Ready to Love Again
momma2fan

Tags: StoryMaster, FanFiction.Net

O/S donated to the Fandom Against Domestic Violence. Summary inside.
Summary: Bella learns the hard way that not all men are like her Ken doll. After meeting the wrong man, she runs to the safety of her father. After settling in a new school and new apartment, she meets Alice. With her help, as well as that of her friends and brother, Bella starts putting together the fragments of her life. Will her abuser find her? Will Bella ever be ready to love again?

BPOV

When I was a little girl, I used to play Barbies either with my cousins or by myself. Never in all that time did I imagine that there were men out there who were nothing like the romantic Ken doll. When I was eighteen, I learned differently.

I had little to no experience with guys by the time I started college. I had had one boyfriend all through high school, but we fought as much as we loved. Mike and I were on again, off again for the whole four years. It wasn't until the night of prom that we were off again for good. When I found him letting my
best friend give him a blow job behind a curtain, a part of me broke.

I had been at the University of Arizona for about a month when I decided to give in to my roommate and go to a frat party. My first. It was there that I first saw him. He wasn't the best looking guy in the room, but the confidence that he displayed made him attractive.

When his eyes met mine across the room, I ducked my head and blushed at having been caught staring at him. I moved from my place on the couch and told Lauren, my roommate, that I was leaving. She just nodded, but never stopped talking to the guy that she had found when we walked in the door.

I had just placed my hand on the knob to open the door, when a voice sounded behind me.

"You're not leaving, are you?"

I turned and came face to face with him. His brown eyes studied me as I thought about what to say. "Um, yeah. I didn't really want to be here. My roommate dragged me with her."

"Too bad," he commented and gave me a grin. "What would it take for the prettiest girl in the room to stay and have a drink with me?"

I blushed again but gave him a small smile. He held out his hand to me and I willingly followed him to the bar. The rest of that night, he was glued to my side.
Things progressed slowly between myself and Quil. I would see him around campus and we would talk, but it was a month before he asked me out. He took me to a nice restaurant for dinner and then to a movie that I had mentioned I wanted to see. I was surprised that he remembered.

"Bella, I listen to everything you tell me."

He was nothing like Mike had been. I couldn't remember the last time that he had taken me to see something that I wanted to see. It was refreshing. Looking back on it now, it was Quil's way of drawing me in.

We had been dating for about a month and I was knee deep in my studies, preparing for finals before winter break. Quil had come by and was sitting on the floor of the dorm room that I shared with Lauren Mallory. I thought that he was studying, but when I chanced a glance over at him I saw that his eyes were on me.

"What?"

Quil crossed his arms before answering me. "I'm just wondering who it is that you're fucking, since you won't fuck me."

"Wh...what? Quil, I'm n...not sleeping with anyone," I stuttered.

"Don't lie to me!"
I flinched back. He had never yelled at me before and I had never seen anger from him like what was on his face in that moment.

"Quil! I am not lying to you!" I protested, rising from my seat. "I'm not sleeping with you because I have never slept with anybody!"

"Oh, bullshit, Bella! You had a boyfriend all through high school. You're telling me that you never had sex with him?" Quil was now standing over me.

"Yes, Quil, that's exactly what I am telling you. Why do you think he cheated on me?"

I never got an answer from him, nor did I get an apology for his accusations. Instead, he picked up his bag and stormed out of my room, leaving me wondering what had just happened.

I tried not to dwell on the fact that the guy I was dating was accusing me of cheating on him and buckled down in my studies. It was the day after my last final that Quil showed up at my room.

"Where the hell do you think you're going?" he asked me as I packed my clothes.

"Home, for break," I told him, not meeting his eyes. He hadn't talked to me all week. I was hurt, so I wasn't going to make it easy on him. Apparently he had the same plan.
Quil grabbed me by the arms and gripped me tightly. He shook me as he growled in my face, "You are mine, do you understand? You will behave and stay away from your ex. I will know if you don't and you will pay the consequences."

"Quil, please, you're hurting me," I gasped.

This only caused him to shake me harder, making my teeth rattle. "You're mine, Bella. I can do whatever I want to you and you can't do anything about it."

With a final squeeze, he let me go with a push and then walked away. I sat on my bed, stunned at what had just happened. I reached my hands up and rubbed my sore arms, knowing that I would likely have bruises. How would I explain that to my mother?

~~FADV~~

During winter break I relaxed and tried to forget about what Quil had said and done before I left. It didn't work. By the time I arrived back at my dorm, I was petrified. Would he be angry? Would the anger be escalated? I didn't want to know the answers. I wanted to avoid him. I tried to, but at the end of the first week he sought me out.

"Where have you been?" he questioned angrily.

