in, "Come on you two, let's go get

some dinner and we can look online for furniture."

Everyone followed her out, but I stayed back to look around with a small smile on my face. Edward came behind me and wrapped his arms around me and put his chin on my shoulder.

"Everything is going to be fine, sweetheart. I don't want you to worry anymore. You were right. This was exactly what we needed."

I turned in his arms, "Just promise me that moody Edward isn't moving in? I don't like him, he leaves me lonely."

"Moody Edward is gone; from now on I am just your Edward."

"That's right, you're mine." I reached up and placed my lips to his. "I love you."

"As I love you." He brought his mouth back to mine. Before he could deepen the kiss a car horn sounded, we broke apart laughing.

"Emmett," we said smiling and walked out to join our family.

AN: Okay so a little more broodyward, but I think he has flown the coop. I think there might only be one more chapter and then an epi, but we'll see. Until Saturday... Leave me some love.

16. Chapter 16

Disclaimer: All characters are the property of Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement intended.

AN: There is an apparent conspiracy taking place on , so in order to save my stories I have put them ALL up on TWCS. I will be posting them on both sites, so rest assured that you will still be able to read your favorites.

Now on with the show...

The days quickly turned into weeks and soon our house was complete. We had found that the entire house had wood flooring and had it all sanded and polished. It now looked brand new. Edward and I had chosen an area rug and then painted the living room and picked the furniture around it. It gave it a warm, homey feel to it.

Our bedroom was my favorite space. It fit both of our personalities. I had turned the second room into an office. I had talked with the dean and dropped all of my classes and was refunded the tuition that I hadn't used. I had decided I was going to write a novel.

Edward had decided to retire from the army and had turned in his letter to his commanding officer. He was training new

recruits until the end of the rest of his three months. He was staying at his apartment on base during the week and then coming home to me on the weekends. He had also started seeing a counselor.

I was secretly seeing one myself, not telling Edward, since I was still having some residual trust issues. I was afraid that Edward was going to start his same old shit of ignoring me. I knew that I wouldn't be able to handle it this time.

So I spent my weekdays sequestered in my office typing away, letting my imagination flow through my fingertips. I had been so sucked in that I didn't hear the doorbell or my phone ringing. It wasn't until I heard voices behind me that I realized where I was.

"Bella!"

I got up and ran into the living room. "What? What is it? What's wrong?" I approached a frantic Edward.

I watched as he sighed in relief, before pulling me into his arms. "Baby, I have been calling and your dad stopped by a few hours ago. Where have you been?"

I looked up at him confused. "I've been in the office. I'm sorry, I was so wrapped up in what I was doing that I didn't hear the door or the phone."

Edward pulled back from me and walked to the kitchen. He grabbed a bottle of water from the fridge and then pulled out

his phone. I stood watching him, not moving from my spot as I tried to figure out what was wrong.

"I found her Charlie...No, she was here the whole time...She said she didn't hear it...Yeah, I'll get it to you in the morning. Bye."

"Get what to him?"

"I'm giving your dad a key to the house." He sighed and ran his hand through his hair before sitting in the recliner. "Bella I sped all the way here from Seattle because no one could get ahold of you. Your dad is getting a key, just in case this happens again."

"Well let's just treat me like a child." I stomped out of the room. I know that I was acting like one right now but I was writing. They all know what I am trying to do and yet they still want to mess with me.

I went back into the office and slammed the door shut. I put on some calming music and sat back down, trying to get back the momentum that I had previously, to no avail. I leaned back in my chair and growled in frustration.

"Did you just growl?"

I spun around in my chair and came face to face with a smirking Edward. "What now?"

The smirk disappeared. "I'm sorry babe."

"I just don't get it. For the last few months you have been less than attentive and then the one time that I don't answer the fucking phone or door, you go all ape-shit and..."

"Bella that's not fair." He cut me off.

"I know, I'm sorry." I got up and moved to him. I place my hands on his chest and felt his heart beating beneath them.

"Honey, when I get in the groove I don't notice anything. This is what my week is like. You're not usually here, so I just don't notice anything. Sometimes I forget to eat."

"Bella, I get that, but babe, I was worried. Especially when your dad couldn't get you. Can you at least try to be more aware of your surroundings?"

I smiled softly, "I'll try, but I'm not making any promises."

"Alright, I can deal with that," he leaned down and pressed his lips to mine.

