Hope springs eternal
by mrstrentreznor

Summary

After Edward left Bella in the forest, she chose herself. NM, AU

Prompt 11 –

One of my one-shots for the Truly Anon Twi fic contest. 45 photo prompts, I wrote 13 stories. Clearly have major issues... lol.
Prompt 11 – was a colour shot of a stencilled message on the pavement. It said 'your existence gives me hope'. To me, it sounded like something Edward Cullen would say. NM AU

Word count: 2000

Disclaimer: *the characters and all recognisable situations belong to Stephenie Meyer - this is a work of fan fiction, except for the legends and histories of the Quileute that, of course, belong to them. I pay my respects to their Gods.*

The title is taken from Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man*, the phrase reading "Hope springs eternal in the human breast, Man never is, but always to be blest:"

The author of the book of Romans, Paul the Apostle argued that hope was a source of salvation for Christians. Romans 8:24-25 states "For in hope we have been saved, but hope that is seen is not hope; for why does one also hope for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, with perseverance we wait eagerly for it".

So I wondered, what if Edward let her go but then he just had to see?

**Hope springs eternal**

Bella had grown up. She had never really lost her doe-eyed look, and her ability to fall over all the time. But she had finally got over Edward Cullen leaving her alone in the forest.

With age and maturity, she finally comprehended that he had lied to her. He did it *because* he loved her. She could see it, now. She had replayed that scene so many times to herself. Now she could see how much effort it had cost him to run away. That extracted promise that she not do anything stupid was the final clue.

He loved her human and alive. She had hung around Forks until she finished High School, graduated and then she had run to college. It was the easiest excuse to get out of the small town. No one could argue with her need to attend college.
She had no idea what on earth she was going to study. She had said that she would just do an Arts major and concentrate later on a particular topic. When pushed, she would blab on about maybe studying English.

She didn't care. Whatever it was; it was a ticket out of Forks.

She could not afford the Ivy League college that the Cullens would have paid for. Between her father and Renee and Phil, they paid her enough each month to cover her tuition and textbook costs. She actually lived in an on-campus residential house for the first year, and it was the best decision she could have made.

Her parents thought she was safe and monitored and she had an instant support group, that helped her settle in at the new college and literally walked with her to classes.

And like most normal people of her age. She formed new relationships at college; new friendships, new loves, new topics of discussion and she blossomed. She found herself having impassioned discussions over espresso on the eternal and thorny issue of Sylvia Plath and Ted Hughes. She completely understood a love so extreme that you would consider dying for that person. She had almost done it herself. She would have become a vampire. She would have died for Edward. And she would have been happy to do so.

She wasn’t so sure that she understood the passion part of that relationship. But then it happened. After some bad dates, some attempts at going out together, a few fumbling in the dark experiences with the wrong guys, she finally found The One.

The fitted together like puzzle pieces. It was amazing and beautiful, and she finally understood what everyone went on about, all the time. They were inseparable. That whole first blush of a romance, when you can't bear to be with others and you virtually isolate yourself, with your own little pet names and your secret coupley behaviour. And they revelled in it.

She adored him. He wasn't as beautiful as a statue, like Edward. He wasn't as physically jaw droppingly impressive as Jake. But he was a lot like her. He was smart and funny and he was hers.

And he loved her.

They did completely normal, non-supernatural things. They met each other's parents. They moved in together and eventually after one night when he had drunk too many glasses of wine, he proposed marriage. He started by saying, "I've been thinking… that we…" and she'd already said "Yes" before he got the rest of the sentence out.

They were gloriously happy. She stopped worrying about aging. She stopped looking for grey hairs and laugh lines. He aged with her and that was the best thing in the world. At least until she fell pregnant. And then she discovered that having a whole little person who was a miraculous mix of the both of you, was the best thing in the world.

The tiny little girl had her father wrapped around her finger, almost literally, within minutes of her birth. She had Bella's enormous brown eyes.

Eighteen months later a little boy made an appearance and another one after that. She had three entirely different little people. How the same two people could together make three different ones, she still thought was miraculous. Maybe she should have paid more attention in Biology classes.

They saved their money and they bought an older house in the inner city. It was close to everything, including the College, where he was now a professor and she an English lecturer. Their home was
full of books and discarded children's toys.

They had an occasional argument and they made up and they were still happy.

Time passed.

One day she felt like someone was watching her as she hurried across the open space to her next class. She got a little unnerved and she dropped her organiser. It took her ages to scoop up all those essential little pieces of paper, covered in scribbles, before they blew away. When she finally completed the task, the feeling was gone.