"Nowhere. Here, classes…" I responded with fear and trepidation.
He grinned evilly at me. "Are you frightened of me, Isabella?"

"Qu…Quil, please. Just leave me alone," I stuttered weakly, hating myself for it.

"Oh, I don't think so. See, I kinda like this. You being all meek and submissive. I think I'll hang around. Have a good day, Bella. I'll be seeing you." He grabbed my chin and kissed me harshly before walking away.

I tried to ignore the trembling in my body as I headed for my next class, but I couldn't. I still couldn't understand what I had done to warrant his behavior. I also wondered when I had become this weak person who was suddenly scared of her own shadow.

I decided in that moment that he was not going to scare me. All he had done was shake me. Granted, I had ended up with bruises, but they went away.

I shook my head to break out of those thoughts. I concentrated on my class and then went about my day. It would be another week before I heard from or saw Quil again. When I did, he acted as though nothing happened.

~~FADV~~

The months passed and I saw Quil periodically. His demeanor had changed and so had the way he treated me. It was still a shock though, the first time that he hit me.
"Bella, we're going to the movies tonight with a bunch of my friends. Be ready to go at seven."

I looked at him like he was crazy. "Quil, I have class until seven. I can't go. You know this." I wasn't prepared for him to grab me.

"You're going to skip that class," he growled and shook me.

"No, I'm n…not."

His hand flashed up so quick I couldn't move. The force of the blow sent me to my knees. I brought my hand up and could feel the warmth from where his hand had connected with my cheek.

"Don't talk back to me, Bella." He leered over me. "You will be joining us this evening or you'll get worse. Do you understand?"

I could only nod as the silent tears rolled down my cheeks. No one, not even my parents, had ever hit me before. I was suddenly very afraid of what he was capable of.

"Get up and stop your blubbering. I'll see you later."

I watched as he walked away, then finally pulled myself up on shaky legs and walked back to my dorm. I prayed that Lauren wasn't in our room; I didn't want anyone to see the mark that I was sure was on my face.

Luck wasn't on my side, however. When I showed up in our
room, Lauren and her boyfriend, Tyler, were inside. Of course they both noticed my face.

"Bella!" Lauren exclaimed, running to my side. "What the hell happened?"

"Noth…"

"Don't tell me 'nothing.' This is definitely something."

"It looks like a handprint to me, Bella," Tyler commented.

I couldn't stop the tears and soon found myself wrapped up in Lauren's arms. "Bella, why didn't you tell me?"

"Tell you what? This is the first time he hit me. Usually he just grabs and shakes me," I explained once I had calmed down.

"I'm gonna beat the shit out of him!" Tyler growled.

I panicked. "No! Ty, please! You'll just make it worse. You can't say anything! Either of you. Please, promise me."

After a few minutes of me begging, Lauren and Tyler reluctantly agreed to keep my secret. Lauren helped me to cover the bruise that was forming before I left to meet up with Quil and his pals.

I felt like I barely had time to breathe as the next weeks passed. I went to class and I tried to avoid Quil, but he always managed to find me. He continued to be rough with me, and I would show up with fresh bruises from his smacks
and punches. Lauren always managed to help me hide them, but nothing could fix or hide the brokenness inside me.

Quil was slowly disintegrating my spirit and self confidence. I started wearing baggy clothes, because he said that he didn't want people to see my body. Then he would complain that I wasn't trying hard enough to be sexy. He told me that I wore too much makeup, so I stopped altogether, and then he would complain that I wasn't pretty enough to be on his arm.

I began to see him around campus with other women, and for the life of me, I couldn't figure out why he kept coming around. I still refused to have sex with him, so he must have been getting it somewhere else. Lauren and Tyler were the only ones that knew what he was doing to me, and they had tried to convince me to leave campus and go away, but I couldn't. I wasn't going to leave before I finished my first year.

It wasn't until after spring break that I would regret that decision.

~~FADV~~

Quil's frat was throwing a pre-finals party and I was expected to be there.

"Don't wear anything too flashy, but you better look hot," Quil had demanded before kissing me harshly while squeezing my chin in his hand. I was sure that I was going to have another bruise that would match his fingers.
I had a bad feeling about the party so I convinced Lauren and Tyler to come with me.

"Bella, if anything happens come find me," Tyler told me as we crossed the threshold.

"I will. Just promise me that you won't leave without me."

"We won't, Bella," Lauren promised.

By the time we got there, Quil and his friends were already drunk. I was immediately grabbed and led down to the game room. It was only me, Quil and six of his friends. I felt extremely uncomfortable and begged to go back up to the party.

"Quil, please! Let's go back upstairs." I should have known when to stop.

His fist connected with my cheek and I would swear that something snapped. When he landed another blow to my midsection, I wanted to vomit on his shoes.