~~OTL~~

I sat beside Esme and Alice in the banquet hall at the retirement ceremony for Edward and a few others. I couldn't believe he was finally done. He would be home to stay and boy were we ready. I was halfway through the novel that I was writing and had sent the first chapter to my friend Angela who worked for a publishing house in New York. Amazingly they were interested and I was excitedly trying to get it finished.

I listened to the speeches and anxiously awaited the evening to be over. I barely paid attention when Edward's name was called. I was lost in a world where he and I were the only people. I was so transfixed that Esme had to nudge me to pay attention.

"...I need to thank my family for supporting my decision to enlist. Mom, Dad you always supported me. Alice, Emmett thanks for being the best brother and sister. I also need to thank my girlfriend Bella, without her I wouldn't have made it home. When we were lost it was her face I would see and I knew that I had to keep fighting so that I could come back and ask her the one question that I had been waiting to. Bella I love you, would you marry me?"

My jaw dropped at his very public proposal. I thought maybe he was kidding, until I saw him walk off the stage and come over to kneel in front of me. The banquet hall was quiet as Edward took a small black box from his pocket.

"Bella, I have loved you since the moment I first met you. I have only grown to love you more with each passing day. Please say that you will spend the rest of your life letting me make you happy. Will you marry me?" He opened the box to reveal an emerald cut Harry Winston engagement ring in white gold. It was two and a half carats and completely gorgeous.

I felt the tears on my cheeks as I nodded, "Yes," I whispered.

The room burst into rounds of applause and cheers of congratulations. I only had eyes for Edward as he slipped the

ring onto my finger. He reached up and kissed me before pulling me into his arms and out of my chair spinning around the room.

"I love you," he set me back on my feet.

I wrapped my arms around his neck. "I love you too."

We sat back down and enjoyed the rest of the evening before going home and celebrating properly and for a long while.

~~OTL~~

I woke and stretched my body. I rolled over and swept my arm across the bed and found Bella's side to be empty and cold. I sat up and looked around the room. I listened for a minute, but didn't hear her anywhere.

"Bella?" I got up and headed for the kitchen. She wasn't there, but a note was propped against the coffee machine.

Went out to run a quick errand. Be back soon. Love you, B

I smiled and headed into the living room with my coffee. I sat in my favorite chair and turned ESPN on the flat screen. I couldn't help my *Whoop* when I saw that the Celtics beat the Heat and were now 2-1 in the East series. I hate the Miami Heat...so I hope they lose the rest of the games and get knocked out of the playoffs.

I must have dosed off because the next thing I knew Bella's

sweet voice was next to my ear. "Wake up baby."

I yawned and looked at her beautiful face and couldn't help but think of how close I came to losing her. All because of my own stupidity. I had been so messed up in my head when I had gotten home that I kept her at arm's length rather than risk losing her. She was too good for me and I couldn't believe that she had agreed to marry me.

"Hi, babe, where ya been?"

She smiled and walked into the kitchen. "I went to talk to Riley. I told him we are getting married and I said one final goodbye. I told him I wouldn't be back to see him."

I stood up and walked to her, "Are you alright?"

"I'm fine. It was time for me to completely let him go. I don't want any ghosts between us after we get married."

I smiled and wrapped her up in my arms and hugged her to me. "I love you Bella."

I felt her nod into my chest and hug me tighter. I couldn't wait to spend the rest of my life with her.

~~OTL~~

I drove to the cemetery, thinking about Edward sleeping in our bed back home. I unconsciously rubbed my ring with my thumb and thought about what I was going to say to him when I got there. I pulled over to the side closest to where he lay

and got out to walk over to the tombstone. I sat on my knees and cleared away some of the debris that gathered there.

"Hi. I bet you're wondering why I'm here so early in the morning. I came because I needed to tell you that Edward proposed. A part of me will always love you Riley, but it's time for me to move forward with my life. I'm writing a book you know. I am trying to make myself a future. I thought that was with you, but I guess fate had other plans. I'm happy now. I never thought I would be, but I'm happy that I put my heart on the line and found someone who is perfect for me. It's time Riley." I stood and brushed off my jeans and kissed my fingers before placing them on the cold stone that bore his name. "Goodbye."

I felt the wind blow through my hair and caress my face and I knew that it was Riley wishing me well. Feeling lighter than I had in days, I walked to my car and drove to my future.

AN: Sorry I know this is a little short. I think all I have left is the epilogue. I might write their wedding I haven't decided yet. Especially with all the FF drama. I will be posting on both and TWCS. I have the same pen-name on both. Looking forward to your thoughts.

17. Epilogue

Disclaimer: All characters are the property of Stephenie Meyer. No copyright infringement intended.