She and her daughter had a ritual. They walked to the local café every Friday afternoon. It was girl time. They ordered frothy cream filled drinks and ate cute cupcakes or slabs of pecan pie or whatever they felt like. And they talked to each other. They had always talked to each other. She was about thirteen now. She had discovered boys and gossip. Their ritual was even more important now.

Now that she was a parent, Bella realised just how badly she had treated Charlie sometimes. She had lied to him and run off. She wanted her daughter to know that she could talk to her about anything.

One Friday, as they stepped down the old stone steps up to their house, there was something stencilled on the pavement.

She saw it and she froze. 'Your existence gives me hope.'

She just knew who it was from.

It even sounded the way he spoke. Edward Cullen. It had to be. Now she suspected that she knew who was watching her, the other day.

Her face went white. Her daughter looked at her in concern. "Mum, are you okay?"

She looked down and read the sign. "Gosh," she commented. "Someone has left a message." She read it aloud. "Your existence gives me hope. Wow," she said. "That's something to think about."

She looked at her mother, who still hadn't moved. "Mum?"

Her daughter tugged at her hand. She made her walk with her. She interlaced her fingers with hers.

Bella was on auto-pilot. She wasn't entirely sure what to think. The message was meant to be uplifting; a confirmation of her existence. Maybe it wasn't from him? But it sounded so much like something that he would say.

She was alive; she wasn't a vampire. She had children. She had aged. And she was still alive.

They walked in companionable silence. She enjoyed holding her daughter's hand. She was at that age when she didn't want to do things like that, anymore. They were almost the same height now. She held her hand and she squeezed it just a little. She squeezed back.

They sat at the café. Adam, the proprietor greeted them. Bella ordered a long black today; she needed the caffeine jolt. Her daughter ordered a café latte; the extra milky coffee was her favourite now. They ordered brownie with extra cream.

Eventually her daughter asked, "Mum, what was that stencilled message?" she paused. "Why did
"I think it was for you?"

Bella thought about how to answer her.

"I assume it is just one of those random thought things. Could even be a band name, huh?" They laughed together. "But it made me think about something; something that I had almost forgotten. I've never told you about my first boyfriend."

Her daughter looked intrigued.

"I fell in love with a guy when I started at High School in Forks. He was so beautiful. And I mean beautiful; not handsome."

"Handsome like Dad," her daughter interrupted. She was still daddy's girl.

Bella smiled. "No… not like Dad at all." She sipped her coffee. "And I was seventeen. We sat next to each other in Biology, and we fell madly in love."

"No… Seriously? First sight and all that?"

Bella nodded. "Just like in all the best romance novels. First sight. I would never believe it could have happened, but it did."

"What was his name?"

"Edward… Edward Cullen."

"Sounds old fashioned." Her nose wrinkled. She was always in love with boys called Cody and Matt.

"What happened? I mean, did you break up or something?"

"We went out for a while. We went to the senior prom together in my second last year." [I forget what you call it - I'd call it year 11]

"Did Grandpa Charlie like him?"

"Not very much. He always seemed to be cleaning his guns when he came over."

They both laughed.

"Did you sneak out?" her daughter asked with a mischievous look on her face.

"Certainly not," her mother answered. "He snuck in. There was a tree outside my window."

"Mum!" That held shock and a hefty amount of admiration. She shoved in a spoonful of brownie to cover herself.

"I would have done anything for him," Bella confessed. Even die, she didn't say. "His family was very wealthy. We could have gone anywhere and done anything." For eternity.

"Rich AND gorgeous. Yeesh Mum. You let him go?"

"He let me go, Honey. It was…" she shrugged. "Hard to explain. We were from different worlds."

"Oh okay… like Romeo and Juliet. He was a Capulet and you were a Montague."
"Other way around, darling." She frowned at her daughter. "I thought you said you were studying it at school?"

Her daughter ignored her. "So?" she prompted.

Her mother stirred her coffee.

"Thinking about him makes you sad," her daughter noted.

"Yes, I guess it does. Just like a dream. A perfect dream that you are frightened you will forget." She smiled at her daughter. "But I have absolutely no regrets with any life decisions I have made. And that includes you." She leaned forward and brushed her daughter's hair from her forehead. "No regrets at all," she repeated.

Her daughter rolled her eyes. "Damn… I was hoping you'd say having the boys. Little brothers are stinky booger brains, you know."

Bella laughed. "One day you'll be so glad you have them. I didn't have any siblings at all, you know."

"Yeah… okay… but they had better improve soon. They make me nuts."

Bella laughed again.

They walked home again together.

After they had left, a tiny woman walked into the café and approached a man huddled down in a booth towards the back. He had an ugly knitted hat pulled down over his bronzed hair.

"There you go, Edward. I told you she was happy."

"Yes Alice, you were right. As always."

"Can we go now?"

"Yes. She has no regrets and neither do I."

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