"We are staying down here, Bella, and you are gonna give me what you've been denying me." Quil's words were slurred, but his intent was clear.

That's when I found the little bit of fight that I had left. I kicked him in the shin and ran for the stairs. I didn't make it far before a hand grabbed my ankle and pulled me down. I hit the stairs with a force that should have knocked me out, but the
adrenaline that coursed through my veins kept my eyes open.

I screamed as loud as I could, but the thumping bass coming from upstairs told me that no one would hear me. This had been his plan all along.

"No! Stop it, Quil!" I screamed, praying that someone would come to my rescue.

His friends' laughter grew, as did my struggles. When Quil reared back and punched me in the face, the fight began to leave me. When he wrapped his hands around my throat, I grabbed at him, trying to get oxygen. I felt my body go limp. I knew that he was still on me and that he was tearing my clothes away, but it was almost as if I wasn't there. When I felt his hand slide inside my panties, the fight was back.

I began thrashing, kicking and scratching—anything that would stop him—but I was overpowered. Quil punched me over and over again until I couldn't feel anything anymore. He tore my underwear from my body and forced his way inside. When he did, I left my body.

I wasn't aware when Quil was suddenly gone from me. I heard, but couldn't make out the grunts and slams, but I was once again being touched and began to scream.

"Bella! Bella, it's okay! It's Lauren."

I stopped screaming and began to sob. I clung to Lauren as if she were my life line. And in a way, she was.
"Ty, stop! We have to get Bella to the hospital!" Lauren shouted to her boyfriend.

Tyler must have come over and picked me up, but I don't remember anything beyond that point.

I woke up in the hospital to the sound of beeping. I turned my head toward the sound and groaned.

"Bells?"

I blinked my eyes, trying to open them, but the light was harsh. I moaned again and squeezed my eyes tightly, before trying again.

"Bella, baby?"

I knew those voices and I blinked, wanting to see my parents. I opened my eyes and saw the blurry figures before me. I waited for the fog to clear and then tried to speak.

"Don't try to talk, Honey. The doctor said it would be hard because of the bruising," my mom told me.

I licked my dry lips and whispered, "What happened?"

"You don't remember?" Charlie, my dad, asked.

I shook my head, and then whimpered from the pain. I looked at my parents again, hoping that one of them would explain.

"Oh, Sweetie, why didn't you tell me when you were home"
that your boyfriend was abusive?"

"Renee," I could hear the warning in Charlie's voice. "Bella, you went to a party and your…this guy attacked you. He beat you up…and he…"

I couldn't stop the tears from pouring down my cheeks. "Don't tell me anymore, Dad," I choked.

I knew that I had been violated when Charlie couldn't tell me anymore. I turned my head away from my parents and looked out the window at the bright, sunny day.

"I'll go get the doctor and tell him that you're awake." I felt my mother press a kiss to my temple, but didn't look at her.

When I heard the door shut, I turned and looked at my father. "Dad, I can't stay here. Can I come live with you for the summer and then I'll transfer to U-Dub?"

"Bells, you know that you can come stay with me whenever. We can make arrangements with the colleges as soon as I get you home."

I nodded and turned my head to look back out the window. "I don't want to live in the dorms, Dad. Do you think Mom and Phil will pay for an apartment?"

"We'll figure it out, Bells."

~~FADV~~
I was in the hospital for a week before I was deemed healthy enough to go home. Instead of returning to my mother's, I got on a plane with my dad and flew to Washington, ready to make a new start.

Quil had run, but the police were looking for him. I knew that they wouldn't find him. He was of Indian descent and was probably hiding on his reservation. His people would protect him, regardless of the fact that he had committed a terrible crime.

I had transferred my credits to U-Dub and would be starting my sophomore year there. My mother and Phil had agreed to take the money they were spending on room and board and rent me an apartment. I found a one bedroom near the campus that was in a gated area and had an alarm. I wasn't sure where Quil was, but I didn't want him to be able to get to me.

Summer passed quickly and my bruises faded away, but nothing could take away the pain and shame I felt from what he put me through.

I moved into my apartment on a rare sunny day. I stood outside on my deck, letting the light shine on me and the heat warm my cold body. I don't know how long I stood out there, but I heard the doorbell and knew that my solitude was over—for now.

I settled into a routine with classes and studying. I avoided people, especially males. I went on like this until October,
when I ran into one of my neighbors. She was a very hyper individual.

"Hi, I'm Alice. I live in 305. You must be 308, right?"

My eyes widened as I watched her bounce. It was a moment before I realized that she had asked me a question.

"Um, yeah, I live in 308."

"Well..." she giggled at me. "What's your name?"

"Sorry. I'm Bella."

I tried to move around her and get to my apartment, but she jumped in my way. "So, I'm having a little Halloween party, nothing big, just my boyfriend and a few friends. You should come."