AN: Well here is the epilogue. I plan at least one outtake, especially of Edward's POV of the New Year's party. I appreciate all of your reviews and support. Remember you can find me on TWCS as well.

Now on with the show...

Two years later...

"Push Bella," Dr. Young ordered.

"Come on baby. Push so we can see our son." Edward encouraged.

I took a deep breath and bore down, pushing my baby into the world. It felt like he was ripping his way out, but apparently that was normal. We had had so much trouble conceiving that I wondered if I would ever be able to give Edward a child.

"Okay, the head is out, take a breath."

I lay back against the pillow and smiled wearily at my

husband. He grinned at me as he wiped my brow with a cool cloth.

"You're doing so well, sweetheart. He's almost here."

"Okay, Bella, get ready. I want you to give me one last push and then you can hold your son." Three minutes later a small cry filled the room. "Here he is."

Dr. Young laid the baby on my stomach and I helped the nurses to clean him up. "He's perfect. Look what we did Edward."

"He's so beautiful." Edward kissed my forehead and then reached out to touch our son's hand. He looked at him in awe as he stroked first his hand and then his cheek.

A nurse walked over and picked him up, saying that she would bring him back in a moment. I knew that Dr. Young was busy cleaning me up, so I nodded for Edward to go over with the baby.

"APGAR is a nine, that's very good. Weight, eight pounds seven ounces, length twenty-one inches."

I barely heard them as they assessed my baby, as I was exhausted from the birth. When they were finally done, the nurses handed Edward the baby and he came back over to me. He placed him gently in my arms and then kissed me.

"Thank you Bella, I love you."

I smiled up at him, "I love you, too."

~~OTL~~

A knock on the door roused me from my sleep. I heard rather than saw Edward get up to answer it and smiled sleepily when I opened my eyes and saw our families.

"Where is he?" Esme asked excitedly.

I watched Edward walk over to the bassinet that held our son and gently pick him up before turning to face the room. He gently placed the baby in Esme's arms and she immediately started to coo.

Alice was bouncing next to her. I giggled, "Alice don't bounce so close to my baby."

"Well are you ever gonna tell us his name?" My dad wanted to know.

Edward met my eyes and I nodded to him. "Everyone meet Andrew Riley Cullen."

"Oh, Bella, Riley would be so happy that you gave him his name." My mom cried.

"I know Mom. I called Vicki and asked her if it was alright with her. She told me it was a great way to honor him."

Just then Andrew left out a lusty cry. "I think someone is hungry," Carlisle commented.

I nodded and pushed myself to a sitting position on the bed, with Edward's help. Esme handed him to me and I opened my gown and he immediately latched on to my nipple.

Emmett cleared his throat. "Um, Bells...do you want us to ... uh, leave."

I looked up from where Andrew was suckling, "No Em, unless you're uncomfortable."

Rose smacked the back of his head, "What are you gonna do when I feed this one in public?" She asked pointing at her protruding belly. She was due in another month, followed by Alice a month later.

"Ow! Damn Rosie, I hadn't thought about it." Emmett rubbed the back of his head.

Everyone laughed at Emmett's discomfort. I looked back down and noticed that Andrew had fallen asleep, so I removed his mouth like the nurse had showed me and Edward took him placing him up to his shoulder and patted his back until he let out a sweet, yet big, burp.

Once everyone had a chance to hold him they let us alone so that we could get some rest. I drifted off to sleep to the sounds of Edward cooing to our son.

~~OTL~~

A month after Andrew was born found us moving into our new

house. We had sold the other one for well above what I had paid for it, seeing as how we had put even more work into after we moved in.

The new house was one block away from Charlie and two blocks from Edward's parents. Yep, they had moved to Forks, Carlisle accepting a position at Forks Memorial. Rose and Emmett hadn't been far behind. Alice and Jasper came a year later.

Now that everyone was settled we all concentrated on our respective career choices. Alice reopened her boutique on Fork's main street. I published my first novel, although it wasn't a huge success at first I did garner a small group of fans. My second one however was a best seller.

Charlie retired from the police department and Edward applied and was hired to replace him as chief. His military experience went a long way to helping him get the position.

Emmett and Esme opened an interior design and refurbishment business. He did all the refurbishing, building and heavy lifting and Esme made it all pretty and stylish.

Rose's Auto Body quickly became the hot spot of Forks. All of the teenagers went there to get their cars detailed, as well as take a look at the hot proprietor.