"Um, thanks for the invite, but I don't think so." I moved around her and walked swiftly down the hall to my apartment.

Once I was safely inside and my door was bolted, I was able to breathe normally. I walked into my living room and sank onto my couch. I put my head in my hands and tried to clear the fear away. The knocking on my door had me jumping up.

"Who...who is it?" I asked cautiously as I crept over to look into the peephole.

"It's Alice."
I unlocked the two deadbolts but kept the chain in place while I pulled the door open slightly. Alice's face appeared in my vision and she had a gentle smile on her face.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to scare you. Jasper says I can be overwhelming sometimes."

"It's okay. Can I help you with something?"

"The Halloween thing that I'm having is more like a game night. I don't want you to feel obligated to come, but I would love it if you did."

"I don't think so, Alice. I'm...um...not very good around strangers."

"Okay. Here..." Alice handed over a folded up piece of paper. "That's my number. Call me anytime." She turned to leave, but turned back before I could shut my door. "You're not alone, Bella. Whatever happened to you, just know that."

I was stunned. I thought that I was putting on a good front, but she saw through that almost immediately. Maybe it was time. I wasn't living, I was existing. All I ever did was go to class, come home and repeat. I was constantly looking over my shoulder, never knowing when he would find me or strike again.

I wouldn't be going far, so I would be fine. I could also take my mace and tell Charlie where I would be, just in case. My decision made, I went into the kitchen to prepare my dinner.
I stood in front of my closet and contemplated what to wear. It was the first time in a long time that I cared what I looked like. I finally decided to just be me and pulled on a pair of jeans, a T-shirt, and my well worn chucks. I left my hair down and kept my makeup light. Once I was satisfied, I walked into my kitchen and grabbed the dip that I had made, as well as the bag of chips from the counter. After making sure that I had my cell phone and my keys—with my mace attached—I walked out of my apartment, locked the door, and then walked down the hall.

I could hear loud laughter coming from the other side of the door as I approached and almost chickened out. I took a deep breath, strengthened my resolve, and then lifted my hand to knock.

The door swung open and I came face to face with a large man. I stepped back and was about to turn and run when he spoke.

"You must be Bella. Ali will be thrilled that you're here. Ooh, is that dip?"

"Emmett, back off. You're scaring her." Alice smiled as she walked up behind the big man who I now knew as Emmett. "Ignore him, Bella. Come on in. I'm so glad you decided to come."
I stepped forward and crossed the threshold, still gripping the dip and the chips. "Sorry, maybe I should have called first."

"Don't be silly. Let me introduce you to everyone."

Alice tucked her arm into mine and led me into the living room. It looked like mine, only in the opposite direction. I took in the four people that were now staring at me.

"You already met Emmett, and beside him is his girlfriend Rosalie. The blonde on the couch is Jasper, my boyfriend, and the guy in the chair is my brother, Edward. Guys, this is Bella. She lives in 308."

Everyone said hello and I tentatively waved. "Nice to meet you."

"Make yourself comfortable," Alice told me as she took the dip and bag of chips from my hands.

I walked over and sat on the farthest corner of the couch, nearest to Rosalie and away from the men. I didn't think they would hurt me, but I wasn't willing to risk it.

I heard crunching and looked over to see Emmett devouring the chips and dip.

"Oh, my, God. Bella, did you make this?" Emmett asked, spraying crumbs everywhere.

I nodded and smiled just as Rosalie yelled at him. "Dammit, Emmett. I don't want crumbs on my clothes."
"Sorry, Rosie," he mumbled and then grinned over at me. "This is awesome."

"Thanks," I said quietly.

"So, Bella, where are you from?" Jasper asked.

I looked over at him fearfully, although I tried to stamp that down quickly. "Um, Phoenix." I knew they wanted to get to know me, but I was still so afraid of getting close to people.

Rosalie was the one that reached out. "Bella, are you okay?"

I looked up at her, tears building in my eyes. "I'm working on it."

"If you ever need to talk, you can call me," she offered.

"Thanks, Rosalie. I'm just not comfortable with strangers right now. Men especially," I explained.

"You'll get there. I promise," she smiled at me.

Alice clapped her hands. "Okay, let's play a game."

"I vote for Scene It," Emmett said.

"You only want to play that because it's the only one you can win, Em," Edward chuckled.

"What's that?" I asked.
I thought everyone's eyes were going to bug out of their heads. "You've never played Scene It?" Emmett asked first.

"No, my uh…my ex was more into punching games."

"What, like boxing?" Emmett wanted to know.

Edward reached up and smacked him in the back of the head. "No, you idiot. He used her as a punching bag."

My eyes filled with tears but I refused to let them fall. They all knew. I guess I wasn't as good at hiding it as I thought.

"Oh," Emmett said. "I'm sorry, Bella. No woman ever deserves to be hit."

"Thanks, Emmett." I tried to smile, but it didn't quite meet my eyes. I looked around the room expecting to see pity, but all I saw was understanding and support. "They haven't found him yet. I am constantly afraid that he will find me and finish what he started in May."

"What happened, Bella?" Rosalie asked.

"He, um…he…" I shook my head and let the tears fall.

I heard a low growl and looked up. Edward, Emmett, and Jasper all had menacing looks on their faces. I should have been scared, but I knew that it wasn't directed at me. These people had just met me and they were already protecting me.

"He raped you, didn't he?" Alice asked with tears in her eyes.
I nodded. "He also beat me within an inch of my life." I swallowed before I went on. I hadn't meant to tell them my story, but it just poured out and I couldn't stop. It was actually kind of healing.

"Bella," Emmett started. "You don't have to worry about him anymore. You have us now."

He got up and crossed the room, picking me up in his strong arms and hugging me. I suddenly felt very safe.

"Can't breathe, Em..." I gasped.

He put me down and smiled sheepishly. "Sorry, B."

After all of the heavy, we got down and had some fun. Every once in a while I would feel like I was being watched, and I would look up to see Edward's eyes on me. I couldn't help the blush that graced my cheeks after every look.

When the night finally wound down and I had beaten Emmett at his game, I stood to leave.

"I have an early class tomorrow. Thanks for this. I didn't realize how much I needed it."

"You're welcome, Bella. Come back anytime," Alice said as she pulled me into a hug.

I was passed around the room, but the minute that I got to Edward, I shut down.
"I'm just…" I pointed to the door. "Night everyone."

I fled the room and started toward my apartment when I heard Alice's door open. "Hey, Bella, wait."

I stopped and stood trembling in my spot as I waited for Edward to catch up to me.

"Don't be scared. I just wanted to walk you to your door," Edward said once he reached me. "I would never hurt you, Bella."

"I'm sorry. Old habits die hard. I didn't used to be like this," I explained as we walked toward my door.

"I would have liked to know you before, but then again, I'd like to know you now." He smiled and held out a slip of paper. "Call me. Even if you just need to talk. I'm a good listener."

"I…"

He held up his hand to stop me. "No expectations. I promise."

I nodded and took his number. He waited while I let myself into my apartment and then I watched from the peephole as he walked away. I made sure that all of my locks we tight and then I turned to go to bed. My dreams were silent for the first time in months. I wondered how long it would last.

~~FADV~~

October faded into November, which faded into December. It
had been a long time since I had seen cold weather during the holidays, so I was getting plenty of packages from my mom, who was beefing up my winter wardrobe. I would laugh every time one would arrive, especially with the looks on Alice's face.

"Bella! Your mom has excellent taste," Alice squealed as she looked at some of my clothes. "Ooh, you have to let me borrow this!"

I couldn't help laughing at her. Since I had been hanging with her and the rest of the group, I had started feeling somewhat normal. "You can borrow whatever you want, Alice."

A knock on the door broke us from the unboxing. I stood up and walked over to answer it. I smiled when I saw Rosalie, Emmett, and Jasper on the other side.

"Hey, guys. Come on in. Alice is drooling over my new clothes."

"Thanks, Bells." Rose sauntered in and walked straight for my shoes. Emmett and Jasper both kissed my cheek as they passed.

"Wow, Bella. Your mom sure knows how to shop, doesn't she?" Rose asked from her perch next to my new boots.

"Yeah," I smiled as I curled up in the big armchair that was next to the couch.
Two hours went by, and between Alice and Rose, all of my clothes were put away. My closet was fully organized and Emmett was grumbling about food.

"Why don't we order a pizza?" I suggested.

Everyone agreed, so Emmett picked up the phone and ordered several, while Alice and Jasper ran to her place to get some soda and beer. What had started out as a boring night of unpacking turned into an impromptu get together with friends. The only person missing was Edward.

As we sat around munching on pizza and talking, I decided to find out what was up.

"Where's Edward tonight?" I didn't miss the looks that passed between the three of them. I hated secrets being kept, especially when I could tell that they were about me. "Guys? What?"

"Um..." Rosalie started, but looked at Alice.

"You see..." Alice tried.

Emmett threw up his hands. "Oh, for fucks sake."

Jasper busted out laughing, but managed to tell me what was going on. "He likes you, but doesn't want to put any pressure on you."

"What?" I asked in shock. "Why?"
"Bella," Rose began. "You've been through a lot. He doesn't want to scare you."