Jasper had gone back to school to finish his degree and came back as the accountant for all off the businesses in Forks, as well as some of the smaller ones in Port Angeles. He and

Alice were both very successful.

Carlisle was enjoying the more laid back atmosphere of the smaller hospital and found that he had more time for his grandchildren. He now had two, Jasper and Alice's oldest daughter Lexi, short for Alexandra, who was almost two. And then of course Andrew, the light of my life.

Andrew was growing so quickly. At one month, he had already gained two pounds and was able to hold his head up, although wobbly, which most one month olds couldn't do.

"Hey, babe..." I called from the nursery.

I heard him before I saw him. "Yeah?" He poked his head around the corner.

"Can you take him so that I can get ready?"

"Bella put him in his crib or the bouncer. I'm trying to get ready too." Tonight was the Cullen's New Year's Eve party.

I sighed and place Andrew in his bouncer, but carried it into the large bathroom, so that Edward could watch him while I jumped in the shower. I sat him on the counter so that he could watch his daddy shave and then started my own preparations.

This would be the first one I had gone to since the debacle of a party after Edward's return. Last year I was on a book tour and the year before that I had refused to go. I wasn't in the

mood to be face to face with the former objects of Edward's affections, no matter the fact that he and I were married.

Once I was finished with my shower I stepped out to dry off and noticed my husband entertaining our child by dancing around with shaving cream on his face. Andrew was giggling a gassy giggle. I laughed myself and continued to get ready.

I slipped into the matching red panty and bra set and then stepped over to apply my make-up, which I left subtle. I put a little mousse in my hair and let it air dry, before going in to slip on my red dress.

By the time I was ready, Edward had finished putting on his tux and gotten Andrew dressed. Alice had made him the cutest little outfit. It looked like a tux, but was actually a sleeper.

"Wow!"

I looked up and met Edward's smirk. "Do I look okay?"

Edward swallowed, "Let's just say that it's too bad you aren't in the clear yet, because I would love nothing more than to ravage you Mrs. Cullen."

I felt myself grow wet at his words and smirked myself, "Good thing that I already got the all clear then, huh, Mr. Cullen?"

I strode over to him and pressed myself against his body. I

licked his lip before placing mine to his. I felt his erection against my belly and new that this would be another New Year I would never forget.

~~OTL~~

"Look at her strutting around here with that baby in her arms." I heard a sniveling voice whisper as I walked past on my way to feed Andrew. "If she thinks that just because she had his kid she'll be able to hang on to him, she better think again."

"Jessica, you're awful. That's his wife."

Ahh, so Jessica was once again gonna try and steal my husband. It was the same game with her every year. This year was different though. This year I wasn't going to stand for it. I walked around the corner and met Jessica's eyes.

"I think it's time for you to leave." I told her.

"Who the hell are you to tell me to leave?"

I felt Edward come up behind me, "She is my *wife* and if she told you to leave, then leave."

"Are you sure you want me to leave, Eddie?" Jessica purred.

I heard the music in the other room stop and the chatter quiet down as the room hushed. Encouraged, I turned to Jessica and growled, "Get out!"

"This isn't over Bella Swan, I will have him." She turned and

just before she left I caught up to her.

I had handed the baby off to Edward and stormed forward, "My last name is Cullen and you would do well to remember that *Mrs. Newton*. Stay away from my husband. I'm sure that yours wouldn't be too happy with your pursuit of a married man."

She looked like she was going to burst into tears. Esme walked up beside me and looked her dead in the face. "You are no longer welcome in my house Jessica. I would suggest that next year you find another way to celebrate, because I can assure you that you will not be here."

Wrapping her arm around my shoulders, we went and enjoyed the rest of our night. Edward followed me to his old room and sat with me while I fed our son.

"I love you, Bella. You have no idea how much." He whispered.

I looked at him and smiled, "I love you too Edward. One of these days you'll realize that I will do just about anything for you." I looked back down at our child. "Except listen to whores plot my demise." I laughed and grinned when he joined me.

"I don't think that will be a problem ever again."

I finished feeding Andrew and then walked to him, "Let's go home, put him to bed and have a private celebration."

Edward didn't hesitate to tell his family good bye. Andrew was barely in his bed and sound asleep, before my dress and Edward's tux were in a heap on the floor and he was moving inside me. It was my favorite way to ring in the New Year.

AN: Well that's all she wrote. Thank you for all of your kind words during this story. I have heard from a few of you that said that this story helped you in some way or the other cope with your loved ones absence. Don't forget this will be posted on FF as well as TWCS. Until the next one...Leave me some love.