"I don't get it. Every time that we've all hung out, he acts fine." I couldn't wrap my head around this revelation. "I know that I am still trying to get over everything that Quil put me through, but therapy helps. Hell, you guys have helped more than anything. You don't treat me with kid gloves. You treat me like a normal person."

"You are a normal person, Bella. Edward is just..." Alice chewed the inside of her mouth in thought. "He's very cautious with things or people that he cares about."

"Hmm..." I stared at all of them. "Emmett, let me see your phone."

He handed it over, no questions. I quickly tapped out a text to find out where he was.

_Dude! You are missing some fun. What RU doing? -Em_

It was no time before his response came.

_Nothing, just watching a movie. Where RU? -E_

_We R at Bella's. Get Ur ass over here! -Em_

_Nah. I can't. -E_

After reading his last text I decided to call him. Still using Emmett's phone and while the other's watched, I dialed him
before I lost my nerve.

"Emmett, I can't come over there," his voice greeted me.

"Why not?" I asked.

"Bella?"

"Hi, Edward." I smiled at the group as they stared.

"Hi. Was that you texting me?" he asked.

"Yeah. Edward, just come over. You don't have to avoid me. I'm not even sure why you are. Have I done something?" I asked, wondering if he would tell me.

"No, Bella. Trust me, it's all me," he sighed and I knew that he was running his hand through his hair. "Okay, I'll be there in a little while."

"Okay, bye." I disconnected and handed the phone back to Emmett.

"That was sneaky, Bells." Rose actually sounded proud.

I shrugged and started cleaning up the mess from our dinner. I had just finished rinsing the last glass when a voice spoke behind me. I jumped and the glass slipped from my hands, shattering on the floor.

"Oh, God, Bella! I am so sorry," Edward apologized.
I bent over to start picking up the broken shards with shaking fingers. "It's okay. I didn't hear you knock."

I couldn't look up at him until I got my fear under control, but he was having none of that. I felt his hand gently grasp my chin and slowly lift my face so that I could meet his eyes. He must have seen something in my eyes, because his changed from alarm to concern.

"Bella, I am so sorry. I didn't mean to scare you." His words were sincere and his hands stilled mine from collecting the broken glass. "Let me do this. You're shaking too much, I don't want you to cut yourself."

"O...okay." I backed up slowly, pulled the trash can from the cabinet, and set in front of him. It was a moment before I spoke, but when I did, my voice was barely there. "I know you didn't mean to scare me, Edward. I wish I wasn't so jumpy."

Edward stood up, reached a hand toward me and pulled me up to stand beside him. "Bella, you went through something traumatic and are still healing. I should have known better than to stand behind you. I'm so sorry."

I squeezed his hand, which was still holding mine, and gave him a small smile. "It's okay." I let go of him and turned to close the dishwasher. After I turned it on, I looked back at him. "Thanks for coming."

He grinned at me and I felt my heart begin to race. "You're welcome. That was pretty sneaky of you, texting me on
Emmett's phone."

I took a deep breath and decided to lay it all out there. "Look, Edward, Jasper said that you liked me and that's why you were avoiding coming over here." I smiled when he blushed. "I don't want you to avoid me."

"Bella, I…"

"Hey, guys! We're gonna play Scene it!" Emmett yelled from the living room.

"We'll talk later, okay?" Edward smiled, and I nodded before following him out of the kitchen.

Later wouldn't come for another week.

~~FADV~~

I was walking across campus a week after our impromptu dinner at my place when I ran smack into Edward.

"Oof…"

My books hit the ground, but strong arms wrapped around me, preventing me from following them.

"Bella, are you okay?"

I looked up and found myself getting lost in Edward's emerald gaze. I nodded and bent down to retrieve my belongings.
"I'm sorry, Edward. I wasn't paying attention."

His hands joined mine as we gathered everything that I had dropped. "It's okay. As long as you weren't hurt..." he trailed off.

"I'm fine."

We stood up and he walked with me toward the parking lot. We made small talk, but with me still unsure what to think about his feelings, and him still unsure how to act around me—it made for uneasy conversation.

~~FADV~~

I was sitting at my computer trying to complete a paper that I had due the next day, when my phone rang. I picked it up without looking at the caller ID.

"Hello?" I said distractedly.

"Did you think that you could hide from me forever, Isabella?" his voice growled in my ear.

I immediately began to shake and got up from my chair. "How...how did you get this...number?"

I don't know how or where, but I somehow found the strength to walk to my door, open it, and then run for Alice's door. I knew that everyone was there and would help me.

"It doesn't matter how I found you or how I got your number.
Just know that I know where you are and that I am coming for you."

I looked up as the door in front of me was wrenched open. Alice pulled me inside when she saw the fear in my eyes and the tears on my face.

"You...you can't. I have a..."

His laughter greeted my ear and I had to pull the phone away. Emmett grabbed it and hit the speaker button.

"Listen to me, you little bitch, there is no piece of paper or person that can keep me from what is mine. And you are mine, Isabella. Remember that the next time that you want to talk to the ginger."

Something about the way that he said that lit a fire in me. "You stay away from him!"

Edward walked forward and lay a hand on my shoulder. I suddenly felt calmer.

"Mind your tongue, Bitch," Quil roared over the phone. "I'll be seeing you soon, my Isabella."

The room was filled with the audible click as he disconnected. My breath hitched a sob and I fell to my knees. I couldn't get a breath and I knew that I was hyperventilating, but I couldn't stop it.

"Bella, take it easy. I've got you," Edward crooned in my ear
as he lifted me and carried me to the couch. He settled my back to his chest and whispered over and over, "Breathe with me, breathe with me."

I'm not sure how much time passed, but I woke up and found myself curled into Edward. I sat up and looked around the room. The concerned gazes of my friends met my eyes and I knew then that the phone call was real.

"He really called, didn't he?" I asked in a whisper.

Alice nodded. "Yes, he did." She looked down at her hands. "Bella, you need to call your dad."

I nodded and sat up with Edward's help. I looked over at him and blushed. "I'm sorry."

He shook his head. "Don't be."

I smiled softly and turned back to the group. "Thanks for being here for me. Um, where's my phone?"

Emmett offered it over to me. "Bella, you don't have to thank us. We're your friends. We love you."

I smiled and blinked back the tears that threatened to spill over and dialed my father's number.

"Bella! How are you, Babygirl?"

"Hi, Dad. Um…not too good, actually."
I felt Edward reach over and take my hand in his.

"What's wrong?" I could tell my dad was going into cop mode.

"He...he found me, Daddy," I whispered.

I could hear a crash in the background and knew that he had thrown something across the room. "What did he say, Bella?"

I told him about the conversation and the threat that Quil had made. I also told him that my friends had heard him.

"Are they there with you?"

"Yeah."

"Let me talk to one of them, Bells," Charlie demanded.

I looked at Edward and handed the phone over. "He wants to talk to one of you."

Edward took the phone but never released my hand. "Chief Swan, this is Edward."

I wished I could hear what my father was saying, but all I heard was the muffled sound and Edward's 'yeses' and 'sures'. Eventually, he handed the phone back to me, squeezed my hand, and then got up from the couch.

I watched his retreat with concern, but put my phone back to my ear. "Dad?"
"Everything is going to be fine, Bella. You have a good team around you, and I am going to call the local police, as well as campus security, and let them know what's going on. I'm going to get a copy of the restraining order to them as well. Everything will be okay."

I was nodding even though he couldn't see me. "Okay, Dad." I disconnected and then looked at Edward, who was now out on the balcony staring at nothing.

I looked at the rest of the group. "I'm going to go talk to him."

"Be gentle, Bells. Edward really cares about you and he's been worrying about this for a while," Jasper told me.

I nodded and walked outside to stand beside him. We stood in silence for a while. Finally, I couldn't take it any longer.

"You have to talk to me."

"What do you want me to say, Bella?" He snapped his eyes to mine. "He found you. All I want to do is wrap you up and run away, somewhere where he can't find you again."

I smiled softly. "Edward, I ran away once and he still found me. I can't run anymore. I know that whatever happens will happen for a reason."

"How can you say that?" He turned and faced me. "Bella, I saw your face when you ran over here. You were petrified. I would give anything to not see that fear in your eyes."
"Dammit!" He ran a hand through his hair. "Bella, you mean so much to me. I can't...no, I won't lose you!"

His movements were so erratic I was afraid he was going to hurt himself. "Edward!" I placed my hands on his cheeks and forced his eyes to meet mine. "You aren't going to lose me."

I watched his eyes soften and I saw him tentatively reach a hand up to brush my hair back from my shoulder. His eyes never left mine as he slowly leaned closer to me. Edward continued to stare into my eyes as he gently rested his forehead against my own.

"Bella," he whispered.

My eyes fluttered closed as I felt his warm breath caress my face. I moved my thumbs across his cheeks and felt him move again. It was only then that I felt the slightest pressure against my lips. Normally, I would have jumped away in fear, but this was Edward. Instead, I increased the pressure of my lips on his.

I don't know how long our lips explored each other, but it wasn't long before I felt the sweep of his tongue against my lower lip. I pulled away when I felt that; I definitely wasn't ready for a kiss of that magnitude.

"I'm sorry," Edward apologized.

"No," I opened my eyes and looked at him. "Don't be. I'm just not ready for that."
He nodded. "I understand."

He tried to move away from me, but I wasn't allowing that. "Edward, just because I'm not ready now, doesn't mean that I never will be. Let's just take this slow, okay?"

He grinned down at me. "I can do slow."

I smiled back up at him and wrapped my arms around his waist. He pulled me to his chest, hugging me tightly. "I'll wait forever for you, Bella."

I smiled against his chest and reveled in the fact that I was in a man's arms and I wasn't afraid.

~~FADV~~

A month passed and then another, and still nothing happened. I received no more calls. It was like he had disappeared off the face of the earth. It made me nervous. Kind of like the calm before the storm.

Edward and I, while still taking things slow, had progressed a little more in the kissing stage. He had an unfailing patience when it came to me that I was in awe of.

I was in the middle of studying for a finals before the end of the semester when there was a knock on my door. I wasn't expecting anyone, so I was instantly on alert.

I got up slowly from my table and picked up my pepper spray on the way to the door. I looked out the peep-hole, but saw
no one. I thought it was strange, but then the knock sounded again.

I stood on my tip toes and looked out once more. This time there was a flash of bronze and I sighed in relief. I opened the door slowly, Edward's face appearing before me.

"You scared me," I told him as I stepped back to let him in.

"I'm sorry," he said as he kissed me lightly.

I shook my head. "It's okay. I just wasn't expecting you. You said that you had to study."

He smiled at me. "I know. Bella, your dad called me and asked all of us to meet him here. I take it he hasn't shown up or called yet?"

I shook my head but walked toward my phone anyway. "I haven't heard from him. I wonder what's going on?"

Edward just shrugged, walked to my fridge, and pulled out a pepsi. I watched as he took a long swallow and had to look away. He was awakening things in me that I thought were dead.

I turned back to answer the door when there was another knock. Anything to get away from the man that was turning me inside out.

"Hey, Bells," my dad said as I let him into the apartment.
"Dad." I shut the door behind him. "What's going on?"

"Let's wait until the rest of your friends are here, okay?"

I narrowed my eyes at him but nodded. While we waited, I introduced my father to Edward.

"Dad, I know you've talked on the phone, but this is Edward."

Edward held his hand out to my father and I watched as he tried to be intimidating. I just rolled my eyes.

"Chief," Edward smiled.

"Edward," my dad said gruffly. "So you're the one that's been taking care of my little girl?"

"Yes, Sir." Edward glanced over at me. "Well, trying anyway."

The knock on the door saved me from the embarrassment that I knew was bound to be coming from my father. I rushed to let the rest of my friends in.

"Hey, guys. Come on in."

Emmett, Rosalie, Alice and Jasper all came inside and immediately introduced themselves to my father. Once that was done, I couldn't wait anymore.

"Out with it, Dad. What's going on?"

I watched as he lowered himself onto the couch and mirrored
his position in the chair.

"Bells, when was the last time that you heard from Quil?"

I visibly quaked at the mention of his name. I felt Edward settle himself behind me and lay a comforting hand on my back.

"Um...about two months, I guess. Not since the first call. Why?"

"He's dead, Bella."

I wasn't sure that I heard him correctly. "I'm sorry, what?"

"His car was found in an embankment about an hour from here. Apparently, he lost control of the car and went over the median. He died on impact. It's over, Bella."

I sucked in a breath. Could it really be over? Was I really free to live my life without fear?

"I can't believe it."

"Believe it, Babygirl. Quil Ateara will never hurt you again."

I got up from the chair and walked to the balcony. I needed a minute to process what I had been told. For over a year I had lived in fear that he would find me and finish what he had started. Now, I have the freedom to live my life and love whomever I want. I let out a shout of triumph that had Edward and my father running to me.
"Baby?"

"Bells?"

I turned to look at them both with tears streaming down my face. "I'm free."

~~FADV~~

Ten years later…

"To Bella and Edward. Happy Anniversary."

I looked up at my husband of five years and smiled. It had been a long road, but Edward had been unfailingly patient with me.

After we had received the news of Quil's demise, I began to live life with a renewed vigor. I left the shell of a girl that had been created in pain and heartache behind. Edward's and my relationship changed and I fell in love.

When he proposed at graduation, I was ecstatic. When we found out that I was expecting our first child we were elated. But like everything in life, nothing can be perfect forever.

However, he and I grew from our tragedies. Although I suffered two miscarriages, we now have a beautiful daughter. Faith Marie Cullen was a chubby five month old and the apple of her daddy's eye.

It took a long time, but I also finally forgave Quil for what he
had put me through. My mother hadn't agreed that I should, but I knew that if I held onto it, I would never be truly free. Because of him, I met my husband. And because of Edward, I learned how to be open and trusting and ready to love... again.

Thank you for reading. Domestic Violence is a horrible thing that happens everyday. If you are in a bad situation, please, tell someone and get the help that you need.